Challenging the Regime, Defending the Regime:
Contesting Cyberspace in China

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Abstract

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Drawing on twelve months of fieldwork and over two years of in-depth online ethnographic work, the dissertation examines state management and popular activism on Chinese internet forums as a window onto China's authoritarian state. Through examination of state management and popular activism on Chinese internet forums, I find not only a conventional cat-and-mouse censorship game in which the party-state, intermediary actors and forum users struggle over the limits of online expression, but also discourse competition in which the regime, its critics and netizens engineer popular opinion to their advantage.

I find that censorship is more complicated than the usual picture of state-society confrontation. It involves the fragmented state, many intermediary actors and netizens with diverse purposes and motivations. To understand the mechanism of the censorship, I trace the evolution of the state censorship system, and explore its external challenges and internal fragmentation (Chapter 2). I also examine forum managers' censorship responsibilities and their "discontented compliance" as a response to state control and netizens' demands (Chapter 3). My examination of netizen activism shows that forum users engage in "pop activism" that blurs the boundary of political participation and popular entertainment (Chapter 4). In the censorship game, though state coercive power establishes the basic logic of censorship, technological know-how and expressive creativity enable forum managers and netizens to counterbalance state control.

In discourse competition, both the regime and its critics have attempted to engineer popular opinion through anonymous public relations strategies. The state's attempts to turn propaganda into public relations through mobilization of paid internet commentators – popularly known as the "fifty cents army" –frequently backfire and chip away at its legitimacy (Chapter 5). However, regime critics' efforts in discourse competition have produced the political framing of regime challengers as saboteurs of the nation rather than freedom fighters (Chapter 6), leading to the rise of pro-regime netizen communities that voluntarily defend the authoritarian regime. By examining how these regime-defending netizens adopt their identity, construct a community and sustain pro-regime discourse, I challenge assumptions about the internet's democratizing power (Chapter 7).

My dissertation presents a nuanced picture of internet politics and a complex pattern of state-society interaction in a reforming authoritarian regime. Unlike earlier work which assumes a control-liberalization relationship between the state and the netizens, both of which are implicitly treated as single entities, my dissertation highlights the internal fragmentation of Chinese state and challenges the assumption of a monolithic internet that is inherently liberalizing and democratizing.

These findings also speak to both the literature on authoritarian resilience as well as recent work on technological empowerment. As scholars devote more attention to understanding varieties of authoritarianism and authoritarian resilience, my work suggests that the "authoritarian resilience" literature focuses too heavily on the regime's adaptability without sufficient attention to the nature and impact of challenges towards the regime. My findings also propose that work on "technological empowerment" overemphasizes the emancipatory character of the internet while neglecting the limitations of internet mobilization.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCP: Chinese Communist Party
CCYLCC: Chinese Communist Youth League Central Committee
COD: Central Organizational Department
CPD: Central Propaganda Department
CPPCC: Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
GAPP: General Administration of Press and Publication
GFW: Great Firewall
ICPs: Internet Content Providers
ISPs: Internet Service Providers
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
NPC: National People's Congress
MEI: Ministry of Electronic Industries
MII: Ministry of Information Industry
MIIT: Ministry of Industry and Information Technology
MOC: Ministry of Culture
MOE: Ministry of Education
MPS: Ministry of Public Security
MPT: Ministry of Postal and Telecommunications
MSS: Ministry of State Security
NPC: National People's Congress
SC: State Council
SARFT: State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television
SCIO: State Council Information Office

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Chapter 1
Introduction

In 2010, the Middle East was in turmoil. As the Tunisian Revolution successfully overthrew President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, triggering the start of the Arab Spring, the power of the internet, particularly the social network media, garnered global attention.[1] On the other side of the world, in China, regime critics, inspired by the Arab Spring, called for their own Jasmine Revolution, which they hoped would disrupt the regime through online and offline mobilization.[2] However, these calls had little visible or lasting impact. One demonstration at central Beijing's Wangfujing Street, widely advertised online by democratic activists, turned out to be little more than a bit of performance art: literally a handful protestors surrounded by thousands of onlookers, hundreds of foreign journalists and local policemen.[3]

As Lisa Anderson has perceptively pointed out, the importance of the Arab Spring lies not in how protesters were inspired by globalized norms of civic engagement or how they utilized technology, but in "how and why these ambitions and techniques resonated in their various local contexts."[4] In comparison to the Middle Eastern countries whose citizens were mobilized during the Arab Spring, China has an authoritarian government that can more effectively control its population, and a robust economy providing more job opportunities.[5] However, such structural factors are hardly sufficient to explain the miniscule scale of mobilization in China's Jasmine Revolution, especially considering the pervasiveness of massive collective incidents[6] and online activism.[7] While collective incidents tend to center on narrowly-defined concrete demands rather than an overarching political agenda,[8] online activism often

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[1] See, for instance, Ethan Zuckerman, "The First Twitter Revolution?" *Foreign Policy,* (January 14 2012); Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 1 (January/February 2011), pp. 28-41; Gilad Lotan, Erhardt Graeff, Mike Ananny, Devin Gaffney, Ian Pearce, and Danah Boyd, "The Revolutions Were Tweeted: Information Flows During the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions," *International Journal of Communication,* 5 (2011), pp. 1375–1405; Nahed Eltantawy and Julie B. Wiest, "Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory," *International Journal of Communication,* 5 (2011), pp. 1207-1224; Rita Safranek, "The Emerging Role of Social Media in Political and Regime Change," http://www.csa.com/discoveryguides/social_media/review.pdf, retrieved August 20, 2012; Colin Delany**,** "How Social Media Accelerated Tunisia's Revolution: An Inside View," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/colin-delany/how-social-media-accelera_b_821497.html, retrieved August 20, 2012.

[2] See Ian Johnson, "Calls for a 'Jasmine Revolution' in China Persist," *New York Times* (February 24, 2011).

[3] James Fallows, "Arab Spring, Chinese Winter," *The Atlantic*, September 2011; Jeremy Page, "Call for Protests Unnerves Beijing," *Wall Street Journal*, February 21, 2011; Austin Ramzy, "State Stamps Out Small 'Jasmine' Protests in China" http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2052860,00.html#ixzz1xjUDL7Mp, retrieved August 20, 2012; Tania Branigan, "China's Jasmine Revolution: Police but No Protesters Line Streets of Beijing," http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/27/china-jasmine-revolution-beijing-police, retrieved August 20, 2012.

[4] Lisa Anderson, "Demystifying the Arab Spring," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (May/June 2011), pp. 2-7

[5] See Gady Epstein, "A Revolution Is Not a Tweetup: Jasmine Revolution and the Limits of China's Internet," http://www.forbes.com/sites/gadyepstein/2011/02/22/a-revolution-is-not-a-tweetup-jasmine-revolution-and-the-limits-of-chinas-internet/, retrieved August 20, 2012; James Fallows, "Arab Spring, Chinese Winter."

[6] For instance, Kevin O'Brien (ed.), *Popular Protest in China* (Harvard University Press, 2008); Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Yu Jianrong, *Kangzhengxing Zhengzhi: Zhongguo Zhengzhi Shehuixue Jiben Wenti* (*Contentious Politics: Basic Questions of Chinese Political Sociology*) (People Publishing House, 2010).

[7] Guobin Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online* (Columbia University Press, 2009); Johan Lagerkvist, *After the Internet, Before Democracy* (Peter Lang, 2010).

[8] Barbara Demick, "Protests in China over Local Grievances Surge, and Get a Hearing," LA Times, Oct. 8, 2011, http://articles.latimes.com/2011/oct/08/world/la-fg-china-protests-20111009, retrieved August 20, 2012. She suggests that demonstrators "have a narrow agenda and concrete demands: Farmers want a stop to confiscations of their land or to get better compensation for lost property. Homeowners want to stop demolitions. People want cleaner air and water and safer food. Truckers and taxi drivers want relief from soaring fuel prices."

targets the authoritarian regime in general and poses demands for more freedom and democracy. What prevents a similar resonance between "ambitions" of discontented citizens and "techniques" that Anderson found in Arab Spring in the Chinese context? Why does China's fragmented authoritarian regime remain resilient despite pluralizing and liberalizing challenges of the internet? How do the party-state, intermediary actors, and netizens struggle to define the limits of online expression? What drives online discourse competition within state-imposed boundaries?

Based on twelve months of fieldwork, over ten years of forum participation and three years of management experience, this project explores the ongoing struggle over online expression in China's internet forums. I find two distinctive yet interrelated sets of mechanisms at work in shaping online public expression in China. The first is a conventional cat-and-mouse control game, well-known in the literature and common in state-society interaction in China. The second is the more often overlooked discourse competition that centers on the manipulation of popular opinion.

Concurrent examination of these two dynamics provides a more nuanced picture of internet politics in China, and sheds light on a complex pattern of state-society interaction in a reforming authoritarian regime, an understanding of which demands a disaggregation of both state and society. What I have found also suggests the need to re-conceptualize two dominant frames for talking about Chinese state-society relations: discussions about "authoritarian resilience" and "technological empowerment". On the one hand, despite its efforts to tame and take advantage of online expression, the regime struggles to deal with both content control and discourse competition. On the other hand, online mobilization by social actors or regime-challengers is limited to narrowly-defined concrete issues or web bounded activism because the internet is fragmented and netizens see no viable alternative to the current regime. This in turn feeds into the apparent resilience of the regime. In other words, unlike the "authoritarian resilience" thesis that focuses on the regime's adaptability or the "technological empowerment" argument that centers on the internet's emancipating effects, this project examines the weaknesses in the state's adaptations as well as limitations of online mobilization. Such a perspective suggests a state-society status quo in Chinese cyberspace featuring a less resilient authoritarian regime matched up against less powerful challengers.

In sections that follow, I first survey current studies on internet politics in China and situate my own project in the literature. Then I introduce internet forums as important domains for public expression in China and explain why they are ideal platforms to study the governance of the internet and its impact on Chinese political life. Empirical findings of this project will be presented and analyzed before I proceed to discuss their implications for state-society relations, authoritarian resilience, and democratic transition. I next describe my data-collection strategy. I conclude with a brief overview of the chapters that follow.

The Empowering Internet vs. the Repressive Authoritarian Regime

With its inherent "control-frustrating characteristics,"[9] the internet has become the locus of debates over liberalization and democratization in authoritarian China.[10] Though highly censored, it has created a relatively free discursive space which some

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[9] Taylor Boas, "Weaving the Authoritarian Web: The Control of Internet Use in Nondemocratic Regimes," in John Zysman and Abraham Newman (eds.), *How Revolutionary Was the Digital Revolution? National Responses, Market Transitions, and Global Technology*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 365.

[10] Michael S. Chase, and James C. Mulvenon, *You've Got Dissent! (*RAND, 2002); Chin-Fu Hung, "The Politics of Cyber Participation in the PRC: The Implications of Contingency for the Awareness of Citizens' Rights," *Issues and Studies,* Vol. 42, No. 4 (December 2006), pp. 137-173.

see as an emerging public sphere.[11] In fact, netizens have not only managed to circumvent and challenge state censorship in creative and artful ways, but have also transformed the internet into a platform for virtual activism.[12] Freer flows of information in cyberspace—as compared to traditional media—have promoted civil society by enhancing both internal communications and the inter-connectedness of civil organizations,[13] and facilitated citizen activism by offering new opportunities and techniques for both domestic and overseas Chinese to mobilize and organize collective action against the regime.[14]

There is no question that the internet has challenged the Chinese regime. Can the regime demonstrate its resilience by adapting itself to limit the internet's disruptive effects?[15] Internet control operates via four mechanisms: the law, technical architecture (code), social norms and the market.[16] In China, all four are subject to the state's heavy influence or direct control. The party-state has, over time, constructed an increasingly complicated and subtle censorship regime, which controls both the internet's network infrastructure and online content,[17] by filtering taboo words, blocking or shutting down websites, jailing internet dissidents, attempting to enforce real name registration, and so forth.[18] For instance, the regime has established a nationwide system, often nicknamed as Great Firewall, to filter and track online information.[19] Another example is the state's attempt to require all PC manufacturers

[11] Guobin Yang, "The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere," *Media, Culture & Society,* Vol. 25, No. 4 (2003), pp. 469–490; Guobin Yang and Craig Calhoun*, "*Media, Civil Society, and the Rise of a Green Public Sphere in China,*" China Information,* Vol. 21, No. 2 (July 2007), pp. 211-236; Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China*. Xu Wu also argues that internet has nurtured and facilitated the spread of cyber nationalism by creating the necessary "public sphere" beyond state's control. See Xu Wu, *Chinese Cyber Nationalism*, (Lexington Books, 2007); Lagerkvist, *The Internet in China: Unlocking and Containing the Public Sphere* (Lund: Lund University, 2007); Yong Hu, *Zhongsheng Xuanhua: Wangluo Shidai de Geren Biaoda yu Gonggong Taolun*（*The Rising Cacophony: Personal Expression and Public Discussion in the Internet Age*）(Nanning: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008).

[12] Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang "Political Expression in the Chinese Blogosphere," *Asian Survey* 48 (2008), pp. 752-772; Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China*.

[13] Guobin Yang, "The Co-Evolution of the Internet and Civil Society in China," *Asian Survey* 43 (2003), pp. 124-141; Guobin Yang, "The Internet and Civil Society in China: A Preliminary Assessment," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 12, Issue 36 (2003), pp. 453-475; Guobin Yang, "How Do Chinese Civic Associations Respond to the Internet? Findings from a Survey," *The China Quarterly* 189 (March 2007), pp.122-143; Zixue Tai, *The Internet in China* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[14] Yongnian Zheng, *Technological Empowerment: The Internet, State, and Society in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Yongnian Zheng and Guoguang Wu, "Information Technology, Public Space, and Collective Action in China," *Comparative Political Studies,* Vol. 38, No. 5 (2005), pp. 507-536; Patricia Thornton, "Manufacturing Dissent in Transnational China: Boomerang, Backfire or Spectacle?" in Kevin J. O'Brien (ed.) *Popular Protest in China* (Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 179-204.

[15] Andrew Nathan, "Authoritarian Resilience," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2003) 6-17.

[16] See Lawrence Lessig, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu, *Who Controls the Internet?: Illusions of a Borderless World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[17] Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China*; Zheng, *Technological Empowerment*; Yonggang Li, *Women de Fanghuoqiang: Wangluo Shidai de Biaoda yu Jianguan (Our Great Firewall: Expression and Governance in the Era of the Internet)* (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2009); 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. Also see Ronald J. Deibert, John G. Palfrey, Rafal Rohozinski and Jonathan Zittrain (eds.), *Access Denied: The Practice and Policy of Global Internet Filtering* (The MIT Press, 2008); *Access Controlled: The Shaping of Power, Rights, and Rule in Cyberspace* (The MIT Press, 2010); *Access Contested: Security, Identity, and Resistance in Asian Cyberspace* (The MIT Press, 2011).

[18] Qianlian He, *The Fog of Censorship: Media Control in China* (Human Rights in China, 2008); Chase and Mulvenon, *You've Got Dissent!*; Jonathan Zittrain and Benjamin Edelman, "Internet Filtering in China," *IEEE Internet Computing* (March/April 2003), pp. 70-77; Greg Walton, "China's Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People's Republic of China," *International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development* (2001); Lokman Tsui, "An Inadequate Metaphor: The Great Firewall and Chinese Internet Censorship," *Global Dialogue,* Vol. 9, No. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 2007), pp.60-68.

[19] See Walton, "China's Golden Shield"; Lokman Tsui, "An Inadequate Metaphor." Though related to internet

to preinstall "green dam" software, meant to filter out pornography and other unhealthy information.[20]

Discontent towards the Liberalization-Control Paradigm

Does the internet empower citizens? Or does it simply facilitate greater degrees of state control? This debate in the literature hints at how the liberalization-control paradigm currently dominant in studies of Chinese internet politics focuses mainly on the dyad of control and dissent.[21] Though this framework has advanced our understanding of internet politics, its limitations are increasingly problematic. The tension between liberalization and control does not account for the diverse activities in Chinese cyberspace and furthermore, exposes only a limited slice of politics and the role of the media in political communication.[22] In particular, the tendency of the liberalization-control framework "to see politics only in the higher echelons of power or as its outright subversion"[23] prevents us from examining and evaluating less confrontational, more adaptive and creative aspects of the struggle over online expression. In addition to direct censorship, the state has shifted towards more subtle management of the public's attention[24] and attempted to work the internet to its own advantage by fueling its own discourse online through innovated propaganda strategies such as astroturfing[25] and ideotainment.[26] Similarly, social actors have not only circumvented and challenged the censorship regime in artful and creative ways,[27] but have also engaged in practices of online activism that do not fit neatly into the liberalization-control framework.[28]

This project introduces two major analytical concerns that are not fully addressed by most current studies that deploy the liberalization-control framework. First, current studies tend to oversimplify the struggle over online expression into a dyadic model of

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monitoring and censorship, the Golden Shield Project was started by the Ministry of Public Security to "informatize" (*xinxi hua*) its workflow, including population management, criminal records and border control. As Dave Lyons has rightly put it, it is "better described as an effort to network the police, rather than police the network." See Dave Lyons, "China's Golden Shield Project: Myths, Realities and Context." Paper presented at 7th Annual Chinese Internet Research Conference, University of Pennsylvania (May 27-29, 2009).

[20] Andrew Jacobs, "China Requires Censorship Software on New PCs," *New York Times* (June 8, 2009). The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology responded promptly, claiming that the software does not monitor users' online activities and can be uninstalled. See Bao Ying, "Filtering Software to Be Installed on New Computers," *The Beijing News* (June 10, 2009).

[21] See Jens Damm, "The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society," *Critical Asian Studies,* Vol. 39, No. 2 (2007), pp. 273-294.

[22] Guobin Yang, "Technology and Its Contents: Issues in the Study of the Chinese Internet," *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 70, No. 4 (2011): 1043-1050; Meng Bingchun, "Moving Beyond Democratization: A Thought Piece on the China Internet Research Agenda," *International Journal of Communication,* 4 (2010), p. 501; Jens Damm, "The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society."

[23] Guobin Yang, "Technology and Its Contents," p. 1044.

[24] Johan Lagerkvist, *After the Internet*, Chapter 5, and p. 122.

[25] Rebecca Mackinnon, "China's 'Networked Authoritarianism'" *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 22, No. 2 (April 2011), pp. 32-46.

[26] Johan Lagerkvist, "Internet Ideotainment in the PRC: National Responses to Cultural Globalization," *Journal of Contemporary China,* Vol. 17, No. 54 (2008), pp. 121-140. He argues that Chinese leaders and intellectuals perceive the internet as a challenge to existing value orientations and ideology, which must be coped with new propaganda strategies like ideotainment, i.e. juxtaposition of "images, symbolic representations, and sounds of popular Web and mobile phone culture together with both subtle and overt ideological constructs and nationalistic propaganda."

[27] Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China.*

[28] Paola Voci, *China on Video: Smaller-Screen Realities* (London: Routledge, 2010); Meng, "Moving Beyond Democratization," pp. 501–508; Guobin Yang, "Beiqing yu Xinue: Wangluo Shijian Zhong de Qinggan Dongyuan" (Of Sympathy and Play: Emotional Mobilization in Online Collective Action), *Chuanbo yu Shehui Xuekan* (*The Chinese Journal of Communication and Society*), No. 9 (2009), pp. 39-66; Yong Hu, "Yaoyan Zuowei Yizhong Shehui Kangyi" (Rumor as Social Protest), *Chuanbo yu Shehui Xuekan* (*The Chinese Journal of Communication and Society*), No. 9 (2009), pp. 67-94.

state-society confrontation, in which either the society or the state dominates. In fact the internet's impact on Chinese political life is more mixed and complicated: it may, for instance, contribute more to liberalization than democratization;[29] it may function as a safety valve, or it may inspire political activism depending on whether bloggers plunge in ahead of mainstream media.[30] Such a dyadic view also leaves out many possible additional actors. For instance, except a few studies on corporations' censorship role,[31] intermediary actors like forum management who have played an important role in censorship have yet to receive sufficient attention.

Second, the liberalization-control framework focuses on the state-society divide without disaggregating the state or cyberspace itself. On one hand, current studies tend to treat the Chinese state as a single entity that represses online expression single-mindedly. Though students of Chinese politics as well as Chinese citizens have long appreciated the fragmentation within the Chinese state and its implications for both policy making and implementation,[32] few studies have explored the horizontal and vertical cleavages within the state's internet governance structure. This is true despite the fact that multiple state agencies in different sectors and at different levels are involved in content control and discourse competition. Such cleavages, because of diverse interests and motivations among these agencies, have clearly affected the outcomes of online politics.

Furthermore, the liberalization-control framework assumes a nearly monolithic Chinese cyberspace that is inherently liberalizing and democratizing. However, evidence from both in and outside China suggests that such an assumption is questionable. While some Chinese internet observers have hailed internet technology for emancipating the society from the authoritarian regime, many Western scholars emphasize the internet's detrimental, disintegrating effects for society and suggest that online discussion may encourage polarization and even lead to a "Balkanized public."[33]

This 'fragmentation thesis' is supported by Chinese data. For instance, James

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[29] Zheng, *Technological Empowerment*.

[30] Jonathan Hassid, "Safety Valve or Pressure Cooker? Blogs in Chinese Political Life," *Journal of Communication,* Vol. 62, No. 2 (2012), pp 212-230. According to Hassid, blogs function as safety valve in cases where the mainstream media set the agenda, and inspire political activism on issues where bloggers get ahead of journalists.

[31] Rebecca Mackinnon, "Corporate Accountability in Networked Asia," in Ronald J. Deibert, John G. Palfrey, Rafal Rohozinski and Jonathan Zittrain (eds.), *Access Contested: Security, Identity, and Resistance in Asian Cyberspace* (The MIT Press, 2010); Lagerkvist, *The Internet in China*, pp. 166-176; Ethan Zuckerman, "Intermediary Censorship" in Ronald J. Deibert, John G. Palfrey, Rafal Rohozinski and Jonathan Zittrain (eds.), *Access Controlled: The Shaping of Power, Rights and Rule in Cyberspace* (The MIT Press, 2010).

[32] Kenneth Lieberthal, Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes* (Princeton University Press, 1988); O'Brien and Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China*; Lianjiang Li, "Political Trust in Rural China," *Modern China,* Vol. 30, No. 2 (2004), pp. 228-258; Andrew Mertha, "'Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0': Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process," *The China Quarterly,* No. 200 (December 2009), pp. 995-1012.

[33] See Cass R. Sunstein, *On Rumors: How Falsehoods Spread, Why We Believe Them, What Can Be Done* (Macmillan, 2009), p. 7. Also see Cass Sunstein, *Infotopia: How Many Minds Produce Knowledge* (Oxford University Press, 2006); Cass Sunstein, Republic.com (Princeton University Press, 2001); Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2008); Barry Wellman and Milena Gulia, "Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone: Virtual Communities as Communities," in Barry Wellman (ed.) *Networks in the Global Village* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999); Kevin A. Hill and John E. Hughes, *Cyberpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); Anthony Wilhelm, "Virtual Sounding Boards: How Deliberative Is Online Political Discussion?" In Barry Hague and Brian Loader (eds) *Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision Making in the Information Age* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 154–78; Lincoln Dahlberg, "Computer-Mediated Communication and the Public Sphere: A Critical Analysis." *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* Vol. 7, No. 1 (2001); 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 (2011).

Leibold finds that the Chinese blogosphere produces "the same shallow infotainment, pernicious misinformation, and interest-based ghettos" as elsewhere.[34] As Jens Damm argues, rising urban and consumerist post-modernity has produced a fragmented and localized internet, in which Chinese netizens are more apt to protest state interference with their particular "zones of freedom" than to demand political change like democratization.[35] Studies on political expression also reveal that netizens are divided in terms of their political orientations and that the agendas of forums are significantly different from one another.[36] However, despite their insights on the fragmentation of Chinese cyberspace, these studies tend to either underplay the impact of online activism by portraying Chinese netizens as apolitical or shed only limited light on the dynamic process of discourse production by relying on static content analysis.

Public Expression on Chinese Internet Forums

As Guobin Yang has pointed out, "the Chinese internet should not be viewed in isolation from its social, political, and cultural contents and contexts."[37] Interestingly enough, though online expression, or the struggle over it, constitutes the core of many studies of the internet in China, few authors have traced the process of information production, spread, acquisition and containment in the context of an online environment like that of internet forums. This project, by exploring state management and popular struggle on Chinese internet forums, addresses precisely this issue.

As online platforms for public discussion in China, internet forums were first introduced to China in the form of Bulletin Board System (BBS) by research and educational institutions in the mid-1990s. While early BBS sites provided only telnet access, web platforms were developed later and became the mainstream format for Chinese online forums. In addition to discussion boards where thematic conversations take place, most forums today also provide within-site mailing and messaging systems, chat-rooms, user blogging and even games to facilitate interaction among their users.[38]

Most internet forums are accessible for both registered and non-registered users. But to engage in discussions, i.e. to post or reply to threads, one must register a username (ID). Though often a valid email account is sufficient for registration, certain forums may require additional identification information like phone numbers, student or even official identity numbers. In some cases, registration is by invitation

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[34] James Leibold "Blogging Alone: China, the Internet, and the Democratic Illusion?" *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70 (November 2011), pp. 1023-1041.

[35] See Jens Damm, "The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society," p.285. According to Damm, Chinese netizens on the whole do not demand political change like democratization even though they are ready to protest when the state interferes with their "zone of freedom."

[36] Fang Tang, "Zhengzhi Wangmin de Shehui Jingji Diwei yu Zhengzhi Qingxiang: Jiyu Qiangguo he Maoyan de Tansuoxing Fenxi" (Political Netizen's Socioeconomic Status and Political Orientation: An Exploratory Research on Qiang Guo and Mao Yan Online Forum), *China Media Report,* Vol. 8, No. 3 (Aug. 2009), pp. 96-107. Analyzing postings by randomly sampled users from the *Qiangguo Luntan* and *Maoyan* forums, Tang found that over 82% of users from *Qiangguo Luntan* identify as moderate or ultra left (43% and 39%) while 73% of users from Maoyan identify as moderate or ultra right (63% and 10%). Yuan Le and Boxu Yang, "Online Political Discussion and Left-Right Ideological Debate: A Comparative Study of Two Major Chinese BBS Forums," Paper presented at 7th Annual Chinese Internet Research Conference, University of Pennsylvania, May 27-29, 2009. The authors reached similar conclusions (*Qiangguo*: 75% left vs. 9.5% right; *Maoyan*: 21.6% left vs. 48.4% right). Compared to Tang's findings, the left-right ratio is less stunning for *Maoyan* in this study. One potential explanation, besides coding, can be: Tang sampled users while Le and Yang sampled posts. Right wing netizens can be under-represented if they are less active in posting.

[37] Guobin Yang, "Technology and Its Contents," p. 1048.

[38] Forums often incorporate other online applications. Most forums have such functions like internal mailing service, short message service, blog service and a chat room to facilitate user interaction beyond discussion boards.

only. Many forums do not restrict the number of IDs one can register. Even forums that attempt to impose such a limit often fail to do so without actually enforcing real-name registration. Postings are often in textual format, though multimedia postings (i.e. pictures, videos, and audio material) are increasingly common thanks to improved hardware, bandwidth and software platforms.

Besides state surveillance (for instance, the Great Firewall), forum management expends significant effort to monitor online expression. Many forums have installed keyword filtering software to prevent postings containing taboo words from being published in the first place. Manual scrutiny is also important, even for forums with pre-filtering measures, as netizens are creative enough to circumvent the automatic filtering. Board managers and editors, either selected from users or appointed by forums, are responsible for stamping out non-compliance by deleting posts, suspending or permanently eradicating user accounts, or even banning IP addresses. To guide discussion, forum management can also promote certain posts by highlighting them, recommending them for the front-page, and placing them at the top of the board. On large public forums, special content monitoring personnel are often installed in addition to or in place of board managers to ensure more effective surveillance. Apart from private forums set up and run by individuals, most medium and large forums are affiliated with larger entities like academic institutions or companies and managed by them. In some cases, these institutions are granted administrative power to directly intervene in forum management when they deem necessary.

Internet forums offer a first-rate window onto online expression and internet governance in China. First of all, online forums are popular and claimed a user base of 144 million or 28.2% of China's internet population in 2011 (see Table 1.1). Nowadays, the largest forum, Tianya.cn, claims almost 70 million registered users with over one million of them simultaneously online during active periods through the day. Even campus-based forums, which usually have highly restricted user bases, can boast a simultaneous user population of over a thousand.[39]

Second, unlike user-centered social media like social network services (SNS), blogs and micro-blogs in which the host has discretion over the topic and audience, online forums are topic-centered and essentially more "public." Discussion on forums usually features common-interest topics and are conducted in a multi-to-multi manner. Such "public-ness," in addition to their popularity, makes internet forums important platforms for political expression and online activism. Though political content may comprise "only an extremely tiny portion of China's cyber-cacophony,"[40] this is not true on popular online forums. In fact, thematic discussion boards devoted to social and political affairs are often among the most popular boards.[41]

Finally, the types of user interaction possible on popular online services strongly resemble a forum. In fact, many popular online services also incorporate the forum function. For instance, on China's thriving social network services (SNS) like renren.com and kaixin001.com, participation in bulletin board systems occurs at

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[39] Data collected by a veteran BBS manager, who is also the board manager of BBSView@NEWSMTH. According to him, among the top 20 BBS sites, all have at least 900 users simultaneously online at their peak. For 18 of them, the number exceeds 1000, and the largest one is over 30,000 (newsmth.net). See "BBS Zhandian Liebiao Qian Ershiqiang (2012 Nian 03 Yue)" (Top 20 BBS Sites (March 2012)), http://www.newsmth.net/bbstcon.php?board=BBSView&gid=45334, retrieved August 20, 2012.

[40] James Leibold "Blogging Alone."

[41] For instance, among the major sites included in this study, NewExpress@NEWSMTH, Maoyan@KDNET, Military@MITBBS, Triangle@BDWM each attracts the largest traffic of its respective forum, and Free@Tianya is only second to the entertainment board of Funinfo (*Yule Bagua*). Qianguo Luntan is an essentially political forum.

disproportionately high rates: over 80% of social media content are in the form of bulletin board systems.[42] In addition, blogs and micro-blogs become hot spots for online traffic when blog hosts gear the discussion towards public affairs. Chinese online news providers have also introduced interactive features so that readers can respond to news reports by clicking expressive icons, or adding comments.

Graph 1.1: China's Internet Population from 1997-2012
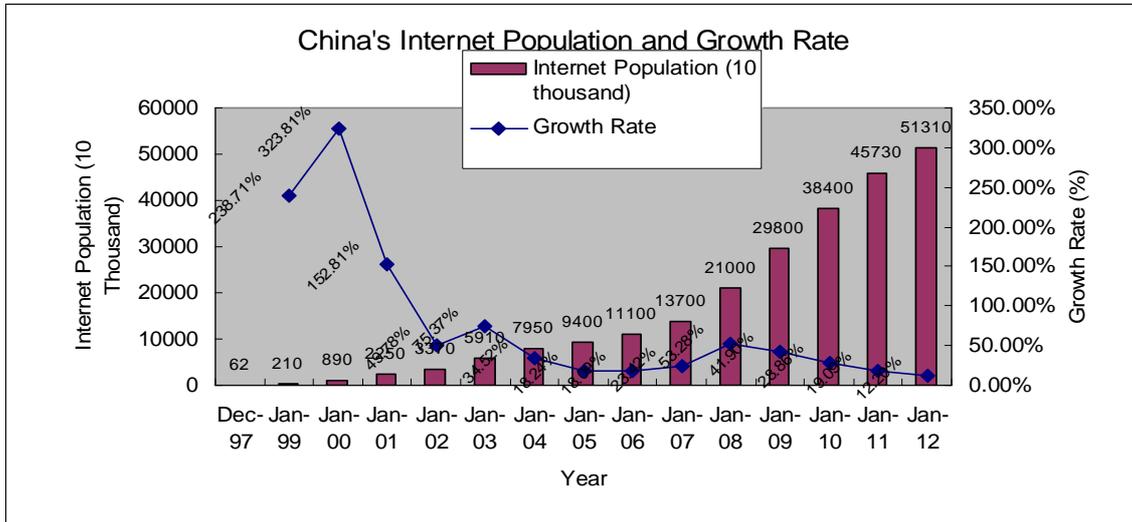
Source：CNNIC 29th Statistical Reports on the Internet Development in China.

Table 1.1: Selected Most Frequently Used Services (12-2009—12-2011)

Services	December 2009		December 2010			December 2011		
	User # (million)	Penetration (%)	User # (million)	Penetration (%)	Growth	User # (million)	Penetration (%)	Growth
News	**307.69**	**80.1**	**353.04**	**77.2**	**14.7**	**366.87**	**71.5**	**3.9**
Search Engine	281.34	73.3	374.53	81.9	33.1	407.40	79.4	8.8
Instant messaging	272.33	70.9	352.58	77.1	29.5	415.10	80.9	17.7
Online gaming	264.54	68.9	304.10	66.5	15.0	324.28	63.2	6.6
Online video	240.44	62.6	283.98	62.1	18.1	325.31	63.4	14.6
Blogging	**221.40**	**57.7**	**294.50**	**64.4**	**33.0**	**318.64**	**62.1**	**8.2**
Email	217.97	56.8	249.69	54.6	14.6	245.77	47.9	-1.6
SNS	**175.87**	**45.8**	**235.05**	**51.4**	**33.7**	**244.24**	**47.6**	**3.9**
Internet literature	162.61	42.3	194.81	42.6	19.8	202.67	39.5	4.0
Forum/BBS	**117.01**	**30.5**	**148.17**	**32.4**	**26.6**	**144.69**	**28.2**	**-2.3**
Micro-blogging	**--**	**--**	**63.11**	**13.8**	**--**	**248.88**	**48.7**	**296.0**

Sources: CNNIC 27th and 29th Statistical Report on the Internet Development in China.

Two Aspects of Online Public Expression
Exploring state management and popular struggle on Chinese internet forums reveals two distinctive yet interrelated sets of mechanisms that focus on two different aspects

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[42]   See   "Social   Media   Dominates   Asia   Pacific   Internet   Usage," http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/global/social-media-dominates-asia-pacific-internet-usage/, retrieved August 20, 2012.

of online expression, i.e. censorship and discourse competition. If we view online expression as a virtual territory, the struggle over censorship centers on the definition of boundaries of public discussion while discourse competition emphasizes the landscape inside those boundaries (See Table 1.2). Close examination of both aspects of online expression provides an opportunity not only to map the power relations between state and societal actors, but also to evaluate the political significance of online expression in a more nuanced and balanced way.

Table 1.2: Comparing Two Aspects of Online Expression

	Cat-and-Mouse Control	*Discourse Competition*
Main actors:	State, intermediary actors and internet users	Anonymous users (state agents, regime challengers, and netizens)
Battlefield:	Boundary-spanning	Within-boundary
Framing:	Three-Actor confrontation (State-intermediary actors-users)	Discourse competition Freedom struggle vs. anti-saboteur
Power exercised:	State: coercive & technological Forum managers/ users: technological and expressive	Expressive and identity

The Cat-and-Mouse Censorship Game

The censorship is a boundary-spanning struggle[43] on the boundaries of what can and cannot be discussed online. Building on previous studies that highlight the state-netizen struggle, my research suggests a three-actor perspective that highlights the role of intermediary actors at the crux of control implementation. Although the state has erected a censorship regime through technical, administrative, and institutional means, external challenges and internal fragmentation of the regime limit state capacity to control online expression, providing opportunities for virtual activism. Intermediary actors, particularly forum managers, trapped between state constraints and demands from users, demonstrate "discontented compliance": most forums comply and even cooperate with state censorship because they cannot afford overt rebellion; yet their compliance is involuntary and they often ignore or even covertly encourage boundary-spanning expressions. For many netizens, state censorship becomes not only a target of online contention, but also an object of amusement, a game of considerable entertainment value. Thus I argue that netizens' response towards censorship can be termed "pop activism," to embrace both the "playful" and "contentious" elements in these online activities.

Though successful in keeping politically indifferent netizens away from taboo zones,[44] the state's censorship regime is constantly challenged and circumvented by the creative counterstrategies of savvy netizens. State censorship is also sometimes

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[43] Kevin O'Brien, "Neither Transgressive nor Contained: Boundary-Spanning Contention in Rural China," *Mobilization: An International Journal,* Vol. 8, No. 1(2003), pp. 51-64.

[44] Calum MacLeod, "Media Controls Leave Most Chinese Unaware of Activist Chen," *USA Today*, May 5th, 2012, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/story/2012-05-04/China-media-blackout/54773020/1, retrieved August 20, 2012. In this sense, the censorship system actually filters the population into politically-sensitive and apolitical groups. Also see Taylor Boas, "Weaving the Authoritarian Web." Boas argues that though state constraints can almost always be circumvented by determined, tech-savvy users, authoritarian regimes may only pursue effective control, i.e. a control level sufficient for the regimes' political, economic, and social goals, rather than perfect control that prevents even tech-savvy individuals to gain unfettered access to the Internet.

counterproductive because it undermines regime legitimacy, politicizes otherwise neutral forum managers and netizens, and nurtures the development of rights consciousness, including calls for more than the freedom of expression:[45] On the one hand, netizens' experiences of being censored are hard lessons through which they learn about the regime's repressive nature; on the other hand, the state's efforts to disguise taboo topics also signal the regime's fears, fuel netizens' curiosity, and drive them to seek information on sensitive topics from unapproved, informal sources.

Neither, however, should we overestimate the power of netizens' activism against state censorship. Such activism remains a low-risk, low-cost form of political engagement, frequently more generative of private amusement than of collective action. Indeed, the cat-and-mouse struggle over the limits of online discussion captures only a small part of online expression since the game sheds little on what is actually going on within state-imposed boundaries.

Graph 1.2: Anti-Extermination Campaign Online
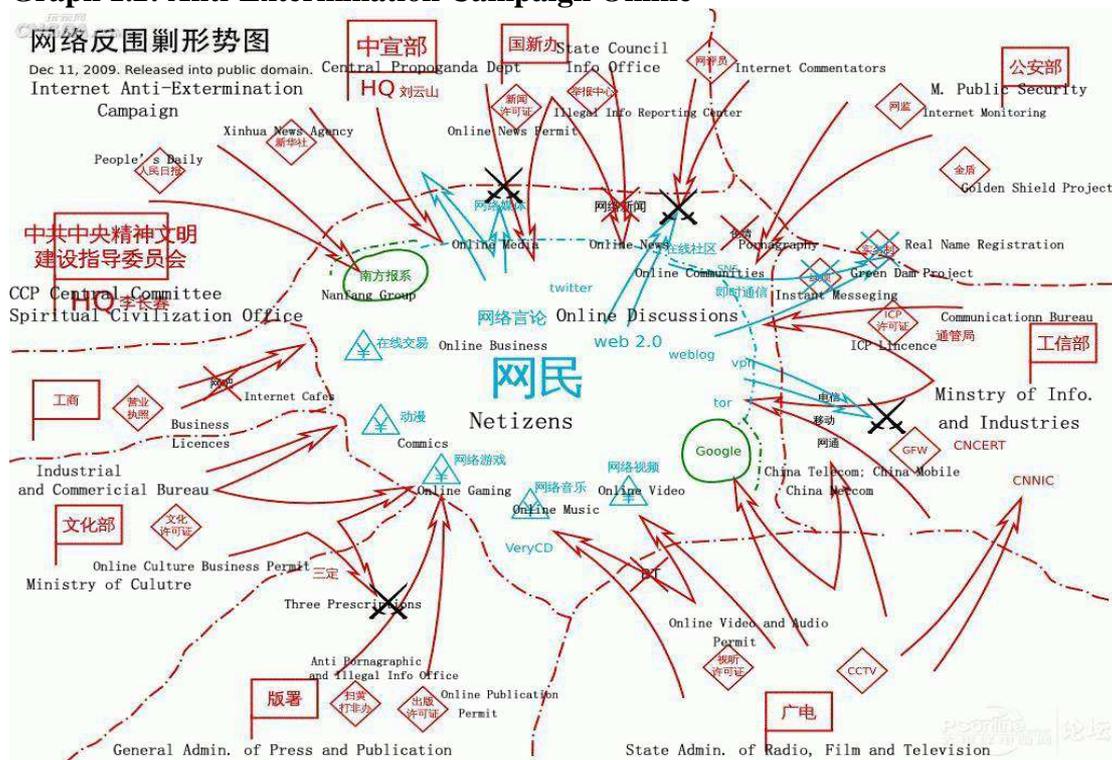
This graph demonstrates the cat-and-mouse censorship game vividly: netizens are surrounded by state agencies that attempt to limit their freedom, with intermediary actors falling in between. The graph has been widely spread online and the original source cannot be identified. This version is adapted (by adding English translation) from: "Tianchao Wangmin de Xiongqi, Fan Weijiao Xingshitu" (Uprising of Chinese Netizens: The Map of Anti-Extermination Campaign), http://itbbs.pconline.com.cn/diy/10854454.html, retrieved August 20, 2012.

Discourse Competition
Discourse competition is one in which state and non-state actors attempt to engineer popular opinion. Among other strategies, political "astroturfing"—the deliberate planting of paid online commentators, known as the "fifty cents army" (*wumao dang*) on popular forums—represent an adaptation of the state to the decentralized, fluid, and anonymous character of online expression. Meanwhile, regime challengers,

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[45] For a discussion of rights consciousness in China, see Kevin J. O'Brien, "Villagers, Elections, and Citizenship in Contemporary China", *Modern China*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (October 2001), pp. 407-35; Lianjiang Li, "Rights Consciousness and Rules Consciousness in Contemporary China," *China Journal*, No. 64 (July 2010), pp. 47-68.

particularly those who would like to see substantial political change, have also taken advantage of similar grassroots PR tactics. Though they might be effective in defaming the regime, such tactics can backfire by leading many netizens to imagine a group of national enemies conducting sabotage and espionage missions in Chinese cyberspace. As a result, rather than viewing the struggle over online expression as a story of social actors allying against the authoritarian state, these netizens develop an alternative framing in which regime challengers are depicted as betrayers or trouble makers. Thus the struggle over online expression is framed as a counter-espionage story of Chinese patriots defending national image and interests against betrayers and their foreign sponsors. This framing not only demobilizes many netizens, it also contributes to the rise of a pro-regime discourse. In effect, some netizens are so persuaded by the counter-espionage framing that they develop a group identity as the "voluntary fifty cents army" (*zidai ganliang de wumao*) and construct online communities that sustain a regime-defending discourse.[46]

Graph 1.3: The Largest Riot Ever in History

This graph shows the discourse competition scenario in China's fragmented cyberspace in which netizens championing different ideologies fight with each other, with many onlookers. The graph has many versions in which the banners are altered to refer to struggles among different camps. This version is from: Qianliexian, "Shishang Zuida Baoluan Jishi" (The Largest Riot Ever in History) http://www.bullogger.com/blogs/qianliexian/archives/125944.aspx, retrieved August 20, 2012.

Instead of merely viewing the politics of online expression in China as a binary liberalization-control struggle, the discourse competition perspective suggests a

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[46] Evan Osnos, "Angry Youth: The New Generation's Neocon Nationalists", July 28, 2008, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/07/28/080728fa_fact_osnos, retrieved August 20, 2012. Also see Li Guang, "'Siyue Qingnian': Wangluo Minzu Zhuyi Xin Shili" ('April Youth': The New Force of Cyber Nationalism), and Wang Jiajun, "Cong Caogen dao Jingying – Dalun Wangluo Minzu Zhuyi Liubian" (From Grassroots to Elitist: The Transformation of Mainland Cyber Nationalism), both in *Fenghuang Zhoukan (Phoenix Weekly)*, May 2012.

fragmented cyberspace. Coherent and relatively independent communities either sustain a certain dominant discourse, or become battlefields of multiple discourses as netizens with distinctive political orientations co-exist or compete. Interactions among both like-minded and rival netizens, socialize internet users in ways that reinforce their beliefs, which in turn consolidate their group identity.

In discourse competition, state and non-state actors compete to manipulate popular opinion to their advantage. Unlike the censorship game where coercive power plays a significant role, players in discourse competition mobilize through identity and expressive strategies. Aware of opinion engineering efforts by both the state and regime challengers, netizens engaging in public discussions are extremely anxious about each other's true identity. This explains why both the state and regime challengers tend to engage in the game anonymously so as to avoid having their strategy backfire, while labeling becomes an effective way of defaming.

What is particularly worth noting is that defamation and attack are the dominant modes of discourse competition on Chinese forums.[47] Among the state and its supporters, efforts to construct and defend a positive image of the state often prove fruitless, while denouncing its challengers as trouble-makers and saboteurs is more effective. Among regime challengers, who have been defamed and censored by the state, spreading negative news about the regime also works more effectively than posing as a viable alternative to the Party-state, particularly considering that ideological and financial links to Western powers are a liability with nationalistic Chinese netizens.

Online Public Expression beyond Censorship and Discourse Competition
The struggle over online expression reveals that neither the state nor the internet is monolithic and the dynamics of state adaptation and popular activism go far beyond state-society confrontation. Examining both traditional and non-traditional state-society interactions in censorship and discourse competition thus not only provides a more balanced picture of internet politics in China, but also contributes to our understanding of state-society relations, authoritarian resilience, and democratization theories.

Fragmented State vs. Fragmented Cyberspace
As Manuel Castells has pointed out, "the relevance of a given technology, and its acceptance by people at large, do not result from the technology itself, but from appropriation of the technology by individuals and collectives to fit their needs and their culture."[48] Analysis of the censorship game and discourse competition reveals fine-tuned and complex state-society relations in Chinese cyberspace, in which state and social actors have demonstrated great adaptability to new socio-political terrains. In the cat-and-mouse censorship game, though the state enjoys the advantage of coercive power over forum managers and netizens, forum managers and netizens evade state censorship through technological know-how and creativity. In discourse competition, the actors involved, including the state and its challengers, resort to grassroots PR strategies to engineer popular opinion to their advantage. This mode of discourse competition has created an atmosphere of subterfuge and uncertainty in

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[47] Chinese netizens are the most likely in Asia Pacific to post negative review of products and they tend to share negative reviews rather than positive ones. See "Social Media Dominates Asia Pacific Internet Usage," http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/global/social-media-dominates-asia-pacific-internet-usage/, retrieved August 20, 2012.
[48] Manuel Castells, *Communication Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 362.

which participants' identities and intentions are constantly contested. Such an atmosphere also conditions netizens' perceptions of discourse competition in Chinese cyberspace, as well as their identity formation and choices of strategies.

Both the cat-and-mouse game and discourse competition demonstrate the need to disaggregate state as well as cyberspace. The understudied role of local and departmental state agencies is particularly worth noting because their interests and motivations have also incentivized control initiatives. For instance, while the central government is primarily concerned about the regime's stability and legitimacy, local state agencies are take action to maintain their own public image and demonstrate their competence to upper levels.[49] As a result, they tend to boast about their propaganda achievements while endeavoring to stifle discussions disclosing local problems. Such actions do severe harm to the regime's legitimacy because they not only disable online expression's safety-valve function, but also intensify netizens' enmity towards the regime.[50] After all, local control and manipulation designed to suppress tangible grievances is often more effective in provoking the wrath of Chinese citizens than abstract causes. In addition, local cover-ups indicate the center's failure, or even worse, its lack of desire, to discipline local agents, which may erode trust in the central government and the regime.[51]

Like that of the state, the fragmentation of Chinese cyberspace should be taken into consideration to understand internet politics in China. Chinese netizens have approached the internet with diverse and mixed purposes. For instance, pop activism, discussed in chapter 4, shows that netizen activism is more than a form of popular online contention. It is driven by both netizens' contentious motivations and their pursuit of fun and recognition. Understanding netizens' activism merely as a strike against censorship or the regime has the danger of over-interpreting netizens' online activities while adopting a very limited view of political participation.

In addition, even among politically motivated netizens we can identity distinctive political orientations, values, and ideologies. Given the pervasiveness of popular opinion manipulation, netizens' extreme anxiety about each other's identity and intentions facilitates formation of coherent and relatively isolated netizen communities. Through repeated amicable interactions among community members and confrontation with rivals, netizens' propositions and group identity, as well as the particular discourses they champion, are often reinforced while discourses are produced and re-produced. Thus, if we agree with Lagerkvist that the internet helps unlock China's public sphere by creating "public sphericules," such a tendency in online expression fortifies the fragmentation of Chinese cyberspace and prevents these "public sphercicules" from evolving into a public sphere.[52]

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[49] In the recent Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands dispute with Japan, several local media outlets in mainland China cropped a picture in their reports to conceal the flag of Taiwan-based Republic of China (ROC) while the original picture was used in reports by national news agencies like *Xinhua News Agency* and *Global Times* (*Huanqiu Shibao*) under People's Daily Group. Clearly local censors imposed tougher constraints in these cases to avoid political risk. See Ding Li and Zheng Lingyu , "Diaoyudao Qingtian Bairi Qi, Zhongguo Meiti Nanti, Zaojiazhe Aipi Daoqian" (Flag of Republic of China over Diaoyu Islands Poses a Dilemma for Chinese Media and Forgers Apologized after Being Criticized), http://www.voachinese.com/content/hk_newspaper_20120820/1491305.html, retrieved August 20, 2012. And for a nice analysis of different rationales behind the central and local authorities in their responses to collective action, see Yongshun Cai, *Collective Resistance in China: Why Popular Protests Succeed or Fail* (Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 4-8.

[50] For online expression's safety-valve function, see Jonathan Hassid, "Safety Valve or Pressure Cooker?" For backfire effects of state's censorship and public opinion manipulation, see Michael Wines, "China's Censors Misfire in Abuse-of-Power Case," *New York Times,* Nov. 17, 2010; also see Chapter 3 and 5 of this project.

[51] Lianjiang Li, "Political Trust in Rural China"; Lianjiang Li, "Political Trust and Petitioning in the Chinese Countryside," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2008), pp. 209–226.

[52] Lagerkvist, *The Internet in China*.

Revisiting Authoritarian Resilience

What does two-aspect analysis of online expression tell us about the impact of online political expression on the authoritarian regime? Critics have warned against evaluating the impact of online politics merely in terms of whether or not online activism will lead to regime change.[53] Yet focusing exclusively on online politics as a "gradual revolution" likewise risks reducing online activism to a "weapon of the weak"[54] and shying away from the legitimate question of whether and how online activism will contribute to possible regime change. I believe analysis of the struggle over online expression offers a testing ground for assessing the regime's resilience.

My findings suggest we need to rethink the basis for the resilience of China's authoritarian regime. Struggles over online expression reveal the agility of the Chinese state in adapting and refining its capacity to deal with new challenges. Yet the regime's adaptability, both in suppressing challenging voices and in utilizing technology to its own advantage, cannot fully explain the "resilience" of authoritarianism because online expression has served to delegitimize the regime when the state's censorship and opinion manipulation efforts have proved fruitless and counterproductive. Rather, the apparent resilience of Chinese authoritarianism in virtual space despite pluralizing and liberalizing challenges of the internet is owed primarily to the fragmentation of the Chinese internet and the lack of consensus on a viable alternative to the current system.

Chinese cyberspace is fragmented in a number of ways. Chinese netizens form a wide range of groups, the majority along non-politically motivated lines.[55] Current studies tend to overestimate the impact of online activism because they fail to recognize this point. Also, even if we focus exclusively on politically motivated netizens, their group identities and political orientations are diverse. Online groups are organized around framings not limited to binary struggle pitting freedom of expression against state repression. Moreover, despite the inefficacy of the state's own efforts at popular opinion manipulation, many are mobilized around an alternative frame that depicts regime-challengers as saboteurs of national interests and calls on netizens to defend the regime against the nation's enemies.

In addition, the lack of viable oppositional forces helps to alleviate the potential challenge to the regime: though online activism has been quite successful in discrediting the regime, online discussions have also helped discredit any alternative to the party-state, especially by questioning the intentions and competence of democratic activists. Take the 1989 student leaders as examples: Chai Ling was blamed online for risking other students' lives for her personal ambitions[56] and Wang Dan has been accused of betraying China's national interests by receiving funds from the U.S. and Taiwan's pro-independent DPP administration.[57] Such distrust in regime-challengers weakens them as viable alternative to the current regime. In fact, many regime challengers have denied their political ambitions in order to retain public

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[53] Guobin Yang, "Technology and Its Contents," p. 1044

[54] James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press, 1987).

[55] Damm, "The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society"; Leibold "Blogging Alone."

[56] "Chai Ling Jiaochu le Toumingzhuang" (Chai Ling Has Proved Her Allegiance [to Foreign Powers]), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military/36507361.html, link expired, last retrieved September 29, 2011.

[57] "Wang Dan zai Fating Chengren: Shoudao Chen Shui-Bian de 40 Wan Meiyuan," (Wang Dan Confesses in Court: He Received USD 400,000 from Chen Shui-Bian) http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military/35644205.html, link expired, last retrieved April 15, 2011; "Wang Adan Na le Chen A-bian 40 Wan Meijin," (Wang A-Dan Took USD 400,000 from Chen A-Bian), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military/35642545.html, link expired, last retrieved April 15, 2011.

sympathy.[58]

So far, challengers promoting regime transition have failed to convince netizens that democratic change would be an improvement. For many netizens, the risks and uncertainties of regime transition far outweigh its potential benefits. They worry about possible disturbance in social stability, economic development, and national security as well as the possibility of achieving a non-functional democracy. Stories on social turbulences and violence in Arab Spring nations, government corruption and ineffectiveness in India, economic stagnation and deprivation in Russia after the collapse of Soviet Union, are widespread online and help reinforce netizen's fears.

Pervasive online nationalism works against the interests of regime challengers, further weakening their position as an alternative to the authoritarian regime. Many Chinese citizens harbor suspicions regarding the intentions and competence of those advocating a regime transition, whom they believe may have close relations with foreign powers, and call into doubt their capacity and willingness to represent and defend China's national interests. Though some have argued that nationalism may possibly go hand-in-hand with democratization in China,[59] my findings (chapters 6 and 7) suggest that nationalistic netizens are wary of the nascent democratic movement not because they are disinclined towards democracy or swayed by state ideology,[60] but because they are highly distrustful of democratic activists.

To assess the resilience of an authoritarian regime, we ought not only examine the regime's ability to adapt to new challenges, but also should pay close attention to what these challenges are, how they challenge the regime, as well as strategies challengers employ. In the case of online expression, my analysis (chapters 4 and 5) has demonstrated that though party-state legitimacy is undermined in both the censorship game and discourse competition, online political expression does not pose the threat to the regime that many expected. In fact, online expression has served as a safety valve to let out pressure in some cases,[61] and effectively demobilized many netizens from pursuing more fundamental change to the regime. In effect, some netizen groups find regime challengers so unappealing that they voluntarily maintain a pro-regime discourse.

A Democratizing Internet or a Democratic Illusion?
The new source of authoritarian resilience that my research brings to light—namely, the weak base of support for challengers—has further implications for China's potential for regime change and democratization. Though political scientists cannot study events that have not yet occurred, it is still possible to examine whether and how online activism has contributed to a transition to democracy, since regime transition does not take place overnight. When studying regime change, we are not starting from the moment when the authoritarian regime collapses and/or a new regime arises. Long before regime shift, the country undergoes gradual, preliminary

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[58] Political ambition carries negative implications among many Chinese netizens because that means the struggle is not between us citizens and the repressive state, but instead one between political power contenders who are only concerned with their own interests rather than public welfare.

[59] Jessica Weiss, "Whither China? Revisiting the Dangers of Nationalism and Democratization," paper presented at IEAS, UC Berkeley (September 9, 2011).

[60] Lagerkvist has an interesting discussion on possible explanations for Chinese citizens' tacit acquiescence to state control of freedom of expression. He argues that Chinese netizens may hold private truths while telling public lies by repeating official discourse, or it may be because people tend to seek psychological coherence for current political status quo. See Lagerkvist, *The Internet in China*, pp. 31-33. Though such explanations may hold under many circumstances, my findings suggest that Chinese netizens' support to the regime may be sincere, active, and rational, even though they dislike the regime.

[61] Hassid, "Safety Valve or Pressure Cooker?" Also see "pop activism" in chapter 4.

processes in which the regime authority is delegitimized and the values and ideas of an alternative regime diffused.

Because the internet is a particularly vulnerable area of China's authoritarian regime, it is an ideal place to observe this process. Johan Lagerkvist, who views internet politics in China from the perspective of competing social norms, argues that negotiations between conflicting Party-state, youth/subaltern, and transnational business norms will foster normative change and the erosion of Party-state norms in China, moving the nation toward inclusive democracy.[62] My research supports his argument on the erosion of Party-state norms by emphasizing the role of online expression in delegitimizing the regime for many netizens, and revealing the fruitlessness and counterproductive effects of the state's censorship and popular opinion manipulation efforts. However, my findings also challenge the rosy expectation of a transformation towards inclusive democracy because erosion of party-state norms and the gradual delegitimation of state authority do not necessarily imply the emergence of liberal and democratic norms.

If understood as a process in which democratic rules and procedures are applied to previously non-democratic political institutions,[63] democratization implies two phases: the collapse of the old regime and the establishment of a democratic one. Though online expression may be contributing to delegitimizing the current regime, it has done little to cultivate a pro-democracy discourse that spreads democratic values and ideas or even to mobilize netizens to struggle for a democratic regime. This echoes the observation that the internet has contributed more to liberalization than democratization.[64] The ubiquity of defamation in discourse competition vividly demonstrates that both the authoritarian regime and its potential alternatives have been discredited, leading to the erosion of political authority in general. As Samuel Huntington pointed out, "the most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government." Failing to indoctrinate netizens with democratic values and ideas or to convince them to support a democratic political order, the "liberalizing" effects of online expression may result in little more than the erosion of the authoritarian regime. For instance, after a series of brutal attacks on schoolchildren across China in early 2010,[65] one picture started to circulate online with a slogan which goes "Every injustice has its perpetrator and every debt has its debtor, get out of the door and turn left you will find the government" (*yuan you tou, zhai you zhu, chumen zuozhuan shi zhengfu*). Clearly, netizens spreading the slogan had little respect of the political authority, but saw the regime as the source of all social ills.

In fact, the Chinese internet shows signs of excessive liberalization rather than democratization: the decay of authority is apparent in online expressions of all types. Interpreting this purely as a sign of authoritarian pullback is misleading because it overlooks the erosion of social capital, which many social scientists consider crucial for a democracy to function.[66] The party state's authority is of course challenged in

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[62] Lagerkvist, *After the Internet, Before Democracy* (Peter Lang, 2010), p. 39.

[63] Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 8

[64] Zheng, *Technological Empowerment.*

[65] Austin Ramzy, "China's Alarming Spate of School Knifings," http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1985834,00.html, retrieved August 20, 2012.

[66] Social scientists generally agree on the crucial role of social capital in a functioning democracy. For instance, see Robert Putnam, Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton University Press, 1993); Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). Alexis de Tocqueville, seeing civic associations as the key to American democracy, defines egoism as "a passionate and exaggerated love of oneself," which according to him is

online expression, but so is trust in regime challengers and other socio-political actors like university professors, journalists, lawyers, and even some NGOs, and each other.[67] In this regard, closer examination of such detrimental effects of online expression, currently rare in the field of Chinese internet research, addresses democratization theories, not only in terms of democratic transition, but also in terms of consolidation and quality enhancement, because it implies that certain governance problems that plague new democracies may be the legacy of the liberalization process, rather than legacies of the authoritarian regime per se.[68]

Notes on Data Gathering

This project draws on data collected through online and offline research that include interviews, offline participant observation, online ethnography, and sources such as media reports, official documents, and scholarly studies.

First, over 60 online and offline interviews were conducted with forum managers, forum users, scholars and media professionals from 2008 to 2011. The majority of interviewees were recruited through a snowball approach. My person connections proved crucial during the initial phases of data collection. In particular, my early BBS experiences and undergraduate connections at Peking University helped me recruit several key interviewees who not only provided their inside stories, but offered connections to other sources. Most interviews with forum managers and veteran users were semi-structured, focusing on their experiences with and perceptions of online discussion, state control, and forum governance. Some interviewees, particularly those from state media outlets, were reluctant to talk about their job in detail. However, even their reluctance revealed a great deal about the sensitive relationship between the state and the online public.

I was invited to the First Annual National Campus BBS Manager Conference at Suzhou in 2009 and the 3rd Beijing-Tianjin Campus BBS Manager Conference at Beijing in 2010. During these meetings, I not only met forum managers from across the country, but also observed how they exchanged ideas with each other and interacted with state and market forces, represented by sponsoring state agencies and companies respectively.

Second, I collected data through in-depth online ethnography on selected forums that involved long-term observation with restricted engagement. To avoid any problems of reactivity, I remained virtually invisible to my subjects most of the time. This was important because political inclination and identity are central concerns of this project. The approach shares a lot of similarities with what Guobin Yang advocates as online "guerrilla ethnography" with an emphasis on limited involvement, fluid movement in networks and exploration of links.[69] However, I depart from Yang's approach by emphasizing constant immersion in a few selected sites. Based on a vision of the internet featuring openness, fluidity, and connections, Yang argues that

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degraded individualism that "blights the germ of all virtue," including that of public life. See Alexis De Tocqueville, Henry Reeve (Trans), *Democracy in America* (New York, A. A. Knopf, c1945), pp. 98-99.

[67] The distrust can be easily identified when netizens start to label experts (*zhuanjia*, 专家) as "brick owners" (*zhuanjia*, 砖家, i.e. charlatans), professors (*jiaoshou*, 教授) as "shouting beasts" (*jiaoshou*, 叫兽), journalists (*jizhe*, 记者) as "prostitutes" or "jorkalists" (*jizhe*, 妓者), and lawyers (lvshi, 律师) as shysters (songgun,讼棍). Similarly, the term "public intellectual" (*gonggong zhishi fenzi*, 公共知识分子), which used to be an honorary title to out-spoken intellectuals, is now often used by netizens as a negative label on those who talk nonsense.

[68] For a brief review and critique of the democratic consolidation literature, see Andreas Schedler, "What is Democratic Consolidation?" *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 9, No. 2 (1998) 91-107. For a collection of the discussion on quality of democracy, see Larry Jay Diamond and Leonardo Morlino (eds.), *Assessing the Quality of Democracy* (John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[69] Guobin Yang, "The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere," p. 471.

long term ethnographic work on a few sites fails to capture the Internet's real strengths and leads to tunnel vision.[70] I maintain, however, that the very fluidity of online discussion requires an approach that not only allows timely compilation of discussion threads (which can be removed at any time because of moderation or censorship), but also permits the ethnographer to learn the norms of the context in real time and accumulate the fluid *metis* (i.e. practical experience and know-how)[71] to read between the lines and accurately interpret meanings and meta-meanings behind the texts. In addition, my aggregated observations suggest that the internet is Janus-faced, featuring not only openness, fluidity and connections, but also fragmentation, closure, and border-reinforcement. Concentrated focus on a few forums also brings into focus underappreciated mechanism that shapes discourse competition, group identity and community building.

My primary sites are TIANYA (tianya.cn), KDNET (kdnet.net), Qiangguo Luntan (bbs.people.com.cn), NEWSMTH (newsmth.net), BDWM (bdwm.net), MITBBS (mitbbs.com), CCTHERE (ccthere.com). These forums are relatively large ones that attract more netizens and cover broader issue areas, and thus are more influential and representative than smaller ones.[72] To increase representativeness, I included both domestic (the first five) and overseas Chinese forums (the latter two). These forums can also be categorized into campus (BDWM), commercial (TIANYA, KDNET), individual (CCTHERE), and state-sponsored forums (QIANGUO). NEWSMTH and MITBBS, though commercialized, bear characteristics of campus BBSes because they both originated at universities and attract large numbers of students.[73] My observations were not restricted to these forums. Instead, they serve as focal points from which I gradually expanded my attention to other online territories by following my subjects' traces. For instance, I first encountered the "voluntary fifty cents army" discussed in Chapter 7 on NewExpress@NEWSMTH; following their steps I started to visit the military boards of the same forum, and then other forums like FYJS (fyjs.cn), SBANZU (sbanzu.com), LKONG (lkong.net), and CJDBY (lt.cjdby.net).

Sites for my online ethnography also include platforms where forum and board managers exchange ideas and information on forum governance. Such platforms include forums,[74] discussion boards,[75] and QQ chat groups.[76] Both during and after my fieldwork, I observed a few of such platforms constantly and anonymously. Ongoing conversations on such platforms provide a unique opportunity to learn about managers of various types of forums, their concerns, practices and strategies.

Online ethnography also provides another important source of data other than direct observations among netizens. Some forums, particularly campus BBSes, maintain historical data in their archival section. Such data include forum and board histories, archives of significant events and discussion threads, and texts of forum and board regulations. Online archives not only constitute an important and systematic source of how forum and board managers have governed their sites, but also provide

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[70] Yang, "The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere," p. 471.

[71] See James Scott, *Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, 1998).

[72] The representativeness of online voices as indicators of public opinion is statistical problematic because, besides everything else, not all citizens are online, and not all netizens are equally active. But the term is used in a narrower sense here, only referring to the degree to which online voices are included in this study.

[73] They also both offer telnet access, which is a defining technical feature of many early campus BBSes.

[74] E.g, Admin5.com, which targets developers and managers of small and medium websites.

[75] E.g. BBSview@NEWSMTH, which attracts campus BBS managers.

[76] QQ is an instant messenger service platform. QQ chat groups are similar to online chat-rooms, but access to such groups needs to be approved by the group administrator.

an important source of information to check and confirm data collected through interviews and online observation.

Finally, sources like media reports, official documents, and scholarly studies are also crucial to this project. For instance, my analysis of online commentators draws primarily from leaked official documents and media reports. Given the sensitivity of online opinion engineering, it might be surprising to see official reports on the topic. Yet, the state sometimes does not try to conceal information about the fifty cents party because the online commentator system is regarded as part of routine propaganda work. In particular, local governments and propaganda branches often regard their success in this area as an achievement to boast about to higher levels. This explains why a local media report on the training of online commentators in Shanxi Province not only reported on the event, but also provided links to reports by other more influential news portals (qq.com and 163.com) and mouthpiece outlets (people.com.cn).[77]

A Preview of What Follows

Besides this introduction and the concluding chapter, the empirical chapters of the dissertation fall into two major parts. The first part focuses on the cat-and-mouse censorship game, which highlights not only state-society confrontation, but also the intermediary actors at the crux of control implementation. In chapter 2, I analyze the technical, administrative, and institutional aspects of the Party-state's internet content control regime, and describe how external challenges and the internal fragmentation of the regime limit state capacity, provide opportunities, and sometimes pose threats.

Chapter 3 examines the crucial role of intermediary actors in the cat-and-mouse censorship game. I focus on how forum and board managers balance state control from above and netizens' challenges from below and suggest that they demonstrate a pattern of behaviors that I call "discontented compliance." Though pervasively unhappy with censorship, forum and board managers nonetheless help preserve state-imposed limitations on online discussion because they cannot afford open disagreement. Yet involuntary compliance also provides them with sufficient incentive to turn a blind eye to or even to encourage boundary-spanning online expression.

In Chapter 4, I first explore how netizens bypass and challenge censorship in innovative ways. However, I find that Chinese netizens have gone beyond activism against censorship. Instead, their behavior blurs the boundary between online political participation and popular entertainment, and thus can be better conceptualized as "pop activism."

Chapter 5, 6, and 7 examine discourse competition and popular opinion engineering. Chapter 5 focuses on the state's astroturfing efforts and details the recruitment, training, functions, and remuneration of online commentators (i.e. the "fifty cents army"). I argue that, although this system is an important adaptation of the propaganda state to the internet age, it often causes more trouble than it resolves because it frequently backfires and chips away at the legitimacy of the party-state. It is particularly ironic that the bureaucratic apparatus undermines astroturfing efforts because the propaganda system motivates online commentators to pay less attention to persuading netizens, and more to demonstrating their competence.

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[77] See "Shanxisheng Shoupi Wangluo Bianji he Wangluo Pinglunyuan Peixunban Xueyuan Zhengshi Zai Bing Jieye" (Commencement of the First Training Class of Internet Editors and Commentators of Shanxi Province), http://www.jcnews.com.cn/Html/guondongtai/2006-12/20/120854983.html, retrieved August 20, 2012. It is interesting that the report provides links to reports of the event by other more influential commercial and mouthpiece news portals like qq.com, 163.com and people.com.

In Chapter 6, I explore how regime challengers have also taken advantage of grassroots PR tactics. I analyze how nationalistic netizens have adopted a different framing of online struggle based on imagining national enemies. With such a framing, the struggle over online expression is not only one in which social actors claim and defend their freedom and rights, but also one in which patriotic netizens defend the nation against online saboteurs.

Chapter 7 furthers my argument of a fragmented cyberspace by studying a particular netizen group who call themselves the "voluntary fifty cents army." I explore how those "voluntary fifty cents army" members pick up and consolidate their group identity through a series of expressive repertories, and argue that their online activities have helped construct online communities that sustain a regime-defending discourse.

Chapter 2
Harmonizing the Internet:
State Control over Online Expression

On September 20, 1987, a Chinese computer expert sent out China's first email from Beijing with the message "Across the Great Wall we can reach every corner in the world."[1] This hailed the arrival of China's internet era with the statement that territorial obstacles between China and the world, as symbolized by the *Great Wall*, would be overcome by the new technology. This message seems somewhat ironic, in retrospect, because the Chinese state has since managed to construct the world's most sophisticated virtual *Great Wall* to filter content exchange between the country and the outside world, a system nicknamed the Great Firewall. Why and how has the Party-state aimed to establish and enhance its control over the internet? How should we understand the dynamics of state control over the internet, particularly with regards to the state institutions that govern online content?

In this chapter, I will take a state-centric perspective to explore China's internet content control regime, by which I mean the complete set of organizational, institutional, administrative and technical tools used by the authoritarian state to control online expression. I argue that the state has developed a multi-agency, multi-level and multi-means system to censor online communication systematically and comprehensively. But external challenges and internal fragmentation of the system contribute to the rigidity and arbitrariness in internet content control.

Internet Governance and Internet Content Governance

Internet governance in China is driven by a complicated set of dynamics. On the one hand, the Party's concern with economic prosperity influences policy formation regarding the internet, as Lena Zhang has rightly highlighted.[2] On the other hand, concerns with technology's social and political challenges have also shaped state policies towards internet governance, particularly the emphasis on control. Facing these two sometimes contradictory tasks, Yongnian Zheng argues that the Chinese authoritarian state has established a regulatory regime to promote the development of the IT industry and a control regime to tame the disturbing implications of the new technology.[3] Similarly, Min Jiang argues that China's internet policies "reflect an internet development and regulatory model – authoritarian informationalism – that combines elements of capitalism, authoritarianism, and Confucianism."

As technology empowers social actors by promoting connectedness of civil organizations, facilitating mobilization of collective action, and encouraging public expression and online activism,[4] the state increasingly recognizes the necessity to control

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[1] Jay Hauben, "China's First Email Link," http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?at_code=437752, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[2] Zhang Lena, "Behind the 'Great Firewall': Decoding China's Internet Media Policies from the Inside," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* Vol. 12, No. 3 (August 2006), pp. 271-291.

[3] Yongnian Zheng, *Technological Empowerment: The Internet, State and Society in China* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 50-53.

[4] Zheng, *Technological Empowerment;* Yongnian Zheng and Guoguang Wu, "Information Technology, Public Space, and Collective Action in China," *Comparative Political Studies,* Vol. 38, No. 5(June 2005), pp. 507-536; Guobin Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China* (Columbia University Press, 2009); Patricia M. Thornton, "Manufacturing Dissent

the internet. How does the party-state achieve its control goals? As Lawrence Lessig argues, controlling the internet involves four mechanisms: the law, technical architecture (i.e. code), social norms and the market.[5] In an authoritarian regime like China's, all of these mechanisms are subject to heavy influence or direct intervention by the state. In particular, the party-state restricts both the physical network infrastructure and the content carried on it.[6] Scholars and human rights watchers have documented different censorship techniques of the authoritarian state, ranging from taboo word filtering to limiting access to certain websites, shutting down websites, and even jailing internet dissenters. Other censorship techniques include coordinating campaigns and comprehensive projects to promote real-name registration, pre-installing monitoring software,[7] and maintaining the Great Firewall.[8]

These studies reveal how the internet censorship regime functions. Yet, most studies fall short of delivering a historical and systematic understanding of China's internet governance that goes beyond an outline of specific control measures. In addition, such studies often treat the control regime as a single, undifferentiated mass. This approach not only makes it difficult to see any variation in state control towards different targets, but also fails to recognize the dynamics within the control regime, which conditions the strategies and techniques of the state.

Below, I will trace the development of China's internet control, with special attention to the evolution in regulations, organizations, technical and administrative tools. In combination, the hard-to-control nature of online expression and the internal dynamics of the state shape state strategies, which are often rigid and arbitrary.

1. Evolution of the Internet Control Regime in China

Since early 1990s, China's internet control regime has undergone a process of enhancement, expansion, and fine-tuning, with different foci, characteristics, and implications at different stages. Taking a historical approach, Yongnian Zheng argued that the Chinese state focused on constructing a regulatory regime in the late 1990s before shifting emphasis to a control regime.[9] Guobin Yang divided regulatory evolution

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in Transnational China," in Kevin O'Brien (ed.) *Popular Protest in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Guobin Yang, "The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere," *Media, Culture & Society,* Vol. 24, No. 5 (July 2003), pp. 469-490; Guobin Yang, "The Co-Evolution of the Internet and Civil Society in China," *Asian Survey,* Vol. 43, No. 3 (May/June 2003), pp.124-141; Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang, "Political Expression in the Chinese Blogosphere," *Asian Survey,* Vol. 48, No. 5 (September/October 2008), pp. 752-772; Zixue Tai, *The Internet in China* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[5] Lawrence Lessig, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (New York: Basic Books, 1999). Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu, *Who Controls the Internet?: Illusions of a Borderless World* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2006.

[6] Eric Harwit and Duncan Clark, "Shaping the Internet in China: Evolution of Political Control over Network Infrastructure and Content," *Asian Survey,* 41, No. 3 (2001), 377-408.

[7] The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology attempted to have all PC manufacturers preinstall the software "green-dam" to filter out pornography and other unhealthy information from the internet. See Andrew Jacobs, "China Requires Censorship Software on New PCs," *New York Times*, June 8, 2009. Upon criticism, MIIT responded promptly, claiming that the software does not monitor users' online activities and can be uninstalled. See Bao Ying, "Filtering Software to Be Installed on New Computers," *The Beijing News*, June 10, 2009.

[8] Qinglian He, *The Fog of Censorship: Media Control in China* (Human Rights in China, 2008); Michael S. Chase and James C. Mulvenon, *You've Got Dissent!* (RAND, 2002); Jonathan Zittrain and Benjamin Edelman, "Internet Filtering in China," *IEEE Internet Computing* (March/April 2003*)*, pp. 70-77; "Freedom on the Net: A Global Assessment of Internet and Digital Media", http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=197&parent=19&report=79, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[9] Zheng, *Technological Empowerment*, Chapter 3.

into three stages, with the first (1994-1999) focusing on network security regulation, service provision, and institutional restructuring. The second stage (2000-2002) was then characterized by expansion and refinement of control with stronger content regulation, and the third (2003 onwards) has centered on further expansion of the internet regulation.[10] Yonggang Li periodized the evolution of internet control similarly into three periods with a policy learning perspective, which provides a better understanding of the evolution of a governance regime by emphasizing state agency.[11]

Such studies are important steps towards creating a comprehensive understanding of China's internet governance and its evolution over time, which is outlined in Table 2.1. I periodized the evolution into three phases the same as Yonggang Li does. Like Zheng, Yang and Li, I see an escalation, expansion and refinement of internet control over time. Like them, I also acknowledge the shifting emphases at different stages from a regulatory regime to a control regime, and from network infrastructure security to content censorship. However, I intend to highlight another factor that is sometimes overlooked: that the state's policy learning process has corresponded to the development of internet usage (Row 1), particularly the expansion and growth of online expression and its ever-increasing socio-political implications. After all, as Zheng has aptly concluded, "the state and social forces are mutually transformative via their interactions in internet-mediated public space."[12]

In addition, I group the state's efforts of policy learning and capacity building into three major categories: (1) policy and regulation enactment, (2) organizational adaptation, and (3) technical and administrative measure creation and enforcement. By doing so, I intend to demonstrate that the state has employed, consciously or unconsciously, an uneven development strategy in building up its capacities at different phases. The state's initial responses came out of its governance inertia and were mostly administrative and technical. Thus, its early efforts at control over the internet were sporadic and unsystematic. Institutional adaptation followed, with the creation of formal rules and norms as well as organizational capacity building. At this stage, the state did not strictly enforce control regulations. The third stage has been one of capacity use and adjustment. During this stage we see the state trying out its control mechanisms more boldly while adjusting in the face of social reaction. The state has also become more innovative at this stage by adopting new public relations tactics like the introduction of an online commentator system. By mobilizing online commentators – popularly known as the "fifty cents army" (*wumao dang*) – who engage anonymously in online discussions to produce pro-government commentary and guide public opinion, the propaganda state has attempted to adapt itself to the information age.

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[10] Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China*, pp. 47-51. "Government" refers to formal institutions, rules and practices of the state, "governance" includes formal and informal institutions, rules, and practices of state and non-state actors, and "governmentality" means the cultural and social context that conditions and sustains the governance.

[11] Yonggang Li, "*Women de Fanghuoqiang: Wangluo Shidai de Biaoda yu Jiandu*" (*Our Great Firewall: Expression and Governance in the Era of the Internet*) (Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2009), pp. 117-126. Yang and Li differ in that when the third stage started. Yang believes the third stage started from 2003 and was marked by the power transition form Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao. Li argues that the third period started in 2004, when the state concluded the policy learning process with important documents like *Opinions on Further Strengthening the Administration of the Internet*. See Li, *Our Great Firewall*, p. 123. Also see Hu Ling, "China's Lawmaking on Internet Before 1998," *Internet Law Watch,* No.2 (2008).

[12] Zheng, *Technological Empowerment*, p. xviii.

Table 2.1: Evolution of Internet Content Control by the State

	Phase I Before 1999	Phase II (1999-2003)	Phase III (2004 –)
Development of Internet Usage	The internet is viewed more as an economic and technological opportunity than a political challenge, and its access is limited to research, education and business purposes.	In this period, online expression becomes politically challenging: for example, the Sun Zhigang case.[13] State adaptation lags behind the explosion in internet population size, online expression and internet applications.	The period features a more powerful internet with more state constraints. Online expression continues to boom. New applications like blog and micro-blog emerge. The popularity of campus BBSes decline relatively, commercial forums continue to grow.
Features of State Control	Focus on physical network security. Attempt to build up a regulatory regime to promote information technology.[14]Content control is unsystematic and reactive, but with quick technical and administrative responses.	Rapid institutionalization and organizational adaptation, with more specific and heavier constraints on content. But legislation still remains in a trial and exploratory process. Governing bodies change frequently on certain issues and conflict over the jurisdictions.[15]	The policy learning process of internet content control has come to a tentative conclusion.[16] The control further expanded and fine-tuned, both institutionally and organizationally. And the state becomes increasingly assertive and adept at content control, with bolder administrative and technical control practices than ever before.
State Regulations (Appendix 2.1)	Regulations focus on security of physical network, and prescriptions on content control are ambiguous and boilerplate.[17]	Content control regulations go beyond principles, and start to establish a systematic framework for licensing, registration, monitoring, information recording, and punishment of online activities.	Regulations are enacted or re-drafted to regulate new online applications, fine-tune content control, and clarify division of labor and promote coordination among state agencies.
Organizational Adaptation (Appendix 2.2)	Trying to accommodate internet governance with existing state apparatus	Expanding jurisdiction of existing state agencies, setting up specialized content control agencies, and promoting self-disciplinary organizations.	Furthering organizational restructuring, enhancing division of responsibility and coordination, and promoting self-discipline of service providers.
Administrative and Technical Control (Appendix 2.3)	Sporadic administrative and technical control, constant attention to campus BBSes.	Intensified content control practices to promote official discourse and suppress unwanted information.	More rigid and bolder efforts to enforce control, notably campaigns with multi-agency cooperation and coordination.

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[13] See Zixue Tai, *The Internet in China*, pp. 259-268.
[14] Zheng, *Technological Empowerment*, pp. 50-53; Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China*, p. 48.
[15] Li, *Women de Fanghuoqiang,* p.75.
[16] Li, *Women de Fanghuoqiang*, p.123.
[17] Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China*, p. 48.

Understanding the Current Internet Control Regime in China

According to Yonggang Li, state governance of internet has proceeded through the "garbage can model" to a "categorized governance" model that applies different governing strategies in different realms.[18] By now, the authoritarian state has established a comprehensive internet content governance regime endowed with a full set of organizational, institutional, technical and administrative tools.

Organizationally, the two most important state tools responsible for internet control are the Propaganda System and the government information office system, headed by the Central Propaganda Department (CPD) and State Council Information Office (SCIO) respectively.[19] The propaganda system, nicknamed the "Department of Truth," [20] is in charge of ideological work of the party-state and has the ultimate control of the media.[21] The SCIO is in charge of planning for the development of online news services, and directing and coordinating news reporting online. [22] Both CPD and SCIO have established specific sub-offices for internet control, including the Internet Division of the Bureau of Information and Public Opinion, the Internet News Office under News Bureau, and the Internet Commentary and Criticism Group, which are under the CPD; and the 5th and 9th Bureaus, which are under SCIO.[23] And in May 2011, the State Council set up the Internet Information Office, which is at the same level of the SCIO and integrates internet regulation and control functions previously under the SCIO.[24] Re-division of labor and re-distribution of power have occurred from time to time among state agencies. For example, the MPS' role in content control has become less significant as the SCIO and the Propaganda system have gradually built up their organizational capacities. [25]

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[18] The garbage can model in organizational theory is a decision making model characterized by problematic preferences, unclear technology and fluid participation. Li, *Women de Fanghuoqiang*, pp. 117-126. Also see Michael Cohen, James March and Johan Olsen, "A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice," *Administrative Science Quarterly,* Vol. 17, No. 1 (March 1972), pp. 1-25.

[19] There are other agencies peripherally involved in internet governance. For instance, the State Administration for Industry and Commerce, which supervises online business, joined with other seven ministries to launch an effort to restrict the spread of undesirable information on the internet in 2002. Zheng, *Technological Empowerment*, p. 55. Also, as the internet has become an increasingly important channel for publicity, many state agencies have established their own information services or internet offices to take care of public relations.

[20] Sometimes, the term is also used to refer to censoring agencies as a whole. For instance, see the report from CDT, "Latest Directives from the Ministry of Truth: July 22 - July 28, 2010," http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2010/07/latest-directives-from-the-ministry-of-truth-july-22-july-28-2010/, retrieved October 24, 2012.

[21] Zheng, *Technological Empowerment*, p. 56.

[22] See "Benban Jiben Qingkuang" (About the Office), http://www.scio.gov.cn/xwbjs/xwbjs/200905/t306817.htm, retrieved October 24, 2012.

[23] See David Shambaugh, "China's Propaganda System", *The China Journal*, No.57; The 5th Bureau of SCIO, i.e. the Internet Bureau, is responsible for organizing and coordinating online media work, guiding planning and construction of online news portals, and collecting online public opinion. It has been delegated the power to supervise and approve internet news information services, and to intervene in routine online news reports through decrees. The 9th Bureau of SCIO manages internet culture, and is also granted the authority to exert control over online forums, blogs, and micro-blog. See Tao Xizhe, "Jiekai Zhongguo Wangluo Jiankong Jizhi de Neimu" (Uncovering inside Stories of China's Internet Censorship Regime), http://rsf-chinese.org/IMG/pdf/China_Internet_Report_in_Chinese.pdf, retrieved September 25, 2012. Su Yongtong, "Guoxinban 'Kuobian', Wangluo Guanli Si Ju Yi Bian Er" (SCIO Expanding with Internet Administration Bureaus Become Two), *Nanfang Zhou (Southern Weekend)*, May 20, 2010.

[24] Michael Wines, "China Creates New Agency for Patrolling the Internet," *New York Times*, May 4, 2012.

[25] The Internet Police under MPS performs multiple functions, and the surveillance of online content is just one of them. Yonggang Li provides a good brief description of the Internet Police. See Li, *Women de Fanghuoqiang*, pp. 96-98.

Meanwhile, the propaganda system has gradually increased its voice in internet censorship since the late 1990s.[26]

Institutionally, the two most important regulations that serve as the "major legal basis for content censorship" are the *Measures on the Administration of Internet Information Services* issued by the State Council in 2000, and the *Administrative Provisions of Internet News Information Services,* issued by the SCIO and MII in 2005.[27] The former set out conditions for websites to operate legally, including registration and licensing. The later established the online news publication qualification system, dividing online news service providers into three categories: those run by news entities, those run by non-news entities, and those established by news entities to carry already-published content. Only websites in the first category can report on news events while those in the second and third categories can only reprint news from news sources prescribed by the state.

For netizens and service providers, censorship rules only become tangible when they are enforced because state regulations and laws are often ambiguous and full of uncertainty in implementation.[28] As SCIO Director Wang Chen suggests, state supervision has been implemented through various means, including:

> "(1) Regulating domain names, IP addresses, registration and recording, and service access. (2) Establishing entry-and-exit mechanism for online information service, i.e. lawfully implementing registration and licensing of information services related to ideological security and public interests; establishing and improving management like routine monitoring, annual review, and administrative penalty; and forming a coordination mechanism of relevant agencies to dispose of hazardous information and prevent its infiltration from abroad. (3) Actively exploring real-name registration..."[29]

Such measures are conducted at multiple levels and target individual users and all levels of service providers, and can be categorized as preventive measures, surveillance measures, crisis management measures, and aggressive measures.

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[26] In his 1999 article, Qiu argued that the government plays a more significant role as the party started to act more in the backdrop. See Jack Linchuan Qiu, "Virtual Censorship in China: Keeping the Gate between Cyberspaces," *International Journal of Communications Law and Policy*, Issue 4 (Winter 1999/2000), p. 12. Also see Tao Xizhe, "Jiekai Zhongguo Wangluo Jiankong Jizhi de Neimu."

[27] See Bei Feng, "China's Internet Censorship System," *China Rights Forum,* No. 2 (2010)*,* http://www.hrichina.org/crf/article/3244, retrieved September 25, 2012. Also see Li, *Women de Fanghuoqiang*, p.85.

[28] For instance, individuals were not allowed to register the domain name ".CN" according to both 2002 and 2009 versions of *Zhongguo Hulianwang Xinxi Zhongxin Yuming Zhuce Shishi Xize* (*CNNIC Implementing Rules of Domain Name Registration)*. But CNNIC did not invoke the regulation until 2009 when CCTV criticized it in the Anti-pornography campaign. According to CCTV, CNNIC's loose supervision on domain names has provided conditions for porn websites to flourish. This is a typical case in which the regulation serves more as a disclaimer to avoid imputation. For 2002 and 2009 versions of *Zhongguo Hulianwang Xinxi Zhongxin Yuming Zhuce Shishi Xize (CNNIC Implementing Rules of Domain Name Registration)*, see http://www.cnnic.net.cn/html/Dir/2003/10/29/1105.htm and http://www.cnnic.cn/jczyfw/cnym/cn01_zcfg/200309/t20030922_15123.html. For news reports, see Xing Jun, Chen Wei, Ji Yu and Zhang Gaofeng, ".cn Geren Yuming Shenqing Bei Jiaoting, Wangyou Zhiyi Tuixie Jianguan Zeren" (Individuals' Application to .CN Domain Name Suspended, Netizens Criticize It as Shirking Regulating Responsibility), http://news.163.com/09/1215/08/5QIHRTVE0001124J.html, retrieved September 25, 2012; and Hou Zhenwei, "Geren Weihe Bei Jin Zhuce '.CN'" (Why Individuals Are Forbidden to Register for .CN Domains), *Beijing Wanbao (Beijing Evening News)*, December 24, 2009.

[29] Cui Qingxin, "Woguo Yi Chubu Jianli Hulianwang Jichu Guanli Zhidu" (Our Country Has Established the Basic Internet Regulation System), http://news.xinhuanet.com/fortune/2010-05/02/c_1269514.htm, retrieved September 25, 2012.

Preventive measures are designed to prevent unwanted information from being accessed or published. Filtering can be done at various levels. At the national level, the GFW employs a collection of filtering technologies to disrupt connections that the state deems harmful. Local governments often add local-specific taboo terms to the filtering list. And most forums automatically and/or manually screen posts before letting them through.[30] Measures like registration and licensing of service providers and real-name registration of users are preventive in that they enable the state to identify violators easily and encourage self-censorship. Similarly, official take-overs of campus BBSes by universities could be considered a pre-emptive action to avoid trouble from the perspective of university authorities.

Online surveillance is carried out through automatic and manual screening of the web to check violators who manage to elude preventive measures. Most observers suspect that the state employs search engine technology to oversee online discussions. In addition, the internet police, the propaganda system, and many other governing agencies employ inspectors to manually watch the web. Intermediary organizations, like service providers and universities, also keep close watch on online discussions and remove "inappropriate" expression to pre-empt state intervention. Finally, state surveillance is supplemented by the illegal information reporting system, which encourages peer-monitoring.[31]

Online crises management has become routine and even local governments employ it.[32] Online crises include mention of taboo topics or other stability-disturbing events, or simply overheated discussions. To defuse crises, internet monitoring agencies send out directives via phone, email or instant messaging to service providers instructing them to take specific actions, including deleting messages within a specific time limit, banning particular users, warning or fining violating websites, and shutting down parts of or entire websites temporarily or permanently. Individual violators may be "invited to tea" (*bei hecha*) or even jailed. Sometimes, campaigns are launched as part of the state's crises management effort.

Beyond censoring online expressions, the state also takes more aggressive actions to influence discourse in cyberspace. For instance, the propaganda system regularly issues decrees to major websites about propaganda initiatives from the state.[33] The introduction of the paid internet commentator system is another policy innovation designed to guide online public opinion.

Explaining Rigid and Arbitrary Control: Challenges from Outside and from Within

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[30] The state has never released an official list of taboo words. So forums have to maintain their own lists. In my interviews, many forum managers claimed that they would welcome an official version so that they could avoid unintentional trespassing. Group discussion at Natioanl BBS Manager Conference at Suzhou, October 24, 2012; Interview RSZ 2009-21, Interview RSZ 2009-23, Interview RSZ 2009-24, Interview RSZ 2009-25, Interview RSZ 2009-29, Interview RSZ 2009-30, with BBS managers at Suzhou, October 23-24, 2009.

[31] See the official website of China Internet Illegal Information Reporting Center, http://ciirc.china.cn/

[32] For instance, see "Shanghai Shi Wangluo yu Xinxi Anquan Shijian Zhuanxiang Yiji Yu'an" (Special Emergency Plan for Internet and Information Security Crises of Shanghai Municipality), http://www.shanghai.gov.cn/shanghai/node2314/node26533/node26534/node26541/node26550/node26553/u21ai182474.html; Fengxian County Party Committee Office, and Fengxian County Government Office,. "Fengxian Xinxi Anquan Tufa Shijian Yingji Yu'an" (Emergency Plan for Information Security Crises of Fengxian County). http://www.sxfx.gov.cn/?viewinfor-199-0-11518.htm (September 25, 2012).

[33] See Tao, "Jiekai Zhongguo Wangluo Jiankong Jizhi de Neimu."

This chapter so far has depicted how the state, as a powerful, well-structured and quick-learning machine, has adapted its control regime to tame the internet. In effect, I've suggested that the party-state has thus far successfully used information technology to advance its economy and at the same time maintained firm control of the country.[34] However, the uncertainty of online expression and internal complexity constitute major challenges. Situating the state as an internally fragmented organization in a complicated environment of high-volume anonymous online expression helps explain the rigidity and arbitrariness of internet control in China.

External Challenges to the Censorship Regime
Even if the state had the capacity to calibrate acceptable expression – which is out of the question– public expression online challenges the Party-state in several ways. For example, the state has to reduce the overwhelming amount of information to a manageable level, address the anonymity of online expression to track and punish violators, and operationalize its propaganda initiatives. These external challenges have conditioned the strategies of the state, which relies on the solidification of virtual space[35] and blacklisting. [36]

The authoritarian regime has attempted to embed the virtual space into the physical world, primarily through the real-name registration of users and a complex system of registration and licensing of service providers. Real-name registration directly target anonymity. The state has more or less succeeded in controlling internet cafes insofar as most now require customers to show their identification cards.[37] Real name registration of cell phones has been partially successful, though SIM cards can be purchased from vendors who seldom check identification cards. However, the state's attempts to induce netizens to register at forums, instant messenger protocols, or blogs have been met with great resistance and have basically failed. Except for some campus forums where student email addresses or ID numbers are required, most public forums only ask for a valid email address to complete account registration. Given that campus forums have become a much smaller force in online expression since MOE mandated them to reform into campus-bounded platforms in 2005, the impact of real name registration has been more symbolic than significant.

The state has attempted to contract censorship responsibilities to service providers, including internet service providers (ISPs), internet content providers (ICPs), and even research and educational institutions. Through measures like registration and licensing, service providers and other relevant intermediary actors are held responsible for preventing unwanted information from appearing in cyberspace. Large service providers like Sina.com or Sohu.com often have special offices for monitoring content.[38] For smaller websites, webmasters are directly held responsible. Interviewees told me that local internet monitoring agencies require them to be accessible via cell phone 24 hours a

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[34] Also see Tamara Renee Shie, "The Tangled Web: Does the Internet Offer Promise or Peril for the Chinese Communist Party?" *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (August 2004), p. 538.

[35] I borrow this idea from Yonggang Li. See Li, *Women de Fanghuoqiang*, pp. 126-130.

[36] See John Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision: New Dimensions of Political Analysis* (Princeton University Press, 1974).

[37] On September 29, 2002, the State Council issued *Hulianwang Shangwang Fuwu Yingye Changsuo Guanli Tiaoli (Regulations on the Administration of Business Sites of* Internet *Access Services).* The document prescribes that internet cafes shall check and register IDs of their customers.

[38] For instance, see Gady Epstein and Lin Yang, "Sina Weibo," *Forbes Asia*, Vol. 7, Issue 3 (March 2011), pp. 56-60.

day.[39] Most campus BBSes are now under the direct supervision of university student affair offices, Communist Youth League Committees, or Party Committees. Generally, the state gives these actors considerable discretion to monitor routine online activities, but will occasionally intervene to patrol, issue directives, or punish offenders.

Outsourcing censorship responsibilities to service providers helps reduce the state's workload by limiting the number of surveillance targets and encouraging self-censorship, as intermediary actors usually have higher stakes compared to individual netizens. After all, for most netizens, deleting their posts or suspending their ID is what they risk when engaging politically sensitive discussions. For intermediary actors, it may result in fines, administrative punishments, and sometimes their whole business. However, the responsibility delegation system is often ineffective or even counterproductive. It is ineffective largely because intermediary actors can evade state control measures. Many webmasters of small and medium forums have managed to bypass licensing and registration by moving their websites overseas or by going through agents who do not authenticate information.[40] It can also be counterproductive because measures to hold intermediary actors accountable sometimes politicize them. This is the main reason why the majority of small-scale web runners sided with Google when the company declared withdrawal in early 2010. Additionally, delegating censorship responsibilities to intermediary actors introduces uncertainty and even arbitrariness into the system as service providers are empowered to make the majority of censoring decisions. Some providers may enforce restrictions to avoid trouble with state authorities and others may not want to enforce controls faithfully, due to either commercial reasons or personal inclinations.

Besides embedding cyberspace in the physical world, China's internet control regime also relies on blacklisting taboo expressions and actors. The cybernetic model of organizational choice suggests that when facing great uncertainty, large-scale organizations tend to display a servo-mechanistic pattern of decision making, i.e., they base their decision making on key indictors and only react when these indicators reach certain thresholds.[41] Online content censorship simplifies its surveillance tasks to monitoring the appearance of taboo words (*mingan ci*) and dangerous groups or individuals. The state will only respond when mentions of these taboos are detected or discussions reach a certain level of intensity.

Blacklisting certain words is critical to Chinese censorship, because it not only circumscribes the number of indicators the state has to watch, but also facilitates automatic filtering. Besides pornography, most taboos are political, i.e., anything the regime deems as disturbing to stability.[42] For instance, the Great Firewall (GFW) system

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[39] Interview RSZ 2009-25, with a campus BBS manager at Suzhou, October 24, 2009; Interview RBJ 2009-18, with a non-official forum campus BBS manager at Beijing, October 22, 2009; Interview OBE 2011-53, phone interview with a private BBS manager, February 9, 2011.

[40] Observation of Baidu Tieba and webmaster forums. Even today, it is still a lucrative business, as indicated by the numerous ads on Tieba. See http://tieba.baidu.com/f?kw=%E5%A4%87%E6%A1%88, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[41] See John Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision*.

[42] Taboo words related to the 1989 Tiananmen Movement, the banned sect Falungong, Xinjiang and the Tibetan independent movements are more likely to be censored than others. And according to Gary King, et al, the regime aims more at silencing online expression that mobilizes collective actions than general criticism. Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Molly Roberts, "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression," http://gking.harvard.edu/files/censored.pdf, retrieved September 25, 2012; Also, the State updates the taboo words in response to changing trends of online expression. See Li Shao, "The Continuing Authoritarian Resilience under Internet Development in China —an Observation of *Sina* Micro-blog," MA Thesis, Institute of East Asian Studies, UC

prevents netizens from accessing blacklisted web addresses or webpages containing forbidden keywords. If sensitive words are detected, the system will not only interrupt the connection, but also reject any sequential connection between the browser and the server for a few minutes. Similarly, the Green-dam software, which the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) attempted to pre-install on all PCs but failed in 2009, works by blacklisting certain keywords and web addresses, a discovery made by protesting netizens who were able to hack the software.[43] Internet content providers also use the same mechanism to enforce self-censorship. Major forums and blogging websites automatically or manually scan postings that users try to put online. When sensitive words are found, the system either directly rejects the posting, asks users to "modify" it, or sends it to a non-public board for manual review by moderators.

The blacklisting mechanism also applies to "dangerous groups or individuals," including but not limited to democratic dissidents, Falungong (FLG) practitioners, Tibet or Xinjiang independence activists, and online opinion leaders. State agents watch them closely to prevent them from publishing disturbing information online. For instance, Liu Xiaobo, a democratic activist and 2010 Nobel Prize Laureate, was regularly put under house arrest and received restricted telephone and internet access during politically sensitive periods before he was jailed again in 2009.[44] However, actions against high profile dissidents often prove counterproductive by turning them into iconic heroes internationally. The state's image is harmed even more among average netizens when the target is non-political, as in the case of Gao Yaojie, a renowned and respected doctor and AIDS activist, who was placed under home arrest for a long time.[45]

Blacklisting may effectively reduce the workload of the state censorship apparatus, but lack the intelligence to make contextualized judgments. At times, they also reveal the hand of the state and even backfire. The blacklisting system is triggered when and only when keywords are detected; thus any variants of the keyword can potentially circumvent the censorship system. For instance, instead of "eighty nine" (八九, referring to the democratic movement in 1989), netizens can add an asterisk between the two characters ("eighty*nine," 八*九) to frustrate automatic filtering.[46] Worse than being ineffective, indiscriminate filtering often enrages and politicizes otherwise indifferent netizens. When the idiom "in eight or nine cases out of ten" is denied because it contains "eight nine," netizens previously unaware of censorship may start to complain or become curious about the event. Additionally, indiscriminate filtering also effectively stifles pro-regime

Berkeley, May 2012; Ian Bremmer, "Why China's Leaders Fear the Teletubbies," http://eurasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/06/13/why_china_s_leaders_fear_the_teletubbies, retrieved September 25, 2012.
[43] See "Lvba Ceping Baogao" (Technique Review of Green-dam Software),http://www.infzm.com/content/29952, retrieved September 25, 2012.
[44] Nick Amies, "Europe Praises, China Condemns Liu Xiaobo Choice for Nobel Peace Prize," http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,6093118,00.html. Hong Sha, "Liu Xiaobo 'Ruanjin' Bairi yu Qizi Dierci Jianmian" (After 100-Day House Arrest, Liu Xiaobo Meeting His Wife A Second Time), http://news.sina.com/ch/dwworld/102-000-101-105/2009-03-20/04163726082.html; "Liu Xiaobo Bei Kong Shandong Dianfu Guojia Zhengquan Zui" (Liu Xiaobo Accused for Inciting Subversion of State Authority), http://news.bbc.co.uk/chinese/trad/hi/newsid_8110000/newsid_8116000/8116019.stm, all retrieved September 25, 2012.
[45] Jim Yadley, "Detained AIDS Doctor Allowed to Visit U.S. Later, China Says," *New York Times*, February 17, 2007.
[46] We will examine more systematically how netizens creatively explore loopholes of the censorship regime in Chapter 4.

voices as netizens supporting the regime also get censored. As a result, they may feel frustration and see irony in their defense of a regime that inhibits them from doing so.

Even when the party-state tries to refine and update its blacklist, its adaption often comes too late and fails to take into account nuanced and specific situations. For example, new taboo words are often only added when a threshold is reached, and by then the topic may have already been disseminated across the web, even reaching the mainstream media.[47] The state's "harmonizing"[48] efforts often only invite criticism, and in some cases energize the topic by re-framing it as an anti-repression story. More than that, censoring directives sent to service providers typically disregard specific situations,. These often ask providers to delete all postings on certain topics regardless of whether they are for the regime or not, or to apply a unified official statement (*tonggao*) from Xinhua News Agency.[49] Such "one size fits all" examples can also be found in a series of regulation campaigns since 2005. In such campaigns, many small websites were shut down as collateral casualties because the entire Internet Data Center (IDC) where their sites are based can be cut off the web because of a few websites that were found to have improper content.[50]

Internal Challenges towards the Censorship Regime
As China scholars have long recognized, the Chinese state is not monolithic, but rather fragmented both vertically and horizontally. [51] If a complicated and uncertain environment poses external crises, the fragmentation of the authoritarian state constitutes internal challenges to state censorship. Conflicting functions, interests, and ideological discrepancies within the state produce opportunities for online expression. However, as I will demonstrate below, such fragmentation may also induce arbitrary censorship actions.

Above all, functional and interest discrepancies between state internet governing organs lead to competition and agenda differentiation among them. Besides containing its disturbing effects, the party-state has been promoting information technology as an industry. These sometimes incompatible goals have led to the building up of not only a control regime, but also a regulatory regime that regulates the IT industry according to market principles.[52] Compared to the ideology-driven propaganda system, The Ministry

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[47] Online discussions on hot-button issues often go through a few stages. During the first stage, an issue becomes hot in cyberspace and netizens start to discuss it and spread it. Sometimes even mainstream media follow the trend. Then the state steps in and tries to cool it down, which is termed by netizens "being harmonized." After that, state mouthpiece start to spread the official stance.

[48] Among Chinese netizens, "harmonize" something refers to "censor" or "eliminate" it because the official ideology of "harmonious society" is often used to justify state censorship.

[49] Interview RBJ 2010-41, with a forum manager of a large commercial website at Beijing, May 21, 2010.

[50] "Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shuqian IP Beifeng Shijian Shimo Xiangdaode" (Thousands of IP Addressed at Waigaoqiao IDC, Shanghai Got Banned and Some Thoughts), http://www.admin5.com/article/20061113/4780.shtml, retrieved October 22, 2012; also Qin Wang, "Zhuli Zhe de Xin Jianghu" (New Rivers and Lakes for Profit-Seekers), *Nandu Zhoukan (Southern Metropolis Weekly)*, No. 3 (2010), p.36.

[51] See Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Kenneth G. Lieberthal, "Introduction: The 'Fragmented Authoritarianism' Model and Its Limitations," in Lieberthal and David M. Lampton (eds.), *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (University of California Press, 1992), pp. 1-30. Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Andrew Mertha, "'Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0': Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process," *The China Quarterly*, No. 200 (December 2009), pp. 995-1012.

[52] See Zheng, *Technological Empowerment*, p. 50. The distinction between regulatory and control regimes is insightful. However, we shall note that regulatory regime may facilitate content control as well.

of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT, formerly MII) emphasizes development of the sector and often does not favor restrictive policies. For instance, the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), taking orders from MIIT, was relatively unconcerned with domain name registration until China Central Television (CCTV) criticized it for "passively providing convenience for porn websites" during the 2009 anti-pornography campaign.[53] ,

> "Prior to 2007, nobody cared about domain name or website registration. But now without registration, government agencies will shut down a website. It is undoubtedly a severe consequence. Since the online rectification campaign started, China Telecom[54] has shut down over 130,000 unregistered websites, and there might be tens of thousands more accidental injuries..."[55]

The pressure not only intensified MIIT's effort, but also forced it to adopt ham-fisted tactics: small websites were all temporarily cut off from the internet for close scrutiny, which MIIT Minister Li Yizhong claimed was a necessary over-correction.[56]

Censorship may bring concrete political or economical benefits, thus driving state agencies to compete for regulatory and control power over the internet.[57] For instance, the Ministry of Culture and the General Administration of Press and Publication have openly fought for the authority to pre-approve online games.[58] Similarly, some observers suspect that the onset of the anti-pornography campaign in 2009 was a result of the long rivalry between MIIT and State Administration of Radio, Film and Television.[59] Such competition not only takes place between governmental agencies, but also between party and government organs. Sources claim that the real-name registration of blogs was an

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[53] CCTV is viewed as a vehicle of the propaganda system. See Austin Ramzy, "China's Domain-Name Limits: Web Censorship?" http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1948283,00.html, retrieved September 25, 2012; Zhang Yi, "Zhuce CN Yumin Jin Qi Ju Geren" (CN Domain-Name Registration Closed for Individuals from Today Onwards), *Xin Jingbao (The Beijing News)*, December 14, 2009. In 2006, CNNIC campaigned to rectify domain name registration. However, it was more for regulatory than control purposes. See "Xinxi Chanye Bu Jiang Zhengdun Yumin Zhuce" (MIIT Will Start Rectifying Domain Name Registration), http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2006-11/06/content_5297176.htm?rss=1, retrieved September 25, 2012. In addition, there are discussions about releasing the policy restrictions. See "Zhuceliang Die Zhi Disi, CN Yuming Ruhe Shoufu Shidi?" (Registration Rate Falling to No. 4; How Would CN Domain Name Reclaim the Loss?), *Zhongguo Xin Tongxin (China New Telecommunications)*, No. 14 (2010), pp. 27-28.

[54] This may be inaccurate as another source suggests that three major telecommunication giants together shut down around 136,000 unregistered websites. See Wang Yunhui, "Gongye he Xinxihua Bu: Shouji Saohuang 'Shenhoushi'" (MIIT: Aftermath of Anti-Pornographic on Mobile Phones), *Nanfang Zhoumo (Southern Weekend)*, (January 21, 2010).

[55] Qin Wang, "Zhuli Zhe de Xin Jianghu," p.36.

[56] "Gongxin Buzhang Fouren Fengsha Geren Wangzhan Chen Zhengzhi Yao Jiada Lidu" (MIIT Minister Denied that Forcing-Out Individual Websites, Asserting that Rectification Will be Strengthened), http://news.163.com/10/0309/09/61ASVNQK000146BD.html, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[57] See Johan Lagerkvist, *After the Internet, Before Democracy* (Peter Lang, 2010), p. 49. Business interests can be closely tied to censorship power. For instance, a PR manager of a multinational corporation, which was in a public relations crisis for voiding its promotional coupons, boasted their good relationship with the propaganda system, which he claimed was more effective than any other means. He did not care what netizens say because "whatever they complain about will be eliminated." Interview RBJ 2009-34, with a PR manager of a multinational corporation at Beijing, April 23, 2010. It is not clear how propaganda department would actually benefit from this process.

[58] See Chen Hanci, "Xinwen Chunban Zongshu Zaici Qiangdiao Wangluo Youxi Shenpiquan Guishu" (GAPP Reasserts Its Authority of Online Gaming Approval), *Diyi Caijing Ribao (China Business News)*, October 12, 2009.

[59] See "Guangdian Zongju he Gongxinbu Qiajia, Nongde Quanguo Jifei Goutiao" (Fight between SARFT and MIIT Caused Wide Turmoil), http://hi.baidu.com/soyalit/item/a0bab281feb0cf5f26ebd990, retrieved September 25, 2012. The interest competition between SARFT and MIIT is widely acknowledged and reported. See: Chen Xuedong, "Liang Buwei Boyi Hulianwang Dianshi" (Struggle between SARFT and MIIT on Internet TV), *Xin Kuaibao (New Express News)*, August 27, 2009; "Gongxinbu vs. Guangdian Zongju Shui Shuole Zhenhua" (MITT vs. SARFT: Who Told the Truth?), http://stock.17ok.com/news/335/2010/0609/1682483_1.html, retrieved September 25, 2012.

effort by the Party's Propaganda Department to wrest control over online information services from the SCIO.[60]

State agencies may have different perceptions of risks and opportunities. For instance, the Ministry of Education (MOE) pushed for real name registration of campus BBSes and turning them into intra-university platforms in 2005. By isolating campus BBSes and making them less likely to take up hot social topics, the MOE attempted to reduce its own responsibility. However, the Chinese Communist Youth League Central Committee (CCYLCC) showed interest in campus BBSes because it saw opportunities in expanding its regulatory reach. At the national campus BBS manager conference, the sponsoring CCYLCC subsidiary showed particular interest in establishing a BBS self-disciplinary association, and in promoting online ideological indoctrination as well as job searches and entrepreneurship through campus BBSes. These goals are clearly safe for the CCYLCC since none of them threaten control over online expression – and achieving these goals would improve the performance evaluations of its officials because that will demonstrate their competence. [61]

Ideological conflicts within the authoritarian regime constitute an even more fundamental and deep-rooted threat to the coherence of the censorship regime. Constant struggles, occurring most prominently during the 1989 democratic movement, between different factions remind us of the ideological divisions within the Party. Many former party-state officials have defected overseas[62] or have departed greatly from Party discipline. They have started to call for constitutional rights, such as the freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, and of demonstration.[63] What is more interesting is that such ideological and factional struggles have spilled over into cyberspace. When the former Party Secretary of Chongqing, Bo Xilai, was removed from his official post in 2012, online debate erupted, and many netizens and several left-wing sites boldly supported Bo.[64] To quell such voices, the propaganda machine has taken a number of measures, including shutting down left-wing forums and websites. Such "targeted censorship" (*dingxiang shencha*) reveals that online expression and the censorship regime have become emblematic of political struggle within the party-state.

Increasing ideological pluralization, together with media commercialization, has started to shake the base of the propaganda state. As Johan Lagerkvist has rightly noted, state agents and political leaders may "slowly begin to doubt the legitimacy and sustainability of the control and censorship regime,"[65] and media elites, reformist

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[60] Tao, "Jiekai Zhongguo Wangluo Jiankong Jizhi de Neimu."

[61] The First National Campus BBS Manager Conference at Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, October 23-25, 2009.

[62] An example here is former high rank Xinhua News agency official Xu Jiatun, who defected after the 1989 democratic movement. See Zhou Nan, "Zhou Nan Koushu: Xu Jiatun Pantao" (Zhou Nan's Account: Defection of Xu Jiatun), *Lingdao Wencui (Leadership Digest)*, No. 16 (2010), pp. 109-112.

[63] See Constitution of the People's Republic of China (1982, amended 1988, 1993, 1999, 2004), Article 35. A most recent example is the *Open Letter to the National People's Congress* by a group of old officials headed by Li Rui, former deputy director of Central Organizational Department, urging freedom of speech and press. See "Open Letter from Party Elders Calls for Free Speech," http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2010/10/open-letter-from-party-elders-calls-for-free-speech/, retrieved September 25, 2012. The message even spread within the GFW. See "Jiang Ping, Li Rui, Hu Jiwei, deng Zhi Quanguo Renda Gongkaixin" (Open Letter to National People's Congress from Jiang Ping, Li Rui, Hu Jiwei, et al), http://www.newsmth.net/bbstcon.php?board=Law&gid=78794, retrieved October 12, 2010.

[64] Oiwan Lam, "China: Censoring the Red and Bo Xilai's Supporters" http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2012/03/16/china-censoring-the-red-and-bo-xilais-supporters/, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[65] Lagerkvist, *After the Internet, Before Democracy*, pp. 272-273.

officials and propaganda officials may influence each other in ways that allow for more discursive space.[66] Some mainstream media outlets such as *Southern Weekend* (*Nanfang Zhoumo*) are known as liberal strongholds, despite heavy-handed state constraints. My interviews further confirm the ideological breakdown among media professionals and propaganda workers.[67] When supposed ideological strongholds of the propaganda system and mouthpieces of the party-state are flawed, the control regime can hardly be as effective as the regime might hope.

Fragmentation exists not only across sectors but also across levels of the party state. As the power to control is delegated, principle-agent problems emerge. Being faithful in implementing censorship policies may not be a sensible choice for subordinates when it conflicts with other priorities. For instance, local legislators in Guangzhou worried about the impact of excessively harsh registration of Internet cafés on the public and small businesses.[68] This example helps explain the variation in content control across regions and even across websites.[69] Such a vertical divide not only provides opportunities for online expression, but also sometimes induces more rigid and arbitrary censorship measures as local agencies tend to showcase competence or conceal incompetence under the cadre responsibility system. For instance, Gary King and his colleagues find that an environmental activist who is supported by the central government has been heavily censored on local websites because he has a record of organizing collective action.[70] According to one of my interviewees, eagerness to show competence was an important drive for mid-level MIIT officials to push for the Green-dam project.[71] And the desire to conceal incompetence is evident in the heavy-handed censorship measures by local governments used to cover up events that suggested instability was on the rise. Local governments have not only sought to eliminate "harmful" information, but have also detained netizens who put up or spread such information.[72] Trials and inter-provincial pursuits of (*kuasheng zhuibu*) netizens for defamation or libel charges demonstrate how far local governments can go.[73] The paramount concern of such "stability maintenance"

[66] Lagerkvist, *After the Internet, Before Democracy*, p. 265.

[67] Interview RBE 2008-02, with a former journalist at *Guangzhou Daily* group at Berkeley, October 25, 2008; Interview RBJ 2009-08, with a former journalist at Beijing, January 9, 2009; Interview OBE 2010-52, phone interview with junior faculty member at communication school, who was a former CCTV reporter, September 4, 2010.

[68] Lagerkvist, *After the Internet, Before Democracy*, pp. 49-50.

[69] An investigative report suggests that websites registered in Beijing have been more tightly controlled than those registered in Shenzhen. See Mr. Tao, "China: Journey to the Heart of Internet Censorship," Investigative Report by Reporters without Boarders and Chinese Human Rights Defenders, October 2007. Similarly Rebecca MacKinnon found that blog service providers censored blogs to different degrees. See Rebecca MacKinnon, "China's Censorship 2.0: How Companies Censor Bloggers," *First Monday*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (February 2009).

[70] Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Molly Roberts, "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression," http://gking.harvard.edu/files/censored.pdf, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[71] Interview RBE 2011-57, with a former campus forum manager, experienced user at Berkeley, May 21, 2011. The interviewee has a friend working in MIIT.

[72] Besides political activists like those who signed the *08 Charter*, local governments often purse netizens to cover up local scandals, like the case of Wang Shuai who was detained for 8 days for putting a post online protesting improper land appropriation by local government at Lingbao, Henan Province. For a collection of such cases, see "Wang Shuai Yihuo Guojia Peichang, Gong'an Juzhang Dengmen Daoqian" (Wang Shuai Has Received State Compensation, Police Chief Visited His House and Apologized), http://www.zgfznews.com/epaper/newcity/3b/2009/4/20/294161.shtml, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[73] Wang Junxiu, Wang Lei "Yipian Tiezi Huanlai Bei Qiu Bari" (One Posting Online Resulted in 8 Days in Detention) *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao (China Youth Daily)*, April 8, 2009. Zhang Dongfeng, "Fatie 'Feibang' Bei Panxing Shijian Wangshang Taolun Relie" (The Incident of Being Jailed because of Online 'Libel' Hot Discussion Arise Among Netizens)，*Nanfang Dushi Bao (Southern Metropolis Daily)*, April 21, 2009. The story is available in English. See "Ordos Becomes Nationally Known Word," http://www.zonaeuropa.com/200904a.brief.htm, retrieved September 25,

(*weiwen*) efforts is clearly not to preserve the legitimacy for the regime, but to reduce trouble for local governments.

Conclusion

China's internet control regime has undergone a process of policy learning through which the state has gradually built up its institutional, organizational, administrative, and technical capacities to tame the internet. However, I argue that the seemingly formidable content control regime still faces severe external and internal challenges that create tensions in internet censorship. On the one hand, anonymous and creative online expression has forced the state to push for real-name registration, delegate censorship responsibility to intermediary actors, and rely on servo-mechanistic surveillance techniques. Though these may be efficient in reducing the workload of censoring agencies, these counter-strategies by the state have helped make the censorship regime rigid, providing maneuvering room for both intermediary actors and internet users. On the other hand, interest and value conflicts among state agencies have contributed to arbitrariness in censorship enforcement across sectors and levels, providing opportunities for online expression in some cases and inducing harsher censorship in others.[74]

As the analysis in this chapter suggests, the evolution of content control regime also hinges on the state's interaction with intermediary actors and internet users. The dynamic process of content control by the state is also a process of non-state actors adapting to the online environment as well as state policies. In this chapter, the role of these non-state actors has been acknowledged, but not detailed. In following chapters, I will examine how the governed, especially forum managers and users, respond to the state censorship.

2012. Also see Liu Wanyong, "Yi Qingnian Jubao Tongxue Gongwuyuan Kaoshi Zuobi Bei Xingju" (A Young Man Has Been Arrested for Tipping off Cheating of His Classmate in Civil Service Exam), *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao (China Youth Daily)*, December 1, 2010.

[74] The uncertainty in the censorship system may encourage self-censorship. See Rachel Stern and Jonathan Hassid, "Amplifying Silence: Uncertainty and Control Parables in Contemporary China," *Comparative Political Studies* Vol. 45, No.10 (October 2012), pp. 1230–1254.

Chapter 3
To Comply or Resist?
Sandwiched Forum Administrators

Despite the state's increasing ability to intervene in online discourse, discussed in the last chapter, the large volume of online expression and creativity of internet users continue to overwhelm state capacity. In one strategy to cope with the challenge of monitoring online expression, the party-state has contracted out censorship to intermediary actors. Besides state-sponsored campaigns and a few nationwide control measures like the Great Firewall, intermediary actors, particularly forum managers, are largely responsible for routine internet content surveillance in Chinese cyberspace.

This chapter examines the crucial role of intermediary actors in the cat-and-mouse censorship game by focusing on how internet content providers like forum and bulletin board system managers balance the demands of state control from above and netizens' challenges from below. I argue that many of these intermediary actors demonstrate a pattern of "discontented compliance:" though pervasively unhappy with censorship, forum and board managers comply with the regime to censor online expression, because they cannot afford overt resistance without endangering their board or forum. As compliance is basically involuntary, many intermediary actors have more than enough incentives to tolerate to or even encourage boundary-spanning expression when it appears.[1]

Intermediary Actors in Censorship

The role and agency of intermediary actors have long been recognized in the literature of Chinese politics. Scholars have critiqued the statist model that takes local cadres as the transmission belt of state policies,[2] and the fragmentation of the Chinese state has been highlighted by studies that find increasingly pluralized policy implementation in the realms of both political economy[3] and contentious politics.[4] Andrew Mertha's conceptualization of "fragmented authoritarianism 2.0" further highlights the role of new policy entrepreneurs like marginalized officials, NGOs, and activists that start to influence the policy-making process.[5] Despite their diverse topics, these studies all emphasize the role of intermediary agents in the exercise of state power.

Online content control is a complicated process in which intermediary actors play an indispensible role. Internet scholars and human rights watchers have documented how internet service and content providers have facilitated censorship by accommodating state censorship actions. Even multinational information technology (IT) giants have chosen "just doing business" and cooperated with the party-state over

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[1] Chinese citizens are adept at boundary-spanning contention. See Kevin O'Brien, "Neither Transgressive nor Contained: Boundary-Spanning Contention in Rural China," *Mobilization: An International Journal,* Vol. 8, No. 1 (2003), pp. 51-64.

[2] For instance, see Vivienne Shue, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford University Press, 1988).

[3] Jean Oi, *Rural China Takes Off: Institutional Foundations of Economic Reform* (University of California Press, 1999). Marc Blecher and Vivienne Shue, "Into Leather: State-led Development and the Private Sector in Xinji," *The China Quarterly*, No. 166 (June 2001), pp 368 393

[4] Thomas Bernstein and Xiaobo Lu, *Taxation without Representation in Contemporary Rural China* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2003); Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Kevin O'Brien (ed.), *Popular Protest in China* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

[5] Andrew Mertha, "'Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0': Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process," *The China Quarterly*, No. 200 (December 2009), pp. 995-1012.

"doing just business."[6] There are many examples of this. For instance, Cisco has equipped China's golden shield project, which later became the backbone of the Great Firewall.[7] Yahoo! was heavily criticized for being complicit in the conviction of several Chinese dissidents by providing their account information.[8] Skype has allowed its Chinese modified version, TOM-Skype, to censor users' conversations with keywords.[9] Similarly, Microsoft has been known to censor its blog services in China.[10] Google, viewed by many as a positive example against censorship because of its withdrawal from China in 2010, also cooperated with the regime, though maybe unwillingly, by censoring search results before they withdrew.[11]

Indeed, work done by intermediary actors is an increasingly important component of censorship.[12] Intermediary actors are pivotal: they both implement state censorship measures and enforce strict self-censorship.[13] As Chinese political scientist Yonggang Li put it:

> "If the 'core' of the 'national firewall' is under the direct control of the state, its 'periphery buffer zone' then is constructed by service providers and individual netizens. Self-censorship of these organizations and self-discipline of netizens fence or suppress information and opinion unapproved by the regime, thus constitute the first layer of pre-emption and filter."[14]

Even this core versus periphery metaphor, however, underemphasizes the importance of intermediary actors. The most pervasive censorship in China is not carried out by state-owned filtering systems or censors, but by individual internet companies just before or after "offending content" is posted.[15]

However, depicting intermediary actors as loyal accomplices of the party-state is misleading, especially considering that both market considerations and the individual beliefs of intermediary actors often counsel against censorship. As Rebecca MacKinnon finds, service providers enforce censorship differently. Her interview data also suggest a number of factors – including features of companies, its owners and the individual editors managing the portal – contribute to variation.[16] However,

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[6] The intelligent contrast between "just doing business" and "doing just business" is borrowed from the title of the following article: Gary Elijah Dann and Neil Haddow, "Just Doing Business or Doing Just Business: Google, Microsoft, Yahoo! and the Business of Censoring China's Internet," *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 79, No. 3 (2008), pp. 219-234.

[7] Sarah Lai Stirland, "Cisco Leak: 'Great Firewall' of China Was a Chance to Sell More Routers," http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2008/05/leaked-cisco-do/, retrieved October 2, 2012.

[8] Rebecca MacKinnon, "Shi Tao, Yahoo!, and the Lessons for Corporate Social Responsibility," http://rconversation.blogs.com/YahooShiTaoLessons.pdf, retrieved October 2, 2012.

[9] Jeffrey Knockel, Jedidiah R. Crandall, and Jared Saia, "Three Researchers, Five Conjectures: An Empirical Analysis of TOM-Skype Censorship and Surveillance," http://www.cs.unm.edu/~crandall/foci11knockel.pdf, retrieved October 2, 2012.

[10] Microsoft maintained its cooperative stance with the Chinese state even after Google's withdrawal. See Rebecca MacKinnon, "Flatter World and Thicker Walls? Blogs, Censorship and Civic Discourse in China," *Public Choice*, Vol. 134 (2008), pp. 31-46; Joshua Rhett Miller, "Microsoft to Continue Censorship in China as Google Opens Up," http://www.foxnews.com/scitech/2010/03/16/google-reportedly-ends-censorship-china/, retrieved Oct. 2, 2012.

[11] Clive Thompson, "Google's China Problem (and China's Google Problem)", New York Times, April 23, 2006. See http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/23/magazine/23google.html?pagewanted=all, retrieved Feb. 16, 2012.

[12] Ethan Zuckerman, "Intermediary Censorship", in Ronald J. Deibert et al (eds), *Access Controlled: The Shaping of Power, Rights, and Rule in Cyberspace* (The MIT Press, 2010), pp. 82-83.

[13] See Lagerkvist, *After the Internet, Before Democracy* (Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 146-147. Intermediary actors like forums take preemptive measures to ensure that their sites do not have content that will trigger state censorship. In these sense, forums are censoring themselves.

[14] Yonggang Li, *Women de Fanghuoqiang: Wangluo Shidai de Jiandu yu Biaoda (Our Great Firewall: Expression and Governance in the Era of the Internet)*, Guangxi Normal University Press, 2009), p.141.

[15] Rebecca MacKinnon, et al, "Authority, Meet Technology: Will China's Great Firewall Hold?" http://www.newamerica.net/events/2010/authority_meet_technology, retrieved Oct. 2, 2012.

[16] Rebecca MacKinnon, "China's Censorship 2.0: How Companies Censor Bloggers," *First Monday*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (February 2009).

MacKinnon does not elaborate on how these factors have affected those service providers' censorship implementation.

How do intermediary actors situate themselves within the censorship regime, and how do they perceive their own situation? How do market considerations and individual attitudes towards censorship affect intermediary actors' strategies when balancing between the demands of the state and users? This chapter explores these questions by examining the role of forum managers in censorship, how faithfully they carry out censorship, and their considerations and tactics to survive and develop their boards or forums.

Situating Internet Forums between the State and Netizens

Intermediary actors like forum managers are "sandwiched between" the state and netizens. On one hand, they have been delegated censorship responsibilities by the state. Compared to monitoring legions of anonymous netizens, it is much easier for state authorities to hold service providers and their managers accountable. Intermediary actors are smaller in number, easier to track through registration and licensing, and have more at stake if they deviate from state directives. In addition, forum managers often can respond to user deviance more quickly and effectively than the state, because they possess users' access data (e.g., account information or IP address) and have tools to silence deviants (deleting posts, suspending IDs, banning IP addresses). Furthermore, forcing forum managers to carry out most censorship tasks establishes a scapegoat that diverts the blame for censorship away from the state itself.

From a user's perspective, forums are platform providers and willing or unwilling accomplices in state censorship. As far as censorship is concerned, the state is invisible to most users most of the time, and forum administrators are the primary censors directly moderating discussions and punishing deviants. However, many netizens acknowledge that it is these service providers who make online expression and virtual life possible in the first place. Many netizens do not want to risk the whole platform because of politically sensitive discussion. After the forced closure of the campus BBS YTHT (established and run primarily by Beijing University students), some of its users blamed politically provocative users, complaining that not only political boards were gone, but also non-political ones like Joke, Picture, and Sex boards. Many users also often feel obligated to censor themselves, particularly when they are institutionally or emotionally tied to the forum, as in the case for most campus BBSes. The take-over of BDWM by Peking University in early 2003 was justified by many users with the rhetoric of "true love of the BBS and the university."[17]

For forum administrators, market considerations and personal values often run against censorship.[18] Leading internet entrepreneurs, including Tencent (QQ) founder and board chairman Ma Huateng and former CEO of Sina, Wang Zhidong, for example, have openly complained about excessive censorship.[19] Even when personal

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[17] Based on Author's personal experience and interviews with administrators and users of BDWM. Interview RBJ 2009-09, January 11, 2009; Interview RBJ 2010-37, May 14, 2010, Interview RBJ 2010-38, May 14, 2010, all in Beijing.

[18] Interview RBJ 2010-42, Interview RBJ 2010-47, and Interview RBJ 2010-49, with several non-official campus BBS manager at Beijing, May 22, 2010; For a collection of stories about of how website owners suffered state censorship, see Zhu Xiaokun, "Baozhengshu de Shijie" (In the World of Letter of Guarantee), *Diyi Caijing Zhoukan (CBN Weekly)*, No. 29 (Nov. 22, 2010).

[19] "Internet Executives Complain about Excessive Net Censorship," http://www.danwei.org/net_nanny_follies/net_censorship_complaints.php, retrieved September 22, 2012.

political orientations are put aside, internet service providers compete for users' attention in order to survive and prosper. However, the threat of state repression is real, with anecdotes of websites being shut down and daring forum managers being "invited to tea" serving as "control parables" that warn forum administrators not to cross the red line.[20] In effect, constant state pressure makes it a sensible choice to comply, even for those who personally believe in a liberal agenda. As the founder of KDNET explained,

> It is unrealistic not to go against our will. Compromise is necessary so far as we can push forward the construction of political civilization. Even one millimeter forward is progress. If we do not compromise, even that one millimeter is not possible.[21]

Feeling trapped, most forums demonstrate a pattern of behavior I call "discontented compliance." On one hand, forums cooperate with the state because they can hardly afford to engage in open challenge. On the other hand, compliance is involuntary, and forums engage in low-profile and, at times, more high-profile resistance when opportunities emerge. Below, I analyze forum managers' "discontented compliance" and explain why forums vary across the discontent-compliance spectrum.

Survival First: Induced Compliance of Forum Administrators

Most forums demonstrate a realistic strategy that prioritizes survival. As stated in the user agreement of NEWSMTH, "the forum will take any conceivable means to prevent user activities that may threaten the survival of the forum."[22] Means to do this include implementing state censorship initiatives, self-censorship, and winning the trust of the supervisory organs.

Implementing State Censorship Initiatives

The most basic acts of compliance include following censorship decrees and obeying laws and regulations that govern internet services and online discussion, especially when the state starts to take a discussion seriously. For instance, largely due to the anti-pornography campaign, ICP registration and licensing has become a big issue for small and medium forums since 2009.[23] Small and medium-sized websites, many of which ignored ICP licensing, were forced to either register or close down.[24] Similarly, the Ministry of Education's 2005 campaign to turn campus BBSes into "internal communication platforms" has forced many campus forums to limit registration to their students and to restrict off-campus access. BDWM, the official BBS of Peking University, has since then restricted overseas or off-campus access. Even when the restriction is lifted occasionally, the popular and politically sensitive Triangle board has denied access to off-campus anonymous users.[25] NEWSMTH, which was forced out of Tsinghua University because of the campaign, started to prohibit anonymous access to its popular board NewExpress board in 2005. It also introduced a scoring

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[20] Rachel Stern and Jonathan Hassid, "Amplifying Silence: Uncertainty and Control Parables in Contemporary China," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 10 (October 2012), pp. 1230-1254.

[21] See "Caifang Kaidi Wangluo Chuangshiren" (An Interview with the Founder of KDNET), http://www.soidc.net/articles/1181644318692/20061113/1184639770219_1.html, retrieved October 2, 2012.

[22] See Article 15 of "Shuimu Shequ Guanli Guize" (NEWSMTH Community Management Regulations), http://www.newsmth.net/nForum/#!reg, retrieved October 2, 2012.

[23] For large commercial or mouthpiece forums, it was not an issue as they were either already registered, or they could easily obtain the status.

[24] Many registered by paying ICP registration agents who claim to have connections with local MII subsidiaries. Many decided to solve the problem once and for all to avoid future campaigns: they moved abroad by hosting websites on overseas servers and registering international domain names.

[25] Registered off-campus users (mostly alumni) can only read but not post.

system that allows only veteran users with a certain number of accumulated points to post on the board since February 2006.[26]

Internet forums are responsible for implementing censorship directives from the state. Large commercial websites like Sina.com and Sohu.com often have special content monitoring divisions that connect with state monitoring agencies and deliver censorship requests to on-duty editors or board managers. For small forums, since the introduction of the ICP registration and licensing system, managers have to provide contact information so that they can be reached 24/7. For campus BBSes, censorship orders are often routed to forum managers through their home universities. For politically sensitive BBSes like BDWM, managers are often scheduled around the clock. To ensure a prompt response to censorship requests, university authorities sometimes demand administrative rights so that they can directly step in when forum managers cannot be reached.

Beyond implementing censorship directives, forums are expected to provide users' data at the state's request.[27] In fact, some forums stipulate explicitly in user agreements that they may release users' data to state agencies. For instance, Tianya states that the forum will release users' data under the following conditions: (1) prior authorization from the user; (2) according to relevant laws, and regulations; (3) at the request of relevant government agencies; and (4) for the public interest.[28] Similarly, NEWSMTH claims that it will deny any request to check users' data, except those from the government.[29]

Compliance through Self-Censorship
Besides cooperating with state censorship, forums are delegated the responsibility to monitor online expression on a routine basis to prevent deviant discussions.[30] For most forums, this means strict self-censorship to avoid trouble. This goal is achieved through a series of measures that deter, detect and punish users who violate the rules.

Above all, most forums have enacted regulations reiterating prohibitions stipulated by the state. Some forums have drafted board-specific user guidelines that further specify prohibitions and punishments to users who violate board regulations. Such regulations often disclaim responsibility for user behavior, but they grant forum managers the power to monitor users and take action they deem proper. Furthermore, they serve as constant reminders to alert forum users about what can be discussed and what cannot, thus encouraging self-censorship among users.

Many forums pre-screen postings and deny posts containing taboo words.[31] It is not clear whether large commercial forums receive a keyword list from the state

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[26] The system translates users online activities (based on how long the account has been established and how active the user is) into points and only those with over 2000 points were allowed to post on NewExpress. In October 2011, the forum lowered the bar to 500 points.

[27] China is not a unique case in this regard. Also, forums are not the only type of service providers that would cooperate with the state on this particular issue. Yahoo!, for instance, provided critical information to Chinese government, which lead to the imprisonment of Shi Tao, a journalist.

[28] See Article 5.1 of "Tianya Shequ Yonghu Zhuce Xieyi" (Terms and Conditions of Tianya Community Account Registration), http://service.tianya.cn/guize/regist.do, retrieved October 2, 2012.

[29] Article 6 of "Shuimu Shequ Baohu Yinsiquan zhi Shengming" (NEWSMTH Community Statement of Privacy), see http://www.newsmth.net/about/privacy.html, retrieved October 2, 2012.

[30] Some forums have also been asked to provide surveillance reports on popular opinion. Interview RBJ 2010-42, with forum manager of a non-official campus BBS in Beijing, May 22, 2010. The forum inherited a popular BBS that was shutdown by the state. This may be the reason why the state keeps a close watch on the forum.

[31] See Li Shao, "The Continuing Authoritarian Resilience under Internet Development in China —an Observation of *Sina* Microblog," MA Thesis, Institute of East Asian Studies, UC Berkeley, May 2012. In some cases, the posting will still be "published," but only accessible to the original poster.

(current evidence suggests they do not).[32] Campus-forums and small individual forums have made also gone through significant effort to establish their own automatic filtering system. In fact, BBS managers participating in the 2010 Beijing BBS Manager Conference asked for a keyword list from the state, so they would not have to devise their own. I have also observed webmasters of small forums looking for keyword lists on forums and QQ groups where forum managers concentrate.[33]

In addition to pre-screening, forum managers watch online discussions. Large commercial forums often hire special board/channel editors to weed out potential posts that are in violation of censorship directives.[34] On campus BBSes, where board managers are often selected from users, popular political boards are frequently directly staffed by forum managers and, in some cases, the supervisory apparatus. Small individual–run forums that lack sufficient technical and human resources sometimes simply avoid political discussions altogether. Many small forum owners in QQ groups I observed said that they only open non-political boards on their forums to avoid potential trouble.[35]

Winning Trust from Supervisory Organs
Beyond implementing state censorship initiatives or self-censorship, internet forums sometimes seek to lower their risk of censorship by cultivating good relations with surveillance agencies. Netizens believe that forums like TIANYA and KDNET dare to exploit politically sensitive topics from time to time because of their close relations with local propaganda departments. NEWSMTH provides another telling example. From early 2012 onwards, the forum started to feature notices or news from the local police branch on its welcome page, which clearly is a signal of its connections with the state.[36] These examples echo what Lagerkvist finds about *Century China* – one of the most influential intellectual websites – which cooperated closely with the party-state to get financial resources and political connections.[37]

It is essential for every campus BBS to maintain good relations with its home university, not only to obtain financial and technical resources,[38] but also to earn some protection from state intervention, which is routed through the university.[39] However, to win the trust of university authorities, a campus BBS often has to enforce stricter self-censorship to assure the university that it will not cause trouble. To do this, forum managers I interviewed told me that they tried to convince university

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[32] Yongming Zhou, *Historicizing Online Politics: Telegraphy, the Internet and Political Participation in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), p. 179.

[33] The fact that forums have to come up with their own taboo words lists provides a technical explanation of the variation in censorship.

[34] All major commercial forums included in my study, i.e. SINA, SOHU, 163, KDNET, and TIANYA, have established such a system. TIANYA has both board managers and content editors, with the later in charge of content control. Board managers are often selected from users, and usually are not responsible for censorship. Their responsibility include mark good discussions, and compile digests, and organize online or offline activities.

[35] This is obviously a rational choice. For them, political discussion will cause trouble, even though it may bring page-views, which brings in ad income.

[36] For instance, on March 6, 2012, the welcome page of the forum provided a link to the following article: Zhang Lei, "Wang Jingguan, Wo Xiang Bao Nin Yixia" (Officer Wang, I Want to Hug You), *Fazhi Wanbao (Legal Evening News)*, February 23, 2012. The article praises a police officer at Haidian Branch, Beijing Municipal Police Bureau.

[37] Yongming Zhou, *Historicizing Online Politics*, pp. 179-180.

[38] BYR was envied by many BBS managers in Beijing because forum managers have maintained very good relationship with the university, which supported them to develop a new software-platform. Interview RBJ 2010-48, with a forum manager at Beijing, May 22, 2010.

[39] Interview RBJ 2010-43, with a university faculty member who supervises student BBS atn Beijing, May 22, 2010. Though impossible to completely fend off state intervention, trust from the university supervisory organs nonetheless may enable freer discussion by alleviating self-censorship.

authorities of the benefits of a campus BBS, including enriching campus culture, promoting campus-wide communication, facilitating student-university dialogue, and enhancing the image of the school.[40]

To demonstrative compliance and win trust from the state, forums sometimes even attempt to incorporate themselves into the censorship regime. During both campus BBS manager conferences I attended, a group of forum managers sought incorporation into the Communist Youth League and circulated a proposal asking for specific censorship guidelines. They also promised strict self-regulation. This was designed to exchange voluntary cooperation for autonomy. Their hope, as one interviewee explained, was to "get some guidance from the state agency to avoid unintentional trespassing."[41]

Restrained Discontent: Management Resistance toward Censorship
Though they comply with the state in most cases, many forum managers do not genuinely support censorship. Although they cannot afford open revolt, they express their discontent through a number of low-profile tactics, particularly grumbling, slacking, technical boycotting, radical online activism, and exit and resurrection.[42]

Grumbling
Almost all forum administrators I interviewed expressed discontent towards state censorship decrees. Some criticized censorship because of their pro-liberal stance. For instance, a Qiangguo Luntan editor I interviewed refused to talk about his work but expressed his dissatisfaction toward censorship in a subtle way. Learning that I had graduated from Peking University, he started to criticize the university for failing its motto of "freedom of thought, all-embracing attitude." Many forum managers complained about being trapped between the state and netizens and blamed by both sides for things beyond their control: the state holds them responsible for netizens' deviance, while netizens blame them for state censorship. Even those who deemed regulation of online expression necessary grumbled about the arbitrariness, rigidity, and ambiguity of censorship measures. "We have to be extremely careful, or someday we will lose the platform."[43]

Although grumbling alone can hardly undermine the censorship regime, it helps build solidarity among forum administrators. It also serves as a signal to both the state and netizens, as forum managers not only complain privately but also semi-openly on online forums or even at state-sponsored conferences I observed.[44]

Slacking
Beyond grumbling, forum managers also show their discontent by enforcing censorship haphazardly, including allowing boundary-spanning expression and delaying the implementation of censorship measures. Daring forum managers turn a

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[40] Interview RBJ 2010-44, Interview RBJ 2010-45, Interview RBJ 2010-48, and Interview RBJ 2010-48, with forum managers at Beijing, May 22, 2010.

[41] Interview RBJ 2009-18, with a non-official forum campus BBS manager at Beijing, October 22, 2009.

[42] These low-profile strategies resemble what James Scott calls "weapons of the weak." See James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

[43] Interview RBJ 2010-44, with a forum manager at Beijing, May 22, 2010.

[44] Forum managers complained in a subtle way. For instance, at the National BBS Manager Conference at Suzhou, a forum manager stated that real-name registration was not necessary because "truth is never afraid of debate" and "censorship will only lead to distrust and facilitate spread of rumors." He also said that sometimes what caused the trouble was "the way in which the government agencies deal with things." His complaints were not well received by the officials according to my observation. In effect, some officials who delivered their own speeches before him had already left. Those sitting in the room did not respond.

blind eye to boundary-spanning expression when it is not closely watched by the state. For example, when Xu Zhiyong, a civil rights activist and law professor at Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications (BUPT), was jailed in July 2009, the topic was prohibited on BYR – home BBS of BUPT – or NewExpress@NEWMSTH. Yet, the BUPT@NEWSMTH still allowed such discussions, largely because the board was not a major surveillance target.

Lax forum managers sometimes also delay implementation of certain censorship measures. Many small forums and websites had ignored the ICP registration policy until the state became really serious about it in 2007.[45] Similarly, forum managers only pursued real-name registration half-heartedly. The policy was dutifully implemented by some universities after the Ministry of Education's 2005 mandate to reform campus BBSes into internal communication platforms. Yet, a manager of a non-official campus BBS told me that they never took it seriously. Below is his clever justification,

> We ask for a valid email address to register. That should be considered as real-name registration since people are supposed to register their real names when signing up their email account.[46]

Forum administrators are sometimes daring enough to delay carrying out specific directives that come with deadlines. An editor from a large commercial forum told me that when receiving state directives to delete postings, her colleagues would not act immediately but instead hold off until the last second. "For every additional second (the post exists), thousands more netizens can read it," she explained.[47]

Some forum mangers also promote discussion of sensitive topics, such as government scandals. The forced abortion scandal in Ankang, Shaanxi is a good example of this. On June 11, 2012, an internet user posted a thread on Huashang Forum accusing local family planning officials of coercing a woman into an abortion in her seventh month of pregnancy (See Appendix 3.1). The topic soon gained momentum across the web, leading to a state investigation and punishment of local cadres. Forum administrators played an important yet under-recognized role: instead of deleting the thread, forum administrator highlighted it nine minutes after its appearance and pinned it to the top of the forum webpage five days later. Surely not all forum managers would be willing to take such risks, nor is the strategy feasible for all topics. But this case shows how forum managers can facilitate boundary-spanning protest by Chinese netizens.

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[45] Registration and licensing of internet service providers were stipulated as early as in 2000 in the State Council *Hulianwang Xinxi Fuwu Guanli Banfa (Measures for Administration of Internet Information Services)*. Its enforcement has often been associated with state campaigns to cleanse the web. In 2004, 14 ministries and central Commissions launched a joint campaign targeting on pornography and websites are required to register. In 2007, as part of a new round of anti-pornography campaign online, Ministry of Information Industry started to enforce it even more seriously. The pressure was further intensified in the 2009 anti-pornography and anti-illegal information campaign. See Li Liang and Yu Li, "14 Buwei Lianhe Jinghua Hulianwang" (14 Ministries and Commissions Jointly Cleanse the Internet), *Nanfang Zhoumo (Southern Weekend)*, (August 18, 2005); Ministry of Information Industry, *Xinxi Chanyebu Guanyu Zuohao Hulianwang Wangzhan Shiming Guanli Gongzuo de Tongzhi (MII Circular on Effectively Doing the Work of Real-Name Administration of Websites)*, 2007; Qin Wang, "Zhuli Zhe de Xinjianghu" (New Rivers and Lakes for Profit-Seekers), *Nandu Zhoukan (Southern Metropolis Weekly)*, No. 3 (January 2010), pp. 34-37; Zhou Peng, "Zhongxiao Wangzhan Handong 'Duanwang'" (Small and Medium Sized Websites 'Down' in Freezing Winter), *Nandu Zhoukan (Southern Metropolis Weekly)*, No. 3 (January 2010), pp. 26-30.

[46] Interview RBJ 2010-42, with forum manager of a non-official campus BBS in Beijing, May 22, 2010. However, quite some campus BBSes started to implement the policy seriously under the pressure of their home universities since the Ministry of Education's campaign to turn campus BBSes into campus-bounded platforms.

[47] Interview RBJ 2010-36 with a forum manager of a large commercial website at Beijing, May 6, 2010.

Technical Barriers

Some forums also establish technical barriers against state surveillance. Delegated responsibility for routine surveillance, forums are under constant state attention to ensure their compliance: state monitoring agencies screen forum activities manually and use keyword filtering technology similar to that of search engines. Manual patrol is hard to avoid, but forums can fool scanning software with simple technical barriers. For instance, one reason why NEWSMTH prevents anonymous access to its NewExpress is to prevent censoring software from scanning postings on the board. Some forums only recruit new users on an invitation basis, thus fending off state monitoring more effectively. A good example is 1984BBS (1984bbs.com). Known for its pro-liberal and anti-censorship stance, the BBS recruited new users through invitations distributed by existing users and had over 10,000 registered users before its forced closure in 2010.[48]

Managerial Online Activism

Though forum managers generally avoid open confrontation with the state, some occasionally engage in more radical online activism. For instance, many forum and board managers of BDWM resigned when the university attempted to take the board over in early 2003. Many of them also protested by banning PKU –an ID representing the president of the university.[49] The struggle between managers of SMTH BBS (Later NEWSMTH) and Tsinghua University authorities was no less dramatic in the 2005 MOE campaign to constrain campus BBSes. Many managers resigned and hundreds posted messages of protest or deliberately sabotaged the forum by deleting all postings on certain boards or posting random material. More importantly, some forum managers fought hard to "steal" the BBS's user-data, which were stored on university-owned servers, and they succeeded, leading to establishment of NEWSMTH.[50]

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[48] Xiao Qiang, "1984bbs Wangzhan Guanbi you Chongkai Shuoming le Shenme?" (What Does the Shutdown and Resurrection of 1984bbs Tell Us?), http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/pinglun/xq-10262010171852.html, retrieved October 22, 2012. The forum based its server outside China though its founder and owner, Jiannan Zhang (aka SecretaryZhang) lives in Beijing. The forum suffered many hacker attacks and Zhang himself was harassed and threatened by the authorities. It was finally forced down in October 2010 after it started to discuss the Nobel Peace Prize award to jailed dissident Liu Xiaobo. An interesting question is why GFW failed to block 1984BBS before its closure. Zhang and his group claimed it was because they outsmarted GFW. However, someone (likely an internet security expert) challenged his claim, suggesting that GFW turned a blind eye because the forum were compromised by the authorities. Another netizen suggested that GFW might let off the forum because it appeared controllable. See the conversation between Huo Ju and Ayue A in the thread "He SecretaryZhang Jiufen Shimo" (Controversy between Me and SecretaryZhang), https://profiles.google.com/109778955150081671489/buzz/c5E5GfefCpR, retrieved Oct. 22, 2012. We also need to note 1984BBS here refers exclusively to 1984bbs.com, not the 1984bbs.org, which was established after the closure of 1984bbs.com.

[49] Interview RBJ 2009-09, January 11, 2009; Interview RBJ 2010-37, May 14, 2010, Interview RBJ 2010-38, May 14, 2010, with BDWM forum mangers, board managers and users, all in Beijing. Also Interview RBJ 2009-17, with veteran forum users at Beijing, September 23, 2009. The take-over took place on January 1, 2003 in a very dramatic way. The university summoned all forum managers for a meeting while conspiring with some forum managers to move the BBS server from Campus Computer Center to Youth Research Center under Communist Youth League Committee of the university. Forum managers who cooperated with the university justified themselves by arguing that the take-over would grant official status to the BBS and thus ensure more support from the university.

[50] Interview RBE 2008-01, with a former forum manager of Tsinghua University, veteran user at Berkeley, September 23, 2008 and Interview RBJ 2009-12, with an experienced SMTH BBS user who used to serve as board manager and knows the administrators of the BBS who was involved in the struggle. For a brief introduction to the event, see "Weishenme You Liangge Shuimu? 3.16 Shi Shenme?" (Why There Are Two SMTH Sites? What Is March 16th?), http://www.newsmth.net/bbscon.php?bid=313&id=9466&ftype=11, retrieved Oct. 2, 2012.

Exit and Resurrection[51]

Exit and resurrection can also be viewed as a way to counter state censorship and demonstrate discontent. When forums are forced to shut down by the state, sometimes their data and reputation can be carried forward by its administrators and loyal users. For instance, in the 2005 MOE campaign, a few administrators of NJUBBS (aka Lily), the second largest campus BBS at the time, refused to cooperate with the university, but instead carried user data abroad and re-established the BBS with the name Wild Lily.[52] In fact, the largest overseas Chinese forum MITBBS, is a successor of earlier PKU and CAS BBSes shut down by the state. YTHT– then the largest campus BBS –provides an even better example. After it was forced to shut down in 2004, three forums claimed to be its successors.[53] Moreover, a PKU graduate inspired by YTHT's free spirit also attempted to re-create a new YTHT from scratch. His insistence to include "YTHT" in the domain name and title caused him a lot of trouble as it was considered a challenge to the regime. He was frequently "invited to tea" and forced to shut down the site during sensitive periods even though the BBS attracted only a few dozen users.

Understanding Variation along the Discontent-Compliance Spectrum

If forum administrators sometimes demonstrate both compliance and discontent, then what accounts for variation along the discontent-compliance spectrum? How do forum administrators "gauge the limit" (*bawo chidu*) of allowed expression when sandwiched between the state and netizens? My research suggests that besides individual political orientations, the primary purpose, affiliation, and scale of a site condition forums' stakes (what to win or lose and the possibility of win or lose) and their bargaining power vis-à-vis the state and users. Table 3.1 categorizes forums in my sample into five groups based on their purposes, affiliations, and scale.

For forums run by state media outlets, the primary concern is political correctness, which results in strict monitoring measures. Take Qiangguo Luntan as an example. The forum attracts thousands of users, and its topics are mostly political. Postings have to go through software filtering and the manual scrutiny of board managers before being published. And unlike most forums that run 24 hours a day, the forum used to close down between 10:00pm and 10:00am the next day before its recent upgrade in July 2012.[54] When it is open, there is at least one board manager on duty

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[51] Forums may take the exit option for two distinctive reasons. Some exit primarily for business purposes. Many small non-political forums exit to avoid arbitrary censorship which can disrupt their business and destroy their hard-earned user bases because users will never return if they go offline for just a few days. Outbursts of such exodus happened when the state tightened up licensing and registration as well as after Google's withdrawal. This is similar to Hirschman's conception of exit, i.e. withdrawing from the relationship. The other type of exit, which is discussed here, is involuntary. And through exit and resurrection, forums not only try to survive, but also intend to demonstrate their resistance toward the censorship regime. In this sense, they "exit" to "voice" their complaints. See Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

[52] Later Nanjing University authorities and forum managers actually compromised and restored NJUBBS, though with more restrictions imposed.

[53] The two based in China –YJRG and LQQM –were significantly de-politicized, but still allowed former YTHT users to grumble. A third forum was re-established in the U.S., under the same name of YTHT. All three forums were based on backup data of YTHT. There was an anecdote about how a version of YTHT's backup was saved. When forcing down YTHT, local authorities attempted to destroy all its hard disks. Yet, some hard disks survived because YTHT administrators at the scene claimed them to be personal belongings. Interview RBJ 2009-07, with a former YTHT board manager at Beijing, January 6, 2009; and Interview RBJ 2010-38, with a BDWM manager, who was also a veteran user and board manager of YTHT at Beijing, May 14, 2010.

[54] See "Renminwang Qiangguo Shequ Xinban Shangxian, Shixian 24 Xiaoshi Kaitan" (New Version of Strengthen the Nation Forum Is Online, Allowing It to Open 24 Hours), http://forum.home.news.cn/thread/100713203/1.html, retrieved September 25, 2012.

(*zhiban*) monitoring the discussion. My interaction with one of its managers showed that its managers are politically alert. He refused to talk about his job as soon as I briefed him about my research project, though our conversations on other issues betrayed his pro-liberal stance. He claimed that China's best time was between the 1976 (Mao's death) and 1989 (Tiananmen Movement) when "ideas interact with the reality naturally and with passion."[55] He also criticizes Chinese intellectuals for lacking independent personality, and thus are "either parasites or servants."[56]

Table 3.1 Categorization of Forums

	STATE-RUN	COMMERICAL/ FOR-PROFIT		CAMPUS BBS	
		Large	Small	Official	Non-official
Examples	Qiangguo Luntan	TIANYA, KDNET, SINA, SOHU	Many	BDWM, BYU, NJUBBS	YTHT, NEWYTHT
Affiliations	State media	Large companies	Individuals	Universities	None
Main Purpose	Political	Profit	Profit	Non-profit	Non-profit / Profit
Loss if shut down	High political	High business	Low business	Medium	Low
Possibility of Shutdown	Low	Low	High	Medium	High
Bargaining Power	Strong	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak
Options and Strategies	Avoid taboos	Avoid taboos/ boundary-spanning	Avoid political topics / Exit	Avoid Taboos/ Boundary-Spanning	Avoid political topics/ boundary-spanning

Though strictly monitored, Qiangguo Luntan still allows various and sometimes critical voices. There are two possible reasons. On the one hand, the forum's affiliation with the state might have provided its managers knowledge about where boundaries lie and thus reduce the uncertainty of state censorship faced by other types of forums. On the other hand, as Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Molly Roberts have suggested, the censorship regime may aim more at curtailing collective action than silencing criticism of Chinese leaders or policies.[57] Discussions on Qiangguo Luntan are indeed closer to abstract ideological debates than conversations that might spur collective actions.

Large commercial sites rely on users to generate profit. Though the stakes seem to be higher than for smaller forums if they are forced to shut down why?, the actual risk is smaller because large commercial websites also have stronger bargaining power vis-à-vis the state: they represent the high-tech industry, which the state supports, and often enjoy stronger relations with the state.[58] For the largest forums and IT companies, being shut down is hardly imaginable – fines and punishing responsible personnel are more likely repercussions. As a result, though large commercial sites still keep away from forbidden zones, they are also more likely to tolerate or even encourage boundary-spanning expression. According to Liu Yawei at The Carter Center, Tencent (qq.com), one of the largest portals, deployed a "promotion and protection strategy" toward politically sensitive celebrities like him

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[55] Interview OBJ 2009-13, online interview with a state-run forum administrator, August 28, 2009.
[56] Interview OBJ 2009-13, online interview with a state-run forum administrator, August 28, 2009.
[57] Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Molly Roberts, "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression," http://gking.harvard.edu/files/censored.pdf, retrieved September 25, 2012.
[58] For instance, Gady Epstein and Lin Yang, "Sina Weibo," *Forbes Asia*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (March 2011), pp. 56-60.

on its micro-blog platform. Though he is a verified user, the company would temporarily remove his verification whenever he posts something sensitive. This is an indirect way of protecting him because Tencent can plausibly claim that have no knowledge of his identity if the state attempts to trace him.[59]

Small for-profit forums, many of which are run by individuals, not only lack scale or strong affiliations with institutions or big business to bargain with the state, but also have smaller and weaker user bases than large forums or campus BBSes. As a result, they are much more vulnerable to both policy and market turbulence. To avoid state intervention, small forums discourage political discussion and only open non-political boards. They also tend to impose stricter self-censorship to play it safe. For instance, as the state attempted to crack down on rumors centering on ousted Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai in early 2012, small forums tightened self-censorship. Consenz, developer of the popular software Discuz! used by many small forums,, added a special function allowing administrators to search sensitive information so that small forums could monitor users more effectively. Managers welcomed the update, and the following comment reveals the rationale of manager of small forums, "It is unusual time, and we need to take it seriously! Where there is life, there is hope!" (*Liude qingshan zai, bupa meichai shao!*).[60]

Nonetheless, small forum managers are not always apolitical. An online survey conducted by a forum popular among small-scale forum administrators shows an overwhelming majority of them sympathized with Google when the company chose to withdraw from China.[61] Meanwhile, many small forums moved their sites abroad to avoid state intervention that can easily ruin their fragile business. However, small forums have little bargaining power with the state and can hardly afford more radical or open actions. In effect, even when they take risks to attract an audience, they often do so with violent or sexual content rather than political topics. The state shows more tolerance towards the first two so far as they keep a low profile and clean up everything when campaigns come.

Unlike early BBSes run by students, most official campus BBSes are now supported and controlled by their home universities. Although BBSes receive technical, financial and even administrative support from the universities,[62] official status also comes with a cost: they are closely supervised by the university party committees, communist youth league committees, student affairs offices, or internet management centers. Students serving as administrators of the forum and sometimes sensitive boards are often co-opted by university authorities and compensated with

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[59] Yawei Liu, "A Long Term View of China's Microblog Politics," talk at CIRC10. The strategy may protect both the micro-blogger and the company in that the company can easily dismiss the case if it is a random user.

[60] See "Jinji Tongzhi: Zongheng Sousuo Kaifang Guanliyuan Sousuo Jinci Quanxian" (Emergency Notice: Zongheng Search Allows Forum Administrators to Search Taboo Words), http://www.discuz.net/thread-2755103-1-1.html, retrieved Sept. 25, 2012. For an English translation of the notice, see "Censorship Instructions for Online Forums," http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2012/10/censorship-instructions-for-online-forums/, retrieved Sept. 25, 2012.

[61] See "Ni Zenme Kandai Google Tuichu Zhongguo Shichang" (What's Opinion towards Google's Withdrawal from China), http://bbs.admin5.com/thread-1546443-1-1.html, retrieved September 25, 2012. The survey shows that 330 voters (86.61%) think that Google has provided convenience to Chinese users and shall not exit China. And the government should support it.

[62] Most campus BBSes are based on university-owned servers, use bandwidth provided by the university, and are exempt from or obtaining ICP registration with university facilitation. Many major campus forums now have obtained ICP registration. Yet, there are still some official campus forums running without the license. Also, official campus forums can generate profit. In fact, some of them earn good money by selling advertising slots on their sites. An informant told me that the annual ad income of BDWM exceeds 200,000 RMB. However, usually BBS managers cannot spend the income directly, thus are generally not incentivized to increase the income. Interview RBJ 2009-19 and Interview RBJ 2009-20, with campus forum managers at Beijing, October 21, 2009

stipends, promotion opportunities as student cadres, or even scholarships.[63] As a result, the degree of freedom campus BBSes enjoy hinges on their relationship with the university authorities, which generally is based on the tacit understanding that it is best to avoid political risk, especially following the 2005 MOE campaign to restrict off-campus access of campus BBSes. As of late 2012, the struggle against the MOE was the last major wave of activism against censorship among campus BBSes.[64]

Non-official campus forums often serve mixed purposes. Many such forums are set up by interested students to serve their classmates, and profit is not their priority. Yet, forums still have to raise funds to sustain themselves and expand.[65] Many non-official forums have become increasingly similar to small for-profit forums as their founders treat their projects as a business endeavor. Without official affiliation, these forums enjoy no protection from universities. Their small scale and limited resources also mean little bargaining power with the state. As a result, these forums can hardly afford politically sensitive discussions that may lead to repercussions. However, since their users are mostly students, non-official campus BBSes sometimes allow freer and more daring discussions when idealistic students dominate. This was especially the case in the earlier years of BBSes when it was not a business model, as the stories of YTHT and NEWYTHT demonstrate.[66]

The above analysis shows that affiliation with the state, large business or a university imposes different constraints on forums. But such affiliations are also accompanied by advantages such as protection from state censorship or market turbulence.[67] Forums attached to state media outlets are monitored most closely, yet they do not have to appeal to their users as much as commercial forums do. Large commercial forums are subject to market incentives, but their user bases are much stronger than smaller forums and the big business behind them can add to their leverage when bargaining with the state. Official campus BBSes are controlled by the supervisory apparatus at the school, but they enjoy stable user bases, do not have to worry about profit, and are supported financially, technically and administratively by their home universities.

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[63] Interview RBJ 2009-18, Interview RBJ 2009-19 and Interview RBJ 2009-20, with campus forum managers at Beijing, October 21, 2009; Interview RSZ 2009-26, with a BBS manager in Suzhou, October 24, 2009; Interview RBJ 2010-46, with a BBS manager at Beijing, May 22, 2010. In one university, there were four student BBSes and their managers would compete for a scholarship set up by a tech-company to advance the development of campus internet platform.

[64] See the Managerial Online Activism section above.

[65] In early years, campus BBSes, whether official or not, were primarily driven by non-profit motivations. YTHT, for instance, was funded by forum managers themselves and donations from its users before its shutdown. This mode is obviously not sustainable. In fact, both its managers and users have recognized this and they discussed about how to generate extra revenue. But unfortunately, they did not have a chance to try out their plans before the site was shut down in 2004. See "lovemeandyou Huida mgzf Tiwen" (lovemeandyou Responding to mgzf's Questions), http://www.hkday.net/ytht/SM_Election/8/3/7/1.html; and "[Huida mgzf Wangyou Tiwen] Guanyu Yitahutu de Fazhan Fangxiang" ([Responses to mgzf's Questions] About the Direction of YTHT's Future Development), http://hkday.net/ytht/SM_Election/8/3/3/1.html, links are expired, last retrieved October 20, 2010.

[66] Being a non-official BBS run primarily by students from Peking University, YTHT attempted to maintain a liberal discussion environment because its administrators and active users believed that the BBS should provide an opportunity to exercise of freedom of expression. Though it was the largest campus forum before it was shutdown due to its daring expression, the forum depended on donations from its administrators and users rather than any other sources. The founder of NEWYTHT was also a PKU graduate. He and a few of his friends set up the new site, claiming to inherit the spirit of YTHT. The new site was not business oriented as well and they insisted to include "YTHT" in the title of the new site, though that caused them a lot of trouble. Interview RBJ 2009-18, with a non-official forum campus BBS manager at Beijing, October 22, 2009.

[67] Ethan Michelson finds that bureaucratic, instrumental or affective ties to the party-state and its agents can help lawyers in their everyday difficulties. See Ethan Michelson, "Lawyers, Political Embeddedness, and Institutional Continuity in China's Transition from Socialism," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 113, No. 2 (September 2007), pp. 352–414.

The size of a forum affects its ability to bargain with the state and users in a more straightforward way than affiliations. In general, the larger a forum is, the stronger its ability to bargain with the state, because large forums have (1) a bigger impact if the state attempts to shut them down and (2) more financial and social resources they can mobilize. However, that being said, except for state-run forums and giant commercial sites, the state may still be bold enough to shut down popular forums, as the case of YTHT shows. But for all the criticism that followed the closure of YTHT, tens of thousands of smaller forums have died almost silently. For instance, during the anti-pornographic campaign started in 2009, over 130,000 small websites were shut down and many were "collateral casualties." The huge loss of small websites owners suffered in the campaign was simply a result of "necessary over-correction" in the eyes of MIIT Minister Li Yizhong.[68]

If scale and affiliation affect a forum's bargaining power with the state, its mission shapes the strategies available to administrators. Forums run by state mouthpieces care less about profit than political risk, which explains why Qiangguo Luntan closes down at midnight. Large commercial forums are in the market that competes for user traffic and their attention, and thus are willing to allow limited boundary-spanning expression. Small for-profit forums that are vulnerable to state and market turbulence have been trying hard to attract an audience while avoiding political expression. Overseas forums, which have not been discussed so far, may choose to compromise with the state if they attempt to attract an audience in China. For instance, MITBBS established a "cleaner" mirror site – mitbbs.cn – hoping to gain access to the Chinese domestic market. Even the pro-regime CCTHERE, a U.S. based forum, tried hard to de-politicize itself by directing political topics, particularly ones related to Chinese domestic politics, to a new site to avoid being blocked by the Great Firewall.[69]

Surely, due to the diversity and large number of internet forums in China, the above analysis does not cover the full spectrum of forums.[70] Nor do I claim to have examined every aspect of forum governance or to have disaggregated the management group. But the analysis has demonstrated that affiliation, scale and primary purpose of forums affect their bargaining power vis-à-vis both the state and users, and thus their strategies they adopt.

Conclusion:
In this chapter, I have examined how internet service providers, in particular forum administrators, situate themselves between the state and users. I argue that under constant threat of state repression, forums and their operators comply with state censorship. Meanwhile, many also demonstrate a degree of discontent with state censorship. After all, state censorship is not only at odds with the political orientations of many forum administrators, it also disturbs the operation and development of most

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[68] Qin Wang, "Zhuli Zhe de Xinjianghu"; Zhou Peng, "Zhongxiao Wangzhan Handong 'Duanwang'." Also see "Gongxin Buzhang Fouren Fengsha Geren Wangzhan, Cheng Zhili Yao Jiada Lidu" (MIIT Minister Denied that Forcing-Out Individual Websites, Asserting that Rectification Will be Strengthened), http://news.163.com/10/0309/09/61ASVNQK000146BD.html, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[69] For an example of how CCTHERE attempted to de-politicize itself, see the notice found on the front page of CCTHERE, April 30, 2012. In this notice, CCTHERE owner and administrator, Tieshou (aka Iron Hand) urged that "No need to register or log in. You are welcome to use herewp.com. Those feel constraint on CCTHERE/CCHERE, you shall consider go and take a look. CCHERE will not cover political disputes. CCTHERE will also gradually clean up political disputes, particularly topics on domestic politics of China."

[70] For stories about how forums geared towards ideological intellectual discussion, see Ji Tianqin and Tang Ailin, "BBS Wangshi" (The Legend of BBS), *Nandu Zhoukan (Southern Metropolis Weekly)*, No. 20 (May 28, 2012), pp. 56-63.

forums by imposing the cost of censorship implementation on forums and increasing the policy uncertainty forums face.

The state and intermediary actors are not the only players in the censorship game. After all, netizens are the ultimate targets of control, both as consumers and producers. With the stage set by the state and forum management, how do Chinese netizens pursue their virtual experience? In particular, how do they react to the censorship regime, given their pluralized interests and motivations? Chapter 4 completes the picture of the censorship game in China by focusing on popular activism by Chinese netizens.

Chapter 4
Pop Activism:
Playful Netizens in Chinese Cyberspace

Current studies on Chinese internet politics tend to treat netizens' activism as the reaction to state censorship and (or) the result of technological empowerment. Despite their insights into state-society confrontation in the authoritarian regime, such studies have downplayed the richness of online activism, and fall short of appropriate conceptualization of the newly emerging pattern of state-society interaction by forcing netizen activism into a liberalization-control framework. How then do Chinese netizens, who access the internet for diverse reasons, see and react to state censorship? In particular, since many netizens go online for fun, how do they balance political and entertaining goals?

This chapter explores how netizens consume and re-produce political topics with a focus on a particular type of cyber activism that blurs the boundary of political participation and popular entertainment. Such *pop activism* is entertaining and popular in cyber sphere and it relies heavily on creative and artful use of rhetorical techniques like comedy and satire. It consumes political topics and often targets political actors, particularly the censorship organs of the party-state. In pop activism, netizens, consciously or not, serve as producers, distributors and consumers, while activism entrepreneurs like dissident artists and opinion leaders, also play important roles in producing, interpreting and politicizing popular expression.

Analysis of pop activism suggests that the dominant liberalization-control framework not only downplays the richness of online activism, but also implies a narrow view of state-society relations. Studying *pop activism* expands the horizon of online activism in at least two aspects. First, though the playful nature of *pop activism* helps circumvent censorship and sometimes provides momentum for online activism, it often turns online activism into a popular, entertaining experience which dilutes political messages. In addition, cyber activism targets dissident groups, political activists, and foreign countries as well as the party-state. In this sense, the concept of *pop activism* accommodates online communicative activities of a much broader spectrum of actors, and also allows us to more accurately access the political impact of online expression.

Understanding Causes and Political Opportunities in Online Activism
Scholars studying internet politics in China tend to see online activism either as an extension of offline protests or a form of radical online communicative contention, i.e. digital contention.[1] In cases when online activism serves as a tool to address offline grievances, the internet is viewed as a technology that cracks open the existing political opportunity structure, which allows more open discussion of public affairs, enables freer and more rapid flow of information, provides new tools to mobilize and organize collective action, and facilitates the development of civil organizations. In the realm of cyber-bounded digital contention, there is often the unquestioned assumption that netizens are engaging in online activism to challenge the censorship regime or express their discontent towards the regime in general.

Observers are often amazed by netizens' creativity in digital contention. For instance, Guobin Yang argues that Chinese netizens have negotiated political control

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[1] See Guobin Yang, "Contention in Chinese Cyberspace: A Field Approach," in Kevin O'Brien (ed.) *Popular Protest in China* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

in cyberspace through rightful resistance, artful contention, and digital hidden transcripts.[2] These innovative strategies to evade and protest censorship reveal the change in style of contention from the pre-internet age, "from an epic style to online activism's more prosaic and playful style."[3] The playfulness and artfulness are evident in state-society confrontation online. For instance, Lagerkvist's study proposes a rise of "young subaltern norms" as opposed to "state norms." The concept of "subaltern" implicitly conveys the message of Chinese netizens being inherently creative and playful. Even the party-state has recognized the trend: to counter the challenges of the internet to existing value orientations and ideology, political leaders and established intellectuals have resorted to "ideotainment" – "juxtaposition of images, symbolic representations, and sounds of popular Web and mobile phone culture together with both subtle and overt ideological constructs and nationalistic propaganda."[4]

Studying digital contention enriches our understanding of political activism in China and provides insights into confrontational interactions between the state and netizens. Nevertheless, how much should we read into online activism? As Jens Damm has argued, studies adopting a liberalization-control perspective are mistaken in assessing the internet's impact on Chinese society because they ignore the rising urban and consumerist post-modernity that renders the internet fragmented and localized.[5] In fact, many netizens are often motivated along non-political lines.[6] However, as Guobin Yang has pointed out, "Entertainment is often used as a scapegoat for blaming the supposedly apolitical character of Chinese internet culture. The assumption is that if people just play online, they are not doing politics."[7]

Are we reading too much into online activism? Or should we not dismiss online activism too easily? In this chapter, I bridge these two seemingly conflicting possibilities by exploring pop activism in Chinese cyberspace, i.e. how netizens mix political activism and popular entertainment in their online experience. I argue that pop activism may be a better conceptual lens to study online activism. On the one hand, the playfulness and entertainment spirit of netizen activism does not mean Chinese netizens are apolitical. Instead, popular online culture formats facilitate digital contention by desensitizing state surveillance and gaining attention from audiences that are otherwise indifferent. On the other hand, online activism is not simply digital contention while the creativity and playfulness of netizens are more than means to resist censorship. It is also a process through which political topics, censorship in particular, are turned into targets of popular entertainment.

Notes on Data Collection
Data for this chapter were main collected through long-term in-depth online ethnography on a selection of popular forums including Qiangguo Luntan (bbs1.people.com.cn), TIANYA (tianya.cn), KDNET (kdnet.net), MOP (mop.com),

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[2] Guobin Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online* (Columbia University Press, 2009), Chapter 4, and pp. 57-60.
[3] Guobin Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China,* p. 24.
[4] Johan Lagerkvist, "Internet Ideotainment in the PRC: National Responses to Cultural Globalization," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 17, No. 54 (2008), pp. 121-140.
[5] Jens Damm, "The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society," *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2007), p. 285.
[6] Damm, "The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society"; James Leibold "Blogging Alone: China, the Internet, and the Democratic Illusion?" *The Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 70, No. 4 (November 2011), pp. 1023-1041.
[7] Guobin Yang, "Technology and Its Contents: Issues in the Study of the Chinese Internet," *The Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 70, No. 4 (November 2011), p. 1045

NEWSMTH (newsmth.net), BDWM (bdwm.net), LKONG (lkong.net), CJDBY (cjdby.net), CCTHERE (ccthere.com), MITBBS (mitbbs.com), 6PARK (6park.com), and BACKCHINA (backchina.com). These forum vary in terms of their affiliation (state mouth-piece, business companies, universities, or individual), primary purposes (profit-seeking, or non-profit), scope of topics (comprehensive, university life, or military enthusiasts forums), and where they are based (in or outside China). It is worthwhile to note that I not only looked at forums/boards devoted to public and political topics like NewExpress@NEWSMTH, Maoyan@KDNET, Free@TIANYA, but also examined entertainment boards. Also, in addition to close observation of ongoing interactions among netizens, I retrieved archival data from some forums like NEWSMTH and BDWM when available. Online ethnographic data is supplemented by offline and online interviews with veteran users and board mangers.

Pop Activism: Activism Driven by Fun

Pop activism involves two reciprocal, intertwined interactive processes: on one hand, by combining digital contention with popular online culture, pop activism not only helps evade censorship, but also helps attract an audience. This is especially important because, on the information-rich internet, different voices online are essentially competing with one another for netizens' attention.[8] On the other hand, through pop activism political topics are turned into a special type of consumer goods in online popular entertainment. Below, I will first discuss how pop activism has served as an effective weapon against censorship and the authoritarian regime before shifting to emphasize why we should also understand pop activism as a form of online entertainment.

Guerrilla Warfare against Censorship

Though taking many different forms, much online activism is driven by the necessity of combating censorship. Before discussing how netizens have deployed pop activism against censorship, I will introduce some guerrilla warfare tactics through which netizens circumvent and counter state censorship.

Chinese Netizens have creatively exploited the weakness of the censorship regime, particularly loopholes in the monitoring system and the rigidity of key-word filtering. Technically, netizens' final and ultimate strategy to evade censorship is to "exit" by going beyond the Great Firewall (GFW). Circumventing the GFW, or wall-climbing (*fanqiang*) as termed by netizens, has been a routine practice of Chinese internet users. Using proxy servers, penetrating software, and VPN services, netizens are able to access sites blocked by the authoritarian state.

Other than wall-climbing, netizens have also learned about and exploited the loopholes in the operation of censorship. Though automatic filtering systems often run around the clock, the intensity of manual surveillance varies at different times during the day.[9] For instance, NEWSMTH users have noticed that midnight is a good time to discuss boundary-spanning topics because manual surveillance of forum managers is often weak, allowing sensitive topics to survive long enough to be discussed by netizens.[10]

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[8] Shaohua Guo, "From the Party Line to the Attention Law: Celebrity Blogs of Sina.com," Paper presented at Haas Junior Scholars Conference: Multi-disciplinary Interrogations of State and Society in China, UC Berkeley, October 6-7, 2012.

[9] This may be the primary reason why Qiangguo Luntan, the forum run by official mouthpiece people.com.cn, used to close down during midnight before its new version getting online on July 1, 2012.

[10] An additional benefit of midnight discussion is that, since the traffic usually becomes much lighter, it is easier to bump a post to the top-ten list to attract more viewership.

Another strategy is to discuss politically sensitive topics on forums or discussion boards that attract little surveillance. Normally large forums that focus more on public affairs are watched more closely by the state and the forum management. Yet, politically sensitive discussions emerge frequently on forums or boards that are thematically non-political. For instance, when civil rights activist and law professor Xu Zhiyong was jailed in July 2009, discussions were virtually absent on BYR, the forum of Xu's home institution, Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications (BUPT), or NEWSMTH's most popular board, NewExpress, where posts were promptly deleted. However, one thread on BUPT@NEWSMTH, a BUPT alumni board that attracts much less traffic and thus surveillance, did manage to survive for days.[11]

Netizens also take advantage of forum functions that lower the risk of being censored. For instance, many forums allow users to edit their own posts. Thus one strategy is to post a perfectly innocuous post and then later edit it to add more sensitive materials.[12] Baidu Tieba users have turned a similar strategy into an everyday practice. Many of them start a thread with the first post containing only "Baidu at first fall" (*yilou baidu*) or "First floor to Lady Baidu" (*yilou xiangei duliang*). They do so because the first post of a thread is more heavily censored and the whole thread may be deleted if it is not verified by the system.[13]

The censorship system hinges on numerous keywords on which the actual censor relies. As a result, one central task of netizens engaging in political activism is to fight back against and circumvent keywords. Adding an asterisk or some other symbol in between taboo words is the most common and simple way. In some cases, random symbols are used to replace the taboo word, leaving audiences to guess the meaning based on the context.[14] Netizens also found that re-formatting texts,[15] converting texts from html, txt, and word formats into pictures may be effective because censorship software cannot search keywords in a picture format.

Expressive Resistance to Censorship
If the above coping strategies are by and large passive, silent, and defensive, netizens' expressive activism amounts to a more aggressive challenge, partly because it is more visible and thus "public." It is in this realm that the creativity and artfulness of netizens is fully displayed. In addition to mocking official discourse, language codes and propaganda rituals, they have also developed a whole web language and a new type of narrative to circumvent censorship and protest the regime.

First, netizens have used official discourse as a means to challenge the censorship regime. For instance, after Premier Wen Jiabao's statement about creating "conditions for the people to criticize the government," his words were frequently cited by netizens whose posts have been deleted.[16] An even more interesting case occurred

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[11] A discussion on Xu also took place in a private club on BDWM in which a few members knows him personally.

[12] Netizens not only use this strategy to avoid censorship. For instance, one MITBBS user used to play the trick for trolling purpose. He put up a post promising 10 MITBBS *yuan* (virtual currency that can be used for a variety of forum functions) to everyone replying. After attracting hundreds of replies, he altered his original post with porn pictures.

[13] See "Weishenme zai Tieba Yilou Yao Gei Baidu?" (Why Dedicating the First Floor to Baidu?), http://zhidao.baidu.com/question/371559846.html, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[14] Also see Yang, *Power of the Internet*, p. 61.

[15] Some tech-savvy netizens have even developed software that automatically breaks down all words or re-formats text so that filtering software cannot recognize taboo words in a post. See an example of such software, see "Wangluo Fayan Fang Hexie Qi" (Anti-Censorship Software for Online Expression), http://fanghexie.sinaapp.com/, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[16] See " Rang Quanli zai Yangguang Xia Yunxing" (How to 'Exercise Power under the Sun'), http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/simp/china/2010/03/100308_china_media_liu.shtml, retrieved September 25,

after the official take-over of SMTH, in which many users quoted Mao's words from 1940s' Xinhua Daily reports (before the KMT was overthrown in 1949) forcefully advocating civil liberties and democracy.[17] Such activism is more provocative and implies more aggressiveness toward the regime than what Guobin Yang describes as online "rightful resistance" in which activists seek to "avoid repression and to widen the channels of communication."[18] These netizens are aware that the party-state will not cease censorship and their actions are aiming at challenging and denying the regimes' legitimacy directly rather than simply avoid repression.

Some netizens also challenge the regime by parodying familiar tropes of state propaganda. For instance, in June 2010, a group of Tianya users began creating a series of video clips that mock CCTV's *Evening News* (*Xinwen Lianbo*), but respond to hot-button issues that are not covered by the Party-state's mouthpiece. Borrowing *Evening News*' style, format, and language, the weekly video program talks about inflation, housing prices, and rampant corruption. In the producers' words, "Put it simply, whatever shitizens (*pimin*)[19] are concerned about, we will do it."[20] The series mock official reports are very critical towards the regime. The title *The Emperor Looks Happy* (*Longyan Dayue*) itself echoes the *Evening News*' nickname *Happy Evening News* (*Xiwen Lianbo*), satirizing CCTV's inclination to please the top leaders rather than appealing to the citizen audience.[21] As one of my interviewee termed it, CCTV Evening News is all about "Everything in China is great and all foreign countries are suffering" (*guonei xingshi yipian dahao, guowai shuisheng huore*).[22]

Beyond parodying official discourse and state propaganda, netizens have created numerous cyber vocabularies using homophones (e.g. "river-crab" stands for party-state official ideology "harmony" because the two terms are both pronounced hexie in Chinese), homonyms (e.g. Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il are called "King F-cked" and "King F-cking" because the Chinese character "日" in their names can be understood either as "the sun" or "f-ck" depending on the context), nicknames (for instance, Premier Wen Jiabao is called The Best Actor because many netizens believe his public persona is a facade, and President Hu Jintao the Crab Emperor (*xie di*)

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[17] See: "Wangyou: Shuimu Qinghua BBS Zhannei Xianqi Xuexi, Yinyong Maozhuxi Yulu Rechao" (Netizens: SMTH BBS Users Started the Upsurge of Learning and Citing Chairman Mao's Quotations), http://cyberpunk.blogsome.com/2005/03/20/22/; "[Post] Guanshuiji de Zhonglei" ([Post] Variaties of Automatic Posting Software), http://smthbbs.blogspot.com/2005/04/post2005-04-21_21.html, both retrieved September 25, 2012.

[18] Yang, *Power of the Internet*, p. 57. He borrowed the idea of rightful resistance from Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li who studied rural protest where peasants uses laws, policies and officially promoted values to resist misbehaves of local authorities and address their grievances. See Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[19] *Pimin*, if literally translated, means "ass citizen," i.e. citizens who are treated unjustly by the government as "ass." The term is used by Chinese citizens to describe their politically powerless status, and conveys self-mockery.

[20] See "'Longyan Dayue' 2011 Quanji" ('The Emperor Looks Happy' 2011 Collection), http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/funinfo/1/2447177.shtml, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[21] The boundary-spanning program sometimes got censored by the state. For instance, one issue that criticizes "official-center-ness" (*guanbenwei*) by mocking the five-bar Young Pioneer in Wuhan got banned by the state according to a FLG source. See "[Jinwen] Longyan Dayue Xinqu Egao Wudaogang" (Forbidden News: New Song by 'The Emperor Looks Happy' Spoofs Five-Bar"), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mrgd5PZZLvg retrieved September 25, 2012. A 13-year-old boy in Wuhan, Hubei Province became one of the hottest topics in the cyberspace in May 2011 after he posted a picture of himself on his micro-blog, wearing a five-bar Young Pioneer badge. The Chinese Young Pioneers is a mass youth organization run by Chinese Communist Party for elementary school students. Student officers of Young Pioneers wear white armbands with red bars to indicate their positions with two bars indicating a class monitor, and three bars a grade-level leader. However, there has never been a five-bar ranking and Huang's five-bar armband, indicating his status as the chief of Wuhan's "Young Pioneers," was a local invention.

[22] Interview OBE 2011-61, with a veteran netizen, October 18, 2011.

because he advances the ideology of "harmony" and river-crab is used to stand for "harmony"), metaphors, and even the so called Martian language (*huoxingwen*).[23] It is fair to say that Chinese netizens have created a complete cyber vernacular corresponding to major political figures and events (See Appendix 4.1).

Such vocabulary not only functions to designate censorship targets, but also is loaded with rich ideological and emotional meaning. For instance, calling Hu Jintao Crab Emperor," Wen Jiabao "the Best Actor," or China as "Turtle Dynasty" (龟朝, turtle, or *wangba* is an insulting word in Chinese) instead of "Heavenly Dynasty" (天朝) clearly demonstrates discontent toward the current regime. Meanwhile, nicknaming the CCP "Bandit Communists" sometimes shows intimacy or antipathy, depending on the context.[24]

With such a vocabulary, netizens are able to produce narratives of political affairs and communicate with each other without resorting to keywords that trigger censorship. Take the Bo Xilai incident in early 2012 for example. Bo, a high rank official and princeling, was removed from the post of Party Secretary of Chongqing Municipality, and caused huge political turmoil among the top leadership. A Sina report on the marketing war between two instant noodle producers caught netizens' attention as a possible political metaphor.[25] The title "Master Kang Intensifies its Conflict with Uni-President and A Fierce Fight on Marketing Channels of Instance Noodles Is Imminent" reads to those in the know as a rumor about Master Kang (referring to Zhou Yongkang, standing member of Politburo who is in charge of the propaganda system) disputing the handling of Bo Xilai with other Politburo members, signified by Uni-President, whose Chinese brand name "统一" (*tongyi*) means unity.

Indeed, a whole narrative has been developed to account for political affairs, in which netizens have creatively used different literary genres, linguistic and rhetorical tools, multiple performative forms, and media formats, including crafting jokes, composing poems, prose, or parables, mimicking comic language or drafting comic pictures, and employing multi-media tactics of text, audio, and video.[26]

The most well-known case of this kind is likely the "grass-mud-horse" (*cao ni ma*, meaning f-ck your mother). The dirty pun was politicized after the fictional animal was deified as one of the "Top Ten Holy Animals" (*shida shenshou*). Netizens constructed stories about the life of the grass-mud-horse, particularly its struggle against "River crabs" (i.e. harmony). The story was produced, told, and retold in all formats ranging from texts, pictures, audio songs, video clips, to comics.[27] Similarly,

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[23] Martian language (*huoxingwen*) refers to the unconventional presentation of Chinese characters, which is extremely hard to decode in some cases. For instance, after the Ministry of Education mandated campus forums to reform into intra-campus platforms, netizens on SMTH BBS, the official BBS of Tsinghua University, started to use the following two characters "困困" to replace the forum's name "水木." By putting "水木" into "口," they try to convey the message that forum is restricted and trapped.

[24] The term "*tugong*" literally means communist bandits, a term the Kuomintang used to defame the Party. However, though "tugong" sounds disparaging, many netizens use it to show their affinity to CCP. For them, it is the very yokel nature that lessens the distance between the party and people at grassroots level. TG is the abbreviation for "tugong."

[25] See "Xinhuawang Shouye shang Kangshifu Zuixin Xiaoxi" (Latest News on Master Kang on the Front Page of Xinhuanet), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military/37741563.html, retrieved May 7th, 2012.

[26] Guobin Yang has a wonderful summary of some genres of digital contention. He identifies two popular categories of such genres: (1) confessional-autobiographical genres like diaries, letters, essays, and personal photographs; and (2) parodic-travestying genres like jokes, doggerel, slippery jingles, and flash videos. He argues that the later category embodies the playful style of digital contention. See Guobin Yang, The Power of the Internet, pp. 76-82, and p. 89.

[27] For instance, see *Cao Ni Ma Zhi Ge (Song of Grass Mud Horse)*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01RPek5uAJ4, retrieved September 25, 2012. The video also has had over 1.1 million views. For a version with English subtitle, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKx1aenJK08, retrieved September 25, 2012.

to protest the green-dam software, which the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) attempted to pre-install on all computers sold in China to filter unapproved information, netizens created a comic figure of "Green-Dam Lady," performed a costume play,[28] and even crafted a "Song of the Green-Dam Lady."

Netizens are not only creative in discussing political topics. They often politicize playful topics by mixing them with discursive protests. For instance, when one Tianya user asked fellow netizens about what they would put on their tombstone, many complained about the rising "housing" price for both the living and the dead as well as forced demolition happening throughout China through hilarious, often acid, replies. One user said sarcastically, "Thanks to the government for solving my 'housing' problem."[29] Others added satiric elements by writing "Land under government plan, must be demolished," [30] or "not long after you were buried, your precious piece of land will be chosen by a real estate developer and soon city inspectors will come with bulldozers."[31] An even richer and more straightforward satire of high housing prices goes,

> "It would be a very tall tombstone and my name should be tiny, only readable with a microscope, followed by 'XXX, lives on XXXX floor of Tomb No. 20349. It is a studio, 90,000 *yuan* per square feet.' Below that: 'Developed by Poor-Don't-Bother Tomb Estate Developing Company. New Villa-Style Tombs by our company are on sale. Book right now!' At the bottom: 'Burying yourself arbitrarily or secretly is against the law and will be punished severely'!" [32]

Some attacked the family planning policy as well as rising housing costs:
> "(1) [you] will die without a burial place, where to put the epitaph if you can not even afford a burial place? (2) [you] have only a daughter and she will marry off (*jia chuqu*, in Chinese tradition, which still persists today, a woman is no longer considered as part of her parents' family after marriage). So [you] won't need a grave since no one will visit [you]!"[33]

Indeed, some netizens are good at weaving hot-button issues into funny short passages that attack social ills and the regime. For instance, one story parodies the alleged epitaph of the most unfortunate man in ancient China who failed everything in his life and died tragically (it appeared several times in the above discussed thread of epitaphs). [34] The passage, satirically titled "*Records of the Grand Historian*:

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[28] Costume play is a type of performance art in which actors dress up to role play characters in movies, comics or games.

[29] See "Bainian Zhihou, Nide Muzhiming hui Zenme Xie?" (What Would Be Your Epitaph after You Pass Away?), http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/free/1/842556.shtml, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[30] See "Bainian Zhihou, Nide Muzhiming hui Zenme Xie?" http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/free/1/842556.shtml, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[31] See "Bainian Zhihou, Nide Muzhiming hui Zenme Xie?" http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/free/1/2310569.shtml, retrieved on September 25, 2012.

[32] See "Bainian Zhihou, Nide Muzhiming hui Zenme Xie?" http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/free/1/842556.shtml, retrieved September 25, 2012. The post not only complains about the housing price, but also parodies the developer and the government: The developer is named as "Poor-Don't-Bother" and develops only tombs for the rich; the government, by prohibiting poor people from constructing their own tombs, forces them to buy from the developer, thus pushing the prices even higher.

[33] See "Bainian Zhihou, Nide Muzhiming hui Zenme Xie?" http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/free/1/2310569.shtml, retrieved September 25, 2012. It should be noted that "die without a burial place" is one of the most unfortunate scenario in the life of Chinese people. The term is actually often used as a severe curse when people are attacking each other.

[34] The epitaph goes like this, "[He] studied literature early on, failed exams 3 times; [he] switched to martial arts, shot the drummer when taking the exam, and was kicked out of the field; [he then] tried medicine with limited success, wrote himself a prescription, took the medicine, and died." The passage is very popular and (it was cited many times in the same thread) because it is so funny. See "Bainian Zhihou, Nide Muzhiming hui Zenme Xie?" http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/free/1/842556.shtml, retrieved September 25, 2012.

Biography of Post-1980 Generation,"[35] goes like this:

> (He) studied literature early on, reached 26 with a debt of over 100,000 *yuan*. He then tried hard to earn a living and took no rest for a decade. Finally he accumulated 100,000 *yuan*, but still could not afford a house. He invested his wealth in the stock market, and it shrank to 10,000 after a year. He was so depressed that he got sick. But the medical care system refused to cover him because he was not eligible for the Major Diseases Insurance.[36] He spent all he had to get into a hospital for a week and was healed without any treatment. His friend sympathized with him and gave him a bag of Sanlu milk powder.[37] He drank it and died.[38]

In this passage, the author targeted the education system, inequality, expensive housing, stock market volatility, the medical system, and food safety issues, which are all major concerns of Chinese society. The fact that this is a parody of the epitaph of the most unfortunate man makes it a particularly miserable self-portrait of China's post-1980 generation, their life opportunities, their outlook, and their discontent.

Turning Digital Contention into Pop Activism
It is fair to say that netizens have developed an innovative cyber-language, narratives, and rituals to counter censorship and challenge the authoritarian regime.[39] However, such strategies are also entertaining, mixing digital contention with popular culture and fun.

Wall-climbing, i.e. circumventing the Great-Firewall, serves as an unlikely example. The action constitutes an explicit and direct, though passive, challenge to the censorship regime. However, motivations of wall-climbers are mixed and complicated. Though resisting censorship is a serious concern of many wall-climbers,[40] it is only secondary or irrelevant to others. The coolness and fun involved also motivates some netizens. The sense of achievement and the heroic sentiment of fighting the formidable state censorship machine are often implicitly expressed by wall-climbers. Neitzens adept in the art of wall-climbing are often perceived as tech-savvy and are envied by people around them, thus generating a certain degree of self-esteem.[41]

Moreover, many netizens view "wall-climbing" not as a form of resistance to repression or struggle for freedom, but rather as a way to overcome a politically-neutral obstacle in order to get what they need and want. The following example is particularly revealing. Some male interviewees admitted that their primary purpose of wall-climbing was to access pornography, which is prohibited by Chinese law.[42] Though arguing that it is completely normal for single males to access porn,

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[35] The title is also a parody of *Records of the Grand Historian,* which is considered as one of the most prestigious, important and trustable history book in ancient China.

[36] Medical Insurance for Major Diseases is a medical care system sponsored by the Chinese government to cover the expenses of major diseases.

[37] *Sanlu* milk was at the heart of a 2008 food safety crisis in which milk and infant formula produced by several producers in China were found adulterated with melamine. There were thousands of victims, including deaths of several babies. The scandal started with *Sanlu* Group. For a collection of reports, see "Sanlu Milk Sickens Babies," http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/china_2008sanlu_page.html, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[38] See "Gaoxiao yu Zhongguo Zhengzhi" (Spoofing and Chinese Politics), http://www.ccthere.com/article/1933680, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[39] It shall be noted that the state responds to that, sometimes by updating the keyword list.

[40] Netizens complained about the difficulty in accessing services like Google, flicker, and Facebook, especially when there is no Chinese counterpart, like Google scholar. Such instrumental reasons are important to explain why Google's withdrawal from China triggered a huge wave of criticism towards the censorship regime.

[41] Interview RBJ 2008-04, with a veteran forum user at Beijing, December 29, 2008; Interview RBJ 2009-16, online interview with a veteran forum user September 22, 2009

[42] Interview RBJ 2009-06, with a board manager and veteran forum user at Beijing, January 6, 2009; Interview RBJ 2009-10, with a veteran forum user at Beijing, August 21, 2009; Interview RBJ 2009-17, with a veteran forum user at Beijing, September 23, 2009. Users of an overseas democratic activist forum, ZYZG (i.e. Free China) had a conversation about this. See "Dui Ziyoumen Gongsi de Jianyi" (Suggestions to the Freegate Company),

they also accept the state prohibition as morally justified.

Moreover, some netizens engaging in "wall-climbing" still actively support the state and distance themselves from dissident groups that help them overcome the GFW. For instance, one user on LKONG who admitted to using Freegate, GWF-breaching software developed by the banned sect Falungong, to access porn sites says,

> "Recently, I often use wheel's Freegate to access porn sites. No more efforts to find proxy servers. Very convenient. The existence of wheels after all has produced some benefits."[43]

The very fact FLG practitioners are called "wheels" (*lun zi*) shows that there is a lack of respect.[44] This particular case is even more telling and ironic considering that these same porn-site visitors actually sided with state on its censorship of Google.[45]

In comparison, expressive strategies are less surprising cases of pop activism, as they are more entertaining, more loaded, and more popular among netizens. Take the "grass-mud-horse" case. The short video of a grass-mud-horse fighting against a river-crab achieved its momentum online not only because of its message of protest, but also because of the adorable images of an alpaca and the lovely voices of a children's chorus that were used.[46] Clearly, adding non-political, particularly entertaining, elements facilitated its circulation.

The same case also reveals a process of adding political meanings to non-political popular behavior. "Grass-mud-horse" was not politically sensitive when it was first used by forum participants. When it first appeared on forums, the term was simply an expedient term used by netizens to bypass forum regulations prohibiting dirty words. Even when it was selected one of the "Top 10 Holy Animals" in late 2008 and early 2009, it was still more playful than contentious to many netizens and was not linked explicitly or implicitly to censorship.[47] This becomes obvious if we look at the rest of the holy animals, all of which are homophones of profane or vulgar words.[48] Such terms are at best social and cultural resistance rather than political contention, not to mention that many netizens just use them for fun. However, the grass-mud-horse was immediately politicized when it was linked to River-Crab and the state discourse on "harmony" in *Song of Grass Mud Horse (Cao Ni Ma Zhi Ge)*.[49]

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http://zyzg.us/archiver/tid-207519.html, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[43] See "Zhongguo Guge Bei Hei le Ma? Quanshi Zhexie Xinwen" (Google.cn Got Hacked? News about It Everywhere), http://www.lkong.net/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=204283&highlight=, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[44] FLG practitioners are called "wheels" because Falungong literally means "Dharma Wheel Practice." Netizens who dislikes FLG call them wheels to satire FLG's belief that the whole universe is a big wheel.

[45] This is before Google's withdrawal. The thread was started by some LKONG user who accidentally found news reports from Epoch Times, the FLG media outlets, via Google.cn. Such information was supposed to be filtered by Google.cn.

[46] See *Song of Grass Mud Horse*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKx1aenJK08, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[47] We can see a saved-screen of an early version of "Top 10 Holy Animals" here: http://www.hudong.com/wiki/十大神兽; Also see Li Bin, "Wangyou Chuangzao 'Shida Shenshou'" (Netizens Created Top Ten Holly Animals), http://news.sina.com.cn/s/2009-01-06/040914985839s.shtml, both retrieved September 25, 2012.

[48] The complete list of top ten holly animals are Grass-mud-horse (*cao ni ma*), Stretch-Tailed Whale (*wei sheng jin*, sanitary pad), Hidden Fiery Crab (*qian lie xie*, prostate), Intelligent Fragrant Chicken (*da fei ji*, male masturbation), Lucky Journey Cat (*ji ba mao*, pubic hair), Singing Field Goose (*yin dao yan*, vaginitis), Chrysanthemum Silkworms (*ju hua can*, broken anus), Small Elegant Butterfly (*ya mie die*, Yamete, meaning "stop", a reference to rape scenes in Japanese Porn videos), French-Croatian Squid (*fa ke you*, f-ck you), Quail Pigeon or Spring Pigeon (*chun ge*, Big Brother Chun, joking the androgynous appearance of popular singer Li Yuchun). For some basic information in English, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baidu_10_Mythical_Creatures, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[49] See Song of Grass Mud Horse, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKx1aenJK08, retrieved September 25, 2012; Michael Wines, "A Dirty Pun Tweaks China's Online Censors", http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/12/world/asia/12beast.html, retrieved September 25, 2012.

Netizens often mix their creativity and artfulness with criticisms towards the regime as well as other political actors, including foreign countries, regime critics, and other netizen groups. For instance, *The Emperor Looks Happy* series emphasizes its entertainment purpose as much as its intent to criticize the party-state.[50] Nationalism is also present in some posts. For instance, in one clip, a news entry joked about the Japanese, saying that Nv Wa, the legendary Chinese goddess who created human beings, made an apology and resigned from her post for creating malfunctioning human beings on the Japanese Islands.[51] The case became more interesting when the producer, in responding to a user who suggested they not target other countries, said,

"Interests and conflicts between countries shall be concerns of those leaders. As a common person, I hate what the Japanese did in the past. We have a limited time in our program so that we cannot cover all different opinions. However, I feel that since *The Emperor Looks Happy* can criticize our own government, why can't we also reproach the Japanese?"[52]

Such observations resonate with Lagerkvist's finding that Chinese cyber-nationalism does not always express "an upset or angry tone," but sometimes calls for "jubilant and cheery celebrations."[53]

In fact, some pro-regime netizens have mobilized pop activism to defend the regime while being playful. This is similar to what Johan Lagerkvist calls ideotainment but differs in that: 1) the entertainment rather than ideological motivations comes first; 2) it is not sponsored by the state, but rather by creative netizens. For instance, on military forums that I observed, users have also created their own vernaculars and innovated using their own narratives, not so much to evade censorship as to entertain themselves and their audience. Among these netizens, for instance, Chiang Kai-Shek is nicknamed "Peanut," "One Space Blank" or Chang Kai-Shen,[54] China is called White Bunny or Panda, and Russia is called Polar Bear, just to name a few. Such vocabularies also include "p-ssy values" for "universal values" (the English word p-ssy is used because it has a similar pronunciation to the Chinese term for universal, *pushi*), 冥主 (*mingzhu*, the underworld-cracy) for democracy (*minzhu*), and 柿油 (*shiyou*, persimmon oil), 湿疣 (*shiyou*, condyloma) or 尸油 (*shiyou*, corpse oil) for freedom (*ziyou*).[55]

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[50] The producers expressed their hope that the title could be a symbol that the program would bring "endless happiness to the audience." See "'Longyan Dayue' 2011 Quanji", http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/funinfo/1/2447177.shtml, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[51] See "Longyan Dayue 037 Qi: Longyan Buluo Hao" ('The Emperor Looks Happy' Issue 37: The Volume of Long Yan Tribe), see http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/funinfo/1/2503694.shtml. The video is also available at http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/FC2dBpPSBmQ, both retrieved September 25, 2012.

[52] See "'Longyan Dayue' 2011 Quanji," http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/funinfo/1/2514722.shtml, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[53] Johan Lagerkvist, *The Internet in China: Unlocking and Containing the Public Sphere* (Lund: Lund University, 2007), p. 46.

[54] Netizens did not make up Chiang's nickname "Peanut," but borrowed it from Joseph Stilwell who derided Chiang as "Peanut" during WWII. See Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China* (Harvard University Press, 2009). Chiang is called "One Space Blank" because his name is often written as "先總統　蔣公" (The Late President Lord Chiang), where one-character-wide space would be left blank before his surname. This is known as *nuo tai*, a typographical practice in written Chinese to shows respect. The literal description of *nuo tai* as "one space blank" shows that the nickname is more a derision than showing respect. Chiang's nickname Chang-Kaishen came from a history professor in Tsinghua University, who failed to recognize "Chiang Kai-Shek" (and a number of other Wechsler phonetic names) and translated it as "常凯申" in her book. The mistaken translation became popular instantly after disclosed as an academic scandal. A similar mistake by a Tongji University Professor gave Mao Zedong a nickname Kun-lun, which is not as widespread as Chang Kaishen, though. See Li Xianfeng, "Mang Jiaoshou Hengkong Chushi Wujiang Maogong Dang Kunlun" (Obtrusive Professor Roar across the Horizon and Mistaken Chairman Mao as Kunlun), *Beijing Chenbao* (*Beijing Morning Post*), January 6, 2012.

[55] See Chapters 6 and 7 of the dissertation. It is worth noting that, netizens using the terms are not necessarily

Based on this wordplay, netizens on these forums develop particular types of narratives, one typical example of which is "Moé[56] translation" (*meng fanyi*). For instance, a series of Moé Translation of Area 11 News (Area 11 refers to Japan, according to the setting of a popular Japanese Anime series *Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion*) have translated Japanese news reports into Chinese using cyber slang, anime jargon, porn vocabulary, and many other popular genres like doggerel.[57]

Similarly, a series called "Glorious Past of the Little White Bunny"[58] recounts Chinese modern history with a focus on the role of the Chinese Communist Party in unifying and building the nation. It is a playful narrative of the official discourse, using a similar expressive form as the Moe Translation, but with little profane vocabulary. The series was then turned into a comic series and even reproduced on videos, and was very popular among nationalistic netizens. After China's first aircraft carrier was handed over to People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), the author of the comic series soon came up with a new section called "aircraft carrier dream" of the nation.[59] The section started with a frame modeling a picture of Liu Huaqing's visit to U.S. carrier Ranger (CV-61) in 1980 (Appendix 4.2).[60] Many regard Liu, then Vice-chief of General Staff, and later vice-chair of the Central Military Commission and PLAN Commander, as the "father of the Chinese aircraft carrier."[61] In the picture, as one MITBBS user commented, Liu looks like a "kid staring at a toy in a toy store."[62] (See Appendix 4.2) The work conveys nationalistic emotion so well that it attracted 561 replies in 44 hours on MilitaryJoke@NEWSMTH alone, and over 80

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opposed to universal values, democracy or liberties. Rather, my observation is that many users are simply targeting certain individuals or groups that advocate these terms. For this netizens, those groups or individuals are opportunists trying to profit from a disruptive transition of China while leaving the common people to suffer.

[56] "Moe" is a Japanese slang word that is closely related to Japanese anime sub-culture. Chinese anime fans and netizens use the term to refer to a particular type of "adorable" or "cute."

[57] For instance, see "[Zongbu Shisheng HGCG Meng Fanyi Xilie] 11 Qu Chanjing: Ji Er Shenme De Doushi Tubalu Wangtu Mabi Huangjun Douzhi de Guiji" ([Headquarter Porn-Saint HGCG Moe Translation Serial] Economic News from District 11: Talking about G2 is Only A Scheme of the Eighth Route Army to Lull the Will of Imperial Army), http://lt.cjdby.net/thread-723428-1-1.html retrieved September 25, 2012. It is extremely difficult to translate it into English without losing the flavor of the narrative. In this post, the translator describes Sino-US G2 relationship as a gay relationship, Japan as a maid abused by the two powers, and US-Japan relationship as a father-daughter relationship.

[58] The thread was posted on February 5, 2011 on cjdby.net and has been circulated to major forums like tianya.net. On cjdby.net along, the thread attracted over 4 million views and 14 thousand replies by July 20, 2012. See "Xiaobaitu de Guangrong Wangshi" (The Glories Past of the Little White Bunny), http://lt.cjdby.net/thread-1066806-1-1.html, retrieved July 20, 2012; "Heihuawen: Xiaobaitu de Guangrong Wangshi (Zhuanzai)" (Jargon Narrative: The Glories Past of the Little White Bunny (forwarded)), http://www.tianya.cn/techforum/content/140/1/606814.shtml, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[59] For a comic version of the narrative, see "Nanian Natu Naxie Shier" (Those Stories of That Bunny in Those Years), http://lt.cjdby.net/thread-1163825-1-1.html. The thread attracts 2.5 million views and over nearly 14 thousand replies by September 25, 2012. For a collection of the video, see "Xiaobaitu de Guangrong Wangshi" (The Glories Past of the Little White Bunny), http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/xtIxqrRHJF4, both retrieved September 25, 2012.

[60] See "1980 Nian Jiefangjun Gaoceng Fang Mei Liu Huaqing Shouci Dengshang Hangmu" (Top PLA Officials Visited U.S. in 1980, Liu Huaqing Boarded An Aircraft Carrier for the First Time), http://news.163.com/photoview/28JA0001/12743.html#p=6QCPISUT28JA0001, retrieved September 25, 2012. Observation of online discussion suggests that many netizens believe that the picture was taken on USS Kitty Hawk (CV-63). But one picture in the collections shows the logo of "CV-61."

[61] For the role of Liu in China's aircraft carrier dream, see Andrew S. Erikson and Andrew R. Wilson, "China's Aircraft Carrier Dilemma," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Autumn 2006), pp. 13-45; Li Jun, "Cisheng Wukui 'Zhongguo Hangmu Zhifu', Zhi Han Weineng Qinjian Zhongguo Hangmu Xiashui" (His Life is Worthy of 'Father of China's Aircraft Carrier' and His Only Regret is Not Seeing China's Aircraft Carrier in Service), *Yangtse Evening News* January 15, 2011. The report was widely circulated on major online portals.

[62] Xinsuan Ah, Kanle Ni Jiu Mingbai Zhongguo Weishenme Yao Jian Hangma Le" (So Bitter! You Will Understand Why China Needs Air Carrier after Seeing This Picture), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military/38453741.html, both retrieved September 26, 2012.

replies claimed the writer was "moved to tears."[63]

It is ironic that nationalistic netizens often borrow popular culture from the countries or regions that are the targets of their anger. Many nationalistic netizens are also fans of Hollywood Movies, Korean TV dramas, Japanese Anime or even Japanese Adult TV stars. On CJDBY and MilitaryJoke@NEWSMTH, for instance, users claim themselves to be a trinity of "military, porn cultures, and otaku" (*jun zhai huang*).[64] When Sino-Japanese disputes over Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands arose in August 2012, netizens started to joke about Sora Aoi, a popular Japanese Adult Video star, who has over 13 million followers on her Sina micro-blog.[65] After the death of Shinichi Nishimiya, the newly appointed envoy to China, Chinese netizens fabricated news saying that the Japanese Prime Minister had named Sora Aoi instead.[66] Appendix 4.3 is a picture in which demonstrators hold a banner saying, "Declare War on Japan, Capture Teacher Aoi!"

Understanding Pop Activism: Spontaneity, Entrepreneurs, and Its Revenge

Under many circumstances, participants in pop activism improvise. A random netizen can become a key player by coining a phrase to describe a certain event, inventing a story, or creatively using a rhetorical tool. Building on such initial creativity, pop activism may start to gain momentum as numerous internet users spread, interpret, and re-create the work. Such a process can seldom maintain systematic attention to a particular political agenda. This echoes LSE media scholar Meng Bingchun who argues that online spoofs, "neither qualify as rational debates aiming to achieve consensus nor have produced any visible policy consequences," but "constitute a significant component of civic culture that offers both political criticism and emotional bonding for all participants."[67]

The impulsive character of pop activism partially explains why topics change so fast on internet forums. However, this is not to say that netizens do not have any political consciousness. In fact, a few consistent themes sustain pop activism, including concerns about disadvantaged social groups, criticism of corruption, pursuit of freedom, justice and democracy, and patriotism. Changing views of Mao's grandson, Mao Xinyu, reveals how netizens' shared concern with corruption influences the evolution of pop activism. Mao Xinyu has been frequently satirized because of his corpulence and his controversial promotion to Major General, which was criticized as high-profile example of nepotism. However, popular opinion towards him changed during the 2012 NPC and CPPCC conferences. Compared to representatives wearing luxury brands, particularly high-ranking princelings,[68] he was always in military uniform and carried a paper handbag. Netizens started to juxtapose

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[63] See "[Heji][Zhuan] Nanian Natu – Liaoning Jian" ([Compiled] [Forwarded] Those Stories of That Bunny – Carrier Liaoning), http://www.newsmth.net/bbstcon.php?board=MilitaryJoke&gid=221488, retrieved September 30, 2012. The thread made its way into top-10 list soon. It is rare for a board like MilitaryJoke that normally only ranks below top 30 in terms of the traffic it attracts.

[64] Otaku is a Japanese term, referring to people that are obsessed with Japanese anime, manga or video games.

[65] "Can't We All Just Get It On? A Japanese Actress Reminds Her Chinese Fans How Conflicted They Are," *The Economist,* Vol. 404, No. 8803 (September 22 2012), p54. However, I argue that the article reads too much out of the slogan "the Diaoyu islands belong to China; Sora Aoi belongs to the world." It is not much a contradiction, but an example of pop activism in which netizens mixed the nationalistic sentiment with fun.

[66] Similar message spread widely online. For example, see "Lubian Kuaixun: Ri Xiang Yetian Jiayan Timing Cangjing Kong wei Xinren Zhuhua Dashi" (Roadside Express: Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda Nominated Sora Aoi as New Ambassador to China), http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/worldlook/1/565840.shtml, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[67] Meng Bingchun, "From Steamed Bun to Grass Mud Horse: *E Gao* as Alternative Political Discourse on the Chinese Internet," *Global Media and Communication*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2011), p. 35.

[68] For instance, Li Xiaolin, daughter of former Premier and Chairman of NPC Standing Committee Li Peng.

his pictures with those of representatives wearing designer clothes. Comments on MITBBS hailed him as "a pollution-free, all-natural organic person compared to those official and rich offspring bastards," or someone who is "not only harmless, but who brought laughter to us people."[69]

The Role of Motivated Activism Entrepreneurs

Not all contentious actions online are spontaneous activism created by Chinese netizens. Though largely anonymous, particular netizens serve as repeat producers, distributors and consumers of pop activism. Some of these repeat players are motivated dissidents, such as FLG practitioners and democratic activists. For instance, overseas forums such as MITBBS and 6PARK, where dissident groups are more active and less covert, feature repeated posts about political scandals by certain users.

Such activism can sneak across the boundary of the GFW. On the last page of a downloaded book from Sina's document sharing service which is based in China, I found the following message (See Appendix 4.4), "Protesting Bandit CCP's Savage Act of Blocking the Internet. Please use proxy servers to access more good books from: http://mybooks.googlepages.com." Above that message was a cartoon pig dressed like a red guard with the Chinese character Mao on the uniform, saying "Stalin is my god-grandpa."[70] The external linkage to the Union of Chinese Nationalists, the Republic of China flag and the language style, suggest that the site may be run by people with strong Kuomintang heritage and disdain for the CCP.

Dissident artists play a particularly important role in producing, interpreting and politicizing pop activism. Take artist and activist Ai Weiwei as an example. Though state media has tried to depict Ai Weiwei as a deviant, a plagiarist, and a tool of western political interference,[71] dissident groups, western media, and his supporters have depicted him as a one-man hero courageous enough to question a repressive state.[72] Ai has created a series of first-rate internet spectacles that challenge the Chiense government.[73] For instance, in 2010, in response to the demolition order of his Shanghai studio, Ai hosted a River-Crab (allusion to state censorship) Feast Party with over a thousand participants.[74] The party quickly became a big topic online, and

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[69] See "Shaojiang Zheme Meng, Nimen Buxu Chaoxiao Ta" (Major General is So Moe, You Should Not Laugh at Him), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t1/Military/37501841_0_2.html, retrieved April 2, 2012. Also see "Shaojiang Zheme Meng, Nimen Buxu Zai Quxiao Ta" (Major General is So Moe, You Should Make Fun of Him)," http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/free/1/2425719.shtml, retrieved September 25, 2012

[70] The book is titled Renmin Gongshe Shiqi Zhongguo Nongmin 'Fan-Xingwei' Diaocha (*Investigation on Peasants 'Counter-Action' during People's Commune Era*), which published by Chinese Communist Party History Publishing House, showing that it is clearly tolerated and uncensored. The link is no longer valid. However, a search points it to http://sites.google.com/site/myboooks/.

[71] Liu Yiheng, "Ai Weiwei Zhen Mianmu: Wu Wan Yishu Jia – Wudu Juquan" (Ai Weiwei's True Colors: An Five-Play Artist – Full of Five Poisons), http://paper.wenweipo.com/2011/04/15/PL1104150001.htm. Though based in Hong Kong, *Wenweipo* is long recognized as a pro-CCP media outlet. Also see Jin Yi, "Zhongguo Dangdai Yishujia Aiweiwei Zuopin 'Tonghua' Bei Zhi Chaoxi" (Chinese Contemporary Artist Ai Weiwei's Work 'Fairy Tale' Charged with Plagiarism), http://news.xinhuanet.com/shuhua/2007-06/21/content_6272614.htm; "Xifang Zongxiang Gei Zhongguo Fayuan 'Pi Tiaozi'" (The West Always Wants to Issue Directives to the Chinese Court), http://opinion.huanqiu.com/roll/2011-06/1779571.html. For a rebuttal, see Geremie R. Barmé, "A View on Ai Weiwei's Exit," http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/articles.php?searchterm=026_aiweiwei.inc&issue=026, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[72] See Alison Klayman, *Ai Weiwei Never Sorry*.

[73] Between December 2008 and May 2009, he tried to investigate the death of students killed in the Sichuan Earthquake, targeting corruption that led to the collapse of thousands of school buildings. In August 2009, he visited Chengdu to support Tan Zuoren (who was charged with "inciting subversion of state power"). His efforts were featured in documentaries like *Disturbing the Peace* (2009) and *So Sorry* (2011), which he distributed online for free, attracting large number of viewers and supporters. See Meng Bingchun, "Mediated Citizenship or Mediatized Politics? Political Discourse on Chinese Internet," Presentation at 10th China Internet Research Conference, University of Southern California, May 21-22, 2012.

[74] Lu Yang, "Ai Weiwei Hexie Yan Zhuizong Baodao" (Follow-Up Reports on Ai Weiwei's River Crab Feast),

was widely viewed by his supporters as an open but creative challenge to censorship.

Ai's contribution to the "grass-mud-horse" story is even more telling about the role of an activism entrepreneur. In one of his pieces of performance art, he took a series of pictures of himself in which he was naked except for a toy alpaca in front of his crotch. The message in these pictures is "F-ck Your Mother CCP Central Committee" because crotch in Chinese is a homonym of Party, and the "center of crotch" a homonym of Party Central Committee.[75] Such provocative performance art by Ai Weiwei clearly contributed to the politicization of the grass-mud-horse by going beyond targeting censorship to challenge the party-state regime directly. Furthermore, when Ai was charged with tax evasion in 2011, he and his friends again made this a cyber spectacle by launching an internet fund-raising campaign to pay back unpaid taxes and fines.[76] Ai added to the episode by singing *Song of Grass Mud Horse* in November 2011 at the request of his creditors who donated money in the fundraising campaign.[77] This could be viewed as a large-scale performance that expresses not only his but also his supporters' protest against state censorship and repression. Of course, Ai is fairly unusual in terms of his radical stance and international reputation compared to most Chinese netizens in China. But his stories demonstrate the role of activism entrepreneur in pop activism.

Revenge of Pop Activism

It is worth noting that pop activism sometimes backfires. Spontaneous playfulness in pop activism sometimes dilutes its message, as creativeness, artfulness, and intentional obscurity can make it difficult for the audience to receive the message the sender intended. Moreover, pop activism sometimes challenges accepted lifestyles, behavior habits, modes of thinking, and moral standards, causing antipathy towards posters. Thus, though may be effective in mobilizing some netizens, it may well at the same time offend others. For instance, in contrast to his international reputation and popularity among his supporters, Ai Weiwei is controversial among many Chinese netizens who do not appreciate his art or are suspicious of his motivation, particularly when his grass-mud-horse series evolved from "grass-mud-horse CCP Central Committee" to "grass-mud-horse Motherland."[78] Though his supporters argued that he was targeting the regime instead of the nation, many netizens thought he was going too far.[79] The backfire effect is evident in the following comment, "So far as Ai wee wee (Ai Weiwei) is anti-CCP, even his shit would be regarded as sweet by someone!"[80]

Similarly, loaded political intention may result in a severe backlash. For instance,

http://www.voachinese.com/content/article-20101107-ai-weiwei-106847008/772266.html, retrieved September 25, 2012. Ai Weiwei himself was not present because he was under home arrest.

[75] Liu Qing, "Ai Weiwei Wangluo Xingwei Yishu Biaoda Yuanfen" (Ai Weiwei Expresses Discontent and Indignation through Online Performance Arts), http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/pinglun/teyuepinglun-07072009112454.html, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[76] Andrew Jacobs, "Lawyer for Released Chinese Artist Seeks Review on Taxes," http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/30/world/asia/30artist.html?_r=1; "Ai Weiwei China Tax Bill Paid by Supporters," http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-15616576, both retrieved September 25, 2012.

[77] See "Ai Weiwei Xuechang Cao Ni Ma Zhi Ge"(Ai Weiwei Learns to Sing Song of Grass Mud Horse), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oL57X4GcyTs, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[78] For the video clip, see http://www.flickr.com/photos/winterkanal/3967547911/, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[79] See "Ai Weiwei: 'Cao Ni Ma Zuguo' –Tamen Zheyang 'Wenhou' Zuguo" (Ai Weiwei: Grass-Mud-Horse Motherland – They Greeting the Motherland in this Way), http://top81.org/show.php?f=1&t=879418&m=6002706, retrieved September 25, 2012; see another discussion, "Ai Weiwei Meiyou Shuoguo Cao Ni Ma Zuguo" (Ai Weiwei Did Not Say Grass-Mud-Horse Motherland), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military/35644267.html, retrieved May 5, 2011.

[80] See "Ai Weiwei Meiyou Shuoguo Cao Ni Ma Zuguo." It is worth noting that "wee wee" was used intentionally in the posting.

a known dissent activist on MITBBS[81] once forwarded a fake suicide report for a local girl to the forum's joke board. This post immediately attracted criticism as some users did not see the message as funny at all.

Similar conflicts between supporters and protesters on FLG material appear frequently on MITBBS and other overseas forums and in some cases forced board managers to impose limitations on such postings.[82]

Conclusion:

Some Chinese netizens routinely circumvent state censorship and challenge the party-state with playful and artful tactics and expressions. Moreover, they have turned online activism into a process of popular entertainment, and targeted political actors other than the authoritarian regime. Thus, I propose *pop activism* as an alternative lens to examine online activism in China beyond digital contention.

Pop activism has enabled netizens to protest against state censorship and authoritarian rule in an artful, humorous, creative, and playful way. In particular, though it is often driven by spontaneous activities of common netizens, motivated activism entrepreneurs like dissident groups and activists can play a big role in production, distribution and interpretation of pop activism. However, pop activism not only challenges the party state as scholars have observed,[83] but also defies all established authorities, values, and norms. Surely, official ideologies like communism, three representatives, and harmonious society have been confronted and deconstructed by many netizens, but so do challenging alternatives to the party-state norms like universal values, by many others. In addition, though pop activism may be effective in popularize political information, it sometimes backfires as the playfulness may dilute the message it carries, while loaded political implications can cause antipathy among netizens who are searching for fun.

Analysis of *pop activism* suggests that a liberalization-control framework of Chinese internet politics downplays the richness of online activism and implies a narrow view of state-society interactions. The research also suggests a new perspective towards popular contention in Chinese cyberspace because *pop activism* has been driven by diverse and mixed motivations. And finally, by exploring whether or how political messages are produced and reproduced in the online environment, the project allows a more balanced assessment of the challenges to the authoritarian regime. In the following chapters, I will explore how state, regime critics and common netizens attempt to engineer popular opinion online through innovative PR tactics, rich rhetorical tools, and creative expressions.

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[81] Netizens learn each other's political orientation through repetitive interaction online. The particular user in this case is identified as a dissident activist because he has been constantly and exclusively posting materials of dissident activities and reports criticizing the regime. He used to post daily reports on Feng Zhenghu, a Chinese citizen and dissident stranded at Narita Airport, Tokyo for months from November 2009 to January 2010 because Chinese authorities refused his entry. And when Ai Weiwei was jailed, he changed his nickname into "I am not the hero; I am a creditor of the hero." Clearly he donated money in the online fundraising campaign. See his personal information page, http://www.mitbbs.com/user_info/powershadow, accessed November 30, 2012.

[82] The policy is pinned to the top of the board, see "Benban Bu Huanying Zhengzhilei Ticai de Fei Xiaohua" (This Board Does Not Welcome Political Topics that Are Not Funny), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t2/Joke/32046745.html, retrieved September 25, 2012. It is worth noting that, forums inside China may also explicitly or implicitly discourage political jokes to avoid censorship pressure, though users' antipathy towards such "not-so-funny" topics also matters.

[83] Johan Lagerkvist, *After the Internet, Before Democracy* (Peter Lang, 2010).

Chapter 5
Manufacturing Consent:
State-Sponsored Internet Commentators

Many studies on online political communication and participation in authoritarian regimes focus on the cat-and-mouse censorship game in which the state and netizens struggle over the limits of what can be discussed and what cannot. However, despite their insights on state censorship and netizens' contention, [1] such a liberalization-control framework implicit in these studies has its limitations: it not only implies us an incorrect image of netizens fighting unanimously against authoritarian states, but also leads us to overlook certain aspects of states' creativity in their adaptations to the internet era. To understand the impact of internet politics on authoritarian regimes, particularly the resilience of authoritarianism in the new governing realm of cyberspace, it is important to look at the strategies of authoritarian states to manage (rather than simply suppress) online public participation. How do authoritarian states manage public opinion beyond direct censorship? And how do they try to steer online public discussions to their advantage without resorting to coercive power?

This chapter explores these questions by examining how China's adaptive authoritarian regime has striven to manufacture consent and maintain legitimacy by employing grassroots public relations efforts on internet forums. I argued that, beyond censorship, the Chinese propaganda state has adapted itself by establishing an army of fifty cents (state-paid online commentators) who would engage online discussions anonymously to promote a pro-government discourse. However, this seemingly smart move has produced mixed results: though fifty cents army may have managed to increase the state's PR effectiveness on specific issues, it often backfires by increasing netizens' general distrust in the state, which in turn ironically suppresses regime-supporters' voices with netizens trying to avoid being labeled as state agents.

Going Beyond Censorship: Chinese Authoritarian State in the Internet Era

As important as it is, boundary-spanning confrontation on censorship is not the only aspect of public expression in Chinese cyberspace. From the state's perspective, as explained by Stern and O'Brien, "beyond a few, well-patrolled 'forbidden zones,' the Chinese authoritarian state speaks with many voices and its bottom line is often unclear."[2] As far as online discussion is concerned, the Party-state has neither the capacity,[3] nor the intention to eliminate all public expression.[4] In fact, even political

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[1] For instance, see Taylor Boas, "Weaving the Authoritarian Web: The Control of Internet Use in Nondemocratic Regimes," in John Zysman and Abraham Newman (eds.) *How Revolutionary Was the Digital Revolution? National Responses, Market Transitions, and Global Technology*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu, *Who Controls the Internet?: Illusions of a Borderless World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Eric Harwit and Duncan Clark, "Shaping the Internet in China: Evolution of Political Control over Network Infrastructure and Content," *Asian Survey* 41 (2001), pp. 377-408. Also see Ronald J. Deibert, John G. Palfrey, Rafal Rohozinski and Jonathan Zittrain (eds.), *Access Denied: The Practice and Policy of Global Internet Filtering* (The MIT Press, 2008); *Access Controlled: The Shaping of Power, Rights, and Rule in Cyberspace* (The MIT Press, 2010); Guobin Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online* (Columbia University Press, 2009); Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang "Political Expression in the Chinese Blogosphere," *Asian Survey* 48 (2008), pp. 752-772; Johan Lagerkvist, *The Internet in China: Unlocking and Containing the Public Sphere* (Lund: Lund University, 2007).
[2] Rachel Stern and Kevin O'Brien "Politics at the Boundary: Mixed Signals and the Chinese State," *Modern China,* Vol. 38, No. 2 (March 2012), pp. 175-199.
[3] The state-imposed boundaries of online expression are with numerous loopholes. For instance, see Guobin Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China*; Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang "Political Expression in the Chinese

discussion is sometimes tolerated, allowing netizens to express diverse political opinions.[5]

The internet has created a "zone of freedom," which is not yet a full-blown public sphere, but relatively independent from the state.[6] Such findings are suggestive, particularly because they implicitly acknowledge the limitations of focusing exclusively on censorship, a perspective that fails to pay sufficient attention to developments within the tolerated realm of online expression. As Sinologist Jens Damm points out, dominant discourses in the field that focus on liberalization or control are mistaken in assessing the internet's impact on Chinese society because they ignore the rising urban and consumerism that renders a fragmented and localized internet.[7] And he further argues that Chinese netizens typically do not demand large-scale political change even though they are ready to protest when the state interferes with their "zone of freedom."[8]

Meanwhile, adaptation by the authoritarian state and its propaganda machinery has gone far beyond simply adopting new censorship measures. Scholars have acknowledged this change. Yuezhi Zhao, for instance, suggests that market mechanisms have been introduced into Party journalism, contributing to the emergence of a "propagandist/ commercial model" that performs more subtle ideological work for the party.[9] In the realm of online expression, the state's censorship efforts have hardly made online discussion conform to its preferences. After all, how topics are discussed, which often is beyond the reach of censors, is as important as what can be discussed. In fact, arbitrary and harsh censorship attempts often backfire, turning otherwise neutral or indifferent netizens into rivals and protestors. Such challenges and this new logic of power exercise in online public communication force the state and its propaganda system to adapt. Lagerkvist highlights the state's adaptability in the internet age with the idea of internet ideotainment, which juxtaposes "images, symbolic representations, and sounds of popular Web and mobile phone culture together with both subtle and overt ideological

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Blogosphere"; Johan Lagerkvist, *The Internet in China*. Also see Chapter 2 of my dissertation project.

[4] For instance, China's premier Wen Jiabao has encouraged criticism of government and called for more freedom of expression. See David Barboza, "China Leader Encourages Criticism of Government," *New York Times* (January 27, 2011); also see Wen Jiabao, Interview with Fareed Zakaria on CNN's Global Public Square, October 3, 2010. The central government may be instrumental as online expression can help discipline local authorities. See Keith B. Richburg, "China's 'Netizens' Holding Officials Accountable," *The Washington Post* (November 9, 2009), http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/08/AR2009110818166_pf.html, retrieved July 20, 2012. This is nothing new in Chinese politics. Observers have noticed that the introduction of village elections or tolerance of rightful resistance by China's central government can be understood as means to hold local government accountable. See Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Kevin O'Brien, "Bringing What We Know about China to the Social Sciences: Discovery, Research Re(design) and Theory Building," talk at Nankai University, Tianjin (March 7, 2010); Peter Lorentzen, "Regularizing Rioting: Permitting Public Protest in an Authoritarian Regime," (June 9, 2010). Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=995330 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.995330.

[5] Yuan Le and Boxu Yang, "Online Political Discussion and Left-Right Ideological Debate: A Comparative Study of Two Major Chinese BBS Forums," Paper presented at *7th Annual Chinese Internet Research Conference*, University of Pennsylvania, May 27-29, 2009; Fang Tang, "Zhengzhi Wangmin de Shehui Jingji Diwei yu Zhengzhi Qingxiang: Jiyu Qiangguo he Maoyan de Tansuoxing Fenxi" (Socioeconomic Status and Political Orientation of Political Netizens: An Explorative Analysis based on Qiangguo and Maoyan Forums), *China Media Report* (Zhongguo Chuanmei Baogao), No. 3 (2009).

[6] See Yong Hu, *Zhongsheng Xuanhua: Wangluo Shidai de Geren Biaoda yu Gonggong Taolun* (*The Rising Cacophony: Personal Expression and Public Discussion in the Internet Age*), (Nanning: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008); Lagerkvist, *The Internet in China*.

[7] Jens Damm, "The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society," *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2007), pp. 273-294.

[8] Jens Damm, "The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society," p.285.

[9] Zhao Yuezhi, "Toward a Propaganda/Commercial Model of Journalism in China? The Case of the Beijing Youth News", *International Communication Gazette*, 58 (1997), pp. 143-157.

constructs and nationalistic propaganda."[10] In his recent book, he likewise highlights the evolution of the propaganda system, arguing that new propaganda has shifted the focus from ideology to the subtle management of the public's attention.[11]

What happens when the adaptive state meets social actors in the "zone of freedom?"[12] In this chapter, I will examine how the state has adapted to challenges of largely anonymous public discussion online through the introduction of the internet commentator system. Through online commentators, popularly known as "fifty cents party" or "fifty cents army" (*wu mao dang*), the party-state resorts to grassroots PR tactics like astroturfing for propaganda, image maintenance and crises management.

Astroturfing and Methods
Originally, the term astroturfing referred to a PR tactic, sometimes used in politics and advertising, in which actors are paid to display overt and apparently spontaneous grassroots support for a particular product, policy or event. On internet forums and in Chinese cyberspace in general, many users are motivated to advocate or impugn particular facts, opinions, values or beliefs anonymously. Regardless of whether they are sincere, these efforts are considered astroturfing if users pose as spontaneous grassroots voices when they are really organized, sponsored or incentivized by certain groups or individuals. Though this technique is also widely adopted by netizens for personal, commercial or other non-political purposes,[13] we will focus on political astroturfing by the state and dissident groups here.

Given the sensitivity of the topic, data collection has been a major challenge. There have been no official announcement regarding when, why or how the internet commentator system was created. Nor are systematic data available on how Internet commentators are recruited and trained or how they conduct their job. Besides interviews with informants no need to mention how many and existing studies, I base my analysis primarily on three sources.

First, sources from the party-state provide us with clues to how the system works. Incompetent, careless or disaffected state officials working in the propaganda system

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[10] Johan Lagerkvist, Internet Ideotainment in the PRC: National Responses to Cultural Globalization, *Journal of Contemporary China,* Vol. 17, No. 54 (2008), pp. 121-140.

[11] Johan Lagerkvist, *After the Internet, Before Democracy* (Peter Lang, 2010), Chapter 5, and p. 122.

[12] One must note that "zone of freedom" does not refer to a space absolutely beyond the state's reach. Rather it means a space where direct censoring measures of the state become ineffective.

[13] Astroturfing is employed by many actors for various purposes. In particular, it has been widely used in internet marketing. The so-called online crises management companies (*weiji gongguan gongsi*), water armies (*shuijun*) and internet pushers (*wangluo tuishou*) can be found behind many internet hot-button topics with agendas of personal branding, product and service marketing and competition, and commercial crises management. See Dexter Roberts, "Inside the War against China's Blogs," *BusinessWeek,* (June 12, 2008); Zhou Chunlin, "Jiekai Wangluo Tuishou Zhizao 'Zuimei Nvjiaoshi' Beihou Neimu " (Uncovering How Internet Pushers Crafted 'The Most Beautiful Female Teacher'), http://news.xinhuanet.com/2007-07/28/content_6441463.htm, retrieved July 20, 2012; Zhang Shunhe, "Wangluo Tuishou Jiemi Chaozuo Neimu: Yige Fengjie Ke Fu Yige Tuandui " (Internet Pusher Disclosing Inside Story of Spinning: A Sister Phoenix Can Make A Whole Group Rich), http://tech.sina.com.cn/i/2010-04-15/11484061901.shtml, retrieved July 20, 2012; Kong Pu, "Jiemi Wangluo Weiji Gongguan " (Deciphering Online Crises Management), *News Magazine* (*Xin Shiji Zhoukan*), Vol. 340, No. 28, (October 2008), pp. 62-63. Sometimes, astroturfing wars are fought among market competitors, and the following article reveals such a case among China's leading diary corporations of Mengniu, Yili and Shengyuan. See "The Chinese Dairy Wars," http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20101021_1.htm, retrieved July 20, 2012. There are even websites like zhubajie.com that serve as platforms where astroturfing tasks are posted and taken. The website advertizes online astroturfing as an effective and cheap method for companies to popularize their products or brands. The technique is also employed by non-profit actors for non-commercial purposes. For instance, China Youth Development Foundation Heart Fund intended to hire internet pushers at a rate of 4 *Yuan* per 10 posts to spread an open letter on forums calling for volunteers to write letters to "left-behind children" (*liushou ertong*), kids left in rural homes by migrant workers in remote cities, on a monthly base. See "Gongyi Huodongtie, Wutu Haofa, 4 Yuan Shi Tie" (Postings for Public Welfare, No Pictures and Easy to Post, 4 Yuan for 10 Posts), http://task.zhubajie.com/511677/uid4147987n60o3f5.html, retrieved July 20, 2012.

have on occasion leaked internal documents, communication logs and other pieces of information exposing online commentators. In addition, people who previously worked in the system sometimes talk about their experiences after leaving their position. For instance, one former Nankai University student explained his work monitoring the university campus BBS.[14]

Second, official media reports constitute another major source of data because the state regards the online commentator system as a part of its routine propaganda work, which it often does not try to conceal at all. In particular, the introduction, training and rewarding of online commentators are viewed by local governments and propaganda branches as achievements to be reported to higher levels. This is evident in a local media report on the training of online commentators in Shanxi Province, which not only reported on the event, but also provided links to reports by other more influential news portals (qq.com and 163.com) and mouthpiece outlets (people.com).[15] Though official media rarely detail how online commentators operate in the field, they still provide clues about the state's perspective and structural features of the commentator system.

Last, along the lines of what Stern and O'Brien call a "state reflected in society approach," I draw on the experiences of netizens with people they suspect to be state agents.[16] With limited direct sources access to direct sources of information inside the state, what netizens see and experience becomes a way to understand the nature of a state. Chinese netizens are very sensitive to the state's efforts to manipulate public opinion in cyberspace. They sometimes are cognizant of governmental astroturfing during crises management or propaganda campaigns. Their perceptions, though not necessarily accurate, reflect characteristics of the online commentator system. Besides, many leaks from the state I draw on were first provided, collected and spread by netizens. Without their work, I would have to rely on much more restricted and limited sources that may not have been sufficient to support my analysis.

Manufacturing Consent in the Internet Age: The Rise of Fifty Cents Army

The internet has lowered the cost of public expression in authoritarian regimes. Technology has enabled individuals and organizations to circumvent many forms of gate-keeping and spread information easily at a minimum cost and a speed that was unimaginable in the pre-internet age. In China, monitoring in the traditional sense (with state censorship as the most extreme form) rarely functions online, as denying or editing by gatekeepers before publication has become uncommon. State agents or intermediary actors, like the forum moderators delegated the authority to filter online content, only assume a partial gate-keeping role by blocking sensitive key words. But even when they do this diligently, their efforts are plagued by a lack of standards and the vast number of threads generated daily by users.[17]

Technology thus provides a cheap and effective way to advance agendas and influence public opinion, even for actors with relatively limited resources. In effect, individuals do not need to promote ideas alone.   Instead, a more effective way is to influence innocent users, making them believe and at the same time spread one's messages. Anonymous online expression, which is the dominant form of online

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[14] See "Jinian Tuoli Wumaodang Liang Zhounian" (Memorial of the Two Years Anniversary since Quitting Fifty Cents Army), http://mitbbs.com/article_t/NKU/31204643.html, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[15] See "Shanxi Sheng Shoupi Wangluo Bianji he Wangluo Pinglunyuan Peixunban Xueyuan Zhengshi Zai Bing Jieye" (Commencement of Shanxi Province's First Training Class of Internet Editors and Commentators), http://www.jcnews.com.cn/Html/guondongtai/2006-12/20/120854983.html, retrieved December 30, 2011.

[16] Stern and O'Brien, "Politics at the Boundary."

[17] See Chapter 2 of my dissertation for a more detailed discussion.

discourse in China, renders discussion particularly vulnerable to such manipulation as it dis-embeds participants from social, economic and political (i.e. real-life) accountability networks. In online conversations, discussion manipulators, sometimes using multiple fake names (IDs) can "stir up" (*chaozuo*) a certain topic to attract other netizens into the discussion and turn the topic into a hot one. Public opinion is manipulated in this process not only because the initial momentum comes from a created "public", but also because the "dominant" view of the "public" can be engineered through purposeful framing and information input, which in turn influences innocent netizens' perceptions and subsequent input. These public opinion manipulators include any number of actors: the state, dissidents, various civil organizations, issue-specific protestors, internet businesses and ordinary internet users.

The state is induced to adopt online PR strategies by both challenges and opportunities the internet has brought about. On the one hand, its propaganda machine is becoming increasingly ineffective. Though scholars suggest that it is still premature to dismiss the role of governmental propaganda,[18] some studies find a negative correlation between the exposure of official propaganda and citizen's trust in the government.[19] Direct observation of online discussion echoes this finding: netizens demonstrate strong distrust of mouthpiece media outlets like CCTV and People's Daily. Such distrust is evident in how netizens mock these media outlets and the reports they produce. People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*), the Party's official newspaper, is called Fxxking the People Newspaper (*Ri Ren Min Bao*) by many, who intentionally alter the sequence of the characters in the term to express their discontent.[20] Similarly, the national TV station CCTV is nicknamed CCAV. With AV standing for pornographic videos, this clearly is directed at mocking the state's anti-pornography campaign. Propaganda efforts by official media often backfire, particularly when critical netizens catch them with their hands dirty. In a report on Libya's response to the French-led airstrike in 2011, CCTV interpreted an image of local Libyans holding a "vive le France" banner as Kaddafi supporters protesting against French intervention, claiming that the banner reads "French Go Home." [21] The deliberate misrepresentation was caught by netizens and attracted heavy criticism from many internet forums. The growing ineffectiveness and the loss of monopoly over information demonstrate the weakness of the propaganda system, pushing the regime to shift toward PR tactics like astroturfing.

On the other hand, the internet also provides the state with new tools to reach every corner of society. The state has not only adapted to the internet age by establishing a control and censorship regime that restricts challengers, but it has also tried to turn cyberspace into a new propaganda frontier.[22] As early as 2000, the state

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[18] John Kennedy highlighted the inconsistent findings from different studies. See John Kennedy, "Maintaining Popular Support for the Chinese Communist Party: The Influence of Education and the State-Controlled Media," *Political Studies,* Vol. 57, No. 3 (2009), pp. 517–536. Also see Lagerkvist, *Before Democracy*, p.180.

[19] Xueyi Chen and Tianjian Shi, "Media Effects on Political Confidence and Trust in the PRC in the Post-Tiananmen Period," *East Asia: An International Quarterly,* Vol. 19, No. 3 (2001)*,* pp. 84–118.

[20] It is particularly striking to see such a term appearing in the nationalistic forum of China.com. See "Ri Renmin Bao: Diaocha Cheng Qichengban Zhongguoren Gandao Xingfu!" (Fucking the People Newspaper: Survey Shows 75% of Chinese People Are Happy!), http://club.china.com/data/thread/1011/2722/80/17/1_1.html, retrieved April 7, 2011.

[21] A post titled "CCAV, Laozi Dong Fayu, Ni pian Gui Ah?" (CCAV Your Daddy Knows French, So You're Cheating the Ghost!) spread across the cyberspace quickly. Crises management mechanism obvious worked in this case. The post was deleted quickly from many major forums. See http://bbs.xs163.net/read-htm-tid-1859405-page-1.html, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[22] For instance, see Lagerkvist, "Internet Ideotainment in the PRC." Lagerkvist noticed that the state adapted in the internet age by adding entertaining elements to propaganda and ideological work.

pushed its major propaganda outlets to set up online platforms. The introduction of the internet spokesperson (*wangluo fayan ren*) system also fits in here. Besides the visible frontier, the battle is also fought in less visible alleyways of the internet. According to Chen Kai, Deputy Secretary of Shanghai Municipal Communist Youth League Committee, the state's internet PR efforts are comprehensive, including public opinion collection (by information collectors), public opinion guidance (by internet commentators), and public opinion analysis and research (by online public opinion researchers).[23] In the next section, I focus on the state's online public opinion guidance efforts through Internet commentators. As Hung has rightly put it, "the party state has, in fact, been revitalizing the propaganda apparatus through the utilization of these commentators."[24]

Introduction of Online Commentators

The earliest mention of online commentators that I can find appeared in an official report stating that, the CCP Changsha Municipal Committee of Hunan Province began to hire internet commentators in October 2004. These commentators were paid a basic monthly salary of 600 Yuan ($88), plus 5 Mao (50 cents) for each post, a pay rate that is a common explanation for why online commentators were later nicknamed "five mao" or "fifty cents army."[25] In late 2004, the Supervision Department of the CCP Central Commission for Discipline Inspection organized a training session for 127 internet commentators from all over the country with a special focus on internet anti-corruption propaganda.[26] The earliest mention of online commentators on campus BBSes can be traced to Nanjing University in 2005.[27]

Though some netizens believe that the online commentator system was a response to the rise of "net spies" (*wangte*),[28] e.g. spies sponsored by hostile foreign forces, the argument is not strongly supported by available data. The cases above suggest that the introduction of online commentators was not a central-coordinated

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[23] See Chen Kai, "Zhuoyan Jiaqiang Wangluo Yulun Yindao, Tigao Qingnian Wangxuan Shuiping" (Focus on Strengthening Online Public Opinion Guidance, Promote Youth Internet Propaganda), http://www.why.com.cn/shtuanshiwei/inc/page.asp?id=10496, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[24] Chin-Fu Hung, "China's Propaganda in the Information Age: Internet Commentators and Wen'an Incident," *Issues & Studies,* Vol. 46, No. 4 (December 2010), pp. 149-181. For adaptation of China's propaganda apparatus, see David Shambaugh, "China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy," *The China Journal*, No. 57 (January 2007), pp. 25-58.

[25] Propaganda Department of CCP Hefei Municipal Committee (Zhonggong Hefei Shiwei Xuanchuanbu), "Guanyu Nanchang, Changsha, Zhengzhou Xuanchuan Wenhua Gongzuo de Kaocha Baogao" (Research Report on Propaganda Cultural Work of Nanchang, Changshang and Zhengzhou), http://swxcb.hefei.gov.cn/ContentDir/20065/24124915293.shtml, last retrieved August 25, 2010. According to *Changsha Yearbook 2006*, the launch of Changsha's internet commentator system could be as early as August 2004. See Gong Jian, "Jianchi Sanjiehe, Zujian Wangluo Pinglunyuan Duiwu" (Stick to Three-in-One Combination and Establish the Troop of Online Commentators), in Changsha Municipal Office of Local Chronicles (ed.), *Changsha Yearbook 2006* (Beijing: Fangzhi Chubanshe, 2006), pp. 55-56.

[26] See Ma Yanjun, "Zhongyang Jiwei Gaodu Zhongshi Wangluo Pinglun Gongzuo" (Central Commission for Discipline Inspection Attaches Much Importance to Online Commendatory Work), http://www.scjc.gov.cn/index_moji_1.aspx?id=4444, retrieved July 20, 2012, originally from *Zhongguo Jijian Jiancha Bao (China's Discipline Inspection and Supervision)*. The "internet anti-corruption propaganda work leadership group" was set up during the training session. In addition, an internet propaganda joint-meeting mechanism was created at this event, with Central Propaganda Department, Central External Propaganda Department and mouthpieces like people.com.cn, xinhuanet, to coordinate and manage internet news and online public opinion.

[27] See David Bandurski, "China's Guerrilla War for the Web," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (July/August 2008), pp, 41-44; Hung, "China's Propaganda in the Information Age." Also see Wen Yunchao (alias Bei Feng), "Shouquan Fabu: Dalu Wangluo Pinglunyuan Jianru Gongzhong Shiye" (Authorized Release: China's Internet Commentators Gradually Gaining Public Sight), http://wenyunchao.com/?p=9951, last retrieved September 22, 2011.

[28] See Wen Yunchao, "Shouquan Fabu."

policy push, but rather an initiative of various state organs at different levels in different sectors. Thus it makes more sense to argue that the rapid spread of online commentators was due to officials at all levels gradually, and more or less simultaneously, realizing their potential for guiding public opinion compared to traditional propaganda tactics.[29]

Recruitment:

Online commentators are recruited though many channels. According to Yunchao Wen (online alias Bei Feng), a former commentator for a news portal, commentators either work full-time for state-owned news portals, such as xinhuanet.com and southcn.com or work part-time as government employees for various government agencies, including ministries, public security and educational institutions.[30] Even some state owned enterprises (SOEs) hire internet commentators. Sinopec, China's largest state-owned oil and gasoline corporation, was discovered running an astroturfing campaign justifying rising gasoline prices.[31]

Sometimes one institution may have more than one system of online commentators at work. For example, a former Nankai University student disclosed that there are two systems working on public opinion on Nankai BBS sites: one under the Propaganda Department of the Party Committee primarily responsible for monitoring and deleting unacceptable posts; the other under the Student Affairs Office for guiding public opinion through astroturfing.[32]

Internet commentators are mostly recruited from within the propaganda system or from employees of government or semi-governmental institutions. In some cases, local governments or government institutions may directly recruit from the general public.[33] Certain recruitment criteria are common, including loyalty to the party and the state and online communication skills.[34] For instance, a leaked document of the Hengyang Party School laid out the following four requirements:[35]

（1） Must have a solid political stance; must champion CCP's leadership; must firmly uphold the Party's rules (direction?), principles, and policies; must be law-biding, and must have good ideology and moral character as well as the sprit of professionalism;

（2） Must be equipped with theoretical training, good at cyber languages, with a wide scope of knowledge and good at writing;

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[29] Hung, "China's Propaganda in the Information Age."

[30] Zhang Lei, "Invisible Footprints of Online Commentators," http://special.globaltimes.cn/2010-02/503820_2.html, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[31] Wang Xing, "Zhongshihua Beibao Zuizhi Renyuan zai Wangshang Xuanchuan Zhangjia Heli" (Sinopec Exposed for Organizing Personnel to Justify Price Increase Online), *Nanfang Dushi Bao (Southern Metropolis Daily)*, (February 13, 2011). The page was taken down by major news portals, including sina.com, qq.com, and gmw.cn within 24 hours. Though probably driven by economic motivation, the issue is highly political not only because of its impact on everyday life of Chinese middle class or Sinopec's SOE status, but also due to the fact that adjustment of gas price is subject to state approval.

[32] See "Jinian Tuoli Wumaodang Liang Zhounian."

[33] See "Zhonggong Zhengding Xianwei Xuanchuanbu Guanyu Zhaopin Hulianwang Wangluo Xuanchuan Pinglunyuan de Tongzhi" (Circular on Recruiting Internet Commentators by Propaganda Department of CCP Zhengding County Committee), http://www.zd.gov.cn/ReadNews.asp?NewsID=12226&BigClassName=%B9%AB%B8%E6%C0%B8&SmallClassName=%B9%AB%B8%E6%C0%B8&SpecialID=0, retrieved November 21, 2009.

[34] Usually, recruiting circulars will emphasize the necessity to introduce online commentators and highlight their responsibilities and selection criteria. See "Guanyu Jianli Shandong Zhongyiyao Daxue Wangluo Pinglunyuan Duiwu de Tongzhi" (Circular on Establishing Internet Commentator Troops of Shandong University of Traditional Chinese Medicine), http://xcb.web.sdutcm.edu.cn/htm/tz/646.html, retrieved July 20, 2012; Dingtao Yizhong (Dingtao No. 1 Middle School), "Guanyu Zujian Dingtao Yizhong Wangluo Pinglunyuan Duiwu de Yijian" (Opinions on Establishing Internet Commentator Troops of Dingtao No. 1 Middle School), http://www.sddtyz.cn/web/pro/detail.php?tid=1450, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[35] See "'Dangxiao Zhendi' Wangpingyuan Guanli Banfa" (Regulations on Internet Commentator Management of 'Party School Front'), http://dx.hydjnet.gov.cn/News_View.asp?NewsID=28290, retrieved February 15, 2011.

（3）   Must be familiar with party school work and have basic computer skills and can adeptly use relevant software and internet applications.

（4）   Must accept supervision and guidance of Party School Frontline website.

However, these standards are difficult to meet, and my interviews show that they are not necessarily strictly enforced. For instance, some universities treat online commentators as part-time positions that provide a modest amount of compensation for needy students and recruitment is open to whomever is willing to do the job.[36] Sometimes, random factors can play a decisive role in recruitment. According to the account of a former Nankai BBS monitor, he was recruited simply because he had a good personal relationship with his predecessor.[37]

Training

Sporadic reports reveal that online commentators often receive some training before taking up their job. Such training takes diverse formats but often focuses heavily on technical aspects. At a training session organized by the Ministry of Culture, internet commentators visited Xinhuanet and People.com.cn, exchanged their experiences in group settings and attended lectures on "Techniques of Online Commentary and Forum Management", "Online Communication and Web 2.0", "Online Communication and Crises Management," "Guidance of Public Opinion on the Internet," and "Characteristics of Online Communication and Writing of Internet Comments."[38] Local governments adopt similar training strategies in their efforts to strengthen online commenting troops. For instance, in October 2009, officials in Jiangdong District of Ningbo, Zhejiang Province held a training session for 102 newly appointed online commentators, which included not only lectures by the local internet administrative center and PSB internet monitor branch directors, but also peer experience exchange.[39] Qingyang District of Chengdu, Sichuan Province invited veteran editors from Xinhua News Agency to lecture on how to write internet comments.[40] The Public Health Bureau of Fuyang, Zhejiang Province trained its part-time internet commentators by providing "Instructions on Internet Propaganda" and "Writing on Public Health Information."[41]

I have no information about what specific techniques have been used in these training sessions, but part of the training is likely quite basic. For instance, the Technical Training Outline by Hengyang Party School Website shows online commentators how to register and login to the system and how to post or reply to threads. The only trick of some complexity concerns pseudo-names (IDs). It advises online commentators to use multiple pseudo-names to avoid compromising their true identity.[42] Sometimes specific instructions are given on an ad hoc basis, as discussed below.

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[36] Observation at First Conference of National Campus BBS Managers, Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, October 23-25, 2009.

[37] See "Jinian Tuoli Wumaodang Liang Zhounian."

[38] See Bei Feng, "Shouquan Fabu." The article provides very good description of how internet commentators are trained.

[39] "Woqu Shouci Zuzhi Wangpingyuan Peixun" (Our District Organizes First Internet Commentators Training), http://www.cnnb.com.cn/gb/node2/newspaper/node53127/node80224/node80622/node80650/node80652/userobject7ai1370162.html, retrieved December 1, 2009.

[40] "Qingyangqu Jianli Wangpingyuan Duiwu" (Qingyang District Establishes Internet Commentators Troops), http://www.qydwgk.gov.cn/news_list_show.asp?topicid=01&kla_id=2030, retrieved December 1, 2009.

[41] "Woshi Weishengju Jianzhi Wangpingyuan Shanggang" (Part-Time Internet Commentators of Public Sanitation Bureau in Position), http://wsj.fuyang.gov.cn/zwdt_8848/20090907226641.shtml, retrieved December 1, 2009.

[42] "Wangpingyuan Jishu Fudao Tigang" (Technical Training Outline for Internet Commentators), http://dx.hydjnet.gov.cn/News_View.asp?NewsID=28291, retrieved February 15, 2011.

Functions

Online commentators hired by different agencies are assigned various responsibilities to guide online public opinion. In some cases, they are simply asked to post and reply to threads on a certain forum. For instance, the Hengyang Party School Front Website asked its online commentators to "post comments, replies or original commentary threads on the website of Party School Front."[43] However, in other cases, they perform a much broader spectrum of public relations functions. In Dongjiang District, Ningbo, online commentators are required to undertake monitoring, collecting, analyzing and reporting online public opinion; posting threads on hot topics to maintain the correct direction of public opinion; tracking the handling of public issues; and coordinating with government agencies to provide timely responses and feedback to netizens.[44] The following excerpt from a recruiting flyer from the Propaganda Department of Zhengding Party Committee, Hebei, provides an example of what online commentators are expected to do: [45]

> 1. Compose original posts and carry out positive publicity online to facilitate priorities and significant deployments of the party committee and the government.
> 2. Release authoritative information on major incidents to depress rumor-spreading and ensure correct direction of online public opinion.
> 3. Answer questions and clarify confusion for netizens on hot-button incidents, interpret policies and measures of the party and the government, and divert netizens' emotions.
> 4. Strengthen information management on the Internet, and tightly integrate analyzing online pubic opinion, disposing of harmful information and guiding online public opinion.

Clearly, besides monitoring public opinion, online commentators engage anonymously in discussion primarily to maintain a positive image of the entity that sponsors them. They are most active when engaging online crises management or facilitating state propaganda campaigns.

Online crisis management refers to the process by which internet commentators try to negate the impact of adverse socio-political events, particularly government scandals that trigger online activism and public discontent. Hung Chin-fu's research offers a very good case study of how online commentators were mobilized to pacify public anger after the Weng'an incident, in which rioters torched government buildings and vehicles. The unrest was triggered by allegations of a cover-up over a girl's death in Weng'an County, Guizhou Province. [46] The following accidentally-disclosed report posted on the student forum at Shanghai Institute of Science and Technology summarizes "achievements of Shanghai online commentators,"[47]

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[43] See "'Dangxiao Zhendi' Wangpingyuan Guanli Banfa." The document stipulates requirements of internet commentators' work, though they are not as strictly enforced. "In particular, shall take initiative to comment on party school activities and hot-button issues that are publicly concerned. Comments should be objective and fair, so as to effectively guide public opinion."

[44] See "Our District Organizes First Internet Commentators Training."

[45] See "Zhonggong Zhengding Xianwei Xuanchuanbu Guanyu Zhaopin Hulianwang Wangluo Xuanchuan Pinglunyuan de Tongzhi."

[46] Hung, "China's Propaganda in the Information Age."

[47] See "Nuli Zuohao Yige Hege de Wangpingyuan: Shanghai Wangpingyuan 09 Niandu Baogao" (Work Hard as A Qualified Internet Commentator: 2009 Annual Report on Internet Commentators in Shanghai), http://www.shyouth.net/website/qinggongbu/contentDetail.jsp%3Fct_id%3D61903%26sj_dir%3Dqgb_jcqggzyx, retrieved January 25, 2010. For more cases, see "Wuchubuzai de Wumao Dang" (Omnipresent Fifty Cents Party) http://www.houkai.com/2009/06/28/5mao.html, retrieved January 25, 2010; "Guanyu Zuzhi Jijian Jiancha Xitong Wangpingyuan dui Chen Shaoji, Wang Huayuan Jieshou Zuzhi Diaocha de Xiaoxi Jinxing Gentie de Tongzhi" (Circular on Organizing Internet Commentators in Discipline and Inspection System to Comment on Party Investigation of Chen Shaoji and Wang Shaoyuan), http://bbs.dqdaily.com/viewthread.php?tid=90485, retrieved December 1, 2009.

In 2009, under the guidance of the Municipal Internet Propaganda Office, online commentators from Shanghai municipal agencies engaged in a series of online incidents, including a building collapse, [48] forcible installation of green-dam software, [49] self-immolation of a resident protesting demolition,[50] the black taxi entrapment, [51] and so forth. They put up, replied to, or forwarded over 200 posts on portal websites and forums including people.com, Xinhuanet, Eastday.com, tianya.cn, and etc, and 20 plus comments have been accepted by Commentary Channel of Eastday.com.

Internet commentators also assume the role of propagandists by facilitating online propaganda campaigns. In 2008, as part of a province-wide propaganda initiative, officials in Hengyang, Hunan Province launched a massive online campaign to "Liberate Thinking and Develop Hengyang" in which online commentators were summoned to engage in thematic discussion, post comments on local and national websites and participate in online interviews with local state officials.[52] A series of guidelines and tips were issued on how they should carry out their work. For instance, a notice on September 26, 2008 notified online commentators that they should compose and post 1,000 comments as replies to a thread titled "Hengyang Municipality Propaganda Branch 'Liberate Thinking Big Discussion' Special Thread."[53] Subordinate counties, districts and bureaus under the municipality were assigned quotas with designated responsible personnel. In a follow-up notice on October 9 titled "Urgent Task," online commentators were asked to post at least 60 opinions and suggestions under one thread before October 15. Both notices included instructions on what those comments should look like: they should be between 100 and 500 words; should be issue-centered rather than pointing at certain units or individuals; should avoid tedious empty talk and focus on concrete opinions and

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[48] See Peter Foster, "Nine Held over Shanghai Building Collapse," http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/5685963/Nine-held-over-Shanghai-building-collapse.html, retrieved July 20, 2012; Hou Lei, "Poor Construction Blamed for Shanghai Building Collapse," http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-06/30/content_8338226.htm, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[49] In 2009, The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) attempted to require all PC manufacturers to preinstall "green dam" software, meant to filter out pornography and other unhealthy information. It was met with widespread resistance and criticism. MIIT soon responded, claiming that the software would not monitor users' online activities and could be uninstalled. See Andrew Jacobs, China Requires Censorship Software on New PCs, *New York Times* (June 8, 2009); Rebecca Mackinnon, "The Green Dam Phenomenon: Governments Everywhere Are Treading on Web Freedoms," http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124525992051023961.html, retrieved July 20, 2012; and Bao Ying, "Filtering Software to Be Installed on New Computers," *The Beijing News* (June 10, 2009).

[50] Qian Yanfeng, "Shanghai Residents Fight Forced Demolitions," http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-02/26/content_9506528.htm, retrieved July 20, 2012. According to the report, it is not actually a self-immolation incident. Instead the protestor was fighting with the demolition squad with self-make Molotov cocktails.

[51] A driver was entrapped by traffic authorities of Pudong District, Shanghai, investigating illegal cabs. He was so disturbed about the allegation that he cut off part of a finger in an attempt to prove his innocence. Follow-up investigation shows that local traffic authorities relied on "entrapment" law enforcement to crack down illegal cabs and have generated millions of *Yuan* in fines in two years. For a collection of reports (translated from Chinese sources), see "The Shanghai Illegal Cab Entrapment Case," http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20091025_1.htm, retrieved July 20, 2012. Also see Bao Qian, "Shanghai Shizhengfu Jieru Diaoyu Zhifa Shijian, Lvshi Shenqing Xinxi Gongkai" (Shanghai Municipal Government Steps in Illegal Cab Entrapment Case and Lawyer Asks for Information Disclosure), *Legal Daily* (*Fazhi Ribao*), (October 19, 2009).

[52] See "Gewei Wangpingyuan Zhuyi: Jinji Renwu!!!" (Attention Online Commentators, Urgent Task!!!), http://bbs.rednet.cn/a/a.asp?B=339&ID=13937127, retrieved June 20, 2009.

[53] See "Hengyangshi Xuanchuan Zhanxian 'Jiefang Sixiang Dajiatan' Taolun Zhuantie" (Hengyang Municipal Propaganda Branch 'Big Discussion on Liberating Thoughts' Special Thread), http://bbs.rednet.cn/a/a.asp?B=339&ID=13937127, retrieved February 26, 2011. The title was later changed to "Hengyangshi Xuanchuan Zhanxian 'Jiefang Sixiang Dajiatan' Ji 'Wenji Wangmin' Taolun Zhuantie" (Hengyang Municipal Propaganda Branch 'Big Discussion on Liberating Thoughts' and 'Asking Netizens for Strategies' Special Thread). When last accessed on February 26, 2011, there were 1155 entries in the thread. And it is worth noting that the language used in both titles carries a strong propagandist flavor.

suggestions; should use multiple pseudonyms, and so forth. The October 9 notice also encouraged creating IDs with various characteristics and sharing them among online commentators.

It is worth highlighting that online commentators' jobs are not restricted to censorship and image maintenance. In fact, they sometimes serve as communication channels between the state and the public. First, the government seeks to proliferate government policies and clarify the government's stance through online commentators. This function, though deemed necessary by some to counterbalance unfounded rumors, is hardly appreciated by most netizens.[54] In addition, monitoring online discussion provides the state with references for policy-making and implementation. For instance, online commentators are said to have contributed to *Changsha Public Opinion Express (Changsha Yuqing Kuaibao),* which is edited by the local External Propaganda Office and delivered to municipal leaders daily.[55] Li Guanghua, former deputy director of Information Office of the Hengyang Propaganda Department, claimed that he used to organize online commentators to compile and report netizens' complaints to the local party secretary, who would then push for solutions. Some campus forum managers I interviewed also confirmed that part of their job is to collect students' suggestions and criticisms for university authorities.[56] "Linking the government and the people" can boost the morale of online commentators.[57]

Rewards

What motivates online commentators? Monetary rewards provide some incentive for many online commentators, though there are also cases in which employees of local governments are mobilized without extra compensation. Online commentators are paid in several different ways. Many only work part-time and receive payments on a per-post basis, with a rate of around 50 cents. However, a recent report reveals that the per post rate has declined and can go as low as 10 cents.[58] Campus online commentators receive work-study compensation, which typically ranges from two to three hundred *yuan* (approximately 30-50 US dollars) per month. Though not a large amount, this compensation is about the amount a student would pay for one or two weeks of dining at a university canteen.

In some cases, working as an online commentator may provide non-monetary rewards. For student online commentators, the job may offer opportunities to become a functionary in the student union or Communist Youth League.[59] Working as a student cadre is not only beneficial for politically ambitious students, but also adds to their resume even when they are looking for other jobs. For online commentators in the propaganda apparatus, a common reward is to select top performing online commentators and grant them awards during anniversaries or Summing-up and Commending Conferences. For instance, Zhejiang Online (*Zhejiang Zaixian*) elected "Top 10 Online Commentators" through online polls and openly displayed their

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[54] Very few people defended the interview commentator system. However, some interviewees mentioned this point as one of the few positive implications. Interview RBJ 2010-39, with a veteran forum user and observer in Beijing, May 21, 2010; Interview RBJ 2010-40, with a junior media scholar in Beijing, May 21, 2010; Interview RBE 2011-58, with a Chinese scholar at Berkeley, May 28, 2011.

[55] Zhang Lei, "Wumaodang de Wangluo Jianghu" (The Cyberspace Rivers-and-Lakes of Fifty Cents Party), *Changcheng News Digest* (*Changcheng Yuebao*), No. 9 (2010).

[56] Interview RBJ 2009-18, Interview RBJ 2009-19 and Interview RBJ 2009-20, with campus forum managers at Beijing on October 21, 2009.

[57] Zhang Lei, "Wumaodang de Wangluo Jianghu."

[58] See "'Dangxiao Zhendi' Wangpingyuan Guanli Banfa."

[59] Interview RSZ 2009-26 and Interview RSZ 2009-28, with BBS managers at Suzhou, October 24 2009.

personal information as part of the website's 10th anniversary celebration.[60]

Evaluating the Online Commentator System

With the declining credibility of the state media, invisible "fifty centers" are playing an increasingly significant role in maintaining the legitimacy of the regime. Through tactics like astroturfing, internet commentators possess fewer characteristics of the traditional propaganda machine and its agents when doing their job. When astroturfing, rather than simply exercising coercive power to control information flow, fifty center rely on identity and rhetorical power, which are more effective in online discussion. By basing themselves on the ground and interacting with netizens like netizens, online commentators not only increase the credibility of messages which otherwise would be discredited if spread by identifiable state sources, they also sometimes enhance popular support for the state's preferred positions. In this sense, the online commentator system is a clever bid to replace increasingly ineffective, traditional propaganda techniques.[61]

Though online commentators may have increased the state's PR effectiveness on specific issues, their work has serious limitations. Without a way to guarantee the quality of online commenting and evaluate the performance of online commentators, it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure their effectiveness in most cases. As Li Guanghua, who led a group of commentators in Hengyang city, pointed out in an interview, proper training for commentators is necessary because "capabilities of online commentators vary and many comments they post fail to guide public opinion online, and even backfire sometimes."[62]

The effectiveness of the system is further plagued by the low morale of many online commentators. Other than those who persuade themselves that they are contributing to social stability and helping link the state to the people, many online commentators are simply not motivated to excel at their job. One campus forum commentator told me in an interview that he basically kept an eye closed towards online discussion by his fellow students,

> "My friends know that I am working as an online commentator. You cannot hide anything when you all live under the same roof. I remain silent most of the time and only remind them when they are going a little too far. It is not glorious, but they understand."[63]

This quote suggests that monetary incentives are insufficient to motivate many online commentators. In fact, the very fact that online commentators are paid can be demoralizing because it makes online commenting seem like a cheap "sale of (priceless) souls" (*chumai linghun*).[64]

A more severe problem of the online commentator system is that it often

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[60] See "Zhejiang Zaixian 'Shijia Banzhu, Shijia Boke, Shijia Wangpingyuan' Pingxuan Huodong" (Selection of Top 10 Board Managers, Top 10 Bloggers and Top 10 Internet Commentators of Zhejiang Online), http://bbs.zjol.com.cn/zjolbbs/system/2008/10/14/010026334.shtml, retrieved July 20, 2012. Also see "Dangwang '2009 Niandu Youxiu Tongxunyuan, Shida Wangpingren' Pingxuan, Huanying Toupiao" (Please Vote for Outstanding Correspondents and Top 10 Internet Commentators of Party Web in 2009), http://71bbs.people.com.cn/viewthread.php?tid=118294, retrieved February 1, 2011.

[61] Hung, "China's Propaganda in the Information Age."

[62] Zhang Lei, "Wumaodang de Wangluo Jianghu."

[63] Interview RBJ 2009-15, with student internet commentator in Beijing on September 21, 2009.

[64] Many netizens look down upon online commentators and accuse them for "selling their souls." Ai Weiwei, an artist and human rights activist in China also used the same term to describe online commentators in an interview with VOA. See "Zhongguo Gansu Chengren Zujian Wumaodang, Beipi Niuqu Minyi" (China's Gansu Province Admits Establishing Fifty Cents Army and Is Criticized for Manipulating Public Opinion), http://www.voafanti.com/gate/big5/www.voachinese.com/content/china-20100124-82548812/460017.html, retrieved July 20, 2012.

contributes to a loss of state credibility, both on specific issues and in a general sense. Though they work anonymously, online commentators display traits which often betray their covert efforts to guide public opinion. Online commentators are sometimes found out by netizens through traces of the official language codes they employ, the freshness of their pseudo-names, the sharing of multiple IDs by one IP address, IP addresses associated with government institutions, or repeated pro-government postings from a particular ID.[65]

In other instances, online commentators are exposed directly or indirectly by the state propaganda system itself. The state is unabashed about its intention to guide public opinion through online commentators and sometimes allows reports on them to appear in the print media or even TV. For instance, *Southern Metropolis* reported on Gansu Province's plan to hire 650 online commentators to guide pubic opinion.[66] One major reason why online commentators are made known to the public is that they are treated like traditional propaganda workers. For instance, a local TV station in Xishui County, Hubei Province reported on the training of local internet spokesmen and online commentators as part of the routine propaganda work of the local government.[67] In this sense, the visibility of online commentators is partly a legacy of past approaches to propaganda work.

Recognition may also trump achievement for many online commentators. As the deputy director of the Hengyang Information Office admitted, when calling on online commentators to participate in an online interview with the municipal party secretary, one of his considerations was to "plead for achievements" (*yaogong*).[68] Another striking case is the Hengyang Party-Building Web (*Hengyang Dangjian Wang*). The website asked online commentators to comment on reports in its party-building channel, which netizens would rarely visit. As a result, we see only party-school commentators following up dull and dry reports simply with a few words like "good" (*hao*), "bump up" (*ding*), or "support" (*zhichi*). Considering that the very website has received a series of awards and honors,[69] it is clear that the targeted audience of such reports is not netizens, but their superiors. By introducing online commentators, local officials and propaganda cadres signal to higher levels that they are working hard. Whether online commenting has any real effect in guiding public opinion may be a secondary consideration.

The online commentator system increases many netizens' distrust in the state, especially when the marks of state propaganda become too obvious. In these circumstances, the system can backfire and any opinion favoring the state can come to be taken as propaganda. Pro-government voices become "politically incorrect" among netizens on many forums, and peer pressure makes netizens distance themselves from such stances. This demoralizes potential government supporters and drives them away from the state. Zhang Shengjun, professor of international politics at Beijing Normal University, complained in a report published by the popular nationalistic newspaper *Global Times*, "Now it [fifty centers] has become a baton waved towards all Chinese

[65] See "Wuchubuzai de Wumao Dang"; Zhou Peng'an, "Wangpingyuan, Buneng Tai Ruozhi" (Internet Commentators, Don't Be Too Stupid), http://www.chinavalue.net/Blog/319418.aspx, retrieved July 20, 2012.
[66] "Gansu Jiang Jian 650 Ren Wangping Duiwu Tixi" (Gansu Province Will Set Up an Internet Commentator Troop with 600 Members), *Nanfang Dushi Bao (Southern Metropolis Daily)*, (January 20, 2010); Cai Xiaoquan, "Suqian 26 Wangpingyuan Jin Shanggang" (26 Internet Commentators in Position Today), *Yangzi Wanbao* (*Yangtse Evening Post*), (April 29, 2005).
[67] See "Video: Xishui's Fifty Cent Party Internal Training", http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2011/09/xishuis-fifty-cent-party-internal-training/, retrieved December 1, 2011.
[68] Zhang Lei, "Wumaodang de Wangluo Jianghu."
[69] See "'Hengyang Dangjianwang' Souhuo Rongyu Yichuan" ('Hengyang Party Building Web' Receives A Series of Honors), *Hengyang Wanbao* (*Hengyang Evening News*), (April 17, 2009).

patriots." [70] A flood of criticism intensifies mutual distrust among netizens, exacerbating the labeling wars. [71]

Finally, the online commentator system has engendered waves of criticism, turning the system into a new source of grievances among some disgruntled netizens. One user from CCTHERE.com (the forum is known for its relatively pro-government stance, which makes the case more revealing) expressed his condemnation, which is typical among many netizens.

> "It is totally because of the incompetence of Central Propaganda Department. For decades it relied on CCTV's monopoly and its capacity degenerated. ... Now it even relies on such disgusting means like employing fifty centers to spread rumours! You're the government, not bandits!" [72]

Such criticism can sometimes take on symbolic forms and occur in public. In April 2010, when Wu Hao, deputy director of the propaganda department of Yunnan Province, was delivering a talk at Renmin University, he was attacked by a netizen who threw a wad of 50-cent RMB notes on his face and yelled "Wu Hao, fifty cents army!" [73] The attack received an enormous acclaim among netizens.

Conclusion:

Despite state censorship, public discussion on internet forums has provided Chinese netizens with some freedom of expression. However, the anonymous nature of online expressions also enables the state to manipulate public opinion to its advantage through tactics like astroturfing. This chapter has detailed the recruitment, training, functions, and rewarding of online commentators. I argue that, though this system is an important adaptation of the propaganda state to the internet age, it often causes more trouble than it resolves. Online commentators may have succeeded in helping defuse particular crises. But this success is at best partial and temporary. As more and more netizens become aware of online commentators, their use frequently backfires and chips away at the legitimacy of the party-state. It is particularly ironic that the bureaucratic apparatus within which they work undermines astroturfing because online commentators pay less attention to persuading the unpersuaded and more to how they will be evaluated. Thus, the targets of many online commentators are not disaffected netizens, but the bureaucratic system itself.

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[70] Zhang Lei, "Invisible Footprints of Online Commentators."

[71] See Chapters 6 and 7 of my dissertation.

[72] "Nayou Shenme Kuzhong, Nayou Shenme Hongshui Mengshou" (Where Are Those Hard-to-Explain Difficulties, Where Are Those Dreadful Monsters), http://www.here4news.com/article/3266887, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[73] See "Wu Hao Renda Yanjiang Bei Reng Wumao Zhibi" (Wu Hao Was Thrown 50-Cent Notes When Giving A Talk at Renmin University), http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2010-04-23/011217411980s.shtml, retrieved July 20, 2012; Zhou Zhimei, Geng Hongren, and Zeng Ming, "Wu Hao Renda Yanjiang Zao Wangyou Reng Yishen Wumao Zhibi"(A Netizen Threw 50-Cent Notes at Wu Hao When He Was Giving A Talk at Renmin University), http://news.sohu.com/20100422/n271684892.shtml, retrieved July 20, 2012. For an English version, see "Venting Mechanisms," http://cmp.hku.hk/2010/04/26/5754/, retrieved July 20, 2012. Wu is a relatively open-minded new generation propaganda official. He calls himself a "sculptor of governmental image" (*zhengfu xingxiang diaosushi*) and emphasizes the importance of dialogue with netizens. Under his auspice, Yunnan introduced the internet spokesperson system, and invited netizens to investigate the controversial "hide-and-seek" (*duo maomao*) incident in early 2009, in which local police claimed that the death of a 24-year-old young man in detention was caused by injuries incurred when playing "hide-and-seek" with other prisoners. See Juliet Ye, "'Hidden Cat': A Prisoner's Death Gives New Meaning to Children's Game," http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2009/02/18/hidden-cat-a-prisoners-death-gives-new-meaning-to-childrens-game/, retrieved July 20, 2012; also see http://schott.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/03/02/duo-maomao/. For a collection of Chinese reports, see "Yunnan Guanfang Yao Wangyou Diaocha Duomaomao Shijian" (Yunnan Authorities Invited Netizens to Investigate the Hide-and-Seek Incident), http://news.sina.com.cn/z/ynduomaomao/, retrieved July 20, 2012.

The state, of course, is not the only party involved in online public opinion engineering. Social actors, particularly dissenters, also employ similar astroturfing techniques to advance their agenda. Their attempts to manufacture discontent,[74] though attracting much less attention and criticism, also impair the development of trust among netizens. Recognizing that their opinion can be manipulated, netizens become extremely sensitive to each other's identity. Terms like "fifty cents army" and "internet spies" are not merely markers that netizens use to label opponents, but also symbolize netizens' anxiety about identity: who is a friend and who is an enemy? Such anxiety often fuels labeling wars and affects netizens' online behaviors, as will be discussed separately in my dissertation.

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[74] For instance, see Patricia Thornton, "Manufacturing Dissent in Transnational China: Boomerang, Backfire or Spectacle?" in Kevin J. O'Brien (ed.) Popular Protest in China (Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 179-204.

Chapter 6
Manufacturing Distrust:
Political Opposition Online and the Backlash

"Some people said that two hundred died in the Square and others claimed that two thousand died. There were also stories of tanks running over students who were trying to leave. I have to say that I did not see any of that. I don't know where those people did [see]. I myself was in the Square until six thirty in the morning. I kept thinking, are we going to use lies to attack an enemy who lies? Aren't facts powerful enough? To tell lies against our enemy's lies only satisfies our need to vent our anger, but it's a dangerous thing to do. Maybe your lies will be exposed, and you'll be powerless to fight your enemy."[1]

■ Hou Dejian, in *Tiananmen: The Gate of Heavenly Peace*

Popular reports on China's internet content control often project a binary image: on the one hand, an authoritarian state suppressing individual freedoms, particularly freedom of expression; and, on the other hand, resistance and protest from a repressed society. Chapter 5, however, described how the state resorts to astroturfing as a PR tatic to compete with challenging voices. In this chapter, I will complicate our understanding of discourse competition further by introducing the role of non-state actors in online mass opinion engineering. In particular, I examine the production of nationalist discourses through imagination of national enemies among pro-government netizens, which I believe is an important contributor to the resilience of the authoritarian regime.

Academic studies of the internet in China have moved beyond binary cat-and-mouse censorship perspectives. For instance, the Swedish scholar Johan Lagerkvist suggests that internet politics in China should be viewed in terms of competing social norms. He argues that negotiation between conflicting party state, youth/subaltern, and transnational business norms will foster normative change and the erosion of party-state in China, transforming the nation toward inclusive democracy.[2] Yonggang Li, however, points out that certain state measures like regulating internet cafes actually enjoy popular support, which feeds into the state's agenda of content control.[3] Such studies break with simplistic "state vs. society" views of internet content governance. I go further, however, by mapping the complex dynamic of competition among diverse voices in micro-level cyber-activity. How do different social actors respond to the soft and relatively covert PR tactics adopted by the state? How have regime-challenging discourses been manufactured and distributed in cyberspace? Finally, does the erosion of party-state discourse automatically translate into growing support for regime-challenging discourse?[4] This chapter first explores dissidents' popular opinion engineering activities and the rise of pro-government voices in Chinese cyberspace. Then it focuses on netizens' participation in the discursive construction of national enemies, through which I

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[1] See Carma Hinton and Richard Gordon, *Tiananmen: The Gate of Heavenly Peace* (Long Bow Group, Inc, 1995). For complete transcript of the documentary, see: http://www.tsquare.tv/film/transcript.html

[2] Lagerkvist, *After the Internet, Before Democracy* (Peter Lang, 2010), p. 39.

[3] Yonggang Li, *Women de Fanghuo Qiang: Wangluo Shidai de Biaoda yu Jianguan* (*Our Great Firewall: Expression and Governance in the Era of the Internet*) (Guangxi Normal University Press，2009).

[4] For instance, Lagerkvist argues that "as long as anonymity on the Internet and online use remains relatively free compared to the offline world, it can be conceived as an institution and cultural form that is facilitating normative change, and transforming China toward its ultimate horizon – inclusive democracy." See Lagerkvist, *After the Internet*, p.39

illuminate processes of discourse pluaralization and identity formation in online forums.

Methodological Note
This chapter focuses on large online forums including TIANYA (tianya.cn), KDNET (kdnet.net), Qiangguo Luntan (bbs1.people.com.cn), NEWSMTH (newsmth.net), MITBBS (mitbbs.com), and CCTHERE (ccthere.com). These forums attract more netizens and cover broader issue areas, and thus should be more representative than smaller forums.[5] For instance, TIANYA claims almost 70 million registered users with over one million of them simultaneously online during active periods through the day. Even the smaller sites newsmth.net, mitbbs.com, and ccthere.com boast a simultaneous user population of a few thousand. To increase representativeness, I included both domestic (the first four) and overseas Chinese forums (the later two). Though no campus forums (in a strict sense) are included, newsmth.net and mitbbs.com attract large numbers of students and can be treated as semi-campus based forums. In addition, these large forums serve as online focal points, from which I gradually expand my attention to other territories on the web by following my subjects' traces.

Weapons of the Weak: Popular Opinion Engineering by Non-State Actors
Online PR tactics like astroturfing were not invented by the state. In fact, BBS users were among the first to practice such tactics, though seldom for political purposes.[6] In the early period of BBS formation, when top ten threads on the front-page were ranked according to the number of participating IDs, astroturfing strategies were employed by users to help their favored topics "hit the top ten"(*chong shida*). Besides inviting friends to join, users employed multiple "jackets" (*majia*, i.e. alternative IDs)[7] to fabricate a crowd.[8] Moreover, as online public opinion gained public influence,[9] aggrieved petitioners, along with other online actors,[10] began using astroturfing to garner public attention, hoping to draw the attention of and/or generate pressure on media or the authorities.[11] For example, Free@TIANYA (Tianya Zatan) attracted so

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[5] The representativeness of online voices as indicators of public opinion is statistical problematic because, besides everything else, (1) not all citizens are netizens; (2) not all netizens are equally active online. But the term is used in a narrower sense here, only referring to the degree to which online voices are included in this study.

[6] Nonetheless, this has a political implication. For instance, some NEWSMTH users initiated politically sensitive topics during the midnight, not only to evade state censorship, but also to bump the post quickly into the top-ten list so as to generate bigger impact beyond the particular board.

[7] Many users create multiple accounts (each with a new username, i.e. a new ID) on a particular forum. Often, one's most frequently used and most well-recognized ID is called primary ID and all other IDs one uses are called jackets.

[8] Jacket IDs becomes so prevalent in determining the top ten list and other BBS activities that major BBSes not only were forced to change relevant rules of how top-ten topics are generated, but also started to regulate the use of jacket IDs in general. For instance, both BDWM and NEWSMTH changed the top ten ranking from ID-based to IP-based because the count of the later is much more difficult to fabricate. In addition, both sites stipulate that one person cannot own over three IDs, and extra IDs will be "killed." However, without strict enforcement of real-name registration, forums cannot practically prevent users from using jackets.

[9] For instance, see Yongnian Zheng, *Technological Empowerment: The Internet, State, and Society in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[10] Both my own observation and interviews with large commercial forum managers reveal that business astroturfing activities are rampant in Chinese cyberspace. In fact, it is a big industry and there are many online crowd-sourcing platforms like zhubajie.com on which business owners can hire astroturfers on task-bases. State media outlets have widely criticized this phenomenon. See Jing Xiaolei, "The Business of Manipulation," *Beijing Review*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (January 2011); Interview RBJ 2010-36 with a forum manager of a large commercial website at Beijing, May 6, 2010.

[11] The instrumental logic is reasonable as pointed out by contentious politics scholars like Yongshun Cai. See Yongshun Cai, "Disruptive Collective Action in the Reform Era," in Kevin O'Brien ed. *Popular Protest in China* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

many petitioners that mutual competition sometimes drove them to register multiple accounts or recruit relatives/friends to "bump their threads" (*dingtie*) and guide opinion.

Online PR tactics like astroturfing and rumor-spreading are natural weapons for disadvantaged social groups like dissidents or petitioners who have few outlets for dissent in an authoritarian regime that controls most media sources.[12] And unlike those grievances issuing from mainstream petitioners with specific and limited goals, dissident groups that challenge the legitimacy of the whole political system face a much harsher environment, forcing them to rely on low-profile and everyday forms of resistance. For instance, after the crackdown on Falungong (FLG), its underground believers have been mobilizing through tactics like posting ads on telegraph poles, writing slogans on RMB notes, or secretly distributing newspapers or CDs.

With the Great Firewall (GFW) filtering keywords and blocking suspicious IP addresses, dissidents must hide their identity to bypass censorship. Meanwhile, many forums also muffle identifiable dissident voices to avoid state repercussions. For instance, Triangle@BDWM used to explicitly refuse reposts from FLG sources like Epoch Times. Similarly, MITBBS decided to eliminate FLG materials from several boards in order to establish a legitimate mirror site for its domestic Chinese users in 2008. Besides state and management censorship, dissidents also sometimes suffer popular antipathy, making astroturfing a more effective option. For instance, FLG sources were banned on MITBBS's ChinaNews and Military boards by popular demand from users who believed that FLG sources were not credible and FLGers were trolling by flooding the boards with a huge number of posts.[13] Thus, astroturfing tactics protect dissidents' voices from state and management blacklisting, and from potential backlash among other netizens.

Dissident groups have spread their information through email spamming or via online forums, as has been documented in the RAND report *You've Got Dissent*.[14] FLG, for instance, is known for its online campaign efforts. Messages posted by FLG believers often carry certain identifying characteristics. An email that I received defaming Jiang Zemin, whose administration suppressed the spiritual group, serves as a good example.[15] The email claims that Jiang had a messy private life and had even asked for sex services during his official visit to Reno in the 1980s. Though users cannot positively identify the sender's identity, efforts to defame point towards FLG.

Dissident attempts to delegitimize the regime can be both indirect and nuanced. On Dec. 1, 2010, an article titled "Alien Visits to Earth and Astonishing Remarks of Martian Boy" was posted on ChinaNews@MITBBS, allegedly citing Pravda, official newspaper of Russian Communist Party, on a Russian boy who claimed to be a Martian. The post, written in eschatological language, claimed that the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake was punishment for a "country lacking belief," prophesied future catastrophes causing nearly a million Chinese deaths, and claimed the Martian boy was on mission to find a China-born "guiding spirit" for mankind. However, none of these points, many of which echo FLG writings, can be found in the Pravda report. In

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[12] "This report addresses the use of the Internet by Chinese dissidents, members of Falungong, Tibetan activists, and other groups and individuals in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and abroad who are regarded as subversive by the Chinese authorities." See Michael S. Chase, and James C. Mulvenon, *You've Got Dissent! (*RAND, 2002), p. 1.

[13] Even today, posts from identifiable FLG sources still invites antipathy on many forums even if they are not explicitly banned. Why netizens do not trust FLG sources is a question we do not intend to address here. Based on my observation, both state defaming propaganda and FLG's association with foreign support matters, in addition to the backlash of their own PR strategies that are discussed in this paper.

[14] Chase and Mulvenon, *You've Got Dissent!*

[15] I received the email on December 6, 2010.

addition, while the Pravda report was published as early as May 2008, the Chinese article did not start to flood the web until Dec. 2010, with the earliest version from Minghui.org, a FLG website. Also, Google search results showed that it was reposted widely on other FLG websites. The post managed to penetrate popular domestic Chinese forums like KDNET, XCAR, and KDS. Many netizens suspected the post had FLG origins.[16]

A widely-circulated post comparing Chinese and U.S. government buildings is another case of dissident astroturfing. The post juxtaposes deluxe Chinese city government buildings and austere U.S. city halls, conveying a clear and powerful message: Chinese government and officials have prioritized their own comfort over the needs of the people. Though the message might contain a kernel of truth, watchful netizens uncovered evidence of manipulation. Although the photographs of Chinese buildings were correctly identified, most of the U.S. pictures were distorted: some were simply fake, others were purposefully miniaturized, and still others were photographs from tiny cities with a thousand or so residents, not even as big as some Chinese villages.[17] Many Netizens believed this post was an astroturfing effort by overseas democratic dissidents.[18] Some believed that the same group of astroturfers also fabricated the widely circulated "RAND Opinions on the Chinese People," a falsified document which, according to Rand Corporation's disclaimer, contains "extremely negative comments about Chinese people."[19] The fabricated report was circulated so widely that RAND was forced to comment on the post and disown it.

Though we cannot draw conclusions about the degree of planning behind these online tactics, these examples suggest highly purposeful attempts at evasion by dissidents. Overseas dissent groups, including FLG, democratic movement activists, and Tibet and Xinjiang Independent movement organizations, are widely-believed to be the major actors behind such attempts. One top leader of a major website I interviewed suggested that he believed that a certain group of subversive activists were coordinating behind the scenes to manipulate online public opinion.[20] Many other interviewees also commented they would not be surprised if this was true.

Imagined Enemies and Backlash
Political astroturfing by dissident and other groups may have effectively challenged the legitimacy of the regime. Yet these efforts also generate backlash. For some netizens, they feed into state propaganda identifying "a handful" of subversive forces. Political astroturfing by regime challengers, along with the spread of online nationalism, promotes a counterespionage tale, at the heart of which is the imagination of a group of "national enemies". These enemies include both external

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[16] Some netizens did suspect that it has FLG origin. For instance, one user on XCAR replied, "fxxk, FLGer?"http://www.xcar.com.cn/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=13568953&extra=&showthread=&page=2, retrieved July 20, 2012; another netizen from KDS also says "It reads like something written by FLG." http://club.pchome.net/thread_1_15_5957312.html, retrieved July 20, 2012. Unlike Xcar, most users expressed doubt here.

[17] See "[Kaozheng] Yige Liuchuan le Hao Jinian de Huanghua Tie" ([Investigation] A Rumor that Circulated for Years), http://www.ccthere.com/topic/2690660#C2690660, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[18] In early 2011, a post titled "Old Pictures: 5-Cents Dining Together" was put up on MilitaryJoke@NEWSMTH, with pictures of the 4th Anniversary Potluck Party at Chinese Democratic Party U.S.A Headquarters. The post claims that one particular figure in the picture was an active online astroturfer ("Director Wang") and charged him for fabricating the U.S.-China government building comparison post. See "Laotu: Wumeifen Kaifan le" (Old Pictures: 5-Cents Dining Together), http://www.newsmth.net/bbscon.php?bid=1031&id=125689, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[19] Rand commented and disclaimed on this issue. See, "Comment on False Web Postings Regarding RAND Work on China," http://www.rand.org/news/announcements/2010/10/04.html, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[20] Interview RBJ 2010-32 in Beijing, April 22 2010.

hostile forces (especially western powers) and internal subversive forces, whose interests or values align with those of external enemies (for instance, dissident groups). According to counterespionage narratives, these forces are actively manipulating China's public opinion, not for the good of the Chinese people or the nation, but for their own interests, and thus should be considered espionage. Often, the believability and transmission of such narratives is enhanced by netizens' online experiences.

As demonstrated by the poem in Appendix 6.1,[21] many Chinese netizens harbor suspicion towards Western countries and believe that if they are not conspiring to undermine China's rise, they are at least seriously biased against China and its people. These suspicions are often reinforced when netizens perceive Western interference with China's domestic affairs. For instance, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's involvement in the Google withdrawal case—including her dinner with internet giants like google and twitter and her later statement on internet freedom—effectively convinced many Chinese netizens that Google was a tool of the U.S. government, and drove them to defend their government even though they also disliked censorship.[22] Similarly, U.S. Ambassador Jon Huntsman's presence at a demonstration in Beijing in February 2011 was taken as evidence of U.S. attempts to destabilize China.[23] And his remarks about reaching out to allies and constituencies within China to "take China down" immediately caught fire among Chinese netizens and were thought to be "honest" about the true hostile intentions of the U.S.[24]

Similarly, Chinese nationalism is often spurred by perceptions of bias in western media outlets. A series of events in 2008 is particularly revealing. During the Lhasa Riots in March 2008,[25] Rao Jin, a Tsinghua graduate and NEWSMTH user, set up a special platform called anti-CNN.com,[26] which compiled screenshots of distorted western coverage of the Tibet Riots. Such distortions included videos or pictures of Nepalese or Indian police forces said to be Chinese police in Lhasa,[27] cropping

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[21] It was a response to Western media coverage of 2008 Tibet Riots and was applauded by many Chinese netizens.
[22] See Cecilia Kang, "Secretary Clinton Dines with High-tech Titans to Talk Diplomacy," http://voices.washingtonpost.com/posttech/2010/01/sec_clinton_dines_high-tech_ti.html, retrieved July 20, 2012. Also see Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks on Internet Freedom," delivered at The Newseum
Washington, DC, January 21, 2010, http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/135519.htm, retrieved July 20, 2012.
[23] Mary Phillips-Sandy, "Jasmine Revolution: Jon Huntsman, Spotted at China Demonstration, Denies Involvement,"
http://www.aolnews.com/2011/02/23/jasmine-revolution-jon-huntsman-spotted-at-china-demonstration/, retrieved July 20, 2012. Also see "Tuwen + Shipin Baoliao: Meiguo Dashi Qinfu Wangfujing Wei 'Dailu dang' Zhuwei Daqi!" (Text, Pictures and Video Reports: The U.S. Ambassador Showed Up on Wangfujing Street to Encourage 'Road-Leading Party' ！   ), http://bbs.m4.cn/viewthread.php?tid=301579&rpid=4155507&ordertype=0&page=30#pid4155507,   retrieved October 20, 2011.
[24] Huntsman made the statement at the South Carolina Republican 2012 Presidential Debate. For Chinese netizens reactions, see "Wokao, Hong Peibo Huochuqu le" (Holy Shit! Huntsman Has Thrown Caution to the Wind), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military/36740857.html, retrieved November 15, 2011; "Qianren Zhuhua Dashi Jingxuan Bushen Xielou Tianji: Mei Zaici Chengba Yaokao 'Zhongguo Neibu de Mengyou'" (Former Ambassador to China Released Top Secrets Unintentionally: The U.S. Should Rely on 'Allies inside China' to Re-establish Hegemony), http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMzIyODA4MDQ4.html, retrieved November 15, 2011; "Hong Bopei – Meiguo Jiang Jiezhu Zhongguo Wangmin de Liliang lai Jikui Zhongguo"(Jon Huntsman: The U.S. Will Topple   China   with   Assistance   from   Chinese   Netizens), http://www.newsmth.net/bbstcon.php?board=MilitaryJoke&gid=174754, retrieved July 20, 2012; "Hong Peibo: Women Yao he Zhongguo Neibu de Mengyou Yiqi Yindao Zhongguo de Biange" (Jon Huntsman: We Should Guide China's Reform with Allies inside China), http://www.ccthere.com/article/3610243, retrieved July 20, 2012.
[25] Wei Cheng, "Shui shi Xizang Saoluan Zhong de Shujia?" (Who Loses in the Tibet Riots?), see http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001018283, retrieved July 20, 2012.
[26] The platform later evolved into a larger and more comprehensive nationalistic website called April Youth Media (m4.cn).
[27] According to anti-CNN.com, such media outlets include n-tv.de, bild.de, rtlaktuell.de, N24, Washington post, and FOX News.

photos to misguide readers,[28] mistaking rescue efforts as suppression,[29] and other direct manipulations of online opinion.[30] These reports assisted Chinese netizens in "[imagining] the western world as a collective that has shared perceptions, shared distortions and shared biases towards China," as a Chinese public intellectual Liang Wendao put it.[31]

During these incidents, netizens not only criticized such reports, but also mobilized to persuade western audiences. One MITBBS user posted a long summary of Mark A. Jones's debate with a pro-Tibet lobbyist as an example of how to effectively communicate and win over westerners.[32] Numerous such materials were circulated on Chinese forums like TIANYA, NEWSMTH, and MITBBS to facilitate the spread of Chinese voices. These efforts took on an even bigger role than the state propaganda machine in publicly defending China's policy in Tibet. In addition, they demonstrated that coverage by the western media can generate considerable backlash, sometimes mobilizing Chinese netizens against the West even more effectively than the Chinese state.

Also in 2008, not long after the Tibet riots, Chinese netizens rallied patriotically during the Olympic torch relay. To show support for the nation, MITBBS users even donated airfare for those flying from other areas to San Francisco to follow the torch on its U.S. leg.[33] There, they were irritated to find that protesters received far more media coverage than the far larger crowds that gathered in support of China. Furthermore, CNN commentator and host, Jack Cafferty's careless comment – "I think they're basically the same bunch of goons and thugs they've been for the last 50 years" – further infuriated Chinese netizens, who cited his remark as another manifestation of the western media's stubborn anti-Chinese bias.[34]

In addition to the West, major dissident groups are also commonly portrayed as enemies of the nation or surrogates for hostile foreign powers. Accounts of dissident groups engineering online public opinion are perceived by many netizens as interfering with China's development, thus it is justified for both netizens and the regime to counter dissident efforts, even by censorship. In fact, the popular perception that democratic activists, FLG, and separatists (Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang Independent movements) are part of a joint force coordinated by the U.S. and other western powers is widespread. Rumors that Wang Dan (a 1989 student leader) received money from Taiwan's DPP administration are frequently cited as evidence of overseas democratic activists colluding with separatist movements.[35] Furthermore,

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[28] CNN cropped a picture by cutting off the half that depicts Tibetans throwing stones at a truck.

[29] Berliner and BBC mistook an ambulance bus for police bus.

[30] Youtube.com is said to have reduced the view counts of a Chinese nationalistic video titled "Tibet Was and Is and Always Be Part of China" from 27,698 to 328 times.

[31] Liang Wendao, "Zai Fanhua Langchao yu Kuangre Minzu Zhuyi Zhijian" (Between China-Bashing and Frenetic Nationalism), http://www.univs.cn/newweb/univs/hust/2008-04-27/837018.html, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[32] "Zongjie Pian— Du Mark A. Jones he Zangdu Bianlun Yougan" (Summary: Reflections after Reading How Mark A. Jones Debated with Tibet Independent Supporters), http://www.mitbbs.com/pc/pccon_2306_36397.html, retrieved April 23, 2008.

[33] See "Lingqu Buzhu Shouxu Liucheng [4 Yue 24 Ri Gengxin Zanzhu Jipiao Feiyong $11777.41 Meiyuan Juankuan]" (Procedure to Claim the Subsidies [April 24th Update: Donated Airfare Funding $11777.41]) http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/SanFrancisco/31296057.html, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[34] Cafferty made that comment on the April 9, 2008 broadcast of CNN's *The Situation Room*. This resulted in offline protests against CNN and an official apology from CNN. See: David Pierson, "Protesters gather at CNN," http://articles.latimes.com/print/2008/apr/20/local/me-cnn20, retrieved July 20, 2012; Alexi Mostrous, "CNN Apologises to China over 'Thugs and Goons' Comment by Jack Cafferty," http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article3756437.ece, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[35] "Wangdan zai Fating Chengren: Shoudao Chen Shui-Bian de 40 Wan Meiyuan" (Wang Dan Confesses in Court: He Received USD 400,000 from Chen Shui-bian) http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military/35644205.html, retrieved April 15, 2011; "Wang A-Dan Na le Chen A-Bian 40 Wan Meijin" (Wang A-Dan Took USD 400,000

the awarding of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo generated similar backlash among nationalistic netizens. The Noble laureate was accused of "taking money from the National Endowment of Democracy," supporting US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and demeaning China by making statements like "It would take 300 years of colonization for China to become what Hong Kong is today."[36]

The perception of online dissent as a threat to national interests has soured many netizens on the democratization movement that sprung up in the 1980s. Many netizens perceive democratic activists as being manipulated by external hostile forces, and blame them for being too stubborn to compromise in 1989, for leaving fellow students behind while fleeing, and for benefiting from the bloody post-1989 crackdown by leaving China and living an easy life overseas. Such factors, in combination with factional struggles with the movement, have convinced many netizens that democratic activists are not a viable alternative to the CCP.[37]

This legacy became evident during the recent Jasmine revolution. After the democratic activist, Wang Juntao, posted a tweet suggesting that well-known democratic activists stay at home to avoid repression,[38] he triggered a wave of jeers aimed at democratic activists. Ranxiang, a popular micro-blogger who calls herself the "Chair of the fifty-cent party",[39] posted a series of satiric entries which were then re-tweeted by fellow micro-bloggers and widely circulated in major forums[40]:

"… Let democratic elites go first and you should hide behind them,"[41]

and

"Most democratic elites have enjoyed fruits of China's reform and opening up and led a good life, so they should be on the forefront and die for their cause; we common people haven't had enough good days and cannot die for now. What's more, your death is different from an elite's death: yours is as light as a swan feather and theirs is as weighty as Mount Tai."[42]

These passages depict democratic activists as cowards who selfishly risk common people's lives for their own agenda. This reminds many netizens of Chai Ling, one of the most noted student leaders of the 1989 Tian'anmen movement, who said "you, the Chinese, you are not worth my struggle! You are not worth my sacrifice!"[43]

In online forums, it is not just dissident groups who are constructed as internal enemies. Pro-democracy liberal intellectuals, opinion leaders and media professionals are also lumped together and grouped as "elites" (*jingying*) and "universalists" (*pushi pai*) or sometimes "universal elites" (*pushi jingying*).

"…if bloody revolution happens, you must remember that your life is most important. Don't

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from Chen A-Bian) http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military/35642545.html, retrieved April 15, 2011.

[36] This accounts for his online nickname "Liu 300." In fact, military board of MITBBS added a sticky post (pinned on the top of the page) titled "NED 2009 Asia Program Highlights", which is not unpinned until April 29th 2011.

[37] Ironically, such dissuasion mechanism is more prevalent on forums outside China, partly because the state bans discussions on these groups.

[38] See twitter entry of Wang Juntao, http://twitter.com/#!/juntaowang/status/42472321251942401, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[39] Netizens later discovered that it is a group behind this ID who want to attract public attention through controversial online expressions. However, this will not affect our analysis here because the concern is not the expressions per se, but rather their popularity.

[40] The message was forwarded to all major forums within my radar like Tianya.cn, newsmth.net, mitbbs.com, ccthere.com, and m4.cn. Also see "Tuwen + Shipin Baoliao"; "Haishi Kankan Ranxiang de Dianjing Zhiyu" (Let's See Ranxiang's Perceptive Comments Again), http://www.here4news.com/article/3298313, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[41] See Ranxiang's micro-blog, http://t.sina.com.cn/1671042153/5KD0VOr8xB9, retrieved March 3, 2011.

[42] See Ranxiang's micro-blog, http://t.sina.com.cn/1654592030/60L0VOrqCZg, retrieved March 3, 2011.

[43] Carma Hinton and Richard Gordon, *Tiananmen: The Gate of Heavenly Peace* (Long Bow Group, Inc, 1995). The excerpt from the documentary cleared had a negative impact on Chai Ling's image. Many view that as her excuse to escape, and many believe that it was the stubbornness of her and a few others that led to the suppression.

trust those *elites* who talk about liberty above everything… Those with most adamant revolutionary will like *Zhang Ming, Li Chengpeng, Huang Jianxiang, Xia Yeliang, Tu Fu, Zhanjiang, and Sanren* should be on the forefront..."[44]

The 'elites' listed here are all public intellectuals, media professionals, or online opinion leaders who are known for their "universalist" stance. Given their influence on online public opinion, some netizens are justifiably wary about their motivations. For instance, during the Egypt turmoil, popular playwright and micro-blog celebrity Ning Caishen posted an entry reporting that his friends were stuck in Cairo due to slow and inefficient evacuation by the Chinese Embassy. The message was re-tweeted over 28000 times before it was deleted. When he re-tweeted it three hours later to clarify his overreaction and acknowledged the embassy's work, it was only forwarded only 491 times in three weeks.[45] The contrast not only shows how online criticism of the government is easily viral and difficult to neutralize, it also convinced many netizens that "black hands" (*mushou heishou*) are manipulate online opinion for subversive purposes.[46] In another case, Li Chengpeng, Zhang Ming and Huang Jianxiang were caught re-tweeting a post claiming that the biggest corruption case in the U.S. history involved only 25,000 dollars. Li's re-tweet alone was forwarded over 2971 times by his followers, few of which actually doubted the claim.[47] But critical netizens, while acknowledging China's corruption problem, correctly cast doubt on the figure and also took the tweet as evidence of opinion leaders irresponsibly inciting subversion and anti-government sentiment by overstating the honesty of U.S officials.[48]

Many netizens also believe that mainstream media groups are motivated by a covertly subversive agenda. The Southern Clique (*Nanfang Xi*),[49] named after the daring and outspoken Southern Media Group which is known for its daring and

[44] See wusuonanyang's micro-blog, http://t.sina.com.cn/1671042153/5en0VNP4PIl. The entry has been deleted when the author attempted to re-visit it on November 14, 2011.

[45] See "The Impact of a Celebrity Microblogger" http://www.zonaeuropa.com/201101a.brief.htm#037, retrieved July 20, 2012. Normally his forward counts range from dozens to a few hundreds. He also forwarded the announcement from Embassy, which was forwarded only 533 times in three weeks. The message was posted on Jan 30, 2011 and 533 times was counted on February 21, 2011. Ning himself felt regret and decided to avoid political discussions when possible. Yang Tingting, "Ningcaishen: Aiji Nashier Huisi Wo le!" (Ningcaishen: That Egypt Thing Really Ruined Me!), http://www.eeo.com.cn/Business_lifes/wenhua/2011/02/17/193600.shtml, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[46] See "Xiang Zhidao Yulun, Zhenxiang Zenme Zaochulai he Chuanbo de me?" (Do You Want to Know How Public Opinion and Truth Are Fabricated and Circulated?), http://www.newsmth.net/bbstcon.php?board=MilitaryJoke&gid=129800, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[47] "The Biggest Corruption Case In American History," see: http://www.zonaeuropa.com/201102a.brief.htm#029, retrieved July 20, 2012. In fact, I randomly checked latest 200 replies, less than 20 directly challenged this claim and was flooded with echoing messages. See Li Chengpeng's micro-blog, http://t.sina.com.cn/1189591617/5en0TsZ7hN6, retrieved April 30, 2011.

[48] "Wumanlanjiang Jiancai Meihua Miguo Tanfu An Bei Jiechuan Dalian" (Wumanlanjiang's Face Being Slapped for Cropping and Beautifying Corruption Case in the U.S.), http://xinu.jinbushe.org/index.php?doc-view-2757, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[49] Some netizens nicknames Southern Clique as Southern Lizard (Nanfang Xi), see "Shenshou Xinpian: Nanfang Xi" (New Holly Animals: Southern Lizard), http://www.ccthere.com/article/2841932, retrieved July 20, 2012. Netizens even created an entry of a Chinese Wikipedia-like website. See http://www.hudong.com/wiki/南方蜥, retrieved July 20, 2012. According to the entry, Southern Lizards live near the Tencent Jungle on the Southern part of Ma-le Dessert (*Male Gebi*, which is a dirty pun in Chinese). South Lizards have scales that can change color for camouflage. They attract insects and small animals with a particular "Pussy, Pussy" sound (mocking "universal value" here). The sound attracts a particular type of fly, elite fly, most ("Elite fly" is homonym of "elite" in Chinese). Southern Lizards have a strange capacity. When they encounter predators, Southern Lizards can drive little insects like elite flies to attack predators while they themselves would flee quickly. Southern Lizards have sharp teeth with strong poison and like drinking persimmon oil (persimmon oil in Chinese means Shiyou, sounds like Ziyou, i.e. freedom). So there are people who cook persimmon oil raising Southern Lizards, threatening that they would let Southern Lizards bite to death anyone who dislikes persimmon oil.

outspoken reports as well as a pro-democratic and liberal standpoint, is often singled out as an typical example.[50] The so-called Clique is a loose grouping of media outlets and professionals that are either affiliated with the Southern Media Group or used to work with the group. One former Southern Media journalist I interviewed confirmed the group's tendency to report on "issues related to the public interest, especially government misbehavior."[51] The Southern Media Group's critical stance is a major part of its reputation and well respected among many readers. Yet it also invites criticism both from nationalist factions and from politically neutral netizens suspicious of any attempt to guide public opinion. In fact, Southern Clique is frequently charged online with "smuggling in its own values and beliefs in reports" and 'brainwashing' the public.[52] The blog entry in Appendix 6.2 claiming that Southern Clique has occupied China's major online media portals only further validates netizens' belief that the Group is engaged in a subversive conspiracy, especially given its reputed disdain for non-liberal viewpoints (also see Appendix 6.3).[53]

Such negative views of the media are only reinforced when reports contain misleading factual errors. For instance, after the Polish President's plane crashed in April 2010, QQ (which is popularly believed to be part of Nanfang Clique) praised the frugality of the Polish government for only owning one plane. This detail immediately caught netizens' attention and online accusations of extravagance and waste in Chinese government spending followed. Suspicious fact-checkers, however, soon found that Poland actually has two Tu-154s, four Yak-40s, and a number of helicopters for its leaders. Once fact-checkers publicized these errors, netizens accused the Southern Clique of deliberately manipulating public opinion to serve its own interests, or at least being blinded by its predispositions.[54]

The social construction of enemies through online discourse evokes strong emotions. When Southern Weekend was the only media granted an interview with President Obama during his 2009 China visit, nationalistic netizens perceived this as a reward for American agents. When the interview was printed, Southern Weekend left its front page half blank (*kai tianchuang*) under the Obama interview as a protest against state censorship. The action, while applauded by pro-liberal netizens, was viewed by their nationalistic counterparts as a public humiliation, defaming China by begging for foreign intervention in Chinese domestic affairs.[55] Similarly, online

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[50] This echoes Lagerkvist's observation on *Southern Weekend* as a major driving force of investigative reports in China. See Lagerkvist, *After the Internet, Before Democracy*, chapter 3

[51] Interview RBE 2011-54 with a former *Southern Metropolis* Journalist at Berkeley on February 11, 2011. It is interesting that media professionals or people who had worked in the media sector I interviewed all demonstrate similar tendency. This may be because of their professional ethic. See Interview RBE 2008-02, with a former journalist at Guangzhou Daily group at Berkeley, October 25, 2008; Interview RBJ 2009-08, with a former journalist at Beijing, January 9, 2009; Interview OBE 2010-52, phone interview with junior faculty member at a communication school, who was a former CCTV reporter, September 4, 2010.

[52] An example of such a conflict can be: "Lvshi Zhangxian: Nanfang ZM Quan Women Busha Yao Jiaxin" (Lawyer Zhang Xian: Southern Weekend Try to Persuade Us Not to Pursue Yao Jiaxin's Death Penalty), http://www.newsmth.net/bbstcon.php?board=Reader&gid=495482, retrieved April 11, 2011.

[53] For many netizens, it is ironic here as self-identified liberalists are not practicing freedom of expression, but rather trying to suppress different voices with managerial power.

[54] For instance, See "Tengxun Shexian Paozhi Jia Xinwen: Sanpian Bolan Zongtong Zhuiji Fangtan Yidoucongsheng" (Tencent Allegedly Fabricated Facts: Three of Its Interviews on Polish President's Plane Crash Are Suspicious), http://lt.cjdby.net/thread-906493-1-1.html, retrieved April 14, 2010; "Lian ge Bolan Zongtong Zhuiji Dou Youren Nong Jia Xinwen" (Someone Even Fabricate Facts on Polish President's Plane Crash), http://www.newsmth.net/bbstcon.php?board=MilitaryJoke&gid=87874, retrieved April 13, 2010.

[55] "Opening a blank window" (*kai tianchuang*) means leaving a space on a page blank. The implicit message is that information is being left out or covered up. Printing a blank page is thus is widely understood as a gesture of protest against censorship. For an English report, see Chris Buckley, "China Demotes Editor after Obama Interview: Sources,"

discourse surrounding a case in which perpetrator Yao Jiaxin stabbed a woman to death, strengthened netizens' imagining of a pro-western media. The victim's lawyer released a micro-blog claiming that a Nanfang journalist tried to dissuade him from pursuing severe charges against Yao in order to promote the abolition of the death penalty in China and numerous netizens became incensed at a purported pro-liberal media infiltrated by "pussy" (yes, they used the English word! The word has a similar pronunciation to the Chinese word for universalism, i.e. *pushi*) western values "sympathetic to the killer but not the victim."

Two Tales: A Multiple-Player Model of Online Discourse Competition
Online PR practices like astroturfing by both the state and its challengers have exacerbated confusion and distrust among netizens. On one hand, as discussed in Chapter 5, many netizens are wary of state PR efforts to cover up failures and manipulate public opinion. In this framing, online discourse competition can be viewed as a story of netizens defending their freedoms against state censorship and manipulation. On the other hand, the above discussion demonstrates popular suspicion of mass opinion engineering efforts by dissident groups and other regime challengers. This promotes a view of online discourse competition pitting pro-state netizens against online anti-China actors. These two views present distinctive perspectives. Netizens either see themselves as freedom-loving fighters—allied to a degree with dissidents, other suppressed domestic actors, and foreign powers pushing for China's liberalization—struggling against state agents and brainwashed regime-defenders, or as patriots allied with the state against subversive actors, including netizens 'brainwashed' by media bias.

Table 6.1: Labeling Wars

	Two Stories Netizens Buy		
	Freedom-struggle Tale		Counterespionage Tale
Labels they use against opponents	Fifty cents army (*wumao dang*, i.e. state-sponsored online commentators)	vs.	Net-spies (wangte, foreign agents), US Cents (meifen dang), dailu dang (road-leading party, see appendix 6.4), or gouliang dang (dog-food party)
	Angry youth (fengqin)	vs.	Elites (jingying)
	Patriotic traitor (aiguo zei)	vs.	Universalists (pushipai) or western slaves (xinu)
	Little red guards (xiaojiang)	vs.	Old generals (laojiang)
	…	vs.	…

In anonymous online discussions, both framings reveal anxiety about the political stance and true identity of others netizens. Widespread netizen engagement in labeling wars, which I define as *rivalries between online users who perpetuate online rhetorical violence by applying humiliating labels to each other*, demonstrates netizens' anxiety about each other's identity and positions. Binary us-vs.-them labels, as shown in Table 6.1, reflect competing framings of online discourse without denoting clearly defined or self-conscious group identities. These labels often intentionally carry negative connotations and may even contain offensive terminology. For instance, in place of the Chinese character 愤 (angry) in angry youth, its homonym 粪 (shit) is often used. Similarly, universalism and universalists are often

called "pussies" (pronunciation similar to the Chinese term 普世). These confrontations often only reinforce netizens' existing biases and trap both sides into identities that they are incapable of escaping. This devolution of labeling wars into conflicts between opposed binary parties comes up again in the next chapter, in the discussion of the "voluntary fifty cents army."

Appendix 6.5 shows an example of a dialogue typical in labeling wars. The thread captured from MITBBS was initiated by Icecool1748, who was called a Xiaojiang (little red guard). Icecool1748 used a satiric tone to deride FLG practitioners who, after destroying their Chinese passports upon arrival in the U.S. as a plea for political asylum status, were neither admitted to the U.S. nor re-issued passports by the Chinese embassy. Benchmark, a Laojiang (old general) known for his anti-CCP stance, replied immediately, jeering that icecool1748 might end up practicing FLG (to stay in the U.S.) because he had not found a job. Icecool1748's follow up reply implied that Benchmark was a traitor and loser by labeling him as an NED agent. In return, Benchmark charged icecool1748 with being a party-state proxy. As more users became involved, the discussion quickly devolved into mutual attacks between Xiaojiang and Laojiang, who blamed each other for being cheap, trashy, and selling their souls to either the party-state or foreign enemies.

This kind of mutual antagonism sometimes escalates. For instance, a Laojiang user skyrabbit showed his hatred towards two Xiaojiang "aspec" and "WPF" by nicknaming himself "aspec is a bastard and WPF is a Son of Bitch."[56] Such hatred sometimes drives personal attacks to a vitriolic level: an alleged Laojiang cursed some Xiaojiang from MITBBS and another overseas Chinese forum 6park.com (implying that he was active on both forums) by creating an online graveyard. And on each of the gravestones in the graveyard was written: "The grave of Son of Bitch Fifty-Cent-Dog XXX@YYY (ID@forum)'s stinky bitch mother, who died of AIDS." Below that was the PRC national flag with the stars replaced by the Chinese character Mao (毛) to symbolize the "fifty cents army." And on the left and right margins of the gravestone were a pair of couplets saying "Listen to the Party, serve as the Party's dog and pretend to be a human and yell out" and "Bite whoever the Party wants you to bite and bite as many times as is ordered".[57]

In contrast, like-minded users interact much more amicably among themselves, for purposes of both exchanging ideas and performative expression. Sharing similar values and opinions, these users sometimes ridicule discussions like cross talk masters chiming back and forth to each other. Take Appendix 6.5 as an example again. WPF asked whether unsuccessful FLG asylum-seekers without valid passports might have to stay underground for their entire lives. Another user, withoutacar, quickly replied that he shouldn't worry about this because the US government respects human rights. Following that, WPF asked, "Won't illegal immigrants be thrown in jail?" Withoutacar then explained his logic: illegal immigrants would be thrown in jail,

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[56] Skyrabbit's political inclination as a "laojiang" is not only shown in his posts, but also through his avatar: an uglified-picture of CCP Leader Hu Jintao. See a screenshot of the skyrabbit's avatar and nickname.

skyrabbit
[回复] [回信给作者] [本篇全文] [本讨论区] [修改] [删除] [转寄] [转贴] [收藏] [举报]
发信人: skyrabbit (aspec是杂种，WPF是SB), 信区: Military2
标　题: zz沈飞惨遭T馆 (转载)
发信站: BBS 未名空间站 (Wed Jan 12 01:38:18 2011, 美东)
进入未名形象秀
【 以下文字转载自 Military 讨论区 】
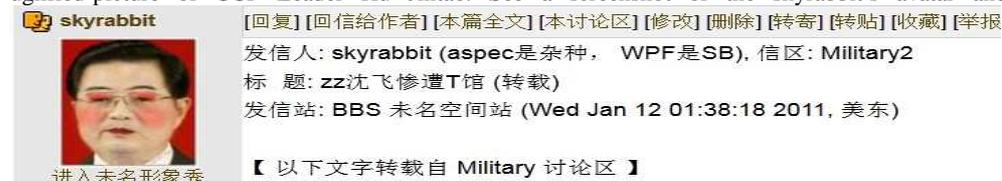
http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military2/119803.html, retrieved February 12, 2011.
[57] See "Biantai Laojiang Zhenshi Xiaoshun Ah, Kuailai Weiguann Laojiang Gei Wolao Gaode Mudi" (The Psychopathic Laojiang is So Filial-hearted: Come and Have a Look at the Graveyard Laojiang Built for Me), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military/35674583.html, retrieved April 20, 2011.

where food and accommodation are provided, thus demonstrating U.S. human rights. Such a dialogue clearly distorts the concept of "human rights" and it makes little sense unless viewed as a purposeful performative behavior through which a common identity is strengthened and rival netizens are mocked.

Two tales of online discourse are both reflected in the labeling wars. In Xiaojiang's eyes, the Laojiang group includes democratic activists, wheels (*lunzi*, FLG practitioners), traitors, the lead-the-way party (*dailu dang*, those would lead the way for foreign invaders) and their supporters;[58] For Laojiang, Xiaojiang are either the "fifty cents army" or angry youth brainwashed by the party-state. In fact, Laojiang have created a list of accused "fifty cents army" on MITBBS，most of whom are identified as Xiaojiang. Similarly, Xiaojiang have made efforts to identify China-betrayers (*hanjian*) on MITBBS. The confrontation spills over to the struggle for forum management: board managers of ChinaNews and Military are frequently criticized for taking one side while suppressing the other.[59]

Though examples here are primarily from MITBBS, similar phenomena happen on almost all major forums both inside and outside China, to different degrees and with minor variations in the labels netizens use.[60] However, whatever labels are deployed, the same dyadic pattern holds: netizens on both sides, either intentionally or unintentionally, seek moral positionality in a binary frame by claiming they are speaking for the people, or on behalf of the truth, and blaming the other side for immorality, insincerity, or serving as either state or foreign agents. Given the different frames, netizens often resort to distinctive norms and facts in their debate, thus making online discussions unconstructive, with netizens speaking to themselves but rarely interacting across opposing frameworks.[61]

The two framings complicate the story of discourse competition on Chinese forums beyond the dominant focus of the literature on the narrative of struggle against monolithic state repression. As I will show, a complex, dynamic process of persuasion and dissuasion involving multiple actors with diverse orientations, norms and values, permeates both frames.

Complications to the Multi-Player Model

The 2011 Japanese earthquake provides a chance to examine the complicated mechanisms at work in online discourse competition. After the quake, Chinese nationalism and anti-Japanese sentiment were stimulated by Japanese netizens, whose cynical reactions to China's assistance were translated and widely circulated on Chinese forums.[62] This was unexpected by a number of actors, including the

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[58] "Yiding Yao Daji Yaoyan Beihou de Laojiang, Minyun, Dailu Dang" (We Must Strike Old Generals, Democratic Activists and Road-Leading Party behind Those Rumors), http://www.mitbbs.com/article/Military/35464931_3.html, retrieved April 20, 2011.

[59] "[Tousu] Zhongguo Xinwen Banzhu Houzinv（monkeylady) Gongkai Mark Renshen Gongji de Wenzhang" ([Complaint]: ChinaNews Board Manager monkeylady Marks Personal Attack Posts), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Complain/31268871.html, retrieved April 20, 2011. She also initiated threads like "Dajia Shuoshuo Zhunbei Zenme Qingsuan Gongchandang ba" (Let's Discuss How Would You Prepare to Even up Debts with CCP) (http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Complain/31268871.html, retrieved April 20, 2011), and changed the board icon into a picture of Aiweiwei in April 2011. So many MITBBS users view her as an implant of laojiang.

[60] One major difference between forums in and outside GFW is the scope of discussion: taboo issues like FLG or democratic movements are more freely discussed (condemned or championed) on overseas forums, they are virtually absent on forums within GFW unless in a veiled manner.

[61] Yong Hu, *Zhongsheng Xuanhua: Wangluo Shidai de Geren Biaoda yu Gonggong Talun* (*The Rising Cacophony: Personal Expression and Public Discussion in the Internet Age*) (Nanning: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008).

[62] "Shuiyao Zaigei Xiao Riben Juankuan, Wo Duo le Ta! (Zhuanzai)" (Whoever Donates to Japanese, I Will Chop

governments and many netizens from both countries.[63] Chinese netizens were obviously not the intended audience when Japanese netizens expressed their views. Yet, the whole process traces to a chain reaction that actually started much earlier from Chinese media projecting a largely negative image of China for its domestic audience, which then filtered overseas (Terms used by Japanese netizens, like "poisonous milk powder" (*du naifen*) and "paper-filling buns" (*zhi baozi*), were all first disclosed by the Chinese media). This image reinforced Japanese netizens' already negative impressions of China owing to a longstanding historical animosity and territorial disputes. So when Chinese responded to the earthquake and tsunami with good intentions,[64] some Japanese netizens revealed their distrust online, which then was translated into Chinese and circulated on Chinese forums. The contrast between Chinese good intentions and Japanese hostility reinforced the image of an ungrateful Japan and reminded Chinese netizens of unpleasant historical experiences.[65] Through such complicated multi-actor dynamics, the impression of external hostility was strengthened, adding credibility to the counterespionage narrative.

In addition, both the freedom-struggle and counterespionage tales may backfire, further complicating our model. Chinese netizens' mixed responses to Google's withdrawal from China provide a good example. Though many framed it as a counterespionage story by imagining the company as a tool of the U.S. government,[66] Chinese netizens in general were divided on this issue. When one CCTHERE user (User A), a website developer, expressed his sympathy for Google and dissatisfaction with state censorship, he was immediately criticized for being hijacked by Google.

> "… This shows that "doggy" (a slighting homophone of Google) has already abducted some of our nationals. No wonder "doggy" feels confident to challenge *tugong* (pet name of CCP). Mrs. Clinton is now on front to take charge and "doggy" cannot even quit the game now. Propping up compradors, cultivating elites and hijacking public opinion, imperialist America has numerous means and is indeed the No. 1 Empire…."[67]

Obviously infuriated, User A replied,

> "All right! I am a comprador. I am elite. I am a fifth column agent planted in China by imperialists. I am the gun used by others. I have been manipulated and abducted. I should not

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Him! (forwarded)), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Stock/33405813.html, retrieved April 12, 2011; "Zhongguo Juanzeng Bengche Hou Riben Wangmin de Fanying" (Reactions from Japanese Netizens After China Donated Pump Vehicles to Japan), http://club.china.com/data/thread/1011/2723/93/31/8_1.html, retrieved July 20, 2012; "[Shishi Jujiao] Zhongguo Bengche Zao Baiyan" ([News Focus] Japanese Disdained Pump Vehicles Donated by China (forwarded)), http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/worldlook/1/333008.shtml, retrieved July 20, 2012; "Riben Wangmin Ruhe Pingjia Zhongguo Juankuan?" (How Japanese Netizens Responded to Chinese Donation?), http://tieba.baidu.com/f?kz=1029009252, retrieved July 20, 2012.

[63] This very fact also demonstrates that the state and elites have lost the monopoly power (through traditional media) in shaping people's imagination of the outside world. Mainstream media used to shape the public's imagination of other countries (or "facts" in broader sense), but the internet has provided alternative sources of information.

[64] This may not be the only mechanism at work. In fact, as soon as the earthquake happens, some Chinese netizens proposed not to help Japan by invoking unpleasant historical memories about Sino-Japanese relations. See "Xiezai He Chen'ai Shangwei Luoding de Shike" (At This Time When Nuclear Dust Is Still in the Air), www.here4news.com/article/3326816, retrieved July 20, 2012. The post received over 3000 flowers (an icon indicating support) the time I retrieved, ranking top 3 in the website's history.

[65] See "Xiezai He Chen'ai Shangwei Luoding de Shike"; "Shuiyao Zaigei Xiao Riben Juankuan."

[66] "Google Fangyan Tuichu Zhongguo, Xilali Yeshi Muhou Tuishou?" (Google Declares Withdrawal from China, Is Hillary Also Pushing behind the Scene), http://bbs.m4.cn/thread-217242-1-1.html; "Google Shitu Yaoxie Zhongguo? Baigong Shitu Zhengzhihua Google?" (Google Attempts to Blackmail China? The White House Attempts to Politicizes Google?), http://bbs.m4.cn/thread-217168-1-1.html. Similar threads are circulated on the forums I have been observing, including Tianya.cn, mitbbs.com, newsmth.net, ccthere.com.

[67] "Yuanlai Gougou Yijing Bangjia le Yixie Guoren~" (So Google Has Already Hijacked Some of Our Compatriots), http://www.ccthere.com/article/2654701, retrieved July 20, 2012.

have spoken my grievances because behind me stands the imperialism. I should not have raised opinions towards website management because I am fooled, brainwashed, with my mind full of institutions and rules. .... For small potatoes in the country like me, does it mean I am manipulated and attempt to attack the government when I talk about housing demolition? Does it mean I side with western environmental fascists and attempt to attack the government when I talk about environmental protection? Does it mean I bind myself with American imperialists and attempt to attack the government when I talk about internet governance and sympathize with Google? Does it mean I attempt to stimulate riots, create trouble and point the spear towards the government when I sympathize with petitioning masses? Standing on the commanding heights of "For the rise of China" and criticizing others is easy. Others are deceived or manipulated, if not driven by bad intentions... [P]lease don't categorize me as being manipulated, abducted, or ignorant. I have my own judgment and thoughts."[68]

While the counterespionage framing may help persuade some netizens to adopt a nationalistic stance, this response demonstrates how irritated neitzens can become when portrayed as an "enemy." User A's background as a web developer matters too[69] Google not only provides services that benefit internet users, but also has been a role model for IT professionals. Its withdrawal from China and slogan "Do no evil' shine as symbols of refusal to cooperate with the unpopular censorship regime. Meanwhile, what dissuaded netizens from further nationalistic mobilization were widespread rumors about how baidu.com, the Chinese search engine giant gained market share through unfair competition and cooperation with regime censorship objectives.

Conclusion:
This chapter demonstrates how purported regime-challengers, like western powers, anti-regime dissident groups, and even pro-liberal intellectuals and media professionals can suffer from a loss of credibility as well as the state. Though the perception of these regime-challengers by many netizens may be unfair, erroneous or based on stereotypes, some netizens imagine a group of enemies and believe a counterespionage tale about their opponents has merit.

This suggests a more complicated picture of the "uneasy social contract on control and freedom"[70] than Lagerkvist suggests. Netizens' passive support of the regime is not an example of "seeking psychological coherence for the current political status quo," but represents a coherent and solid logic: netizens may support a pro-state political discourse not because the state is doing well (persuasion), but because its opponents are doing worse (dissuasion). For many netizens who buy the counterespionage tale, the party-state is a "necessary evil" for defending national interests and delivering prosperity and regime challengers have failed to prove themselves as a viable alternative.

Imagining enemies is a process through which netizens integrate fragmented and unsystematic pieces of information to form a stereotype. This is often done in a collective manner through interactions among like-minded netizens who echo each other in online discussions and form small colonies in cyberspace. In such colonies, netizens share common values, adopt the same set of behavior codes, and interact to sustain a certain preferred discourse. And through repeated interactions with comrades,

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[68] "Meicuo, Wo Shi Maiban, Wo Shi Jingying, Woshi Diguozhuyi Fang Zhongguo de Diwu Zhongdui" (All Right! I Am a Comprador. I Am Elite. I Am a Fifth Column Agent Planted in China by Imperialists), http://www.ccthere.com/article/2654783, retrieved July 20, 2012.
[69] "Kuai Yinian le, Huitou Kankan Zhiqian Ziji Fa de Zhepian Tiezi, Yi You Shenme Fenlu Gan le" (Almost a Year Now, When Read This Post Again, I Am No Longer Angry), http://www.ccthere.com/article/3222301, retrieved July 20, 2012. This may be the reason why the majority of small websites managers sided with Google according to my observation on platforms for IT professionals, like ITExpress@NEWSMTH and Admin5.
[70] Lagerkvist, *After the Internet*, pp. 265-267.

common memory of online experiences is constructed and collective identity is strengthened. The next chapter will examine the formation and maintenance of online communities by focusing on the so-called the "voluntary fifty cents army." If in this chapter, I have emphasized the process in which netizens constructed a counterespionage framing to understand online discourse competition, studying the "voluntary fifty cents army" highlights their identity formation, community building and discourse production through repeated interactions among themselves as well as against imagined enemies.

Chapter 7
Defending the Authoritarian Regime:
The "Voluntary Fifty Cents Army"

In chapter 5, I examined how the Chinese state has turned to internet commentators, popularly named "fifty cents army" (*wumao dang*) to produce pro-state online commentary. These astroturfing efforts have tended to backfire when netizens investigate and disseminate knowledge about them, engendering pandemic online criticism of the state and its "fifty cents army" agents. However, struggles over control in the competitive terrain of online discourse are not binary interactions between state agents and those representing "society." Chapter 6 argued that through imagining "online enemies of the Chinese nation," a constituency of netizens has been persuaded by an anti-sabotage framing that depicts regime challengers and their sympathizers as saboteurs of the nation rather than freedom fighters. This suggests a multi-actor model of online discussions in a cyberspace that includes fragmented netizen constituencies.

This chapter explores the fragmentary politics of online discussion by looking at online communities, especially the group of "voluntary fifty cents army" (*zidai ganliang de wumao*) who distance themselves from more radical netizens who directly challenge the regime or even identify with a regime change agenda. By examining a selection of their repertoires, I intend to reveal not only how voluntary fifty cents army members maintain their identity through constant rhetoric confrontations with their opponents and amicable interactions among themselves, but also how their online activities have created public sphericules in which a regime-defending discourse prevails. The study not only suggests not only a more complete and balanced picture of China's Internet governance than previously available, but also illustrates a complex pattern of state-society interaction in a reforming authoritarian regime: the anonymous discourse competition illustrates a game in which non-coercive power dominates, and provides a chance to demonstrate empirically how art spills over into the realm of politics.

Fragmented Cyberspace: Towards Public Sphere or A Balkanized Public?

Western and China scholars have drawn diverse conclusions about the impact online political discussion has on civic participation. While many observers of the Chinese internet have hailed the technology for enabling civil society and the public sphere to flourish under an authoritarian regime,[1] people who study the internet elsewhere are less convinced. Many emphasize the internet's detrimental effects.[2] Matthew Hindman, for example, argues that instead of making public discourse more accessible, online audience of political advocacy communities or blogs follow a "winner-takes-all" distribution, turning blogs into a new elite media.[3] Others argue

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[1] For instance, see Yongnian Zheng, *Technological Empowerment: The Internet, State, and Society in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). Guobin Yang, "The Co-Evolution of the Internet and Civil Society in China," *Asian Survey,* Vol. 43, No. 3 (2003); Guobin Yang, "How Do Chinese Civic Associations Respond to the Internet? Findings from a Survey," *The China Quarterly,* No. 189 (2007); Guobin Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online* (Columbia University Press, 2009); Johan Lagerkvist, *The Internet in China: Unlocking and Containing the Public Sphere,* (Lund: Lund University, 2007).

[2] See Johan Lagerkvist, *The Internet in China: Unlocking and Containing the Public Sphere* (Lund: Lund University, 2007), pp. 149-150.

[3] He measured the online traffic and audience share using link density as an effective proxy. See: Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 56.

that the internet does not necessarily promote the critical exchange of ideas. Wellman and Gulia find that many online communities are based on relatively homogenous groups with similar interests, concerns and opinions. Online communities structured around homophily tend to foster empathetic understanding and mutual support rather than encouraging critical evaluation of each other's claims.[4] Content analysis of posts from bulletin boards[5] and Usenet newsgroups[6], where more political discussion can take place, also finds high concentrations of like-minded individuals. Thus, Dahlberg argues that online interaction is fragmented into exclusive groups of similar values and interests.[7] In fact, rather than simply being exclusive, Sunstein suggests that online discussion tends to encourage polarization on issues that involve diverse opinions, leading to a "Balkanized public" composed of users interacting exclusively within "information cocoons, or echo chambers of their own design,"[8] leading to the entrenchment of discourse in different communities.

This 'fragmentation thesis' is supported by data on Chinese online forums revealing distinctive and coherent patterns of discourse pattern and political identity emerging on different online forums. Fang Tang, analyzing postings by randomly sampled users from the *Qiangguo* and *Maoyan* forums, has found that over 82% of users from *Qiangguo* identify as moderate or ultra left (43% and 39%) while 73% of users from *Maoyan* identify as moderate or ultra right (63% and 10%).[9] Content analysis of posts from the same two forums by Le and Yang reaches similar conclusions (*Qiangguo*: 75% left vs. 9.5% right; *Maoyan*: 21.6% left vs. 48.4% right).[10] The formation of online communities around internally coherent political orientations has clearly obstructed open deliberation among diverse netizens.

Given China's oppressive authoritarian regime, scholars of Chinese internet politics have understandably emphasized the liberalizing and empowering effects of technology. Guobin Yang's conception of the public sphere, for example, emphasizes 'free spaces'" rather than "spaces for rational debate in the Habermasian sense."[11] Concerns about the detrimental impact of the internet on civic participation are largely non-existent. Lagerkvist puts this most succinctly: The emergence of online communities coalescing around shared affinity and interests, or what he calls 'public

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[4] Barry Wellman and Milena Gulia, "Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone: Virtual Communities as Communities," in Barry Wellman ed. *Networks in the Global Village* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999).

[5] Kevin A. Hill and John E. Hughes, *Cyberpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

[6] Anthony Wilhelm, "Virtual Sounding Boards: How Deliberative Is Online Political Discussion?" In Barry Hague and Brian Loader (eds.) *Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision Making in the Information Age* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 154–78.

[7] Lincoln Dahlberg, "Computer-Mediated Communication and the Public Sphere: A Critical Analysis." *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication,* Vol. 7, No. 1 (2001). 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 (2011), p. 618.

[8] Cass R. Sunstein, *On Rumors: How Falsehoods Spread, Why We Believe Them, What Can Be Done* (Macmillan, 2009), p. 7. Also see Cass Sunstein, *Infotopia: How Many Minds Produce Knowledge* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

[9] Fang Tang, "Zhengzhi Wangmin de Shehui Jingji Diwei yu Zhengzhi Qingxiang: Jiyu Qiangguo he Maoyan de Tansuoxing Fenxi" (Political Netizen's Socioeconomic Status and Political Orientation: An Exploratory Research on Qiang Guo and Mao Yan Online Forum), *China Media Report*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (August 2009), pp. 96-107. Tang first sampled the users from the two forums and then analyzed their political inclination by tracing and coding their online posts.

[10] Yuan Le and Boxu Yang, "Online Political Discussion and Left-Right Ideological Debate: A Comparative Study of Two Major Chinese BBS Forums," Paper presented at 7th Annual Chinese Internet Research Conference, University of Pennsylvania, May 27-29, 2009. Compared to Tang's findings, the left-right ratio is less stunning for *Maoyan* in this study. One potential methodological explanation, besides coding, can be: Tang's sampled users while Le and Yang sampled posts. Right wing netizens can be under-represented if they are less active in posting.

[11] Guobin Yang, "The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere," *Media, Culture & Society,* Vol. 25, No. 4 (2003), pp. 469-490.

sphericules' represents progress in unlocking the public sphere as they serve as "bases for public opinion, social organizing, and the occasional stirring of political mobilization."[12] Although his 2010 book acknowledges the internet as a "force field in which different social forces and political interests compete over norms and values," it also frames the regulation, influence and control of online public opinion as a "control and freedom" game that shows conflict between the party state and rising subaltern norms.

Will public sphericules precipitate the formation of a public sphere in China, or instead remain "information cocoons" resulting in a "balkanized public"? Binary conceptualizations of online political discussion as a state-society confrontation neglect outside factors that condition and influence online participation. After all, it makes little sense to assume away factors found in open societies simply because China is an authoritarian regime. Moreover, a discourse analysis approach[13] is unable to reveal both the character of and changing trends in online political discussion. Therefore, close examination of the dynamic discourse production in online communities allows us to understand the character of online public sphericules and their role in public sphere formation. This chapter makes such an attempt by tracing how online groups like the 'voluntary fifty cents army' engage in political discussion, thus linking together netizens, online communities and discourse competition in a dynamic model. And by casting light on how an opposition to the opposition forces has developed, the chapter also seeks to inspire those primarily concerned with liberalizing and/or "democratizing" China.

Some Methodological Considerations
This chapter relies heavily on online ethnography, involving long term semi-participant observation of selected boards/forums. My attention to members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" was an accidental consequence of "guerrilla ethnography."[14] My attention was initially drawn to popular online platforms, due to my interest in issue-centered critical discourse analysis, rather than small minority netizen communities. However, I frequently heard netizens saying things like "Go back to the military boards where you can keep each other warm!" or "Go back to your angry youth home, KDNET!" The association between certain IDs and expressive behaviors with certain boards and forums not only led me to explore those platforms, but also inspired me to probe deeper into the relationship between netizens, virtual communities and discourse. My primary sites are military boards on NEWSMTH (newsmth.net) and MITBBS (mitbbs.com), CCTHERE (ccthere.com), the Outlook (*guoji guancha*) board of TIANYA (tianya.cn; the board of a particular forum will be expressed in the following format Outlook@TIANYA), as well as military fans forums like CJDBY (cjdby.net), and SBANZU (sbanzu.com).

I choose to focus on "voluntary fifty cents army" for methodological convenience. First, this strategy not only provides analytical continuity with the analysis in the previous chapter, but also avoids the impossibility of having to go through an exhaustive list of possible online groups. Second, it offers a perspective on public

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[12] Johan Lagerkvist, *The Internet in China: Unlocking and Containing the Public Sphere* (Lund: Lund University, 2007), p. 151. He borrowed the concept from Todd Gitlin, "Public Sphere or Public Sphericules?" in Tamar Liebes and James Curran (eds.) *Media, Ritual and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[13] For instance, see Hill and Hughes, *Cyberpolitics;* Wilhelm, "Virtual Sounding Boards"; Fang Tang, "Political Netizen's Socioeconomic Status and Political Orientation"; Le and Yang, "Online Political Discussion and Left-Right Ideological Debate."

[14] Guobin Yang, "The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere," *Media, Culture & Society* vol. 25 (2003), p. 471.

opinion in Chinese cyberspace that differs greatly from that which emerges from static content analysis of state vs. society, or right vs. left. And, finally, it helps us understand why China's authoritarian regime still enjoys popular support, though it also suggests that support may be quite passive and reactive.

As doubts may arise as whether members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" are truly voluntary, let me clarify the reasons why I believe this to be so. First, they show diverge from state discourse[15] and are critical towards the regime on a wide scope of issues, from policies like censorship, minority policies, to official ideology and discourse.[16] Second, they often flourish on overseas, smaller-scale, or less popular boards/forums, which are not at the heart of the state's efforts to maintain stability and guide public opinion. If members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" were state agents, it is likely that they would appear mainly on popular domestic platforms. Moreover, I personally know a few active "voluntary fifty cents army" members who I believe are not state agents, which gives me confidence that at least some members of this group are not merely unthinking tools of state propaganda.

Voluntary Fifty Cents Army: Identity, Community and Discourse

Online interactions tend to encourage the formation of homogeneous user communities.[17] Though seemingly a fluid and unreal space with anonymous users constantly logging in and out and commenting on diverse topics, online forums or discussion boards often allow users to develop closer online and/or offline ties, stronger mutual trust, and shared group identity that differs them from others. Such netizen groups, with distinctive language and behavior codes, shared values and political inclinations, often promote discourse with "communitarian subject constituted within, and bound by, an ethically integrated community."[18] Thus, homogeneous online communities become "information cocoons"[19] in which relatively stable discourse will be sustained and reproduced through frequent online and offline interactions.

In this section I will focus on repertoires through which the "voluntary fifty cents army" confronts opponents and interact with each after briefly discussing how the "voluntary fifty cents army" rises as a group identity in the first place. And through the analysis, I demonstrate how internet users with diverse political inclinations may develop an online community with distinctive language and behavior codes, shared values and political inclinations, which in turn sustain a relatively stable regime-defending discourse.

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[15] A small but revealing example is the nickname they gave to Dr. Sun Yet-San, honored in official discourse as the founding father of the Republic of China. They call him "Big Gun Sun," i.e. a big mouth that boasted too much but achieved little. They also debate among themselves about merits and faults of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and even Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, which are discouraged by the state.

[16] For instance, members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" frequently criticize the Party's propaganda system as either incompetent or corrupted. A more telling example is that they nickname Wen Jiabao as "best actor," just like netizens or dissidents who are critical towards the regime. In fact, the disgraceful nickname of the premier was used by Yu Jie, a dissent writer in exile, in his book title. See Yu Jie, *Zhongguo Yingdi Wen Jiabao (China's Best Actor: Wen Jiabao)*, (Hong Kong: New Century Press, 2010). The book is banned by the Chinese authority. See Michael Wines, "China Seeks to Halt Book That Faults Its Prime Minister," *New York Times*, July 7, 2010, A8. Similarly, Hu Jintao is nicknamed as "Emperor Facioplegia" (miantan di) by some (not all) members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" because his constant emotionless face in public. This nickname is obviously not respectful.

[17] See Wellman and Gulia, "Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone"; Hill and Hughes, *Cyberpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet*; Anthony Wilhelm, "Virtual Sounding Boards"; Dahlberg, "Computer-Mediated Communication and the Public Sphere" and Dahlberg, "The Internet and Democratic Discourse."

[18] Lincoln Dahlberg, "The Internet and Democratic Discourse," p. 618.

[19] Cass Sunstein, *Infotopia: How Many Minds Produce Knowledge* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

Voluntary Fifty Cents Army: The Formation of Group Identity

How did the "voluntary fifty cents army" come into being as a group identity? And how did they emerge as an online community? My observation is that the identity of the "voluntary fifty cents army" is both passively imposed and actively chosen. In the first place, online antagonism like labeling wars provides the initial momentum of identity formation by imposing the label of the "fifty cents army" (*wumao dang*, i.e. state sponsored online commentators) on some netizens. Censorship and opinion guiding efforts by the state often spark netizens fury towards lurking "fifty cents army" such that any voice supportive of the state comes to be viewed as a state agent regardless of any "accidental causalities."[20] Although many of those being labeled "fifty cents army" simply retreat or keep silent,[21] some fight back. In this sense, many netizens become the "voluntary fifty cents army" involuntarily: they fall into this camp because they are labeled as the "fifty cents army" (*bei wumao*) by others who dislike their pro-government stance. The confrontation often further amplifies enmity, which in turn promotes the imagination of enemies and consolidates the "voluntary fifty cents army" identity.

The passive reception of the "fifty cents army" label is complemented by active construction of the identity, which promotes voluntary acceptance of it. Being victims of reckless labeling wars, some netizens have somehow turned the disgraceful label of "fifty cents army" into a medal of heroism and superiority: they believe they are labeled only because they are more rational and patriotic than most netizens. For instance, Zhang Shengjun, professor of international politics at Beijing Normal University, explicitly links the "fifty cents army" to "patriotism" by arguing that the label has become a "baton waved at all Chinese patriots."[22] Similarly, association of the "fifty cents army" label with rationality also justifies acceptance of the identity. Comparing China's 2005 One-percent Population Survey and its 2000 Census, many netizens argue that family planning is tantamount to "genocide" of Han Chinese because the growth rate of Han and non-Han populations is so unequal (2.03% vs. 15.88% respectively). Before explaining how this could be caused by statistical errors, one CCTHERE user added this passage.

> "I heard about the job of paid internet commentators, which I have always wanted. But I don't know who is in charge of recruiting. Since I have been longing for the job, let me try to explain this "genocide policy" by *Tugong* (Bandit Communist Party).[23] Take it as my effort to

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[20] "Accidental casualties" are not unidirectional. Several interviewees reported being labeled as both the "fifty cents army" and the "U.S. cents army" by netizens on the same forum, sometimes even under the same thread. Interview OBJ 2009-05, online communication with a veteran forum user and board manager, January 3, 2009; Interview RBJ 2009-11, Interview with a veteran forum user, a junior faculty member in an economics department at Beijing, August 23, 2009; and Interview RBJ 2010-33, with a media student at Beijing, April 23, 2010; Interview RBJ 2010-35, with a veteran BBS user and observer in Beijing, May 6, 2010.

[21] Sometimes, there were also complaints about verbal violence.

[22] Zhang Lei, "Invisible Footprints of Online Commentators," http://special.globaltimes.cn/2010-02/503820.html, retrieved November 14, 2011. It is also worth noting that Zhang believes that the foreign media are crucial in spreading the term, see: Zhang Shengjun, "'Wumao Dang' de Maozi Neng Xiazhu Shui?" (Who Will Be Intimidated by Being Labeled as Fifty Cents Army?), http://news.163.com/10/0120/16/5TG1UTRM00012GGA.html, retrieved November 14, 2011. His article immediately wins him numerous "fifty cents army" hats. See http://comment.news.163.com/news2_bbs/5TG1UTRM00012GGA.html, retrieved November 14, 2011. It is also worth noting that certain platforms like military boards served as bases for the "voluntary fifty cents army." This is by no means an accident because military boards tend to attract nationalistic netizens with a realist perspective on international politics. On the one hand, such an inclination affects their view towards the regime given its historical role in unifying, industrializing and strengthening China. On the other hand, a realist or even hawkish view makes it easier for them to imagine domestic and foreign enemies who are working hard to sabotage the rise of nation.

[23] Though it sounds disparaging, the nickname "*tugong*" is actually used by many netizens to show their affinity to CCP. For them, it is the very yokel nature that lessens the distance between the party and people at grassroots level. It is also used in its abbreviation format, TG.

clean up the mess for *Tugong* and count it as my application for the internet commentator position. So please feel free to forward. You may get a referral bonus."[24]

Taking on the identity of the "voluntary fifty cents army" does not mean these netizens will build up online communities. In fact, community building of the "voluntary fifty cents army" occurs through a process similar to that of identity formation, which is driven by confrontations with netizens who disagree and amicable interactions among those who are like-minded. Before discussing their repertoires of action, it is worth noting that certain platforms like military boards served as initial bases for the "voluntary fifty cents army." This is by no means an accident because many of these military boards tend to attract nationalistic netizens with a realist perspective on international politics. They tend to see the regime as playing a critical historical role in unifying, industrializing and strengthening the nation.[25] At the same time, a realist or even hawkish inclinations makes it easy to imagine domestic and foreign enemies working to sabotage the rise of China.[26] As a result, these netizens gravitate to small online colonies in which they intensify interactions and the exchange of ideas, produce distinctive discourse, and further consolidate their identity.

Repertoires of the "Voluntary Fifty Cents Army"
Member of the "voluntary fifty cents army" engage in a rich collection of rhetorical games in their everyday online activities. Below I will first briefly introduce a selection of these games and then go on discuss how these games have contributed to identity formation and community building.

Labeling Wars   We have seen how labeling wars provide initial momentum for the formation of the "voluntary fifty cents army" identity by imposing it on some netizens. The same mechanism continues to reinforce this identity in online debates. In addition, a labeling war is never unidirectional. If being labeled as "fifty cents army" helps a person to define passively who they are, labeling others, particularly those enemies in their imagination, constitutes a more active seeking of their identity by defining who they are not. Members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" deploy quite a few labels to describe their opponents,[27] including "U.S. cents party" (*meifen dang*, e.g. internet commentators hired by U.S.), "dog food party" (*gouliang dang*, e.g. those begging foreign powers for food like dogs), "road-leading party" (*dailu dang*, e.g. those who lead the way for invaders).[28] Besides acting as a disgraceful denotation, all of these counter-labels evoke nationalistic sentiments and accuse opponents of being foreign agents. In this sense, all these labels represent a form of what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence," by associating patriotism with their own stance.

Face Slapping (*dalian*)   Given the symbolic importance of face (*mianzi*) in Chinese society, "face slapping" is even more radical and directly confrontational. In

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[24] See "Guanyu 2000 Nian – 2005 Nian Renkou Zengzhang de Linglei Jieshi" (An Alternative Explanation to Population Growth from 2000 to 2005), http://www.ccthere.com/article/996699, retrieved November 14, 2011.

[25] For these netizens, despite all its problems, CCP's success contrasts well with pre-1949 regimes that not only failed to establish domestic orders, but also could not defend the nation against external threats. So they are persuaded that the nation is on the right track, maintaining stability is necessary, and without viable alternatives, the current regime is a necessary evil that defends China's national interest against foreign and domestic enemies.

[26] This actually echoes the state propaganda of foreign threats as well as "a handful" bad elements.

[27] This fact actually reflects the diverse political inclinations among members of the "voluntary fifty cents army."

[28] Such labels are also widely used by netizens beyond communities of the "voluntary fifty cents army." Also, besides those labels directly corresponding to the "fifty cents army", "elites" (*jingying*, 精英, sometimes purposefully misspelled as "elite flies," 精蝇) or "*du yun lun*" (a collective nick for separatists, democratic activists, and Falungong practitioners) are used as well, carrying very similar implications.

online discussion, face slapping is an effective way to impair an opponents' reputation by challenging a point ruthlessly and pointing out errors in logic, factual mistakes, or discrepancies.[29] For instance, internet regulation efforts by liberal democracies have often been cited to "slap the face" of those advocating internet freedoms in China. The goal of the "voluntary fifty cents army" is not to defend censorship, but rather to rebut those who fail to differentiate regulation and censorship, and to criticize "road-leaders" for turning a blind eye to their master's "censorship" and highlighting Western hypocrisy.[30]

In many cases, face slapping serves to defend the regime more directly. For instance, after the March 2010 Japanese Earthquake, a CJDBY user explicitly stated that "Those claiming that earthquakes can be forecasted after the Wenchuan Earthquake, I am here to slap your face!!!!"[31] The post defends the regime by suggesting that many criticisms are unfounded and unfair. This same logic held when the face of Nanfang Group (*nanfang xi*, Southern Clique, long imagined enemy by the "voluntary fifty cents army") was slapped over the same incident. When reports by the group appeared on forums praising the Japanese for being orderly and lauding its government for transparency, the "voluntary fifty cents army" immediately followed up with news about looting in earthquake stricken areas as well as criticism of Tokyo Electric Power and the Japanese government.[32] For them, a comparison of the media reaction towards similar disasters in Japan and China, displayed the double standard of media outlets like the Nanfang Group as well as their malicious intentions.[33]

Cross-talk (*xiangsheng*) Unlike labeling wars and face-slapping, both of which require direct confrontation of opponents, rhetorical games like cross-talk involve collective derision of enemies. The popular, linguistic art of Chinese cross-talk uses exaggeration, irony or parody to highlight the illogical, laughable or ridiculous stance of one's opponents. For instance, when responding to a thread on China's first aircraft carrier starting sea trials, one CCTHERE user said: "Ah, we don't want a floating

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[29] The weapon can be used by both the "voluntary fifty cents army" and their opponents.

[30] Those netizens are not necessarily pro censorship. Even though some of them believe that online expression needs to be regulated, many simply do so to dismiss the idea of "free internet" as utopian, even in the western liberal democracies. Cynical as it is, such a belief is not totally unfounded. So when combined with nationalistic sentiments, it helps strengthen the stance of the "voluntary fifty cents army": if the west can justify its control with concerns of terrorism or public security, why China cannot justify its censorship for the sake of stability or national interest? See Ronald Deibert, John Palfrey, Rafal Rohozinski, and Jonathan Zittrain, eds. *Access Controlled: The Shaping of Power, Rights and Rule in Cyberspace* (The MIT Press, 2010), pp.4-5.

[31] "I personally feel sorry for Japanese Earthquake victims…. I remember after Wenchuan quake, many jumped out shouting that Earthquake Administration was incompetent and China was impotent for failing to forecast the earthquake! They claimed countries like Japan have advanced technologies to forecast earthquakes with high successful rate! They … attacked anyone daring enough to say that earthquakes cannot be forecasted! Then what about this earthquake in Japan? …I am waiting for their explanations!" See "Dangnian Wenchuan Dizhen Shi Naxie Yubao Dang Ne?? Wo Jintian Lai Dalian le" (Where Are Those Earthquake Forecasters after Wenchuan Earthquake? I AM to Slap the Face Today," http://lt.cjdby.net/thread-1090661-1-1.html, retrieved November 14, 2011; also see "Qiguai, Riben de Dizhen Xuejia Zenme Ye Yubao Buliao Dizheng Ah" (Strange, Why Japanese Seismologists Could Not Forecast Earthquake either?" http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/free/1/2114334.shtml, retrieved November 14, 2011.

[32] "Nanfang Riwu Zhoukan Pinming wei Riben Dizhen Biaoxian Xidi" (*Nanfang People* Is Trying Its Best to Justify Japan's Behaviors After the Earthquake), http://xinu.jinbushe.org/index.php?doc-view-4740.html, retrieved November 14, 2011; "Nanfang Zhoumo: Di Luan Le, Xin Que Bu Luan, Zai Da Zhenzhai Li Du Riben" (*Southern Weekend*: The Earth Is A Mess, The Heart Isn't: Read Japan in the Disastrous Earthquake, http://www.newsmth.net/bbstcon.php?board=MilitaryJoke&gid=139829, retrieved November 14, 2011; "Chaoxiao Guizi Dizhen de, Dou Yinggai Qukan Zuixin de Nanfang Renwu Zhoukan" (All Those Laughing at Japanese Earthquake Shall Read the Latest Issue of *Nanfang People*), http://www.newsmth.net/bbstcon.php?board=MilitaryJoke&gid=141451, retrieved November 14, 2011.

[33] The rationale was made explicit in one post titled "Double Standards in Japanese Earthquake," which concluded that Chinese people and government were performed well if not better after comparing behaviors of the governments, military forces, volunteers, and citizens, and other aspects between 2011 Japan and 2008 China earthquakes.

coffin. We want a star destroyer instead."[34] Most users in the community would know that author is deploying cross-talk by poking fun at those who condemn the Chinese carriers as "coffins floating on the sea."[35] Similarly, when the "voluntary fifty cents army" members on MITBBS hail slogans like "Heaven Condemns the CCP" (*tianmie zhonggong*)[36] or "It is all because of the Three Gorges Dam"[37] after earthquakes shook New York and Washington, they are not condemning the CCP or criticizing the Three Gorges project, but practicing cross-talk.[38] Their comments ridicule and parody the tendency of some netizens (and dissidents) to attribute all disasters to the Chinese Communist Party.

Fishing (*diaoyu*) One of the most popular games among the "voluntary fifty cents army" members, fishing takes advantage of people's tendency to believe what they want and hooks netizens with false or fabricated information. The game has four stages: (1) bait preparation, i.e. fabrication of a message as bait; (2) bait spreading, i.e. posting the message to targeted forums; (3) setting the hook, i.e. collecting evidence of netizens spreading false information; and (4) celebration, i.e. laughing at those who were gullible enough to fall for the false message. A classical case of fishing started at sbanzu.com, a military forum where many "voluntary fifty cents army" members post. Mainly with the intent of demonstrating the superficiality, ignorance and bad intentions of Kuomintang fans (*guofen*) and the Truth Discovery Party (*zhenxiang dang*)[39] were, the user Muhaogu forged a handwritten receipt by Mao Zedong stating that he had received 350 million Gold Rubles from the Comintern.[40] The picture contained historical anachronisms and font bugs that were not difficult to discern with basic professional training.[41] However when posted on forums like Tianya and KDNET, two places the "volunteer fifty cents army" perceive as bases of KMT and the truth discovery party supporters, it was taken by many netizens to be a piece of newfound hidden truth about the CCP's inglorious history. The climax of the story, according to Muhaogu, was that a KDNET user, who was an MA student of Party

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[34] Star destroyer is a non-existent powerful space weaponry platform depicted in many science fictions. See "Ah, Buyao Piaofu de Haishang Guanchai, Women Yao Jianxing Jian" (Ah, No Floating Coffin on the Sea, We Want Star Destroyer), http://www.ccthere.com/article/3528859, retrieved November 14, 2011.

[35] Calling the Chinese carrier a coffin is not rare. For instance, see "Mei Zhuanjia Cheng Dalu Hangmu Shi 'Tie Guanchai', Taiwan Bubi Danxin" (American Experts Say that Mainland Air Carrier is Iron Coffin, And Taiwan Shall Not Worry), http://war.news.163.com/11/1019/10/7GNL1LFJ00011MTO.html, retrieved November 14, 2011.

[36] The slogan, frequently used by FLG media outlets and its practitioners, brings about Chinese traditional political belief that interprets natural disasters as symbols of heaven's outrage towards illegitimate or incompetent ruler.

[37] Many netizens (and some dissidents) attribute the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake to the Three Gorges project. See Li Ping, "Sanxia Gongcheng Hui Shengtai, Yuanshi: Daba Jiancheng Dizhen Duo" (Three Gorges Project Damages the Ecology and CAS Member Says More Earthquakes after the Dam Constructed), http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/11/6/9/n3280858.htm, retrieved November 14, 2011; "1992 Nian Sanxia Shuiku Kaijian shi Fanduipai de Beitan, Rujin Sanxia Zhishang Zhende Yingyan le" (Sigh of Someone Who Opposed Three Gorges Project in 1992 and Now Worries Are Becoming Real), http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/free/1/2169063.shtml, retrieved November 14, 2011.

[38] See "Niuyue Dazhen, Tianmie Zhonggong" (New York Shakes and Heaven Condemns CCP), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Joke/31999563.html, retrieved November 14, 2011. Besides the title, is the post has only one line: "It is all induced by Three Gorges".

[39] "Kuomintang fans" is the label imposed on netizens supporting Kuomintang's rule prior to 1949. The "Truth Discovery Party" refers to netizens who often claim they have found out hidden historical truth, usually concealed purposefully by the current regime. Both groups share the common goal of de-legitimatizing the CCP regime.

[40] See "(4 Yue 21 Ri Gengxin Yixie Xin Dongxi) Zhenxiang Dang Yongzhuan Tu" (April 21st Updates: Picture Reserved for Truth Discovery Party), http://www.sbanzu.com/topicdisplay_safe.asp?TopicID=2560239, retrieved November 14, 2011; "3 Yi Jinlubu Diaoyu Shijian Huigu" (Review of the 300 Million Gold-Ruble Fishing Event), http://xinu.jinbushe.org/index.php?doc-view-2503.html, retrieved November 14, 2011. The picture was revised several times by the Muhaogu based on suggestions from other netizens to make it look more real.

[41] "3 Yi 5 Qianwan Jinlubu Tiezhengrushan Kaozheng" (An Ironclad Investigation that Falsifies the 350-Million-Gold-Ruble Receipt), http://bbs.tiexue.net/post_4717662_1.html, retrieved November 14, 2011.

History, cited the picture in her MA thesis and got expelled from her program as a result. This was an unexpected and delectable fish for many in the "voluntary fifty cents army."

A more influential case of fishing even made it into China's print media. Mimicking one report on Huang Wanli, a scientist well-known for his opposition to the Three Gorges project, a MITBBS user fabricated a story of an imaginary environmental scientist Zhang Shimai who proposed a theory that high speed trains will cause massive geological disasters.[42] Two key concepts in the forged theory, "Charles Chef Force" and "Stephen King Effects", defined in length in the post, were actually named after two popular MITBBS users, xiaxie and StephenKing. Widely reproduced online, the article hooked many despite clarifying efforts by netizens and the Chinese Academy of Science.[43] More astonishingly, the non-existent Professor Zhang was quoted by *China Business News* (*diyi caijing ribao*) after the high speed train accident on July 23rd, 2011.[44] The newspaper was forced to make an apology when netizens started to slap its face by commenting on the report. However, even after that, Zhang was still quoted by a Xinhua News Agency reporter in her micro-blog.[45] Such events enhanced long-standing belief of the "voluntary fifty cents army" that the media groups involved were either unprofessional, or had a pre-set agenda that blinded them from simple facts.[46]

In addition to these rhetorical games, the "voluntary fifty cents army" also directly mobilizes shared beliefs, values, or emotions. The following lyrics (adapted from Ode to the Motherland (*gechang zuguo*) which was sung at the Opening Ceremony of Beijing Olympics) by a CJDBY user, with my notes in parentheses, serves as a good example:[47]

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[42] The post title is "Gaotie: Qiaoqiao Kaiqi Qunfaxing Dizhi Zhaihai de Mohe" (High Speed Rail: Quietly Opens the Pandora Box of Geological Disasters). The original post has been deleted. For reference, see http://songshuhui.net/forum/viewthread.php?tid=14993, retrieved November 14, 2011. Even the name of the figure, Zhang Shimai, is a straightforward parody. Shimai, meaning "ten miles," is corresponding to Wanli, i.e. "ten thousand *li*". "*li*" is a Chinese distance unit that equals to half a kilometer.

[43] "Chuan Zhongguo Dizhi Bushihe Jian Gaotie, Zhongkeyuan Cheng Xi Yaoyan" (Rumors on Chinese Geological Conditions Not Suitable for High Speed Rail Refuted by CAS as Groundless), http://news.163.com/10/1031/11/6KAR20VS0001124J.html, retrieved November 14, 2011.

[44] Zhang Lihua and Zhang Li, "Gaotie 'Zizhu Chuangxin' Zhimi" (The Myth of 'Self-Reliant Innovation' of High Speed Rail), http://www.yicai.com/news/2011/07/970535.html, retrieved July 29, 2011. The quotation was removed from the link after netizens pointed it out. However, the original article was still available at http://finance.qq.com/a/20110729/000413.htm, by October 3, 2011.

[45] See The Micro-Blog of Xinhuashe Wen Jing, http://weibo.com/1461830555/xivWBzQ9Z, retrieved November 13, 2011. When netizens criticized and laughed at her ignorance, the blogger deleted the entry and published something saying that she had to delete the entry due to "reasons that she cannot tell," This was interpreted by netizens as her attempt to depict herself as a victim of censorship. However, many micro-bloggers took that as an excuse to cover her ignorance. For more consequences of this particular fishing case, see "Jiao Nimen Ya de Hai Diaoyu" (You Guys Fishing Again!), http://www.newsmth.net/bbstcon.php?board=RailWay&gid=719820, retrieved November 14, 2011.

[46] It is interesting and ironic to note that many members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" do not actually believe in state propaganda, which is accused for being the agent of China's new Comprador class, or being incompetent (as being defeated technically and ideologically by the west, and cannot communicate effectively with the people). This is why we often see the "voluntary fifty cents army" joining their opponents to criticize CCTV, People's Daily, and other official media outlets as well as the Propaganda system.

[47] See "Jingli guo Haiwan, Yinhe, Taihai, 58, Zhuangji, Gunzi, Jingli guo BKC Mantianfei de Toushinian de Xiongdi tou TMD Jinlai ya" (Come in! Brothers Lived through The Gulf War, Yinhe Incident, Cross-Strait Crises, May 8th Incident, Air-collision, J-10, and The Ten Years When The Sky Was Full of BKC!), http://lt.cjdby.net/thread-1048839-5-1.html, retrieved November 14, 2011. The thread was posted right after China's stealth fighter J-20 had its maiden show and got over 1000 replies within 2 weeks. The title contains rich nationalistic sentiments. All the events but for J-10 were either taken as a shock or a humiliation by nationalistic netizens. The Gulf War refers to the first gulf war and it was a complete shock to Chinese military, which came to realize the technological gap between China and the U.S. and its incapability to fight a high-tech war. Yinhe Incident refers to the 1993 Sino-U.S. confrontation in which U.S. Navy forced a Chinese regular container ship, Yinhe, to stop at international waters for three weeks, for allegedly carrying chemical weapons to Iran. And the

The Flag of Five Stars (Author's note: referring to the Chinese national flag, clearly a symbol of nationalism) is fluttering in the wind,

The Song of CNMD (The abbreviation is a pun, can be understood as "fxxk your mother" or Chinese National Missile Defense) is so sound,

We are singing for our "black-belle" TG (both "black-belle" and "TG" are jargon used by military fans, meaning "evil communist Party", which stands for the regime),

And the Fxxking Two Holes (This again is a dirty pun, and is used by military fans to refer to Fighter J-20) is even more shameless and rogue.

We are clean and honest,

We are nice and kindhearted,

The White Bunny and the Panda are the role models of our kind (The White Bunny and the Panda are both innocent and adorable version of image of China),

How many times we've being looked down upon we cannot count,

And today we finally can be proud and unbridled. (Evoking nationalism through past memories of humiliation)

We love river crabs (Showing the "voluntary fifty cents army" identity and support to the regime. "River crab" for many netizens is a symbol of internet censorship[48]),

We love keeping accounts (*jizhang*, jargon meaning taking records of both glories and humiliating movements so that all will be paid back in the future),

Who ever owes us money and refuses to pay back will be eliminated!

Long live our motherland, our Mighty and Powerful Motherland! (This is not part of the lyrics, but shows the nationalist sentiment bluntly)

The author's identity as a member of the "voluntary fifty cents army" is clearly revealed in his ostensible nationalistic stance and support for the regime. And the mixture of nationalism through national symbols combined with a particular military forum subculture (including profanity) appealed to his fellow community members, making the post a very popular one.[49]

The above list is not exhaustive and I have left out popular games like on-looking (*weiguan*), playing undercover (*wujiandao*), and keeping accounts (*jizhang*).[50]

U.S. refused to apologize even after the ship was proved innocent by a Saudi-U.S. joint search. Cross-strait Crises refers to the 1995-1996 crises across the Taiwan Strait in which U.S. intervention was viewed as violent interference of Chinese sovereignty. The "May 8th Incident" refers to the accidental bombing by U.S. air force of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999. The "Air-Collision" refers to the 2001 Collision of a U.S. EP3-E Intelligence Aircraft and a Chinese J-8II fighter, causing the death of Chinese pilot. J-10 is a 3rd generation fighter developed by China and has been viewed by Chinese military enthusiasts as the symbol of China's concrete step to catch up with the latest military technology. BKC, literally means "white underpants," refers to surrender because "white underpants" resembles white flags. Similarly HKC, literally means "red underpants," refers to confidence.

[48] See Michael Wines, "A Dirty Pun Tweaks China's Online Censors," and "Song of the Grass Mud Horse," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKx1aenJK08, retrieved November 14, 2011.

[49] Text is designed to only be read and understood by insiders. Part of the reason why people liked it, I bet, was that they "got the joke" and all the insider references. Methodologically, this is one particular instance where my long-term online ethnographic work pays off.

[50] The term "on-looking" (*wei guan*), is commonly used today in Chinese cyberspace. It literally means surrounding and watching certain spectacle by large crowds. Many internet observers has rightly emphasized its potential as concentrated public opinion and a minimal form of public participation, see: "The Surrounding Gaze," http://cmp.hku.hk/2011/01/04/9399/, retrieved November 14, 2011; "Zhongguo Hulianwang 16 Nian: Weiguan Gaibian Zhongguo" (16 Years of China's Internet: On-Looking Changes China), *Xin Zhoukan (New Weekly)*, No. 22 (November 2010); and Wang Xiuning, "Weibo Zhili Shidai Shida Shijian: Weiguan Gaibian Zhongguo" (Top Ten Big Events in Era Micro-Blog Governance: On-Looking Changes China), *Shidai Zhoubao (Time Weekly)*, No. 106 (November 2010). However, members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" here play the game in a pejorative sense. By on-looking, they not only imply that the target is abnormal, absurd, or laughable, but also demonstrate their solitary by lining up the target with replies saying "on-looking", "on-looking, too", and so on. For an example of on-looking, see replies to the following post, "Mao Huijian Riben Shehui Dang Weiyuanzhang Zuozuomu Gengshan" (Mao Meeting Japan Socialist Party Chairman Sasaki Kouzou), http://www.ccthere.com/article/2118383, retrieved November 15, 2011. "Playing undercover" is a similar tactic to cross-talk, in which users hide their true attitude and propose opposite stance in radical and exaggerated ways so as to make the opposed stance less appealing or even disgusting, thus not trustworthy. "Keeping accounts" means keeping a record of what the enemies have said or done so that everything will be paid back in the future. For

However, the rhetorical games discussed already are sufficient to understand online activities of the "voluntary fifty cents army". Closer examination of these games shows that they vary along two important dimensions, i.e. the degree of confrontation and the types of persuasive power (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: Categorization of Rhetorical Tools

	Confrontational	←------→	Amicable
Factual/rational	Slapping face	Fishing	Cross talk
Normative/emotional	Labeling war		Positive mobilization

Along the first dimension, we see some of these games involve direct attacks on opposing opinions or netizens, others are more like language carnivals among community members, and still others fall in between. Along the second spectrum, some games mainly rely on facts and reasoning to persuade others or laugh at their opponents, others resort to emotional and normative appeals.

The categorization is not definitive, but rather contextualized. One the one hand, the factual/rational and normative/emotional divide is not a clear-cut one. For instance, in the positive mobilization case, readers' attention was directed toward a series of historical facts that are imbued with nationalistic sentiments.[51] In fact, nationalism and rationality serve as major forces in defining the stance and identity of the "voluntary fifty cents army": Nationalism provides the normative imperative and moral high ground for the "voluntary fifty cents army" to defend the nation against online sabotage by enemies from within and without. Emphasizing facts and logic, however, not only justifies a accusation of the "voluntary fifty cents army" that many online criticisms are unfounded or biased, but also makes them feel confident that they are enlightening netizens deceived by criticisms that is ill-informed and unreflective.[52] Thus, both factual/rational and normative/emotional persuasion provides the "voluntary fifty cents army" with a sense of fulfillment and superiority.

On the other hand, the enmity inherent in a particular game largely depends on who is playing the game, and where the game is played. For instance, games like cross-talk that involve soft satire are often echoed by members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" or even appreciated by neutral netizens, but may escalate into direct confrontations with the presence of netizens who disagree. Similarly, the degree of enmity may vary at each stage in multi-stage games depending on changes in context or players. Take fishing as an example. While bait preparation and celebration are generally amicable interactions among members of "voluntary fifty cents army," setting a hook often involves direct confrontation to humiliate the hooked (often at perceived enemy sites, which the "voluntary fifty cents army" sees as "fish ponds").

instance, a CCTHERE user compiled a collection of BBC reports on Chinese Internet over eight years, in which the same photo was interpreted differently in subtitles. See "[Wenzhai Jizhang] BBC: Yizhang Zhaopian Yong Banian, Yushijujin Hao Bangyang" ([Account-Keeping Digest]: BBC: Keeping Using the Same Photo for Eight Years, Good Example for Keeping Paces with Times), http://www.ccthere.com/article/1717029 retrieved November 15, 2011.

[51] See Footnote 47 above.

[52] Netizens debate on facts and rationality. I am not saying members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" are more factually correct or rational than their opponents. Instead, they emphasize "facts and rationality" in their rhetoric. For an interesting study on how state and oppositions struggle over "facts" in content control in micro-blogger sphere, see Li Shao, "The Continuing Authoritarian Resilience under Internet Development in China —an Observation of *Sina* Microblog," MA Thesis, Group of Asian Studies—Institute of East Asian Studies, UC Berkeley, May 2012.

In fact, many "voluntary fifty cents army" members refer to this step as "face-slapping".

The Reach of the "Voluntary Fifty Cents Army"
Despite the variation in enmity and the pattern of persuasive power of these rhetorical games, they all add to the collective online experiences of the "voluntary fifty cents army," consolidating their group identity, strengthening their community ties, and preserving generally pro-regime discourse. Fishing, involving multiple community members at different stages, is a perfect example. Though it takes only one creative member to fabricate the bait, others may contribute by offering comments and suggestions, producing adaptations of the message or even derivative stories.[53] Community members play a larger role in spreading the bait, especially initially.[54] Setting a hook often involves collective confrontation with those hooked, thus promoting group identity through solidarity against a common enemy. Celebration enhances a stereotypical image of the enemy, and against a "they" that the "voluntary fifty cents army" passively define themselves against as "us," Moreover, by employing shared language and behavior codes and championing similar values and beliefs, the "voluntary fifty cents army" not only demonstrates group identity or community ties, but also effectively establishes independent online colonies, or public sphericules, with a fairly stable nationalistic discourse that defends the regime against unreflective criticism and is skeptical towards domestic and foreign regime challengers.

These rhetorical games may backfire. Fishing, for instance, though it can effectively discredit opponents, is a double-edged sword. To counter criticisms about China's aircraft carrier project, a Military@MITBBS user wrote a post titled "For a country without human rights, what's the point of building aircraft carriers?"[55] In the post, the author goes,

> "Recently, in one of its northern cities, a power has been speeding up construction of an aircraft carrier, which has symbolic significance
>
> …
>
> However, under the glossy surface as an Olympic Games host and aircraft carrier owner is a different picture – at the same time when the carrier is being built, growing mass incidents are imposing huge pressure on the country's stability maintenance apparatus. They have introduced strict control over internet, manipulated public opinion, deployed legions of police to disperse assembly, and are ready to arrest netizens spreading 'inharmonious' information. Canada's Vancouver Sun commented on [August] 10th that the society is 'sick'.[56]
>
> French commentator Agnes Poirer even told the BBC that, this country remained one of the *most "unequal societies"* [in Europe].[57]

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[53] For a wonderful case, see "[Heji] Zhe Neng Diao Shang Shayu Bu?" ([Compilation] Can This Hook Some Foolish Fish?), http://www.newsmth.net/bbstcon.php?board=MilitaryJoke&gid=165373, retrieved September 15, 2011.

[54] Sometimes, they may ask the original author for permission to post the bait on other forums; other times, they simply do it. Once it becomes popular, it starts to disseminate like rumors.

[55] "Yige Meiyou Renquan de Guojia, Zao Hangmu You Shenme Yong?" (For A Country without Human Rights, What's the Point of Building Aircraft Carriers?), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military/36266465.html, retrieved September 18, 2011; also "Mou Zheng Jianzao Hangmu de Daguo, Ni Minzhu le Ma?" (The Power That Is Building an Aircraft Carrier, Are You Democratized?), http://www.ccthere.com/article/3535578, retrieved September 18, 2011.

[56] The post does not provide original source. It may be referring to the following report: Matt Falloon and Mohammed Abbas, "U.K. Streets Calmer after Nights of Riots, Chaos," The Vancouver Sun, August 11, 2011. http://www.vancouversun.com/news/streets+calmer+after+nights+riots+chaos/5233023/story.html, retrieved September 18, 2011.

[57] The post does not provide original source. The following report contains the same quotation from Agnes Poirer: Anna Tomforde, "Britain's Riots Seen as a Reflection of 'Broke Society'," http://www.edmondsun.com/news_tab3/x670925914/Britain-s-riots-seen-as-a-reflection-of-broke-society/print,

..."

Though the author confessed that he intended to mock Great Britain, both netizens critical towards Chinese regime and some members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" took the bait and he was even attacked by fellow members of the "voluntary fifty cents army." This case reveals the dilemma faced by the "voluntary fifty cents army": fishing may fail to discredit opponents and educate netizens when people prove unable or unwilling to recognize the barbs in the bait. Hooking a fish can become feeding a fish and involuntarily add to the volume of rumors and criticism that the "voluntary fifty cents army" is trying to fight.[58]

Members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" are not limited to the isolated virtual colonies they occupy. As a reaction to unreflective criticisms of the regime, the "voluntary fifty cents army" members frequently confront opponents not only at their bases, but also on battlefields where they are not dominant. Such battlefields include other discussion boards/forums and micro-blog services. For instance, members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" on NEWSMTH often engage in discussion on the more popular board NEWEXPRESS. Similarly, though the "voluntary fifty cents army" on TIANYA tends to concentrate on Outlook (*guoji guancha*), it does not prevent some of them from entering debates on Free (*zatan*). Through labeling wars, cross-talk, or fishing, they try to exert influence beyond the cells they occupy.

The "voluntary fifty cents army" has also built deeper and broader ties beyond their base platforms. Many of the "voluntary fifty cents army" communities have established more intimate communications, including QQ groups, in which active members develop real-life friendships. In addition, cross-community connections are established across the web, linking relatively isolated public sphericules together. As suggested by previous studies, like-minded websites cross-link more than different-minded websites.[59] Similarly, cross-site based members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" weave connections among those otherwise relatively isolated information sphericules. For instance, on NEWSMTH military boards, the latest posts from Military@MITBBS or CCTHERE often appear. Or fishing on Sbanzu inspires the "voluntary fifty cents army" members on MITBBS and NEWSMTH.[60] In fact, some netizens even consciously advocate an alliance of virtual communities that share similar political inclinations or face a common enemy. A CCTHERE user explicitly argued that they should support WYZX (*wyzxsx.com,* a left-wing website) against the common enemy of universalists (*pushi pai*).[61] Forums like April Media (formerly Anti-CNN.com) likewise show that the "voluntary fifty cents army" community, which has generally been reactive, may be growing into a more self-conscious group with a clearly defined mission to provoke.[62] Through such a leap, some members of

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retrieved September 18, 2011.

[58] Members of the "voluntary fifty cents army" recognize the dilemma. See "[Heji] Xinzhu Yihou Cai Zhidao, Gen Kandaha de Wanggong Bi, Zhongguo de Gugong Zhishi ge Nongzhuang" ([Compilation] Didn't Know until I Believe in God: Forbidden City Is Only A Farm Compared to Kandahar's Palaces), http://www.newsmth.net/bbstcon.php?board=MilitaryJoke&gid=166906, retrieved October 21, 2011.

[59] Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com* (Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 59-60.

[60] It is not only the "voluntary fifty cents army" communities that will form cross-site links. Other groups do so as well. For instance, users on Reader@NEWSMTH are usually close to certain groups on douban.com.

[61] "Weishenme Yao Zhichi Wuyou Zhixiang?" (Why We Should Support WYZX?), http://www.ccthere.com/article/3534277, retrieved December 21, 2011. Most CCTHERE users do not identify themselves with users of WYZX as they perceive them as ultra-left.

[62] For a brief history of April Media that grew out of Anti-CNN.com, see "Brief History of the April Media," http://www.m4.cn/about/#m4history, retrieved February 20, 2012; also see Li Guang, "'Siyue Qingnian': Wangluo Minzu Zhuyi Xin Shili" ('April Youth': The New Force of Cyber Nationalism), Wang Jiajun, "Cong Caogen dao Jingying – Dalun Wangluo Minzu Zhuyi Liubian" (From Grassroots to Elitist: The Transformation of Mainland

the "voluntary fifty cents army" are turning themselves into political activists who strive to disseminate nationalism and other political belief online.

Conclusion:

Cyberspace is not a monolithic medium through which public deliberation takes place. Instead, it contains fragmented fields that either serve as frontiers where opponents meet, or colonies occupied by certain online communities. The extensive analysis of the "voluntary fifty cents army" in this chapter detailed how group identity has been shaped through repeated rhetoric interactions with both opposing netizens and fellow community members. Such interactions turn some online platforms into bases of the "voluntary fifty cents army" in which particular discourse is produced and reproduced.

Though only a very small portion of netizenship in Chinese cyberspace, the influence of the "voluntary fifty cents army" on public opinion can not be neglected. In fact, some researchers have found that social consensus can be effectively influenced or even reversed by a minority of committed agents that "consistently proselytize the opposing opinion and are immune to influence".[63] Members of the "voluntary fifty cents army," though not randomly distributed in online forums, are nonetheless committed to proselytizing opposing opinions and are largely immune to influence. Their relatively neutral stance, calls on nationalism, emphasis on facts and rationality, as well as their sense of humor, all make them more effective in persuading netizens compared to state agents.[64] That being said, online activities of the "voluntary fifty cents army" may backfire as in the case when "hooking fish" turns into "feeding fish."

This chapter is not a defense of what the "voluntary fifty cents army" is doing on the internet. I fully acknowledge the contribution of researchers, observers and activists who are trying hard either to "push China's limits on web"[65] or to understand the phenomenon. Instead, the discussion here aims to highlight the complicity and plurality of opinions on the internet, in a word, the public sphericules in Chinese cyberspace, which have received insufficient attention so far. Such a perspective, I believe, helps take our understanding of online political participation in China beyond the state vs. society model (subaltern norms vs. state norms; expanding public sphere vs. state censorship; rising civil society vs. authoritarian regime; empowered social actors vs. state suppressions) to one that embraces conflicts among social actors themselves and some social actors vs. other political oppositions.

Cyber Nationalism), both in *Fenghuang Zhoukan (Phoenix Weekly)*, May 2012.

[63] See J. Xie, S. Sreenivasan, G. Korniss, W. Zhang, C. Lim, and B. K. Szymanski, "Social Consensus through the Influence of Committed Minorities," Phys. Rev. E 84, 011130 (2011).

[64] A CCTHERE user who is influential among fellow users suggests that the "voluntary fifty cents army" is playing a bigger role in maintaining social stability given the incompetence of state propaganda organs. See "Xianhua 67: Zidai Ganliang de Wumao" (Casual Talk Serial 67: The Fifty Cents Army that Carries Their Own Rations), http://www.ccthere.com/article/3304108, retrieved December 22, 2011.

[65] Edward Wong, "Pushing China's Limits on Web, if Not on Paper," http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/07/world/asia/murong-xuecun-pushes-censorship-limits-in-china.html?pagewanted=all, Retrieved December 15, 2011.

Chapter 8
Conclusion

The dissertation has examined the struggle over public expression in Chinese cyberspace both as a censorship game and as a form of discourse competition. In the censorship game, the Chinese authoritarian state, intermediary actors, and internet users have been constantly engaging each other in numerous boundary-spanning battles that define taboo zones as well as free zones of online expression. As a form of discourse competition, all actors play within the boundaries prescribed by the censorship regime. Struggle among actors centers not so much on what content is expressed, but rather on how this content is effectively conveyed, spread, and creatively manipulated to shape popular opinion.

The empirical chapters of the dissertation have been organized into two parts. The first three empirical chapters focused on internet censorship. Chapter 2 traced the evolution of the censorship system, and explored how external challenges and internal fragmentation have limited the state's capacity to control online content. Chapter 3 examined forum managers' censorship responsibilities, and how "discontented compliance" is a common response to state control from above and netizens' challenges from below. Chapter 4 looked at "pop activism" by forum users, especially how it blurs the boundary of political participation and popular entertainment while also challenging state censorship.

Chapters 5 to 7 focused on discourse competition. Chapter 5 examined the state's astroturfing efforts through mobilization of internet commentators, popularly known as the "fifty cents army." I showed that attempts to turn propaganda into public relations frequently backfire and chip away at the legitimacy of the party-state. Chapter 6 looked at regime critics' efforts to engineer public expression, and explored the emergence of a framing among netizens in which regime challengers and their sympathizers are depicted as saboteurs of the nation rather than freedom fighters. Chapter 7 studied the netizens who voluntarily defend the authoritarian regime. By examining how the "voluntary fifty cents army" adopts its identity, constructs a community and sustains pro-regime discourse, this chapter challenged assumptions about the internet's democratizing power.

The struggle over online expression is not simply one between the authoritarian regime and internet-empowered social forces. The boundaries and landscape of online public expression are shaped by internal interests and ideological fragmentation within the party-state, the diverse capacities and agency of intermediary actors, and the heterogeneity of internet users. This diverse and destabilizing terrain of internet politics complicates the apparent resilience of the party-state, and undermines any technological-deterministic view of a democratizing internet.

A Reflection on Authoritarian Resilience
The authoritarian resilience literature suggests that the Chinese party-state has been quite successful in adapting itself to new challenges.[1] However, Li Cheng questions the notion of resilient authoritarianism by pointing out major tensions within the regime, including nepotism, rampant corruption, growing oligarchic power, and factional struggle.[2] He argues that China as a nation may be resilient with its

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[1] Andrew Nathan, "Authoritarian Resilience," Journal of Democracy, vol. 14, no. 1 (2003), pp. 6–17; David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* (University of California Press, 2008).
[2] Cheng Li, "The End of the CCP's Resilient Authoritarianism? A Tripartite Assessment of Shifting Power in

emerging middle class, new interest group politics, and dynamic society, but that the party-state's capacity and legitimacy is fragile, perhaps even in the midst of serious decline.[3] Li's observations about the possible degeneration of the party-state are perceptive. However, if he is correct, then how has the authoritarian regime survived the onslaught of tens of thousands of popular protests across the country every year and pervasive criticism of the regime online? Missing in the debate on resilient authoritarianism is a realization that the resilience of an authoritarian regime not only hinges on its capacity to adapt, but also depends on the nature of challenges it faces.

The Chinese party-state faces two distinctive types of crisis. The first particular type of challenge, which might be called a legitimacy crisis, calls into question the legitimacy of the regime as a people's republic and as a socialist state. Indeed, the regime's image as a "people's republic" collapsed after it crushed the democratic movement in 1989, and its ideological foundations, communism and socialism, have been eroded by the ever-expanding market economy and proliferating liberal democratic values.[4]

However, many challenges the party-state faces do not question its right to rule, but instead contest how power is exercised by the Party. Rapid economic and social transformation has posed great challenges to the regime's governing resources and capacities. Such challenges, which might be called a governance crisis, make demands on the state to better provide services and address social ills.

The distinction between governance crises and legitimacy crises is crucial to understanding the resilience of the party-state and gauge the impact of online expression on the authoritarian regime. In the end, most Chinese citizens are more concerned with addressing the governance crises than challenging the regime's legitimacy.[5] So for the regime, demonstrating its ability and intention to solve governance problems, rather than limiting criticism on it or engaging in debates about its own legitimacy, are more central to its resilience.

Online Expression and Authoritarian Resilience
The internet challenges the authoritarian regime by facilitating mobilization among collective actors, promoting the development of civil organizations, and creating spaces for public expression. The primary challenge of online public expression, which I have focused on in the dissertation, is in breaking down the state's monopoly over media, thus allowing non-official discourse, or even discourses of dissent to spread and flourish. In response, the state has not only attempted to censor online content, but also tried to influence cyber opinion through innovative PR tactics like astroturfing. Yet such stability-maintenance efforts, examined from the conceptual lens of governance-legitimacy crises, are not optimal for the authoritarian resilience because they do not solve but rather merely obscure governance problems. In effect, state control over online expression has added to governance crises in a number of ways.

China," *The China Quarterly*, No. 211 (September 2012), pp. 595-623.

[3] Cheng Li, "The End of the CCP's Resilient Authoritarianism?" Also see Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

[4] The following joke is very indicative: "In 1949 only socialism could save China; in 1979 only capitalism could save China; in 1989 only China could save socialism; in 2009 only China could save capitalism." See Jonathan Watts, "The World's Most Important Story," talk at 2012 China Environmental Press Awards, Beijing, April 10, 2012, http://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/4876--The-world-s-most-important-story-, retrieved November 15, 2012.

[5] This partially explains why the Bo Xilai crisis has caused little social turmoil at the grassroots level, though it has generated huge debates among intellectuals and on the internet. After all, fights among the top leadership, no matter ideological conflicts or factional struggles, are remote to their everyday life in average citizens' eyes.

Above all, the state's control over the internet is not as effective as it may expect; it veers at times toward counter-productivity. The party-state has mobilized its institutional, organizational, administrative and technical resources to control content production and distribution online. Yet its primary reliance on taboo-words filtering for content control makes it ill equipped to counter the largely anonymous and highly creative character of online expression. Regime challengers and politically motivated netizens have come up with creative and playful tactics to effectively circumvent state censorship, and turned censorship measures into targets of digital contention. In addition, the internet control regime also suffers from internal fragmentation of the party-state, which is driven not only by divisions based on interests and bureaucratic responsibilities, but also by fundamental ideological conflicts. Though such internal fragmentation has not always created opportunities for freer online expression, it nonetheless erodes the effectiveness of the censorship regime.

State censorship is often counter-productive because it frequently provokes digital contention, further lowers the creditability of the state, and substantiates regime-challengers' criticism about regime repressiveness. Rigid and arbitrary censorship not only prevents taboo expression, but also frequently disturbs normal communications that are not politically sensitive at all. I have observed complaints about such "collateral casualties" many times on internet forums, blogs, and other online platforms.[6] In this way, poorly targeted tactics of censorship have annoyed and frustrated many otherwise indifferent netizens. Even innovative PR tactics like astroturfing through online commentators can backfire. As netizens learn about the state's attempt to manipulate popular opinion, any voice supporting the party-state becomes dubious. Indeed, cases like labeling netizens as the "fifty cents army" and "grass-mud-horse" fighting against "river-crabs" are vivid examples of how state censorship and opinion manipulation efforts have incensed netizens and fed online digital contention.

The censorship regime also jeopardizes the state's relationship with IT business entrepreneurs. Internet service providers and other intermediary actors, which are given responsibilities for censorship, play a pivotal role in online content control. My study of forum administrators shows that they generally demonstrate "discontented compliance" towards censorship (Chapter 3). Discontented compliance implies a different pattern of state-business relations compared to that depicted in early studies, which suggest a rosy picture of mutual dependence: the party-state has attempted to boost economic development, which has become an important source of regime legitimacy,[7] while business elites are closely tied to and depend on the current regime economically and politically, and thus favor preserving the status quo or even allying with the authoritarian state.[8] The scenario is different in the censorship system. Though the state has treated the internet as a vehicle of technological economic advancement, political challenges encouraged by the technology, particularly online expression, have led to strict content control. Yet, state control is at odds with business

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[6] Let me give a non-political example. Netizens who share novels online sometimes cannot post new content of a novel because it contains just one taboo word. Though it is easy to fool the filtering system if the taboo word is known, it is extremely frustrating to identify that particular word in a passage of thousands of words, not to mention that some taboo words are hard to recognize.

[7] Yongnian Zheng, *Technological Empowerment: The Internet, State and Society in China* (Stanford University Press, 2007).

[8] An Chen, "Capitalist Development, Entrepreneurial Class, and Democratization in China," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 117, No. 3 (Fall 2002), pp. 401-422; Jie Chen, and Bruce Dickson, *Allies of the state: Private Entrepreneurs and Democratic Change in China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010). Also see Jie Chen and Chunlong Lu, "Democratization and the Middle Class in China: The Middle Class's Attitudes toward Democracy" *Political Research Quarterly,* Vol. 64, No. 3 (September 2011), pp. 705-719.

interests (and that of other intermediary actors) as it increases operational costs, political risks, and market uncertainty. Thus, compliance of intermediary actors is not a voluntary choice because of their ties with or dependence on the regime for success, but a result of the fear of being punished. Instead, business elites in the IT sector, in my case forum administrators who have been treated arbitrarily or harshly, have strong justifications for their discontent.

The internet can help the state deal with its governance crises, but content control efforts have often worked in the opposite direction. Online expression may serve as a safety valve,[9] provide a channel to collect popular opinion, and function as a fire alarm to discipline its local governments and agents.[10] Like the introduction of village elections or the tolerance of rightful resistance[11] which have increased the regime's accountability and responsiveness and helped the center to discipline local agents, the internet has provided an opportunity for state building and venting off steam. Yet, the censorship system shows quite clearly that the state prioritizes suppressing popular expression to responding to popular demands and solving governance problems, however pressing they might be.

It is particularly worth noting that the censorship system disables the fire-alarm function of online expression and weakens the center's control over local agents. Local governments and officials have been trying their best to suppress citizens' online petitioning, and the censorship system provides them with convenient tools to do so. Because targets of local censorship are often tangible grievances, which provoke the wrath of citizens more than abstract causes, censorship ultimately plays a detrimental role in maintaining regime stability. In effect, most tangible grievances are essentially governance problems that can be addressed by disciplining local cadres or accommodating limited popular demands. Local control initiatives only decrease citizens' trust in both the local state and the regime as whole. After all, allowing local governments to block online petitioning indicates the center's failure, or even worse, its lack of intention, to discipline local agents.[12]

Online Expression and Technological Empowerment
The internet, with its inherently unruly characteristics, has been thought to empower social actors to challenge authoritarian regimes. Though the mobilizing power of social media services like Twitter and Facebook in the Arab Spring seem to have had democratizing effects, optimism about the new technology's political effects has been challenged by cases like Singapore and China. Observers of Chinese internet politics

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[9] See Xiaobo Lu, Guobin Yang and Qiang Xiao, ""Internet, Censorship, and Political Participation in China" - 2010 CHINA Town Hall," Panel discussion at the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University, October 18, 2010. http://www.columbia.edu/cu/weai/cth/cth-eventsummary.html, retrieved Nov. 9, 2012.
[10] In quite some cases, the state has responded to scandals disclosed by netizens. For instance, see Malcolm Moore, "Chinese Internet Vigilantes Bring down another Official," http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/4026624/Chinese-internet-vigilantes-bring-down-another-official.html; Tom Phillips, "Chinese Civil Servant Sacked Over Luxury Wardrobe," http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/9558179/Chinese-civil-servant-sacked-over-luxury-wardrobe.html, both retrieved November 15, 2012. Local governments, maybe reluctant to respond at the beginning, were often forced to take action under increasing popular pressure. Such crisis management efforts could have been more effective if the state were more ready to respond rather than surrendering under pressure.
[11] Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Daniel Kelliher, "The Chinese Debate over Village Self-Government," *China Journal,* No. 37 (January 1997), pp. 63-86. Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, "Accommodating 'Democracy' in a One-Party State: Introducing Village Elections in China," *The China Quarterly*, No. 162 (2000), pp. 465-489.
[12] Chinese citizens tend to trust the central government more than local governments and they also distinguish the central government's intent and capacity in making local governments enforce its policies. See Lianjiang Li, "Political Trust and Petitioning in the Chinese Countryside," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2008), pp. 209–226. Also see O'Brien and Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China*.

have found the technology a convenient tool for mobilizing collective action, promoting intra and inter-connectedness of social organizations, and as platforms for public expression. Yet, expectations of the internet's effects on democratization have not been met. Existing studies offer different explanations: the state has achieved sufficient control over the internet;[13] cyberspace is only a virtual place of everyday resistance that slowly expands the public sphere and transforms norms;[14] the internet has contributed to liberalization, but not democratization.[15] My research suggests that internet politics in China is not a zero-sum game between the state and the society. To assess the empowerment effects of the internet, we need to understand internet politics in a broader sense, acknowledge the diversity of social actors, and examine in what ways social actors are empowered.

First, the internet may have provided opportunities for political activism, but people may not take advantage of such opportunities. To gauge the political impact of the internet, non-political use of the technology must be taken into account because we cannot assume that Chinese netizens are pre-occupied with resisting the authoritarian regime simply because many observers are concerned with the internet's liberalizing and democratizing effects. As James Leibold has pointed out, "political content comprises only an extremely tiny portion of China's cyber-cacophony."[16] Similarly, Jens Damm argues that "the Chinese Internet is more a playground for leisure, socializing, and commerce than a hotbed of political activism."[17] My study of netizen activism (Chapter 4) confirms their findings to a large extent by highlighting non-political motivations in citizen activism online, yet emphasizes the marriage of popular entertainment and political activism. In short, we should neither dismiss non-political use of internet so easily, nor overestimate the political impact of netizens activism.

Second, netizens have diverse identities, concerns, values and purposes. Even when we narrow our focus to political expression and netizens who are interested in it, the control-liberalization framework can scarcely account for the pluralized opinions and discourses displayed in Chinese cyberspace. In that sense, depicting internet politics as a struggle between "young subaltern norms" against "state norms"[18] is over-simplified. As the case of the "voluntary fifty cents army" (Chapter 7) demonstrates, netizens are divided in their attitudes towards the regime, and some have developed a particular identity that leads them to defend the regime.

Many Chinese believe they still have plenty of reasons to support or at least passively tolerate the authoritarian regime. Members of the "voluntary fifty cents army," as I showed in Chapter 7, still choose to defend the regime largely because they have doubts about the intentions and capacities of regime-challengers. These netizens are not "true believers" but harbor their own critiques of the regime. But they acknowledge the historical role of the revolution and the party-state, and more importantly, trust the state's intentions and capacities to cope with the governance crises. In their eyes, it is unfair to attribute all social ills to the regime[19] and the hope

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[13] Taylor Boas, "Weaving the Authoritarian Web: The Control of Internet Use in Nondemocratic Regimes," in John Zysman and Abraham Newman (eds.), *How Revolutionary Was the Digital Revolution? National Responses, Market Transitions, and Global Technology*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

[14] Johan Lagerkvist, *After the Internet, Before Democracy* (Peter Lang, 2010).

[15] Zheng, *Technological Empowerment*.

[16] James Leibold "Blogging Alone: China, the Internet, and the Democratic Illusion?" *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70 (November 2011), p. 1027.

[17] Jens Damm, "The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society," *Critical Asian Studies* Vol. 39, No. 2 (2007), p. 290.

[18] Johan Lagerkvist, *After the Internet, Before Democracy* (Peter Lang, 2010).

[19] They do not attribute all achievements of the nation to the party-state, either, suggesting that they are not "true

for regime transition expressed by challengers is morally dubious, factually slippery, and logically flawed. They believe China needs a strong government to continue its development and to cope with its governance crises, and that a transition will not solve all problems, but instead may cause some of them to worsen, and possibly lead to social turmoil.

It is particularly interesting that netizens defending the regime online often champion nationalism. According to Jessica Weiss, nationalism served as a mobilizing force for grassroots democratic activism in the 1980s.[20] But in today's cyberspace, nationalism seems to be posed against democratization. This is worth our attention because my research shows that it is not that the authoritarian state has successfully co-opted nationalism, but that regime challengers, particularly democratic activists, have lost their appeal among nationalistic netizens.

Third, social actors may be empowered by the new technology, but what are they empowered to do? In the realm of online expression, many observers have argued that the internet has contributed to the rise of a public sphere,[21] because it has provided a relatively free discursive space for Chinese citizens to express opinions on public affairs despite heavy state constraints. However, the conception of the public sphere in these studies is often stretched, emphasizing its anti-control rather than its deliberative features. The labeling wars among netizen groups and the polarization of ideas observed in this project suggest that today's Chinese cyberspace is far from a public sphere in a Habermasian sense.[22]

If we focus on how online activism has affected real-life politics, the internet may have empowered Chinese netizens more to address governance problems than to mobilize a revolution. Internet-based mobilization has facilitated collective action,[23] induced the state to discipline its cadres,[24] corrected local policy blunders,[25] and even led to the adjustment of state policies.[26] In this regard, the internet has enhanced the accountability and responsiveness of the party-state to Chinese citizens.

Liberating the Internet to Improve Governance: Policy Implications

Internet content control has caused the state many problems, and doing away with it would not be a disaster for the regime. My findings suggest that though online

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believers."

[20] Jessica Weiss, "Whither China? Revisiting the Dangers of Nationalism and Democratization," talk at Institute of East Asia Studies, UC Berkeley (September 9, 2011).

[21] Guobin Yang, "The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere," *Media, Culture & Society,* Vol. 25, No. 4 (2003), pp. 469-490; Johan Lagerkvist, *The Internet in China: Unlocking and Containing the Public Sphere,* (Lund: Lund University, 2007).

[22] Scholars like Johan Lagerkvist and Yong Hu see the internet as an unfinished "public sphere," and both of them take the repressive state as the main obstacle. My findings suggest that we cannot assume that gaining independence from the state will automatically lead to public deliberation. See Johan Lagerkvist, *The Internet in China*; Yong Hu, Zhongsheng Xuanhua: Wangluo Shidai de Geren Biaoda yu Gonggong Talun (*The Rising Cacophony: Personal Expression and Public Discussion in the Internet Age*) (Nanning: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008).

[23] Tang Hao, "Xiamen PX, A Turning Point?" China Dialogue (2008), http://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/1626-Xiamen-PX-a-turning-point-, retrieved November 15, 2012; Zhu Hongjun and Su Yongtong, "Minyi yu Gongzhong Zhihui Gaibian Xiamen" (Public Will and Wisdom Changed Xiamen), *Nanfang Zhoumo (Southern Weekend)*, December 20, 2007.

[24] Malcolm Moore, "Chinese Internet Vigilantes Bring down another Official"; Tom Phillips, "Chinese Civil Servant Sacked over Luxury Wardrobe."

[25] Greg Distelhorst, "Publicity-Driven Accountability in China: Qualitative and Experimental Evidence," MIT Political Science Department Research Paper Working Paper 2012-24, September 27, 2012. Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=2153057 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2153057.

[26] Keith J. Hand, "Citizens Engage the Constitution: The Sun Zhigang Incident and Constitutional Review Proposals in the People's Republic of China," in Stephanie Balme and Michael Dowdle (eds.), *Building Constitutionalism in China* (Macmillan, 2009), pp. 221-242.

criticism sometimes challenges the party-state's legitimacy, it is far from effective in mobilizing a revolution that might topple the regime. The internet first and foremost serves as safety valve that allows netizens to vent their anger concerning both personal and social grievances. In particular, without censorship, there might well be less criticism and more supporting voices. After all, censorship is a huge source of grievances for many netizens and intermediary actors, and doing away with it might alleviate such complaints. And for netizens who still trust the regime, they could then defend the regime with more confidence. State censorship has effectively muted supporting voices because it not only justifies resistance, but also dampens supporter's enthusiasm for the regime. Reliance on tactics like taboo words filtering results in the indiscriminate censorship of both supporting and challenging voices. The resulting irony – that the regime does not allow netizens even to defend it – is disheartening for regime supporters. As Hu Ping, chief editor of the New York based dissident magazine *Beijing Spring*, commented,

> "Currently, the Chinese Communist Party is suppressing voices from both liberals and leftists and Maoists. Under such a circumstance, it is ridiculous for someone who perceives himself as a leftist, whose voices are suppressed, to defend the repressive regime."[27]

Indeed, instead of censorship, the party-state could try to take advantage of the internet to improve its governance. As David Shambaugh has pointed out, "The Chinese Communist Party is in the simultaneous state of atrophy and adaptation."[28] The survival of the regime to a large extent depends on whether its adaptations will outpace its atrophy. Systematic political reform of course will be crucial,[29] but so are its efforts to address concrete governance problems. In this regard, the internet and other communication technologies can be convenient tools. Of late, the party-state may be recognizing this point and signaling it intention to utilize the internet to improve government efficiency, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness.[30] Recent speeches by top leaders, the "government online project" (*zhengfu shangwang gongcheng*), and various local e-government trials, all seem to point, at least generally, in this direction.[31]

But more serious action needs to be taken, particularly in terms of responding to popular demands related to specific governance issues. Although Premier Wen Jiabao did urge "creat[ing] conditions that allow the people to criticize and supervise the government,"[32] heavy censorship and punishment of out-spoken netizens make it hard for netizens to believe the government's sincerity. Even if the state is still concerned with stability and would rather continue censoring the web, it needs to tolerate complaints about governance issues and show its commitment to solve such problems by responding to netizens rather than habitually covering problems up.

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[27] See Ye Bing, "Sima Nan Tan VOA Dianshi Bianlun, Huiying Wangshang Pingyi" (Sima Nan Talks about His TV Debate at VOA and Responds to Online Comments), http://www.voachinese.com/content/sima-nan-voa-debate-remarks-20121115/1546487.html, retrieved November 25, 2012.

[28] David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party*, p. 161.

[29] Cheng Li, "The End of the CCP's Resilient Authoritarianism?"

[30] Lian Yuming and Wu Jianzhong (eds.), *Wangluo Xinzheng (New Politics of the Internet)*, (Beijing: Zhongguo Shidai Jingji Chubanshe, 2009).

[31] Zhou Xiang, "E-Government in China: A Content Analysis of National and Provincial Websites," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (July 2004); Jens Damm, "China's E-Policy: Examples of Local E-Government in Guangdong and Fujian," in Jens Damm and Simona Thomas (eds.), *Chinese Cyberspaces: Technological Changes and Political Effects* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), Chapter 5.

[32] "Premier Calls for Accelerating Political Reform," http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/7113368.html, retrieved November 20, 2012.

Future Projects

Many questions remain about the relationship between online expression and China's political prospects. First, I have paid more attention to the regime-defending "voluntary fifty cents army" to balance current studies that emphasize state-society confrontation. However, to assess the challenge of online activism, we also need more studies of netizens who sympathize and support regime challengers. How do they adopt their identity and construct their community? What are the strategies they adopt in online debates? Are they pursing regime change or simply improved governance? In particular, to what extent are they willing to take risks that go beyond online activism and involve street action?

Second, though my analysis has shown that Chinese netizens are divided in their political orientations, I have made no claims to having representative data. Gary King and his colleagues at Harvard have been developing methods to conduct computer aided text analysis of internet activism.[33] Using such methods, future projects may be able to discuss frequencies and variation and provide a mapping of popular political opinions in Chinese cyberspace. My exploratory research in (particularly Ch. 4 on "pop activism" and Ch. 7 on the "voluntary fifty cents army") can serve as a starting point for this mapping, but there is much more still to be done.

Third, to date, few studies of internet politics in China have examined the connection between online experience, political orientation and offline political behavior. How do online activities affect netizens' political orientation and their political behavior in real life? How does netizens' offline life impact their online participation? To answer these questions, we need new research designs. And the payoff will be great if we can establish solid causal linkages between physical and virtual political activities.

Finally, it would be fruitful to place the China case in comparative perspective and explore how cyber-politics interacts with authoritarianism in other parts of the world. Why and how have the internet successfully challenged the political order in some authoritarian regimes, but helped improve capacity and governance in others? Examining these questions will help answer bigger questions about how socio-political structures shape goals and strategies of citizens and authoritarian states; it will also tell us much about how these choices impact the present and future of authoritarian rule.

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[33] Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Molly Roberts, "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression," http://gking.harvard.edu/files/censored.pdf, retrieved September 25, 2012.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: List of Cited Interviews

Interview RBE 2008-01   Interview with a former forum manager and veteran user at Berkeley, September 23, 2008.

Interview RBE 2008-02   Interview with a former journalist at *Guangzhou Daily* group at Berkeley, October 25, 2008.

Interview RBJ 2008-04   Interview with a veteran forum user at Beijing, December 29, 2008

Interview OBJ 2009-05   Online communication with a veteran forum user and board manager, January 3, 2009.

Interview RBJ 2009-06   Interview with a board manager and veteran forum user at Beijing, January 6, 2009.

Interview RBJ 2009-07   Interview with a former forum board manager at Beijing, January 6, 2009.

Interview RBJ 2009-08   Interview with a former journalist at Beijing, January 9, 2009.

Interview RBJ 2009-09   Interview with a former forum manger, January 11, 2009.

Interview RBJ 2009-10   Interview with a veteran forum user at Beijing, August 21, 2009

Interview RBJ 2009-11   Interview with a veteran forum user at Beijing, August 23, 2009.

Interview RBJ 2009-12   Interview with an experienced forum user at Beijing August 25, 2009.

Interview OBJ 2009-13   Online interview with a forum administrator, August 28, 2009.

Interview RBJ 2009-15   Interview with one student internet commentator in Beijing on September 21, 2009.

Interview RBJ 2009-16   Interview with a veteran forum user at Beijing, September 22, 2009.

Interview RBJ 2009-17   Interview with a veteran forum user at Beijing, September 23, 2009.

Interview RBJ 2009-18   Interview with a non-official campus forum manger at Beijing, October 22, 2009

Interview RBJ 2009-19   Interview with a campus forum manager at Beijing, October 21, 2009.

Interview RBJ 2009-20   Interview with a campus forum manager at Beijing, October 21, 2009.

Interview RSZ 2009-21   Interview with a campus forum manager at Suzhou, October 23, 2009.

Interview RSZ 2009-22   Interview with a faculty member in charge of forum supervision at Suzhou, October 23, 2009.

Interview RSZ 2009-23   Interview with a campus forum manager at Suzhou, October 23, 2009.

Interview RSZ 2009-24   Interview with a campus forum manager at Suzhou, October 23, 2009.

Interview RSZ 2009-25   Interview with a campus forum manager at Suzhou, October 24, 2009.

Interview RSZ 2009-26   Interview with a campus forum manager at Suzhou, October 24, 2009.

Interview RSZ 2009-27   Interview with a campus forum manager at Suzhou, October 24, 2009.

Interview RSZ 2009-28   Interview with a campus forum manager at Suzhou, October 24, 2009.

Interview RSZ 2009-29   Interview with a campus forum manager at Suzhou, October 24, 2009.

Interview RSZ 2009-30   Interview with a campus forum manager at Suzhou, October 24, 2009.

Interview RSZ 2009-31   Interview with a campus forum manager at Suzhou, October 24, 2009.

Interview RBJ 2010-32   Interview with a leader of a major website at Beijing, April 22, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-33   Interview with a media student at Beijing, April 23, 2010

Interview RBJ 2009-34   Interview with a PR manager of a multinational corporation at Beijing, April 23, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-35   Interview with a veteran forum user and observer in Beijing, May 6, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-36   Interview with a manager of a large commercial forum at Beijing, May 6, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-37   Interview with a veteran user and board manager, May 14, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-38   Interview with an experienced forum manager, May 14, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-39   Interview with a veteran forum user and observer in Beijing, May 21, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-40   Interview with a junior media scholar in Beijing, May 21, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-41   Interview with a manager of a large commercial forum at Beijing, May 21, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-42   Interview with a non-official campus forum manager at Beijing, May 22, 2010

Interview RBJ 2010-43   Interview with a university faculty member who supervises a campus forum at Beijing, May 22, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-44   Interview with a campus forum manager at Beijing, May 22, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-45   Interview with a campus forum manager at Beijing, May 22, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-46   Interview with a campus forum manager at Beijing, May 22, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-47   Interview with a non-official campus forum manager at Beijing, May 22, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-48   Interview with a campus forum manager at Beijing, May 22, 2010.

Interview RBJ 2010-49   Interview with a non-official campus forum manager at Beijing, May 22, 2010

Interview RBJ 2010-50   Interview with a campus forum manager at Beijing, May 22, 2010.

Interview RBE 2010-52   Phone interview with junior faculty member at a communication school, who was a former CCTV reporter, September 4, 2010.

Interview OBE 2011-53   Phone interview with a private forum manager, February 9, 2011.

Interview RBE 2011-54   Interview with a former *Southern Metropolis* Journalist at Berkeley on February 11, 2011.

Interview RBE 2011-57   Interview with a former campus forum manager, experienced user at Berkeley, May 21, 2011.

Interview RBE 2011-58   Interview with a Chinese scholar at Berkeley, May 28, 2011

Interview OBE 2011-61   Online communication with a veteran netizen, October 18, 2011.

Appendix 2.1: Evolution of State Regulations Related to Content Control

Phase I Before 1999	Phase II (1999-2003)	Phase III (2004 –)
■ In 1994, State Council issues *Regulations on Safety and Protection of Computer Systems,* prohibiting using "computer information systems to conduct activities against national interests, public interests, or legitimate interests of citizens."[1] ■ In 1997, Ministry of Public Security releases *Computer Information Network and the Internet Security Protection Management Regulations,* prohibiting nine types of information.[2]	■ In 2000, State Council publishes two regulations, the *Regulation of Telecommunications* and *Measures for Administration of Internet Information Services*. The former reiterates the nine prohibitions in the 1997 MPS Regulation. The latter demands registration and licensing of online information services.[3] ■ In 2000, MII issues the *Regulation on Internet News and Bulletin Boards*, requiring registration of BBSes.[4] ■ In 2000, State Council Information Office (SCIO) and MII prescribe the qualifications and channels for online news services through *Interim Provisions for Administration of News Publication by Internet Sites*.[5]	■ In 2005, MII issues *Administrative Measures of the Registration of Non-commercial Internet Information Services* to enhance control over non-commercial content providers.[6] ■ In 2005, SCIO and MII jointly issue the *Administrative Provisions of Internet News Information Services,* adding two new prohibitions, prohibiting information that incites illegal gathering, association, demonstration, or crowding to disturb social order; and information that organizes or carries out activities under illegal non-government organizations.[7] ■ In 2007, SARFT and MII jointly issue the *Administrative Provisions on Internet Audio-Visual Program Services,* extending control to multimedia formats.[8] ■ In 2006, 16 central party and state departments jointly issued *The Work Program for the Coordination of the Internet Websites Management*, dividing control responsibilities.[9]

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[1] State Council, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Jisuanji Xinxi Xitong Anquan Baohu Tiaoli* (*Regulations on Safety and Protection of Computer Systems, PRC*), February 18, 1994.

[2] These nine types are information that (1) incites to resist or obstructs the implementation of the Constitution, laws or administrative regulations; (2) incites to subvert the government or the socialist system; (3) incites separatism or harms national unification; (4) incites ethnic hatred or ethnic discrimination or undermines ethnic solidarity; (5) forges or distorts facts or spreads rumors that disturb social stability; (6) spreads superstitions, obscenity, pornography, gambling, violence, homicide, terrorism or instigates crime (7) openly insults other people or slanders people with fabricated information; (8) damages the credibility of state organs; (9) any other type that violates the Constitution, laws or administrative regulations.

[3] State Council, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Dianxin Tiaoli* (*Regulation of Telecommunications of PRC*), September 20, 2000; State Council, *Hulianwang Xinxi Fuwu Guanli Banfa (Measures for Administration of Internet Information Services*), September 25, 2000.

[4] MII, *Hulianwang Dianzi Gonggao Fuwu Guanli Guiding* (*Regulation on Internet News and Bulletin Boards*), October 27, 2000.

[5] SCIO and MII, *Hulian Wangzhan Congshi Dengzai Xinwen Yewu Guanli Zanxing Guiding* (*Interim Provisions for Administration of News Publication by Internet Sites*), Nov 6, 2000.

[6] MII, *Fei Jingyingxing Hulianwang Xinxi Fuwu Beian Guanli Banfa (Administrative Measures of the Registration of Non-commercial Internet Information Services)* ,January 28, 2005.

[7] SCIO and MII, *Hulianwang Xinwen Xinxi Fuwu Guanli Guiding* (*Administrative Provisions of Internet News Information Services*), September 25, 2005.

[8] SARFT and MII, *Hulianwang Shiting Jiemu Fuwu Guanli Guiding* (*Administrative Provisions on Internet Audio-Visual Program Services)*, December 29, 2007.

[9] CCP Central Propaganda Department, et al, *Hulian Wangzhan Guanli Xietiao Gongzuo Fangan (The Work Program for the Coordination of the Internet Websites Management).*

Appendix 2.2: Organizational Adaptation Related to Content Control

Phase I Before 1999	Phase II (1999-2003)	Phase III (2004 –)
■ Ministry of Information Industry (MII) is formed by the merger of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPT) and the Ministry of Electronics Industry (MEI). MII is more a regulatory institution to promote the development of information technology. ■ Ministry of Public Security is delegated the power of content control at this stage	■ The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) extends its power to online video and audio programs, the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) to online publications, and Ministry of Culture (MOC) to online cultural and artistic activities, online gaming and commercial terminal services like internet cafes.[10] ■ In April 2000, the SCIO sets up the Internet News and Propaganda Administration Bureau.[11] ■ Organizations like Internet Society of China, China Youth Internet Association and Wireless Internet Trust and Self-discipline Alliance, advocates self-discipline of service providers and users.	■ In 2008, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) is established, inheriting internet regulatory and control power from MII and State Council Informatization Office.[12] ■ In April 2010, SCIO sets up a 9th Bureau to guide, coordinate and supervise internet cultural development and management.[13] ■ In 2006, 16 central party and state departments jointly issues *The Work Program for the Coordination of the Internet Websites Management*, dividing control responsibilities.[14] ■ Local coordination and cooperation mechanisms through joint leadership.[15] ■ Continued promotion of self-discipline of service providers; established illegal information reporting mechanisms.[16]

[10] SARFT, *Guanyu Jiaqiang Tongguo Xinxi Wangluo Xiang Gongzhong Chuanbo Guangbo Dianying Dianshi Jiemu Guanli de Tonggao (Circular on Strengthening the Management of Broadcasting Radio, Film and TV Programs via the Internet)*, October 1999; SARFT, *Hulianwang Deng Xinxi Chuanbo Shiting Jiemu Guanli Banfa (Regulations on Broadcasting Video and Audio Programs through the Internet)*, January 7, 2003. GAPP and MII, *Hulianwang Chuban Guanli Zanxing Guiding (Provisional Regulations on Administration of Internet Publications),* June 27, 2002. MOC, *Hulianwang Wenhua Guanli Zanxing Guiding (Provisional Regulations on Internet Culture Management)*, May 10, 2003.

[11] Local governments quickly followed suit. For instance, in June 2000, Beijing Municipal Government Information Office established its Internet Propaganda Administration Office to supervise online information services. See Beijing Association of Online Media website, http://www.baom.org.cn/biannian/bn2000.html, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[12] Though primarily a regulatory agency, MIIT did play an indispensable role in censorship because all IDCs, ISPs, and ICPs have to register with the Ministry before entering the market.

[13] Su Yongtong, "Guoxinban 'Kuobian,' Wangluo Guanli Jusi Yi Bian Er" (SCIO Expansion with Internet Administration Bureaus Become Two), *Nanfang Zhoumo (Southern Weekend)*, May 20, 2010; "Guowuyuan Xinwen Bangongshi Zengshe Dijiuju Fuze Hulianwang Guanli Gongzuo" (SCIO Adds Nineth Bureau for Internet Administrative Function), http://www.xwcbj.gd.gov.cn/news/html/zxdt/article/1271947109554.html, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[14] See "Hulian Wangzhan Guanli Xietiao Gongzuo Fang'an" (*The Work Program for the Coordination of the Internet Websites Management)*, http://www.sda.gov.cn/WS01/CL0306/10768.html. The 16 agencies are CCP Central Propaganda Department, MII, SCIO, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Health, MPS, Ministry of State Security, Ministry of Commerce, SARFT, GAPP, SAPSS, SAIC, SFDA, CAS, and Communication Department of General Staff Department. The joint work program is a legacy of *Quanguo Jizhong Kaizhan Hulianwang Qingli Zhengdun Gongzuo Xietiao Xiaozu (Coordination Group of State Jointly Efforts to Clean-up and Rectify Internet Websites)*.

[15] For instance, The Beijing Municipal Government formed the Internet Propaganda Administration Leadership Group to coordinate the public security system, the Internet News Propaganda Administration Office, and the Communications Administration. See Wang Hao, "Beijingshi Hulianwang Xuanchuan Guanli Lingdao Xiaozu Huiyi Zhaokai" (Beijing Municipal Internet Propaganda Administration Leadership Group Conference Convened), http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64107/64110/5982104.html, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[16] For instance, see China Internet Illegal Information Reporting Center, http://ciirc.china.cn/.

Appendix 2.3: Technical and Administrative Control

■ Blocking hostile overseas websites, and jailing violators.[17] ■ Presses service providers to conduct self-censorship.[18] ■ Highly attentive to campus BBSes, the first places to gain internet, sources of 1989 student movement. All major campus forums are carefully monitored. At times, BBSes are shut down owing to worries about spillover effects into offline protest or during sensitive periods like Deng Xiaoping's death.	■ Encourages state media outlets to conquer online "commanding heights of thought and public opinion."[19] ■ The Golden Shield Project, launched in 1998, starts to function as the Great Firewall. Through techniques like IP blocking, URL and DNS filtering and redirecting, the state is able to monitor information flowing online and prevent netizens from accessing "hostile" websites.[20] ■ To control public internet access terminals by cracking down on unregistered internet cafes and demanding others record customers' ID information.[21] ■ Severer measures taken to punish deviants: websites are shut down; more people are jailed, often charged with "subverting the state" or "leaking state secrets'.[22]	■ More serious enforcement of registration and licensing of service providers to establish databases of internet content providers (ICPs), IP Addresses and domain names.[23] ■ Real name registration of terminals (cell phones and internet cafes) and applications (instant messengers, blogs, and forums).[24] Some forums start to have managers registered since 2006.[25] ■ Directly targets pornography and other illegal information. As part of the efforts, MIIT introduces "green-dam" project to block illegal information, which is invoked under criticism.[26] ■ Tightens control over campus BBSes: YTHT BBS shut down in 2004. MOE mandates BBSes to restrict off-campus access in spring 2005. ■ Introduces internet commentators, e.g. "fifty cents army"[27] to guide public opinion anonymously.

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[17] See Seth Faison, "E-Mail to U.S. Lands Chinese Internet Entrepreneur in Jail". *The New York Times*, 21 January 1999.

[18] See Qiu, "Virtual Censorship in China: Keeping the Gate between Cyberspaces," p. 12.

[19] The first group of news portals designated by SCIO as key online information service providers include People's Daily Online, Xinhuanet.com, China.com.cn, CCTV Online, CRI Online, China Daily Online, and China-Youth Online.

[20] Walton Greg, "China's Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People's Republic of China," *International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development* (2001).

[21] Li, *Women de Fanghuoqiang*, pp. 90-93. As Li has rightly pointed out, such campaigns have regulatory purposes.

[22] For a detailed list, see Zheng, *Technological Empowerment*, pp. 70-78.

[23] Enacted as early as in 2000, the regulation was not seriously enforced until 2004, when 14 ministries jointly launched a registration campaign. The pressure only intensified in the later anti-pornography and illegal information campaigns.

[24] See Jiao Likun, "Shouji Shimingzhi Zuiwan Xiayue Tuichu, Zhongguo Yi Fengsha Wanbu Shouji" (Real-name Registration of Cell Phones Will Be Implemented from Next Month Onwards, and China Has Banned Over 10,000 Cell Phones), http://news.qq.com/a/20051222/001135.htm; "'Wangyou Shimingzhi' Jin Qi Shixing, Xinzheng Zaoyu Zhixingnan" (Real-Name Registration of Online Gaming Becomes Effective Today, The New Policy Encountered Difficulty in Enforcement), http://tech.xinmin.cn/internet/2010/08/01/6071003.html, retrieved September 25, 2012; "Tencent QQ Jiang Shixing Wangluo Shimingzhi, QQ Qun Chuangjianzhe Xu Shiming Dengji" (Tecent QQ Intends to Introduce Real-Name Registration, QQ Group Owners Need to Register with Real Names), http://it.sohu.com/20050721/n240175776.shtml, retrieved September 25, 2012; "Boke Shimingzhi Anran Tuichang, Wangluo Guanzhi Yiyou Fansi" (Real-Name Registration of Blog Services Abandoned and We'd Reflect Internet Control), http://tech.qq.com/a/20070525/000162.htm, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[25] Li, *Women de Fanghuoqiang*, p.95.

[26] Wang Qihua, "Bufen Jigou he Shanghui Huanying Gongxinbu Tuichi Yuzhuang 'Lvba'" (Organizations and Commerce Chambers Welcomed MIIT's Decision to Postpone Pre-installation of Green-dam"), http://www.caijing.com.cn/2009-07-01/110191695.html, retrieved September 25, 2012.

[27] They got the nickname because it is said that they are paid fifty cents per post. See Chapter 5 of the dissertation.

Appendix 3.1: The Management Role of Forum Manager

🏠 > 华商论坛 > 陕西论坛 > 安康论坛 > 惨绝人寰！7个月的胎儿被强制引产，孩子尸体就放在妈妈身边！　[切换到宽版] 最新帖子 精华

《返回列表 《 **1** 2 3 4 5 》 共7页　Go　上一主题 下一主题 阅读:49859 回复:102　　➡ 回 复　　➕ 发 帖

主题:[转帖]惨绝人寰！7个月的胎儿被强制引产，孩子尸体就放在妈妈身边！　　　　楼层直达 □ 🆒

👤 我不是飞贼

楼主 发表于: 2012-06-11 09:51　　　　　　只看楼主 更多操作 ▾

管理提醒：
本帖被 一鸣一言 执行置顶操作(2012-06-16 22:28:55)'
本帖被 祖籍江苏 执行加亮操作(2012-06-11 10:00:12)'

关注(0)粉丝(4)
➕关注TA ✉发私信
级别:名动江湖
😊😊
金币:　　56
威望:　　166
发帖数:　238
注册时间: 2012-02-13

惨绝人寰！7个月的胎儿被强制引产，孩子尸体就放在妈妈身边！

注意！本帖后两张图片可能会令您身体不适！请慎重浏览！

"陕西省安康市镇坪县曾家镇政F非珐拘禁，野蛮残害7个半月胎儿"一事，成为了当地老百姓茶余饭后的热门话题。
一、非珐拘禁孕妇(冯建梅)72小时。
孕者冯建梅系内蒙古人，系镇坪媳妇。此怀孕属第二胎，也是合乎当地政策。因女方冯建梅户口在内蒙古，其家人都在外打工，办理户口一直没迁移到当地。曾家镇政F30余人把冯建梅在租住屋(拘禁一天，其后又在其姑姑家拘禁两天，三天内，曾家镇政F人员严格限制冯建梅人身自由，由专人看管。使怀孕7个半月的冯建梅陷入极度恐慌之中，差点自杀)。

二、吐匪行为，再没有直接监护人的情况下，强行致使孕妇签字按手印，暴力按压孕妇打毒针使7个半月胎儿流产。
在6月2日，这已是拘禁冯建梅的第四天，一大早，镇政F一帮人用衣服蒙住孕妇头，他们不顾及孕妇死活，强拽将冯建梅拖入车上到镇坪县医院。随行没有孕妇亲属，在打毒针1小时前，曾家镇政F工作人员给孕妇丈夫通电话，还讨价还价说需交押金4万元，一分不少，其丈夫也同意交纳押金，可万万没想到，在孕妇直接监护人没到场的情况下，镇政F人员强行让孕妇签字、按手印，甚至强制按压其孕妇上手术台。当时，整个过程其用手机记录非珐过程，但均被镇政F工作人员野蛮抢夺致使手机资料删除，手机让医院护士送达。

Source: "Canjue Renhuan! 7 Ge Yue de Taier bei Qiangzhi Yinchan, Haizi Shiti jiu Fangzai Mama Shenbian" (Such a Tragic! A 7 Month Baby Aborted by Force and the Dead Body Placed Right Beside Her Mom) http://bbs.hsw.cn/read-htm-tid-3697258.html，available Sept, 25, 2012. The light yellow area shows the operations of forum administrators. One administrator highlighted the posting on June 11, 2012, and another administrator pinned the thread to the top of the forum on June 16, 2012. For more information about the scandal, see "Wangbao Shaanxi Ankang Huanyun 7 Yue Yunfu Qiangzhi Yinchan" (Woman in Her 7-Month Pregnancy Forced to Abort in Ankang, Shaanxi Province According to Internet Sources), http://news.163.com/12/0612/18/83QP5TAI00011229.html, retrieved Sept. 25, 2012.

Appendix 4.1: Selected Examples of Political Cyber Vocabulary

English	Cyber Vocabulary
China	天朝 (*tianchao*, Heavenly Dynasty)/兲朝(*tianchao*)[28]
Government	朝廷 (*chaoting*, Royal Court)[29]
Chinese Communist Party	土共(*tugong*, Bandit Communist Party)/TG[30]
Politburo and its members	长老团(*zhanglaotuan*, Council of Elders)/长老(*zhanglao*, Elders)
Mao Zedong/Chairman Mao	主席(*zhuxi*, Chairman), 太祖 (*Taizu*, Emperor Taizu), 腊肉 (*larou*, bacon)[31]
Deng Xiaoping	笑贫(*Xiaopin*, laughing at the poor)/ shopping/286[32]
Jiang Zemin	才帝(*caidi*, Emperor the Talented)/江 Core (*Jiang* Core)/386[33]
Hu Jintao	团团(*tuantuan*, Round and Round)/面瘫帝(*miantandi*, Emperor the Face-Paralyzed)/蟹帝(*xiedi*, Emperor the Crab)[34]
Wen Jiabao	宝宝(*baobao*, Baby)/影帝(*yingdi*, The Best Actor)[35]
Li Changchun	长春真人 (*changchun zhenren*, Ever-Spring Immortal)[36]
Zhou Yongkang	康师傅(*Kang Shifu*, Master Kang)[37]
Bo Xilai	平西王(*pingxiwang*, The King Who Pacified the West)[38]

[28] Chinese netizens often use dynastical system to mock today's Chinese regime, the meaning which can be negative, positive, and neutral depends on the context. In the second term, a rare Chinese character of 兲 is intentionally used. The character has the same pronunciation and same meaning as 天 but is composed of "王" and "八," which, when put together, means tortoise, an offensive term similar to SOB in English.

[29] Again, netizens are using dynastic system to mock the government today.

[30] Though sounds disparaging, "*tugong*" (TG in abbreviation) is used by many netizens to show affinity to CCP. For them, it is the very yokel nature that lessens the distance between the party and the people at grassroots.

[31] It is pretty straightforward when netizens call Mao Zedong Chairman. He is referred to as Taizu Emperor because he was the founding leader of the People Republic. He is also called "bacon" by those who hate him because his body is still preserved today in his memorial hall located at Tiananmen Square.

[32] He is nicknamed "laughing at the poor" because the economic reform has enlarged income gap and left the poor behind; He is called 286 (Intel's 80286 CPU) because he was the core (*hexin*) of PRC's 2nd generation leadership. Deng is called "shopping" because the English word has a similar pronunciation of his name, Xiaoping. The nickname was actually from a joke on him: Deng was visiting the U.S. and was interviewed in English while waiting for his interpreter. The reporter asked him, "What's your next stop?" Deng couldn't understand but he thought that the reporter might be asking about his surname. So he replied in his Sichuan dialect accent, "*wo xing deng*," which sounds like "Washington." The reporter then asked, "What do you plan to do?" Deng could not understand again, but he pondered that this time the question should be about his given name. So he replied, "*Xiaoping*," which sounds like "shopping." The reporter again got amazed. He then continued with a few extra questions about Taiwan's leadership after Chiang Ching-Kuo, which Deng replied with "*Ni deng hui er*" (Wait a moment) and "*Suibian*" (whoever), which sounds like "Li Teng-Hui" and "Chen Suibian" respectively.

[33] Jiang was called Jiang Core or 386 because he was the core of China's third generation leadership. He is called Emperor the Talented because he likes showing off his versatility in front of international media.

[34] Hu Jintao is called "*tuantuan*" because of his Communist Youth League experience as "*tuan*" means the league. Netizens call him "Emperor the Face-Paralyzed" because he always keeps a straight face in front of the public. He is named Emperor the Crab (The Chinese pronunciation for "River Crab" and "Harmony" is the same) because of his official ideology of "Harmonious society."

[35] Wen got his petty nickname "Baby" in 2008 when he was highly regarded because of his performance in Sichuan earthquake. However, his nickname of "The Best Actor" soon became more popular because he failed to control housing and commodity prices despite all those promises he made.

[36] Li Changchun, one of the nine politburo standing members in Hu-Wen administration, is in charge of the propaganda department. He is named Ever-Spring Immortal because his first name literally means "Ever-Spring" which happened to be the Taoist monastic name of a Taoist in history.

[37] Zhou Yongkang is one of the nine politburo standing members in Hu-Wen administration and his is in charge of the police and court system. Master Kang is an instant noodles brand.

[38] Bo Xilai, the controversial provincial level leader, has become the target of censorship since Spring 2012, when he lost the political struggle. "The King Who Pacified the West" was the title given to a general in late-Ming and early-Qing period, Wu Sangui, who surrendered to the Manchurians and led their way into the Great Wall. Netizens call him The King Who Pacified the West for two reasons: (1) Chongqing locates in Southwest China, geographically to Wu's fief in Yunnan Province; (2) Like Wu, Bo was not trusted by the central government.

Appendix 4.2: "That Bunny in Those Years"

Source: "Gei Zhezhang Tu Peide Nanian Natu de Tu Shui You?" (Who Has the Picture in 'That Bunny in Those Years" that Matches this Photo?), http://www.newsmth.net/bbstcon.php?board=MilitaryJoke&gid=220230; "Xinsuan Ah, Kanle Ni Jiu Mingbai Zhongguo Weishenme Yao Jian Hangma Le" (So Bitter! You Will Understand Why China Needs Air Carrier after Seeing This Picture," http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military/38453741.html, both retrieved September 26, 2012.

Appendix 4.3: Capture Sora Aoi Alive

Source: Qi Zhifeng, "Zhongguo Wangluo Guancha: Cangjing Kong Hen Meng" (China Internet Watch: Sora Aoi is Moe), http://www.voachinese.com/content/china-web-watch-20120921/1512730.html

Appendix 4.4:

This is the last page of a book in PDF format shared at Sina's document sharing service, ishare.iask.com.cn. The book is titled Renmin Gongshe Shiqi Zhongguo Nongmin 'Fan-Xingwei' Diaocha (*Investigation on Peasants 'Counter-Action' during People's Commune Era*), which published by Chinese Communist Party History Publishing House, showing that it is clearly tolerated and uncensored. The link, http://mybooks.googlepages.com, is no longer valid. However, a search points it to http://sites.google.com/site/myboooks/.

Appendix 6.1:

What Do You Really Want from Us[39]
(by Anonymous Author)

When we were the Sick Man of Asia,
We were called the Yellow Peril.
When we are billed as the next Superpower, we are called The Threat.
When we closed our doors, you launched the Opium War to open our markets.
When we embraced free trade, you blamed us for stealing your jobs.
When we were falling apart, you marched in your troops and demanded your fair share.
When we tried to put the broken pieces back together again,
Free Tibet, you screamed. It was an Invasion!
When we tried communism, you hated us for being communist.
When we embraced capitalism, you hated us for being capitalist.
When we had a billion people, you said we were destroying the planet.
When we tried limiting our numbers, you said we abused human rights.
When we were poor, you thought we were dogs.
When we lend you cash, you blame us for your national debts.
When we build our industries, you call us polluters.
When we sell you goods, you blame us for global warming.
When we buy oil, you call it exploitation and genocide.
When you go to war for oil, you call it liberation.
When we were lost in chaos, you demanded the rule of law.
When we uphold law and order against violence, you call it a violation of human rights.
When we were silent, you said you wanted us to have free speech.
When we are silent no more, you say we are brainwashed xenophobes.
Why do you hate us so much? We asked.
No, you answered, we don't hate you.
We don't hate you either,
But do you understand us?
Of course we do, you said,
We have AFP, CNN and BBC. . . .
What do you really want from us?
Think hard first, then answer . . .
Because you only get so many chances.
Enough is Enough, Enough Hypocrisy for This One World.
We want One World, One Dream, and Peace on Earth.
This Big Blue Earth is Big Enough for all of Us.

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[39] Anonymous netizen, "What Do You Really Want from Us?" http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/16/AR2008051603460_pf.html, retrieved July 20, 2012. The poem circulated widely on Chinese forums, and searching the Chinese title of the poem via Baidu.com generates around 14600 entries on March 28, 2011.

Appendix 6.2: Excerpt from Liu Yuan's Blog Entry:

"Southern Group's contribution is not limited to newspapers it operates. It has educated countless people who worked there and influenced peer media workers. When it and *China Youth Daily* become role models, their values are accepted by numerous media workers …. Internet provides the most freedom of expressions. But interestingly, left voices are rare on major portals, except Sina. … I told my friends, among the four major portals, QQ's Chief editor Chen Juhong was from *Nanfang Zhoumo (Southern Weekend)*; Sohu's Zhao Mu, who runs the blog sector was from *Southern Weekend*, and Liu Xinzheng was from *Xin Jingbao* (*The Beijing News*, co-founded by Guangming Daily and Nanfang Group); Sina has many old friends from *Nanfang Dushibao (Southern Metropolis*) and *The Beijing News*; Not to mention Wangyi (*Netease*), whose VP, chief editor, deputy chief editor, chief inspector, and almost all managing channel editors were from Southern Group….No doubt, they play a big role in clamping down extreme nationalism. Pitiful leftists can only curse in their or others' blogs in vain. Internet gurus know that a portal recommended rational post would be more influential than ten thousand follow-up cursing leftist posts."[40]

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[40] Liu Yuan，"[Zhongguo Bu Gaoxing]: Zuofen de Huanghun" (China is Unhappy: The Coming Doomsday of the Shit Leftists), http://sohuliuyuan.blog.sohu.com/114075956.html, retrieved July 20, 2012.

Appendix 6.3: Summary by Wise Netizens:[41]

不 许 说 美 国 的 坏 话！

Southern Weekend [logo]: We Do NOT Allow You to Say Anything Bad about the U.S.!

不 许 说 中 国 的 好 话！

Netease [logo]: We Do Not Allow You to Say Anything Good about China!

我 们 在 讨 论 民 主，不 许 你 说 话！

Kdnet.net [logo]: We Are Discussing Democracy and We Do Not Allow You to Say Anything!

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[41] Sichuan Xiaoqi, "You Zhihui de Wangyou Zongjie: Nanfang Zhoumo: Buxu Shuo Meiguo Huaihua" (Summary by Wise Netizens: Southern Weekend: We Don't Allow You to Say Anything Bad about the U.S.), http://bbs.m4.cn/thread-3244443-1-1.html, retrieved January 3, 2012.

Appendix 6.4: Dailu Dang (Road-Leading Party)

The comic depicts a farmer – invokes the image of elderly farmers in China's anti-Japanese War effort who fought fiercely against the invaders – guiding a UN soldier. The two lines on the blue flag are "Leading the way (for foreign intervention) is glorious" and "Liberate China" respectively. Original source: weibo.com/2105744042. The picture has been deleted from its original source but spread widely circulated on forums. For an example of nationalistic responses and debates, see "Dailu Dang, Yige Lingren Exin de Qunti" (Road-Leading Party: A Sick Group of People), http://bbs.tiexue.net/post_5107937_1.html, retrieved July 20, 2012.

Appendix 6.5: Example of Labeling War

Thread：Wheels (FLG Practitioners) Used to Tear Their Passports for Political Asylum[42]

[Board: Military][OP：icecool1748] , April 2, 2011 14:38:49
[Page:1]
Sender: icecool1748 (ICE), Board: Military
Now foreigners don't want them so they are crying and yelling to go back. The (Chinese) Embassy refuses to issue passports because their identities cannot be verified. So each of them is crying and yelling, shamelessly hang on outside the embassy and [I] saw quite some thrown out by security guards.
--
Sender: benchmark (maine), Board: Military
You haven't found a job. You may go practice FLG one day

【 Quoted from icecool1748 (ICE) 's Post: 】
: Now foreigners don't want them so they are crying and yelling to go back. The (Chinese) …
--
Sender: icecool1748 (ICE), Board: Military
I guess you don't even know what is 401K. NED will never provide social welfare for you, right?

>>Sender: icecool1748 (ICE), Board: Working
>>[You're] truly an inexperienced unenlightened guy.
>>Our company deposits 3% without us contributing a single penny.

【Quoted from benchmark (maine)'s Post: 】
: You haven't found a job. You may go practice FLG one day
--
Sender: withoutacar (知道错了，改过来就好.), Board: Military
Join older generals (Laojiang) when you are in the dead end? So you laojiang have many precedents?

【Quoted from benchmark (maine)'s Post: 】
: You haven't found a job. You may go practice FLG one day
--
Sender: WPF (清七对), Board: Military
Then what to do? Without a passport and thus the identity cannot be verified? Staying underground here in the U.S. for their entire lives?

【Quoted from icecool1748 (ICE)'s Post: 】
: Now foreigners don't want them so they are crying and yelling to go back. The (Chinese) …
--
Sender: benchmark (maine), Board: Military

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[42] See "Lunzi Dangnian Si Huzhao Gao Zhengzhi Binan" (Wheels Used to Tear Their Passports for Political Asylum), http://www.mitbbs.com/article_t/Military/35576285.html, retrieved April 2, 2011.

The (Chinese) Embassy has been nice to you then, even provided this for you.

【Quoted from icecool1748 (ICE)'s Post: 】
: I guess you don't even know what is 401K. NED will never provide social welfare for you, right? ...
--
Sender: benchmark (maine), Board: Military
There are many such precedents among young generals (Xiao Jiang).

【Quoted from withoutacar (知道错了，改过来就好.)'s Post: 】
: Join older generals (Laojiang) when you are in the dead end? ...
--
Sender: withoutacar (知道错了，改过来就好.), Board: Military
The US government respects human rights, so you don't have to worry about this.

【Quoted from WPF (清七对)'s Post: 】
: Then what to do? Without a passport and thus the identity cannot be verified? ...
--
Sender: withoutacar (知道错了，改过来就好.), Board: Military
Non-promising young generals turn into old generals. No wonder old generals are of low quality.

【 Quoted from benchmark (maine)'s Post: 】
: There are many such precedents among young generals (Xiao Jiang).
--
Sender: icecool1748 (ICE), Board: Military
If that cannot do, they can be shipped to India and stocked with horde of Dalai Lama. Though they may suffer in terms of material life, they should enjoy spiritual life under the sunshine of democracy.

【 Quoted from WPF (清七对)'s Post: 】
: Then what to do? Without a passport and thus the identity cannot be verified? …
--
Sender: WPF (清七对), Board: Military
Won't illegal immigrants be thrown in jail?

【Quoted from withoutacar (知道错了，改过来就好.)'s Post: 】
: The US government respects human rights, so you don't have to worry about this.
--
Sender: Mvwd (wht dsnt kill u mks u strong), Board: Military
If the U.S. is smart enough, they should take measures to prevent these people become anti-US terrorists.

【Quoted from icecool1748 (ICE)'s Post: 】
: Now foreigners don't want them so they are crying and yelling to go back. The (Chinese)…
--
Sender: withoutacar (知道错了，改过来就好.), Board: Military
Illegal immigrants, verified. (Go to) Jail, provides food and accommodation. This is

human rights.

【 Quoted from WPF (清七对) 's Post: 】
: Won't illegal immigrants be thrown in jail?
--
Sender: withoutacar (知道错了，改过来就好.), Board: Military
Chinese people won't. One American guy in my company who visits Asia frequently told me frankly: Chinese people are either good or bad. Easy to tell that. The good guys have a diverse attitude towards the U.S. and those bad guys all love the U.S.

【Quoted from Mvwd (wht dsnt kill u mks u strong)'s Post: 】
: If the U.S. is smart enough, they should take measures to prevent these people become anti-US terrorists.
--
Sender: Janus (道不行，乘桴浮于海), Board: Military
Not many wheels would tear their passports. Those who do are mostly illegal immigrants.

【Quoted from icecool1748 (ICE)'s Post: 】
: Now foreigners don't want them so they are crying and yelling to go back. The (Chinese) …
--
Sender: icecool1748 (ICE), Board: Military
These wheels are as cheap as boneless pugs and they don't even have balls to become terrorists.

【Quoted from Mvwd (wht dsnt kill u mks u strong)'s Post: 】
: If the U.S. is smart enough, they should take measures to prevent these people become anti-US terrorists.
--
Sender: Mvwd (wht dsnt kill u mks u strong), Board: Military
Laojiang hate CCP that much. So they can hate US as well when US abandons them. That's very normal.

【Quoted from icecool1748 (ICE)'s Post: 】
: These wheels are as cheap as boneless pugs and they don't even have balls to become terrorists.
--
Sender: typical (高天流云), Board: Military
You practiced?
【Quoted from benchmark (maine)'s Post: 】
: You haven't found a job. You may go practice FLG one day
--
Sender: canghai (沧海), Board: Military
I glanced at NTDTV (Rongbin: New Tang Dynasty Television, a FLG media outlet) yesterday and they were stirring this up. Through this (we) further see wheels are the trash among the trash.

【Quoted from icecool1748 (ICE)'s Post: 】

: Now foreigners don't want them so they are crying and yelling to go back. The (Chinese) …

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