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**Politics And Public Opinion in China:  
The Impact of the Internet, 1993-2003**

**by**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics and International Studies**

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## **Declaration**

I certify that all materials have been properly identified and that no portion of this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification in this or any other university or other institution of learning.

## Summary

This dissertation is to provide empirical evidence as well as in-depth discussions to reflect the theme of new technologies like the Internet and its impact and implications on the political systems and public opinion in the Chinese context. It is the premise that technology can transform the mode of political communication and that this in turn can change the nature of political participation, as well as the milieu in which political discussions are made.

This project concludes that the Internet has not at this stage fundamentally transformed China's political system, let alone caused a sudden political regime collapse and engendered a sweeping democratisation process. The Internet is, however, expanding people's minds, facilitating public discourse, and pushing for more transparent and accountable governance. In other words, the Chinese government is argued as not being as much in control of public debates on the Internet as it is of debates in other forms of media channels; the government cannot control and manipulate public opinion as much as it has traditionally done.

This work has contributed to a more systematic picture of public opinion on political issues with documented examples, thanks to the Internet. Besides, this research has shed light on how to measure the impact of the Internet upon political debates, and to document the political impact of the Internet. Moreover, this dissertation highlights a usually neglected phenomenon that researching the political change or transformation in China can also be conducted from different aspects like the impact of Information Communication Technologies on its political system. The conventional approaches may be enriched thanks to the advent of new technologies in the increasingly networked, globalised and marketised world.

## **Abbreviation**

BBS	Bulletin Board Systems
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CDP	China Democracy Party
CEPA	Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement
CEPD	Council for Economic Planning and Development
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
CINIC	China Internet Network Information Center
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
EPB	Economic Planning Board
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICP	Internet Content Provider
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ISP	Internet Services Provider
IT	Information Technology
MBFT	Ministry of Broadcasting, Film and Television
MEI	Ministry of Electronics Industry
MII	Ministry of Information Industry
MITI	Ministry of International Trade and Industry

MPT	Ministry of Post and Telecommunications
NPC	National People's Congress
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRC	People's Republic of China
SARFT	State Administration of Radio, Film and Television
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SCSCNIS	State Council Steering Committee on National Information Structure
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SMS	Short Messaging Service
SOE	State Owned Enterprise
SETC	State Economics and Trade Commission
UKCOD	UK Citizens Online Democracy
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organisation

## Chapter 1 Introduction

*“Mao Zedong said that to have power you need two things: the gun and the pen...The Communist Party has the gun, but the Internet is now the pen. If they lose control of it, something will happen to challenge their authority.”—Guo Liang, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing.<sup>1</sup>*

### Section I The Rise of Public Opinion

The Chinese political system is in transition. Commentators have focused on various factors driving the changes: economic development, new generations of leaders, the opening of the country to the outside world, increasing pluralism of sources of information, and contestation from below.<sup>2</sup> One recent development that brings all of these factors together is the advent of Information and Communication Technologies, particularly the Internet, to the People’s Republic of China (PRC).<sup>3</sup> At the core of the information technology revolution is the Internet, which was originally developed in the late 1960s for military and security reasons. Globalisation, backed by a market-oriented economic philosophy—liberalisation, privatisation, and deregulation, has helped boost the significant growth and diffusion of Internet technology in established democracies and most developing countries.<sup>4</sup> As the information

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<sup>1</sup> A Lin Neumann, “The Great Firewall,” *CPJ: Press Freedom Report*, January 18, 2001, available online at <[http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2001/China\\_jan01/China\\_jan01.html](http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2001/China_jan01/China_jan01.html)>, accessed on May 1, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Yun-han Chu, Chih-cheng Lo and Ramon H. Myers, eds., *The New Chinese Leadership: Challenges and Opportunities after the 16th Party Congress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Yongnian Zheng, *Globalization and State Transformation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Peter Nolan, *China at the Crossroads* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004); Bruce J. Dickson, *Red Capitalists in China: The Party, Private Entrepreneurs, and Prospects for Political Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Christopher R. Hughes and Gudrun Wacker, eds., *China and the Internet: Politics and the Digital Leap Forward* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Michael S. Chase and James C. Mulvenon, *You’ve Got Dissent! Chinese Dissident Use of the Internet and Beijing’s Counter-Strategies* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Emanuele Giovannetti, Mitsuhiro Kagami and Masatsugu Tsuji, eds., *The Internet Revolution: A*

revolution now sweeping across Asia has widened the ordinary citizen's access to information,<sup>5</sup> it impels academics to ponder whether the Information Technology (IT) revolution, beyond its economic repercussions, may pose any impact upon other arenas such as politics and society in Communist China, where popular opinion has been thought to be under the strict control of the Party and government, and thus manipulated by being limited to only official information sources.

Liu Xiayang, a Chinese media expert, contends: "...the interactivity of the Internet is beginning to draw closer the general public, ...and changing the way people discuss state's affairs, and the way of supervision by public opinion."<sup>6</sup> In this sense, Chinese Internet users can now express themselves more freely to a degree never before experienced, in a country that prohibits mass gatherings and demonstrations. Others refute this, arguing that the Internet, which may serve as a catalyst for political change, is in reality only available to a small minority of the population. This is identified as the digital divide, and they argue that Internet activism is overwhelmingly dominated by an elite-based discourse.<sup>7</sup> Given these arguments, the *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) pointed out as early as 1996 that "...the value of the Internet so outweighs its potentially harmful aspects—pornography and politically destructive information—that the Chinese

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*Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Nina Hachigian and Lily Wu, *The Information Revolution in Asia* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003); Hilton L. Root, "What Democracy Can Do for East Asia," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 1, January 2002, pp. 118-119.

<sup>6</sup> "Burgeoning Cyberspace Democracy in China," *People's Daily*, March 8, 2001, available online at <[http://english1.peopledaily.com.cn/200103/08/eng20010308\\_64463.html](http://english1.peopledaily.com.cn/200103/08/eng20010308_64463.html)>, accessed on April 23, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Jason P. Abbott, "Democracy@internet.asia? The Challenge to the Emancipatory Potential of the Net: Lessons from China and Malaysia," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 1, February 2001, pp. 115-128.

government has approved its opening to the public.”<sup>8</sup> Later on, as the *People’s Daily* acknowledged, “China’s Internet construction has gone through the process of growing out of nothing, after several years of development, China’s Internet, now with a fairly solid foundation and significant strength, has played a positive role in media coverage of public opinion and in major international media struggle.”<sup>9</sup> The Chinese government is nonetheless determined to hang on to the “correct guidance of public opinion.”<sup>10</sup> Could public opinion and debates be guided or directed within the context of globalisation of Information Technology?

The Chinese media in the 1990s has been the rising tension between the greater degree of market competition and the media’s political role—the propaganda.<sup>11</sup> Following the increasing commercialisation of the Chinese media, it has carved newer spaces of public expression both for journalists and ordinary people. Absolute media controls have given way to economic policies seeking to stimulate market competition. Press subsidies have been cut down or suspended and the media governing structures have been streamlined. These changes in the media sector have resulted in the processes of de-centralisation of media governance, specialisation of media contents, and multiplication of media production and distribution. Whether the emergence of a commercialised media sector in China, in particular the Internet, has

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<sup>8</sup> Cited in Willy Wo-Lap Lam, “China: State Power versus the Internet,” in Louise Williams and Roland Rich (eds.), *Losing Control: Freedom of the Press in Asia* (Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2000), p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Commentator, “Vigorously Strengthening China’s Internet Media Construction,” *People’s Daily*, August 9, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> “Journalists Told to Correctly Guide Public Opinion,” *People’s Daily*, November 8, 2000, available online at <[http://english.people.com.cn/english/200011/08/eng20001108\\_54681.html](http://english.people.com.cn/english/200011/08/eng20001108_54681.html)>, accessed on March 14, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph M. Chan, “Commercialization without Independence: Trends and Tensions of Media Development in China,” in Joseph Cheng Yu-Shek and Maurice Brosseau (eds.), *China Review 1993* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1993), pp. 25.1-25.21.

been democratising in that it is closer to ordinary people, addressing at least some of their concerns, speaking their language, treating them as protagonists, and providing them with wider access to participate through their presence online, remains to be systematically further examined. More specifically, is the Internet enhancing civil discourse, through which public opinion on national or foreign policies can be expressed, and is it facilitating the emergence of “public space” in China?

As Deng Xiaoping, Chinese former paramount leader bluntly put it:

*Don't think that a little mental pollution doesn't matter much, that it's nothing to be alarmed at. Some of its ill effects may not be immediately apparent. But unless we take them seriously and adopt firm measures right now to prevent their spread, many people will fall prey to them and be led astray, with grave consequences. In the long run, this question will determine what kind of people will succeed us to carry on the cause and what the future of the Party and state will be.”(October 12, 1983)<sup>12</sup>*

Deng's attitude towards potential public opinion indeed sheds light on further enquiry into whether Internet-enabled public opinion could possibly influence the trajectory of future China's political socioeconomic development.

## **Section II Why It Matters to Conduct this Project**

From March 1993 the Chinese central government embarked upon a series of so-called “Golden Projects”<sup>13</sup>—including Golden Bridge, Golden Card, and Golden

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<sup>12</sup> Deng Xiaoping, “The Party's Urgent Tasks on the Organisational and Ideological Fronts,” Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, Volume III (1982-1992), *People's Daily*, available online at <<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/c1160.html>>, accessed on June 10, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> The “Golden Projects” consist of several sub-projects, including primarily, Golden Bridge—a national public economic information communication network aiming to connect ministries and state-owned enterprises and to build the infrastructure backbone over which other information services will run; Golden Card—an electronic money project which aims at setting up a credit card verification scheme and an inter-bank, inter-region clearing system; Golden Customs—a national

Customs—to give it information on and control over the rapid decentralisation of decision-making that was taking place as a result of the move towards a market economy. The year 1993 can also be remembered as the formal start-up stage of China’s informatisation.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, this was aimed at laying the infrastructure for the digitisation of China’s telecommunications network, on the other hand, the central government started indeed to utilise the infrastructure of the Internet to improve its own administrative control over provincial and local offices, enhancing its governing capacity and authority, as well as sociopolitical stability. In November 1998 the authorities further announced the “Government Online Project” whereby the end of 1999 and 2000; at least 60 and 80 per cent respectively of China’s government offices and ministries were going online: all ministries and provincial authorities would establish their own Web sites for citizens to consult.<sup>15</sup> China even christened 1999 “The Government Online Year”<sup>16</sup> and 2000 the year of “Enterprise Online Project.”<sup>17</sup>

One of the chief purposes of these moves is to modernise the decision-making process, making administration more efficient and enabling Chinese companies to

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foreign economic trade information network project; Golden Marco—a national economic macro policy technology system; Golden Tax—a computerized tax return and invoice system project; Golden Gate—a foreign trade information network aimed at improving export-import trade management; Golden Enterprise—an industrial production and information distribution system; Golden Intelligence—the China Education and Research Network (CERNET); Golden Agriculture—an overall agricultural administration and information service system; Golden Info—a state statistical information project, and Golden Cellular—a mobile communications production and marketing project.

<sup>14</sup> Lu Xinkui, ed., *Zhongguo Xinxihua* (China’s Informatisation) (Beijing: Electronics Industry Publisher, 2002), p. 53.

<sup>15</sup> *Zhengfu Shang-wang Gongcheng: Huigu yu Zhanwang* (Government Online Project: Reviews and Perspectives), available online at <<http://www.gov.cn/govonlinereview/6future/01.htm>>, accessed on March 6, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> “1999: The Government Online Year,” *People’s Daily*, January 3, 1999, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> “The Internet Timeline of China, Part II,” *China Internet Network Information Center*, available online at <<http://www.cnnic.net.cn/html/Dir/2003/12/12/2001.htm>>, accessed on May 12, 2004.

catch up with competitors overseas. No thought seems to have been given to other possible political consequences of these changes, such as transparent and accountable governance. One important reason is that China's leaders have mainly parlayed their success at transforming the mainland economically into a de-politicisation of the masses that provides the necessary political legitimacy for the continued communist Party rule. However, would the opening of information networks empower citizens to hold the government accountable, and possibly even challenge them?

There is developed literature in the West, particularly in the United States, which suggests that the Internet may fundamentally transform democracy by enabling citizens to consult with each other and disseminate their own views in real time without governments being able to stop them. Maybe it would even lay the foundation for a kind of "strong democracy" advocated by Benjamin Barber.<sup>18</sup> The assumptions about the Internet's democratic potential were highly stressed in earlier literature. More recently, an increasingly robust body of literature criticised this perspective and suggested, instead, that the impact of the Internet upon the political system in the PRC was likely to be less than that envisaged or hoped for by the pro-democracy activists. At any rate, applying discourses of Internet-enabled public opinion to a case study like China provides a lens through which we can further understand both the (changing) nature of the Chinese political system, and also the efficacy of the predominating discourses themselves in the context of China.

It is often the premise that technology can transform the mode of political communication and that this in turn can change the nature of political participation, as

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<sup>18</sup> Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1984).

well as the milieu in which political discussions are made. In the case of China, proponents of the Internet-derived democracy hold that the new media has empowered grass-roots citizens to acquire, disseminate and exchange (alternative) information from outside, which is usually unavailable from the official media. The rise of online public opinion stands one spectrum of the Internet politics in China.<sup>19</sup> Yet sceptics argue that the Internet is either tightly controlled by the state or it is merely a fresh communication tool exclusively for a small proportion of Chinese people. Adding to the limited Internet access is what some argue that the Net's impact on politics in China is insignificant because most Netizens are not much interested in finding reactionary information available online to subvert the Chinese authorities. In the meantime, China is "proactively guiding the development of the Internet so that the medium serves state interests."<sup>20</sup>

To verify the validity of these arguments, this research project is, as a result, important to provide empirical evidence as well as in-depth discussions to reflect the theme of new technologies and its impact and implications on the political systems, and the extent to which Chinese experience may be compared with established democracies and lessons learnt by other like-minded authoritarian states.

### **Section III Objective of the Dissertation**

The primary objective of this dissertation is to examine the impact of the Internet upon Chinese political debates in China since 1993. In itself it would provide an

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Johan Lagerkvist, "The Rise of Online Public Opinion in the People's Republic of China," *China: An International Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, March 2005, pp. 119-130.

<sup>20</sup> Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, "The Internet and State Control in Authoritarian Regimes: China, Cuba, and the Counterrevolution," *First Monday*, Vol. 6, No. 8, August 2001, available online

opportunity to examine the impact of this new technology upon a still undemocratic country. Most of the literature on the political impact of the Internet has focused on the opportunities for developing an already existing democracy. Yet some speculate that the Internet may be more of a challenge for authoritarian regimes. For example, a few articles have suggested that the Internet was a prime catalyst in the downfall of the Suharto regime in Indonesia.<sup>21</sup> At the very least it is worth considering whether something like the same processes are likely to take place in China. And one of the most surprising dissident movements in China—the Falun Gong—have relied heavily upon the Internet to organise themselves despite official hostility.<sup>22</sup> Though she is basically sceptical of the role of the Internet to topple the Communist China, Shanthi Kalathil still holds: “Although outside observers often believe the Internet in China is wholly controlled by the central government, the reality is that the private sector plays a larger role in determining what is and isn’t acceptable, in accordance with how it gauges the prevailing political wind.”<sup>23</sup>

As it has been widely perceived, the Chinese government has conventionally practised “a system of information control and censure, with an intricate grading process for who at what level is allowed to see which kinds of information.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, it is usually argued that the mass media in China are an extension of the

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at <[http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6\\_8/kalathil/index.html](http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_8/kalathil/index.html)>, accessed on September 4, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> David T. Hill and Krishna Sen, “The Internet in Indonesia’s New Democracy,” *Democratization*, Vol. 7, No. 1, spring 2000, pp. 119-136.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Stephen D. O’Leary, “Falun Gong and the Internet,” *Online Journalism Review*, June 15, 2000, available online at <<http://ojr.usc.edu/content/story.cfm?id=390>>, accessed on May 22, 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Shanthi Kalathil, “Nationalism on the Net,” *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, February 22, 2002, available online at <<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view &id=919>>, accessed on March 8, 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Tony Saich, *Governance and Politics of China*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 306.

Party-state, or the so-called “mouth and tongue”<sup>25</sup> (*hou-she*) of the communist Party. As a consequence, it is difficult to become the mediaspace for public discussions or debates to be conducted.

Nevertheless, existing literature on the Internet’s political effects has shown that the increased availability and use of the Internet may pose a challenge to the state-run media. For example, Li Xiguang and Xuan Qin note that the Internet-based chatrooms are now fundamentally reversing the conventional news flows in China. It has resulted in the government-imposed agenda “revised” or “reconstructed” because of the Internet.<sup>26</sup> In addition, public opinion and debates are witnesses on the Internet that are pushing the authorities concerned into being more transparent and accountable. For instance, the Jiangxi school explosion which caused a total of 38 deaths took place in March 2001. It was first reported by local official media with coverage suggesting that a madman was responsible for this incident. Yet angry villagers resentfully rejected it, making their alternative accounts appear online. Their online opinion has actually drawn much attention from the international media as well as the authorities in Beijing. The school explosion incident eventually caused the former Premier Zhu Rongji to formally apologise and promise to re-examine.<sup>27</sup> This blast incident effectively marks the very first time that the Chinese government is obliged to “respond to what is in part an Internet-facilitated outpouring of public

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Marlowe Hood, “The Uses and Abuse of Mass Media by Chinese Leaders during the 1980s,” in Chin-Chuan Lee (ed.), *China’s Media, Media’s China* (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> Xiguang Li and Xuan Qin, “Shei Zai Shezhi Jintian de Yicheng?—Dianzi Luntan zai Zhongda Xinwen Shijian zhong dui Dangbao Yiti de Chonggou,” (Who Is Setting the Chinese Agenda?—Impact of Online Chatrooms on Party Press) in Li Xiguang and Zhao Xin-shu (eds.), *Meiti de Liliang* (The Power of Media) (Guangzhou: Nanfang Ribao, 2002), pp. 156-169.

<sup>27</sup> Craig S. Smith, “Chinese Premier Apologizes for Schoolhouse Explosion,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 2001; Craig S. Smith, “China Backs Away From Initial Denial in Schoolhouse Explosion,”

opinion.”<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, it provides episodic evidence that the Internet has already made a difference in China since its promotion from 1993 and with the initiation of Web forums in 1999. In this respect, this incident reveals two significantly interwoven implications: it shows on the one hand the increasing difficulty of constraining a story when more and more Chinese Netizens are gaining access online, and on the other hand, it shows that popular opinion in China today is not going to be as easily controlled and manipulated as it was before the introduction of the Internet to the mainland.

There is a further reason for tackling this subject. While China is considerably more open than it was a quarter of a century ago, it is still relatively difficult to know what ordinary Chinese think about politics. Not only does the state prohibit independent social surveys by any foreign organisations and individuals without government permission,<sup>29</sup> but the media is also particularly reticent on topics that are politically sensitive. Although casual contact with individual Chinese shows that there is a much greater diversity of political views than the leaders would acknowledge, it is hard, if not impossible, to document public opinion in any way systematically. If the Internet, described as “*dianzi dazibao*” (electronic versions of the big-character posters that were allegedly the most efficient means of mobilising

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*The New York Times*, March 16, 200, p. 1A.

<sup>28</sup> Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, “The Internet and State Control in Authoritarian regimes: China, Cuba, and the Counterrevolution,” *First Monday*, Vol. 6, No. 8, August 2001, available online at <[http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue6\\_8/kalathil/](http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue6_8/kalathil/)>, accessed on September 28, 2001.

<sup>29</sup> See *Shewai Shehui Diaocha Huodong Guanli Zhanxing Banfa* (Temporary Measures for the Management of Social Survey Activities Involving Foreign Nationals), China National Statistics Bureau, August 15, 1998, available online at <[http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfg/gzjgfwj/t20020424\\_18337.htm](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfg/gzjgfwj/t20020424_18337.htm)>, accessed on May 15, 2004.

public opinion during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 70s)<sup>30</sup> provides opportunities for individuals to air their political views in chat forums, on bulletin boards, where previously they only talked among themselves, a study of this kind will also present chances to gain a more systematic picture of public opinion on political issues with documented examples. Without doubt, the topics that attract the liveliest debate on bulletin boards may not always be the ones one would choose if one wanted to build up a comprehensive picture of public opinion or civil discourse in China—one is always dependent upon the messages that others post. Nevertheless, it is possible to choose certain themes as illustrations. The significance will be increased: if they are contrasted with what the official media were writing on the same subject, and if the expected effect or outcome is not what the authorities initially envisaged. Apart from that, as for their impact upon the political system, already it is possible to identify a few cases where the wider access of individuals to online news and information, and to subsequently comment on it through the Internet, has somewhat forced the government to respond to public concerns in ways that previously were thought unnecessary.

It has been suggested that official surveillance of the Internet discussions may be especially tight at times of particular significance to the regime, e.g. the congresses of the CCP, or sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC). The Sixteenth CCP Congress in November 2002 and the Tenth NPC Congress March 2003, form part of this project, devoted to an analysis of the discussions that appear on a bulletin board

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<sup>30</sup> The definition is cited from Xi Xiguang's work. See Xi Xiguang, "ICT and the Demise of Propaganda," *Global Media Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Fall 2003, available online at <[http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/SubmittedDocuments/archivedpapers/Fall2003/pdf\\_files/Internet%20and%20democracy\(xiguang\).pdf](http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/SubmittedDocuments/archivedpapers/Fall2003/pdf_files/Internet%20and%20democracy(xiguang).pdf)>, accessed on 12 March 2004.

(the Strong Country Forum) around the time of these congresses, which was contrasted with the reports that appear in the official *People's Daily*. The comparison should illustrate the political impact of the Internet upon Chinese political system. If the Internet has an impact at these times, it can certainly be inferred that it will do so on more relaxed occasions.

There is an interesting quote by former President Jiang Zemin, which was in response to the question of how China would be changed by the Internet:

*I'm getting old and sometimes I have trouble using a mouse. But my grandson is very good at navigating the Internet. I tell him that there is a positive side to the Internet, because it can help promote the spread of information and understanding. And there is a negative side, which is when misinformation is spread. So I tell my grandson that he should use the Internet to enrich knowledge, and he should not use it to visit pornographic sites. But my grandson lives far away from me. I cannot tell him what to do. I can only advise him what to do.<sup>31</sup>*

It seems the Chinese leadership begin to realise that the Internet will be increasingly difficult to administer despite its heavy-handed control, and the reality is often the case that the authorities may only regulate and intimidate but not compulsorily direct Internet users how precisely to navigate online. Besides, it has been suggested by some commentators that the new media may bring about a potentially subversive challenge to the communist rule in the future because the long-practiced information control mechanism as one of its key pillars to maintaining political power has been

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<sup>31</sup> Walter Isaacson, "Going Online When the Emperor's Away," *Time* (online edition), May 13, 2001, available online at <<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,109632,00.html>>, accessed on June 25, 2001.

growingly confronted.<sup>32</sup> As Nina Hachigian notes, “If Internet use continues to grow in China, and an economic or political crisis occurs, the Internet will suddenly become both a field and a tool of battle.”<sup>33</sup> This assumption will be further tested in the following contents, namely, chapter 5 (contingent incidents) and chapter 6 and 7 (pre-planned political events), to examine its validity.

Lastly and equally importantly, reviewing the existing literature on public opinion in China, I noticed that there were surprisingly few publications tackling this theme. In part this may reflect the sensitive political reality in China where posting unauthorised information and opinions in relation to public affairs are largely constrained. Alan Liu pointed out: “Until recently, U.S. scholars specializing in China paid episodic attention to Chinese mass sentiments. The concept of public opinion did not appear in the lexicon of contemporary U.S. Sinology until the 1980s.”<sup>34</sup> For that reason, this work will also contribute to the general literature upon Chinese public opinion, because the documented impact of the Internet upon Chinese political system could be conducted through the openness of the information and network technology. Would it be the situation that David Shambaugh depicts: “Despite its [China’s] continued grip over the *Xinhua* media system, the party has lost control of the key Leninist device of controlling what people read, see, hear, and learn. Without control over the media, the party can no longer control people’s minds.”<sup>35</sup> Or could the state still separate politics from economics as they have been successful in doing for the

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Xiao Qiang, “Cyber Speech: Catalyzing Free Expression and Civil Society,” *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 25, No.2, Summer 2003, pp. 70-75.

<sup>33</sup> Nina Hachigian, “China’s Cyber-Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 2, March/April 2001, p. 129.

<sup>34</sup> Alan P. L. Liu, *Mass Politics in the People’s Republic: State and Society in Contemporary China*, (Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press, 1996).

<sup>35</sup> David Shambaugh, “The Chinese State in the Post-Mao Era,” in David Shambaugh (ed.), *The*

last two decades? This dissertation aims to shed light on crucial questions which may reshape Internet studies on politics in general and have a significant impact upon public opinion in China in particular.

## **Section IV Research Questions**

### **A. Basic Research Questions**

This dissertation poses two basic questions.

Question 1: Is the Chinese government as much in control of public debates on the Internet as it is of debates in other forms of media?

Question 2: Does the Chinese government still control and manipulate public opinion as much as it has traditionally done?

Since public debates and public opinion are significant components within a political system, it is important to analyse whether these primary bases have been challenged or even changed on account of the adoption and use of the Internet.

### **B. Secondary Research Questions**

1. How can one measure the impact of the Internet upon political debates?
2. How can one document the political impact of the Internet?
3. Why and how does it matter to focus on the impact of the Internet upon political debates in China? And can we relate this subject to the broader theme of political change in China?

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*Modern Chinese State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 179.

## Section V Analytical Framework and Research Methods

### A. Analytical Framework

The figure 1.1 locates China in a circle where external (global) forces of information technology, globalisation, and marketisation heavily impact on the PRC in accelerating its economic integration with the outside world. The three external forces are independent yet closely interrelated. The term “information technology revolution” usually refers to the rapid technological advances in computer technologies, communication tools, and computer software and infrastructures that have led to a dramatic reduction in the cost of transmitting and processing information.<sup>36</sup> The concept of globalisation can be thought of as:

*...a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions—assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact—generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power.<sup>37</sup>*

In addition, marketisation usually refers to the “market-oriented philosophy.” It is part of the grand globalisation process which in turn stimulates the wider diffusion and use of the information technology.<sup>38</sup> The information revolution has significantly enhanced the scale and speed of globalisation. In other words, distant occurrences and developments can “come to have serious domestic impacts while local happenings

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<sup>36</sup> Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr., “Power and Interdependence in the Information Age,” in Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and Joseph S. Nye Jr. (eds.), *Governance.com: Democracy in the Information Age* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), pp. 162-163.

<sup>37</sup> David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> Emanuele Giovannetti, Mitsuhiro Kagami and Masatsugu Tsuji, “Introduction,” in Emanuele Giovannetti, Mitsuhiro Kagami and Masatsugu Tsuji (eds.), *The Internet Revolution: A Global*

can engender significant global repercussions.”<sup>39</sup>

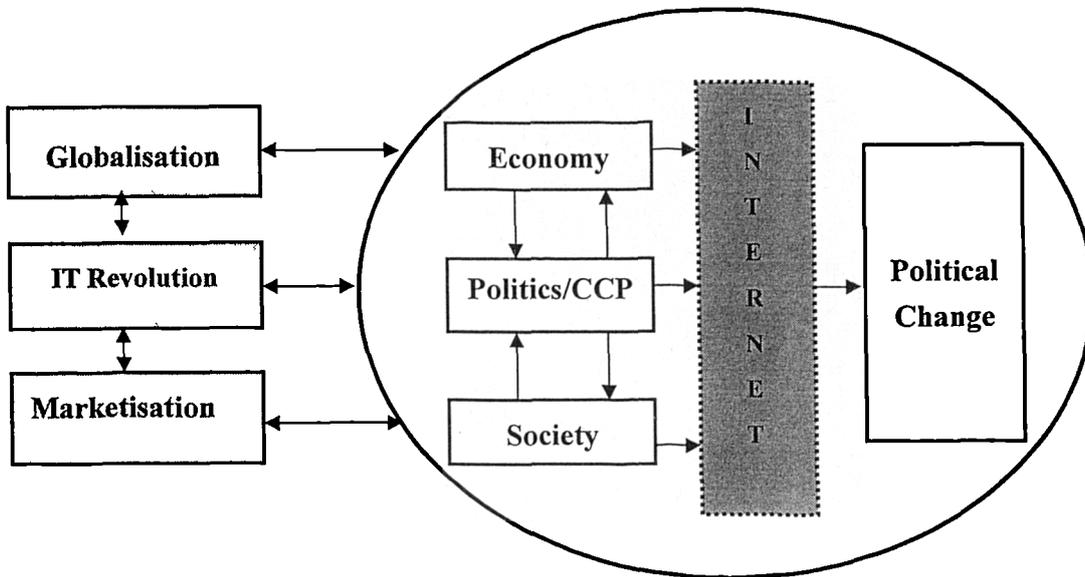


Figure 1.1 The Internet Impact upon Political Change

In consideration of the impact of the Internet at the national level, the medium of the Internet is then treated as a mediating variable that may determine, but not necessarily steer, the course of political change. Precisely, the mediating variable (the Internet) may link with the dependent variable (political change) but it does not necessarily imply causation because it needs to be examined in detail whether the medium is truly employed as an effective means of political change. The politico-economic and sociocultural settings in a given state can certainly exert a fundamental influence on political change or transformation. They are methodologically dealt with as

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*Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> David Held and Anthony McGrew, “The Great Globalization Debate: An Introduction,” in David Held and Anthony McGrew (eds.), *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the*

independent variables and political change as the dependent variable as a result. In short, the mediating variable is seen as one that links the independent and dependent variables.

Within the Chinese context (inside the circle), the political factors, particularly the role of the CCP, are so paramount that they can crucially affect the socioeconomic development. In the economic domain, the state still largely controls the (re)distribution process of economic resources, although its authority has been weakened since the open door policy began in the late 1970s. In Susan Strange's argument, "...the authority of the governments of all states, large and small, strong and weak, has been weakened as a result of technological and financial change and of the accelerated integration of national economies into one single global market economy."<sup>40</sup> The Chinese state is no exception. This analytical framework helps lead to the scheme of the dissertation that I shall approach the research questions set.

## **B. Research Methods**

In addition to official and policy documents analysis, two major research methods are employed, i.e., case studies and interviews, into this research project.

**Cases**—in the study of the political impact of the Internet in China, it seems essential to conduct empirical research on certain specific cases. As a consequence, a variety of cases are considered to show different dimensions of the impact of the Internet on the political system in China. The cases fundamentally form the contents of chapter 5 in

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*Globalization Debate* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge:

which the case studies, such as the US spy plane incident and the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak, took place unexpectedly, and the contents of chapter 6 and 7 in which the political events (the Sixteenth Chinese Communist Party Congress, and the Tenth National People's Congress) were planned well ahead by the authorities. The contrast of the nature of these incidents (planned and unexpected) is to demonstrate the extent to which the Internet has had an impact on political systems in China. This is to examine Hachigian's hypothesis that the Internet will have more of an impact in China when accidents and contingent events occur.<sup>41</sup> Such a comparison will indeed shed further light on the study of the significance of the contingencies associated with Internet-induced change—the extent to which the new media have impacted on the political system in a given national context.

**Interviews** were largely conducted with staff working for major Chinese Internet portals, such as Sina.com and Soho.com, as well as private Internet entrepreneurs (Internet café bars), based in large cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Guangzhou, as well as smaller cities like Chengde in Hebei province, Kunshan and Suzhou in Jiangsu province, and Zhuhai in Guangdong province. A number of interviews were also conducted with media and Internet scholars based at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Tsinghua University, and the Communication University of China (renamed from Beijing Broadcasting University in early September 2004). The interviews totalled about 20 cases to examine the major argument of chapter 4—the existence of a relationship between the Internet entrepreneurs and the Chinese government. The criteria to decide what questions to

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Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 13-14.

ask Internet entrepreneurs were largely based upon the explorations of the concept of “government-business nexus” in the Internet sector with similar interview questions, such as: “how do you cope with the government’s regulations?”, “How do you monitor Internet, cyber chatrooms or cybercafés?”<sup>42</sup> Interviewees were selected to test the assumption that there exist variations of Internet law enforcement between the North and the South, the big and small cities within China. Part of the interviewees were randomly selected from the participants of the 2002 Forum on Chinese Internet Media held in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, where more than 300 government officials, media/Internet entrepreneurs and experts took part in.

## **Section VI Outline of the Dissertation**

To approach the questions set out above, this dissertation begins with a literature review (Chapter 2) of the Internet’s impact upon political systems in established democracies as well as developing ones. Following the general discussion of the Internet’s possible political impact, there is a specific review of works with regard to the Internet’s political impact in China. The dissertation will show how the literature review has helped identify the research agenda in this dissertation. Since this project is also closely related to online data and information, a section discussing the methodological issues of the reliability of information and knowledge on the Internet is presented, so as to provide insights into the problems in relation to online research. After general points about the need to be systematic when doing Internet research, I will present my strategies to handle the potential problems against the backdrop of

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<sup>41</sup> Nina Hachigian, “China’s Cyber-Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, p. 132.

<sup>42</sup> See Appendix 9 for all the interview questions.

Chinese sociopolitical cyber environments.

In Chapter 3, the dissertation considers the fundamental issue of Internet governance in China. As it is generally perceived, the increasingly availability of information made possible by the global information revolution and systems, including the Internet, has affected governance and the political process. In authoritarian states like China, it is also true that Internet governance will influence the creation, dissemination, availability, and use of information on the Internet in global information systems. This project first considers the introduction of the Internet into China and its diffusion therein. The dissertation will then review the transitional Internet regulation regimes from the 1990s in order to better understand the setting of Internet regulation and censorship. A section addressing the countermeasures of Internet control is provided, demonstrating the ‘virtual’ cat-and-mouse game of the Internet environment that users and governments in China are now encountering.

Chapter 4 moves to the exploration of the relationship between Internet entrepreneurs and the government in China. This chapter will first outline the setting of the private economy in the wake of economic reform in the late 1970s, and the exponential development of the IT sector from the 1990s, in particular. The hybrid clientelist-corporatist complex is argued to illuminate the unique relations in China’s Internet industry, with case studies supporting the arguments. Such a relationship does have implications for civil society in China because the Internet entrepreneurs have helped unleash a more plural society.

Chapter 5 will consider the actual use of the Internet by Netizens in China. In

Chapter 4, it shows that the Internet entrepreneurs might not boldly promote or even fully realise Internet's political potential unless the directions or initiatives are guided by the state. What in turn makes the Internet salient is how and to what extent the medium is utilised by Netizens in China. This chapter then addresses the actual use of the Internet, centring upon four separate yet intertwined dimensions of Internet-mediated cases: (A) foreign relations: the U.S. spy plane collusion; (B) domestic political issues: the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak; (C) legal politics: the BMW incident; (D) dissenting politics: the Falun Gong movement. The exploration of the cases under review has revealed the political impact of the Internet upon a still un-democratic China. It also highlights the extent to which contingency may be different from those of pre-planned events.

In Chapter 6, the focus shifts to the micro examination and analysis of messages posted online. I contrast the official coverage of the themes, i.e., (A) corruption; (B) the concept of *xiaokang shehui* (a moderately wealthy society) and income inequality; (C) the theory of the "Three Represents" and the official accession of private entrepreneurs into the CCP; and (D) political reform, that appear in the *People's Daily* with what appeared on the *Qiangguo Luntan* (Strong Country Forum) during the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2002. This chapter serves to investigate the extent to which the Internet has facilitated the evolution of *e*-social capital and the possible emergence of a public sphere.

In Chapter 7, this project will look at other empirical evidence garnered during the first session of the 10th NPC and the National Committee of the CPPCC (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) held in March 2003. The case-study

centres on four categories of issues: (a) “*san-nong*”: “*nongye*” (agriculture), “*nongcun*” (village), and “*nongmin*” (farmers); (b) employment and social security; (c) the role and reform of the NPC and the CPPCC; and (d) the rule of law. It is expected that exploration of these discourses should illuminate the impact that these discussions have had on China’s politics in general, and public opinion and political participation in particular.

In the final chapter, the dissertation will summarise the conclusions drawn from previous chapters and re-emphasise some of the key points of the Internet and its accompanying development of public opinion and political impact in China. The concept of “prolonged stability, delayed Internet impact” is presented to integrate the individual chapter’s contentions, hoping to critically shed light on other Internet research of political impact in authoritarian states. The limitations of this project and an agenda for future work are identified so as to contribute to the existing literature.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **Section I Literature on the Internet's Impact upon Political Systems in General**

According to Manuel Castells, we are now living in a network society that is fundamentally different from those of the past. A number of processes converge in the information age, including the restructuring of capitalism and the introduction of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). These processes have effectively facilitated and reacted to globalisation.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, there has been an accelerating growth of a relatively sophisticated literature in the West, especially in the United States, that researches widely on the impact of ICTs on societies and political systems both in industrial democracies and developing countries. Research on the relationship between ICTs and political impact has turned up ample evidence mostly with regard to the established democracies, and to a lesser extent the yet undemocratic ones. Their focus centres upon the political application and implementation of ICTs, seeing them as primary tools in the working of a democratic political system or the evolution of democratisation. Whilst the Net effect on (un)democratic countries is hotly debated between social scientists, the conclusion drawn is yet to be unanimous. As far as academic literature is concerned, there are two broadly conflicting arguments on the likely impact of the Internet on modern political domain. On the one hand, commentators hold optimistic views that the new technologies will help improve existing democratic participation, facilitate more

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<sup>1</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Cambridge, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Cambridge, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); Manuel Castells, *End of Millennium* (Cambridge, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Manuel Castells, *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on Internet, Business, and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

direct, lower-cost, interactive and immediate participatory processes, so as to enhance civil engagement in the political sphere, a greater degree of civic deliberation over public issues, and to build a thicker electronic space of social capital as well as a workable mechanism of horizontal communication networks.<sup>2</sup> A few observers further advocate quantum leaps in the direction of direct democracy, synonymous with digital democracy, cyberdemocracy, e-democracy, virtual democracy, calling for a new era of more radical participatory polity and a fresh form of public participation in the information age.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, some are more sceptical about the romantic thinking of technological freedom and empowerment. They think the ICTs are increasingly being utilised in a more vigilant way for national security purposes and the manipulation of public opinion by commercial interests-based groups, which all serves the incumbent political powers and elite groups to sustain the domination of the newer communication tools.<sup>4</sup> In addition, concerns have been articulated about a tendency towards newer forms of divide, i.e., digital divide, thus creating a disparity between technological haves and have-nots, and possibly incurring undesirable economic and sociopolitical tensions.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, the Internet and ICTs are regarded as reinforcing the dominative positions of already existing interests, rather than radically

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2001).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Krishna Sen and David Hill, *Internet and Democracy in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2003); Diana Saco, *Cybering Democracy: Public Space and the Internet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Linda Main, "The Global Information Infrastructure: Empowerment or Imperialism," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 1, February 2001, pp. 83-97; Philip E. Agre and Marc Rotenberg, *Technology and Privacy: The New Landscape* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Mark Warschauer, *Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide*

reversing pre-existing power relations. In this regard, the Internet is argued to be less than a public medium that serves to advance liberation and pluralism but on the contrary, the centralisation and consolidation of social class—those who possess (certain) power or the financially better-off can monopolise it.

Both arguments have contributed to a better understanding of democratic theory and the working of democratic and undemocratic political systems in the Internet age. This literature review section is designed to examine the interrelated political issues associated with the new technologies. Specifically, how the Internet may or may not lead to increased participation of citizens in the making of policies in democratic nations, strengthening social capital, enhancing e-government service delivery, creating or reinvigorating civil society, broadening political discussion and reviving the public sphere, promoting political campaigns, voting, and advertising, bridging the digital divide, and lastly transforming authoritarian states? The contents that follow will as a result briefly review and illustrate the current developments of relevant literature.

#### **A. Electronic Government (E-government)**

The use of ICTs and related institutional arrangements are now impacting on the way government works and the services delivered to its citizens. In this respect, democratic governments, particularly in North America and Western Europe, are increasingly turning to ICTs, such as E-mail, online discussion forums, and bulletin boards, in order to support and enhancing the policymaking process. It is hoped that through the new technology-enabled channels and official Websites governments

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(Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2003).

nowadays can better reach out to their citizens and consequently gather public opinion. The adoption of electronic government is arguably leading to more transparent, interactive, open and accountable administration. For instance, Jane E. Fountain contributes to the intellectual understanding of information technology in organisational life with empirical evidence drawn from the federal administration in the United States. She proposes a “technology enactment” framework to describe the way that new technologies, especially the Internet, are creating a new concept of government organisation—a “virtual state,” in which it is “...a government that is organised increasingly in terms of virtual agencies, cross-agency and public-private networks whose structure and capacity depend on the Internet and web.”<sup>6</sup>

A comparative study of government Web sites for openness and accountability in fourteen countries including major western democracies, along with China, Egypt, and Japan, reveals that the introduction of the e-government may not necessarily lead to a more accountable public sector as it is wished. The lesson learned from this study is that there will be a limited success in enhancing accountability if the e-government project in any specific case country is not accompanied by “...the corresponding institutional reform of the civil service system and organisational reform of the agency.”<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, a policy-oriented publication from OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) provides lessons and experiences in OECD member countries. This report presents several guiding principles for

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<sup>6</sup> Jane E. Fountain, *Building the Virtual State: Information Technology and Institutional Change* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson Wong and Eric Welch, “Does E-Government Promote Accountability? A Comparative Analysis of Website Openness and Government Accountability,” *Governance*, Vol. 17, No. 2, April

successful online consultation and citizens' cyber engagement in policymaking processes, in the hope of fully exploiting the potential promised by the e-government proponents. The guiding principles are 1.) start planning early; 2.) demonstrate commitment; 3.) guarantee personal data protection; 4.) tailor your approach to fit your target group; 5.) Integrate online consultation with traditional methods; 6.) test and adapt your tools; 7) promote your online consultation; 8) analyse the results; 9.) provide feedback; and 10.) evaluate the consultation process and its impacts.<sup>8</sup> In addition, five challenges to success of e-government are also identified as 1.) the problem of scale; 2.) building capacity and active citizenship; 3.) ensuring coherence; 4.) conducting the evaluation of e-engagement; and 5.) ensuring commitment.<sup>9</sup>

#### **B. Improving Governance (E-Governance)**

For the past decades there has been a growing trend in Western democracies of declining trust and support of the governed in government, particularly in the United States. The mistrust between government and the governed is the subject of a collected volume, *Why People Don't Trust Government*, in which a number of essays provide an account of the roots of and explanations for mistrust in the context of the United States.<sup>10</sup> The mistrust also reveals a problem for the future of governance. La Porte, Demchak and de Jone, for example, argue that the Internet has increasingly

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2004, p. 291.

<sup>8</sup> See OECD, *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement* (Paris, OECD, 2003), pp. 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64-90.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Philip D. Zelikow and David C. King, *Why People Don't Trust Government* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

become the prime gateway for the public into government bureaucracies and their services in the information age. Governance ought to adapt accordingly.<sup>11</sup>

ICT has arguably made impact in the sphere of traditional institutions and processes of governance. In this regard, e-governance is likely to impact the productivity and performance of the public sector, empowering e-government to boost and revive citizen involvement within the governing process.<sup>12</sup> Yet some political scientists articulate a cautious note about the assertions of the Internet's transformation of governance, bureaucracy, institutions, elections, and civic life.<sup>13</sup>

### C. Enhancing Social Capital (E-Social Capital)

Since the publication of the provocative and influential 1975 work, *The Crisis of Democracy*, there has been a growing concern about the health and fragility of modern democracy in the “Trilateral areas”—North America, Europe, and Japan. Existing democracies were at that time puzzled by a crisis of governability. Specifically, the crisis of states' capacity to effectively respond to the surging public demands was also compounded by slower economic growth as well as the decline of State authority.<sup>14</sup> Such accounts of the sombre prospects for existing democracies were shared by a number of other works from the same era, and Americans still

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<sup>11</sup> Todd M. La Porte, Chris C. Demchak and Martin de Jone, “Democracy and Bureaucracy in the Age of the Web: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Speculations,” *Administration & Society*, Vol. 34, No. 4, September 2002, pp. 411-446.

<sup>12</sup> See Robert D. Carlitz and Rosemary W. Gunn, “Online Rulemaking: A Step toward E-governance,” *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 4, June 2002, pp. 389-405; Thomas B. Riley and Rogers W’O Okot-Uma, eds., *Electronic Governance and Electronic Democracy: Living and Working in the Wired World* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and Joseph S. Nye Jr., eds., *Governance.com: Democracy in the Information Age* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University Press,

expressed political cynicism in the post-Cold War in the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> Particularly in his book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam called attention to the general anxiety about participatory democracy and the erosion of the sense of community.<sup>16</sup>

The waning of social capital, characterised as consisting of social mistrust, the lack of associational membership and political apathy, has engendered attempts amongst academics to argue that social capital may be restored through the convenience of ICTs, in particular the Internet. Peter Ester and Henk Vinken argue that “the Internet is likely to be the ultimate tool for particularly younger generations to gain and advance social capital, to build and take part in communities.”<sup>17</sup> Barry Wellman and others have presented evidence in the 1998 survey of 39,211 visitors to the Web site of the National Geographic Society, investigating how the Internet affects social capital. To assess the Internet’s impact, they consider social capital as social network contacts (known as network capital), organisational and political participation (known as participatory capital), and community commitment. Their results suggest that a subtle and mixed relationship exists between the Internet and social capital: Internet usage supplements network capital, increases participatory capital, but decreases community commitment.<sup>18</sup>

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1975).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Richard Rose, *Challenge to Governance: Studies in Overload Politics* (Beverly Hills and London: Sage, 1980); Pippa Norris, ed., *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Susan J. Pharr and Robert D. Putnam, eds., *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Peter Ester and Henk Vinken, “Debating Civil Society: On the Fear for Civic Decline and Hope for the Internet Alternative,” *International Sociology*, Vol. 18, No. 4, December 2003, p. 675.

<sup>18</sup> Barry Wellman, Anabel Quan Haase, James Witte and Keith Hampton, “Does the Internet Increase, Decrease, or Supplement Social Capital? Social Networks, Participation, and Community Commitment,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 45, No. 3, November 2001, pp. 436-455.

Keith Hampton and Barry Wellman have also demonstrated an empirical case study on Internet's impact upon neighbourhood community. Based on a three-year ethnographic survey in the wired suburb Netville near Toronto, their findings show that Internet can enhance the sense of neighbourhood by facilitating neighbourhood-based interactions and social contacts because "spatial, temporal, and social barriers to community organising are overcome."<sup>19</sup>

Yet there has not been a comprehensive survey from a comparative perspective to help judge whether the new technologies will indeed facilitate the growth of social capital; most of them are still experimental and relatively small-scale studies.

#### **D. Promoting Political Campaigns, Advertising and Internet Voting**

The debates with regard to the Internet's impact on political campaigning and advertising explore whether the Internet can enhance the power of politicians to conduct election activities on the one hand and enable citizens to make better choices in elections because of more information-abundant news media and campaign Web sites on the other hand.<sup>20</sup> Whilst the Internet may be able to play a bigger role through election campaigns, electronic lobbying, and reducing the power of money associated with traditional elections, the electorates may somehow confirm Thomas Jefferson's

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<sup>19</sup> Keith Hampton and Barry Wellman, "Neighboring in Netville: How the Internet Supports Community and Social Capital in a Wired Suburb," *City & Community*, Vol. 2, No. 4, December 2003, p. 305. See also Hans Pruijt, "Social Capital and the Equalizing Potential of the Internet," *Social Science Computer Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2, May 2002, pp. 109-115.

<sup>20</sup> Lynda Lee Kaid, "Effects of Political Information in the 2000 Presidential Campaign: Comparing Traditional Television and Internet Exposure," *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 46, No. 5, January 2003, pp. 677-691; Dave D'Alessio, "Use of the World Wide Web in the 1996 US Election," *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4, December 1997, pp. 489-500; Thomas J. Johnson and Barbara K. Kaye, "Boost or Bust for Democracy? How the Web Influenced Political Attitudes and Behaviors in the 1996 and 2000 Presidential Elections," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 3, July 2003, pp. 9-34.

assertion that an informed citizenry is the foundation of a free society.

Bruce Bimber presents a historical account and conceptual approach for the political use of information in the context of United States. He suggests that information is a universally significant ingredient in political processes, and several types of “information regimes” in the history of American politics have been affected or interrupted by the information revolution.<sup>21</sup> Richard Davis holds that the Internet in America is gradually set to promote electoral lobbying and “virtual” campaigns, gauge public opinion, educate citizens, and achieve policy resolution. In his observation, many political players are now well adapting to the new technology and ensuring that this new medium benefits them in their ultimate struggle for political power.<sup>22</sup> Yet Bimber and Davis in their joint work argue with a sceptical tone that the effectiveness of the Internet-based political campaigns is still limited or constrained. In their work, the four categories—opinion reinforcement, activism, fundraising, and voter mobilisation—were adopted to investigate the actual use of the Internet campaigning in the 2000 Presidential elections in the US.<sup>23</sup>

Graeme Browning provides empirical analysis of how various groups, including advocacy groups and political organisations, have exploited the Internet to further their policy interests and electoral campaigns. Browning suggests that better designing personal Web sites may effectively disseminate political information and elicit support through interactive participation of Internet users.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Bruce Bimber, *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Richard Davis, *The Web of Politics: The Internet's Impact on the American Political System* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Bimber and Richard Davis, *Campaigning Online: The Internet in U.S. Elections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Graeme Browning, *Electronic Democracy: Using the Internet to Transform American Politics*

In addition, some commentators consider whether “Internet voting”<sup>25</sup> may be able to help improve lower election turnout amongst most Western democracies. Susan Henry, for instance, investigates the results of the pilot electronic voting held at five councils within 2002 UK local elections. Given that the voter turnout increased by 3.5 per cent, she suggests that many more future pilots are required to make a more conclusive judgement on the Internet’s voting impact.<sup>26</sup> Christos Bóuras and others present a detailed account, arguing that public administrations can additionally gather public opinion through the use of Internet voting on several public issues, such as public services delivering and environmental protection. This may in turn positively help support government’s decision-making process.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, a few observers have also raised a number of concerns, including the security issues of online voting and public Internet accessibility across racial and socioeconomic lines.<sup>28</sup> As a matter of fact, the concept of e-voting is, however, in its initial stage and there are surely lots of difficulties, technical and conceptual, to be overcome in the near future.

### **E. Promoting Digital (Direct) Democracy and Reviving the Public Sphere**

Marshall McLuhan was one of the first scholars to explore the effects of media and

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(Medford, NJ: Information Today, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> The Internet or electronic voting is in itself using electronic ballots that allow voters to cast their votes to elect officials over the Internet. For a general discussion about remote Internet voting, see, for example, R. Michael Alvarez and Thad E. Hall, *Point, Click and Vote: The Future of Internet Voting* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> Susan Henry, “Can Remote Internet Voting Increase Turnout?” *Aslib Proceedings*, Vol. 55, No. 4, July 2003, pp. 193-202.

<sup>27</sup> Christos Bouras, N. Katris and Vassilis Triantafillou, “An Electronic Voting Service to Support Decision-Making in Local Government,” *Telematics and Informatics*, Vol. 20, No. 3, August 2003, pp. 255-274.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Yurong Yao and Edward Watson, “Concerns and Solutions on Electronic Voting

technology on humankind. In his seminal book *The Medium Is the Message* published in 1967, McLuhan argued that people have historically associated messages with what people are saying (their content), and have tended to ignore the importance of the media. He reversed the traditional discourse of “content dominance over medium” and held that the medium is of great significance because the environment can heavily shape public messages.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, McLuhan’s popular concept of the “global village” highlights that technologies are extensions of human beings. In his observations:

*In the electric age, when our central nervous system is technologically extended to involve in the whole of mankind and to incorporate the whole of mankind in us, we necessarily participate, in depth, in the consequences of our every action.*<sup>30</sup>

His vision of “global village” has shed light on a number of aspects of later literature about how the technological innovations may transform public lives, including the changes in contemporary political systems. In *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler examined the overwhelming impact of technological advance in the 1970s upon human lives. The society was undergoing a structural change from an “industrial society” to a “super-industrial society.”<sup>31</sup> Toffler further considered the impact of the information and knowledge revolution on society, which he called “the third wave” following the second wave of the industrial revolution. In what he termed the “Twenty-first-century democracy,” he held that educated citizens could achieve “direct democracy” by

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Systems Adoption,” in Gerry Gingrich (ed.), *Managing IT in Government, Business and Communities* (Hershey, PA: Idea Group Publishing, 2003), pp. 127-146.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Message* (New York: Bantam, 1967).

<sup>30</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1964), p. 149.

“using advanced computers, satellites, telephones, cable, polling techniques, and other tools”<sup>32</sup>

Toffler’s visions have inspired others to explore the possibility of renewing the classical model of Athenian democracy associated with regular mass participation in public debate, consultation, and decision-making amongst the citizenry. In his influential work *Strong Democracy*, Benjamin Barber demonstrates the weakness of modern liberal democracy. He thinks that liberal democracy is a “thin democracy” in which “democratic values are prudential and thus provisional, optional, and conditional.”<sup>33</sup> Instead, he proposes “strong democracy”—a new form of participatory politics for a new age. He states:

*Strong democracy requires unmediated self-government by an engaged citizenry. It requires institutions that will involve individuals at both the neighbourhood and the national level in common talk, common decision-making and political judgement, and common action.*<sup>34</sup>

The idea of the “television town meeting” can enhance, in Barber’s thought, “direct” public participation and citizen-powered decision-making process. In this regard, new technology as an intermediary medium is essential to achieve the “strong democracy” because citizens can conduct deliberative discussions and debate via the interactive form of electronic town meeting amongst (local) communities, and thus to improve

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<sup>31</sup> Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (London: Pan Books, 1971).

<sup>32</sup> Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (London: Pan Books, 1980), p. 439.

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley, CA. and London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

“thin” democracy.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, one of the few practicable measures discussed in the 1980s was electronic town meetings via local cable television networks by which local citizens could discuss or debate local issues.<sup>36</sup> Yet this concept of electronic town conferences or electronic town hall meetings remains a more primitive and top-down mode of communication which preceded the commercialised application of the Internet. It was not until 1992 that the National Science Foundation of the United States lifted the ban on commercial traffic on the Internet,<sup>37</sup> thereby the earlier debates over “teledemocracy” encouraged a more innovative mode of mass participation in public affairs. In this respect, the Internet emerged to open up newer prospects for an Athenian democracy in the information age.

Ted Becker and Christa D. Slaton argue that a “new democratic paradigm”—electronic democracy and teledemocracy—is coming into being, which is characterised by the widespread application of advanced ICTs in present-day democratic theory and practice. To achieve teledemocracy, the critical mass is urged to synergise “scientific deliberative polling, comprehensive electronic town meetings and the Internet.”<sup>38</sup> Tony Kinder further presents the survey results of the application of teledemocracy in 31 European cities. Focusing on teledemocracy at the local (city) level, he argues that its adoption in those European cities under review has shown the increased level of interactivity between citizens and local councils, improved quality

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<sup>35</sup> Benjamin R. Barber, “Three Scenarios for the Future of Technology and Strong Democracy,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 113, No. 4, winter 1998, p. 583.

<sup>36</sup> F. Christopher Arterton, *Teledemocracy: Can Technology Protect Democracy* (London: Sage Publications, 1987).

<sup>37</sup> See <<http://www.house.gov/boucher/docs/boucherinfotech.htm>>, accessed on June 1, 2004.

<sup>38</sup> Ted Becker and Christa D. Slaton, *The Future of Teledemocracy* (Westport, Conn. and London: Praeger, 2000), p. 47.

of services and enhanced services availability, which has beneficial effect on the quality and legitimacy of local government.<sup>39</sup>

As a matter of fact, teledemocracy functions in a sense like neighbourhood salons that help aggregate individual preferences into a collective choice. Online democratic practice involves Internet users participating in rational and critical deliberation and consultation, hence reviving the heated discussions about “public sphere” in cyberspace.<sup>40</sup>

Since Habermas’s important publication, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, about the rise and fall of the liberal bourgeois public, his continuously evolving theory of the “public sphere” has inspired numerous works on deliberative democracy and a more democratic media system.<sup>41</sup> The notion of the Habermas’s theory of the public sphere is based upon the ideal of a “deliberative” as opposed to merely “informed” public. It is a “public” space between the state and civil society in which citizens can debate issues of common concern. As a result, a well-functioning public sphere is dependant on both on access to pertinent information about the actions of governmental institutions and opportunities for citizens to engage in rational and critical deliberation that results in the formation of public opinion and the shaping of governmental conduct. Empirical evidence of online activities in relation to “public sphere” in the Chinese context will be further discussed and presented in chapter 6 and 7.

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<sup>39</sup> Tony Kinder, “Vote Early, Vote Often? Tele-democracy in European Cities,” *Public Administration*, Vol. 80, No. 3, autumn 2002, pp. 557-582.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Lincoln Dahlberg, “Democracy via Cyberspace: Mapping the Rhetorics and Practices of Three Prominent Camps,” *New Media & Society*, Vol. 3, No. 2, June 2001, pp. 157-177; Antji Gimmler, “Deliberative Democracy, the Public Sphere and the Internet,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Vol. 27, No. 4, July 2001, pp. 21-39.

<sup>41</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category*

In the Internet age, channels exist that provide debates and consultations to be easily conducted over the cyber venues of Usenet, discussion boards, chat rooms, e-mail lists, where participants are encouraged to conduct deliberative forms of discussions and debates. For instance, the US Minnesota E-Democracy <<http://www.e-democracy.org/>> is a citizen-based project whose mission is to improve citizen interaction and participation in public issues through the use of information networks. The Minnesota E-Democracy initiative is conceivably the best known and oldest Web forum (1994) which attracts over 4,000 mailing-list subscribers to its project updates sent out via e-mail, whose participants can take part in discussion forums covering both nationwide and local political issues. UK Citizens Online Democracy (UKCOD) <<http://www.partnerships.org.uk/articles/ukcod.html>>, founded in 1996, is Britain's popularly known e-democracy service. Similar to the US-based Minnesota one, the UKCOD aims to promote online discussion and debates on national and/or controversial public issues, and to revive the deliberative democracy by encouraging the general public to voluntarily participate in the decision-making process. It is, however, relatively inactive when compare with the Minnesota's E-Democracy.

In fact, some social scientists claim that the mode of computer-mediated communications (CMCs) exploited by civic network groups shapes and facilitates grassroots democracy, bringing people into the democratic participatory processes.<sup>42</sup> The rationale is that with more and more people engaging in public discourse online, the concept of government may transform into a regime, which is more accountable

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*of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989).

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Damian Tambini, "New Media and Democracy: The Civic Networking

and responsive to its people. In this sense, the Internet could have the potential to become a more open online platform particularly for periphery groups to engage in public discourse than that of traditional media. Roza Tsagarousianou and others have further studied the empirical basis of electronic democracy by looking into the recent establishment of city-based civic networks in the United States and Europe. Their findings show how different understandings of democracy have led to different approaches in bringing about an electronic incarnation of “electronic democracy” in each city project.<sup>43</sup>

Ian Budge talks about the concept of “direct democracy” and explores the technical feasibility in a society where the modern ICTs are widely available. Based upon Anglo-American political development, his argument highlights the significance of direct democracy and associated extended public participation as remedies for the ills of present-day democracy. He thinks that direct democracy creates opportunities to enhance social inclusion.<sup>44</sup>

There are nevertheless cautious voices articulated about the argument of electronic democracy. Kevin Hill and John Hughes, for instance, have investigated the political implications of the Internet and computer-mediated political communication by looking at E-mail, Usenet groups, and Web pages in the context of the United States. Their investigations show “the Internet is merely an extension of the fax machine, the telephone, the postal system...in being a medium of political

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Movement,” *New Media & Society*, Vol. 1, No. 3, December 1999, pp. 305-329.

<sup>43</sup> Roza Tsagarousianou, Damian Tambini and Cathy Bryan, eds., *Cyberdemocracy: Technology, Cities and Civic Networks* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> Ian Budge, *The New Challenge of Direct Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

communications.”<sup>45</sup> As a result, they maintain that the Internet is, at best, “a supplement to political discourse, not a gigantic paradigm shift.”<sup>46</sup>

Jay Blumler and Stephen Coleman also note that the Internet possesses a “vulnerable potential” to provide a democratic space that is open to all and connected to real democratic institutions. In their words, “[a]n infrastructure for its proper realisation is lacking.”<sup>47</sup> In another article, Coleman focuses more on current inadequacies about existing communication channels for democratic representation. He suggests a mode of information-flows for e-democracy, i.e., “the creation of a trusted online space for democracy; integration of e-democracy into constitutionally recognised channels; the cultivation of meaningful interactivity between representatives and the represented; the recruitment of traditionally excluded voices to online public debate.”<sup>48</sup> These proposals, in the author’s opinion, are criteria to further assess the Internet’s (democratic) impact beyond sheer speculation.

## **F. Bridging the Digital Divide**

Some sceptics of the Internet’s democratic impact have focused on the issues of the “digital divide.” The phrase generally refers to the disparity between those who have and those who do not use or have no access to ICTs. The growing concern of

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<sup>45</sup> Kevin A. Hill and John E. Hughes, *Cyberpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet* (Lanham, MD and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), p. 179.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Jay G. Blumler and Stephen Coleman, *Realising Democracy Online: A Civic Commons in Cyberspace* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research/Citizens Online Research Publications, 2001), No. 2, p. 4, available online at <<http://www.citizenonline.org.uk/pdf/realising.pdf>>, accessed on June 8, 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Stephen Coleman, “The Future of the Internet and Democracy Beyond Metaphors, Towards Policy,” in OECD (ed.), *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement* (Paris: OECD, 2003), p. 143, available online at <<http://www1.oecd.org/publications/e-book/4204011E.PDF>> , accessed on February 12, 2004.

inequalities in ICTs has spurred scholarly debates over the last decade since ICTs commercially applied to the public domain in the early 1990s.<sup>49</sup> There are also serious concerns about the enhanced economic disparities brought about by ICTs between rich developed countries and less developed ones, reinforcing the nature and development of inequality in the world economy.<sup>50</sup> Howard Rheingold particularly refers to the question of digital divide when he assesses the relationship between virtual (community) networks and the Internet-enabled democracy. He mentions that “...no discussion of technology-assisted democracy can begin without referring to the key question of who can afford to take advantage of the new media.”<sup>51</sup>

As a result, the notion of a dichotomous digital divide of “haves” vs. “have-nots” or to a lesser extent, the “information-rich” vs. the “information-poor,” is famously held by some commentators as an obstacle to the political discussion of socioeconomic issues. As Kenneth Wilson and others caution that the digital divide should not be seen as merely an issue of technology as such, but ought to be looked upon as a complex of socioeconomic and politico- cultural issues.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, Paul Foley and others present a comprehensive research that addresses the digital divide in big cities like London. Instead of employing the traditional approach

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Benjamin M. Compaine, ed., *The Digital Divide: Facing a Crisis or Creating a Myth* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2001); David J. Gunkel, “Second Thoughts: Toward a Critique of the Digital Divide,” *New Media & Society*, Vol. 5, No. 4, December 2003, pp. 499-522.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, William Wresch, *Disconnected: Haves and Have-Nots in the Information Age* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996); OECD, *Communications Outlook 1999* (Paris: OECD, 1999), available online at <<http://nor-kermit.colorado.edu/slingshot/ebookeng.pdf>>, accessed on March 12, 2004; and UNDP, *Human Development Report 1999: Globalization with a Human Face* (New York: UNDP, 1999), available online at <<http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/1999/en/default.cfm>>, accessed on March 12, 2004.

<sup>51</sup> Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2000), p. 377.

<sup>52</sup> Kenneth R. Wilson, Jennifer S. Wallin and Christa Reiser, “Social Stratification and the Digital Divide,” *Social Science Computer Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2, June 2003, pp. 133-143.

that regards socioeconomic factors, i.e., income, education, job, and technology skills, the Foley-led team highlights a socio-personal approach that encompasses attitudinal and behavioural factors of potential users, with a hope to better comprehend the nature of digital divide. Their findings reveal that lower levels of interest, awareness, understanding, and acceptance of ICTs are all contributing to the digital divide.<sup>53</sup>

Pippa Norris develops academic research on this subject, which had previously been more empirical and evidence-based, in the direction of a more theoretical perspective that is developed through a comparative multilevel research design covering a wide range of political systems. For Norris, the concept of digital divide is a composite phenomenon that encompasses three distinct aspects: the global divide (the divide between industrial and developing countries), the social divide (the divide within a nation, that is the divide between rich and poor), and the democratic divide (the divide between those who do, and do not, use the Internet to engage, mobilise, and participate in public life).<sup>54</sup>

As for the Internet's democratising potential or effects, Jason Abbott cautions, while the new information technologies may be exploited in some countries as an effective means to bring about political change, its democratising impact may be significantly counteracted by severe digital inequalities and the growing trend of the commercialisation of this medium.<sup>55</sup> To sum up, the issue of digital divide does

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Foley, Ximena Alfonso and Shazad Ghani, *The Digital Divide in a World City*, prepared by IECRC and Citizens Online for the Greater London Authority, LondonConnects and the London Development Agency, June 20, 2002, available online at <[http://www.london.gov.uk/gla/publications/e-london/digital\\_divide.rtf](http://www.london.gov.uk/gla/publications/e-london/digital_divide.rtf)>, accessed on June 2, 2004.

<sup>54</sup> Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> Jason P Abbott, "Democracy@internet.asia? The Challenges to the Emancipatory Potential of the Net: Lessons from China and Malaysia," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 1, February 2001, pp. 99-114.

matters when considering ICTs' impact on politics. It is primarily because the Net's impact will be limited and constrained if the new technologies are relatively confined to a small proportion of users in a society where the majority still lacks the means of access to a wider range of (alternative) information and knowledge. The problem of the digital divide with respect to China will be further referred to in later chapters.

### **G. Transforming Authoritarian States, Bringing in Democratisation**

As ICTs are increasingly proliferating and utilised across the world, they spark heated debates over the question of whether ICTs, particularly the Internet, may not only bring forth new forms of mass participation and reforms of established democracies, but also spread democracy to non-democratic countries. Specifically, the growing body of literature, which addresses the Internet's impact on authoritarian states, also known as cyber-democratisation or electronic democratisation, asks whether the Internet will contribute to the disintegration of authoritarian regimes, fostering the establishment of democratic practices by providing citizens and activists with the tools to disseminate subversive or alternative information, coordinate and organise sociopolitical movements to challenge and undermine incumbent governments.

Christopher Kedzie, for example, conducted a macro-level research of 144 countries with the aim of finding correlations between democracy (political freedom) and the new communication media (network connectivity). Kedzie concludes that democracy and networked communication are indeed positively correlated.<sup>56</sup> In their investigations of the content of 2,500 messages in 41 Usenet groups worldwide,

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<sup>56</sup> Christopher R. Kedzie, *Communication and Democracy: Coincident Revolutions and the Emergent Dictator's Dilemma* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1997).

Kevin Hill and John Hughes also reveal that the level of democracy is closely associated with the electronic communications within a country. Their quantitative analysis demonstrates that Internet messages about the countries with lower levels of democratisation are far more likely to have anti-government content.<sup>57</sup> Michael Mazarr, in his edited book, provides snapshots of the impact of digital media on politics by investigating often-noted case studies, such as the use of the Internet by the Zapatista National Liberation Movement and Army in Mexico; the use of mobile telephones in democratisation process or conflict situations in Senegal, the Philippines, and Congo; the Internet's impact on the development of politics and civil society in China, Indonesia, and Iran; and the role of cybercafés and the Internet-driven modernisation strategy in India. Yet the conclusion drawn is a mixed message. In the case that authoritarian countries can successfully police and control the Internet, it thus plays a role as a centralised propaganda tool. Besides, the Internet will be used to promote the political mobilisation of alternative political content when authoritarian states are incapable or ineffective in controlling the medium.<sup>58</sup>

Peter Ferdinand in his edited volume, *The Internet, Democracy and Democratization*, provides assessments of the Internet's impact in various sociopolitical settings. This volume looks at issues of political campaigns in the United States, "virtual" party politics in Germany, the case study of the African Americans political engagement in the US, anti-modern political movements of the neo-Nazis in Germany and Taliban in Afghanistan, and the cases of Internet

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<sup>57</sup> Kevin A. Hill and John E. Hughes, "Is the Internet an Instrument of Global Democratization?" *Democratization*, Vol. 6, No. 2, summer 1999, pp. 99-127.

<sup>58</sup> Michael J. Mazarr, ed., *Information Technology and World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

democratisation in Indonesia, Africa and Tibet. Whilst this work suggests that the Net is unlikely to fundamentally transform politics, many authors in this volume remain cautiously optimistic about future prospects of Net's repercussion on politics.<sup>59</sup>

Indrajit Banerjee's edited book *Rhetoric & Reality* provides a preliminary critical overview of the actual use of the Internet in political discourse and practices across nine Asian countries: China, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. This comprehensive study evaluates the role and impact of the new media on political systems and structures of Asian countries. Amongst other things, the regulation and censorship of governments, lower-level of public access to the new media and the digital divide are identified to have largely mitigated and influenced the political impact of the Internet in this region.<sup>60</sup>

In addition, Jeffrey Winters holds that international media coverage of Indonesia and the Internet has primary impact at the level of elite politics there. The Internet in Indonesia serves not only as an alternative source of information, but also as a tool for civic activism and coordination amongst an increasingly disenchanted opposition in Indonesia.<sup>61</sup> Some commentators argue that the Internet's impact upon authoritarian regimes will consequently heighten political challenges in a crisis. Bruce Bimber, for example, coins the phrase "accelerated pluralism" to show that the Internet will facilitate grassroots mobilisation and civic organisation, and it will particularly

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<sup>59</sup> Peter Ferdinand, ed., *The Internet, Democracy and Democratization* (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

<sup>60</sup> Indrajit Banerjee, ed., *Rhetoric & Reality: The Internet Challenge for Democracy in Asia* (Singapore: Eastern University Press, 2003).

<sup>61</sup> See Jeffrey A. Winters, "The Political Impact of New Information Sources and Technologies in Indonesia," *Gazette*, Vol. 64, No. 2, April 2002, pp. 109-119. See also David T. Hill and Krishna Sen, "The Internet in Indonesia's New Democracy," *Democratization*, Vol. 7, No. 1, spring 2000, pp. 119-136.

accelerate the process of "...an intensification of group-centred, pluralistic politics."<sup>62</sup>

In other words, the Internet, in Bimber's observation, will accelerate an already existing process of social pluralism.

#### **H. Revisionist Literature on the Internet's Impact upon Politics**

Yet there are counter arguments suggesting that the Internet may not simply function as a catalyst for democracy and democratisation against authoritarian states. The so-called revisionist literature that calls into question the conventional wisdom marks a movement away from the technological determinism that has been the dominant ethos for several years in Internet studies. Their research has reached a newer level of sophistication of Internet studies. Central to the revisionist literature is the fundamental question of whether new technologies such as the Internet may undermine the power of authoritarian regimes. Instead of challenging or undermining authoritarian states, the Internet may ironically be used by the state to strengthen its ruling legitimacy, and thus limit or even prevent political democratic transformations from taking place.

In *Cyberpower*, Tim Jordan evaluates several subjects in cyberspace, including the "virtual" individual, the "virtual" social, and the "virtual" imaginary. One of his great contributions to the general literature is that he furthers intellectual understandings about the nature of power in cyberspace. And he demonstrates how culture and politics are in essence shaped by the Internet.<sup>63</sup> In addition, Andrew

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<sup>62</sup> Bruce Bimber, "The Internet and Political Transformation: Populism, Community, and Accelerated Pluralism," *Polity*, Vol. 31, No. 1, Fall 1998, p 156.

<sup>63</sup> Tim Jordan, *Cyberpower: The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace and the Internet* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

Shapiro provides an overview of the control revolution, which is now seriously affecting almost every aspect of our lives, ranging from individual freedom online to the limits of freedom imposed by the state and large corporations.<sup>64</sup>

Lawrence Lessig builds an analysis of control force over hardware and software that shape this new medium. Lessig contradicts the popular belief that the Internet cannot be regulated by investigating how social norms, laws, markets, and physical architecture have already moulded and affected behaviours both in real space and in cyberspace. He cautions that the profit-oriented decisions of large software and entertainment companies are likely to endanger our online privacy and even harm democratic systems if there is no interference from the government.<sup>65</sup> His warnings relate to his latest work, in which he argues that the Internet appears over-controlled, legally and technically, and in turn, ordinary people are deprived of the extraordinary value of freedom.<sup>66</sup>

In specific country contexts, Garry Rodan investigates the Singaporean state, revealing that the challenges to electronic media controls, including the Internet, have been relatively limited and ineffectual. The Singaporean government, he argues, has not only successfully contained cyberspace within which the reformist groups may be empowered to form a civil society to organise collective political action to challenge the “semi-authoritarian” regime, but has also actively refined Internet-related legislation and promoted the project of a Singaporean “infocommunication hub” to actively deter potential political threats. The existing structured dependence of the

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<sup>64</sup> Andrew L. Shapiro, *The Control Revolution: How the Internet Is Putting Individuals in Charge and Changing the World We Know* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1999).

<sup>65</sup> Lawrence Lessig, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

<sup>66</sup> Lawrence Lessig, *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World* (New York:

state-society relations in Singapore has also reinforced the relative success of the state in harnessing the Internet for its commercial advantages whilst constraining the medium's undesirable sociopolitical effects.<sup>67</sup>

Dismissing the idea of “blind optimism” about the Internet, Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor Boas provide a critical assessment of the Internet's impact on several authoritarian states—Egypt, Singapore, Burma, China, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam. The analytical framework in their assessment consists of four dimensions of Internet uses: civil society, politics and the state, the economy, and the international sphere. Their comparative studies suggest that the Internet may not necessarily transform authoritarian regime. The new media may instead be exploited by the authorities as an effective tool to further strengthen their governing capability in the information age.<sup>68</sup>

Nina Hachigian considers the power of the Internet and its relations with one-party states in East and Southeast Asian—China, Malaysia, Burma, North Korea, Singapore and Vietnam. Hachigian refutes the commonly held assumption that one-party states will definitely attempt to contain or control online political activities for the hope of regimes' continued survival. She argues instead that governments'

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Vintage Books, 2002).

<sup>67</sup> Garry Rodan, “Embracing Electronic Media But Suppressing Civil Society: Authoritarian Consolidation in Singapore,” *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4, December 2003, pp. 503-524. See also Garry Rodan, “The Internet and Political Control in Singapore,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 113, No. 1, Spring 1998, pp. 63-89; and Terence Lee, “Internet Use in Singapore: Politics and Policy Implications,” *Media International Incorporating Culture and Policy*, Vol. 2003, No. 107, May 2003, pp. 75-88.

<sup>68</sup> See Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003). Earlier analyses can be found at Shanthi Kalathil, “Dot Com for Dictators,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 135, March/April 2003, pp. 42-49; Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, “The Internet and State Control in Authoritarian Regimes: China, Cuba, and the Counterrevolution,” *First Monday*, Vol. 6, No. 8, August 2001, available online at <[http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6\\_8/kalathil/index.html](http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_8/kalathil/index.html)>, accessed on September 4, 2001.

attitudes towards the Internet use vary in Asia, resulting in no clear conclusion that can be drawn about what approach will be most effective or successful in promoting regime longevity. She suggests that those one-party states who embrace the Internet are not more likely to fail than those that attempt to constrain the medium.<sup>69</sup>

In summary, much of the literature reviewed above tends to suggest that there is indeed a potential for the new media to affect politics in general, although there are cautious voices about how and to what extent the Internet may effectively transform politics. Much of the work remains in an exploratory and primitive stage that requires more cases of individual-based literature to help generalise the Net's impact upon politics. The following section will provide a review of current literature on the Internet's impact in the Chinese context.

## **Section II Literature on the Internet's Impact upon China's Political System**

The extrapolation of the Internet's political impact has to some extent been inspired and strengthened by the fall of communism in the Former Soviet Union and East Central Europe, where the authoritarian communist states were arguably incapable of reining in the electronic flow of subversive information.<sup>70</sup> Communist China in this regard serves as an illuminating case that may shed light on the further study of the Internet's political impact upon still developing and undemocratic nations. It is also partly because China, like many developing countries, has deepened economic reform

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<sup>69</sup> Nina Hachigian, "The Internet and Power in One-Party East Asian States," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3, summer 2002, pp. 41-58. See also Nina Hachigian, "Telecom Taxonomy: How Are the One Party States of East Asia Controlling the Political Impact of the Internet?" in Junhua Zhang and Martin Woesler (eds.), *China's Digital Dream: The Impact of the Internet on Chinese Society* (Bochum: The University Press Bochum, 2002), pp. 35-67.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Frank Ellis, *From Glasnost to the Internet: Russia's New Infosphere* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999).

and aggressively promoted ICT developments, in the hope of stimulating economic growth. As a result, much of the literature in the study of the Internet's impact on China has often focused upon the ambiguity between the Chinese government's promotion of ICT developments on the one hand, and its vigorous attempt to contain the arguably inherently democratising impact of the new technologies on the other hand.

Observers like William Foster, Seymour Goodman and others have provided a comprehensive overview of technical and infrastructural features of Internet development in China.<sup>71</sup> Peter Lovelock presented an earlier account of China's IP telephony market and the Internet development.<sup>72</sup> Xing Fan provided analyses of the Chinese communication and information sectors, centring on issues of initiatives and characteristics of the sectors, policy and regulatory frameworks, strategies and foreign involvement.<sup>73</sup> When comparing Internet development in India and China, Larry Press and others argue that the Chinese government can accelerate Internet diffusion by administrative decree rather than consensus building followed by legislative and

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<sup>71</sup> William Foster and Seymour E. Goodman, *The Diffusion of the Internet in China* (Palo Alto: Center for International Studies and Cooperation, Stanford University, 2000). See also Wei Lu, Jia Du, Jin Zhang, Feicheng Ma and Taowen Le, *Journal of Information Science*, Vol. 28, No. 3, June 2002, pp. 207-224; Jinhong Tang, "Recent Internet Developments in the People's Republic of China: An overview," *Online Information Review*, Vol. 24, No. 4, April 2000, pp. 316-321; Richard Cullen and Pinky D. W. Choy, "The Internet in China," *Columbia Journal of Asian Law*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Spring 1999, pp. 99-134; Milton Mueller and Zixiang Tan, *China in the Information Age: Telecommunications and the Dilemmas of Reform* (Westport, Conn. and London: Praeger, 1997), chapter 5 (pp. 81-99); Hongxin Zhao, "Rapid Internet Development in China: A Discussion of Opportunities and Constrains on Future Growth," *Thunderbird International Business Review*, Vol. 44, No. 1, January/February 2002, pp. 119-138.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Lovelock, *China: IP Telephony and the Internet*, paper presented at International Telecommunication Union IP Telephony Workshop in Geneva between June 14-16, 2000, available online at <<http://www.itu.int/osg/spu/ni/iptel/countries/china/china-iptel.pdf>>, accessed on June 7, 2003.

<sup>73</sup> Xing Fan, *Communications and Information in China: Regulatory Issues, Strategic Implications* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001).

regulatory reform.<sup>74</sup> This has somehow confirmed what Dali Yang has noted, “once the Chinese leaders became convinced of its significance [in enhancing China’s economic prosperity and growth], they began to play critical roles in unleashing its potential.”<sup>75</sup> Zixiang Tan and others argue that the Chinese government has maintained a “state-coordinated Internet infrastructure”—a “hierarchy of responsibility” over the Internet networks, accompanied by a “certain degree of competition and decentralised decision-making.”<sup>76</sup> This has greatly assured that the Internet development is hardly evolved beyond state control.

Xiudian Dai maintains that the Internet is a double-edged sword for China: indispensable for economic prosperity but also confronting the Chinese authorities with unprecedented challenges. To better comprehend the Internet’s impact on the Chinese political system, he suggests it should be examined in a long-term perspective.<sup>77</sup> Jianhai Bi notes that cyberspace power presents the greatest challenge and threat to the Communist regime. The Chinese government should not underestimate public opinion as an increasing number of Chinese Internet users are now empowered by the new technologies to challenge and influence the regime. In other words, Internet users have indeed compelled the government to pay heed to what the messages have allegedly said.<sup>78</sup> Ronald Deibert assertively holds that the “...[Internet] doors are being opened, and path dependencies created, that cannot

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<sup>74</sup> Larry Press, William Foster, Peter Wolcott and William McHenry, “The Internet in India and China,” *Information Technologies and International Development*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Fall 2003, pp. 41-60.

<sup>75</sup> Dali L. Yang, “The Great Net of China,” *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4, Winter 2001, pp. 64-69.

<sup>76</sup> Zixiang (Alex) Tan, William Foster and Seymour Goodman, “China’s State Coordinated Internet Infrastructure,” *Communications of the ACM*, Vol. 42, No. 6, June 1999, p. 44 & 52.

<sup>77</sup> Xiudian Dai, “Chinese Politics of the Internet: Control and Anti-control,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, Spring/Summer 2000, pp. 181-191.

<sup>78</sup> Jianhai Bi, “The Internet Revolution in China: The Significance for Traditional Forms of

easily be reversed.”<sup>79</sup>

The work highlighted above nonetheless pays little attention to the demographics of Internet users in China. A handful of works have empirically investigated Internet users’ behaviour in cyberspace, including their online usage patterns, attitudes and characteristics. Jonathan Zhu and Zhou He, for example, have developed a theoretical framework centring on perception, motivation and social context to account for the adoption and use of the Internet in China.<sup>80</sup> The China Internet Network Information Centre (CINIC) has on a semi-annual basis released comprehensive surveys on the development of China’s Internet under the authorisation of the Ministry of Information Industry since October 1997.<sup>81</sup> Guo Liang and Bu Wei, Internet observers based in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, have also surveyed Internet usage and its impact in several cities in China, under the auspices of the UCLA World Internet Project and with the Markle Foundation.<sup>82</sup>

In addition, some commentators continue to consider the Internet’s impact on

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Communist Control,” *International Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 3, summer 2001, pp. 421-441.

<sup>79</sup> Ronald J. Deibert, “Dark Guests and Great Firewalls: The Internet and Chinese Security Policy,” *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 58, no. 1, January 2002, pp. 143-159, and p. 155.

<sup>80</sup> Jonathan J. H. Zhu and Zhou He, “Perceived Characteristics, Perceived Needs, and perceived Popularity: Adoption and Use of the Internet in China,” *Communication Research*, Vol. 29, No. 4, August 2002, pp. 466-495. In another article, the authors consider how access to the Internet and other sources of information, perceived credibility of the Internet and conventional media, and cognitive sophistication relate to value orientations of Chinese Internet users and non-users. See Jonathan J. H. Zhu and Zhou He, “Information Accessibility, User Sophistication, and Source Credibility: The Impact of the Internet on Value Orientations in Mainland China,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 7, No. 2, available online at <<http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol7/issue2/china.html>>, accessed on June 11, 2002.

<sup>81</sup> See <<http://www.cnnic.net.cn/index/0E/00/11/index.htm>>, accessed on June 17, 2004.

<sup>82</sup> See Guo Liang and Bu Wei, *Hulianwang shiyong zhuangkuang ji yingxiang de diao-cha baogao* (Investigative Report on Internet Use and Its Impact), (Beijing: Center for Social Development, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2001), available online at <<http://www.chinace.org/itre>>, accessed on September 2, 2001; and Guo Liang, *Surveying Internet Usage and Impact in Twelve Chinese Cities* (Beijing: Research Center for Social Development, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2003), available online at <[http://www.markle.org/downloadable\\_assets/chinainternet\\_](http://www.markle.org/downloadable_assets/chinainternet_)

China's political development. Geoffrey Taubman, for instance, maintains the "built-in incompatibility" between the Internet and undemocratic regimes. He relates his contentions to the Chinese context and argues that the pillars of undemocratic rule of information control are seriously challenged. He holds that the CCP's dominance over the domestic affairs will be diminished despite the Beijing government implements stringent censorship measures and regulations to keep online contents or messages politically reliable.<sup>83</sup>

A 2001 report from the United States Embassy in Beijing notes that the Internet is now fundamentally "...revolutionising the way [in which] Chinese interact and communicate."<sup>84</sup> The report sees that as long as China's market economy keeps developing, the seemingly irreversible trend is that the Internet will become "...a more important, positive force in facilitating the rights of Chinese users to be informed, and to be heard."<sup>85</sup> In addition, Randy Kluver and Jack Linchuan Qiu provide snapshots of the Internet's impact on democracy in the PRC. They argue that the Internet does "...bring a new force into the country and break the traditional power structure in which previously media regulators exerted omnipresent control."<sup>86</sup>

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usage.pdf>, accessed on October 2, 2003.

<sup>83</sup> Geoffrey Taubman, "A Not-So World Wide Web: The Internet, China, and the Challenges to Nondemocratic Rule," *Political Communication*, Vol. 15, No. 2, March 1998, pp. 255-272. See also Geoffrey L. Taubman, "Keeping Out the Internet? Non-Democratic Legitimacy and Access to the Web," *First Monday*, Vol. 7, No. 9, September 2002, available online at <[http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue7\\_9/taubman/index.html](http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue7_9/taubman/index.html)>, accessed on June 13, 2003.

<sup>84</sup> American Embassy Beijing, *Kids, Cadres And "Cultists" All Love It: Growing Influence Of The Internet In China*, March 2001, available online at <<http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/sandt/netoverview.html>>, accessed on June 12, 2004. There are two more reports published by the U.S. Embassy Beijing, one in 2000, and another 1998.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. See also American Embassy Beijing, *China's Internet "Information Skirmish"*, available online at <<http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/sandt/webwar.htm>>; American Embassy Beijing, *PRC Internet: Cheaper, More Popular and More Chinese*, available online at <<http://www.usembassy-china.gov/english/sandt/Inetcawb.htm>>, both accessed on February 12, 2001.

<sup>86</sup> Randy Kluver and Jack Linchuan Qiu, "China, the Internet and Democracy," in Indrajit Banerji (ed.), *Rhetoric & Reality: The Internet Challenge for Democracy in Asia*, p. 54.

Xiguang Li, a Beijing-based media scholar, even holds that the Internet and associated online forums and chatrooms have changed the fundamental flows of news and information in China, resulting in the increased inability of the party-controlled press and media to set the public agenda and shape public opinion.<sup>87</sup>

Li's claim has generally reflected upon the concerns shared by Chinese media scholars about the Internet's unfavourable influence over "thought work" in China.<sup>88</sup> There are, nevertheless, few domestic Internet studies addressing the Internet's impact upon China's politics. It is a stark contrast when compared with the ample studies on electronic commerce and Internet technical development in China. One of the few official works on the Internet's impact on politics in China is a two-volume publication edited by China Central Television (CCTV), which acknowledges the rising power of the new medium, and most importantly, urges a greater degree of social responsibility from Internet media practitioners.<sup>89</sup> Additionally, the recommendation during the third Forum on Network Media held in Beijing in

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<sup>87</sup> Xiguang Li and Xuan Qin, "Shei Zai Shezhi Jintian de Yicheng?—Dianzi Luntan zai Zhongda Xinwen Shijian zhong dui Dangbao Yiti de Chonggou," (Who Is Setting Chinese Agenda?—Impact of Online Chatroom on Party Press) in Li Xiguang and Zhao Xinshu (ed.), *Meiti de Liliang* (The Power of Media) (Guangzhou: Nanfang Ribao, 2002), pp. 156-169; Xiguang Li, "ICT and the Demise of Propaganda in China," *Global Media Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Fall 2002, available online at <[http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/SubmittedDocuments/archivedpapers/Fall2003/pdf\\_files/Internet%20and%20democracy\(xiguang\).pdf](http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/SubmittedDocuments/archivedpapers/Fall2003/pdf_files/Internet%20and%20democracy(xiguang).pdf)>, accessed on June 2, 2004; Xiguang Li, Xuan Qin and Randolph Kluver, "Who Is Setting the Chinese Agenda?—The Impact of Online Chatrooms on Party Press in China," in K. C. Ho, Randolph Kluver and Kenneth C. C. Yang (eds.), *Asia.com: Asia Encounters the Internet* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), pp. 143-158.

<sup>88</sup> See Jian Wang and Zhuoying Li, "Hulianwang dui Sixiang Zhengzhi Gongzuo de Yingxiang ji Duice" (The effects of the Internet on political thought work and its strategies), *Changbai Xuekan* (Changbai Journal), Vol. 2001, No. 2, February 2001, pp. 20-22; Haiguang Xie, ed., *Hulianwang yu Sixiang Zhengzhi Gongzuo Gailun* (Introduction to The Internet and political thought work), (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2000); Haiguang Xie, ed., *Hulianwang yu Sixiang Zhengzhi Gongzuo Anli* (Case Studies of The Internet and political thought work), (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2002); Willy Wo-Lap Lam, "China: State Power versus the Internet," in Louise Williams and Roland Rich (eds.), *Losing Control: Freedom of the Press in Asia* (Canberra: Asia Pacific Press at the Australian National University, 2000), pp. 37-57.

<sup>89</sup> Lianxi Liu, ed., *Jueqi de Liliang: Zhongguo Wangluo Meiti, 1995-2003*, Volume I & II (The Rising

October 2003 was highlighted in the “Beijing Declaration” that particularly stressed media’s social responsibility.<sup>90</sup>

Meanwhile, Wenfu Liu has introduced a number of concepts in relation to Internet politics but with little reference to the actual situations in China.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Chuangang Chen and Yongliang Xie present an introductory discussion on political security in the Internet age, including cyber nationalism and terrorism, religious online activism, and cyber culture clash.<sup>92</sup> It is striking, but perhaps not surprising, how much domestic studies have avoided the Chinese context except for the themes that are basically in line with the government’s policies, such as the clampdown on online activism of the Falun Gong.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless they mention in passing that Chinese Internet research is increasingly integrated into worldwide Internet media studies. This opens the door to more political-neutral and policy-oriented research themes.<sup>94</sup> Weixing Chen, for instance, has addressed the impact of the Internet on social development, such as Internet pornography, “virtual” communities, and digital divide issues.<sup>95</sup>

Moreover, Junhua Zhang looks at Internet use by the Chinese government. He

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Power: China Internet Media, 1995-2003) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2003).

<sup>90</sup> The forum focuses on the social responsibility of Internet media. The Declaration urges that under the market economy, the Internet has to make a balance between commercial interests and social responsibility.

<sup>91</sup> Wenfu Liu, *Wangluo Zhengzhi: Wangluo Shehui yu Guojia Zhili* (Internet Politics: Network Society and State Governance) (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 2002).

<sup>92</sup> Chuangang Chen and Yongliang Xie, *Wangluo Shidai de Zhengzhi Anquan* (Political Security in the Age of the Internet) (Zhengzhou: Zhongyuan Nongmin Press, 2000).

<sup>93</sup> See, for example, Hanqi Fang, “Falungong yu Hulianwang” (Falun Gong and the Internet), *Xinwen yu Chuanbo Yanjiu* (Journalism and Communication Studies), Vol. 9, No. 1, January 2002, pp. 1-12.

<sup>94</sup> See, for instance, Jie Lu, *Wangluo Shidai de Xinxi Anquan* (The Information Security in the Age of the Internet) (Zhengzhou: Zhongyuan Nongmin Press, 2000); Yuanzheng Luo and Baowen Jiao, *Zhongguo Dianzi Zhengfu de Tansuo yu Shijian* (The Explorations and Practices of Electronic Government in China) (Beijing: Zhongguo Caizheng Jingji Press, 2003).

<sup>95</sup> Weixing Chen, ed., *Wangluo Chuanbo yu Shehui Fazhan* (Internet Communication and Social Development) (Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press, 2001).

argues that the implementation of electronic government project is an integral part of China's recent modernisation and informatisation efforts. It is also designed to maintain "technical legitimacy," aiming to boost economic prosperity and thus extensively improve the general public's living standards. Zhang holds that the introduction of e-government will in the long term inevitably lead to a breakthrough in both the political system as well as in the citizens' and governmental thinking and behaviour. He is yet cautiously optimistic in claiming that e-government has the possibility to accelerate the process of a peaceful revolution.<sup>96</sup>

Guobin Yang presents discourse analysis of the online forum *Qiangguo Luntan* (Strong Country Forum), and a cyber-ethnographic study of *Huaxia Zhiqing* (Chinese Educated Youth). Yang argues that the Internet and civil society co-evolve in the Chinese context. In his presentations he states that whilst the Internet offers newer possibilities for facilitating the rise of civil society through mass participation, civil society in turn reshapes the Internet development and accordingly enables citizens and societal organisations to effectively interact and communicate in the cyberspace.<sup>97</sup>

Christopher Marsh and Laura Whalen note that the Internet and cyberspace allow for a new and unique form of social organisation to be generated online, dubbed

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<sup>96</sup> Junhua Zhang, "Will the Government 'Serve the People'? The Development of Chinese E-government," *New Media & Society*, Vol. 4, No. 2, June 2002, pp. 163-184; Junhua Zhang, "China's 'Government Online' and Attempts to Gain Technical Legitimacy," *ASIEN*, July 2001, available online at <<http://web.syr.edu/~ztan/Gov2.pdf>>, accessed on November 18, 2001; Junhua Zhang, "A Critical Review of the Development of Chinese e-Government," *Perspective*, Vol. 3, No. 7, December 2002, available online at <[http://www.oycf.org/Perspectives/19\\_123102/eGovernment.htm](http://www.oycf.org/Perspectives/19_123102/eGovernment.htm)>, accessed on February 15, 2003.

<sup>97</sup> Guobin Yang, "The Co-evolution of the Internet and Civil Society in China," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 43, No. 3, May 2003, pp. 405-422. See also Guobin Yang, "The Internet and Civil Society in China: A Preliminary Assessment," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 12, No. 36, August 2003, pp. 453-475.

“e-capital.” Given that Internet use in China is not yet widespread, they are optimistic in believing that current Internet users have already undermined state control and contributed to the forming of a civil society in China. He believes the Internet’s political impact will be likely realised in the future.<sup>98</sup> Kathleen Hartford, nonetheless, warns us that incomplete Internet control does not necessarily spell greater freedom in China. The assertions between Internet’s subjection to government control and Internet’s democratisation effects will be decided ultimately by the Internet users rather than by the technology itself.<sup>99</sup>

Furthermore, there are a number of articles discussing regulation and control of the Internet in China with regard to the political implications of the medium.<sup>100</sup> For example, Eric Harwit and Duncan Clark demonstrate the evolutionary development of political control over Internet infrastructure and content in China. They argue that government control over the physical network and contents come from their intention to tap the lucrative Internet industry.<sup>101</sup> Assafa Endeshaw describes the dilemmas of Internet regulation in China as a “...never-ending cat and mouse game.” He maintains that China’s crackdown on the Internet will only shorten the days of the

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<sup>98</sup> Christopher Marsh and Laura Whalen, “The Internet, e-Social Capital, and Democratization in China,” *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, April 2000, pp. 61-81.

<sup>99</sup> Kathleen Hartford, “Cyberspace with Chinese Characteristics,” *Current History*, Vol. 99, No. 638, September 2000, pp. 255-262.

<sup>100</sup> For an overview of China’s Internet regulation, see, for example, Greg Walton, *China’s Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People’s Republic of China*, The International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2001, available online at <<http://www.ichrdd.ca/english/commndoc/publications/globalization/goldenShieldEng.html>>, accessed on March 12, 2002; Reporters Without Borders, *The Internet under Surveillance: Obstacles to the Free Flow of Information Online*, 2003, available online at <<http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/doc-2236.pdf>>, accessed on December 2, 2003; and Lokman Tsui, “The Panopticon as the Antithesis of a Space of Freedom: Control and Regulation of the Internet in China,” *China Information*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2003, pp. 65-82.

<sup>101</sup> Eric Harwit and Duncan Clark, “Shaping the Internet in China: Evolution of Political Control over Network Infrastructure and Content,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 41, No. 3, May/June 2001, pp. 377-408.

dictatorship.<sup>102</sup> Daniel Lynch also presents an overview of Internet control pertaining to propaganda in China, focusing on ways in which Internet users can circumvent government cyberwalls to access foreign Internet sites.<sup>103</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, however, holds that current Chinese propaganda work has incorporated innovative approaches like the Internet to strengthen the work of preserving the positive images of the Party and government, and effectively “regiment the public mind.”<sup>104</sup> Still, Jason Lacharite claims that digital censorship in China is vulnerable, and can be seen as “nothing more than a reactive attempt to control an information medium that is typically beyond absolute control.”<sup>105</sup>

Yet there are works raising deep concern of the government’s rigorous control over the Internet medium when judging the Internet’s impact in China. For example, Michael Chase and James Mulvenon reveal new forms of countermeasures by the Beijing government against Internet challenges to its rule, ranging from Internet hacking to brute intimidation. These are sophisticated strategies of Internet censorship and regulations, which has proved relatively successful in containing various sociopolitical dissident groups within and outside China, such as the Falun Gong and various human rights organisations.<sup>106</sup> Jonathan Zittrain and Benjamin Edelman of the Berkman Centre for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School present one of the

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<sup>102</sup> Assafa Endeshaw, “Internet Regulation in China: The Never-Ending Cat and Mouse Game,” *Information & Communications Technology Law*, Vol. 13, No. 1, March 2004, pp. 41-57.

<sup>103</sup> Daniel C. Lynch, “Dilemmas of ‘Thought Work’ in *Fin-de-Siecle* China,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 157, March 1999, pp. 173-201.

<sup>104</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, “Regimenting the Public Mind: The Modernization of Propaganda in the PRC,” *International Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 4, autumn 2002, pp. 563-578.

<sup>105</sup> Jason Lacharite, “Electronic Decentralization in China: A Critical Analysis of Internet Filtering Policies in the People’s Republic of China,” *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 37, No. 2, July 2002, pp. 336-345, esp. 345.

<sup>106</sup> Michael S. Chase and James C. Mulvenon, *You’ve Got Dissent! Chinese Dissident Use of the Internet and Beijing’s Counter-Strategies* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2002).

few quantitative surveys of the scope of Chinese government's blocking. Their technical focus on Internet filtering in China shows that more than 10 per cent of studied Web sites are regularly blocked.<sup>107</sup> Wenzhao Tao provides a quantitative estimate of Internet censorship rate by looking at *Qiangguo Luntan*. The internal data he acquired shows that the censorship rate was between 1 and 2.5 per cent of those posted messages that were blocked and weeded out in the period from September 1999 until August 2000.<sup>108</sup> Jack Linchuan Qiu argues that the Beijing government has exerted a wide range of regulatory constraints upon online political communication, and indeed transformed the Internet to serve their expected interests. The "virtual censorship" imposed on the Internet is, in his observation, limiting the liberalising impact of the new medium upon China's politics.<sup>109</sup>

Nina Hachigian argues that the three-pronged strategies of the CCP to maintain its authority in an increasingly networked society—sustaining economic growth and some personal freedoms, managing the negative impact of the Internet, and harnessing the Internet's commercial potential—have proved relatively effective and successful. Instead of becoming a political threat, she holds that the Internet is in fact strengthening the Party's rule at least in the short term. Yet, she also acknowledges the Internet's power to galvanise anti-party sentiment on a large scale in the wake of politico-economic crises when the Internet penetration is potentially far more

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<sup>107</sup> Jonathan Zittrain and Benjamin Edelman, *Empirical Analysis of Internet Filtering in China*, available online at <<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/china/>>, accessed on March 5, 2004.

<sup>108</sup> Wenzhao Tao, "Censorship and Protest: The Regulation of BBS in China People Daily," *First Monday*, Vol. 6, No. 1, January 2001, available online at <[http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue6\\_1/tao/index.html](http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_1/tao/index.html)>, accessed on March 8, 2001.

<sup>109</sup> Jack Linchuan Qiu, "Virtual Censorship in China: Keeping the Gate between the Cyberspaces," *International Journal of Communications Law and Policy*, No. 4, Winter 1999/2000, pp. 1-25.

pervasive in the longer term.<sup>110</sup> Yuezhi Zhao and Dan Schiller note that whilst China is continuously assimilating into an evolving transnational network of electronic capitalism, the digital divide between the well-off urban elites and the countryside disenfranchised, together with cumulative efforts of political censorship on the Net, have not yet fanned the flames of freedom in China.<sup>111</sup>

Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas maintain that the state has, on the one hand, successfully harnessed the Internet to limit its undesirable sociopolitical impact, and on the other hand, utilised it to serve the state's imposed agendas and interests. Meanwhile, a series of rigorous Internet measures and regulations are also implemented to ensure that the Net's impact is not beyond state's control. On the basis of their four-tier framework for research, i.e., Internet use in the civil societal, political, economic, and international spheres, they conclude that "Internet use is unlikely to launch the dawning of a new political age in China."<sup>112</sup> An article by Shanthi Kalathil specifically examines the interplay between Internet entrepreneurs and the Chinese state in the information age. She notes that Internet businesspeople in China have to respond to the growing market demand for timely news and information. In the meantime, they need to closely co-operate with the Beijing government to provide information that is deemed politically reliable by the authorities. Contradicting the conventional wisdom in which the rise of autonomous and self-interests business elites are believed to bring forth a civil society, she argues that foreign and domestic

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<sup>110</sup> Nina Hachigian, "China's Cyber-Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 2, March/April 2001, pp. 118-133.

<sup>111</sup> Yuezhi Zhao and Dan Schiller, "Dances with Wolves? China's Integration into Digital Capitalism," *Info*, Vol. 3, No. 2, April 2001, pp. 137-151.

<sup>112</sup> Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule*, p. 42.

Internet companies are likely to play a rather limited role in promoting political liberalisation. She explains it is largely because the central government prevails in pre-emptive strategies, compounded by the Internet entrepreneurs' stance of self-censorship and their cooperative measures vis-à-vis the state over information they provide.<sup>113</sup>

Christopher Hughes and Gudrun Wacker present a book-length treatment calling into question the conventional wisdom associated with sociology of technology, dubbed "technological determinism," which was reinvigorated from the 1990s in the wake of proliferation of ICTs. Their original intention was to assess the political and economic impact of ICTs on Chinese society on the one hand, and to examine the prospects for achieving digital economic "leapfrogging" on the other hand. They appear sceptical of the "wishful" wisdom, arguing there is "...little evidence to support the thesis that the Chinese state is being eroded in any special way by ICTs."<sup>114</sup> Instead, they suggest that States across the globe have been relatively succeeded in harnessing this new medium. Investigating the atrocities committed against ethnic Chinese during the riots that swept Indonesia in May 1998 as a case study, Christopher Hughes finds that popular campaigns on the Internet have to date been closely associated with online nationalism. In his argument, the Chinese cyberspace is increasingly becoming an important venue for nationalist activities, rather than a cyberspace breeding liberal democracy that is widely wished by outsiders. In other words, he is suspicious about the claim that the spread of the

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<sup>113</sup> Shanthi Kalathil, "China's New Media Sector: Keeping the State in," *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4, December 2003, pp. 489-501.

<sup>114</sup> Christopher R. Hughes and Gudrun Wacker, eds., *China and the Internet: Politics and the Digital Leap Forward* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 2.

Internet will necessarily lead to the path of political democratisation.<sup>115</sup> Randy Kluver has also examined the 2001 Sino-US crisis over the crash of an American spy plane with a Chinese fighter jet. He observes that the subsequent Chinese-US cyberwarfare exemplifies that “the Internet is as conducive to increasing hostility [of extremist nationalist sentiment] as it is to peacemaking.”<sup>116</sup>

In summary, the literature review has critically helped identify the research agendas in this dissertation that will be further examined in the chapters to come:

First, is the Internet censorship in China foolproof or porous? If the latter, how and to what extent will the incomplete Internet control over the medium bring about political impact on the political systems in China?

Secondly, is it a valid statement as claimed by Shanthil Kalathil and others that foreign and domestic Internet entrepreneurs are likely to play a rather limited role in bringing forth a civil society to China?

Thirdly, as argued by Nina Hachigian and others the Internet may augment its own ability to impact political system in China in the wake of a major political and socioeconomic crisis. It is important to test whether the Net’s impact is greater in those contingent incidents such as the spy plane collision incident rather than in non-contingent events such as the various congresses?

Fourthly, is the “digital divide” a crucial factor that affects and explains the political impact of the Internet in a populous country like China where inequality in

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<sup>115</sup> Christopher R. Hughes, “Nationalism in Chinese Cyberspace,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No.2, Spring/Summer 2000, pp. 195-206.

<sup>116</sup> Randy Kluver, “New Media and the End of Nationalism: China and the U.S. in a War of Words,” *Mots Pluriels*, No. 18, August 2001, available online at <<http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP1801ak.html>>, accessed on January 12, 2002. See also Jack Linchuan Qiu, “Chinese Opinions Collide On-line: U.S.-China Plane Collision Sparks Civil Discussion on the Web,” *On-line Journalism Review*, April 12, 2001, available online at <<http://ojr.usc.edu/content/story.cfm?id=561>>, accessed

terms of access to information technologies is obvious?

Finally, has the Chinese cyberspace so far been linked largely to sentiments of nationalism as argued by Christopher Hughes and others?

### **Section III Methodological Issues Concerning the Reliability of “Information” and “Knowledge” on the Internet**

With the widespread usage of the World Wide Web (WWW), the Internet has increasingly developed into an alternative hub of source of information and reference in addition to traditional models. As Peter Ferdinand observes, individual user can now surf the Web and acquire a great deal of information without physically going to a library. It implies it is now relatively easy to secure and retrieve information as one goes online. Yet he also notes that the problems of the reliability of information are often being underestimated, given the wealth of information in cyberspace.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, as Alan Jarman sees it, “...the concept of reliability is beginning to take on new meaning as Information Technology becomes pervasive in both the private and public sectors.”<sup>118</sup> This issue ought to be addressed and deserves more attention.

In other words, the issues of reliability of electronic information and knowledge on the Internet have particular saliency which is largely induced by the growing availability of on-line information. As noted, there are a number of reasons why Internet systems can usually have limited reliability, including errors on Web pages,

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on April 20, 2001.

<sup>117</sup> Peter Ferdinand, “The Internet, Democracy and Democratization,” *Democratization*, Vol. 7, No. 1, September 2000, p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> Alan Jarman, “‘Reliability’ Reconsidered: A Critique of the HRO-NAT Debate,” *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, Vol. 9, No. 2, June 2001, p. 98. See also Richard A. Spinello, “Information Integrity,” in Duncan Langford (ed.), *Internet Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp.

errors with search engines, ontological differences, asymmetric knowledge between database users and developers, developers' motives, limited resources and expertise, limited accountability and changes in referenced pages.<sup>119</sup>

In the meantime, given the ways in which information is communicated, accessed and disseminated is changing in the information technology age, it needs to be critically pointed out that information is not necessarily transferable into knowledge. With information flowing relatively more freely in cyberspace than in the conventional media, attention and emphasis ought to shift gradually away from acquiring and/or administering archives or databases to managing knowledge. It is not only becoming a pressing agenda within industrial democracies, but also authoritarian regimes like Communist China.

Whilst the administration of archives and databases has to do with acquiring, assessing, searching, retrieving, storing and indexing documents/files records, knowledge management raises a bigger intellectual challenge. It is primarily because knowledge concerns the realising, rationalising and comprehending processes from information secured in a way that eventually could help and support to make a rightful/optimal decision and/or prevent any previous failures from taking place again. As Gordon Graham puts it:

*In the expression "digital information" the word "information" is used in its barest sense and means no more than a set of electronic impulses which can be made to produce text and images on a screen. Information in this technical sense has no epistemological implications: it does not imply that such information conveys any*

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174-176.

<sup>119</sup> Daniel E. O'Leary, "Internet-based Information and Retrieval Systems," *Decision Support System*,

*genuine knowledge. This is what makes it misleading, because in normal speech "information" is an epistemologically normative term: to be newly possessed of information implies that we now know something we did not know before. But "digital information" can store misinformation in the ordinary sense as much as it can store the truth, so that the text or image it generates may be wholly misleading and produce erroneous belief rather than knowledge.*<sup>120</sup>

On the other hand, knowledge does carry some weight and matters a lot particularly when a country is increasingly networked by the power of globalisation and information technology. Nazli Choucri argues that knowledge-networking has resulted in two mutually reinforcing dual outcomes: globalisation of knowledge via greater diffusion and localisation of knowledge via presentation. Above all,

*"...the diffusion of knowledge-networking practices now makes it possible to engage in multidirectional and multiparty interaction (that is, top-down as well as bottom-up) and enables the flow of knowledge generated bottom-up into domains at the top, both within and across societies that greatly enhance inputs into decisions."*<sup>121</sup>

In summary, the Internet has enhanced both the mobility of information and sophistication of information management in the networked environment, which in turn inevitably augment difficulties involved in managing and assuring the reliability of information. As Gordon Graham has suggested, "The Internet is a valuable source of knowledge and information only in so far as we are able to subject what we find on it to all the normal checks we customarily use in the case of other sources." And it is in

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Vol. 27, No. 3, December 1999, pp. 320-322.

<sup>120</sup> Gordon Graham, *The Internet: A Philosophical Inquiry* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 89.

<sup>121</sup> Nazli Choucri, "Introduction: CyberPolitics in International Relations," *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 21, No. 3, July 2000, p. 259.

essence that “Internet is as reliable and as unreliable as the sources from which it comes.”<sup>122</sup> It is, as a result, important to understand that information provided by the Internet technology is not synonymous with reliability, nor can information be naturally translated into knowledge.

In view of the critical role in ensuring reliable information in cyberspace, some intellectual deliberations are instrumental, if not necessary, in better comprehending the Internet technology in general and shedding light on further Internet-based research in particular. This section will not go into details about the philosophical debates associated with issues of ontological and epistemological meanings of “information,” “truth” and “knowledge.” Instead, it is mainly concerned with methodological issues related to the reliability of information on the Internet with special reference to messages posted in cyber chat rooms in China.

#### **A. Building a “Reliable” Networking Information Environment in Cyberspace**

To begin with, a noticeable feature of electronically held “information” or “data”<sup>123</sup> is its high volatility. In general, information changes on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, depending on the management and maintenance of a particular Web site. In the case of Chinese cyber chat rooms, information (literally, posted messages) piles up daily. Keeping the maximum accurate and detailed records of the online messages may help establish a knowledge base of reliable information for ongoing and future study.

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<sup>122</sup> Gordon Graham, *The Internet: A Philosophical Inquiry*, p. 91.

<sup>123</sup> There is no broadly accepted definition of the terms of “information” and “data.” For the purposes of this dissertation, “data” means a representation of facts, concepts or instructions in a formalised manner suitable for communication, interpretation or processing by human beings or by automatic means. “Information” is the meaning assigned to data by means of conventions applied to that data. See *OECD Guidelines for the Security of Information Systems: Towards A Culture of Security* (Paris: OECD, 2002), available online at <[http://www.oecd.org/document/19/0,2340,en\\_2649\\_34255\\_](http://www.oecd.org/document/19/0,2340,en_2649_34255_)

Considering the convenience of conducting Web-oriented research and for the purpose of information verification, it is crucially important to archive/save or print the messages/information that is being studied, other than creating bookmarks. This is to guarantee researchers against all loss of messages if the particular piece of information disappears and/or weeded out at a later time for whatever reasons. After all, a researcher is still able to retrieve and (re)locate data/information from his or her archival database and use or quote the information needed in the research project.<sup>124</sup> It is especially valuable and expedient when doing Internet research in China since the government may single out specific messages/information deemed subversive and provocative and delete them as a result.

Secondly, visiting Web sites or topical chat rooms on a regular basis is required for the sake of consistency and stability in data collection within the research period. This should maximise the integrity and accuracy of information collected as identical collecting time and procedures are employed. This can in turn help ensure that the information used can be checked for accuracy. It is essential that the collection of information/data be carried out in similar and defined ways. Procedures for data collection that are not clearly defined may be inconsistent and result in erroneous outcomes. In the Chinese context, because the Web masters are held responsible for

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1815059\_119820\_1\_1\_1, 00.html>, accessed on June 25, 2004.

<sup>124</sup> Ananda Mitra and Mitra Cohen have also reminded us that because of impermanence of the messages/texts studied in cyberspace, the researcher should retain records of the texts being examined. They held that even though there might be traces left as saved files and/or hard copies, the text (message) is without much meaning if it cannot be accessed by anyone on the Web. The researcher has little control of this process, other than making it clear in the analysis that the result of the analysis is a snapshot of cyberspace. Given the textual characteristic, they suggest two principal solutions: first, the research needs to demonstrate that a trace of the text/message was maintained; and second, the researcher needs to be able to demonstrate that the implications of the text's disappearance were considered. See Ananda Mitra and Mitra Cohen, "Analyzing the Web: Directions and Challenges," in Steve Jones (ed.), *Doing Internet Research: Critical Issues and Methods for Examining the Net*

any messages and information appearing on their Web pages, they usually adopt a policy to monitor online messages and censor “inappropriate” opinions. It is thus vital for a researcher to check and visit the studied Web site(s) on a regular basis so as to minimise the data collection variations, chiefly because we may never know when the Web site moderators delete messages. On the other hand, a researcher usually cannot non-stop surf and observe the complete online activities during the research period. In this regard, adopting an acceptable measure seems both methodologically necessary and beneficial.

Thirdly, as far as reliability of information gleaned in cyberspace is concerned, the issue “...has to do with the reproducibility of the result, and marks the degree to which a given procedure for transforming a concept into a variable: producing the same results in tests repeated with the same empirical tools (stability) or equivalent ones (equivalence).”<sup>125</sup> Anton Vedder and Robert Wachbroit have contended that researchers need to distinguish “content” and “pedigree” criteria of reliability. Whereas “content criteria,” also known as primary epistemic criteria, mean “...the conditions or criteria of reliability that are a function of the content of the information itself,” the “pedigree criteria,” also known as secondary epistemic criteria, is “...the conditions or criteria of reliability that are a function of the source of the information.”<sup>126</sup> To be specific, the content criterion includes two categories of criteria: criteria of evidence and logical criteria. Whilst the criteria of evidence imply that whether some information is reliable will ultimately depend upon the available

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(Thousand Oaks and London: Sage. 1999), p. 198.

<sup>125</sup> Piergiorgio Corbetta, *Social Research: Theory, Methods and Techniques* (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003), translated from the Italian by Bernard Patrick, p. 81.

<sup>126</sup> Anton Vedder and Robert Wachbroit, “Reliability of Information on the Internet: Some

evidence and how that evidence supports the information, the logical criteria means that if some information is inconsistent or even entails an absurdity, then the information cannot or should not be trusted and used. On the other hand, “pedigree criteria” are usually established by the third party which is intermediary credibility-conferred by institutions, mostly academic institutions and persons, and partly by newspaper and journal organisations.<sup>127</sup> The two approaches shed light on clarifying discussions on the topic of reliability of information on the Internet and facilitate how to measure it. In summary, people who are experts in or at least somewhat familiar with the field or subject of the information may use the primary criteria. On the other hand, people may have to turn to secondary criteria if there are no signs of authoritative sources or the credibility of intermediaries is in question.<sup>128</sup> Internet users need to cultivate critical and robust thinking when assessing the quality of information in cyberspace.<sup>129</sup>

Last of all, the information, data or messages on a particular Web site may usually have an economic and/or sociopolitical agenda. This may be found in cyberspaces of Western democracies, but is much more frequent in the cyberspaces of authoritarian regimes such as China. Take *Qiangguo Luntan* for instance. Whilst in large part, extremely pro-government and Party points of view will be aired, a band of

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Distinctions,” *Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2003, p. 212.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., pp. 212-213.

<sup>128</sup> Anton Vedder, “Reliability of Information,” in Frances S. Grodzinsky, Richard A. Spinello and Herman T. Tavani (eds.), *Computer Ethics in the Post-September 11 World: Proceedings for Computer Ethics Philosophical Enquiry* (Boston: Boston College, 2003), pp. 144-157, available online at <<http://rechten.uvt.nl/vedder/Docs/vedderboston.pdf>>, accessed on May 2, 2004.

<sup>129</sup> Vedder raises concerns about the problem that the second criteria mentioned above cannot easily be applied to information on the Internet, and, therefore, a serious ethical reflection is called for to come to terms with it. See Anton Vedder, “Misinformation through the Internet: Epistemology and Ethics,” in Anton Vedder (ed.), *Ethics and the Internet* (Antwerpen-Groningen and Oxford: Intersentia, 2001), p. 129, available online at <<http://rechten.uvt.nl/vedder/Docs/wrdreli.pdf>>, accessed on May 2, 2004.

opposite extremist opinions might also be seen, even though it is just for a short while. Not only the remaining messages located in the middle of the political spectrum are meaningful, but the extreme views expressed in the political spectrum have certain implications as well. The overall online messages demonstrate a significant yet often overlooked cyber phenomenon—a hidden sociopolitical agenda, which is an unprecedented indication in the mainstream of Internet culture in China. Consequently, it is usually critical to bear in mind that when evaluating information found on the Internet, the author’s motivation for placing the specific information/message on the Net must always be considered, even if it is usually impossible conclusively to determine what it is. Besides, it is also crucial to be alert when examining who is the provider of the “information” (or message), and what their opinion or bias might be. Partly it is because cyberspace is becoming an ideal venue where the virtual identity of participants is usually anonymous and it is partly growing to be a prime sociopolitical marketing and advertising tool. In a word, in the light of these methodological concerns, online characteristics are open to highly “interpretative” use of information and messages, and hence a researcher needs to be heedful of hidden/explicit sociopolitical agenda behind information and data when researching information and opinions found on the Internet.

#### **B. Strategies to Tackle Problems Associated with Cyber Research in the Chinese Context**

First, since the messages posted online are highly volatile, particularly when they are “inappropriate” opinions, it is important to check and visit the studied Web site on a

regular basis during the research period. During the various congresses of the CCP, NPC and CPPCC, the author paid regular visits to the *Qiangguo Luntan* twice a day: 9:30~11:30 AM and 1:00~2:00 PM in GMT (Greenwich Mean Time). (The Forum is open to the public to post messages from 10AM to 10PM, China time.) The main reason for adhering to these time slots is that it is virtually impossible to observe the online messages at all time, so it seems methodologically acceptable to adopt a procedure of identical visiting time. It was designed to minimise the data collection variations.

Secondly, when visiting the studied Web site, the posted messages as well as Web pages were archived, lest some of them might be deleted for whatever reason. This would ensure that the obtained data could be checked for accuracy and authenticity in the future. When referring to a specific piece of information, a relevant Web site is provided together with the date visited. As noted, "...it is always important to date references to websites..." because "...it would be possible for an unscrupulous researcher to attempt to make false claims."<sup>130</sup>

Thirdly, in practice, it is more likely when doing Internet research in China to use pedigree criteria for bulletin board discussions chiefly because the messages are usually neither easily judged by common-sense nor by the specification of logical reasoning. The contributors to bulletin boards mostly adopt *noms de plume* and some even float ideas that they do not themselves necessarily completely believe in.<sup>131</sup> A

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<sup>130</sup> Peter Burnham, Karin Gilland, Wyn Grant and Zig Layton-Henry, *Research Methods in Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 190.

<sup>131</sup> Caroline Straathof, "New Media and Democracy: Case Studies—China," *Are the New Media Good for Democracy?—Media Round Table Report* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2001), pp. 24-25, available online at <[http://www.idea.int/2001\\_forum/media/mrt\\_papers/round\\_table\\_report.pdf](http://www.idea.int/2001_forum/media/mrt_papers/round_table_report.pdf)>, accessed on May 15, 2002.

researcher with fluent Chinese proficiency is indispensable and with the cyber culture against the backdrop of China's political traditions is a plus in order to better comprehend and read between the lines of the online messages. It is, as a result, reasonable to use the pedigree criteria in determining the reliability of the studied data and information.<sup>132</sup>

Fourthly, the messages posted online may usually have a sociopolitical agenda. It is especially true in the Chinese cyberspace where there is a widespread online censorship under China's political traditions. It thus makes it more difficult and even complicated to judge precisely what views that were posted online are noteworthy, since an outside researcher is usually barred from access to Netizens' credentials and their motivation when engaging in the cyber activities. Still, the nuanced wording and the context within his or her view may suggest a hidden agenda.

This literature review chapter has critically contributed to the overall development of this dissertation primarily by identifying the research agenda that I set out to do in this project. This is clearly stated at the end of the first section of this chapter. In chapter 3, I will first investigate the Internet governance in China, laying the foundation for the future discussions of the Internet's impact upon China's political system.

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<sup>132</sup> It should be acknowledged that it is still difficult for a researcher to judge Internet users' pedigree if they use assumed names.

## Chapter 3 Governing the Internet in China

### Section I The Introduction of the Internet into China and Its Diffusion

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is now an integral part of the whole realm of human activities. Manuel Castells notes that we have seen that ICT is (re)shaping the material basis of society at an accelerated pace. He argues that the new information-centred technological revolution is now fundamentally altering every aspect of our lives.<sup>1</sup> In other words, it seems we live in a world, that in the expression of Nicholas Negroponte, has become “digital.”<sup>2</sup> In another work, Castells goes on to describe work the specific role of the Internet as “the fabric of our lives,” adding that,

*“...if information technology is the present-day equivalent of electricity in the industrial era, in our age the Internet could be likened to both the electrical grid and the electric engine because of its ability to distribute the power of information throughout the entire realm of human activity.”<sup>3</sup>*

This chapter does not, however, suggest that technology absolutely determines social activity, nor does the realm of society and politics condition the entire course of technological change. Instead, it is likely to be a two-way interaction between the technology and sociopolitical development.

In the Chinese context, as mainland China is gearing up to transform its economy from central planning into one of the world’s key IT-driven economies, it provides a crucial test case for other like-minded regimes—Vietnam and North Korea, particularly—as to the ways in which governments may handle the threat or grasp the

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<sup>1</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), second edition, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (London: Coronet Book/Hodder & Stoughton, 1995).

economic opportunities from cyberspace. As Hu Angang, a renowned Chinese scholar, enthusiastically holds, China, under economic globalisation, ought to adopt the knowledge-driven strategy as its most significant national development approach in the twenty-first century. He explains that the application of ICTs can not only “bridge the divide between China and developed countries in terms of knowledge development, but also shrink the digital gap between hinterland and coastal China.”<sup>4</sup> To date, Internet access has been expanding rapidly and extensively chiefly due to direct support and promotion by the Chinese government. As we may observe in the recent semi-annual survey report on the development of China’s Internet, released by the quasi-official China Internet Network Information Centre (CINIC), the estimated total number of Internet users by January 2004 was 80 million, the world’s second largest Internet market after the United States.<sup>5</sup> Table 3.1 illustrates this.

Undeniably the Chinese government has acted as a vital driving force for boosting Internet and e-commerce diffusion. Anyhow, such an amazing achievement within a rather short period of time coincides with Dali Yang’s argument that, although China is a latecomer to the Internet world, the government can act swiftly to play a key part in unleashing the Internet’s economic potential.<sup>6</sup>

Table 3.1 Internet Growth in China

Computer Hosts	Internet Users	Domain Names (.cn)	Web Sites	International Bandwidth (Mbps)
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<sup>3</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Internet Galaxy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Hu Angang, *Zhongguo Zhanlue Gouxiang* (Strategy of China) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2002), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> See <<http://www.cnnic.net.cn/html/Dir/2004/02/03/2114.htm>>, accessed on March 2, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Dali L. Yang, “The Great Net of China,” *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4, winter 2001, p. 65.

Nov 1997	299,000	620,000	4,066	1,500	18.64
July 1998	542,000	11,750,000	9,415	3,700	84.64
Jan. 1999	747,000	2,100,000	18,396	5,300	143
July 1999	1,460,000	4,000,000	29,045	9,906	241
Jan. 2000	3,500,000	8,900,000	48,695	15,153	351
July 2000	6,500,000	16,900,000	99,734	27,289	1,234
Jan. 2001	8,920,000	22,500,000	122,099	265,405	2,799
July 2001	10,020,000	26,500,000	128,362	242,739	3,257
Jan. 2002	12,540,000	33,700,000	127,319	277,100	7,597.5
July 2002	16,130,000	45,800,000	126,146	293,213	10,576.5
Jan. 2003	20,830,000	59,100,000	179,544	371,600	9,380
July 2003	25,720,000	68,000,000	250,651	473,900	18,599
Jan. 2004	30,890,000	79,500,000	340,040	595,550	27,216

Source: *Zhongguo Hulianwangluo Fazhan Zhuangkuang Tongji Diaocha* (Statistical Reports on the Internet Development in China), several years, China Internet Network Information Center, available online at <<http://www.cnnic.net.cn/index/0E/00/11/index.htm>>

## Section II The Transition of Regulatory Regimes in the Internet Sector

China has vigorously implemented ICTs to foster ongoing informatisation accompanying industrialisation as a crucial pillar to drive its future economic development. The unfettered perspective on the free use of the Internet has been challenged because the Chinese authorities at all levels have aggressively regulated public use of the Internet, in particular through control over the political and dissent use of the Net. Many measures as well as legalisations have been enacted with the purpose to make the Internet behave like any other form of mass media under its firm control.

It is vital to understand how the Internet is being governed if we are to better comprehend its impact on China's political system. To facilitate discussions, the regulatory regime of the Internet governance in China may be divided into three stages since its inception from the late 1980s: the experimental and fragmented period, which was before 1994; the transitional regulatory period, which ranged between

1994 and 1998; and the current period since 1998.<sup>7</sup>

The establishment of the Economic Information Joint Committee in 1993 marked a milestone in the development and regulation of the Internet in China. It is primarily because it shifted focus from initially “formulating policies for the development of a national information infrastructure,”<sup>8</sup> to a more particular attention to the Internet medium. With the increasing development of the Internet over the following years, the Committee was later in 1996 developed into the State Council Steering Committees on National Information Structure (SCSCNII). The set-up of SCSCNII reflected several competing and rival bureaucracies, such as the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPT), the Ministry of Electronics Industry (MEI), the Ministry of Broadcasting, Film and Television (MBFT), the Ministry of Public Security, and the *Xinhua News Agency*, which was actively involved in formulating, and implementing Internet policy. Amongst them, the MPT enjoyed enormous commercial and political advantages over its rivals as a result of its historical status as Internet operator and regulator. The main competitor of the MPT came from the MEI, especially from late 1993 when the MEI created a separate but affiliated corporation called “*Ji Tong*” (the Auspicious Telecommunications Company). One of the main tasks *Ji Tong* commissioned was the so-called “Golden Projects,” in which they promoted the wider linkage of financial institutions and government agencies with digitalised communications and information networks. Given there had not been any paralysis in the Internet development, some real regulatory problems arose mainly

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<sup>7</sup> Zixiang (Alex) Tan, “Regulating China’s Internet: Convergence toward a Coherent Regulatory Regime,” *Telecommunications Policy*, Vol. 23, No. 3/4, April 1999, pp. 265-270.

<sup>8</sup> Paul S. Triolo and Peter Lovelock, “Up, Up, and Away—With Strings Attached,” *The China Business Review*, Vol. 23, No. 6, November/December 1996, p. 28.

between MPT and MEI.<sup>9</sup> A Steering Committee was accordingly required to coordinate and oversee the Internet development.

The bureaucratic body of SCSCNII under the State Council had the following major responsibilities:<sup>10</sup>

1. To formulate guiding principles, policies, rules and regulations in the developing process of national informatisation;
2. To formulate the strategy for developing national informatisation and its overall and stage-by-stage plans;
3. To organise and coordinate the construction of important information projects;
4. To be responsible for the coordination of and solutions for important issues arising from the computer networks and the internet, and
5. To establish the standards for the technology and application related to informatisation.

The new Ministry of Information Industry (MII) was approved in March of 1998 by a decision of the Ninth National People's Congress (NPC). This was against the backdrop of the Asian financial crisis (1997), political succession issues (1997-98), and the restructuring of government bureaucracy (1998). The MII was basically set up by merging the MPT with the MEI, while the MBFT was converted into a "general bureau" (*zong ju*) under the State Council. The major task for MII was, as officially announced, to administer the national manufacturing of IT products, national

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<sup>9</sup> For details on the conflict between the MPT and MEI, see, for example, Eric Harwit, "China's Telecommunications Industry: Development Patterns and Policies," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 2, summer 1998, pp. 175-194. For confrontation between the MPT and the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), see Junhua Zhang, "Network Convergence and Bureaucratic Turf Wars," in Christopher R. Hughes and Gudrun Wacker (eds.), *China and the Internet: Politics of the Digital Leap Forward* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 85.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Cullen and Pinky D. W. Choy, "The Internet in China," *Columbia Journal of Asian Law*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Spring 1999, p. 116.

communication and software industries, facilitating the informatisation of the national economy and social services.<sup>11</sup>

The set-up of such a super-ministry was in a sense to “...reduce jealousies between the MPT and MEI so that genuine competition within the telecommunications industry could finally be introduced.”<sup>12</sup> In this aspect, the institutional and legal reforms involved were initiated and put into practice in order to meet the increasing demand for technological convergence and the negotiations for the expected entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Above all, it implies that the authorities in Beijing intended to restore administrative control over the telecommunications sector from previous stages of devolution, which had resulted in fragmented governance and intensified pluralisation in terms of efficient flow of information among several telecommunications service providers. Philip Sohmne notes, “Although the SCSCNII is in theory a superior body to the MII, in practice it seems as if the MII is responsible for policies up to the highest level.”<sup>13</sup>

As a matter of fact, the intrinsic characteristics of the bureaucratic rivalry among the competing parties in the Internet industry since the 1990s have been to take respective organisational interests in consideration. Regulatory control of the Internet is complicated: the MII has been assigned to superintend the general development of the Internet but specific authority has been divided between the Internet Services Providers (ISPs) and Internet Content Providers (ICPs). Whilst the MII oversees ISPs

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<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Information Industry (China), available online at <<http://www.mii.gov.cn/mii/bmjjs.htm>>, accessed on September 10, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel C. Lynch, *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, and “Thought Work” in Reformed China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 173.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Sohmne, “Taming the Dragon: China’s Efforts to Regulate the Internet,” *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 2001, p. 18.

and their related infrastructure, the Internet Information Management Bureau under the State Council Information Office is in charge of supervising the ICPs. In addition, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) and the Ministry of Culture are still enthusiastic in sharing the development and management of the Internet, as is the Netnews Bureau of China Internet Information Center.<sup>14</sup> Barry Naughton vividly notes that the current economic decisions in China are made by a “broad and diverse group of economic agents.”<sup>15</sup>

Simply put, the processes of the de-concentration prior to 1998 and concentration course from 1998 onwards simply exhibit the competitive tension between the forces, with each “respectively supporting either centralised control or the break-up of the monopoly.” In other words, both ideas are based on self-interest of the respective group.<sup>16</sup> The rationale behind the de-concentration process is basically in line with the greater political economy setting: de-concentration of decision-making authority over economic policies. Accompanied by the ideological decompression of the post-Mao period, and the rapid diffusion of new communications technologies, these have all contributed to produce significant administrative fragmentation.

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<sup>14</sup> Kay Hearn and Brian Shoemith, “Exploring the Roles of Elites in Managing the Chinese Internet,” paper presented at *Euricom Colloquium: Electronic Networks & Democracy*, October 9-12, 2002, Nijmegen, The Netherlands, available online at <<http://oase.uci.kun.nl/~jankow/Euricom/papers/Hearn%20and%20Shoemith.pdf>>, p. 7, accessed on March 3, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Barry Naughton, “The Patterns and Logic of China’s Economic Reform,” in the Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States (ed.), *China’s Economic Future: Challenges to U.S. Policy* (New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> See Yousun Chung, *Anatomy of the Decision-Making Process in China: (De)Concentration of the Internet Industry*, p.55. Unpublished MA thesis. Graduate Interdisciplinary Programme in Area Studies, Seoul National University, South Korea, February 2002.

### Section III Internet Censorship and Control

What are the online contents deemed undesirable by the Chinese authorities? This is exemplified in the “Measures for Managing the Internet Information Services (*Hulianwang Xinxi Fuwu Guanli Banfa*), which holds service providers responsible for contents they display on the Net. In practice, the ISPs, ICPs and Internet café owners have set up their own monitors, known as “Big Mama”, to censor the chatrooms and bulletin boards and to delete materials that are not in line with the laws which are broadly decreed. Nine categories of information are banned in creating, replicating, retrieving, and transmitting:<sup>17</sup>

1. Materials that oppose the basic principles established by the Constitution;
2. Materials that jeopardise national security, reveal state secrets, subvert state power, or undermine national unity;
3. Materials that harm the prosperity and interests of the state;
4. Materials that arouse ethnic animosities, ethnic discrimination, or undermine ethnic solidarity;
5. Materials that undermine state religious policies, or promote cults and feudal superstitions;
6. Materials that spread rumours, disturb social order, or undermine social stability;
7. Materials that spread obscenities, pornography, gambling, violence, murder, terror, or instigate crime;
8. Materials that insult or slander others or violate the legal rights and interests of others;

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<sup>17</sup> *Hulianwang Xinxi Fuwu Guanli Banfa* (Measures for Managing the Internet Information Services) was promulgated on October 1, 2000 by the State Council. For full text, see <<http://past.people.com.cn/GB/channel5/28/20001001/257566.html>>, accessed on February 12,

9. Materials that have other contents prohibited by laws or administrative regulations.

In the second item relating to “state secrets,” other laws are specified. It declares that “...state secrets are all issues relating to the security and interests of the nation, determined in accordance with legally defined procedures, the knowledge of which is restricted to a defined scope of personnel for a defined length of time.” (Article 2) As a result, state secrets include (Article 8):

1. Secret issues in significant decisions in national affairs;
2. Secret issues in the activities of national defence building and the strength of the armed forces;
3. Secret issues in the activities of diplomacy and foreign affairs;
4. Secret issues in the economic and social development of citizens;
5. Secret issues in scientific technology;
6. Secret issues in activities of maintaining national security and the investigation of criminal activity;
7. Any other state secret issues which the national secrecy protection work agencies determine should be preserved.

Those illustrations of “state secrets” or a broader definition of “state security” matters could deter Netizens’ online activities for fear of breaching the laws. They serve to lay down warnings about the comprehensive limits to online activities and to deter potential offenders. It *de facto* deprives a significant portion of legal defence for cyber actions, such as virtual political debates and consultations against governments or authorities, since such conduct can be deemed illegal.

## A. Great Net Firewall, Censoring and Blocking Websites

The Chinese government has also maintained its control over the Net by means of physical Internet infrastructures. The four national networks,<sup>18</sup> for instance, require all direct international networking traffic to use international incoming and outgoing channels provided by China Telecom (Article 6), which functionally serves as a sort of “Intranet” that connects all ISPs within the country. Legally speaking, the *Provisional Regulations on the Administration of International Interconnection of Computer Information Networks*, enacted in February 1996 and amended later in May 1997, have formalised the control of “computer information network” (*jisuanji xinxi wangluo*). These government-led Internet gateways to the world are based in the metropolitan cities of Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. In other words, the requirement that all ISPs must be registered with one of the four major networks is to ensure their global Internet access services, as opposed to home Internet (Chinese) contents, pass through the packet-level filtering software installed on the interconnecting networks.<sup>19</sup> Without doubt, the Chinese government has set up an ostensibly solid “great firewall,” aiming to exert a tight grip on information to

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<sup>18</sup> The four interconnecting networks are (1) CHINANET (*Zhongguo Gongyong Jisuanji Hulanwang*, China Network), (September 1994) formerly owned by the MPT and now by MII since 1998; (2) CSTNET (*Zhongguo Keji Wang*, China Science and Technology Network), (April 1995) owned by the Chinese Academy of Sciences. (3) CERNET (*Zhongguo Jiaoyu he Keyan Jisuanji Wang*, China Education and Research Network), (July 1995) owned by the State Education Commission and (4) CHINAGBN (*Zhongguo Jinqiao Xinxi Wang*, China Golden Bridge Network) (September 1996) formerly owned by the MEI, but now by MII. See Article 7 of the *Provisional Regulations*. It has been expanded into eight international Internet gateways, including additional four networks, CIETNET (*Zhongguo Guoji Jingji Maoyi Hulanwang*, China International Economy and Trade Network) (January 2000), owned by China International Economy and Electronic Commerce Center (*Zhongguo Guoji Jingji Dianzi Shangwu Zhongxin*)

<sup>19</sup> Remarks made by Michael Iannini, general manager of Nicholas International Consulting Services Inc. in Beijing. Cited from Greg Walton, “Great Wall, Small World,” CECC Open Forum, March 10, 2003, available online at <<http://openflows.org/~jamyang/GREATWALLsmallworld.htm>>, accessed

constrain what it perceives to be adversely liberalising Net effects.

Besides, the Chinese government has allegedly begun to exploit the system of automated packet filtering from October 2002 that results in the slowdown of international connections as an extra stopover for each transmission is required.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, the “packet-sniffer” software is integrated into the government-controlled international Internet routers that can re-direct Internet users trying to access certain domains that are deemed “inappropriate” to other “safer” or “politically neutral” web sites. This move is obviously to embed a more centralised and sophisticated filtering device/software into policing global online contents. An Internet consultant based in Beijing described the current end-user impact of the “closed” routers as being as if all of China’s online population were “...breathing through the same tiny air hole.”<sup>21</sup>

The Chinese authorities have also allegedly employed and trained more than 40,000 cyber police,<sup>22</sup> including students, to constantly monitor the content and usage of the Web, in addition to tracing cyber dissidents. The official *People’s Daily* acknowledges that the special cyber police force is intended “...to intensify real-time monitoring, to intercept and delete harmful information and to capture and check illegal server data.”<sup>23</sup> Additionally, it has often been claimed that the government

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on March 26, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> “Net Users Angry Over Slow Connections,” *South China Morning Post*, March 5, 2003; “China’s Web Surveillance Slows Access even as Government Promotes Internet Use,” *The Associated Press*, March 5, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Greg Walton, *Great Wall, Small World*, Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), CECC Open Forum, March 10, 2003, available online at <[http://www.cecc.gov/pages/roundtables/031003/walton.php#\\_ftn11](http://www.cecc.gov/pages/roundtables/031003/walton.php#_ftn11)>, accessed on July 2, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Mooney, “China’s ‘Big Mamas’ in a Quandary,” *YaleGlobal*, 12 April 2004, available online at <<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=3676>>, accessed on June 12, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> “China Seeks to Build Boundary on Internet,” *People’s Daily*, April 1, 2003, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200304/01/eng20030401\\_114386.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200304/01/eng20030401_114386.shtml)>, accessed on May 17,

practises comprehensive Internet censorship and has already blocked many Web sites deemed subversive and undesirable. The first source to argue this in any systematic way was the December 2002 study by Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet and Society. With the help of a computer programme, the Study showed that some 50,000 out of 200,000 Web sites were inaccessible from China on at least one occasion.<sup>24</sup>

## **B. Breach of Privacy and Criminal Penalty**

National security, as well as concern of public security, has historically overridden efforts to protect the privacy of personal communications not merely in communist countries such as China.<sup>25</sup> As Jose Caral observes, there has been a steady increase in government regulation of the Internet in the US since 1996. "Civil libertarians are disturbed by the intrusive nature of emerging Internet regulation, particularly those granting security agencies wider powers of surveillance."<sup>26</sup> As information and communications technologies advance rapidly, Internet users' privacy—the collection, storage, dissemination, communication and the use of information—is to a varying degree violated when a state's security is at stake.<sup>27</sup> The breach of individual privacy,

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2003.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Zittrain and Benjamin Edelman, *Empirical Analysis of Internet Filtering in China*, available online at <<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/china/>>, accessed on March 5, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Marcia Coyle, for instance, argues that even a democratic country like the United State has few provisions currently in place protecting American citizens from unconstitutional forms of surveillance. Such situation may be further deteriorating in the wake of the September 11 (2001) terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. See Marcia Coyle, "September Attacks Prompt Sharp Debate on Scope of Surveillance Law," *Law.com*, October 1, 2001, available online at <<http://www.law.com/cgi-bin/nwlink.cgi?ACG=ZZZ1NUCI6SC>>, accessed on December 18, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Jose MA. Emmanuel A. Caral, "Lessons from ICANN: Is Self-Regulation of the Internet Fundamentally Flawed," *International Journal of Law and Information Technology*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2004, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> For a more general discussions about the state's meddling with the privacy because of the needs for national interests, national security or law enforcement, see, for example, W. Diffie and S. Landau,

the use of surveillance and even the imposition of criminal penalties have taken place for the sake of national and public security. David Lyon vividly claimed that people are nowadays living in an “electronic panopticon,” in which traces of the use of electronic communications can be recorded, compiled, and even compared as a personal record of people’s online activities.<sup>28</sup>

In the Chinese case, there is no doubt that many officials believe that they can control online activities partly by infringing Internet users’ rights of privacy and freedom of expression through administrative measures. Control over the Internet and censorship of Web contents may be achieved from the government’s view by applying regulatory measures as well as licensing procedures to the parties of ISPs and ICPs. ISPs are required to store all users’ detailed personal information and keep a record of users’ online activities, including Web sites visited, for at least sixty days and render them to public security officials when requested. In a similar vein, those ICPs are obliged to store contributions to any Internet chat rooms, discussion boards and disclosed to authorities on requested. Both ISPs and ICPs are required to report any of their patrons that violate relevant laws and regulations.

However, do ISPs, ICPs and the (local) police force rigorously enforce the laws to monitor and report all incidents of violations in online and offline activities? The fieldwork behind this project suggests that the authorities may charge or sentence a few offenders in the increasingly adept Internet population, thereby setting an example for other potential violators. In other words, it is called “killing chickens to frighten monkeys,” (*sha ji jing hou*) as the Chinese proverb goes. In part this is

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*Privacy on the Line: The Politics of Wiretapping and Encryption* (Cambridge, MA. and London: MIT Press, 1998).

because the government is unlikely to manoeuvre and mobilise all its physical resources to check the Net at all time. Selective prosecution of cyber-offenders, accordingly, seems a practical way to deter those who might intend to violate the laws. Arresting and detaining a few cyber-dissents has thus been one of the government's plausible measures to tackle the problem.<sup>29</sup>

The London-based Amnesty International has claimed that Chinese Internet users are at risk of arbitrary detention, torture and even execution by the authorities.<sup>30</sup> Amongst those who have been arrested and detained is the Shanghai-based computer engineer, Lin Hai, who was allegedly the first victim of stringent Internet regulations in China. His breach of regulations in 1998 brought him two years in jail because he provided some 30,000 e-mail addresses to the pro-democracy "VIP Reference," (*Dacankao*), an underground electronic newsletter, run on a daily basis by Chinese dissidents and diasporas based in the United States.<sup>31</sup> Another prominent figure, Huang Qi, a Chengdu-based Internet entrepreneur, also operated a pro-democracy Web site ([www.6-4tianwang.com](http://www.6-4tianwang.com)), which was provocatively established to defy the Chinese governments' atrocities in the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. He was consequently charged with subverting state power and sentenced to five years in

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<sup>28</sup> David Lyon, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

<sup>29</sup> For more information about Chinese individuals currently detained for online political and religious activity, see, for example, the full list compiled by the organisation of Digital Freedom Network (DFN) at <http://www.dfn.org/focus/china/netattack.htm>, accessed on July 22, 2003. According to DFN, there are currently 34 Chinese individuals detained and only three have been released.

<sup>30</sup> Amnesty International, *China: Internet Users at Risk of Arbitrary Detention, Torture and Even Execution*, November 26, 2002, available online at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGASA170562002>, accessed on January 5, 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Amnesty International, *State Control of the Internet in China*, November 26, 2002, available online at [http://web.amnesty.org/library/pdf/ASA170072002ENGLISH/\\$File/ASA1700702.pdf](http://web.amnesty.org/library/pdf/ASA170072002ENGLISH/$File/ASA1700702.pdf), pp. 3-4, accessed on March 17, 2003.

prison in May 2003.<sup>32</sup>

### C. Internet Café Regulations and Crackdown

The June 6, 2002 fire in Beijing's "lanjisu" cybercafé that claimed 25 lives with 12 other people injured severely alarmed the authorities about inadequate governance and supervision of Internet cafés. As such, the tragedy provoked a rapid order to crack down on illegal cybercafés and it made all cafés re-register. Take China's capital city for example. Beijing has 2,200 out of the total 2,400 Net bars operating illegally,<sup>33</sup> where people usually associate with the strictest Internet governance of Net cafés.

In fact, official sources suggest that only 46,000 out of 200,000 Internet cafés are licensed, which means less than one quarter of them are legally registered.<sup>34</sup> The nationwide overhaul of Internet cafés simply resulted in the closure of some 3,300 illegal cafes over the six months following the fatal arson.<sup>35</sup> Yet there are many other cafés still thriving across the country in all sorts of guises,<sup>36</sup> since the demand from young people, students, the badly-off and rural residents, for instance, remains high.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> "Beijing Internet Cafes Ordered to Stop Operation for Rectification," *People's Daily*, June 17, 2002, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200206/17/eng20020617\\_97950.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200206/17/eng20020617_97950.shtml)>, accessed on June 18, 2002; "Fire Prompts Tight Control on Internet Cafes in China," *People's Daily*, June 18, 2002, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200206/18/eng20020618\\_98048.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200206/18/eng20020618_98048.shtml)>, accessed on June 18, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> "China Orders Unlicensed Internet Cafes Closed Nationwide," *People's Daily*, June 29, 2002, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200206/29/eng20020629\\_98774.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200206/29/eng20020629_98774.shtml)>, accessed on June 30, 2002; Hannah Beech, "Living It Up in the Illicit Internet Underground," *Time*, Vol. 160, No. 4, July 22, 2002, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> "China Closes over 3,300 Internet Cafes in Six Months," *People's Daily*, December 27, 2002, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200212/27/eng20021227\\_109161.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200212/27/eng20021227_109161.shtml)>, accessed on December 27, 2002.

<sup>36</sup> Some cafés operate under the guise of other businesses, such as "labor skill training center," which is regulated by the labour department, and some have a private school as their front, which falls under the jurisdiction of the education department. Other cafés even discreetly place cameras overlooking the pavement, and monitoring any movement toward the door. See Raymond Zhou, "Internet Cafes Percolating Despite Legal Clampdown," *China Daily*, December 4, 2002, available online at <[http://www3.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2002-12/04/content\\_146503.htm](http://www3.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2002-12/04/content_146503.htm)>, accessed on January 16,

Many of them cannot afford to buy the required computer facilities or they are not better off by gaining Internet access at home. Still, they are keen on trying to get access to the Internet partly because the Internet may provide them with future opportunities to get prospered or they can also show that they can live like others in the information age.

In addition, the Chinese government at all levels has staged periodic raids on Internet cafés, not only because they are worried about online pornography or violent online games that pose a moral hazard to young people, but also largely because of the “reactionary” or “undesirable” materials readily available on the Internet that have long plagued the government. The former head of the Chinese Ministry of Information Industry, for instance, has warned that moral standards in China are being severely challenged by the rapid flow of information emerging from the Internet. He states:

*Due to historical and technical reasons, 90 per cent of the information available on Internet is in English and the overwhelming majority of it generated from developed countries, whereas developing countries are mostly information receivers. As information flows across borders and developing countries are absorbing advanced technological and cultural information, their cultural traditions, moral standards and values have been severely challenged.<sup>37</sup>*

More importantly, Internet cafés in China are under the management of multiple government departments. Such a governing structure has often resulted in loose coordination between the different departments or bureaus. Specifically, to acquire

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<sup>37</sup> Roman Rollnick, “Telecommunication Summit: China Concerned at Electronic Threats to Moral Standards,” *Earth Times News Service*, January 14, 2002, available online at

the legal licences to operate Internet cafés, four governmental organisations and three procedures are usually involved: firstly, special business and cultural permits issued by the Public Security Bureau and the Cultural Bureau; secondly, an Internet information service business permit issued by the Telecommunications Bureau (under the Ministry of Information Industry), and thirdly, a business licence issued by the Administration of Industry and Commerce. Often an Internet bar will have some but not all of these required licenses; there are frequently one or two missing. A report<sup>38</sup> has revealed it usually takes one to two months to obtain one of the licenses, and it is thus rather difficult to attain all of the licences for an Internet café in less than half a year. Before granting the operational licenses, an owner first needs to have the rental contract approved, then get the cybercafé inspected and approved by the fire department, and also make sure that all the computer facilities have been purchased in advance. During the waiting period whilst the acquisition of licenses is pending, an owner will spend tens of thousands of *renminbi* in rent. Because of the poor inter-governmental coordination and excessively time-consuming and complicated approval procedures, the so-called “*hei wangba*” (literally “black bars” in Mandarin, illegal Internet cafés) has to seek for ways to survive. That precisely provides more channels for those who pursue rent-seeking behaviour.

#### **Section IV Counter-Measures to Evade Internet Control and Regulations**

One Chinese proverb neatly captures the measures to counter Internet control in

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<[http://earthtimes.org/jan/telecommunicationchinajan14\\_02.htm](http://earthtimes.org/jan/telecommunicationchinajan14_02.htm)>, accessed on November 23, 2002.

<sup>38</sup> See Deng Ke and Wu Chenguang, “Wangba he Tade Shengcun zhi Dao” (Internet Cafés and Their Ways of Existence), *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend), June 21, 2002, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/it/48/297/20020621/758428.html>>, accessed on March 15, 2004.

China, namely, “Where there is a policy at the top, there is a counter-policy at the bottom” (*shangyou zhengce, xiayou duice*). Despite the official scrutiny of the Net and many Internet regulations, it would be far from certain to assume that the Chinese authorities have gained absolute control of the Internet. On the contrary, the online battle between the government and Internet users, or so-called cat-and-mouse games, is still under way, and it should be judged from a long-term perspective.

Xiudian Dai holds that there are holes in the “Great Firewall” of heavy regulation of the Internet in China since clearly defined implementation mechanisms are deficient. In his words, “Whilst government ministries are scrambling for power and control, loopholes are likely to be created—in interpreting government policy on the Internet.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, take the recently promulgated regulation on the Internet café bar for instance. The *Regulations on the Administration of Business Sites for Internet Access Services* replaced the previous one released in April 2002 and came into effect in mid-November 2002.<sup>40</sup> Such a measure involves four government departments, i.e., the MII, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Culture, and the State Administration for Industry and Commerce. All of them have contributed to the overlapping of responsibilities and to a large extent the inefficiency and ineffectiveness in Internet governance.

According to the Regulation, the cultural administration department in a county’s people government (*xian*) is responsible for issuing licences to the Net bar owners. (Article 4) It is required by the Regulations that cybercafés place the licence

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<sup>39</sup> Xiudian Dai, “Chinese Politics of the Internet: Control and Anti-control,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Spring/Summer 2000, p. 187.

<sup>40</sup> For the full text, see <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/14677/21980/22078/1898093.html>>, accessed on June 12, 2003.

certificate in a conspicuous location at the entrance (Article 20), and juveniles are not allowed to enter the Internet café bars unless accompanied by their parent(s) or guardians (Article 21) because an identification card is needed for access (Article 23) Online gambling (Article 18) as well as offline games (Article 17) are breaches of the Regulations. Their opening hours are fixed between 8 o'clock in the morning and mid-night (Article 22) For the sake of safety and public security, smoking is prohibited and bars cannot be fixed over the windows. (Article 24)

The actual state of Internet governance, nevertheless, exhibits a diversified picture of how the Regulations are really implemented. Based on a series of surveys conducted secretly by news reporters from the official *Xinhua News Agency*, the implementation of the Internet regulations demonstrates diversity with “Chinese characteristics.” In the capital city of Beijing, the Regulations are rigorously enforced as generally expected.<sup>41</sup> It is nonetheless loosely implemented outside Beijing. Shanghai, for instance, is a major business hub in China, but here the Regulation is virtually analogous to “a piece of empty paper” according to the *Xinhua* survey.<sup>42</sup> Minors are free to enter the café bars since the bar personnel do not really verify their ID card. Some of them even stay over for days and nights. Additionally, in spite of the “No Smoking” sign that hangs on the wall, there are ashtrays on the tables besides the computers and the cafés do sell cigarettes. More importantly, gaining access to pornographic sites is not met with any difficulties and the café owners do not maintain

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<sup>41</sup> “Beijingn wangba guanli bijiao guifan, shangwang xu chushi shenfen zheng” (Administrations of Cybercafés in Beijing are Better Regulated, Personal ID is Required to Gain Internet Access), *Xinhua News Agency*, January 29, 2003, available online at <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2003-01/29/content\\_712337.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2003-01/29/content_712337.htm)>, accessed on March 7, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> “Shanghai: Zhengfu fagui rutong yizhi gongwen” (The Government Regulations Are Simply Pieces of Blank Papers in Shanghai), *Xinhua News Agency*, January 29, 2003, available online at <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2003-01/29/content\\_712361.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2003-01/29/content_712361.htm)>, accessed on March 7, 2003.

records for sixty days of what their patrons have access. There is only a one-day record available. Cybercafés are still open after 3 o'clock in the early morning. The cases surveyed in Shanghai are not isolated at all, but typical of the rest of China. In Chengdu, Sichuan province; Shaoyang, Hunan province; Changchun, Jilin province; ...etc., many other cafés are still operating after 12 o'clock because they can simply lock the main entrance lest the inspection teams carry out raids. You can still gain admission without a personal ID card.<sup>43</sup>

At times, Internet service operators even bend the rules over dissident messages posted on the discussion boards. They may make concessions to offenders over their subverting and agitating opinions, allowing them to remain online for a while and deleting them later in exchange for their cooperation to maintain proper operation of the sites. On the one hand, the Web site managers (operators) have indeed complied with official guidelines to monitor and weed out "unhealthy" postings, given that they tacitly tolerated such messages to remain on board only for a short period of time. On the other hand, operators' deliberate connivance at those postings could help maintain good relations with cyber-dissents and help sustain their popularity among Internet users.

With these compromising initiatives, the cat-and-mouse games between

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<sup>43</sup> More surveys are available on *Xinhua News Agency*, at <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2003-01/29/content\\_712345.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2003-01/29/content_712345.htm)>; <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2003-01/29/content\\_712360.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2003-01/29/content_712360.htm)>; <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/it/2003-01/13/content\\_687806.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/it/2003-01/13/content_687806.htm)>, all accessed on March 7, 2003. Besides, my personal experiences in several Internet café bars during the field works in two summers of 2002 and 2003 confirmed the above-mentioned phenomenon. Cybercafés in Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Suzhou, Chengde would either let me in without even asking to show my personal ID, or just required me to write my ID in a notebook without any certification. I can always give others' ID numbers when registered. The malfunction of the regulatory mechanism seems to suggest that paying money is more important than showing your ID. These illustrations indeed exist in many cybercafés in China. Some of them are illegal and are nicknamed as "*hei wang ba*."

operators and Netizens would make the Web operations more profitable and manageable.<sup>44</sup> In a legal sense, it implies that failure to abide by the law in handling Internet online activity affairs and laxity in law enforcement are common occurrences (*youfa buyi, zhifa buyan*), which accordingly creates potentially serious holes in the “Great Wall” around the Internet. Thus loose and arbitrary implementation of regulations is likely to contribute to the potential political impact of cybercafés—the anonymity making it difficult to get caught.

Using a proxy server is an effective way to circumvent the great firewall in accessing Web sites surreptitiously that are blocked. The basic principle is that the proxy servers, situated in a third place like the United States or Europe, can act as an intermediary for Internet service requests. These intermediary (proxy) servers can thus help bypass Internet control. In this regard, proxy servers are functionally designed to reroute requests through unblocked sites. The Chinese government blocked access to the popular search engine Google in early September of 2002 to try to disrupt dissidents. Even though the blockage was lifted after about nine days, the central government in Beijing had vigorously sought to bar access to proxy servers and the cache facility for the use of Google’s immense database storage for the sole purpose of disconnecting access to forbidden Web sites and pages. In a sense, since Google can cache or reproduce Web pages (mirror sites) on its own that circumvent

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<sup>44</sup> During a conversation with a provincial capital-based Web site operator in the summer of 2002, he confessed to me that they had developed strategies to deal with online posted messages from dissent groups, in particular those Falun Gong followers. He said that they would not filter their messages as soon as they were posted. It was in fact futile because they would not easily give themselves up posting and it in turn escalated the tense situation. They had reached a compromise which allowed these postings to remain up for two hours and then deleted them in exchange for their Web site survival and prosperity. Local Web site operators usually have had strategic flexibility that arises from their relatively relaxed environment, and can follow closely to the market profit concerns, particularly non-political contents, such as cyber pornography.

the blocked Web sites, Chinese Internet users may thus create space relatively out of the reach of the Chinese government. As Gartner research director French Caldwell explains, "Google is one way the Chinese users get around the blockage. They may not be able to link directly to a site, but they can link to a cached version of the site."<sup>45</sup>

Dissident material online can also be distributed via e-mail; people send e-mails to other recipients in and out of China to get around the firewall. Weblogs, bulletin boards, cyber discussion fora, and Web sites that constantly alter IP addresses can skirt government censorship in a large part. In addition, the use of encryption software is another way of dodging governmental surveillance over the Internet activities. The added veil of encryption is thus maintaining electronic anonymity by converting messages into codes that, in theory, only their designated recipients can decipher. As such, "it directly concerns the conditions of possibility for anonymity, personal security, and political dissension in the context of the pervasive visibility engendered by state and corporate mechanisms for surveillance and control."<sup>46</sup>

The peer-to-peer (P2P) technologies are employed by many Internet users to conduct interactive online chatting via computer programs like as Microsoft MSN, ICQ, QQ, Yahoo Messenger, and Skype. Through the interactive and real-time communication networks, the Internet users can discuss and disseminate/share information or files that in a way make it more difficult for governments to track, monitor, and censor online activities. Ross Anderson, a Cambridge University-based Internet scholar who helped kick-start the concept of P2P file-sharing, boldly

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<sup>45</sup> Jay Lyman, "Google Responds to China Ban," *NewsFactor Network*, September 3, 2002, available online at <<http://www.newsfactor.com/perl/story/19279.html>>, accessed on November 6, 2002.

<sup>46</sup> Diana Saco, *Cybering Democracy: Public Space and the Internet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 142.

advocates a new and improved version of Usenet via P2P networks, commenting, “The effect of peer-to-peer networks will be to make censorship difficult, if not impossible.”<sup>47</sup>

## Section V Conclusion

The Chinese government has long been torn by the ambivalence brought about by the Internet. It regards the Internet as an engine to drive economic growth on the one hand, and as a subversive challenge to undermine the ruling Communist Party on the other hand. As soon as ICTs, particularly the Internet, were introduced and Web sites mushroomed, the Party was so determined to harness the new medium to assure the Internet’s economic and scientific benefits. As a consequence, controls other than stifling ICTs would be critical for the CCP’s agenda to achieve the century-long modernisation process and in the meantime, consolidate its power. As Wu Jichuan, ex-Minister of MII, recognises, “Network and information safety can not be overemphasised, as it has a bearing on the sovereignty and economic security of a nation. Any improper handling of the relations will hamper the overall economic development.”<sup>48</sup>

It is true to claim that Internet control in China is not foolproof, nor has the Internet governance achieved much success there. The Chinese government has tried hard to keep the average Internet users on a tight leash, regardless of self-censorship or penalties among Internet users. There are reasonable grounds for believing that the

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<sup>47</sup> Tracey Logan, “File-sharing to Bypass Censorship,” *BBC World Service*, April 9, 2004, available online at <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/3611227.stm>>, accessed on May 12, 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Roman Rollnick, “Telecommunication Summit: China Concerned at Electronic Threats to Moral Standards,” *Earth Times News Service*, January 14, 2002, available online at

democratising nature of the medium is likely to prevail because the CCP cannot control every facet of Internet use in China.

The discussions in this chapter have contributed to the overall argument of this dissertation that the Chinese government is not as much in control of public use on the Internet as it is of governance (or domination) of other forms of traditional media. As shall be explored in chapters 5, 6, and 7, the spread of information technology has further contributed to a gradual pluralisation of alternative value orientations and political communications aided by a wealth of information now available online that (in)directly contradicts the Party's spin on events and crises.

In other words, whilst the government can exert some control over the Web contents and messages/information posed online, the state control over the new medium is indeed diminishing, when particularly compared with traditional press and mass media. The Internet has incrementally created a shift in mass communication that allows the public to speak en masse. There are indeed political implications as will become apparent in the chapters to come. Before the dissertation moves on to argue that the government is not as much in control of public debates on the new media as it is in debates in other mainstream mass media, it will explore the role that Internet entrepreneurs play in Chinese society. Are there any sociopolitical implications that may be revealed from the government-business nexus in the Internet sector?

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<[http://earthtimes.org/jan/telecommunicationchinajan14\\_02.htm](http://earthtimes.org/jan/telecommunicationchinajan14_02.htm)>, accessed on November 23, 2002.

## **Chapter 4 Confrontation or Reconciliation: The Interactions between Internet Entrepreneurs and the Chinese Authorities**

### **Section I The Private Economy and the Rise of the IT Sector**

One of the most far-reaching changes brought about by the economic reform in China has been the emergence of new business elites in the non-state sectors. Private entrepreneurs are now not only officially recognised as important to the powerhouse of the national economy, but also are acknowledged as a new “stratum” in the post-Mao sociological setting in China.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the emergence of private entrepreneurs in China is striking because it helps unleash a dynamic and rapid economic transformation in contemporary China, with possible transitions spilling over into the sociopolitical arena. It is also a noticeable change from when initially the private economy was largely confined to small-scale operations because of the prevalent political philosophy of collectivism doctrine. Yet after a quarter of a century of dramatic economic reforms in China, official statistics released by National Bureau of Statistics has shown that private economy, along with the state-owned and collective economies, has now become the motor that drives China’s fast economic

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<sup>1</sup> According to a collaborative work conducted by a few sociologists from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, it marked off “ten strata,” namely (1) strata of national and social management; (2) managers; (3) private enterprise-owners; (4) professional technicians; (5) clerks; (6) industrial and commercial individuals; (7) business service staffs; (8) industrial workers; (9) agricultural labourers and (10) city unemployed, laid-off and half laid-off vagrants in urban areas. See Lu Xueyi, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo Shehui Jieceng Yanjiu Baogao* (Research Report on Social Strata in Contemporary China), (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian, 2002). The work is, however, arguably served a specific sociopolitical purpose and is under the acquiescence and auspices from the Chinese authorities. For example, Joseph Fewsmith argues that the book is apparently written in part to support the Jiang Zemin’s efforts to dampen notions of class struggle and to broaden the social basis of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule. See Joseph Fewsmith, “Social Issues Move to Center Stage,” *China Leader Monitor*, No. 3, summer 2002, available online at <<http://www.chinaleadershipmonitor.org/20023/JF.pdf>>, accessed on October 12, 2002.

growth.<sup>2</sup>

Within China's fast growing private economy, the information technology (IT) industry has stood out particularly in the past few years. Internet entrepreneurs as an outgrowth of the information technology take-off from the mid-1990s are actually a new social component in Chinese society. The very appearance of the Internet entrepreneurs may suggest the possibility that they are unlikely to be merely "transmission belts"<sup>3</sup> of the Leninist state but rather harbingers of a fresh pattern of state-business relations in twenty-first century China. David Sheff, for example, presents an in-depth account of what impact the Internet has had upon business activities of several major information technology industry players in the Chinese context. He suggests that the emerging Internet entrepreneurs will ultimately transform China's economy into a more capitalist market.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, are the newly emerging Internet entrepreneurs in China actually positioning themselves to employ their economic favoured position to play a role in China's political affairs or even drive the democratisation process?

The conventional wisdom about the role of entrepreneurs basically follows the discourse of structural theory that sees the rise of entrepreneurial elites as crucial to the extension of societal autonomy from state domination, and the change of

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<sup>2</sup> "Private Sector Ranks Third in China's Economy," *Xinhua News Agency*, January 18, 2003, available online at <<http://www.china.org.cn/english/BAT/53891.htm>>, accessed on April 24, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> A political party that strictly follows Marxist and Leninist ideals in a socialist system functions in an almost entirely different way from its counterparts in western democracies. Within the traditional Leninist states, virtually all sort of institutions, including media and (business) associations are dominated by the party and mostly function as a sort of "transmission belt" for implementing the party policies. See Tony Saich, "Negotiating the State: The Development of Social Organizations in China," *The China Quarterly*, No. 161, March 2000, pp. 124-141. For a classic explanation, see Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (New York: Praeger, 1966), second edition.

<sup>4</sup> David Sheff, *China Dawn: The Story of a Technology and Business Revolution* (New York:

“structure of power” (state versus entrepreneurs) will lead towards liberalisation and eventually democratisation.<sup>5</sup> Guobin Yang, for instance, argues that the co-evolution of the Internet and civil society does exist in contemporary China. The mushrooming of online Internet forums (including blogs) and cyber-communities in a sense exemplify a nascent civil society taking root in the Chinese communist regime.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the growth of entrepreneurs and civil society out of capitalist development will forge the counterweight to the state apparatus, and as long as the structure is changed or shifted, sooner or later the democratisation process will take place. It is nonetheless generally regarded as a long-term process of change.

In contrast with the structural approach, a more recent argument, which is more case-oriented, has suggested that the (Internet) entrepreneurs in an authoritarian regime like China have opted for cooperating with rather than confronting the state. For example, Bruce Dickson coins the term “red capitalists” as a metaphor to capture the merger of competing political and economic power in contemporary China. The “red capitalists” who have close personal and political connections to the CCP are increasingly co-opted into the Party for further economic development. As a result, he suggests that they are unlikely to advance political democratization.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, Shanthi Kalathil posits that Internet entrepreneurs, domestic or foreign, like all

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HarperCollins, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Joseph A. Schumpeter, *The Theory of Economic Development: An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest, and the Business Cycle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1943); Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Guobin Yang, “The Co-evolution of the Internet and Civil Society in China,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 43, No. 3, May/June 2003, pp. 405-422. See also Guobin Yang, “The Internet and Civil Society in China: A Preliminary Assessment,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 12, No. 36, pp. 453-475.

<sup>7</sup> See Bruce J. Dickson, *Red Capitalists in China: The Party, Private Entrepreneurs, and Prospects for*

investors in China, are keen to make profits in China's "confusingly regulated but opportunity-laden markets." Together with a series of stringent regulations imposed on their operations and the business licences, she sees the "relationship-dependent business practices" laden in the Internet sector and accordingly she suggests the Internet entrepreneurs are playing a rather limited role in promoting political liberalisation.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst acknowledging the insights both approaches have contributed, a hybrid approach, the *clientelist-corporatist* argument, may be more plausible in explaining the current relationship between Internet entrepreneurs and the Chinese state. Margaret Pearson develops a hybrid pattern—socialist corporatism and clientelism—to conceptualise present-day's state-society relations in China's leading economic sectors, such as foreign and private sectors. In her words, while socialist corporatism "dominates the state's efforts in the associational realm," clientelism "characterizes the behaviour of both individuals and associations."<sup>9</sup> Bruce Dickson has also argued that the Chinese authorities create corporatist links with business associations as part of the state's strategy of adapting Leninist regimes.<sup>10</sup> These analytical frameworks are both illuminating and practical to help investigate if the emergence of private Internet entrepreneurs in China is likely to serve as agents of

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*Political Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), pp. 13-42; Shanthi Kalathil, "China's New Media Sector: Keeping the State in," *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4, December 2003, pp. 497-498.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret M. Pearson, *China's New Business Elite: The Political Consequences of Economic Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), esp. chapter 6. See also Margaret M. Pearson, "Entrepreneurs and Democratization in China's Foreign Sector," in Victoria E. Bonnell and Thomas B. Gold (eds.), *The New Entrepreneurs of Europe and Asia: Patterns of Business Development in Russia, Eastern Europe and China* (New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), pp. 130-55.

change and accordingly promote political liberalisation and even democratisation.

Here, Internet entrepreneurs are referring particularly to those civilian-managed or privately-owned Internet enterprises: they usually consist of managerial elites of Internet Content Providers (ICPs), Internet Service Providers (ISPs), Net bar owners or operators, and Internet-related service providers like Short Message Service (SMS), which is a service to send messages from/to the Internet. One of the main substances of being “private” that makes this category of elites so critical to civil society in China is the assumption that their commercial-oriented capabilities to master the skills of entrepreneurialism, beyond its economic repercussion, may pose impact upon other arenas such as politics and society. In other words, the assumption underlying the entrepreneurialism-democratisation linkage is that the rise of a class of entrepreneurs might have a positive impact on the direction of socio-economic and political change.

#### **A. A Brief History of the Evolvement of the Private Economy**

Although private businesses never completely disappeared in China, even during the Cultural Revolution, the first businesses were not officially sanctioned by the central government until 1978 after the Third Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) 11th Central Committee. The “Decision on Reform of the Economic System” adopted in October 1984 by the Third Plenum of the Twelfth Central Committee embarked on a novel strategy that relied heavily upon the comprehensive development of state-owned, collectively-owned and individually-owned

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<sup>10</sup> See note 7 above.

enterprises.<sup>11</sup> The Chinese government later allowed private enterprises to exist in 1988 under the “Tentative Stipulations on Private Enterprises.” It was not until 1999 that China passed a constitutional amendment, giving formal and full recognition to the country’s rising and flourishing private sector.<sup>12</sup> The CCP had even conceded the possibility of recruiting capitalists or entrepreneurs into the Party at the Fifteenth National Party Congress in November 2002. This idea is embodied in Jiang Zemin’s version of the so-called “Three Represents.” In his groundbreaking speech delivered on the CCP’s Eightieth anniversary on July 1, 2001, he officially advocated the accession of the private entrepreneurs (capitalists) into the Party, since the Party represented the fundamental interests of the vast majority of the people. In other words, the Party is not only the vanguard of the working class, but the representative of the basic interests of the majority of the people as well.<sup>13</sup> The thoughts of the Three Represents were later enshrined in the Party’s constitution as an amendment at the Party’s Sixteenth Congress in November 2002,<sup>14</sup> and were written into China’s constitution, along with amendments to safeguard the ownership of private property, in March 2004 during the second plenum of the Tenth National People’s Congress

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<sup>11</sup> Robert F. Dernberger, “China’s Transition to a Market Economy: Back to the Future, Mired in the Present, or through the Looking Glass to the Market Economy?” in *China’s Economic Future: Challenging to U.S. Policy*, ed. Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 63-65.

<sup>12</sup> “Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Xianfa Xiuzhengan, Dijiujie Quanguo Renmin Daibiao Dahui Dierci Huiyi Tongguo” (The draft amendments to the constitution of the People’s Republic of China has been approved by the presidium of the Second Plenum of the Ninth National People’s Congress on March 15, 1999), *People’s Daily*, March 17, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> The notion of the “Three Represents” also indicates that the communist Party represents the advanced productive forces, and the advanced culture. See Jiang Zemin, *Speech at the Rally in Celebration of the 80th Anniversary of the Founding of the Communist party of China*, July 1, 2001 (Beijing: New Star Publishers, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> “Full Text of Resolution on Amendment to CPC Constitution,” *People’s Daily*, November 15, 2002, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200211/14/eng20021114\\_106825.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200211/14/eng20021114_106825.shtml)>; “Amendment to CPC Constitution Approved,” *People’s Daily*, November 14, 2002, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200211/14/eng20021114\\_106809.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200211/14/eng20021114_106809.shtml)>, both web sites accessed

(NPC).<sup>15</sup>

## B. The Industrial/Technology Policy and the Rise of the IT Sector

Unlike the approach towards industrial reform and policies that were adopted in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern and Central Europe where more attention was given to privatising large state-owned enterprises, and the introduction of market forces, the Chinese state has instead opted for a “heterodox path”<sup>16</sup> by actively intervening in the market and promoting a wide array of industrial policies to support, for example, the growth of a “national team” of large firms that can compete with the world’s leading corporations and eventually share the state’s nation-building project.<sup>17</sup>

The old Chinese technology policy was replaced by a new one adopted by the central government in August 1999, following a more favourable political atmosphere towards private enterprise since the 15th Party Congress in September 1997, and the exponential growth of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) from the late 1990s.<sup>18</sup> Compared with the previous decisions made in 1985 and 1995, as

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on January 13, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> “*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Xianfa Xiuzhengan, Dishijie Quanguo Renmin Daibiao Dahui Dierci Huiyi Tongguo*, March 14, 2004” (The draft amendment of the Chinese constitution adopted by the second session of the tenth NPC on March 14, 2004), *People’s Daily*, March 16, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> In terms of property rights of the state assets, the Chinese has tended to pursue the quick and more comprehensive privatisation process in rural and in medium- to small-sized urban state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Yet, the large SOEs remain the stronghold of the state. Partly it is because of the large-scale unemployment concern.

<sup>17</sup> The “national team” or “national champions” were often SOEs, which were selected by the government in the thrust to promote industrial and technology development. They received tremendous resources for nurturance and support from the government. See Peter Nolan, *China and the Global Business Revolution* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 67-139. Additionally, a good example from the China national team within the private commercial Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector is the Lenovo Group Ltd. (*Lian-Xiang Jituan*, formerly Legend Computer), the largest and most profitable personal computer manufactory. See Li Tao, *Zhongguo Lianxiang* (China Legend) (Taipei: Jiuding Guoji, 2002); Wang Yang and Kang Yiren, *Lianxiang Wuxian* (Legend infinity) (Taipei: Kuangbang Wenhua, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177. The 1999 Decision, Zhonggong Zhongyang Guowuyuan Guanyu Jiaqiang Jishu Chuangxin Fazhan Gaokeji Shixian Chanyehua de Jueding (The Decision of the Central Committee of

well as the “China Torch Program” in 1988, the 1999 Decision has exhibited more concrete and practicable initiatives aimed at boosting technological innovation, high-tech development and the industrial application of new technologies. The Chinese government at all levels has aggressively rewarded those Chinese who were trained overseas with IT-related knowledge and entrepreneurial skills because of a desperate shortage of talent.<sup>19</sup>

The role of overseas trained Chinese in China’s ongoing informatisation is pivotal and unique. It is pivotal because the advanced innovative, technical, and managerial skills as well as expertise they have acquired are much needed to further promote China’s High-tech development. From the government’s viewpoint, the extensive “brain drain” over the past decades may be enhanced if more overseas well-trained professionals, Chinese and foreign nationals, may be attracted back to help develop China’s nascent information industry. In one aspect, the move is to

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the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council on technological innovation, high-tech development and industrialisation of new and high technologies), was released on August 20, 1999. The full text appeared on the *People’s Daily*, August 25, 1999, p. 1, available online at <[http://202.99.23.245/rmrb/199908/25/newfiles/col\\_19990825001008\\_jryw.html](http://202.99.23.245/rmrb/199908/25/newfiles/col_19990825001008_jryw.html)>, accessed on February 24, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> The China’s State Councilor Chen Zhili in an interview revealed that hi-tech talent and high-level managerial personnel were in “short supply” and “constrained the current Chinese development.” See “Erecting Pillars of the Future,” *Beijing Review*, Vol. 46, No. 42, October 16, 2003, pp. 11-14. Apart from the supportive and preferential measures declared in the 1999 Decision, there are a few more additional friendly initiatives and provisions for those who are willing to return home, such as the creation of Silicon Valley-like science and technology industrial parks, enterprises clusters, funds, the housing and social benefits. See, for example, the recent rewarding measures for the overseas high-tech personnel by the Xiamen City Council, Fujian Province, available online at <<http://xm01.w1.chinae.com.cn/xmok/news/view.asp?NewsID=584&classID=5>>, accessed on February 18, 2004. As a matter of fact, through setting up housing and providing others social benefits as mentioned above, some high-tech enterprises have recreated the institutional features of the *danwei* (work unit). See Corinna-Barbara Francis, “Reproduction of the *Danwei* Institutional Features in the Context of China’s Market Economy: The Case of Haidian District’s High-Tech Sector,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 147, September 1996, pp. 839-859. For a more detailed discussion about the impact of the “Silicon Valley” model on the formation of the regional economy of “greater China” (PRC, Taiwan and Hong Kong), see, for example, Ngai-Ling Sun, “(Re-) Imagining ‘Greater China’: Silicon Valley and the Strategy of Siliconization,” in *China and the Internet: Politics of the Digital Leap Forward*, ed. Christopher R. Hughes and Gudrun Wacker (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp.

narrow the gap in science and technology that exist between China and the developed countries in the world. This kind of vein is evidenced when the Chinese paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping, made a speech to the National Science Conference in March 1978. During this speech, he acknowledged that "...backwardness must be recognised before it can be changed. One must learn from those who are most advanced before one can catch up and surpass them."<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, the role of foreign trained elites is also unique since the information technology industry is the sector in which China currently enthusiastically promotes industrialisation through informatisation. Such a vision makes China's development process even more noteworthy. It aimed at leapfrogging the industrialisation process, which most Western advanced countries have gone through for more than a century, into the informatisation process. The IT talent inflows that have greatly contributed to the take-off and sustainable development of Taiwan's semiconductor and IT industries may likewise be duplicated in China.<sup>21</sup>

China's industrial and technology policies are usually characterised as favouring certain sectors at the expense of others. In general, sectoral discrimination is often accompanied by unequal treatment of foreign and domestic firms. That is part of the wider strategies employed by the Chinese government as Long and Zhang have

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102-126.

<sup>20</sup> Deng Xiaoping, "Speech at Opening Ceremony of National Science Conference," *Peking Review*, Vol. 21, No. 12, March 24, 1978, p. 10. It is also available online at <<http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/dengxiaoping/103390.htm>>, accessed on June 6, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> For more about the IT talent flow cross the Taiwan strait and the California Silicon Valley of the USA, see Tse-Kang Leng, "Economic Globalization and IT Talent Flows: The Taipei/Shanghai/Silicon Valley Triangle," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 42, No. 2, March/April 2002, pp. 230-250. See also Barry Naughton, "The Information Technology Industry and Economic Interactions Between China and Taiwan," in Françoise Mengin (ed.), *Cyber China: Reshaping National Identities in the Age of Information* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 155-184.

argued.<sup>22</sup> A series of policies and initiatives have resulted in the transformation of the industrial structure which is shown in Table 4.1. In fact, it generally accords with the worldwide industrialisation process: the reduction in primary industry and the growth of the tertiary (service) industry. Whilst the share of GDP represented by primary industry dropped from 28.1% in 1978 to 15.4% in 2002, the secondary and tertiary industries increased from 48.2% and 23.7% in 1978 to 51.1% and 33.5%, respectively. In the meantime, given that secondary and tertiary industries are the mainstay of the national economy which totalled 84.6% in 2002, the primary industry employs a larger proportion of the national work force of about 50% in 2002, dropping from 70.5% in 1978, which is still starkly disproportional to its output. The sharp increase in the secondary and tertiary industries in recent years is partly because of the IT sector, particularly the Internet industry, which serves as one of the most preferential sectors in present-day China. By and large, it reflects the ongoing strategy in China to promote industrialisation through informatisation. Such a vision makes China's development process even more noteworthy. It aimed at leapfrogging the industrialisation process, which most Western advanced countries have gone through for more than a century, into the informatisation process.

For example, Zeng Peiyan, minister of the State Development Planning Commission, accentuated the "Tenth Five-Year Plan (2001-05)," claiming that the State would during this period give top priority to the development of IT, with the

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<sup>22</sup> According to Zhang and Long, there are principally six patterns of industrial policies used, each one interweaving another: "central government financing and planning; empowering key industries with direct financing; preferential interest and tax rates and favorable financing for target industries; infant industry (trade) protection; pricing policies; and administrative means." Xiaoji Zhang and Guoqiang Long, "China's Industrial Policies in the Process of Marketization," in Seiichi Masuyama, Donna Yandenbrink and Chia Siow Yue (eds), *Industrial Policies in East Asia*, cited in Ding Lu, "Revamping the Industrial Policies," in Shang-Jin Wei, Guanzhong James Wen and Huizhong Zhou (eds.), *The*

slogan of “driving industrialisation with informatisation.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the new leap-forward strategy has been sustained by the impressive economic performance of the IT sector during the “Ninth Five-Year Plan (1996-2000).” During this period, this industry saw a 31.4 per cent annual growth rate on average, and it had taken about 2 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), making its contribution to the overall GDP growth rise from 5.2 per cent to 12.4 per cent.<sup>24</sup>

Table 4.1 China’s Industrial Structure<sup>25</sup> (1978-2002; Unit: %)

	Primary Industry		Secondary Industry		Tertiary Industry	
	Employment	Proportion of the GDP	Employment	Proportion of the GDP	Employment	Proportion of the GDP
1978	70.5	28.1	17.3	48.2	12.2	23.7
1980	68.7	30.1	18.3	48.5	13.0	21.4
1985	62.4	28.4	20.8	43.1	16.8	28.5
1989	60.1	25.0	21.6	43.0	18.3	32.0
1990	60.1	27.1	21.4	41.6	18.5	31.3
1995	52.2	20.5	23.0	48.8	24.8	30.7
1996	50.5	20.2	23.5	49.0	26.0	30.8
1997	49.9	19.1	23.7	50.0	26.4	30.9

*Globalization of the Chinese Economy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2002), p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> This concept was first explicitly proposed in the Fifth Plenary Session of the 15th Congress of the Communist party of China held in October 2000. See Lu Xinkui, ed., *Zhongguo Xinxihua* (China Informatization) (Beijing: Electronics Industry Publisher, 2002), pp. 51-83; “State to Launch Specific Information Industry Unit,” *People’s Daily*, September 26, 2001, available online at <[http://fpeng.peopledaily.com.cn/200109/26/eng20010926\\_81100.html](http://fpeng.peopledaily.com.cn/200109/26/eng20010926_81100.html)>, accessed on March 15, 2002. For more details, see Ministry of Information Industry (MII), *Tenth Five-Year Plan (2001-2005)—Information Industry*. The English translation is provided by the Telecommunications Research Project of Asian Studies at the University of Hong Kong, available online at <<http://www.trp.hku.hk/infofile/china/2002/10-5-yr-plan.pdf>>, accessed on September 14, 2002; Xiudian Dai, “Towards a Digital Economy with Chinese Characteristics?” *New Media and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 2, June 2002, pp. 141-162.

<sup>24</sup> “State Nurtures Fledgling IT Sector,” *Business Weekly*, April 24, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> The industrial structure re-defined and decreed under the title *Sanci Chanye Huafen Guiding* (Regulations on the Classification of the Three Industrial Structures) was published by the National Bureau of Statistics of China on May 14, 2003, in which the primary industry includes farming, animal husbandry and fishery, the secondary industry includes mining, manufacturing, electronic power, water supply and construction, and lastly the tertiary industry are those which are excluded from the primary and secondary industries, including transportation, post and telecommunications, information industry, financing and services, ...etc. See <<http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjbz/sccyhfgd/1200305280116.htm>>, accessed on June 25, 2003.

1998	49.8	18.4	23.5	48.7	26.7	32.9
1999	50.1	17.7	23.0	49.3	26.9	33.0
2000	50.0	15.9	22.5	50.9	27.5	33.2
2001	50.0	15.2	22.3	51.1	27.7	33.6
2002	50.0	15.4	21.4	51.1	28.6	33.5

Source: *Zhongguo Tongji Nianjian* (China Statistics Yearbook) (Internet version), National Bureau of Statistics of China, various years, available on-line at <<http://huang9.nease.net/images/jianding.htm>>, accessed on February 19, 2004.

## Section II The Emergence of Internet Entrepreneurs and their Operational Environment

The Internet entrepreneurs did not mushroom in China right after the economic reforms in the late 1970s. In the early 1990s indigenous private IT managers did not possess adequate know-how and entrepreneurial skills for the operation and governing of IT-related businesses. Yet, the lack of Internet capitalists was later supplemented by transnational corporations, overseas-trained Chinese and Chinese diaspora when the IT industry was ready to take off in the mid-1990s. One survey indicates that many high-tech ventures in China have started with “foreign-educated Chinese” (*hai gui*, “sea turtles” in Mandarin) who have had overseas credentials or close contacts, who usually have received funding support before they are lured back to China.<sup>26</sup> They have also tended to further import technology and capital for China’s economic development.<sup>27</sup> Zhang Chaoyang (Charles Zhang), for instance, chairman and CEO of Sohu, is MIT-trained (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) with a Ph.D. Similarly, the incumbent Sina CEO, Wang Yan, also has a Bachelors degree in

<sup>26</sup> Debbie Liao and Philip Sohmen, “The Development of Modern Entrepreneurship in China,” *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 2001, p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> See David Zweig, Chen Changguo and Stanley Rosen, “Globalization and Transnational Human Capital: Overseas and Returnee Scholars to China,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 179, September 2004,

Law from the University of Paris. And the former Sina CEO, Mao Daolin, completed his Master's degree from Stanford University. All of them are relatively young, between 30 and 40, and were all trained overseas.

Since there were few pioneering Internet entrepreneurs to grasp the abundant opportunities during the Internet boom in China, many of them have become tycoons in recent years. Quarterly financial reports of major Internet portals have revealed that their operating profits are principally derived from online advertising business, wireless value-added services, corporate network services, the online gaming market, and mobile phone short messaging service (SMS).<sup>28</sup> The results of the 2003 *Forbes* China Rich List have further confirmed their economic achievements. As Tim Ferguson, editor of *Forbes Global*, commented, "This year [2003], particularly, we are seeing the development of a new type of Chinese businesses from high-tech sectors, especially the Internet industry."<sup>29</sup> Whilst Charles Zhang, CEO of Sohu.com, ranked No. 20 with \$270 million, Ding Lei (William Ding), founder and chief architect of NetEase.com, topped the Rich List, with wealth that could be as big as US\$1 billion.<sup>30</sup> As a consequence, the Internet entrepreneurs have become

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pp. 749-754.

<sup>28</sup> Vanessa Hua, "Portals Hit Pay Dirt: 3 Net Companies Set up Lucrative Deals in China," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 7, 2003, available online at <<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2003/07/07/BU34838.DTL>>, accessed on July 8, 2003. The major Internet portals have provided Internet content to users of China's nearly two hundred million mobile phones. On their phones, subscribers can receive news report, entertainment and sports news, jokes or advice on their sex lives, and access their e-mail account. In 2003, for example, at least forty-five percent of the revenue of each portal came from wireless phone service. See Yilu Zhao, "China's Web Portals Open a Door to Risk," *The New York Times*, March 7, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> "High-tech Tycoons Highlighted in Forbes China Rich List," *China Daily*, October 31, 2003, available online at <[http://www1.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-10/31/content\\_277355.htm](http://www1.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-10/31/content_277355.htm)>, accessed on December 9, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> "The Top 15 China Rich List Members," *Forbes Magazine*, No. 11, November 24, 2003, available online at <<http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2003/1124/156.html>>. There were a total of eight technology tycoons amongst the Top one hundred China Rich List, reflecting better time for the Internet-related technology industry. See also Russell Flannery, "Web of Nation," *Forbes Magazine*,

economically influential role models in China and in particular amongst the younger Internet generations. As such, “it is the Internet that has made their economic success possible.”<sup>31</sup> One of the implications may be that socioeconomic change both abets and is abetted by the new Internet entrepreneurs. Whether the political orientations and its influence of the Internet capitalists may be favourable or opposed to the existing regime is a critical question for the Chinese government and those concerned about China’s (political) future.

As said earlier, the Internet industry, together with high-technology enterprises, did not flourish in China until the mid-1990s. Institutionally speaking, it was only in September 2000 that the State Council classified the telecom business into two categories in the China Telecom Regulations: basic telecom service and valued-added telecom business. Whilst the basic telecom service includes fixed-line and mobile phone, paging, data and satellite communications, the valued-added telecom business encompasses Internet content providers (ICPs), Internet service providers (ISPs), Internet, Internet data centres, and application service providers.<sup>32</sup> Sohu.com and Sina.com were among the first group of Internet companies to be awarded an official ICP licence by the MII in early 2001, which is renewable on a yearly basis.

In practice, the recent development of China’s “Internet media,” also known as the new media, may be classified into three major categories in terms of its affinity with the state and its ownership: (1) websites operated by traditional official media,

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No. 11, November 24, 2003, available online at <<http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2003/1124/154.html>>, both addresses were accessed on January 24, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Henny Sender, “China’s Future: Entrepreneurs,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 163, No. 4, January 27, 2000, p. 73.

<sup>32</sup> *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Dianxin Tiaoli* (Telecom Regulations of the People’s Republic of China), Article 8, State Council, September 2000, available online at <<http://www.mii.gov.cn/mii/hyzw/hygl/dxtl.htm>>, accessed on February, 13, 2004.

such as the *People's Daily*, *Xinhua News Agency*, China Central Television (CCTV), *China Daily*; (2) websites supported mainly by the provincial/local news media and government (news) organisations, such as CYCNET (China Youth Computer Information Network), QiangLong Net (21dnn.com), Eastday (Dong Fang Wang), Enorth.com.cn (Bei Fang Wang), Southcn.com.cn (Nan Fang Wang); (3) commercial Internet media websites, domestic and foreign, including Sina, Sohu, Netease, Tom, Chinese Yahoo, China.com (Zhongguo Wang). The Internet entrepreneurs in a broad sense may encompass any managerial elites that govern and operate websites. However, in contrast to traditional media websites (category 1) and those provincial and local quasi-official ones (category 2), that both to a varying degree receive government funds and subsidies for their regular operation and are subject to official directives, the commercial Internet websites have instead born full responsibility for their Internet company's survival.<sup>33</sup> In other words, the Web sites sponsored by traditional and provincial/local media have shown official or quasi-official features, and more importantly the propaganda-orientation characteristics.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the commercial websites are indeed part of the non-state sector and fall into the *min-ying*

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<sup>33</sup> Guo Letian, "2003: Zhongguo de Xinwen Wangzhan Hechuqu" (2003: Where do Chinese News Media go), *Chuanmei GuanCha* (Media Observer), No. 2, February 19, 2003, available online at <<http://www.chuanmei.net/Topic/articleshow.asp?ID=1870&TopicID=6>>, accessed on May 1, 2003.

<sup>34</sup> In an interview with Zhang Ping, CEO of *China Daily*, he confirmed that *China Daily* like some other official media "served the main purpose to propagandise China to the world in a good manner." Vice CEO of the China Internet Information Centre (*Zhongguo Wang*, China Net), Li Jiaming also confirmed that under the state fund, China Net was not under business pressure like the commercial Internet Web sites. If there was any pressure, it came from whether the Web site was popular amongst Internet users. Both illustrations highlight the general features of those official and quasi-official media websites in the face of commercial websites. See "Zhongguo Ribawang Zongcai Zhangping: Zhuiqiu Gongzuo he Shenghuo de Shuangying" (CEO of *China's Daily*, Zhang Ping, pursues the win-win situation both in work and life), *People's Daily*, September 30, 2003, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/14677/21965/22069/2118206.html>>; "Zhongguo Wang Fuzongcai Li Jiaming: Xianghe Wangyou Jiao Pengyou," (Vice CEO of China Net, Li Jiaming wants to make friends with Netizens), *People's Daily*, September 30, 2003, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/14677/21965/22069/2118215.html>>, both accessed on February 27, 2004.

(civilian-managed) enterprises, also known as *siying* (private) enterprises.<sup>35</sup> In this respect, the dissertation has adopted a narrower but practical definition towards what is meant by “Internet entrepreneurs,” that is to focus mainly on the private and commercial Internet websites that fall wholly in category 3.

The environments in which the private Internet entrepreneurs operate demonstrate at least some notable phenomena. Firstly, the commercial websites are significantly constrained from legally publishing (*fa bu*) their own news reports, and reprinting off-shore news sources; they can only reprint (*zhuan zai*) news from those websites sanctioned officially.<sup>36</sup> As a consequence, the main news sources for commercial media websites are supposed to come solely from monopoly news channels—central and provincial traditional media outlets. By and large, the commercial Internet portals have signed cooperative agreements with authorised news outlets and carry news from them. The immediate result can be partially examined in the figures presented by Chen Tong, editor-in-chief of Sina.com, which showed that the total online news hits were shared principally by the four national

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<sup>35</sup> Four operational definitions decreed by the government to distinguish private enterprises from state-sector ones: (1) be financially self-reliant; no budgetary funds available for the enterprises; (2) business established entirely at the initiative of the business founders; no state administrative participation or intervention; (3) a high degree of autonomy in their management; (4) be responsible for their own profits and losses. See *Xinhua Yuebao* (New China Monthly), No. 584, June 1993, p. 42, cited in Bennis Wai-yip So, “Evolution of *Minying* High-tech Enterprises in China: Legitimizing Private Ownership,” *Issues & Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 5, September/October 2001, p. 82.

<sup>36</sup> *Hulian Wangzhan Congshi Dengzai Xinwen Yewu Guanli Zhanxing Guiding* (Provisional Regulations on Governance of Internet-based News Providers Registration of News Websites), jointly issued by the Information Office of the State Council and the Ministry of Information Industry (MII) on November 7, 2000, available online at <<http://www.isc.org.cn/20020417/ca42718.htm>>, accessed on February 21, 2004. Key stipulations related to commercial websites include: (1) If commercial portal sites run by non-news organisations wish to carry news, they may do so only after obtaining permission. After gaining approval, they may only publish news provided by officially approved news organisations; (2) Commercial portals may not carry any news items based on their own interviews or from other sources. Other commercial sites run by non-news organisations are not allowed to carry news of any kind; (3) No China-based Web sites will be allowed to link to overseas news websites or carry news from overseas news media or websites, without separate approval by the State Council Information Office and (4) Commercial websites that wish to carry news must first sign cooperative

websites, Sina, Sohu, *Xinhua News Agency*, and the *People's Daily*, at 35 per cent, 20 per cent, 20 per cent, and 20 per cent, respectively. But when it came to the comparison with general website visiting, there existed stark differences between commercial and traditional websites. Sina had more than 27 per cent share of total visits, whilst Sohu, *Xinhua News Agency* and the *People's Daily* occupied 19 per cent, 2 per cent, 2 per cent, respectively.<sup>37</sup>

Because all ISPs, ICPs, and Internet café owners are responsible for reporting any patron who violates the laws and regulations, the stringent but ambiguous regulations have a profound impact upon Internet entrepreneurs; they promote self-censorship and set up their own monitors, known as “Big Mama,” to censor the chatrooms, bulletin boards and Internet cafés lest they may incur “severe penalties for content violations by third parties on their network, site, or server.”<sup>38</sup> In so doing, they may keep in line with the laws that are broadly decreed. Given these constraints on Internet operators, they have publicly committed themselves on several occasions to adhere to (Internet) media controls put forward by the CCP on the one hand, and continue to utilise the leeway provided to Internet-based commercial portals unavailable to other media on the other hand. There will be more discussion in the

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agreements with authorized news outlets.

<sup>37</sup> “Shangye Wangzhan yu Guanfang Wangzhan zai Hezuo zhong gong Fazhan” (Commercial and official websites develop through co-operation), *People's Daily*, September 26, 2003, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/14677/21965/22069/2111292.html>>. See also a recent comprehensive survey conducted by Guo Liang under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, entitled *2003 nian Zhongguo Shier Chengshi Hulianwang Shiyong Zhuangkuang ji Yingxiang Diaocha Baogao* (The 2003 research report on surveying Internet usage and impact in twelve Chinese cities), especially part 3.3, available online at <[http://tech.sina.com.cn/focus/internet\\_R/index.shtml](http://tech.sina.com.cn/focus/internet_R/index.shtml)>, both websites were accessed on October 30, 2003.

<sup>38</sup> American Chamber of Commerce in the People's Republic of China, *2002 White Paper: American Business in China*, section on the Information Technology, available online at <<http://www.amcham-china.org.cn/publications/white/2002/en-20.htm>>, accessed on February 29, 2004. See also Lokman Tsui, *Internet in China: Big Mama Is Watching You*, unpublished MA Thesis, University of Leiden, 2001, available online at <<http://www.lokman.nu/thesis/010717-thesis.pdf>>, accessed on

ensuing sections about their pragmatic approaches.

In this respect, the Internet has emerged as an alternative to the traditional media to acquire, exchange, and disseminate information in the wired world. In fact, compared with Web sites affiliated to traditional media such as the *People's Daily* or *Xinhua News Agency*, news channels on Internet portals have advantages in a more flexible style palatable to a broader readership. That is partly because the Internet portals can also acquire much more news reports than any single medium by means of extensive cooperation and purchasing stories. Moreover, they have also provided a wide array of content online. At times, “news” (*xin wen*) is virtually indistinguishable from “information” (*xin xi*) because there seems no clear-cut distinction between them, when especially “news” and “information” are carefully edited in the Chinese context. As Jiang Yaping, head of the online version of the *People's Daily*, acknowledged, “The unique feature of the Internet is exhibited in its ambiguity between news and information, and between news publishing and reprinting. They are all interwoven and thus have resulted in the truth that it is but a step from news to information.”<sup>39</sup> This has created space for privately owned Internet web sites to exert influence on their targeted audiences.

### **Section III Case Studies of the Internet Portals—Sohu.com and Sina.com**

The Internet media in China, according to Charles Zhang, CEO of the Sohu.com, was not treated as a popular mass media when it was set up in 1996. It was not until 1998

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March 12, 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Jiang Yaping, “Zhongguo Wangluo Meiti Xianzhuang Fenxi he Zhanwang,” (Analysis and Outlook of Current China Internet Media) *People's Daily*, July 4, 2002, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/it/48/298/20020704/768519.html>>, accessed on November 4, 2003.

that the Internet began to play a role similar to the traditional media. “When there is tremendous online traffic of some two hundred million hits daily on Sohu.com, the role of the popular Internet media outlet is confirmed and strengthened.”<sup>40</sup> With a mostly foreign-funded ownership structure and partly western-style management, Sohu started their Web site as early as 1996 when Charles Zhang returned from the USA with foreign funds.<sup>41</sup>

Sohu has proclaimed its Internet editorial policy as “humanitarian care, social responsibility and media credibility.”<sup>42</sup> Sohu’s policy is in principle consistent with China’s Internet laws and regulations, such as the *Provisional Regulations on Administration of Internet Culture*, which was promulgated by the PRC Ministry of Culture in May 2003. In comparison with previous Internet-related rules, the regulation further specifies the roles that the Internet media should play in enhancing social responsibility and facilitating social conscience. Above all, Internet media ought to shoulder the obligation to serve the people, state and socialism.<sup>43</sup> Under the present news constraint, Sohu.com has like other Internet portals presented “softer” or “safer” online materials,<sup>44</sup> featuring less politically sensitive and subversive arenas,

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<sup>40</sup> “Duihua Souhu Zhang Chaoyang, Zhubu Chengdan qi Meiti de Zhongda Zeren,” (Dialogs with Sohu’s CEO, Zhang Chaoyang—Undertake Media’s Great Responsibility Gradually), *People’s Daily*, December 31, 2003, available online at <<http://www.peopledaily.com.cn/GB/it/1067/2273587.html>>, accessed on 19 February 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Descriptions cited in Sohu.com, available at <<http://www.sohu.com/about/English/vision.htm>>, accessed on January 12, 2004.

<sup>42</sup> “Souhu Xinwen Yizhi zai Nuli Jianchi Ziji de Wangluo Xinwen Jiazhi guan” (Sohu’s news is persistently working on its own Internet news media values), *Sohu.com*, 12 November 2003, available online at <<http://news.sohu.com/06/23/news215502306.shtml>>, accessed on March 14, 2004.

<sup>43</sup> *Hulianwang Zhanxing Guanli Guiding* (The Provisional Regulations on Administration of Internet Culture), article 5. For full text, see <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/1027/1946034.html>>, accessed on January 8, 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Caroline Straathof, spokeswoman for Sohu.com, has acknowledged that given websites have to be what people called politically correct, that only concerns most sensitive political news. See Caroline Straathof, “New Media and Democracy: Case Studies—China,” *Are the New Media Good for Democracy?—Media Round Table Report* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2001), 24, available

such as entertainment, environmental protection, gender and ethical issues, violence, and so forth. Although their materials are politics-free in form, these reports usually have some political implications in nature. Furthermore, the coverage from Sohu and other commercial Internet portals has indeed widened the public debates and displayed the plurality of public opinion. By skilfully editing news and information, comprehensive categorising, and Web page designing, Sohu has become a predominant Internet news platform with its timely and all-round coverage of the news and information. The results have been far-reaching: commercial Internet Web sites like Sohu have demonstrated themselves influential mainstream media that attempt to shape and direct public opinion and debates.<sup>45</sup> Chinese people, who in the past were limited to official sources of news and information, such as the evening news at seven o'clock on China Central Television (CCTV, *xinwen lianbo*) or the *People's Daily*, have now found themselves equipped with multiple sources of news and information once they get online.

It should be always born in mind that a commercial Internet company like Sohu has striven hard to maximise their profits from the fledgling Internet market. One of the consequences is that online chat rooms with their anonymity, convenience and interactiveness have, for example, fallen victim to pornographic and sexually seductive messages and contents.<sup>46</sup> Allegedly in order to boost their cyber traffic and

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online at <[http://www.idea.int/2001\\_forum/media/mrt\\_papers/round\\_table\\_report.pdf](http://www.idea.int/2001_forum/media/mrt_papers/round_table_report.pdf)>, accessed on May 15, 2002.

<sup>45</sup> "Sohu Gongsì Shouxì Yunyingguan Gu Yongqiang Xiansheng Zhici—Quanwen" (The full text of speech of Gu Yongqiang, Sohu's Chief Operating Officer), *Sohu.com*, November 12, 2003, available online at <<http://news.sohu.com/16/22/news215502216.shtml>>, accessed on March 14, 2004.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Wang Jipeng, "Wangzhan CEO de Xiayige Chenghu—Laobao: Tantan Wangluo Seqing," (The next title for the Internet portals' CEO—pander: talks about the online pornography) *Yahoo China*, June 20, 2003, available online at <<http://cn.tech.yahoo.com/030620/55/1nybk.html>>, accessed on February 27, 2004.

popularity, Internet portals have formed “marketing alliances” with illegal pornography Web sites, after their previous online marketing strategy failed.<sup>47</sup> Official media, scholars and commentators have then responded by stepping in and calling for greater attention to the seriousness of such online obscenity.<sup>48</sup>

The topical case is the Mu Zimei incident. Working for a biweekly column on *City Pictorial*, Mu Zimei, a 25-year-old sex columnist, was small-fry until she was hailed as a household name in the Internet community because of her most controversial work—diaries of sexual encounters, appearing online from mid-June 2003 onwards. Sina.com has even used its platform to promote the serialisation since November 11, 2003. One of their management officers explains that “Sina.com normally attracts 20 million hits daily. However the number immediately jumped to 30 million and stayed there for 10 days soon after the serialisation of Mu Zimei was online.”<sup>49</sup> As a result, Sina.com credited her with attracting 10 million daily visitors. Sohu.com, says “Mu Zimei is the name most often typed into its Internet search engine, surpassing one occasional runner-up, Mao Zedong.”<sup>50</sup> Her writings have fuelled a wide range of discussions and debates about sexuality and gender issues on the Internet, where more people are inspired others to write weblogs. Sina.com was later attacked first by *Beijing Wanbao* (Beijing Evening News) for its negligence of maintaining social responsibly and excessive pursuit of online viewings and

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<sup>47</sup> Sarah Schafer, “The Portals into China,” *Newsweek*, October 13, 2003, p. 38.

<sup>48</sup> “Zhongguo Wangluo Yulun Wenti Duoduo,” (Plenty of public opinion’s issues in China’s Internet), *Liao Wang Xinwen Zhoukan* (Outlook Weekly), No. 5, February 26, 2004, available online at <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/newmedia/2004-02/25/content\\_1330194.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newmedia/2004-02/25/content_1330194.htm)>, accessed on February 27, 2004;

<sup>49</sup> Jim Yardley, “Internet Sex Column Thrills, and Inflames, China,” *The New York Times*, November 30, 2003, p. 3, available online at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/30/international/asia/30CHIN.html>>, accessed on December 2, 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

commercial benefits.<sup>51</sup> Sina.com has as a result shrunk its coverage and moved the related reports from a prominent layout spot to a less notable position in response to social criticism.

In this regard, commercial Internet outlets like Sina.com are emancipating a relatively fettered society where the once tabooed social themes now can be more lively and openly discussed, online and offline. The Internet is now impacting China's sociopolitical environment, creating a more pluralised society where diversified public interests may coexist. In this respect, the private Internet entrepreneurs have provided a loosely regulated platform that serves a wide range of people's interests. Despite negative impacts upon society, there is no doubt that different interests and needs of the public may now converge in Chinese cyberspace.

In addition, Internet portals like Sohu.com have also fulfilled their corporate social responsibility on the one hand, and maintain a good relationship with the state on the other hand. Take the coverage of the World AIDS Day on December 1, 2002 as an example. Here, Sohu covered a lengthy and wide range of issues in approximately forty pieces of news to bring the seriousness of this issue to the public's attention. One of the noticeable and controversial events on that day was an HIV-positive woman from the central province of Guizhou marrying her HIV-negative fiancé in Beijing. This interesting contrast from Sohu's coverage on this matter bears an important implication here that while there were varied standpoints from the health authority, the Beijing Municipal Government, and the former President Jiang, their perspectives

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<sup>51</sup> "Zenme Kan Mu Zimei" (How to look upon Mu Zimei phenomenon), *Beijing Wanbao*, 16 November 2003, available online at <<http://www.bjd.com.cn/BJWB/20031116/GB/BJWB^11523^10^16W1010.htm>>, accessed on April 15, 2004.

could be presented in a number of cyber media spaces besides Sohu.com.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, Sohu has managed to establish a closer tie with the authorities by giving concrete support to government and quasi-government societal organisation for its own causes. For instance, Sohu was exclusively granted the privilege to cover the World Economic Forum: China Business Summit 2003 Conference, in cooperation with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the China Enterprise Confederation in November 2003.<sup>53</sup> Sohu.com actually used its Internet platform to widely publicise such a high-profile event. On top of the VIP participants consisting of high-ranking officials and foreign as well as domestic CEOs, China's Executive Vice-Premier Huang Ju took part in the conference and delivered a keynote speech about China's growing prospects in the midst of continuous development.

Both cases have revealed two significant political meanings. First, Sina, Sohu and other commercial Internet portals have played a part in widening public debates, and presented people with a much wider horizon. They may have even moved the bottom line of what the government considers acceptable and created a more relaxed socioeconomic environment. As Li Xiguang optimistically notes, with the proliferation of new communications technologies, Chinese people can now begin to "form their own viewpoints by verifying and discounting information that they

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<sup>52</sup> See "Case Study I: Sohu.com—A CSR Perspective," *CSR in China Quarterly*, No. 2, April-June 2003, p. 5, available online at <[http://www.mfcinsight.com/files/CSR\\_BB\\_Oped3\\_Update030725.pdf](http://www.mfcinsight.com/files/CSR_BB_Oped3_Update030725.pdf)>, accessed on January 16, 2004; "Aizibing: Guojia Gai Guan Shenme, Bu gai Guan Sheme," (AIDS: What does the state should intervene and not intervene) available online at <<http://news.sohu.com/00/07/news204670700.shtml>>; "Yufang Kongzhi Aizibing Ying Jiejue Liangge Falu Wenti," (There should solve two legal issues on preventing and controlling AIDS), available online at <<http://news.sohu.com/38/31/news204663138.shtml>>; both appeared on Sina.com. on December 1, 2001, and accessed on March 13, 2004.

<sup>53</sup> See the homepage of the China 2003 Business Summit at <<http://business.sohu.com/36/66/column214726636.shtml>>, accessed on March 10, 2004.

consider biased.”<sup>54</sup> Secondly, Sohu has not only promoted its non-profit public image for socioeconomic causes, but also broadened the channels to further (business) cooperation with government organisations, agencies and officials in the future. In a word, commercial Internet media like Sohu may strengthen its brand-name image and most importantly enhance their businesses relationship with the Chinese authorities.

Such a business practice has accordingly become something of a mantra for successful entrepreneurs to maintain ties with central and local governments under such intricate *guanxi* networks. Partly *guanxi* is in this respect seen as filling the “institutional hole” created by China’s incomplete and partial reforms; it has its own independent logic.<sup>55</sup> All in all, it leads some commentators to argue that “the possibility of being shut down by the government has encouraged self-censorship [and discipline] by Internet companies—which in turn has dampened online political communication,”<sup>56</sup> and there is little reason to expect that commercial or foreign Internet operators would risk advancing noble and just political ends like human rights and democracy. It is nevertheless too early and the reality too complicated to jump to a conclusion. As a matter of fact, the pragmatic approach adopted by Sohu and other portals alike in dealing with their online contents has proved very successful in negotiating China’s political winds. When the grand political climate turns towards nationalism (patriotism) and tighter media censorship at the time of special (political)

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<sup>54</sup> Li Xiguang, “ICT and the Demise of Propaganda in China,” *Global Media Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Fall 2003, p. 4, available online at <<http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/SubmittedDocuments/Fall2003/Refereed/Xiguang.htm>>, accessed on March 16, 2004.

<sup>55</sup> See more debates in Thomas Gold, Doug Guthrie, and David Wank, eds., *Social Connections in China: Institutions, Culture, and the Changing Nature of Guanxi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>56</sup> Shanthi Kalathil, “The Internet and Asia: Broad Band or Broad Bans?” *Foreign Service Journal*, Vol. 78, No. 2, February 2001, available online at <[http://www.ceip.org/files/Publications/internet\\_asia.asp?p=5 &from=pubdate](http://www.ceip.org/files/Publications/internet_asia.asp?p=5 &from=pubdate)>, accessed on April 18, 2001.

events, the Internet portals have deftly asserted their loyalty and political support for the government's policies and stances. However, in more liberal times and relaxed occasions, they tend to have presented themselves as crucial bridge builders between the Internet customers and the seemingly unfettered gateway to their large news and information databases. The Internet entrepreneurs are thus adopting this kind of practical approach in dealing with (political) demands from the authorities, but in the meantime hunt for business profits to attract more online viewers. This approach and aptitude is a link to the next theme to be discussed: the clientelist-corporatist relationship between the state and the Internet entrepreneurs.

#### **Section IV State-Business Relationship in the Internet Sector**

In pre-reform China, state-society relations were partly sustained and strengthened through state authority and Party ideology. The central government exercised its grassroots control by means of local party meetings that were usually conducted through an individual *danwei* (work unit) or neighbourhood association—village committee (*cunweihui*). As a result, the Party was indeed ubiquitous in penetrating into peasants' and workers' everyday lives, partly because the *danwei*-based society depended heavily upon the delivery of social welfare and provisions, as presented by Andrew Walder in his book, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism*.<sup>57</sup> The centrally mandated practice of business operation has been gradually withered away in the reform era since 1980s. Due to the institutional changes in the wake of economic transition, the economic imperatives require at least some compliance with directives

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<sup>57</sup> Andrew G. Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). See also Martin K. Whyte and William L. Parish,

of the Party and the command economy.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, the institutional changes in China have undeniably benefited some groups more than others in the state-led redistribution of resources and benefits.<sup>59</sup> Private entrepreneurs including former bureaucrats who have left the communist Party, government office, military organisations, and SOEs, and newly emerged business elites have also all contributed to the reshaping of the state-business relationship in China. In one sense, the “Three Represents” mirror the state’s proactive measure to cope with the changing relationship.

This dissertation argues that the state-business nexus in the Internet sector is and will be remaining a “clientelist-corporatist” trajectory at least in the short- to medium-term. With respect to clientelism, the state has awarded resources (operational licences, for example, in the case of the Internet sector) to its clients (Internet entrepreneurs) in exchange for their political support for ruling legitimacy and social contributions like job creation, tax revenue and national wealth for the majority of populace. In the meantime, the state may concede certain operational autonomy to their everyday Internet business management.

The hybrid clientelist-corporatist complex is manifested in one way or another within the Internet industry. Not only are the government-sponsored or -supported Internet enterprises effectively under heavy control of their patrons, but the private Internet companies also have to comply with the government’s administrative regulations in return for a limited numbers of operating licences. The Internet industry

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*Urban Life in Contemporary China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Andrew G. Walder, “The Decline of Communist Power: Elements of a Theory of Institutional Change,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 2, April 1994, pp. 297-323.

<sup>59</sup> Xiaobo Hu, “The State and the Private Sector in a New Property Rights Systems,” in *China after*

in China is hence by and large a protected sector given that the IT industry is exposed to fiercer competition from global corporations under the concessions and terms made in its entry into the WTO. Prior to China's accession to the WTO, the former Minister of MII, Wu Jichuan, spoke publicly in September 1999 that foreign companies would not be allowed to invest nor operate in Chinese Internet-related business, whether content providers or service providers, for both fall into the category of value-added telecom services.<sup>60</sup> China is still only partially opening up the market even after entering the WTO in spite of the terms of IT and basic telecommunications policies agreed.<sup>61</sup> One of the direct impacts on the industry is that competition is still regulated by issuing a certain number of licences. The state's discriminatory policy is thus apparent in the domains of policy interpretation and law enforcement. These situations have somewhat resulted in distorted and discriminatory market competition where the Internet entrepreneurs are usually and ought to be well connected to

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*Jiang*, eds. Gang Lin and Xiaobo Hu (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 69-89.

<sup>60</sup> Hans Lombardo, "China Bans Foreign Investment in Internet Sector," *Internetnews.com*, September 14, 1999, available online at <<http://www.internetnews.com/bus-news/article.php/200131>>, accessed on February 13, 2004.

<sup>61</sup> Upon China's accession, foreign service suppliers for those value-added services, including Internet and paging services, would be permitted to establish joint venture value-added telecommunication enterprises, without quantitative restrictions, and provide services in the cities of Shanghai, Guangzhou and Beijing. Foreign investment in joint venture would be no more than thirty per cent. Within one year after China's accession, the areas would be expanded to include Chengdu, Chongqing, Dalian, Fuzhou, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Ningbo, Qingdao, Shenyang, Shenzhen, Xiamen, Xi'an, Taiyuan and Wuhan and foreign investment would be no more than forty-nine per cent. Within two years after China's accession, there would be no geographic restrictions and foreign investment would be no more than 50 per cent. See "China's WTO Commitments," *Beijing Review*, Vol. 47, No. 4, January 2004, pp. 16-18. For example, American venture capital fund International Data Group (IDG) has helped a Chinese Internet company named 8848.com to get back to the Internet market in the aftermath of China's accession into the WTO. As a matter of fact, the IDG Technology Venture Investment has been the first American venture capital investor to enter the Chinese information market that has invested in dotcoms. We can even proclaim that many major Internet ISPs and ICPs, such as Sina.com, Sohu.com, NetEase.com, Tom.com, 3721.com, Baidu.com, ...etc., have to a varying degree received foreign investments in different forms. See Tang Yuankai, "Net Profits," *Beijing Review*, Vol. 47, No. 4, January 22, 2004, pp. 22-24; Russell Flannery, "Mergers and Acquisitions: China's Internet M&A Bang Likely to Last," *Forbes.com*, December 1, 2003, available online at <[http://www.forbes.com/2003/12/01/cz\\_rf\\_1201china.html](http://www.forbes.com/2003/12/01/cz_rf_1201china.html)>, accessed on January 22, 2004. But for the basic telecom service,

political power for the purpose of enjoying such privileges.

The current politico-economic climate in the Internet industry also promotes the ostensibly imperative doctrine that Internet and ICT entrepreneurs have to maintain a close relationship with government officials at all levels. They are apt to believe that the clientelist approach is both a politically safe and an economically effective strategy to manoeuvre the way they do Internet business vis-à-vis the state bureaucracy. For instance, Rupert Murdoch, a household name of media tycoon, claimed in September 1993:

*Advances in the technology of communications have proved an unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes: Fax machines enable dissidents to bypass state-controlled print media; direct-dial telephone makes it difficult for a state to control interpersonal voice communication; and satellite broadcasting makes it possible for information-hungry residents of many closed societies to bypass state-controlled television channels.<sup>62</sup>*

Nevertheless, in order to gain limited access to China's lucrative markets for ICTs, Murdoch has been currying favour with the Chinese regime by removing the BBC World Service Television newscasts since April 1994 from his Star TV satellite broadcasts because the Beijing government deems that the BBC usually carry politically inappropriate and sensitive issues in its coverage of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. He has also broadcasted China Central Television's (CCTV) programming in Europe and America.<sup>63</sup>

The situation is even more conspicuous for Internet entrepreneurs running

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there have not seen a single operating licence granted to a foreign-invested telecom joint venture two years after China's WTO entry.

<sup>62</sup> Marcus W. Brauchli, Joseph Kahn and S. Karene Witcher, "Murdoch's Plans Could Aid China in Media Control," *Wall Street Journal*, January 31, 1996, p. A4.

<sup>63</sup> William Atkins, "Brand Power and State Power: Rise of the New Media Networks in East Asia,"

cybercafés in medium or small cities. This is largely because Internet entrepreneurs still more or less depend on the local government's discretionary favouritism for protection and resources.<sup>64</sup> In this regard, the Internet café entrepreneurs have less autonomy but more structural dependence. It is analogous to the practice of "embedded autonomy" as Peter Evans has called it, in which he describes the phenomenon mostly found in developmental states, of "...an autonomy embedded in a concrete set of social ties that bind the state to society and provide institutionalised channels for the continual negotiation and renegotiation of goals and policies."<sup>65</sup> Given that the Chinese case does not perfectly conform to the definition provided, the Internet entrepreneurs still increasingly play a consultative role for the government because many executives have been appointed to government policy panels aimed at soliciting visions from Internet industry and enhancing cooperative government-business relationship.<sup>66</sup>

The strong regulatory powers over the behaviour of domestic Internet practitioners also have somewhat promoted indigenous firms' personal relationships with the authorities concerned.<sup>67</sup> In an interview for this project, an Internet manager talked about the role of the "princeling party" (*taizidang* or *gaogan zidi*) in significantly facilitating business prosperity through government support or resources. The "princeling party" in China is the special privileged class; they are usually the

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*The Pacific Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4, December 2003, pp. 473-480.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with a local Internet entrepreneurs running a cyber café in Chengde city, Hebei province, in July 2002.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Evans, *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 59.

<sup>66</sup> Shanthi Kalathil, "China's New Media Sector: Keeping the State in," *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4, December 2003, pp. 497-498.

<sup>67</sup> Christopher R. Hughes, "China and the Globalization of ICTs: Implications for International Relations," *New Media & Society*, Vol. 4, No. 2, June 2002, pp. 208-210.

offspring or relatives of the nomenklatura. Normally they manage to draw on the legacy or influence of their veteran communist revolutionaries in a subtle way to take power or hold key posts in the party, government, military, or more recently in lucrative business fields.<sup>68</sup> Since the group of *taizidang* is usually the family members of political leaders, they appear to have easy access to political power when they engage in business. Those *taizi* or protégés are often sought by transnational corporations as “advisers” of their business into the gigantic China market chiefly because of their *guanxi* more than their professional advice. Albeit that the institutional constraints on the “princeling party” has now been stronger than ever as Cheng Li has argued,<sup>69</sup> the role of *gaogan zidi* can not be simply overlooked.

Specifically, two renowned IT figures were mostly identified in an interview for this chapter: Jiang Mianheng, son the Jiang Zemin, and Daniel Mao, husband of President Hu Jintao’s daughter. Jiang Mianheng, vice president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, holds a long list of directorships, including chairman of China Netcom, a state-run project to build China’s Internet backbone. He is especially collaborating with Taiwan tycoon Winston Wong to construct a US\$1.63 billion semi-conductor plan in Pudong, Shanghai.<sup>70</sup> Daniel Mao is the former CEO of Sina.com, China’s biggest Internet portal, and he still remains on the Sina board of directors. In this respect, the unique factor, the role of the *taizidang* in boosting

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<sup>68</sup> For a more general discussion about the “princeling party” in China, see, for example, Pin Ho and Xin Gao, *Zhongkong taizidang* (China’s Princeling Party) (two volumes) (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 1993).

<sup>69</sup> Cheng Li, *China’s Leaders: The New Generation* (Lanham, Md. and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

<sup>70</sup> Informal talk with Internet entrepreneurs in Beijing in September 2003. See also “China’s IT Power Player,” *Asiaweek.com*, July 27–August 3, 2001, available online at <<http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/technology/article/0,8707,168222,00.html>>, accessed on March 5, 2004. The group of *taizidang* is the family members of political leaders and they usually have easy access to political

China's IT industry, has also nurtured and strengthened the state-business relationship, insofar as it provides telling evidence for the coexistence of clientelism and state corporatism.

Meanwhile, strong autonomous and independent groups from the Internet-related businesses are relatively few in China. Take the Internet Society of China (*Zhongguo Hulanwang Xiehui*, <<http://www.isc.org.cn/>>) for instance. It is probably the only (nationwide) Internet association that encompasses Internet players, lawyers, and media scholars. It was inaugurated in May 2001. It functions as an intermediary between the government and entrepreneurs. Its objective is to propagate state policies, laws and regulations with regard to the Internet industry, reflecting the needs and wants of specific policies from members, helping the government enact relevant Internet policies and promoting self-regulation among members.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, all societal organisations, including trade and labour unions, virtually have to be sanctioned by the state. The authorities chiefly organise them, and their leadership is directed by or subjected to government leadership, ensuring the members of the associations conform to the state's interests, such as the overall national informatisation process and network economy. They are far from acting contrary to or challenging the communist regime and running against the stability of the society. Resembling many other civic groups, the Internet Society largely serves the cause of the state and is arguably a form of state corporatism. Both clientelism and corporatism have effectively prevented an organised and a threatening Internet entrepreneurs association from coming into being.

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power when they engage in business.

<sup>71</sup> *Internet Society of China*, available online at <<http://www.isc.org.cn/xhjs/index.htm>>, accessed on

As Charles Zhang, CEO and President of Sohu.com stated after receiving their ICP licence in 2001, that Sohu would,

*"...further strengthen the working relationship between the state and private new media enterprises by enhancing their legal status. We will work with the government to create an Internet environment where stability and growth go hand-in-hand for everyone to benefit."*<sup>72</sup>

Whilst the government fears the Internet as a source of open information, the goal-keepers of the large commercial sites are seen as safely self-censored. What is also worrisome for the Beijing authority, however, is that these relatively smaller, individual sites are difficult to regulate and even harder to keep track of. One of the interviewees has confirmed,

*"The sky is high and the emperor is far away. (tian gao huang di yuan) So I can take advantage of the geographical remoteness from the centre to make profits, [although the online contents displayed are at times not wholly in line with government's requirements]."*<sup>73</sup>

The situation is not an isolated case, but allegedly a widespread phenomenon since there are variations in law enforcement across provinces and regions within China. It is usually referred to as the consequence of decentralisation reform, in which the central government delegated greater decision-making authority to local government in the reform era.

Moreover, many foreign Internet entrepreneurs seem reluctant to press for

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March 4, 2004.

<sup>72</sup> "Sohu.com in First Batch to receive ICP licence," *Sohu.com*, January 11, 2001, available online at <<http://www.sohu.com/about/English/023.htm>>, accessed on March 3, 2004.

<sup>73</sup> Informal talk with a local Internet entrepreneur running an Internet portal in Shanghai in September

political liberalisation and reform. Their shrewd attitude has in turn solidified the clientelist-corporatist relationship between the state and Internet entrepreneurs. They usually turn a blind eye to the calls from human rights organisations to pressure the Chinese government into relaxing their human rights violations on cyber-activists. Amnesty International, for example, claimed recently that fifty-four people were detained or sentenced for expressing “revolutionary” online opinions or for disseminating and downloading “unhealthy” information from the Internet. They asserted that “foreign corporations indirectly contributed to human rights violations or at the very least, failed to give consideration to the human rights implications of their investments.”<sup>74</sup> Specifically, several foreign companies, including Cisco Systems, Microsoft, Nortel Networks, Websense and Sun Microsystems, were allegedly accused of providing technology or software to censor and control the use of the Internet in China.<sup>75</sup> Cisco and Microsoft dismissed the allegations with the defence that “if the government of China wants to monitor the Internet, that’s their business. We are basically politically neutral.” “We just focused on delivering the best technology to people throughout the world. We cannot control the way it may ultimately be used.”<sup>76</sup> Both responses are actually in line with how most foreign Internet-related entrepreneurs operate in dealings with the Chinese government. All in

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2003.

<sup>74</sup> “People’s Republic of China: Controls Tighten as Internet Activism Grows,” *Amnesty International*, January 28, 2004, available online at <<http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/ENGASA170012004>>, accessed on February 5, 2004.

<sup>75</sup> David Lee, “Multinationals Making a Mint from China’s Great Firewall,” *South China Morning Post*, October 3, 2002; Greg Walton, *China’s Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People’s Republic of China*, released by Rights and Democracy, October 2001, available online at <[www.ichrdd.ca/english/commdoc/publications/globalization/goldenShieldEng.html](http://www.ichrdd.ca/english/commdoc/publications/globalization/goldenShieldEng.html)>, accessed on March 17, 2002.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Mooney, “China’s Cyber Crackdown,” *Newsweek International*, December 16, 2002, available online at <<http://www.msnbc.com/news/844730.asp>>, accessed on March 25, 2003.

all, the profit-orientation of the Internet entrepreneurs, home and foreign, has intensified the clientelist-corporatist relationship. This relationship may be linked as the often-noted rhetoric—a socialist economy with Chinese characteristics.

## **Section V Conclusion**

### **A. Implications for Civil Society**

Although the overall party-state capacities have been declining since the economic reform and opening to the outside world, the central government has nevertheless laboriously attempted to utilise the Internet and its related infrastructure to improve its administrative control over provincial and local governments. Although operational autonomy is practised in the increasingly commercialised Internet sector, the outcome has not been further political democratisation. Partly the party-state is still powerful enough to harness and alleviate any negative spin-off deriving from economic prosperity. Meanwhile, the operational autonomy is usually confined to enterprise management. Besides, the Internet entrepreneurs as the beneficiaries of the IT's take-off in the past decade have not developed a solid socio-economic foundation to distance themselves from the state apparatus. The structural dependence and asymmetric power between the state and Internet entrepreneurs still remain palpable. Having said that, since the Internet industry is still a relatively protected sector with a mildly open market, many capitalists have prospered as a result of the preferential policy. It has also strengthened their proclivity for political clientelism vis-à-vis the authorities. The Beijing government can thus effectively prevent the emergence of vigorous and potentially dangerous social groups to challenge the rule of the

communist party.

In addition, China has until now been a country where any formal organisations needed to be sanctioned and created under government auspices. Autonomous legal civil associations that are free from state power are difficult to find not only in the Internet sector but all throughout the private economy. The circumstances appear similar to what Frolic has called “state-led civil society—“social organisations and quasi- administrative units created by the state to help it manage a complex and rapidly expanding economy and changing societies.”<sup>77</sup> It may be conceived of as a “Chinese” mode of political development, that is, an outcome of such clientelist-corporatist approach of development after more than two decades of economic reform.

Yet the Internet entrepreneurs have to cater to an increasingly diversified audience of users. They cannot just simply mimic official Internet media to sell progaganda, nor can they merely present “softer” or “safer” contents, acting as an extension of the entertainment industry in cyberspace. To solicit Internet users’ popularity usually leads to business profit. Against this backdrop, the entrepreneurs may not directly challenge the authorities politically, but the contents and “virtual” media spaces they provide may further push the society into becoming more pluralized, where many value orientations are coexistent. Online pornography material stands at one extreme. The Internet entrepreneurs may (un)intentionally promote indecent content; nevertheless, cyberspace in this domain is ill-regulated and a nascent civil society with common interests begin to form online. Similar civic

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<sup>77</sup> B. Michael Frolic, “State-Led Civil Society,” in Timothy Brook and B. Michael Frolic (eds.), *Civil Society in China* (Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 46-67.

online groups, such as environmental activists, gay rights promoters, can also be found in cyberspace. At another extreme, an international ICT player like Rupert Murdoch has asserted that the international community can play a key role in assisting China to “achieve progress across an entire spectrum of economic, social, legal and political issues.” He commented at the 2004 Asia Society Annual Dinner,

*We need to be far more aggressive in helping China confront and come to grips with its deepening AIDS crisis. We need to encourage China to develop institutions that strengthen the rule of law. We need to support and engage grass-roots organisations in China—groups such as NGOs—that affirm civil society by tackling such problems as environmental pollution and local corruption. And we need to help China more effectively combat the rampant piracy of intellectual property that left unchecked will undermine the business models of creative companies worldwide.<sup>78</sup>*

Many foreign and indigenous Internet entrepreneurs such as Murdoch are unlikely to provoke the authorities publicly, but how they run their digital and Internet media may indeed provide foundations and pave the way for incipient public space to be possibly created online which is necessary for a healthy civil society to grow and be nurtured.

## **B. Concluding Remarks**

The Internet entrepreneurs are increasingly powering the national economy, and they are accordingly in one way or another being integrated into the communist party and state bureaucracy. For the CCP, in so doing, it can guarantee the continuing communist rule by recruiting the rising private elites into the incumbent regime, lest

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<sup>78</sup> Rupert Murdoch, Keynote Address at the Asia Society Annual Dinner, February 25, 2004, available online at <<http://www.asiasociety.org/speeches/murdoch04.html>>, accessed on April 7, 2004.

they may act against the state for demanding for economic and political rights as reform takes root. It is also a preemptive strategy for the state to deter potentially reactionary forces from the private sector. For Internet entrepreneurs, their pragmatic approaches in dealing with the government have proven relatively successful. They have in turn strengthened the structure of the clientelist-corporatist relationship in the Internet sector in China. They are therefore more willing to cooperate with the government rather than push ahead with political liberalisation and democratisation. The decade-long economic success in China has created more business opportunities for them to become better-off. Unlike some Chinese people previously enthusiastic about realising political ends during the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, (Internet) entrepreneurs have nowadays become more pragmatic and compromised; they are now more concentrating on “economic and other non-political endeavours.”<sup>79</sup>

It is inappropriate to exaggerate the potential of the Internet entrepreneurs for an inevitable political transformation into a healthy civil society if we simply extrapolate trends from Western experiences and theories and insert them into China’s political future. This is not to suggest that Western experiences are invalid when applying into the Chinese situations. I would instead suggest that the foreign experiences need more empirical grounds to support such assertions. The emergence of civil society in the wake of Internet entrepreneurs might be delayed, partly because of governments’ efforts (Internet control and the preemptive strategies) and partly because of the premature socio- and politico-economic environment.

More importantly, it may not be the Internet entrepreneurs that directly advance

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<sup>79</sup> Suisheng Zhao, “Introduction: China’s Democratization Reconsidered,” in Suisheng Zhao (ed.), *China and Democracy: The Prospect for a Democratic China* (New York and London: Routledge:

political causes in China, but the Internet users themselves. In general, the Internet entrepreneurs might not be bold enough to promote or even fully realise the political potentials of the Internet unless the directions are guided or initiatives implemented. What in turn makes the Internet significant is how and to what extent the medium is being utilised by Netizens or any NGOs. As Sohu's CEO Charles Zhang comments, "With more access to information, people are listening rather than just hearing, are thinking rather than blindly following directions. The Internet empowers the individual."<sup>80</sup> In summary, the Internet has a strong potential to transform the Chinese state, but it ultimately depends upon how the Internet is used. Benjamin Barber also suggested that "whether democracy survives and flourishes is not going to depend on the quality and character of our technology, but on the quality of our political institutions and on the character of our citizens."<sup>81</sup>

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2001), p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> Lisa Movius, "To Be Young, Chinese and Weiku," *Salon.com*, May 30, 2001, available online at <[http://archive.salon.com/tech/feature/2001/05/30/china\\_web/print.html](http://archive.salon.com/tech/feature/2001/05/30/china_web/print.html)>, accessed on February 26, 2004.

<sup>81</sup> Benjamin R. Barber, "Which Technology for which Democracy? Which Democracy for which Technology," *International Journal of Communications Law and Policy*, No. 6, Winter 2000/2001, p. 8.

## Chapter 5 Case Studies of the Impact of the Internet upon the Political System: from Words to Action

### Section I Introduction

Information management in China has according to Tony Saich, conventionally practised, “a system of information control and censure with an intricate grading process for who at what level is allowed to see which kinds of information.”<sup>1</sup> Saich illustrates this with the “Rectification Movement” in Yan’an in the 1940s to emphasise the significance to provide the authoritative and correct interpretations of Party history. To Mao Zedong, it was particularly important because “accurate” presentations of Party history are mainly associated with regime stability, (central) leadership consolidation, and policy implementation.<sup>2</sup>

In a sense, this is in order for the communist Party to rein in information flows and uses, ensuring that the central leaders can and will always govern the world’s most populous country in a more effective manner. To achieve this, they try to prevent any significant alternative stream of information flows from spreading among the general public for fear of the destabilising and subverting effect of popular mobilisation based upon numerous precedents in Chinese history. There are basically two distinct communication systems that the Chinese Communist Party applies with varying objectives. Whilst one system, which is characterised as the bottom-up approach, accumulates information and data that is sent upwards into the

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Saich, *Governance and Politics of China* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Saich, “Writing or Rewriting History? The Construction of the Maoist Resolution of Party History,” in Tony Saich and Hans van de Ven (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 299-338.

bureaucratic hierarchy,<sup>3</sup> the other top-down mode of communication network disseminates organisationally sanctioned information from the top to the general public. This is done on the basis of what is called the “grading system,” where the higher a person’s official position, the greater the quantity and quality of the information s/he receives.

The mass media in China have never been a significant forum for any serious free policy discussions and debate. This is primarily because of grand social and political stability concerns. Meanwhile, the nature of insert the “traditional” media and the character of the government-controlled news outlets has also hindered the creation of a freer media space out of the Chinese state apparatus. Yet, with the advent and proliferation of the Internet, cyber chat-rooms in particular, the “new” media are arguably acquiring the potential for a much greater impact on the political system in general, and on the government-controlled media in particular, as increasingly diversified and alternative information and opinions are made available.

The previous literature review chapter showed that western sources from the 1990s onwards have generally researched whether the new media (the Internet) may lead to increased political participation and the reinvigoration of industrial democracies. From the late 1990s, however, we have seen the rise of the revisionist arguments of “technological determinism” that contend that the spreading Internet use and Internet-derived political transformations and democratisation are not necessarily correlated in a linear process. On the contrary, the Internet is likely to

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<sup>3</sup> This kind of information is usually called *nei-bu-can-kao*, or *nei-can*, internal reference. For more information, see Qingliang He, *Zhongguo Zhengfu ruhe Kongzhi Meiti* (How the Chinese Government Control the Media), a Report by Human Rights in China, 2004, pp. 44-48, available online at <[http://www.hrichina.org/fs/downloadables/pdf/downloadable-resources/MediaControlALL.pdf?revision\\_id=20206](http://www.hrichina.org/fs/downloadables/pdf/downloadable-resources/MediaControlALL.pdf?revision_id=20206)>, accessed on February 24, 2005.

serve the incumbent (authoritarian) leadership to shore up their dominance and authority.

It is hypothesized that when deliberating the impact of the Internet on society and the political system as a whole, it may hinge upon two considerations: the short-term and long-term perspectives of the Internet's consequences, though the two are linked. This chapter will investigate a few episodes as short-term empirical evidence, aiming to lay the basis for mid- and long-term assessments of the political impact of the ICTs.

## **Section II     The Impact of the Internet on Foreign Relations**

The Internet has become a particular venue for Chinese nationalist politics. China's modern history is full of national humiliations, accounts of its nation-building process and currently "rightful" place in the world. The Internet is in this respect acting more or less as a venue for nationalist cyber-politics, with online activists vying for online influence or impact on state authority. In other words, the Internet's power in the Chinese foreign context may be to influence and (re)shape the government-imposed agenda and to affect the implementation of foreign policies. The Spy Plane Incident, a contingent event in itself, serves as an appropriate case to highlight the Net's impact on China's foreign politics.

### **The U.S. Spy Plane Collision**

On 1 April 2001, a U.S. Navy EP-3 surveillance aircraft collided with a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea. Since this shocking incident reminded the

Chinese people of earlier national humiliations, it triggered immensely populist sentiments both on- and offline. Media sources such as the *People's Daily* covered the official interpretations that the U.S. plane was spying in Chinese air space and violated China's sovereignty. The plane eventually landed on Hainan Island in southern China.<sup>4</sup> Because traditional media-space in China was either deficient or not readily available to play a role of an interactive channel linking the public and the authorities, the new media, the Internet in particular, had as a result emerged quickly both as a "virtual" hub of congregations of civic discourse, and functioning as a platform to originate and disseminate news and/or information with regard to the later developments of this incident.

In terms of online traffic following the incident, two weeks later on 13 April 2001, the popular commercial Internet portal, *Sina.com*, claimed two hundred thousand postings and nearly one million visits to their Web site.<sup>5</sup> Another popular Web chat room, *Qiangguo Luntan* (Strong Country forum), hosted by the Communist Party's flagship newspaper, the *People's Daily*, saw a similar soaring of online postings and clicks.<sup>6</sup> This incident per se is contingent and unpremeditated that the Beijing government lagged behind the quick response from the Chinese cyberspace. The online version of the *People's Daily* was the first Chinese media outlet to cover the collision, whose report appeared at 7:33 PM on 1 April 2001 from

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<sup>4</sup> See <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/16/20010403/431573.html>>, *People's Daily*, April 3, 2001, accessed on April 3, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> See <[http://www.pladaily.com.cn/gb/pladaily/2001/04/24/20010424001006\\_TodayNews.html](http://www.pladaily.com.cn/gb/pladaily/2001/04/24/20010424001006_TodayNews.html)>, *Jiefangun Bao* (PLA Daily), April 24, 2001, p. 1, accessed on April 26, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> The *People's Daily* reported a fivefold increase of online visits to their Web site. See <<http://www.people.com.cn/BIG5/it/48/297/20010414/441959.html>>, *People's Daily*, April 14, 2001, p. 5, accessed on April 15, 2001.

its journalist based in Washington D.C.<sup>7</sup> Yet, two hours earlier, one message entitled “*Meiguo Zhenchaji yu Zhongguo Zhanji Xiangzhuang, Pojiang Huanan*” (the US spy plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet, landed in Southern China) was posted in *Qiangguo Luntan* at 5:22 PM,<sup>8</sup> after the crash took place at 10:15 AM on the same day.

There was another sharp contrast between the mainstream media reports and the online messages covering this incident. During the first two days (April 1-2), the official media, whose news sources were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, released only nine news items in total (three news pieces each in the *People's Daily*, *Xinhua News Agency* and China Central Television), while the foreign news outlets, mainly from the *Associated Press*, *Reuters* and *Agence France-Presse*, had more than fifty news reports, and posted messages on *Qiangguo Luntan* exceeded one thousand.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, the online media had acted more swiftly than the traditional ones. The Internet in China is thus playing an increasingly essential role of alternative platform for the Web-based communications and information to be originated and exchanged, and most importantly, the often-undervalued public opinion much mediated and represented in the cyberspace.

On the other hand, after the first message was posted, it aroused greater public attention and agitated lively discussions and debates. In general, the contents of posted messages renewed a strong wave of nationalist sentiment against America's

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<sup>7</sup> See <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/19/20010401/430587.html>>, *People's Daily*, April 1, 2001, accessed on April 2, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> See <<http://tech.sina.com.cn/i/c/2003-06-05/1556195040.shtml>>, *Nanfang Zhoumou* (Southern Weekend), June 5, 2003, accessed on September 10, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> “*Cong Zhongmei Feiji Xiang-zhuang kan Lianguo Meiti de Guojia Yishi*,”(National Consciousness though the Media: the Sino-US Plane Collusion Incident) *People's Daily*, December 18, 2001, available online at <<http://five.people.com.cn/bike/viewnews.html?id=144>>, accessed on January 15, 2002.

perceived aggression and hegemony, following the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999. As a matter of fact, in addition to a special theme of the US spy plane incident Web site, which was prominently exhibited in the *People's Daily Online*, a number of government-sanctioned military and international law experts were also mobilised to participate in the interactive discussions held in *Qiangguo Luntan*, aiming to shape "correct" online public opinion so that it could follow the Party line during such a national crisis. Similarly, other commercial Internet portals like Sina.com and Netease both set up a feature Web page and related chatrooms to accommodate the latest news as well as an upsurge of public opinion.

In general, the Internet has played a significant part not merely in the extension of the traditional/mainstream media in China, but also in regard to the alternative sources of information and communications (ICTs) platform. The state-run media, as widely believed, have usually upheld the guidelines of politically-correct reporting particularly when issues or incidents themselves are of great political influences. So the mainstream media appear reticent and cautious in covering news and publishing commentaries if no clear official directives are given, lest they transgress political taboos.

In the severe politico-diplomatic crisis, cyberspace was unlike the traditional mediaspace, which had been almost tamed by the central government; it instead emerged as an effective means to challenge authority. The level of public opinion enabled by the Internet had tended to push government officials into a stronger line on foreign negotiations with the US government. As such, the surging anti-American

sentiments were fanned in part by the long-practised political education, which was closely associated with patriotism and official propaganda. The young, educated and urban professionals and students, who constitute the majority of the Chinese Internet users, had usually circumvented cyber censorship to post news and opinion and retrieved information from non-official resources. Many of them were directly from offshore (mirror) Web sites that were not permitted according to China's Internet regulations.<sup>10</sup>

Without doubt, nationalist sentiments in cyberspace were rampant as some people were motivated by government-controlled media to vent their resentments against the US over its intervention in China, which had caused a Chinese casualty.<sup>11</sup> But a close examination of several Chinese Internet fora revealed that posted messages did not always give much credence to the government's account, although a great deal of government resources, including manpower, had been deployed to monitoring rigorously the online content. One of the reasons why the authorities clamped down on extreme online nationalist sentiments was that it could undercut the CCP's legitimacy in a direct or indirect way if they were not under the government's absolute control as would also be seen after the anti-Japan protests in April of 2005. Meanwhile, the Beijing authorities cannot afford to ignore

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<sup>10</sup> Alan R. Kluver, "New Media and the End of Nationalism: China and the US in a War of Words," *MOTS PLURIELS*, No. 18, August 2001, available online at <<http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP1801ak.html>>, accessed on January 12, 2002; Li Xiguang and Qin Xuan, "Shei Zai Shezhi Jintian de Yicheng?—Dianzi Luntan zai Zhongda Xinwen Shijian zhong dui Dangbao Yiti de Chonggou," (Who Is Setting Chinese Agenda?—The Impact of Online Chatroom on Party Press) in Li Xiguang and Zhao Xin-shu (ed.), *Meiti de Liliang* (The Power of Media) (Guangzhou: Nanfang Ribao, 2002), pp. 156-169; Jack Linchuan Qiu, "Chinese Opinions Collide Online: U.S.- China Plane Collision Sparks Civil Discussion on the Web," *Online Journalism Review*, April 12, 2001, available online at <<http://ojr.usc.edu/content/story.cfm?id=561>>, accessed on April 20, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, China's official media deliberately manipulated news stories from the United States and played down the US offer to help search for the missing Chinese pilot. See Dexter Roberts and Pete Engardio, "Lessons of a Crisis," *Business Week*, April 23, 2001, pp. 56-57.

nationalistic sentiments because it is an effective tool for the ruling entity to have patriotic Chinese citizens who are loyal to the Communist regime. The Chinese government was in this sense compelled to assuage (online) nationalism before it got out of control. An article from *Time* magazine revealed that about ten Big Mamas (webmasters, or *ban-zhu* in Chinese) were employed by the *People's Daily* to engage in censoring what the authorities deemed “unhealthy” and “inappropriate” online messages to “sharpen the anti-American fervour by erasing pro-U.S. Web postings.”<sup>12</sup>

There indeed existed a greater diversity of opinions on the Internet. Empirical evidence from Internet chatrooms indicated that while some requested an official apology from the US, others criticized the CCP and challenged the official agenda by advocating a tougher and an unyielding government stance towards the handling of the US crew as well as the damaged plane. Notably a few Netizens deftly incorporated a variety of metaphors in their postings to contrast the different stances on foreign policy under Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and Jiang Zemin's leaderships.<sup>13</sup> Their messages of disaffection were either in the form of explicit indications or covert signs conveyed between the lines. Meanwhile, a few hot-headed Chinese youth, also called “*hong-ke*” (hackers)<sup>14</sup> in Mandarin, had

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Thompson, Mathew Forney, James Carney, John F. Dickerson and Hannah Beech, “Four Key Lessons,” *Time*, Vol. 157, No. 16, April 23, 2001, p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> See <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/chinese/news/newsid\\_1514000/15142951.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/chinese/news/newsid_1514000/15142951.stm)>, *BBC News Online* (Chinese edition), August 29, 2001, accessed on February 10, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> There are two distinctive expressions concerning the term “hacker” in China: “Red Guest” (*hong-ke*) and “Black Guest” (*hei-ke*). While “Black Guest” is a Chinese slang term for any computer intrusions by hackers, the “Red Guest” mainly refers to Chinese hackers because they normally do not act out of malice but of patriotism. See Chin-fu Hung, “The Internet and the Changing Beijing-Taipei Relations: Toward Unification or Fragmentation?” in Françoise Mengin (ed.), *Cyber China: Reshaping National Identities in the Age of Information* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 150, note 76.

boldly engaged in a series of fierce cyber attacks, mostly defacing US official Web sites and blocking their online access.<sup>15</sup>

The official agenda—moderate response to the US government—seemed challenged in the cyber community. The authorities made it clear that Chinese citizens were strictly prohibited from waging protests against the US embassy, which was evidently different from the earlier US bombing incident in 1999 when people were allegedly “encouraged” to take part in demonstrations. Li Xiguang, for example, argued the Internet users had during the US spy plane incident “revised” and “re-constructed” the imposed official agenda, and their critical discussions and debates had contributed to the emergence of a civil society.<sup>16</sup> Commentators like Richard Worf take a further step to hold that public opinion can no longer be tightly controlled by the Communist Party since its power has forced the government “...to compromise its immunity to popular criticism.”<sup>17</sup>

In summary, this incident highlights a few subtle and steady changes that have been taking place in Chinese cyberspace. The changes illustrated here are closely correlated. Firstly, Netizens, even though they live in an authoritarian regime like China, can wage cyberwarfare at any time without being officially sanctioned. The online actions—hacker activities, online petitions, and strong nationalist views—to

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, “World War on the Internet,” *The Straits Times*, May 4, 2001; Ted Bridis, “U.S., Chinese Hackers Infiltrate Web Sites, Trade Insults Across Pacific in ‘Net War,’” *Wall Street Journal*, May 1, 2001, p. B.6; Michelle Delio, “Is This World Cyber War I?” *Wired News*, May 1, 2001, available online at <<http://www.wired.com/news/print/0,1283,43443,00.html>>, accessed on May 2, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Xiguang Li, “ICT and the Demise of Propaganda in China,” *Global Media Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Fall 2002, available online at <[http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/SubmittedDocuments/archivedpapers/Fall2003/pdf\\_files/Internet%20and%20democracy\(xiguang\).pdf](http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/SubmittedDocuments/archivedpapers/Fall2003/pdf_files/Internet%20and%20democracy(xiguang).pdf)>, accessed on June 2, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Worf, “Speaking out: The Internet in China,” *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 23, No. 4, winter 2002, p. 7.

some extent constrain the options of the national leaders at a time when China is increasingly entwined in global affairs. In other words, Internet users have already been developing and gaining more political autonomy from the Chinese state than they had been in the 1999 NATO bombing incident. Although the Chinese hackers targeted foreign (primarily the US in this case) Web sites this time, there was no guarantee the Chinese government would not be singled out by the backfire next time.

Secondly, the lively debates and discussions with regard to this incident have paved the way for a healthy public space to emerge in the long term. Virtual “public” participation during this incident attempted to sway the government from negotiations with the US. The information and communication technologies are in this respect facilitating the expression of strong public opinions on sensitive issues like Sino-US relations. This supports Nina Hachigian’s observation that “Because the Internet offers perspectives not shaped by the state-controlled media, Chinese citizens are being empowered to challenge their Communist Party leadership.”<sup>18</sup> One of the direct implications in terms of political development is that the revived or burgeoning public discussions have boosted the significance of public opinion in today’s China that is usually ignored or not seriously taken into account when initiating (public) policies.

Thirdly, the on-line discourse shows it is increasingly difficult for the government to mould or manipulate popular opinion as much as it has traditionally done prior to the introduction of the Internet. The Chinese government has also

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<sup>18</sup> Nina Hachigian, “Chinese ‘Web Worm’ Find Their Own Sort of Truth,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 2001, p. B-13.

realised the necessity to exploit online public opinion to better serve its imposed agenda and purposes through tactics of sophisticated use and control of the Internet like the establishment of the “Government Online Project”<sup>19</sup> and “Golden Shield Project (Internet Great Firewall).”<sup>20</sup> Yet public opinion per se is a two-edged sword. Shanthi Kalathil confirms that if nationalist sentiments amplified on the Internet are skilfully manoeuvred, it can help maintain CCP’s political legitimacy and bolster its popularity. On the other hand, they may also limit and undermine the government’s governing capability.<sup>21</sup>

In summary, the governing capability of the Chinese government is now increasingly influenced or even challenged by Internet-based public opinion and debates, which the communist government is unaccustomed to dealing with.

### **Section III The Impact of the Internet on Domestic Political Issues**

The Internet has also impacted China’s domestic politics. One striking case is the outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which occurred in early 2003. The demand for the truth about the real threat from the deadly SARS epidemic from both the public and international community had imposed enormous pressure on the government in Beijing to reverse its policy from covering it up to a more transparent and accountable handling of the outbreak. This case shows that the

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Jinkui Ji et al., *Zhongguo Dianzi Zhengwu Lingdao Ganbu Zhishi Duben* (China’s E-Government: Reading for Leaders) (Beijing: Central Party School Press, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Greg Walton, *China’s Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People’s Republic of China* (Montreal: Rights & Democracy, 2001), available online at <[http://www.dd-rd.ca/english/commdoc/publications/globalization/CGS\\_ENG.PDF](http://www.dd-rd.ca/english/commdoc/publications/globalization/CGS_ENG.PDF)>, accessed on March 12, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Shanthi Kalathil, “Nationalism on the Net,” *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, February 22, 2002, available online at <<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=919>>, accessed on March 8, 2002.

Chinese government is increasingly obliged to respond to the ICTs-facilitated public opinion.<sup>22</sup>

### **The SARS Outbreak**

The genuine account and full scale of the outbreak of SARS, or called *fei-dian* (atypical) in Mandarin, may not have been exposed or have been little revealed if it were not for the ICTs and foreign media. People now confirm that the first SARS case was reported in Foshan, a city in China's southern province of Guangdong, on 16 November 2002, which was nearly five months prior to the official acknowledgement of SARS on 20 April 2003. The first news report in the Chinese media was, however, from a local newspaper in Heyuan City, Guangdong, on 3 January 2003, whose news resource was from the local health bureau. This piece of news did not take the epidemic seriously, simply noting, "No epidemic disease is being spread in Heyuan ...Symptoms like cough and fever appear due to relatively colder weather."<sup>23</sup> After that there were scattered news reports from seriously affected cities like Zhongshan, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou but all played down the gravity of this epidemic, quoting provincial authorities to the effect that there was no need for people to panic since the health department had effectively controlled the virus. In the meantime, the propaganda department banned journalists from reporting on the outbreak.

The attempt to suppress media coverage regarding the epidemic was partly out

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<sup>22</sup> Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, "The Internet and State Control in Authoritarian regimes: China, Cuba, and the Counterrevolution, *First Monday*, Vol. 6, No. 8, August 2001, available online at <[http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue6\\_8/kalathil/](http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue6_8/kalathil/)>, accessed on September 28, 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Jan Wong, "How China Failed the World," *The Globe and Mail*, April 5, 2003, p. F6.

of the great concern that the perplexing disease might breed “unnecessary” social unrest and possibly lead to political instability, when particularly the prominent political event of an annual meeting of the so-called “Two Sessions”- National People’s Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC) – was being prepared in anticipation of the top-level leadership transition in March 2003. While there was no official statement about the illness, rumours began to spread swiftly. Some speculated that the disease was caused by bioterrorists, and others believed fish-curing vinegar was an effective way to kill the virus. More people would take traditional Chinese (herbal) medicine, mainly *ban-lan-gen* in Chinese, which was alleged to ward off the disease. On the electronic side, people used digital media, including email and mobile phones, to inform their relatives and friends about the lethal virus and how to cure it. A lot of information sent to mainland China was actually from friends and relatives living abroad.<sup>24</sup> The situation further deteriorated as people temporarily migrated on a massive scale during the Chinese Lunar New Year to visit relatives in other cities and provinces.

It was not until February 10, 2003, that the Guangzhou municipal government held a press conference in response to extensive rumours among ordinary people. The message conveyed by the officials was simple but confident: “Public panic is unwarranted; there is nothing to worry about.”<sup>25</sup> In fact, the Guangdong authorities already reported the outbreak to the Central government on 7 February 2003,

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<sup>24</sup> Ciping Huang, “No Press Freedom in China after SARS: Statement to CECC,” *New Century Net*, September 8, 2003, available online at <<http://www.ncn.org/asp/english/da-en.asp?ID=54412>>, accessed on March 2, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Baopu Liu, “Containing SARS: A Case Study of China’s Bureaucracies,” *China Brief*, Vol. 3, No. 11, June 3, 2003, available online at <[http://www.jamestown.org/print\\_friendly.php?volume\\_id=19&issue\\_id=676&article\\_id=4739](http://www.jamestown.org/print_friendly.php?volume_id=19&issue_id=676&article_id=4739)>, accessed on October 20, 2003.

according to *Nanfang Ribao* (Southern Daily).<sup>26</sup> The official statements, dated 18 March 2003 and 26 March 2003, respectively, from central leaders, including Zhang Wenkang, the then-minister of the Health Ministry, and Kong Quan, the then-spokesman of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, both stressed that effective measures had been adopted and the government had put the epidemic under its tight control.<sup>27</sup> Apparently, the Chinese authorities, until then, had not seriously reckoned on the seriousness of the epidemic. They thought they could, on the one hand, cover up the health crisis as they had handled other incidents in the past, and on the other hand, prevent news on the virus from being reported in traditional media and contain the widespread rumours circulating in the online and offline communities.

As a matter of fact, during the early stage of the SARS crisis, the hyper-cautious propaganda department issued warnings to owners of newspapers and magazines not to cross the official line of reporting subjects that may be politically significant but unacceptable. For instance, the *Er-shi-yi Shiji Huanqiu Baodao* (The Twenty-first Century World Herald), which is part of the *Nanfang Daily* Group, had been ordered to close its operations for more than one month by the Guangdong propaganda authority due to their extensive coverage (up to eight pages) of the outbreak.<sup>28</sup> They ensured that citizens could only access information and news from sources under government censure. This implied “stability above all else.” The closing of newspapers and the arrest of journalists/editors would in fact

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Xupei Sun, *Freedom of the Chinese Press vs. Keeping State Secret In Light of the SARS Crisis: An Analysis*, paper prepared for the 2004 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Law Schools, Atlanta, Georgia, January 2-6, 2004, available online at <<http://www.aals.org/am2004/Xupei2004.pdf>>, accessed on June 2, 2004.

<sup>27</sup> See <<http://www.pkusimba.com/sars/dsj2.htm>>, accessed on May 2, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> See <<http://www2.epochtimes.com/gb/3/6/9/c13301.htm>>, accessed on September 18, 2003.

set a punitive deterrent for potential violators not to boldly cross the line.

Yet grapevine gossip prevailed. People communicated through informal channels to discuss and learn about SARS. When people were quarantined during the SARS crisis, the Internet and SMS (Short Messaging Systems/Services) rapidly expanded the medium of information flow: sharing and disseminating alternative information behind the government's back.<sup>29</sup> The turning point came when Jiang Yanyong, a retired physician at Beijing's Chinese People's Liberation Army General Hospital (No. 301), wrote a letter to media outlets on April 4, 2003, revealing that there were in fact more cases in Beijing than had been officially announced. The signed statement was later provided to *Time* magazine and subsequently broadcast to the outside world.<sup>30</sup> The aftermath of that report was a global storm, leading to the arrival of a team from the World Health Organisation (WHO) for the purpose of investigating the situation in China. China eventually acknowledged the outbreak of SARS on 20 April 2003. One of the immediate impacts was the dramatic sacking of China's health minister and the mayor of Beijing for covering up the true story and mishandling the SARS outbreak.

Dr. Jiang's disclosure of the seriousness of the epidemic was still somehow downplayed by the government, and instead, the state apparatus of the Supreme

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Holly Williams, "Chinese Txt for Virus Information," *BBC News*, April 8, 2003, available online at <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2928969.stm>>, accessed on April 20, 2003; Irene Wang, "Text Messages Boost SARS Fight," *South China Morning Post*, November 4, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Dr. Jiang firstly sent out his letter to *Fenghuang Weishi* (Phoenix Television) based in Hong Kong on April 4, 2003 and then to the China Central Television (CCTV-4) the following day. He later disclosed the truth in his statement given to the *Time* on April 9, 2003. See Susan Jakes, "Beijing's SARS Attack," *TIME*, 8 April, 2003, available online at <<http://www.time.com/time/asia/news/daily/0,9754,441615,00.html>>, accessed on April 10, 2003; Lou Yi, "SARS Xiqin: Jiang Yanyong – Chengshi de Yisheng," *CaiJing Zazhi* (Financial Magazine), May 8, 2003, available online at <<http://finance.sina.com.cn/g/20030508/1230338214.shtml>>, accessed on June 19, 2003; John Pomfret, "China's Crisis Has a Political Edge," *Washington Post*, April 27, 2003, p. 33A.

Court even threatened fines and criminal liability of prison terms of up to five years for people who spread “false” information that was not released by the central government. The reporting of SARS for journalists became a clear instruction from the central government following the new law. The move was believed to stave off continuous speculation and rumours that were still rampant via the Internet and SMS. Considering the government’s crisis management, ordinary people tended to be suspicious of official interpretations and were alienated by their mishandling of the SARS epidemic.

A few illustrations manifest the degree to which people, especially those who live in the most affected areas, were desperate for SARS-related information. For example, before the *Radio Free Asia* (RFA, <http://www.rfa.org/>) Web site was banned, or jammed, on May 4, 2003, the online traffic directly from China had reached its highest record with visits in April 2003 double those of the preceding year.<sup>31</sup> Beijing Netcom reports that Internet use increased up to 40 per cent during the outbreak of SARS. Sina had previously experienced a rise of 20 per cent in Internet traffic then.<sup>32</sup> Besides, the Telecommunication Research project under the auspices of the University of Hong Kong published some telling figures about the use of the telecoms during the outbreak of SARS in greater China (PRC, HK and Taiwan). It shows:

1. Shanghai Mobile monitored any mobile users for sending more than 100

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<sup>31</sup> See *SARS in China: Implications for Information Control, Internet Censorship, and the Economy*, p. 32, hearing conducted by the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission on June 5, 2003, available online at <[http://www.uscc.gov/hearings/2001\\_02hearings/transcripts/02\\_06\\_05tran.pdf](http://www.uscc.gov/hearings/2001_02hearings/transcripts/02_06_05tran.pdf)>, accessed on February 3, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in a market research report from the BDA, a China-based telecom and technology consulting services corporation. See Ted Dean, “SARS Drives Internet Boom,” BDA Analysis, May 15, 2003, available online at <<http://www.bdachina.com/content/en/features/analyses/B1056331768>>, accessed on January 12, 2004.

- SMS per hour;
2. SARS-related information enquires topped other entries, and the *Baidu*, one of China's popular search engines, saw a 9 per cent strong increase everyday in April 2003;
  3. The number of mobile subscribers to Shanghai Telecom's broadband services increased three-fold (up to 25,000) in just two weeks between late April and mid-May 2003, compared with 7,000 each week in March 2003.<sup>33</sup>

The SARS crisis aroused two distinct arguments about its impact on China's political system: while one argued that SARS would be "China's Chernobyl,"<sup>34</sup> bringing in sweeping political transformations and reform, the other explanation was more pessimistic, believing that the political system would absorb the impact and would not result in change.<sup>35</sup>

Both arguments capture some but not all dimensions of the SARS impact upon China's politics. If one were to assess the impact from a governance perspective, the government has since pressed forward to become more transparent and accountable in terms of major public issues like public health. The authorities that once

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<sup>33</sup> Telecoms InfoTechnology Forum, *Telecoms and SARS: two brief papers from TIF and Telecomasia.net*, July 2003, available online at <<http://www.trp.hku.hk/tif/papers/2003/jul/telecoms-sars.pdf>>, accessed on June 5, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Gorbachev, for example, argues that "The accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station was graphic evidence not only of how obsolete our technology was, but also of the failure of the old system." See Mikhail Gorbachev, "Diagnosing SARS in China," *The New York Times*, p. 20A, May 19, 2003, available online at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/19/opinion/19MON1.html>>, accessed on May 21, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> *China and SARS: The Crisis and Its Effects on Politics and the Economy*, roundtable discussion co-sponsored by the Atlantic Council of the United States, the Brookings Institution, The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and the U.S.-China Business Council, held on July 2, 2003, available online at <<http://www.brookings.edu/comm/events/cnaps20030702.pdf>>, accessed on December 2, 2003; Joan Kaufman, "Can China Cure Its Severe Acute Reluctance to Speak?," *The Washington Post*, April 27, 2003, p. B01, available online at <[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A39950-2003\\_Apr25.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A39950-2003_Apr25.html)>, accessed on May 1, 2003; Gordon G. Chang, "SARS Crisis: New Disease, New Leaders, Same Old Regime," *China Brief*, Vol. 3, No. 8, April 22, 2003, available online at <[http://www.jamestown.org/publications\\_details.php?volume\\_id=19&&issue\\_id=673](http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=19&&issue_id=673)>, accessed on May 7, 2003.

attempted to keep a lid on the epidemic have now found that it caused a greater national health disaster and damaged its “good” international image, which the regime has carefully cultivated since the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989. Whilst the state-controlled media were covering up the seriousness of the epidemic and giving propagandistic accounts, online communities like the *Qiangguo Luntan*, administered by the *People’s Daily*, were already inundated by postings condemning officials for failing to tell the truth in a timely and accurate fashion, thus demanding concrete protective measures and openly updated information about SARS.

It should be noted that after the Chinese authorities gave the green light for mainstream media to cover the SARS story, Internet chat rooms encountered stringent censorship on discussions of the pandemic. News reports appearing in the press media and messages posted online were strictly required to toe the government line, citing officially sanctioned statements and data, or their postings would be deleted before they could appear online.

A news report released by *Agence France-Presse* revealed confirmation of heightened cyber-censorship from China Internet operators because “negative” postings deemed by the authorities could incur harsh penalties. According to this report, one staff member (webmaster) working for the *People’s Daily* commented, “If the postings have something to do with pneumonia, we will post the ones we think should be posted and not post those that shouldn’t be.” The commercial Internet operators were similarly required to follow suit, as one manager of Sohu.com noted, “The main point is that positive postings can be posted, but those that are negative cannot be posted...There are regulations, if the posting [will] have a bad

influence on social stability then we can't post these kinds of things."<sup>36</sup>

In the circumstance of a national crisis, Internet usage was heavily monitored, for fear of further social unrest and widespread rumours. As a result, the SARS crisis did not eventually result in "China's Chernobyl." In the end, online and offline coverage of the SARS crisis largely converged, but at a point of greater openness than if there had only been offline traditional coverage. Although the Chinese government still managed to curb the flow of information, it nevertheless discovered ways in which global issues such as SARS could have a far-reaching impact on its domestic national agenda. The government's attitude is changing as partly reflected by relevant administrative statute,<sup>37</sup> enacted in response to the increasing gulf developing between the authorities and the public over its credibility and public trust, which in turn may undermine its legitimacy if they continue to ignore life-threatening issues like SARS.

Whether or not the public opinion and debates will be guided in the "right" direction is an issue that will be evaluated in the long run. At the very least, the authorities are now giving more weight to public opinion that is facilitated and mediated by the ICTs. This has profound implications. Despite the government Web presence that is most likely for the purposes of propaganda, the interactive mechanism set up online may in a sense encourage "virtual" political participation in the solution of public affairs and stimulate a gradual increase in deliberative

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Robert J. Saiget, "China Gags SARS Talk in Internet Chatrooms," *Newsobserver.com*, April 5, 2003, available online at <<http://newsobserver.com/24hour/technology/story/842454p-5919649c.html>>, accessed on April 16, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> The administrative regulation, entitled *Tufa Gonggong Weisheng Shijian Yingji Tiaoli* (Regulations on Preparedness for and Response to Emergent Public Health Hazards), was enacted and promulgated by the State Council in mid-May 2003. For full text, see <<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/APCITY/UNPAN009620.pdf>>, accessed on April 26, 2004.

discourse, upon which democracy rests.

It is widely perceived that China's Fourth Generation (*Hu-Wen*) leadership are striving to foster the good image of effective governance and most importantly work closely with ordinary people particularly after the regime has been highly criticised for its mishandling of the SARS situation. Below is another case study—the BMW incident—that will demonstrate how the Internet is impacting legal and political issues in China as well.

#### **Section IV The Impact of the Internet on the Legal-Political Sphere**

The Internet has also facilitated the better functioning of the rule of law, contributing to a more legally just society in China. This could be done mainly through mounting pressure on the authorities to alter the balance of interests that shape the political dynamics, which determine the content of law.

##### **The BMW Incident**

The BMW incident would be similar to any other traffic accident in China that would have been by and large ignored, or at best, mentioned in passing by the traditional news outlets, if it were not for the Internet.<sup>38</sup> The incident, best known as *Baoma Shijian* in Chinese community, occurred on 16 October 2003 in the northwestern city of Harbin, the centre of the Chinese industrial rust belt. The gist of

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<sup>38</sup> In 2003, for example, official figures revealed that there were more than sixty-six thousand road accidents which cost some one hundred thousand lives, reinforcing the country's notorious reputation as one of the world's most dangerous places to drive. See "Gonganbu Tongbao 2003-nian Quanguo Daolu Jiaotong Shigu Qingkuang" (The Ministry of Public Security promulgates situations of the nationwide road traffic accidents for 2003), *Xinhua News Agency*, January 18, 2004, available online at <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2004-01/18/content\\_1282400.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2004-01/18/content_1282400.htm)>, accessed on April 15, 2004.

this road accident was that a well-off woman, Su Xiuwen, drove into a crowd, killing a peasant woman, Liu Zhongxia, on a rickety tractor and injuring twelve onlookers after her BMW was accidentally scraped by the peasant's cart loaded with market-bound spring onions. The Harbin Daoli District People's Court ruled on 20 December 2003 that it was merely an "accidental traffic disturbance" caused by Su's negligence. Su was thus sentenced to two years' imprisonment with a three-year reprieve.

The incident first broke in a local newspaper, *Shenyang Jinbao* (Shenyang Today), on 4 January 2004, which contributed a series of news reports on the subject until 13 January 2004, 10 days in total. Its serial reports unveiled some inside stories and suggested a retrial of this case.<sup>39</sup> The report from this city-based news media, however, received little attention until it was picked up by the popular commercial Internet portal, Sina.com, whose news sources are usually from national and local press channels. This piece of news was immediately reprinted (*zhuan zai*)<sup>40</sup> on Sina.com on the same day. As a result public interest in this story surged significantly. In fact public outrage emerged swiftly through the Internet. In many cases, the contributions of Netizens' comments reached a record high in several cyber chatrooms. For instance, Chen Tong, editor-in-chief of Sina.com, noted, "We have received more than 200,000 postings within ten days. That's the biggest

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<sup>39</sup> See the first news item, for example, at <[http://bf3.syd.com.cn/gb/syjb/2004-01/04/content\\_888791.htm](http://bf3.syd.com.cn/gb/syjb/2004-01/04/content_888791.htm)>, *Shenyang Today*, January 4, 2004, accessed on March 12, 2004.

<sup>40</sup> According to China's Internet regulation, the commercial Internet portals cannot publish their own news reports but can only "reprint" news from national or local media outlets that are officially approved to publish news stories. See *Hulian Wangzhan Congshi Dengzai Xinwen Yewu Guanli Zhanxing Guiding* (Provisional Regulations on Governance of Internet-based News Providers Registration of News Websites), jointly issued by the Information Office of the State Council and the Ministry of Information Industry (MII) on November 7, 2000, available online at <<http://www.isc.org.cn/20020417/ca42718.htm>>, accessed on February 21, 2004.

response we have ever got for a single story.”<sup>41</sup>

After the story about the controversial verdict was posted on Sina.com, the mainstream press and other Internet portals issued news on this event and many of them set up feature Web sites to cater for the surging public interest by following up the latest developments. Specifically, besides Sina.com ([www.sina.com](http://www.sina.com)), *Sohu* ([www.sohu.com](http://www.sohu.com)), *Netease* ([www.163.com](http://www.163.com)), *People's Daily Online* ([www.people.com.cn](http://www.people.com.cn)), *Yahoo* ([cn.yahoo.com](http://cn.yahoo.com)), *Xinhua News Agency* ([www.xinhuanet.com](http://www.xinhuanet.com)), *Qianlong Wang* ([www.qianlong.com](http://www.qianlong.com)) and *Dayoo Wang* ([www.dayoo.com](http://www.dayoo.com)) all created their own Web sites to cover this incident. A Sina.com staff member revealed that the very first piece of the news covered on Sina.com had experienced more than 10,000 contributions within a single day (11AM-8PM), far exceeding other major incidents like the outbreak of SARS, the arrest of Saddam Hussein and the launch of China's Shenzhou-V space flight.<sup>42</sup> The visits to Sina.com and Sohu.com for news about the BMW incident also outnumbered any other event.<sup>43</sup>

The large-scale coverage both in the traditional press media and Internet Web sites as well as discussion boards has demonstrated greater public attention both in cyberspace and in the offline world. In this respect, the Internet served to accelerate the speed and scale of communications in regard to the latest developments of this incident. Collective online fury has indeed had an impact on public discourse. This

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<sup>41</sup> Ching-Ching Ni, "Incensed Chinese Wield Internet Clout to Press for Justice," *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 2004, available online at <[http://www.latimes.com/news/print/edition/asection/la-fg-bmw17jan17,1,1672021.story?coll=la-news-a\\_section](http://www.latimes.com/news/print/edition/asection/la-fg-bmw17jan17,1,1672021.story?coll=la-news-a_section)>, accessed on April 4, 2004.

<sup>42</sup> See <<http://medianet.qianlong.com/7692/2004/01/06/33@1806521.htm>>, *Qianlong Wang*, January 6, 2004, accessed on February 8, 2004.

<sup>43</sup> See <<http://www.bjd.com.cn/BJWB/20040108/GB/BJWB^11576^3^08W312.htm>>, *Beijing Wanbao* (Beijing Evening News), January 8, 2004, accessed on March 20, 2004.

in part reflects citizens' long-concealed feelings about rampant social injustice and official corruption. The Internet has also provided a prompt, anonymous and most importantly, interactive, platform for the rocketing public opinion about this unforeseen event to be vented and it again led to convergence of on- and offline opinion in cyberspace. Political leaders at the central and provincial levels not only gave heed to the event, but also promised to step in to make sure this criminal case was handled justly.

The official responses to the public opinion mediated off- and online were of great implication and importance in terms of the Internet's impact on legal politics. The government's *Xinhua News Agency* published initial comments the very next day from the provincial leader in response to public anxieties over this incident. On 5 January 2004, Han Guizhi, Chairman of Political Consultative Conference in Heilongjiang province met with journalists to clarify wildly spread rumours on the Internet and in the press that she was the defendant's mother-in-law. She promised the government would intervene to deal with the allegations through due process.<sup>44</sup> A few days later, the Party's *People's Daily Online* on 10 January 2004 quoted a spokesman from Harbin government information office to the effect that "the judicial and public security organs were now re-investigating the BMW case, and they would soon deliver a 'responsible' response to the general public and the press."<sup>45</sup> China Central Television (CCTV) also broadcast a special TV programme on 9 January 2004 in response to people's challenge to the verdict made in the

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<sup>44</sup> See <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-01/06/content\\_1261829.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-01/06/content_1261829.htm)>, *Xinhua News Agency*, January 6, 2004, accessed on April 27, 2004.

<sup>45</sup> See <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper39/11093/1004523.html>>, *People's Daily*, January 12, 2004, accessed on April 27, 2004.

Harbin district court.

These illustrations demonstrated that the Party and government were very aware of the event. In one sense, the higher degree of attention put them under heavy pressure to review or even intervene in legal cases like the BMW one. The Internet had during this incident served as an effective means to boost collective public resentment against the verdict since a spate of angry online opinions demanded further investigation and even renewed prosecution of Su Xiuwen. Many People perceived the court verdict as telling evidence that the Chinese “judicial system is far too easily manipulated by the rich and powerful”,<sup>46</sup> and consequently, resulted in a rather light sentence—a two-year jail sentence that came with a three-year reprieve. Given the ruling of the reinvestigation into this case reaffirmed that the previous verdict was “appropriate,”<sup>47</sup> the growth of (online) public opinion would in this regard foster more responsive and accountable political institutions in the PRC. Public opinion has begun to create an enabling socio-political environment for a more transparent government to emerge. In present-day China, it is popularly addressed as, “*yulun jiandu*” (supervision by public opinion), as Dalin Yang holds that “the Internet can fulfil the role the media should play in an open society.”<sup>48</sup>

The impact of the BMW affair upon China’s authoritarian regime is profound but limited. It is profound because when we consider the BMW incident, along with

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<sup>46</sup> “Road Rage, and Web Rage: The Growing Power of the Internet,” *The Economist*, Vol. 370, No. 8360, January 31, 2004, p. 57.

<sup>47</sup> See <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2004-03/28/content\\_1388452.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2004-03/28/content_1388452.htm)>, *Xinhua News Agency*, March 28, 2004, accessed on April 2, 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Julie Chao, “Internet Rages over China’s ‘BMW Incident’,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 18, 2004, available online at <[www.ajc.com/news/content/news/0104/18chinabmw.html](http://www.ajc.com/news/content/news/0104/18chinabmw.html)>, accessed on February 5, 2004.

other hotly-debated legal cases such as those of Sun Zhigang,<sup>49</sup> Liu Yong,<sup>50</sup> the grassroots online discussions have been able to bring the case concerned to the wider attention of ordinary people, the Party and the government, and the international media. The Chinese government also somewhat tolerates a higher degree of public discussion on some sensitive issues with the caveat they do not cross the political bottom line and are not overly critical of the Party and government. Yet the impact is still limited because the Chinese government has neither been willing to unleash the full potential of the Internet power upon public affairs, nor has it extensively relaxed its tight grip on the Chinese cyberspace. Wei Lai, an editor of Sina.com, disclosed on 20 January, 2004 that the company already deleted about 20 per cent of its contributions to discussion boards on the BMW incident in compliance with government requests. At that point there were still nearly a quarter-million messages remaining on the board. On 15 January 2004, those remaining 250,000 messages were all deleted.<sup>51</sup> The source from Sina.com also acknowledged that the flood of postings was so great that it exceeded the

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<sup>49</sup> The BMW Incident can be paralleled with the Sun Zhigang and Liu Yong cases in terms of the Internet impact upon the judicial system in China. In the case of Sun Zhigang, he was mistakenly detained in a Guangzhou shelter for the homeless and later died in police custody after allegedly being beaten up. The report initially broke from *Nanfang Dushibao* (Southern Metropolis News) on the Web, which is a Guangzhou-based news outlet famous for its outspoken editorial policy. Relayed by the Internet and widely discussed by cyber chatters, this piece of news reached Chinese people in an almost nationwide scale and elicited enormous public concern and debates. The Internet in this case has partly contributed to similar heated debates on public issues and the eventual abolition of the two decades-old regulations on repatriating migrants and vagabonds.

<sup>50</sup> Acting as a gangland boss, Liu Yong was sentenced to death in April 2003. He was, however, given a two-year reprieve after an appeal in August 2003. This ruling drew widespread criticism on the Internet as Internet users weighed in with an outcry against the verdict. Netizens suspected that Liu had used personal connections with the former mayor and deputy mayor of Shenyang to get off. In December 2003, the Chinese Supreme Court overturned the verdict and ordered the immediate execution of Liu.

<sup>51</sup> Philip P. Pan, "The Unquiet Death of a Chinese Peasant: Lenient Treatment for Driver in 'BMW Case' Ignites Media Frenzy, Wide Discussion of Wealth and Justice," *The Washington Post*, January 16, 2004, p. A14, available online at <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&contentId=A21197-2004Jan15&notFound=true>>, accessed on March 15, 2004.

capability of Web monitors to censor them.<sup>52</sup> The surge of online critical public opinion, as well as the forthcoming annual meetings of the NPC and CPPCC, partly explained the periodical crackdown on news discussion forums that targeted harsh and critical opinions and independent reporting, which had not been sanctioned by the propaganda department. The growth of grassroots opinion mediated online is emerging as a force that the authorities usually have to reckon with.

To summarise, the BMW incident stands out as a unique case in China's legal politics: the vocal court of "virtual" public opinion prompted traditional media outlets to catch up and follow the detail of the latest developments. With the increasingly widespread diffusion and usage of the Internet and digital media, incidents may not always go away quietly. In other words, Internet users may set their own agendas that the authorities concerned cannot easily overlook. The Internet is giving ordinary people a wider platform than the traditional media to vent their feelings and possibly organise themselves in ways that were unavailable to past generations. Meanwhile, lending force to the outrage from the BMW incident, China's recent experiences with SARS have most likely aroused a strong sense of public concern about the merits of good governance. In a word, the collective pressure from the Internet users and the general public has increasingly compelled the government to seriously take their opinions into account.

## **Section V     The Impact of Internet-enabled Dissenting Groups and Individuals on Politics**

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Marquand, "China Mutes Online News," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 10, 2004, available online at <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0310/p07s01-woap.html>>, accessed on April 4, 2004.

Arguably the Internet becomes an extraordinary tool in the hands of activists devoted to sociopolitical change.<sup>53</sup> The “battle of Seattle” in November 1999 saw one of the largest anti-globalisation protests against the ministerial convention of the World Trade Organisation in which more than 50,000 protesters were organised and assembled in part through the frequent and extensive use of the Internet communication.<sup>54</sup> Partly the success is attributed to the basic nature of the new technology itself, in which it “...presents them with a variety of new opportunities for disseminating information to a larger and more geographically dispersed audience than ever before, and potentially for organising their activities in unprecedented ways.”<sup>55</sup>

In the context of China, the key point is whether the cyber activists or dissidents are willing and capable of exploiting this fresh communication tool to express their dissent views and/or organise themselves to achieve their ends in both the online and offline worlds. When considering China’s cyber dissidents, they are usually composed of dissident groups of Falun Gong, Pro-Taiwan/Tibet Independence, the Uyghur (or East Turkestan) Coalition, and individuals who heavily criticise Party cadres and government officials (usually high-level) for wrongdoings. Before this section moves to discuss the dissident group—Falun Gong—in more detail, it is helpful to pay some attention to the individual cyber dissidents in order to have a more complete picture about cyber activism in China in

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers (eds.), *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge: 2003).

<sup>54</sup> For more details, see, for example, <<http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Seattle.asp#MediaPortrayal>>, accessed on August 28, 2004.

<sup>55</sup> Michael S. Chase and James C. Mulvenon, *You’ve Got Dissent! Chinese Dissident Use of the Internet and Beijing’s Counter-Strategies*, p. 38.

general. In one aspect, how are they different from dissident groups in terms of their online strategies to express dissent (political) discourses?

Among many other cyber dissidents in China, Liu Di, for example, who is better known for her screen name—*bu-xiu-gang laoshu* (stainless steel mouse)—became a cause celebrity for her online anti-government opinions. Because of her “reactionary” cyber postings, which expressed sympathy for Huang Qi, a famous jailed Internet activist, criticising the closure of Internet cafés and online chat rooms, and urging other Internet users to ignore state propaganda, she was finally seized on her Beijing Normal University campus on 7 November 2002. She was detained in Beijing’s Qincheng prison without charge for about one year. After she was released on bail and put under house arrest on 28 November 2003, her cyber adventure was later posted online, entitled “*bu-xiu-gang laoshu shangwang ji.*” (Adventurous log of “stainless steel mouse’ going online) In her words:

*“...I was deeply moved by the rise of movements to safeguard Internet rights during my one year in detention...In the past, we had set up a more efficient approach in communicating, and made our work and [virtual] organisation more transparent and democratic. The Internet somehow replaced the functions of [formal] organisation. And it had already fostered the integrity of the Chinese society, nourishing a public space from which the often oppressed Chinese civil society could emerge.”<sup>56</sup>*

As a matter of fact, the detention without charge of Liu Di is not an isolated case. But this case may highlight the fact that the Internet is increasingly employed to disseminate alternative and uncensored information online and served as a platform to exchange grassroots public opinions. Yet the medium is rarely utilised on behalf

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<sup>56</sup> See <<http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/4/1/18/n450779.htm>>, *Da Ji Yuan* (Epoch Times), January 18, 2004, accessed on January 20, 2004

of sociopolitical movements in the offline world to stimulate political transformation in authoritarian China. The political effects are thus limited. In this respect, this may partly explain why Liu Di was freed without charge in the end, because the Chinese government now appears to be more tolerant towards Internet users' discussions on unconventional subjects or even debates of a few sensitive issues so long as they do not cross the (political) bottom line. In the meantime, the government may add another channel to gauge public opinion from cyberspace.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless if Netizens do indeed cross the (political) line, the authorities will duly take action to punish some offenders so as to set an example. Moreover, the light punishment also resulted from the fact that she did not really translate her online dissent opinions into organising political campaigns to attack the government in the offline world. This is something that the CCP perceives as a real and immediate threatening force that is associated with the Internet's political impact. Thereby it marks a notable difference between individual cyber dissidents and dissident groups like the Falun Gong that will be discussed next.

### **The Falun Gong Movement**

It was a large Falun Gong-led demonstration, involving 10,000 of the group's followers outside the *Xinhua*men, *Zhongnanhai*, the politically cloistered compound of the Party and State, on 25 April 1999 that first drew Beijing authorities' attention to the severe threat from such incidents. Wang Zhaoguo, a high-level Chinese

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<sup>57</sup> Since there is no political opinion polling in China, the central government has generally gauged public opinion through other channels, including the internal references written and/or compiled by the official *Xinhua News Agency*, the annual meeting of the NPC and CPPCC, and the petition system (It is usually referred to as the system of letters and visits. It is called *xinfang zhidu* in Chinese.

official, described the sit-in protest as "...the most serious political incident since the June 4 political turbulence in 1989."<sup>58</sup> Nancy Chen has pointed out the Falun Gong practitioners were able to assemble such a large-scale demonstration against the CCP's crackdown in the capital city because of their tactics of "combined low tech (word of mouth) and high tech (Internet)."<sup>59</sup>

When Li Hongzhi, the spiritual leader of Falun Gong or Falun Dafa, was asked in what way such a coordinated protest could be effectively organised "without any organisational structure"; he replied succinctly "...[t]hey learned it from the Internet."<sup>60</sup> In other words, by means of effective and efficient exploitations of the Internet, including electronic mail, the Falun Gong followers successfully managed to penetrate the forbidden compound of the Communist Party, a shocking intrusion that the then-President Jiang Zemin found both "disturbing and intolerable."<sup>61</sup> In the light of China's hierarchical and tight public security net, the Communist leaders have grounds to believe that the Falun Gong movement has precisely presented such an insurmountable challenge to the very foundations of the State's absolute authority. Vivienne Shue, for instance, maintains that Falun Gong "quietly proselytizes its corrosively critical counterhegemonic system of value and its alternative

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<sup>58</sup> "Ge Minzhu Dangpai Zhongyang he Quanguo Gongshanglian Lingdaoren ji Wudangpai Renshi Biaoshi Jianjue Yonghu Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Chuli 'Falun Gong' Wenti de Juece" (Leaders of China's eight non-Communist parties and the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, as well as some leading personages without party affiliation, have voiced their support for the policies made on 'Falun Gong' from the CCP Central Committee), *People's Daily*, July 24, 1999, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Nancy N. Chen, "Healing Sects and Anti-Cult Campaigns," *The China Quarterly*, No. 174, June 2003, p. 514.

<sup>60</sup> See <<http://faluncanada.net/fldfbb/news990502.htm>>, accessed on August 20, 2002.

<sup>61</sup> James Tong, "Anatomy of Regime Repression in China," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 42, No. 6, November/ December 2002, p. 819.

transcendental cosmology.”<sup>62</sup> The Chinese officials, consequently, strongly urge the elimination of such potential threats.

The Falun Gong group was officially denounced as a “*xie-jiao*” (heterodox organisation or evil cult) and outlawed in July 1999, three months after its demonstration. Propaganda spoke of its great harm to the integrity of Chinese society and the Party-state. It was then forced to rely heavily on the Internet to disseminate information, exchange opinions, and wage any offline campaigns, since any attachment with the Falun Gong in Chinese society is labelled a serious political taboo. The State relentlessly represses it.<sup>63</sup>

Because of the continuous harsh crackdowns on the Falun Gong movement in mainland China, the followers had to appeal to a much wider international community through the use of digital media, mainly the Internet and satellite communities, to counterattack the autocratic Chinese government for their serious violations of basic human rights—freedom of speech, assembly and religion. As Yuezhi Zhao notes, “If books and audiovisual tapes were the main carriers of the Falun Gong message in its early years inside China, the Internet has been instrumental to its more prominent emergence as a transnational global community.”<sup>64</sup> Stephen O’Leary holds that the Fulun Gong “offers a fascinating glimpse of an ancient religious tradition that is mutating rapidly as it makes the leap

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<sup>62</sup> Vivienne Shue, “Global Imaginings, the State’s Quest for Hegemony, and the Pursuit of Phantom Freedom in China: From Heshang to Fulun Gong,” in Catarina Kinnvall and Kristina Jonsson (eds.), *Globalization and Democratization in Asia: The Construction of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge), 2002, p. 224.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Han-qi Fang, “Falun Gong yu Hulanwang” (Falun Gong and the Internet), *Zhongguo chuanboxue: Fansi yu qianzhan* (China Mass Communications Studies: Introspection and Prospect) (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2002), pp. 173-191.

<sup>64</sup> Yuezhi Zhao, “Falun Gong, Identity, and the Struggle over Meaning Inside and Outside China,” in Nick Couldry and James Curran (eds.), *Contesting Media Power: Towards a Global Comparative Perspective* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), pp. 216-217.

into cyberspace.”<sup>65</sup>

In what ways is the Falun Gong actually adapting to this novel cyber world to continue their offline teachings of Master Li? Certainly Minghui Net <www.minghui.org>, acting as an official propaganda centre of the Falun Gong, plays a directive and vital role for the movement. In addition to the Chinese version of the Minghui Net (both traditional and simplified version), eight additional languages, such as English, French, German, Spanish, are provided to appeal to the global community. In terms of online content, there are nine major categories: Falun Dafa, updates from China, news and media reports, persecution accounts, Falun Dafa worldwide, open forum, personal cultivation, cultivation in persecution, truth clarification, and scientific findings. A lot of Master’s Li’s handouts, publications, and audio/video materials are available online.

To achieve the objectives of breaking through the Chinese government’s obstruction, exposing the persecution of Dafa practitioners, and spreading the “truth” of Falun Dafa, there are six recommendations promoted by the Falun Gong headquarters that shape their backbone cyber-tactics. Since the recommendations represent general guidelines for dissident groups like the Falun Gong to exercise cyber militancy, they are quoted in detail as follow:

1. Falun Dafa practitioners in different regions of different countries are encouraged to make every possible effort to set up websites to spread Falun Dafa and, at the same time, strengthen coordination between websites;
2. All Dafa websites are encouraged to promptly re-post more *Minghui* articles.

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<sup>65</sup> Stephen D. O’Leary, “Falun Gong and the Internet,” in Danny Schechter (ed.), *Falun Gong’s Challenge to China: Spiritual Practice or “Evil Cult”?* (New York: Akashic Books, 2000), p. 208.

Please indicate that the articles were originally posted on *Minghui* Net (<http://minghui.ca>) and the three official mirror sites announced on *Minghui* Net (ex. <http://minghui.org>) when necessary. This will stop saboteurs from finding any loopholes to be exploited for interference;

3. All Dafa websites can set up mirror sites of *Minghui* Net, but please ensure that the sites are updated frequently and promptly with the most recent contents in order to be responsible to the readers and Dafa;
4. Whenever possible, make links to Dafa websites from various public websites. This will enable more readers to gain access to Dafa websites, and increase the accessibility of Dafa information in society;
5. If technical support is needed to set up *Minghui* Net mirror sites, please contact both <[mirror@minghui.org](mailto:mirror@minghui.org)> and <[webteam@minghui.ca](mailto:webteam@minghui.ca)>;
6. Set up reliable and safe email lists to periodically send articles from postings on Dafa Websites (including *Minghui* Net) to practitioners in China and people who are concerned about Dafa.<sup>66</sup>

Apart from the six-point-recommendations, several further technical measures, including the use of encryption technologies and proxy servers, were circulated on their Web sites in what they deem the “crusade” against the vicious crackdown launched by the Chinese government at all levels. Yet the social movements led by the Falun Gong following the outright ban on the spiritual movement in July 1999 are relatively smaller, mainly because many followers were intimidated by potential arrests and the authorities have always remained highly alert to every social gathering in cities and the countryside. The local leaders of residential committees (*ju wei hui*) and village committees (*cun wei hui*) have helped the security

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<sup>66</sup> Minghui editors, “Break through Blockades and Enhance the Effectives of Falun Dafa Websites around the World,” *Minghui Net*, July 15, 2000, available online at <<http://www.minghui.org/mh/articles/2000/7/15/2625.html>>, accessed on April 22, 2004.

departments keep a close eye on the possible assembly of suspected practitioners of Falun Gong. Reinforced by the Chinese propaganda apparatus, the general political atmosphere is deliberately shaped so that any affinity with the Falun Gong is seriously regarded as a no-go area.

In cyberspace, online police as well as Web site administrators enhance heightened scrutiny of online contributions and contents, ensuring no alternative opinions stray away from political correctness on the subject of Falun Gong. The owners of Internet cafés are also required to keep records of online activities of their patrons for at least 60 days, which in turn submitted to security authorities if requested. The offenders, regardless whether it is an individual Internet user, ISPs and ICPs, are all held responsible for their online postings or contents. Most Falun Gong Websites registered in mainland China are shut down and those registered off-shore are blocked. Several popular Internet search engines, including Google and Yahoo, are either under heavy censorship or impose self-censorship to filter contents by keywords, and thus erase/de-list some of their sensitive content, including their cache feature that makes the deleted Web pages available from their database of archived Web pages. They comply with the Chinese government in order to enter China's vast electronic business market.<sup>67</sup>

Protesters have turned up at Tiananmen Square amid heavy security where they usually display banners, shout or even commit self-immolation in protest against the heavy-handed crackdown on their community. Nevertheless, social control remains in the tight grip of the CCP. As Shanthi Kalathil observed, "Albeit some mainland

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<sup>67</sup> See, for example, *Internet Filtering in China in 2004-2005: A Country Study*, available online at <[http://www.opennetinitiative.net/studies/china/ONI\\_China\\_Country\\_Study.pdf](http://www.opennetinitiative.net/studies/china/ONI_China_Country_Study.pdf)>, published on April 14, 2005, accessed on April 18, 2005.

Chinese followers possess the technical prowess necessary to access overseas Falun Gong sites and evade capture, the government's campaign to eradicate the bulk of the domestic movement...appears to be succeeding."<sup>68</sup>

Comparing independent cases of Internet activism like the Liu Di incident and the Falun Gong movement reveals an important implication that the CCP may allow a certain degree of online critical debate or voices to be expressed. It will not, however, tolerate any offline sociopolitical force to emerge to either directly or indirectly, threaten or challenge its power basis. In other words, as long as the online criticism does not translate into substantive offline political movements to protest in the streets, the CCP appears more lenient in letting a certain degree of freedom of speech linger in cyberspace. One of the serious concerns is that the offline social movement may not target the government now, but instead one day turns against the authorities. In this sense, to consolidate the CCP's reign, it is essential to take precautions to prevent an Internet-based "peaceful revolution" from taking shape in the offline Chinese society. It is thus obvious that on any account, the Chinese authorities claim that the struggle with Falun Gong will be "long-lasting, intense, and complicated so long as some of its adherents still refuse to give in."<sup>69</sup>

## **Section VI Discussions and Conclusions**

From the cases discussed above, it is clear that the Internet has had an impact upon

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<sup>68</sup> Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), p. 30.

<sup>69</sup> Ping Lun Yuan (commentator), "Gonggu he Kuoda Jiepi Falun Gong Douzheng de Chengguo" (Carry and intensify the battle against Falun Gong through to the end), *People's Daily*, July 20, 2000, p. 1. Also available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/1042/151762.html>>, accessed on April 20, 2004.

China's political system. First of all, the repercussions of the U.S. Spy Plane Incident (April 2002) illustrated the ways in which the power of the regime to conduct diplomatic manoeuvring was constrained by the groundswell of nationalist opinions online. Some of them even threatened to disrupt the foreign and business relations with countries like the US or Japan. The SARS and BMW incidents have highlighted the increasingly popular concept of "people's right to know" (*zhi qing quan*) when the local authorities have neither disclosed nor released any official real-time accounts of the incident. The profound concerns about public health as well as the heightened social inequality between the rich and poor have all contributed to the heated discussions and debates online. That the government's initial attitude was ambiguous, non-transparent, and ineffective in the process of handling these events further incurred widespread speculation and rumours both online and offline, deeply damaging the CCP's long practised vertical flow of communications, and instead boosting horizontal public communications through digital media like the Internet and Short Message Service. The mishandling of the SARS epidemic has particularly widened the mistrust between the government and the public, strengthening pressure for a more transparent, responsive and accountable administration.

Interestingly but not surprisingly, the Beijing authorities appeared to be more tolerant of this sort of online activism during the US Spy Plane incident, as long as they did not cross the line by waging protests in the streets. One explanation is that nationalist activists vis-à-vis the US, Japan or Taiwan are much less threatening to the communist regime than pro-democracy dissidents such as followers of Falun

Gong who explicitly challenge its monopolised power structure. Considering the postings articulated online during the Spy Plane incident, the majority of them were indeed patriotic whose opinions expressed the need for a stronger government to uphold a tough stance in the diplomatic negotiations with the United States over compensation and an official apology. Moreover, the government can also gauge and track public opinion through which they may sometimes mobilise (online) opinion for support of the incumbent regime when needed.

Secondly, the “virtual” public discourse conducted via Internet fora has pushed and challenged the sanctioned boundary of free speech, and most importantly, demanded a greater degree of response and accountability from the government. An article appeared in the Chinese *Oriental Outlook* bluntly claiming that the BMW incident, for instance, demonstrated that “ordinary people have little faith in law and they distrust the state apparatus.”<sup>70</sup> In other words, the official media fail in these incidents to play the “watchdog” role found in many Western societies. Effectively, there is a “thin” public media space where freer mass opinion can be expressed without fearing threats and retaliation from the State. The Internet media has therefore extended the range of traditional media outlets to widen horizontal communications and convey public opinions online. This is largely because there are few institutional measures or mechanisms underlying China’s socio-political system that accommodate public opinion. The concepts of human rights and freedom of speech are either mentioned in a broadly unspecific manner, such as the notion that the Chinese government vows to generally respect and protect human rights, or such

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<sup>70</sup> Liu Haipo, “‘Baoma’ An Zhenzheng Lingren Youlu zhi chu” (What it is really worrying about the BMW case), *Liaowang Dongfang Zhoukan* (Oriental Outlook), No. 3, 2004, January 15, 2004, p. 31.

concepts are merely touched upon in passing in China's 1982 Constitution, the subsequent amendments in 2004, and in the "International Convention of Civil and Political Rights" signed in 1998. Public opinion is seldom a crucial and integral part to be taken into account in the decision-making and arbitration processes of public policies and affairs. Adding to this is the scarcity of institutionalised channels like regular, free elections or an impeachment mechanism.

As Joseph S. Nye Jr. argues, information dissemination implies that "...power is more distributed and networks tend to undercut the monopoly of traditional bureaucracy."<sup>71</sup> Following this logic, he implies that the speed of the Internet has to some extent constrained governments' agenda, whether central or local, requiring much more rapid responses to events. The Shenzhen case,<sup>72</sup> highlights the positive interactions between local government officials and citizens (the cyber writer). What should not be simply overlooked, however, is that underpinning this virtuous circle is the Internet-enabled public opinion. To restore the government's credibility and public trust, and to strengthen its hand, the Shenzhen city council took the revolutionary step of keeping abreast of the changing opinion of its citizens, and trying to respect the right of the people to have access to government information. Given that the public opinion articulated in cyberspace may not be allowed the final say on the direction of development of the city, the change in public attitudes and

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<sup>71</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Information Technology and Democratic Governance," in Elaine Giulla Kamarck and Joseph S. Nye Jr. (eds.), *Governance.com: Democracy in the Information Age* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 2002), p. 11.

<sup>72</sup> The case is about an online controversial article, under the title of "Who Ditched You, Shenzhen," written on November 16, 2002 by a Chinese Netizen nicknamed "wo wei yi kuang" (crazy for her). The article provided illustrations of many sorts of deep-seated problems in Shenzhen, such as the inefficient government agencies, social security, urban environment management ...etc. The article was swiftly circulated and widely discussed online with the result that Shenzhen and related issues generated a great deal of debate. And this eventually led to a face-to-face dialogue between the author and the city's mayor.

sociopolitical behaviour has a far-reaching impact on the government in connection with its roles, institutions and bureaucracies. In this regard, the government has gradually taken public opinion into consideration when initiating and implementing public policies.

Thirdly, the incidents under review have generated evidence that the Internet has somewhat shaped and affected the traditional media. One dimension is that the mainstream media have been “stimulated” and “encouraged” to take bolder steps to follow what has been hotly debated in the cyber community. They are stimulated because they have to compete with rivals in pursuing more commercial benefits. Besides, since they may be in a less risky position, they are also encouraged to cover incidents that are already heatedly discussed in cyberspace. “Virtual” discussions thus provide justifications for traditional media outlets to follow suit. One of the direct consequences is that we have witnessed freer media coverage, probing the bottom line of press and media scrutiny. Meanwhile, it is increasingly becoming a news media practice that online opinions or discourses can be incorporated into the mainstream media where the previous news and traditional media channels were independent and separate.

The Internet’s impact on Chinese society has also revealed another factor—the effect of accident or contingency. The Spy Plane incident, the BMW incident, and many others came up unexpectedly but they all caught the media spotlight. One cause is that ordinary people may in general be aware of social injustice and official corruption such as allegedly existed in the BMW case, and the concern with anti-hegemony (or anti-imperialism) against the US (or Japan) during the CCP’s

political socialisation. Their disaffection and wrath are often constrained and/or concealed until a specific incident emerges. Only then will they be induced to actively express their resentment and engage in (online) discussions. In other words, those kinds of events can be expected to take place soon or later. Yet they are fundamentally different from the pre-planned political events that will be discussed in the coming two chapters. The Net's political impact is therefore varied. When, for example, the public expresses its sympathy with people who have become victims, they may further fuse their long-standing hatred and anxiety into joint civic engagement, online or offline. Both incidents illustrated have had effect in challenging the existing legal and governing systems, and awakening concern with civil and legal rights.

In the case of SARS, it was a contingency but not an event anyone had expected would emerge in comparison with the previous two cases (Spy Plane and BMW incidents). The Internet's political impact has thus shown subtle differences between contingent events that are and are not anticipated. In the case of the SARS epidemic, after local government's mishandling of the crisis, the aftermath of the newly-issued regulation on public health highlighted a gradual but critical step of the Chinese government to construct a more comprehensive mechanism for managing public emergencies. They now hold local government officials accountable for either hiding and delaying emergency information or giving false information. It aims to achieve a more responsive and transparent local government for a timely, comprehensive, and accurate public disclosure of information. In a word, in terms of the political impact of the Internet, the unexpected contingent event appears greater

than expected because when things are expected to occur, the authorities will have leeway to limit its impact. This preliminary conclusion drawn from the previous case studies will be further tested and contrasted in the next two chapters.

In fact, the power of the Internet following circumstantial events recalls what Nina Hachigian has predicted,

*“...[t]he power shifts wrought by the Internet will surface clearly only during an economic or political crisis in a future China where the Internet is far more pervasive. At that time, the Internet will fuel discontent and could be the linchpin to a successful challenge to party rule.”*<sup>73</sup>

Fourthly, in the realm of the political impact of the Internet, the Falun Gong can arguably be defined as a representative group of political dissent, which poses a potential threat to China’s Party-state. Some have further linked Falun Gong with the Internet as a metaphor of “marriage made in Web heaven.”<sup>74</sup> Given the fact that the Internet has presented Chinese dissidents with a weapon to challenge the party-state through their offline mass demonstration, the Falun Gong has yet posed any serious direct and imminent threat to the Communist regime. At best, the Internet has enabled its followers to bring more international pressure against the Chinese government. Its impact is significantly constrained.

Lastly, the Internet has been employed to advance advocacy of public awareness pertaining to social justice and civil rights at a moment in time. An online petition, entitled “Declaration of Citizens’ Rights for the Internet,” for instance, was

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<sup>73</sup> Nina Hachigian, “China’s Cyber-Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 2, March/April 2001, p. 118.

<sup>74</sup> “Falungong and the Internet: A Marriage Made in the Web Heaven,” *VirtualChina.com*, July 30, 1999, available online at <<http://www.virtualchina.com/infotech/perspectives/perspective-073099.html>>, accessed on September 15, 2001.

signed on July 29, 2002, by a total 18 Chinese intellectuals on the eve of the enforcement of the “Provisional Regulations for Internet Publication and Management” of August 1, 2002. Addressing the necessity to safeguard the legitimate rights of Chinese people’s use of the Internet, the declaration proposed freedom of speech on the Internet, freedom of Internet information and freedom of Internet organisations.<sup>75</sup> The increasingly intense glare of the Internet and other ICTs has also enhanced the public’s awareness of the government’s warts and blemishes. The awakening of civil rights in the wake of wider application of ICTs may further suggest that utilising the modern technology stands at the forefront to open a freer Chinese sociopolitical society, albeit it is still in the incipient stage.

To sum up, there are grounds based on the empirical evidence presented in this chapter to suggest that the Internet indeed has had an impact on the government in a way that leads to a more transparent and accountable governing system in China. Internet users may not directly or quickly subvert communist rule, nevertheless, they have manoeuvred and mobilised the deemed “reactionary” power to challenge the government’s perceived agendas and bring forth sociopolitical relaxation, albeit it is still premature to talk about political democratisation. The dramatic increase in information available online is potentially a great challenge to the CCP’s propaganda-filled media environment. The Internet-enabled public opinion in China is, as a result, bound to grow significantly in the future. After all, the Internet’s political impact will be shaped and determined less by the intrinsic nature of the

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<sup>75</sup> “Zhongguo Xuezhe: Wangluo Gongmin Quanli Xuanyan,” (Chinese Scholars - Declaration of Citizens’ Rights for the Internet), No. 152, *Yi Bao* (China E-Weekly), July 29, 2002, available online at <<http://www.chinaeweekly.com/history/gb02070411.htm>>, accessed on April 30, 2004. See also Sophie Beach and Xiao Qiang, “As Control Increase, ‘Internet Citizens’ Demand More Freedom,” *South China Morning Post*, October 3, 2002.

Internet itself, and more by the underlying political dynamics of public opinion.

This chapter has contributed to the overall argument of the dissertation with a picture of the overall impact of separate events on the Chinese political system. It has basically been conducted from a macro perspective. The next chapter will explore whether the Chinese government is as much in control of public debates in cyberspace as it is of debates in the form of traditional media of the *People's Daily*.

## **Chapter 6 The Political Impact of the Internet upon Value Orientation (I): Case Study of the 16th National Congress of Communist Party of China (November 2002)**

### **Section I Introduction**

What can be the impact of the Internet upon authoritarian regimes? This chapter addresses the issues of the formation and development of a public sphere and online social capital in China with an empirical analysis of messages posted on the *Qiangguo Luntan* web site during the 16th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The discussions centre upon four separate yet intertwined categories of issues, (a) corruption, (b) the concept of *xiaokang shehui* and income inequality, (c) the theory of the “Three Represents” and the official accession of private entrepreneurs into the CCP, and (d) political reform. By contrasting the official coverage of the themes that appears in the *People’s Daily*, the examination of the *Qiangguo Luntan* can help explore the extent to which the Internet has facilitated the evolution of e-social capital and the possible emergence of a public sphere, albeit with Chinese characteristics.

#### **A. Internet, Online Discussion Board and the Growth of Public Opinion**

“Public opinion” is related to what Jurgen Habermas has designated as the “public sphere.” The “public sphere,” in his words, is “...a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed... We speak of a political public sphere when the public discussions concern objects connected with the practice of the state.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jurgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere,” in Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (eds.),

In other words, the public sphere, as McNair explains, "...comprises in essence the communicative institutions of a society, through which facts and opinions circulate, and by means of which a common stock of knowledge is built up as the basis for collective political action."<sup>2</sup>

In addition, examining the environmental agency and public opinion in Guangzhou, Lo and Leung conclude that "...[i]t is no longer taboo for a bureau to use social forces to counter other parts of the bureaucracy. Public opinion is now seen as a valuable resource."<sup>3</sup> As far back as late 1995, the US-based scholars Jie Chen and Yang Zhong, in cooperation with the Public Opinion Research Institute of People's University of China, conducted a public opinion survey on political interests and apathy in Beijing. Instead of showing political apathy, their finding reveals that there is indeed a high level of political interest in Beijing.<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, public opinion is now a force that leaders may often reckon with. As Joseph Fewsmith puts it, "...[t]he Government cares about public opinion because it is concerned with political stability."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, as argued by Minxin Pei,

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*Rethinking Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 398-404.

<sup>2</sup> Brian McNair, *An Introduction to Political Communication* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Carlos Wing Hung Lo and Sai Wing Leung, "Environmental Agency and Public Opinion in Guangzhou: The Limits of a Popular Approach to Environmental Governance," *The China Quarterly*, No. 163, September 2000, pp. 677-704.

<sup>4</sup> The study shows that two-thirds of respondents are either "somewhat interested" or "very interested" in politics, 90 per cent indicate that they either "occasionally," "often" and "always" talk about politics with their friends and family members. See, Jie Chen and Yang Zhong, "Mass Political Interest (or Apathy) in Urban China," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 3, September 1999, pp. 281-303.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Joseph Fewsmith and Stanley Rosen, "The Domestic Context of Chinese Foreign Policy: Does 'Public Opinion' Matter?" in David M. Lampton (ed.), *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy, 1978-2000* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 151-187; Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 16.

*[w]hereas past policies were largely determined by the ruling ideology, its erosion [the declining appeal of communism] means that the struggle over policy has become a more spirited debate in which many political factors, including public opinion, carry weight. Without any ideological reason to command loyalty, too, the regime must be far more sensitive to its standing among ordinary people.”<sup>6</sup>*

In terms of public opinion, the Internet may offer the possibility of a public space free from monopoly control of governments in China. When asked by the *New York Times* about Internet governance in China, Jiang Yaping, who heads the Internet division of the *People’s Daily*, replied, “We try to let the people speak. We are the main newspaper of the Party, so of course there are limits. But it would take something stronger than these [messages that are critical of the Party or the Government for them] to be removed.”<sup>7</sup>

## **B. The Internet and Political Values Orientation**

Studies and surveys have all pointed out that the majority of Chinese Internet users come from urban and coastal areas, and are young male professionals with economically better-off backgrounds.<sup>8</sup> But the implication behind the reality is that the use of the Internet for the time being for any serious information searches and even for political associations and engagement appear to be a minor sideline, compared to

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<sup>6</sup> Minxin Pei, “Hearing the Voice of The People at Last,” *Newsweek*, May 7, 2001, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Messages such as: “I want her to know that we Chinese People don’t like our government,” “The Communist Party doesn’t let Chinese people read newspapers from overseas” are weeded out. See, Elisabeth Rosenthal, “Web Sites Bloom in China, and Are Weeded,” *The New York Times*, December 23, 1999, Section A, Page 1.

<sup>8</sup> China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), *Semiannual Survey Report on the Development of China’s Internet* (October 1997–January 2004), available online at <<http://www.cnnic.net.cn/index/0E/00/11/index.htm>>, accessed on February 17, 2004.

the massive flows of online traffic in entertainment, such as online games and audio-visual programmes, chat rooms and increasingly business/commerce-related activities.<sup>9</sup> A survey using the Google search engine shows that business-related Web sites and pages greatly outnumber their counterparts for politics and news information: 148,000,000 as against 4,430,000 entries respectively. Similarly, there are about 3,200,000 business entries versus 883,000 ones for politics and news-based websites whilst surveying the Chinese version of Google.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless a Chinese expert has argued that compared to Internet users in other countries, the Chinese Netizens seem to demonstrate greater enthusiasm in expressing their viewpoints over social, political, economic and military matters. In part he believes the Internet is a venue where Netizens may enjoy a relatively freer space for expression than in the traditional media.<sup>11</sup> Online political debates and consultations are becoming a critical hinge that can link grassroots politics with broader possible social and political change.

Jonathan Zhu and Zhou He have carried out research on Internet users and their value orientation in China. They demonstrate that the impact of the Internet on value orientations of ordinary citizens in major cities of Beijing and Guangzhou has shown a tendency to shift from official-oriented communism to the value system of

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<sup>9</sup> It is generally in line with the Internet use in the West. See, for example, Kevin A. Hill and John E. Hughes, *Cyberpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> The results deriving from both standard and Chinese versions of Google search engine were conducted on February 18, 2003. While keywords of "business" and "commerce" were input in standard Google search engine, the Chinese equivalent words "qi ye" (business) and "shang ye" were input in the Chinese version of Google. Meanwhile, keywords of "politics" and "news" were input in standard Google, and "zheng zhi" and "xin wen" in Chinese version of Google.

<sup>11</sup> Wang Xiaodong, "Hulianwang yu Zhongguo de Sixiang Duoyuanhua" (The Internet and Thought Pluralisation in China), *BBC Chinese Service*, May 9, 2002, available online at <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/chinese/china\\_news/newsid\\_742000/7422391.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/chinese/china_news/newsid_742000/7422391.stm)>, accessed on March 6,

materialism and post-materialism.<sup>12</sup> Such a result coincides with a general survey showing that the official ideology of communism is losing its popular appeal. Instead, a more secularised and consumerist value orientation is increasingly prevalent, in particular among younger generations in the reform era.<sup>13</sup> This seems especially likely amongst coastal urban Chinese audiences as China accelerates its pace of engaging with the world economy after accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in late 2001 and signals the official acceptability of private entrepreneurs in the CCP in late 2002.

## **Section II Internet, e-Social Capital and Public Sphere**

The notions of public sphere and social capital have usually been addressed and debated separately in the social sciences. Rarely have they been studied jointly together with the Internet. Since the Internet has brought a media revolution in developed and most developing countries since the mid-1990s, I propose linking together the public sphere, social capital and the Internet to deepen the analysis of the political impact of the Internet upon any given state context, whilst adding a normative dimension to the analysis.

Habermas defined the concept of public sphere in *Between Facts and Norms*. He thinks that the public sphere can best be described as “a network for communicating information and points of view, where the streams of communication are filtered and

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<sup>12</sup> Jonathan J. H. Zhu and Zhou He, “Information Accessibility, User Sophistication, and Source Credibility: The Impact of the Internet on Value Orientations in Mainland China,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 7, No. 2, January 2002, available online at <<http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol7/issue2/china.html>>, accessed on May 16, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Wei-wei Zhang, *Transforming China: Economic Reform and its Political Implications* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), chapter 13.

synthesised in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinion.”<sup>14</sup> To him, public or association life is part of the material from which the public sphere may emerge. In fact such association life does not necessarily imply physical proximity, as the classical example of café bars suggests.<sup>15</sup> Bennett and Entman have further claimed that the public sphere could refer to other areas of “informal life,” ranging from traditional cafés to modern Internet cafés, or any place where the exchange of public opinion could be held—“where ideas and feelings relevant to politics are transmitted or exchanged openly.”<sup>16</sup>

In this sense, the Internet may help create new public spaces. Such a new public sphere in the information age can refer to a fresh pattern of public/associational life that the public get involved and participate in the debates and discussions of public policy issues. As a result, like-minded citizens can gain a voice in public affairs outside formal democratic institutions.<sup>17</sup> Interactive communication mediated by the Internet means not merely a two-way process, but also a many-to-many channel of

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<sup>14</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Oxford: Polity, 1996), p. 360.

<sup>15</sup> As Antje Gimmmler has pointed out, Habermas was pessimistic about the return of a critical public sphere in his earlier work (1962 German versions and 1989 English version). Nonetheless he changed his mind and argued that the return of such a sphere is possible within the resurgence of civil society itself. See Antje Gimmmler, “Deliberative Democracy, the Public Sphere and the Internet,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 2001, p. 25; James Curran, *Media and Power* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 234.

<sup>16</sup> W. Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman, “Mediated Politics: An Introduction,” in W. Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman (eds.), *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Lincoln Dahlberg, “The Internet and Democratic Discourse: Exploring the Prospects of Online Deliberative Forums Extending the Public Sphere,” *Information, Communication & Society*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2001, pp. 615-633; Mark Poster, “Cyberdemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere,” in David Porter (ed.), *Internet Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 201-217; Douglas Kellner, “Intellectuals, the New Public Spheres, and Techno-politics,” in Chris Toulouse and Timothy W. Luke (eds.), *The Politics of Cyberspace: A New Political Science Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 167-186; Lincoln Dahlberg, “Computer-Mediated Communication and the Public Sphere: A Critical Analysis,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 7, No. 1, October 2001, available online at <<http://www.ascuse.org/jcmc/vol7/issue1/dahlberg.html>>, accessed on December 11, 2002.

exchanging, disseminating and relaying information, whether top-down, bottom-up or horizontally. Hence Klein argues that the new technology like the Internet has provided a new means for realising what Alexis de Tocqueville has held about the application of the democratic theory into civic associations. He claims, "By providing a new technology for [public] forums, the Internet opens new possibilities for citizen associations."<sup>18</sup> Robert Putnam further links civic associations and voluntary associations with what he terms "social capital" for political participation and effective governance, after he has surveyed decades-long decline of American civic engagement from the 1960s.<sup>19</sup> He defines that "social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them,"<sup>20</sup> that "enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives."<sup>21</sup>

A growing literature from the late 1990s has begun to tackle the role of the Internet with the connections of social capital and public sphere in advanced industrial democracies.<sup>22</sup> Relatively few works, however, have applied the same approach to less developed democracies and undemocratic countries. Those few works that have been written tend to treat the Internet as an isolated socioeconomic phenomenon without considering how interactions on the Net may fit together with other impact

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<sup>18</sup> Hans K. Klein, "Tocqueville in Cyberspace: Using the Internet for Citizen Association," *The Information Society*, Vol. 15, No. 4, October-December 1999, p. 216.

<sup>19</sup> Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 1, January 1995, pp. 65-78; Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Robert D. Putnam, ed., *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Robert D. Putnam, "The Strange Disappearance of Civil America," *The American Prospect*, Vol. 7, No. 24, winter 1996, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Barry Wellman, Anabel Quan Haase, James Witte and Keith Hampton, "Does the

and influences of ordinary people's political participation. Christopher Marsh and Laura Whalen are amongst the few who have conducted research on *e*-social capital and the Internet with regard to the Chinese context. Building upon the concept of "social capital,"<sup>23</sup> Marsh and Laura postulate that the Internet and cyberspace allow for a "new and unique" form of social organisation that can be used to generate an electronic form of social capital.<sup>24</sup> After examining Netizens' usage as well as access to the Internet, together with the (in)capability of the Chinese government to contain the new medium, they come to the conclusion that Internet users undermine state control and contribute to the formation of a civil society.<sup>25</sup>

This piece of work has shed light on further cyber studies in China, although it is too soon to comprehensively assess their argument that the Internet and the evolution of *e*-social capital have facilitated a definite democratic transition in China. The term *e*-social capital, in the eyes of this dissertation, does not connote social capital generated on the Internet merely, though it is indeed a principal component of *e*-social capital per se. Rather, I would suggest that the electronic form of social capital may be interplayed with social capital in the physical world, mutually influencing and reinforcing each other. In addition, when studying social capital, Pippa Norris

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Internet Increase, Decrease, or Supplement Social Capital," *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 45, No. 3, November 2001, pp. 436-455.

<sup>23</sup> This concept is borrowed from James Coleman and is defined as "social organisation constitutes social capital, facilitating the achievement of goals that could not be achieved in its absence or could be achieved only at a higher cost." See James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press, 1990), p. 304.

<sup>24</sup> Traditionally, social capital must be formed in civil society where it is a relatively autonomous sphere in a society which rests between the state and the private sector. The "new and unique" environment afforded by cyberspace provides the form of social organisation that can be used by democratisation movements in authoritarian regimes, despite these regimes' best efforts to control civil society and organised opposition. See Christopher Marsh and Laura Whalen, "The Internet, *e*-social Capital, and Democratization in China," *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, April 2000, p. 62, 66 and 67.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Marsh and Laura Whalen, "The Internet, *e*-social Capital, and Democratization in

suggests it is more significant to “analyse the cultural norms and values associated with membership.”<sup>26</sup>

To sum up, attempts to compare the ways in which the same or similar events are treated when the Internet was and was not available over a certain period of time may in a sense highlight the Internet’s impact upon the political domain. In the Chinese case, since the Internet is increasingly exploited by many users, it presents a favourable backdrop for us to further study the debates over online discussion boards such as *Qiangguo Luntan*, hosted and administered by official *People’s Daily*, contrasting the news coverage from the *People’s Daily* itself during and around the 16th National Congress of the CCP in November 2002. By comparing the two media outlets addressing the same political event, we can present empirical evidence to show how and to what extent the Internet has impacted upon the evolution of social capital and the public sphere, and in consequence on the Chinese political system.

### **Section III Sixteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party: Contrasting *Qiangguo Luntan* with the *People’s Daily***

The establishment of the *Qiangguo Luntan* came from a deliberate initiative of Jiang Yapin, chief of the online *People’s Daily*.<sup>27</sup> As Jiang sees it, the forum taps a growing

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China,” pp. 61-81.

<sup>26</sup> Pippa Norris, *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 166.

<sup>27</sup> According to an interview with a news reporter from *Time* magazine, Mr Jiang explained that the idea of a chat room for discussing the news was approved in early 1999, but there was some hesitation over when and how to launch it. “We were waiting for a special occasion.” That presented itself on May 8, 1999, when a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) warplane bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. A day later (May 9, 1999), the Protest Forum named “*Qianglie Kangyi Beiyue Baoxing BBS Luntan*” was set up for ordinary people to express their reaction. Soon after the protests died down, Jiang and his staff realized that people should be able to do more than just protest, so the Protest Forum was later (on June 19, 1999) renamed the *Qiangguo Luntan* (Strong Country Forum) to

trend towards outspokenness because "...[a]fter two decades of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, Chinese people want to express their ideas to the government, and the government needs to know what the people are thinking."<sup>28</sup> The forum founded in 1999 is now extensively acknowledged as one of the most popular and influential Chinese language online discussion fora, which is sponsored by news media in Mainland China.<sup>29</sup> It has attracted more than 200,000 registered users as of April 2003, where average daily postings numbered around 7,000 and 10,000 in July 2001.<sup>30</sup> During the 16th Party Congress, average daily contributions to the *Qiangguo Luntan* even reached as high as around 40,000, far beyond the normal number of 10,000.<sup>31</sup> The reason why the *Qiangguo Luntan* enjoys unique popularity is in part because unlike the developed media environment in those democracies where freer public debates and consultations can be made through traditional media, there are yet few equivalent channels available in China. Although the *Qiangguo Luntan* is looked upon by some (Chinese) commentators as "...breaking through one-dimensional

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expand wider discussion topics.

<sup>28</sup> Mia Turner, "An Avenue for Dissent," *Time*, Vol. 155, No. 14, April 10, 2000, available online at <<http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/2000/0410/china.chatroom.html>>, accessed on April 12, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, "Wangshang 'Renmin Luntan'—Qianxi *Renmin Ribao* Wangluoban 'Qiangguo Luntan'" (Online 'People's Forum'—Reviewing the 'Strong Country Forum' in the *People's Daily*), *Xinwen Zhanxian* (News Battlefront), December 22, 1999, available online at <<http://bbs.people.com.cn/fuwu/mt/mt-1/004.html>>, accessed on April 12, 2003; Du Ping, "Zhongguo de 'Wangshang Tequ'" ('Online Special Administration' in China), *Lianhe Zaobao* (Singapore), July 17, 2000, available online at <<http://bbs.people.com.cn/fuwu/mt/mt-1/006.html>>, accessed on April 12, 2003; Xue Yan, "Renminwang Wunian Chengguo Huihuang" (Fruitful Accomplishments of the People's Daily Online), *Jinghua Shibao*, January 6, 2002, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/other7018/7248/7249/20020404/702365.html>>, accessed on April 11, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Chen Tongxu and Deng Lifeng, "BBS Yiti de Xingcheng yu Shuaibian—Dui Renminwang Qiangguo Luntan de Gean Yanjiu" (The Formation and Decay of Issues in BBS—A Case Study of 'Strong Country Forum' in the *People's Daily*), *Xinwen yu Chuanbo Yanjiu* (Journalism and Communication Studies), No. 1, 2002, available online at <<http://bbs.people.com.cn/fuwu/mt/mt-1/013.html>>, accessed on April 12, 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Li Xiaoming, "Renminwang 'Qiangguo Luntan' Tongshi Zaixian Tupo Siwan" (Online Population Reaches 40,000 Simultaneously in the 'Strong Country Forum' of the *People's Daily*), *People's Daily*,

public opinion”<sup>32</sup> and “...revising as well as re-constructing the government’s agenda-setting,”<sup>33</sup> it is nonetheless constrained by the official guidelines of regulations, and is probably obliged to propagate the Party and Chinese Government’s images, and to direct public opinion by standing out against the more liberal international public opinion and media.<sup>34</sup>

The 16th Party Congress, convened between November 8 and 14, 2002 in Beijing, was the first to mark the incorporation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into the nationwide propaganda machinery. Where previously the general public relied upon the traditional media of TV and newspapers to secure information about the 15th CCP Party Congress proceedings in September 1997, they can now take advantage of the mushrooming of news coverage boosted by the new media—the Internet. Live, diversified and audio-visual reports, provided by the Chinese media as well as foreign channels, were promised by the Internet-based technologies to bring them a more digitalised coverage of the 16th Party Congress. Provincial or local Party leaders, government officials and scholars were, for example, invited or assigned to come to *Qiangguo Luntan* to serve as special guests elucidating the General Secretary’s Report and to take questions from ordinary Internet users.

As regards the selection of articles from the *People’s Daily*, the basic principle is that articles appearing in the first few pages are usually regarded as prominent in

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November 17, 2002, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Min Dahong, “Dangbao han Dangbao Wangzhan” (Party Newspaper and Party Newspaper’s Website), *Zhonghua Xinwenbao*, July 10, 2001, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Li Xiguang and Qin Xuan, “Shui Zai Shezhi Jintian de Yicheng?—Dianzi Luntan zai Zhongda Xinwen Shijian zhong dui Dangbao Yiti de Chonggou” (Who Is Setting Chinese Agenda?—Impact of Online Chatroom on Party Press), in Li Xiguang and Zhao Xin-shu (eds.), *Meiti de Liliang* (The Power of Media) (Guangzhou: Nanfang Ribao, 2002), pp. 156-169.

<sup>34</sup> Zhang Husheng, “Jiangchi Zhengque Daoxiang, Tuxian Wangluo Tese” (Persist Correct Orientation, Project Internet Characteristics), *Xinwen Zhanxian*, No. 7, 2002, available online at

terms of propaganda and agenda-setting. Accordingly, they enjoy a priority position for those relevant official stories pertaining to the themes set to be selected and compared with those in *Qiangguo Luntan*. In addition, official guidance on the selection of the themes discussed has a great deal to do with the (changing) nature of the Party Congress. Issues of corruption, income inequality and political reform, for instance, are usually articulated amongst ordinary people and brought into discussion in the cyber chat rooms. These subjects are nevertheless hotly debated during the session of National Party Congress. It is partly because the Netizens wish to take full advantage of this opportunity to fuel and heighten their cyber-based agendas, making themselves understood particularly by the Party representatives congregating in Beijing. In part, they may also elevate and debate the themes lively in the cyberspace since, from their perspectives, the restructuring of the Party chief and key personnel may be the herald of new hope in tackling old problems.

Besides, the newly proposed and stressed concepts of *Xiaokang Shehui*, the Three Represents Theory and official acknowledgement of private entrepreneurs into the Communist Party are newly emerged issues that are expected to have the potential to provoke wider public debates both in the “virtual” and “real” communities. Therefore this chapter will focus on these notions. In short, the themes addressed in this chapter are supposed to reflect the concerns of Chinese Netizens and provide a valuable opportunity to lay the foundation to examine the triangular relations of the Internet, *e*-social capital and public sphere in the Chinese cyber context.

There are, of course, some messages that are “strongly” sympathetic to the government’s agendas mirrored in the *People’s Daily*. These messages are re-directed

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<<http://www.snweb.com/gb/xw/2002/07/a0701009.htm>>, accessed on April 11, 2003.

into the main website version of *People's Daily*, known as *Renmin Wang*, or *People's Daily Online*, and re-posted in a highly selective manner of course. Nonetheless, the existing evidence is still sufficient to answer the research question posed at the onset of this chapter. One of the primary reasons is that the research has been conducted without deliberately sifting through one forum like *Qiangguo Luntan* to find provocative or contrasting online messages in favour of the conclusions drawn. Apart from that, the cyber messages that have been presented were not painstakingly chosen as representative opinions to justify the arguments, but instead these sorts of messages are so widespread that it is necessary to select an illustrative sample.

#### **A. Corruption**

There is no doubt about the enormous public concern over the seriousness of corruption amongst government officials and party members. Such sentiments are reflected in nationwide opinion polls. A recent survey, for instance, was conducted in 2001 by the State Development and Planning Commission of China, researching the public attitudes of Chinese residents. It revealed that 73.8 per cent of respondents regarded *Fubai Guanliao Zhuyi* (corrupt bureaucratism) as the most crucial factor affecting social stability in China.<sup>35</sup> Although the corruption issue is of high concern amongst ordinary people, it is usually underreported or reported selectively in the official media primarily for political reasons. Only after corruption incidents are concluded can they usually be publicised. Often, in the face of state media cover-ups

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<sup>35</sup> Ding Yuanzhu and Zhou Yongping, "Zhongguo jumin shehui xintai genzong fenxi," (An Analysis of the Attitudes of Chinese Residents) in Ru Xin, Lu Xueyi and Li Peilin (eds.), *2002: Zhongguo Shehui Xingshi Fenxi yu Yuce* (2002: Trend Analysis and Prediction of the Chinese Society) (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxiang, 2002), p. 24. (Table 7)

or before news about corruption is released by official resources, cyberspace has been playing the role of virtual watchdog in publicising corruption cases.<sup>36</sup>

Official campaigns in combating corruption (*Fanfubai*) have been extensively addressed by many senior Party leaders in many occasions, including this 16th CCP Congress. They have in general acknowledged the fatal threat that corruption has brought to the party and the regime. For example, in Jiang Zeming's *Report* to the 16th Party Congress, he accentuated anew the importance of anti-corruption, affirming that

*"...[t]o combat and prevent corruption resolutely is a major political task on the whole Party. If we do not crack down on corruption, the flesh-and blood ties between the Party and the people will suffer a lot and the Party will be in danger of losing its ruling position, or possibly heading for self-destruction."*<sup>37</sup>

The front page of the *People's Daily* on 11 November 2002 issue, also covered remarks made from Wei Jianxing, a top-level Party cadre, that

*"the anti-corruption move has been going on well and made new achievements with concerted efforts of the whole Party...The practice of fighting corruption over the past thirteen years fully shows that the third-generation collective leadership with Jiang Zemin at the core has a sober understanding of the anti-corruption situation...Our Party is fully capable of resolving the corruption problem."*<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jianhai Bi, "The Internet Revolution in China: The Significance for Traditional Form of Communist Control," *International Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 3, summer 2001, p. 429.

<sup>37</sup> "Full Text of Jiang Zemin's Report at 16th Party Congress (3)," *People's Daily*, November 18, 2002, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200211/18/eng20021118\\_106985.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200211/18/eng20021118_106985.shtml)>, accessed on November 18, 2002.

<sup>38</sup> "Guanche 'Sange Daibiao' Zhongyao Sixiang, Jianchi Buxie di Kaizhan Fanfubai Douzheng" (Carrying out the Three Represents, and persistent efforts should be made to combat corruption), *People's Daily*, November 11, 2002, p. 1, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/>>

The views quoted are basically the official interpretations in relation to the problem of corruption.

Based upon empirical research conducted by the author of this dissertation during the 16th Party Congress, the majority of the posted messages related to corruption on the *Qiangguo Luntan*, quite revealingly, exhibited a cynical and critical tone that deviated from official accounts in the *People's Daily*, which praised much the Party's notable results in building a clean and honest government and combat corruption.<sup>39</sup> Several opinions were articulated as examples illustrate in Appendix 1.

The comments and questions quoted in Appendix 1 indicate that a growing number of Internet users are not content with the government's strategies in tackling corruption. Amongst their online debates over corruption, other than complimenting the authorities' efforts, Internet users tend to be sceptical and critical of official interpretations. They have instead proposed other solutions to the issue, paving the way for a primitive form of public sphere in China's cyberspace, and creating *e*-social capital in a rudimentary form, since they have been mapping an Internet community within which basic trust and norms for China's future development are taking shape, as the following examples show.

“The cause of corruption is that power is not effectively checked and balanced. Under the current personnel promotion system, the government officials are held responsible to their party superiors, not to the ordinary people. The current system has enabled Party

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paper464/7697/734954.html>, accessed on November 11, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, “Fanfu Changlian Qude Xinde Mingxian Chengxiao” (The endeavour to build a clean and honest government has yielded fresh notable results), *People's Daily*, November 1, 2002, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/news/8410/20021101/855896.html>>, accessed on November 2, 2002.

officials to override government officials' power and authority, and overshadow members of the National People Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). And then who is capable of supervising the Party secretaries?" ("Beifendecaomin," 2002-11-06, 16:16:10)

When such a critical question was posed to an invited guest, one Netizen responded: "The people, only the people can do that" ("Meidaoxiangzhu," 2000-11-06, 16:16:47), and another bluntly and cynically responded "Can the people monitor their deeds...?" ("Gongyuan erererer de zuihouyipilang," 2002-11-06, 16:27:14) Another replied "...the sole remedy for overcoming corruption is precisely to implement democratic supervision over government officials." ("Beifendecaomin," 2002-11-10, 15:15:48) Another Netizen claimed the so-called "Internet-based anti-corruption campaign" ought to be adopted by the fourth-generation of leaders in fighting corruption because Internet users could disclose corruption cases within the *danwei* (work unit) that they know. ("Zhonghuazhanshi," 2002-11-16, 20:11:32)

## **B. *Xiaokang Shehui* and Income Inequality**

So far as economic issues were concerned, coverage in the *People's Daily* during the 16th Party Congress upheld the market economy mechanism. On the one hand it declared that

*"China should establish the principle that labour, capital, technology, managerial expertise and other production factors participate in the distribution of income in accordance with their contributions."*<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "Yao tuijin jingji jianshe han jingji tizhi gage, baochi guomin jingji chixu kuaisu jiankang fazhan"

On the other hand it stressed that the economic tasks for China in the following five years are to

*“...improve the socialist market economy, promote strategic adjustment of the economic structure, basically accomplish industrialisation, energetically apply Information Technology, accelerate modernisation, maintain a sustained, rapid and sound development of the national economy and steadily uplift the people’s living standards.”*<sup>41</sup>

In other words, the ultimate and fundamental goal for economic reform is to build a *Xiaokang Shehui* (a moderately wealthy society) as claimed in the *Report* delivered at the opening ceremony of the 16th Party Congress in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.<sup>42</sup>

During the Party Congress, the concept of *Xiaokang Shehui* was one of the main themes and the term has been used to address the ambition of economic reform: “building a well-off society in an all-round way” (*quanmian jianshe xiaokang shehui*) in the twenty years ahead, and in the meantime addressing the Party’s concern for the improvement of living standards of ordinary people. For example, some coverage has focused on how senior Party leaders and other delegates highly commended the

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(Speeding up the economic development and restructuring, Maintaining a sustained, rapid and sound development of the national economy), *People’s Daily*, November 13, 2002, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/7720/736473.html>>, accessed on November 13, 2002.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Speaking at a press conference after the 16th Party Congress, Zeng Peiyan, director of the State Development Planning Commission, commented that “by the year 2020, we shall quadruple the GDP of the figure in the year 2000 [800 US dollars] and achieve a GDP per person of 3000 US dollars, which is the then projected average income in moderately developed countries.” See “Official on Connotation of a Complete Well-Off Society,” *People’s Daily*, November 11, 2002, available online at <<http://www.peopledaily.com.cn:80/GB/shizheng/19/20021111/863150.html>>, accessed on November 12, 2002.

*Report*.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the issue of income distribution has been one of the thorniest puzzles for the Beijing's authorities. China has, however, ranked itself amongst countries where resident incomes are rather unequal. Take the capital city of China for example. The income gap in Beijing in 2002 between the highest and lowest 20 per cent of population has reached 16,620 *renminbi*, the most serious disparity since 1949.<sup>44</sup> An even bleaker statistic is that the per capita disposable income of urban residents was 7,703 *renminbi* in 2002; a 13.4% increase from 2001, whereas for rural residents it was 2,476 *renminbi*; a 4.8% increase.<sup>45</sup> This suggests that the income distribution disparity is widening at an unprecedented pace. In this regard, there seems no disagreement that income inequality has deteriorated as the Gini Coefficient, according to the *People's Daily*, grew from 0.33 in 1980 to the internationally recognised critical point of 0.4 in 1994, and has exceeded 0.45 in 2001.<sup>46</sup> The pyramid of the wealthiest 20 per cent of Chinese residents occupies more than 51 per cent of total national fortune, compared with the 4 per cent of the poorest. In other words, the ratio between the two economic classes has worsened from 4.5:1 in the early reform

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<sup>43</sup> See, for example, "Jinjin Zhuazhu Zhongyao Zhanlue Jiyu, Qi Quanmian Jianshe Xiaokang Shehui" (Keeping a firm grip of important opportunities on building a well-off society in an all-round way), *People's Daily*, November 12, 2002, p. 1, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/7707/735596.html>>.

<sup>44</sup> Data released by Statistics Department of Beijing Municipal Government in early 2003 indicated whilst the per capita disposable income of the least 20 percent of Beijing residents in 2002 was 6,729 *renminbi*, a 7.3% increase over that of 2001, the top 20 percent of well-off population had reached 23,349 *renminbi*, a 16.7% increase compared to 2001. See, Jiang Xinju, "Jing jumin shouru jiada, gaodicha 16,620" (The Income Gap among Beijing Residents is Widening, Reaching at 16,620 *Renminbi*), *Beijing Yule Xinbao*, February 14, 2003, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shenghuo/76/123/20030214/923387.html>>, accessed on February 17, 2003.

<sup>45</sup> "Top Planner Zeng Peiyan Delivers Report to 10th NPC," *People's Daily*, March 6, 2003, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200303/06/eng20030306\\_112810.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200303/06/eng20030306_112810.shtml)>, accessed on March 7, 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Li Yan, "China Is Among Countries with Wide Income Gap," *People's Daily*, May 10, 2002, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200205/10/eng20020510\\_95447.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200205/10/eng20020510_95447.shtml)>, accessed on February 18, 2003.

era to 12.66:1.<sup>47</sup> He Qinglian even maintained that the intertwining of power and money in China had resulted in the corruption of government cadres, accelerating the gap of income distribution between country and city, eastern provinces and western ones.<sup>48</sup>

In general, complimenting much of the economic success achieved under Jiang Zemin in the past thirteen years, the *People's Daily* avoided harshly criticising and publicising socioeconomic problems brought about by reform and the opening-up to the outside world during the past decades.<sup>49</sup> The closing ceremony, for example, has again highlighted that CCP's achievements, stating

*"In the last thirteen years, the third-generation leadership of the CCP has led the Chinese people in making universally acknowledged achievements in reform, economic and social development, maintenance of stability, foreign affairs, national defence...and so forth."*<sup>50</sup>

Many Netizens, nevertheless, show little interest in the officially propagated concept

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<sup>47</sup> "Shengguo Fenpei Zhidu Gaige, Suoxiao Shouru Fenpei Chaju" (Deepening the Reform of Distributional System, Shortening the Gap of Income Distribution), *People's Daily*, March 8, 2002, available online at <<http://www1.peopledaily.com.cn/GB/shizheng/252/10307/10308/20030308/939243.html>>, accessed on March 9, 2003.

<sup>48</sup> He Qinglian, "Zhongguo Gaige de De yu Shi" (The Success and Failures of China's Reforms), *Dangdai Zhongguo Yanjiu* (Modern China Studies), No. 1, Spring 2002, pp. 2-24, available online at <<http://www.chinaj.net/StubArticle.asp?issue=020101&total=76>>, accessed on September 26, 2002.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, "Renmin Ribao: Yushi Jujin, Kaituo Chuangxin (She Lun)" (People's Daily: Marching with time, engaging in exploration and innovation: Editorial), *People's Daily*, November 8, 2002, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/news/8410/20021108/861784.html>>, accessed on November 8, 2002; "Meiri Redian—November 9" (Daily Spotlight: November 9), *People's Daily*, November 9, 2002, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/252/8956/9434/20021109/862642.html>>, accessed on November 9, 2002; "Yanzhe Dangde Shiliuda Zhiyinde Fangxiang Fenyong Qianjin (She Lun)" (Editorial: Advancing courageously along Orientation charted by Party Congress), *People's Daily*, November 15, 2002, available online at <<http://www.peopledaily.com.cn/GB/paper464/7738/737664.html>>, accessed on November 15, 2002.

<sup>50</sup> "Zhongguo Gongchandang Dishiliuci Quanguo Daibiao Dahui zai Jing Bimu" (The 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China convened in Beijing), *People's Daily*, November 15, 2002, p. 1, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/7738/737676.html>>, accessed on November 15, 2002.

of *xiaokang shehui*, as a few patchy messages emerged on the *Qiangguo Luntan*. By and large, those messages, demonstrated in Appendix 2, neither praise the economic performance achieved in the past, nor express satisfaction about the improvement in their living standards.

### **C. The “Three Represents” and the Accession of Private Entrepreneurs into the Chinese Communist Party**

Jiang Zemin repeatedly upheld his notion of the “Three Represents” (*sange daibiao*) when delivering the *Report* to the 16th Party Congress. He summarised the lesson from CCP history over the past thirteen years as that the Party must always “...represent the development trend of China’s advanced productive forces, the orientation of China’s advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people.”<sup>51</sup> Shortly after the Congress, the term, “Three Represents” was written into the Constitution of the CCP.

In addition to a stream of authoritative editorials and an ocean of lower-level comments from a variety of news outlets to boost the nationwide political campaign of studying the “Three Represents,” the *People’s Daily* released a series of articles complimenting and conveying the importance of the “Three Represents” for the future of the entire Party. For example, “The Three Represents is the crystallisation of the Party’s collective wisdom and a guiding ideology the Party must follow for a long time to come...The Three Represents is an operative guideline to create a new

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<sup>51</sup> “Full Text of Jiang Zemin’s Report at 16th Party Congress (1),” *People’s Daily*, November 18, 2002, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200211/18/print20021118\\_106983.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200211/18/print20021118_106983.html)>, accessed on November 23, 2002.

situation in building socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new century.”<sup>52</sup>

Additionally,

*“The Party delegates are unanimous in support of the ‘Three Represents’ when discussing the amendments of the constitution of the CCP. It is a common wish amongst the Party members and the majority of ordinary people to write the ‘Three Represents’ into the Constitution of the CCP.”*<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, the *People’s Daily* and *Xinhua News Agency* emphasised the great changes in society by stressing that China’s social structure after more than two decades of policy of reform and opening-up is no longer composed simply of workers, farmers and intellectuals; the original social strata are disintegrating and new classes are taking shape and becoming stronger.<sup>54</sup>

Amongst the 2,114 party delegates in the Grand Hall of the People in Beijing, Xi Pei and Qiu Jibao were amongst the first handful of entrepreneurs from the private sector to be officially sanctioned to attend the Party congress in the CCP’s history. As a matter of fact, they enjoyed high-profile attention after the political leaders from all sorts of media, both national and international. In this respect, the Party’s goal in inviting such prominent capitalists to its premier political event was to highlight a

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<sup>52</sup> “Ba ‘Sange Daibiao’ Zhongyao Sixiang Queli wei Dang de Zhidao Sixiang” (Establish firmly the important thoughts of the ‘Three Represents’ as a guiding ideology that the Party must follow), *People’s Daily*, November 11, 2002, p. 1, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/7697/734952.html>>, accessed on November 11, 2002.

<sup>53</sup> “Ba Quanmian Guanche ‘Sange Daibiao’ Zhongyao Sixiang Xieru Dangzhang Shi Guangda Danyuan de Xinyuan he Yiwan Renmin de Xinsheng” (To write the ‘Three Represents’ into the Constitution of the CCP is a common wish amongst the Party members and the majority of ordinary people), *People’s Daily*, November 11, 2002, p. 1, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/7697/734953.html>>, accessed on November 11, 2002.

<sup>54</sup> “CAS Marks off Ten Social Strata in Chinese Society,” *People’s Daily*, December 17, 2001, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200112/17/eng20011217\\_86852.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200112/17/eng20011217_86852.shtml)>, accessed on January 25, 2002; “Zhengque Renshi Woguo Xinde Shehui Jieceng” (Understanding the New Social Strata in the People’s Republic of China Correctly), *Xinhua News Agency*, February 23, 2003, available online at <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2--3-02/23/content\\_741036.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2--3-02/23/content_741036.htm)>.

significant stage in China's transformation from impoverished icon of collectivised farming and inefficient state industry to the world's dynamic market economy.<sup>55</sup> Jiang did not, however, advocate opening the party's doors wholly to the private sector. Instead, he stressed that those from other social strata including private entrepreneurs who were considered for admission must first undergo a long period of testing. It is argued that Jiang did not want to offend conservatives who believe that accepting businesspeople into the Party's ranks will undermine it.<sup>56</sup>

The "Three Represents" has especially promoted far-reaching political campaigns in the CCP organisations before and after the Party Congress,<sup>57</sup> nationally, provincially and locally. Following a politically correct boosting of the "Three Represents," the *Qiangguo Luntan* also invited Li Juru, Vice-President of Central Party School, for instance, to take questions during the convention of the Party Congress. Several online messages questioned whether this unprecedented initiative of co-opting private entrepreneurs would seriously challenge the CCP's core support of the proletariat and impact the future of Party building and its reorientation. Especially critical Net users rejected the idea of incorporating capitalists into the CCP simply because the consequence would encourage private entrepreneurs to take advantage of this membership to re-exploit other people.

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accessed on March 7, 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Susan V. Lawrence, "Jiang Ensures Party Endures," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 165, No. 46, November 21, 2002, pp. 34-38.

<sup>56</sup> "Behind China's Closed Doors," *Economist*, Vol. 365, No. 8298, November 9, 2002, pp. 41-43.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, "Ba Sange Daibiao Zhongyao Sixiang Quli wei Dang de Zhidao Sixiang" (To establish firmly the important thought of the 'Three Represents' as the guiding ideology of the Party), *People's Daily*, November 11, 2002, p. 1, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/19/20021111/863176.html>>, accessed on November 12, 2002; "Buduan tuijin de sixiang lilun jianshe" (Constantly bring forth theoretical thought building), *People's Daily*, November 1, 2002, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/guandian/26/20021101/855783.html>>, accessed on November 3, 2002.

Typical questions were posed to the guest, such as: “Can we declare that these government officials are implementing the thought of the ‘Three Represents’ when they spend public funds to provide for their mistresses?” (“Fanfuhua,” 2002-11-10, 15:44:22)

Ans.: “Such extremely few officials are precisely the targets that we should endeavour to wipe out when implementing the important thought of the ‘Three Represents’” (“Yang Yiyong,” 2002-11-10, 15:48:24)

Re: “Corrupt officials are in small numbers at any time” (“Fayanruzuo,” 2002-11-10, 15:52:16)

Re: “Wherever ‘No Shitting and Urinating’ is written means that people are indeed doing so” [implying such situations do indeed exist] (“Zhejiangcaomin,” 2002-11-10, 15:53:20)

Re: “The number of people who have been disclosed is surely small, but what about those who haven’t been uncovered?” (“Genyuan,” 2002-11-10, 15:52:00)

Re: “No, it’s not in small quantities. Village governors in Guangdong province and elsewhere are doing it as well” (“Atuzai,” 2002-11-10, 15:50:14)

Many doubts were expressed about the proposal, raising questions such as “Can we say the Party is from now the paradise of capitalists?” (“Wuxiandidai,” 2002-11-06, 16:13:27) or reaffirming the tediously ideological question about whether the Party should represent all walks of life, or merely the working class (“Chuanchangshan erzhanzhehejiu weiyideren,” 2002-11-06, 15:55:06) Generally speaking, there were heated debates about the idea of incorporating private entrepreneurs into the CCP. On the one hand, some commented: “If capitalists are allowed to enter into the CCP, it means they can legitimately get wealthy by exploiting others and then become members of the Party.” “When Jiang Zemin vowed to protect all legitimate income even when it did not come from work, it is to safeguard the act of exploitation” [of capitalists], according to some Netizens. (“ongbeilaoxiang,” 2002-11-10, 16:44:15)

However, there are messages welcoming such ideas as long as the capitalists referred to are creating job opportunities and paying taxes. In their expressions, the idea of “exploitation” does not exist simply because they are creating fortunes for the whole people and country as well. Besides, it is a more sophisticated political means to control the bourgeoisie that some Internet users believe they cannot plainly judge individuals’ progressiveness or backwardness in political awareness.

#### **D. Political Reform**

The theme of “political reform” or even “Chinese democratisation” has drawn much attention from scholars and policy makers since the launch of economic reforms and opening up in the late 1970s, and particularly since the end of the Cold War. One of the critical questions for reform of China’s political system is the role for the Party and its relationship to other organisations like the business sector. Yet the Tiananmen Incident of June 1989 put a complete halt to whatever progress might have been made with regard to political reform.

Jiang reasserted in the *Report* to the 16th Party Congress that

*“...adhering to the ‘Four Cardinal Principles,’<sup>58</sup> we must go on steadily and surely with political restructuring, extend socialist democracy and improve the socialist legal system in order to build a socialist country under the rule of law and consolidate and develop the political situation characterised by democracy, solidarity, liveliness, stability and harmony.”<sup>59</sup>*

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<sup>58</sup> The Four Cardinal Principles—to keep to the socialist road and to uphold the people’s democratic dictatorship, leadership by the Communist Party of China, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought—are the foundation on which the CCP claimed to build the country.

<sup>59</sup> “Zhongguo gongchandang di shiliuci quanguodaibiao dahui zi jing kaimu” (16th CPC Party Congress opens in Beijing), *People’s Daily*, November 9, 2002, available online at

During the 16th Party Congress, official media like the *People's Daily* tended not to cover much about the issues like political reform that might provoke unnecessary discussions or unrealistic public expectations. Official media sources have instead stressed much about the Party construction or the rule of law, urging, for example, "To strengthen and improve Party building, we must hold high the great banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory, implement the important thought of the 'Three Represents' in a comprehensive way."<sup>60</sup> "Under the CCP leadership, we will move forward to building a country that is ruled by law, and to ensuring that the laws are observed and strictly enforced, and law-breakers are prosecuted."<sup>61</sup> And, "To establish a socialist political civilisation, it is imperative to enhance the government's ability to perform official duties according to the law."<sup>62</sup>

How do Internet users view the issue of the political reform? Is their stance consistent with that of officials?

Question to the guest: "What is the trend and tide in politics?" ("Dahuazhongyou," 2002-11-10, 15:51:39)

Ans.: "It is political democratisation—a great upgrading of political civilisation and continuous improvement of the political system. It is rather important to China." ("Lu Jianhua," 2002-11-10, 15:57:29) (Note: Lu Jianhua is a PhD of Sociology from the

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<<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/7684/733929.html>>, accessed on November 9, 2002.

<sup>60</sup> "Haobu Fangsong di Jiaqiang he Gaishan Dang de Lingdao, Quanmian Tuijin Dang de Jianshe Xinde Weida Gongcheng" (Spare no efforts to strengthen and improve the party's leadership and fully advance the greater new undertaking of party building), *People's Daily*, November 12, 2002, p. 1, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/7707/735655.html>>, accessed on November 12, 2002.

<sup>61</sup> "Yifa Zhiguo: Dang Lingdao Renmin Jianshe Shehui Zhuyi Fazhi Guojia" (To rule the country under the leadership of the party to build a socialist country under the rule of law), *People's Daily*, November 10, 2002, p. 6, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/7689/734362.html>>, accessed on November 10, 2002.

<sup>62</sup> "Jianshe 'Zeren Zhengfu'" (Develop a responsible government), *People's daily*, November 12, 2002, p. 6, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/7707/735635.html>>, accessed on November 12, 2002.

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Re: "According to Marxism, the economic base determines the superstructure. Is that correct?" ("Fayanruzuo," 2002-11-10, 16:01:22)

Re: "I strongly agree. But political democratisation is not merely democracy within the CCP, it should be expanded outside the CCP..." ("Genyuan," 2002-11-10, 16:00:22)

Re: "It is such a cliché. Why can't we see any significant progress made?" ("Aozhoudalongxia," 2002-11-10, 15:58:48)

Increasing opinions were expressed as to whether there are any new initiatives of political reform in the Report. Those messages were heatedly aired and debated on the Net, as these illustrations demonstrate in Appendix 3.

## **Section IV Discussions and Conclusions**

### **A. Discussions**

With limited formal channels of political participation, and a skewed as well as conservative news media environment, Chinese Internet users show enthusiasm to take part in online political debates. In a sense, they are fulfilling their political and social right of being a citizen, and in another sense, it is their wish to make their online opinions heard by government officials. Jin Mengyu, a media expert in Beijing, supports this, claiming,

*"The advantages of the Qiangguo Luntan are not merely its pioneering role in this field, but its unrivalled status of being mainstream media and staying close to the centre [of the hierarchy]. A very noticeable phenomenon is many Netizens' desire that what they say online should be heard."*<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Jin Mengyu, "Qiangguo Luntan: Toudi Wenlu?" (The Strong Country Forum: Throwing a Stone to Clear the Way?), *Zhongguo Xinwen Zhoukan*, No. 23, June 3, 2001, available online at <[http://www.chinanews.com.cn/xinwenzhoukan/2001-23-50/txt/\(6\)%201.html](http://www.chinanews.com.cn/xinwenzhoukan/2001-23-50/txt/(6)%201.html)>, accessed on April 12, 2003.

But how independent is the *Qiangguo Luntan*? When Jiang Yaping, head of the *People's Daily* online version, was asked whether online chat rooms should set agendas for public discussions, he acknowledged: "There is no doubt about that. We do not conceal our intention to set online agendas in directing opinions of online users since we are the media under the auspices of the Central Committee of the CCP. We ought to firmly reflect our own perspectives and will."<sup>64</sup> Fearing for cyber chaos and destabilising opinions opposed to the rule of the Communist regime, the officials of the *Qiangguo Luntan* skilfully set agendas for discussions during the proceedings of the 16th Party Congress by establishing a special forum within the *Qiangguo Luntan*, and most importantly, manoeuvring several guests who are basically in line with the government's stance to take questions from Netizens and to some extent propagate official viewpoints. Nevertheless, the reality found from my research for this project is that the posted messages and questions on the *Qiangguo Luntan* do exhibit a certain degree of autonomy, deviating from the authorities' deliberate agendas mirrored in the *People's Daily*, and relatively critical of the authorities, although it is believable that a large amount of harsher messages have been weeded out before they could appear on the forum. Observations of the author seem in accordance with the assertions of Wu Guoguang, the former top-aide and speech writer for the ex-Party general secretary Zhao Ziyang, that the old role of the *People's Daily* in shaping and restructuring Chinese public opinion is nowadays seemingly unsustainable.<sup>65</sup> Daniel C. Lynch has

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<sup>64</sup> Min Dahong, "Renmin Ribao Wangluban han Lianhe Zaobao Dianziban Zhubian Changshuo Dianzi Luntan," (Editor-in-Chief talks about the Discussion Forum: from the *People's Daily* and the *Lianhe Zaobao*), *Renminwang Qiangguo Shequ Luntan*, September 2, 1999, available online at <<http://bbs.people.com.cn/fuwu mtmt-1/002.html>>, accessed on April 12, 2003.

<sup>65</sup> Guoguang Wu, "Command Communication: The Politics of Editorial Formulation in the *People's*

also commented, "...[i]n today's setting of administrative fragmentation, property-rights reform, and technological advance, the *People's Daily* and *Xinhua* [News Agency] can only set the agenda for a very few politically active individuals."<sup>66</sup>

## B. Conclusions

As a result, this dissertation holds that the *Qiangguo Luntan* has begun a process of incrementally forming a critical cyberspace in Habermas's sense of "public sphere," although it is still in its "primitive" stage. The term "primitive" has a few implications. First of all, the form of online public debates and consultations is not very deliberative. Messages posted are to a large extent short in terms of word count and contents. They usually contain one or two lines of message, which are relatively far from being thoughtful consultations and debates. These are far too brief to be considered as serious contributions to debates, though they do reveal an active interest in politics. Such an online phenomenon does not emerge solely in the *Qiangguo Luntan*, but almost everywhere else in other chat rooms or BBS establishments in China. Moreover, messages are usually posted under assumed names. This does allow people to express views that may be more controversial, but at the same time it may also encourage the floatation of ideas that they do not themselves always fully believe in. All of this is sometimes dismissed as "*guan shui*" (literally "adding water" in Mandarin), an online sub-culture that is less reflexive and at times illogical in

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*Daily*," *The China Quarterly*, No. 137, March 1994, pp. 194-211.

<sup>66</sup> Daniel C. Lynch, *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, and "Thought Work" in Reformed China*, p. 161.

content.<sup>67</sup> Despite many critical and deliberate messages, which contradict official propaganda and contribute to further public consultations, without the more deliberative form of debates and discussions, it does not follow that there is currently a full-fledged public sphere in Chinese cyberspace.

Secondly, the quantity of posted messages on the special forum of the *Qiangguo Luntan* is relatively small. They totalled some hundred messages, a sharp contrast to that of the April 2001 U.S. Spy Plane Incident alone, when several thousands of messages were posted in a very short space of time. There may be at least two possible explanations for such differences: On the one hand, the Spy Plane Incident was such an unexpected international crisis between the US and China that the reactions of the Chinese authorities obviously lagged behind and were slow to tackle it. It thus left much leeway for the Netizens to get involved online and vent their sentiments in a short period of time. Unlike the Spy Plane Incident, the 16th Party Congress was a well-planned political event and great concerted efforts and precautions were made before and during the Congress on the forum to prevent any online anarchy. On the other hand, PRC textbooks and the official press, as Susan Shirk claims, have usually been “socialising people into a highly suspicious attitude towards governments in Japan, the U.S. and Taiwan,” as they are the “hot-button” issues of Chinese nationalism, and the rapidly growing popular press and Internet chat-rooms often take even harder lines.<sup>68</sup> The Spy Plane Incident thus apparently attracted much more

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<sup>67</sup> Xin Yizhou, “Qiangguo Luntan: Minjian de Shengyin, Xuanxiao de Jiangtan,” (The Strong Country Forum: Civil Voices, Clamorous Forum), *Chuanmei Guancha*, June 3, 2002, available online at <<http://bbs.people.com.cn/fuwu/mt/mt-1/012.html>>, accessed on April 12, 2003.

<sup>68</sup> Susan L. Shirk, *Chinese Nationalism and Policies Toward the United States, Japan and Taiwan*. Publication of The ASPEN Institute Policy Programs—U.S.-China Relations, March 29 —April 7, 2002, pp. 9-47, available online at <<http://www.aspeninst.org/congressional/pdfs/shirk.pdf>>, accessed on October 26, 2002; Minxin Pei, “Hearing the Voice of the People at Last: Chinese Gain An

attention from Netizens than the Party Congress. We may tentatively conclude from comparing the two cases that as long as a particular event, national or international, is anticipated by the authorities concerned, the political impact of the Internet is most likely diminished, because it has allowed enough time for the Chinese government to prepare for it, and for the online censorship to be alerted. The challenge will come from unanticipated crises. To some extent this corresponds with what James Mulvenon, Stuart Johnson and Nina Hachigian have argued, namely that in spite of Beijing's relatively successful countermeasures in tackling the political use of the Internet. In Hachigian's words,

*"...[t]he power shifts wrought by the Internet will surface clearly only during an economic or political crisis in a future China where the Internet is far more pervasive. At that time, the Internet will fuel discontent and could be the linchpin to a successful challenge to party rule."*<sup>69</sup>

Thirdly, the reason why the public sphere is still primitive is because the authorities have from time to time thwarted the medium to silence the opposition's opinions of the party and regime, which have been expressed on the Net. In fact, the Chinese authorities are notorious for heavy-handed measures to repress dissident use of the Internet,<sup>70</sup> resulting in slow but incremental development of the Internet for political use. Paradoxically this has also widened the divide between the regime and Internet

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Indirect Role in Shaping Policy," *Newsweek*, Vol. 137, No. 19, May 7, 2001, p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> Nina Hachigian, "China's Cyber-Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 2, March/April 2001, p. 118. See also Michael S. Chase and James C. Mulvenon, *You've Got Dissent! Chinese Dissident Use of the Internet and Beijing's Counter-Strategies* (Santa Monica, CA.: RAND, 2002).

<sup>70</sup> Several pieces of work have been written on the subject. See, for example, Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, "The Internet and State Control in Authoritarian Regimes: China, Cuba, and the Counterrevolution," *First Monday*, Vol. 6, No. 8, August 2001, available online at <[http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue6\\_8/kalathil/](http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue6_8/kalathil/)>, accessed on September 8, 2001; Jonathan Zittrain and Benjamin Edelman, "Internet Filtering in China," *IEEE Internet Computing*, Vol. 7, No. 2,

users because the latter have adopted the old technique of dissidents in authoritarian regimes by overtly praising the regime, whilst in practice meaning the opposite. To some extent this has strengthened the sense of e-community, because regular visitors to chat rooms know how to read the messages that they see. But this community is still in an inchoate form, since greater openness would provoke retribution.

Yet undeniably the *Qiangguo Luntan* has presented a more relaxed environment for public opinion than that of the *People's Daily*, otherwise it would not attract many Netizens to keep posting and viewing the messages in the forum. According to Caroline Straathof, a corporate executive of Sohu.com who worked for several years in the Internet industry in China, the people and the society in the country are to a great extent “under-communicated.” Therefore, “the Internet’s impact is bigger than in a country that already has 57 news channels in killing taboos and taking up issues that were not discussed previously.”<sup>71</sup>

It is impossible to find any information available showing how many viewers have read a particular message and how many messages have been deleted by the Web master for whatever reasons. This makes it more difficult to judge the impact of online public debates upon those Internet users who simply view particular messages without participating in the debates or the true picture of what the online debates would be without these constraints. In other words, we cannot assess the e-social capital, based upon the interactions of the virtual community in the forum that has been created. Further research through interviews or questionnaires may be required

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March/April 2003, pp. 70-77.

<sup>71</sup> Caroline Straathof, “New Media and Democracy: Case Studies—China,” *Are the New Media Good for Democracy?—Media Round Table Report* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2001), p. 23, available online at <[http://www.idea.int/2001\\_forum/media/mrt\\_papers/round\\_table\\_report.pdf](http://www.idea.int/2001_forum/media/mrt_papers/round_table_report.pdf)>, accessed on

to better understand the social bond of online community: social networks, norms and trust.<sup>72</sup> However, some speculative thoughts as to the general relationship between public sphere and *e*-social capital are that both concepts are usually interplayed in a closely positive relation, which implies that a full-fledged public sphere normally accompanies strong social capital. In China's case, the authorities may tolerate a relatively nascent online public space, but they are to be bound to step in and possibly stifle the online social capital if it is likely to be converted into social Web/networks in the physical world. In the meantime, it seems sensible to believe that the degree of government intervention varies from subject to subject. In other words, the level of government intervention may be assumed to be higher in political and dissent matters, but lower in economic and social affairs, and much lower in sports and entertainment, since Chinese leaders have long upheld the doctrine of Deng Xiaoping that "development is the fundamental principle," whilst the overriding belief is "stability above all else."

To summarise, this chapter has endeavoured to answer the primary research question: how and to what extent the Chinese Internet users act and respond on Internet discussion boards. We can see that whilst there is a primitive form of public space on the Chinese cyberspace, *e*-social capital is less apparent. By and large, the implication of the current formation and development of the public sphere and *e*-social capital in China make us cautiously optimistic about the prospect for the

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May 15, 2002.

<sup>72</sup> Some key questions of interview or questionnaire may be identified, such as: Do you feel you are belonging to the community of the *Qiangguo Luntan*? How often do you visit and/or post message in the *Qiangguo Luntan*? Do you usually reply message posted by whom you know of? If yes, how many online users people you know? Do you usually go online to meet other Netizens in the forum? Do you contact Netizens you meet after getting offline?

Internet's impact upon the political system in the PRC. As David T. Hill and Krishna Sen have warned from the experience of Indonesia, where the Internet did play a significant role as a catalyst for political change in 1998,

*"A flourishing public space underpinning a new democracy in Indonesia may emerge from the Web of political conversations on the net but only if there is a continued and conscious commitment from the participants to maintain an autonomy from the state and capital."*<sup>73</sup>

This chapter has contributed to the overall argument of the dissertation with a critical investigation into the "virtual" public debates in China. On the one hand, this section has demonstrated the actual lively public debates conducted in Chinese cyberspace. On the other hand, compared with the contingent events documented in Chapter 5, this Chapter has shown the nuanced difference of Internet-induced change in non-contingent (or well pre-planned) events. The implication of my findings confirms what has been argued that the Internet-induced (political) impact is greater in those incidents of crisis than those of well-planned events because the authorities may have more time and leeway to take necessary action to minimise the Internet's impact. In a word, the Internet has facilitated a qualitatively different impact here, as compared with the separate events that were described in Chapter 5. In the next chapter, this dissertation will continue to consider the public debates conducted over the Internet with another political event—10th NPC and CPPCC Congresses, which were well prepared long in advance. The exploration will aim to further confirm the validity of the findings in Chapter 6.

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<sup>73</sup> David T. Hill and Krishna Sen, "The Internet in Indonesia's New Democracy," in Peter Ferdinand

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(ed.), *The Internet, Democracy and Democratization*, pp. 119-136.

## Chapter 7 The Political Impact of the Internet upon Value Orientation (II): Case Study of the 10th National People's Congress and 10th CPPCC (March 2003)

### Section I Introduction

The National People's Congress (NPC) and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), dubbed the "two sessions" (*liang hui*), are probably the most significant political events after the National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Associated with China's leadership transition, the first session of the 10th NPC in March 2003 marked a distinctive change by ushering in an almost entirely new set of key government personnel, including a new President and Premier.<sup>1</sup> The session also elevated the theme of governmental organisation restructuring, and paved the way for the implementation of the goal to "...build a comparatively well-off society in an all-round way" set at the CCP's 16th National Congress in November 2002. The first session of the 10th NPC was thus convened to turn the guidelines of the 16th Party Congress into the will of the state through legal procedures.

The "two sessions" formed a preplanned ceremonial event that was state-oriented and manipulative in nature. Using the "two sessions" as a case study, this chapter argues that a nascent public space for "virtual" political participation, albeit with Chinese characteristics, can be found in online forums in China.

Even though China is far from being a democracy, the Internet may still have an impact. The use of Web sites to disseminate government information vertically and

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<sup>1</sup> For more discussion regarding the Chinese leadership transition and the 10th NPC, see H. Lyman Miller, "The 10th National People's Congress and China's Leadership Transition," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 7, Summer 2003, available online at <<http://www.chinaleadershipmonitor.org/20033/lm.pdf>>, accessed on August 25, 2003.

allow feedback from citizens is one possible example.<sup>2</sup> Yet another is horizontal communication between citizens on electronic bulletin boards and in discussion groups. This latter possibility is especially likely to be a significant factor in an authoritarian country. As Howard Rheingold argues, “The political significance of computer-mediated communication lies in its capacity to challenge the existing political hierarchy’s monopoly on power communications media, and perhaps thus revitalise citizen-based democracy.”<sup>3</sup> In this respect, bulletin board systems (BBS), chatrooms, Weblogs, Peer-to-Peer technologies, Short Message Service (SMS), and listservs may be utilised to exchange ideas, disseminate information, debate issues, mobilise opinion, and eventually build lasting sociopolitical bonds. Nonetheless, nondemocratic regimes have, to varying degrees, orchestrated concerted efforts to control the Internet—despite simultaneously expanding and promoting the diffusion of the new medium in the hope of reaping the potential economic benefits promised by the new technologies. Commentators like Geoffry Taubmann have raised the question of whether or not “built-in incompatibility” exists between nondemocratic rule and the Internet.<sup>4</sup>

The main argument in this chapter is that the discussion forums mediated by the

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<sup>2</sup> Vertical mode of communication between governments and citizens is not the main focus of this research paper. For more on the electronic government/governance in China and its interactions with citizens, see, for example, Junhua Zhang, “China’s ‘Government Online’ and Attempts to Gain Technical Legitimacy,” *ASIEN*, No. 80, July 2001, available online at <<http://web.syr.edu/~ztan/Gov2.pdf>>, accessed on November 18, 2001; Junhua Zhang, “Will the Government ‘Serve the People’: The Development of Chinese E-Government,” *New Media & Society*, Vol. 4, No. 2, June 2002, pp. 163-84; “*Jiefang ribao* anfang Shanghai zhengfu bumen wangzhan” (A secret investigatory survey of the Shanghai city government’s web site by journalists from the *Liberation Daily*), *People’s Daily*, July 7, 2003, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/14562/1955049.html>>, accessed on July 31, 2003; “Renmin shiping: ‘Wangshang zhengfu’ yinggai shenmoyang?” (*People’s Daily* commentary: What the “online government” should be?), *People’s Daily*, July 11, 2003, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/guandian/1033/1961999.html>>, accessed on July 31, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Surfing the Internet* (London: Minerva, 1994), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffry Taubmann, “A Not-So World Wide Web: The Internet, China, and the Challenges to Nondemocratic Rule,” *Political Communication*, Vol. 15, No. 2, March 1998, pp. 255-72.

Internet have actually supplied and sustained a virtual “public space”<sup>5</sup>—venues for discussions, consultations, and information dissemination of issues—that is in essence framed to a wider public. The questions guiding this research are the ways in which and to what extent Internet users in China interact on Internet discussion boards. Underlying the analysis are two crucial concepts—public opinion and “virtual” political participation—that define the realm wherein political initiatives from below may grow and the political impact of the Internet may be visible. Empirical evidence from the 10th NPC and the 10th CPPCC in March 2003 forms the base of this investigative case study.

The body of this chapter is devoted to an analysis of the online discussions that appeared on *Qiangguo Luntan* (Strong Country Forum) around the time of the first session of the 10th NPC and 10th CPPCC. This data set is contrasted with the coverage appearing in the Party’s mouthpiece, the *People’s Daily*. There are two essential grounds for such a comparison. First, messages posted on the discussion board can be assumed to be closer to expressions of spontaneous individual opinion—ideas which stand in sharp contrast to the reader or audience views appearing in most Chinese mass media, which are effectively edited and manipulated to fall in line with the editorial policy of state- or party-controlled press organs.<sup>6</sup> Second, *Qiangguo Luntan* has been widely acknowledged as the most popular and

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<sup>5</sup> Any sort of communication (including political communication) requires at least two essential elements: one is the “public” and the other is the “public place.” Drucker and Gumpert have argued that the public place is the catalyst for expression in the public forum, and is also the backstage area for unstructured and informal social gatherings. See Susan J. Drucker and Gary Gumpert, “Freedom and Liability in Cyberspace: Media, Metaphors, Paths of Regulation,” in Susan J. Drucker and Gary Gumpert (eds.), *Real Law@Virtual Space: Communication Regulation in Cyberspace*, (Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 1999), p. 80.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel C. Lynch argues that one of the most significant developments in Chinese “thought work” since the 14th Party Congress in 1992 is the combination of mass media and telecommunications in the form of numerous radio and television hotlines—*jiaodian fangtan* (focus) programmes, where listeners with access to a telephone can ask questions and offer opinions. See Daniel C. Lynch, *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, and “Thought Work” in Reformed China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 101.

influential Chinese-language online discussion forum sponsored by news media in mainland China. The forum's popularity among Internet users has boosted "virtual" civic engagement to a level much higher than that by any other traditional media. The analysis of online discourses will centre on four separate, yet interrelated categories of issues: (a) "*san-nong*", i.e. "*nongye*" (agriculture), "*nongcun*" (village), and "*nongmin*" (farmers); (b) employment and social security; (c) the role and reform of the NPC and the CPPCC; and (d) the rule of law. Exploration of these discourses should illuminate the impact that these discussions have had on China's politics in general, and public opinion and political participation in particular.

## Section II The Internet, Public Discourse, and Value Orientations

Over the past two decades, political communication has comprehensively been transformed by global processes of liberalisation and deregulation as well as by the diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICTs).<sup>7</sup> The forces of media commercialisation and conglomeration have also given rise to a series of general tendencies at the level of national politics—altering the ways in which political actors attempt to communicate with one another.<sup>8</sup> Manuel Castells in fact argues that all politics now subsist within the frame of electronic media.<sup>9</sup>

The increasing online dynamics of public discourse have been argued to have a positive part to play in facilitating and reinforcing "virtual" political participation and

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, James Stanyer, "Political Communication in Transition: Conceptualizing Change and Understanding its Consequences," *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 18, No. 3, September 2003, pp. 385-94.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Junhao Hong and Yu-Chiung Hsu, "Asian NIC's Broadcast Media in the Era of Globalization: The Trend of Commercialization and its Impact, Implications, and Limits," *Gazette*, Vol. 61, No. 3/4, July 1999, pp. 225-242; John Street, *Mass Media, Politics, and Democracy* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), chap. 6; Terhi Rantanen, *The Global and the National: Media and Communications in Post-communist Russia* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Nancy Morris and Silvio Waisbord, eds., *Media and Globalization: Why the State Matters* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp.

civic engagement in cyberspace, as the Western literature has suggested.<sup>10</sup> Apart from other sociocultural impacts, these shifts have implications for other aspects of political life: in the nature of popular support, and in the basis of legitimacy, the party politics and systems.

In short, the prior research has suggested that cyberspace is indeed changing the Chinese people not only in terms of the socioeconomic physics of human life, but also in terms of the political physics as well. This effect has been achieved by broadening the size, volume, and power of online political participation. Yet without base-line measures of online activity, we are unable to assess the impact of the Internet in any systematic way, being unable to compare the impact of Internet discussion forums with those in traditional media outlets. This chapter will therefore present the online discourses—the “*san-nong*” issue, employment and social security, the NPC and CPPCC, and the rule of law—that were conducted on *Qiangguo Luntan* during the time that the two sessions took place in March 2003 in order to highlight the theme of public discourse and “virtual” political participation mediated on the Internet in transitional China.

### Section III Tenth NPC and CPPCC: Contrasting *Qiangguo Luntan* with the *People's Daily*

#### A. The “San-Nong” Issue

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391-392.

<sup>10</sup> There is much literature arguing that the Internet has a positive effect in shaping the public sphere in general terms. See, for example: Lincoln Dahlberg, “The Internet and Democratic Discourse: Exploring the Prospects of Online Deliberative Forums Extending the Public Sphere,” *Information, Communication & Society*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2001, pp. 615-633; Mark Poster, “Cyberdemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere,” in David Porter (ed.), *Internet Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 201-217; Douglas Kellner, “Intellectuals, the New Public Spheres, and Techno-politics,” in Toulouse and Luke, *The Politics of Cyberspace*, 167-186; Lincoln Dahlberg, “Computer-Mediated Communication and the Public Sphere: A Critical Analysis,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 7, No. 1, October 2001, available online at <<http://www.ascuse.org/jcmcl/>

Since the CCP's 16th Congress in late 2002 put forward the twenty-year objective of building a comparatively well-off society, where improving the livelihood or income of farmers and other related rural agricultural issues have become particularly salient on the national development agenda. This issue has been more prominent since China's entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in late 2001. Whereas a majority of urban residents have prospered under more than two decades of reform and opening up, farmers' incomes have stagnated for years, thereby further widening the income gap between rural and urban areas. Bernstein and Lu have warned that rural unrest has been rising as peasants rebel against paying increasing fees and taxes charged by local authorities.<sup>11</sup> Economic disadvantages aside, the rural areas have also been left behind in such sectors as infrastructure, education, medical care, and social welfare—thereby keeping the impoverished from enjoying the benefits of China's growing prosperity.

Former Premier Zhu Rongji conceded that, despite his pledge to transform the condition of China's peasantry when he took office in March 1998, farmers still faced glutted grain markets, sliding prices, slow or even negative income growth, and a heavy tax burden. In delivering his *Report on Government Work* to the first session of the 10th NPC, Zhu emphasised the significance of agriculture and the rural economy for the communist regime's survival. In this report, he reiterated that “developing agriculture and the rural economy and increasing farmers' income should be the top priority in the new government's economic work, and that the government should conscientiously implement all policies and measures designed to lighten the burden on farmers.”<sup>12</sup> Acknowledgments of Zhu's assertions were echoed in the mainstream

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vol7/issue1/dahlberg.html>, accessed on December 11, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas P. Bernstein and Xiaobo Lu, “Taxation without Representation: Peasants, the Central and Local States in Reform China,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 163, September 2000, pp. 742-763.

<sup>12</sup> Zhu Rongji, “Zhengfu gongzuo baogao” (Report on government work), March 5, 2003; full text was

media like the *People's Daily* by the new Premier Wen Jiabao who states that "...the comparatively sluggish development of agriculture and the slow increase of farmers' income have emerged as a major problem facing his new cabinet."<sup>13</sup> The concerns of Zhu and Wen are reflected in the government's proposed budget for 2003, which promises—despite the problem of an increasing deficit—to finance the country's ongoing rural development, agricultural restructuring, and social security projects.<sup>14</sup>

Coupled with the deepening market economy and the concentration of the economic boom in the eastern coastal regions, the Chinese government has obviously perceived the severity of the developmental imbalance represented by the "*san-nong*" issue: agriculture is not a top priority sector in the national development; the majority of government funding is pouring into the industrial and IT sectors. Addressing the consequences and determined to improve the living standards for farmers, the authorities set the issue of "*san-nong*" as one of the most pressing agenda items of the government's work for the next five years. Official media like the *People's Daily* cover a series of reports both from Government officials and delegates' opinions. The Minister of Agriculture Du Qinglin, for example, promised that "China will carry out a series of reforms to streamline government agencies in rural areas, as part of the nationwide effort to alleviate farmers' economic burden."<sup>15</sup> And, "The most significant and difficult part of building a well-off society in an all-round way hinges

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released by the *Xinhua News Agency* on March 19, 2003, and is available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/16/20030319/947375.html>>, accessed on March 22, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> "Wen Jiabao zongli da Zhongwai jizhe wen" (Premier Wen Jiabao answering questions from domestic and foreign journalists), *People's Daily*, March 19, 2003, p. 1, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8738/816649.html>>, accessed on March 20, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Xiang Huaicheng, "Guanyu 2002 nian zhongyang han difang yusuan zhixing qingkuang ji 2003 nian zhongyang han difang yusuan caoan de baogao" (Report on the implementation of the central and local budgets for 2002 and on the draft of the central and local budgets for 2003); full text was released by the *Xinhua News Agency* on March 20, 2003, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/19/20030320/948375.html>>, accessed on March 22, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> "Nongye he Nongcun Jingji Xingshi Shixian le Lishixing Zhuanbian" (Agriculture and the situations of the rural economy have undergone historical transformations), *People's Daily*, March 11, 2003, p. 4, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8668/811778.html>>.

on the issue of 'san-nong.' We shall do our utmost to resolve the problem and as a result increase farmers' income."<sup>16</sup> Some delegates have also expressed serious concerns about the issue, commenting "Do not let farmers down. There should be a comprehensive social security for farmers. Implement tax reform to alleviate farmers' burden."<sup>17</sup>

There were enthusiastic discussions over the issue on *Qiangguo Luntan* both during and after the proceedings, with opinions expressed on how the issue should be tackled from the perspectives of "Netizens." Several examples of this discussion over the Internet are illustrated in Appendix 4.

The statements listed in Appendix 4 demonstrate a simple but profound political message: a growing number of people are getting involved in online public debates. This "virtual" political participation could potentially foster a more positive regard amongst Chinese citizens for political processes and democratic practices. The number of Internet users in China is currently around 80 million,<sup>18</sup> the world's second largest Internet population second only to the United States. If the figure is credible, 80 million users are still a minority of 6 per cent of the total population of 1.3 billion. The majority of Chinese are either computer-illiterate or financially unable to gain access to the networked world. It is thus significant that farmers have little say in online debates on related farm issues. Since employment and social security are largely related to the "san-nong" issue, many other Internet users have also exhibited

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accessed on March 11, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> "Hu Jintao, Zeng Qinghong, Huang Ju, Wu Guanzheng, Li Zhangchun Fenbie Canjia Daibiaotuan Shenyi" (Hu Jintao, Zeng Qinghong, Huang Ju, Wu Guanzheng, Li Zhangchun joined in panel discussions), *People's Daily*, March 9, 2003, p. 1, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8652/810506.html>>, accessed on March 9, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> "Sannong Wenti Zui Guanqing" (The Sannong issue is the most concerned), *People's Daily*, March 9, 2003, p. 5, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8652/810468.html>>, accessed on March 9, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> See China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), *Semiannual Survey Report on the Development of China's Internet* (January 2004), available online at <<http://www.cnnic.net.cn/download/manual/statisticalreport13th.pdf>>, accessed on February 17, 2004.

concern over reform of state-owned enterprises and the country's entry into the WTO.

## B. Employment and Social Security

Economic reform has fundamentally transformed labour and employment relations in communist China and rendered the traditional social security system (which was based on the work unit [*danwei*]) increasingly both inadequate and inefficient in the age of a capitalist market economy. The “iron rice bowl” (*tie fanwan*) policy—lifelong employment and a self-sufficient welfare system within each work unit—created by the centrally planned economy of Mao's reign has been dramatically eroded by the introduction and strengthening of market-oriented economic reforms since the 1980s.<sup>19</sup> The phenomenal economic success of the past two decades has also been accompanied by a wide array of challenges not only to the social security system itself, but also to the communist sociopolitical structure as well. Chinese scholar Hu Angang, for example, has remarked that

*“China is faced with a war of employment. The serious problem of layoffs and unemployment has produced tremendous influence in China's economy, society, politics, and every other aspect of life and has become the most severe challenge to China's development in the first ten years of the new century.”<sup>20</sup>*

Michel Bonnin has argued that the main source of instability in China today is the employment situation of the urban employees and workers.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the record-high

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example: Joe C.B. Leung, “Social Security Reforms in China: Issues and Prospects,” *International Journal of Social Welfare*, Vol. 12, No. 2, April 2003, pp. 73-85; Peter Whiteford, “From Enterprise Protection to Social Protection: Pension Reform in China,” *Global Social Policy*, Vol. 3, No. 1, April 2003, pp. 45-77; Sarah Cook, “From Rice Bowl to Safety Net: Insecurity and Social Protection during China's Transition,” *Development Policy Review*, Vol. 20, No. 5, November 2002, pp. 615-635; Peter Saunders and Xiaoyuan Shang, “Social Security Reform in China's Transition to a Market Economy,” *Social Policy and Administration*, Vol. 35, No. 3, July 2001, pp. 274-289.

<sup>20</sup> “Zhuanjia huizhen Zhongguo jingji wuda nanti” (Experts for group consultations on five major Chinese economic problems), *Guoji jinrong bao* (International Financial Daily), June 28, 2002, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Michel Bonnin, “Perspectives on Social Stability after the Fifteenth Congress,” in Hung-mao Tien and Yun-han Chu (eds.), *China Under Jiang Zemin* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2000), p.

urban unemployment<sup>22</sup> and the soaring income gap between China's relatively prosperous coastal regions and its poorer countryside (where about 70 per cent of China's population of 1.3 billion live) show the urgent need for improvements in employment and social security.

Despite the record-high urban unemployment and the soaring income gap between the coastal and inland regions, however, the official accounts conveyed by the media seem to suggest that the government is complacent over its "success" in managing these problems. On the whole, official media like the *People's Daily* tend to glorify past and present achievements, rather than thoroughly review and debate contemporary issues facing the country. The Minister of Labour and Social Security, Zhang Zuoji, for example, commented in the *People's Daily* that "China has made considerable progress in improving its social security system, has basically developed a market-oriented employment mechanism, and has established a framework of social security."<sup>23</sup> Other key officials have likewise boasted that spending in the past five years on social welfare has increased nine-fold, while agriculture and education expenditure has doubled. The central government has also announced an initiative to better manage the country's national welfare fund by tackling the huge pension shortfall—developing the rural backwaters and ensuring there is support for state pensioners and the jobless.<sup>24</sup>

There are voices calling for further development of the social security net. The

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<sup>22</sup> The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' annual report on social trends noted that in the coming years China's unemployment rate could surge above 15 percent, compared with an official figure of 3.6 percent in urban areas now, though unofficial estimates put the figure around 8-20 percent. See "A Survey of China—Urban Discontent," *The Economist*, June 15, 2002, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> "Zhang Zuoji, Yang Yanyin jiu jiuye han shehui baozhang, zuidi shenghuo baozhang deng huida jizhe wen" (Zhang Zuoji and Yang Yanyin answering questions on employment, social security, and minimum social insurance), *People's Daily*, March 13, 2003, p. 4, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8688/813340.html>>, accessed on March 13, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Xiang Huaicheng, "Guanyu 2002 nian zhongyang han difang yusuan zhixing qingkuang ji 2003 nian zhongyang han difang yusuan caoan de baogao" (Report on the implementation of the central and

*People's Daily* also covered comments from senior Party cadres and government officials in relation to this issue. Luo Gan, for example, stressed that "The government will further establish and improve a social security system, and develop social relief and welfare programmes for the impoverished in urban and rural areas."<sup>25</sup> Some delegates suggested, "The authorities need to strengthen the re-employment programmes for those laid-off women and to initiate relevant regulations to improve the worsening unemployment."<sup>26</sup>

The Budget Report may indeed signal an important shift in economic policy that places less emphasis on ratcheting up fixed-asset investment and instead boosts allocations for the rural and urban poor.<sup>27</sup> Note that Premier Zhu issued a stern warning during the 10th NPC session that the poverty and frustrations of some 800 million rural dispossessed residents could threaten both the country's economic future and the foundations of CCP rule.<sup>28</sup>

The statements listed in Appendix 5 show that China's Internet users are demonstrating their cares via cyber participation and conducting public debates over public policy. These Netizens make suggestions as to the serious problems of unemployment and social security net by either confronting the official agenda or debating what the media coverage has accidentally or deliberately left out.

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local budgets for 2002 and on the draft of the central and local budgets for 2003)

<sup>25</sup> "Fazhan Shehui Fuli he Shehui Baozhang Shiye, wei Teshu Shehui Qunti he Kunnan Qunzhong Paiyou Jienan" (Establishing the social welfare and insurance business for those special groups and the needy), *People's Daily*, March 8, 2003, p. 4, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8647/810144.html>>, accessed on March 8, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> "Jianyi Baozhang Funu Jiuye" (A proposal to suggest to guarantee the employment for women), *People's Daily*, March 10, 2003, p. 6, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8660/811177.html>>, accessed on March 10, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> James Kynge, "Beijing Budget Shifts Emphasis to Help the Poor," *Financial Times*, March 7, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Zhu's concern over the social security system in the rural areas is echoed by Chen Xiwen, deputy director of the Development Research Center of the State Council, who stated that for the time being the country's social security system is not able to cover the total rural population of 800 million. See "Nongye han nongcun jingji xingshi shixian le lishixing zhuanbian" (The situation in agriculture and

Reading between the lines of these discussions, one can see that a covert anti-government sentiment exists among contributors. Their opinions are usually challenging the government's agenda and sending an important message: that the mass media and the state mechanism have failed to address issues that the public is genuinely concerned about. It is reasonable to assume that numerous "reactionary" and "unhealthy" opinions have been stifled for fear of provoking further social frustration and disillusionment over the so-called "market socialism."<sup>29</sup> Some Netizens have realised that the role of the NPC and CPPCC needs to be strengthened in order to better tackle pressing issues of the day.

### **C. The Role and Reform of the NPC and CPPCC**

In theory, the NPC is the highest legislative institution through which the Chinese people exercise their state power; the CPPCC is China's top advisory body, which is comprised of delegates from the CCP, various "democratic" parties, nongovernmental organisations, ethnic groups, and other social strata. The people's political consultative conferences at all levels are supposed to be dedicated to political consultation, democratic supervision, and participation in as well as discussion of major political issues. The preface of the PRC Constitution (1982), however, pledges the NPC's adherence to the principle of CCP leadership. In this respect, the hierarchical leadership led by the CCP has long resulted in a lesser degree of NPC autonomy in the overseeing of government policy than is prescribed by the Constitution.

During the 10th NPC session, Chairman Li Peng of the 9th NPC Standing

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the rural economy have undergone historic changes), *People's Daily*, March 11, 2003, p. 4, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8668/811778.html>>, accessed on March 13, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Reporters Without Borders, *China: Living Dangerously on the Net—Censorship and Surveillance of Internet Forums*, May 12, 2003, available online at <[http://www.rsf.org/print.php3?id\\_article=6793](http://www.rsf.org/print.php3?id_article=6793)>.

Committee urged people's congresses at all levels to attach equal importance to the supervisory and legislative roles: the supervisory role should be standardised and codified, and power must be subjected to oversight in order to avoid corruption.<sup>30</sup> In the meantime, he stressed the political leadership of the CCP over the NPC, stating that:

*"We should translate the CCP's guidelines into the will of the state through legal procedures, and take concrete steps to better integrate the upholding of CCP leadership with the efforts to make the people the true masters of the country and to govern the country according to law."*<sup>31</sup>

And, "The People's Congress should voluntarily adhere to the leadership of the CCP, perform its functions according to law and contribute to the development of socialist democracy and political civilisation in China."<sup>32</sup>

In a similar tone, the new chairman of the 10th CPPCC National Committee, Jia Qinglin, repeatedly noted that

*"...the 10th CPPCC National Committee will follow the direction of Deng Xiaoping theory and the important ideas of the 'Three Represents', carry out the spirit of the CCP's 16th National Congress, concentrate on the two major themes of unity and democracy, and give full play to its role in political consultation, democratic supervision, and participation in the deliberation and administration of state affairs."*<sup>33</sup>

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accessed on May 14, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> "Li Peng: Jinyibu shixian renda jiandu gongzuo guifanhua faluhua" (Li Peng: Further implementing the supervisory role of the NPC deputies in a standardized and codified fashion), *People's Daily*, March 13, 2003, p. 1, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/252/10307/10314/20030313/942496.html>>, accessed on March 13, 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Li Peng, "Quanguo renmin daibiao dahui changwu weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao" (Report on the work of the 9th NPC Standing Committee), *People's Daily*, March 10, 2003, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/16/20030321/949488.html>>, accessed on March 22, 2003.

<sup>32</sup> "Renda Yaowei Jianshe Shehui Zhuyi Zhengzhi Wenming Zuochu Gongxian" (The People's Congress should contribute to the development of a socialist political civilisation), *People's Daily*, March 11, 2004, p. 4, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8668/811784.html>>, accessed on March 11, 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Jia Qinglin, "Zai Quanguo zhengxie shijie yici huiyi bimuhui shang de jianghua" (Talk at the closing meeting of the 1st session of the 10th CPPCC), *People's Daily*, March 15, 2003, p. 1, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8705/814533.html>>, accessed on March 15, 2003.

Most importantly,

*“The People’s Congress system best suits and accords with the Chinese national conditions and characteristics, and thus it cannot be abolished. We have to stick unswervingly to this political system because it will guarantee the common people their fundamental interests, as well as ensure China’s prosperity and longevity.”*<sup>34</sup>

Premier Wen declared that China would proceed with “political restructuring” (other than “political reform”) in three aspects: decision-making, law-based administration, and democratic supervision. Specifically, China would draw opinions from officials, experts, and civilians for major issues and economic construction projects in order to forge a scientific and democratic decision-making system; a law-based administration would be implemented. Meanwhile, China would also push forward democratic supervision, with the government being supervised by the NPC and CPPCC, the common people, and the media.<sup>35</sup> Wen also underscored the role that the CCP would and ought to play in the face of arduous societal modernisation by saying “...the only way out is to give scope to all positive factors and rely on the joint efforts of the people throughout the country under the leadership of the CCP.”<sup>36</sup> In general, the *People’s Daily* has played a central role in propagating the achievements of the NPC and CPPCC over the past five years. This newspaper has highlighted the quantities of laws enacted, especially those that usher in openness and competition; the property rights law, the venture capital investment law, the state-owned assets law, and the corporate bankruptcy law.

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<sup>34</sup> “Bixu Jianchi de Genben Zhidu” (The People’s Congress system is such a fundamental system that should be adhered to), *People’s Daily*, March 13, 2003, p. 5, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8688/813333.html>>, accessed on March 13, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> “Wen Jiabao zongli da Zhongwai jizhe wen” (Premier Wen Jiabao answering questions from domestic and foreign journalists), *People’s Daily*, March 19, 2003, p. 1

<sup>36</sup> “Chinese Vice Premier Underlines Democratic Decision Mechanism,” *Xinhua News Agency*, March 5, 2003, available online at <<http://www.10thnpc.org.cn/english/features/57347.htm>>, accessed on March 7, 2003.

On the other hand, there were several messages posted on *Qiangguo Luntan* that expressed deep concern about the reform of the NPC and CPPCC. A message posted by one citizen, “*Bimu yangshou diandianshui*”, for example, proposed that the numbers of deputies ought to be reduced significantly and full-time professional deputies initiated, whilst thoroughly interactive debates should take place in lieu of the current symbolic annual sessions (3/5/2003, 11:26:29). Such contentions were affirmed by other contributors such as “*Xiaoxiao gongmin*” (3/6/2003, 13:37:03) and “*Chang siliang*” (3/6/2003, 13:03:05) who further stimulated debates about the role and restructuring of the future “two sessions.” One participant wrote: “It needs to be ensured that the deputies are really elected by the people. Their representation has to reflect the will of people; otherwise, they could be merely nicknamed a ‘rubber stamp’ and a veteran club comprised of retired Party and government officials” (Zhenyan wuji 01, 3/5/2003, 23:05:34). Many more opinions were expressed on this issue in Appendix 6.

Apart from making suggestions on the reform of the NPC and CPPCC, the online debates demonstrated scepticism towards the government’s determination and ability to restructure the two government-affiliated organs. Some of the online messages have expressed their views on one of the most sensitive issues: Is China to be ruled by “the CCP” and a handful of top-ranking cadres or to be ruled by “law”?

#### **D. The Rule of Law**

While the legal system was effectively at ground zero prior to the reform and opening up in the late 1970s, the Chinese government has come to realise that, as the country opens up more to the outside world, there is a pressing need to introduce legislation to ensure foreign investors a stable and lawful investment environment. The Chinese

legal system needs to be more in line with international practice. This process has been accelerating since China entered the WTO in late 2001. Jiang Enzhu, spokesman for the 10th NPC, confirmed that the NPC would give priority to meeting the needs of the market economy, social progress, and the challenges of WTO membership during its five-year term between 2003 and 2008.<sup>37</sup> Tony Saich argued that the legal system in China is

*"...simply one specific cog in a bureaucratic machine that is built to achieve state objectives. It enjoys parity with other bureaucratic entities. This kind of system means that enforcement is variable depending on the power of the administrative agencies concerned."*<sup>38</sup>

The weakness of China's legal system has to a large extent enabled rampant corruption and serious abuses of power to permeate the country, breeding resentment and frustration amongst the populace because there are virtually no conduits for them to voice or redress grievances and effectively defend people against predation. Scholars, both at home and abroad, have suggested remedies. Liberal Western scholars such as Larry Diamond hold that "China urgently needs political reform primarily because a rule of law, with an independent judiciary and other autonomous institutions of horizontal accountability, is vital."<sup>39</sup> Chinese scholar Wei Pan advocates an alternative, "consultative rule of law regime," which is a rule of law regime supplemented by democracy rather than a democracy supplemented by the rule of law.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> "China to Establish Comprehensive Legal System by 2010," *People's Daily*, March 17, 2003, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200303/17/eng20030317\\_113397.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200303/17/eng20030317_113397.shtml)>, accessed on March 18, 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Tony Saich, *Governance and Politics of China* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 123-124.

<sup>39</sup> Larry Diamond, "The Rule of Law as Transition to Democracy in China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 12, No. 35, May 2003, pp. 319-331.

<sup>40</sup> Wei Pan, "Toward a Consultative Rule of Law Regime in China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, No. 34, February 2003, pp. 3-43.

The media reports during the Two Sessions have largely praised achievements made in legalisation over the past five years. The *Remin Ribao*, for example, commented “The socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics has basically completed for the past five years.”<sup>41</sup> Yet, there are suggestions to improve the socialist legal system, i.e., “strengthening legalisation and improving the Chinese legal system; raising the level of law enforcement by administrative authorities and cultivating a law-abiding citizenry.”<sup>42</sup>

In the realm of Internet-mediated public discourse, a diversified spectrum of opinions—from radical proposals of change, through a moderate pragmatic approach, to a more conservative inclination—regarding the rule of law has been posted. For instance, one Internet user posted a message favouring democratic supervision under the leadership of the Communist Party because he thought the CPP could safeguard the people’s constitutional rights.<sup>43</sup> This posting attracted several hundred viewings<sup>44</sup>—which is a rare phenomenon on the discussion forum—and further provoked heated debates over the relationship between the CCP, the rule of law, and democracy. Samples of such messages are listed in Appendix 7.

Some Internet users have pointed out that the administrative, legislative, and judiciary organs of the state must be linked to media investigation and public scrutiny. Otherwise, China will not be able to rein in such problems as rapidly mounting corruption, rising crime, inequality, arbitrary abuse of power, and declining appeal of

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<sup>41</sup> “Yifa Zhiguo Dian Jishi—Jiujie Quanguo Renda Wunian Gongzuo Huigu” (Laying the foundation for the rule of law—the review of legalisation over the past five year under the 9th NPC), *People’s Daily*, March 5, 2003, p. 5, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8614/807762.html>>, accessed on March 5, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> “Shuli Fazhi de Quanwei” (Consolidating the authority of legal system), *People’s Daily*, March 14, 2003, p. 5, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8698/813965.html>>, accessed on March 14, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Qing Yuan, “Dang lingdao xia de minzhu jiandu zhidu keyi baozhang renmin de hefa quanli” (A democratic supervisory system under the leadership of the party can safeguard the people’s legitimate rights), posted in the “*Qiangguo Luntan*” at 13:42:57, March 6, 2003.

<sup>44</sup> On electronic bulletin boards, participants may choose not to post a responding message but may

ruling legitimacy—nor will China be able to deliver better, fairer, and more transparent and effective governance. (See Appendix 8)

In contrast to the range of public opinion expressed on the Internet, the official *People's Daily* has exhibited only an overwhelmingly positive image of the two sessions and promoted politically correct information highlighting the achievements in legislative work. The government work report, for example, concluded that

*"...the government has intensified administrative supervision, auditing, and economic supervision—contributing significantly to promoting the exercise of administrative powers according to law, fighting corruption, building a clean government, and uncovering major economic cases. All the measures adopted for the comprehensive improvement of law and order has been put in place, resulting in a turn for the better in law and order and thus making the people feel more secure."*<sup>45</sup>

In addition, Li Peng promised that there would be greater openness and transparency in legislative work and that the people should be involved in the enactment of laws; this would be accomplished in part by soliciting public opinion, conducting surveys, and holding hearings on legislative matters. Note, however, that Li added that the work of the NPC must adhere to the leadership of the Communist Party.<sup>46</sup>

## **Section IV Discussions and Conclusions**

### **A. Discussions**

With limited formal channels of political participation and a government-directed news environment that discouraged openness, people in pre-reform China felt that the general environment did not allow them to speak freely, particularly on public

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instead simply observe a specific topic or issue.

<sup>45</sup> Zhu Rongji, "Zhengfu gongzuo baogao" (Report on government work), March 5, 2003.

<sup>46</sup> "Renda gongzuo yaozai dang de lingdao xia buduan kaituo chuangxin" (Constantly expanding and innovating the work of the people's congress under the leadership of the party), *People's Daily*, March 12, 2003, p. 1, available online at <<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/8678/812626.html>>.

occasions. After a quarter of a century of dramatic economic change in their lives, however, more and more Chinese Internet users are now beginning to enthusiastically take part in online political debates and consultations. This kind of political participation is obviously facilitated by the global revolution in communication technology. In a sense, Chinese Internet users are fulfilling their political and social rights as citizens: the ability both to make their opinions heard by government officials and to hold these officials more accountable and responsive. The classical democratic theory has also emphasised the importance of direct participation in public affairs. Bowler and Donovan note, "...participation is not just of value in and of itself, but also has an educative role that promotes civic engagement and wider virtues."<sup>47</sup> Whilst the Communist Party and government are retreating from their once "totalitarian penetration" of the economy and society, the general public are finding and reviving their voices both in the socioeconomic sphere and a lesser extent in the political arena. Some Chinese, in particular those who are better-off, are now starting to speak and act for themselves online.<sup>48</sup>

As noted above, the majority of Chinese Internet users are either computer-illiterate or financially unable to gain access to the networked world. Nevertheless, some Chinese media commentators and practitioners believe that, compared to Internet users in other countries, Chinese Netizens seem to demonstrate greater enthusiasm for expressing their viewpoints over issues of social, political, economic, and even military matters. They argue in part that the Internet is a venue

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accessed on March 12, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Shaun Bowler and Todd Donovan, "Democracy, Institutions and Attitudes about Citizen Influence on Government," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 32, No. 2, April 2002, p. 374.

<sup>48</sup> Studies and surveys have pinpointed that the majority of Chinese Internet users come from urban, coastal, and economically better-off backgrounds and are generally young male intellectuals, with 85.1 per cent of users being aged between 18-35 and 84 per cent of users being high school and college graduates. See CNNIC, *Semiannual Survey Report on the Development of China's Internet* (October 1997-January 2004), available online at <<http://www.cnnic.net.cn/index/0E/00/11/index.htm>>, accessed on February 17, 2004.

where Netizens may enjoy a relatively freer space for articulation than in the traditional media.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, modern Chinese history has also provided evidence regarding the critical role that elite or intellectual discourses play in guiding public opinion and in exciting further public debates. The elite leaders in the May Fourth Movement (1919) and the June Fourth Tiananmen Incident (1989) were often referred to as “Enlightenment intellectuals.” This term is analogous to the political science concept of “opinion leaders” who influence the public and set a demonstration effect amongst citizens. Online political debates and consultations are in this regard becoming a critical hinge that can link grass-roots politics with broader potential social and political change.

As a result, the widening of public horizontal communication brought by the Internet is becoming an important source for the formation and growth of public opinion in a diversified civil society with a fledgling public sphere.<sup>50</sup> This change is due to the comparative ease and convenience promised by the medium, allowing unprecedented access to multiple sources of news. This trend does not suggest, however, that the Chinese authorities have given a loose rein to those Chinese using the Internet. Instead, the government has tried to shape what it calls a “healthy and

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<sup>49</sup> Wang Xiaodong, “Hulianwang yu Zhongguo de sixiang duoyuanhua” (The Internet and thought pluralization in China), *BBC Chinese Service*, May 9, 2002, available online at <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/chinese/chinanews/newsid\\_742000/7422391.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/chinese/chinanews/newsid_742000/7422391.stm)>, accessed on March 6, 2003; Jin Mengyu, “Qiangguo luntan: toushi wenlu?” (The strong country forum: throwing a stone to clear the way?), *Zhongguo xinwen zhoukan* (China News Weekly), No. 23, June 3, 2001, available online at <[http://www.chinanews.com.cn/xinwenzhoukan/2001-23-50/txt/\(6\)%201.html](http://www.chinanews.com.cn/xinwenzhoukan/2001-23-50/txt/(6)%201.html)>, accessed on April 12, 2003.

<sup>50</sup> The argument is further supported by the most recent research report on Internet use in China which was released in mid-November 2003. The two-year project, conducted by the CASS, surveyed Internet usage and impact in twelve Chinese cities. Key findings include: (1) 71 per cent of Internet users and 69 percent of non-users agreed that the Internet gives people more opportunities to express their political views; (2) 79 per cent of Internet users and 77 per cent of non-users agreed that the Internet gives people a better knowledge of politics; (3) 79 per cent of Internet users and 73 per cent of non-users agreed that the Internet will give the government a better understanding of the views of its citizens; and (4) 60.8 per cent of Internet users and 61 percent of non-users agreed that the Internet gives people more opportunities to criticize government policies. See Guo Liang, “Surveying Internet Usage and Impact in Twelve Chinese Cities,” *The CASS Internet Report 2003* (Beijing: CASS Research Center for Social Development, 2003), pp. 55-57, available online at

orderly” online environment, mainly through the use of firewalls; Internet regulations and policing; threats and arrests to contain public Internet use; and encouraging self-censorship among Netizens and the business sector.<sup>51</sup> Yet firewalls are intrinsically porous,<sup>52</sup> as this investigative case of the two sessions has shown. A recent survey conducted by “Reporters Without Borders” also reveals that the censorship efforts of the moderators in control are patchy: the monitors are neither omnipotent nor omnipresent. There exist at least small cracks in the system of self-censorship where space for freer expression can exist, even though such opportunities may just last for a few minutes.<sup>53</sup> The dissertation’s argument is an extension of Chen and Shi’s research in which they contend that media exposure in Chinese-language news outlets have had negative effects on people’s attitudes towards authority and political institutions in general and accordingly people have little trust and political support in their government.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the Internet in this regard challenges state hegemony over the dominance of unitary public opinion that the government has long envisaged through stern media and propaganda machines.<sup>55</sup>

In comparison with the official *People’s Daily* coverage of the two sessions in March 2003, the civic discourses conducted in chat rooms like *Qiangguo Luntan* suggest that the Internet has begun a process of incrementally forming a deliberative

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<[http://www.markle.org/news/parts.4\\_to\\_7.pdf](http://www.markle.org/news/parts.4_to_7.pdf)>, accessed on November 18, 2003.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Michael S. Chase and James C. Mulvenon, *You’ve Got Dissent! Chinese Dissident Use of the Internet and Beijing’s Counter-Strategies* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Jason Lacharite, “Electronic Decentralisation in China: A Critical Analysis of Internet Filtering Policies in the People’s Republic of China,” *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 37, No. 2, July 2002, pp. 333-346.

<sup>53</sup> Reporters Without Borders, *China: Living Dangerously on the Net—Censorship and Surveillance of Internet Forums*, May 12, 2003, available online at <[http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=6793](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=6793)>, accessed on May 24, 2003.

<sup>54</sup> Xueyi Chen and Tianjian Shi, “Media Effects on Political Confidence and Trust in the People’s Republic of China in the Post-Tiananmen Period,” *East Asia*, Vol. 19, No. 3, September 2001, pp. 84-118.

<sup>55</sup> In Yuezhi Zhao’s words, it is termed “Party Journalism”—monolithic, positive, and highly predictable journalism that manipulates the spatial and temporal dimensions of news to suit the state agenda on certain issues. See Yuezhi Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), p. 49.

and burgeoning cyberspace, a kind of “public sphere.” Party chief Hu Jintao in a CCP Politburo meeting declared that press coverage of meetings and leadership activities has to be improved, ordinary people’s concerns have to be addressed, and more importantly, news has to be made “close to the reality, close to the masses, and close to the public’s lives”—the so-called “three closes” (*san tie jin*);<sup>56</sup> the truth, however, is that the people’s right to know (*zhi qing quan*) is yet underdeveloped. The core of the problem is obvious: the media in China is not truly independent; they are in large part an extension and complement of the Party and government. In sharp contrast, the role the mass media plays in China is distinct from the function of a “watchdog” as its equivalent is perceived in the West. The Chinese authorities may tolerate a more autonomous media space in covering news in economic and social domains as long as these reports do not provoke potential social unrest and/or economic disorder. The unbending stance against dissenting news is unambiguous when coverage concerns political issues and in particular when it concerns the image and criticism of the Communist Party. The *People’s Daily* has therefore followed a propagandistic practice in covering the proceedings:

*The emergence of multiple voices in the press has provided a more accurate and realistic picture of Chinese society and people today, and the problems and contradictions inherent in their daily lives. The fact that ordinary people felt that they were represented gave them the feeling that they were a part of the two sessions and, as a result, they had an even deeper respect for the event.*<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> “Hu Jintao zongshuji zhuchi zhaokai Zhonggong zhongyang zhengzhiju huiyi” (General Secretary Hu Jintao chaired the meeting of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee), *Xinhua News Agency*, March 28, 2003, available online at <<http://202.84.17.73:7777/Detail.wct?RecID=11&SelectID=1&ChannelID=4255&Page=1>>, accessed on April 6, 2003. Further stress of the “three closes” can be seen, for example, in Li Zhangchun, “Cong ‘San tie jin’ rushou gaijin jiaqiang xuanchuan sixiang gongzuo” (Improve and strengthen propagandistic thought work through the “three closes”), *Xinhua News Agency*, May 20, 2003, available online at <<http://202.84.17.73:7777/Detail.wct?RecID=6&SelectID=1&ChannelID=4255&Page=1>>, accessed on May 21, 2003.

<sup>57</sup> “Mass Media Experts Comment on Coverage of NPC, CPPCC,” *People’s Daily*, March 19, 2003, available online at <[http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200303/19/eng20030319\\_11357.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200303/19/eng20030319_11357.shtml)>.

On the one hand, the official media have provided lavish coverage of the two sessions. On the other hand, voices of ordinary people are underreported. The underlying rationale seems apparent: Chinese leaders have long upheld the sacred doctrine of Deng Xiaoping that “development is the fundamental principle” (*fazhan shi ying daoli*), while the overriding principle is “stability above all else” (*wending yadao yiqie*). Official media coverage of such a paramount political event is premised on this. As a consequence, this principle requires the media to toe the Party and government line. As a leading “organ paper,” the *People’s Daily* has rigidly conformed to what the guidelines<sup>58</sup> have stipulated, claiming to

*“...operate according to Deng Xiaoping theory and the important doctrine of the ‘Three Represents’; incarnate earnestly the spirit of the 16th Party Congress; stick to the course of democratic, honest, united, stable, mobilising, and positive propaganda; grasp firmly the correct course of public opinion; and propagandise major accomplishments achieved in the past five years with great vigour.”*<sup>59</sup>

Specifically, acting as the Party and government mouthpiece, the *People’s Daily* published “*lianghui tegao*” (feature reports)—a series of special reports presented prior to the two sessions, designed to set the official agenda and thus guide public debates over the proceedings. Both successive news coverage and the opening as well as closing editorials were released in accordance with the progression of the two sessions.

Such concerted action has propagandised the remarkable achievements in reform, development, and stability carried out over the past five years under the leadership of

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accessed on March 22, 2003.

<sup>58</sup> *Lianghui xinwen baodao jihua* (Guidelines for news report during the two sessions).

<sup>59</sup> “Chenggong lianghui de chenggong fanying—Renmin Ribao 2003 nian lianghui baodao jianshu” (The successful reflections of the successful two sessions—summary of news report of the *People’s Daily* on the two sessions), *Xinwen zhanxian*, April 2003, available online at <<http://www>.

the Party Central Committee—thereby minimising the negative images to emerge from public frustration and social stratification due to more than two decades of reform and opening up. Prior to the growth of information and communication technologies, the task was relatively effortless. Since then, the government has found it difficult to completely stifle the dissenting news and information made possible by such new media as the Internet, E-mail, and short message service (SMS) messaging. As evidenced by examples presented in Chapter 5, citizens have shown little faith in official government pronouncements. Mistrust of the authorities has been growing and possibly given way to cynicism and speculation when particularly a major sociopolitical crisis takes place. The state media is in this respect seemingly burying government voices since the propaganda present less what people want to read or are concerned about. The coverage of the *People's Daily* during the two sessions was also more propaganda-oriented than people-based. Such coverage cohered with the political mobilisation techniques that the regime has long exerted: “all articles with one face, all mouths with one voice, and everyone parroting words and quotes from the *People's Daily* editorials.”<sup>60</sup>

A special chat forum on *Qiangguo Luntan* entitled “*Lianghui taolun zhuanqu*” was set up for the two sessions on March 1st. Seven NPC deputies and seven CPPCC members appeared as guests on the forum, taking questions from Internet users in order to guide “correct” public opinion and defend government perspectives when necessary. Since the authorities support the so-called “*yulun jiandu*”<sup>61</sup> (supervisory

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snweb.com/gb/xw/2003/04/ a0401005.htm>, accessed on May 1, 2003.

<sup>60</sup> Li Xiguang, “ICT and the Demise of Propaganda,” *Zhonghua chuanmei wang* (Media China Net), May 19, 2003, available online at <[http://academic.mediachina.net/lw\\_view.jsp?id=666](http://academic.mediachina.net/lw_view.jsp?id=666)>, accessed on May 19, 2003.

<sup>61</sup> The term “*yulun jiandu*” was first raised in the CCP Central Committee’s “Political Report” delivered to the Party’s 13th Congress (1987) and consecutively repeated in the 14th (1992), 15th (1997), and 16th (2002) congresses. See Jiang Zemin, “Quanmian jianshe xiaokang shehui, kaichuang Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi shiye xin jumian” (Building a comparatively well-off society in an all-round way and create a new situation in building socialism with Chinese characteristics), *Ta Kung*

function of public opinion mediated by the media), about nine hundred postings poured into the forum during the two-week-long proceedings. Against this backdrop, *Qiangguo Luntan* has become the unique hub of both online consultations and even petitioned activities that circumvented the formal judiciary and procuratorial organs during the annual sessions of the NPC and CPPCC. Unlike a handful of “liberal” news media—such as *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend) or *Beijing Qingnian Bao* (Beijing Youth Daily) which often probe beneath sanctioned news presentations,<sup>62</sup> the *People’s Daily* was tied to the official point of view. For example, several Internet users had evidently pleaded to the deputies for help and involvement because they believed the deputies’ “privileged position”<sup>63</sup> in Chinese politics might solve their difficulties.<sup>64</sup> Such messages have prompted further discussions. In other words, the more lively the discussions and the closer they are to the political edge, the more readers are attracted.<sup>65</sup> What has been termed “*yulun jiandu*” by Chinese officials seems to be government-led supervision of public opinion, and is a top-down crafted

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*Pao* (Hong Kong), November 9, 2002, available online at <<http://www.takungpao.com/news/2002-11-9/16con-72505.htm>>, accessed on November 14, 2002.

<sup>62</sup> A growing number of Chinese media outlets have tried to make the most out of policy by probing the edges of the shifting official boundaries. As Chin-Chuan Lee has noted, “Many newspaper editors have confessed [to him and to others] that their front page endorses the planned economy, their second to eighth pages support the mixed economy, and their ninth to sixteenth pages advocate the market economy.” See Chin-Chuan Lee, “Servants of the State or the Market?: Media and Journalists in China,” in Jeremy Tunstall (ed.), *Media Occupations and Professions: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 246. The Chinese authorities, however, have begun to require journalists to take re-assessment tests from 2003 onward, ensuring that the licence system may make particularly the independent-thinking reporters toe the Party line. See Vivien Pik-Kwan Chan, “Mainland Journalists to Face Ideology Test,” *South China Morning Post*, December 7, 2002.

<sup>63</sup> One of the characteristics of the NPC is that the deputies are normally not full-time legislators. By and large, being a member of the NPC in China is simply a side job. Primary occupations include judges, lawyers, party cadres, government officials, and so forth.

<sup>64</sup> As an example, a message entitled “Renda daibiao qing bang women huyu: zhizhi shiye danwei lingdao ruci siyi gaige” (NPC deputies, please call upon leaders of enterprise units to stop their arbitrary reform), posted by “*Dang diaomin haishi shunmin*” at 22:02:00, March 24, 2003, revealed that several employees from a remote sensing corporation in Guangxi had called for the improvement of their pension and welfare system. See Wang Yougen, “Ben cheguansuo de fubai shili: heyi gan shi ‘Renda’ wei xingtong xushe?” (The power of corrupt officials—why do they dare to ignore NPC deputies?), at 18:15:56, March 7, 2003; and Dou Xueyuan, “Huyu baohu jubao gaoguan fubai de jubaoren” (Urging protection for those who unmask corrupt high-profile officials), at 12:31:11, March 5, 2003.

<sup>65</sup> Andrew Stroehlein, “Internet Censors in China Loosening Their Grip,” *Online Journalism Review*,

tactic of directing public discourse through the incarnation of official ideologies. Public opinion from a government perspective is not supposed to challenge, undermine, or even subvert; but to uphold and support the government's presentation and opinion-moulding (socialisation). However, the question arises: Can public opinion and debates be guided or directed within the context of globalisation of information technology?

As a matter of fact, *Qiangguo Luntan* is not the only online popular forum that provides a public arena to communicate, interact, and debate over issues in Chinese cyberspace; there are other Internet forums that serve different discourses—such as *Shiji Zhongguo* (Century China) at <<http://www.cc.org.cn>>; *Huaxia zhiqing* (Chinese Educated Youth) at <<http://www.hxzq.net>>; *Xinlang wang* at <<http://www.sina.com.cn>>; and *Sohu* at <<http://club.sohu.com>>. The mushrooming of online Internet forums and the growth of online communities exemplify a nascent civil society taking root in a communist regime and can be attributed to the intensified diffusion and use of the Internet.<sup>66</sup> Such an acknowledgment may also serve to underpin the arguments presented in this chapter. To repeat, it is mainly because *Qiangguo Luntan* is not the sole discussion board in Chinese cyberspace that the forum enjoys relatively freer and deliberative public space in comparison to “almost”<sup>67</sup> mass media such as the *People's Daily*.

In the meantime, the selection of *Qiangguo Luntan* highlights the reality that

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May 23, 2003, available online at <[http://www.ojr.org/ojr/world\\_reports/1053660077.php](http://www.ojr.org/ojr/world_reports/1053660077.php)>, accessed on May 26, 2003.

<sup>66</sup> Guobin Yang has conducted an ethnographic case study of “*Huaxia zhiqing*” based on his online participant observation and close contact with its collective management. He argues that “*Huaxia zhiqing*” is only one of many cases of the co-evolution of the Internet and civil society in contemporary China. Yang's case study reflects the challenges and dynamics of an incipient civil society. See Guobin Yang, “The Co-evolution of the Internet and Civil Society in China,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 43, No. 3, May/June 2003, pp. 405-22.

<sup>67</sup> It is arguable that every mass media outlet has to a varying degree had connections with the Communist Party and/or governments at all levels. In both theory and reality, the Party and/or government are their chief patrons, although the subsidies received from them are now in a decline

even a forum sponsored and administered by a foremost “organ paper”—the *People’s Daily*—can demonstrate the dynamic public discourse and “virtual” civil engagement, albeit one still at a primitive stage. This is essentially because online debate is for the time being still not very deliberative and rational in the Habermas sense of the “public sphere,”<sup>68</sup> although it has shown the publicness of the access and participation. As we have seen from the postings regarding various issues earlier on, the messages are often too brief to be considered as thoughtful contributions to debate, although the section on the “rule of law” appears to have been more interactive and deliberative. Some Internet users simply disseminate articles that they think interesting without adding any comment, and some read postings without making any contributions of their own.

One of the reasons for this state of affairs is that the authorities are attempting to prevent cyberspace from becoming a hotbed of anti-government discussion; they are undoubtedly trying hard to silence Internet-based opposition to both the Party and regime, particularly during the critical political events such as the two sessions or the Party’s national congress. Government intervention has thus deterred at least some people from venting genuine opinions, which may be too critical about sensitive issues. Likewise, it is difficult both for a researcher based outside or inside China without “connections” to acquire the entire collection of contributions posted on the forum because some messages are believed to have been automatically weeded out by filtering programs before having the chance to appear online. Other messages are manually deleted even though they have successfully been posted. These types of

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partly because of the ongoing press reform measures and China’s entry into the WTO.

<sup>68</sup> See Peter Ferdinand and Chin-fu Hung, “The Internet, e-Social Capital, and Public Sphere—A Study of *Qiangguo Luntan* during the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (November 2002)” (Paper presented at the conference on “China and the Internet: Technology, Economy, and Society in Transition” at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California, May 30-31, 2003).

ensorship have obstructed a complete account of what is really happening in Chinese cyberspace.

The existing evidence is nonetheless sufficient to answer the research question posed at the outset of this chapter. One of the primary reasons is that the research has been done without deliberately sifting through one forum like *Qiangguo Luntan* to find interesting or provocative messages in favour of the conclusions drawn.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the online messages that have been presented were not selected to justify the arguments, but instead these kinds of messages are so widespread that it is necessary to select an illustrative sample.

Moreover, it is of importance to compare the contingent and the well-prepared in Internet-induced change after investigating contingent events and accidents in Chapter 5 and non-contingent ones such as the congresses of the Party, NPC and CPPCC in Chapters 6 and 7. In an authoritarian regime like China, the authorities can usually mobilise every resource available to prevent, deter, or at least minimise any (fatal) challenge provided they are given enough time to react. This is precisely where the Internet may pose greater impact upon China's political system if any contingent or accident takes place. The new media in this regard serves as the catalyst to induce the Net's power and thus facilitate a qualitatively different impact, as compared with the congresses that have been well prepared long in advance. It accordingly makes sense to compare non-contingent events with contingent ones; such a comparison highlights the extent to which the Internet impacts upon political system in a given (authoritarian

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<sup>69</sup> There are, of course, some messages that are "strongly" sympathetic to the government's agendas mirrored in *People's Daily*. Interestingly, they might adopt the old technique of dissidents in authoritarian regimes of overtly praising the regime, while in practice meaning the opposite. Apparently, regular visitors to chat rooms know how to read the messages. For example, a message posted by "Lu shi" on 3/7/2003 (10:18:10) claims that "Ex-Premier Zhu Rongji is an honest and upright official. He is also a good official full of wisdom and stratagems. People will not forget you." Messages like this could very well mean the opposite.

state) context.

## **B. Conclusions**

The Internet and its affiliated chat rooms characterised as computer-mediated communications (CMCs) make information relatively accessible by the grass-roots level. Such horizontal communication challenges those assertions made by authoritarian governments about their “success stories” in managing as well as controlling information flow—both on- and off-line. Netizens are now enjoying the relative ease of (horizontal) communication just as easily as the process can be performed through the top-down propaganda channels by governments, such as Internet versions of state-owned media coverage and the electronic government projects. In other words, with the Internet, people can now speak more freely among themselves, debate and consult with ideas and public issues comparatively more easily, and gradually engage the mainstream generators of news and opinions such as the official media and propaganda machine.

The case studies as demonstrated in this chapter have broadly supported the argument articulated in the introduction that Internet-based political participation is leading to a gradual but steady change of value orientation and an emerging nascent public space in China. This finding somewhat challenges the interpretation of Kalathil and Boas as well as others, who tended to downplay the role played by the Internet. The Chinese government, they believe, has done a rather good job in regulating and utilising the Internet in a manner that strengthens Party governance. This dissertation argues, instead, that there are grounds to remain cautiously optimistic about the Internet’s impact on China. This is not to promote “technological determinism” but instead a wish to re-evaluate the impact of the new media on the basis of solid evidence.

With the rising expectations and public demands for an improved quality of life and protection of social, economic, and political rights, the citizens of transitional China may not merely want the regime to address their demands through (state-owned) mass media, but also require adequate channels to proactively articulate them in the first place. This bottom-up force or pressure derived from the general public may facilitate and reinforce a favourable social basis of the twin effects: the increasingly dynamic civic society and Internet diffusion. In other words, this incipient online civic engagement and fledging public space serves as a precondition for a civil society, which in turn is the foundation for and a necessary ingredient of any future democracy/democratisation. A nascent public space for “virtual” civic engagement, albeit with Chinese characteristics, can indeed be found in online forums in China.

This chapter has basically confirmed what have been argued in Chapter 6, that the Internet has contributed to the public debates in Chinese cyberspace. After the separate discussion of the contingent events (Chapter 5) and non-contingent events and accidents (Chapter 6 and 7), it is now appropriate to accentuate the significance of the contingencies and incidents in Internet-induced change upon China’s political system. A profound explanation with regard to structural constraint in Chinese cyberspace is to be explored in the following concluding chapter, showing why the Internet may not fully realise its democratic potentials. The constraint is what will be addressed in the conclusion—prolonged stability, and delayed Internet impact upon China’s political system.

## Chapter 8 Conclusion

### Section I Evaluation of the Impact of the Internet upon the Chinese Political System

Whilst western concepts of “public opinion” have been extensively addressed, there has been a dearth of scholarship on China’s counterpart. It is partly because this reflects the political reality in China that publicly posting unauthorised bills like posters in the street are banned. On the other hand, those who have long been accustomed to perceiving communist China as an autocratic regime believe that the top communist leaders need not give any heed to what their people think, let alone the idea that public opinion might influence government policy. Since the legitimacy of the regime is not based primarily upon the majority support of the electorate, outsiders may form the impression of a total monopoly of Chinese government control over its media as well as its effective tools of political manipulation. In short, under the cardinal guidelines of Chinese political correctness, the Chinese public are often perceived as unlikely to form any independent opinions over political expression, and thus unlikely to make any significant impact upon public policies.

Ever since the late Qing dynasty in the second half of the 19th century, modernisation has been the major project for Chinese leaders as they compete with their western counterparts, as well as their more recently developing neighbours in East Asia. The core of modernisation at the time of the Qing dynasty was to industrialise China to safeguard the country from western commercial and military aggression. To make China a strong (*qiang*) and wealthy (*fu*) state was the top priority of the newly established Republican government. In Mao’s China, the “Great Leap

Forward” (*da-yue-jin*) in the late 1950s epitomised his ambition to speed up the process of industrialisation, which he conceived of as a nationwide mobilisation to construct a massive steel and iron sector as the strategic industry in the development of a communist society. Nevertheless, Mao did not succeed in hauling China out of its still desperate backwardness. Instead, following the disastrous “Cultural Revolution,” a series of government measures were implemented, known as the “second revolution,” under Deng Xiaoping’s reign.<sup>1</sup> Deng’s successors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, have also addressed the theme, with different national strategies that reflect the information age. In Jiang’s words, “Digitalisation will become a power house in the modernisation process, and information technology (IT) is one of China’s top priorities and a driving force behind the country’s economic development.”<sup>2</sup>

When information and communication technologies (ICTs), principally symbolised by the Internet, converge on the political environment in most authoritarian and developing countries, ICTs allow the possibilities of the public gaining more latitude in expressing opinions. Communist China is a particularly significant country in this respect. Here, the (mass) media was traditionally used by the authorities to serve as tools of propaganda (*xuanchuan jiaoyu*) and for purposes of agenda-setting (*yulun daoxiang*). Entering the Internet age, the state is seen to assure its economic competitiveness in a globalised context where information largely drives

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<sup>1</sup> In Deng’s words, “The reform we are now carrying out is very daring. But if we do not carry it out, it will be hard for us to make progress. Reform is China’s second revolution. It is something very important that we have to undertake even though it involves risks.” Deng Xiaoping, “Reform is China’s Second Revolution,” *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, Volume 3* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1998), available online at <<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/c1160.html>>, accessed on May 30, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Hou Mingjuan, “Jiang Says IT Is a Top Priority,” *China Daily*, August 22, 2000, available online at <[http://ddi.uni-paderborn.de/didaktik/aktuell/china\\_daily\\_wcc2000.html](http://ddi.uni-paderborn.de/didaktik/aktuell/china_daily_wcc2000.html)>, accessed on May 12, 2002.

global and domestic economy. The government keenly bolsters the development of information and network technology, but at the same time, it has been persistently trying to minimise the undesirable effects that the Internet has brought about since it was introduced in the early 1990s. Because the political impact of the Internet has caused the Beijing government unease as it threatens its long-held monopoly over the flow of information, the regime has adopted a variety of strategies to harness it, limit the impact of the new technology to an acceptable degree, and hopefully to turn it to the government's benefit, particularly in the prospects of e-commerce and e-government.

In the area of e-commerce, the government has initiated a so-called "twin-track strategy" that ambitiously integrates industrialisation into the grand process of informatisation.<sup>3</sup> Informatisation is treated as the key in promoting industrial advancement, industrialisation and modernisation in China. The key importance and role of the Information Technology will principally be to serve as the basic, pioneering, supporting and strategic industry of the national economy, and increasingly play a pivotal part in promoting the domestic economy, national safety, the welfare of citizens, and social development.<sup>4</sup>

For the development of electronic government, the Chinese government has not merely rhetorically underlined the magnitude of the correct "agenda-setting," but has also vigorously shaped it in the "Government Online Project" since 1998, the year which was dubbed China's "Government Online Year." The project can, in one sense,

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<sup>3</sup> For more about China's "twin-track strategy", see, for example, Xiudian Dai, "Towards a Digital Economy with Chinese Characteristics?" *New Media and Society* Vol. 4, No. 2, June 2002, p. 144.

<sup>4</sup> *Tenth Five-Year Plan (2001-2005)—Information Industry*, Ministry of Information Industry, available online at <<http://www.trp.hku.hk/infofile/china/2002/10-5-yr-plan.pdf>>, accessed on

be interpreted as the authorities' proactive effort to restore the propaganda machinery that has been weakened throughout the reformist period, and particularly the gradual reduction in the state's monopoly over the provision of information and communications.<sup>5</sup>

This dissertation was written with the ambition to answer the two fundamental research questions, presented at the outset: Is the Chinese government as much in control of public debates on the Internet as it is of debates in other forms of media? And does the Chinese government still control and manipulate public opinion as much as it has traditionally done? These two questions are closely interrelated with the concepts of public opinion and the Internet. To approach the questions set in the introduction chapter, the dissertation began with a literature review in Chapter 2 of the general theme of the Internet's impact upon the political system in established democracies and some developing as well as authoritarian states, thus, laying the foundation for research on the politics and public opinion in the age of the Internet in China. One of the major findings derived from reviewing existing works is that there is very little literature tackling the theme of public opinion in China; even after the introduction of ICTs, particularly the Internet. The prevailing literature has tended to suggest that the Internet has little impact upon politics and public opinion in China. This assumption is contested in this dissertation in subsequent chapters.

In Chapter 3, the dissertation investigated the fundamental issue of Internet governance in China. As generally perceived, the increasing availability of information made possible by global information systems, including the Internet, will

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September 14, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> See also Xiudian Dai, *The Digital Revolution and Governance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp.

affect governance and the political process. In authoritarian states like China, it is also true that Internet governance there will influence the creation, dissemination, availability, and use of information on the Internet in global information systems. The Internet regulation regime in China is crucial as Internet control is made with regard to information production, access, distribution, and use, which may in turn swing to a more open or closed cyberspace. As a consequence, what decides the setting of online public debates hinges partly on Internet censorship and anti-control measures. As the chapter's conclusion reveals, Internet governance in China has achieved some success, resulting in self-censorship to some degree amongst Internet users. Yet the system of Internet control is porous and far from foolproof. It accordingly provides grounds for testing whether the Chinese government is as much in control of public debates on the Internet as it is of debates in other forms of media.

Chapter 4 considered the relationship between Internet entrepreneurs and the government in the wider context of telecommunication systems. Following the industrial and technology policies, as well as Internet regulations addressed in Chapter 3, an account was provided of how Internet entrepreneurs emerge and of their operational environment, which the authoritarian Chinese regime has cautiously managed. It is argued that relations here can be characterised as a hybrid clientelist-corporatist complex. Case studies are provided to support the arguments. Such a relationship does have implications for civil society in China because the Internet entrepreneurs have helped unleash a more plural society, even though they have closely cooperated with the authorities.

In Chapter 5, the focus moved to consider the actual use of the Internet by

Netizens in China. As the conclusion of Chapter 4 shows, the Internet entrepreneurs may not boldly promote or even fully realise the Internet's political potential. What in turn makes the Internet significant is how and to what extent the medium is utilised by Netizens in China. This chapter provides empirical evidence to support the argument that the reinvigoration of civil and political rights in the wake of wider diffusion and utilisation of the Internet may stand at the forefront of facilitating a freer sociopolitical environment, although it is still in an embryonic stage. The discussions centre on four dimensions of Internet-mediated impact, with each category illustrated by one case: (a) foreign relations: the U.S. spy plane collision; (b) domestic political issues: the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak; (c) legal politics: the BMW incident; (d) dissent politics: the Falun Gong movement.

In Chapter 6, there was an investigation of the impact of the Internet upon authoritarian regimes with specific reference to China. This chapter addressed the issues of the formation and development of a public sphere and online social capital in China with an empirical analysis of messages posted on the *Qiangguo Luntan* (Strong Country) Web site during the 16th National Congress of Communist Party of China in November 2002. The discussions centred upon four separate yet intertwined categories of issues, (a) corruption, (b) the concept of *xiaokang shehui* (a moderately wealthy society) and income inequality, (c) the theory of the "Three Represents" and the official accession of private entrepreneurs into the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); and (d) political reform. By contrasting the official coverage of the themes that appear in the *People's Daily*, the examination of the *Qiangguo Luntan* can help explore the extent to which the Internet has facilitated the evolution of *e*-social capital

and the possible emergence of a public sphere, albeit with Chinese characteristics. The conclusion demonstrates that whilst there is a primitive form of public space in the Chinese cyberspace, *e*-social capital is less apparent. Nevertheless, the implication of the current formation and development of the public sphere and *e*-social capital in China make us cautiously optimistic about the prospect for the Internet's impact upon the political system in China.

Chapter 7 is another micro investigation into the online messages posted on the *Qiangguo Luntan* during the first session of the 10th NPC (National People's Congress) and the National Committee of the CPPCC (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) held in March 2003. Similar to the previous chapter, this one centres on the discourses of four categories of issues: (a) "*san-nong*", i.e. "*nongye*" (agriculture), "*nongcun*" (village), and "*nongmin*" (farmers); (b) employment and social security; (c) the role and reform of the NPC and the CPPCC; and (d) the rule of law. Examination of these discourses illuminates the impact that they have had on China's politics in general, and public opinion and political participation in particular. Specifically, these case studies have broadly supported the argument that Internet-based political participation is leading to a gradual but steady change of value orientation and an emerging nascent public space in China. In addition, it is a main argument of this chapter that after examining separately the contingent events in Chapter 5, and well-prepared political events in Chapter 6 and 7, one can tentatively conclude that the Internet will be more likely to have a (political) impact in China when accidents and contingent events occur as compared with non-contingent events such as the various congresses.

## **Section II Prolonged Stability, Delayed Internet Impact upon Political System in China**

The revisionist literature of technology determinism is right to caution us that “...understanding the impact of information technology in China requires knowledge not only of the ways in which technology works, but also of the political system, culture and history of that country.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, examining the Internet’s impact upon the political system in China leads to a mixed message, that is, on the one hand, there seems little basis for the assertion that the Internet and Short Messaging Systems/Services will fundamentally change the political system, bringing democracy to authoritarian states like China when we look at the stringent Internet regulations and polices, together with the clientelist-corporatist complex of state-business relationship in the Internet industry. Nevertheless, when considering actual Internet use on the mainland, there is striking evidence to support the determinists’ claim that the Internet, among other things, has facilitated the awakening of awareness about civil and political rights and the formation of a primitive form of public space. In some cases like the SARS outbreak, the Jiangxi school blast, the BMW accident case and so forth; the Internet’s impact has been more noticeable than in others. It does begin to hold the Chinese government more accountable and responsive to the people’s right to know.

Why cannot the Internet completely realise its democratic potential in China? I argue that the reason lies chiefly in the relatively extended stability that the regime has

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher R. Hughes and Gudrun Wacker, eds., *China and the Internet: Politics and the Digital*

maintained since the reform and opening launched a quarter of a century ago. Despite the “political upheavals” that culminated in the 1989 pro-democracy movement, the CCP has managed to achieve a prolonged economic and sociopolitical stability, particularly from the 1990s onwards. The economic growth of the previous decades has relatively improved the economic well-being of the majority of the population, reinforcing the determination to deepen the market economy in the new century. There are still unstable forces that are likely to challenge the capacity and authority of the CCP. Amongst other things, laid-off workers who have fallen victim to the restructuring of the state-owned enterprises, the lack of a comprehensive social security net, and the economic crises that are destructively inherent in the widespread fraud in the banking and credit systems are all potentially subversive forces that might significantly alter the existing prolonged stability which the Chinese regime has attained. In these cases, the Internet, serving as an effective communications channel, may augment grievances and dissatisfaction and act as a catalyst for political change.

The notion of the “Three Represents” proposed by Jiang Zemin has delicately attempted to coopt elites from the private economy in the CCP, aiming to solicit political support from potentially subversive business groups like the private (Internet) entrepreneurs. In addition, the state has also maintained social control as one of the crucial pillars to the continuing of the PRC. Yet the state is increasingly challenged by societal organisations, such as Falun Gong.<sup>7</sup> However, the state has arguably exploited its “authoritarian power structures to crush any overt opposition and ride out

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*Leap Forward* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Vivienne Shue, “Global Imaginings, the State’s Quest for Hegemony, and the Pursuit of Phantom Freedom in China: From Heshang to Falun Gong,” in Catarina Kinnvall and Kristina Jonsson (eds.), *Globalization and Democratization in Asia: The Construction of Identity*

any unrest.”<sup>8</sup> At any rate, the state has managed to sustain a relatively prolonged stability despite increased challenges from subversive forces of socioeconomic arenas. In short, we can cling to the argument that the final outcome of political change (dependent variable, see Figure 1.1) still relies upon a complex pattern of interaction between political and socioeconomic development (independent variables).

Nevertheless the Internet is arguably set to transform the political system and its associated development as examined in the literature review chapter. Fearing the trend of “peaceful evolution” from the Internet’s democratising impact, the communist regime is trying to grapple with the challenges of the interplay of globalisation and marketisation, symbolised by the Internet, so as to prevent it undermining further the ruling capacity and authority of the CCP, and help it actively uphold one of its pillars of power—information control. The CCP, in particular, have proactively shaped the use and development of the Internet medium from the very beginning of its introduction. Set aside a series of measures adopted to promote self-censorship amongst Internet users, the government is so keen to attempt to control the Internet through a variety of means. This includes constructing basic network infrastructures and connection backbones, imposing online content filtering and censorship, implementing relentless criminalization charges against offensive Internet users. These measures lay down warnings and make an example of discouraging potential offenders of Internet laws and regulations. In a sense, it reflects the uneasiness felt by Chinese leaders who are managing the propaganda and media

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(London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 210-229.

<sup>8</sup> Tony Saich, “Globalization, Governance, and the Authoritarian State: China,” in Joseph S. Nye Jr., and John D. Donahue (eds.), *Governance in A Globalizing World* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), p. 224.

systems and cannot totally control the free flow of information in cyberspace as they used to do in harnessing traditional press and mass media.

Besides, the economic factor does affect the Internet in one way or another. In this thesis, I have discussed that the Internet entrepreneurs have on the one hand co-operated with the authorities to make the most of profits from the business opportunity-laden marketplace and a relatively protected ICT sector. Still, the private business elites have on the other hand helped unleash a more plural and diversified society that is increasingly underway in China because of their profit-oriented management of the Web sites and online contents. Also some of them (especially outside Beijing) have found ways of coexisting with official regulations whilst at the same time conniving at their circumvention by Internet café users.

In the realm of culture and society, one key feature is that Internet users are mostly well-to-do urban elites, professional people, and students. It is the so-called digital divide. Considering the rapid economic growth in China in the past decades, these elites are more commercially motivated since they are the major beneficiaries of China's economic reform. They tend, at least for the time being, not to act as a disruptive group like countryside peasants, migrant workers, or urban unemployed workers who feel relatively deprived of economic prosperity and a social security net.

Taking account of the current development of state-society and state-business relationships in China, the Party-state has subtly maintained prolonged stability. Of course it will take increased efforts on the part of Chinese leadership to contain the challenges of Internet and globalisation from undermining further the power and governance of the CCP. Thanks to the prolonged socio-economic stability, the Internet

is yet to turn into an absolute alternative media environment under current political milieu. Nevertheless, as has been demonstrated in Chapters 6 and 7, the Internet has facilitated the emergence of a nascent public space in China. The public discourse mediated by the forces of ICTs and globalisation is also making the government more transparent and accountable as examined in this dissertation (Chapter 5). Yet, there are Netizens who toe the government line and buy their arguments.

It should be remembered that there is a line to be crossed with commenting on public affairs and direct advocacy for democracy, democratisation, socially and politically sensitive issues like pro-Taiwan/Tibet independence, and the Falun Gong movement. Apart from that there is a grey area of economic and sociopolitical issues, where people may debate in a different tone from the official account. The public discourse may also be conducted in a different form of words but address essentially identical things. This makes reading and analysing the online messages challenging but rewarding. It is challenging because a full knowledge of the language is a must, as well as an understanding of the prevalent cyberculture. This makes it difficult sometimes to comprehend the hidden agenda of messages and accordingly impossible to analyse the posted messages with any computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, as was attempted in an earlier stage of this research. The messages are also rewarding because there is a subtle difference between public debate and discourse conducted in open forums by Chinese outside China. It forms partly what has already been addressed in previous chapters, i.e., a nascent public space for virtual civic engagement with Chinese characteristics.

To sum up, the Internet has not at this stage fundamentally transformed China's

political system, let alone caused a sudden political regime collapse and engendered a sweeping democratisation process. The Internet is nevertheless expanding people's minds, facilitating public discourse, and pushing for more transparent and accountable governance. In other words, the Chinese government could be argued as not being as much in control of public debates on the Internet as it is of debates in other forms of media channels. There is indeed increased scepticism arising from Internet-mediated messages that articulate contradictory or even challenging tones against the ways the government deals with public issues and affairs. The government cannot control and manipulate public opinion as much as it has traditionally done. Although the rise of dynamic public opinion is relatively small in terms of scale and vigour, these virtual discourses, at any rate, are positive for a healthy public space to be carved out in the future. If the stable system that provides "prolonged stability" in China is seriously challenged and undermined, such as by political and socioeconomic crises, the Internet-enhanced political change may precipitate the processes.

### **Section III Contributions and Limitations**

#### **A. Contributions**

Apart from the major findings noted above (Section 1), the major contributions have to be related to the research questions set at the onset of this dissertation. As noted, there is little literature tackling the theme of public opinion in communist China for various reasons. Works either deliberately ignore the possibility of public opinion generated over mass media or they are in practice prevented from conducting public opinion research independently because of the regulation that prohibits independent

social surveys by any foreign organisations and individuals.<sup>9</sup> This work has contributed to a more systematic picture of public opinion on political issues with documented examples, thanks to the Internet.

Specifically, this research has shed light on how to measure the impact of the Internet upon political debates, and to document the political impact of the Internet. The analytical approach employed in this work is to contrast the public debates conducted in cyberspace with official media coverage of the same themes around the same time. The Internet's impact upon political debates will be demonstrated if there is a marked difference between the two. In other words, if the expected effect and outcome is not what the authority initially envisaged, the significance of Internet impact can be assumed to have increased. It suggests that the CCP cannot completely manipulate and direct public opinion and debates as it is accustomed to.

Meanwhile, when researching the Internet's political impact in a given (authoritarian) state, this dissertation has specifically distinguished the level of impact from contingency and pre-planned political events. Within contingent cases, a special attention to the nature of contingency is given to tell expected contingency from unexpected one. In so doing, this work has contributed to the general literature that highlighted the subtle different level of the political impact of the Internet and has shed light on further research topics in the realm of Internet studies.

Moreover, this work highlights a usually neglected phenomenon that researching the political change or transformation in China can also be conducted from different

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<sup>9</sup> See *Shewai Shehui Diaocha Huodong Guanli Zhanxing Banfa* (Temporary Measures for the Management of Social Survey Activities Involving Foreign Nationals), China National Statistics Bureau, August 15, 1998, available online at <[http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfg/gzjgfwj/t20020424\\_18337.htm](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfg/gzjgfwj/t20020424_18337.htm)>, accessed on May 15, 2004.

aspects like the impact of ICTs (Internet, e-mail, online chatrooms, short messaging systems, blogs, and peer-to-peer technology such as Yahoo Messenger, ICQ, QQ, Skype) on its political system. The traditional approaches towards the study of political change, i.e., modernisation approach, transition approach, and structural approach,<sup>10</sup> may be enriched thanks to the advent of new technologies in the increasingly networked, globalised and marketised world. This micro-level approach to the study of public discourse mediated online may form a solid sociopolitical basis to advance research of a wider political impact. In other words, this subject may be related and applied to the broader theme of political change beyond China; in a similar setting of authoritarian states in which the authorities embrace the new media for potential commercial benefits but at the same time try to control the new technologies lest they might become politically subversive forces. In sum, the exploration of this research subject yield a number of contributions that can be related to the wider theme of political transformation.

## **B. Limitations**

There are a number of research limitations that ought to be addressed at the end of this work:

First of all, it should be clear that we are still in the early stage of technological innovation, with probably the first glimmers of the full Internet implications and impacts ahead. It is as a result too soon to make a final judgment at this phase about the Internet's impact upon China's political system or change. A series of researches is

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<sup>10</sup> See David Potter, "Explaining Democratization," in David Potter, David Goldblatt, Margaret Kiloh and Paul Lewis (eds.), *Democratization* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997), pp. 10-24.

necessary not only to acquire a comprehensive and substantial account of the Internet's impact on politics, but to build a solid foundation for the future Internet study in a comparative perspective as well. One thing, nonetheless, seems certain at this point: China is being inextricably linked with and affected by the global phenomenon of the Internet, and the new media are increasingly playing a pivotal role both in the socioeconomic arena and political affairs.

Secondly, it has to be conceded that there were few interviews with Internet entrepreneurs and practitioners. There were two major constraints: on the one hand, Internet business elites tend to be reluctant to be interviewed where researchers are outsiders, especially from abroad, when research questions relate to political and governmental issues. On the other hand, the present regulation in China which bans any serious social survey activities by foreign organisations and individuals without government permission has also compounded the difficulty of independent research of Internet survey and questionnaires involving attitudes and usage of online and offline Internet users.

Thirdly, empirical data on the treatment of the Internet by some major (political) events like the 15th CCP National Congress (September 1997), 9th NPC and CPPCC Sessions (March 1998), atrocities committed against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia (May 1998), the U.S. bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade (May 1999), were unavailable despite requests to major Internet portals such as the *People's Daily* or Sina.com. There are two major reasons: first, I embarked on this research project from October 2000, and secondly, the data is not accessible for outsiders for various concerns on behalf of the Internet media companies.

#### **Section IV    Agenda for Further Studies**

This dissertation has focused, as far as possible within the time and space constraints, on a number of issues with regard to the Internet's impact upon public debates in mainland China. The objective of this work has been to understand public opinion and politics in China in general, and the impact of the Internet on political system in particular. There nevertheless remains a rich agenda for future studies that are in part related to the limitations noted above.

First, a wide range of online and offline surveys and interviews could be conducted with joint efforts from researchers based in Chinese institutions. This can in part practically resolve the regulation limits imposed on social survey activities imposed on foreign researcher(s). Meanwhile, online surveys may eliminate the problem of interviewer bias and in particular, when the research questions come to politically sensitive issues. This is especially helpful in the Chinese context that the respondents are likely to give "politically correct" answers. As such, this can be a serious research problem in surveys. As a consequence, these measures can enhance the capacity of future research to engender a more comprehensive empirical basis for further conceptualisation and theorising on the Internet's impact upon political change in authoritarian states in general, and public debates in particular.

Secondly, a series of comparisons of public debates on political events, such as Party Congresses and NPC and CPPCC Sessions, can provide a longer-term comparative picture. This could also further conceptualising and theorising on the Net's impact upon politics.

Thirdly, it may be worth considering the relationship between the level of public sphere and e-social capital not only in the Chinese context but also in any existing democracies in the near future. To be specific, is “e-social capital” a rather high-level attribute associated with well-developed public sphere? Can it be measured? Is it plausible, both in theory and reality, that we have e-social capital in different degrees, for discussions on different topics, such as politics, economics, society, domestic or international contexts?

Fourthly, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) like NVivo may be employed to help analyse the political impact of the Internet in China provided the public debates are deliberatively conducted. This project initially attempted to utilise the NVivo to strengthen the validity of research findings from qualitative data garnered from online discussion forums. It turned out to be the case that the cyber debates were not so rational and deliberative because of shorter messages and discourses. One of the main characteristics of CAQDAS is that it can help process a huge amount of data and information from, say, in-depth interviews. Through collecting data from empirical (field) work, including interviewees’ sex, age, educational background, profession, ...and so forth, researchers can then utilise CAQDAS to process the data garnered besides their online debates, and derive any causation relationship between the designated variables (independent, mediating or dependent). For the time being, debates in the Chinese cyberspace were not so deliberative and were at times inconsistent for various reasons such as Netizens’ insufficient legal and socio-political information/knowledge. Prevalent online censorship and increasingly physical intimidation and arrest of Internet users have

also contributed to China's current cyberculture. Nevertheless, as more and more people become familiar with the Internet, and as they are willing to disclose their identity and are able to discourse more on public issues with deliberation in cyberspace, there will be an increased need to exploit the qualitative computer programmes to assist both data analysis and concept construction because of the exponential proliferation of material.

## Appendix 1

### Corruption

“The reason why corruption prevails over Party organisations has nothing to do with the integrity of our legal system, but the act of overriding the law by the Party” (“Jueqizhonghua,” 2002-11-05, 18:12:19)

“Despite the continuous release of new theories [on corruption], the problem does not yet diminish. The more we talk about ‘practice,’ the more we emphasise ‘theory.’ Does it mean we are making progress [in combating corruption]?” (“Liema,” 2002-11-06, 16:15:30)

“In Mao’s era, corruption was not as serious as it is now. The Party is usually boasting to march with time, but why does corruption appear rampant? What’s the reason?” (“Hairui 2000,” 2002-11-06, 16:01:47)

“Such rhetoric that attributes the cause of corruption to deficits of institutions and regimes is in fact intended to shirk government responsibility at all levels.” (“Jiubanxian,” 2002-11-10, 15:33:35)

“Will it be plausible to establish a Hong Kong modeled ‘Independent Commission Against Corruption’ (ICAC) in order to combat corruption?” (“Luntanjianxisheng,” 2002-11-10, 15:34:16)

“It has already been proclaimed in the *Report* to the 15th Party Congress that the Party would adhere to the principles of exercising strict self-discipline, maintaining the progressiveness and purity of Party members, but why are corrupt officials instead increasing?” (“Bali,” 2002-11-10, 17:28:37)

“The solution to anti-corruption is to consolidate the authority of members of Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Communist Party of China, but the dilemma is that party secretaries outrank those members...” (“Baihuayuan,” 2002-11-06, 16:06:01)

“It is notorious that Party cadres are corrupt, but why is this problem consistently unresolved? But why could the corruption problem be remedied during Mao’s era?” (“Woshilaoyang,” 2002-11-06, 16:07:27)

Q: “Without analysing the cause of corruption, do you reckon we are able to handle the problem?” (“Jiangzhenhuazhennan,” 2002-11-11, 20:49:29) “Did the Report make any conclusion on the cause of corruption?” (“Jiangzhenhuazhennan,” 2002-11-11, 20:41:27)

Ans.: “We can learn from the Korean experience on managing corruption problems; our legal and democratic systems are developing and the punishment for corruption is tightening up.” (“Liyawei,” 2002-11-11, 21:04:18)

Re: “Because this is not a special report on governing corruption, it cannot elucidate every problem in detail.” (“Laoxin,” 2002-11-11, 20:51:00)

Re: “After all, this [corruption issue] is what the public is most concerned about” (“Jiangzhenhuazhennan,” 2002-11-11, 20:53:49)

“Although the government has repeatedly taken a harsh stance on corruption, what is the actual effect? The fundamental cure [for corruption] hinges on ‘institutions’...” (“Hongjianqing,” 2002-11-11, 20:45:41)

## Appendix 2

### *Xiaokang Shehui* and Income Inequality

“To deeply comprehend the meanings of building a well-off society is something related to common benefits of every citizen” (“Fayanruzuo,” 2002-11-10, 15:06:54)

“I don’t agree with the statement that the basic medical and health conditions in rural areas are minimally adequate. Many peasants are becoming much poorer because of illness...” (“Shangwangliuniaopaozao,” 2002-11-10, 15:06:41)

“...But I have seen many kinds of peasants in rural areas that cannot afford even to go to primary school. The reason is that they are poor on one hand, and it is useless to study on the other hand...” (“Luntanjianxisheng,” 2002-11-10, 15:04:53)

“Does it mean we are in a *xiaokang shehui* when 20 per cent of wealthiest population own 80 per cent of national wealth?” (“Zhubajiechixigua,” 2002-11-10, 15:31:23)

“What are the characteristics of a well-off society? How do we realise when we have built a well-off society?” (“April,” 2002-11-10, 14:57:05)

“Whilst governments boast of building a well-off society in an all-round way, do they really mean the authorities will put particular emphasis on solving the poverty and employment problems for the impoverished population?” (“Gaogaoshan,” 2002-11-10, 15:06:28)

“Building a well-off society in an all-round way is fair enough” (“Dazhi,” 2002-11-11, 20:11:51)

Re: “It seems we have heard it for more than ten or twenty years” (“Jiangzhenhuazhennan,” 2002-11-11, 20:15:38)

## Appendix 3

### Political Reform

“I can’t see any difference in the Report to the 16th Party Congress when compared to the one in the 15th Party Congress in terms of the discussions of the political reform” (“Qiannianmaohuozhi,” 2002-11-12, 15:05:03)

“Do you think the pace of political reform is in line with that in economic reform? Does the pace of political reform lag far behind that of economic reform?”

("Tashixianminzhuhaochuduo," 2002-11-12, 15:03:04)

"I don't think that implementing political reform can really combat corruption. We should not be too zealous" ("Jueqizhonghua," 2002-11-12, 15:02:52)

"What is the crystallisation of the political reform measures in the past thirteen years?" ("Shangqiongbiluo," 2002-11-12, 15:28:53)

"We can almost find the answers to those questions raised in the *Qiangguo Luntan* from reading the Report. The role played by the *Qiangguo Luntan* in the building of political democracy is increasingly significant. ("Xuebu," 2002-11-11, 21:20:01 & 21:22:43)

"Absolutely right! That is the reason why I adore the *Report* very much. I think it has synthesised the collective human wisdom among the entire Party membership, fellow countrymen and even all overseas Chinese." ("Dazhi," 2002-11-11, 21:22:38)

"Do you have any conscience as intellectuals when boasting like that? Is the *Report* comprehensive within such limited words" ("Zhonghuadiyisaohangmu," 2002-11-11, 21:22:10)

Question to two guests: "Could you talk about China's democratisation? This is the issue I most care about." ("Zhongguodeminzhuhuaajianshe," 2002-11-11, 21:13:57)

Ans.: "The functioning of democracy is examined whether it can improve and sustain people's living standards" ("Dazhi," 2002-11-11, 21:17:25)

"Then, do you think we are in a democracy now?" ("Aozhoudalongxia," 2002-11-10, 21:19:14)

Response of the first guest: "We don't really possess much democracy, but we do have some democracy because I can chat a lot freely after leaving my working unit," ("Dazhi," 2002-11-11, 21:21:49)

Reply from the second guest: "There is still some progress in the democratic process like village elections" ("Li Yanwei," 2002-11-11, 21:21:10)

"It looks as though there are necessary contradictions between the two [political] systems" ("Guoyougu," 2002-11-11, 21:18:48)

"Democracy is a kind of system, a kind of national system" ("Wosiguwozai," 2002-11-11, 21:16:43)

"You are ordinary people and I'm the master" ("Baguoyumin," 2002-11-11, 21:16:13)

"There is no such expression in the *Report*, is there?" ("Ergou," 2002-11-11, 21:15:44)

“Our democracy is still progressing. We are enjoying much greater freedom under democracy than before. Nevertheless it ought to make progress continuously. There is no way of achieving democratisation in a moment” (“Li Yanwei,” 2002-11-11, 21:15:18)

“Democracy with Chinese characteristics is the most progressive form of democracy in the world” (“Guoyougu,” 2002-11-11, 21:15:12)

“[This sort of democracy has] abundant features, but scant substance. (“Wozhendebuzaihu,” 2002-11-11, 21:20:40)

#### Appendix 4

##### The “Sang-Nong” Issue

“The key to China’s problems is the village issue. To solve it hinges on settling the land problem.” (“*Nongmin yao jin cheng*”, 3/5/2003, 21:02:07)

“Resolving the ‘*san-nong*’ issue requires that we transform villages into the paradise of those who are self-employed. This can be done through developing information technology.” (“*Tiancheng oude*”, 3/7/2003, 17:28:58)

“My suggestion to reform agriculture is to have the reform mainly carried out through developing various service agencies that are devoted to the rural development of agriculture. In addition, informatisation, limiting the use of fertilizer, and directing more assistance to the farmers living in northeast China should all be implemented.” (“*WKH*,” 3/8/2003, 13:15:08)

“Never be dishonest or perfunctory in tackling the ‘*san nong*’ issue. Several [concrete] measures should be taken into account when solving the problems. At a minimum this includes reviewing the difference of the ‘price scissors’ of agriculture and industry, and the physical infrastructure for the development of agriculture.” (“*Rujia ergou*”, 3/9/2003, 13:33:22)

“Although NPC deputies and CPPCC members have all talked about the issue of ‘*san nong*,’ their remarks appear to be rather grandiloquent and infeasible. I think it is more important to focus on the improvement of agricultural production.” (“*Guangfu*”, 3/8/2003, 22:25:37)

“Great improvements ought to be made in village employment opportunities [so that farmers would rather stay in the countryside than go out to look for jobs in the cities].” (“*Mai mai ti*”, 3/8/2003, 19:29:06)

“Urbanisation is fundamental to solving the ‘*san-nong*’ issue. Nevertheless, the critical point is how and to what extent we can urbanise the villages.” (“*Guan kui*”, 3/8/2003, 18:07:47)

“The ‘*san-nong*’ issue needs to be treated as a systemic problem, so that a better constructed and more comprehensive plan will be initiated to deal with it.” (“*Hu*

*huanfu*”, 3/13/2003, 08:18:29)

“Completely solving the ‘*san-nong*’ issue requires exerting much more effort to improve overall education in the villages.” (“*Micang gubo*”, 3/15/2003, 16:00:09)

“Dealing with the ‘*san-nong*’ problem requires improving job creation in order to absorb the surplus of manpower from the villages. In addition, enacting relevant laws to prohibit job discrimination against immigrant farmers from villages and reinforcing extensive applications of information technology within villages will contribute to the accomplishment of the task.” (“*Weiming xiansheng*”, 3/15/2003, 17:45:53)

## Appendix 5

### Employment and Social Security

“The elderly are indeed those who are impoverished in our society. Many of them have become the victims of the reform and the restructuring of their work units. They are refused a pension allowance when they retire or get laid off.” (“*Xiaoba lazǐ*”, 3/6/2003, 20:42:42)

“Can the NPC deputies care for people of the so-called ‘*laosanjie*’, those middle-aged workers who have fallen victim to the Cultural Revolution, 1966-70]? They are economically worse off and many of them are now jobless. The governments at all levels should initiate policies to take particular care of them by granting them compensation and pensions.” (“*Y-*”, 3/9/2003, 21:06:41)

“Cease the illegal campaign of laying off workers!” (“*Ti xiagang gongren shuoju gongdao hua*”, 3/7/2003, 13:58:37)

“The conundrum of social insurance/security for the rural farmers who are now working in the cities can be resolved by means of transfer payment to the villages where they used to live rather than paying the cities where they are currently working. This may improve social security in the villages and countryside, and in the meantime take into account the high mobility of farmers.” (“*Mai mai tǐ*”, 3/10/2003, 13:40:46)

“Build up a comprehensive social security net!” (“*Jiu ban xian*”, 3/6/2003, 20:22:19)

“The key to solving the unemployment problem is to create job vacancies [to deal with] the excessive surplus of rural manpower. Both the government and entrepreneurs ought to work closely in order to promote job creation.” (“*Chang siliang*”, 3/12/2003, 14:37:31)

“It is necessary to enact relevant labour and employment laws in order to protect individual labour from suffering from the reform of the state-owned enterprises.” (“*Gu jing w*”, 3/10/2003, 23:37:40)

“Improve and reinforce well-functioning labour unions for all immigrant farmers working in the cities. The labour unions should play the key role in bridging the gap between the farmers and the cities, and should address their concerns. The labour rights [of immigrant farmers] have also to be safeguarded by law.” (*“Shangqiong biluo”*, 3/13/2003, 14:58:14)

## Appendix 6

### The Role and Reform of the NPC and CPPCC

“How many proposals submitted by the NPC deputies can be adopted and put into practice?” (Cynically argued by *“Yue wang tu”*, 3/5/2003, 21:59:36)

“Why do the NPC deputies have their opinions heard only for a few days during the [annual] session?” (*“Nan manzi”*, 3/5/2003, 19:45:32)

“Rules to elect NPC deputies have to be promulgated.” (*“Lu shi”*, 3/7/2003, 10:18:10)

“The NPC deputies should be elected through free and fair elections.” (*“Aiguo zhi shi”*, 3/7/2003, 10:44:26)

“The NPC deputies ought to become full-time positions, and the Congress’ electoral system reformed as well.” (*“Sanmian hongqi wansui”*, 3/7/2003, 10:06:14)

“To ensure the separation of powers, government officials cannot simultaneously be NPC deputies and CPPCC members.” (*“Ren si”*, 3/10/2003, 09:49:26)

“Can the NPC deputies effectively supervise themselves?” (*“Kefei xiansheng”*, 3/10/2003, 13:42:48)

“Responsibility rather than honour is far more important for the NPC deputies. Those clique members [who just come to compliment the achievements of the party and the government] must be dismissed right away.” (*“Shangjie diyi ban, xiazhuan disi ban”*, 3/10/2003, 14:17:15)

“How can they [NPC and CPPCC delegates] watch over the government if they themselves are government officials?” (*“Kefei xiansheng”*, 3/10/2003, 13:47:24)

“The NPC should rectify their rules of procedure in accordance with the rules set in the CPPCC codes.” (*“Mai mai ti”*, 3/10/2003, 12:07:47)

“Instead of submitting proposals from individual members during the two sessions, I think it would be more plausible to concentrate on a few critical issues and come up with solutions to them.” (*“Mengju hongqi”*, 3/9/2003, 17:12:20)

“Can the common people’s proposals be directly handed in to the NPC deputies?” (*“Li meidao”*, 3/12/2003, 14:44:20)

“There should be more full-time NPC deputies in the future.” (“*Chexy 654*,” 3/11/2003, 20:07:04)

“To enhance the transparency of the NPC [and CPPCC] proceedings, their political consultations and debates ought to be broadcast live.” (“*Sanmian hongqi wansui*”, 3/11/2003, 13:54:13)

“The numbers of NPC deputies and CPPCC members should be reduced since many of them know little about their paramount obligations [to review government policies]. ... Only when thoughtful debates are conducted during the two sessions—as in Western parliaments—can we judge that a genuine Chinese democracy is beginning to take shape.” (“*Wanli shuang*”, 3/13/2003, 21:18:54)

“There should be NPC deputies selected from this Internet forum in the next session, for the Netizens are superior and better informed—and their opinions are profound but practical.” (“*San niu ge*”, 3/16/2003, 18:40:32)

## Appendix 7

### The Rule of Law: Part I

“Democratic supervision under the leadership of the Communist Party hinges on a very critical condition that there should be no factional interests within the Party. However, the reality is ... [that these factional interests do exist].” (“*Zhengshizhe*”, 3/16/2003, 10:14:16)

“The key point is that the Party should be separated (distanced) from factional interests. However, the Party is a net, a horrible net [that cannot be divided].” (“*Shengling 12345*”, 3/14/2003, 07:56:23)

“I’m not against the leadership of the Communist Party. But the key is its governance. The Party’s leadership ought to be restructured and its power checked.” (“*Lu ming*”, 3/13/2003, 21:04:52)

“Saying is one thing, doing is another. It is too early to comment [on the good of democratic supervision under the leadership of the Communist Party].” (“*Tudi 2*”, 3/13/2003, 10:52:40)

“Corruption will absolutely exist if a political party has stayed in office for long. And if it loses popular support, the party will die for sure.” (“*WWW 11225500*”, 3/12/2003, 20:54:20)

“History has proven that ‘*sanquan fenli*’ (separation of the legislative, executive, and judicial functions of a government) under the leadership of the Communist Party is unlikely to ensure the people’s constitutional rights.” (“*Huayang fanxin, huali youhua*”, 3/11/2003, 21:41:31)

“No matter what the nature of regime is, an excellent one is one that can function effectively.” (“*Guang xun*”, 3/12/2003, 00:58:51)

“Election, supervision, and checks-and-balances would guarantee the people’s constitutional rights. Merely holding an election is insufficient.” (“*Wu ren*”, 3/11/2003, 18:20:58)

“To rein in corruption would require political reform: strengthening the functions of the NPC, ruling the country according to law, and implementing effective supervision.” (“*Zhu mu zhen*”, 3/11/2003, 11:17:54)

“Never blindly copy models of foreign systems. Democratic supervision is much better.” (“*Guang xun*”, 3/11/2003, 01:17:14)

“Other than practising the Western model of a multiparty system in which all political parties contest for power, it is worth considering to divide the CCP into several cliques.” (“*Kongdangde yuanye 2*”, 3/11/2003, 00:51:52)

“Only when there is a general election on the basis of universal suffrage can the people’s constitutional rights be assured. People can accordingly decide whether the incumbent officials should be dismissed or stay in office.” (“*Wanli shuang*”, 3/11/2003, 21:38:26)

## Appendix 8

### The Rule of Law: Part II

“A journalism law must be enacted in order to ensure that news reports can truly reflect public opinion and people’s lives.” (“*Ren si*”, 3/10/2003, 10:16:44)

“I agree. The rule of law has to transcend the will of the leaders, and the abuse of power has to be denounced as well.” (“*Yun zi wuxin shui zi xian*”, 3/10/2003, 21:09:43)

“The restructuring of government agencies at all levels, government spending, and the salaries of NPC deputies must all be legalised and supervised in accordance with law.” (“*Wanli shuang*”, 3/10/2003, 21:41:28)

“Discrimination against migrant workers from poorer provinces in major urban areas is evidently prevalent. It is so ironic that the government has long boasted of a ‘socialist country under the rule of law.’ I urge that an ‘anti-discrimination law’ urgently be enacted.” (“*Mo long*”, 3/11/2003, 21:23:15)

“I agree. The current situation is fairly grave—discriminating against workers on the basis of education, age, and gender.” (“*Xinzhong de meng*”, 3/12/2003, 09:57:04)

“There are more than one hundred million hepatitis patients suffering discrimination in the job market. Who is going to speak up for them?” (“*Nengbuneng guanxin guanxin women*”, 3/13/2003, 15:32:05)

“What people are much more concerned about are democracy, rule of law, and science.” (“*Dang zhi pai*”, 3/13/2003, 12:20:33)

“No, people are more keen to live fair and just lives. (*Xiao jiu*”, 3/13/2003, 23:34:39)

“What China really needs is an independent judiciary.” (*Lan bo*”, 3/12/2003, 10:13:27)

## **Appendix 9**

### **Interview Questions:**

1. What is your understanding of the development of the internet and its impact on business opportunities in China?
2. What are the prospects for Internet-related business in China?
3. How would you cope if faced with the Chinese Government's (arbitrary) regulations?
4. What actions would you take? (following the question No. 3)
5. Do you employ the so-called "Big Mama" to monitor chat-rooms and check on-line contents? If so, what are the ways in which you conduct the checking and monitoring?
6. Do you block certain Web sites or pages? Do you have examples of any practical actions you have been involved in?
7. What do you understand by the term "Self-discipline" pledged by some 100 Chinese Internet business players on 26th March 2002?
8. How do you make profits from operating Internet portals (internet café/bar) in China?
9. In general, do you think it is easy or difficult to get a license to operate your internet business?
10. What job and role do you believe Internet entrepreneurs have had in the transition of the Chinese society?

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