From Teahouses to Websites: Can Internet bulletin boards construct the public sphere in China?

Yan Wu

**Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies
Cardiff University**

**A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

January 2007

UMI Number: U584134

UMI

Dissertation Publishing

ProQuest

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

The Internet has been viewed as a revolutionary means for including individuals in public deliberation on an equal basis. However, there is insufficient empirical work on applications of computer mediated communication to public deliberation under non-democratic social circumstances. This thesis explores the potential of computer-mediated communication in constructing the public sphere in post-Communist China and focuses on the current affairs discussion on *Qiangguo Luntan* (QGLT), one of the most popular Internet bulletin boards in China.

The production–content-reception study shows that: 1) Internet bulletin boards in China are not 'online dissident avenues' without administrative surveillance. In addition, self-censorship works in a long-term and covert way in restraining the democratic potential of online discussion; 2) Internet bulletin boards enable ordinary Chinese to have their identities as politically activated citizens constructed in cyberspace. Their enthusiasm in voicing differentiated political standpoints proves that online public opinion could enrich the political discourse in China, and has the potential of leading to tensions between the public and the state; 3) QGLT SARS postings display the growth of a public critique that ventured to touch upon a taboo issue that was originally banned from public discussion. Non-localized and dialogic forms of communication among the users have created an alternative form of publicity outside the mainstream media's agenda and could potentially check the government's policy-making.

The Internet may work to undermine public deliberation by increasing inequalities of access, fragmenting public discourse, and accommodating non-progressive rhetoric. Nevertheless by enlarging the scale of civic participation, advancing alternative and oppositional public discourses, and tackling problems at a global level, Internet bulletin boards could make a significant contribution to the construction of an alternative public sphere representing divergent political views. In summary, under the articulated forces of commercialisation, democratisation, and globalisation, the virtual public sphere in China today has been put in tension between democratisation and degeneration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Introduction

On 9 May, 1999, I was one of the many peaceful demonstrators marching in Beijing. We were protesting against NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during Kosovo Conflict. Three journalists were killed in this bombing, which stirred fervent public opinion in China condemning the USA's military hegemony. Nevertheless, street demonstrations were only allowed for one day in major cities by the Chinese government. A few days later, I heard for the first time the name of *Kangyi Luntan* (the Protest Forum), later *Qiangguo Luntan* (QGLT thereafter), which was sited on the Communist Party's organ the *People's Daily*'s website. QGLT became known as a replacement venue for street protests in cyberspace and the expression of public opinion.

The literal meaning of QGLT in Chinese is 'strong nation forum' or 'strengthening the nation forum'.[1] The connotation of this name reflects an ambivalent attitude towards 'Western powers' among Chinese intellectuals, which can be traced back to the nineteenth century. From 1842 to 1945, China was colonised by various European powers and also Japan. Chinese intellectuals emphasised the importance of learning advanced technologies and democratic polity from the Western colonisers in order to 'strengthen' their own country and win national independence. By promoting 'Self-Strengthening', Chinese intellectuals have emphasised China's 'autonomy and initiative' in learning from the West (Fairbank 1987:100).

Since 1999 I had attended several conferences when Mr. Yaping Jiang, the founder of QGLT and the Deputy President of people.com.cn, was the keynote speaker. In those conferences, he spoke about his experience of managing QGLT, and those talks were also covered by various media. As Jiang saw it, Chinese people wanted to express their ideas to the government and the government wanted to know what the people thought and an online forum was the ideal tool to bridge these two ends (Turner 10/04/2000). Jiang admitted QGLT moderators delete postings and as he said no 'sex', 'libel', or 'state secrets' are allowed on QGLT (Gilley 24/05/2001). At the same time, he also admitted the management of the bulletin boards could not be too strict so as to

prevent a true reflection of public opinion occurring online. The critical public opinion on QGLT shows that 'the top leaders appear willing to tolerate a certain amount of frankness that would otherwise be stamped out' in traditional media (Turner 10/04/2000).

Because of the critical public debate fostered on its bulletin boards, QGLT has been referred to by the foreign media as 'a Trojan horse filled with angry citizens right inside the party gates' (Gilley 24/05/2001), 'an avenue for dissent' (Turner 10/04/2000), or 'a hint of the challenge' to the Chinese government (Hewitt 26/07/2001). At the same time, QGLT also displays nationalistic features in its online discussion, which is regarded as 'a source of comfort to the Communist Party' (Cohn 21/07/2001).

I was fascinated with reading the political discussion on QGLT, which provides a totally different content from what I could find in the traditional Chinese media. Voices from ordinary people, rather than government officials, could be heard here; different ideological and political preference could be found within this online community, and discussion and debate on current issues might not necessarily lead to agreement. QGLT accommodates more critical public opinion on politically 'sensitive issue' than the most daring Chinese newspapers. This general impression of QGLT became a concrete question when I considered writing a PhD research proposal: does online political discussion construct the public sphere in non-democratic societies such as China?

In the past decade, there has been an increasing growth of online political projects promoting civic participation promoted through 'two-way conversations' between citizens and the state by government, citizen groups or academia[2]. Much has also been debated in the academic world about the possibility of the Internet enhancing deliberation and democracy. However, most research and debate is situated in the context of democratic societies. There is insufficient research on the deliberating potential of the Internet and how it construct the public sphere through the discursive space generated by online interaction in non-democratic countries.

Research concerning deliberation through the Internet sometimes finds disheartening

results (Noam, E. M. 2005). There have been arguments that online discussion cannot move beyond simple opinion-sharing (White, C. 1997) or that online democracy is configured through contestation and conflict rather than consensus and rational and legal procedures (Dean, J. 2003). However, other evidence indicates a positive relationship between Internet use and users' communal and civic involvement (Katz et al. 2001; Katz and Rice 2002). In spite of all limitations, the 'reciprocal dynamics' generated from talks among online participants 'is the catalyst for the civic cultures' that features a new democratic politics in cyberspace (Dahlgren 2005: 159). Interactive text-based computer-mediated communication is central to the idea of electronic deliberation. Engaging in online discussion exposes participants to a variety of opinions they otherwise might not encounter and encourages self-reflection over the issues at debate (Weger and Aekhus 2003) and thus a public can be created from online discursive interaction. The merit of using the deliberative approach to study Internet democracy according to Lincoln Dahlberg, lies in the fact that it heeds the 'multiple differences between subjects within pluralist societies' (Dahlberg 2001a: 616). The deliberative democracy approach acknowledges the difference in subjects and provides a basis for discursive interaction among participants who represent different political viewpoints and opinion. This helps to explain the democratising potential of the political talk on QGLT bulletin boards.

In this study, 'Internet bulletin boards' (or 'bulletin boards') is used as a general term that addresses any facility on the World Wide Web for holding interactive discussion among users, though I acknowledge that there have been many other terms used for online discussion. According to the Columbia Encyclopaedia (6th Edition), 'discussion groups', 'newsgroups', and 'bulletin boards' are all used interchangeably to refer to users posting messages and looking for responses on the Internet. The online encyclopaedia Wikipedia points out that in current usage (primarily in China and Japan), 'bulletin boards system' is used interchangeably with 'Internet forum' which may also be phrased as 'web forums', 'message boards', 'discussion boards', 'discussion forums', 'discussion groups', 'bulletin boards', *fora* or 'forums' in other contexts[3]. The similarity between bulletin boards and Internet forums is obvious: they both allow users to post and interact with each other, and usually virtual communities are formed from such interaction. Internet bulletin boards are usually split into individual boards that deal with particular topics. The object of study for this PhD,

3

QGLT, is an online forum for political discussion about current affairs. 'BBS', 'Internet forum' and 'web forum' have been used by Chinese media and users when describing it.

This thesis aims to examine the potential of online political discussion to foster deliberation in Post-Communist China. To be specific, this thesis examines the possible realisation of the deliberative approach to Internet democracy through a case study of QGLT. By comparing existing online discursive interaction on QGLT to the set of criteria for the public sphere developed by Jürgen Habermas (1989), this thesis evaluates whether the online rational-critical public discussion constructs and then extends the wider public sphere in China.

My main argument substantiates the theoretical argument that rational critical discourse in the public sphere can be found in the discursive space on Internet bulletin boards. The Internet can enlarge the scale of civic participation, advance alternative and oppositional public discourses, and tackle problems at a global level. Internet bulletin boards construct a public sphere with divergent political views represented. This alternative public sphere online has the potential of freeing civil society from state control, and cultivating critical public opinion that is able to check on an authoritarian government's policy-making. In this sense, online deliberative forums play a more important role in non-liberal societies in extending the public sphere than their counterparts in democratic societies.

1. Research Background: Digital Media Ecology in China

The discursive space generated on QGLT is not an exceptional case and is rooted in the socio-economic changes in China. The Communist Party's ultimate control over media was thwarted after economic reform in 1978. Since then, China has witnessed the commercialisation of its media and the opening of the media market to foreign companies. Joining the WTO's Information Technology Agreement in 2003[4] further opened the Chinese telecommunications industry to both western capital and western ideology. Since the early 1990s, the Internet has developed quickly in China and the country boasted 8% of the population online in January 2006 (CINIC Report 'XVII). In this section, I intend to map the digital media ecology in China in order to provide

readers with the context in which rational critical public debate emerges online. By 'digital media ecology', I mean the institutional framework that dictates the Internet media and the users it creates. I will look at the political economy, control, and regulations of the Internet media; and the growth of online communities based on bulletin boards in China.

1.1 The Political Economy, Control and Regulation of the Internet

The Chinese government has been the driving force behind the explosive development in information and communication technologies (ICTs) in China. The Chinese government believes that ICTs are crucial factors for building a strong economy and overcoming interregional development gaps at home. In fact, by the mid-1990s, China became the leading force among Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) countries in efforts to promote the development of ICTs (Giese, K 2003:38). In terms of the political economy of digital media, state ownership is not the only form. The Internet has been transformed from sole state ownership to a variety of ownerships in the 1990s. However, in spite of the changes in the media's political economy, stringent administrative regulations still have been imposed on Internet media.

The Internet was first used as a data network that enables scholarly exchange of information in China, and 'generally fell under the auspices of the education and academic sectors of the central government' (Harwit and Clark 2001:384). The first commercial Internet Service Provider (ISP) ChinaNET, was affiliated to the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications[5] and was opened to the public in January 1996. As Harwit and Clark comment:

> The company was licensed as one of the government's major interconnecting networks and acted both as a wholesale provider of Internet bandwidth as well as a brand name for the regional provincial telecommunications administrations to offer their own retail service provision. Early ChinaNET customers were to be state corporations, private companies, or wealthy individuals who could afford connection fees (2001: 384).

The launch of ChinaNET heralded more State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in the telecommunication and information industry over the following years. SOEs, which

5

operate like private companies, are owned entirely by the Chinese government. More importantly, ISPs which are SOEs control China's international bandwidth connection. As a consequence, at least in theory, any information exchange between personal computers in and out of China has to go through the state-controlled information hub.

At the same time, the Chinese government gave financial support and favourable policies[6] to state-controlled tradition media as an encouragement to 'go online'. From 1995 to 1998, five major central media, namely the Chinese Central Television, *People's Daily*, Xinhua News Agency, China Radio International and *China Daily* all launched their websites[7]. By April 2000, 273 Chinese newspapers, 68 radio stations, and 128 television stations had their websites (Wang, Y. 2001: 203-204).

Moreover, private Internet companies in China live under the double pressure of a state monopoly over telecommunication resources, and state control of online content (Jiang, Q. 17/03/2005). Private ISPs have to rent telephone lines and optic cables from the government-controlled China Telecom, which leaves them vulnerable to SOE's manipulation of the market through a connecting fee (Jiang, Q. 01/09/2000; Wei, C. 15/08/2005). The Information Office of the State Council also formulated regulations as early as in 1999 to ban the private Internet Content Providers (ICPs) from publicising their self-gathered news. All journalistic content on commercial Internet portals, according to this regulation, has to be sourced from the state-controlled traditional media.

China has opened itself to transnational media organisations' capital and entertainment content, but closed itself to any accompanying democratising ideas in Journalistic practice. In 1999, the Zhonghua Network became the first NASDAQ-listed private Chinese Internet company, setting the trend for its peers to attract US capital by listing on the stock market. Up to 2005, a number of NASDAQ-listed Chinese Internet portals such as Sina, Sohu, Netease and the search engine Baidu all have gained profit. At the same time, AOL Time Warner, News Corporation, Microsoft, and Yahoo are allowed to enter the Chinese market. However, the government's control over online content has never been relaxed and as early as 1996,

hundreds of overseas-based English and Chinese web sites were blocked in Mainland China. The *Los Angeles Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, and CNN and the BBC, as well as 'those sponsored by the Taiwan government and overseas human rights and dissident groups' (Zhao 1998:177) have all been blocked from public access.

Apart from explicit administrative measures, government bodies such as the Public Information Networking Security Surveillance Bureau[8] were created in 1998 to monitor online communication. According to the *Independent* reporter David Eimer (16/11/2005), around 40,000 'technocrats' have been employed by the government to watch over Internet users' online talk and dampen dissident opinion. China's Internet filtering system, named the 'Golden Shield' by the government, 'is in the front line of the Chinese authorities' attempts to maintain control of an increasingly fractious society by preventing the spread of political dissent' through blocking overseas websites (Eimer 16/11/2005).

The structural dimension of the Internet in China reflects an ambivalent attitude from the Chinese government. The Communist Party has been trying to explore the economic potential of the Internet while restraining its deliberating potential.[9] Xiudian Dai believes that the Chinese government attempts to 'marry the opportunities and dynamics of the global communications revolution with the country's unfinished process of industrialisation' (2003: 24). The Chinese government regards the arrival of the Internet as a new channel for economic development and supports digitalisation in commerce, banking, and other industries.[10] In the meantime, the Internet has been put under tight control to prevent the spread of democratic ideas that might challenge the Communist Party's ideology. In terms of online content control, the Chinese government actively supports state-controlled mainstream media to use the Internet as an extended information platform. On the other hand, the Chinese government discourages commercial Internet Content Providers (ICPs) from providing informative content other than entertainment-oriented popular culture (Jiang, Q. 17/03/2005). Worth noticing here is a hidden assumption in the Communist Party's digital media strategy: *news* and *current affairs reports* from non-official sources,

especially from overseas media, can challenge the Party's governance but 'soft' content online, such as popular culture and entertainment, is not contained in the public sphere. Nevertheless, as Habermas says:

> The institutional core of the public sphere comprises communicative networks amplified by a cultural complex, a press and, later, mass media; they make it possible for a public of art-enjoying private persons to participate in the reproduction of culture, and for a public of citizens of the state to participate in the social integration mediated by public opinion (1987:319).

Through this argument, Habermas draws attention to the cultural public sphere which is also 'the environment relevant to *generating legitimation*' (*ibid.*) The combined forces of the emerging middle class, urbanisation, wide spread of knowledge, and popularisation of culture can provide the environment for the emergence of a critical public.

1.2 The Rise of the Chinese Public Online

In spite of control from the government, political communication in China nevertheless involves public scrutiny into its fairness, completeness, pluralism of views, and ideological tendencies. The Internet has played an active role in this process and enables users' interaction with digital media and with their peers online at local and global levels. Such interaction makes it possible for little-known individuals and politically marginalised groups to reach out to each other and re-structure public affairs (Ferdinand 2000). The discursive and interactional process in online communication helps the 'public' to emerge in China.

Long before the arrival of the Internet, the communal practice of reading newspapers, listening to the radio, and watching television existed in Communist China (Lull 1991). James Lull notices that Chinese audiences were not passive mass receivers of media content, and 'read [...] between the lines in order to pick up the less obvious messages' (1991: 216). Such interaction with media sees audiences interpret media's 'symbols and semiotic structures to create their own meanings, promote their own understandings, and develop their own ideological coalitions' (Lull, J. 1991: 216). However, these practices in the mass communication age were inconsistent, sporadic,

limited to a small number of population, and lacked channels for public opinion expression.

The Internet has created a new form of interaction among Chinese people and started to challenge the sense of political community traditionally represented by official meetings, neighbourhood or organisation study groups, or intellectual elite-dominated salons. The first bulletin board in mainland China, *Dawn BBS*[11], was launched in May 1994.[12] Major steps were made towards building online communities when the influential Tsinghua University-based *Shuimu Tsinghua BBS* was set up in Beijing in August 1995. More campus-based BBSs moderated by students have been set up ever since. Campus-BBSs have become the primary forum for students to air complaints about the rising costs of university education, official corruption, and even criticism of party policies. By the end of 1996, the number of bulletin boards in Mainland China reached 62 (Huang and Ding: 2001: 610-614). There is no updated number of bulletin boards in China, but one can tell with certainty that bulletin boards, along with other online interactive facilities such as web messenger, discussion groups, chat rooms, personal webpages, and blogs proliferate among more than 123 million users in China (CINIC Report XVII 2006). CINIC Report XVII (2006) reveals that interactive communication facilities enjoy great popularity among Chinese users: 42.7% of users use web messengers, 43.2% use Internet forums, bulletin boards, discussion groups, and 19.9% use web-based chat rooms[13].

Even since the early days of Internet development in China, online interaction has encouraged users to talk over issues of common concerns at a global level. The CINIC Report XI (2003) found that 53.1% of Chinese users identified their primary reason for accessing the Internet as 'to get information' and 'keep informed'. Overseas Chinese language sites account for 7.0 % of all information obtained by Chinese users from the Internet, and overseas English language sites account for 5.6% (CINIC Report XIV 2005). On bulletin boards, overseas postings first appeared on campus-based BBSs and became an important alternative information source. However, this interaction among Chinese people across national boundaries also led to administrative intervention from authorities. In 2001, postings about the '1989 Tiananmen Square massacre' from overseas alumni appeared on the *Baiyunhuanghe* BBS based in the Huazhong University of Science and Technology. This campus-

based bulletin board was shut down by the local government and was later taken under control by the university in September.[14] Nevertheless, since every individual who can read postings and reply in a discussion group 'is also potentially a publisher' (Rheingold 1993)[15], the dispersed information sources online make censorship much more difficult to perform. Postings such as news from overseas Chinese media (e.g. the *United Morning News* in Singapore), overseas users' translation of news stories from foreign language media, and original eye-witness reports from diasporic Chinese can still circumvent the surveillance and appear on major China-based bulletin boards, including the official QGLT.

Because of its autonomous and grassroots nature, the Internet has the essential quality of allowing the general public to decide how and which issues are structured in the public sphere. This character of online communication has a revolutionary effect on public life in China. Traditional media forms in China are responsible for moulding public opinion by setting official agendas and promulgating the Communist Party's instructions. As a consequence, traditional Chinese media are mainly representations of the dominant ideology from 'above'. The Internet media, on the contrary, opens alternative channels for ordinary people to voice their political concerns and interests, which involves public contribution to the plurality of viewpoints in political communication. Topical discussion on bulletin boards covers a range of 'hard' issues such as current political affairs, international relations, environmental protection, education, or unemployment. However, it would be simplistic to assume the 'soft' topical discussion which looks 'nonpolitical' is always 'apolitical'. For example, homosexual relationships were regarded as a 'psychological disease' before 2001 or labelled as anti-social behaviour in China and sexual minorities' rights are not officially protected. In this sense, online discussion about gay rights usually appears on bulletin boards themed as 'Romance' or 'Relationship' is revolutionary in putting this 'taboo' issue on public agenda. Another example is public discussion on bulletin boards themed as 'Car Fans' or 'Property Owners'. Evidence shows that consumer organisations actively use bulletin boards to unite their members online and defend consumers' rights against big corporations. Some online communities such as *Jie Ban* (Volkswagen Jetta owners' bulletin board) accommodate public dialogue on drunken driving, road safety awareness, and air pollution.[16]

Online discourse on the Internet is not necessarily always subversive. However, the Internet can broaden the scope of public agenda, mobilise the politically marginalised or suppressed social groups, and provide a space to unify them into critical publics, thus constructing a paralleled dimension in the public sphere offline. In this sense, the Internet is intrinsically a radical media form that changes political culture in China.

2. Significance of This Study

This thesis aims to examine the role of Internet bulletin boards in constructing alternative public discourses and fostering rational critical public debate in China. This project intends to explore a currently under-researched topic addressing the possibility of deliberative democracy being realised in cyberspace. Lincoln Dahlberg suggests that:

> A more rigorous analysis of the intersection between the Internet and deliberative democracy would not only be sociological fruitful ...[but also] offers a powerful vision of democracy that is in step with the needs of contemporary pluralist society: the deliberative model recognises difference between individuals and the importance of rational deliberation to build strong citizens (2001c: 157; 170).

This research, based on the empirical study of political discussion on Chinese bulletin boards, aims to contribute to the ongoing scholarly debate on online deliberative democracy, and also explore deliberative forms in the democratising process in China.

Debates on electronic democracy can be roughly divided into four camps: the liberal individualism; communitarianism; post-modernism; and deliberative democracy. The concept of liberal individualism, promoted by Alvin Toffler (1981), Christa Daryl Slaton (1992), Mitchell Kapor (1993), and others, celebrates the digital frontier as assisting the expression of individualised interest (Dahlberg 2001a: 616). Cyberspace is regarded as increasing direct democracy and facilitating emerging free-willed online citizens exempted from the authoritarian domination in the offline world. This view, however, overlooks the fact that the Internet has been increasingly integrated into governmental policy-making and employed for military, educational, public, and commercial use (Loader, B. D. 1997: 6). Communitarianism (see Rheingold 1993;

Doheny-Farina 1996; Wilbur, S. P. 1997; Healy, D. 1997; Smith and Kollock 1999) emphasises the communitarian ethos of cyberspace in uniting people together. Nonetheless, this view runs the risk of enhancing the Internet's role as an undifferentiated communal spirit, and thus fails to heed the 'multiple differences between subjects within pluralist societies' (Dahlberg 2001a: 616). The post-modernist approach (Lyotard, J-F. 1984; Harvey, D. 1989; Poster 1995, 1996, 2001 [1995]) links post-modern culture with the socio-political changes caused by the decentralised communication facilitated by digital media. Jean-François Lyotard (1984) defines the postmodern age as 'incredulity toward metanarratives' by which he implies that individuals are unable to understand their current circumstances. Whilst all social groups have a right to speak their authentic and legitimate voices (Harvey 1989:48) in a many-to-many fashion, the post-modernist narratives 'ha[ve] ... more in common with [...] sound-bite politics which epitomise [...] the commodification of political discourse rather than informed political dialogue' (Loader, B. D. 1997:9). Contrary to the three theoretical frameworks detailed above, the deliberative democratic approach tends to view cyberspace not only as an extension of the Habermasian public sphere, but also as a discursive space in which individuals arrive at 'informed' decisions about public concerns through democratic interaction.

Compared to the above three approaches, the merit of the deliberative democratic approach (Buchstein 1997; Coleman, S. 1999, 2004; Fernback 1997; Hauben and Hauben 1997; Kellner 1995, 1998, 1999) in studying political discussion on bulletin boards lies in the following aspects. Firstly, the deliberative democractic approach emphasises the *reflexivity* and *rationality* in online dialogue among its participants. Participants of open and free online dialogue put forward their own arguments, 'lay aside particular interests and opinion', and debate common problems of public concerns until they are swayed by reasons 'in deference to overall fairness and the common interest of the collectivity' (Miller 1992:56). Participants of deliberative dialogue 'attempt to come to an understanding of their interlocutors and to reflexively modify their prediscursive positions in response to better arguments' (Dahlberg 2001c: 167). Secondly the outcomes of deliberative dialogue, the informed choices, are not exclusive to the *differences* among its participants. The source of both liberal individualism and communitarianism are rooted in notions of a self-determining subject (Habermas 1996: 103) while deliberative democracy relies upon

12

intersubjectivity (Dahlberg 2001c: 168). In the deliberation process, legitimate (rational) decisions are reached through a process by which each individual's will is formed as opposed to pre-given collective wills being expressed (Manin 1987: 351-2). Thirdly, the deliberative democratic approach does not view cyberspace as a disjuncture of the offline world, and does not negate the discursive space generated from the existing offline world. Hubertus Buchstein says, 'the use of the Internet has to be carefully situated within the context of already existing democratic institutions' (1997: 260). The Internet is regarded as a facilitating medium for both online and offline discursive interaction, through which individuals coalesce into publics. For these reasons, a deliberative democratic approach is employed as the theoretical framework for this study on text-based public discussion online and its socio-political influence in China.

Several factors help to explain the lack of research on electronic deliberation through online public discussion in China. Firstly, the structural dimension of Internet media in China still seems hostile towards democratic public discourse. Dahlgren comments that 'a society where democratic tendencies are weak is not going to give rise to healthy institutional structures for the public sphere' (2005:149). The infamous online speech control, surveillance and censorship from the Chinese government (see for example, Kalathil, S. and Boas, T. 2003; Wacker, G. 2003; Zittrain and Edelman 2003a; 2003b) block researchers' insight into the digital *resistance* from Chinese users. Secondly, the anonymity and volatility associated with online political communities makes the study of the critical public's composition very difficult. Jean-Luc Nancy dismisses the significance of online participants as 'multiple, dispersed, mortally fragmented existences' (1991: xi) and the ease of joining and withdrawing online political engagement also makes it difficult 'to estimate what portion of the citizenry is actually involved' (Dahlgren 2004: xiii). Thirdly, online public opinion is not always democratic in its nature and is hard to evaluate in terms of its influence on official agendas and policy-making. Scholars also lament that online democratic deliberation is overshadowed by consumerism, entertainment, non-political networking, and apolitical chatting (Ferdinand 2000; Dahlgren 2005). In China's case, the extreme nationalism demonstrated on some bulletin boards (Hughes 2002; Rosen 2003) tend to eclipse the rational and deliberative potential in online public opinion.

An ethnographic approach is employed in this research in studying the media organisation (QGLT), users (a combined role of traditional producers and audiences), and online content (postings). This approach is central in providing an insider's perspective and understanding of the gate-keeping process, the identity-construction of users, and the textual component of online political discourse. As Teun A. van Dijk says:

> All features of discourse [...] are systematically related to the many features of the socio-cultural context. This means that we also need detailed ethnographic observations about the production ad (*sic*) uses (participation) of communicative events in the media, both for communicative events [...] 'in' the media, as well as those 'by' the media, i.e. with media users als (*sic*) participants (van Dijk, T. A. 1985: 7).

My ethnographic work involved being a registered user since 2003 and also consisted of a more than two month 'internship' with QGLT in 2004. The empirical experience of being a user and a moderator helped me to grasp the culture, lexis and norms concerning political discussion within this online community and also helped me to build a rapport with other users and moderators. By utilising these connections, I conducted participant observation of the gate-keeping process, semi-structured in-depth interviews with both moderators and users, and textual analysis of postings. Through such research, this thesis endeavours to address the deficit in empirical studies concerning electronic deliberation on bulletin boards.

This ethnography-oriented qualitative research approach aims to reveal QGLT participants' online practice of constructing, interpreting, contesting, and changing their understanding of political identity. At the same time, it also intends to examine how public interest and sense of social reality are represented online through deliberative dialogue. The exchange of political viewpoint in online discussion is in a sense a signifying practice and needs to be linked with 'a much wider series of questions concerning the overall ideological, cultural and political significance of media institutions in relations to the social formation as a whole' (Connell and Miles 1985: 36). Thus, it needs to be examined not only from a linguistic perspective but also an approach that emphasises the social contexts within which texts are constructed and used (Fairclough 2003). Based on this belief, this research emphasises the social contexts within which texts of online public discourses are used.

Online public discussion brings together diverse actors to communicate in a virtual space, and is often of a transnational character. Textual analysis of online postings reveals that although online public opinion can be formed outside of dominant political institutions in China, online discussion still largely evolves around policy-making political actors in the offline world[17]. As a result, the deficit in electronic deliberation is eventually pre-determined by the existing offline 'democratic deficit' (Schlesinger 1999:264).

3. Structure of the Chapters

Chapter 2 examines a range of conceptual developments of the public sphere and focuses on the democratising role of media, especially the Internet's role in expanding the alternative public sphere. This chapter argues that the Internet plays a central role in political deliberation in contemporary Chinese society through enhancing participation, enlarging the scope of political discussion, and fostering rational critical public opinion.

Chapter 3 explores the historic development of the public sphere in China. By analysing the contextual factors affecting the role of media in political communication, this chapter argues that the 'alternative public sphere' and 'the oppositional public sphere' are expanding as a response to the public call for civil participation in contemporary China since media reform in 1978.

The 4th chapter maps out the research methods employed for this PhD project. I adopt multiple qualitative research methods which involves analysing gate-keeping, production, representation and reception. To be specific, my research methods include a two-month participant observation with QGLT as an intern moderator; in-depth interviews; and textual and discourse analysis of QGLT users' online identity and postings during the SARS crisis in 2003.

Chapter 5, 6 and 7 respectively examine the production-content-reception in the online political communication environment. Chapter 5 looks into the gate-keeping process within QGLT - how online political discussion is moderated, filtered, and

censored. This chapter argues that digital technologies are not free from administrative surveillance in China and censorship muzzles criticism and dissident opinions online, which limits the deliberating role of the Internet. Chapter 6 explores the community nature of QGLT and investigates its potential to cultivate a critical public in China. This chapter reveals that a strong sense of political participation, which has been suppressed in offline life, connects individuals on QGLT bulletin boards. At the same time, along with political clusters formed online, QGLT users' online behaviours support the argument that online identities should be examined in offline social-political contexts. Through a case study of QGLT postings during the SARS crisis, Chapter 7 demonstrates that bulletin boards can create an alternative means for users to resist, negotiate, rectify or reinforce the official interpretation of the SARS crisis. However, rationality in online discussion can also be weak and lead to the spread of rumours, extreme nationalism, and public panics.

Chapter 8 investigates the global nature of the virtual public sphere in Greater China[18]. This chapter also discusses how Internet bulletin boards bring the global Chinese diaspora together to share information, discuss political issues, and coordinate actions. Global participation in Chinese-related public debate can contribute to solving problems such as environmental protection or human rights abuses at an international level.

In the concluding chapter, this study argues that the public sphere can be constructed in cyberspace in non-democratic societies. In spite of the limitations of perpetuating inequalities of access, fragmenting public discourses, and accommodating conservative rhetorics, the Internet can enlarge the scale of civic participation, advance alternative and oppositional public discourses, tackle problems at a global level, and construct an alternative public sphere. This alternative public sphere online has the potential to free civil society from state control, and cultivate critical public opinion as a check on the authoritarian government's policy-making. In this sense, online deliberative forums may play a more important role in extending the public sphere in non-liberal societies than their counterparts in democratic systems.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: the Public Sphere in the Digital Age

The concept of the public sphere has triggered discussion and debate among scholars worldwide since *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was translated into English in 1989. Should the public sphere be understood as a fact or as a political ideal never quite realised? Does the public sphere only exist in liberal democratic society or does it exist in different forms under different social realities? Does the public sphere exist today in mediated forms or did it exist in the past on the basis of face-to-face communication only? Is the public sphere singular and comprehensive or is it multiple and complex? Will media consolidate or undermine the public sphere? Debates over these questions became more divisive when the Internet started to play an important role in public communication.

This chapter looks at a range of conceptual developments of the public sphere with a focus on the democratising role of media in general, and the Internet more specifically, in consolidating and extending the public sphere in cyberspace. Though Jürgen Habermas blames commodified mass media for the decline of the public sphere (1989), media in fact have functioned as a social institution in connecting people, enhancing participation, enlarging the scope of political discussion, and fostering rational critical debate (Garnham, N. 1992, 2000; Hartley, J. 1992; Sparks, C. 1998, Curran, J. 2002). The deliberating role of media has become more effectual with the arrival of computer mediated communications (CMC). CMC has the potential to provide ordinary citizens, especially traditionally marginalised and deprived social groups, with a more comprehensive access to proactive political engagement at a global level. By comparing the conceptual criteria of the ideal public sphere with the civic activities on Internet bulletin boards, this chapter concludes by holding up the argument that the Internet is playing a central role in political deliberation in contemporary society.

1. The Habermasian Public Sphere and Its Development

This section outlines the conceptual development of the public sphere proposed by

Jürgen Habermas (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has triggered scholarly debate on the relationship between state and civil society in various socio-political contexts ever since its English translation was published. The public sphere, as Habermas proposes, appeared in late eighteenth century Europe and referred to a homogeneous public space which was 'casting itself loose as a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion' (Habermas 1989: 25-26). The public sphere, as Habermas depicts, is the locale in bourgeois societies in which common actions from citizens were 'coordinated through speech and persuasion' (Benhabib 1992: 78).

However, the public sphere depicted by Habermas neglects some other forms of public discourse and activities which were not included in or even opposed to that of the dominant bourgeois sociability. This negligence leaves much room for other theorists to develop the public sphere concept in explaining the emancipatory nature of non-bourgeois socio-political activities, resistance, or movements. Among these theorists are Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1993) who argue for the 'proletariat public sphere' that demonstrates an 'experience specific to workers' (1993:28); Nancy Fraser (1987), Joan Landes (1988), and Mary Ryan (1990, 1992) explore the possibility of a feminist public sphere; Geoff Eley (1992), Fraser (1992), and John B. Thompson (1993) contest the existence of multiple public arenas and competing publics; and Karol Jakubowicz (1991), Ole Nørgaard (2001) and others (Chatterjee 2001, Metzger 2001, Lee H. 2001) examine social emancipation and democratic enlightenment in non-liberal societies. These critics argue that even in the absence of formal incorporation into political participation, suppressed social groups still work out their own political identities and had their interests represented. The public sphere in reality is constituted of exclusion, a multiplicity of public arenas, contesting meaning and competing publics (Eley 1992; Fraser 1992; Thompson 1995; Keane 2000).

1.1 The Ideal Bourgeois Public Sphere

The Habermasian public sphere deals with a specific moment of history (eighteenth century) in the rising bourgeois society in Europe. The public sphere is a realm where

citizens can exchange views over important issues of the common good, foster rational critical debate and form public opinion. As a part of the civil society, the public sphere evolved from the 'intimate sphere of the conjugal family' (Habermas 1989: 29) to the tension-charged field between state and society. The ideal public sphere is characterised by equality in public discussion, autonomous public participation, and rational critical public debate. The physical existence of the public sphere was independent from church and state, and embodied in places such as coffee houses where public discussion over literature criticism later extended to include economic and political disputes.

Equality by which 'nobility met with the "intellectuals" on an equal footing' (Habermas 1989:33) is a key feature of the bourgeois public sphere. That is, in principle, class differentiation became less significant in the public sphere. The coffee houses 'embraced the wider strata of the middle class, including craftsman and shopkeepers' (1989: 33), which helped to transform the relationship between the aristocracy and the newly emerging bourgeoisie. As such, the public sphere was not a space for meritocracy and competition among political elites. Rather, it was regarded as the 'creation of procedures whereby those affected by general social norms and collective political decisions can have a say in their formulation, stipulation, and adoption' (Benhabib 1992: 87).

To get access to the public sphere however, autonomous individuals needed to be 'propertied and educated' (Habermas 1989: 37). Those who 'did not have at their disposal the buying power needed for even the most modest participation in the market of cultural goods' (Habermas 1989: 38) were thus excluded. These two criteria were developed by deliberative democracy theorist Rawls (1993) as the two dimensions in substantive equality – namely the equality of *resources* and the equality of *capacity*. The former implies that the individuals have to own 'a minimum threshold of primary goods' as a basis for 'the means of freedom' (Rawls 1993:183). The latter implies that citizens 'do have, at least to the essential minimum degree, the moral, intellectual, and physical capacities that enable them to be fully cooperating members of society over a complete life' (Rawls 1993:183). Other relevant political capacities include the capacity to formulate authentic preferences, the effective use of cultural resources, and some basic cognitive abilities and skills (Knight and Johnson

1997: 298-9).

Autonomous public participation is the basis for political reasoning in the public sphere and is central to the conception of modernity (Benhabib 1992: 85). Coming out of the liberal tradition, the Habermasian discursive model has the merit of openness and indeterminancy, which neither restricts individuals' access to public space nor sets the agenda for public debate (Benhabib 1992). Theoretically, the public sphere is open to all citizens in an un-coerced and non-manipulated fashion. To achieve this goal, 'the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinion' is needed as a normative framework (Habermas 1996: 369). Habermas vigorously defends the legal protection of basic human rights as the legitimacy from which political orders draw their recognition (2001: 113). Habermas particularly criticises the authoritarian model of development in East Asian countries (such as China and Singapore) 'according to which the freedom of the individual is subordinated to the "good of the community"' (2001:125). He argues that basic human rights such as freedom of speech, association, religious practices and so forth 'institutionalise the communicative conditions for a reasonable political will-formation ... [and] make the exercise of popular sovereignty possible' (2001: 117). Therefore, constitutional and legal frameworks of human rights protection are needed to prevent the public sphere and civil society from deformation.

The autonomous role of ordinary citizens in liberal politics according to Habermas (1989), is mainly determined by their negative rights with reference to the state and other citizens. With the growth of the press, public meetings, and political associations, an antagonistic public arose as a political force against the state in Britain at the turn of the nineteenth century. This antagonistic public resulted from organised public involvement in critical debate of political issues, and broke the 'exclusiveness of Parliament and evolved into the official discussion partner of the delegate' (Habermas 1989: 66).

The ongoing public discourse in the public sphere addresses issues of common concerns among citizens. Because of the autonomous nature of participants in the public sphere in liberal societies, topical orientations of the public discussion and debate can reach some areas that used to be limited to the monopolistic interpretation

20

from the church and the state authorities. In such manner, the public sphere performs its role as a regulating factor of the civil society (Habermas 1989:52). The relation between the ideal public sphere and the state is that the public sphere mediates between the society and the state through *critical* public opinion formation:

> With the rise of a sphere of the social, over whose regulation public opinion battled with public power, the theme of the modern [...] public sphere shifted from the properly political tasks of a citizenry acting in common [...] to the more properly civic tasks of a society engaged in critical public debate [...] (Habermas 1989: 52).

The deliberative model of the public sphere implies that public good will be achieved through rational critical debate rather than simple aggregation of private interest. Deliberative politics acknowledges the conflicts and difference in individuals' social choices, and believes negotiation and bargaining can be involved in searching for a collective interest. The discursive model of the Habermasian public sphere originates from the Kantian tradition of freedom of speech and universal human rights. Freedom and human rights guarantee that 'each individual requires to be convinced by reason that the coercion which prevails is lawful' (Kant 1991:85). Habermas' model of rational critical public debate captures the essence of the 'dynamic and renegotiable aspects of such distinctions as that between the right and the good' (Benhabib 1992: 84-5).

Because of its intrinsic nature of being open to all citizens, the bourgeois public sphere consists of different ideologies based on autonomous individuals from different social strata. As Habermas contends, 'class interest was the basis of public opinion' (Habermas 1989:73), and the public sphere is consequently in need of a negotiating mechanism which can resolve the collision of interests from various social groups. A public discourse of argumentation and persuasion, in which participants are expected to communicate reasons with each other, can be a means to reach collective choices. The set of fundamental ideals in public reasoning such as reciprocity, publicity and accountability can also be found in the works of Gutmann and Thompson (1996) and Rawls (1997). Public reasoning among equal citizens, as is believed to start with freedom of expression, implies a respect for 'reasonable pluralism' and the equal deliberative standing of those with whom one disagree (Cohen 1996:105). Joshua Cohen (1997) points out that public reasoning should be harnessed under deliberative and legitimate norms in democracy, which implies that

participants 'recognize one another as having deliberative capacities, i.e., the capacities required for entering into a public exchange of reason and for acting on the result of such public reasoning' (1997:73). Otherwise, public reasoning would be an unguided ship on the rough sea of conflicting currents.

1.2 The Plebeian and the Proletariat Public Sphere

Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* fails to account for the 'plebeian public sphere', an element that constitutes a contrast to the bourgeois elite public sphere on which Habermas focuses all of his attention. The plebeian public sphere, according to Habermas (1989), briefly appeared during the French Revolution and was subsequently suppressed. In his later reflection, Habermas (1992) cited Lottes in addressing the emancipatory nature of the plebeian public sphere:

> The emergence of the plebeian public sphere thus marks a specific phase in the historical development of the life relations of the petite bourgeoisie and the strata below it. It is, on the one hand, a variant of the bourgeois public sphere, for it takes it as a model. On the other hand it is more than a mere variant, since it develops the bourgeois public sphere's emancipatory potential in a new social context. The plebeian public sphere is, in a manner of speaking, a bourgeois public sphere whose social preconditions have been rendered null (1992:426 citing Günter Lottes).

Geoff Eley (1992) highlights the radical nature of the plebeian public sphere by arguing that people from lower social strata fought for the 'same emancipatory language' during the French Revolution as the bourgeois class. 'The liberal desideratum of reasoned exchange also became available for nonbourgeois, subaltern groups, whether the radical intelligentsia of Jacobinism and its successors or wide sections of social classes like the peasantry or the working class' (Eley 1992:304). Contrary to Habermas' belief that the plebeian public sphere could be easily suppressed, Eley points out that the liberal public sphere was faced at the very moment of a 'radical' plebeian public sphere which was 'combative and highly literate' (Eley 1992:305).

Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1993) employ public sphere theory in explaining the practice of proletariat movements. They emphasise the role of media (especially

the electronic media at a global level) in grasping the raw material of working class people's experience (Hansen 1993:xii). Negt and Kluge argue that the 'proletariat public sphere' crystallises the unique experience of the working class, and distinguishes itself from the bourgeois public sphere. Stemming from classic Marxist theory, they believe that bourgeoisies 'force' society into a unity based on its value of commodity exchange and private property (Hansen 1993: xlvii). The working class expresses its own politically proletarian interests in its own forms of public sphere through 'the autonomous, collective organisation of the experience specific to workers' (Negt and Kluge 1993:28). The reconciliation between the bourgeois and the proletariat public sphere is impossible as:

> The proletariat public sphere negates the bourgeois one because it dissolves, partially destroys, and partially assimilates the latter's elements. In serving its opposing interests, the bourgeois public sphere does the same to every form of the proletarian, which is not supported by the powers opposing it and thus cannot protect itself from attack (Negt and Kluge 1993:35).

There have been theorists who view the Marxist tradition as not being compatible with the ideal of civil society because Karl Marx views individuals as isolated and aggressive due to the demise of feudal societies (Femia 2001). Marx views the relations of individuals in feudal society as connected to the state through various forms:

> The elements of civil life, for example, property, or the family, or the mode of labour, were raised to the level of elements of political life in the form of seigniory, estates, and corporations. In this form, they determined the relation of the individual to the state as a whole - i.e., his political relation, that is, his relation of separation and exclusion from the other components of society (1844:19).

The bourgeois emancipation brought about the dissolution of the old feudal regime. It also released egoism among individuals and caused human alienation 'from his community, from himself and from other men' (Marx 1844:10). However, what Femia neglects is Marx's strong argument of human beings' emancipation through which men can 're-absorbs in himself the abstract citizen' and 'recognised and organised his social-powers' (Marx 1844: 21). Such emancipation is not incompatible with the ideal of civil society.

Another criticism of Marxism's inability to co-exist with the ideal of the public sphere

23

came from André Corz. Gorz argues that a Marxist controlled economy requires growth of the state apparatus which 'gives society precedence over the individual and assumes their common subordination to the state' (Gorz 1982: 77). In this understanding, individuals are viewed as inapt to form an antagonistic public against the state. However, Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's (1985) exploration of 'radical and plural democracy' proves that 'new antagonisms' are expressions for alternative resistance towards hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe develop the Gramscian notion of 'counterhegemony' and suggest that civic activities have broad political relevance through institutions and practices that exist as an alternative to a hegemonic bloc in society. Instead of being a direct attack on, or engagement with, the dominant political discourse, 'new antagonisms' 'manifest themselves through a proliferation of particularism and crystalise into a demand for autonomy itself' (1985:164). The dominant public discourses are indirectly challenged through the alternative civic discourses that valorise 'differences' and create new identities.

> Pluralism is *radical* only to the extent that each term of this plurality of identities finds within itself the principle of its own validity, without this having to be sought in a transcendent or underlying positive ground for the hierarchy of meaning of them all and the source and guarantee of their legitimacy. And this radical pluralism is *democratic* to the extent that the autoconstitutivity of each one of its terms is the result of displacements of the egalitarian imaginary (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 167).

Therefore, the radical and plural democracy implies the struggle 'for a maximum autonomisation of spheres' on a basis of 'equivalential-egalitarian logic' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 167). Such an argument enriches the complexity of the public sphere debate and emphasises the autonomous nature of the alternative resistance to the commodification, bureaucratisation and increasing homogenisation of social life in the post-war era.

1.3 The Gender-Specified Public Sphere

Scholars point out that one significant problem in Habermas' account of the public sphere is its masculine character (Fraser 1987; Landes 1988; 1998; Eley 1992). Though theoretically the public sphere is open to all, in practice it is predominantly restricted to men (with the consequent exclusion of women). Habermas overlooks the

association of women's discourse and interests with 'particularity' (which is usually labelled as 'private' and treated as inappropriate subjects for public debate), and the alignment of masculine speech with truth, objectivity, rationality, and reason'. Thus the Habermasian public sphere 'rule[s] out all interests that would not or could not lay claim to their own universality' (Landes, J. 1998: 142-3).

Habermas is not unaware of the exclusion of women from nineteenth-century politics. The lack of depiction of gender differentiation in his narrative was because women were largely suppressed in their social political life (Eley 1992). The concept of the public sphere, articulated in the political discourse, is not free from the male-dominance of the private sphere. When women were still subject to male authority in the private sphere, their equal status in participating in politics in the public sphere would be fictional, as Habermas argues:

> The independence of the property owner in the market and in his own business was complemented by the dependence of the wife and children on the male head of the family; private autonomy in the former realm was transformed into authority in the latter and made any pretended freedom of individuals illusory (Habermas 1989: 47).

Thus the bourgeois public sphere was 'essentially, not just contingently, masculinist' (Landes 1988:7). Women's suppression in public life, as Landes (1988) argues, was the 'new symbolic order' of the eighteenth century French Republic which legitimised the domestication of women. The Republican ideology of motherhood, which tied women's service to the polity to their maternal duty, meant that 'the most likely consequence was to offer women political representation in a mediated fashion' (1988:138). The ethos of the Republican public sphere in 1780s to 1790s France was constructed in opposition to that of a more woman-friendly feudal salon culture. Contrary to the 'artificial,' 'effeminate,' and 'aristocratic' salon culture, the Republican promoted a 'rational', 'virtuous,' and 'manly' style of public speech and behaviour. Masculine speech or the language of reason are believed to be opposite to femininity in the rhetoric 'if by the latter we mean [...] pleasure, play, eroticism, artifice, style, politesse, refined facades, and particularity' (Landes 1988: 46). Consequently, the gender-specified Republican public sphere 'was constructed against women, not just without them' (*ibid*:171). The exclusion of women from the bourgeois public sphere 'was given conceptual form by the Enlightenment and

institutional realisation by the French Revolution' (Baker 1992:199).

Gendered exclusion in eighteenth century political life in France, England and Germany, as Geoff Eley (1992: 308-18) argues, was linked to other exclusions originating in class formation. Therefore, 'simply invoking traditional patriarchal structures to explain the exclusion of women from politics is perhaps too easy' (Eley 1992:311). Drawing on Davidoff and Hall's work *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, Eley argues that when middle-class men fought against the privilege of the aristocrats from the 1790s to the 1840s England, they sought to translate their economic weight into politics via 'associational trajectory' relating to other classes. However, their activities 'strictly demarcated the roles of men and women via a mobile repertoire of ideologies and practices, which consistently assigned women to a non-political private sphere' (Eley 1992: 312) and to playing a supportive role to their men. This separation between the public and the private spheres, 'between the masculine realm of public activity and the feminine realm of the home', was replicated in the situation of the working class movement such as the Chartism in Britain (Eley 1992:313). The *People's Charter*, as a successful outcome from the movement, guaranteed full suffrage for men over 21 but did not include women.

The exclusion of women administratively from the public sphere also spurred the development of a feminist consciousness. Drawing on the findings of the women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s, Seyla Benhabib believes that the traditional modes of drawing distinction between the public and the private have been part of a 'discourse of domination that legitimises women's oppression and exploitation in the private realm' (1992:93). The reproductions in the private realm more often result in a 'patriarchal-capitalist-disciplinary bureaucracy' (Benhabib 1992:98) which disempowers women in terms of participating in public debate.

Before the second wave of the feminist movement which started in the 1960s, women's access to the public sphere was denied in almost every aspect of the bourgeois civil society, for example, paid work, state administration, and citizenship (Fraser, N. 1987: 45). This gendered inequality in socio-political life can be regarded

as rooted in the private sphere, in the domain of familial relations which is characterised by 'sexual inequality, unremunerated work, and seething discontent' (Landes, J. B. 1998: 1). Women's virtue in a socio-cultural sense has long been associated with being submissive to their men, taking on unpaid household work, and childrearing instead of addressing their own interests and desires. This institutional inferiority of women in bourgeois societies allows 'the *social* and *political* construction of masculinity' (Eley 1992: 309) as the dominant power in both the private and public spheres. As long as social inequality persists, 'deliberative processes in public spheres will tend to operate to the advantage of dominant groups and to the disadvantage of subordinates' (Fraser 1992:122-3). In this sense, even if women are officially admitted into the public sphere, they are still not guaranteed equality in expressing their own interest through deliberation.

Women's disadvantaged role in socio-political life will be aggravated in a singular comprehensive public sphere and alleviated in a heterogeneous public sphere (Fraser 1992: 122-3). In the singular comprehensive public sphere, socially oppressed groups have no venue for deliberation among themselves (Fraser 1992: 123). Public discourse in the public sphere, if there were any, is under the supervision of the dominant social group. Under such circumstances, public speech can be more easily distorted systematically by social repression and 'it is not likely that open debate in the public sphere would eliminate that distortion' (Poster, M. 1995: 103). In such a case, social repression might even be reinforced in communicative process. Since the mid-twentieth century, feminist movement advocates have stood side by side with other social agents on the political stage, for example, students, racial and ethnic minorities, gay rights advocates, and environmentalists. The existence of these multiple counter-publics striving towards emancipation of various socially oppressed groups can help to expand the feminist discursive space and change the disadvantaged position of women in political life.

1.4 Competing Publics

By focusing his attention on the elite-dominated bourgeois public sphere, Habermas neglects some other forms of the public discourse and activities which were not

included in or even opposed to bourgeois sociability from seventeenth to nineteenth century Europe. The bourgeois public sphere was never 'defined solely by the struggle against absolutism and traditional authority' (Eley 1992: 306) and was always constituted by conflicts and contesting meanings. The public sphere in reality never appears in 'isolation' (Keane 2000:7), and consists of multiplicity of public arenas and competing publics (Eley 1992; Fraser 1992; Thompson 1993; Keane 2002).

'A plurality of competing publics' (Fraser 1992:125) implies a multiplicity of publics whose identities are slighted and whose interests are under-represented in the official structured settings. Those publics from a disadvantaged social status, however, can have their identities constructed and voices heard in alternative venues through the 'subaltern counterpublics'. The subaltern counterpublics 'are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs' (Fraser 1992: 123). Such 'subaltern counterpublics' have been present in the every stage of the history of the public sphere.

In nineteenth century North America, women were excluded from formal political incorporation through suffrage and were still denied access to political life. However, as Mary Ryan (1992) shows, women 'worked out their own political identities, opened up the public to a vast new constituency, and enlarged the range of issues that weighted into the "general interest"' (1992:283). The notion of a multi-tiered, interconnected public sphere is particularly central to understand the contemporary politics. In a contemporary context, the competing publics can be found in 'new social movements oriented to peace, ecology, feminism, and social justice'. Their struggle towards constructing 'subaltern counterpublics' has often been 'sought or been forced into confrontation rather than accommodation with the capitalist state' (Dryzek 2000:23). The wider public domain consists of the contesting subordinated groups in contemporary society, which may involve women, workers, farmers, peoples of ethnic minorities, environmentalists, gay rights activists, and even non-progressive forces such as 'fundamentalist religious movements, nationalists, or anti-abortion groups' (Dryzek 2000:23).

Iris Young (1999) argues for *difference* as a necessary resource for democratic communication. By 'difference', Young implies that 'social groups do not themselves have substantive, unified identities, but rather are constituted through differentiated relations' (390). It is the differentiated structural relations and individuals' multiple group affiliation, rather than the internal common attributes among group members, that determine the character of social groups. Difference gives democratic participants 'some shared *perspectives* on social life' in the process of cooperating, understanding and doing justice (1999: 385). As the democratic process is 'a form of practical reason for conflict resolution and collective problem solving' (Young 1999: 400), the participants are required to attend to their particular differences in order to 'understand the situation and perspectives of others' (*ibid*: 402). According to Young, such plurality of perspectives in deliberation serves the health of democracy through following purposes: Firstly, it motivates individuals to express 'their proposals as appeals to justice' rather than 'mere self-interest or preference' (*ibid*: 402); secondly, 'confrontation with different perspectives, interests, and cultural meanings teaches individuals the partiality of their own' (*ibid*: 403); thirdly, 'expressing, questioning, and challenging differently situated knowledge adds to social knowledge' (*ibid*: 403). Through such a mediated understanding, participants in democratic discussion can 'gain a wider picture of the social processes in which their own partial experience is embedded' (1999:404).

1.5 The Public Sphere in Non-Liberal Societies

Because of different histories, geopolitics, culture, development of time, and security concerns, the relationship between individuals and the state might take different forms in individual countries. The conception of the public sphere has been developed by scholars to explain the social emancipation under different political circumstances.

Kaviraj and Khilnani (2001) argue that European colonisation worldwide in the nineteenth century created a need for people in colonies to search for a concept for the spheres of social activities left out of state control. Outside of Europe, public

deliberation started in European colonies for the following reasons. Firstly, the European discourse of 'civil society' was disseminated in colonies, though originally this concept was used as a justification for a colonial administration's intervention into the colonised societies. Secondly, colonisation, though unintentionally, 'brought in institutions which had a certain type of discursive field associated with them' (Kaviraj and Khilnani 2001:4). Thirdly, 'modern elites in colonies often absorbed Western influences and emulated forms of behaviour based on these distinctions' (*ibid*).

Studies on the literary public sphere in postcolonial Bengal (Chatterjee 2001) and the integration of Confucian utopianism and Western democratic ideas in China (Metzger 2001) proved the adaptation of a democratic ideal among elite intellectuals from colonised societies. Lee's study of the literary public sphere in the first two decades in twentieth century China exhibits that experience in the literary public sphere 'provided members of the bourgeoisie with a measure of progressive self-understanding and an unprecedented awareness of their rights and duties in society' (Lee, H. 2001: 322). Zubaida's (2001) study on the Middle East intellectuals' engagement in 'voluntaristic aspects of organisations' out of state control demonstrates the contesting meaning-making between Islamic advocacy and secular response.

A major merit of public sphere theory is that it can be employed to explain problems and practices in constructing democratic institutions in countries 'with little or no historical traditions of democracy to call upon' (Garnham, N. 2000:169). Though Peter Dahlgren argues that a society 'where democratic tendencies are weak [...] is not going to give rise to healthy institutional structures for the public sphere' (Dahlgren 1995:12), discursive spaces for deliberation prove to be in existence in such non-democratic societies and contribute to constructing the public sphere. Karol Jakubowicz (1991) uses 'three public spheres' to describe the multiplicity of the changing public discourses in post-Communist Poland. Though the Communist Party's control over civic life constructed the 'official public sphere' as the dominant tier in socio-political life, the alternative and oppositional public spheres are constructed through public engagement with informal channels. What Jakubowicz

(1991) finds in the 'alternative' and the 'oppositional' are wide-ranging and influential spheres that may include all manner of reformist groups seeking to either coexist with, or replace, the existing partisan hegemony. Nørgaard noticed in authoritarian countries, even if the majority of people 'apathetically accept the arbitrary exercise of power', there are still 'islands of resilience' under dictatorship. In less controlled non-democratic societies, 'islands of autonomy in civil society' can survive, and the 'competing factions' within the governing authority more or less connected with structures of civil society (Nørgaard 2001: 12-3). These 'islands of resilience' refer to non-official spheres of civic activities, which is outside of and usually oppositional to the authoritarian government's discourse. In China's case, the alternative and the oppositional public spheres exist in the form of wall newspapers (*Dazibao*, see more detailed discussion in Chapter 3), underground literature, nonofficial journals, private associations, and salons organised by liberal intellectuals. Alternative media such as wall newspapers are not only an index of Chinese people's struggle for free speech, but also a measure of their struggle over the public sphere (Downing, J. 2001: 172).

All the above research illuminates a variety of ways of accessing public discourse in a stratified society. Such arguments are potent and eloquent in explaining civic participation in contemporary authoritarian societies such as China where freedom of speech is not possible and political parity has not yet been achieved.

2. Media and the Public Sphere

On the role of media in the public sphere, Habermas attributes the decline of the public sphere to the emergence of mass media. Carrying on the Frankfurt School tradition, Habermas (1989) believes modern mass media (especially the commercial broadcast media) isolate individuals from each other and constitute a threat to the physical existence of community in public life. By transforming citizens into alienated consumers of homogenised commercial culture, mass media create obstacles for citizens to raise critical questions, discuss commonly-concerned issues, and form opinion collectively.

This rather pessimistic view of media in contemporary public life has been challenged by other scholars. The constructive role of media in the public sphere can be summed up as: modern media can expand political participation for the general public (Laclau and Mouffee 1985; Douglas 1988; Downing, J. et. al. 2001; Curran 2002); media can reflect, shape and direct public opinion (Curran 1991; Hartley 1992; Morley 1992: Dahlgren 1995); and media can facilitate and promote rational critical public debate (Hall 1977; Thompson 1990; Eley 1992; Fraser 1992; McQuail 1992; Sparks 1998). By displaying and deliberating conflict and consent in an international arena, media contribute to 'processes of democratic deepening' in contemporary world (Cottle and Rai 2006: 163).

Habermas correctly points out the market suppression of the deliberative role of media in the public sphere. Nevertheless, by emphasising the market and government control over media, he overlooks the media's central role in constructing and consolidating the public sphere. By examining major arguments from both camps in this section, I argue against Habermas' conceptual understanding of media either as an extension of 'face-to-face' communication or as an alienating and dismantling factor in public life. The large scale and the complexity of decision-making in modern society limit the extent to which the public can meet, debate, and deliberate in person on a share locale (Thompson 1990). Media thus constitute an inseparable part in contemporary political structures in building channels of dialogue among citizens and between the civil society and the state, through which deliberation can be achieved and public opinion can form. By disseminating knowledge to the general public, media also enlarge the scope of political participation and enrich the content of political deliberation.

2.1 Media and the Decline of the Public Sphere

Habermas' view of the print media is shaped by a model of oral communication and bears the imprint of the classical Greek conception (Thompson 1990; Garnham 1992). Print media are regarded as a continued extension of face-to-face conversation which is interwoven with the life of other social institutions in the public sphere (Habermas 1989: 42). What is problematic about Habermas' argument is that he fails to realise that the scale and the complexity of decision-making in modern society limits the

extent to which public can be organised in a participatory way (Thompson 1990: 120). Thus, he also fails to recognise the constructive role of mediated communication in the public sphere.

Lamenting the failure of the press in transmitting and amplifying 'the rational-critical debate of private people assembled into a public' (Habermas 1989: 188), Habermas attributes the collapse of the public sphere to mass communication in that 'the public is split apart into minorities of specialists who put their reason to use nonpublicly and the great mass of consumers whose receptiveness is public but uncritical' (1989:175). His central argument lies in the transformation of the public from 'reasoning' to 'consuming' in the mass production age in the cultural sphere, an argument which is steeped in the conceptual influence of the Frankfurt School on his thinking (Benhabib 1992). Frankfurt School scholars such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (2002) are known for their critiques of mass-production, commodification, and standardisation in the culture industries and how these developments influence individuals' integration into the ideology of capitalism. Habermas developed the Frankfurt School's conceptual legacy and argues that commodified cultural industries transform the public sphere into the sphere for the publicity of private interest (1989:171-2) and the rational critical public into 'consumers':

> The mass press was based on the commercialisation of the participation in the public sphere on the part of broad strata designed predominantly to give the masses in general access to the public sphere. This expanded public sphere, however, lost its political character to the extent that the means of 'psychological facilitation' could become an end in itself for a commercially fostered consumer attitude (Habermas 1989:169).

Habermas believes that since the mid-nineteenth century, 'the institutions that until then had ensured the coherence of the public as a critically debating entity have been weakened' (1989:162). Profit-seeking media in the modern age prioritise entertainment and leisure content in their mediated communication and bring about the de-politicization of content in public communication. Panel discussion programmes prevailing on radio or television 'assume [...] the form of a consumer item', and 'the conversation itself is administrated ... [and] ... loses its publicist function' (Habermas 1989:164). Within the 'manipulated public sphere' and the 'manufactured public sphere' (Habermas 1989: 217), the media both represent political ideology and are used as vehicles of advertising (Habermas 1989: 215-217).

Citizens are transformed into consumers and released from the obligation of forming public opinion through rational critical political debate. These changes in public life brought about by the commercial mass media have a tendency towards an eventual collapse and disintegration of the public sphere (Habermas 1989:168).

Mediated mass communication in capitalist societies today contributes to the deconstruction of the public sphere in the following ways:

Firstly, mediated communication in public life limits public access both to channels and means of communication. Isolated individuals' access to the channels and means of communication 'depends upon the mobilisation of scarce material resources, the distribution of which is dependent upon the very structures of economic and political power that democratic processes of debate were intended to control' (Garnham 1992:365). Applied to political news reporting, this structure of economic and political power is specified by Lewis et al. as a 'top-down structure' which has an intrinsic inability to construct active citizens (2004: 163).

Secondly, authenticity in the content and subjects of public debate (i.e. the lifeworld experience) has been sacrificed in the mediated mass communication. By 'the lifeworld', Habermas (1987) means an environment structured by shared understandings, attitudes, and values through face-to-face contact in various social groups. In mediated communication, market-driven media play a key role in interpreting the real lifeworld and providing citizens with 'objects of consumption'. Such practice largely limits individuals' lifeworld experience to 'the system of economic production and exchange' (Garnham 1992: 365-6).

Thirdly, because of the 'the cognitive division of labour in science', a kind of expert knowledge has been produced with content which rarely can be tested or evaluated by 'laypersons'. Such a division of labour deteriorates the mediated public sphere, since information provided and passed through by the experts dominates communication channels (Bohman 1999: 590-607). Ordinary citizens, or a lay public, have little chance to contribute to public discourse. Even worse, this communicative division of labour can even 'introduce distortions and manipulation, [...] since the goals of the mass media are [...] to shape communication in order to achieve greater market share

or to further the goals of their paying customers' (Bohman 2000: 47-48).

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the whole world witnessed a wave of deregulation in the media economy, liberalisation in media law, and horizontal and vertical integration in the communication industry. This industrial trend makes it more noticeable that mediated communication today is shifting away from involving people as critical political citizens towards involving them as consumers in a corporate world. Changes brought about by the conglomeratisation in media industry do not empower the public with sound information for deliberation. On the contrary, as Herman and Chomsky argue, concentration in socio-political control over media makes media 'effective and powerful ideological institutions that carry out a system-supportive propaganda function' (1988: 306).

2.2 Media's Role in Constructing the Public Sphere

Though Habermas convincingly presents a case for the role commercial media play in weakening rational critical debate, he overlooks the fact that in contemporary societies 'face-to-face communication can be only a small part of the process of democratic deliberation' (Chambers and Costain 2000: xii). Through their comprehensive coverage of world events, media have the power to create among their viewers a sense of belonging to a national or even international community, thus redefining the boundaries of societies in physical forms (Dayan and Katz 1992).

Scholars are not unaware of media's limited role in constructing the public sphere under market suppression and governmental control. Nevertheless, 'there is more going on in the communication of news than the manipulation of news agendas by powerful strategic interests or the circulation of power semiotic codes and discourses' (Cottle and Rai 2006: 164). Media still play a central role in deliberation in the contemporary world. In fact, John Hartley (1992) makes a persuasive argument that media *are* the public sphere. Media, as key political institutions in contemporary political structures, can construct, consolidate, and expand the public sphere (Curran 2002; Garnham 1992, 2000; Sparks 1998). It is argued that electronic media, particularly public service broadcasting, open systems of dialogue between the public and authority, enhancing representation of collective interests of citizens (Dahlgren

1995; Curran 2000). Peter Dahlgren concludes that contemporary notions of the public sphere 'point [...] to the issues of how, and to what extent, the mass media, especially in their journalistic role, can help citizens learn about the world, debate their responses to it and reach informed decisions about what courses of action to adopt' (1991:1).

To summarise the main arguments in terms of the relationship between media and the public sphere, three main threads can be detected. Media, especially the popularisation of electronic media, can significantly expand political participation for the general public. Media are able to create a new means of 'locality' in reflecting, shaping and directing public opinion. By representing various interest groups in the society, media may also enrich the content of public dialogue, facilitate debate among conflicting social groups, and enhance the multiplicity of the public sphere.

2.2.1 Media expand political participation for general public

Popularisation of the media can expand public engagement in politics by disseminating information and knowledge, and proliferating communication channels to ordinary citizens. James Curran (2002) believes that the modern media have assumed the role of the church in the Middle Ages, 'in a more secular age, of interpreting and making sense of the world to the mass public' (2002:77). By making information about public affairs more widely available to more people, the media have expanded political participation and promoted a culture of democracy.

Laclau and Mouffee admit that the 'expansion of means of mass communciation' has 'the undeniable effects of massification and uniformation' (1985:163). However, they also notice that:

> This media-based culture also contains powerful elements for the subversion of inequalities: the dominant discourses in consumer society present it as social progress and the advance of democracy, to the extent that it allows the vast majority of the population access to an ever-increasing range of goods (*ibid.*.)

Mass media have played a significant role in changing the subject and content of the public sphere. As Robert Darnton (1997) notices, before the French Revolution there was a general culture of multi-connected media:

Dozens of publishing houses sprang up all around France's borders. Hundreds of agents operated an underground system, which brought the books to readers.[...]In eighteenth-century France, books [...] circulated in a society that overflowed with gossip, rumours, jokes, songs, graffiti, posters, pasquinades, broadsides, letters, and journals (xx, xxii).

As a consequence, the media helped to stimulate public opinion as a preparation for the French Revolution. The media fixed public disaffection in print so that the word was preserved and spread to a wider public. They also fit public opinion into narratives which transformed loose talk into coherent discourse (Darnton 1997: 191). The practices of popularisation of mass media rescued them from social elite control and enabled a connection between information (including both serious public discussion and pleasure and entertainment) and ordinary citizens (Curran 2002: 22)

In Great Britain, as James Curran argues, the growth and development of the press contributed to 'the expansion of the political community' (2002: 5). By establishing themselves in many places, and by increasing their circulation and political coverage, the press started to include those in peripheral areas distant from London and from lower social strata into their readership (Curran 2002: 5-6). Since the Second World War, the electronic media have gradually become the most popular media form for the general public. Because of its 'levelling effect on the status and power' (Douglas 1988: 210), electronic media avail themselves to the majority of the public. Public service broadcasting, particularly, could diminish the knowledge gap between the elites and the general public 'because it made informing the public an institutional priority' (Curran 2002: 6). Radio and television also avail themselves to the general public through phone-in programmes and talk-shows, which have provided new channels for public participation in (political) dialogue and deliberation. As Livingstone and Lunt argue, television talk-shows offer opportunities 'for minority groups, protest groups and ordinary people to gain access to mediated communication' (1994:176).

Media populist narrative believes that the popularisation of the media is a democratic triumph. 'Popular preferences were acknowledged to have validity' and 'an increase of social egalitarianism eroded the values of hierarchy' (Curran 2002: 14). In this sense, by providing the majority of the public with an easy access to information,

knowledge, and dialogue, mass media broaden the scope of political participation in the public sphere.

2.2.2 Media can reflect, shape, and direct public opinion

Habermas criticised electronic media for eroding people's sense of place, which is the basis for public opinion formation (1989). This argument is flawed in that Habermas overlooks the fact that electronic media has changed our understanding of 'neighbourhood' and 'communities' through mediated political communication. Media become a new social domain where the public construct their own identity, negotiate their relationship with each other, and have their opinion expressed.

Habermas acknowledges that by representing critical public opinion to the government, the print media empowered the public by subjecting authority to scrutiny in the eighteenth century. Critical press and independent journalism helped to introduce political public opinion into the British Parliament. This historic moment took place with the growth of urban culture in eighteenth century England and the public sphere was regarded as growing from:

> The novel arena of a locally organized public life (meeting houses, concert halls, theatres, opera houses, lecture halls, museum), to a new infrastructure of social communication (the press, publishing companies, and other literary media [...]), and to a new universe of voluntary association (Eley 1992:291).

As David Morley suggests, the media create a 'psychological neighbourhood' within which 'experience is both unified beyond localities and fragmented with them' (1992: 280). The mediated experience in the electronic age challenges the traditional locale of a 'neighbourhood' and re-assembles people together beyond the proximity. Meanwhile, certain media function in particular ways for certain groups of people, which results in specific consequences with political character. Thus Morley argues that 'we must attend to the need to construct a properly postmodern geography of the relations between communication and power' (1992:282). Meanwhile, Hartley boldly states that, 'television, popular newspapers, magazines and photography, the popular media of the modern period, are the public domain, the place where and the means by which the public is created and has its being' (Hartley 1992: 1).

Through his study of British political development in the seventeenth to eighteenth century, Habermas reveals that the reporting of parliamentary proceedings from the independent media constructed extra-parliamentary social interaction among the public. Circulation of debates in the newspapers constructed public opinion *outside* Westminster, and exerted pressure on the Parliament to adapt to changing circumstances (Reid, C. 2000):

> It was calling every day on the public to judge of the proceedings of parliament. By these daily publications the people were taught to look upon themselves as present at the discussion of all the proceedings of parliament, and sitting in judgment on them (Cobbett, cited in Reid, C. 2000: 25)

The critical press directed public opinion and 'knew how to assert itself against the government and that made critical commentary and public opposition against the government part of the normal state of affairs' (Habermas 1989: 60 citing Kluxen). By doing so, the critical press welded the social strata together (Habermas 1989: 51) and gradually established its role in facilitating the process of public opinion formation, expression and dissemination. This role of media in constructing critical public opinion and an antagonistic public is best summarised as the 'fourth estate' by Thomas Carlyle:

> Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters' Gallery yonder, there sat a *Fourth Estate* more important far than they all. [...] Printing, which comes necessarily out of Writing, I say often, is equivalent to Democracy: invent Writing, Democracy is inevitable. [...] Whoever can speak, speaking now to the whole nation, becomes a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in law-making, in all acts of authority. It matters not what rank he has, what revenues or garnitures: the requisite thing is that he have a tongue which others will listen to; this and nothing more is requisite (Carlyle: 1993 [1841]: 141).

The media's role as the 'Fourth Estate' in socio-political life has not diminished with the arrival of broadcasting media. Instead, the electronic media provide new means for citizens to engage in conversation with the entire nation, or even the entire world. Dahlgren (1995) categorises talk shows as 'elite' and 'vox-pop'. The 'elite' talk shows are featured with politicians and professional experts; while 'vox-pop talk shows' made the voice 'from ordinary people' heard (1995:63). Such new locality in the mediated public communication provides 'an independent forum of debate'. A more recent study of terrestrial and satellite television news in six different countries comes

to a more deepened understanding of television news in constructing deliberative discourse at a global level. Simon Cottle and Mugdaha Rai (2006) argue that there are universal structures organising the formations of television news within liberal democracies. In the process of international television news production, 'a repertoire of identifiable communicative frames [...offer] differing possibilities for the public elaboration and engagement of contending interests, issues and identities' (2006:185).

2.2.3 Media can facilitate the rational critical public debate

By publicising information in the public sphere and representing various interest groups in society, the mass media not only bring issues concerning public interest to the public's attention, but also require the public to scrutinize critically the issue in question (Chambers 2000: 193). Consequently, mass media have a positive role in generating and facilitating the rational critical debate within the public sphere. Through representing rational critical public opinion, media can 'enable the people to shape the conduct of government by articulating their views' (Curran 1991:29).

The public sphere, as an 'institutional mechanism' for rationalizing political discussion, mediates 'between society and the state by holding the state accountable to society via publicity' (Fraser 1992:112). This publicity consists of two dimensions. Firstly, it requires that 'information about state functioning be made accessible so that state activities would be subject to critical scrutiny and the force of public opinion' (*ibid.*). This implies a public vigilance over the network of institutionalisation of the communication process in government. Such practice involves an institutional mechanism that holds the state accountable to citizenry. Secondly, this publicity implies the 'general interest' of 'bourgeois society' to the state via 'forms of legally guaranteed free speech, free press, and free assembly, and eventually through the parliamentary institutions of representative government' (*ibid.*). Such practice involves a discursive interaction of bargaining and argumentation among an enlightened public aiming at a consensus in decision-making. Both dimensions in the process of publicity rely today on strong and democratic media in easing access to information, providing interaction between public and elites, improving feedback mechanism, and promoting rational critical public debate in decision-making.

As Hall says, the media help us know about the world as well as help us make sense of it by 'offering the maps and codes which mark out territories and assign problematic events and relations to explanatory contexts' (Hall 1977:341). This informative role of media in providing public 'explanatory contexts' is critical for diminishing the influence of political parties and formulating ideas from citizens representing different political interests. Curran argues that public service broadcasting cultivates social unity which 'fosters a feeling of mutual identification that breeds concern for others' (2002: 207), so that it 'facilitates debate about common social processes'. Through 'an open and reciprocal dialogue between sections of the community' (Curran 2002: 207), public deliberation over issues of common concerns can be achieved. Furthermore, media's live broadcasting of certain socio-political events crystalises latent trends in public opinion and triggers debate. By giving voice to 'formerly inarticulate or dormant proposals', media can contribute to the openness in politics and diplomacy (Dayan and Katz 1992: 200-203).

Such features of facilitating public debate made the mass media ideal tools for deliberative democracy which, as Cohen argues, has the virtue of recognising and representing differences while aiming at a consensus (Cohen 1989). In addressing how mass media represent diversified public interests, McQuail says:

> Paradoxically, diversity can also help in resolving social conflict and promoting social peace. Without the possibility of pluralistic solutions, many conflicts could not be resolved...In general, media diversity contributes to social order by promoting free expression of discontent or disagreement and by offering pathways to compromise (McQuail 1992: 143-4).

This mediated discursive process, however, does not necessarily take place in a shared locale in contemporary time. Various forms of communication in modern society provide the public with information, power, knowledge, and awareness of rights so that rational critical public debate can be exercised. The original idea of the public sphere as bound to a print medium or face-to-face interaction cannot be applied to the conditions created by new technical media (Thompson 1990: 120). A mediated public sphere detached from sharing a common locale can extend the audience for political debate, change the registers of political rhetoric, and widen the scope of the political public sphere (Sparks 1998: 112).

3. The Public Sphere Reconstructed in Cyberspace

Scholarly debate on electronic democracy has resulted in a polarisation of arguments on the emancipatory potential of digital media uses regards to online public deliberation.

A pessimistic approach views the Internet as inhibiting rather than facilitating public deliberation. According to this belief, the Internet does not help to improve parity in political participation, quality and rationality of public discourse, constructing critical publics, or overturning political hegemony. Critics believe that the Internet creates a 'digital divide' and reinforces inequality and domination in the offline world (Schiller, H. 1996). Meanwhile, online rational critical debate is often weak, limited to a small number of participants (Noveck 2000; Cammaerts and van Audenhove 2005) and discourages challenging opinions (Gurak 1999; Wilhelm 2000). Thirdly, the atomising effect of the Internet can erode common understanding among the public which is the basis for deliberation (Boyer 1996; Noveck 2000; Muhlberger 2005). Furthermore, commercialisation of the new media can turn the Internet into another privately controlled commodity (Boal 1995; Garnham 1992; Patekis 2000; Schiller 1996), creating an 'apolitical' culture online (Ferdinand 2000; Dahlgren 2005). Finally, the Internet is not free from online gate-keeping (Bennett et al. 2004) and administrative surveillance (Russell 2005).

However, in spite all these limitations, the Internet as a new media form is still a potent tool for deliberation. The emancipatory role of the Internet especially poses a threat to authoritarian rule in regimes such as China where the traditional media fail to perform their role as a democratic institution in the public sphere. To be specific, the Internet facilitates deliberation in the following aspects:

Firstly, digitalisation brings down the hierarchy in the offline world and leads to decentralisation, harmonisation and empowerment (Rheingold 1993; Castells 1996, 2001). The horizontal structure of citizen networking online (Castells 2001) and the autonomous role of users (Taylor and Saarnen 1994) makes the Internet an ideal tool for 'from-below' politics. Such quality of the Internet avails itself as a weapon to challenge authority in totalitarian regimes (Kalathil and Boas 2003).

Secondly, computer-mediated communication provides an 'uninhibited and nonconforming' way of communication (Reid, E. 1999) and creates a new sense of community in which individuals are reunified (Poster 2001 [1995]; Ferdinand 2000). Public discourse online represents a diversity of opinion (Poster 1996) and users' own experience (O'Regan and Goldsmith 2002), which makes the Internet an important device in forming public opinion (Dahlgren 2000; Dahlberg 2001a, 2001b).

Thirdly, as an electronic agora, the Internet is rooted in a culture that credits openness and strong reasoning (Castells 2001). Through an interactive 'conversation' model (van Dijk 2000) users enlarge their horizons, exchange ideas, and test their own views by exposing to alternative outlooks (Sunstein 2001). Such features make the Internet an ideal mechanism in facilitating rational critical public discussion.

Finally, the Internet is inherently a global media (Downing et al. 2001). It can construct transnational forums for rational debate and enhance cosmopolitan democracy through citizen networking and opinion mobilization at an international level (Calabrese and Borchert 1996; Calabrese 1999; Sparks 2001; Ferdinand 2000; Dahlgren 2005).

3.1 Electronic Democracy: Dystopian View

Scholars have raised many critiques about electronic democracy in terms of the parity in participation, the quality of the political discussion content, the atomising effect of the Internet, the growing commercialisation of the new media, and the availability of digital technology for online surveillance and control.

Participation parity in online political debate depends on both physical material (such as computers) and social capital (such as the knowledge in CMC, or computer literacy, and political consciousness). Difference in the possession of social wealth, education, and expertise largely affect procedural equality in electronic deliberation. Political discussions online are mainly limited to those with access to and knowledge of computers and the Internet, while exclude those who would benefit most from the

43

democratising potential of the Internet (Papacharissi, Z. 2002: 19). The gap between the information rich and the information poor existed before the arrival of the Internet. According to Nicolas Garnham, the information rich are provided with specialised information and cultural services, while the information poor are given increasingly homogenised entertainment services on a mass scale (1992:362). However, such differences, as Herbert Schiller envisioned a decade ago, would reinforce rather than reduce in cyberspace when the Internet became more and more under the control of private and corporate enterprises (1995). As results feed on their own course, the more 'homogenised entertainment services' the information-poor receive, the more disadvantaged they are in political participation. The digital divide can exacerbate participatory parity and strengthens 'the age-old scourges of the market system: inequality and domination' (Schiller, D. 2000: 209).

The increasing availability of information on the Internet will not necessarily benefit the public by empowering them with knowledge and wisdom for deliberation. The Internet brings an overwhelming amount of information to public attention, but it also draws the public into 'irrelevancies'. Rational online discussion 'is easily derailed by individuals pulling the conversation off its fulcrum' (Noveck 2000:23-25). In cyberspace, an 'economy of attention' drives individuals into competing with each other for the attention resources of the public (Muhlberger 2005). The result of this might be 'a hyper-speed cacophony of dissonant shouting voices' (Noveck 2000: 19) online instead of public debate featuring interaction among participants. Wilhelm (2000) comes to the similar conclusion that online discussion lacks rationality, tolerance towards oppositional ideas, and interaction in civil manners. In fact, the degree of interactivity or rational critical debate is often weak and limited to a small number of male participants (Cammaerts and van Audenhove 2005). This feature suggests that limitless data on-line will not necessarily mean information and connections that lead to public reasoning, as Noveck predicts the demise of virtual public sphere: 'There is much information, but no guarantee of knowledge; a lot of chat but little debate. Seemingly transparency and openness lead to but a loss of privacy, rather than the emergence of a virtual public sphere' (Noveck 2000: 20).

Though the Internet can give socially marginalised groups a 'voice', it can also reinforce the offline ideological hegemony. Scholars notice that within online

discussion groups, uniformity in the community ethos might discourage the expression of questioning, dissenting, or challenging opinions (Gurak 1999). Dale Spender (1995) argues that instead of being a liberating weapon for women, the Internet can actually reinforces male domination and female suppression in offline communication. In the anonymous online environment, men attack women's posts by flaming, intellectualising, intimidating, harassing, or posting lengthy line-by-line rebuttals of women's messages, which distresses women to retreat into silence (1995: 193-199).

The atomising effect of the ICTs can erode the common ground of public knowledge, experience and understanding, which is the basis for deliberation (Noveck 2000: 18). M Christine Boyer writes in *Cybercities* that 'cyberspace pulls the user into the receding space of the electronic matrix in total withdrawal of the world' (1996:11), thus frequently 'fragmentise political discourse' (Papacharissi, Z. 2002). The fluid character of web-based political engagement and the ease of joining and withdrawing makes it even more difficult 'to estimate what portion of the citizenry is actually involved' (Dahlgren 2004: xiii). Individualisation of media consumption online makes public interest articulated through meaningful discussion hard to achieve, and thus 'makes resistance to tyranny increasingly difficult' (Noveck 2000:29).

An increasing tendency to deregulation and privatisation in the media industry worldwide is shifting media from 'a public good' to 'a privately appropriable commodity' (Garnham 1992:363), and the Internet is no exception. The political economy of the Internet suggests that it is developing rapidly towards intensified commercialisation which characterises the traditional media model (Patekis 2000). With such a development, virtual space is being 'fenced off' for multinational corporations' interest and citizens are being forced into being 'slaves of consumerism' (Boal 1995: 5). Information Content Providers (ICPs) and Information Service Providers (ISPs), as they are privately constructed and profit-driven, will 'of necessity, [...] embody the fundamental features of a private enterprise economy: inequality of income along with the production of goods and services for profit' (Schiller, H. 1996: 96). One effect will be that the Internet becomes more and more vulnerable to direct control by those with economic power:

> Some good political sites exist but there is no simple way to find them or to happen upon them, especially when richer commercial sites can afford to buy priority on the major search engines and to purchase eyeball-catching advertising time on other media, including television and newspaper, to attract people to their sites (Noveck 2000:30).

Scholars thus lament that in cyberspace, democratic deliberation is overshadowed by consumerism, entertainment, non-political networking, and apolitical chatting (Ferdinand 2000; Dahlgren, P. 2005).

Meanwhile, cyberspace can also spread Far Right ideologies such as neo-Nazis, xenophobia, racial hatred and radical nationalism and even terrorism. Michael Whine's (1997) study of neo-Nazism bulletin boards in North America and Europe proves that German neo-Nazi groups have explored computer mediated communication (CMC) technologies since 1980s. Bulletin boards and discussion lists have been used to propagate racial hatred ideologies and also 'allows those who would previously have been "observers" to become more active' (Whine 1997: 209).

Finally, digital technologies can also enhance monitoring and surveillance, which puts the public directly under censorship and endangers press freedom. The electronic public sphere is not free from gate-keeping by professionals. Bennett et al.'s study shows that journalists 'actively maintain the boundaries of different social and political encounters by expanding or restricting the degrees of recognition and mutual response opportunities among the participants' (2004: 452). Through such practice, socially privileged groups still play a key role in the online gate-keeping process. The Internet can also be put directly under administrative surveillance. According to Russell, since the 9/11 terrorist attacks government monitoring of Internet activities in the name of national security became part of the online routine in the US. Firewalls and copyright law are also employed to limit access to information (Russell 2005). In authoritarian countries such as China, arrests and prosecutions of Internet users and activists prove that the Internet can be used as a tool of repression. Global digital media conglomerates can even facilitate the authoritarian government to quench down the liberating voices in order to gain their market share in China[19].

To sum up, the Internet cannot solve the problems in offline political deliberation, and

online political discussion cannot be a substitute for the offline experience. Technology itself is intrinsically neutral – it is neither democratic nor autocratic. The Internet can be shaped by civic forces to serve democratising purposes while it also, as Theodore Roszak believes, 'has the obvious capacity to concentrate political power, to create new forms of social obfuscation and domination' (1986: xii).

3.2 Internet and Electronic Deliberation

Electronic democracy rhetoric has been through a few stages. Early celebratory views of the CMC as a challenge to the existing political hierarchy were proved to be over-optimistic. At the turn of the new millennium, scholars argued that the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to media provides an *alternative* means to enhance citizen political participation rather than 'a replacement for traditional "analogue" political practice' (Hacker and van Dijk 2000:1). The recent theoretical approaches of 'digital resistance' (Russell 2005) require analysts to pay attention to relationships between the online and offline political engagement of differentiated social groups. Digital resistance, according to Russell, has come about through 'a combination of necessity and opportunity' for those who:

> have been denied access to information and media products and/or the power to convey and control their message. They resist by moving around and through the barriers to and filters of mainstream media and by hacking technological and legal restraints on information, delivering alternative messages to expanded audiences and making new media or using existing media in new ways in the process (Russell 2005: 514)

Therefore, in spite of all its limitations, the Internet is still regarded as an important channel for political participation and deliberation. Three defining qualities distilled from the Habermasian public sphere– access, recognition, and responsiveness - can be used to evaluate media's role in deliberation (Bennett et al.2004:438). According to this argument:

> The conditions for audience deliberation are best established when news accounts: (a) report diverse voices (access), (b) identify and comparably value those voices (recognition), and (c) invite those with opposing views or claims to respond directly to each other (responsiveness) (Bennett et al. 2004: 439).

In the following sub sections, I will look into how these qualities and the global nature in online political discussion are documented in existing literature and examine to

what extent the Internet provides users a rich set of qualities with which to deliberate.

3.2.1 Access: citizen network online fitting into the 'from below' politics

The grassroots tradition of the Internet bulletin boards creates a horizontal structure which involves direct participation and interaction among individuals. This feature enables the Internet to represent various voices from ordinary citizens, which resembles the Athenian 'direct democracy'. Citizen networking among ordinary people also enables a type of sociability outside the dominant discourse and an ensemble of an antagonistic public towards political authority.

Though the Internet was first created for military research and communication, the development of the Internet in its early stage coincided with the culture of individual freedom upsurge in the university campuses of the 1960s and 1970s. Such libertarian culture is an 'ideology based on the uncompromising defence of individual freedom as the supreme value - often against the government' (Castells 2001: 33). ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), an infant network sponsored by the Pentagon, was first installed in the University of California, Los Angeles in 1969. ARPANET quickly rolled out its designed goal of long-distance computing in collaborating on projects and became an electronic venue for its users (mainly scientists and graduate students at the time) to meet up and know each other. Researchers were using ARPANET to trade notes on work, and eventually, to downright gossip and network each other. Manual Castells (2001) argues that the involvement of graduate students in the design of ARPANET incorporated the campus culture which values individual freedom, independent thinking, sharing and cooperating with peers into the ideas and the software they designed.

> This student culture took up computer networking as a tool of free communication, and in the case of its most political manifestations, as a tool of liberation, which, together with the PC, would provide people with the power of information to free themselves both from governments and corporations (Castells 2001:25).

The Internet came into existence, from a technical point of view, when the National Science Foundation in the US started to operate a university based wide area network (NSFNet) in January 1983. The commercial use of the Internet faced the public first in 1985 and became popular in the early 1990s. Celebration of Internet technology in constructing 'a new Athenian Age of democracy' (Gore 1995, cited in Buchstein, H.

1997:249) and thriving 'a sort of cyber-Jeffersonian renaissance' (Wilbur 1997: 14) along with decentralisation can be heard from both politicians and academics. Rheingold (1993), Negroponte (1996) and Castells (1996, 2001) are only a few among many who agree that digitalisation brings down hierarchy in offline world and brings about empowerment through the unrestrained expression of opinions from ordinary citizens. The shared locale on Internet bulletin boards, discussion lists, electronic mail and teleconferencing, electronic town halls and other interactive communication also implies a dismissing of a 'centre' in the virtual space as to what is in the real world. By 'relatively levelling the ground of symbolic manipulation, and by broadening the sources of communication', the Internet provides the general public an electronic public agora to meet and talk (Castells 2001: 165).

The Internet provides a means of public communication that features by its 'horizontal' structure 'from one-to-one as well as from one-to-many' communication (Castells 2001:157), which helps to bring up diverse voices from ordinary people. This structure of communication forms a contrast to the traditional highly controlled vertical structure of social organisations, which lacks interaction among ordinary citizens. Users are transformed from 'passive consumers' to 'active producers' online (Taylor and Saarinen 1994). Ordinary citizens are freed from the restraints that prevent their access to the mainstream media and start practicing networking among themselves through 'self-publishing' and 'self-organizing' (Castells 2001). As a consequence, the Internet inspires the proactive use of media among the public to seek, share, and express their interest, concerns, and lifeworld experience that ignored by dominant media. Specialized bulletin boards, news groups, discussion groups, etc. bring people with similar concerns together, so that they are more likely to facilitate group-oriented communication.

The most distinctive feature of online political discussion groups is its grassroots network quality. The information and communication technologies, such as the Internet, can 'advance the interests of oppositional social groups and movements that have been excluded from mainstream media and political debate' (Kellner 1999:101). Every individual can become a political actor and through a connected means, disadvantaged social groups can get their voices heard, interests represented, and

identities constructed:

> Every form of wired opposition, regardless of efficacy or ideology, is now part of the information web, available for copy and adaptation by the vast majority of users everywhere. In the face of fears of a rising authoritarian and homogeneous global culture, these projects underline the independence and plurality that exist in the new media environment (Russell 2005: 514).

Social movements today – human rights, feminist, environmental protection, labour, religious and the peace movements – often take place from the grassroots and tend to call for coordinated global action. A strong 'community ethos' found within online groups, [20] as Gurak (1999) points out, makes the Internet an ideal means of communication and organisation for social movements. This new context for social movement 'from below' makes the horizontal structure of public communication on the Internet ideal for collaborating actions across nation-states boundaries:

> It is obvious that social movements and the political process use, and will increasingly use, the Internet as well, making it a privileged tool for acting, informing, recruiting, organizing, dominating and counter-dominating. Cyberspace becomes a contested terrain (Castells 2001:137).

Bulletin board-based online groups have already actively participated in social movements at both national and international levels. In democratic societies, the Internet is becoming integrated with the established system of political communication and is used to challenge the established power structure (Dahlgren 2005:151). Online practices such as 'electronic townhalls' enable citizens to inform themselves about policy-making and submit comments directly to the government online (Coleman 1999). 'Teledemocracy', which implies the application of ICT in citizen networking, is regarded by two American scholars Ted Becker and Christa Daryl Slaton as a solution to the 'increasing domination of so-called representative governments by tiny cliques of economically powerful and well-organised interests who are, by and large, sexist, racist, and Social Darwinists at heart' (2000:6). In totalitarian countries, though the authority can guide Internet development for its state-defined goals, there are 'many ways in which Internet use may pose challenges to authoritarian regimes' (Kalathil and Boas: 2003: 136). The Zapatistas[21] uprising particularly proved that use of the Internet allowed the Zapatistas to disseminate

information throughout the world and called for international support. International public opinion advocating the movement made it 'literally impossible for the Mexican government to use repression on a large scale' (Castells 1997:80).

3.2.2 Recognition: the Internet helps online public opinion formation

On the Internet, ordinary citizens can communicate with their peers in a spontaneous way of one-to-one or one-to-many encounters. Virtual communities are thus formed on the basis of such interaction in which participants construct their identities in relation to each other (Rheingold 1993). Through 'acts of discourse' that are 'not constrained by the gender and ethnic traces inscribed in face-to-face communication' (Poster 1996:211), diversified viewpoints can be identified and evaluated in the process of public opinion formation.

Howard Rheingold defines online communities as 'the social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough with sufficient human feelings, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace' (1993:5). Scholars (Jones, S. 1998, Baym, N. 1998, 2000) argue that 'sharing' is the primary value within online communities. What welds online communities together, apart from 'shared interest', is also information, knowledge, expertise, wisdom, and in fact, 'a holding-in-common of qualities, properties, identities or ideas' (Wilbur 1997: 8). Nonetheless, such commonality does not rule out public plurality. The online experience of dislocation in time and space helps individuals to discover their own identities in different perspectives (Wilbur 1997:11). Such self-expression with diversity in opinion demonstrates the potential of reunifying people and renewing democracy (Poster 1995: 42-3).

Howard Rheingold (1993), Elizabeth Reid (1999) and other scholars all noticed that people in computer-mediated groups are 'relatively uninhibited and nonconforming' than they were in face-to-face groups (Reid 1999: 111-113). Though the 'disinhibition effect' (Smith, A. D. 1999) might encourage aggression and deception, it can also support intimacy, confidence, and 'reconciliation of differences and discovery of the facts of a particular case' (Smith, A. D. 1999:156). Uninhibited interaction within virtual communities encourages participants in political discussion to recognize different perspectives and comparably value other opinions. Such mediated

experience provides a new approach to 'public reason' which, according to Kant, involves the efforts of putting oneself in the position of anyone else and the exercise of reflective judgment (Garnham 2000).

The Internet's role in facilitating community construction is increasingly receiving attention from both scholars and government. Scholars believe that the potential of online communities in generating rational critical public opinion might be a cure for offline political apathy and official neglect (Ferdinand 2000: 5). E-government has been adopted by many municipal governments in the USA (Moon 2002) and has been consistently progressing (Norris and Moon 2005). 'Electronic town meetings' has been practiced by scholars since 1995[22] to promote citizens' direct participation in debating and deciding on local issues.

Admittedly, the Internet cannot create a virtual community as a substitute for a real life electorate. However, the real-time interactive communication provides the possibility to enhance public integration into political life, especially for those who 'have been marginalised in the increasingly money-dominated world of democratic election' (Ferdinand 2000: 10). Public opinion formed online constitutes an alternative public discourse parallel to the offline political discourse in the public sphere. Under most circumstances, such practice of online public opinion formation is still more or less informal. Habermas says that the 'communicative power' generated from 'informal public opinion formation' in the public sphere 'influences the premises of judgment and decision making in the political system without intending to conquer the system itself' (Habermas 1996: 487). In this sense, the practice of informal online public opinion formation can help to represent the interest from the 'subaltern counterpublics' and contribute to the health of the multi-tiered public sphere in contemporary society.

3.2.3 Responsiveness: the Internet assists rational critical public debate

The Internet has the potential to provide diverse, open and reflexive public debate in which rationality in publicity and the critical public opinion can be formed. This argument is supported by these facts – preconditions for deliberation can be met in cyberspace; certain technological effects make the Internet compatible to reflexivity

(Smith, A. D. 1999); and Internet culture credits rationality and reasoning (Castells 2001). Since 'every sovereign, centralized state is potentially aggressive and dictatorial' (Keane 1991:94 citing Weil, S. 1933), critical public opinion is a very important harness to the hegemonic power of the state. For that reason, rational critical public debate online can specially contribute to a better democratic social structure in countries like China.

On deliberation, social choice theorist Kenneth Arrow proposes three conditions that aim to ensure the procedural equality: unrestricted domain, anonymity and neutrality (cited in Knight and Johnson 1997: 290). The practice of the online public discussion shows that these conditions can be mainly achieved in cyberspace. Within online discussion groups, there are no prior constraints on the content of public discussion, and every individual (online ID) in cyberspace is free from hierarchy in the offline social structure. Moreover, there is no bias for or against any particular discourse online. Through interaction with others on the Internet, users are continually 'testing their own views by learning about alternatives' (Sunstein 2001:194). These qualities of online discussion pave the way for rational deliberation.

Certain technological traits of the Internet facilitate reflexive rationality in online discussion. Richard Shell (1995) finds out that people may pay more attention to the substantive content of online messages than to the same content delivered verbally. Such lengthened concentration can potentially prevent *faux pas*, and improve reflection, communication, relationships, and problems-solving (Smith A. D.1999: 156). The time lag during any interactive communication online can 'gives one time to think, decide on courses of action and compose one's words' (*ibid.*). Another advantage of online communication is the verbatim record of any interaction among users. It can provide instant and accurate evidence for later reflection or study (*ibid*). Finally, ICTs support multiple tasks for one user at one time. This 'ability to multiplex' allows users to consult key people and information sources during the process of online debate (Smith, A. D. 1999: 157).

The culture of the Internet is a 'techno-meritocratic culture', as Manuel Castells argues (2001). This culture is rooted in the scholarly tradition of crediting the authors of each discovery, building a reputation based on academic excellence, and

acknowledging contributions based on peer review (Castells 2001:40). This techno-meritocratic culture accords with the characteristic of the ideal public sphere, in that merits of argument instead of social status determine the outcomes of public discussion.

Based on the above qualities of online public communication, we can conclude that the responsiveness which accompanies the Internet enables those holding opposing views or claims to respond directly to each other. As a consequence, in mediated online communication lay publics are no longer in an inferior position to expert communicators, whose social status or professional knowledge holds them in an advantageous position of delivering messages to the public offline. Through online critical debate, the general public can evaluate, test and comment on the messages they receive from expert communicators when the offline 'asymmetries of information, agency, and control' (Bohman 2000: 57) is lacking.

Public engagement in rational critical discussion online creates the conditions for active interchange of opinion between people rather than between highly professionalized expert communicators. Through such a communication process, the political participation will be more comprehensive, effects will be more direct, and the scope of the influence will be more inclusive. As Laclau observes, authoritarian hegemonic forces take great pain to prevent the emergence of grass-roots movements (1977:81-142) so that the true critical public opinion would not be heard and would not challenge the *status quo*. Contrary to traditional communication means, the Internet has the potential to reverse the unbalanced power relationship between the communicators and public, and contributes to a robust public sphere through publicity. Such qualities make the Internet particularly revolutionary in authoritarian regimes.

3.2.4 Trans-nationalness: the global public sphere online

Globalisation arrived before the emergence of the Internet. However the Internet, as Downing enthusiastically proclaims, 'is potentially our first global public sphere' (2001:202):

> The Internet is the first medium through which individuals and independent collectives throughout the globe may hope to communicate, in their own voices, with an international audience of millions. Thus the purely technical possibilities for the Internet

as a public sphere are unlimited (Downing, J. et al. 2001: 202).

Globalisation's impact on the mediated public sphere is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, globalisation eliminates the barriers between national states and brings the publics together in scrutinising both domestic and international issues, which can ideally employ the Internet as an agora for a global debate (Sparks 2001). On the other hand, the worldwide flow of capital changes the political economy of digital media and heightens the role of transnational media corporations in the public sphere, which might subject public interest to international capitalism (Garnham 1995 [1986]).

Globalisation first took off in the economic area after the Second World War and gradually spread to the technological, cultural, social, and political aspects of modern life. In the socio-cultural sphere, the concept of globalisation is usually associated with cultural assimilation and cultural imperialism. For example, Richard A. Gershon argues that global corporations control the international marketplace of ideas (1997:4-5) and create a 'homogenized world culture' (1997:128). Nevertheless, Gershon overlooks the positive effect mass media have brought about in the process of globalisation. Globalisation enables media to bring sidelined public issues and marginalised public voices to international attention, which can reschedule the public agenda and might contribute to solve regional problems and conflicts in a 'global village'.

The idea of a 'global village' was theorised by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s. By 'global village', he implies that electronic media such as television overcame time and space barriers in human communication and enable people to interact on a global scale as if it were in their own village (McLuhan 1962; McLuhan 2001 [1964]). Since the early 1980s, transnational broadcasting networks such as CNN and the BBC, along with international newspapers and magazines, established themselves as global media and created an international media environment (Sparks 2001). Access to international news is available around the world. Such an international media environment affects new political alliances and increasingly impacts on public participation, notions of political identity and 'citizenship', and the agendas and formats of political journalism within the global public sphere (Volkmer 2003).

The Internet is no novelty device that replaces the existing global media structure. On the contrary, the Internet is an integrated part of the media 'convergence' in a global sense. 'Convergence', according to Thomas Baldwin et al. (1996), indicates the blurring of media industry boundaries. Media convergence has created organizations providing information through a heavily interconnected information network within which, however, the Internet plays a central role.

The Internet, as Castells (1996) argues, has increased the dynamics and complexity of the political globalization process and has created a new global 'network society' *not* in McLuhan's sense of 'sameness' but rather in the sense of 'Networked Individualism' (Castells 2001). 'Networked Individualism', as Wellman et al. (2003) argue, refers to the changed concept of citizenship through positive Internet use. The understanding of citizenship moves away from 'solidary, local, hierarchical groups' to 'fragmented, partial, heavily-communicating social networks' (Wellman et a. 2003). The Internet, viewed by Castells as a metaphor for a new global communication infrastructure, 'de-centralizes' the globalization process and affects the political identity of individuals within a new set of 'supra- and subnational coordinates'. Such change as brought by the Internet has a profound implication on how people relate to each other and how they, as citizens, relate to governance at various levels.

The Internet can spread ideas across national boundaries in a strikingly quick way. Hence it can put public issues under the critical scrutiny of a diverse international audience at almost the same time. Scholars thus believe the 'new media' can enhance the transnational, cosmopolitan democracy through publicity in a global sense (Calabrese and Borchert 1996; Calabrese 1999; Chambers 2000). Publicity at a global level enables Internet use to function as a democratic watchdog 'overseeing the actions and policies of the state' (Chambers 2000: 193-4), which guaranteed the public sphere not be completely colonized by commercialism and political power (Chambers 2000:194).

The attribute of 'transnational forums, global networking, and opinion mobilization' (Dahlgren 2005: 153) of the Internet enables it to be an important tool for grassroots democratic movement at a global scale. There has been research indicating the revolutionary role of the CMC in constructing 'the new global solidarity' for

56

progressive politics and humanistic forces at a global level (Waterman 1996; 2001[1998]). Calabrese believes a 'nascent global civil society' comes into existence when resourceful activists from all around the world apply the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in exposing 'what otherwise might be unaccountable government power, buried in arcane process of transnational deal making' (Calabrese 2000: 79).

A global online civil society can be envisioned also because in the wired world, censorship becomes almost impossible. Peter Ferdinand (2000) believes that messages on the Internet are broken up into separate 'packets' of information at the sending end, and only 'reassembled' at the receiving end after directing across various routes. Therefore, it is impossible for governments to intercept online messages en route 'without destroying most of the efficiency gains that such a technology can bring' (Ferdinand 2000: 12). The nature of circumventing censorship makes the Internet a 'long-term strategic threat' to authoritarian regimes. As Charles Swett (1995) evaluates the information on the Internet:

> News from the outside world brought by the Internet into nations subjugated by such regimes will clash with the distorted versions provided by their governments, eroding the credibility of their positions and encouraging unrest. 'Personal' contact between people living under such governments and people living in the free world, conducted by e-mail, will also help to achieve a more accurate understanding on both ends and further undermine authoritarian controls. Information about violations of human rights and other forms of oppression will be increasingly conveyed to the outside world by the Internet, helping mobilize external political forces on behalf of the oppressed (Swett, C. 1995).

The 'multimedia experiences' facilitated by new technology, according to Ohmae (1995), has fundamental consequences in terms of its 'thought process and mind-set'. Based on these arguments, the continuity of information flow 'exported' from democratic societies to authoritarian societies can have the long-term effect of subverting totalitarianism. Cosmopolitan democracy will be envisioned through 'a gradual introduction of the content of various political and social rights into the life of individual countries' (Beck 2000: 93).

In his more recent reflection on the public sphere, Habermas explains the possibilities of a global public sphere. Since individuals have the communicative capacity to act

politically: 'it is the deliberative opinion and will-formation of citizens, grounded in the principles of popular sovereignty, that forms the ultimate medium for a form of abstract, legally constructed solidarity that reproduces itself through political participation' (Habermas 2001: 76).

The global public sphere is not free from offline economic and social structures. Globalisation can intensify the discrepancies between the information-rich and information poor. The most significant challenge to global democracy is still 'issues of redistribution' (Habermas 2001:72) of social, economic and cultural capital. Meanwhile, the mechanisms for transforming international public opinion into offline decisions and policies are still highly limited (Dahlgren 2005: 153). Nevertheless, these limitations are not meant to restrict the potential of the Internet as the global public sphere. What is urgent, however, is to tackle a difficulty facing the idea of the public sphere in a post-national era which, as Habermas notes, is that 'the regulatory power of collectively binding decisions operates according to a different logic than the regulatory mechanisms of the market. Power can be democratised; money cannot' (2001: 78).

4. Summary

This chapter reviewed the conceptual development of the theory of the public sphere, media's role in consolidating the public sphere, and the Internet in constructing the alternative public sphere. Three main arguments are presented. Firstly, the public sphere does not exist today in a singular comprehensive form. It is defined by plurality, complexity, exclusion, and competing publics. Secondly, modern media can consolidate the public sphere by extending political participation to the general public, representing various interest groups in the society, enriching the content of public dialogue, and facilitating public debate. Thirdly, in spite of all limitations, computer-mediated communication provides ordinary citizens, especially traditionally marginalised social groups, a more comprehensive access to political debate through a more dynamic interaction among people. The Internet also enlarges the horizon of political participation and facilitates rational public opinion formation at a global level. Dahlgren points out that politics through mediated online participation becomes 'an expressive activity, a way of asserting, within the public sphere, group values, ideals,

and belonging' (2005:155).

The public sphere in the contemporary mediated communication environments can be defined as 'the collection of places and spaces – from neighbourhood cafés to Internet chat rooms' (Bennett et al. 2004: 437). Academic arguments on the media's active role in facilitating communicative rationality in public opinion formation have greatly broadened the original meaning of the public sphere. Online political participation thus becomes a part of the extra-parliamentary 'new politics' which is phrased as 'life politics' by Anthony Giddens (1991); 'sub-politics' by Ulrich Beck (1997); and 'lifestyle' politics by Bennett (1998, 2003). Emphasis on the institutional role of media (the Internet particularly) in the public sphere helps media students to keep abreast with the evolving relationship between communication and politics.

Worth noticing, however, is that among the literature reviewed there has been little description of how the Internet helps to construct the public sphere in authoritarian societies. China, one of the few Communist countries in the world, has witnessed marketisation of its economy and globalisation in its socio-cultural sphere since the late 1970s. During this process, the Chinese media, previously totally controlled by the state, have been put in tension between democratisation and commercialisation. The Internet, which first connected China to the world in 1990, brings into Chinese society promises of a deliberating public sphere in cyberspace and the dangers of public interest being subjected to political hegemony and global capitalism.

Thus this thesis seeks to apply the theory of the public sphere to examine online deliberation on Internet bulletin boards in contemporary China. Components of the virtual public sphere – the emerging antagonistic publics, the quality of the public debate, the administrative surveillance over the media itself, and the global context of 'Greater China'– will be studied. Different histories, geopolitics, culture, development of time, security concerns, and the relationship between individuals decides the channels and means of political participation in different states. The public sphere thus takes different forms under different political circumstances. In the following chapter, I will explore the historic development of the public sphere in China and media's role as a social institution in the tension-charged field of political deliberation.

Chapter 3

Historic Account of the Role of Media in the Public Sphere in China

The concept of the public sphere has long been regarded as only existing in democratic societies rather than in 'totalitarian' regimes such as China. However, similar social institutions to those in the Western public sphere have been in existence in China since late nineteenth century and developed in the electronic age. In this chapter, I will explore the historic development of the public sphere in China and argue that the media have played a significant role in constructing the public sphere throughout history.

The first Republic (The Republic of China) was established in 1911 and was the outcome of the emergence and development of the Chinese bourgeois public sphere in the nineteenth century. By disseminating bourgeois enlightenment ideas and cultivating public understanding of civil rights, bourgeois newspapers played a critical role in bringing down the feudal Qing Empire. The bourgeois elites played a leading role in public deliberation, and people from lower social strata (such as peasantry, workers and soldiers) also actively participated in the revolution against feudalism and colonialism. The first bourgeois public sphere was also demonstrated by the emancipatory rhetoric from women (though small in number) concerning their equal rights as new citizens.

The second Republic (the People's Republic of China) was characterised before the late 1970s by both the emergence and disappearance of the proletariat public sphere. Media in the PRC was owned and controlled by the state and used as ideological apparatus in propagating the Party's policies to the people. Antagonistic voices from the public were muzzled and the media failed to perform their roles as watchdogs over the Party and the state. The Communist Party's control over the media has constructed, to borrow Jakubowicz's (1991) words, the 'official public sphere' as the dominant tier in social political life. The 'alternative public sphere' and the 'oppositional public sphere' existed marginally in the form of wall newspapers[23], underground literature, or other radical media forms.

The media have undergone significant changes in terms of political economy since reform took place in China in 1978. Though they are still mainly state-owned, mass media in China have been downplaying their role as ideological propagators for the Party and emphasising their roles as market-oriented information providers. This process of media commercialisation in China allows a certain degree of editorial independence for the media, which moderately attenuates absolute state control and in part helps to bring out the public voice. However, the commercialisation of the media privileged a small group of elites in setting the social political agenda for the majority of the public. Access to the media system is determined almost exclusively by those with political power or economic power, 'a power the majority of workers and peasants do not possess' (Zhao 1998: 152). Jian Meng believes that the emergence of a middle class and re-construction of social strata following the economic reform heralded emerging public power in China (Meng 2000). Though the 'alternative public sphere' and 'the oppositional public sphere' are expanding as a response to the public call for civil participation, the general Chinese public still struggles to find channels outside the official media for their political engagement.

1. The Emergence of the Public Sphere in China: Bourgeois Press and the First Republic

The first bourgeois public sphere in China emerged in the late nineteenth century, resulting from the bourgeois Reformist and Revolutionist movements[24]. During this process, bourgeois media and political associations provided public knowledge of the world, a channel to express political opinion, and a forum to debate China's future. Bourgeois newspapers introduced the ideas of enlightenment and democracy into China and included intellectuals, people from lower social status, and women in the public discourse of anti-feudalism and anti-colonism (Wu 2004). For the first time in Chinese history, newspapers acted as a symbol for freedom of speech and an outlet for public opinion.

However, the first bourgeois public sphere had a tendency towards elitism and was dominated by scholars, officials, and gentry class members. This elite-dominated public sphere was not only a natural outcome of the poverty and massive illiteracy

that was prevalent in the country, but also an inheritor of feudal legacies such as the meritocratic political structure rooted in Confucianism. Though Confucius has been admired for his emphasis on 'virtue' rather than 'noble blood' in evaluating rulers of society, the key Confucian political thought hangs on the idea that the intellectual class who labour with their minds are the rightful rulers of society; while those country-men who labour with their physical strength are governed[25]. This meritocratic political culture is based on the popular acceptance of inequality among a population as a function of merit, which is contradictory to an egalitarian society.

1.1 Public Life in Feudal China

China entered feudalism in 476 B.C. and the last feudal emperor was overthrown by the bourgeois Revolutionists in 1911. During this lengthy period of feudalism, there had hardly been any trace of public engagement in political life. However, social institutions such as kinship families and teahouses helped to weld people together in a patricentric community and they developed a primitive form of public discussion. Such interaction ultimately maintained the social stability in ancient China.

Habermas acknowledges that the public sphere evolved from the sphere of the conjugal family where individualisation was promoted through humane interpersonal relations as well as solitary reading (Habermas 1989: 43-45). Patricentric kinship families in feudal China played pivotal roles in bonding the community members together and regulating social and political life. The ancestor temples (*ci tang*) in natural kinship villages were the earliest venue for public gatherings, meetings, and decision making in a male-dominated community. A proportion of villages in feudal China were self-governing 'because the central government lacked the resources to extend government to the grass-roots' (Gray J. 1990:16), which allowed the kinship families more autonomy to act like local social and political bodies. It was usually the senior males in kinship families who took responsibility for the maintenance of social order, developing self-contained village economies, and creating and safeguarding behavioural norms for its member families (Feng 1996).

Around the core of kinship families there were teahouses, neighbourhoods, associations, and the world of letters that connected people together. Teahouses were

62

especially popular in cities and towns for people to meet regularly, discuss current issues, promote business, arbitrate conflicts, or even talk about politics. During special periods such as peasant uprisings, teahouses were even used for gathering political information or exchanging military intelligence (Liu, Xiuming 1997: 98-112). In the world of letters, private diaries, annotations,[26] and some primitive form of non-official 'newspapers'[27] were used as means of political engagement by literati and intellectuals.

Nonetheless, these primitive forms of social institutions hardly constructed an antagonistic public. The political system in feudal China was moulded by the Confucian ideal which implies 'ruling by an enlightened elite' (Gray, J. 1990: 15). The Emperor possessed paramount power in political life, and the Confucian elite intellectuals served as his advisers (Gray, J. 1990). To a certain degree, the Confucian ideal moralised public opinion, as the saying goes as: '[words from] people weighs much more than [that of] the Emperor'. However, discussions among the literate elite were 'normally part of the state apparatus' (Fairbank 1987: 6) and seldom related to the common concerns of the lower social strata. Meanwhile, as harmony, social order and continuity were stressed as an ethos in feudal China (Rowe, W. 1990:243), an antagonistic public was viewed as a danger to the society. The 'public' were viewed by the governing elite as ignorant and riotous 'masses'. Public opinion had neither been expressed through official outlets nor protected institutionally:

> All communications [from ordinary people] with officialdom were, by definition, petitions. Appeal against the actions of an official could only be to his superior in office, who had often as much reason as his underling to cover up evidence of maladministration or injustice (Gray, J. 1990:16).

Those who ventured criticism of government would receive severe punishment, and the punishment usually extended to all members of the offender's kinship family. The last feudal empire, the Qing Dynasty, was notoriously known for its 'word prisons' (*Wen Zi Yu*), or the imprisonment of intellectuals who aired their dissatisfaction towards the state in any written form.

In brief, the ancient Chinese empires were characterised by state monopolisation in almost every aspect of social life. Meritocracy and 'a religious cult of the emperor'

was the political culture in feudal China (Fairbank 1987:8). Before the introduction of modern bourgeois enlightenment ideas, there had been no means of channelling public opinion into policy making in feudal China.

1.2 Bourgeois Press and the Reformist Movements

The early bourgeois press in China was closely associated with social movements that aimed to achieve modernisation and independence of the nation. These goals immediately put the bourgeois press on the opposite side of the Qing feudal governor and Western colonists. The bourgeois Reformists newspapers were highly politically-oriented and systematically incorporated into the social activists' appeals for reform to the feudal Emperor. By disseminating European bourgeois enlightenment ideas, newspapers promoted a certain degree of public discussion over national salvation among young scholars, intellectuals, and members from the gentry class. However due to its very exclusive nature, the bourgeois Reformist movement proved to be an abortive attempt to save feudal China.

The emergence of the bourgeois press in China was highly influenced by the early practice of foreign commercial and religious newspapers. The first English paper in China, the *Canton Register*, was set up on 8 November 1827 in Guangdong Province (Ding, et al. 1998: 36). Though this commercial paper focused mainly on business news, it devoted a substantial amount of content to political news, current affairs report and editorials. After defeat in the first Opium War in 1842, China was forced to cede Hong Kong to Britain and open coastal cities for foreign trade. More foreign press thus launched in China (Ge 1985 [1956]: 55-62).

The practices of the foreign press made Chinese bourgeois intellectuals more aware of the importance of newspapers in enlightening the public. Hong Rengan regarded newspapers as a means to 'fulfil democratic politics' in that the press can instruct the masses, superintend the government, and bridge the governors and the people by bringing forth public opinion (Ding, et al. 1998:37). Wang Tao, the owner of the first Chinese paper *Xunhuan Daily*, believes that 'newspaper is for opinions' and newspapers should 'comment and discuss the current issues without any restraints'

(Ding, et. al. 1998:61). Zheng Guanying, an independent publisher, pointed out that the press should 'reflect the complaints of the people and reflect public opinion' (Ding, et al. 1998:62).

In the late nineteenth century, the majority of newspapers in China were set up and controlled by bourgeois Reformists and Revolutionists. The bourgeois press became seedbeds of political unrest and was closely associated with national salvation from Western colonisation.

Kang Youwei, the Reformist leader, wrote in 1895 that newspapers should help in 'safeguarding territory, promoting reform', and 'getting rid of corruption.'[28] 1895 is also the year in which China failed to resist Japan's invasion and was forced to cede land to Japan. Facing China's failure in international relations and military conflicts, Chinese intellectuals were eager to debate China's future on a new platform. Against such a background, the first Reformist paper *Qiang Xue Bao* (Newspaper on Strengthening [the country] through Studying) was set up on 12 January 1896. Though this paper only lasted for six days (until 17 January), it was 'devoted to promotion of public discussion and publications on reform issues' (Bays, D. H. 1978: 20). Following this, Reformist newspapers, periodicals, associations and study groups were set up all over the country and constituted a bourgeois public sphere in which the intellectual elites and the gentry class participated. *Shi Wu Bao* (the Current Affairs Paper), the organ of the Reformist's association *Qiang Xue Hui*, was set up in 1895 in Shanghai and became a public forum for young intellectual elites to debate the country's salvation. As Daniel H. Bays says, by 'combining editorial essays with factual news and translations from the foreign press', this paper 'provided the first public forum for many young men who would later be important figures in the first decades of the twentieth century' (Bays, D.H.1978:33).

The Chinese bourgeois press also introduced to the public the idea of newspapers as watchdogs of the government. According to Kang, newspapers should 'let know complaints from the people and corruption of the officials' (Ding, et. al, 1998: 89). Liang Qichao, who was influenced by the philosophical thoughts of Rousseau and Montesquieu, argued in 1902 that newspaper should 'aim at serving the public interest

of the majority of citizens' and 'act as a superintendent of the government' (Ding, et. al, 1998: 89).

The bourgeois reform movement won a temporary victory during the *One Hundred Day Reform* in 1898. With support from Emperor Guangxu, some forty reform decrees were issued on 11 June 1898 'aiming at modernizing the Chinese state, its administration, education, laws, economy, technology, and military and police systems' (Fairbank 1987:135). Among these reform strategies, the press received a fair amount of emphasis. Newspapers were allowed to be published by officials, the gentry class and ordinary citizens. Journalists were allowed to 'report the truth and elaborate upon the truth without inhibition' (Ding, et al, 1998: 94). Thus in a short period of prosperity, the critical press experienced a rapid growth and facilitated the spread of bourgeois Reformism ideas in major urban centres (Fairbank 1987:142). With support from the upper social classes, the Reformists later set up 'newspapers, journals, schools, and study societies all over the country numbered in the dozen' in the year (Bays, D. H. 1978:20). Nonetheless, this short-lived reform was interdicted when a royal dowager Cixi staged a *coup d'etat* and detained Emperor Guangxu. Most of the reform decrees were denounced on 21 September 1898 and six Reformist leaders were decapitated, which marked the failure of the bourgeois Reformist movement.

The central concern of bourgeois Reformist papers was to introduce world news, technology, and Western Enlightenment ideas such as press freedom to the Chinese public. Seeing their country being colonized by western imperials, bourgeois intellectuals believed they should learn advanced technologies and advanced social political ideas from Western countries so that they could shake off the shackles imposed by feudalism and colonisation.

Bourgeois papers also promoted freedom and reasoning in public speech and debate. As Reformist leader Liang Qichao pointed out, public opinion is the utmost sanction power in the society, while the press is the most effective institution to reflect public opinion. In order to foster dynamic and vigorous public opinion, Liang believed 'public reasoning should be guided by the goal of searching for truth rather than enforcing personal preference through emotion' (cited from Ding, et al, 1998: 135).

These ideas put forward by the Reformists were very similar to eighteenth century Enlightenment ideas in Europe when the 'reliance on the use of reason' and 'faith in the power of reason' in investigating nature, man and society became the dominant feature of the intellectual process (Reiss 1991:6).

1.3 Bourgeois Press and the Revolutionary Course

Newspapers owned by the bourgeois Revolutionists in China were used as radical media in the fight against the dying feudal Qing Empire. Newspapers propagated revolutionary ideas and promoted revolts and uprisings. Compared to the Reformist papers, Revolutionary newspapers enlarged readership and systematically incorporated the revolutionary course. Through debating and reasoning, the bourgeois Revolutionary papers enhanced the public understanding of its political ideals, which finally helped bringing down the Qing dynasty.

When the bourgeois Reform movement started within China, Chinese bourgeois Revolutionists set up their associations and the revolutionary press overseas. Revolutionist leader Sun Yat-sen set up the first bourgeois revolutionary association *Xin Zhong Hui* in 1894 in Honolulu and the first revolutionary paper *Zhongguo Ribao* (China Daily) in Hong Kong in 1900. *Zhongguo Ribao* introduced bourgeois revolution in Britain and France to the Chinese public. It 'instigated the people rise up against the feudalism, and to pursue democracy, freedom and civil rights' (Ding, et. al. 1998, 2002: 98). Sun enlisted support from overseas Chinese for his anti-feudalism course and set up the first Chinese bourgeois revolutionary party, the *Tong Meng Hui* in Tokyo, Japan 1905. The first bourgeois Party's organ *Min Bao* (People's Paper) was launched in the same year (till 1910). Under the influence of political theory of Karl Marx and Henry George[29], Sun Yat-sen perfected his political perception as *San Min Principle* which was published in the first issue of *Min Bao*. *San Min Principle* (the three People's Principles) which included *Minzu* (nationalism), *Minzhu* (democracy), and *Minsheng* (the people's livelihood) thus became the guiding principles for the bourgeois revolutionary course. *Min Bao* and other newspapers were used actively by the Revolutionists to propagate their political ideas and instigate public discussion on anti-feudalism and pro-democracy. Overseas Chinese students associations in Japan, England, France, Belgium and Germany supported the revolutionary enthusiastically

and also propagated the revolutionary ideals in their own publications (Li 1956:193).

One central concern of the Revolutionary press was to promote the idea of national salvation through the overthrow of the corrupt Qing feudal government. The media dared to expose corruption of the royal family and aristocrats, let known government incompetence in dealing with international conflicts, and voiced the misery of the general public. *Min Li Bao*, a Revolutionary paper set up in 1910 in Shanghai, publicly denounced the Qing empire as 'retroaction government' and supported the grassroots anti-colonization movements and anti-feudalism uprisings. During its one year of practice, *Jinghua Ribao* (1904-1905) in Beijing reported such scandals as Qing aristocrats burying their concubines alive; the Royal army harassing local residents; and Chinese labourers being maltreated by their British employers in South Africa. *Jinghua Ribao* was closed in 1905 by the Qing government for arousing dissident public opinion, and its editor-in-chief Peng Yizhong was exiled. However, public opinion showed its silent power when more than one thousand people turned up to see Peng off on the day he was exiled from Beijing (Ge 1985 [1956]: 142; Ding, et al, 1998: 113).

As one feature of the bourgeois enlightenment, Revolutionary papers also promoted public reasoning in debate. This quality of weighing up arguments in terms of the logos was exemplified in the public debate between the Constitutionalists (the former Reformists) and the Revolutionists during the Qing empire constitutional monarchy period[30] (1906-1911). The Constitutionalists promulgated their political standpoint in their organ *Xinmin Congbao* (February 1902 - August 1907) and the Revolutionists in *Min Bao*. The polemic centred on some important issues in China's social political life such as:

> Did China need a national revolution?
> Did China need a revolution for civil rights?
> Was it essential to confiscate private land and distribute it equally among citizens?
> Would the revolution invite foreign interventions which might lead to China's disintegration? (Ding, et. al. 1998: 118).

It was the first time in China's history that two oppositional political camps debated their ideas openly through the media. As journalism historian Gongzhen Ge recorded,

the Revolutionists presented their argument as: China needed a national revolution for civil rights; land should be equally distributed among citizens; the revolution would not invite foreign interventions and would not lead to China's disintegration. This revolutionary view was 'based upon concise and critical analysis' of China's social political reality and most importantly, it was in the public interest (Ge, G. 1985 [1956]: 124-5). The Revolutionist idea was well received by the public through this debate, which helped to pave their way to the success of the bourgeois revolution in 1911.

The apogee of the bourgeois revolution came along with the Wuchang Revolt on 10 October 1911, which marked the end of feudalism in China. The beginning of 1912 saw the first Republic established in China. On 12 March 1912, the Nanjing temporary government decreed the Temporary Constitution of the Republic of China, in which it stated: 'people have their rights of freedom in speech, publication, meeting, gathering and association'. Up to April 1912, the number of nationwide newspapers grew from around 100 before the Wuchang Revolt to more than 500, and the total circulation reached 42 million (Ge 1985[1956]:149).

1.4 The Plebeian Public Sphere

Though intellectuals constituted their main readership, the bourgeois papers also emphasised the promotion of world knowledge and Enlightenment ideas to the general public. The plebeian public sphere emerged during this time and included nonbourgeois subaltern groups such as radical intelligentsia, the working class, peasantry, and soldiers at low ranks. The plebeian public sphere was not just an imitation of the bourgeois public sphere. Rather, it developed the bourgeois public sphere's revolutionary potential and expanded civic participation into broader social life, which finally helped bringing down the feudal empire.

The formation of the plebeian public sphere in China owed firstly to the bourgeois Reformists' efforts in introducing Enlightenment ideas and Western education systems into the country in the late nineteenth century. Kang Youwei, the Reformist leader, proposed in 1896 that bourgeois newspapers should aim 'to enlighten the public' and 'to enhance the public learning'[31]. Kang Youwei also advised the emperor Guangxu about the importance of opening educational institutions to public: if 'everyone knows

to learn and schools are set up all over the country', he said, China would benefit from its talents and become strong.[32] The first Western styled university *Jin Shi Da Xue Tang* (today's Beijing University) was established during the *One Hundred Day Reform* and provided public with western higher education. *Jin Shi Da Xue Tang* survived the failure of the reformist movement and continued to be the cradle of liberal ideas in China.

During his editorship at *Qing Yi Bao* (December 1898-November 1901) and *Xinmin Congbao* (February 1902-August 1907), Reformist Leader Liang Qichao used his papers to introduce Western political thoughts, cultural and science knowledge to the Chinese public. Liang wrote in 1902 that citizenship can be nurtured through civic education and the newspaper was the 'representative of the citizens' common interests' (Ding, et al. 1998: 107). The Reformist papers thus became a source of knowledge to the general public to learn about economy, military, legislation, religion, civil rights, revolution and even the idea of destruction (Ding, et al. 1998: 107-8). One of the Reformists' political ideals was to encourage ordinary people to participate in the press. The One Hundred Day Reform triggered the setting up of more than 70 new private papers between 1896 and 1898. Journalism historian Ge Gongzhen (1985 [1956]) believes that the bourgeois enlightenment movement helped the Chinese people to grasp the ideas of freedom, humanity and equality:

> With the arrival of the newspaper and periodicals, public issues started to be reported to the public. Thanks to the technology of modern print, the report of the public issues disseminated easily. As a consequence, there came the fashion of critical debate through which the truth could be attained. The so-called Freedom, Humanity and Equality were introduced into our nation (1985 [1956]:146 author's translation).

China witnessed a development in communication and media, and 'participated in the worldwide rise of the popular press, international news reporting, and mass publication of books and journals' in the early twentieth century (Fairbank 1987: 142). The progress in technology had an impact on both the literate elite in cities and 'the literate upper level of the peasantry' (Fairbank 1987:142) in rural areas. The geographical distribution of newspapers and periodicals extended from the coastal cities (such as Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Shanghai) to provincial capitals (such as Hankou, Chongqing, Chengdu, and Xi'an) and small cities (such as Hengyang, Pingxiang, and Wuhu). Apart from the political and partisan papers, periodicals

started adapting themselves to a broader readership - professionals, youth, women, and children (Ding, et al. 1998: 93).

In this wave of an emerging popular press, a generation of independent publicists who came from humble family backgrounds came into the field and revolutionised the popular press. The written language in the Qing dynasty was still classical Chinese, and differed sharply from *Baihua* which was the spoken language used by the ordinary populace who had little classical education. At the beginning of the twentieth century, bourgeois intellectuals started to use *Baihua* in their press as to enlarge their readership to 'farmers, craftsmen, vendors, soldiers, and the teenager boys and girls' (Lin Baishui cited from Ding, et al, 1998:103). In June 1901, the first *Baihua* paper appeared in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. Its editor-in-chief Lin Baishui claimed that the paper should be 'an institution of public speech' and journalists should use the language acceptable to ordinary people (Wang, K. 06/09/2005). From then on, the *Baihua* paper developed, and was well received in Jiangsu, Zhili and other provinces, which cultivated a large popular readership for it. Early Communist party leader Chen Duxiu also set up a *Baihua* paper in Anhui province in 1908 and aspired to inform the public of 'knowledge and current affairs in the most simple and easy language' (Ding, et al. 1998:103).

The plebeian public sphere significantly facilitated the bourgeois anti-feudalism revolution. Geoff Eley argues that the liberal public sphere was faced at the very moment of its emergence by not only a 'plebeian public that was disabled and easily suppressed' but also 'a radical one that was combative and highly literate'(1992:305). In China's case, this combative and literate plebeian public was directly involved in and guaranteed the success of the bourgeois revolution. *Da Jiang Bao* (The Great River Newspaper and formed on 14 December, 1910) in Wuhan aimed to reach soldiers and officials of low rank and endeavoured to 'reflect the bitter situation of soldiers' life, and safeguard their rights' (Ding, et al, 1998:206). This readership constituted a radical public. Though they mainly came from humble family backgrounds, soldiers and officials of low ranks received a certain amount of education enlightened with bourgeois ideas, and were collectively combative when compared to the majority of the public. One example is that up until the bourgeois revolution at the end of 1911, about one third of the 15,000 soldiers in the Hubei New

Army joined various revolutionary associations (Huang K. 31/08/2005). Democratic ideas were well received by the soldiers and this plebeian public played a critical role in the success of the Wuchang Revolt led by the Bourgeois Revolutionists on 10 October in 1911. The Qing feudal empire was brought down and the first bourgeois republic was set up in China.

1.5 Bourgeois Press and the Gender-Specified Public Sphere

Scholars (Fraser 1992; Landes 1988; 1998; Thompson 1993) point out that though theoretically the public sphere is open to all, in practice it is predominantly restricted to men. Chinese women were excluded from almost every aspect of social political life in the feudal society and it was the bourgeois reform and revolutionary movements that first included women in the public sphere. During this process, the bourgeois press promulgated the idea of equal rights and women's emancipation, which helped Chinese women to shake off the feudal shackles and participate in social movements.

In feudal China, the Confucian ideal of woman's virtue was regarded as being subject to one's father, husband and son because 'women are morally and intellectually less capable than men and therefore are to be under male control' (Ebrey 1990: 204). Father versus daughter, husband versus wife, and son versus mother, constituted three levels of paternal and masculine dimensions in public life. To further guarantee male dominance in all aspects of social life and women's inability to pursue knowledge, sociability, or career in the public life, foot-binding had been practiced since approximately the 10th century. Foot-binding usually started at a very early age and was practiced during the woman's whole life. 'Golden lily feet', as the men euphonised the bound feet once formed, could not be unlocked like a chastity belt (Fairbank 1987:70). Those who dared not to bind their feet, if there were any, would be regarded as having no guarantee of their chastity, which would bring huge shame to their families. 'By leaving only men able-bodied', Fairbank says, 'they ensured male domination in a very concrete way' (1987: 70).

Women's liberation was first brought onto the public agenda during the bourgeois

Reformist movement in the 1890s. The first significant step was a campaign to abandon foot-binding. In August 1898, the bourgeois Reformist leader Kang Youwei sent a petition letter to the Emperor Guangxu about 'allowing women to abandon foot-binding'. Kang raised his protest against this culturally constructed masculinity by acclaiming that 'human rights were granted by Heaven; men and women are all equal' (Su-Ren 2003:45). Since then, associations like *Tian Zu Hui* (Natural Feet Association) were set up in major cities calling on Chinese women to discard their feet-binding cloths. *Tian Zu Hui* even had its association journal to promulgate the idea of women's emancipation (Ge, G. 1985 [1956]: 103). The prevalence of foot binding finally died down in the 1920s after the establishment of the first Republic (Fairbank 1987: 70).

Chinese women started going out of their houses for their careers by participating in journalistic works with the bourgeois press from the late 1890s. The first Chinese woman working with a newspaper was Yufang Qiu who started work for her uncle's *Wuxi Baihua Paper* in March 1898. From then on, more and more female editors and journalists were involved in the bourgeois press such as the *Dahan Paper*, and papers or journals aimed at the female reader such as *Chinese Women's Paper*, *Women's Magazine*, *Women and the Family*, *Women's Daily*, *Women's Learning*, and so on. The prestigious paper *Shi Bao* (*Times*) also created pages for both women and children, and started to employ female journalists (Ge, G. 1985 [1956]).

With the dissemination of bourgeois enlightenment ideas, Chinese women started emerging in public life by voicing the same emancipatory language for national liberation. The first bourgeois paper set up solely by women was formed in 1907. The female social activist and revolutionist Qiu Jin established this independent paper *Zhongguo Nübao* (*Chinese Women*) and advanced the slogan of 'fighting for women's rights, fighting for independence, fighting for liberation' (Ding, et al. 1998:136). By bringing forward these ideas, the concept of women's rights was closely associated with the salvation of the nation and the emancipation of the oppressed and the exploited populace. Qiu Jin even named her paper as a 'division' of the bourgeois revolutionary army (Ding, et al. 1998:136) to portray the important role women played in social changes.

1.6 Characteristics and Limitations of the First Bourgeois Public Sphere

The first bourgeois public sphere in China was characterised by contradictions. The bourgeois public sphere was dominated by bourgeois elites with the exclusion of the majority of the population. At the same time, 'subaltern counterpublics' (Fraser 1992:123) also emerged and constituted the radical forces during the bourgeois revolution. The bourgeois intellectuals introduced Western enlightenment ideas and public reasoning to Chinese people while at the same time, partisan interest and personal loyalty undermined rationality in public debate.

In terms of the inclusiveness of the public sphere, bourgeois intellectuals from the officials and the gentry class dominated public debate. During the heyday of bourgeois reform between 1895 and 1898, discussion of reform was largely confined to the 'scholar-official class' (Bays, D. H., 1978:20). People who were actually involved in debating China's future were mainly young gentry members in Beijing or were near cosmopolitan places such as Canton and Shanghai (Bays, D. H. 1978:20). Mass illiteracy among the lower social strata made it impossible for the rise of a reading mass public in China. The self-sustaining agricultural economic mode in rural areas limited the peasantry class from participating in broader public life. However, it is not feasible to insulate the bourgeois discursive arenas from the effects of inequality against other societal groups. As Fraser puts it,

> Where societal inequality persists, deliberative processes in public spheres will tend to operate to the advantage of dominant groups and to the disadvantage of subordinates [...] these effects [of societal inequality] will be exacerbated where there is only a single, comprehensive public sphere (1992:122-3).

Members from subordinated social groups (young intellectuals, overseas students, soldiers, officials, and women) constituted the alternative publics. Armed with such shared emancipatory language as 'freedom', 'equality', 'emancipation' and 'national salvation', these oppressed social groups recast their needs and therefore consolidated their positions in the political arena.

Bourgeois newspapers introduced the idea of rational critical debate to the Chinese

public. For the first time in China, history saw that two political camps, the Constitutionalists and bourgeois Revolutionists, debated in public over the nation's political future. The Revolutionists won the debate for their merits in rationality. However, bickering among partisan cliques and also personal loyalty to the power holders undermined the bourgeois ideal of deliberation and reinforced the Confucian ideal of meritocracy. Daniel Bays points out during the bourgeois Reformist movement: 'the society and the newssheet went under in the crossfire of partisan political infighting between individuals and cliques in the never ending political wars of the court' (1978: 21). Fairbank states that in the bourgeois revolution in China, 'governing' was still regarded as 'a moral responsibility borne by virtuous men to benefit the populace as Confucius taught' (1987: 171).

A few months after the establishment of the Republic of China, the elected President Sun Yatsen was tactically replaced by warlord Yuan Shikai, who controlled military power. Yuan Shikai promised to arrange the abdication of the last Qing feudal Emperor in return for being named as the new President of this militarily weak new bourgeois Republic. In this way, feudalism was brought to an end in China and Yuan Shikai became the Provisional President. In the following years, China witnessed a conflicting warlord era. 'From 1916 to 1931 the political history of China as a united country virtually ceases. There was a shifting system of quasi-independent states concerned to maintain or improve their positions in a struggle to control the national government' (Gray, J. 1990: 170). The result of the warlord era was 'the feudalisation of government' (Gray, J. 1990:170-171). In 1928, the country was brought under the one party dictatorship of the National Party (*Guomindang*). In 1931, China was invaded and colonised by Japan until the end of the Second World War.

2. The Second Republic, Proletariat Authoritarian Governance, and the Dissolution of a Proletarian Public Sphere (1949-1978)

Marxism was regarded as a new solution to national salvation by Chinese intellectuals who were dispirited by the failure of bourgeois revolution. After the Republic of China fell into the hands of warlords, a generation of young Chinese intellectuals went to Europe searching for a philosophical justification for their struggle against feudalism and colonialism. They found Marxism and in 1921, with the help from the

Communist International, the Chinese Communist Party was formed in southern China. The Chinese Communist Party injected Marxism into the Chinese indigenous revolution experience, and projected a comparatively progressive view of political participation which involved governance by the majority proletariat. However, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the Party suppressed free public speech by putting the media under tight control. The media were viewed as part of the ideological apparatus, and used as propaganda tools for political indoctrination and mass mobilisation (Zhao 1998: 4).

Under the Communist Party's dominant control in the official public sphere, alternative and oppositional public spheres existed marginally in the forms of wall newspapers, underground literatures, private gatherings, and non-official associations. Alternative political preferences and oppositional voices were largely unheard of by the majority of the population. Nevertheless, in times of crisis, alternative media forms such as the wall newspapers could proliferate, attract a large audience, and assist the expression of critical public opinion, and finally facilitate socio-political changes. The alternative and oppositional media showed their effect in bringing down the Partisan cliques and buttressing the economic reform in the turbulent 1970s. However, the alternative and oppositional public spheres have not become institutionalised in Chinese society, hence they can be easily manipulated by the dominant political power.

2.1 The Rise of the Communist Party

The emergence of the Communist party in China was an outcome of the domestic working class struggle, the New Culture Movement started in 1915,[33] and gained momentum due to the international influence of the Russian Bolshevik revolution of 1917. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Chinese working class expanded and working class movements were put on the political agenda. Meanwhile, the New Culture Movement further enhanced Enlightenment ideas and the Chinese youth eagerly searched for 'a philosophical justification of the individual conscience' (Gray, J. 1990: 204). The success of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution was regarded as a new solution for national salvation when 'a united front of intellectuals, merchants, and workers had defeated the Government in defence of national interests'

(Gray, J. 1990:199).

The development of the Communist Party in China was a result of the 'imperfect autocracy' of the National Party (*Guomindang*) from 1928 to 1949 (Fairbank 1987: 185). As Fairbank points out, 'the ruling-class elite had expanded and differentiated but the peasant masses, though restive in many small uprisings quickly suppressed, were still politically inert' (1987:171). Under the name of a Republic, a meritocracy of those qualified by social status and wealth continued in China, and a large proportion of the population was left out of political participation.

The dynamic bourgeois public sphere that was formed before the first Republic was disappearing, and public concern was banned from discussion:

> The press, though it persisted, was heavily censored. Publishers were harassed and some assassinated. Anyone concerned for the masses was regarded as pro-Communist. This anti-Communist stance had the effect of discouraging if not preventing all sorts of projects for betterment of the people (Fairbank 1987: 221).

Contrary to the National Party's autocracy the Chinese Communist Party, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, practiced a 'mass line' philosophy as their political strategy for social change (Gray, J. 1990). This philosophy attracted the majority proletariat – the urban working class, the rural peasantry, intellectuals and students, and the low-status soldiers in the army. 'Mao Zedong had appealed to the Chinese people against the oppressiveness of Guomindang censorship, suppression of intellectuals, brutality towards students, murders of political opponents, and increasingly Fascist methods' (Gray 1990:293). In Marx and Engels' *The German Ideology*, they state that 'the production of consciousness is interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men – the language of real life' (1976:36). Due to social division of labour, the working-class people (the 'masses' in Mao's words) who actually produce the goods in society do not have enough leisure-time to create social consciousness but only 'the means of subsistence'. Thus, it is important for a 'revolutionary class' to be created to counter the ruling class, arouse the working-class people to revolution, and participate in the changing of societal consciousness. In China's case, the Communist Party identified itself as the revolutionary class for the working-class people. The Communist Party claimed they

would rely on the people, act out of the interest of the people, and serve the people. The majority proletariat was also promised comprehensive civic participation, including universal suffrage and freedom of speech in political life.

Though the Communist Party promised freedom of speech, Mao also proposed the method of 'unity-criticism-unity' as a guideline for public discussion. 'Unity-criticism-unity' means that 'if all discussion begins from acknowledged unity of purpose, then it can be carried on without rancour, after which unity can be reaffirmed at a higher level of rationality and mutual understanding' (Gray 1990: 283). This common view of 'democracy' held by the Chinese Communist Party is a mixture of bourgeois enlightenment, Marxism, and Confucianism. According to Fairbank (1978), the optimistic (man-is-educable) Confucianism believes that 'good government rests on a natural harmony of interest between the ruler and all individuals [...] every individual should develop his abilities and so contribute more to the common good' (1978:152). In Mao's philosophy, this state-centred Confucianism is rendered as 'unity'. Individuals should therefore fit into the unity of common purpose, while anti-unity will not be in the interest of the masses, and thus will not serve the mutual purpose of the governor and the governed.

This comparatively progressive view of comprehensive political participation, especially when it involved for the first time political participation for the majority proletariat, won people's support for the Communist Party during the Chinese civil war (1945-1949). 'The people's warfare', as Mao named it, finally overthrew the National Party under Chiang Kai-shek's governance. In late 1949, the People's Republic of China was established.

2.2 Disillusion of the Proletariat Public Sphere

Establishment of the People's Republic of China did not bring about the expected unified proletariat public sphere. The public sphere in China became a situation of "absorbing the less powerful into a false 'we' that reflects the more powerful" (Fraser 1992: 123 citing Mansbridge). Though the polity of the PRC is 'people's democracy authoritarian', it is actually one-Party dictatorship in a deceitful way. Antagonistic

public voices, if there were any, were muzzled under the Party's iron grip. The Party Principle (*dangxing yuanze*) became the guideline in both public societal life and the media daily practice. As Zhao explains, the Party Principle is comprised of three basic components: 'that the news media must accept the Party's guiding ideology as its own; that they must propagate the Party's programs, policies, and directives, and that they must accept the Party's leadership and stick to the Party's organisational principles and press policies' (Zhao 1998:19).

Chinese media in the early 1950s consisted of the state-subsidised organs of the Communist Party and a small number of commercial newspapers and radio stations from the old regime. As Zhao noticed, commercial media 'were forced to design their coverage to support the Party's guidance in political and social life' and drop their practice of 'intrusive' interviewing style (1998:16). Being unable to attract any advertisement, commercial newspapers dropped in number from 58 in 1950, to 25 in 1951, before disappearing entirely in 1952 (Zhao 1998:16).

Freedom in political discussion was gradually taken back by the Party when the Party's organisations started their own newspapers. By 1954, there were 151 Party organs, 17 newspapers were aimed at workers, 23 at farmers, 17 at youths and juveniles, 14 at specialised trades and 15 papers were from social organisations and other parties in China (Zhao 1998:17). Though on the surface it looked as if independent media proliferated under the Communist regime, the Party controlled the media both financially and ideologically. All media were subsidized by the state and required to observe the 'Party Principle' in their journalistic practice. Even the official organ of the Chinese Democratic League[34], *Guangming Daily* (est. 16 June 1949) which is supposed to be the media for oppositional parties, was supported by the Communist Party and 'considered integral parts of the socialist press system' (Zhao 1998:16).

All newspapers in China apart from the Party's organ focused on a certain subject area (e.g. economy, health, education, etc.), targeted specialised readership groups (e.g. workers, women, peasants, etc.), and were under the control of a certain official institution (e.g. Ministry of Health, National Trade Union, etc.). This measure, as Zhao says, 'effectively prevents newspapers from being independent civil institutions

outside the Party/state apparatus or the pseudo-civil organisations dominated by the Party' (1998:127).

China witnessed wave after wave of nationwide political turmoil, such as the Anti-Rightist Movement in the 1950s and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. These political campaigns involved extreme use of brainwashing, psychological pressure and physical deprivation against those assumed as being antagonistic towards the proletariat authoritarian governance. As Zhao contends, mass media were tightly controlled by the most powerful political clique within the Communist Party as a weapon for propagating political indoctrination to the people. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), most papers (including many of the Party organs) ceased publication. There were only 43 regular newspapers in China in 1967 (Zhao 1998:17).

As to the ordinary Chinese citizens, the only officially acknowledged means for the expression of political opinion were the wall newspapers (*dazibao*) which were hand-written tabloid news-sheets expressing political preferences or grievances posted on walls for public reading. Wall Newspapers have been praised by Marxists for their social role as political weapons (Gray, J. 1990). Mao Zedong believed the wall newspapers cost almost nothing in production, but were simple and accessible to anyone, and therefore should be encouraged for their 'classless' nature. Mao's backing for the free airing of views through wall newspapers brought about the heyday for wall newspapers during the Cultural Revolution. However Gray notices:

> In his [Mao's] stress on the importance of democratic consciousness he underrated the importance of democratic institutions; democracy as a set of rules for the protection of particular rights was of no interest to him. The aroused masses would spontaneously create their own democratic institutions, he believed. Yet what was actually created in the Cultural Revolution? Nothing except Jacobin tribunals pre-empted by fanatics, leading inevitably to the Thermidor of the army-dominated 'revolutionary committees' (1990:378).

Mao's poetic vision of the political mobilisation of proletariat during the Cultural Revolution proved to be a catastrophe for the whole nation. Schools and universities were closed; government institutions and state-owned media were taken over by different Partisan cliques; political disagreement displayed among wall newspapers

escalated from verbal fights to armed skirmishes in real life; retaliation among different cliques led to arbitrary arrest, killing and missing. The proletariat public sphere failed to achieve people's comprehensive political participation in China.

2.3 The Alternative and the Oppositional Public Spheres

The Communist Party's control over the media and other aspects of civic life in China has constructed, to borrow Karol Jakubowicz's (1991) words, the 'official public sphere' as the dominant tier. However beneath this 'concrete' surface, the 'alternative public sphere' and the 'oppositional public sphere' have existed and might change their role from marginal and underground to central during times of crisis.

'Public' in the Communist Party's political discourse is phrased as 'people' or 'masses'. People's role in public life as Mao Zedong states, is to embrace the Party's ideas:

> In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily 'from the masses, to the masses.' This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge (Mao 1967:120).

The Party's media, as Mao emphasised in 1948, is 'to educate the masses, to enable the masses to know their own interests, their own tasks and the Party's general and specific policies' (Mao 1969:242). Thus the public in the Communist regime has been regarded as passive receivers of the Party's indoctrination and the active executors of the Party's decision. However, by making the above comment, Mao neglects the autonomy of the people in forming public opinion, especially the progressive nature of the liberal intellectuals which made them opinion leaders during time of crisis.

During the Cultural Revolution, underground literature and underground journals (mostly circulated through hand-written copies), private correspondence and gatherings functioned as an informal institutionalisation of the alternative and

oppositional public sphere. Underground literature, with poetry as its major form, aired out public grievances towards political chaos in the country and directed the accusation towards the partisan clique headed by Mao's wife. When the Prime Minister Zhou Enlai died in 1976, national mourning was demonstrated by voluntary poetry reading at Tiananmen Square in April. This later turned into a nationwide civil protest nationwide and helped bring down the 'Gang of Four'[35], which finally ended the Cultural Revolution.

Nevertheless, the most widespread and effective alternative media in China is the wall newspapers (*Dazibao*), or 'Big Character Posters' (Sheng 1990). According to legal scholar Hua Sheng (1990), the first Big Character Poster in China appeared on 23 March, 1942. Wang Shiwei, a 36-year-old pro-Communist scholar at the time, posted an essay written in large characters on the wall of a building in Yan'an, the base of the Communist Party during most of the anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) and Chinese Civil War (1945-1949). In his essay, Wang criticised the Party leaders for their 'arbitrary and repressive treatment of political dissident' (Sheng 1990: 235). Though Wang was beheaded and his supporters were imprisoned for raising criticism of the Party, his essay in the form of wall newspapers marked the birth of a form of political dissent in China. After the establishment of the PRC, wall newspapers were regarded by Mao Zedong as a form of 'classless' media that enable the proletariat class to raise their voices. In the late 1950s, with backing from Mao, wall newspapers proliferated in major cities: 'they included lengthy formal theses, sarcastic essays, poems, cartoons, and traditional Chinese novels. After some posters were put up, many more followed to support or oppose views expressed in previous ones, resulting in lively debates' (Sheng 1990: 237). It is widely believed that wall newspapers were manipulated by Mao Zedong to attack his political opponents and consolidate his leadership throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, wall newspapers 'provided a means of expressing dissent publicly that facilitated open criticism of the government as well as criticism disguised as endorsement of Party policy' (Sheng 1990: 243).

Deng Xiaoping launched his economic reform in spite of opposition inside the Communist Party in 1978, young intellectuals posted wall newspapers in Beijing to champion this move of the modernisation. As Chen says, public opinion aired in these wall newspapers supported Deng to carry out his reform plan, which secured Deng's

position in the Party (cited in Downing, J. et al. 2001: 172). This wall later became the famous Xidan Democracy Wall for accommodating oppositional political opinion.

Nonetheless, when wall newspapers later expanded their discussion from backing Deng's reform to criticism of the Communist Party, Deng's consent to the wall newspapers on the Xidan Democracy Wall changed to disapproval. Chen says that the oppositional public opinion carried on the wall newspapers harboured radical rhetoric such as condemning the Communist Party rule as a 'feudal monarchy', dismissing Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong-Thought as a 'deceitful hoax', calling for people to hold demonstrations and organize citizens petition groups for human rights, and calling for establishing democracy (Downing, J. et al. 2001: 170-2). The Wall Newspapers in Beijing further triggered a nationwide flourish of underground journals and constructed oppositional public opinion against the Communist Party. These journals were 'heartily embraced' by the Chinese public and the excess of demand over supply made it impossible for the authorities to ignore their existence:

> Though they [the underground journals] were inferior to the official journals by being mimeographed, often illegible and roughly bound with poor editing and often poor writing, nevertheless their ample variety of content, bold approaches to sensitive subjects and, most of all, prompt response to current events to readers' demands outweighed this. (Chen, R. cited in Downing, J. et. al. 2001:172-3)

The alternative public sphere and the oppositional public sphere were temporarily buttressed by the national leader when public opinion served his interest. When antagonistic public opinion started to challenge the Party's leadership, the government closed down the Democracy Wall and the underground journals (Gray, J. 1990: 392).

To sum up, under the totalitarian governance of the Communist Party, media were viewed as the ideological apparatus of political indoctrination and mass mobilisation in China. Media, largely separated from the public, were used as tools for mass propaganda and persuasion by the government or individuals from the Party. Though the alternative and oppositional media forms existed marginally, they failed to build a rational critical public and reflect antagonistic public opinion in a systematic way. In this perspective, the vision of a proletariat public sphere ended in failure in China.

3. Media Reform in a 'Socialist Market Economy' (since 1978)

Economic reform commenced in China in 1978 and a 'socialist market economy' was officially adopted in 1992. Though the Chinese media still remain as government institutions, they have obtained a certain amount of financial independence to meet the audience's demand. During the process of commercialisation, democratic forces also called for independent media and press freedom, which brought the Party's control over the media into question. Public interest (in Chinese political discourse, the 'people's principle') has been promoted from time to time as a challenge to the arbitrary power of the Party.

However, the change in the economic sphere in China marked the 'semi-takeover' of capitalism and had the effect of 're-energising China's capitalist revolution after Tiananmen' (Pei 1994:84). The commercialisation of the Chinese media took place under this universal push towards globalisation and diversification of media ownership, privatisation and deregulation in the communication field (Lent, J. A. 1998). Though commercialisation freed the Chinese media from being an absolute ideological apparatus for the Party, the democratic ideas for a more independent public sphere were still 'elementary, fragmentary and unsystematic', as Zhao observes (1998:41).

3.1 Commercialisation of Mass Media

The commercialisation of media in China has a double-sided effect. On the one hand, it brought about the phenomenon of de-ideologisation (Chu, L. 1994). Leonard L. Chu argues that with the liberalisation and marketisation of China's media system, the Party's power and ideological control are eroded and Chinese media are used less as ideological apparatus. However on the other hand, commercialisation brought business interests into the media industry, which posed a threat to the emerging public sphere.

The media's reform in China started when the Party's organ *People's Daily* first embraced the market economy. The Ministry of Finance approved the introduction of business management to the *People's Daily* in 1978 and later to other media. Zhao

84

observes that:

> Although these newspapers were still regarded as political and cultural institutions and still received subsidies, they began to be managed as business enterprises [...] They were forced to save money by streamlining operation and were subjected to cost analysis, profit targets and government taxation (1998:53).

Since the early 1980s, the government gradually cut its subsidies to media and encouraged commercialisation in the media industry. As a consequence, the media got the permission of the Party to abandon the practice of propagating 'class struggle' and started providing information to the public. As Zhao recorded, Li Ruihuan, the Communist official in charge of media and propaganda, stated in 1992 that propaganda work should emphasise economic construction. He further pointed out that 'media should be more informative and should meet the needs of various audience' (Zhao 1998:48). This guideline of meeting the needs of readers/audience was enthusiastically practiced by the Chinese media. During my internship with *Guangming Daily* from July 1994 to February 1995, the majority of domestic news I was assigned to cover were consumer-oriented stories about the likes of food quality and intellectual property rights conflicts.

Commercialisation of the media in China enhanced media expansion and encouraged the proliferation of media outside of Party organs. From 1991 to 1995, the number of newspapers in China rose from 1,543 to 2,202[36], the number of radio stations from 724 to 1,202 and television stations 543 to 837[37]. Evening papers, morning papers, tabloid papers, paper devoted to legal issues and crime stories flourished in the market and succeeded in building up their readership. Zhao (1998) perceives a power shift within the media system reflected in the decline of Party organs and the rise of metropolitan papers. Most municipal media outlets in China dropped the practice of propagating Party and government policies. Content close to daily life of the urban population was welcomed by both media practitioners and audiences (1998:68-9). In the southern cosmopolitan city Guangzhou, the Guangdong Provincial Party's Organ *Nanfang Ribao* set up the first media conglomerate within the Party press system – the Southern Media Group in 1998. The Southern Media Group covers publishing, printing, advertising, information service, real estate, and other business areas. Even the Party's organs and the government organisations' papers in Beijing expanded their

pages or produced weekend editions to meet their readers' demand. *People's Daily*, the Party's media conglomerate, now has eight papers, six weeklies, and 11 journals affiliated to it. Apart from the overseas edition of the *People's Daily*, most affiliated papers and journals are market-orientated, which can be detected from their names such as *Market News* (since 1979), *International Finance News* (since 1994), or *Chinese Automobile* (since 1984). Readership of the newly established commercial or semi-commercial publications in urban areas started to divert readers' attention from the Party hegemonic role in societal life.

With more and more media becoming financially independent from the government, some liberal Chinese journalists started to question the Party's interference in editorial matters. In 1986, the chief editors of national newspapers openly expressed their desire for press freedom and autonomy of journalistic practice. Some journalism theorists in that period even claimed that press freedom should be written into legal frameworks, which advocated their support for the media's desire to break away from the 'arbitrary power of the Party' (Zhao 1998:35-6). The call for press freedom reached its peak in May 1989 when Hu Jiwei, one of the Party's top leaders, released a statement contending that 'there will be no genuine stability without press freedom' (Zhao 1998:37). Journalists from both Party organs and newly established media walked into the streets and were directly involved in the pro-democracy movement. Yet after the brutal crackdown on June 4, the media reverted to the old track as part of the Party's undertaking, and had to hold the same view as the Party (Meng 2000). Restrictions on editorial autonomy even increased for a few years after 1989. *People's Daily* 'was required to report its main news content to the Party's Propaganda Department before its daily four o'clock editorial committee meeting' (Zhao 1998:46).

With the progress of commercialisation after 1989, Chinese media has gradually stripped away 'the ideological straitjacket imposed by the CCP [Chinese Communist Party]' (Lee, C-C. 1994:12). Media content was shifted from political instruction and propaganda to more business information, social news, entertainment, and even criticism of authority. As Zhao noticed, media in China went from 'leader-oriented' to 'reader-oriented'. Journalists started to emphasise 'truthfulness', 'brevity', 'timeliness,' 'liveliness' and 'readability' in their stories. Human interest stories,

disaster news, crime news, and news that criticised the wrongdoing of officials became acceptable (Zhao 1998:34). Journalists and writers from provincial media especially dare to expose scandals and express antagonistic opinions that would not be allowed on the Party's organs. *Nanfang Zhoumo*, a flagship paper from the Southern Media Group, is a case in point. Being China's largest circulation weekly, *Nanfang Zhoumo* won fame for its coverage of sensitive or even scandalous social issues such as two imprisoned corrupt officials in Shenyang who still enjoyed extravagant banquets in prison (26/01/2006), or a peasant who bombed the judical high court in Gansu Province and killed the judge (08/01/2006). These topics, though well received by the public, were usually regarded as 'negative reporting' by the Party. However, in spite of being forced to dismiss its journalists or editors by the Party's Propaganda Department, *Nanfang Zhoumo* has not given up its bold coverage of taboo issues in contemporary China and always stirs up a big reaction among its readers. As Zhao comments, media commercialisation in China makes it possible that the 'principle of Party journalism such as positive propaganda, "correct" guidance of public opinion, as well as conventional Party definitions of news, have been disregarded or subverted' (1998:139).

Nevertheless, commercialisation of media had the negative side effect of undermining the emerging public sphere. Since advertising has become the major financial source for Chinese media, business interests started to influence the coverage of public affairs. Meanwhile, financial independence has not brought media freedom from the Party's administrative control. Chinese media have become a servant with two masters and have to observe the Party's instructions and serve their business clients at the same time. Sponsorship brought in business interference in editorial policy which Zhao calls 'Chinese infomercials' that is 'paid information services that are integrated into regular media content' (1998:59). According to Zhao, commercial sponsorship of media content started in the mid-1980s from entertainment and educational programmes, and spread to news programming and across different media (1998:62). When it came to the 1990s, a business could take over content production from a media establishment. A purchasing company 'can buy a segment of the Party's mouthpiece and turn it into its own mouthpiece while still making a profit' (Zhao 1998: 65).

3.2 Media's Representation of the 'Public'

As discussed before, the 'public' in the Communist regime were regarded as 'masses' to be educated and represented by the Party through state-controlled media so that they would know their own interest. After the reform taken up in the late 1970s, scholars started arguing for the 'People's Principle' in media coverage in the early 1980s. As Xinfen Gan argues, the Chinese media should speak for the people and represent the people's interest:

> The lesson of the holocaust of the ten-year Cultural Revolution has taught us that the Party's leadership, even the Party Central Committee, may commit mistakes. When mistakes are made and when the party's press blindly executes the leadership's intentions, newspapers themselves are committing serious mistakes. Therefore, upon discovering mistakes, editorial departments should not blindly implement their instructions. Newspapers should put the interests of the people above everything else and be run accordingly....When a communist society is attained, even the Party will be eliminated. Yet the people are permanent, they live forever! (cited from Zhao 1998:38)

The economic reform, as Jian Meng believes, brought about the re-construction of social strata and an urban middle class emerged, which heralded a rising public power in China (2000). The call for civil participation from the newly emerged middle class expanded the 'alternative public sphere' and 'the oppositional public sphere'. Some liberal-minded leaders within the Party sensed this change, and tried to situate the media within both the 'Party's Principle' and the 'People's Principle'.

In October 1987, the Party's former General Secretary, Zhao Ziyang, first used the phrase 'political transparency' to advocate openness in governmental policy-making procedure. It is Zhao who first suggested a democratic communication model between the Party and the people: the Party and the government should inform the people about important events (*zhongda shiqing rang renmin zhidao*), decision-making over important issues should involve public discussion among the people (*zhongda wenti jing renmin taolun*) (Liu, X. 17/10/2004), and the Party should be supervised by public opinion (*Yulun Jiandu*) (Zhao 1998:36). Though Zhao Ziyang's efforts in launching democratic political reform were aborted with the crackdown in Tiananmen Square in 1989, public-orientated content started to receive more emphasis in media's coverage in the following years.

The reflection of public interest could be found in some broadsheet newspapers such as *Beijing Youth News* in the capital. *Beijing Youth News*, which is an official organ of the Beijing Communist Youth League, was one of the dailies successfully adapted to the market and its reader-oriented content was largely welcomed. Zhao describe the paper in the mid-1990s as 'had elements of the nineteenth-century American penny press' in 'breaking away from an elite readership'. The paper, as Zhao believes, was 'downplaying narrow political news' and 'emphasising entertainment and news outside the Party/state apparatus'. It won its popularity for 'its concerns for common people and defence of their interests against corrupt officials and business,', 'its social critiques,' and 'crusading journalism' (Zhao: 1998: 144-5).

In the radio and television section, audiences started to participate in programmes and have their voice heard. Call-in radio programmes started first in entertainment shows then with experiments in news and current affairs, so that 'the elitism of some media professionals and reformers has been at least partially modified' (Zhao 1998:156). The call-in radio programmes started in the late 1980s in Guangdong Province and quickly spread across the country. As one presenter recalled:

It seemed suddenly every radio station opened their call-in hotlines. Listeners then called in to participate in the topical panel discussion, interview the guest speakers, confide their troubles to the presenter in late-night talk programmes, or request songs for their families or friends... (Li, Q. 2005:119 author's translation).

This interaction between the media and ordinary audiences undermined the media's role as solely the Party's mouthpiece. Ordinary people, who do not necessarily have qualifications or institutional recognition, can simply act on their own behalf, air their complaints, express their opinions, and speak out in their own language.

TV programmes followed this example. In 1993, the China Central Television (CCTV) launched a morning magazine programme *Oriental Horizon* (*dongfang shikong*). This magazine programme has provided close contact with ordinary people, addressed their concerns, and treated them as protagonists[38]. In 1996, the first talk-show programme *Tell It Like It Is* (*Shihua shishuo*) in China was launched on CCTV. This programme has provided Chinese public with access to participate in public discussion and speak their opinions in their own language. These two programmes were hugely popular and triggered copycat programmes all over the country. Though the audience participation goes through selection process and is still limited in terms of numbers, the democratising potential is worth noticing. Public participation in

media production reduces the Party's advantage in using media as ideological apparatus, and thus poses a challenge to the Party's hegemony in public perception.

Today's audience-oriented commercial media in China is different from pro-democracy political journals such as the *World Economic Herald* (the *Herald*) in the 1980s. Li Cheng and Lynn T. White argue that the *Herald*, had an 'obvious bias for the interests of technocratic elites' (1991:365). 'Social welfare, environment, labour, and domestic trade were rare among its domestic coverage. Women, the elderly, urban housing, and other important issues received little attention' (Cheng and White 1991:364). Commercial papers in China today cater to a wider range of readers and audience, including the self-employed, urban unemployed, immigrants peasants, and workers whose needs are usually neglected by the Party's organs. The latest commercial TV success, the *Super Girls*, as Sociologist Li Yinhe comments 'represents a victory of the grass-roots over the elite culture' (*China Daily* 30/08/2005). The *Super Girls*, an American-Idol type show in 2005, involved national voting for the final winners, and was heralded by many Chinese as a mediated experience of democracy. One has to admit that the commercialised voting for a pop idol is totally different from casting votes while practicing suffrage. However, as famous Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo points out, the popularity of *Super Girl* created a carnival of public participation and national voting, which created a 'non-political politics' in China. The *Super Girl* phenomenon revealed that a sense of citizenship has been cultivated in a civil society (Liu, X. 25/08/2005). Compared to the elite-dominated democracy discourse prevalent before 1989, the post-1989 democratisation reflects the decreased intellectual divisions in China by bringing the majority of the public into an enlightenment dialogue.

3.3 Characteristics and Limitations of the Public Sphere in Contemporary China

The public sphere in today's China is exemplified by various informal institutions in societal life. Media (various in their forms and political economy) play a significant role in reflecting rising public power and constructing the alternative and oppositional public sphere. On the surface, the dominant tier in the public sphere is still consolidated by state-controlled media. Under this dominance, semi-independent commercial media and radical media venture to expose social inequality,

governmental scandal, and even challenge the hegemonic Party ideology. However, under the joint forces of commercialisation and globalisation, Chinese media are at the same time undergoing a process of de-politicalisation. Entertainment content rather than coverage on political and public current affairs becomes the main content provided by various media. Even in news programmes/stories and current affair coverage, the demarcation between information and entertainment or advertisement is blurred. Some current affairs coverage aim more at tantalising the public with sensational details than helping the public to cultivate rational critical discussion. In this sense, the public sphere in China is facing the danger of deterioration from both political intervention and commodification.

Before the media reform, the political economy of mass media in China was 100 percent owned and controlled by the Party and the state. As Leonard Chu (1994) says the Community Party was 'the owner, manager, and the practitioner' of Chinese media and no private media organisation was allowed. With the commercialisation of the media, state intervention decreased and ideological application of media was weakened in public life. Similar changes were observed by Slavko Splichal in analysing media system in eastern European countries: 'privatization is seen as the only instrument that can reduce and possibly abolish state intervention in the media' (1994: 136).

The media gains proportionally more autonomy when they gain a certain amount of economic independence from the state. As Habermas argued, with the establishment of the bourgeois constitutional state and the legalisation of a political public sphere, the press as a forum of rational-critical debate was no longer requested to take sides ideologically (1989: 184). In China's case, commercialisation helped change the media's role from the Party's mouthpiece to a public forum. Chu thus grouped together commercialised local television, radio, cable and satellite TV, commercial papers (such as evening papers), and foreign media (such as BBC and VOA) as 'China's alternative media, which the Party has found to be disturbing but impossible to curb' (1994:9). However, commercialisation in the media industry will not necessarily fulfil the media's role as carrier of critical public opinion against the political authority. With the commercialisation of media, government's control over

the media does not loosen but changes more subtly 'by sending unclear signals regarding the degree of freedom allowed, thus keeping editors and broadcasters off balance and producing dangerously high levels of self-censorship' (Lent 1998: 185). This is what happened with the Chinese media. As Zhao noticed:

> Commercialisation outlets survive and flourish not by directly challenging the party principle and discarding political propaganda but by softening the tones of political propaganda, moving beyond narrow political propaganda, and broadening content to include social and personal issues. Their contents are supplementary rather than oppositional to the more conventional Party organs (1998:159).

Meanwhile, commercialisation sets new rules for media to fit their content into business management. John Keane criticises the structural limitation of the market in building democracy:

> Market competition produces market censorship. Private ownership of the media produces private caprice. Those who control the market sphere of producing and distributing information determine...which opinions officially gain entry into the "marketplace of opinions" (1991:90).

Within the commercialised media system public interest, public concerns, and diversity in public opinion may not be fully reflected in media content. As Lent argues, under the circumstances of media commercialisation, many representative groups in society are trivialised into a 'haphazard, dull, sketchy and negative picture' (Lent 1998:159). Before the economic reform, there were government-funded wire-radio networks and newspapers carrying agriculture news and information in the rural areas. In the fierce competition for advertisement, papers for peasants who lack both political and cultural capital declined dramatically. Wired-radio network deteriorated due to lack of public investment (Zhao 1998: 69-70).

4. Summary

The public sphere in China has been characterised by its pluralism, complexity and also deficiency in public deliberation. Throughout history, the media's role in constructing the public sphere is worth noticing. The bourgeois press was used as a

radical media form in fighting against the feudal empire. Under the Communist regime, the media was used as ideological apparatus for maintaining the status quo by suppressing an antagonistic public. In today's China, media's role in constructing rational critical publics is both facilitated and hampered by commercialisation. The public sphere in China is charged with tension and ambiguity.

The bourgeois press had actively participated in Reform and Revolution since the late nineteenth century. The media fulfilled the roles of enlightening the public, exploring public wisdom, voicing public complaints, and guiding public opinion. Class barriers were broken down in debates over China's future and arguments were weighed according to the logo and factual evidence. The rising Bourgeois class regarded themselves as the representatives of the general public and used the press as a weapon in anti-feudalism and anti-colonialism political campaigns. Alongside the bourgeois public sphere, 'subaltern counterpublics' such as working class people, soldiers of low rank, and women also developed their own emancipatory language, which contributed greatly to the Bourgeois revolutionary course that brought down the feudal Qing Empire.

During the Communist Regime from the 1950s to the late 1970s, the Party maintained its overt control of the political economy of mass media and other social institutions in the public sphere. The public are regarded as 'masses' to be educated and motivated by the Party through the media which was used as a propagating tool. The media were not able to be watchdogs over the Party and the government, nor could they reflect antagonistic public opinion. As Zhao contends, the media had not emerged as an independent public sphere (1998:151).

Since the Economic Reform in the late 1970s, the Party's absolute control over media has been largely attenuated. Financially independent media emerged in the metropolitan cities and won readers and audiences from the Party's mouthpieces for their bold coverage on social problems. Even the state-controlled media have regained a certain degree of editorial independence in producing public-oriented content. Also, for the first time media, especially broadcasting, started to involve public participation in their productions by launching phone-in programmes, talk shows and public-voting programmes. However, the downside of this commercialisation is that 'the

undistinguished "masses" and "the people" of the Party's mass-line journalism may eventually become the advertisers' targeted middle-class consumers' (Zhao 1998:155), which will lead to the deterioration of the public sphere rather than building up a critical public.

China's joining the World Trade Organisation has quickened the country's pace in globalisation. Today's China sees that 'a globally integrated [...] communication system is rapidly redefining communicative relationships within and across Chinese borders' (Zhao 2003: 68). Under such circumstances, web-based new media forms such as bulletin boards shed hope on the structural transformation of the public sphere in China. CMC can broaden the scope of public discussion, facilitate rational critical debate, mobilise politically marginalised or suppressed social groups, and cultivate a sense of citizenship among Chinese publics. The use of bulletin boards can be oppositional, but not always subversive. By constructing an alternative public discourse, the bulletin boards can build a discursive space for conversation among citizens first and might gradually engage the state in this dialogue. In this sense, the Internet is intrinsically a media form that might change political culture in China.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Studying online communities based on bulletin boards involves rethinking (and probably revising) traditional research methods in media studies. The tradition of the production-content-reception study is challenged, as the demarcation between production and reception is blurred in cyberspace where producers and audiences can be integrated into one. This research, as argued before, attempts to reflect the changed relationship between gatekeepers and users (the traditional audience) in cyberspace, and explores how this change affects the outcome of media content. Therefore, I adopt multiple qualitative research methods which involve analysing gate-keeping, production, representation and reception. To be specific, this research includes:

- Field notes of a two-month participant observation with QGLT as an intern moderator;

- Interviews with seven QGLT moderators, 22 users, one NGO member, two journalists and one government official;

- Textual analysis of QGLT users' pennames, signature files, and postings during the SARS crisis in 2003.

1. Research Ethics

China is a country that practices severe online censorship and imprisons online dissidents. For that reason, one central concern of this study is research ethics. As Neuman (1994) believes, research ethics are about how to acquire and disseminate trustworthy information in ways that cause no harm to those being studied. The ethical obligations require avoiding deception, asking permission to record, being honest about the intended use of the research and ensuring interviewees are not hurt because they agreed to talk with the researcher (Rubin, H. and Rubin I. 1995:94).

I have been reading QGLT postings since 2001. Since the SARS crisis in early 2003, I registered a few pennames[39] with this community and started posting occasionally. This participation in the online community gave me an opportunity to gradually familiarise myself with the terms and social norms within QGLT and also gain
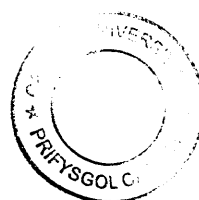
knowledge of other community members. This experience helped greatly with my in-depth interview with QGLT users from April 2004 to April 2005 and my participant observation of QGLT from July to September in 2004. One delicate issue regarding this is how I can truthfully integrate the data from field research in my dissertation without endangering the interviewees who trusted me with their insiders' perspective of media policies in China or their antagonistic political opinion.

Before I conducted interviews, I indicated the purpose of the study clearly in the first email sent to my interviewees. When I started recruiting interviewees, I made the aim of this project and the use of data known to QGLT users who agreed to be interviewed. Interviewees' consent was given by emails, web Messenger, and through phone calls. Also before each interview, the interviewees were again informed and made aware of the nature of my questions and purpose of my research. QGLT staff, two journalists and one informant from the State Council remain anonymous in the research and are identified only by their affiliation. All QGLT users believe that their pennames function as a protection of true identity, so all of them agreed to allow me to use their pennames as that guarantees a kind of anonymity.

However, before submitting this dissertation, I need to consider some of my interviewees who trusted me by telling me of their offline activities that might offend the authorities (e.g. one interviewee had his articles about the labour pension system in China posted on the site of a labour rights organisation based in the USA). Though there is a slim opportunity that this dissertation will be read by the Chinese police, I will still replace their pennames by common English names.

2. Participant Observation of Gate-Keeping Process within QGLT

Participant observation, as some scholars believe, is 'particularly suitable for a study of the gatekeeping process' (Wimmer and Dominick 2000: 113). As a qualitative research method, participant observation combines document analysis, direct participation and observation, interviewing, and introspection from an insider's perspective (Denzin 1989, Flick 1998).

In June 2004, I applied to www.people.com.cn for an internship with QGLT and had my application granted in July. From July 18 to September 20, 2004, I worked with QGLT editors in the same work settings and practiced moderating under supervision for two months. A field notes journal was kept during this period. This experience provided me with in-depth descriptions of the media environment and an explanation of QGLT editors' gate-keeping and self-censorship practice that would otherwise be difficult to obtain.

2.1 Gaining Access to the Work Setting

The research setting was part of the www.people.com.cn 1,500 square metres open working area in a two-story building located inside the big complex of the *People's Daily*. Holliday suggests the research setting 'should be sufficiently small: logistically and conceptually manageable' (2002:38). The QGLT working area had 12 cubicle working units in total when the research was conducted, which is sufficiently small and manageable. Each member of staff works with a PC in their open unit adjacent to each other, which provides a natural bounded environment for field observation.

Since I was told by Mr. Jiang Yaping, the Deputy President of www.people.com.cn, that QGLT had never received researchers for participant observation before, I applied to work as an intern moderator. Stated in my application letter were also the research purpose and how I would use the field observation data. Steven Taylor and Robert Bogdan contend that the rapport between the researcher and observed is best established when the researcher participates in common activities which will not disrupt the institution's normal routine (1984). Working as one of the newsroom staff was the best approach for me to observe the gate-keeping process of my study without disturbing its staff's daily media practices. I believe my participation improved my access to sources and had a minimal effect on the QGLT staff who were being observed.

2.2 Field Work Journal as Data Collecting

The field work journal, as Spradley defines, is the personal perspective of

'experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise during field work' (1979:76). The central part of my field work journal is my experience of moderating one of the QGLT boards, *Lianyi Huiguan* (Friendship and Liaison Board). Apart from that, I also took notes of the newsroom weekly meetings, what happened in the news room, what was said by the QGLT director, my interaction with QGLT staff, interviews with QGLT staff, as well as my impressions and interpretations of what was observed. I usually scribbled down observations and impressions in a note book and expanded this condensed note into detailed field notes during natural breaks or at the end of the day.

My routine work of moderating *Liangyi Huiguan* (*Huiguan* thereafter) mainly included designing 'soft' topics (which means less political, more cultural or entertaining) for discussion, and deleting inappropriate postings (such as postings containing political innuendo, obscene language, or officially banned topics). *Huiguan*, as I later found out, was one of the few boards[40] allowed to be moderated by non full-time QGLT staff such as volunteers[41]. Meanwhile, *Huiguan* is the only board within QGLT that is open till 11pm or even later when other boards close at 10pm. Discussion goes on as long as there are volunteers moderating the board (in Chapter 5, the role of volunteers in QGLT will be discussed in detail). These two characters give *Huiguan* a certain amount of autonomy and accommodate active interaction among users late at night. Moderating *Huiguan* generated rich and detailed data for this research.

My field observation usually started at 9 in the morning. One of the editors-in-chief would assign the day's working shifts among editors – due to the intensity of online moderating, each editor works two hours for one shift. Meanwhile, editors would submit a summary of postings they had deleted from the previous day and post their summary on the internal forum. This practice aims to provide for every editor a guideline to what recent sensitive issues (s)he should keep an eye on.

Every afternoon, there would usually be an online panel meeting with guest speakers within QGLT. I was assigned to design questions for panel meetings several times and to post those questions during the session under pseudo-usernames. The questions were supposed to be sharp, meaningful, and challenging, but not provocative or

confrontational. This practice served a few purposes, according to the QGLT administration. Firstly, if there were a small amount of users logged on for the panel meetings, the pre-designed questions would save guest speakers from the embarrassment of meeting no 'audience'; secondly, even if there were enough users turning up for the panel meetings, the pre-designed questions would be prioritised so that the online discussion would be moderated under some 'correct' guidelines.

Apart from observing the real life working environment, I also browsed information on the internal discussion board which was only open to QGLT editors. The internal board is updated with newsroom policies, detailed regulations concerning moderating, and opinion-exchanging among editors. Unfortunately, my user name and password for the internal board lasted for only one week before the QGLT director decided I should be banned from accessing this board.

In the field notes I recorded what happened in the newsroom, the newsroom policies, my interaction with QGLT staff, as well as my impressions and interpretations of what was observed. To draw the distinction among events observed or heard, and my own impression or interpretation, I followed Strauss et al.'s strategies in keeping field notes: words within quotation marks signified exact recall; words with apostrophes indicated a lesser degree of certainty or paraphrasing; and verbal material without markings meant recall. Explanation and impression was kept separated from actual observations by the use of single parentheses and brackets (Strauss et. al. 1964:29).

Box 4.1 An example of field note:

Time: July 22 2004 17:10

Event: Warning the user who posted 'inappropriate' messages

Observation:

At 17:13:53, a posting from editor Jon appeared in QGLT, it read:

'Dear user *wo ai yesu*, thank you for your continuous support to QGLT. You are a veteran user within this community, so there is no need for me to repeat some regulations to you. Please help others by helping yourself when you post. Thank you. Jon.'

I came to Jon and asked:

YW: What happened just now? I saw you posting a message to *wo ai yesu*.

Jon: *Oh, I just gave *wo ai yesu* a warning.*

YW: Warning? Why?

J: * *wo ai yesu* has been holding a negative opinion against the previous Prime Minister Zhu Rongji. He has been particularly against Zhu's financial policy of levying 20 percent tax on increased interest from banks. He always claims that Li Peng was a better Prime Minister than Zhu. Look at his postings, there's no content at all apart from '*Jiaxi jiaxi jiaxi jiaxi....*' ('increasing the interest' 20 times). But *wo ai yesu* has been a veteran user and he knows these kind of postings are inappropriate, so I only need to give him a warning*.

YW: Why inappropriate? Negative comments on Zhu Rongji or posting '*Jiaxi jiaxi jiaxi jiaxi....*' without content?

J: Both. He also used to upload *Old Testament* and *New Testament* to QGLT. You know, it is illegal to preach religion in non-religious venues. That was also inappropriate behaviour.

YW: Will the warning prevent *wo ai yesu* from posting similar messages?

J: Warning works for the short period of time. Then he'll be back. I know.

YW: Would it be easier for you to block his penname so he couldn't post?

J: *No, no, no. If I blocked this penname, he would change to another 'waistcoat' (penname) and come back again. Some users have more than ten 'waistcoats'. It will be more difficult to spot him if he's in a different waistcoat. It's better to just give a warning*.

[**Impression**: To punish those who post 'inappropriate' messages, QGLT moderators can delete the postings, give warnings, block the users' pennames or even block the users' IPs. Most QGLT moderators tend to choose a mild way of punishing – not just for building better relationship with users, but also for more efficient management of the boards].

The major difficulty in conducting participant observation with QGLT was the growing suspicion towards me from the administrators. My overseas student status always cast doubt over me as I might be suspected of getting information from the

Party's organ for some antagonistic western media or political groups. I was requested to stop taking notes during meetings and during work. Later in my field work, making mental notes and transcribing them at the natural intervals of work replaced jotting down a condensed account of observation.

3. Interviews

Thirty-three interviews, including seven interviews with QGLT staff, twenty-two with users, and four with other sources were conducted for this research. Semi-structured open-ended questions were used as an interview guide. In-depth interviews was the main method for this specific research for the following reasons:

- QGLT participants' understanding, knowledge, and insights of the virtual community might not be measured by quantitative methods like surveys;
- The choice of interview questions can be tailored to match what the individual interviewees know and feel (Rubin, H. and Rubin I. 1995:6) so that it can generate answers based on each respondent's perspective. In-depth interviews work best for sensitive issues (Wimmer and Dominick 2000: 122), so that it fits well with the study of QGLT as 'an avenue for dissidents' (Turner 10/04/2000) in authoritarian China;
- The practice of online communities based on the Internet bulletin boards forms a new culture, lexis and norms. As a researcher, I need to 'figure out the special new vocabulary and the taken-for-granted understandings' (Schütz 1967:74) through in-depth conversation with QGLT staff, users and informants.

The qualitative in-depth interviews conducted are in a *semi-structured* (also called *focused*) format (Merton, et al. 1990) of topical interviews. Before every interview, I had already read the online profile and postings from the interviewee and had some knowledge of his/her interest and main argument on certain current issues. I started interviews with general questions such as the interviewees' media consumption habit (or journalistic work experience for the QGLT staff), then guided the discussion by asking individually tailored questions dealing with more defined subjects. For example, one Taiwanese user who posted frequently in 2001 advocating Mainland China's re-unification with Taiwan, moved his family to the Mainland in 2002. My

101

interview questions included, 'what was your motivation for logging on to QGLT to discuss current issues when you were in Taiwan'; 'how did other QGLT users react to your argument for China's re-unification', etc.

3.1 Interviews With Gate-keepers

Fifteen www.people.com.cn staff, including twelve QGLT staff, two Vice-Presidents and the President of www.people.com.cn were invited to be interviewed in person. Letters of invitation for interviews were submitted to the President and the vice-Presidents with the major questions listed. Finally, seven interviews were conducted.

In getting knowledge of QGLT staff, I conducted a small-scale survey among them. The questionnaire consisted of mainly demographic features such as age, education, political affiliation, journalistic working experience, years of using the Internet, years of working with QGLT, etc.

My impression of QGLT editors (moderators) was that they were amenable in terms of helping me when it came to familiarising myself with the working environment and moderating the boards. However, when I asked in person (in a more or less private way) for an interview, some of them reacted defensively. Instead of openly turning me down, those editors (moderators) showed extreme reluctance in fixing a date and time for interview. Meanwhile, two of the three top administrators declined my invitation for interviews as they said what they could tell me would have been covered in www.people.com.cn online public relations materials. Eventually, seven interviewees accepted in-depth interviews with each interview lasting about one hour. Box 4.2 shows the composition of my interviewees.

The major difficulty of interviewing QGLT moderators was how to handle the issue of confidentiality in our conversations. Since I had been working with them, most of them tended to treat me as a colleague and talked honestly about this online community to the best of their knowledge. However at certain points, they were also aware of my overseas student status and requested that I should not include what they said in the interview transcription. One of the editors had a lot of insightful ideas about political discussion on Chinese bulletin boards when the two of us chatted over

lunch, but when I took out a tape recorder and a notebook, he started to speak like a spokesperson from QGLT. In a country like China where journalists still go to jail for passing information to Western journalists, I can totally understand their suspicion and worry.

Box 4.2 The composition of interviewees from QGLT

Interviewees from QGLT, www.people.com.cn

- Top-level administrator: Mr. Jiang Yaping (founder of QGLT and Vice-President of www.people.com.cn);
- Mid-level administrator: Mr. Shan Chenbiao (one of the major founders of QGLT and Director from August 1999 to July 2004);
- Two QGLT Editors-in-chief;
- Three QGLT editors (moderators).

3.2 QGLT Users Interviews

The majority of my in-depth interviews were conducted with QGLT users. Interviews with QGLT users were semi-structured topical interviews which, as Rubin and Rubin describe, is 'a tree-and-branch mode' (1995:201). I started out with a set of structured main questions covering the overall subjects such as users' media consumption behaviour, the frequency they visit and post on QGLT, their understanding of good postings and good online discussion, etc. There were a few probes and follow up questions under certain main questions such as asking users to give examples of 'good discussion' or 'bad discussion' they experienced within QGLT (see Appendix 1 for an example of my semi-structured interview with a QGLT user).

'Many qualitative interviews have both more structured and less structured parts but vary in the balance between them' (Rubin, H. and Rubin I. 1995:5). In the less structured parts of the interview, I tailored my questions to each individual based on my knowledge of them from their postings. The less-structured part of the interview provided detailed information about what factors encourage or inhibit QGLT user's online opinion expression, their specific understanding of political discussion, and

their unique experience of identity construction both online and offline.

3.2.1. Sampling

The sampling strategy was a combination of maximum variation sampling (Wimmer and Dominick 2000: 115) and snowball sampling (Lindlof 1995: 127-128) due to the sensitive political nature of the research objectives.

I started sending emails with questionnaires attached to QGLT users' personal email addresses as a pre-selection process from May 2004. The questionnaire consists of three sections of multiple choices. Section I is the demographic features of QGLT users (e.g. gender, age, education, profession, place of origin, place of living, and political affiliation). Section II is about QGLT users' media consumption including their Internet using behaviour. Section III aims to gain a general understanding of how users perceive QGLT online discussion (see Appendix 2).

My own contact with 11 users and another 24 users from snowball sampling answered questionnaires. Based on the questionnaires received and also users' voluntary participation, I selected 22 of them for intensive interviews (see Appendix 3 for the composition of my interviewees). My interviewees were chosen according to the following criteria:

- They were 'encultured informants' within QGLT. American anthropologist Spradley uses this term (1979:47) to describe those individuals who know the local culture well and take it as their responsibility to explain it to others. All my interviewees had been encultured in QGLT for at least 1 year up to the interview date and were quite familiar with this virtual community. Apart from one lurker recruited from my off-line friend circle, all the rest of the QGLT interviewees were heavy posters and played active roles within the community;

- They were chosen purposefully to yield as many different and varied situations as possible. My selection of interviewees varied in its composition in terms of gender, education, age, profession and other demographic elements. By doing so, I attempted to present a range of views from QGLT users;

- They were willing to talk about their experience. There were some QGLT users who answered my questionnaire, but later turned down my invitation for an interview. One reason might be their preference towards maintaining the anonymity associated with online identity. The other reason might be the political risk in being involved in this kind of research based overseas. I had been questioned a few times for my real identity and once was even asked to show my ID card by my interviewee. Some QGLT users suspected I worked either for the Chinese government or for a foreign media organisation under the disguise of a Cardiff University student.

The major difficulty for this research is the potential political danger to QGLT users associated with their passing on information to an overseas researcher. This concern restrained some QGLT users from talking to me about their involvement in online political discussion. Social institutions like parliament in China (namely, the People's Congress) do not accommodate open debate. Political discussion among ordinary citizens only exists in the virtual world when anonymity provides some kind of protection. Even in online discussion, the Communist Party imposes many taboos in terms of what should be debated. Talking about issues like Taiwan's independence, Tibet's independence, the Falungong Spiritual movement, the 1989 pro-democracy movement, criticism of the Communist Party and its top leaders, etc. might lead one into political persecution. It is widely believed that spies from government organisations (e.g. Public Security Bureau) have been lurking on most bulletin boards ready to track down 'offenders' for prosecution (Cohn, M. R. 21/07/2001). This harsh reality made a planned online focus group impossible and also recruiting users for interviews very difficult.

3.2.2. Record the interview

The Internet allows data collection from individuals all over the world at fast speed and reasonable cost. In addition, since the respondents remain anonymous, they may be more likely to honestly express their opinion on sensitive topics (Wimmer and Dominick 2000: 422). These qualities make the Internet a possible tool for conducting in-depth interviews. However, it also brings challenges to the recording of conversation in traditional face-to-face interviews. Interviews conducted for this research were recorded in emails, instant messenger online chatting record, and

traditional audio cassette.

Based on the information from questionnaires, I realised that only two of my interviewees live in Beijing, 18 of them live in other parts of China, and two of them in the USA. It was physically and financially impossible for me to conduct face-to-face interview with them all. Meanwhile, most of my interviewees only agreed to accept interviews through electronic media form (e.g. emails, QQ, MSN, Skype, etc.) even after talking over the phone with me when I fixed the interview time. The following table shows the communication means I used for intensive interviews with QGLT users.

Table 4.1 Tools used for conducting interview with QGLT users

Face-to-face interviews	2
Face-to-face interview + Instant Messenger* + Online phone talk	1
Telephone interviews	8
Telephone + email	1
Telephone + Instant Messenger	3
Instant messenger	1
Instant messenger + email	3
Emails	3
Total	22

* Instant messenger used including MSN, Skype, and QQ.

The following reasons might also contribute to QGLT users' preference for being interviewed through electronic media rather than face-to-face communication:

- The anonymity associated with online identity encourages users to talk about politics openly and honestly. Communication through electronic media enables users to preserve a certain amount of anonymity;
- Most users are fairly adapted to express their opinion through computer-mediated communication. They prefer to talk 'serious issue in-depth' through the electronic communication means;

- Computer-mediated communication can be used as an alternative means for efficient data collecting. For example, instant messengers allow individuals to have instant verbal exchange of conversation. Facial icons (a smiley / surprised / angry / depressed / confused face) express partially how the 'conversationalists' feel. Besides, most instant messengers support online audio/video communication between individuals using the same messenger service, which might be viewed as an alternative to telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews.

Intensive interviews conducted online also have self-evident disadvantages. As the New Yorker Cartoonist Peter Steiner said in July 1993, nobody knows you are a dog in cyberspace. There is no way to check whether the interviewees are who they say they are (Wimmer and Dominick 2000: 422). Follow-up questions are more difficult to ask and probing into the interviewees' changes in attitude or tone becomes impossible. To avoid unintended deception from users, I read and took notes of all available postings from them before interviews. Self-disclosure postings from users were used as guidelines for raising probes and follow up questions. One interview was conducted in July 2004, according to the interviewee's request, through the instant messenger service Skype. We started the interview by exchanging verbal messages and followed by talking online through microphones and earphones. A few weeks later, we met in person in Beijing so that I had the chance to check my online interview data. The follow-up face-to-face interview confirmed what I had already learnt from online interviews. Interviews with another two QGLT users in person also corresponded with my impression of their online identity and personality.

It is true that multiplicity in identity can create deception in online communities. However, as Judith Donath notices, some varieties of identity can be subtle identity manipulations, which are 'similar to the adjustments in self-presentation we make in many real-world situations' (1999: 44). This identity manipulation or concealment from interviewees would not be able to be avoided even in offline contexts when interviews are conducted face-to-face.

3.3 Other informant interviews
My other informant interviews included interviews with the founder of an

environmental protection non-government organisation, two journalists from the official media, and one official from a government organisation. Originated as an anthropology / ethnography term, informants are defined as native speakers who are a source of information for the ethnographer (Spradley 1979: 25). In this study, the informants are 'natives' in their work settings. They played vital roles in providing me with valuable insiders' perspective of the social ecology for online discussion on the Internet bulletin boards.

The founder of the environmental protection NGO was interviewed over the phone for her understanding of the role of Internet bulletin boards in coordinating actions among grassroots NGOs. Two journalists from the national media kindly worked as my informants during the SARS crisis in 2003 and shared with me their knowledge of governmental measures for regulating media during this crisis and the corresponding news room policies. Another informant from the Information Office of the State Council provided me with comprehensive information of government policies of controlling online political discussion over the Internet bulletin boards.

One sensitive issue arising from this is the protection of my informants. In China, informants for western media are still persecuted in the name of 'leaking national secrets' and have their career, freedom, and even life jeopardised. I had communicated my research objectives as clearly as possibly to my informants, kept them informed about how I was going to use the material, and kept them anonymous in this dissertation.

4. Textual Analysis

The study of QGLT postings during the SARS crisis is a case study. A case study, though focusing on a single event as a research subject, can provide detailed and explanatory information about the research topic. It aims to capture 'the particularity and complexity' in this event and 'understand its activity within important circumstances' (Stake 1995: xi). A variety of research methods can be employed in a case study (Wimmer and Dominick 2000: 125). To capture the complexity of the SARS incident, I used textual analysis as the research method in analysing online postings.

I started monitoring SARS postings within QGLT from Feb. 8, 2003 when first I heard of the outbreak of 'serious pneumonia' in China from personal contacts. In the following three months, I collected postings on SARS discussions mainly from three sub-bulletin boards within QGLT - *Current Affairs*, *In-Depth*, and *Health*. I filtered 355 postings in total from the *QGLT In-Depth* with 'SARS' or 'Atypical Pneumonia' （非典） in their titles for textual analysis. This analysis is also compared with the 322 SARS news stories from the *People's Daily* from April 4 to April 30. The sample thus covers periods when the SARS crisis started to emerge to the time when it was gradually put under control. This selection of text aims to be both representative and significant.

Alan McKee writes that textual analysis is a process that means 'we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text' (2003:1). The definition of a "text" can be any object that is symbolic and carries meaning (Matheson 2005: 182) – the words, numbers, pictures, news articles, television footage, online postings, etc. On Internet bulletin boards, the textual elements in each posting can be broken down as the title (of the posting), the penname (of the contributor), body of the posting, signature file (of the contributor), replies and follow-up postings to the main posting, and hyperlink(s) in the posting, as shown in the following figure:

Figure 4.1 The Composition of a posting
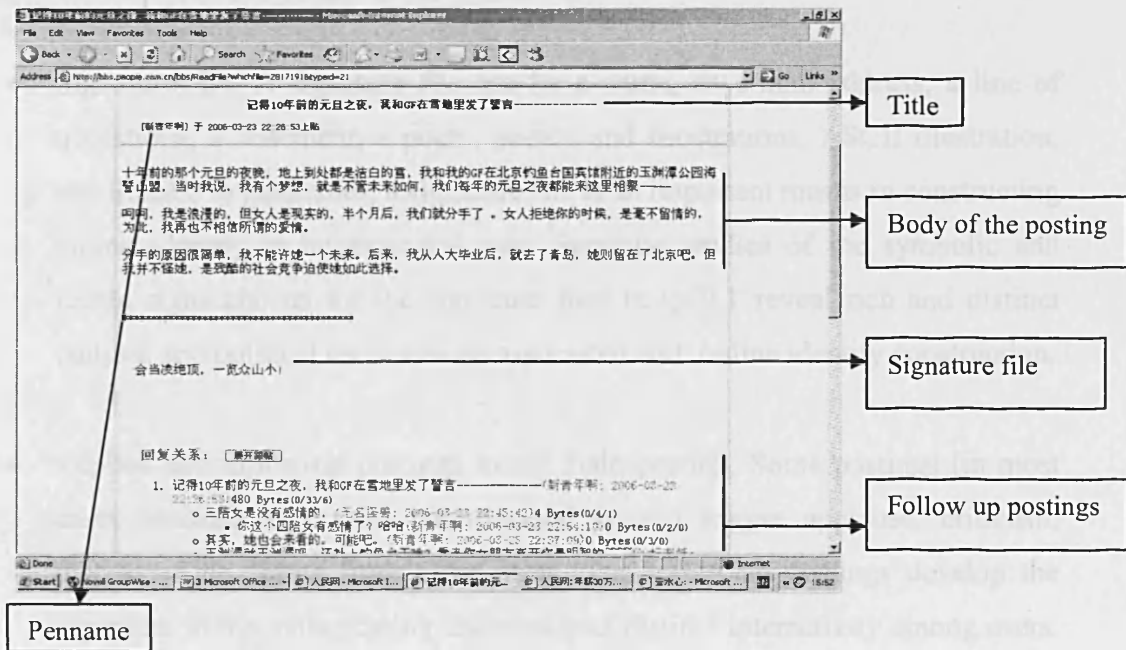
The above screenshot shows an ordinary QGLT posting. As displayed above, an online posting as a new media discourse can be broken down into mainly the following textual elements.

- Title. The title is usually made up of words, phrases, or a short sentence. It can be a summary of the main ideas in the posting or used to arouse other users' interest by raising a question.

- Penname (Username). A penname could be made up of words, phrases, or even a short sentence in QGLT. This is an important means for users to present their identity. A semiotic study of users' pennames can reveal the connotation of the symbolic signs chosen for the pennames and the ideology constructed through choosing signs and arranging words in sequence.

- Body of the Posting. Online postings, as a novelty discourse contributed by individual users, have the potential of both observing and breaking down the generic conventions found in traditional media. Postings can be any form of headline news, investigative stories, feature stories, news commentaries,

reviews, diaries, letters, audio or video clips, photos and pictures, etc or the combination of any of these different forms.

- Signature file. A signature file can be a name, an e-mail address, a line of quotations, a statement, a poem, photos and illustrations, ASCII illustration, etc. Similar to pennames, a signature file is an important means in constructing online identity in an extended way. Semiotic studies of the symbolic and iconic signs chosen for the signature files in QGLT reveal rich and distinct cultural and political connotations associated with online identity construction.

- Replies and follow-up postings to the main posting. Some postings (in most cases because they raise controversial issues) trigger applause, criticism, discussion or debate from other users. The follow-up postings develop the argument in the main posting and construct distinct interactivity among users. A narrative study can reveal, to a certain extent, how knowledge of social events is constructed through interaction among users according to cause and effect and how this development of argument moves towards a conclusion.

- Hyperlinks. Hyperlinks can be found in QGLT users' pennames, signature files, or body of the postings. These links are usually directed to users' online profiles, personal webpages or blogs, relevant articles or background information. The study of intertextuality between main postings and their secondary texts can further reveal the pattern of online narrative construction.

Since the 1980s, a trend in the study of texts is that it has moved from a simply linguistic perspective to an approach emphasizing the social contexts within which texts are constructed and used (van Dijk, T. A. 1985; Fairclough 2003). The concept that media texts are 'transparent' bearers of meaning is challenged and much attention is given to both the linguistic and ideological structuration in media messages (Hall 1980: 117-8). Stuart Hall defines 'the media as a major cultural and ideological force, standing in a dominant position with respect to the way in which social relations and political problems were defined and the production and transformation of popular ideologies in the audience addressed' (1980:117). It is based on this belief that textual

analysis is used in this project to reveal how Chinese users construct, interpret, contest, and change their sense of social reality. Thus in this research the analysis of text-based online interaction is not limited to describing the syntactic meaning of each sentence. Instead, this research focuses on the context of the production of online text, and aims to reveal the ideological position of users and the power relationship between the public and the political authority in both online and offline circumstances.

5. Summary

Multiple qualitative research methods including participant observation, in-depth interview, and textual analysis are used in this research to analyse the gate-keeping process, and the production, representation and reception within online communication.

As argued before, the tradition of the production-content-reception study is challenged in the online media environment as the demarcation between production and reception is blurred in cyberspace and producers and audience can be integrated into one. Thus, I choose qualitative research methods with an ethnographic approach in an attempt to reflect an 'insider's' perspective of the changed power relationships in the online media environment, and explore how this change affects the outcome of media content. The qualitative research methods can be effectively applied when the anonymity, mobility and multiplicity associated with online identity make quantitative research methods such as surveys less practical and less reliable. It is also worth noticing the role of the Internet facilitated communication methods such as emails, instant messenger, etc. These new online communication devices are efficient and effective tools for recruiting and interviewing users across the world. Finally, I would add that only when the researcher him/herself becomes an 'encultured informant', can (s)he be able to reveal part of the mystery associated with online communication.

Chapter 5

Surveillance, Censorship and Self-Censorship in QGLT

In theory, computer-mediated communication opens a dialogue among citizens and the decentralising nature of the Internet makes censorship very difficult. However, digital technologies that facilitate electronic deliberation can also 'provide the ultimate means of surveillance' (Noveck 2000:25). Information communication technologies can consolidate the offline gate-keeping process, enhance digital monitoring, and put online public content directly under the censorship of authority. In this chapter, I will look into how online political discussion in China is moderated, filtered, and censored based on my participant observation as an intern moderator with QGLT from July to September 2004.

My study reveals that in spite of the commercial business model introduced into the Party's organ *People's Daily* since 1978, political discussion within its online community QGLT still has to go through the micro and the macro level of the gate-keeping process. On the micro level, QGLT staff practise the moderating roles. All users' postings have to go through editors, editors-in-chief, and directors before they can appear on QGLT bulletin boards. On the macro level, certain government institutions such as the Beijing Municipal Government Public Information Administration (Department of Internet Censorship), and 1106 Office from the Central Propaganda Department can intervene at any time by giving administrative orders.

Existing studies on Internet bulletin boards in China often focus on discourse analysis of online postings, rather than the study of production which involves gate-keeping on bulletin boards. The following sections examine the online gate-keeping process in which ICTs are used as 'ideological state apparatuses' to consolidate the dominant political discourse. Based on my ethnographic research within QGLT, I found this bulletin board subject to strict administrative regulations and news room censorship by journalists (moderators). Self-censorship is also practised among users (mainly through the mediation of volunteers), which further limits new media's deliberation

potential. By setting the agenda for public debate, diverting the discussion topics away from sensitive issues, and punishing opinionated dissidents, QGLT is facilitating the stringent watch from 'big brother'.

1. The Political Economy of the QGLT

The commercialisation of the media in China brought about the phenomenon of de-ideologisation (Chu, L. 1994) meaning that Chinese media are now used less as an ideological apparatus by the Communist Party. Being part of www.people.com.cn, the online edition of the Party's organ *People's Daily,* QGLT possesses the dual characteristics of being financially semi-dependent and administratively dependent on the government. This feature makes it more tolerant towards liberal ideas contributed from users; while still subject to administrative surveillance, newsroom policies, and self-censorship practised by QGLT editors/moderators.

People's Daily, which has been the Chinese Communist Party's 'mouthpiece' ever since its creation in June 1948, has a circulation of more than 3 million. Like its counterparts in other former Communist countries[42], *People's Daily* has the status of a separate government ministry (Haggart, K. 1992:50) and provides 'official political roadmaps for party officials and other readers who needed to be informed' (Johnson, O. 1998:108). Unlike its counterparts in other Communist regimes, *People's Daily* went through a transformation from being solely a Party organ to a media conglomerate after reforms in 1978.

As the Party's organ, *People's Daily* is under direct surveillance from the Party's Propaganda Department and the Information Office of the State Council. A hotline connects the Propaganda Department and the chief editors' offices. In times of crisis, chief editors consult the propaganda officials or 'the Propaganda Department might well call in the chief editors on a daily basis' (Haggart, K. 1992:52). Top Party officials (including the late Chairman Mao) penned a number of editorials for the *People's Daily* from time to time (Zhao: 1998).

Nevertheless, since the media reform in 1978, *People's Daily* has been actively involved in a series of business activities, and has become a conglomerate of a

business enterprise despite continuing to be an ideological state apparatus. Apart from being a media group, *People's Daily* now extends its business antenna into real estate, finance, infrastructure construction, the film industry, and both domestic and foreign trade. [43] These changes in the economy of *People's Daily* reflect the rate of commercialisation in the Chinese media industry. The media were gradually stripped off its 'ideological straitjacket' (Lee, C-C 1994:12) and shifted its content from political propaganda to more business information, social news, entertainment, and even criticism of the authorities.

In terms of media, the *People's Daily* group owns 10 dailies,[44] 3 weeklies,[45] and 12 journals.[46] Most of these publications, apart from *People's Daily* and its overseas edition, are market-oriented commercial papers with a focus on social news, economics, finance and lifestyle. Even *People's Daily* is still used to pass the Party's instructions to the people. It has changed significantly and 'began carrying more human-interest stories, more objective reporting on social problems [and ...] more citizens' grievances on the popular letters-to-the-editor page' (Haggart, K. 1992:51).

Launched on January 1, 1997, *www.people.com.cn* was first created as 'the online news publishing platform'[47] of *People's Daily*. This on-line Party's organ has enjoyed a prosperous development ever since. During the 9/11 attacks on the USA, online traffic reached an impressive 10 million hits daily. Aiming to become a world-level Internet portal of 'multi-media', 'interactivity', 'database' and 'multi-terminals' (Jiang, Y. 2002), *people.com.cn* now has more than 70 offices throughout the world, 2 mirror sites in Japan and the USA, and provides online services in 7 languages.[48] Following *People's Daily*'s example, in the year 2000 more than 200 Chinese newspapers went online (Liu, Y. 2000).

As Shanthi Kalathil notes, *People's Daily* views its web site as 'separate entities with their own corporate culture and often a more progressive mode of operation' (2002). *People.com.cn*'s front page brands itself more as a commercial portal than the Party organ, as illustrated below:

Figure 5.1 People.com.cn's front page
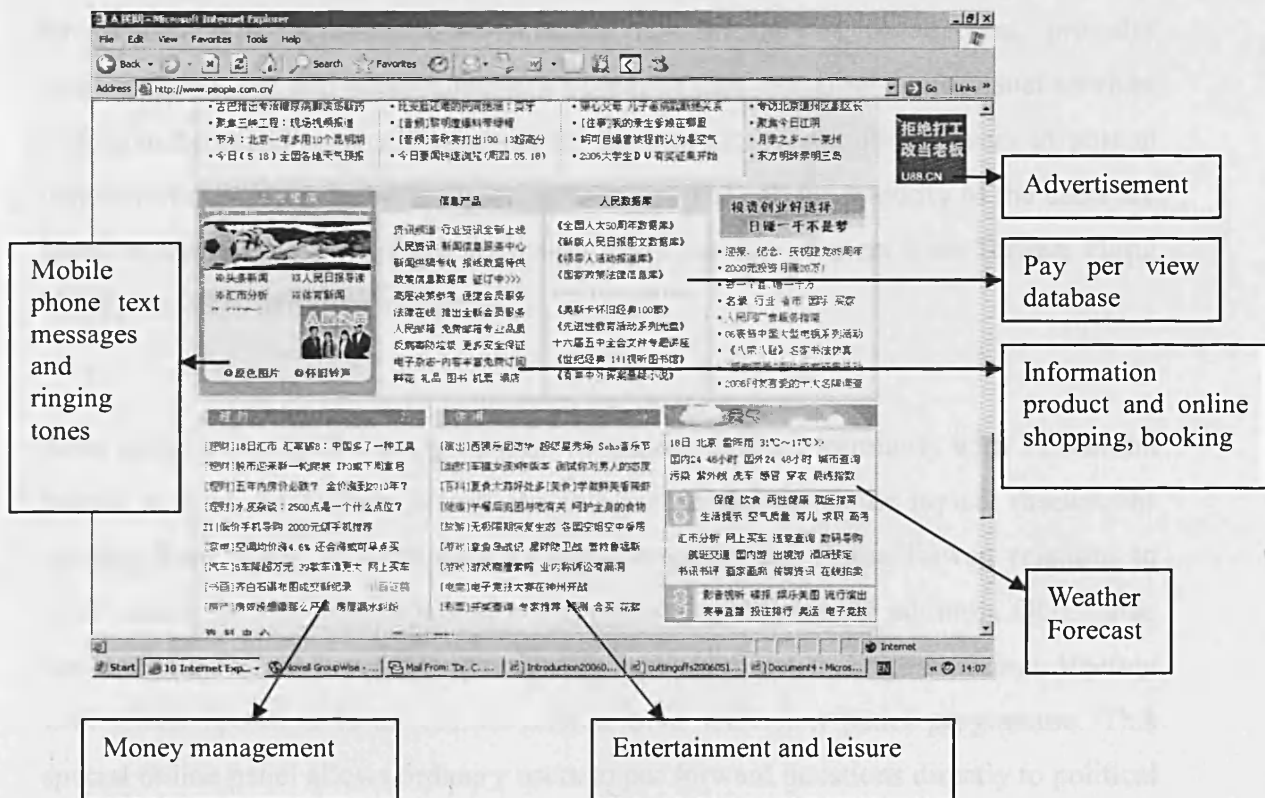
Also adopted is the commercial media's journalistic practice. *People.com.cn* updates its news 24-hours of the day and the average number of updated news items per day is more than 6,000.[49] There are more than 40 website channels including 'political news', 'local news', 'international news', 'viewpoints', 'economic news', 'sports news', 'entertainment' and so forth. Its flagship QGLT has become 'the most popular Chinese-language bulletin board.'[50]

QGLT was set up on 9 May 1999, one day after NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the Kosovo conflict. The bulletin board was first named *Kangyi Luntan* (Protest Forum) and attracted 50,000 visitors within 24 hours (Turner 10/04/2000). More than 90,000 messages of civil protest were posted until the forum changed its name to *Qiangguo Luntan* (QGLT) on 19 June when the protest died down.

Any user can view QGLT sites, but only registered users can post. By 18 May 2006, the number of registered users reached 443,726. The average number of daily visitors

116

is 'near 1,000,000'[51] and the average number of daily postings is more than 10,000.[52] Broadband, with a connection speed of 200 Megabytes per second, provides comparatively fast and steady input and output of data including audio-visual services. The asynchronistic temporal structure of the bulletin boards allows users to post at different times along the same topical discussion. Though the majority of the users are based in Mainland China, there are a significant number of users from Taiwan, Hong Kong, the USA, and other countries.

After seven years, QGLT has grown into a mature online community with 35 bulletin boards in total. 33 bulletin boards are in Chinese and cover the topical discussions ranging from 'hard' subjects such as anti-corruption and China-Taiwan relations to 'soft' issues such as education and environmental protection. In addition, QGLT also has a *China Forum* board for current affairs discussions in English. *Panel Meeting with Guest Speakers* is an online version of a television panel programme. This special online panel allows ordinary users to put forward questions directly to political officials, professional experts, celebrities or news figures from around the world (see Appendix 4 for a list of all QGLT bulletin boards).

These 35 boards are linked through navigation bars at the top of the QGLT front-page so users can easily move from one board to the other. The three most popular boards are *Current Affairs, In-depth Discussion,* and *Friendship and Liaison.* The *Current Affairs* board is known for its highest online traffic; the *In-depth Discussion* for its accommodating rational debate through in-depth analysis (the minimum length of postings on this board is 500-words); and *Friendship and Liaison* is the only board that has users as volunteer moderators and in theory is open 24-hours[53] while all the other QGLT boards are open from 10am to 10pm.

Figure 5.2: the front page of QGLT community (18/05/2006)
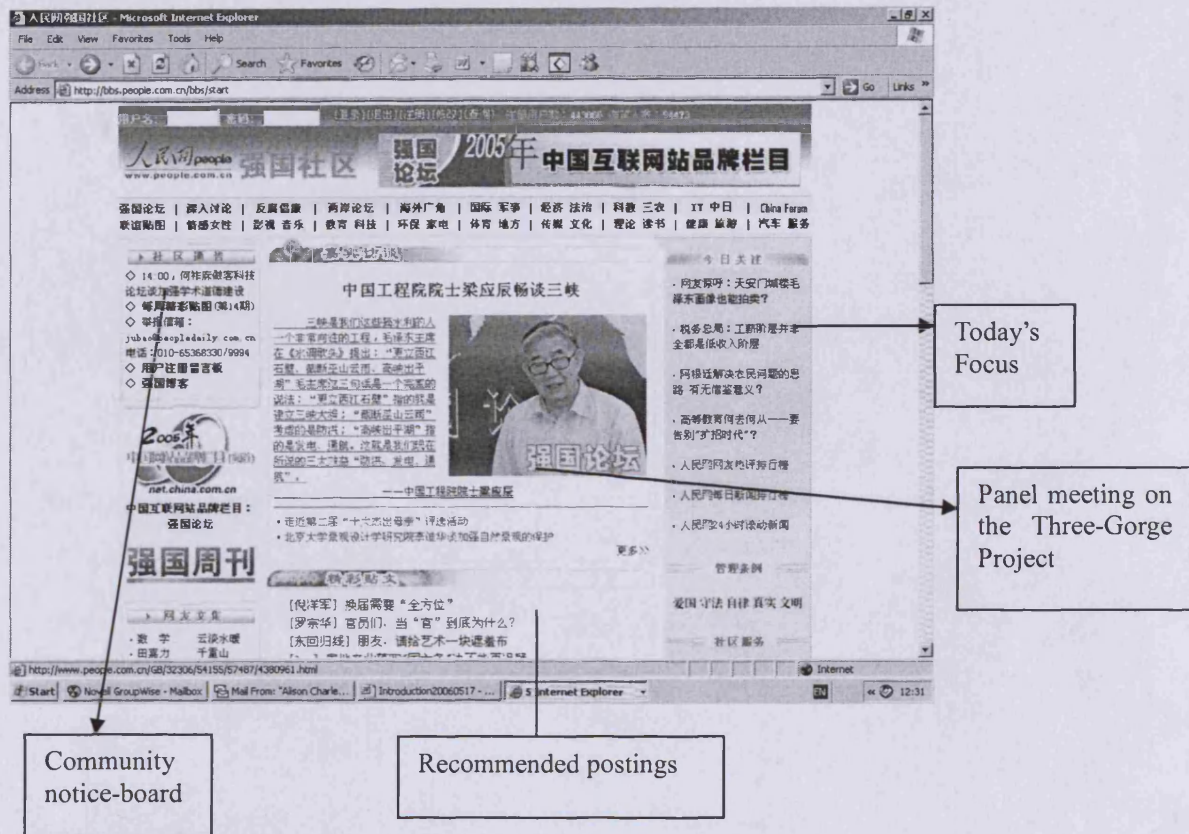
Yaping Jiang, Vice President of *people.com*, said *people.com* is still a 'Socialist medium' and it has to meet both the Party's requirements and its users' demands (Xiao, C. 04/06/2001). This statement again reflects this nascent medium's ambivalent status of being a political instrument, a semi-commercial medium, and a public service forum at the same time. The consequence is clear: 'it received more restrictions than commercial websites both financially and administratively' (Wang, Zhujun 2001: 418).

According to Jiang, around 50% of *people.com*'s annual budget comes from the government; 25% from its parent company *People's Daily*; and another quarter comes from its own commercial activities such as online advertisements, text messages, and information and technical services. From 1997 to 2001, *people.com* received 20 million Yuan RMB (around £1.6 million) from the government as financial support. Some observers believe *people.com* will remain a 'state-owned enterprise' and cannot be financially independent. Even if *people.com* attained financial independence, it

would still be administratively subject to its real 'boss', the Chinese Communist Party. The Party would never let its own 'organ' go against its will and become a 'fourth estate'.

Jiang, who impressed me more as a daringly critical scholar than a bureaucrat, stated on several public occasions that 'the first priority' for *people.com* is 'serving the 'boss''. Only by 'making the 'boss' satisfied' first, can they 'provide the public with a place to speak' (interview 20/04/2003).

Nevertheless, the liberalisation of the market still has its effect on the liberalisation of media content on the Internet. Junhua Zhang (2002) believes that interaction and communication between citizens and government in China has been improved via digital networking. This celebratory view can also be supported by statistics. A survey conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2001 on the impact of the Internet on Chinese politics shows that 60.8% of respondents believe that the Internet gives them more opportunity to express their political opinions; 51% think it gives them more opportunities to criticize government policies; 55.9% think they have a better knowledge of politics, and 43.8% think it will allow top officials to listen to public opinion from the common people (Guo, Liang 2001).

On QGLT, online 'panel meetings' between citizens and government officials have been actively used for political networking since 2003 and some online public opinion has been be translated into decision making. Professor Hongyu Zhou, a People's Congress delegate and a university president, posted his propositions for the annual People's Congress Assembly on QGLT on March 1, 2004. Within five days, his postings had been viewed 3,210 times and had received 33 responses. Among the replying messages, there was criticism of the arising university tuition fees and calls for attention to the miserable livelihood of employees of state-owned enterprises. Further postings urged the government to take steps to improve human rights:

> The People's Congress should work out a timetable for putting into effect the UN Covenant on Civil Political Rights (*Yang Liankang* 06/03/2004)

Scholars from Mainland China have been eager to celebrate the democratisation

accompanying the digital revolution. Min (10/07/2001) and Li and Qin (2001) argue that QGLT enables the user to enjoy their right to express an opinion over domestic and international current issues, breaks down the uniformity in public opinion presented by the traditional media, and forms online public opinion. Chen and Deng (2002) point out that online public opinion (especially critical public opinion) formed on QGLT serves as an institution of 'safety valve'[54] in Chinese society for channelling conflicts while maintaining the stability of society. By observing the online interaction within QGLT during an incident when Chinese and US military planes collided in 2001[55], Tang and Shi (2001) concluded that the Internet bulletin boards contribute to the formation of the public sphere in contemporary China. Such literature correctly points out that 'gate keeping' on the Internet is technically weak and online public opinion developed on bulletin boards has impacted upon the offline democratisation process. However, all the above scholars fail to point out that technology can also be explored to reinforce the *status quo*. Censorship of media content will not necessarily be alleviated on the Internet. On the contrary, new technology can even be employed to fortify the censorship in post-Communist China.

2. Surveillance and Censorship over QGLT

Technically speaking, computer-mediated communication enables 'free and open dialogue' on common concerns among ordinary citizens who 'attempt to come to an understanding of their interlocutors and to reflexively modify their pre-discursive positions in response to better arguments' (Dahlberg, L. 2001c:167). Compared with traditional media, there is no unifying media playing a central role in cyberspace and autonomy is one of the most essential values (Lévy, P. 1996:108-112). Rational individuals can make informed and un-coerced decision through such a decentralised communication process, and can offer an alternative 'persuasive discourse' which might challenge the authoritative discourse (Mitra, 2001:32).

However as a Computer Mediated Communication service provider, *people.com.cn* is subject to regulations from the Ministry of Information Industry; as a section of the official newspaper, it receives instructions from the Communist Party's Propaganda Ministry, the State Council Information Office, and other security organisations such

120

as the Public Information Administration Division of the Beijing Municipal Government (well known as Internet Surveillance Division). As the online 'information platform' of the Party's organ, QGLT is also obliged to practice self censorship.

The relaxed control over the media's economy does not result in the same level of laxity in the Communist Party's control over media content. The omnipresent censorship muzzles criticism and dissident opinions on both official and commercial bulletin boards, which largely limits the deliberating role of the Internet. Although China has witnessed a quick growth in Internet development and boasted that 8% of the population were online in January 2006 (CINIC Report XVII), the strict control over Internet media has hindered the construction of the public sphere in cyberspace.

2.1 General Administrative Regulations

Up to April 2006, 205 administrative regulations concerning the Internet were promulgated in China[56]. Some of them are measures regulating the general online practice such as protecting intellectual property rights[57]; while others are rules that QGLT and other Internet bulletin boards have to follow when publishing news or information. Since early 1996, the Communist Party has introduced administrative regulations to contain what it considered to be 'inappropriate' content on the Internet. Among them are these key regulations:

- *Provisions on the Administration of Internet News and Information Services* (effective from Sep. 24, 2005);
- *Measures for the Administration of Filing an IP Address* (effective from March 19, 2005);
- *Measures for the Administration of Broadcasts of Audio-Visual Programs through the Internet and Other Information Networks* (effective from Oct. 11, 2004);
- *Notice on Issues Concerning the Regulation of Short Messaging Services* (effective from April 14, 2004);

- *Interim Provisions on the Administration of Internet Culture* (effective from June 30, 2003);

- *Interim Administrative Provisions on Internet Publishing* (July 31, 2002);

- *Interim Administrative Provisions on Websites Engaging in the Business of Posting News* (Oct. 23, 2000);

- *Administrative Provisions for Electronic Bulletin Services on the Internet* (Oct. 7, 2000);

- *Notice Concerning the Filing of Records on Computer Information Systems* (January 29, 1996);

- *Measures for the Administration of Inbound and Outbound Channels for International Networking of Computer Information Networks* (effective from April 9, 1996);

Among these, *Administrative Provisions for Electronic Bulletin Services on the Internet* passed in October 2000 is a comprehensive administrative regulation from the Ministry of Information Industry that aims to regulate bulletin board service. It says that Internet bulletin boards, electronic forums, chat rooms, message boards and other interactive services must be put under tight control of government institutions to prevent the spread of pornography, violence, rumour, slander, and anything that undermines national security.

Internet users in China are required to register with an ID card when they apply for an Internet connection at home. They are also forbidden from posting any information that might 'endanger the nation's security, let out the nation's secrets, subvert the sovereign, and impair national unification', or 'stain the nation's reputation or damage the nation's interest'[58]. These evasive and ambiguous political phrasings can be used in any circumstances when the Communist Party needs a reason to punish those who voice antagonistic views online.

Internet service providers are required to delete so-called 'objectionable' information immediately if it occurs, record the violations, and report to 'certain governmental institutions'.[59] In terms of daily security management, the Internet service providers must keep all postings for at least 60 days including the senders' time spent online, their usernames, IP addresses or domain names, and dialled number if using the

telephone line for at least 60 days in case this information is needed for investigation by 'certain governmental institutions' which is often an euphemism for the public security bureau and online police.

Most Internet bulletin boards operators (especially those affiliated to the traditional media) have their own news exchange programme with international media outlets such as Reuters or the AFP. At the same time, they also rely on their users' contribution for news tips. On May 8, 1999, a commercial web portal www.sina.com posted the news of NATO's bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade[60] within minutes after the incident took place thanks to one user's contribution. Chinese users celebrated this moment as a turning point for the Internet becoming an autonomous grassroots media. However, the Chinese government immediately followed the users' celebration by passing an administrative notice that political news could only be posted on websites with the permission of the government (Fries 2000:56). Later, in February 2000, the State Council Information Office (SCIO) ruled that Chinese websites that wanted to distribute news had to apply for a license from the SCIO[61]. Also according to the rules, Internet content providers cannot hire reporters to produce news content exclusively for their websites. They have to source from China's traditional media if they want to carry news[62] (Fries 2000:57). Thus, instead of cultivating a new media form, all these regulations tend to restrain the online freedom of speech.

This strict control from the government over QGLT, www.people.com.cn and *People's Daily* is also expressed in physical forms. On each gate of the *People's Daily* offices, there are armed soldiers guarding the entrance. This is a legacy from the crackdown of the 1989 pro-democracy movement. Armed forces have taken the major official media back from the liberals and have 'safeguarded' the media ever since.

2.2 The Weekly Meeting

The weekly meeting held in QGLT usually includes updating stuff on newsroom policies and regulations concerning online surveillance from the government, editors discussing 'problems' from the previous week, and planning for the coming week. The meeting is compulsory for all staff and to a certain degree, confidential. When I

123

first started my 'internship', I was allowed to participate in the weekly meetings. A few weeks later, I was picked out at the meeting by one of the vice Presidents Guan Jianwen from www.people.com.cn for 'taking notes'. After that my access to the weekly meeting became unwelcome and later denied. In the following paragraphs, I am going to give examples of how weekly meetings within QGLT shape news room policies.

The gate-keeping process within QGLT (see Figure 5.3) flows in two ways. When postings come in, they are directed to editors (moderators) first. Editors decide which postings can go to the bulletin boards and which cannot. However, editors do not have entire autonomy in making such decisions. Editors are responsible to editors-in-chief, and editors-in-chief to their upper level administrators. On the top level, the President and the vice Presidents of www.people.com.cn decide the general framework concerning the management of QGLT, which involves setting an agenda for online public discussion and conceptualising the press freedom tolerated on QGLT bulletin boards. The President and two vice Presidents of www.people.com.cn are all veteran journalists who know well enough about media policies from the government. On weekly meetings, they review the public discussion on QGLT in the previous week, comment on the merits and shortcomings of the editors' work, and give detailed instructions on how to deal with 'problematic' postings which usually contain political dissident opinion. Such organised control over online discussion is not much different from the traditional media's gate-keeping process such as the selection of letters to the editors. Editors from print media can decide whose concerns can be voiced through their selection of readers' letters for publication (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002b). On the QGLT bulletin boards, the moderators play a similar role in constructing the publics by giving some users' opportunities to express their opinion while denying others.

Figure 5.3: the gate-keeping process of QGLT *in* www.people.com.cn

```
                                        ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                                        │ President, www.people.com.cn │
                        ┌───────────────┤                             │
                   ┌────┴──────────┐    └─────────────────────────────┘
                   │ Vice Presidents │
                   └────┬──────────┘
          ┌─────────────┘
    ┌─────┴──────────┐
    │ Director of QGLT │
    └─────┬──────────┘
  ┌───────┼────────────────┐
┌─┴──────────────┐         │
│ Deputy Director │         │
└────────────────┘    ┌─────┴──────────┐
                      │ Editor-in-chief │
                      └─────┬──────────┘
                          ┌─┴──────┐
                          │ Editors │
                          └────────┘

                      ┌────────────────┐
                      │ Editor-in-chief │
                      └─────┬──────────┘
                          ┌─┴──────┐
                          │ Editors │
                          └────────┘

                      ┌────────────────┐
                      │ Editor-in-chief │
                      └─────┬──────────┘
                          ┌─┴──────┐
                          │ Editors │
                          └────────┘
```
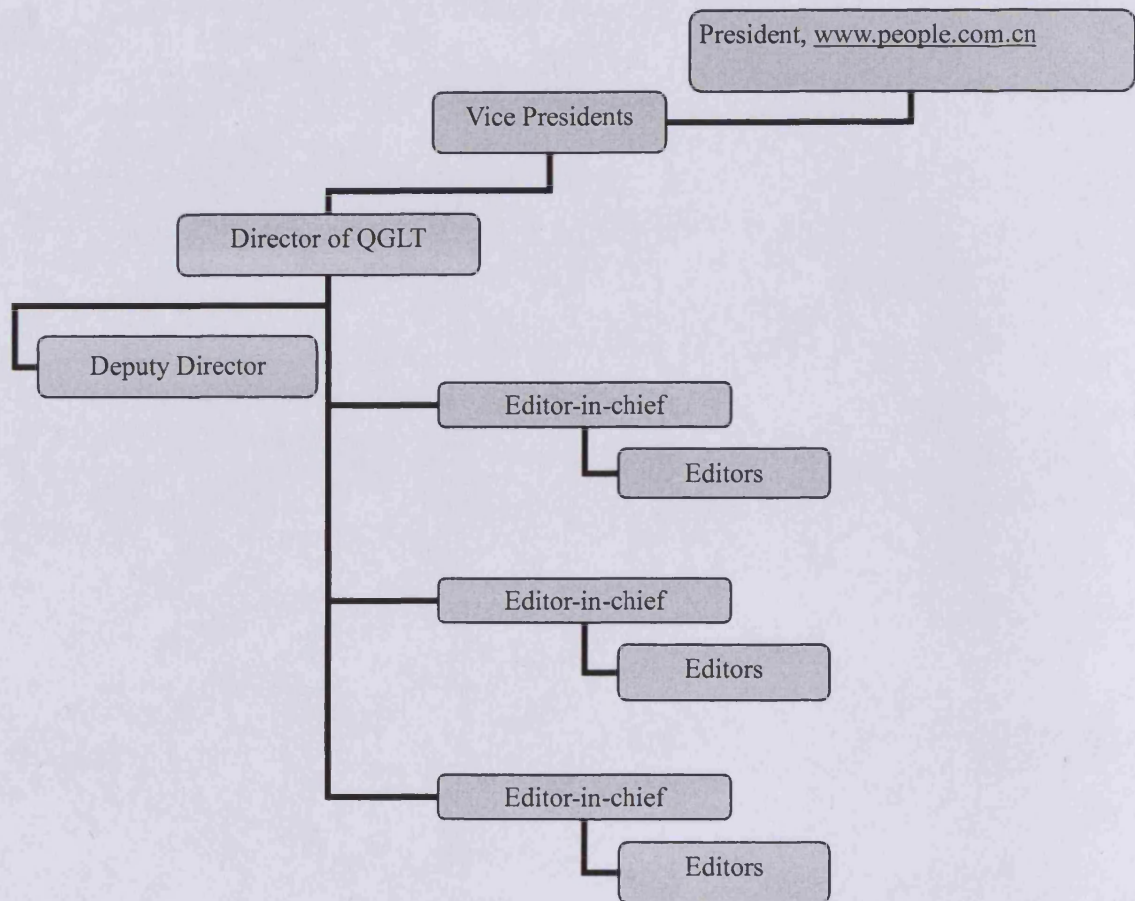
The weekly meeting of 27 July, 2004 mainly focused on the requirements for moderators to keep their work logs. Moderators are required to keep a record of the number of users and the key discussion topics. They are required to make a copy of 'problematic' postings in their work logs before deleting them from the boards. In this meeting, the importance of the work logs was emphasised and moderators were required to keep 'detailed' record of any offensive postings.

'Problematic' postings could be any article that touches 'sensitive political issues', shows dissident opinions, or just does not conform to the Party's dominant discourse under certain circumstances. The 'problematic postings' raised at the weekly meeting

on 10 August, 2004 were online discussions about the late national leader Deng Xiaoping (http://202.99.23.223:8080/dxp/list.php). August 2004 marked the 100th anniversary of Deng's birth. www.people.com.cn, like other official media, launched a memorial page. Within QGLT, one fervently discussed topic was comparing Deng with Mao in their respective achievements and mistakes. Guan Jianwen, Vice President from www.people.com.cn who directly supervised QGLT[63], made the following comments:

> It is unavoidable that we have postings on the comparison between the two late national leaders. However, we are not supposed to encourage this.... We are not supposed to comment on Deng's contributions and his faults on QGLT. Firstly, Deng is a great man; secondly, the official nature of our forum [does not allow us to make comments on national leaders]; thirdly, we must only say good things because this year marks the 100 year anniversary of Deng's Birth (field note 10/08/2004).

Because it is affiliated to the Party's organ, QGLT shows less tolerance towards political discussion on controversial issues than other commercial bulletin boards do. However, the QGLT administration has its own justification. Because of the official nature of QGLT, public opinion formed on this bulletin board has been frequently interpreted by western media as fluctuations in the political climate, i.e. 'warming up' propaganda from the Communist Party that prepares the ground for future political movement. For that reason, QGLT has to be very cautious in releasing radical political voices from its users.

Ironically, my interviews with QGLT users partly confirmed this justification. Gary*, who is an employee in a state-owned enterprise, said one of his articles on an online anti-corruption campaign was interpreted by Hong Kong-based Asian Times Online (www.atchinese.com) as 'Hu Jitao is about to build an online democracy wall' in fighting corruption (interview 03/09/2004). User Tony* also said some of his argument had been quoted by the Voice of America and Deutsche Welle Chinese broadcasting as sourced from the Chinese *official* bulletin board rather than from a QGLT user (interview 17/08/2004).

Therefore, some foreign media's misinterpretation of the relations between grassroots postings on QGLT and government policy alarmed the Communist Party and provoked them to tighten up its control over online postings on controversial domestic

and international issues. A case in point is the control of online discussion on the anniversary of the end of WWII in Asia, which inevitably involved anti-Japan extremist voices. Liu, Director of QGLT called to the attention of all staff the need to 'safeguard the security of QGLT bulletin boards':

> We are the governmental bulletin boards, we are the *official media*. It won't be a big deal if some [extreme anti-Japan] postings appeared on the non-governmental forums; but it will be regarded as a signal from the central government if these kinds of (extremist) postings appear on QGLT. This is decided by the special nature of the www.people.com.cn. So we have to be very cautious (field note of weekly meeting 12/08/2005).

Nonetheless, this official control of anti-Japan discourse does not contradict Hughes' (2002) argument that the Internet is used to legitimate the Communist Party's governance. Chinese media have been used by the Communist Party to cultivate nationalism and hatred against Japan as Thomas J. Christensen (1999) argues:

> Nationalism has always been a strong element of the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and opposing Japanese imperialism is at the core of this national story. As a result, Chinese citizens have been fed a steady diet of patriotic, anti-Japanese media programming designed to glorify the CCP's role in World War II. Although far removed from that era, most Chinese young people hold an intense and unapologetically negative view of both Japan and, in many cases, its people (Christensen 1999:54).

However, Christensen also pointed out that the anti-Japan public emotion has not affected the practical management of Sino-Japanese relations. 'On the contrary, since the 1980s the Chinese government has acted to contain anti-Japanese sentiment in society at large to avoid damaging bilateral relations and to prevent protestors from using anti-Japan sentiment as a pretext for criticising the Chinese government, as occurred several times in Chinese history' (Christensen 1999: 54-5). The day-to-day management of the China-Japan relationship is mainly dictated by the close trade and investment links between the two countries, which makes it too risky for the Communist Party to lose Japan as a business partner and investor. According to Japan's Ministry of Finance, total trade (exports plus imports) between the two countries reached $64.1 billion in 1997 and the bilateral trade balance is in China's favour. Japanese firms invested in China $4.5 billion in 1995 and $2.0 billion in 1997 (Johnstone, C. B. 1998: 1072).

2.3 A Routine Weekday for a QGLT Moderator

A moderator's daily work mainly involves monitoring the bulletin boards and maintaining webpage layout. Among all the bulletin boards within QGLT, four sub-boards such as the *Nüxing Luntan* (Female Forum) and *Lianyi Huiguan* (Liaison and Friendship House), *Zhongri Luntan* (China-Japan Relations Forum), and *China Forum* have their own respective moderators. The rest of the boards are moderated by all moderators by shift. *QGLT Current Affairs* and *QGLT In-depth* are the highlights of the community and the main focus for moderators' work. *Current Affairs* gathers most users and attracts 330-400 main postings (with exclusion of follow-up postings) per hour on average. On the *In-depth* board, postings are required to be more than 1,000 bytes (that is, at least 500 Chinese characters) which encourages a quality of argument. All postings have to go through the selection process of the moderators before they can appear online. Due to this intensity of monitoring, each work shift lasts about two hours.

The following table shows the duties of one editor-in-chief and one moderator on an ordinary work day:

Table 5.1 QGLT moderators work shift 19/07/2004

A Editor-in-chief	Updating the 'news & interaction' on the community front page;
	Deciding *'Today's Focus'* and *'Today's Headline News'*
	Recommending postings for the front page of www.people.com.cn
	Moderating *QGLT Current Affairs* 10:00 -11:30
	Moderating *QGLT In-depth* and the *Three Educations* 13:30 -15:30
B Moderator	Updating the 'Focus' on QGLT community front page
	Moderating *QGLT In-depth* and the *Three Educations* board 10:00-11:30
	Moderating *QGLT Current Affairs* 13:30 -14:30
	Preparing questions for the Guest interview in the afternoon

The first duty in the morning for QGLT moderators is to search the traditional official media news feed and recommend news stories to the editor-in-chief for *Today's Focus* and *Today's Headline News*. The editor-in-chief of the day will decide on a couple of news stories and post on *QGLT Current Affairs*. So as an ordinary user, when s/he opens the link to QGLT at 10:00am in the morning, s/he will find a selection of current affairs waiting to be read.

At 09:06:38 am on 19 July 2004, almost one hour before the opening of QGLT bulletin boards. Li, the editor-in-chief, decided the following news stories should be put on *Today's Focus* and posted this message on the internal forum:

Today's Focus:

Analysis of the economic situation in the latter part of the year;

Campaign against Internet pornography;

China National Audit Office shifts its focus to auditing the leaders of state-owned enterprises and the officials above the county level;

Storms strike most parts of the country;

Urgent countermeasures put into effect for the stormy weather in Beijing.

These stories were taken from the news feed provided by *People's Daily, Beijing Youth, Chinese Youth* and other official newspapers. Li chose these news stories because they were 'concise, substantial, and could trigger discussion among the users' (Interview 19/07/2004). *Today's Focus* and *Today's Headline News* set the agenda for an otherwise anarchic public discussion online. This macro control of the agenda of public opinion confirms the hegemonic role of politically powerful institutions in dominating people's everyday knowledge. By highlighting certain meaning making in people's everyday experience, the politically powerful institutions discourage people from thinking thoughts that might challenge the status quo (Eliasoph, N. 1998:232).

To a certain degree, the moderating work shares a similarity with the selection of letters to the editors in newspapers[64]. Moderators have the right to not upload postings. However, the four rules of selection of letters to editor: relevance, brevity, entertainment, and authority (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002a) do not necessarily exist on Internet bulletin board moderating in this instance. Due to the almost limitless capacity of cyberspace, bulletin boards have the potential to accommodate in-depth

arguments and users' own topics on the agenda. The anonymity associated with online identity also permits individuals without authority to have their voice heard. However, by recommending some postings (adding flashing icons such as a star or a diamond to postings or linking postings on the www.people.com.cn front page) and deleting others, QGLT moderators actually manipulate the representation of online public opinion. Postings that fit into the official agenda are publicised and highlighted, and postings containing antagonistic voices disappear.

During their seven-year experience of managing these bulletin boards, the QGLT administration has worked out a news room policy for forbidden topics. It is stated in *QGLT Regulations* that users cannot post anything against the Reform and Opening up policy or the Four Basic Principles[65]. Claiming the independence of Tibet or Taiwan in postings is regarded as a 'malign behaviour' that will result in closing down of users' online identities. The following regulation has been used by moderators as guidelines for moderating *QGLT In-Depth*:

Table 5.2 'Postings that are prohibited from going public' from the 'Regulations on the QGLT In-depth discussion (2004-02-13)

1. Postings that try to attack the present policy and the present national leaders in the name of discussing historic issues such as the Cultural Revolution, the history of the Chinese Communist Party, or the historical judgement of Mao Zedong;
2. Postings of pure news crossposted from other media without any comments or analysis from the user;
3. Petition postings that should appeal to court or the public prosecution institutions;
4. Flaming, and personal attacks among the users;
5. Repeating postings.

The above regulations might sound vague, but from time to time, these abstract terms will be translated into the concrete action of banning public discussion on the bulletin boards. Postings such as 'Demonstrators protest against the officials' corruption in

Beijing' (18/07/2004) never had the chance to be published on QGLT. Users who post such messages will have their detailed information recorded in moderators' work logs which will later be submitted to the government. In some cases, moderators are even asked to delete all discussion on a certain topic even if the topic banned has not violated any of the above regulations. On 22 July, 2004, a sudden phone call from the www.people.com.cn administration sent all the QGLT staff carefully searching for any 'problematic' discussion on a newly published poetry collection *Xin Cang Da E* (Bearing Great Evil in My Heart). This poetry collection exposed young people's frustration, resentment and rebellion, and was regarded as 'inappropriate' for public discussion by the Propaganda Ministry. Thus, even mentioning the poet's name, Haobo Shen, on QGLT was not allowed. It is written in their news room policy that: 'Problematic' postings should be deleted first to avoid them being misplaced and disseminated'.

Table5.3 Skills in moderating in QGLT (13/02/2004)

● Try to release postings according to the time order we receive them. Release eligible postings as soon as possible. Try not to give the users an impression that we prefer postings from some users and deliberately restrain postings from others;   ● Very long articles could be divided into series of short articles and posted under the same title;   ● Don't let three (or more) postings go to the bulletin boards at the same time so that we can avoid releasing the problematic ones by mistake;   ● If you are not sure whether a posting can be published, consult other moderators or leaders to avoid letting loose the problematic postings.   ● If you decide not to release a posting, you'd better send a message to the user. Show him/her respect and create a friendly atmosphere;   ● Try to be neutral and impartial when you comment on postings. Try to know more about other moderators' previous comments on the same posting to avoid different comments from QGLT. Otherwise, misunderstandings will arise.

Some QGLT moderators were self-deprecatory about their role as 'cleaners' within QGLT where their only job is to delete 'objectionable' postings. Nevertheless, even

cleaners have their professional skills and ethics in doing their job, so do QGLT moderators. The above *Skills in moderating QGLT* are drafted by Mr. Shan (Director of QGLT from 1999-2004), and posted on the internal forum as a guideline for other moderators (see Table 5.3). By employing these skills, the online surveillance in QGLT becomes more covert, so that an illusion of a free market of opinion is created.

3. QGLT Words Filtering System

The 'words filtering system' is computer software used in QGLT to prevent 'inappropriate' postings from appearing online. This system automatically selects 'sensitive' words from postings, and highlights them in yellow, red or purple colours. Moderators are expected to scrutinise these postings more carefully. It is true that postings containing obscene words like 'fuck', 'fart', 'intercourse', or even 'sex' will not get through this system, but political surveillance is the major reason for the existence of this system. For example, a posting containing the Chinese character Jiang (江), as in Jiang Zemin, will appear in red colour, which indicates a high level of alert to the moderators. However, Jiang (江) as a character also has the meaning of 'river', apart from being used as a surname. QGLT moderators need to scrutinise and decide whether the posting is an innocent article about a river or an 'evil' posting 'attacking' the national leader.

There is a list of words that cannot go through the words filtering system posted on the internal forum. As shown in the following table, I categorise these words into the following major eight groups according to their political relevance and give a few words out of many as examples to each category:

Table 5.4 QGLT words filtering system database (July 2004)

Political Relevance	Words as examples
Chinese Communist Party leaders	'M', 'Mao', 'Mao Zedong', 'Jiang' (as in Jiang Zemin), 'Song' (as in Song Ping), 'Peng' (as in Li Peng), 'the third generation', 'core', 'Zhu Rongji', etc[66].
1989 Democratic Movement	'Wu Er Kai Xi (Urekesh)', 'Chai Ling', 'Dai Qing', 'Tian'an' (as in Tian'anmen square), 'Blood', 'butcher', 'memorise', etc[67].
International relations	'The Japanese Embassy', 'North Korea', etc.[68]
Taiwan	'The Democratic Progressive Party', '(Annette) Lu Shiu-lian', etc.[69]
Domestic social problems	'Atypical pneumonia', 'SARS', 'press censorship', 'to muzzle public opinion', 'inflation', 'class dictatorship', 'one party system', 'Li Hongzhi', 'Fa Lun Gong' etc[70].
Religion and ethnic minorities	'Islam', 'the riot in Tibet', etc.[71]
Dissidents and dissidents' opinion	'The Beijing University Triangle', 'the stainless steel mouse', etc[72].
Hyperlink	'img', 'http', and other html language.

Also worth noticing is the ever growing amount of censored words and the wide application of the word filtering system in Chinese cyberspace. The database of forbidden words keeps growing and getting updated. Meanwhile, not just QGLT and other bulletin boards in China, but also wireless and instant messenger services (including text messaging services) in China filter user communication through key word blocking systems. According to *China Digital Times.net*, among all the forbidden words, about 15% are sex-related; 20% are Fa Lun Gong related; 15% are names of officials and their relatives; 10% are words used in liberal political discourse such as 'democracy'; 5% are related to certain nationalistic issues; 15% are related to anti-corruption, and the rest of the censored words include names of dissidents writers

and intellectuals, and names of foreign publications (Xiao, Q. 30/08/2004).

QGLT words filtering system has been an open secret to its users and has triggered resistance from time to time. QGLT users have invented their own lexis for politically sensitive words, which is vague enough to pass through the words filtering system but clear enough to get the idea across to others. Using other Chinese characters of similar pronunciation is the most common practice. During the SARS crisis in 2003, when Atypical Pneumonia (非典 in Chinese, pronounced as *Feidian*), was blocked, users invented *Huidian* (灰颠, 灰电) to avoid censorship. Another strategy is to combine Chinese characters with numbers. Human Rights (人权 in Chinese), could be written as '人 22 权' or '人 1 权 1' so the postings would not be picked out by the system.

Some postings like the following example came out as a direct challenge to the online censorship:

> Human rights and democracy; democracy and human rights. Human rights and democracy; democracy and Human rights. Human rights and democracy, democracy and human rights. Human rights and democracy, democracy and human rights. (*Shibuguanji Gaogaoguaqi* 19/07/2004)

Another user posted this 'game invitation' in *Lianyi Huiguan* board on 19 July 2004: 'Let's play a great game: from now on, every posting must contain a word from the QGLT filtering system. I'll go first: the wind from the Yangzi River (Jiang 江) set my guest off his course...' (*Xueshan Xiongying*). This 'game' was received enthusiastically by other users and the *Lianyi Huiguan* webpage was bombarded with 'innocent' postings containing sensitive words. By ridiculing the censorship, QGLT users show their defiance towards the authority.

'Digital resistance' now attracts analysts' attention on the nature of online interaction and the relationship between online and offline political engagement. Digital resistance, according to Russell (2005), has come about through 'a combination of necessity and opportunity'. People who practice 'digital resistance' are usually those who 'have been denied access to information and media products and/or the power to convey and control their message' (Russell 2005: 514). In China's case, these 'digital

resistors' can be categorised as those holding politically marginalised voices. By commanding technological and cultural skills, digital resistors can get around the barriers to and filters of media, hack technological and legal restraints on information, so that they deliver alternative messages to other netizens (Russell 2005: 514).

4. Punishing the 'Offenders'

To prevent 'problematic' postings from appearing on QGLT and to punish those who post 'inappropriate' messages, moderators take four steps to punish the offenders: warning; blocking the penname temporarily; blocking the pennames permanently; and blocking out the Internet Protocol addresses permanently.

A warning is usually given to users who conduct 'minor misbehaviour'. Moderators usually send a message of warning to users through the QGLT internal messenger service. Or sometimes, a warning message will be posted within the QGLT community. As the following one found on 22 July 2004:

> Dear user *Wo Ai Ye Su*, thank you for your continuous support to QGLT. You are a veteran user within this community. So there is no need for me to repeat some regulations to you. Please help others by helping yourself when you post. Thank you. (Moderator Jon 22/07/2004)

This message did not give any reasons for warning *Wo Ai Ye Su*. So I asked moderator Jon and he gave the following reasons:

> *Wo Ai Ye Su* has been holding negative opinions against the previous Prime Minister Zhu Rongji. He has been particularly against one of Zhu's major policies of levying 20% tax on increased interest from banks. [...] Look at his postings, there's no content at all apart from "*Jiaxi jiaxi jiaxi jiaxi....*" ("increasing the interest" 20 times). [...] This user also uploads *Old Testimony* and *New Testimony* to QGLT from time to time. You know, it is illegal to preach religion in non-religious venues. Those postings are also inappropriate (field notes 22/07/2004).

I asked Jon whether the warning would prevent *Wo Ai Ye Su* from posting 'offensive' messages and if not, whether he would consider taking other measures such as blocking the penname to punish him? Jon said that a warning works for a short period of time, but he would rather not block *Wo Ai Ye Su*'s penname because he would

register another pseudonym (field notes 22/07/2004).

In general, users who ignore QGLT warnings will receive further punishment by having their pennames blocked temporarily or permanently so they cannot post on QGLT boards. This punishment message appears on the *Public Notice Board* (www.qglt.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=99). 168 records of blocked users' pennames were shown from 17 June to 18 August 2004. The following table is an example:

Table 5.5 A sample of QGLT users who had their pennames blocked temporarily or permanently (2004-08-18).

Penname	Time for blocking	Reason for being blocked
Hui Sikao de Luni (A Slave who can think)	7 days from 2004-08-15	Posting articles against QGLT regulation
Ji mo Kai Wu Zhu (Lonely in blossom)	7 days from 2004-06-22	Attacking Jiang Zemin and voicing grievance for Jiang, Yanyong[73]
Taiwan Lang (Taiwan Guy)	10 days from 2004-06-13	Disseminating the idea of Taiwan's independence
Sui Bian~~~! (Anyhow~~~!)	7 days from 2004-07-23	Posting obscene language
Fengfeng Diandian Sheng (A mad guy)	Permanent	Similar penname to Fengfeng Diandian Seng

Apart from the examples given above, other reasons that may lead to pennames being blocked include criticism of the Ministry of Propaganda, criticism of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, criticism of the nine members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau; postings mentioning the 1989 pro-Democracy Movement; personal attacks against the guest speakers and other users; extremist rhetoric about Japan (including both extreme admiration towards and extreme hatred towards Japan); discrimination against peasants or ethnic minorities, posting advertisements, etc.

Blocking users' IP is the most severe punishment and this is used most carefully by QGLT moderators. When a users' penname is blocked, s/he can still switch online identity and post again; but if a user's IP is blocked he cannot post on QGLT from that PC terminal. Five IP addresses were blocked by August 2004 for the following reasons: constantly posting ideas about Taiwan's independence, postings containing attacks on Jiang Zemin, and constantly posting advertisements.

The ultimate punishment for the Internet users is imprisonment. According to Reporters Without Borders (17/11/2005) 'China is the world's biggest prison for cyber-dissidents, with 62 in prison for what they posted online'. The political economy of the Internet suggests its development quickly directs the intensified commercialisation (Patekis 2000), and media conglomerates are usually eager to embrace authoritarian governments for an exchange of market profit. The Yahoo arm in Hong Kong passed on information from its discussion groups to the Chinese security ministry in 2005, which led to Chinese journalist Shi Tao's imprisonment in the name of 'leaking national security information to the foreign sources' (BBC news 07/09/2005)[74].

5. Hierarchy in Human Resources Management, Self-Censorship, and 'Big Brother Watches You'

Before the media reform in 1978, all Chinese media gave their journalists permanent employment. Accompanying the 'marketisation' of media, a proportion of fixed-term employment has been introduced into media human resources management. A 'caste' system has been gradually established, where all levels of leaders in media organisations hold permanent positions while staff are usually on fixed-term contracts.

In August 2004, QGLT has in total 16 staff: 1 Director, 1 Deputy Director, 3 Editors-in-chief, 9 editors, and 2 part-time editors. Like most official media in China, the Director of QGLT holds a permanent position, while the rest of the staff are on temporary contracts. The director, who was just designated from the leaders 'above', is supposed to supervise the 'gate-keeping' of her staff and take full responsibility for the 'security' of QGLT.

Most moderators on fixed-term contracts are university graduates in their 20s or early 30s. They have a comparatively low salary (RMB 2,500 - 3,000) and have no professional training in communication or journalism. Their major duty is to delete postings, which, as one moderator put it, 'could be done by any literate person'. QGLT is used as a stepping stone for young moderators to get a more profitable and more stable position in other media, which leads to a lack of enthusiasm towards work and great mobility in QGLT staff.

In his interview with Chinese journalists from 1998 to 2000, Hugo de Burgh (2003) found that most Chinese Journalists:

> live in the world as it is constructed for them by their political masters and probably jog along as best they can, accepting the perks of the job, fitting in with the spin doctors and propagandists, ducking the risky opportunities to anger the bosses but still imagining themselves belong to the congregation of the faithful (2003:96).

This conclusion also applies to the moderators working for the official Internet bulletin boards. During my association with the moderators, I found they possessed journalistic integrity, but in their day to day work their integrity disappeared. They joined the team and 'duck[ed] the risky opportunities to anger the bosses' by practicing self-censorship. Self-censorship practice in the newsroom works in a long, indirect, covert way, compared with the short-term, direct and overt censorship from the Communist Party. Self-censorship among QGLT moderators works more effectively in muzzling the courageous grassroots voice, and undermines online press freedom from its very base.

On 21 July 2004, a posting on *QGLT Current Affairs* revealed a scandal when the Chinese government suppressed independent voices in the press:

> Main Posting: Chen Guidi's *A Report on the Investigation into China's Countryside* has been censored and banned!
>
> Reply 1: The censorship is conducted through phone calls to the media. Censorship is a dagger kills without leaving traces of blood!
>
> Reply 2: Chen Guidi: *A Report on the Investigation into China's Countryside*. Here is the electronic version (Field note 21/07/2004)

Since the above three postings contained no forbidden words, they came through the filtering system and appeared on QGLT. But within minutes, these three postings disappeared. I asked moderator James why he deleted these postings. His answer surprised me and showed the day-to-day instructions from the Ministry of Propaganda have such a brainwashing effect on the moderators:

> Peasants' livelihood in the countryside varies greatly from East to West. This book [*A Report on the Investigation into China's Countryside*] is very biased in that it only displayed the negative side of the story. This book has stirred up the dissatisfactions among the public. The Ministry of Propaganda has notified media at all levels not to report the book or quote from this book since last year (Field note 21/07/2004).

Censorship within QGLT can also be detected from the manoeuvre of the so called 'live net-casting' *Panel Meeting with Guest Speakers*. The panel meeting is designed to be an exchange of opinion between the policy makers and the public through their interaction online. Guest speakers (mainly government officials and scholars) are supposed to be challenged by questions from users. However, to guarantee their guest speakers do not encounter 'hostile' questions, QGLT staff prepare 10-15 'harmless' questions for each panel meeting and post under different pseudo-pennames so that the questions look like they are coming from ordinary users. This self-censorship practice creates an illusion of 'open and transparent' political dialogue between the authority and the grassroots, while in reality erodes the basic professional ethics of integrity.

In August 2004, an anonymous official from the State Council Information Office told me that agents from the Public Security Ministry worked in almost every official Internet media. To further control online public opinion, a notorious plan called the 'one-thousand-people writing army' was fermented. This conspiratorial campaign from the Communist Party aimed to recruit at least one thousand people nationwide who were 'politically reliable' to guide discussion on public bulletin boards away from politically sensitive issues. By receiving subsidies from the government as part-time 'online commentators', these officially patronised individuals would contribute 'public opinion' regularly to major bulletin boards anonymously as ordinary users. This information was confirmed in 2005 when the *Southern Weekend* revealed that 'a

team of about 20 commentators has been operating in the city of Suqian, in Jiangsu province' since April 2005 (Watts 14/06/2005).

The squad of government-subsidised online agents has been expanding. Since early 2006, 'web superintendents' have been openly recruited in major cities in China[75] to moderate both commercial web forums and campus-based bulletin boards. 'Web superintendents' are ordinary users recruited by the Chinese government. They play a role as 'part traffic cop, part informer, part discussion moderator' (French 09/05/2006) online without the knowledge of their peers. They introduce 'politically correct or innocuous themes for discussion', 'steer what they consider negative conversations in a positive direction', and report 'anything they deem offensive' to Web masters for deletion (French 09/05/2006). They are also responsible for reporting any 'offences' to the governmental organisation through emails, phone calls and irregular meetings[76].

6. Volunteer Systems and the Decline of *Ce Lun Qu*

It is inevitable for the moderators to recruit volunteers from the most active members to help on Internet bulletin boards where thousands of messages are posted every day. QGLT started recruiting volunteers in 2000 and the volunteers have now become part of its culture. Responsibilities associated with QGLT volunteers include raising discussion topics, giving induction to new users, maintaining the rational discussion (including breaking up fights sometimes), and deleting postings containing obscenity, flaming or politically inappropriate content. To a large extent, the role of volunteers lies between that of the moderators and users. Though volunteers contribute greatly to the autonomous online political discussion within QGLT, they also inevitably become a part of the online surveillance.

Sociologist *Hairui Liangqian* and lawyer *Laoxin* are two of the earliest volunteers invited to join the QGLT moderating team in May 2000. According to *Huirui Liangqian*, a researcher specialising in Employment and Labour Studies, he was chosen to be a volunteer for the following reasons:

> One reason is the lack of hands within QGLT. Another reason is that moderators found it difficult to cope with topical discussions covering all aspect of social life, and they need

professional people for consultancy. *Laoxin* and I started by designing discussion topics based on our professional knowledge. We even set up a virtual courtroom '*Lianyi Courtroom*' where users could ask questions concerning legal issues. We were also granted the right to delete postings on *Lianyi Huiguan* board (interview 26/08/2004).

Volunteers' most successful experience was the launch of *Ce Lun Qu* (CLQ) which literally means 'Policies Debating Area'. Released as an experimental form from 2000 to 2001, CLQ consolidated its nature as a board devoted to autonomous debates over policies. As one volunteer recalled, the discussion 'captured the focus in social thought and took a leading role in controversial debates' (*Chenmozhi* 12/04/2004)[77]. CLQ changed its name to the *Special Discussion Channel on Strategic Development* in 2001. In early 2003, with most key volunteers withdrawing, CLQ was taken back by QGLT.

CLQ successfully targeted detailed problems in China's development and raised them for public scrutiny. 12 volunteers, *Hairui Liangqian, Huangyan, Dahe Xiqu, Chenmozhi* and others, were actively involved in the daily management of the board by designing topics, organising discussion, and moderating online debate. This practice was warmly received by other QGLT users. After one year's discussion on strategic development (2001-2002), 69 users actively participated and 134 articles of original writing about development problems in China were posted. Up to April 2002, 25 topical discussions were put on the agenda, ranging from domestic issues like 'Education and Social Welfare', 'Reform on Governmental Administrative System', 'Anti-corruption and Balance of Power', 'Reform of State-owned Enterprises', to the Taiwan issue and international relations.

Dryzek believes that 'discursive democracy should be pluralistic in embracing the necessity to communicate across difference without erasing difference' (2000:3). However, QGLT is not always tolerant towards difference through discursive interaction. QGLT users have not yet acknowledged that the difference among their awareness of civil communication and class interests should not necessarily be erased through online discussion. When their efforts towards reaching a bargained consensus fail, users holding difference viewpoints resort to flaming. Flaming as Littman (1995) says, is 'a dangerous invitation to digital vigilantism and promiscuous computer violence' (cited in Whine, M. 1997: 224). As one previous volunteer recalled, when

discussion on the strategic development of the country turned into 'dispute engendered by personal feelings and preferences',[78] he felt disheartened and decided to drop the volunteer team (*Chenmozhi* 12/04/2004).

When reflecting on reasons contributing to the failure of CLQ, *Hairui Liangqian* first blamed the fluidity of online identity, and mobility in online communication. These two factors made it difficult to engage a stable group of conversational members who are able to carry on a topical discussion for a long span of time. Also he said 'some users lack the capacity of conducting civil debate' in that they could not 'carry the topics towards a rationally constructive conclusion' (Interview 26/08/2004).

The decline of CLQ revealed some vital weakness in the online grassroots deliberation in China. According to Coleman and Gøtze, public deliberation at its best should include the following elements:

- access to balanced information;
- an open agenda;
- time to consider issues expansively;
- freedom from manipulation or coercion;
- a rule-based framework for discussion;
- participation by an inclusive sample of citizens;
- scope for free interaction between participants;
- recognition of differences between participants, but rejection of status-based prejudice; (2001:6-7).

However, there are a few elements of an ideal deliberation missing in CLQ political discussion in China. As Rawls (1993), Cohen (1996), and Dryzek (2000) all argue, 'reasonable pluralism' which implies of 'public reasoning so conceived begin with freedom of expression' is the foundation for deliberation:

> Arguments that persuade like-minded individuals...will not be persuasive to all members of society, which gives force to the need to couch arguments in terms differently-minded individuals...can accept (Dryzek 2000:11).

What should be blamed for the decline of CLQ is the lack of a social mechanism for

negotiating compromise and the lack of some kind of institution framework to guarantee public reasoning. Under a 'free public reasoning among equals' (Cohen 1996:99), 'participants regard one another as equals; they aim to defend and criticize institutions and programmes in terms of considerations that others have reason to accept' (Cohen 1996:100). However, the Internet public sphere 'faces a severe "economy of attention" – the economy of competing draws on the attention resources of individuals' (Muhlberger 2005). For this reason, the degree of interactivity for debate among users is often rather weak (Cammaerts and van Audenhove 2005). In addition, due to the lack of an offline democratic framework in which the Internet culture is embedded, the loose organisation of online communities would be easily subject to political pressure.

According to *Hairui Liangqian*, CLQ gradually became quiet after April 2002. When it came to the following March, propagating the National People's Congress (NPC) Assembly and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) became a political obligation for www.people.com.cn. CLQ was then turned into an officially accredited *Special Area for Policies Debating for* the *NPC and CPPCC*. This was perceived as a bridge between citizens and government via digital networking.

With the growth and expansion of QGLT, more volunteers were involved and the managing of volunteers became more systematic. Volunteers are no longer expected to chair online debates but are expected to initiate non-political topics, keep the intensity of interest high, and most important of all, help moderators to keep QGLT free from 'inappropriate postings'. More and more frequently, voices from users ask for the abolition of the volunteers system. I asked former QGLT director Shan why Lou was kept as a volunteer while there was a lot of criticism of him from other users. The answer was: 'Lou is diligent in writing and he's *politically reliable*!' If a volunteer who has the right to delete other users' postings is politically reliable to the authority it is hard to imagine that any critical, not to mention dissident, voices can come through this self-imposed surveillance.

7. Summary

Being part of the official media *People's Daily* (especially the Party's organ) is both an advantage and disadvantage for QGLT. Emerging from the ashes of a political incident, QGLT was immediately injected with public enthusiasm and became the most credible brand name of the *People's Daily* Group. On the other hand, QGLT has been a troublesome 'child' for its mother company in that liberal ideas from this online community could offend the conservative Maoists in power. Because of its sensitivity as a political public forum affiliated to the Party's organ, QGLT has been under the direct surveillance of the government organisations. 'Big brother' is always watching QGLT and he tightens his grip from time to time.

This official nature enabled QGLT to attract a group of quality users until 2002 under rather relaxed surveillance. Jiang Yaping, the founder of QGLT and a veteran journalist, used to instruct his staff in 1999 that 'if you have hesitation in deleting a post, then don't delete it'. However now Jiang is only one of the vice-Presidents of people.com.cn and his responsibility is to 'make money' rather than manage content online. Most QGLT moderators I interviewed admitted that tolerance towards critical political debate in QGLT is shrinking. As moderator Cindy said:

> The Internet bulletin boards are the newest media form, thus they should be more daring in touching sensitive social political issues and help both government and people become familiar with critical voices. If we carry on expanding their political tolerance, they [the Party and the government] will gradually adapt to this new media culture. However, QGLT is binding its own feet now and hesitating to move forward (Interview 31/08/2004).

Editorials from *People's Daily* have long been regarded as a window to detect political changes in China. Now QGLT plays the same, if not a more, important role, which attracts both contributors and viewers. However as moderator Hank said, bearing in mind the fear that QGLT postings might be interpreted as tips for policy changes from the top, the Party's propaganda institutions choose to squash lively online debates rather than encourage them.

During my ethnographic studies with QGLT, a lot of users and moderators were

worried over the future of QGLT. There are a few problems worth consideration within QGLT. The pre-arranged questions for a 'live' net-cast of online panel meeting with guest speakers produce 'faked online interaction'; technical problems such as users being unable to get access to QGLT from time to time have existed for five years without any proper solution; the search engine with QGLT can only help users track down articles posted during the past month; the volunteer system caused more conflicts than it intended to solve; online secret agents pinned down dissident voices and encouraged eulogies for the dominant political authorities; critical rational voices were censored, punished and exiled.

Technologically, bulletin boards and other interactive Internet facilities are harder for authorities to control. Brants *et al* point out: 'network technology has the potential to create a new public sphere which fits the social structure better [...] However, politics does not yet fit the new technology. Politicians feel uncomfortable with the different role they play in such a challenging direct democracy' (1996: 246).

Some scholars predicted that the policies on online speech freedom would loosen slowly step by step in Mainland China, though the process might have 'pauses and even reversals in special times' (Tao 2001). However, taking into account that 50 cyber-dissidents are currently imprisoned in China (Reporter Without Borders 20/01/2006), and that Chinese people have been detained for online political activities such as browsing overseas-based 'reactionary web sites', downloading 'reactionary' articles or publishing 'subversive articles' on overseas bulletin boards, the relaxing of online surveillance seems anything but immediate.

Chapter 6

The 'Net-beings': QGLT Users study

Online communities are 'social aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships' (Rheingold 1993:5). The QGLT community provides Chinese users with a virtual civil space for identity construction and network building. Internet bulletin board users integrate the role of information producer and receiver in an (almost instant in some cases) interactive environment. Bulletin boards open a new arena for users to act out roles as journalists, news analysts, current affair commentators, scholars and social activists. At the same time, interpersonal relationships are also established within this community and can extend into offline experience.

This chapter depicts the emerging Chinese 'public' as represented on QGLT bulletin boards. Users' pennames, signature files, political clusters formed within the community, and how gendered-social structure affects women users will be examined respectively. By exploring the community nature of QGLT, this chapter aims to investigate the potential of CMC in uniting users into a critical public through opinion expression over current issues. The chapter concludes that enthusiasm in constructing political identities as active citizens within QGLT helps to bring about a mediated public sphere online. Nevertheless, online identity construction will not necessarily give the public the knowledge and wisdom needed for deliberation.

The QGLT community provides an example of how 'task-focused' and 'relationship-based' online group performance can co-exist simultaneously. Jan Walls attributes to the role of CMC within online groups 'either as a means to achieve firm goals through flexible social relationships or as a means to maintain firm relationships by achieving flexible goals' (Walls 1993: 157). A strong sense of political participation, which is suppressed in offline life in China, welds different opinionated individuals together in the QGLT community. In this sense the nature of QGLT is 'task-focused', while at the same time, the interaction among QGLT users also suggests social relationships

rooted in 'offline symbolic and economic contexts' (Hills 1999:258) have been developed within this online community. The study of QGLT political clusters verifies Bart Cammaerts and Leo van Audenhove's (2005) argument that online debate between ideologically different participants represents political conflicts in the offline world. To a certain extent, online behaviours such as lurking, posting, flaming, and gendered-structure of Internet use within QGLT is not only a reflection, but also a confirmation, of offline social political relationships.

1. Construction of Online-Personalities within QGLT

Within online communities, the 'public' has largely been a blurred picture of anonymous individuals as the Internet 'make[s] possible the creation of an identity so fluid and multiple' (Turkle 1995: 12). Scholars believe the anonymous online environment and fluid online identity can disguise CMC users' true public selves. Anonymity enables CMC users to switch their genders, ages, sexual orientation, and other aspects of their public self or to take on multiple identities (McRae 1997; Myers 1987; Stone 1995; Turkle 1995). However, studies on online communities also prove the consistency of online and offline selves among the majority of users (Baym 1998; 2000). The *Self* is 'a reflexive project' through which the individual constructs 'with the symbolic and material resources at their disposal, a coherent life-project' (Thompson 1995: 215). Thompson also points out that individuals increasingly depend on a range of social institutions and systems for both the material and symbolic means in constructing a narration of self identity (1995:215).

By observing QGLT users' pennames and signature files, one can spot from the construction of their online identities an aspiration for political participation. When this aspiration has not been fully implemented in offline experience in contemporary China, users turn to bulletin boards to have their voice heard in cyberspace. This strong sense of civil participation connects people together for a virtual public debate about issues of public interest, which forms a collective identity of the online group. A consistency of online and offline selves can also been found among QGLT users and the invention of online identities is situated closely in offline social context.

QGLT has an asynchronous temporal structure – that is, the responses among users do

not occur at the same time[79], so that interpersonal communication within the community is mediated by a time difference. The asynchronous temporal structure enables participants in computer-mediated communication to have time to think about what to write before posting, thus enhancing their ability to strategically manage the impressions they create (Walter 1996). Within QGLT, users have control of their online personalities by naming and grouping themselves in an anonymous environment. The hierarchy among QGLT users is largely decided by their seniority with the community, frequency of posting, the click rate of their articles, the number of replies to their articles, and the frequency of their articles recommended by the moderators on the front page of www.people.com.cn. Expressional icons are not provided within QGLT and users rely on words, signs[80], repetition, HTML language, or set the words in larger font or in colour for emphasis or expression of emotion.

This online image management is particularly relevant in political bulletin boards such as QGLT where political inclination largely decides online relationship among users. Most users flag up their political preference when they first unlurk, i.e. they usually associate themselves with certain political belief or ideological preference when they first start posting or introduce themselves to others. Through this practice, 'friends' or 'enemies' are demarcated during online debate and affect other online behaviour such as lurking (keeping silent) and flaming (having verbal conflicts with others). Political clusters formed within QGLT reflect a variety of ideological inclinations in contemporary China.

Information communication technologies offer women, as a 'traditionally subordinated group', a new means for their struggle for equality (Pattanaik 1999), and to subvert masculine dominated culture (Plant 1995, 1997). Women users' participation in the online political discussion within QGLT shows that Chinese women users are as capable as their male peers of addressing the important issues in the public sphere. However, women's use of the Internet is hindered by a gendered social and cultural structure. Without the change in the basic structure in the society, new media and technologies alone would not be able to help women change the rules of the game in the communication process.

1.1 Pennames

The asynchronous temporal structure within QGLT gives users great control over their cyber-image by naming themselves in an anonymous environment. Names are 'transformed into trademarks, distinctive individual smells by which their users are recognized as either friends or enemies within an otherwise vague and anonymous BBS communication environment' (Myers 1987: 240). The majority of QGLT users' pennames contain a political theme of 'strengthening the country' which is demonstrated in pennames advocating patriotism; nationalism; democracy; humanism and humanity; and social justice.

A theme of patriotism runs through most QGLT users' pennames such as *LovelyChina* and *Zhonghua shi wo qin'ai de jia* (China is my beloved motherland). Patriotism in China is usually associated with nationalism, which exhibits a certain degree of state insecurity from a more than one hundred year history of being invaded and colonized. One example is the penname *Renzhong Daoyuan Baowei Zuguo* which literally means 'when it comes to safeguarding my motherland, the task is solemn and the road is long'. *Zhongguo de Nuhou* (Angry roaring from China) from Taiwan registered this penname with QGLT in April 2001 to show the user's indignation towards the USA's military dominance in an incident involving the collision of Chinese and US military planes[81]. A similar example can also be found in *Rihuo sheng rihuo, guohuo zhu guohuo* (the Japan-made commodities bring calamity; the China-made commodities benefit our country) which extends the patriotism into the economic realm.

Public resentment towards corruption, injustice and inequality, the widening gap between rich and poor, and other social problems in contemporary China can also be detected from QGLT pennames. *Zuigaofayuan dafaguan xuancheng de sifa gongzheng zai na'r??* (where is the legislative justice claimed by the Supreme Court Judge??) questions the operation of the Chinese legal system. The penname *Teda Tanguan*, which means 'a super corrupt officer' in English, is chosen to express the user's 'hatred towards official corruption' and his 'sarcasm and derision' (20/04/2004). A celebration of working class pride and a sympathy with proletarian livelihood can be detected in QGTL from pennames like *Shanyecunfu* (a peasant from the wild countryside) or *Banyun Gongren* (a porter). Pennames are also used to reflect the

149

miserable life of the lower social stratum such as *Ti xiagang shiye zhigong shuoju gongdaohua* (speaking out for the unemployed workers) and *Woshi nongmin, nongmin ming zhenku* (I'm a peasant; our peasants have a doomed destiny).

Ideological advocacy and political viewpoints are also embedded in QGLT pennames. *Minzhu qingchu fubai* (democracy eradicates corruption) and *Jianjue hanwei gongmin jiben quanli* (firmly safeguarding citizens' basic rights) exhibits users' political objectives. Behind the penname *ЯКоb* in Russian is the user's 'democratic Socialism' ideal (Interview 31/08/2004). Movement towards a market economy has brought about privatisation in China since 1992, and has triggered public debate and nostalgia towards an idyllic equality during the Socialist era within QGLT. The penname *Shichang neng jiejue wenti ma* (can the market solve all the problems) is one example.

A survey conducted by QGLT in 2004[82] (see Table 6.1) reveals that among the 1635 QGLT respondents who have pennames, around 17.8% (291 people) have more than one penname. One QGLT user I interviewed claimed he has more than 500 pennames from the end of 2000 to April 2005. Pennames attributed to him are created to show his attitude in topical discussions. For example, he used *Lixing Kangri* (Resisting Japan rationally) in the March 2005 nationwide online protest against Japan's whitewashing of wartime events in their history textbooks; and *Huanying Lian Zhan Laifang* (Welcome Lian Zhan to the Mainland) before Taiwanese Kuomintang Party top official Lian Zhan's visit to Beijing in April 2005. Multiple-identity, according to a user who registered more than twenty pennames up to 2004, is also a way to avoid flaming when disagreement in political debates leads to personal attacks (*Songyang* 19/04/2004).

Flaming, defined by Gattiker, is 'a virulent and often largely personal attack against the author of a posting on the Internet' (2001:195). My participant observation revealed that QGLT users tend to flame when disagreement in subjective discussion cannot reach a compromise and the rational debate is carried away by personal feelings. For example, during the 2003 war in Iraq, some anti-war users labelled those who supported the USA's military action as the USA 'running dog' and called them to 'go and fetch a left bone from your master' or 'go and lick up your master's boots'. For those users who do not want to confront such flaming postings, they can pretend

to go offline by switching identities.

Table 6.1 Survey on QGLT users' pennames (2004)

Number of pennames used per person in QGLT	1	2-5	6-9	10-15	16
Number of respondents	1344	227	15	31	18
Percentage	82.20%	13.88%	0.92%	1.90%	1.10%
Total respondents:	1635				

Use of multiple identities has been a feature for almost all online communities. However, the majority of users stick to one identity. My in-depth interviews found veteran QGLT users who have built up credibility within this online community especially prefer to stick to their main penname. *Laobenniu* (the old dull bull) is a Chinese living in the USA who has registered this penname since 2000. He uses *Laobenniu* to post and this name has been well known among other users. Two other pennames *Xin laobenniu* (the new old dull bull) and *Aidang Aiguo Airenmin* (Love the Party, love the country, and love the people) are only used when *Laobenniu* is blocked temporarily (usually up to seven days) for his occasional dissident opinions such as advocating the 1989 pro-democracy movement[83]. Though QGLT moderators know well these three different pennames come from the same IP, they would rather not lose this loyal community member, as long as he does not become too radical in his political opinion.

1.2 Signature Files

Signature files can be a name; an e-mail address; a line of quotations; a statement; a poem; photos; illustrations; or even ASCII illustration (built out of punctuation marks and letters) that are attached to the bottom of each posting. A signature file usually shows the user's hobbies; political preference; humour; or friendliness. Because they appear on every posting from the senders, they become 'one of the most immediate and visually forceful cues to identity' (Baym 1998:56). Embodied in QGLT users' signature files, the expression of their political preference constitutes an indispensable

151

part of the online selves and a reflection of the community identity.

Appearing most often in QGLT users' signature files are URLs of their personal web pages; blogs; or contact details like email addresses or even telephone numbers, which resemble the exchanging of business cards in offline society. Apart from Email addresses and personal websites, some users also make a small statement in their signature file to further disclose their personality. As *Ji'an*'s signature file says, to him, Internet bulletin boards are his farmland on which he works for the benefit of the 1.3 billion Chinese people. He also invites other users to publish, copy, or crosspost his articles or translate his articles into other languages and communicate the idea to the world.

Political enthusiasm constitutes an indispensable part of QGLT users' signature files and reflects a collective identity. Patriotism, nationalism, longing for democracy and resentment towards social injustice remain key themes. *Qiangtan Kanke* quotes a line from the former national leader Deng Xiaoping in his signature file: 'I'm a son of Chinese people, I devote my deepest compassion to my motherland and people'. *LovelyChina* states his wish for Chinese unification along the Taiwan Strait and declares himself as 'an absolute Chinese nationalist!' *Renwoying* expresses his yearning for democracy: 'Democracy is the only road leading to a strong nation for China!' 'Only democracy can save China! Only democracy can save China! Only democracy can save China!...'[84] *Laobenniu*, who has been living in North America for 16 years, still has concerns over corruption in the Mainland, and expresses this concern in his signature files:

> The old dull bull,
> Hates the corrupt officials;
> He's digging graves for them;
> He's working for the elimination of corruption...
> (http://www.qglt.com/bbs/GetGuestInfo?GuestID=66069 accessed 16/04/2004)

During my interview with *Laobenniu,* he said that *Laobenniu* is a 'netbeing' possessing its own character and credibility. This signature file of resenting corruption

contributes to the overall 'personality' of this netbeing.

1.3 Clusters Formed From Different Political Views

Political discussion over current affairs brings about the categorization of the 'Left' and the 'Right' among QGLT users. Some users even flag up their political preference through self-explaining pennames such as *Zuo Ye* (a leftist), *Youce tongxing* (passing through on the right side) or *Gongchan zhuyizhe Jia* (Communist A).

In their study of QGLT postings regarding the 2001 US-China planes collision incident, Tang and Shi (2001) concluded that QGLT users formed three political clusters online—the Left, the Right, and the Middle-of-the-road. Members of the same political cluster appeared online at the same time and showed group characteristics. Key members of each cluster (usually 3 to 5) actively posted and led the on-line debate. According to Tang and Shi, the Left viewed the incident as a provocation from 'American imperialists' and urged the Chinese government to take a hard-line on foreign policy. The Right urged the Chinese government to return the American planes and the crew for a peaceful solution to the crisis; while the Middle-of-the-road put this single incident in the context of international relations and international laws and started re-thinking China's role in a changed international security environment.

The left-right demarcation in QGLT is characterised by contrasting ideological preferences adopted by different clusters. However, the boundaries among the political clusters are never stable, and users can easily move into overlapping subgroups holding pro, anti, and mixed attitudes towards any current issue. Tang and Shi's categorisation simplified the complicated political outlooks presented within this community. Meanwhile, though 'Left' and 'Right' have been used as political terms in China since 1920s, the demarcation between left-right is very different to that in Western nations. In general, the Left in China refers to those who advocate the Communist Party's governance, while the Right refers to those who long for democracy. These dual standards in categorizing political preference can sometimes

create confusion within QGLT. For example, *Akob* claimed to be Centre-Left advocating Democratic Socialism, but other QGLT members on the 'Left' have labelled him as 'Right'.

Based on my participant observation and textual analysis of QGLT users' postings, I attempt to provide a basic description of the prevalent political beliefs within the QGLT community in the following Table 6.2 *'An Analysis of QGLT clusters'*.

Worth noting is also the trend that more and more QGLT users believe they cannot be simply labelled as Left or Right. The users who advocated the USA's military invasion of Iraq in 2003 (usually the 'Right' in QGLT) could be the same group of users arguing for the public ownership of educational institutions (usually the 'Left'). Hence, a growing number of QGLT users choose to strike a balance between the 'Left' and the 'Right' outlook and tend to describe themselves as: 'a moderate leftist', 'a so-called rightist', 'a slight leftist', and so on.

The categorisation of political 'Left' or 'Right' triggers debates and even flaming within the QGLT community. But most users believe the categorisation of political clusters is necessary for debating ideas (*Yundan shuinuan* 06/01/2004). Some even believe the magnetism of QGLT lies largely in its debates among different political clusters, from which 'dialogue between different political camps are held' (Interview with *Dahongyan* 18/04/2005).

Table 6.2 An analysis of QGLT political clusters

QGLT Category	Description	Economic advocacy	Totalitarianism/ democracy	Equality and social justice	International Issues	Transformation of society
Far Left	Maoists	Planned Economy; Organised social production, State ownership	People's democratic dictatorship (totalitarianism)	Anti-humanism	Aggressive Nationalism	Radical
Neo-Left	Neo-Leftism in China	Accept market economy, but advocate a mixed economy with a significant public sector; Advocate state intervention in the economy	Agree with freedom and democracy, but believe the social conditions in China are not ready for democracy	Concerns for public interest; against the widening gap between the rich and the poor	Range from Aggressive Nationalism to Nationalism	Range from radical to reformist view
Right	Liberalism and centre-left	Accept market economy, but advocate a mixed economy with both public sector and private sector; Limited state intervention in the economy	Advocate for democracy and social liberty	Concerns over the wellbeing of common people	Rational Nationalism	Sympathize with or advocate democratic movements
Far Right	Extreme Liberalism	*Laissez faire* capitalism ; Privatization of industries; Economic liberty	Longing for western (especially American) democracy	The state should prioritize economic liberty to social equality	Internationalism pro-Americanism	Mixed to radical
Centralism	A mixture of *via media* and no-attitude	Developing economy and strengthening the nation is the first priority for China	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Against radical social changes

155

1.4 Lurkers

Lurkers, those users who choose to rarely or never contribute to the online discussion, account for a significant majority within QGLT. As Nancy Baym argues 'one cannot create a recognisable identity in any [online] group without posting' (Baym 2000:144), and lurkers remain anonymous and invisible in general. Nevertheless, the boundary between lurkers and posters are not as stable as that between audience and media producers in traditional media. A lurker can suddenly unlurk by posting messages; while an active poster can stop posting and go lurking for various reasons. In this sense, lurkers are participants rather than 'audiences' in cyberspace.

A QGLT survey in 2004 shows that around 48% (1481 out of 3116) of respondents have never registered pennames. Since only registered users can post in this community, almost half of QGLT users choose not to talk about politics in public. My participant observation found an even higher percentage of users lurking within QGLT. Take for example, a typical 'rush hour' for QGLT from 1 to 2 pm GMT (9-10 pm Beijing Time) on an ordinary weekday on 5 January, 2005. The total number of registered users reached 348,160 on that day from QGLT's inception. Of the 38,570 visitors online at 13:52 GMT, only 168 users posted. The rough figure is that 4 out of 1000 users post on average. The majority of the posters gathered in the *QGLT Current Affairs* board (105 out of 168), another 38 users posted in *QGLT In-Depth*, and there were still dozens of users in another two discussion boards. Therefore, a large number of QGLT users, 38,420 in my observation, were interested in the current issues being discussed but remained as a silent anonymous collective.

Hannah, an unregistered user in QGLT, is a 33-year-old female university administrator. When talking about her lurking, she gave the following reasons:

> I don't think I'm cherishing an enthusiasm for politics or holding an *extreme* political

attitude which presses me to speak out in public in this online community... But I do like reading other users' posting every day during the lunch break... I also visit other universities' bulletin boards like *Yita Hutu* based in Beijing University. To me, the online discussion and debates remind me of the other part of my personality, that of an active citizen apart from being a good employee, a wife and a mother (Interview 05/08/2004).

Unregistered lurkers like Hannah are extremely difficult to trace. Their status will only be registered as a number of 'visitors online'. The existence of lurkers, as some scholars argue, can be viewed as the 'passive' audience in the mass communication process. David Marshall believes that the lurkers indicate the 'past relationships to media can be channelled through new media' (2004: 26). However, Marshall is wrong in believing that 'the lurker watches and listens much as the viewer/audience subjectivity is produced by television or radio' (2004: 26). What lurkers gain from the Internet bulletin boards is a more individualised experience than viewers get from traditional mass media. Meanwhile, the status of lurkers can be also fluid, and flexible in that lurkers and posters change their roles from time to time.

Quite a few of the QGLT heavy posters started as lurkers when they first joined this online community. *Wanyusu* had been lurking for a few months before posting. He had been 'listening too much and thinking too much,' and found words failing him at the beginning (28/05/2004). *Chenmozhi* had been a heavy poster in QGLT from 2001 to 2004, but chose to lurk in 2004 because 'the more I know about this society, the less I can write about. The more I understand, the more willingly I choose to keep silent' (12/04/2004). *Sanyeqing* started by posting short comments on *QGLT Current Affairs* and soon felt himself rather 'shallow' compared to others. Then he opted to be a lurker and had been lurking for 3 years before unlurking again as a frequent poster (30/05/2004). Thus, there is a fluid identity exchange between lurkers (especially the registered users) and posters, and reasons for this identity exchange vary greatly among individuals.

2. Talking Politics: a Gendered Issue?

Information and communication technologies offer women, as a 'traditionally subordinated group', a new means in their struggle for equality (Pattanaik 1999) and in subverting the masculine dominated culture (Plant 1995, 1997). Women users' participation in the online political discussion within QGLT shows that Chinese female users are as capable as their male peers of addressing the important issues in the public sphere. Internet bulletin boards help women, to a certain degree, to 'reverse traditional power games in the communication process' (Castells 1996:391). Nonetheless, women's use of the Internet is hindered by a gendered social perception.

The gender ratio within QGLT is extremely unbalanced (especially on the *Current Affairs* and *In-Depth* boards), with almost nine out of ten users being male in 2001[85]. But, compared with most ICPs who address their female users with gendered topical discussion on child care, cooking, fashion, and relationships, QGLT provides female users (though in a small group) with an equal chance to take part in political discussion. Female users have developed their speciality in talking about politics— *Jieyu* on agriculture and migrant peasant workers issues, *Xiaowan* on Chinese unification along the Taiwan Strait, *Aierbushang* on the historic account of state-owned enterprises. Postings from QGLT female users show that women are more than capable of giving their opinions on important political issues in the public sphere.

Jieyu, a university teacher, revealed in her postings that she was brought up in a lower-status peasant family. This connection to the rural area means she is still concerned with agricultural policies, village development, and the miserable lives of migrant peasant workers. In her postings, *Jieyu* argues for equal rights for the migrant peasant workers in the city (15/05/2002) and discusses measures to protect their rights (16/05/2002). Along with some other users, she suggested setting up a special discussion board on agriculture policies, peasants, and peasant migrant workers within

QGLT in 2002, which later became a platform for discussion on issues concerning agriculture, rural development, grassroots democracy, and migrant peasant workers[86].

As an online current affairs discussion community, QGLT is comparatively friendly to female users. When asked whether she observed discrimination against women in a male-dominated QGLT, *Jieyu* said:

> In some commercial web forums or bulletin boards like *Xilu* and *Tianya,* the colour of ID is differentiated according to gender status. But gender status is not displayed in QGLT. I really appreciate this☺ I have never felt discrimination against women in discussion myself in QGLT (Interview 24/08/2004).

This friendly atmosphere encourages female users to take a clear political stand in online debate. Compared to male users, female users are less likely to join abstract theoretical debates, but more likely to participate in the discussion over specific issues. Meanwhile, most female users showed little interest in categorising themselves and others into political clusters, nor were they inclined to flame over oppositional opinions. Describing herself as 'slightly Left', *Aierbushang* said she shows respect towards her 'opponents' within QGLT:

> I respect the QGLT Right like *Meiyuan* and *Xueqinren.* They are loyal to their own political belief and adhere to it. They show civilized and serious attitude in discussion. I can detect the philosophical thoughts and a sense of justice in their arguments. I also respect the centrists like *Qingwuyudanghe, Yangzijian,* and *Caoqiaoguanmin,* they are more cool-headed and rational. I learn more about a true China through online political discussion (Interview 28/07/2004).

To encourage more female users to participate in online discussion, QGLT launched *Nüxing Luntan* (Female Forum) in March 2003 'to increase the inclusiveness and openness of the QGLT community' (Interview with *Nüxing Luntan* moderator 31/08/2004). *Nüxing Luntan* attracted 300 main postings daily on average from a group of gender-balanced users. The backbone of this forum is the online panel meeting with female professional guests. These guests are usually government officials, scholars, news figures, and professionals like artists, Olympic champions,

entreprenuers, journalists, and so on. The panel meeting is intended to provide female users a space for serious, in-depth discussion concerning issues of 'female interests' such as:

> Money management at home and in the company (10/04/2003)
> Women and the Internet (14/03/2003)
> What does the family mean to the modern women (08/08/2003)
> Series: Eradicating domestic violence against women (Nov. 2003)
> Female thoughts and its influence on social development (09/01/2004)
> Female and youth education (09/032004)
> Equal rights and female labour protection: legislation and development (22/052004)
> How can we be good parents (23/07/2004)

The above topical discussions in *Nüxing Luntan* prove Mary Ryan's argument that access to the public sphere holds many promises for women (Ryan 1992: 260). For most Chinese women today, family loyalties still play a significant role in their identity construction. The awareness of their social roles is mediated between the consciousness of independence in public (the capacity to earn a salary and support their families) and womanliness in private (fidelity to their parents, husbands and motherliness to their children). When 'going public', Leonore Davidoff believes most women do so in order 'to protect and further their position within the bounds of the category "women" as it has been constructed within the home and family', and tend to campaign 'around issues generally designated as domestic and private' (Davidoff 1998: 183). This character of women's public commitment is shown on *Nüxing Luntan* within QGLT as well. It seems that most Chinese women users feel more comfortable accessing the public sphere by talking about issues of 'domesticity' as the first step. As Mary Ryan says, by bringing issues of domesticity to public attention, women 'place [...] a multitude of specific issues, often draw [...] from their "private" experience, on the public agenda' (Ryan 1992:260). Such topical discussion shows the permeable boundary between public affairs and private issues. Fraser believes 'the 'private' idioms of domesticity and motherhood' can be served as 'springboards for public activity' (1992: 115). The feminist perspective constitutes a vital part of the public sphere and adds new content to the discussion and debate in public. However,

according to the *Nüxing Luntan* moderator, female users are usually passive in volunteering opinions in public, which makes it difficult to mobilise their active involvement. Meanwhile many QGLT males think the 'female topics' are not of interest in 'strengthening the country', and feel embarrassed to participate in 'women's talk'.

The demarcation between 'female' topics and 'male' topics also affects the perception of female presence in 'male' topical discussion. As one user says:

> On the day when the military planes collision incident happened, most of the users were cursing George W. Bush. I still remember the moderator was *Gangtie*. We were very happy because he's a guy. So we wouldn't worry about the inconvenience of the presence of ladies and could curse and swear as we like (*Songyang* 19/04/2004).

QGLT females are usually talked about by male users based on perceived traits of femininity such as 'naivety and elegance' rather than rationality or eloquence in their writing. Though *Aierbushang* has posted many serious articles about state-owned enterprises, she was remembered by male user *Laokexinlai* as 'a very interesting little girl' who has a 'genuine Beijing dialect in her postings'. But other male users were remembered by *Laokexinlai* for their professional speciality in online political discussion: '*Gangbijiaqianbi* is good at analysing transportation problems. *Yangliankang* seems have speciality in water conservancy projects' (25/04/2004).

3. Exclusions and Limitation of the Virtual Public Sphere

Though Internet bulletin boards provide a platform for public political discussion, its empowering capacity has inherent limitations. This virtual public sphere emerging in China tends to exclude those who are poorer, less educated and female. It is also vulnerable to political control and commercialisation. Political extremist voices also pose a threat to the rational critical debate online.

3.1 Elite-Dominated Virtual Public Sphere

Though in theory the public sphere is open to all, Habermas points out that the 'public' in the bourgeois public sphere are those private individuals 'who – insofar as they were propertied and educated – as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion' (Habermas 1989:37). Thus the public sphere in practice excludes those who are less well-off, uneducated or less educated. This elitist tendency in public discussion is also found online. Nicolas Jankowski and Martine van Selm (2000) argue that the online discussion in practice seems to be dominated by elites and is unable to influence public policy formation. The exclusion from the online public discussion exists in the form of digital divide in China, which puts people from rural area or with less education at a disadvantage position.

In general, QGLT users fall into the propertied, educated and digitally well-off category. Among the 35 QGLT users who answered my questionnaire, 34 of them hold a university degree or above and live in a non-rural area. The latest nationwide census in 2000 displayed that only 3.53% of the whole Mainland China population hold a university degree or above, whilst 63.91% of the whole population live in a rural area.[87] Comparing with this demographic figure, the composition of QGLT users is quite selected.

This elitist trait within QGLT is a reflection of the domestic digital divide in China. As Karsten Giese says, the digital divide in China is characterised by 'a national situation in which a few high-tech islands stand isolated in what amounts to a vast technological wilderness' (2003: 40). Though the quick growth of Chinese public online looks promising at first glance, the distribution of Internet users in China is economically, geographically and educationally imbalanced. Three economically developed provinces – Guangdong, Shandong and Jiangsu, made up 29.4% of the national users up to 31 December, 2005. While the less developed provinces,

162

especially the Western provinces, share a rather marginal percentage: Tibet (0.1%); Qinghai (0.2%) and Ningxia (0.3%). Media illiteracy also excludes a large population from electronic deliberation. Statistics show that by the end of 2005, 50.7% of Chinese Internet users hold or are doing a university degree or above. 38.7% of non-users state they 'have not knowledge and skills in using computers or the Internet' (China Internet Network Information Centre 2006). The majority of Chinese users, according to CINIC 2006 Annual Report XVIII, can be described as male (58.7%), single (57.9%), working towards a university degree or are already university degree holders (50.7%), and are aged between 18 to 30 (54.4%) (CINIC Report XVII 2006). Such demographic features reveal how gender, education, and other social political elements affect participation in online dialogues.

Nevertheless, there are also signs showing that QGLT users are not entirely middle class elite intellectuals. The QGLT survey in 2004 shows that 73% of QGLT users claim they have no steady income or a monthly income less than RMB 2,000, which indicates their economic status as below the urban middle class.[88] More importantly, all QGLT users I interviewed are very reluctant to label themselves as 'elite intellectuals.' 'Elite intellectuals' to them are intellectuals trading their knowledge and social conscience for personal gains from the government or foreign powers. They view themselves as plebeian representatives, talking about issues of general public interest with the goal of 'strengthening the country'.

Computer-mediated communication, 'favours uninhibited communication and stimulates participation from lower-status workers in company-based networks' (Castells 1996:390-391). However, Pierre Bourdieu points out that there is an opposition between ordinary entrepreneurs and cultural entrepreneurs. Ordinary entrepreneurs seek 'immediate economic profit', while the culture entrepreneurs are 'struggling to accumulate specifically cultural capital, albeit at the cost of temporarily renouncing economic profit' (1993:83). QGLT users, intentionally or unintentionally,

fall into the category of cultural entrepreneurs. As self-employed QGLT user *Zhongguo de Nuhou* said, 'if judged from our intelligence and our thought, we are elite; but if judged by wealth and social status, we are definitely not' (interview 01/09/2004). As cultural consumption is determined by class location (Bourdieu 1984) rather than immediate economic status, Internet users from QGLT are still elitist according to such a social determinant.

3.2 Male Dominated QGLT

There have been several reasons contributing to the lack of female users in QGLT. Different language patterns in argumentation, men's dominance in communication, bad manners from male users, and the traditional social norms that frown upon women participating in public speech (especially politics) should all be blamed. All these reasons are rooted in the offline gendered role-playing in socialisation, as Dale Spender argues 'the sexes are taught specific technological relationships as part of their gender identity' (1995: 172).

Different language pattern between male and female users is one reason for the exclusion of women in online political debate. Savicki et al. (1996) argue that men tend to use more fact-oriented language and call for action, whereas women are more likely to self-disclose and try to prevent or reduce tension. The language pattern within the male-dominated QGLT is 'masculine' in its objectivity, impersonality and rationality. The general language pattern of femininity, associated with subjectivity, personal feelings, and emotions, does not fit into this community very well. Even though QGLT female users show their ability to join rational critical debate, their intrinsic disposition to prevent or reduce tension makes them vulnerable in the powerful 'warfare of argument'.

164

Nevertheless, the gendered difference in online language pattern is only the superficial phenomenon of men's dominance in offline communication. 'Men talk more often, they talk for longer periods [...]; men define the topic, assume the legitimacy of their own view, and override women who do not see the world in their terms' (Spender 1995:193). If a woman tries to play a central role in public communication, one common strategy for men to regain their dominant status is to *interrupt* and *correct* the woman so that they 'redefine her meaning in their own terms' (Spender 1995:193). These offline social values and linguistic tactics are transferred to the online world and keep women in their disadvantaged conversational position.

Bad attitudes from male users such as using intimidating, insulting or harassing language is still another reason for female users' exclusion from online discussion. There is evidence suggesting that 'users can behave in a much more abusive and crudely coercive way when they are anonymous, than they would in a face-to-face situation' (Spender 1995:195). *Aierbushang* has been in QGLT since 2002, but she still finds it 'difficult and frustrating' when she is confronted with 'vulgar and coarse' language from male users (interview 28/07/2004). A young female user *Qingjumingyue* revealed in her posting that some male users had posted sexual innuendo or harassing messages to female users (14/09/2004)[89]. As a female intern moderator, I had the experience of getting unpleasant postings from male users as well. When I was moderating the *Lianyi Huiguan* board on 21 July 2004, a male user *Banong Guocui* followed my postings with questions such as 'Who's this chick?' and 'Which guy in QGLT possesses her?' I replied to him and told him 'to watch his language', which only invited swearing. Within 20 minutes, a verbal fight containing coarse language ensued between users who sympathised with me, and those who took the side of *Banong Guocui*. This fight was only ended when I deleted all these hostile postings under the supervision of Mr. Shan, then the QGLT director. Though Mr. Shan backed me all through this minor incident, I still could not help feeling guilty for

165

triggering such a 'fight' within QGLT. It is not difficult to imagine how shocked, distressed, and discouraging this kind of experience would be to other female users.

To avoid the online discrimination, provocation and harassment, many women choose a 'neutral' penname which has no clear indication of their gender (Wallace 1999:47). This is the strategy for some QGLT females as well. However, the barriers for female users to join political online discussion are not just the know-how of the online language pattern and online communication skills.

Taking care of the household rather than talking politics in public is still culturally accepted as the woman's role in Chinese society. When a woman goes online, the socially and culturally defined gender stereotype encourages women to engage in issues concerning domesticity rather than other more 'serious' issues in the 'public' life.

> Female users are addressed by Internet service providers and content producers as representatives of the 'category of women,' defined in terms of embodied difference (menstruation, pregnancy, maintenance of femininity), the gendered division of labour (child care, housework, home decoration, cooking) or interests (relationships, fashion, beauty, romantic fiction) (Paasonen, S. 2002: 30).

For those women who do post on political bulletin boards, they have to make the best use of their time between work and taking care of the household. One female user said she usually visits QGLT whilst cooking supper every evening. She has to rush back to attend dishes on the stove while reading and posting. Though never discouraging her explicitly from 'arguing on the Internet bulletin boards', her husband 'laughed at' her for being such an 'aggressively fighting chicken' and tried to talk her into 'reading without making comments' (19/04/2004).

Under all the pressures from both online and offline environment, most Chinese

women are actually excluded from the electronic deliberation. Dale Spender (1995) argues that the socio-culturally accepted gender identity negates women's connection with machines or digital technologies. I want to add that the socio-culturally accepted gender identity in China also negates women's connection with political debate. Chinese women's socialisation leads them into the belief that debating politics in public does not fit with their notions of themselves as virtuous women. Even when they are online, they would rather choose some light-hearted topics on which to chat, as female user *Jieyu* commented (interview 24/08/2004).

Gendered inequalities will not be eradicated by women changing their behaviour alone. The exclusion of women from electronic deliberation is rooted in the offline administrative inequality of genders. Seyla Benhabib believes that the traditional modes of drawing distinction between the public and the private have been part of a 'discourse of domination that legitimises women's oppression and exploitation' (1992:93). The silence of women online has to be changed because 'the silence that goes with women not being able to get a word in … [will prevent them from] raising the topics that are of concern to them' (Spender 1995:197). Otherwise, women will not be liberated from the 'patriarchal-capitalist-disciplinary bureaucracy' (Benhabib 1992:98) that disempowers them in the public sphere.

3.3 Editorial Control over the Construction of Online Identities

Users' construction of online identity within QGLT is under full supervision. When a user fills in the online form to register as a QGLT member, he/she has to wait for approval from the QGLT moderators. Those who register "inappropriate" pennames or signature files will receive an email from QGLT staff suggesting they should create another online identity as the one they applied for will not be activated. So before they create an online identity that does not challenge the *status quo*, newly registered QGLT users will not be able to post within this community.

167

Interestingly, there are no specific newsroom regulations concerning the gate-keeping of the construction of online identity. It is rather censorship practiced by moderators. Moderators can decide which pennames should be permanently blocked, then record this "offence" in the internal forum. The reason for blocking out a penname permanently (equivalent to life imprisonment in an offline context, as one user says) is usually only 'being inappropriate'. For example, the following two messages were found within the internal forum:

> *Guanyuan ai fubai, renmin ai zaofan* (which literally means 'Officials love to corrupt and people love to rebel') is permanently blocked. Inappropriate penname.
> *Bupafeng, bupasha, bupatankeche* (which literally means 'Not afraid of being blocked, not afraid of being killed, not afraid of tanks'[90]) is permanently blocked. Inappropriate penname (QGLT internal forum 11/08/2004).

One side effect of this editorial control over the construction of online identity is that QGLT has become a more and more self-contained community. Before going through QGLT moderators, the newly registered pennames are 'dead' names as they do not allow the user to post. Therefore a large number of new members in QGLT are forced into lurking before they can finally 'speak'. Because QGLT has a limited number of staff, a huge number of pennames registered, but not activated, have been accumulated during the past years. I was shocked to find out that among the 330,000 registered users up till July 2004, almost 160,000 were not activated. To solve this problem, QGLT administration assigned a new moderator to inspect all these pennames and activate those harmless ones. However, he only activated about 2,000 pennames before he was assigned another task to moderate online postings. When I finished my 'internship' in September 2004, there were still more than 150,000 pennames not activated.

For those QGLT users who have already had one (or more than one) online identity, they can send internal messages to the moderators asking them to activate their new pennames. But for those who registered for the first time, they have to wait and lurk

unless they contact the QGLT office by other means. When I first registered in 2003, I was not able to post for a few months before I made a phone call to QGLT director to complain. Thus, censorship in QGLT not only blocks out the voices challenging the authority, but also contains the online community to a self-cloning one. It is well known within QGTL that most new pennames are actually new identities from existing members.

However, this "seamless" censoring system has loopholes through which extremist voices can slip. Online identities constructed within QGLT can also be used to convey non-progressive discourse. During my participant observation, I found the following signature files from a user *Yongyuan de Monggu* (Forever Mongolian):

> I must arouse those mobs that are cruel and irritable
>
> Riding the wind
>
> Drinking the dews
>
> I must burn down your houses
>
> Made your wives and daughters suffer from cold and starvation
>
> So that you will know what to regret [91]

I sent this user an internal message asking: 'you have a very unique signature file'.

He replied: 'These are my ancestors' words. I dare not to forget even for a moment.'

Then I followed: 'Who are your ancestors? What are the ancestors' words? Who are "you"?'

I did not get any further reply.

As John S. Dryzek comments, the wider public domain consists of contesting subordinated groups in the society, which may involve non-progressive forces such as 'fundamentalist religious movements, nationalists, or anti-abortion groups' (Dryzek 2000:23). Apart from the civil society organisation, non-progressive activities can also find the Internet an ideal venue for assembling and organising. The fluid character of

Internet-based interaction, and the ease of joining and withdrawing make it 'really difficult to estimate what portion of the citizenry is actually involved' (Dahlgren 2004: xiii).

4. Strong Publics? Weak Publics?

Worth exploring is also the question whether users from online political bulletin boards constitute an antagonistic public, that is, an online equivalent to a strong public. 'Strong publics', as Nancy Fraser argues, refer to 'sovereign parliaments' which are the sites 'for the discursive authorization of the use of state power,' while 'weak publics' refer to the 'publics whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion formation and does not [...] encompass decision making' (1992:134). QGLT users' online activities prove that CMC can cultivate a sense of 'citizenship' among people and bring about 'publics' in the virtual space debating over issues concerning public interest. However, the translation of online public opinion into offline policy making is still dictated by the offline polity.

Statistically, China has the world second largest online population. The official CINIC Report XVII shows that up to December 31, 2005 mainland China had 49.5 million computers connected to the Internet, and the total number of Internet users[92] reached 111 million. Chinese Internet users show great interest in obtaining news and networking with each other online. As shown in the following figure, reading news (67.9%) and sending and receiving Emails (64.7%) are two major online activities for Chinese users. Online interactive communication facilities enjoy great popularity as well: 41.9% of users use Instant messengers, 41.6% use Internet forums, bulletin boards, discussion groups, and 23.1% of the users use web-based chat rooms. These figures show that Chinese users are keen to get news from the Internet and ready to contribute to online discussion.

Figure 6.1 Chinese Internet Users' Online Activities

Chinese Internet Users' Online Activities

Activity	Percentage
Reading news	67.90%
Search engine	65.70%
Emails	64.70%
Instant messenger	41.90%
Forum/BBS/Discussion groups	41.60%
Getting (health, customer service, etc.)information	39.80%
Music listening/downloading and web-radio	38.30%
Online audio watching/downloading and web-TV	37.10%
(Non-video/audio) uploading and downloading	33.80%
Games	33.20%
Classmates.com	28.60%
Online shopping	24.50%
Chat rooms	23.10%
Job hunting	18.90%
E-journals	16.70%
Blogs	14.20%
Personal webpages	14.20%
E-learning	14.10%
Financial activities (online banking, stock market, etc)	14.10%
Trade (promoting products, auction)	9.90%
Mobile phone messages	9.50%
Online phone calls (including IP, PC to phone)	6.50%
E-government	5.10%
Booking (hotels, tickets, etc.)	4.60%
Match-making, clubs	4.00%
Others	3.80%

Source: CINIC Report XV: Statistics on Internet development in China (Jan. 2006)

What 'issues' are the Chinese users talking about on bulletin boards overall? A commercial search engine www.anyspeak.com grouped the bulletin boards according to their topical discussion into the following 22 categories (accessed: 26/04/2005):

171

Table 6.2 Topical discussion on Chinese bulletin boards from www.anyspeak.com

Topical discussion	Number of Bulletin boards
IT	758
Education	696
Computer games	668
Society and politics	518
Automobile	366
Literature	358
Arts and pop culture	350
Music, film and TV	349
Economy	306
Romance and emotion	285
Sports	259
Telecommunication	251
Careers and profession	194
Photos and cartoons	192
Life style	187
Cities	153
Media	139
Military	104
Property	82
Traveling	79
Health information	64
Industry	22
Total	6380

As we can see, non-political discussion on IT, education and computer games are the top 3 discussions. Nevertheless, political discussion bulletin boards (categorised as Society and politics) rank fourth. Topical discussion in this category covers issues relating to 'society' (187 bulletin boards), 'current political affairs' (134 boards),

'history' (50 boards), 'legislation' (43 boards), academic (40 boards), environment protection (23 boards), ethnicity and religion (14 boards), charity (13 boards), international relations (9 boards), science and technology (4 boards) and government (1 board). Meanwhile, as I have argued in Chapter 1, it would be over simplistic to assume topical discussions under 'nonpolitical' categories are always 'apolitical'. Public discourse on gay rights, consumers' rights, drunken driving, and air pollution appears on bulletin boards under the category of 'Romance', 'Automobile' or 'Property'. The autonomous nature of the Internet enables users to play a role in agenda-setting through their communal decision on what issues are debated in contemporary China. Interactivity associated with the Internet thus brings about a sense of empowerment to users as 'interactivity, at some level, transforms the relation between consumer and producer' and users are closely involved in 'mixing or producing their screen media experience' (O'Regan and Goldsmith 2002: 103). Chinese individuals who have no authority, celebrity or expertise in the offline world can now give their opinions to the whole nation.

For most of the Chinese public, this channel of access into citizen debate through online discussion is also the prime means to practice freedom of speech. Users frequently mention "press freedom" as one of the major motivations to join QGLT. One user said he came to QGLT: 'to satisfy the desire of getting [my ideas] publicised. Only through this, can I make my voice heard and viewpoint known'. (*Weibu* 31/05/2004). What QGLT users want to 'publicise' is usually the public concerns over 'people's livelihood' and 'people's right' as one user summarised (*panhh* 26/05/2004). Only in the virtual space of bulletin boards, one QGLT says, can he forget the hierarchy in real life. All the users are treated as 'ordinary Chinese' no matter whether they are top officials or beggars on the streets (*Teda Tanguan2* 20/04/2004).

QGLT users believe that through their online discussion and debate, solutions to social problems in China might be reached, so that the public debate online can help

to build a strong nation offline. Public debate on healthcare; corruption; education; environment; economy; Taiwan; sustainable development; crime and legislation; international relations and other issues will, as *Lishilaoren* (12/05/2004) believes, promote democratisation in China. For that reason, QGLT is regarded as a 'democratic city hall' and online discussion within this online political community is compared to 'the parliamentary debate from some other countries' (*Wanyusu* 28/05/2004).

Some users believe that because of its partisan nature (QGLT belongs to the Communist Party's organ the *People's Daily*), public opinion formed on QGLT has far more political influence than its commercial counterparts and might be reflected in policy making. To a certain degree online public opinion from QGLT, as long as it does not challenge the Communist Party's governance, can have a positive effect on decision making. QGLT user *Woweiyikuang* was given an audience by the Shenzhen municipal government for his constructive suggestions on sustainable development in the city; user *Ji'nan Li*'s analysis of the capital accumulation and the shortage of resources in Southern China drew attention from the State Council's think tank. However, with the lack of deliberative social institutions offline, these cases of online opinion integrated into policy-making are irregular, sporadic, and without legislative guarantee. These cases of translating citizens' voices into policy making are no better than the practices of lobbying and nepotism. From this sense, in spite of its great potential, the public formed within QGLT still needs time to form a strong public in China.

5. Summary

This chapter examines the construction of online political identities within QGLT bulletin boards in China. Findings suggest that Internet bulletin boards enable ordinary Chinese to have their identities as politically activated citizens constructed in cyberspace.

A consistent enthusiasm for political participation can be found in users' pennames, signature files, political clusters, and online behaviours. Though patriotism is still the theme of QGLT users' identity, humanism and a critical view of social problems such as corruption and social injustice are also displayed. Meanwhile, public longing for freedom and democracy, often kept underground and regarded as a challenge to the authoritarian administration, also finds its place in the virtual public sphere. Online debate among different clusters reflects a variety of ideological preferences in contemporary China. Women users, though small in number, also participate in the online political discussion.

However, this emerging 'public' online has its limitations in terms of inclusion and autonomy. The construction of a 'public' is subject to political control and vulnerable to non-progressive discourses. The online public formed within QGLT still limit their deliberative practice within opinion formation in cyberspace, and do not have the access to channel this public opinion into policy making on a regular basis.

Fluidity of online identity could thwart the stability in political engagement (Poster 2001[1995]; Dahlgren 2004). Nevertheless, when a democratic polity is still remote in China, the strong sense of political participation actually fosters a group of users who are fairly stable with their identities and political beliefs. Though QGLT users cannot be viewed as a strong public, the formation and expression of online public opinion maximises the democratic potential of the Internet bulletin boards and contributes to the democratisation in China.

Thus, this online 'public', rooted in well-educated intellectuals, emerges from the social background of economic development, urbanisation and digital globalisation. Their enthusiasm in constructing political identities as active citizens is reflected in their voicing of the alternative and oppositional political concerns. QGLT postings

during the SARS crisis proved that the online public opinion could enrich the political discourse, has the potential of leading to tensions between people and the government, and might eventually reshape the political culture in China.

Chapter 7

Case study of SARS

The deliberative nature of Internet bulletin boards could be best illustrated through 'Internet media events' in China. This is the term Chinese users have created to refer to news stories first 'reported' by Internet media, (that is, originating from bulletin boards, chat rooms, new groups, etc.), discussed online, and generating online public opinion presses the authority to take action offline. Online discussion about Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is one of the 'Internet media events' through which both the potential and limits of online deliberation has been displayed.

SARS hit China in November 2002 and became one of the biggest international media stories in 2003. The coverage of SARS in Chinese official media went through four stages (Xia and Ye 2003) characterised by the administrative control of public health information. During these stages, Internet bulletin boards demonstrated their potential as an alternative media in constructing deliberative public discourse and pushing the limits of press freedom that the Chinese government could tolerate. Nevertheless, rumours and non-progressive discourse were also built up within cyberspace, which shows the limitations of online deliberation.

In this chapter, I mainly evaluate 355 postings from *QGLT In-Depth* containing '非典' (Atypical Pneumonia) or 'SARS' in their titles from February 8 to April 30, 2003, and will examine:

- whether online discussion about SARS brought forth transparency in public health information;
- whether online discussion about SARS set an alternative public agenda and constructed antagonistic public opinion;
- what limitations are associated with online discussion about SARS.

SARS postings on QGLT demonstrated the dual-nature of computer mediated communication in constructing the public sphere. On the one hand, CMC created an alternative means to enhance citizens' participation in political discussion. QGLT users actively explored alternative information resources during the SARS crisis to resist, negotiate or reinforce official interpretations of the incident. Active interaction among users generated a type of publicity through which public interest was aired, and state activity was held to the scrutiny of public opinion. However, there was also a lack of rationality in QGLT SARS discussion, which contributed to the spread of rumour, false notions and panic. Meanwhile, the virtual public sphere was still not free from official surveillance and journalistic management which aimed to maintain the boundaries of 'acceptable' political discourse in China.

1. China's Official Media Coverage on SARS: Policies and Framing

The Chinese media's coverage on disasters cannot be analysed without looking into government media policies concerning 'the Party Principle' and 'the People Principle'. 'The Party Principle' (*dangxing*), according to Lei, requires the media to be the eyes and ears (to report what they see and hear), and the throats and tongues (to instruct the 'masses') for the Party (1997:183). 'The People Principle' (*renminxing*) refers to the 'relationship between people and media' and 'people's expectation from media' (Lei 1997:184). Media can never use the people's interest to deny the Communist Party's leadership, because 'the Party's interests accord to the People's' (Lei 1997:184), as expressed in this official document:

> [Mass media in China] must be subordinate to the Party's leadership. Mass media must subject their newsroom policy to the Party's decision on any report that relates to the Party's route, guiding principle, and policy. They must keep in step with the party on the coverage of major political and theoretical issues and have no autonomy. If media staff hold a different opinion from the Party's route, guiding principle and decision, they can consult the upper Party administration or even the Central Committee. Certain news can only appear on the internal publications within the Party, and cannot be publicized openly [to the masses] without the consent from the upper Party administration. All in all, mass media cannot have their own say and can not preach opinion antagonistic to the

Party's (*Decisions on Guiding Principles on Media's News Report from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China* 1981, cited and translated from Lei 1997: 183).

When it comes to disaster coverage (such as earthquakes and severe traffic accidents), the Party requires media to report the news from a positive perspective, otherwise they have to remain silent. Media coverage needs to focus on rescue works from the government rather than death or economic losses incurred in the disaster, so that social stability and China's 'good' image can be maintained. Chun Liu, a veteran journalist who used to work with China Central Television, said, 'I participated in the coverage of the 1998 flood, but I haven't known exactly how many people died till now!' (Liu, C. 17/01/2006).

However, the Internet media make it difficult for the Chinese government to hoard information by pushing the boundaries of 'acceptable reportage', as Shanthil Kalathil comments:

> Chinese web portals have been encouraging competition between news organizations. This competition means that small, local news organisations are increasingly pushing the boundaries of acceptable reportage, pressuring larger national organisations to follow. News often appears on the Internet either exclusively or before traditional media outlets can publish it (Kalathil 2002).

The SARS crisis became an example of how the Internet could break through the 'Party Principle', and bring about grassroots information concerning public health. By providing a platform for the public to exchange information and viewpoints, the Internet played an important role in fostering critical public opinion that finally pressured the government into admitting the severity of SARS and taking active countermeasures against the epidemic.

The first SARS case, diagnosed as Atypical Pneumonia (ATP), occured in Guangdong province on November 16, 2002. This was not reported till January 5, 2003 when a local commercial newspaper the *New Express* (*Xin Kuai Bao*) covered this case of

'virus infection' (Zhang, Z. 2003:37).

Mobile phone text messages broke the SARS silence in an unexpected way. A text message 'fatal flu seized Guangzhou (the capital of Guangdong Province)' started to spread among Chinese mobile phone users on February 8, 2003 (Xia, Q. and Ye, X. 2003). Lack of SARS information from the mainstream media boosted the prevalence of grassroots communication through text messages[93], phone calls, and the Internet. With the news also came rumours: bird flu, plague and anthrax were all used to explain the cause of this disease. Steaming vinegar indoors and drinking Chinese herbs were said to prevent catching SARS, which led to panic buying of vinegar and herbal medicine in Southern China (Yu, X. and Zhang, J. 20/02/2003).

SARS coverage started cautiously in February in some local media in Guangdong province. *Nanfang Wang* (www.Southcn.com), *Yangcheng Evening, Southern Daily, Guangzhou Daily, Southern Metropolis* and a few others had published in total 603 stories from February 10 to 20 (Zhang, Z. 2003). However, media coverage was under strict administrative control. News about SARS was only carried by local media rather than the national media, and reports were rather belated[94]. Meanwhile, a simplistic optimism was displayed in media's coverage: 'ATP has been put under control' (*Southern Daily* 12/02/2003); 'ATP could be prevented, cured, and controlled' (*Yangcheng Evening* 14/02/2003). The national media was silent over the SARS crisis until March 26 when Xinhua News Agency released an article under the headline 'the imported ATP case in Beijing is under effective control', which was the first SARS report from Beijing (Zhang, Z. 2003:38).

It was governmental control that led to the media's collective silence over the SARS outbreak. Journalists from *People's Daily* and other official media received instructions that the coverage of SARS should be under tight control of the Communist Party's Propaganda Department. [95] This systematic hoarding of information reached its climax when the then Minister of Health held a press

conference on April 3 and claimed there were only 12 SARS infected cases and three had died in Beijing.

Jiang Yanyong, a retired surgeon from a military hospital in Beijing, was furious at the lies from the Ministry of Health and disclosed the truth of the SARS infection in Beijing. His testimony was first carried by *Time* on April 8 and later by numerous Internet bulletin boards. In his testimony, Jiang disclosed that at least 60 SARS patients were reported in one hospital on April 3 and seven had died. Jiang also disclosed that in early March, the Ministry of Health notified hospitals at all levels that SARS cases were found in Beijing but as a strict discipline, this news could not be released to the public. The concealment was said to serve the purpose of creating a secure environment for the annual convention of the National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee[96].

Over the following days, according to CNN's report *SARS Closing Beijing Schools*,

> China's leaders had been stung by international criticism that they covered up the spread of the disease and say such tough measures are essential to both contain the virus and repair the country's image. [...] China's leaders have pledged full cooperation with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and say any further officials found to be covering-up SARS cases will be severely punished (22/04/2003).

Then the new Prime Minister Wen Jiabao requested the Chinese media to 'report the truth (of SARS) as it is'. Li Changchun, the Minister who was in charge of the Propaganda Department, also vaguely expressed his permission of SARS reports within national media on April 8. Yet it was not until April 15 that mainstream official media received this confirmed permission to cover SARS: 'Media should discard the practice of creating a peaceful image of social stability and report the truth as it is now. Must not lie. Do not boast [of putting SARS under control]'.[97] This internal decision finally reached all levels of governmental institutions in a written form on April 17: 'Get correct information of the plague (SARS), report as it is, and publicize to the

society at regular time, must not delay or cover up in reporting' (Zhang, Z. 2003:38).

The third SARS press conference on April 20 showed a promising development in the new government's policy towards information transparency. The number of SARS cases soared to 1807 nationwide compared with a mere 37 confirmed cases declared previously (the *Economist* 26/04/2003: 19). From then on, news coverage on SARS became much more open, honest and balanced marked by the sacking of the Health Minster and the Mayor of the Beijing Municipal Government.

Xia and Ye (2003) thus categorise the coverage of SARS by the Chinese media into the following four stages:

- From November 22, 2002 to February 7, 2003: information vacuum stage. During this stage, only one local newspaper in Guangdong Province reported the first few SARS cases.

- From February 8 to April 2, 2003: information scarcity and inadequacy stage. Local media in Guangdong Province (including the prestigious *Southern Weekend*) started covering SARS, but their information sources were limited and the coverage was optimistic. Internet and mobile phone text messages started playing roles in informing the public, but rumours also spread and led to public anxiety, panic buying and mass storage of food and Chinese herbal medicines.

- From April 3 to April 19: information cover-up stage. National media started to cover SARS stories. However, SARS reports from the mainstream media were mainly over-optimistic and moral-boosting. While online discussion about SARS started to develop criticism of the government for its hoarding of information concerning public health.

- After April 20: information openness stage. After two top officials were sacked, mainstream media's coverage started to be transparent and honest. Online discussion on bulletin boards demonstrated more consistencies with

the official media, and morale boosting postings account for a significant share of online discourse.

Positive reporting and an optimistic tone prevailed in the official media's SARS coverage before the information openness stage. *People's Daily* had in total 131 editorials, headline news, and feature stories about SARS from April 4 to April 19, while all these articles were used as outlets for the government to release reassuring information or ideological instructions to the people. Domestic news pages were filled with statements of governmental confidence, and detailed effective measures for fighting SARS. Headline news and feature stories portrayed doctors and nurses as brave altruistic heroes, while health pages featured advice from medical authorities, such as telling people to air rooms and wash hands thoroughly. Ordinary citizens were depicted as an active and calm collective, carrying on their normal life in the capital, whilst the panic shopping in Beijing never appeared in the official media's coverage. Meanwhile, the WHO officers' visit to Beijing was reported as evidence of China's active international co-operation.

Marked by the sacking of the Minister of Health and the Mayor of Beijing on April 20, the Chinese official media started to report SARS in a more open and honest way. Official media started to release the gruesome daily figures of SARS infection. From April 20 to April 30, *People's Daily* had 191 stories about SARS. To address the severity of the epidemic, phrases like 'disaster', 'ATP wreaks havoc', 'a battle without gunfire', 'a sudden catastrophe', and 'national jeopardy' were repeatedly used. However, ATP, rather than SARS, was still the term used to refer to the epidemic. The language of propaganda was still prevalent within the official media. Morale boosting slogans could be found in key phrases like 'people's warfare', 'highly responsible' [new government], 'national spirit', and 'millions of people all of one mind'. Heroic medical workers were called 'angels in white', 'soldiers in white', 'remarkable soldiers', 'remarkable heroes', and 'martyrs' for those who died on their posts. Meanwhile, the official media also highlighted the Communist Party members'

positive images in their news coverage such as: 'I'm a Communist Party member, let me do it' (*People's Daily* 23/04/2003 p.4) and 'Communists party members always rush to the frontier' in combating SARS (*People's Daily* 21/04/2003 p.1). As Bai and Xiong summarised:

> Aside from the grim daily statistics, the coverage has ranged from news items on governmental and grassroots efforts to contain the spread of the disease in various parts of China, to reports on the medical research into the nature of the virus and the hunt for a vaccine. Stories of heroic medical workers saving lives have also become a common news item in the Chinese print and broadcast media. Talk shows and newspaper features focus on how to prevent the disease (Bai and Xiong 24/04/2003).

Worth noting in the Party's media policy is the difference between traditional media and Internet media. Even though 'lying is endemic in China's bureaucracy' (*the Economist* 26/04/2003:20), Internet media (especially those affiliated to the traditional media) have a special position in the whole media strategy of the Communist Party. In the early stage of the SARS outbreak when the Propaganda Department prohibited SARS coverage in traditional media, the Internet media had a 'privilege' in their reporting. *People's Daily* released on its website a special channel on SARS coverage in February.[98] Framed as 'Atypical Pneumonia', 11 stories about SARS and the panic buying it triggered in Guangdong province were put online from February 11 to 19. When traditional media were allowed to cover SARS in April, the Propaganda Department also emphasised the important role of the Internet in disseminating news, and required online reporting to be 'objective, at the right time, and to the right degree'[99].

2. QGLT Online Public Opinion Constructed an Alternative Public Discourse

When the Chinese government tried to hoard SARS information, an alternative public discourse developed outside the official media's range. As statistics show, in January 2003 China had 59.10 million Internet users, with 53.1% of them identifying their primary goal of accessing the Internet was 'to get information' (CINIC Report XI). At

the same time, China had around 250 million mobile phone users. The flow of information between the Internet and mobile phones constitutes a grassroots network of interpersonal exchange of information. When news about SARS first started with mobile phone text messages, it soon spread online and developed into a heated public discussion.

The following chart shows the comparison between *QGLT In-Depth* board and *People's Daily* in terms of publishing SARS articles in April 2003. The data shows that when the official media was silent on SARS crisis before April 4, there was public discussion about SARS on the bulletin boards; when the Chinese government concealed SARS information, the online discussion was heavily censored; when the SARS information became more transparent after April 20, online discussion became very active.

Figure 7.1 SARS articles on QGLT bulletin boards and in People's Daily, *April 2003*

SARS articles on QGLT bulletin boards and in *People's Daily* in April 2003

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
QGLT	0	4	7	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	1	2	3	3	5	7	7	4	8	24	35	24	40	29	28	38	37	33	27
People's Daily	0	0	0	5	4	4	5	4	6	7	16	8	6	8	6	8	10	21	13	12	8	11	18	15	33	13	17	18	23	23

date
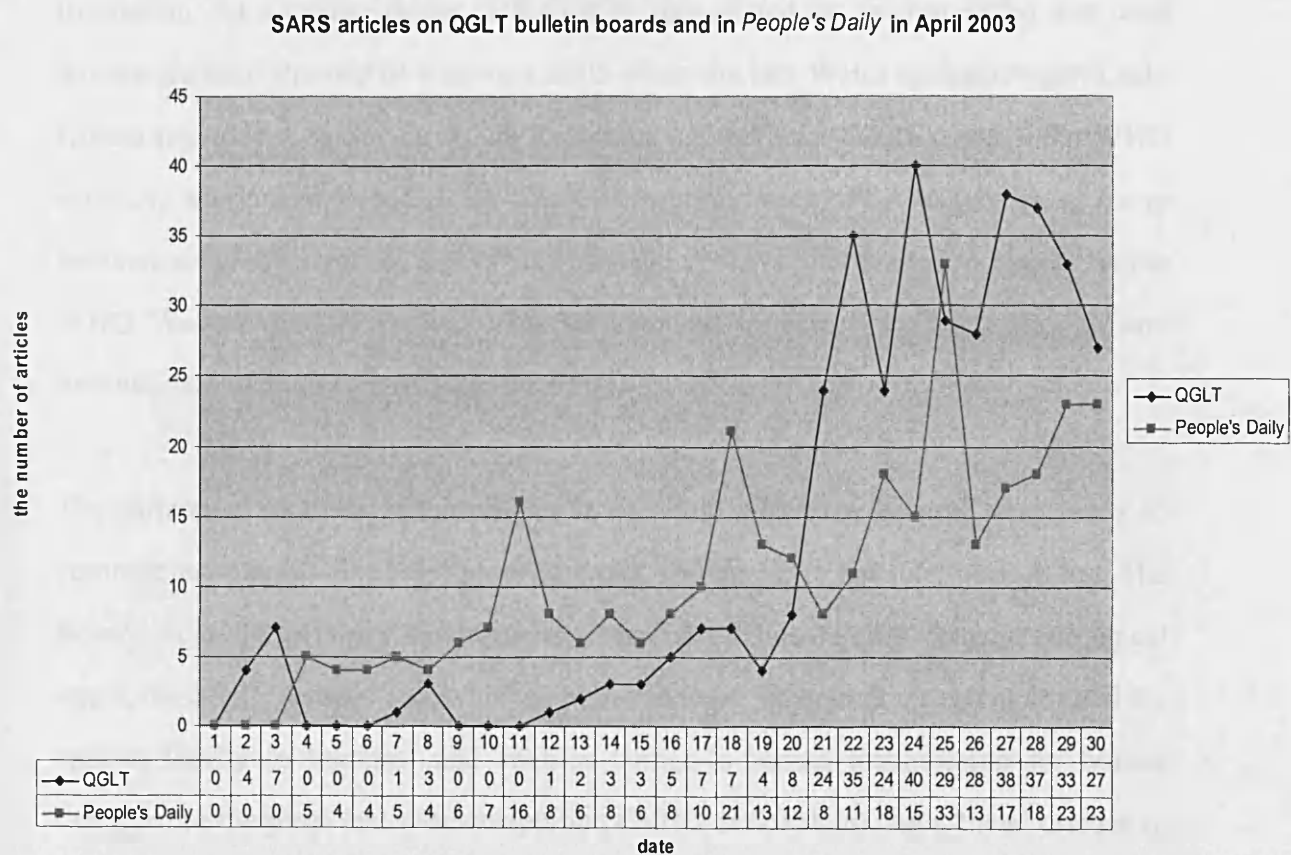
This section will demonstrate how the online discourse challenged the government's framing of SARS, and aimed to gain transparency in information concerning public health from alternative information sources. QGLT users showed resistance towards the official interpretation of the crisis by offering their own suggestions, and were also critical about counter-measures against SARS. QGLT users also raised calls for press freedom and used humour as a form of political engagement. The sharing of information, emotion and humour created a community bond among the Chinese Internet public. As BBC journalist Holly Williams suggested, the new technology allowed ordinary Chinese people to circumvent state-controlled media, and to reach out to each other during the SARS crisis (08/04/2003).

2.1 Terminology of the Epidemic

SARS was first diagnosed as atypical pneumonia (ATP). This terminology (in Chinese translation: *fei dianxing feiyan* 非典型肺炎 abbreviated as: *feidian* 非典) was used worldwide until the end of February 2003 when the late WHO epidemiologist Carlo Urbani renamed it as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which the WHO officially announced on March 28. The Chinese translation of SARS (*yanzhong jixing huxidao zonghezheng* 严重急性呼吸道综合症; or *sasi* 萨斯) started to appear on the WHO Western Pacific Region Chinese-language website www.wpro.who.int/ and international media like BBCChinese.com.

The difference in these terminologies is obvious. ATP as a general term refers to common pneumonia-like respiratory diseases, and this term has long been in use. The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome is a respiratory disease caused by an etiological agent, the SARS coronavirus, which is believed to be 'an animal virus that crossed the species barrier to humans' and enables human-to-human transmission for human exposure to the virus and virus adaptation (WHO 10/2004: 6). As a 'new' disease in

the 21 Century, laboratories around the world are continuing to work on the epidemiology and ecology of SARS coronavirus infection (*ibid*).

However, official media in China used ATP as a substitute for SARS in their news coverage. Using ATP as a substitute for SARS ignored the high rate of infection and the mutating nature of SARS, which consequently downplayed the challenges it imposed. Among all *People's Daily*'s coverage on SARS in April 2003, there are 322 articles with 'ATP' in their titles. SARS (and its Chinese translation) was never used on any page. Such framing of the SARS crisis reflected a legacy of the Communist concept of news that still reverberates in official media in China. As Lenin maintained, news and information were useless and could be more damaging than useful if they only informed for the sake of informing (Buzek 1964: 169). To serve the purpose of 'educating' and 'informing' the masses, one method used in Communist Regimes was to suppress some news and delay others until a more 'suitable moment' for publication (Buzek 1964:173). The social production of official news of 'atypical pneumonia' in the SARS crisis carefully manoeuvred public opinion from the more serious public health threat, and aimed to maintain social stability under the Communist Party's governance.

Although within *QGLT In-depth* in April 2003 there are 83 out of 370 postings that contain 'SARS' as a key word in their titles, the remaining 287 postings use the word '*feidian* (ATP)'. The borderless Internet offered Chinese users an opportunity to get access to information sources other than the official media, and develop their knowledge of the epidemic.

Yet these figures still do not provide a complete picture of SARS postings. To go through the stringent online words filtering system (Internet portals in China, including the commercial ones, are required to install software filtering politically forbidden words in postings), experienced users employed different Chinese characters with similar pronunciation to ATP and SARS to circumvent the

187

surveillance. When postings containing '非典' (Chinese for ATP) could not get through the filtering system, '非电', '沸点', '灰颠', 'FD', '飞碘', '啡、', and '沸点' were used; when postings containing 'SARS' were blocked, '萨斯' or '沙斯' were used. The online words filtering system created a proliferation of almost limitless versions of the same concept, which demonstrates the resistance from the users in this online information 'guerrilla warfare'.

2.2 Online Postings Filled in the Information Void Left by the Official Media

During the SARS information scarcity stage (Feb. 8 – April 2), postings revealing this crisis and calling for information transparency concerning public health gradually appeared in QGLT. The first article about SARS was posted on *QGLT In-Depth* on 11 February 2003. *Yushanmoke*, a user from Guangdong province, revealed the public panic over 'ATP' in his city and expressed his concerns over the lack of management of the crisis by the government. This article was viewed 380 times and triggered replies from others echoing the need for information transparency:

> Have those leaders ever heard of the story of Yu taming the flood[100]? Why do they only want to block up [information]? (*Shuyin* 11/02/2003)
> News of this epidemic should be publicised through the official channels. (*Huajiang* 11/02/2003)

On the following day, *Yushanmoke* posted another article calling for the official press's immediate intervention into the 'ATP' crisis. This posting was viewed 293 times, and triggered further discussion on the relationship between the media and how crisis were reported. The Chinese government's control of the media was also questioned in these postings:

> The government has to adapt to the information age and change their old way of administration. (*Xiaofengyun* 12/02/2003)
> It's proven that the old propaganda policy doesn't serve the contemporary audience both at home and overseas. (*Xishanyeren* 12/02/2003)
> Do media have the right to intervene [in the ATP crisis]? Did they ignore the crisis or were they forbidden from reporting by the government? (*Shuyin* 12/02/2003)

During online discussion, follow-up postings can be as informative as the main postings. The above follow-up postings developed the argument in the main posting, implying that information was controlled by government, and suggesting changes in official 'propaganda policy'.

Before *People's Daily* had its first SARS (ATP) story published on 4 April, postings about SARS had disseminated adequate information about the epidemic and triggered discussions within QGLT. The silence from official media was in contrast to a growth in online public opinion requesting 'information transparency'. The table below demonstrates that when the traditional media failed to provide information concerning public health, discussion on the bulletin boards filled the void.

Table 7.1 QGLT In-Depth SARS postings (Feb. 8 –April 2)

DATE	Key Words	Click rate[101]	Replies[102]
11/02	ATP, panic, early warning system, emergency (social) mechanism	380	3
12/02	ATP, panic, media's intervention	293	3
13/02	ATP, social panic, Humane concerns	613	12
14/02	ATP, panic, the local government, health network;	149	0
	ATP, prescribed (Chinese herbal medicine) recipe	205	1
20/02	ATP, sputum, snivel, cough, sneeze	71	1
31/03	ATP, quarantine, atypical news coverage, Western media	132	0
02/04	ATP, USA, immunity	216	2
	ATP, antibody	259	2
	ATP, USA, 69 SARS cases	209	8
	SARS, worries, government, measures	353	17
Total	ATP: 10; SARS: 1	2880	49

11 long articles (more than 500 Chinese characters) from *QGLT In-Depth* provided

the public an alternative source of information about SARS. These postings informed the public of the SARS explosion, and urged Chinese government to take urgent measures to publicise the truth and control the epidemic (see Appendix 5 for an example of SARS postings). As an alternative information source, online postings about SARS came from users' personal experience and sources, or overseas media (this included overseas Chinese media, Chinese language websites, and foreign language media).

One topic QGLT users talked about from their personal experience and sources was the cost of SARS treatment. As *The Economist* claims, the medical welfare system and the networking of rural clinics in China collapsed after the economic reform: 'As many as 70% of country people cannot afford to pay for medical treatment' (26/04/2003: 20). Because the cost of SARS treatment is far beyond the reach of ordinary families in China, this topic was avoided by the official media. User *Shuangchenggushi* gave an estimation of medical expenses for SARS treatment on 28 April 2003.

Personal information sources from QGLT users also exposed scandals in covering up SARS information from the local government:

> Seven [SARS patients] were delayed six hours for treatment in Inner Mongolia (*dammos* 21/04/2003)

> Even the concealing of truth is not the worst. The most fearful thing is when some Big Brother in Guangdong province warned the journalists rigorously that they would face the consequences in reporting [SARS], which intimidated journalists from reporting. (*Xuantiezhongjian* 17-04-2003)

'Overseas media', especially the Western media in foreign languages, are not accessible to most ordinary Chinese.[103] The Internet makes it possible for those who have access to foreign media sources to share the information. 'Overseas media' were commented highly by QGLT users in that they played an important role in informing

Chinese the Chinese government's hoarding information about SARS:

> It is overseas media that first reported the concealment of this plague by the Chinese government, exposed the covering up of SARS reporting in Beijing. Also it is overseas media that published the true story of a physician from 301 military hospital in Beijing...we can see clearly that overseas media has played a vital role (*yiminweiben* 22/04/2003).

SARS coverage from the *New York Times*, for example, had been referenced to evaluate the economic cost of SARS to China as 210 billion RMB Yuan (*Fulaibin* 29/04/2003).

2.3 Online Public Opinion as Suggestions and 'Constructive Criticism'

QGLT users also raised suggestions regarding countermeasures against SARS, and criticised the Chinese government for concealing the truth. Deliberative democracy theorist Dryzek points out that authentic democracy requires public communication that 'rules out domination via the exercise of power, manipulation, indoctrination, propaganda, deception [...] and attempts to impose ideological conformity' (2000:2). By posting suggestions and criticism regarding SARS control, QGLT users in fact discounted the indoctrination and manipulation of information from 'above'. Recognition and responsiveness were observed among active users, which contributed to the quality of online opinion.

Suggestions on fighting SARS within QGLT mainly focused on the following detailed issues:

- 'compulsory quarantine' (*Zhenzhaoji* 15/04/2003);
- 'free treatment for [SARS] patients' (*dammos* 15/04/2003), (*Koushixinfei* 22/04/2003), (*dammos* 21/04/2003);
- preventing SARS from spreading (especially to the rural area) during the May Day

vacation which is usually the peak time for mass transportation around the country (*Shutielong* 14/04/2003), (*dslhb* 22/04/2003).

These online postings touched on the core problem in the commercialisation of China's health system which, according to John Chan (03/05/2003), is 'one of the victims of economic restructuring'. Since the early 1980s, the proportion of health care funded by the government's budget has fallen to less than 20%. The poorest seven provinces in western China received only 5% of the total national health budget. 'In the last 10 years, health costs for ordinary families have jumped by 600%.'[104] One QGLT user said that the state-owned medical institutions 'changed from a disease preventive organisation to a money-making machine' (*daoluanshibai zaidaoluanzaishibai zhidaochenggong* 21/04/2003). If refused free medical treatment, most ordinary Chinese SARS patients would wait to die and might spread the epidemic to people around them. Therefore, preventing SARS from hitting the poor rural areas and the free treatment of patients were the main concerns of QGLT users. Meanwhile, other suggestions for counter-measures against SARS were also aired:

- forbidding restaurants to serve wild animals as dishes (*nanzhuce* 20/04/2003)

- launching a nationwide SARS prevention and treatment online information service system (*Dazhi* 20/04/2003)

- stopping outwards transportation from SARS-stricken areas (*Huanghai2000* 24/04/2003)

- preventing the SARS virus from contaminating food supplies (*dammos* 28/04/2003)

- treating SARS patients or SARS suspects in quarantine with humane measures (*qqy* 25/04/2003)

- taking measures to deal with public panic (*zhiyanle* 28/09/2004)

The above suggestions from users mainly dealt with the specific issues concerning prevention of the epidemic, so that they were more or less well received by policy makers at different levels. Regulations on banning the consumption of wild animals came into effect quickly at different administrative levels. On May 23, 2003, National

People's Congress decided to revise *the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Wildlife* (1991). The emphasis of this revision was to forbid eating all kinds of wildlife, and stop the practice of hunting wild animals for food. SARS consultation hotlines were set up in Beijing's major hospitals in April 2003. Volunteers who had psychological or medical knowledge started to answer questions from the public and tried to calm the panic-stricken Beijing residents. [105] A spokesperson from the Ministry of Health said on Dec. 16, 2003 that the Chinese government had provided free treatment for SARS patients. The Chinese government also planned to legalise free medical treatment for pandemic patients[106].

Mild criticism of the Chinese government for its mis-handling of the SARS crisis could also be heard on the QGLT bulletin boards. Users *Shuangcheng gushi* (03/04/2003) and *Shangqiongbiluo* (28/04/2003) pointed out the lack of international cooperation from China during the SARS crisis. *Shangqiongbiluo* also criticised the 'show' elements in the government's 'opening up' SARS information in the official media's coverage[107].

2.4 Radical Political Discourse Calling for Press Freedom and Democracy

QGLT users' criticism of the government's concealing of SARS information dug into the political relationship between the 'Party' and the 'People', and put this issue in the social context of the rising civil society in China. Calls for press freedom and democracy were again raised on the Internet, even within the official bulletin boards of QGLT. A real problem exposed in the SARS crisis, according to QGLT user *Shengdongyouqu*, was the lack of press freedom, because 'press freedom is the best way for media to express public opinion' (28/04/2003).

LovelyChina used the term 'dark box practice' to describe Chinese government's concealing of SARS information, and suggested that such practice facilitated the

193

spread of the epidemic:

> I will never believe the 'dark box practice' works better than the open policy in dealing with epidemics like SARS. I will never believe dark box practice serves social stability, maintains national credibility and builds a positive international image of China (03/04/2003)

The consequence of concealing SARS information, as one user *Qiangguoluntan kanke* pointed out, would be: 'chaos, the spread of disaster, and angry youth of xenophobia' (07/04/2003). He fervently requested QGLT moderators: 'please don't delete postings of the plague [SARS]. People have the right to know!' (07/04/2003). Even when the government gave permission to the mass media to cover SARS, online criticism pointed out that official media's coverage of SARS was still delayed (*Shangqiongbiluo* 28/04/2003).

To explain the reason that the Communist Party hoarded SARS information, *Koushixinfei* said in his/her posting:

> They [the Communist Party officials] view their own positions, their own 'face' as more valuable than people's lives [...] Another reason is that [the officials] view people as 'masses', as the object of being governed [...]. These are acts of behaviour from an authoritarian government. (21/04/2003)

Protesting voices calling for press freedom usually appeared as follow-up messages in one line such as:

> When can journalism be free!!!!!!!!! (*Xuantiezhongjian*22/04/2003)
> SARS demands a radical change in China (*Fulaibin* 24/04/2003)

2.5 Online Humour as a Political Engagement

'Every joke is a tiny revolution,' says George Orwell. 'Whatever destroys dignity, and brings down the mighty from their seats, preferably with a bump, is funny' (1968: 284). Humour has long been used as a means of political engagement in both Western

194

societies and China. Haiqing Yu argues: 'Chinese culture has a long tradition of using jokes, parodies and rhymes as a semiotic game to engage with politics' (2004: 37). During the SARS crisis, parody was employed by users to ridicule the incompetence, corruption, deception, and bureaucracy of the government.

Though humour seems to appeal more to an emotional rather than a rational response, Kavita Kulkarni (2004) argues that humour is an effective method for initiating political engagement and resistance, 'the use of irony and parody promotes negation, critical thinking, and scepticism, all of which are important tools for invalidating the ideological dominance of those in power' (2004: 17). The following examples are only two out of many satirical folk ballads from the Chinese bulletin boards:

SARS folk ballad 1.

The Party can't solve the problem of officials eating and drinking at public expense, but SARS did!

The Party can't solve the problem of officials travelling on public expenses, but SARS did!

The Party can't solve the problem of mountains of red tape and vast oceans of futile meetings, but SARS did!

The Party can't solve the problem of officials deceiving their superiors and subordinates, but SARS did!

The Party can't solve the problem of prostitution, but SARS did![108]

SARS folk ballad 2:

SARS prevailed in Guangdong and Beijing was contaminated;

The government loosened its strict control, so the media dares to clamour;

SARS victim are many and the hospitals are full

Doctors and nurses work really hard and risk their lives on the front line;

The masses are scared out of their wits,

Everyone wears masks covering their faces,

International organisations have come to supervise,

SARS will soon be brought under control.[109]

This playful use of folk ballads shows public engagement with politics in a humorous way. Dudden argues 'humour on the topic of politics has been a familiar vehicle for popular disdain or even opposition' (Dudden 1985: 51). The online laughter surrounding the SARS crisis was more cynical than destructive or antagonistic. By pointing out the supposedly positive side effect of the SARS crisis, it distrusted the government officials who were incapable of handling domestic problems such as corruption. Humorists focused on 'the indigenous resources at hand to poke fun at foolish or knavish political figures' (Dudden 1985: 51). By ridiculing the incompetent officials and shortcomings in the bureaucracy, Chinese users laughed and expressed their contempt.

Humour can also bond those who share the laughter together. 'Scepticism always, and cynicism often...[binds] these comic practitioners together with each other and their audiences' (Dudden 1985:53). By ridiculing the incompetent officials as 'them', online humour confirmed the status of Chinese public as being 'us', which differentiates the public from the state.

2.6 Online Community Bonding

During the SARS crisis, Internet bulletin boards such as QGLT served as a virtual sphere for public bonding based on shared emotion and communal support. Since democratisation 'can be viewed as the increase and growth of autonomous public spheres among participants' (Benhabib 1992: 87), the new form of publicity and community bonding online forms the basis for deliberation.

When the true number of SARS infections in Beijing was revealed in late April 2003, measures to prevent a pandemic were adopted. Most companies encouraged their employees to work at home. Densely populated institutions like universities were put

in quarantine to prevent students from going home and spreading the epidemic to others.

The Internet started playing a significant role of community bonding from then on. The Internet has been used for online donations (www.bjydf.org.cn) for medical facilities for SARS victims since April 28; charity networks had recommended public books to read at home since April 29[110]; starting from campus based bulletin boards, postings of mutual support brought in a new understanding of community into Chinese people's life.

A posting from a postgraduate student sharing her thoughts about staying on the densely populated campus was cross-posted among major bulletin boards and received a warm response:

> If you stay in Beijing, there is a higher possibility that you will be infected; but if you go back to your hometown, there is the possibility you start a new area [of SARS contamination]. If you think nothing's more important than your personal safety, I can't say anything. When I have to choose between putting myself or others in danger, I choose to risk my own safety (*Aini Yiwannian* 25/04/2003).[111]

The SARS crisis meant most Beijing residents halted their work or study, which gave people some time to reflect and share their thoughts. *Reader's Digest*-style postings, as some users termed them, emerged online and were characterised with poetic sentences and a humane touch. These postings appeared on major Internet bulletin boards including QGLT as a grassroots means of showing mutual support to each other:

> SARS reminds us of the unpredictability and the vulnerability of life [...] SARS tells us to be grateful, appreciate the friendliness and peace in the crisis [...] SARS encourage us to be sympathetic and empathetic to fear and anxiety [...] SARS provides us a chance to [...] be more mature and more rational, to show more trust in other people and less complaints [...] to have more tolerance and understanding [...] (*BigTall* 28/04/2003)

The abbreviation of the epidemic – SARS, was appropriated by Internet users into 'Show Active Real Support', 'Smile, And Retain Smile', and 'Sacrifice, Appreciation, Reflection, and Support' on bulletin boards. A letter to those who suffered from SARS (*dengxiong* 22/04/2003), and photos of lovers kissing each other with facial masks (*aichitang* 14/04/2004) also appeared on QGLT.

Interactivity associated with the new media can break down the alienation of audience in the mass communication age (Marshall, D. 2004). Scholars (Jones, S. 1998, Baym, N. 2000) argue that 'shared interest' works as the social bond within online groups. 'Sharing' has been regarded as the primary value within online communities. What is shared within online communities is not only 'interest', but also information, knowledge, expertise, mutual support, and wisdom. The new form of community bonding online re-constructs the sense of identity among users in China and has the potential to detach citizens from the control of the state. Such community building can pave the way to citizen deliberation. As John Gastil (2000) suggests, citizen deliberation enhances democracy in that 'interaction among citizens develops political knowledge, the sophistication of public judgments, political efficacy, and stronger habits of civic participation' (359-60).

3. QGLT Public Opinion Fitting into the Official Media Agenda

The Internet has been regarded as a grassroots media form of expression for usually socially inhibited selves (Turkle 1995). However, a significant number of QGLT online postings conformed to the official media's discourse of boosting public morale, praising the new government, and singing medical staff' praises. Internet users' echoing of the mainstream official media's agenda could also be detected from their practice of employing the official media's language pattern, such as 'people's warfare' and 'united in heart and soul in combating SARS', in their online writing.

This strange phenomenon of using official discourse to express socially suppressed selves might be explained through the framing effects on audience reception. Framing, as explained by Robert Entman involves *selection* and *salience*:

> To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described (1993: 52).

One key procedure in framing is suggesting remedies. The Chinese government employed the media discourse of 'the government's central role in maintaining social stability' as the main remedy in tackling the SARS crisis. Supporting this core concept, public morale boosting, confidence in the new Hu government and appraisal of doctors and nurses appeared in state-controlled media texts. The selection and highlighting of such meaning-making in official media had its impact on users' construction of their own interpretation of the SARS crisis within QGLT.

3.1 Morale Boosting

Headline news about SARS from the mainstream official media featuring highly propagandised language was found within QGLT. Buzek notes that two characteristics of Communist propaganda are 'simplified, preconceived, schematic images and selection and slanting of all information to suit the needs of the party line' (1964:18). Such a practice still characterises the Chinese Communist Party's organ and extends into cyberspace:

> The leaders and the masses have the same aim in fighting the plague [SARS]; we are united in heart and soul combating ATP (*Wuchenzi* 22/04/2003)
>
> People's warfare and iron discipline are the prerequisite for combating SARS (*Fengyunxiao* 23/04/2003)

Even *Laobenniu*, a user who holds a Canadian passport and has been living in North America for over 15 years, slipped comfortably into the political vocabulary he had been familiar with from Communist propaganda:

> [I] hope our country, our nation, under the central government headed by Chairman Hu will win this victory in combating the disaster, and stride to bright future. What makes me happy now is that our country, our nation, didn't have a catastrophic situation as some people expected. The unfavourable situation is under effective control, the spread of the plague is slowing down. Facts proved again that the Chinese nation is a great nation; P. R. C. is a strong country. We as a nation experienced too many national and manmade disasters, but our country grew stronger from the hardship of the disasters. I feel proud of being one member of Chinese nation! (28/04/2003)[112]

During my interview with *Laobenniu*, he proclaimed himself a nationalist and acknowledged that he still bore 'the imprint of Communist China' from his life experience. As scholar who writes in English, he shows a distinct character in following propaganda language patterns in his online political postings. Shan, the director of QGLT (1999-2004), estimated the average age of QGLT users was 33 in 2001. Users at this age in China had been fed a diet of political slogans from Communist press during their school years. Stalin wrote the Communist press was 'the strongest instrument with which, day by day, hour by hour, the party speaks to the masses in their own essential language' (Buzek 1964:39). Under such daily cultivation, the party's indoctrination became the people's key glossary. For many of the QGLT users, the rigid political vocabulary became the only resource available for them when they talk about politics.

3.2 Appraisal of the New Hu Government

SARS hit China during a politically sensitive period when Jiang Zemin stepped down and Hu Jintao emerged as the new national leader. The Chinese public witnessed for the first time in the Communist Party's history top officials being sacked for their

200

incompetence under the new government. Meanwhile, the new President Hu Jintao, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao and the Deputy Prime Minister Wu Yi actively tackled the SARS crisis. These facts won high praise for the Hu government on Internet bulletin boards. University students started to use endearing names for the national leaders such as *Tao Ge* (Brother Tao), *Xiao Bao* (Little Bao), and *Wu Jie* (Sister Wu) on campus-based bulletin boards, and this endearment soon spread among most Chinese users including QGLT users:

> Telling people the truth [about SARS] demonstrates our government's confidence (*Yundanshuinuan* 03/04/2003)
>
> Brother Tao and little Bao raise us hopes for the victory [over SARS] (*Xuantiezhongjian* 21/04/2003)
>
> Pay tribune to Ms Wu Yi who shouldered the solemn task in the time of jeopardy! (*yingxiongyiqufanhuajin* 28/04/2003)
>
> Brother Tao you stride forward without fear [dedicated to President Hu Jintao] (*Baihualin* 28/04/2003)

Apart from the state-controlled official media giving credit to the new Party leaders, a proportion of online postings showed favour towards the national leaders. When talking about pluralism, Chantal Mouffe says that 'what is really at stake is power and antagonism and their ineradicable character' (1996: 247). What is lacking in contemporary political culture in China is the key element in Mouffe's 'radical and plural democracy' - the establishment of a set of institutions through which the dominant power can be limited or contested. Without such democratic institutions, Chinese people who can be compared to their ancestors in feudal society in this sense can only expects a wise 'emperor' to eliminate all the wrongdoings from the previous emperor and brings the 'masses' good policy. The 'grateful' masses singing the national leaders' praises was found in QGLT. *Chixiannongfu* stated in his posting that the new leaders 'have already found the key to the glorious future for the whole nation' (21/04/2004); *Xuebu* asked Deputy Prime Minister Wu to 'take a good rest', because she looked 'very tired on TV' (29/04/2003).

These postings of gratitude towards the national leaders exposed a major problem for online deliberation in China. Online censorship leaves little space for political dissidents to express their opinion but gives much liberty to those who post messages that do not challenge the authority. Complimentary postings to the national leaders become a 'play safe' strategy for some QGLT users who are eager to get their names (or usernames) known for their own interests[113]. At the same time, since QGLT has been regarded as a very important means for the expression of public opinion,[114] complimentary postings towards national leaders help the Communist Party to legitimate its governance. Nevertheless, these postings from the 'grateful masses' impair the Internet's potential to cultivate a critical public antagonising the dominant totality in China. Therefore, it is possible to see that despite endeavours by civil society to hold the state in check, this attempt has not succeeded.

3.3 Complimentary Articles on Medical Staff

When they were allowed to cover SARS news, the official mass media devoted a good proportion of their coverage to touching stories of how medical staff sacrificed their lives to combat SARS. These complimentary articles on medical staff, mainly cross-posted from the official media's online service, flooded QGLT and other bulletin boards.

> This story of how doctors in Guangdong treat ATP patients is really touching... (*Manchengjinchuanhuangmajia* 25/04/2003)
>
> [This is an article I would] strongly recommend: 'Her beauty stays in my heart: memories of the nurse in Guangdong who sacrificed her life in combating ATP (*Laobenniu* 28/04/2003)

As a result of this cross-posting, the traditional media's rhetoric such as 'soldiers in white' and 'our most lovable people' also appeared in QGLT users' postings as a

tribute to the doctors and nurses. The traditional media's focus was on the medical staff who worked 'on the frontline combating SARS', while SARS patients were only reported as a collective group and most of them had 'almost come back to health' (*People's Daily* 13/04/2003 p.2). This difference in weighting medical staff and SARS patients in traditional media coverage was also reflected in online postings.

The Internet media in China are not given the right to gather their own news yet, and the traditional media's news feed is still the lifeline for online media. Therefore, the dominant role of the official media in setting the agenda for public discourse has not been challenged in many ways. When amateur online writers fall back upon the 'formal' and 'authoritative' report from official media to add credibility to their postings, they actually reinforce the dominant influence of mainstream media in the virtual sphere.

Delivered in day-to-day news coverage and embodied in concrete *persona*, the official media's 'morale boosting', 'positive reporting', and 'hero making' on SARS coverage became the dominant public discourse. QGLT users were unavoidably under this influence and some of them showed sympathy with the official media's rhetoric on government policy:

> I believe Chinese government's counter-measures are correct (*Tuzhuantou* 08/04/2003)

However, the response to this posting was not very enthusiastic – one sarcastic follow-up message reads: 'now the government just need people like you to reassure the public!' (*zhumozhai* 09/04/2003).

4. Rumours of SARS as a Biochemical Attack from the USA Targeting China

During the SARS crisis, a rumour that 'SARS was a biochemical attack from the USA targeting China' spread on QGLT. This rumour, rooted in the offline social political environment, formed a collective communication transaction among QGLT

participants. The dissemination of political rumour revealed the vulnerability of the Internet to non-rational public discourse. As Tamotsu Shibutani believes, when a rumour is passed on, a person repeats the rumour can speak without assuming full responsibility for what he says. Such practice provides an avenue for 'releasing repressed impulses' (Shibutani 1966: 6). The Internet, because of its anonymous nature and its potential of releasing social suppressed selves, becomes an ideal media for spreading rumour and creating panic and xenophobia. Manipulation of rumour on bulletin boards – the government suppressed some beliefs that were inconvenient for the regime in power and permitted others – poses a further danger to electronic deliberation. Apart from its deliberation potential, online discourse can also be manipulated to legitimate the authoritarian government's hegemony in political life.

4.1 Starting a Rumour

The rumour that SARS was a biochemical attack from the USA started in *QGLT In-Depth* on 31 March, 2003. In his/her posting entitled: 'Atypical quarantine policy and the atypical coverage [of SARS] from the Western media', *Niunaijiakele* carefully sowed the seeds of doubt within QGLT by asking these questions: Why was Western (especially the USA's) media so hysterical in reporting SARS in China? Why were they 'framing China'? This posting received 132 viewings, but did not attract any follow-up.

Skipping April Fool's Day, the same user posted his/her second article on April 2: 'The editor of the *Wall Street Journal* in the USA has the strongest immunity to ATP'. This article reads: the Americans seemed to be immune to SARS and the USA government seemed to have effective anti-dose for SARS infections in its country, which implied SARS was a biochemical weapon originated from the USA. This rumour received 216 viewings. Two follow-up messages linked this rumour to the USA's political hegemony: 'Terrible genetic weapon!' 'US-Iraq war is at its peak, the

whole East Asia is seized by ATP. If this were part of the military strategy, it would be so perfectly complete!'

Box 7.1 Discussion triggered by SARS as biochemical attack rumour within QGLT (03/04/2003)

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:10px;">

Main posting: The American newspapers confessed without being pressed: 69 ATP patients in the USA! Suggest US government to quarantine [ATP patients] in California (03/04/2003)

Follow-up 1 Are there any white people [as SARS] patients?

Follow-up 1.1 What a question! Do you think the 69 patients are all Asian? That would be interesting - white people are immune to any toxin.

Follow-up 1.1.a I'm so afraid of [SARS being] bio-weapon experiment...

Follow-up 1.2 Yes, there are white people cases. But I still suspect SARS is strategic biochemical attack.

Follow-up 1.2.a Nothing wrong with cautious prevention. But some of our government institutions have been playing ostrich – they think they hide their heads and cover their eyes and ears, then there will be no danger!

Follow-up 1.3 Because it was an experiment, there must have been mistakes. But there is no point to debate this question. The important thing is [to heed] the result of this experiment and its improvement.

Source: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=17&pn=3&qvar=2&qval=非典
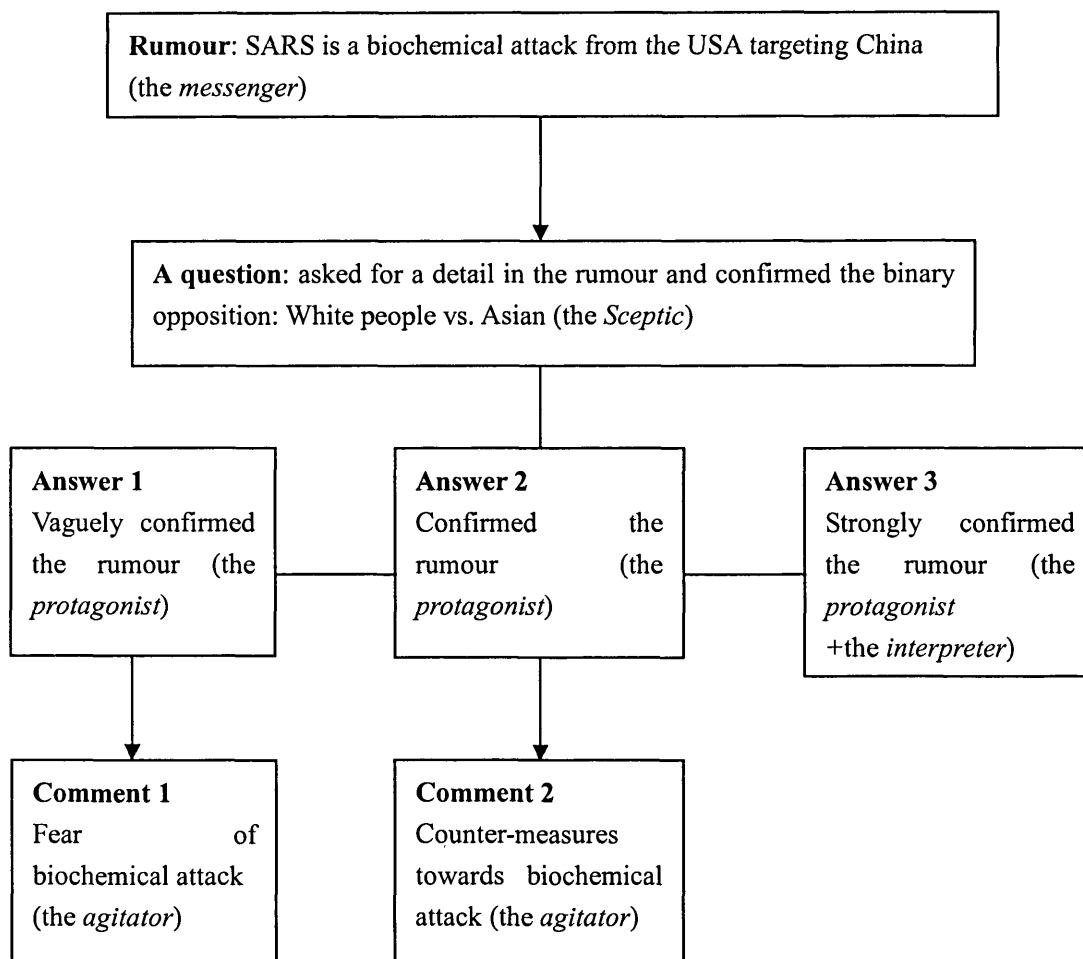
p.8 of 9 pages; accessed: 06/05/2003

</div>

As shown in the above box, when this same rumour from the same sender revisited *QGLT In-depth* on April 3, (s)he developed further 'evidence' to justify her/himself. This posting claimed that there were 69 SARS patients in the USA, but nobody died from SARS. Therefore, SARS must have originated there, and the SARS virus could

have been a virus leak from a biochemical experiment in the country. Though there existed no substantive evidence linking the SARS cases and the biochemical attack, this posting attracted 209 viewings. Follow up postings dwelled on the consequences of biochemical attack and how China should react, rather than questioning the nature of the rumour.

This development of discussion showed a four-level communication among QGLT users, as shown in the following chart:

Figure7.2 Four-level communication in SARS rumour

```
┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Rumour: SARS is a biochemical attack from the USA targeting China │
│ (the messenger)                                            │
└────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              │
                              ▼
┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ A question: asked for a detail in the rumour and confirmed the binary │
│ opposition: White people vs. Asian (the Sceptic)           │
└────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Answer 1 Vaguely confirmed the rumour (the *protagonist*)	Answer 2 Confirmed the rumour (the *protagonist*)	Answer 3 Strongly confirmed the rumour (the *protagonist* +the *interpreter*)

Comment 1 Fear of biochemical attack (the *agitator*)	Comment 2 Counter-measures towards biochemical attack (the *agitator*)

Such a communication process for spreading rumours constitutes 'a collective transaction, involving a *division of labour* among participants, each of whom makes a *different* contribution' (Shibutani 1966: 13). Shibutani's role allocation in rumour

communication can be detected in examining the roles played by QGLT users as shown above.

On the first level, the rumour was started by the *messenger* who brought the news to the group;

On the second level, there were no challenges to the rumour. A question was raised by a *Sceptic* expressing doubt over the authenticity of the report and demanded details (whether all the SARS patients were white). This question, however, confirmed the xenophobic binary oppositions in the rumour - 'USA' vs. 'China', 'White people' vs. 'Asian'. These binary oppositions fit well into the long tradition of anti-American sentiment within QGLT;

On the third level, three answers were given by three *protagonists* to the question in level two. Each of them positively sponsored and confirmed the rumour;

On the fourth level, comments from two as-if-*agitators* on the answers given at level three (the confirmation of SARS as biochemical attack). Fear and worries regarding counter-measures against the 'biochemical attack' in these postings look as if the 'biochemical attack' had already happened and affected the posters personally.

The spreading of the online rumour that SARS was a biochemical attack confirmed Das' (1998) argument on the characteristics of rumours and explained it in terms of an online environment. Language used in rumours is 'communicable, infectious, causing things to happen almost as if they had occurred in nature', which creates '*mounting panic*' (Das 1998:117). The anonymity of source and 'its capacity to build solidarity' (Das 1998: 116) often make rumours well received by public. Within QGLT, the

anonymous online environment, public panic during the SARS crisis, and the users' 'solidarity' in protesting USA's military action in Iraq during the same period all contributed to the reception of this rumour. Moreover, in the decentralised online environment where everyone speaks, the openness of online discourse makes the public vulnerable to rumours. It is difficult for users to orient their attention among various information sources, and it is even more difficult for them to question the authenticity of any information they receive. Within QGLT, when the average number of daily postings is more than 10,000,[115] users tend to pay attention to postings that keep appearing and attract enough attention. The economy of attention online sadly works in favour of sensational, odd, or repetitive information. With a gradual build up of readership and replies, rumours 'naturalise [...] the stereotypical distinctions between social groups and hides the social origins and production of hate' (Das 1998:117). One has to admit that the openness of the online communication environment creates a favourable condition for the spread of rumours.

4.2 Xenophobic Nationalism Behind the Rumour

Online rumours are rooted in offline social contexts. The xenophobia and nationalism displayed in the rumour of 'SARS being a biochemical attack from the USA' reflects a long-held 'wounded nationalism' (Chang, M. H. 2001) in modern Chinese history. Rumours 'are not isolated reports but phases of a more inclusive adjustive process, and the analysis of symbolic content alone is not likely to yield adequate understanding' (Shibutani 1966: 24).

China has been invaded and colonised by technologically advanced Western powers and Japan for more than one hundred years. Maria Hsia Chang explains that this history of colonisation left a legacy of collective insecurity, 'wounded pride and resentment' among its people (2001:26). This feeling of defeat renders the nation vulnerable to reactive nationalism and view Western powers as hostile and unreliable

(*ibid.*). 'China has had to accept the West as a mentor of modernisation and reject it as a hostile oppressor' (Huang and Lee 2003: 42). Thus an ambivalent attitude towards developed western countries, especially the USA, has developed in modern Chinese history. Yu Huang and Chin-Chuan Lee argue that the USA has been regarded as a symbol of advanced technology and liberal democracy among Chinese intellectuals[116], but on the other hand the USA has been regarded as an 'opponent' on issues such as Taiwan's independence. A survey conducted by the *China Youth Daily* on 4 July 1995 reveals that 87% of Chinese respondents considered the USA to be the 'most hostile country to China' (Huang and Lee 2003: 46).

In such an offline social political context, the rumour of 'SARS as a biochemical attack from the USA targeting China' revived the 'wounded nationalism' and xenophobia towards American hegemony among Chinese users. Details to support the rumour were also gradually added. A user claimed that this 'news' was released by Russian experts on Russian media (*Lintan* 18/04/2003). 'Rumours tend to build on each other. Once a plausible start is made, it is supported through a variety of other material' (Shibutani 1966: 68-9). QGLT witnessed continuous development of this rumour and xenophobia towards USA. The following postings are examples on 22 April 2003:

- HIV, SARS, BSE, Ebola, all these are bacteriological experiment from the USA! These are rehearsals of the real battles! [The USA] has been testing their feasibility!

- Shameless USA! If the pro-America cliques in China didn't learn lessons [from this biochemical attack] and still followed those pro-America cliques holding [USA] Green Cards, they could kill themselves without knowing it.

- Damn it! As long as there exists this source of trouble [USA], the whole earth weeps.

- China always strikes its enemy back later. Now [China] must be gathering evidence.

- This issue is worth investigating. Why didn't USA report [its SARS cases] to the WHO?

- The Chinese government should put every effort in investigating. The USA is really worth resenting! (22/04/2003)

This rumour of conspiracy received criticism from some other users, though in limited

numbers. Protesting messages denounced this rumour as 'shameless' (*genyuan* 28/04/2003), having 'shaky evidence' (*hanyangzao* 30/04/2003), while other users called for 'a stop to the rumour of SARS as biochemical attack!' (*shengdongyouqu* 23/04/2003). However, in the name of patriotism, this rumour encountered less restraint from the newsroom censorship and government surveillance, and was kept alive till the SARS panic finally died down in China. The SARS rumour postings revealed that in spite of the conflicting ideas presented on QGLT, the degree of interactivity or rational debate among users was rather weak among a limited number of users. By not voicing their opinion, the majority of bulletin board users can turn the Internet into another traditional media form which are used as 'bastions of the powerful where the relatively powerless have remained silent and silenced' (Mitra 2004: 507)

4.3 'Harmful Rumours' and 'Harmless Rumours'

Rumour is a natural response from an insecure public which has an unsatisfied need for information in times of crisis, and when the routine of organised life has been disturbed (Shibutani 1966). Officials can control or even suppress rumours by eliminating false beliefs, eliminating beliefs that are inconvenient for the regime in power (Shibutani 1966: 200). On the other hand, officials can also neglect, or even promote rumours that can potentially consolidate its governance. In this sense, the Internet is still a vulnerable public sphere to political manipulation in China.

In moments of crisis, as Shibutani (1966: 47) argues, rumours usually flourish when discontent arises among under-privileged persons who feel that they are deprived, insecure, alienated, and restless. Such disadvantaged groups lack adequate information to explain their situation. They usually 'become responsive to anything that might identify the source of their discontent or any object or program that is likely to bring relief' (Shibutani 1966: 47).

During the time when SARS information from official sources was scarce, rumours such as 'Beijing will be sealed off', 'martial law will be imposed at the airports, train stations and motorways', 'medicines will be sprayed from helicopters', and 'one employee from Hailong Building [who died from SARS] disappeared mysteriously' spread through Internet bulletin boards, and chatrooms to mobile phones until, in the last case, the employee who 'disappeared mysteriously' came out in public on YNET.com to prove that she had not died from SARS (Pu, H. 25/06/2003).

QGLT also accommodated one rumour concerning SARS in Beijing on 22 April 22 2003. User *Yuconger* posted the following message on *QGLT Current Affairs*:

> Internal news about the ATP: There have been around 7,000-8,000 people infected [SARS] in Tongzhou District in Beijing, more than 300 died.[117]

This message came online at 10:49:39 Beijing Time and was deleted (along with nine replies to the postings) within an hour. On the following day, China Central Television announced that *Yuconger* had been detained for spreading rumours online (Sima 29/04/2003). Apart from the capital, several provincial and municipal governments issued similar notices warning Internet users who 'distorted facts' or 'spread rumours' about SARS would face criminal prosecution.[118] In Foshan city, Guangdong Province alone, seven cases of spreading SARS rumours online were investigated by the local public security bureau, and the people who 'spread the rumours' were detained[119]. During the SARS crisis, more than one hundred people were detained, fined, warned, or educated in the name of spreading SARS rumours through the Internet and mobile text messages since April 2003 (Kuang 26/05/2004).

Forming a contrast was the fact that users who spread rumours of SARS as a biochemical attack from the USA remained unpunished. I asked Mr. Shan (Director of QGLT 1999-2004) why *Yuconger* was detained for spreading rumours whilst others

were not. He said, 'these two kinds of rumours had different natures. The first rumour [of exaggerating SARS infection in Beijing] caused great public panic; while the second rumour did not cause similar consequence' (Interview 01/09/2005). Shibutani argues that politicians often exploit already established rumours for their purposes (1966: 212). The Chinese government showed permissiveness towards the 'biochemical attack' rumour, which served the purpose of corroborating the Communist Party's governance in 'protecting' Chinese people from 'invasion'.

Different ways in handling rumours is just one of many examples of the Party's manipulation of public attention on online discussion. From February 20 to March 31, there was no single article about SARS posted in QGLT or any online news coverage of SARS from www.people.com.cn. This time span 'coincided' with the annual convening of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee and National People's Congress. Both media administration and newsroom censorship were tightened during that period to filter out any 'negative' news no matter how vital they were to the public interest. At roughly the same time, contrasting to the scarcity of SARS information in February and March, heated discussion on the Iraqi war started on February 27 (almost one month ahead of the actual breakout of the war) and anti-war postings flooded QGLT and other bulletin boards.

Indeed, technology and media are by nature 'neither automatically democratic nor demagogic' and 'both their democratic potential or demagogic potential can be consciously tapped' (Grosswiler 1998:149). Technology and media can empower ordinary people to express their opinion, discuss and debate issues of common concerns, whereas at the same time they can also be used by political and business interest groups to control public thought (Chomsky 1989). Internet bulletin boards in China have been pushing the limits of the Party's political tolerance through online discussion on current affairs. However, the freedom of online discussion is more plausible on international issues than domestic issues to the Party. When online discussion on taboo issues such as SARS was raised at the 'wrong' time, the Party

212

will control the online discussion through censorship, diverting public attention and other various means. Furthermore, as scholars point out, Internet use can even cultivate xenophobia and nationalism, which serves the communist party's need to legitimate its own hegemony (He 2000; Hughes 2002; Huang and Lee 2003).

5. Summary

Based on dialogic forms of communication across national borders, Internet bulletin boards have created an alternative publicity outside the official agenda in China. In spite of all the newsroom censorship and government control, online discussion on Internet bulletin boards has a certain degree of autonomy and is characterised by contesting political viewpoints. Through the case study of SARS online discussion within QGLT, I conclude that a multi-tiered virtual public sphere is in development. Though the official discourse is still dominant, the subaltern publics are expanding and constructing alternative and oppositional political voices, which enriches the content of political communication and extends the forms of political participation in China.

However, the many-to-many communication model online leaves Internet users exposed to all kinds of information, including non-progressive and non-deliberative political voices. 'Citizens' in the networked public sphere had to wade through a series of rude and sometimes nasty messages; speculation even more wild than that on the television (Kramer 03/02/2003). There are both great potential and pit-falls for public deliberation on Internet bulletin boards.

5.1 QGLT as an Alternative Online Discourse: Between the Media Silence and Media Hype

Although Chinese media have gained some autonomy in reporting since the media reform in 1978, Kalathil (2002) argues that Chinese media are still far from

functioning as an impartial observer and commentator even as they are struggling to keep pace with the economic development and globalisation sweeping the country. Their 'collective silence' in the early stage of SARS coverage becomes another example of how much control the authoritarian government can have over mass media.

However on the other hand, the Western media's coverage of SARS has been criticised by scientists as 'media hype'. Nobel Prize winning virologist David Baltimore accused journalists of spreading hysteria: 'a media-transmitted epidemic of concern for personal safety outpaces the risk to the public health from the actual virus' (Ricchiardi 2003).

Online postings within QGLT have reflected a range of perspectives in contemporary public opinion in China. The way in which information is disseminated online has its autonomy in setting its own agenda. This was the case when SARS postings first appeared. On the Internet bulletin boards, there is a snowballing effect in terms of postings being viewed. Postings receive more viewing rates and follow-up messages tend to attract more users later. SARS online discussion proved that it was users' autonomous selective attention decides and prioritises online topical discussion. Public opinion formed from this discussion reflects a parallel public discourse contrasting, challenging, or antagonising the official agenda of hoarding information concerning public health.

A survey conducted by Yu et al. on March 22-23, 2003 in Beijing revealed that the Internet (24.6%) ranked the third primary information source among 396 Beijing residents (the first two are television at 80% and newspapers at 57.5%). Among these respondents, people who get SARS news from the Internet have an average age of 31.31, and 85.5% of them hold a university degree or above. They are younger and better educated compared with other audience groups (Yu, Guomin et al. 20/12/2005).

My study of QGLT SARS postings finds that: a group of well-informed Internet users

first voice out SARS news and their opinion based on their personal information source such as overseas media, personal experience, or other channels. This group of well-educated university graduates mainly in an urban setting derive pleasure in writing and debating online. They actively seek and disseminate truth that few official media venture to voice. By doing so, they provide others with an alternative media discourse alongside the official one. They played the role of opinion leaders in the anonymous online environment and actively contributed to the forming of public opinion online.

As discussed in previous sections, a words filtering system (see more in Chapter 5) was used in QGLT to filter public discussion about SARS. However, when 'SARS' or '非典' was blocked, users found other words to replace them; when talking about SARS was controlled on domestic bulletin boards, overseas bulletin boards became popular among users; when bulletin boards were under strict supervision, internal communities messaging, QQ[120], MSN messenger, emails, mobile phone texts, news group and mailing list were used to communicate ideas. Thus, Kuang (26/05/2004) argues that the 'avalanche of information' effect of online information dissemination makes any efforts in shielding out information eventually impossible. The authoritarian government will face a dilemma in information control online: the control of one Internet communication means will trigger other information communication technologies. The banning of certain topics will arouse curiosity from users and so ironically produce more information.

5.2 SARS is not China's Chernobyl

The Economist compared the outbreak of SARS in China with the explosion of a nuclear reactor at Chernobyl in that 'a leader of just a few months' standing in power [and] political uncertainty reinforced the tendency of party apparatchiks to conceal bad news' (26/04/2003: 9). Chernobyl in April 1986 has been acknowledged as 'a great accelerator' of openness and restructuring which helped, 'just three years later,

to bring down first the Soviet empire, then the Soviet Union itself and the Communist Party' (*The Economist* 26/04/2003: 9)

Three years have passed since SARS broke out in China and we can tell that SARS has not become China's Chernobyl. There are various reasons that contribute to this. Though online postings about SARS in China displayed a deliberative potential, they also demonstrated intrinsic limitations associated with Internet media at the same time. Meanwhile, behind the illusion of free, open and autonomous online political discussion, the Chinese government has been controlling online public opinion in various ways to serve its own administration.

Internet bulletin boards are vulnerable to irrational, derogatory, and non-progressive discourse. American foreign policy expert David J. Rothkopf used the word 'infodemic' to describe the media hype over SARS which 'made the crisis harder to control, especially as panic and rumours spread via chat rooms, bulletin boards and e-mail worldwide' (Ricchiardi 2003). The Internet, particularly, had been rife with rumour of SARS as a 'Chinese Plague' and bioterrorism. There were online postings blaming Asian food for the spread of disease (Ricchiardi 2003) or linking SARS to a global conspiracy. In spite of the deliberative potential of information technology, the virtual public sphere is not all necessarily democratic in its nature.

The rumour of 'SARS being a biochemical attack from the USA' as spread on QGLT boards was disguised as patriotism and nationalism. The Communist Party has propagated the idea of 'China as subject to hostile external and internal predators' (Renwick and Cao 2003:62). This long-term brainwashing paved the psychological basis for the reception of rumour regarding SARS as a conspiracy from the USA. The enthusiasm from QGLT users in responding to this rumour reflects the cultivated 'wounded nationalism' among Chinese public.

Behind the online nationalism presented in QGLT SARS postings is the Communist Party' manipulation of online political discussion to serve its own governance. Legitimating the political power became more significant for the Communist Party after the 1989 pro-Democracy Movement. Nationalism thus became a handy reason to justify the Party's hegemony under the Party's sole leadership; China can unite and resist marginalisation and exclusion from Western powers (especially the USA for its intervention over the issue of Taiwan).

This anti-USA discourse had in fact started before the breakout of SARS. In mid February 2003, more than one month before the war in Iraq broke out, major official media in China were instructed to: 'make full use of the variety of news sources from foreign news agencies and giving the war a comprehensive report as soon as it breaks out'[121]. From then on, heated anti-war discussion prevailed on Internet bulletin boards and denunciation of USA's military hegemony was echoed among users.

The heated discussion of a remote war in Iraq forms a sharp contrast to the suppression of online discussion over SARS that took place at home. By diverting public attention on international issues and away from domestic affairs, the Communist Party granted the Chinese public a selective freedom of political expression of opinion. The Chinese public can feel free to debate the issues permitted by the Party but not necessarily the issues of their concerns. This fact seemed to prove what Zaller (1992) believes, that an elite framing effect is still a central power in the democratic process in that it determines public opinion.

This strategy of diverting public attention to the Party's preferred issues was also applied when SARS information became 'open' and 'transparent'. Users were not restrained from praising the new government, or of giving credit to medical staff. They were also allowed to give constructive suggestions and mild criticism (especially when the criticism was targeted at local government). By consciously or

217

unconsciously displaying a certain level of consistency to the official agenda in their postings, QGLT users reinforced the official agenda.

However, James Druckman and Kjersten Nelson's (2003) recent study shows that the elite framing has only a short-term effect and can be limited by interpersonal conversation and individual heterogeneity. In this sense, the decentred and non-hierarchical cyberspace can be an ideal tool in promoting interaction between heterogeneous individuals, which prevents any individualised social actor from representing him or her self in totality. Public deliberation displayed during the SARS crisis further pushed the Chinese government towards press freedom and democratisation. When SARS revisited Guangdong Province in 2004, both the government institutions and official media immediately revealed the news to the public and put SARS under effective control[122]. This changed attitude in dealing with the same issue is largely due to the active role Internet media played in 2003. As some scholars believe, China's new leader may have learned valuable lesson from SARS:

> In the era of instant global communication, cover-ups become almost impossible. While state-controlled media may tamely follow government orders, the proliferation of Internet and other new high-tech information sources signal an end to government chances of remaining the sole provider of information – or even the most listened-to source (Yuan J-D. 03/06/2003).

Seyla Benhabib gives three reasons as to why deliberative processes help to improve the practical rationality of collective decision-making processes: a) deliberative processes impart new information; b) deliberative processes help individuals to order their preferences coherently, and c) deliberative processes impose a certain reflexivity on individual preferences and opinion, forcing participants to adopt an 'enlarged mentality' (1996: 71-72). Through the case study of SARS communication within QGLT, we can tell that the embryonic deliberative procedure online improves the quality of the outcome of decision-making. Though SARS did not bring profound changes in China's politics as Chernobyl did to the former USSR, Internet bulletin

boards and other online facilities did present competing publics in the political landscape. An alternative political discourse 'may have fostered the growth of a public critique that, over time, the party will be hard put to ignore' (Brookes, A. 24/06/2003). The public sphere constructed online gives voice to the alternative and oppositional political groups to air their concerns, which enriches the political discourse and may eventually reshape the political culture in China.

Chapter 8

Cyber-Greater China: Bulletin Boards in the Mediated Global Public Sphere

Computer mediated communication builds up online communities extending beyond geopolitical boundaries (Castells 1996, 2001). The intrinsic global nature of the Internet makes it an ideal tool for creating an autonomous association among people who share the same culture but live in dispersed geopolitical regions. For that reason, the Internet opens up the public discussion over China's issues to Chinese people all over the world and constructs a virtual public sphere in Greater China[123] hardly anticipated before. Public discussion over the virtual public sphere in Greater China has been viewed as a new approach to solve regional conflicts along the Taiwan Strait, and also assist progress towards democracy in the Mainland (Copper 2003).

In this chapter I am going to explore the global nature of Internet bulletin boards and examine how online public opinion as an alternative public discourse concerning China-related political, economic, cultural, and human rights issues, is formed within Greater China and influences the official agenda in the Mainland. Using QGLT as an example, my study suggests that QGLT and other bulletin boards based in China serve as a tool for deliberation in Greater China through the following means:

a) Bulletin boards, as a grassroots media form, bridge the information gap between the Chinese users both in mainland China and those overseas so that a common ground for further political discussion is formed;

b) Bulletin boards provide Chinese users with a platform to interpret news from mainstream media sources, and forms an alternative public discourse within the online community;

c) Bulletin boards attract scholars both from Mainland China and overseas, contributing to studies on China-related issues;

220

d) Bulletin boards bond Chinese people together all over the world into online civil protests during significant political events;

e) Bulletin boards are also used as a tool for organising individuals into online civil rights groups.

Finally, this chapter will discuss the limitations of this virtual public sphere in Greater China and concludes that the "horizontal civic communication" (Dahlgren 2004: xiii) on bulletin boards and web forums contributes to the construction of a virtual public sphere in Greater China.

1. Bulletin Boards as an Alternative Information Source

Internet bulletin boards, as an autonomous media form, can disseminate grassroots information, thus providing an alternative public voice in parallel with the dominant media discourse. This person-to-person sharing of information helps to bridge the information gap between the Chinese users in mainland China and those overseas, so that a common ground for further political discussion can be found.

One fatal weakness of modern journalism is its extreme selectivity in making news (Rucht, D. 2004:34). Modern journalism provides little space for citizens who have no authority, celebrity or expertise to give their political opinions. Lewis et al. argue that 'the traditional top-down structure of political reporting' (2004: 163) excludes active citizen access to the media, and mass media in general are 'focused on the doings of the powerful' (2004:154). However bulletin boards, as Rheingold argues, can turn an ordinary person anywhere in the world into 'a publisher, an eyewitness reporter, an advocate, an organizer, a student or teacher, and potential participant in a worldwide citizen-to-citizen conversation' [124] . This 'citizen-to-citizen conversation' on the bulletin boards plays a very important role as an information source in China where the media are largely government controlled, media content is under partisan

surveillance and established foreign media are banned from direct public access[125].

Many QGLT postings contain news which otherwise would not be carried by the official media in China. By posting on Internet bulletin boards, Chinese users inside the country and overseas become each other's information source. The traditional power relation between the exchanging of information and sharing of news has created a common ground for individuals to develop topical discussion.

Avoiding the stringent censorship in the official media, overseas news can always find a place on Internet bulletin boards. This overseas news 'feed' includes cross-posting of news from overseas Chinese media, users' translation of news in foreign languages, and original eyewitness 'reports' from overseas users. Overseas information has played an important role for breaking news events like the September 11 attacks. 17 minutes after the first airliner crashed into the World Trade Centre, when the official Chinese media were still silent, a message about it from Hong Kong, coded in traditional Chinese (Big5), was posted on QGLT (Guo 2003). Similar examples could be found in postings from Taiwan regarding the earthquake in 2001 and the general elections.

When virtual proximity in cyberspace creates a sense of locality, overseas Chinese users become information sources from their host countries to their home country. As well as heavily regulating the use of satellite TV in China, the Chinese government also has blocked most international media organisation's websites (such as bbc.co.uk) from personal computers within its border. Negative news about China reported by foreign media is largely blocked out from the Chinese public. However, QGLT users from the USA, Germany, Australia, Singapore, and other countries can convey news concerning China from international media sources into their postings (though mostly in a subtle way). For example the following paragraph, taken from a posting contributed by QGLT user *Zhiyanle* from the USA, revealed a piece of negative news about China. At the same time, the Chinese official media had been downplaying the severity of the AIDS situation in the country:

Reuters and New York Times (July 7): The UN gave warning that AIDS cases are on sharp rise in Asia. There was one out of every five AIDS patients from Asia last year. While this year, one out of every four AIDS patients are from Asia. [...] The increase in AIDS cases in China is catching up that is in Thailand. UN public health representative gave the above report on the 15 International AIDS Conference and gave warning especially to Asia and China (*Zhiyanle* 07/07/2004 author's translation)

The informational role of bulletin boards can also be illustrated in domestic users' posting their personal accounts of social changes and problems in developing China. This individualized perspective of social news would be regarded as too 'insignificant' or too 'negative' to appear in the traditional media. In January 2004, a posting containing stories and photos of the miserable livelihood of peasants, migrant workers, beggars, prostitutes, the homeless, and the unemployed got 'published' on QGLT[126]. These images on the Internet, with 640 click rates within four hours in QGLT, made a sharp contrast to the images of economic prosperity and social harmony presented in traditional media. As such, they convincingly construct an alternative public discourse.

Also within QGLT, *Jieyu*, who comes from a village herself, frequently contributes articles on the equal rights of peasant migrant workers in the city (15/05/2002) and legal protection for their civil rights (16/05/2002). William* has started to write about the lack of social welfare and the poor condition of the pension system for migrant workers since 2003. His articles were later adopted by *Southern Weekend* and several other media in China before it appeared on the website of an overseas labour rights organization based in the USA.

A survey conducted by the CINIC reveals that 39.1% of Chinese Internet users identify their primary goal for going online is 'to get information'. Among all the online sources obtained and browsed, overseas Chinese sites count for 7.0 % and overseas English sites 5.6 % (Report XV 2005). The informing role of bulletin boards has started to affect the traditional media agenda. As Bennett observes, the Internet is

becoming more and more an information source for traditional journalists (Bennett, W. L. 2004: 141). Thus the validity of the online information might flow from the virtual space into the macro mass media. Meanwhile, the increasing importance of the informing role of Internet media also reflects a growing public awareness of press freedom in mainland China. The 'loss of the right to speak', as a QGLT user wrote in his signature file: 'will eventually endanger the right to live'.

Bulletin boards and other interactive online communities create a new sphere for public meeting and discussions, which demonstrates the potential for reunifying people and remapping the political constituencies in a global sense. By sharing information among isolated individuals, Internet bulletin boards reunify people and cultivate a well-informed public ready for public discussion. The decentralised nature of the Internet has the potential of thawing the hegemonic control over public dialogue and bringing about empowerment of citizens.

2. Interpreting the Dominant Media Discourse

Internet bulletin boards enable Internet users to create a secondary text of current affairs based on their reception of mainstream media coverage. By interpreting news received from mainstream media, users can integrate their own knowledge, understanding, experience, and critique into a 'negotiated' alternative public discourse. The active audience in the mass communication era have already shown their resistance in how they decode media messages. The audience can selectively accept, resist, engage with or propose their own 'oppositional' reading of the encoded values in television programmes (e.g. Morley, D. 1980). The Internet offers a greater opportunity for the resistant audience from the mass communication age to make known their decoding of the culture they receive from 'above'.

One notorious feature of Chinese journalism before the media reform started in the

late 1970s is that traditional media always shed positive light on their coverage of even the most disastrous media events. For example, an earthquake report will be covered from the perspective of national leaders' visit to the earthquake stricken area, or the People's Liberation Army's rescue efforts. This practice was a 'principle' of newsroom policy, and has not been totally eradicated within the official media. However, Internet bulletin boards have provided Chinese users with a platform to interpret news from mainstream media sources and construct their own narratives of the current affairs, which forms an alternative public discourse within the online community.

Audience studies have long revealed a two-way relationship between audience and texts in media reception. Audiences can resist, engage with and create their own meanings from the messages received (Morley, D. 1980; Fiske, J. 1989; de Certeau, M. 1984). This role of the audience in the semiotic 'guerrilla war' with the media producers becomes more important with the arrival of the Internet. The Internet provides the audience (users) with both material for producing, and space for publishing their interpretation, snatched from the mass media feed.

The power relationship between information sending and receiving has been challenged, if not totally reversed, on Internet bulletin boards. Based on the text obtained from the traditional mass media, Chinese users interpret the news and create new meaning within their framework of knowledge and experience, which adds complexity and plurality to the original media text. Internet bulletin boards provide a platform for users publishing their negotiated interpretation of the current news, which might influence the official agenda.

CINIC's 2005 survey reveals that 62.0% of the mainland users browse the Internet for news and 20.8% of them also use the bulletin boards and online communities for discussion. Within the officially administrated QGLT, comments and analysis by users on current social political events provide an alternative reading to the news from the

mainstream media. In an attempt to write out their own news stories, QGLT users rely on multi-textual information and personal experiences before approaching news stories from a critical perspective. By doing so, the traditional 'passive audience' gain their right to construct and publish their own news narratives.

Tianjiali, a retired employee from a state-owned enterprise, frequently posts his 'news analyses' on QGLT. From my interview with him, I found that his media consumption includes television (watching headline news and investigative stories from China Central Television), newspapers (reading both local and national broadsheet papers), and Internet media. This intertextuality in media consumption provides materials and helps to cultivate his critical thinking when he writes his own news comments. One example is his news analysis of a 'touching' story that appeared on *Chongqing Evening* in July 2004. The local news reported a 6-year-old girl selling newspapers on the street and earning money for her father's medical operation. The local paper focused on the little girl's filial duty to her parent and people's kindness in donating money, but for *Tianjiali* it raised questions about the social welfare system:

> I'm happy for the little girl for her receiving the attention of the media as well as the help from the society. However, who can support the other victims suffering from similar accidents? [...] Prestigious writer Liang Xiaosheng says, if we want to judge the rationality of a social system, we should look at how the poorest live their lives rather than how the richest spend their money [...]. We saw these people in need failing to get social support in time, so we know there must be something wrong with contemporary social mechanism (*Tianjiali* 31/07/2004 author's translation).

Most QGLT users' interpretation of news offers a critical approach, written in plain conversational language. This writing style differs sharply from the mainstream official media's opinion page which is characterised by the ideology of 'instructing the masses', and written in rigidly structured political clichés. Overseas Chinese users, because of their free access to media sources, special knowledge of China, and the fact that they do not need to fear the authorities, can become the most eloquent and daring news commentators within QGLT.

In July 2004, UNESCO urged China to take measures in protecting the ancient buildings surrounding the Forbidden City in Beijing. But Beijing municipal officials argued that tearing down the old buildings for new roads is to make 'a central axial line' for the Capital city[127]. An overseas user *Zhiyanle* interpreted this news based on her/his knowledge of the corruption in China. (S)he argued the real reason behind building new roads in Beijing is 'to benefit the real estate business'. He/she also challenged the authority to expose 'the connections between relevant government organisations to the real estate companies to the public'.[128]

The impact of users' interpreting current affairs on bulletin boards is the breaking down of uniformity in public opinion (Min 2001; Li and Qin 2001, Chen and Deng 2002). The capacity of the Internet media to harbour different political beliefs is owing to the "ideologically thin" (Bennett 2004:134) communication within the civil network online. Bennett believes that due to the lack of "common ideological or issue frames", online communication may reduce conflicts and harbour intellectual contradictions (2004: 134-5).

The intellectual contradictions within QGLT users could be best exemplified by the Special Discussion Channel on Strategic Development (2001–2002)[129]. Obtaining permission from the people.com.cn administration, 12 users volunteered to select topics, organise and moderate online discussions on development problems facing China. This was a response to QGLT users' enthusiasm for debating China's future and desire to search for solutions through public discussion. This one-year practice involved 69 users who actively participated and consisted of 134 articles of original writing about the development problems in China that were posted on the site. Up to April 2002, 25 topical discussions were put on the agenda, ranging from domestic issues like 'Education and Social Welfare', 'Reform on Governmental Administrative System', 'Anti-corruption and Balance of Power', 'Reform of State-owned Enterprises', to the Taiwan issue and international relations.

However, when key members gradually withdrew from the volunteer group, this self-initiated in-depth analysis was taken under the control of QGLT and transformed into an online panel meeting. This new edition of in-depth public debate over policy making was launched in 2003 during the sessions of the annual National People's Congress Assembly and the Political Consultative Conference Delegation. Top officials and people's delegates were invited to QGLT online panel 'meetings' with users to answer questions. There is clear evidence that common concerns from Internet users, like policies regarding education and agriculture, were later embodied in national delegates' proposals. With a growing tolerance towards politically 'constructive' suggestions, it seems that the Communist Party's tight control over public opinion has relaxed through online dialogue between citizens and government officials, mediated by official media such as QGLT.

3. Scholarly Studies on China-Related Issues

QGLT attracts scholars from both China and overseas who contribute their studies on Chinese-related issues. QGLT provides its users with a platform for intellectual conversation through independent, and sometimes even oppositional, scholarly voices. Scholarly research, ranging from history studies to international relations studies, is presented on the bulletin boards to trigger dialogue, discussion, and even debate. To better understand their interlocutors, participants of the online academic debate 'reflexively modify their pre-discursive positions in response to better arguments' (Dahlberg 2001c:167). Through such processes, rational critical discussion within the online community engages Chinese intellectuals in a discursive interaction.

For non-professional researchers in China who usually have difficulty in getting access to mainstream publishers and academic institutions, Internet bulletin boards and other online communities become an ideal place to 'publish' articles, debate viewpoints, challenge ideas, and derive inspiration. As one QGLT user said, there has

been an atmosphere of 'learning from each other and progressing through the interaction and communication within this community' (*Fanzi* 04/03/2004).

Describing himself as a 'plebeian scholar', *Gaomu* has a university degree in Business Economy and has worked with three state-owned enterprises. QGLT has been his 'publisher' since 1999. He has constantly posted articles concerning problems in the process of corporationalisation and privatisation of the state-owned enterprises (27/08/2004). He also calls for a more appropriate 'social mechanism' in the economic reform to best serve the basic interest of the majority public (11/08/2004). As an amateur scholar, he has to rely on his own income and family help for research work. Despite the fact that he contacted a few big publishers, he failed to get his work published. Only by posting on Internet bulletin boards can he challenge the mainstream economists whom he believes 'engage too much with Western Micro Economics theories and stray far away from the economic reality in China' (Interview with *Gaomu*: 03/09/2004).

QGLT also attracts mainstream researchers such as *Hairui2000* whose professional title is a Senior Researcher specializing in Employment Studies. Though admitting it is not easy to form an ideal rational critical debate around topics like 'Civil Societies and Socialism' (*Hairui2000* 06/02/2002) on bulletin boards, *Hairui2000* still finds 'meaningful' discussions going on within small subgroups in QGLT community.

Within QGLT, there are also overseas scholars like *Zhuliu* who post on behalf of China Strategic Research and Development Institute (CSI), which consists of Chinese scholars and post-graduates students in the USA. Registered in California in June 1994, CSI, as it claims, is devoted to:

> research and designing Chinese-including Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong-development strategy worldwide, to set into action, so China can improve its democracy and human rights, to promote its people quality, to realize China's modernization and its potential for world peace and human development (available at:

Some academic works were abstracted, edited, or integrated into postings before they appeared on bulletin boards. The following piece appearing on QGLT is taken from a Sociologist *Zhong Dajun*'s book on the implication of 'national treatment' after China joined the WTO. National treatment, as a WTO principle, implies that both foreigners and locals should be treated without discrimination. This principle applies to imported and locally-produced goods, foreign and domestic services, trademarks, copyrights and patents within WTO member countries[130]. *Zhong* uses the concept of national treatment to argue that although China became a WTO country, discrimination against the rural population such as the deprivation of free migration could be found within its own territory. This unequal treatment of its own citizens results in a widening gap between the city and countryside, and the rich and poor. It is hard to imagine that this severe criticism of the official census registry system could be found on any other media than Internet bulletin boards:

> This is a forced deprivation of the citizen rights of free migration and free choice of profession. This census registry system with Chinese character is more brutal than the racial segregation in the South African [...] It can be compared only to the Nazi's concentration camp in some sense. (06/05/2003 author's translation)[131]

All QGLT users I interviewed, no matter whether it was the amateur researcher *Gaomu* or the senior researcher *Hairui2000,* refused to label themselves as 'elite intellectuals'. They believe that 'elite intellectuals' are those who hold important positions within the government or derive benefits from western powers. The growing distrust of government and government-supported experts helps the growth of a confrontational intellectual group online.

4. E-protesting

Bulletin boards have bonded together Chinese all over the world into online civil protest groups during significant political events: from the 1998 May Riot against

ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, to human rights abuse in Mainland China. Though some of the civil protests, such as the online protest against NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, are in the Communist Party interest, one cannot deny that an antagonistic public has also displayed its oppositional political opinion in Mainland China. As Yang (2003) argues, online civic participation among Chinese worldwide has had visible influences on transnational politics through problem articulation, civic association and the mobilisation of activism.

Tay (1998) uses the term 'global Chinese community' to describe the communal formation through online gathering of dispersed Chinese worldwide during the Indonesia Riots of May.[132] This online protest within a global Chinese community started in May 1998 when an anti-Chinese riot arose in Indonesia (before the formation of QGLT). The World Huaren Federation (http://www.huaren.org) based in the USA launched its 'Yellow Ribbon' campaign, and fervently condemned the violence targeting the Chinese community in Indonesia, especially the raping and killing of Chinese women. The 'Yellow Ribbon' campaign urged users around the world to spread the news through emails and other forms of online communication, and harnessed international public opinion to press the Indonesian government into taking action[133]. A protest thus spread like wildfire across cyberspace, disregarding geopolitical boundaries. Online condemnation and protest later triggered offline actions. Demonstrations were held in the USA, Canada, the UK, Peru, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, mainland China, and Taiwan[134]. Under the pressure of international public opinion, Indonesian President Habibie admitted that the gang-raping and killing of Chinese women was 'the most inhumane incident in Indonesia history' and an independent committee was set up to investigate the riot.

During the online protest against the May Riot in Indonesia, *Zaobao Luntan* (ZBLT), the web forum affiliated to *the United Morning Post* in Singapore, played a significant role in welding together a Chinese community worldwide. Most Chinese users turned

to ZBLT to seek information and voice their condemnation (Lin and Zhao 06/06/2003). As one user recalled:

> [T]hrough ZBLT, Chinese all around the world showed their attitude towards the Indonesian government that atrocities targeting at Chinese people couldn't end with no answer; through ZBLT, Chinese all around the world learnt the living situation in Indonesia and learnt viewpoints and attitude from other Chinese fellows. It is the Internet that connects the Chinese all around the world together, and form a online wave of outrage[135] (Author's translation).

In the following year, in a similar political context, QGLT emerged in Beijing when protests against NATO's bombing went online. The online protest against the USA was not a threat to the Chinese Communist Party and was even supported by them because the nationalism displayed during these events served the Party's interest. However, once the public was awoken to their civil rights, they started to use this right in other aspects of social life, which made it almost impossible for the authoritarian government to avoid the rising publics.

The idea of a separation between *civil society* and *the state* came from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment when the state came to be viewed as the antithesis of 'free association' or of a 'community of interests' (Hassan 2004:101). Though QGLT is still mainly state-financed and administrated, confrontations between civil society and the state can still be found in online protests, as the Internet brings domestic issues to an international level. Publicity in a global sense thus furnishes a 'universalisation test for global norms by opening up those norms to the critical scrutiny of a diverse international community' (Chambers 2000:193). This universal publicity functions as a democratic watchdog 'overseeing the actions and policies of the state' (Chambers 2000: 193-4), which guarantees that the public sphere could not be completely colonized by arbitrary political power (Chambers 2000:194). Online protest within the global Chinese community over Sun Zhigang's death in 2003 was directed at the Chinese government, and pressed it to abolish the notorious *Regulations of Custody and Repatriation of Wanderers and Beggars in Cities*[136]. Online protest in Sun's case

proves bulletin boards can gather scattered marginal political voices, and serve as venues for civil rights movement in cyberspace.

Sun, a 27-year-old migrant worker in Guangdong province, was detained on his way to an Internet café on 17 March, 2003 by the local police. Because he failed to produce an ID card and a Temporary Resident Permit, and he 'answered back' when questioned, he was detained in the local custody and repatriation centre for migrant labourers. Sun was found dead 72 hours later from a 'heart attack' in the detention medical centre, but the later anatomy report showed that he was beaten to death! Local Chinese paper *Southern Metropolis Daily* first reported Sun's case on 25 April both in its print media and its online service. Within hours, this news was spread online all across the country, and 'tears were shed and protests rose all over the Internet during one night' (Lin and Zhao 06/06/2003). Thousands of Internet users forwarded the article about Sun's death to their friends by emails or posted it to bulletin boards. Hundreds of thousands of protest messages appeared on popular sites such as *sina.com* and *sohu.com*. In decrying Sun's death and denouncing the social injustice, Chinese users also shared their own experiences of being abused by police.[137] A memorial page to Sun (www.cn.netor.com) was set up and received hundreds of thousands of outraged messages within days.

Similar tragedies had been covered by media before. However, the global nature of the Internet made this single case known within the Chinese community worldwide. Public denunciation of the Communist Party's practice of deporting migrant workers was echoed on bulletin boards based in many different countries. Chinese Internet users aired their voice on Beijing-based QGLT, Singapore-based ZBLT, USA-based Boxun BBS at www.peacehall.com, and oppositional bulletin boards such as Humanity and Human Rights in China (HRIC) based in Hong Kong.

> First they came for the Jews / And I did not speak out – / Because I was not a Jew. / Then they came for the communists / And I did not speak out – / Because I was not a communist. / Then they came for the trade unionists / And I did not speak out – / Because

233

I was not a trade unionist. / Then they came for me – / And there was no one left to speak out for me. --Pastor Martin Niemoller, Berlin (1939)

The translation of the above poem has been posted across Chinese Internet bulletin boards, to call for public unification in fighting against inequality, discrimination, and abuse of human rights. By spreading this poem on bulletin boards, Chinese users are passing a message to each other: if you are not speaking out for Sun Zhigang, you might end up as the next victim of social injustice.

Within QGLT, public discussion gradually went beyond the outrage and raised questions challenging the system: How can the public supervise the police if the police failed to perform their duties legally? The Temporary Residents Registry System discriminates against the rural population and shows no respect to humanity, but why is it still in existence?[138] On 20 May 2003, a special channel 'the death of Sun Zhigang - public opinion - legal problems concerning the custody practice' was set up in QGLT. Later it changed its name to 'The death of Sun Zhigang questioning the Custody and Repatriation system', which indicates that online public opinion shifted its focus from the media event to the relevant legal system[139]. On 6 June, Professor He Weifang from Peking University hosted an online panel meeting with QGLT users[140]. As a distinguished legal scholar in China, Professor He requested a revision of the custody and repatriation regulations from the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. [141] During the two-hour online interaction, 35 questions were raised. Comments on the custody system, the media's responsibilities, and the legal procedures for revising the administrative regulations against the Constitution were fervently discussed among users:

> The aim of legislation is to limit the power of the state, because the power of the state has its intrinsic nature of being invasive. If we failed in limiting the state power, the civil rights will be at danger. Sun's Case is a new proof. (*Laoxin* 06/06/2003 author's translation)

> The weakness in legal education in China is: we are never told the civil rights of citizens!!! (*Zhenna zhuce ayiyou* 06/06/2003 author's translation)

In China's Constitution, there are articles protecting citizen's lives, properties and freedom. [...] But various administrative regulations deprive our civil rights entitled by the Constitution. Meanwhile, the administration of justice in China is not independent, which leads to incidents of civil rights invasion in the real life. This is particularly obvious in [administrations'] invasion of public rights... *(He Weifang* 06/06/2003 author's translation)

On 9 June, it was announced that 18 police officers involved in Sun's death were sentenced. In September 2003, the migrant detention centres in China changed into 'voluntary service centres', and 'a revised administrative regulation allows any homeless person the right to refuse help from the government.'[142]

Politics 'from below' is how the domains of social movements are sometimes characterised. Increasingly, innovative uses of communication and information technologies are seen as essential to this politics (Calabrese 2000: 66).

During the online protests over the Sun case, a strong sense of public awareness of civil rights could be detected from online postings. QGLT users also demonstrated an eagerness to question the social injustice in policy-making through rational critical public debate. Thank to the 'empowering' and 'emancipatory' digital technologies, Internet bulletin boards nurture a sense of political equality among Chinese users, which is central to the deliberative ideal.

5. E-organising

China has seen a continuous growth of grassroots interest groups originated from bulletin boards. Environmentalists, nationalists, animal rights groups, gay rights groups, and professionals such as journalists or lawyers start to find their peers in online communities and co-ordinate activities of common interest. The group bond formed online quite often, if not always, extends into the offline world. The potential of mobilising the public makes bulletin boards a new terrain for civic participation

and the Internet a type of 'tactical media' in political organising.

'Tactical media', as David Garcia and Geert Lovink (1997) explain, have a do-it-yourself nature which makes them accessible to almost any groups and individuals:

> Tactical Media are what happens when the cheap 'do it yourself' media, made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and expanded forms of distribution (from public access cable to the Internet) are exploited by groups and individuals who feel aggrieved by or excluded from the wider culture. Tactical media do not just report events, as they are never impartial they always participate and it is this that more than anything separates them from mainstream media. (Available at: http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-1-9705/msg00096.html, accessed: 16/08/2003)

QGLT user Gordon* is an Internet café owner in Shenzhen, southern China. Since the Communist Party's control over the free flow of online information usually starts by closing down Internet cafés, private business owners encounter great difficulties and risks. Governmental institutions such as police have the right to come and inspect their business, and some corrupt officials use this power to blackmail the Internet café owners by threatening to close down their business. From March 2004, Gordon started posting articles questioning the *Administrative Regulations Over the Internet Access Service Business* (the *Regulations*) which is notorious for blocking online information, closing down ISPs and Internet cafes, and triggering corruption. During the first 6 months of writing, Gordon was contacted by Internet café owners from all parts of the country. A loose organisation, the National Internet Café Owners League, was set up in the summer of 2004. Keeping contact with each other in cyberspace, this League launched its first nationwide non-violent action in July 2004. They sent a petition letter with collective signature to the National People's Congress asking for reviewing the *Regulations* and 'protecting' their 'Constitutional rights' to run legal business.

Alongside the grassroots organisations such as the National Internet Café Owners

League, NGOs in China have also actively explored the Internet bulletin boards in pursuing public interest and co-operating with other international organisations. According to the latest statistics, the number of NGOs in China reached 283,000 up to April 2005 [143] . Non-government environmental protection organisations have encountered comparatively less restraint from the Communist Party than other social groups. Well-established environmental NGOs like the Friends of Nature (www.fon.org.cn/) and the Green Earth Volunteers (www.chinagev.org) all employ the Internet to network their members and promote environmental protection education. Members from these environmental NGOs learn from the bulletin boards about coming events such as tree planting, debate about better environmental schemes, or even participate in the governmental audition on controversial civil engineering projects.

One of the most significant steps in the Chinese environmental NGOs' civil participation was their efforts to stop the Yunnan provincial government from building 13 hydro-electricity dams on Nujiang River, known as *Nujiang Action*. Nujiang (Upper Salween) River, running through the Three Parallel Rivers Basin world heritage area in Southwest China, is 'one of last free-flowing international rivers in Asia'[144]. The proposed dam project will cause irreversible damage to the endangered flora and fauna in the area, at least 50,000 local people would need to be relocated, and will also affect the lifestyle of those who live along the lower Salween in Thailand and Myanmar. When Wang Yongchen, the founder of the Green Earth Volunteers and also a journalist with the national radio, learned of the hydro-electricity dam project in August 2003, she started a campaign against it. Chinese environmentalists have networked and explored all media, including the Internet to campaign against the Nujiang project since then. They recruited international support from more than 60 countries in November 2003 when the Second International Meeting of Dam-Affected People and Their Allies was held in Thailand. In a collective movement, a petition letter was sent to UNESCO requesting its intervention

on the issue. In the following February, the Chinese government announced that the hydropower project on Nujiang River had been postponed after UNESCO expressed 'grave concern' over the dam project[145]. This has been acclaimed by the national news agency *Xinhua* as 'the first time that NGOs in China changed plans made by a local government'[146].

Robert Hassan (2004:135) argues that 'the forms of struggle will have to change' in the digital age when the relationship among citizens, space and technology changes. Chinese NGOs' Nujiang Action proved that coordination among Chinese and international environmentalists enhanced the civil participation within China, and had a positive influence on the outcome of policy making. 'If not for NGOs involvement, the hydro-electricity dams would have been built in 2003', Wang said. She pointed out Nujiang Action could be a step towards democracy in China:

> Chinese NGOs attached much importance to the procedural justice and public participation in their environmental protection campaigns. [...] I would say, environmental protection could be regarded as the breakthrough in the democratisation process in China. In protecting Nujiang River, we call for the protection of the local people's rights as well. (Interview with Wang 09/04/2005)

She also pointed out the importance of communication in the Nujiang Action:

> We also became more aware of the important networking role of media, especially, the Internet in coordinating our action. A Chinese-English website Our Attachment to Nujiang River (www.nujiang-river.ngo.cn) was set up in March 2004 to arouse public awareness of ecology protection with an online forum devoted to discussion about river reservation and ecology protection. We also plan to hire a part-time professional to monitor the bulletin boards on the Green Earth Volunteers website. (Interview with Wang 09/04/2005)

'The public in a democracy should have opportunities [...] to participate directly in them, through channels of access' (McNair 2000: 105). Cross-national Chinese dissident associations also extended their activities into cyberspace. Human rights associations such as Human Rights in China (www.hrichina.org) focuses on current

human rights abuse cases in Greater China; a 'Virtual Democracy Wall' (http://books.dreambook.com/read/tiananmen.html) set up in cyberspace to commemorate the 1989 pro-democracy movement by international Chinese activists; Tibet Net (www.xizang-zhiye.org) aims to promote Tibetan independence; and the religious Falun Dafa forum (www.creader.org/cgi-bin/falun.cgi) has been used to preach its religion and draw attention to the Communist Party's prosecution of Falun Dafa practices in China. Though these online organisations have different goals, John Bray noticed that both in the PRC and abroad, Chinese dissidents groups have 'begun to make common cause' with each other by cross-posting articles and offers links to each other on their websites (2004:169).

Figure 8.1 The Front page of www.nujiang.ngo.cn

6. Limitation of the Virtual Public Sphere in Greater China

Construction of the virtual public sphere in Greater China is still hampered by a variety of obstacles. The 'Golden Shield'[147] project launched in 2000 has banned most oppositional overseas sites (including traditional media sites) from public access within China. Before they can appear on mainland China-based bulletin boards, dissident voices face strict online monitoring from the government and moderation from the ICPs. In the meantime, commodification of the public sphere is also taking place at an international level. Multinational media corporations have joined the authoritarian government in quenching dissident opinion online. Non-progressive voices such as those advancing extreme nationalism are spreading within the virtual public sphere in Great China, and undermining the embryonic rational critical public debate.

6.1 Nationalism

Online public opinion is under the threat of being manipulated by the authorities. QGLT user Dave* says his experience shows that when online public opinion coincides with the Communist Party's interest, the government usually use public opinion to justify their course. However when online public opinion goes against the Party's interest, public opinion will be silenced by the Party in cyberspace. One example is the Chinese government's tolerance towards nationalist rhetoric online. The Chinese public has turned to bulletin boards to vent their nationalist anger over the Japanese government's denial of the Nanjing Massacre and Japanese top officials' annual visit to the Yasukuni shrine commemorating the WWII War criminals. The Chinese League of Resisting Japanese Commodities and other civil organisations posted their notices on the most popular Chinese sites, and called on all Chinese to join the action by 'never buying Japanese commodities and spreading this notification on all bulletin boards'.[148] In August and September 2004, several distributions of anti-

Japanese commodity leaflets were organised in Shenzhen, Hong Kong and other cities. Details of actions were communicated mainly through bulletin boards.[149] Apart from the civil activities such as the call for a boycott of Japanese commodities, online nationalist discourse can go beyond rationality, and turn into hostility against Japan and jingoism over unification with Taiwan. Hughes thus claims that the Communist Party has been using information communication technologies to 'mobilize nationalism to legitimate its own claim to power' (2002: 218).

Extreme anti-Japan postings such as 'we have a wolf as our neighbour! We can't feed it with our own blood!'[150] become the mottos for nationalist bulletin boards. Any current issue regarding the clash of economic interests or cultural values between the two countries can trigger a new wave of hatred between the two peoples. The Asia Cup Final in 2004 was contested between the Chinese and Japanese teams. When a Japanese footballer scored with his hand, which proved to be the winning goal, this sports event developed into a diplomatic issue. Anti-Japan posts suddenly flooded all bulletin boards, including the official QGLT:

> Keep Japanese' hands off our high-speed railway between Beijing and Shanghai... (*Zheli Shimian Maifu* 08/08/2004 author's translation)

> Here I post several photos of Japanese Army's atrocities [during the WWII]. Those who cheer for the Japanese team need to have a look... (*Bushi Wo Shuode* 08/08/2004 author's translation)

Nationalist fervour can also be detected from online discussion about the Taiwan issue. Unification with Taiwan is one of the never-failing themes within QGLT. Chinese nationalists believe in using military power for the unification along the Taiwan Strait, and display an aggressive attitude towards those supporting Taiwan's independence.

Nationalist fervour can often flare up among users and thwart the rational critical political debate. The different opinions of nationalists have been labelled as 'betrayal'. Users who post pro-Japan or pro-USA opinions are called 'running dogs' and 'boot-

lickers' of foreign powers, and even receive threatening messages, virtual stalking and hacking.

As discussed before, nationalist fervour has been a major trigger for online flaming within QGLT and has turned cyberspace into a rude and lawless battlefield. Extreme nationalism online impairs 'people's public use of their reason' (Habermas 1989: 28) in deliberation and, as Christopher Hughes (2002) argues, helps to legitimate the Communist Party's claim to power. Though the use of ICTs in the Greater China public sphere can potentially solve regional conflicts, extreme nationalism online might in fact 'destabilise foreign relations' in the Asia Pacific region (Hughes, C. 2002: 218).

6.2 The 'Great Firewall of China' and Global Capitalism

I have already discussed in the previous chapter the detailed measures the Chinese government has adopted to control online public opinion. The Chinese government has explored the information communication technologies for the country's economic development but in the meantime, it is fully aware of the Internet's potential for subversion, and tries to contain what it regards as the malign influence of the Internet (Bray 2004:170). As a result China has become one of the countries witnessing the fastest Internet growth, yet also has the strictest control over the Internet at the same time.

The Chinese government's Golden Shield Project, widely known as the 'Great Firewall of China' to the rest of the world, is the 'most sophisticated and extensive in the world' according to a report by the Harvard Law School scholars (Zittrain, J. and Edelman, B. 2003b). This filtering system shields out dissident server IPs, domain names and keywords so that the import of Internet content is 'sanitised' before it reaches the Chinese users. A recent report from *Reporters Without Borders* presents

China and another 14 countries as 'enemies of the Internet' who 'crack down hardest on the Internet, censoring independent news sites and opposition publication, monitoring the Web to stifle dissident voices, and harassing, intimidating and sometimes imprisoning Internet users and bloggers who deviate from the regime's official line' (Reporters Without borders 17/11/2005[151]).

As overseas Chinese dissident sites are banned in China, dissident opinion has to find its way, sometimes under disguise, to reach the bulletin boards within the Communist regime. For example, one QGLT overseas user used 'Liu si' (柳丝 Willow branch) when he referred to 'Liu si' (六四 Chinese short form for the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown). Though this strategy of using different Chinese characters is common among users to dodge the filtering system (see Chapter 7), the depth of the original posting is usually largely sacrificed.

The opening up policy in China invited foreign multinational media corporations such as News Corporation and Disney to invest. The emerging public sphere in Greater China faces the risk of degradation, and cross-national media tycoons and Internet companies have been criticised for 'agreeing to China's strict rules governing the Internet, which Communist Party leaders fear could be a tool to spread dissent'[152]. Microsoft was criticised in June 2005 for censoring Chinese bloggings. Yahoo Hong Kong has been accused of supplying information to the Chinese government, which led to the jailing of a journalist[153].

The development of the Internet suggests that it is quickly turning toward the intensified commercialisation model that has characterised the traditional media (Patekis 2000). For that reason, 'digital capitalism' which has strengthened the present power domination (Schiller, D. 2000: 209) can pose a serious danger to electronic deliberation. Thus, there is great urgency to develop a public sphere at the international level (Garnham 1995 [1986]:251).

7. Conclusion

Online discussion facilitated by the CMC is bringing Chinese people across the world closer together to share information, political discussion, and coordinate action. At this early stage, one has to admit that the virtual public sphere in Greater China is more a conceptual development than a reality. It will take some time to predict whether this global virtual public sphere will vanish or flourish.

In this chapter, I have discussed factors that might contribute to the decline of this global Chinese public sphere. Extreme nationalism or cross-national jingoism has been displayed on QGLT and other Chinese bulletin boards and might trigger xenophobia among the Chinese community worldwide. Online surveillance from the Chinese government, such as a blockade of online traffic, has seen administrative intervention into the rational critical public discussion across borders. The prevalence of global capitalism also poses a looming danger to the new public sphere, which might eventually delay the fulfilment of deliberative democracy in cyberspace.

However, in spite of all these limitations, with the worldwide flow of information and culture, globalisation has generated a kind of social bonding (Beck 2000). The Chinese diaspora's participation in Mainland-based bulletin boards has created a spiritual bonding, which might contribute to solving problems like environmental crisis or human rights abuse at the global level. A virtual civil society mediated through Internet bulletin boards in Greater China has a positive influence on the democratisation in the Mainland China. To be more specific, the contribution of Internet bulletin boards to the construction of a virtual public sphere in Greater China lies in the following aspects:

Firstly, overseas Chinese participation in the global rational critical discussion over

244

China-related current issues is breaking down the Communist Party's strict control over press freedom. The Internet bulletin boards have been used to 'upload' grassroots opinion at an international level and have a revolutionary implication of setting a non-official political agenda in the mainland.

Secondly, QGLT and other Internet bulletin boards are regarded by users as venues for exchanging ideas and contesting viewpoints. Online discussion based on equality promotes a gradual shift from the media's function as the Party's 'mouthpiece' to a public forum where rationality in political debate will pave the way for deliberation.

Thirdly, a virtual-real interactive community has brought about an alternative to peaceful protest that is still lacking in the real political life in Mainland China. The public power demonstrated over Internet media events (see chapter four) such as the Sun Zhigang Case constructed a contesting public power in the virtual sphere, which has a great impact on the relationship between the state and the civil society in the Mainland.

Finally, Internet bulletin boards have been used to organise Chinese individuals across geopolitical bounders. Cyberactivism is demonstrated in the active exploration of bulletin boards by social movements groups, research bodies, NGOs, and so on across the geopolitical region of China, which might eventually reshape the political culture in the Mainland.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

By enlarging the scale of civic participation, advancing alternative public discourses, and tackling problems at a global level, Internet bulletin boards can construct an alternative public sphere representing divergent political views. Focusing on the QGLT community from www.people.com.cn, this PhD project explores whether Internet bulletin boards contribute to the construction of the public sphere in post-Communist China. Based on an approach of production, reception, and content studies, I examined the gate-keeping process within QGLT, the autonomy of users, online postings during the SARS crisis, and the global nature of the bulletin boards. Here I draw the following conclusions:

- Internet bulletin boards have been used as an alternative media form in constructing alternative, oppositional and marginal public discourses in post-Communist China;

- Though still elite in nature, the virtual public sphere is characterised by inclusiveness in participation and multiplicity in composition, which represents divergent political views offline;

- By fostering antagonistic public opinion, the virtual public sphere has the potential to regulate agenda-setting and check on government policy-making in offline life;

- The virtual public sphere is constructed beyond national boundaries. A trans-national Chinese public sphere is formed by deliberating over Chinese-related issues at a global level;

- The Internet public sphere faces surveillance from the government and obstacles in achieving rational debate. Under the joint forces of commercialisation, democratisation, and globalisation, the virtual public sphere in China sees the forces of degradation and democratisation in tension

with one another.

It has to be acknowledged that the use of the Internet in constructing the public sphere in China faces many constraints. The study of QGLT shows that bulletin boards are still far from being 'online dissident avenues' without administrative surveillance or self-censorship. The analysis of QGLT postings also shows that the nature of Internet bulletin boards is still quite elitist. The online debate is dominated by well-educated and propertied intellectuals who are already politically active in the offline world. In addition, the lack of a democratic ethos in the online environment weakens the rational critical public debate. Furthermore, the commercialisation of the Chinese media industry imposes a danger of the commodification of public interest which can undermine and degrade the public sphere in formation.

However, it is fair to say that the Internet allows for the growth of public engagement in online debates about domestic and international current issues that are otherwise banned from public discussion. In this regard, the Internet does facilitate short and long-term active civic engagement. Non-localized and dialogic forms of communication among users has created an alternative form of publicity outside the government-controlled media's agenda, and could potentially provide a check on the authoritarian government's policy-making. By providing real-time worldwide communication, the Internet is well established as a global medium coordinating non-organised Chinese citizens worldwide and facilitating the expression of public opinion. The Internet opens up opportunities for Chinese, both inside and outside of China, in the realms of informal political mobilisation, to tackle issues concerning the public interest. Thus, under non-democratic social circumstances such as in China, the Internet provides an emancipatory technological structure for public deliberation, which makes it a more central factor in constructing and consolidating the public sphere than it does in a democratic society.

247

1. Limitations of the Virtual Public Sphere

Though the Internet is viewed as an emerging public sphere, it is a problematic virtual space filled with conflicts and contradictions. Firstly, the Internet is vulnerable to extremist and non-progressive discourse such as aggressive Nationalist fervour within QGLT. The lack of democratic control procedures online can create a 'mediated anarchism' and undermine digital deliberation. Secondly, the Internet bulletin boards in China are not free from administrative surveillance and self-censorship. On the contrary, technology can even be used to facilitate online censorship and control. Furthermore, the Internet will not necessarily bridge the gap between the information-rich and the information-poor. The elitist nature of Internet bulletin boards makes online discussion more of an advantage to those who already have specialised knowledge of empowerment offline and parity of political participation might even be undermined by the digital divide. Finally, the trend of commercialisation and globalisation in the Chinese telecommunications industry might combine the interest of those politically powerful with that of economically powerful, which exposes the online public sphere to the danger of degradation and disintegration.

1.1 The Aggressive Nationalism in the Virtual Public Sphere

Despite the deliberative potential of the Internet, the online virtual public sphere is not always democratic in its nature. Online public discussion on bulletin boards can degrade into a mediated chaos when non-progressive discourses such as extreme nationalist and xenophobic voices lead the public debate off the rational track.

One distinct feature of the QGLT community is the aggressive nationalism or jingoism displayed in its users' postings. This extremist rhetoric diverts public attention from reasoned discussion and encourages hatred and xenophobia. The ease of joining and withdrawing on the bulletin boards augment the possibility of hatred

248

flaring up towards Japan and the USA, and increasing the diplomatic tension with Taiwan. Because of the anonymity and fluidity associated with online identities, it is even difficult to estimate the proportion of such non-progressive discourses.

The rumours about SARS as a biochemical attack from the USA in 2003 triggered irrational xenophobia against the USA within QGLT. This proved that bulletin boards can be vulnerable to the amplification of offline non-rational rhetoric through collective online activities. Rather than exposing and criticising contemporary social evils within China, some QGLT users explore cyberspace to denounce the imagined 'injustice' from an outsider 'enemy', and 'justify' it with a variety of disinformation. The aggressive nationalism presented within QGLT diverts public attention from problems concerning public interest within the country (such as the privatisation of health care) and unites minds in the name of safeguarding the nation's sovereignty, which, to a certain extent, serves the Communist Party's dominance.

1.2 Administrative Surveillance, Newsroom Censorship, and Self-Censorship

QGLT, along with other Internet bulletin boards in China, is under an omnipresent censorship from the Communist Party. Administrative surveillance, newsroom censorship, and self-censorship are all gradually transforming QGLT from a previously 'online dissident avenue' into an affiliate of the giant Chinese bureaucratic system.

QGLT is subject to regulations from the Ministry of Information Industry, the Party's Propaganda Department, the State Council Information Office, and other government organisations such as the Public Information Administration Division of Beijing Municipal Government. Editorial autonomy is limited by administrative surveillance. By punishing those who have the courage to voice antagonistic opinion online, the Communist Party reins in online public speech and silences dissidents.

The daily gate-keeping routine for QGLT moderators involves agenda-setting for online discussion, moderating bulletin boards and managing users. By highlighting certain news for topical discussion while downplaying others, agenda-setting within newsroom can guide public attention away from views that might challenge the *status quo*. This practice is further guaranteed by the practice of moderating bulletin boards which involves encouraging public discussion on certain topics, banning discussion on others, and punishing the 'offenders' who venture to break the editorial regulations. Managing users involves the similar procedure of censoring users' pennames which is an indicator of their politically constructed online identity. Through such gate-keeping practices, QGLT moderators, playing a similar role to traditional journalists, mediate people's knowledge of the world by prioritising certain meaning-making in their daily practice.

Self-censorship works in a long-term and covert way compared with the short-term and overt censorship from both government and media. As a 'proactive' control measure from the grassroots, self-censorship encourages peer censoring and works indirectly to promote state authority. Self-censorship muzzles public voices online, impairs the independent role of Internet media, and curbs the democratic potential of the Internet.

Online surveillance measures adopted in China prove that in spite of the democratising drive, technology can also be used to facilitate online censorship and control. The Chinese government actively explores the technological potential of the Internet in retaining its authority. On the one hand, it actively promotes regime-sponsored web programs and e-government services; on the other hand, it uses technological means such as the Internet Filtering Software Products to ban the online appearance of black-listed words (most of which are politically sensitive). In this sense, information technology shows again it is intrinsically neutral in its nature and can be used for both good and evil purpose. It is the social exploration of technology

that decides whether it is autocratic or democratic.

1.3 Elitism in the Virtual Public Sphere

The elitism associated with the Internet in China might weaken the parity in online political participation, which undermines the basis for public deliberation. Observation of QGLT reveals that the elitist nature of the Internet privileges the information rich and socially active groups in offline life. Underprivileged groups in economic terms and political terms tend to have limited access to the Internet.

The study of QGLT users demonstrates that Internet bulletin boards are firmly established among some classes of Chinese society, but remain out of the reach of the majority of the population. In general QGLT users are gathered in cities and socially embedded among well-educated intellectuals. Compared with the majority of the population, these online intellectuals are more inclined to accept humanist ideas such as equality, freedom, and justice. However, 'the intellectual is living proof that all individuals are not equal' (Kellner 1995). The intellectuals presented on QGLT bulletin boards, though they are not necessarily propertied, are privileged compared to the subordinate classes who have not received adequate education. The intellectual skills give them better abilities than their fellow Chinese to access, interpret, adapt, and create knowledge of empowerment.

Hence, the digital divide in China does not only manifest itself in the physical availability of computers networks, but also in people's intellectual ability to use and create knowledge using information and communication technologies. This is not denying the fact that a significant proportion of the whole population in China are excluded from the digital deliberation because of their lack of financial means. Nonetheless, there is a strong concern that a large part of China's Internet population lacks social capital and web literacy which can help them actively explore the potential of the Internet for meaningful social practices.

The Internet bulletin boards are still selective media. The Internet's potential for expanding civic participation and motivating the socially underprivileged and politically latent has been under-explored in China. The Internet is used more to reflect the existing power relationship and favour the elites in the offline life. The divide between the information-rich and the information-poor in the mass media era cannot necessarily be bridged by digitalisation.

1.4 The Looming Danger of Degradation of the Public Sphere

With economic reform quickening its pace, and the opening-up of the country's markets to foreign capital, China is witnessing commercialisation in its telecommunication industry and media field. As a consequence, the current virtual public sphere is now exposed to the danger of decline and disintegration.

The commodification of the Internet bulletin boards is dictated by the political economy of the Internet. The digital media environment in China disadvantages citizen-based networking and it favours corporately organised communication from commercial Internet portals and the state-subsidised media online section.

Multi-national capital bought up the first generation of Chinese Internet portals such as sina.com and sohu.com in the late 1990s. In the post-Internet bubble era, commercial Chinese portals were keen to gain profit from their investment and the popularisation of entertainment became the major business model. International corporations such as Yahoo and Google are also eager to share the booming market economy in China. Self-censorship over online content is a price these commercial Internet companies are prepared to pay for the privilege of exploiting the Chinese market. Official Internet media such as www.people.com.cn are partly subsidised by the government but fully under the Party's surveillance of its online content.

The commercialisation of the macro media environment and the low level of web literacy among the general public do appear in topical discussions on the bulletin boards. On most commercial Internet portals, consumerism and sensationalism are reflected in topical discussion about computer games, fashion, lifestyle, (soft)-pornography, horoscope, celebrities, etc. Even on QGLT, some users improperly use the bulletin boards as their own free advertisement boards. A false feeling of 'empowerment' in expressing 'opinion' online (though it is rarely critical political opinion) creates an illusion of freedom in expression, which weakens the political significance of meaningful civic discourse and results in political apathy.

Commodification imposes a serious danger of deteriorating the virtual public sphere that is currently under construction. The majority of the Chinese population, pigeonholed into a world market by both domestic and international capitalists, have the potential of losing their power of deliberation under the flooding of entertainment and disinformation online.

2. The Internet in Constructing the Public Sphere in China

In spite of all the restraints, Internet bulletin boards allow Chinese citizens to construct an alternative public discourse as an expression of direct political participation, which potentially inhibits the state's hegemonic control over ideology.

The Internet, as the alternative public sphere, is firstly characterised by multiple tiers in its composition. Chinese from various social classes can construct their identity as politically activated citizens online. Divergent political standpoints, ideological preferences, and class interests are reflected within QGLT community.

Secondly, the SARS crisis proved that in a non-liberal society where other democratic devices such as parliamentary debate are not obtainable, the bulletin boards are used as public forums for the expression of divergent grassroots voices. Public opinion

253

formed online can be integrated into informal political procedure and affect policy-making.

Thirdly, as a novelty grassroots media form, the Internet provides a potential for citizen-based networks; a new concept in Chinese political life. Internet bulletin boards can circumvent the hierarchy and bureaucracy in offline life, and provide an ideal venue for cyberactivists to coordinate civic activities.

Furthermore, by 'eliminating' the boundaries in an offline context, the Internet helps to build a virtual Chinese public sphere based on shared language and culture. Current issues relating to China are brought to global attention along with calls for international collaboration to solve problems.

2.1 Multiple Tiers in the Virtual Public Sphere

The Internet consolidates and expands the alternative public sphere offline by reflecting the complexity of political beliefs, ideological preferences and class interests in offline political contexts. The Internet amplifies the divergent public grassroots voices which have previously been neglected by the mainstream media. All of this can potentially attenuate the Party's ideological hegemony in China.

In general, QGLT users' identity is constructed in such a way that their offline suppressed political selves are expressed online. A strong sense of civic participation, which is socially suppressed in offline life in China, can be detected from QGLT users' pennames, signature files, and the political clusters formed online. Though it is well noted that the economic, political, and cultural biases in which the culture of cyberspace is embedded prefer those possessing social capitals, the revolutionary potential of the Internet in cultivating a different environment for civic participation should not be underestimated. QGLT users come from different social strata, different incomes and education levels. Suppressed social groups, such as female users, show

their capacity to express political opinions.

At the same time, the construction of an online political identity is closely connected to offline social realities. Signs were carefully chosen by QGLT users for their political connotations in demonstrating individuals' ideological preference. In their pennames and signature files, QGLT users demonstrated patriotism and nationalism which, to a certain extent, fitted into the Communist Party's discourse. However, manifestations of humanism - like concerns over corruption, injustice, and inequality - are also aired. Furthermore, a public longing for freedom and democracy, which had not been publicly advocated before and was regarded as challenging the authoritarian administration, are also displayed within QGLT users' profiles.

QGLT users' political viewpoints are categorised into five clusters in this research: Far Left (Maoist), Neo-Left, Right (Liberalism and centre-left), Far right (Extreme Liberalism), Centralism (a mixture of *via media* and no-attitude). The differentiation in ideological preference, shown in users' postings and interactions, is rooted in the offline political contexts and reflects the divergent political standpoints in contemporary China. Difference in political belief triggers flaming among QGLT users, which resembles the offline conflicts between political camps. Multiple identities are found among QGLT users in such circumstances. Transforming a singular physical being into multiple identities, users can show their respective political attitudes in different topical discussions. Multiple identities are also an escape when disagreement in political debates leads to flaming.

The public sphere in offline life in China emerged from the anti-feudalism and anti-colonisation struggle and evolved into the digital age. It has never existed in a singular comprehensive form. In contemporary China, the rising middle-class liberal intellectuals play a key role in fighting for civil rights. Intellectuals have been rising since the economic reform in the late 1970s, and their identities are rooted in the proletariat class. Meanwhile, subordinated social groups such as the working class,

women, ethnic minorities, and their representatives, also construct discourses to reflect their identities and interests. The virtual public sphere is characterised by competing publics and consists of conflicts and contesting meanings. Different interest groups, such as environmental protection NGOs, human rights groups, and trade-union grassroots organisations, are fashioning their own ways into public discussion online. The Internet has been used as a tool for enlightenment, petition, protest, and self-organising. The public online moved from strategies of 'giving a voice to the voiceless' (Hamelink 1995:141) to strategies by which people speak for themselves through 'people's media' (Hamelink 1995:146; Downing, J. et al. 2001: 206). Voices 'loud, coarse, and [...] abrasive' (Ryan 1992:286), banished from the official public sphere, have taken different forms to make themselves heard.

By enhancing the emancipatory potential of the competing publics in the virtual public sphere, Internet bulletin boards can dismantle the symbolic environment created by the state's absolute control of the communication process. When exposed to such divergent political voices, citizens are less likely to accept the state's political propaganda as legitimate. This poses a challenge to the authoritarian regime.

2.2 Antagonistic Public Online

QGLT SARS postings displayed the growth of a public critique that ventured to touch upon a taboo issue that the Communist Party originally prohibited from public discussion. When other democratic institutions such as Parliamentary debate are still not obtainable in post-Communist China, bulletin boards are used as public forums for divergent grassroots voices, which largely expands the scope of public debates and enhances the depth of political discussion. Online public opinion developed around the SARS crisis showed its potential to challenge, or even check, the authoritarian government's policy-making over public health.

The Internet offered an incomparable autonomy which enabled users to actively select,

256

gate-keep, and prioritise information during the SARS crisis. Grassroots voices broke the collective silence in the mainstream media on the SARS issue and this evolved into online public debate. SARS postings replaced the public health information void in the mainstream media with non-official sources and grassroots interpretation of official information. Being a 'time-space compression' (Harvey, D. 1989) technological device, the Internet changes the spatiality of information dissemination and thus changes the way that 'we represent the world to ourselves' (Harvey, D. 1989: 240). Users were exposed to media narratives constructed by domestic official media, overseas Chinese media, foreign language media, personal testimonial reports and so forth. The breaking down of official media hegemony helped the public to be aware of the SARS explosion, and paved the way for further critical debate.

Paralleling the official discourse of patriotism and morale-boosting, the virtual public sphere gives voice to alternative and oppositional political groups that raise concerns rarely heard before. Online discussion about SARS raised suggestions on policy concerning public health and welfare, criticised the government's measures to combat SARS; and called for press freedom and democracy. The development of the online SARS discussion finally pushed the government into taking effective countermeasures. Meanwhile, online postings also united the non-localised public in the virtual space and bonded them together in a virtual community through the sharing of emotion and humour concerning SARS.

Internet bulletin boards in China are used as a substitute for real-life democratic institutions such as Parliament or an independent media. Bulletin boards, still the least censored media format in China, provide a venue for political discussion among ordinary citizens when other public forums are not available.

This is not to deny the fact that the Communist Party practices stringent online surveillance. However, the character of information flow on the Internet makes the traditional censorship hard to perform. The bulletin boards feature users' contributions

257

from a variety of sources, including overseas media outlets and testimonial reports from users themselves. This variety of sources challenges the hegemonic control of information from the traditional media and broadens Chinese users' awareness of the rest of the world. Users can contribute to the bulletin boards from home, their work places, Internet cafés, or even post through overseas proxy servers. This makes tracking down and punishing of the 'offenders' much more difficult. Meanwhile, even though major bulletin boards in China are forced to install word-filtering software, there are always ways to circumvent this censorship. New words are created among users to replace the sensitive words blocked, so that the discussion over taboo issues can get through the word filtering system. Most important of all, attempts to control online information will divert users to other communication means, thus leading to a proliferation of channels and content. Thus, in the limitless cyberspace, the free speech frontier can always be exploited (Bryan & Tatam 1999: 161-168).

From the study of QGLT, one can conclude that a public based among urban intellectuals is emerging in cyberspace in China. The rising critical public are 'critical and insurgent intellectuals' (Kellner 1995) who are specialists in critique and negotiation. As a collective, they construct their identities as enlightened citizens and representatives of the working class and people from lower social strata. By reflecting critical and oppositional discourse on the Internet bulletin boards, they devote their online activities to putting social issues up for debate and discussion. By raising criticism and negating authority, they show the potential of influencing the outcome of policy making. Under certain circumstances this online public can directly criticise the authorities by linking their debates to social actions triggered by such social issues as human rights abuses (as in Sun Zhigang case). However, it is still too early to say if this antagonistic public online has the potential to subvert the existing order.

2.3 The Internet Media Event

As a horizontally structured grassroots media form, the Internet connects citizens

through networking. This feature makes the Internet bulletin boards an ideal venue for coordinating civic activities and mobilise activists during 'Internet media events' such as protests against human rights abuses.

'Internet media events' is the term coined in this dissertation to capture the media events involving the following elements: a) news stories first reported by Internet media – testimonial reports originating from bulletin boards, chat rooms, newsgroups, or online reports from traditional media; b) news stories mostly discussed within online communities before they are well known offline; c) news events which firstly attract large online audiences before attracting wider public attention offline; d) public opinion that originates from online discussion of such news stories triggering social unrest or civil action; e) the expression of public opinion exerts pressure on the authorities and urges them to tackle such problems; f) during the progress of such Internet media events, space and time are conquered by the decentralised social structures online.

Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz coin the term 'media events' to describe the television live broadcasting of spectacular events such as 'epic contests of politics and sports, charismatic missions, and the rites of passage of the great' (1992:1). The live broadcasting of media events has great effect on viewers and public opinion. Through their experience of watching (or 'attending') media events at the same time, viewers develop a 'shared membership in a national or international community' (1992:197). By stirring up public attention, media events 'focus public opinion and activate debate on a given issue or set of issues' and 'may affect public opinion by encouraging or inhibiting the expression of preferences, values, or beliefs' (Dayan and Katz 1992:199).

'Internet media events', to a certain extent, are 'media events' in mass media age extended in cyberspace. Internet media events have been a unique media phenomenon in China where the mainstream media still lack the autonomy to expose social

259

inequality and injustice. Bulletin boards and other Internet facilities are crucial in circulating news information and mobilising public opinion during events such as the SARS crisis and the Sun Zhigang Case. Online public opinion formed during such events demonstrates Chinese users' consciousness in exercising their civil rights and engaging in policy making. The anonymity associated with online identity increases the audacity of users under an authoritarian government. The shared concerns over public health and human rights bond users to co-ordinate which courses of action to adopt. In the Sun Zhigang Case, this action turned out to be nationwide online protest, which contributed to the abolition of the administrative regulations discriminating against migrant populations. In this sense, Internet use in China is not confined to mere opinion-formation. Instead, it has the potential of affecting policy-making.

The Internet opens up many opportunities for informal political processes and the organisation of social movements. The radical public sphere online expands the spectrum of political discussion and alleviates the single event to an administration level. As Downing et al. describe, the Internet, when used as a radical medium 'express[es] opposition vertically from subordinate quarters directly at the power structure and against its behaviour' and 'to build support, solidarity, and networking laterally against policies or even against the very survival of the power structure' (2001:xi). These features of the Internet make it a revolutionary medium in a Post-Communist country in terms of broadening the sources of communication among people, levelling the ground of civic participation, and defying symbolic manipulation by the privileged.

'People's control' of the Internet (Castells 2001:165) enables an alternative multi-tiered public sphere that is antagonistic towards the abuse of people's will in the offline sphere. In this sense, Internet bulletin boards can be compared with other radical media forms such as underground literature and press, subversive artwork and music in that they augment essential means of mass organisation. It is not a substitute for these media, but offers an alternative means for traditional radical media.

This radical use of Internet bulletin boards is still sporadic in social life and has not forged its way into formal legislation. Nevertheless, by amplifying the direct participation from organised and non-organised citizens, Internet bulletin boards can re-orient the public agenda, having a profound impact on the notion of citizenship and political culture in China (cf. Yu, Haiqing 2006).

2.4 The Internet and the Global Chinese Public Sphere

The Internet has the intrinsic nature of being global. By 'eliminating' the boundaries in the offline context, the Internet helps to build a virtual public sphere for Chinese people worldwide based on their shared language and culture. Current affairs, ranging from domestic issues to international affairs, are brought to global attention, deliberation, and collaboration when searching for solutions.

Findings from the study of QGLT suggest that online communities based in Mainland China are constructed beyond the geopolitical boundaries of the nation state. Shared language, culture, and concerns can bind Chinese together worldwide. Diasporic Chinese actively seek participation within the Mainland-based bulletin boards such as QGLT. Diasporic users, as mediators between China and the world, can pass on their knowledge and experience of the world to domestic users and 'upload' domestic issues in China to a global level for deliberation. Civic communication among the global Chinese population creates a political interest in Chinese-related issues. From the online protest against the anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia in 1998 to the Sun Zhigang case in 2003, horizontally connected citizen networks played a significant role in distributing information and knowledge to Mainland China, and conversely receiving and publicising information from mainland Chinese users. Affinity based on same concerns was built up and online actions were coordinated on issues such as protecting the environment, fighting against SARS, and safeguarding civil rights across the political territory.

261

The global Chinese public sphere has a potentially great influence on the Mainland at different levels. International public opinion formed within this communicative civic space can pressure the authoritarian government into taking measures to curb problems such as human rights abuse. Meanwhile, to the Internet users based in the Mainland, actively participating and being exposed to civil debate beyond national boundaries has fundamental consequences in their thought processes and mind-set, which can help to cultivate the concepts of citizenship and democracy. Finally, being exposed to a variety of ideas within this public sphere mediated between the home countries and host countries, Chinese diasporic users have an opportunity to 'exercise critical judgement in granting credibility to sources or assessing situations from many points of view' (Downing, J. et. al. 2001: 205). The sense of belonging to a global community can help to eradicate barriers between political entities and tackle problems at a global level.

The diasporic Chinese virtual public sphere is just one example of how the Internet can be used as a powerful medium in a global civil society. The Internet allows streams of non-localized and dialogic forms of communication among people so that alternative forms of publicity can be formed. The international participation in civic dialogue concerning Chinese-related issues demonstrates that public knowledge shaped outside of the mainstream media's framework can develop public opinion. This new public opinion can impact on the mainstream media's agenda and policy-making worldwide.

This global Chinese public sphere, largely bounded by language and culture, is becoming more interactive with other international organisations in facilitating transnational civic participation. The global Chinese public sphere in cyberspace can circumvent the hierarchal structure for political engagement in offline life and opens up a totally new vision of the world for Chinese users.

262

3. Concluding Remarks and Suggestions for Further Research

The Chinese government is attempting to reap the economic benefits of the Internet while avoiding the 'pitfalls' of democratisation. The Communist Party has been actively encouraging the application of interests for economic prosperity while it has also struggled to rein in online political deliberation. However, this does not mean that the Internet is politically irrelevant or futile in terms of digital resistance. Instead, freedom of speech in China has expanded significantly and official limits of political toleration has been tested, pushed, and re-negotiated since the arrival of the Internet. There is little reason to believe that Internet use will trigger a digital revolution or political movement in China in the near future. Nevertheless, the Internet plays a far more significant role in catalysing socio-political changes than traditional media.

This study also suggests the following areas for further investigation.

A major concern remains in whether online political discussion participants constitute 'strong publics' or 'weak publics' (Fraser 1992). In post-Communist China, the government body for opinion formation such as the People's Congress still has yet to fully translate public concerns into legislation. On the other hand, synchronous online chat-group software encourages rapid exchange rather than rational critical discourse. Under such circumstances, it is hard to evaluate to what degree online public opinion can be translated into authoritative decisions or supervise the conduct of governments. This quest becomes harder to pin down at a global level. Scholars predict that online civic participation among Chinese worldwide can influence transnational politics and civil society (Yang 2002, 2003). Whether the combined forces of technological advances and developments of transnational organisations may empower Chinese publics still needs further study.

Another area that remains under-researched is the composition of online publics in China and the social capital required for digital deliberation. The wider public domain

online consists of contesting sub-groups, which may involve marginal social groups such as ethnic minorities, gays right advocates, religious groups, etc. The nature of such subaltern publics is still largely unknown in terms of the extent and means they help to expand the discursive virtual space. Closely related to this is the social capital required for digital deliberation. Communicative practice online develops its own rules, norms, culture, and netiquette. Attention should be paid as to how access to rational critical debate can be increased for subaltern groups – those who are traditionally denied or deprived access. Technology, netiquette, and the type of forum management need to be modified to draw out rational critical discourse from online interaction (Dahlberg 2001b). These proposed solutions need further exploration to maximise the deliberative potential of online political discussion.

This study substantiates the theoretical argument that the rational critical discourse in the public sphere will be extended in cyberspace, and verified this argument in a computer-mediated communication environment in a non-liberal society. This thesis compares existing online discourse in China with a set of requirements of the public sphere, and concludes that the democratising rhetoric and practice on the Internet bulletin boards constructs deliberative spaces for Chinese people. The Internet may undermine deliberation by perpetuating inequalities of access, fragmenting public discourse, and accommodating non-progressive rhetoric. However, by enlarging the scale of civic participation, advancing alternative and oppositional public discourses, and tackling problems at a global level, Internet bulletin boards construct a public sphere with divergent political views represented. This alternative public sphere online has the potential to free civil society from state control, and cultivates critical public opinion that is able to check on an authoritarian government's policy-making. In this sense, online deliberative forums play a more important role in non-liberal societies in extending the public sphere than their counterparts in democratic societies.

*To protect my interviewees' from any possible political interference in their online activities, I have replaced some QGLT users' pennames with common English names.

Endnotes:

[1] In Chinese, *Qiang* can be used as both an adjective and a verb. Thus *Qiang Guo* can be understood as either 'Strong Nation' or 'to strengthen the nation'.

[2] For example, The Civic Practices Network http://cpn.journalism.wisc.edu/cpn/cpn.html; Minnesota E-Democracy http://freenet.msp.mn.us/govt/e-democracy/; The Political Participation Project: http://www.ai.mit.edu/projects/ppp/home.html; Public Communication Technology Project http://aspin.asu.edu/~pctp/; Teledemocracy Action News +Network Project www.auburn.edu/tann. UK Citizens Online Democracy: http://www.democracy.org.uk/ (cannot be opened now); E-democracy national Project: http://www.e-democracy.gov.uk/default.htm; UK New Citizen: http://www.uknewcitizen.org/; and BBCi Schools: CitizenX: http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/citizenx/index.shtml.

[3] See item 'Internet forum' from Wikepedia, the online free encyclopedia at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_forum 16/05/2006.

[4] 'China, Egypt join WTO's Information Technology Agreement', *WTO News*, 24 April 2003, available at: http://www.wto.org/English/news_e/news03_e/news_china_egypt_25apr03_e.htm, accessed: 29/04/2006.

[5] The Ministry of Information Industry after March 1998.

[6] For example, state-controlled media are allowed a low connection fee to use the telecommunication resources provided by SOE China Telecom.

[7] China Central Television's site www.cctv.com was launched in December 1996; *People's Daily*'s site www.peopledaily.com.cn was launched in January 1997; *Xinhua News Agency*'s site www.xinhua.org was launched in November 1997; *China Radio International*'s site www.cri.com.cn (now http://gb.chinabroadcast.cn/) was launched in December 1998; and *China Daily*'s site www.chinadaily.com.cn was launched in December 1995.

[8] Set up by the Ministry of Public Security in August 1998.

[9] This argument has been developed by various scholars and social activists, see for example, the thesis collection in Hughes, C. R. and Wacker, G. (2003) *China and the Internet: Politics of the Digital Leap forward*. RoutledgeCurzon. Thompson, B. (2006) 'Looking for change in China', in *Free Press*, No. 151, (March/April). P. 1.

[10] One example is China's three state-sponsored 'Golden Projects' which started in March 1993. The three 'Golden Projects' – the golden bridge, golden gate and golden card projects- aim to build an information infrastructure for economic information networking, online banking, and digitalised customs declaration for imports and exports.

[11] It was launched by a government-sponsored research institute, the National Research Centre for Intelligent Computing Systems, in Beijing.

[12] 'Major Event in China's Internet Development: 1986-1993', *China Internet Network Information Centre*, available at: http://www.cnnic.com.cn/html/Dir/2003/10/22/1002.htm, accessed: 17/02/2006.

[13] In terms of Internet use, the CINIC questionnaire allowed multiple choices for Chinese users. Therefore, there are overlaps in using web messengers, Internet forums, bulletin boards, discussion groups and chat rooms.

[14] Reuters (17/10/2001) 'China Closes Scribe BBS', *Wired News*, available at: http://www.wired.com/news/politics/0,1283,47645,00.html, accessed: 12/04/2003.

[15] Rheingold, H. (1993) *The Virtual Community* (electronic version), available at: http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/4.html, accessed: 24/08/2006.

[16] Interview with Mr. Baishun Mei, Jetta driver in Beijing (01/07/2004).

[17] Such as the Chinese government in the SARS case and the UNESCO in Nujiang Action: as discussed in Chapter 8.

[18] The concept of Greater China emerged in the 1980s and has borne different economical and political implications ever since. In this paper, it is used to refer to a cultural sphere that bonds together global Chinese with shared culture and language, which roughly includes Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and other major Chinese-speaking communities in Southeast Asia, Europe and North America.

[19] For example, Cisco helped the Chinese government to design online word filtering software for monitoring political online discussion. In January 2006, Google launched its Chinese version Google China and agreed to practice self-censorship. Google China as a search engine will automatically filter out politically sensitive content that might offend the Chinese government. Another example is the Shi Tao Case in 2005. A Yahoo branch in Hong Kong passed on information from its discussion groups to the Chinese security ministry, which led to a Chinese journalist Shi Tao's imprisonment in the name of 'leaking national security information to the foreign sources' (BBC News (07/09/2005) 'Yahoo "helped jail China writer"', available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4221538.stm, 21/04/2006.

[20] Gurak uses this word to refer to a group quality, i.e. the cultural and moral tone of a community.

[21] The full name lis Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, EZLN). It is an armed revoluktionary group based in Ciapas, Mexico, representing the indigenous people's interests. The Zapatista movement came to International attention in 1994 with its original aim of overthrowing the Mexican government. After a short aremed skirmish, a ceasefire between the Mexican government and the EZLN has been observed since January 12 of that year. The Zapatista uprising is regarded as the first 'post-modern' revolution in that 'an armed, yet non-violent (despite this uprising in the early 1990s) revolutionary group that incorporates modern technologies like satellite telephones and the Internet as a way to obtain domestic and foreign support'. The EZLN considers itself as part of the worldwide anti-globalisation and anti-neoliberalism movement (source: Wekipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EZLN).

[22] For example, *Teledemocracy Action News +Network* (www.auburn.edu/tann) launched by Ted Becker and Christa Slaton from the University of Alabama in 1995.

[23] Wall newspapers are hand-written tabloid news-sheets that express political preferences or grievances, and are posted on walls for public reading. Mao Zedong believed the wall newspapers cost almost nothing in production, but were simple and accessible to anyone, and therefore should be encouraged for their 'classless' nature. Wall newspapers started to emerge in the 1950s and were most popular during 1960s and 1970s in China. For more discussion on wall newspapers, please refer to page 76.

[24] The bourgeois Reformists in this dissertation refer to the bourgeois intellectuals who emerged in the late 19th Century China, with Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao as their leaders. The Reformists arose when feudal China declined under colonisation from Western powers and Japan. They promulgated Western Enlightenment ideas and believed the only way of national salvation was to learn advanced science and technology, and political governance from Western countries. The Reformists won sympathy from the court especially from the emperor Guangxu himself. With backing from the Emperor, a reform was launched on 11 June 1898 involving reforms in the political, economic, military, educational aspects. The Reform failed when the Royal Dowager Cixi launched a coup on 21 September 1898 and detained the Emperor. Kang and Liang fled China and six other main Reformist leaders were capitulated. After the failure of the Reform, the exiled Kang and Liang carried on their Reformist ideas. However, their personal loyalty towards the Emperor made them advocate the Constitutional Monarchy system and disapprove of the idea of a bourgeois Republic.

The bourgeois revolutionists in this dissertation refer to the bourgeois intellectuals who emerged by the end of nineteenth century with Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1844-1925 CE) as their leader. The first bourgeois Revolutionists organisation was set up in 1894 by Dr. Sun who was regarded as the founding father of modern China. As a Chinese expatriate, Sun began his political career by organising reform groups of Chinese exiles overseas. The bourgeois Revolutionists' ideal was to overthrow the feudal Qing Empire and set up a Chinese Republic. Sun's concept of the Three Principles of the People (Nationalism, Democracy, and Livelihood) became the guideline for bourgeois revolution. In 1911, the Bourgeois Revolutionists revolted in Wuchang and overthrew the feudal government. In 1912, the first bourgeois Republic was set up in China with Sun as the acting president.

[25] Confucianism in China consists of mainly two philosophers' works - the analects from Confucius and Mencius. This argument '劳心者治人，劳力者治于人' is found in The Works of Mencius (translated by James Legge) Clarendon Press, 1895. Book III, Part I: T'ang Wan Kung (cont.), available at: http://nothingistic.org/library/mencius/mencius10.html, accessed: 18/08/2006.

[26] Annotations (literally meaning: 'writing down comments on the blank margins of the book') is a unique way of expressing people's contemporary reflections over current issues under the disguise of historical or literal criticism in ancient China. The person who made annotations might be imprisoned or even sentenced to deatch if he dared to criticise the authorities.

[27] The first primitive form of 'newspaper' in China, 'Di Bao', appeared in Tang Dynasty (618—907 AD) and carried official news. Di Bao were written by, read by and distributed among government officials. There were also 'Xiao Bao' run by private and read by intellectuals emerging in Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD).

[28] The Chinese Press and Publishing Network (04/01/2006) 'Qiang Xue Bao', available at: http://press.gapp.gov.cn/news/wenb.php?val=news&aid=9220, accessed: 10/03/2006.

[29] 'Sun Yat-sen', in The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia. © 2000–2005 Pearson Education, publishing as Infoplease, available at: http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/people/A0847255.html, accessed: 10/03/2006.

[30] In 1906, Royal Dowager Cixi decided to 'change the laws and practice new governance' (变法新政). The Qing Government decreed the Constitution which imitated the British and Japanese Constitutional Monarchy system and included 14 items concerning the power of the Monarch, and the 9 items concerning the rights and obligations of the citizens. The intention of the composition of the Constitution was to save the declining Royal governance of the Qing Empire. The first item of the Constitution concerned the ultimate power of the Qing monarch: 'The Qing Emperor governs the Qing Imperial. The Royal governance comes from a single origin and lasts for ever'

("大清皇帝统治大清帝国，万世一系，永永尊戴"). The preparation for the Constitutional Monarchy was designed to be 12 years and later changed to 9 years. The bourgeois revolution aborted the constitutional monarchy attempts.

[31] The Chinese Press and Publishing Network (04/01/2006) '*Qiang Xue Bao*', available at: http://press.gapp.gov.cn/news/wenb.php?val=news&aid=9220, accessed: 10/03/2006.

[32] 'The history of modernisation: Jingshi Da xuetang opened the door for leaning from the West', available at: http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/ch-yuwai/167848.htm, accessed on 14/02/2006.

[33] The New Culture Movement in 1915 in China was a movement of Enlightenment and liberalisation. During the New Culture Movement, bourgeois radical intellectuals enthusiastically promulgated the ideas of democracy and science among the general public, introduced and translated various Western philosophical thoughts into Chinese (including Marxism), and denounced superstition, ignorance, and feudal authoritarianism. Major figures during the New Culture Movement such as Chen Duxiu later became founders of the Chinese Communist Party.

[34] Consisting of China's eight democratic parties – Revolutionary Committee of the Guomindang, China Democratic League, China Democratic National Construction Association, China Association for Promoting Democracy, Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democractic Party, China Zhi Gong Dang, Jiu San Society, and Taiwan Democratic Self-Government.

[35] The Gang of Four refers to the four chief members within the Communist Party who played a key role in directing the brainwashing and purging during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in China. This Partisan clique included Mao's wife Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen, and Yao Wenyuan. The Gang of Four was accused of trying to seize power after Mao's death. When the coup failed, they were arrested and later publicly tried and found guilty of treason in 1980.

[36] Fang, Hanqi. (25/07/2002) 'One Hundred year history of Journalism Communication in China', from *China Dominant-journalism Development Centre*, available at: ahttp://www.cddc.net/shownews.asp?newsid=501, accessed: 14/03/2006. Another figure is: 2,089 from 'The General History of the Print and Publishing in China', available at: http://www.cgan.net/book/books/print/g-history/gb_12/20_1.htm, accessed 14/03/2006.

[37] Editorial Board of China Broadcasting Yearbook (1997) *China Broadcasting Yearbook 1996.* Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press. P. 623.

[38] This magazine programme has a few segments. Among them, the Oriental Figure (*dongfang zhizi*) features distinguished scholars, officials, or news figures; the Ordinary People's Story (*Baixing Gushi*) tells the story of ordinary people's life with a human interest perspective; Horizon Investigation (*Shikong Diaocha*) is an in-depth investigative report that usually exposes social problems or scandals such as corruption.

[39] The reason I registered a few usernames was quite accidental. I registered my first QGLT username in February 2003, but quickly found that I could not post under this name. I thought this was a technical problem such as the failure to submit the online registry form. I tried registering a few others usernames, but only found these were invalid as well. Then I emailed Mr. Shan, the director of QGLT, asking for help. I got his replies in March simply telling me that those usernames I registered were valid now. I later found that QGLT had a strict censorship system for users' pennames. Usernames registered online will be examined for potential 'inappropriate' political implication or sexual innuendo before they can be activated (so that users can post under such names). Due to the lack of staff, around 160,000 registered usernames had not been activated up to July 2004.

[40] The other two boards moderated by volunteers are *Yueguang Lianyi* and *Qinggan Shikong*. These two boards are designed for discussion on music, arts and romance, rather than on current affairs

[41] 'Volunteers' refer to QGLT users who obtained permission from QGLT administration to voluntarily moderate bulletin boards. More discussion about QGLT volunteers can be found in Chapter 5.

[42] Its equivalent in former Communist regimes would be: Prada in the former USSR; Trybuna Ludu in Poland; Rude pravo in Czechoslovakia; Nepszabadsag in Hungary; Rabotnichesko Delo in Bulgaria; Neues Deutschland in East Germany, D. R.; Scinteia in Romania; and Zeri i popullit in Albania.

[43] 'Development', available at: http://www.people.com.cn/GB/1018/22259/29814/index.html, accessed: 16/05/2006.

[44] They are: the *People's Daily, People's Daily Overseas Edition, East China News, South China News, Market Daily, Jinghua Times, International Financial Daily, Jiangnan Times, Global Times,* and *Securities Times*.

[45] They are: *China Automobile News, Health Times,* and *Satire and Humour*.

[46] These weekly, bi-weekly and monthly journals are *The Earth, News Front, Global People, People's Digest, Listed Companies, Motor Trend, Security Today, Times Trend, Information Weekly, Greenlife, Chinese Economic Weekly,* and *People Forum*.

[47] 'Introduction to People's Daily', available at:
http://www.people.com.cn//GB/other7018/7019/20011213/626152.html, accessed: 02/03/2003.

[48] They are Chinese simplified, Chinese traditional, English, Japanese, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic.

[49] 'Introduction to People.com.cn', available at:
http://www.people.com.cn/GB/50142/50458/index.html, accessed: 18/05/2006.

[50] 'Introduction to People's Daily', available at:
http://www.people.com.cn/GB/other7018/7019/20011213/626152.html, accessed: 12/02/2003.

[51] Interview with Mr. Chengbiao Shan, the QGLT Director (1999-2004) on 15/04/2004.

[52] Introduction to People's Daily', available at:
http://www.people.com.cn/GB/50142/50458/index.html, accessed: 18/05/2006.

[53] As long as a volunteer moderator manages the board, the discussion on this board can carry on at any time.

[54] The Safety-valve theory was first systematically developed by Lewis Coser. He believed that conflict served as the safety-valve in society in that it is 'as an outlet for the release of hostilities which, were no such outlet provided, would sunder the relation between the antagonists' (1956:41). With the modernisation of society, there is a growth of 'safety-valve institutions'. More about the safety-valve theory can be found in Coser, L. (1956) *The Functions of Social Conflict*. Glencoe, Ill : Free Press. Pp. 33-48.

[55] On 1 April, 2001, an American spy plane collided into a Chinese military plane in Chinese territorial airspace. The Chinese plane plunged into the sea and the pilot went missing. The American spy plane was forced into an emergency landing in China. After two-week bilateral talks the American plane and the pilot were returned to the US.

[56] Source: China IT Law, available at: www.chinaitlaw.org, accessed: 06/06/2006.

[57] Such as the 'Measures on Administrative Protection of Internet Copyright' publicised on 9 April, 2005.

[58] See Item 2 and Item 3 of Article 9, *Administrative Provisions for Electronic Bulletin Services on the Internet* (互 联 网 电 子 公 告 服 务 管 理 规 定), available at: http://www.cnnic.com.cn/policy/21.shtml and http://www.chinaitlaw.org/?p1=search, accessed: 22/04/2003.

[59] *Administrative Provisions for Electronic Bulletin Services on the Internet* (互联网电子公告服务管理规定), available at: http://www.cnnic.com.cn/policy/21.shtml, accessed: 22/04/2003.

[60] On 8 May, 1999, Chinese Embassy in Sarajevo was bombed by NATO's missiles during the Kosovo Conflict. The American Ministry Of Defence later admitted they mistakenly bombed the wrong target, but most Chinese believe it is a conspiracy rather than accident. This incident triggered nation-wide protests against the USA in China.

[61] 'China ICPs Need Approval, License Before Posting News', *China Online* (18/02/2000)', available at: http://www.chinaonline.com/issues/Internet_policy/currentnews/open/c00021851.asp, accessed: 20/03/2000.

[62] 'China Strengthens the Secrecy Management of Computer Information Systems Attached to the Internet 26/01/2000', available at: http://www.chinanews.com.cn/2000-1-26/26/16782.html, accessed: 16/05/2006.

[63] It is said among QGLT staff that Guan was assigned 'from above' to replace Jiang Yaping, the founder of QGLT. Jiang, a more liberal veteran journalist who used to encourage his staff to keep the dynamics of the bulletin boards, was not regarded as suitable for the Party to keep QGLT in rein. Jiang was later assigned the task of self-financing www.people.com.cn while the more conservative Guan was assigned to take charge of the content.

[64] See for example, Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2002) 'Understanding the Conditions for Public Discourse: four rules for selecting letters to the editor', in *Journalism Studies* Vol.3, No. 1. pp.69-81.

[65] The four basic principles include four 'must stick to's of the Chinese Communist Party's leadership, Socialist System, Proletariat Dictatorship and the Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thoughts.

[66] The corresponding Chinese characters are: 'M', '毛', '毛泽东', '江', '宋', '鹏', '第三代', '核心', '朱镕基'. 'The third generation' is used to refer to the third generation of Communist Party leaders with Jiang Zemin as the General Secretary. 'Core' is used to refer to Jiang Zemin as the core of the Communist Party's leadership. National leaders' names are set as forbidden words because they are often criticized by Internet users. For example, Mao Zedong was criticised for his mistakes in launching the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution; Deng Xiaoping for his 'going against the proletariat dictatorship', and Jiang Zemin for his 'leading the nation to corruption'. Source: QGLT internal document '*Yi Du Bao Gao*' (Field notes: 18/08/2004).

[67] The corresponding Chinese characters are '吾尔开西', '柴玲', '戴晴', '天安', '血', '屠夫', '纪

念'. Wu Er Kai Xi (Urkesh Davlet), Chai Ling and Dai Qing are three leading dissidents during the 1989 pro-democracy movement.

[68] The corresponding Chinese characters are '日本使馆', '北朝鲜'.

[69] The corresponding Chinese characters are '民进党', '吕秀莲'. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is the party in power in Taiwan and has been promulgating the idea of Taiwan independence. Annette Lu Shiu-lian is the chairwoman of the DPP.

[70] The corresponding Chinese characters are: '非典', 'SARS', '新闻管制', '舆论钳制', '通货膨胀', '阶级独裁', '一党制', '李洪志', '法轮功'. Fa Lun Gong is a spiritual group in China which has been proclaimed as 'cult' by the Communist Party. Li Hongzhi, who lives in the USA now, is the leader of Fa Lun Gong.

[71] The corresponding Chinese characters are '伊斯兰', '西藏骚乱'.

[72] The corresponding Chinese characters are: '北大三角地', '不锈钢老鼠'. The Beijing University Triangle is a triangle area on the campus and has been renowned for the posters that promulgate liberal ideas here. 'The stainless steel mouse' is the online identity of a young female dissident who was detained by the Communist Party in 2001. Her detention aroused fervent online public opinion condemning the Communist Party, which finally led to her release.

[73] Jiang Yanyong is a retired surgeon from a Beijing military hospital. He exposed the real number of SARS infections in early 2003. He was later detained and questioned by the government for his online articles that give a personal account of death and injury during the 1989 pro-democracy movement

[74] BBC News (07/09/2005) 'Yahoo "helped jail China writer"', available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4221538.stm, 21/04/2006.

[75] See for example, 'Beijing Internet Media Association Recruiting 200 Web Superintendents' (15/05/2006), available at: http://news.sohu.com/20060515/n243238828.shtml, accessed 15/05/2006.

[76] 'Beijing Internet Media Association Recruiting 200 Web Superintendents', available at: http://news.sohu.com/20060515/n243238828.shtml, accessed: 15/05/2006.

[77] Available at: http://www.qglt.com.cn/bbs/ReadFile?whichfile=486798&typeid=17 accessed: 25/08/2004.

[78] Available at: http://www.qglt.com.cn/bbs/ReadFile?whichfile=486798&typeid=17 accessed: 25/08/2004.

[79] For example, all postings on the *QGLT In-Depth* board have to be more than 1,000 bytes (500 Chinese characters) and all postings will go through QGLT moderators before they can appear online.

[80] For example, users have been using!!!; ???; ●●●; △△△△; ▲▲▲ for emphasis. ^_^ for a smile face and @_@ for a surprised or confused reaction.

[81] See Note 55.

[82] A series of mini-questionnaires regarding the demographic features of its users was put on QGLT from June to August 2004. The result of this survey has only been used as an internal reference among moderators however. I got a copy of it by virtue of being an intern moderator.

[83] Interview with QGLT moderator Hank (02/09/2004) when he commented on Laobenniu: 'Laobenniu is a problematic user' because 'he sometimes speaks for those who have been prosecuted during and after the June 4 Incident [1989 pro-democracy movement]'.

[84] Source: http://www.qglt.com/bbs/GetGuestInfo?GuestID=89810 accessed 16/04/2004.

[85] Interview with Chengbiao Shan, Director of QGLT (1999-2004), 06/05/2003.

[86] The URL for this discussion channel is:
http:// bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/ReadFile?whichfile=6321&typeid=42, accessed: 31/07/2004.

[87] Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China
http://www.stats.gov.cn/was40/detail?record=5&channeldid=52984
http://www.stats.gov.cn/was40/detail?record=3&channelid=52984, accessed: 22/04/2005.

[88] The average monthly income in Shenzhen is RMB 4109 and Beijing: 3764 in 2004. Source: 'Beijing Salaries Rise', available at: http://english.sohu.com/20041207/n223372380.shtml, accessed: 23/04/2005.

[89] The posting is available at:
http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/ReadFile?whichfile=104&typeid=99, accessed 14/09/2004.

[90] During the crackdown of the 1989 pro-democracy movement, the Chinese government despatched tanks and armed vehicles on the streets in Beijing to disperse the demonstrators. A photo showing one Chinese dissident standing in front of a tank caught global attention. From then on, "tanks" became closely related to Tiananmen Massacre following the 1989 pro-democracy movement.

[91] The Chinese verses are: '我必兴起那残忍暴躁之民,以风为骑,以露为饮,必焚烧你们的屋,令你们的妻女冻饿,然后让你们知道悔改'.

[92] According to the China Internet Network Information Centre's definition, a 'Chinese Internet user' refers to any Chinese citizen who uses the Internet at least for one hour per week on average.

[93] According to Guangdong mobile communication statistics, the flow of mobile phone text messages in the province rans as high as 40 million on February 8; 41 million on 9th; and 45 million on 10th. (Xia and Ye 2003).

[94] For example, there were 305 SARS patients in Guangdong province on February 10, but this number was revealed on *Southern Weekend* until 3 days later. See for example, Chen, Hai, and Jiang, Hua (13/02/2003) 'Guangzhou is fighting an unknown virus', in *Southern Weekend*. Available at: http://www.nanfangdaily.com.cn/zm/20030213/xw/tb/200302130499.asp, accessed: 12/05/2006.

[95] Anonymous informant's work diary, 01/04/2003.

[96] Jakes, Susan (08/04/2003) 'Beijing's SARS Attack', available at:

www.time.com/time/asia/news/article/0,9754,441615,00.html, accessed: 19/05/2005.

[97] Anonymous informant's work diary, 15/04/2003.

[98] 'Special topical discussion: Reflections on the ATP and the panic shopping in Guangdong Province', available at: http://past.people.com.cn/GB/news/9719/9720/20030219/925747.html, accessed: 07/06/2005.

[99] Anonymous informant's work diary, 15/04/2003.

[100] Yu is an ancient king in Chinese myth. The legend says that there was a Great Flood in Yu's time. Yu's father built dams to stop the water from taking lives, but failed. Yu successfully dredged channels that directed the water to the sea and saved millions of people. It is widely believed in China that public opinion is like a flood. Inept governors build 'dams' to block it up, but wise governors let out public opinion and guide it to their own course.

[101] Here refers to the total number of viewing the main posts of the day.

[102] Here refers to the total number of replies to the main posts of the day.

[103] Foreign media can not publish and market on its own behalf in China. In order to get published in China, foreign media have to apply for a registry number from the government-controlled the China National Publications Import and Export (Group) (CNPIE). CNPIE and other government organisations are also responsible for signing selling contracts on behalf of foreign press with news agencies in China.

[104] Chan, John. (03/05/2003) 'SARS epidemic triggers political crisis in China', World Socialist Web Site, available at: http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/may2003/sars-m03.shtml, accessed: 23/05/2005.

[105] Interview with Miss Dan Shi on 26 June, 2004. Miss Shi was a volunteer working is Peking Union Medical Colleague Hospital in Beijing during the SARS crisis.

[106] 'Free treatment to certain groups of epidemic victims will be written down in law' (17/12/2003), available at:
http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2003-12/17/content_1234805.htm, accessed: 10/02/2006.

[107] Available at: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/ReadFeil?whichfile=242603&typeid=17 accessed: 28/04/2003.

[108] The Chinese version is: 大吃大喝党治不了，非典治了；公款旅游党治不了，非典治了；文山会海党治不了，非典治了；欺上瞒下党治不了，非典治了；卖淫嫖娼党治不了，非典治了。

[109] The Chinese version is: 广东流行非典了，北京也被感染了。政府不再严管了，媒体也敢呐喊了。患者已经不少了，医院也都住满了。医护人员辛苦了，前线冲锋冒险了。群众吓得没胆了，带着口罩捂脸了。国际组织监管了，控制日子不远了。

[110] For example, Shenzhen Charity Network http://www.4343.net/article/list.asp?id=807, accessed 30/05/2005.

[111] Available at: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/ReadFile?whichfile=6249661&typeid=14, accessed: 25/04/2003. Also at: http://www.creaders.net, accessed: 24/04/2003.

[112] Available at: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/ReadFeil?whichfile=242443&typeid=17, accessed: 28/04/2003.

[113] For example, QGLT user Lou Mingxian who works as a vet in a small town in southern China uses his real name as his username. He admitted in his postings that having his name appear on the Party's paper *People's Daily*'s bulletin boards brought him fame locally. Local people treated him differently because of his connection with the national media in the Capital.

[114] Xiao, Chunjiang. (2001) 'The development of the people.com' in *Computer World Daily*. June 4th. Available at: www.people.com.cn/GB/it/48/297/20010604/481118.html, accessed 02/02/2003.

[115] Introduction to People's Daily', available at: http://www.people.com.cn/GB/50142/50458/index.html, accessed: 18/05/2006.

[116] For example, during the 1989 pro-democracy movement, a replica of the Statue of Liberty in New York was dressed as a statue of a Chinese woman holding a torch, and erected by students on Tiananmen Square.

[117] Available at: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/ReadFile?whichfile=6212189&typeid=14, accessed: 22/04/2003.

[118] 'Freedom of the Press and the 2002-2003 SARS Outbreak', available at: http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/exp/expsars.php?mode=print&PHPSESSID=c53, accessed: 23/05/2005.

[119] Zou, Huijiang and Wen, Yangqin. (26/04/2003) '7 cases of SARS rumour are investigated in Foshan', *Information Times*, available at: http://informationtimes.dayoo.com/gb/content/2003-04/26/content_1045422.htm, accessed: 22/05/2003.

[120] QQ is a Chinese instant messaging software similar to MSN.

[121] Anonymous informant's work diary, 17/02/2003.

[122] See, for example, 'Ministry of Health: the suspect case confirmed as ATP in Guangdong', available at: http://unn.people.com.cn/GB?22220/31145/31146/2280637.html, accessed: 30/05/2005.

[123] The concept of Greater China emerged in the 1980s and has been bearing different economical and political implications ever since. See for debate on this term in Rawnsley, G. R. and Rawnsley M-Y T (2003) *Political Communications in Greater China: The Construction and Reflection of Identity*. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon.

[124] Rheingold, H. (2003) *The Virtual Community* [The electronic version], available at: http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/intro.html, accessed: 25/03/2006.

[125] For example, receiving satellite TV is banned in China. It is illegal for Chinese citizens to set up their own satellite dishes and receive signals from foreign media. Satellite TV reception is only allowed to official media, educational and research institutions, foreign companies, and the non-Chinese residential areas.

[126] See 'the unforgettable images on the Internet 2003', available at: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/ReadFile?whichfile=419500&typeid=17, accessed: 31/01/2004.

[127] Epoch Times (07/07/2004) 'Warning from the UNESCO: China should perform its responsibility in protecting the world heritage sites', available at: http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/4/7/7/n589144.htm, accessed: 07/07/2004.

[128] Available at: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/ReadFile?whichfile=9273572&typeid=14, accessed: 07/07/2004

[129] Available at: http://202.99.23.235/cgi-internet bulletin boards/ReadFile?whichfile=42116&typeid=25, accessed: 12/04/2003.

[130] 'Understanding the WTO: Basic: Principles of the trading system', available at: http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/fact2_e.htm, aaccessed: 14/12/2005.

[131] Available at: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/ReadFile?whichfile=6335665&typeid=14, accessed: 10/05/2003.

[132] On 13-15 May, 1998, riots broke out across Indonesia after four students were fatally shot by security forces during an anti-government demonstration at Trisakti University in Jakarta. There then followed a period of looting and destruction of property against the ethnic Chinese minority. Later, human rights atrocities committed against the ethnic Chinese claimed 1198 lives. Meanwhile, 31 Chinese were missing, 40 shopping centres, 4083 shops, and 1026 houses were burnt down, and at least168 girls and women were raped with quite a proportion of gang-rape in public. Twenty of them were stabbed or burnt to death after their ordeal. President B. J. Habibie, at first denied the atrocities, later he disputed that the May Riots were racially motivated, and implied that those ethnic Chinese victims were attacked because 'they didn't give to the community' during his interview with *Business Week* (3 August, 1998). Sourced from: http://members.fortunecity.com/dikigoros/indonesatroc.htm, accessed: 24 Nov.2004.

[133] Available at: http://www.huaren.org/diaspora/asia/indonesia/yelrib.shtml, accessed: 24/11/2004.

[134] 'Protest against anti-Chinese atrocities and call for punishing the criminals', available at: http://wenhua.jztele.com/may/007.htm, accessed: 24/11/2004.

[135] 'Protest against anti-Chinese atrocities and call for punishing the criminals', available at: http://wenhua.jztele.com/may/007.htm, accessed: 24/11/2004.

[136] *Regulations of custody and repatriation of Wanderers and Beggars in Cities* had been put into effect since 12 May, 1982. This system had been increasingly used to detain migrant workers, who come from rural area to the cities in search for employment. Others detained included beggars, vagrants and others with no fixed residence or regular employment, among whose member included people who were disabled or mentally challenged, and homeless child beggars. People held in the transfer centres have to pay for their food and accommodation and for their transportation to their origin place. Those who cannot pay are forced to work instead. Many are reportedly held in such centres for months without prospect of release because they have no money and no relatives or friends to bail them out. The system effectively permits the arbitrary detention of individuals who are not suspected of committing any crime. Sourced from: 'China: migrant worker dies in custody' http://web.amnesty.org/wire/July2003/China, Accessed: 24/11/2004.

[137] Human Rights Watch, 'Chinese Protest Online: The Case of Sun Zhigang', available at: http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/china/beijing08/voices.htm, accessed: 24/11/2004.

[138] Available at: http://www.people.com.cn/GB/news/9719/9720/20030520/996164.html, accessed: 23/11/2004.

[139] Available at: http://www.people.com.cn/GB/news/9719/9720/20030520/996164.html, accessed: 22/11/2004.

[140] Available at: http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shehui/46/20030610/1013342.html, accessed: 22/11/2004.

[141] Prof. He is one of the Chinese legal scholars who wrote to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) in May 2003 asking for a review of *Regulations of custody and repatriation of Wanderers and Beggars in Cities* for its human rights violation. He and other legal scholars also urged the NPC to abolish temporary residence permits and reform the migrant detention centres.

[142] 'China: 10 snapshots in 2003' (06/01/04), available at: http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/gyzg/t57916.thm, accessed: 24/11/2004.

[143] Xinhua Net. (22/04/2005)'NGOs getting more prominence', available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-04/22/content_2862677.htm, accessed: 11/01/2006.

[144] International Rivers Network, available at: http://www.irn.org/programs/China, accessed: 24/11/2005.

[145] The Nujiang Hydro-power project has been postponed up till the writing of this dissertation under both domestic and international public opinion. In June 2005, UNESCO decided to send a monitoring commission to Nujiang River in 2006 to evaluate the situation.

[146] Xinhua Net. (22/04/2005)'NGOs getting more prominence', available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-04/22/content_2862677.htm, acessed: 11/01/2006.

[147] The Golden Shield Project was launched in China in November 2000. It was created for 'the adoption of advanced information and communication technology to strengthen central police control, responsiveness, and crime combating capacity, so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of police work.' By implementing the Golden Shield Project, the Chinese government is equipped with the latest technology to crack down on technological crimes, illegal online activities, and dissident opinions. This project, whose success largely depends on international Internet infrastructure equipment corporations such as the American based Cisco Systems Inc., enables the Chinese government to track down, identify and convict political dissidents. Sources: 'China's Golden Shield Project', sourced from: http://www.stanford.edu/~mdelgado/cs201/golden_shield.htm, accessed: 02/05/2006.

[148] Available at: http://post.baidu.com/f?kz=1274977, accessed: 26/11/2004.

[149] See for example, the online exchange of messages in organising the boycott of Japanese commodity in Shenzhen at: http://webinternet bulletinboards.szonline.net/bin/corpuscontent.asp?artno=2848516&uid=76376&UFlag=0, accessed: 24/11/2004.

[150] Available at: http://www.300000.org/internet_bulletin_boards/list.asp?boardid=23, accessed: 24/11/2004.

[151] Reporters Without Borders (17/11/2005) 'The 15 enemies of the Internet and other countries to watch', available at: http://rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=15613, accessed 26/11/2005.

[152] BBC News (07/09/2005) 'Yahoo "helped jail China writer"', available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4221538.stm, accessed: 07/09/2005.

[153] Shi Tao worked for a business newspaper in China before he was arrested and sentenced in April 2005 to 10 years in prison. He was found guilty of sending foreign-based websites the text of an internal Communist Party message. Yahoo's Hong Kong branch, according to Reporters Without Borders, helped China link Shi Tao's email account and computer to a message containing the information. Source: BBC News (07/09/2005) 'Yahoo "helped jail China writer"', available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4221538.stm, accessed: 07/09/2005.

Bibliography

Academic bibliography in English

Baker, K. M. (1992) 'Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France', in Calhoun, C. (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press. Pp.181-211

Baldwin, T. D., McVoy, S. & Steinfield, C. (1996) *Convergence: Integrating Media, Information and Communication*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.

Baym, N. K. (1998) 'The Emergence of On-line Community', in Jones, S. G. (ed.) *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*. London: SAGE. Pp.35-68.

---- (2000) *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE.

Bays, D. H. (1978) *China Enters the Twentieth Century: Chang Chih-tung and the Issue of a New Age, 1895-1909*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Beck, U. (1997) *The Reinvention of Politics: Rethinking modernity in the global social order*. (translated by Mark Ritter) Cambridge: Polity Press.

---- (2000) *What is Globalisation?* (translated by Patrick Camiller) Cambridge: Polity Press; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Becker, T. L. and Slaton, Christa D. (2000) *The Future of Teledemocracy*. Westpost, Conn: Praeger.

Benhabib, S. (1992) 'Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jurgen Habermas', in Calhoun, C. (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press. Pp.73-98

---- (1996) 'Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy', in Benhabib, S. (ed.) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Pp.67-94.

Bennett, W. L. (1998) 'Annual Meeting Highlights - 1998 ITHIEL DE SOLA POOL LECTURE - The UnCivic Culture: Communication, Identity, and the Rise of Lifestyle Politics', in *P.S.: Political Science and Politics*, 31(4): 741-761.

---- (2003) 'Lifestyle politics and citizen-consumers: Identity, communication and political action in the late modern society', in Corner, J. and Pels, D. (eds.) *Media and Political Style: Essays on representation and civic culture*. London: SAGE. Pp. 137-50.

---- (2004) 'Communicating global activism: Strengths and vulnerabilities of networked politics', in van de Donk, W., Loader, B. D., Nixon, P. G and Rucht, D. (eds.) *Cyberprotest: New media, citizens and social movements*. London and New York: Routledge. Pp.123-146.

Bennett, W., Pickard, V., Iozzi, D., Schroeder, C., Lagos, T, & Caswell, C. (2004) 'Managing the public sphere: Journalistic Construction of the Great Globalisation Debate', in the *Journal of Communication*, 54 (3): 437-455.

Boal, I. A. (1995). 'A flow of monsters: Luddism and virtual technologies', in Brook, J. and Boal, I. A. (eds.) *Resisting the virtual life: The culture and politics of information*. San Francisco: City Lights. Pp. 3-16.

Bohman, J. (1999) 'Democracy as Inquiry, Inquiry as Democracy: Pragmatism, Social Science and the Division of Labour', *American Journal of Political Science,* 43 (2): 590-607.

---- (2000) 'The Division of Labour in Democratic Discourse: Media, Experts, and Deliberative Democracy', in Chambers, S. and Costain, A. (eds.) *Deliberation, democracy, and the media*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. pp. 47 -64.

Boyer, M.C. (1996) *CyberCities: visual perception in the age of electronic communication*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York,

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. (Trans. by Richard Nice) London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

---- (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production: essays on art and literature*. Cambridge: Polity.

Brants, K., Huizenga, M. & Van Meerten, R. (1996) 'The new canals of Amsterdam: an exercise in local electronic democracy', in *Media, Culture and Society*, 18: 233-247.

Bray, J. (2004) 'Tibet, Democracy and the Internet Bazaar', in Ferdinard, P. (ed.) *The Internet, Democracy and Democratisation*. London and New York: Routledge. Pp.157-173.

Bryan, C. & Tatam, J. (1999) 'Political Participation and the Internet', in Liberty. (The National Council for Civil Liberties) (ed.) *Liberating Cyberspace: Civil Liberties, Human Rights and the Internet*. London, Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press. Pp.161-168.

Buchstein, H. (1997) 'Bytes That Bite: The Internet and deliberative democracy', in *Constellations*, 4 (2): 248-263.

Buzek, A. (1964) *How the Communist Press Works*. London and Dunmow: Pall Mall

Press.

Calabrese, A. & Borchert, M. (1996) 'Prospects for Electronic Democracy in the United States: Re-Thinking Communication and Social Policy, in *Media, Culture and Society*, 18: 249-268.

Calabrese, A. (1999) 'The Welfare State, the information society, and the Ambivalence of Social Movements', in Calabrese, A. and Bergelman, J-C. (eds.) *Communication, Citizenship, and Social Policy: Re-Thinking the Limits of the Welfare State*. Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. Pp. 259-277.

---- (2000) 'The Means of Communication and the Discourse on Sovereignty', in Chambers, S. and Costain, A. (eds.) *Deliberation, democracy, and the media*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. pp. 65-82.

Cammaerts, B. & van Audenhove, L. (2005) 'Online Political Debate, Unbounded Citizenship, and the Problematic Nature of a Transnational Public Sphere', in *Political Communication*, 22(2): 179-196.

Carlyle, T. (1993 [1841]) *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*. Berkeley, LA, and Oxford: University of California Press.

Castells, M. (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

---- (1997) *The Power of Identity*. Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell.

---- (2001) *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chatterjee, P. (2001) 'On civil and political society in postcolonial democracies', in Kaviraj, S. and Khilnani, S. (eds.) *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 165-78.

Chambers, S. (2000) 'A Culture of Publicity, in Chambers, S. and Costain, A. (eds.) *Deliberation, democracy, and the media*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. pp. 193-208.

Chambers, S. & Costain, A. (2000) 'Introduction', in Chambers, S. and Costain, A. (eds.) *Deliberation, democracy, and the media*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. pp. xi-xiv.

Chang, M. H. (2001) *Return of the Dragon: China's Wounded Nationalism*. Boulder, Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press.

Cheng, L. and White, L. T. III. (1991) 'China's Technocratic Movement and the World Economic Herald,' *Modern China*, 17(3): 342-88.

Christensen, T. J. (1999) 'China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma

in East Asia', *International Security*, 23(4): 49-80.

Chu, L. L. (1994) 'Continuity and Change in China's Media Reform,' in *Journal of Communication*, 44(3): 4-21.

Chomsky, N. (1989) *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies.* South End, Boston.

Cohen, J. (1989) 'Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy,' in Hamlin, A. and Pettit, P. (eds.) *The Good Polity: Normative Analysis of the State,* NY: Blackwell: pp. 18-27.

---- (1996) 'Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy', in Benhabib, S. (ed.), *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp. 95-119.

---- (1997) 'Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy', in Bohman, J. and Rehg, W. (eds.) *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics.* Cambridge, MA, London: MIT. pp.67-92.

Coleman, S. (1999) 'The New Media and Democratic Politics', in *New Media and Society*, 1(1): 67-74.

---- (2004) 'Connecting Parliament to the Public via the Internet: Two case studies of online consultations', in *Information, Communication &Society,* 7(1):1-22.

Coleman, S. and Gøtze, J. (2001) *Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation.* London: Hansard Society. [WWW] <http://www.clubepublic.org/eve/030708/bowlingtogether.pdf> [accessed: 02/02/2006].

Connell, I. & Miles, A. (1985) 'Text, Discourse and Mass Communication', in Van Dijk, T. A. (ed.) *Discourse and Communication: New Approaches to the Analysis of Mass Media Discourse and Communication.* Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter. Pp. 26-43.

Copper, J. F. (2003) 'The meaning and significance of Greater China', in Rawnsley, G. D. & Rawnsley, M. T. (eds.) *Political Communications in Greater China: the Construction and Reflection of Identity.* London and NY: Routledge Curzon. Pp.10-37.

Coser, L. A. (1956) *The Functions of Social Conflict.* New York and London: Free Press.

Cottle, S. & Rai, M. (2006) 'Between Display and Deliberation: analysing TV news as communicative architecture', in *Media, Culture and Society*, 28(2): 163-189.

Curran, J. (1991) 'Rethinking the media as a Public Sphere', in Dahlgren, P. and Sparks, C. (eds.) *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere*

in the New Media Age. London: Routledge. Pp.27-56.

---- (2000) 'Rethinking Media and Democracy', in Curran, J. and Gurevitch, M. (eds.) *Mass Media and Society.* London: Arnold. Pp.120-154.

---- (2002) *Media and Power.* London: Routledge.

Dahlberg, L. (2001a) 'The Internet and Democratic discourse: Exploring the prospects of online deliberative forums extending the public sphere', in *Information, communication and Society,* 4(4): 615-633.

---- (2001b) 'Computer-Mediated Communication and The Public Sphere: A Critical Analysis', in *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication,* Vol. 7, No.1. (October). [WWW] <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol7/issue1/dahlberg.html> [accessed 13/04/2006].

---- (2001c) 'Democracy via cyberspace: Mapping the rhetorics and practices of three prominent camps', in *New Media &Society,* 3(2):157 - 177.

Dahlgren, P. (1991) 'Introduction', in Dahlgren, P. and Sparks, C. (1991) *Communication and citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere in the New Media Age.* London: Routledge. Pp.1-26.

---- (1995) *Television and the Public Sphere: Citizenship, Democracy and the Media.* London: SAGE.

---- (2000) 'The Internet and the Democratisation of Civic Culture', in *Political Communication,* 17(4): 335-340.

---- (2004) 'Foreword', in van de Donk, W. (ed.) *Cyberprotest,* London: Routledge. Pp. xi – xvi.

---- (2005) 'The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication: Dispersion and Deliberation', in *Political Communication,* 2(2): 147-162.

Dai, X. (2003) 'ICTs in China's development strategy', in Hughes, C. R. and Wacker, G. (2003) China and the Internet: Politics of the Digital Leap forward. RoutledgeCurzon. Pp. 8-29.

Darnton, R. (1997). *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France.* London: Fontana Press.

Das, V. (1998) 'Specificities: Official Narratives, Rumour, and the Social Production of Hate,' *Social Identities,* 4(1):109-130.

Davidoff, L. (1998) 'Regarding Some "Old Husbands' Tales": Public and Private in Feminist History', in Landes, J. B. (ed.) *Feminism, the Public and the Private.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 164-194.

Davidoff, L. & Hall, C. (2002) *Family* fortunes: *men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* [revised version]. London: Routledge.

Dayan, D. & Katz, E. (1992) *Media events: The live broadcasting of history.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dean, J. (2003) 'Why the Net is not a Public Sphere', in *Constellations*, 10(1): 95-112.

De Burgh, H. (2003) *The Chinese Journalist: Mediating information in the world's most populous country.* London: Routledge.

De Certeau, M. (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Berkeley, CA University of California Press.

Denzin, N. K. (1989) *The Research Act (3rd ed.)* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Doheny-Farina, S. (1996) *The Wired Neighbourhood.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Donath, J. S. (1999) 'Identity and deception in the virtual community', in Smith, M. A. and Kollock, P. (eds.) *Communities in Cyberspace.* London: Routledge. Pp 29-59.

Douglas, S. (1988) *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1922.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Downing, J. D. H. (with Ford, T. V., Gil, G., & Stein, L.) (2001) *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements.* Thousand Oaks, CA, London, New Delhi: SAGE.

Druckman, J. & Nelson, K. (2003) 'Framing and Deliberation: How Citizens' Conversations Limit Elite Influence', *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(4): 729-745.

Dryzek, J. S. (2000) *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations.* NY: Oxford University Press.

Dudden, A. P. (1985) 'The Record of Political Humour', in *American Quarterly.* 37(1): 50-70.

Ebrey, P. (1990) 'Women, Marriage, and the Family in Chinese History', in Ropp, P. S. (ed.) *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization.* University of California Press. Pp.197-223.

Eley, G. (1992) 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', in Calhoun, C. (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere.* Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press.pp.289-339.

Eliasoph, N. (1998) Avoiding Politics: how Americans produce apathy in everyday life. Cambridge University Press.

Entman, R. M. (1993) 'Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm', in

The Journal of Communication, 43(4): 51-58.

Fairbank, J. K. (1987) *The Great Chinese Revolution: 1800 –1985.* HarperPerennial.

Fairclough, N. (2003) *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research.* London and New York: Routledge.

Femia, J. (2001) 'Civil society and the Marxist tradition', in Kaviraj, S. and Khilnani, S. (eds.) *Civil Society: History and Possibilities.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp.131-46.

Ferdinand, P. (2000) 'The Internet, Democracy and Democratisation', in Ferdinand, P. (ed.) *The Internet, Democracy and Democratisation.* London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass.Pp.1-17.

Fernback, J. (1997) 'The Individual within the collective: Virtual Ideology and the Realisation of Collective Principles', in S. G. Jones (ed.) *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety.* London: SAGE. Pp. 36-54.

Fiske, J. (1989) *Understanding Popular Culture.* London and New York: Routledge.

Flick, U. (1998) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research.* London: SAGE.

Fraser, N. (1987) 'What's Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender,' in Benhabid, S. and Cornell, D. (eds.) *Feminism as Critique: essays on the politics of gender in late-capitalist societies.* Cambridge: Polity. Pp. 31-55.

---- (1992) 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in Calhoun, C. (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere.* Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press. Pp.109-42.

Fries, M. (2000) *China and Cyberspace: the development of the Chinese national information infrastructure.* Bochum, Germany: Bochum University Press.

Garcia, D. & Lovink, G. (16/05/1997) 'The ABC of Tactical Media', Nettime.org, [WWW] <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9705/msg00096.html> [accessed 16/08/2003].

Garnham, N. (1992) 'The Media and the Public Sphere', in Calhoun, C. (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere.* Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: MIT Press. Pp.359-76.

---- (1995 [1986]) 'The Media and the Public Sphere', in Boyd-Barrett, O. and Newbold, C. (eds) *Approaches to Media: a Reader.* London: Arnold. Pp. 245-251.

---- (2000) *Emancipation, the Media and Modernity: Arguments about the Media and Social Theory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gastil, J. (2000) 'Is Face-to-Face citizen deliberation a Luxury or a Necessity?', in

Political Communication, 17(4): 357-361.

Gattiker, U. E. (2001) *The Internet as A Diverse Community: Cultural, Organisational, and Political Issues.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Gershon, R. A. (1997) *The Transnational Media Corporation: Global Messages and Free Market Competition.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age.* Cambridge: Polity.

Giese, K. (2003) 'Internet Growth and the Digital Divide: Implications for spatial development', in Hughes, C. R. and Wacker, G. (eds.) *China and The Internet: Politics of the Digital Leap Forward.* London and New York: Routledge/Curzon. Pp. 30-57.

Gorz, A. (1982) *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, (trans. by M. Sonenscher) London: Pluto Press.

Gray, J. (1990) *Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1800s to the 1980s.* Oxford University Press.

Grosswiler, P. (1998) 'Historical Hopes, Media Fears, and the Electronic Town Meeting Concept: Where Technology Meets Democracy or Demagogy?', *Journal of Communication Inquiry,* 22(2):133-151.

Guo, L. (2001) 'Report on a Survey into The conditions and Influence of Internet Usage'. [WWW] <http://www.cycnet.com.cn/ce/itre> [accessed 12/05/2004].

---- (2003) 'The First Day of the Terrorist Attack on the World Trade Centre: Discussion on "Strong China Forum"'. (manuscript.)

Gurak, L. J. (1999) 'The Promise and the peril of social action in cyberspace: ethos, delivery, and the protests over Market Place and the Clipper chip', in Smith, M. A. and Kollock, P. (eds.) *Communities in Cyberspace.* London: Routledge. Pp 243-63.

Gutmann, A. & Thompson, D. (1996) *Democracy and Disagreement.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Habermas, J. (1987) The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. 2. *Lifeworld and system: a critique of functionalist reason.* (Trans. McCarthy, Thomas). Cambridge: Polity.

---- (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.* Cambridge: Polity press.

---- (1992) 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere'. In Calhoun, Craig. Ed. (1992) *Habermas and the Public Sphere.* Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: MIT Press. Pp.421-61.

---- (1996) *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discovery Theory of Law and Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

---- (2001) *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*. (Trans. and ed. By Pensky, M.) Cambridge: POLITY press.

Hacker, K. L. and van Dijk, J. (2000) 'What is Digital Democracy', in Hacker, K. L. and van Dijk, J. (eds.) *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE. pp.1-9.

Haggart, K. (1992) 'Chinese newsrooms in the aftermath of Tiananmen', in Porter, R. (ed.) *Reporting the News from China*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs. Pp.46-60.

Hall, S. (1977) 'Culture, the media and the "ideological effect"', in Curran, J., Gurevitch, M., and Woollacott, J. (eds.) *Mass Communication and Society*, London: Edward Arnold. Pp. 315-48.

Hall, S. (1980) 'Introduction to Media Studies at the Centre', in Hall, S. Hobson, D. Lowe, A, and Willis, P. (eds.) *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies*. London: Hutchinson and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham. Pp. 117-121.

Hamelink, C. (1995). *World communication: Disempowerment and self-empowerment*. London; Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Zed Books.

Hansen, M. (1993) 'Foreword', in Negt, O. and Kluge, A. *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. (Translated by Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff). Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press. Pp.ix-xli.

Hartley, J. (1992) *The Politics of Pictures: The Creation of the Public in the Age of Popular Media*. New York: Routledge.

Harvey, D. (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Harwit, E. & Clark, D. (2001) 'Shaping the Internet in China: Evolution of Political Control over Network Infrastructure and Content', in *Asian Survey*. XLI(3): 377-408.

Hassan, R. (2004) *Media, Politics and the Network Society*. Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Hauben, M. and Hauben, R. (1997) *Netizens: on the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*. Los Alamitos, CA: IEEE Computer Society Press.

He, Z. (2000) 'Working with a dying ideology: dissonance and its reduction in

Chinese journalism', *Journalism Studies*. 1(4): 599-616.

Healy, D. (1997) 'Cyberspace and Place: The Internet as Middle Landscape on the Electronic Frontier', in Porter, D. (ed.) *Internet Culture*. New York and London: Routledge. Pp. 55-68.

Herman, E. S., and Chomsky, N. (1988) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, New York: Pantheon.

Hills, M. (1999) 'Virtual Community and the Virtues of Continuity'. in *New Media &Society*. 1(2): 251-260.

Holliday, A. (2002) *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE.

Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, T. W. (2002) *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*: Philosophical fragments. (translated by Edmund Jephcott; edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr). Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Huang, Y. and Lee, C-C. (2003) 'Peddling party ideology for a profit: Media and the rise of Chinese nationalism in the 1990s', in Rawnsley, G. D. & Rawnsley, M. T. (eds.) *Political Communications in Greater China: the Construction and Reflection of Identity*. London and NY: Routledge Curzon. Pp.41-61.

Hughes, C. R. (2002) "China and the globalisation of ICTs: Implications for international relations", in *New Media &Society*. 4(2): 205-224.

Hughes, C. R. and Wacker, G. (2003) (eds.) *China and The Internet: Politics of the Digital Leap Forward*. London and New York: Routledge/Curzon.

Jakubowicz, K. (1991) 'Musical chairs? The three public spheres in Poland', in Dahlgren, P. and Sparks, C. (eds.) *Communication and citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere in the New Media Age*. London: Routledge. Pp.155-175.

Jankowski, N. & van Selm, M. (2000) 'The Promise and Practice of Public Debate in Cyberspace', in Hacker, K. L. and van Dijk, J. (eds.) *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE. pp.149-165.

Johnstone, C. B. (1998) 'Japan's China Policy: Implications for U.S.-Japan Relations', in *Asian Survey*, XXXVIII(11):1067-1085.

Johnson, O. V. (1998) 'The Media and Democracy in Eastern Europe', in O'Neil, P. H. (ed.) *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*. Boulder, Colorado and London: Lynne Rienner. Pp.103-124.

Jones, S. G. (1998) 'Information, Internet, and Community: Notes Toward an Understanding of Community in the Information Age', in Jones, S. G. (eds), *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*. London: Sage. Pp.1-34.

Kalathil, S. (2002) *Chinese Media and the Information Revolution*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
[WWW] <http://www.ceip.org/files/publications/kalathil_harvardasia.asp> [accessed 23/05/2005].

Kalathil, S. and Boas, T. C. (2003) *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule*. Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Endowment.

Kant, I. (1991) *Political writings*. (edited by Hans Reiss). Translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kapor, M. (1993) 'Where is the Digital Highway Really Going?', *Wired* 1(3): 53-59. [WWW] <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/1.03/kapor.on.nii_pr.html> [accessed 14/08/2006].

Kaviraj, S. and Khilnani, S. (2001) 'Introduction: ideas of civil society', in Kaviraj S. and Khilnani, S. (eds.) *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1-7.

Katz, J., Rice, R., & Aspden, P. (2001) 'The Internet, 1995-2000: Access, civic involvement, and social interaction', in *American Behavioural Scientist*, 45(3): 405-419.

Katz, J. & Rice, R. (2002) *Social Consequences of Internet Use: Access, Involvement and Interaction*. Cambridge, MA. MIT Press.

Keane, J. (1991) *The Media and Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity.

--- (2000) 'Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere', in Hacker, K. L. and van Dijk, J. (eds.) *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE. pp.70-89.

Kellner, D. (1995) *Intellectuals and New Technologies*. [WWW] <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/dk/INT.htm> [accessed 12/04/2006].

---- (1998) 'Intellectuals, the New Public Spheres, and Techno-Politics', in Toulouse, C. and Luke, T. W. (eds.) *The Politics of Cyberspace: A New Political Science Reader*. New York and London: Routledge. pp. 167-86.

---- (1999) 'Globalisation from Below? Toward a Radical Democratic Technopolitics', *Angelaki: A New Journal in Philosophy, Literature and Social Sciences*, 4(2):101-113.

Knight, J. & Johnson, J. (1997) 'What Sort of Political Equality Does Deliberative Democracy Require?' in Bohman, J. and Rehg, W. (eds.) *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*. Cambridge, MA, London: MIT. pp.279-320.

Kramer, S. D. (03/02/2003) 'Shuttle Disaster Coverage Mixed, but Strong Overall', in *Online Journalism Review*.

[WWW] <http://www.ojr.org/ojr/kramer/1044260857.php> [accessed 03/08/2005].

KulKarni, K. (2004) 'Billionaires for Bush', *hemisphericinstitute.org*. [WWW] <http://www.hemisphericinstitute.org/journal/1_1/kukarni_print.pdf> [accessed 03/05/2006].

Laclau, E. (1977) *Politics and ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism*. London: Verso.

Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.

Landes, J. B. (1988) *Women and the Public sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*. Ithaca.

---- (1998) 'Introduction', in Landes, J. B. (ed.) *Feminism, the Public and the Private*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 1-17.

Lee, C-C. (1994) 'Ambiguities and Contradictions: Issues in China's Changing Political Communication', in Lee, C-C. (ed.) *China's Media, Media's China*. Boulder: Westview Press. Pp.3-20.

Lee, H. (2001) 'All the Feelings That Are Fit to Print: The Community of Sentiment and the Literary Public Sphere in China, 1900 -1918', in *Modern China*, 27(3): 291-327.

Lent, J. A. (1998) 'The Mass Media in Asia', in O'Neil, P. H. (ed.) *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*. Boulder, Colorado and London: Lynne Rienner. Pp.147-70.

Lévy, P. (1996) *Cyberculture*. (Translated by Robert Bononno) Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.

Lewis, J., Wahl-Jorgensen, K. & Inthorn, S. (2004) 'Images of Citizenship on Television News: constructing a passive public', *Journalism Studies*, 5(2):153-64.

Li, C-N. (1956) *The Political History of China: 1840-1928*. (Translated and edited by Ssu-Yu Teng and Jeremy Ingalls) Princeton, NJ, Toronto, London, NY: D. Van Nostrand Compnay, Inc.

Lindlof, T. R. (1995). *Qualitative Communication research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Livingstone, S. M. and Lunt, P. (1994) *Talk on television: audience participation and public debate*. London; New York: Routledge.

Loader, B. D. (1997) 'The governance of cyberspace: Politics, technology and global restructuring', in Loader, B. D. (ed.) *The Governance of Cyberspace: Politics, Technology and Global Restructuring*. London and New York: Routledge.

Lull, J. (1991) *China Turned On: Television, Reform, and Resistance*. London and New York: Routledge.

Lyotard, J. F. (1984) The *Postmodern Condition: a report on knowledge* (translation by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi) Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Mao, Tse-tung. (1967) 'Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership', in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 3. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press. Pp. 117-122.

---- (1969) 'A Talk to the Editorial Staff of the *Shansi-Suiyang Daily*', in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 4. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press. Pp. 241-246.

Matheson, D. (2005) *Media Discourses: analysing media texts*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Manin, B. (1987) 'On Legitimacy and Political Deliberation', *Political Theory*, 15(3): 338-368.

Marshall, P. David. (2004) *New Media Cultures*. London: Arnold.

Marx, K. (1844) *On the Jewish Question, Deutsch-Franzosische Jahrbucher.* [WWW] <http://www.sozialistische-klassiker.org/Marx/marxe08.pdf> [accessed 19/04/2006].

Marx, K. & Engels, F. (1976) 'The German Ideology: Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets', in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Collected Works, vol.5,*. London: Lawrence and Wishart. Pp.19-93.

McKee, A. (2003) *Textual Analysis: a Beginner's Guide*. London: SAGE.

McRae, S. (1997). 'Flesh made word: Sex, text, and the virtual body', in Porter, D. (ed.) *Internet culture*. New York: Routledge. pp. 73-86.

McLuhan, M. (1962) *The Gutenberg galaxy: the making of typographic man*. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul.

--- (2001[1964]) *Understanding media: the extensions of man*. London : Routledge.

McNair, B. (2000) *Journalism and Democracy: an evaluation of the political public sphere,* London: Routledge.

McQuail, D. (1992) *Media Performance: Mass communication in the Public Interest.* London: Sage Publication.

Mencius. (1895) *The Works of Mencius* (translated by James Legge). Clarendon Press, 1895. Book III, Part I: *T'ang Wan Kung (cont.)* [WWW] <http://nothingistic.org/library/mencius/mencius10.html> [accessed 18/08/2006].

Merton, R. K., Fiske, M., & Kendall, P. L. (1990) *The Focused Interviews: A Manual of Problems and Procedures* (2nd ed.). New York: Free Press.

Metzger, T. A. (2001) 'The Western concept of civil society in the context of Chinese history', in Kaviraj, S. and Khilnani, S. (eds.) *Civil Society: History and Possibilities.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 204-31.

Miller, D. (1992) 'Deliberative Democracy and Social Choice', *Political Studies,* XL (5): 54-56.

Mitra, A. (2001) 'Marginal voices in cyberspace', in *New Media &Society,* 3(1): 29-48.

---- (2004) 'Voices of the Marginalised on the Internet: Examples From a Website for Women of South Asia', in the *Journal of Communication,* 54(3): 492-510.

Moon, M. J. (2002) 'The Evolution of E-Government among Municipalities: Rhetoric or Reality?' in *Public Administration Review,* 62(4): 424-433.

Morley, D. (1980) *The 'Nationwide' audience: structure and decoding.* London: British Film Institute.

---- (1992) *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies.* London: Routledge.

Mouffe, C. (1996) 'Democracy, Power, and the "Political"', in Benhabib, S. (ed.) *Democracy and Difference.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Pp. 245-256.

Muhlberger, P. (2005) 'Human Agency and the Revitalisation of the Public Sphere', in *Political Communication,* 22(2):163-178.

Myers, D. (1987). 'A new environment for communication play: On-line play', in Fine, G. A. (ed.) *Meaningful play, playful meaning.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics. pp.231-245.

Nancy, J-L. (1991) *The Inoperative Community* (ed. By P. Connor. Trans. by P. Connor, L. Garbus, M. Holland and S. Sawhney) Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Negt, O. & Kluge, A. (1993) *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere.* (Translated by Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff). Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.

Negroponte, N. (1996) *Being Digital.* London: Coronet Books.

Neuman, W. L. (1994) *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative*

approaches (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Noam, E. M. (2005) 'Why the Internet Is Bad for Democracy', in *Communications of the ACM*, 48(10): 57-58,

NØrgaard, O. (2001) 'Democracy, Democratisation and Institutional Theory': *DEMSTAR Research Report no. 4.* [WWW] <http://www.demstar.dk/papers/Democracy.pdf> [accessed 18/04/2006].

Norris, D. F. & Moon M. J. (2005) 'Advancing E-Government at the Grassroots: Tortoise or Hare?', in *Public Administration Review*, 65(1): 64-75.

Noveck, B. S. (2000) 'Paradoxical Partners: Electronic Communication and Electronic Democracy', in Ferdinand, Peter. (ed.) *The Internet, Democracy and Democratisation.* London and New York: Routledge. Pp. 18 -35.

Ohmae, K. (1995) *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies.* London: HarperCollins Publishers.

O'Regan, T. & Goldsmith, B. (2002) 'Emerging ecologies of production', in Harries, D. (ed.) *The New Media book.* London: BFI. Pp. 92-105.

Orwell, G. (1968) *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell. Vol.3: As I please, 1943-1945*, London : Secker and Warburg.

Paasonen, S. (2002) *Figures of Fantasy: Women, Cyberdiscourse and the Popular Internet.* Turku, Finland: Annales Universitatis Turkuensis.

Papacharissi, Z. (2002) 'The virtual sphere: The Internet as a public sphere' in *New Media and Society.* 4(1): 9-27.

Patekis, K. (2000) 'The political economy of the Internet', in Curran, J. (ed.) *Media Organisations in Society.* London: Arnold. Pp. 84-106.

Pattanaik, B. (1999). 'Home and the World: The Internet as a Personal and Political Tool', in Hawthorne, S., and Klein. R. (eds.) *CyberFeminism; Connectivity, Critique and Creativity.* Melbourne: Spinifex. Pp.19-32.

Pei, M. (1994) *From Reform to Revolution: The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Plant, S. (1995). 'The Future Looms: Weaving Women and Cybernetics', in Featherstone, M. and Burrows, R. (eds.) *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk.* London: Sage. Pp. 45-64.

---- (1997). *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture.* London: Fourth Estate.

Poster, M. (1995) *The Second Media Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

---- (1996) 'Cyberdemocracy: the Internet and the public sphere', in Porter, D. (ed.) *Internet Culture*. New York and London: Routledge. Pp. 201-17.

(2001 [1995]) 'Postmodern Virtualities', in Durham, M. G. and Kellner, D. M. (eds.) *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*. Oxford: Blackwell. Pp.611-25.

Rawls, J. (1993) *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

---- (1997) 'The Idea of Public Reason', in Bohman, J. and Rehg, W. (eds.) *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*. Cambridge, MA. and London: MIT Press. pp.67-92.

Reid, C. (2000) 'Whose parliament? Political oratory and print culture in the later 18th century', in *Language and Literature*, 9(2):122-134.

Reid, E. M. (1999) 'Hierarchy and power: social control in cyberspace', in Smith, M. A. and Kollock, P. (eds.) *Communities in Cyberspace*. London and NY: Routledge. Pp.107-33.

Reiss, H. S. (1991) 'Introduction', in Kant: Reiss, H. S. (ed.) *Kant: Political Writings*. Trans. By H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1-40.

Renwick, N. & Cao, Q. (2003) 'Modern Political Communication in China', in Rawnsley, G. D. and Rawsley M-Y T. (eds.) *Political Communication in Greater China: The Construction and Reflection of Identity*. London: RoutledgeCurzon. Pp.62-82.

Rheingold, H. (1993) *The Virtual Community* (the electronic version). [WWW] <http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/intro.html> [accessed 17/05/2006].

Ricchiardi, S. (2003) 'On the SARS Beat', from *American Journalism Review* (June) [WWW] <http://www.ajr.org/article_printable.asp?id=3042> [accessed 19/05/2005].

Rosen, S. (2003) 'Chinese Media and Youth: Attitude toward nationalism and internationalism', in Lee, C-C. (ed.) *Chinese Media, Global Contexts*. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon. Pp.97-118.

Roszak, T. (1986) *The Cult of Information: The Folklore of Computers and the True Art of Thinking*. NY: Pantheon.

Rowe, W. T. (1990) 'Modern Chinese Social History in Comparative Perspective', in Ropp, P, S. (ed.) *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*. University of California Press. pp.242-262.

Rubin, H. J. & Rubin I. S. (1995) *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. SAGE.

Rucht, D. (2004) 'The quadruple 'A': Media strategies of protest movements since the 1960s', in van de Donk, W., Loader, B. D., Nixon, P. G. and Rucht, D. (eds.) *Cyberprotest: New media, citizens and social movements*. London and New York: Routledge. Pp.29-56.

Russell, A. (2005) 'Editorial: exploring digital resistance', in *New Media and society*, 7(4): 513-515.

Ryan, M. P. (1990) *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

---- (1992) 'Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth Century America,' in Calhoun, C. (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press. Pp.259-88.

Savicki, V., Lingenfelter, D., & Kelley, M. (1996) 'Gender language style in group composition in Internet discussion groups', in *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 2, No.3.
[WWW] <http://207.201.161.120/jcmc/vol2/issue3/savicki.html> [accessed 08/06/2002].

Schiller, D. (2000) *Digital Capitalism: Networking the Global Market System*. Cambridge: Mass. and London: MIT press.

Schiller, H. I. (1995) 'The Global Information Highway: Project for an Ungovernable World', in Brook, J. and Boal, I. A. (eds.) *Resisting the Virtual Life: The Culture and Politics of Information*. San Francisco: City Lights. Pp. 17-34.

---- (1996) *Information Inequality: the deepening social crisis in America*. London: Routledge.

Schlesinger, P. (1999) 'Changing Spaces of Political Communication: The Case of the European Union', in *Political Communication*, 16(3): 263-279.

Schütz, A. (1967) *The phenomenology of the social world*. (Translated by George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Shell, R. (1995) 'Computer-assisted negotiation and mediation: Where we are and where we are going', in *Negotiation Journal*, 11(2):115-121.

Sheng, H. (1990) 'Big Character Posters in China: A historical survey', in *Journal of Chinese Law*, 4(2): 234 -256.

Shibutani, T. (1966) *Improvised News: a sociological study of rumour*. Indianapolis, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc.

Slaton, C. D. (1992) *Televote: Expanding Citizen Participation in the Quantum Age*.

New York: Praeger.

Smith, A. D. (1999) 'Problems of conflict management in virtual communities', in Smith, M. A. and Kollock, P. (eds.) *Communities in Cyberspace*. London and NY: Routledge. Pp.134-63.

Smith, M. A. & Kollock, P. (1999) (eds.) *Communities in Cyberspace*. London and NY: Routledge.

Sparks, C. (1998) 'Is there a global public sphere?', in Thussu, D. K. (ed.) *Electronic Empires: Global Media and Local Resistance*. London, NY, Sydney, Auckland: Arnold. Pp.108-124.

---- (2001) 'The Internet and the Global Public Sphere', in Bennett, W. L. and Entman, R. M. (eds.) *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp.75-95.

Spender, D. (1995) *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace*. Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press.

Spradley, J. P. (1979) *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Dallas, Montreal, Toronto, London, Sydney: Holt, rinehart and winston.

Stake, R. (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Stone, A. R. (1995). *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of The Mechanical Age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Strauss, A. L., Schatzmann, L., Bucher, R., Ehrlich, D., & Sabshin, M. (1964) *Psychiatric Ideologies and Institutions*. New York: Collier-Macmillan: Free Press.

Sunstein, C. (2001) *Republic.com*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Swett, C. (1995) 'Strategic Assessment: The Internet', FAS.org (*Federation of American Scientists*). [WWW] <http://www.fas.org/cp/swett.html> [accessed: 05/05/2006].

Tao, W. (2001) 'Censorship and Protest: The Regulation of BBS in China People Daily', in *First Monday*, Vol.6, No.1. [WWW] <http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_1/tao/index.html> [accessed 25/02/2005].

Tay, E. (1998) 'Global Chinese Fraternity and the Indonesian Riots of May 1998: The Online Gathering of Dispersed Chinese'. [WWW] <http://wwwsshe.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue4/tay.html> [accessed 17/02/2005].

Taylor, M.C. & Saarinen, E. (1994) *Imagologies: Media Philosophy*. London and NewYork: Rouledge.

Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1984). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: The*

search for meanings. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Thompson, J. B. (1990) *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

---- (1993) 'The theory of the Public Sphere', in Featherstone, M. (ed.) *Theory, Culture and Society*, 10(3):179-187

--- (1995) *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Toffler, A. (1981) *The Third Wave*. London: Pan Books.

Turkle, S. (1995) *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Van Dijk, J. (2000) 'Models of Democracy and Concepts of Communication', in Hacker, K. L. and van Dijk, J. (eds). *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory & Practice*. London: SAGE. Pp.30-53.

Van Dijk, T. A. (1985) 'Introduction: Discourse Analysis in (Mass) Communication Research', in van Dijk, T. A. (ed.) *Discourse and Communication: New approaches to the analysis of mass media discourse and communication*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter. Pp. 1-11.

Volkmer, I. (2003) 'Dialectical Spaces in the Global Public Sphere:
Media Memories across Generations', The Joan Shorenstein Centre on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Working Paper Series. [WWW] <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/presspol/Research_Publications/Papers/Working_Paper s/2003_5.pdf> [accessed 28/04/2006].

Wacker, G. (2003) 'The Internet and Censorship in China', in Hughes, C. R. and Wacker, G. (eds.) *China and The Internet: Politics of the Digital Leap Forward*. London and New York: Routledge/Curzon. Pp. 58-82.

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2002a) 'Understanding the Conditions for Public Discourse: four rules for selecting letters to the editor', in *Journalism Studies*, 3(1): 69-81.

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2002b) The Construction of the Public in Letters to the Editor: Deliberative Democracy and the Idiom of Insanity. *Journalism*, 3(2): 171-293.

Wallace, P. (1999). *The Psychology of the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Walls, J. (1993). 'Global networking for local development: task focus and relationship focus in cross cultural communication', in Harasim L. M. (ed.) *Global Networks: Computers and International Communication*. Cambridge: MIT Press. pp.153-166.

Walter, J. (1996). 'Computer-mediated communication: Impersonal, interpersonal and hyperpersonal interaction', in *Communication Research*, 23(1): 3-43.

Waterman, P. (1996) 'A New World View: Globalisation, Civil Society, and Solidarity', in Braman, S. and Sreberny-Mohammadi, A. (eds.) *Globalisation, Communication and Transnational Civil Society*, Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press. Pp.37-62.

---- (2001[1998]) *Globalisation, Social Movement and the New Internationalisms*. Washington, D. C.: Mansell.

Weger, H. Jr. & Aakhus, M. (2003) 'Arguing in Internet chat rooms: argumentative adaptations to chat room design and some consequences for public deliberation at a distance', in *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 40(1): 23 -38.

Wellman, B. Quan-Haase, A. Boase, J. Chen, W. Hampton, K. de Diaz. I. I., & Miyata, K. (2003) 'The Social Affordances of the Internet for Networked individualism', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. Vol. 8, No. 3. (April).
[WWW] <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol8/issue3/wellman.html> [accessed 02/06/2006].

Whine, M. (1997) 'The Far Right on the Internet', in Loader, B. D. (ed.) *The Governance of Cyberspace: Politics, Technology and Global Restructuring*. London and New York: Routledge. Pp. 209 – 227.

White, C. (1997) 'Citizen participation and the Internet: prospects for civic deliberation in the information age', in *The Social Studies*, 88(1):23 -28.

Wilhelm, A. G. (2000) *Democracy in the digital age: Challenges to Political life in Cyberspace*. London: Routledge.

Wilbur, S. P. (1997) 'An Archaeology of Cyberspaces: Virtuality, community, identity', in Porter, D. (ed.) *Internet Culture*. New York and London: Routledge. Pp. 5-22.

Wimmer, R. D. & Dominick, J. R. (2000) *Mass Media Research: An Introduction* (6th ed.) Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Yang, G. B. (2003) 'The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere', in *Media, Culture and Society*, 25(4): 469-490.

Young, I. M. (1999) 'Difference as a Resource for Democratic Communication', in Bohman, J. and Rehg, W. (eds.) *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*. Cambridge, Mass,. London: The MIT press. Pp. 383-405.

Yu, H. (2004) 'The Power of Thumbs: the Politics of SMS in Urban China,' in *Graduate Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies*, 2(2): 30-43.

---- (2006) 'From Active Audience to Media Citizenship: The Case of Post-Mao China', in *Social Semiotics*, 16(2):303 -326.

Yuan, J-D. (03/06/2003) 'Will SARS be the Catalyst for Change in China?', *Global Beat Syndicate*. New York University.
[WWW] <http://www.bu.edu/globalbeat/syndicate/yuan060203.html> [accessed 03/02/2006].

Zaller, J. R. (1992). *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Zhang, J. (2002) 'Will the government "serve the people"?: The development of Chinese e-government", in *New Media &Society*, 4(2):163 -184.

Zhao, Y. (1998) *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: between the Party line and the bottom line*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

---- (2003) 'Transnational Capital, the Chinese state, and China's Communication Industries in a Fractured Society', in *The Public*, 10(4): 53-74.

Zittrain, J. & Edelman, B. (2003a) 'Internet Filtering in China', *IEEE Internet Computing*, 7(2): 70-77.

---- (2003b) 'Empirical Analysis of Internet Filtering in China'. [WWW] <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/china/> [accessed 02/05/2006].

Zubaida, S. (2001) 'Civil society, community, and democracy in the Middle East', in Kaviraj, S. and Khilnani, S. (eds.) *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 232-49.

Journalistic bibliography in English

Amnesty International. (2003) China: migrant worker dies in custody. [WWW]
<http://web.amnesty.org/wire/July2003/China> [accessed 24/11/2004].

Bai X. & Xiong L. (24/04/2003) China: the war at home. [WWW]
<http://www.worldpress.org/print_article.cfm?article_id=1181&dont=yes> [accessed 23/05/2005].

BBC News (07/09/2005) Yahoo "helped jail China writer" [WWW]
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4221538.stm> [accessed 21/04/2006].

Brookes, A. (24/06/2003) SARS sows doubts among jubilant Chinese. [WWW]
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/3017064.stm> [accessed 23/05/2005]

Chan, J. (03/05/2003) 'SARS epidemic triggers political crisis in China', World Socialist Web Site. [WWW] <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/may2003/sars-m03.shtml> [accessed 23/05/2005].

China Daily (30/08/2005) China rockin' to "Super Girl". [WWW]
<http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-08/30/content_473432.htm>
[accessed 15/03/2006]

China IT Law. [WWW] <www.chinaitlaw.org> [accessed 06/06/2006]

China Online (18/02/2000) China ICPs Need Approval, License Before Posting News' [WWW] <
http://www.chinaonline.com/issues/Internet_policy/currentnews/open/c00021851.asp
> [accessed 20/03/2000].

CNN.com (22/04/2003) SARS Closing Beijing Schools. [WWW]
http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/asiapcf/east/04/22/sars.china.school/index.html
[accessed 27/08/2006].

Cohn, M. R. (21/07/2001) 'China Seeks to Build the Great FireWall; Controlled modernisation the mantra', in *Toronto Star*. Page A01.

Economist. (26/04/2003) 'China Wakes Up', in *the Economist*, 367(8321):19-20.

---- 'China's Chernobyl?' in *the Economist*, 367(8321): 9.

Eimer, D. (16/11/2005) 'How the Great Firewall of China Keeps Cyber Dissidents in Check', *The Independent*. [WWW]
<http://news.independent.co.uk/world/asia/article327308.ece> [accessed 27/03/2006].

French, H. W. (09/05/2006), 'As Chinese Students Go Online, Little Sister Is

Watching', *New York Times*. [WWW]
<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/09/world/asia/09internet.html>   [accessed
06/06/2006].

Gilley, B. (24/05/2001) "Trojan Horse: A chat site run by the Communist Party is
delivering stinging criticisms – of the party". *Far Eastern Economic Review,*164(20):
64.

Hewitt, D. (26/07/2001) 'China's Net Generation', BBC News. [WWW]
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/1455943.stm> [accessed 02/08/2006].

Human Rights Watch. 'Chinese Protest Online: The Case of Sun Zhigang'. [WWW]
<http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/china/beijing08/voices.htm> [accessed 24/11/2004].

Jakes, S. (08/04/2003) 'Beijing's SARS Attack'. [WWW]
<www.time.com/time/asia/news/article/0,9754,441615,00.html>   [accessed
19/05/2005].

Reuters (17/10/2001) 'China Closes Scribe BBS', *Wired News*. [WWW]
 <http://www.wired.com/news/politics/0,1283,47645,00.html> [accessed 12/04/2003].

World Health Organization (10/2004) WHO guidelines for the global surveillance of
severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS): *Updated recommendations October 2004.*
[WWW]
<http://www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/WHO_CDS_CSR_ARO_2004_1/en/i
ndex.html> [accessed 10/02/2006].

Reporters Without Borders (17/11/2005) 'The 15 enemies of the Internet and other
countries to watch'. [WWW] <http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=15613>
[accessed 30/04/2005].

---- (20/01/2006) 'Journalist tried for posting "alarmist" reports on foreign websites',
[WWW] <www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=16221> [accessed 03/02/2006].

Thompson, B. (2006) 'Looking for change in China', in *Free Press*, No. 151,
(March/April). P. 1

Turner, M. (10/04/2000) 'An Avenue for Dissent', in *TIME*. Vol.155 No.14. [WWW]
<http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/2000/0410/china.chatroom.html>
[accessed 12/08/2005].

Watts, J. (14/06/2005) 'China's secret Internet police target critics with web of
propaganda', in *Guardian Unlimited Network*. [WWW]
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/china/story/0,,1506016,00.html> [accessed 28/08/2006].

Williams, H. (08/04/2003) 'Chinese txt for virus information'. [WWW]
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/2928969.stm> [accessed 27/08/2005].

WTO News. (24/04/2003) 'China, Egypt join WTO's Information Technology Agreement'. [WWW] <http://www.wto.org/English/news_e/news03_e/news_china_egypt_25apr03_e.htm> [accessed 29/04/2006].

WTO. 'Understanding the WTO: Basic: Principles of the trading system'. [WWW] <http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/fact2_e.htm>   [accessed 14/12/2005].

Xiao, Q. (30/08/2004) 'The Words you never see in Chinese cyberspace', *China Digital Times*. [WWW] <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2004/08/the_words_you_n.php> [accessed 12/06/2006].

Bibliography in Chinese

Chen, Hai, and Jiang, Hua (13/02/2003) 'Guangzhou is fighting an unknown virus', in *Southern Weekend.* [WWW] <http://www.nanfangdaily.com.cn/zm/20030213/xw/tb/200302130499.asp> [accessed 12/05/2006].

Chen, Tongxu and Deng, Lifeng. (2002) 'The Form and the Decline of BBS Topic: a case study of the Qiangguo Forum of www.people.com.cn'. In *Journalism and Communication Research.* No. 1. Pp.11-26.

Chinanews.com (26/01/2000) 'China Strengthens the Secrecy Management of Computer Information Systems Attached to the Internet'. [WWW] <http://www.chinanews.com.cn/2000-1-26/26/16782.html> [accessed 16/05/2005].

China Internet Network Information Centre. (CINIC) *Administrative Provisions for Electronic Bulletin Services on the Internet* (互联网电子公告服务管理规定), [WWW] <http://www.cnnic.com.cn/policy/21.shtml> [accessed 22/04/2003].

---- 'Major Event in China's Internet Development: 1986-1993'. [WWW] <http://www.cnnic.com.cn/html/Dir/2003/10/22/1002.htm> [accessed 17/02/2006].

---- (January 2006) Report XVII: Statistics on Internet development in China. [WWW] <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/images/2006/download/2006011701.pdf> [accessed 03/03/2006].

---- (January 2005) Report XV: Statistics on Internet development in China. [WWW] <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/download/2005/2005011801.pdf> [accessed 04/03/2005].

---- (January 2003) Report XI: Statistics on Internet development in China. [WWW] <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/download/2003/10/10/170932.pdf> [accessed 06/07/2003].

Ding, Ganlin et al.(1998) *New Edition of the History of Journalism Course in China.* Chengdu: Sichuan People Press.

Editorial Board of China Broadcasting Yearbook (1997) *China Broadcasting Yearbook 1996.* Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press.

Epoch Times (07/07/2004) 'Warning from the UNESCO: China should perform its responsibility in protecting the world heritage sites'. [WWW] <http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/4/7/7/n589144.htm> [accessed 07/07/2004].

Feng, Ergang. (1996) *Kinship Families and Family Temples in Ancient China.* Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan International Corp. Ltd.

Fang, Hanqi. (25/07/2002) 'One Hundred year history of Journalism Communication in China', *China Dominant-journalism Development Centre.* [WWW] <http://www.cddc.net/shownews.asp?newsid=501> [accessed 14/03/2006].

Ge, Gongzhen. (1985 [1956]) *The History of Press in China*. Beijing: Chinese Journalism Press.

Huang, Kunlun (31/08/2005) 'Da Jiang Bao and the Wuchang Revolt', in *the Communist Party History Information Weekly*. [WWW] <http://www.ccphistory.org.cn/include/read.asp?id=3615> [accessed 14/02/2006].

Huang, Shengmin & Ding, Junjie. (2001) *Research on the Integration of China's Broadcasting Media*. Beiing: Zhongguo Wujia Press.

Jiang, Qiping (01/09/2000) 'Analysis: Chinese private internet companies' journey to heaven'. [WWW] <http://tech.sina.com.cn/review/media/2000-09-01/35507.shtml>   [accessed 18/02/2006].

---- (17/03/2005) 'The Calculus in Private Internet Companies Operation', in *China Internet Weekly*. [WWW] <http://www.ciweekly.com/article/2005/0317/A20050317399501.shtml>   [accessed: 20/05/2006]

Jiang, Yaping (2002). 'Analysis and Prospect on the development of Internet media in China', in *Chinese Journalists*. [WWW] <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/other7018/7248/7249/20020705/769386.html> [accessed 18/05/2006].

Kuang, Wenbo. (26/05/2004) 'The behaviour characteristics of Internet users in unusual period', in *MediaChina.net*. [WWW] <http://academic.mediachina.net/lw_view.jsp?id=904> [accessed 06/06/2005].

Lei, Yuejie.(1997) *Journalism Theory*. Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press.

Li, Xiguang, & Qin, Xuan. (2001) 'Who Sets the Agenda for Today's China?: electronic forum reconstructs the Party's organ's agenda during major news events', in *Journalism and Communication Research*, No. 3, pp. 55-61.

Li, Qiang. (2005) *Words from a DJ: theory and practice of music programme presenters*. Fuzhou: Fujian People Publishing House.

Liu, Chun. (17/01/2006) 'News Reforms After SARS', in *MediaChina.net*. [WWW] <http://academic.mediachina.net/academic_zjlt_lw_view.jsp?id=4190&peple=46> [accessed 28/08/2006].

Lin, Chufang & Zhao, Ling. (06/06/2003) 'Articles from people.com.cn strengthened the determination of investigation of Sun Zhigang's Murder Case'. [WWW] <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shehui/46/20030606/1010188.html>   [accessed 22/11/2004].

Liu, Xiaobo. (17/10/2004) 'Zhao Ziyang's Contribution to China's Reform'. [WWW] <http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/4/11/3/n707567.htm> [accessed 15/03/2006].

---- (25/08/2005) 'Profound Meaning in a Few Trivial Words Concerning the *Super Girls'*. [WWW] <http://www.peacehall.com/news/gb/china/2005/08/200508280208.shtml> [accessed 15/03/2006].

Liu, Xiuming (1997) *Tea-drinking and teahouses in Ancient China*. Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan International Corp. Ltd.

Liu, Yong. (2000) *Media in China*. Chengdu: Sichuan People's Press.

Meng, Jian. (2000) 'The Development of Mass Communication and Progress to Democracy in China', in Yuan, J. and Hu, Zh-R. (eds.) *Communication Studies Towards New Century: Sino-Canadian Communication Symposium Collection*. Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Press. Pp.123-38.

Min, Dahong. (10/07/2001) 'The Party's Organ and the Party's Website', in *China Journalists* P.4.

Pu, Hongguo. (25/06/2003) 'food store sufficient, chaos gone'. [WWW] <http://www.qianlong.com/3413/2003-6-26/225@917629.htm> [accessed19/05/2005].

Sima, Nan. (29/04/2003) 'What you said is not the truth'. [WWW] <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2003-04-29/08301022162.shtml> [accessed 19/05/2005].

Sohu.com (07/12/2004) 'Beijing Salaries Rise'. [WWW] <http://english.sohu.com/20041207/n223372380.shtml> [accessed 23/04/2005].

Sohu.com (15/05/2006) 'Beijing Internet Media Association Recruiting 200 Web Superintendents'. [WWW] <http://news.sohu.com/20060515/n243238828.shtml> [accessed 15/05/2006].

Su-Ren. (2003) *Kang Youwei*. Beijing: Minzu Press. [WWW] <http://www.e56com.cn/publish/pdf/6.pdf> [accessed 14/02/2006].

Tang, Dayong & Shi, Jie. (2001) 'Virtual Community or the Public Sphere: a case study of the QGLT during plane collision crisis', in Deng, X-X. and Li, X-G. (eds.) *Internet Communication and the News Media*. Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Publishing. Pp.393-411.

The Chinese Press and Publishing Network (04/01/2006) '*Qiang Xue Bao*'. [WWW] <http://press.gapp.gov.cn/news/wenb.php?val=news&aid=9220> [accessed 10/03/2006].

Wang, Kailin. (06/09/2005) 'Baishui's articles stand the passage of time'. [WWW] <http://www.hn.xinhuanet.com/cul/2005-09/26/content_5215480.htm> [access

14/02/2006].

Wang, Zhujun. (2001) 'The Advantages of the Internet Media', in Deng, X-X. and Li, X-G. (eds.) *Internet Communication and News Media.* Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press. pp.412-18.

Wang, Yu. (2001) 'The Survival Strategy for Chinese Traditional Media Websites', in Deng, Xinxin and Li, Xingguo. (eds.) *Internet Communication and News Media.* Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press. Pp. 203- 210.

Wei, Cheng. (15/08/2005) 'Surfing on the Internet for ten years'. [WWW]
<http://www.e-economic.com/info/3121-1.htm> [accessed 18/02/2006].

Wu, Yan. (2004) 'The Emergence of the public sphere in China: on the political function of the Bourgeois Press in the late 19th and early 20th Century', in Su, Zh-W. and Ding, J-J. (eds.) *Asian Communication and Media Studies.* Pp.136-146.

Xia, Qianfang. & Ye, Xiaohua. (2003) 'From Collective Silence to Hubbub: Chinese media's coverage on SARS crisis from February to May, 2003', in *Journalism and Communication.* Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Science. No. 2. (Summer) Pp. 56-65.

Xiao, Chunjiang. (04/06/2001) 'The development of the people.com' in *Computer World Daily.* [WWW]
<www.people.com.cn/GB/it/48/297/20010604/481118.html> [accessed 02/02/2003]

Xinhua Net (17/12/2003) 'Free treatment to certain groups of epidemic victims will be written down in law'. [WWW]
<http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2003-12/17/content_1234805.htm> [accessed 10/02/2006].

---- (22/04/2005) 'NGOs getting more prominence'. [WWW]
<http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-04/22/content_2862677.htm>   [accessed 11/01/2006].

Yu, Guoming, Zhang, Hongzhong, Jin, Yi & Zhang, Yan. (2003) 'Choosing Communication Channels during Breaking News Events: A survey on Beijing residents' choice of media during the SARS crisis', in *Media Studies,* 1(1):18-23.

Yu, Xi & Zhang, Jie. (20/02/2003) 'Guangzhou: 5 days in jeopardy', in *Southern Weekend.* D25.

Zhang, Zili. (2003) 'SARS Crisis and Health Communication', *Media Studies.* Vol. No. 1. Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press. Pp. 37-43.

Zou, Huijiang & Wen, Yangqin. (26/04/2003) '7 cases of SARS rumour are investigated in Foshan', *Information Times.* [WWW]
<http://informationtimes.dayoo.com/gb/content/2003-04/26/content_1045422.htm> [accessed 22/05/2003]

Appendix 1
An example of Semi-structured Interview questions for QGLT users (31/07/2004)

- You have been a QGLT member for 3 years. Before joining this online community, did you use the Internet? Did you participate in online discussion?
- How did you start to know QGLT?
- Why did you register as a QGLT member?
- Compared with other Internet bulletin boards, what is the unique character of QGLT?
- Is there anything about QGLT that you are not satisfied with?
- Your postings on *QGLT In-Depth* (specially your postings about migrant workers from rural areas) triggered a lot of debate. Among the follow-up postings, there are usually both agreement and disagreement. What's your opinion of these follow-up postings? What would you say to those who replied to your postings?
- What is your opinion about the online interpersonal relationship?
- What postings are good and what are bad? Can you give me some examples of both good and bad postings from QGLT?
- Why did you choose this penname? What is the implication of it?
- What do you think is a good online discussion (i.e. the exchange of opinion in follow-up postings triggered by one main posting)? Can you give me an example?
- Apart from QGLT, do you post on other Internet bulletin boards?
- You expressed a positive attitude towards China's future development in politics, economy and other areas. Do you think Internet bulletin boards such as QGLT can play a constructive role in achieving these goals?
- A lot of your postings are in-depth analysis based on news stories from traditional media. Most of your postings expressed your sympathy with the socially disadvantaged groups such as the migrant workers. What is the motivation for writing these articles?
- Do you communicate with QGLT moderators?
- Is QGLT a left-winged community? Why do you think there is the lack of 'objectivity', 'rationality', and 'seeking for truth' in QGLT discussion?
- Do you think you are politically Right (who advocating democracy) in QGLT? What is your opinion of the political clusters within QGLT?
- Will you describe yourself as middle-class? Do you think you are one of the intellectual elites in contemporary China?
- You said that almost a quarter of your postings were deleted by QGLT moderators. For what reasons? Can you give me an example?

Appendix 2
Survey questions to QGLT users:

Part III Your use of the Internet and the QGLT

How often do you Use the Internet	daily	3-4 times per week	weekly	2-3 times per month	occasionally/ rarely

How often do you Visit the QGLT	daily	3-4 times per week	weekly	2-3 times per month	occasionally/ rarely

Others: _____

How often do you Visit the *QGLT In-Depth*	daily	3-4 times per week	weekly	2-3 times per month	occasionally/ rarely

Others: _____

How often do you Post on bulletin boards	daily	3-4 times per week	weekly	2-3 times per month	occasionally/ rarely

How often do you Post on *QGLT In-Depth*	daily	3-4 times per week	weekly	2-3 times per month	occasionally/ rarely

How long have You been a QGLT member	5 years	4 years	3 years	2 years	1 year of less Than 1 year

Others: _____

How long have You been with *QGLT In-Depth*	5 years	4 years	3 years	2 years	1 year of less Than 1 year

The majority of Your postings are	cross-posted from Chinese traditional media	cross-posted from Chinese Internet media	cross-posted from overseas Chinese media	translated from overseas media (from foreign languages)	self-composed

Others _____

Have you had Your postings deleted in QGLT	almost all your postings	most of your postings	half of your postings	a quarter of your postings	it rarely or never happens to you

What is your political affiliation in QGLT community	Ultra-Left	Left	Mid-of the road	Right	Ultra-Right	refuse to be grouped

Your opinion about the political affiliation within QGLT:

_____

Do you find QGLT a friendly community?	very friendly	friendly	moderate	not friendly	very unfriendly

Have you had contacts or communication with other QGLT members offline? Please indicate in the following form:

	frequently	often	sometimes	occasionally	rarely/never
Telephone					
Mails					
Emails					
Meeting up					
Work relationship					
Friendship					

Others: _____

Please describe the theme of your postings (including the articles you cross-posted from other media):

	frequently	often	sometimes	occasionally	rarely/never
Headline News					
Investigative journalism					
Online petition					
Literature					
History					
Politics					
Economy					
Military studies					
Personal experience					

Others: _____

Which of the following adjectives best describe the language used in your postings?

	very appropriate	appropriate	not sure	inappropriate	very inappropriate
Patriotic					
Concerning (about the country & the people)					
Passionate					
Sarcastic/cynical					
Objective					
Truthful					
Rational					
Logical					

Others _____

What's your impression of other QGLT postings?

	very appropriate	appropriate	not sure	inappropriate	very inappropriate
Patriotic					
Concerning (about the country & the people)					
Passionate					
Sarcastic/cynical					
Objective					
Truthful					
Rational					
Logical					

Others: _____

Among the following list of possibilities, what will happen to China in the coming 20 years?

	highly possible	possible	don't know	impossible	highly impossible
Continuous economic development					
A strong military power					
Unification with Taiwan					
Democracy					.
Compulsory education for all children					
Better international relations					
Improvement in					

environmental protection					
Improvement in protecting rural population's rights					
Further privatisation of state-owned enterprises					
No census registry system					
Effective control of corruption					
Progress in legislation system					

Others: _____

Appendix 3

Selection of 22 QGLT informants for intensive interviews (2004)

Categories	Demographic Distribution of Interviewees				
Gender	Male		Female		Refuse to reveal
	17		4		1
Age	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	N/A
	2	13	5	1	1
Education	High school Diploma	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	PhD	N/A
	1	17	2	1	1
Place of origin	Village /town	Cities	(provincial) capital	Overseas	N/A
	10	4	6	1	1
Place of Present living	Village /town	Cities	(provincial) capital	Overseas	N/A
	2	9	9	2	0
Profession	Self-employed	Researcher /Professor	Teacher	Administrator	Student
	5	3	1	2	1
	State-owned enterprise employee	Foreign /private company employee	Medical Staff	Retired	N/A
	4	3	1	1	1
Political affiliation	Communist Party	Communist Youth League	Other parties	No political affiliation	N/A
	4	1	1	15	1
Join QGLT since	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
	3	6	3	6	4

Appendix 4
A List of 35 QGLT Bulletin Boards (up till August 2006)

- 强国论坛 domestic current affairs; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=14,

- 深入讨论 in-depth analysis of current affairs;

  URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=17,

- 反腐倡廉 anti-corruption; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=108,

- 两岸论坛 China-Taiwan relations; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=92,

- 中日论坛 China-Japan relations; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=92,

- 国际问题论坛 international relations; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=40,

- 军事论坛 military issues; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=38,

- 三农论坛 agriculture policies, rural area development and rural population;

URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=42,

- 经济论坛 the economies; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=41,

- 法治论坛 law and legislation; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=39,

- 科教论坛 science and education; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=43,

- 女性论坛 women; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=24,

- 影视沙龙 film and television; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=114,

- 韵动旋律（音乐）music; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=85,

- 科技论坛 science and technology; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=112,

- 教育论坛 education; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=111,

- 环保论坛 environmental protection; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=110,

- 传媒沙龙 media; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=104,

- 文化论坛 culture; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=107,

- 理论交流厅 academic debate; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=106,

- 读书论坛 book reviews; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=13,

- 健康论坛 health; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/mlbrd?to=60,

- 旅游论坛 travelling; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=89,

- 体育论坛 sports; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=5,

- 地方论坛 local issues; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/mlbrd?to=83,

- 汽车论坛 automobile; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=105,

- 联谊会馆 friendship and liaison; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=21,

- 情感时空 romance and emotions; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=26,

- IT 讨论区; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=45,

- 海外广角 overseas (non-political) current affairs;

URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=96,

- 家电论坛 electronic appliances; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=109,

- 服务区 feedback from users; URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/mlbrd?to=103,

- 贴图园地 picture gallery. URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=93,

- *China Forum* board for current affairs discussions in English.

URL: http://bbs.people.com.cn/bbs/chbrd?to=15,

- 嘉宾访谈 *Panel Meeting with Guest Speakers* is an online version of a television panel programme. UR:: http://www.people.com.cn/GB/32306/54155/index.html.

Appendix 5
An example of SARS postings on *QGLT In-Depth* [author's translation]

Title: My deep concerns over the [Chinese] government's dealing with SARS
Username: *lovelychina*
Posting time: April 2, 2003 16:39:11

My deep concerns over the [Chinese] government's dealing with SARS

The full name of SARS is Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome. Translated into Chinese, it is *Yanzhong Jixing Huxixitong Zonghezheng*. This disease was previously called Atypical Pneumonia in our country. The first case of SARS was found in Guangdong province on 16 November 2002 before this epidemic quickly spread across the globe. There has not yet been any effective medical measure in preventing this highly contagious and lethal pneumonia [from spreading]. There has not yet been any effective measure in treating [SARS patients]. This disease is highly infectious. It is widely believed that it can spread through saliva and close contact, but it is not yet confirmed that if it can spread through air or faeces. SARS patients will develop fever before they pass on the disease to others. Most SARS infected cases can self-heal. When patients recover from the disease, they carry antibody in their blood serum, which sheds hope for further medical breakthrough in SARS treatment.

The Chinese government denied the accusation of its mishandling of SARS crisis from international public opinion, and emphasised that 'it is not necessary to conceal the truth [of the SARS crisis]', and the government 'is going to publicise updated data of this epidemic very soon'. However, I am extremely worried over the development of this plague in China. If you know the respective consequences in Singapore and Hong Kong due to their different approaches in dealing with SARS crisis, you will understand my worries. QGLT moderators: I hope you all regard public health as the first priority, and treat my posting of worries with a long-term vision. Please let more users know the truth! I thank you all in advance!

The first [3 SARS] cases in Singapore were imported from Hong Kong. 3 people caught SARS when they stayed in a Hong Kong hotel in February, and they passed the disease to doctors and nurses in hospitals [in Singapore]. When the number of infected [SARS] cases reached 30ish, the Singapore government decided to employ corresponding legislations to control the epidemic through practicing compulsory quarantine. The number of [SARS infected case] rose sharply for two days before it dropped drastically. More recently, only 1 or 2 new cases emerging every day, and the disease has been under effective control. The Singapore government also practiced strict examination of international travellers (especially those who travelled from high-risk regions such as Taiwan or Hong Kong) at Changi International Airport. At least one passenger who carried SARS virus was detected. These measures guaranteed the effectiveness of the quarantine control and prevent the epidemic from disseminating further.

It is said that SARS infection in Hong Kong started from the same hotel. The Hong Kong

government tried its best in controlling [the epidemic]. Nevertheless, a fear that revealing the truth [of SARS] would affect the economy in Hong Kong resulted in concealment [of SARS information by the Hong Kong government]. Though the Hong Kong government adopted similar measures in controlling SARS in the later stage, the previous reluctance and lateness [in dealing with SARS] led to a different situation today [from what is in Singapore]. The highly infectious nature of this epidemic led to almost 700 infected cases [in Hong Kong]. Unless there is a suspension from work on the whole island, to quarantine all [SARS] patients and those who had close contact with [SARS] patients seems impossible. (One infected patient was found in a Motorola workshop, which involved a quarantine of more than 500 workers from the same workshop). To effectively prevent the disease from spreading, quarantine is both necessary and compulsory.

From the above comparison, we can have a clear picture. It was around the same time (about a month ago) that first [SARS] case was found in both Hong Kong and Singapore respectively. Both regions have close connection with Mainland China, and there are a large number of people travelling between China and these regions every day. For both Singapore and Hong Kong, tourism industry is the pillar industry in their economy. However, due to different measures adopted in dealing with SARS crisis, [there come different consequences in these regions]. Singapore had 95 infected cases and has rarely new cases coming up. In Hong Kong, everyone on the street wears a hygienic mask and worries about their safety. While in Singapore, you seldom see anyone wearing hygienic masks. We have to admit that, quarantine maybe be the best (even the only) measure in preventing this disease from spreading before the vaccine can be developed. Worse than what happened in Hong Kong, there have been no quarantine measures at all in China since the first case of SARS was diagnosed.

Let's take a look of the development of this epidemic in China. Since the first SARS case was found in Guangdong Province on November 16, 2002, the government admitted only 5 deaths and 300 infected cases [relating to SARS]. The government is so determined to insist that the epidemic has been put under effective control. What confused me is that the Health Division of the Guangdong government recently announced that 792 infected cases and 31 deaths were found in Guangdong province by the end of February. Among them, 680 infected cases and 24 deaths were in Guangzhou city. [While at the same time], the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently announced that 'A few imported cases of Atypical Pneumonia in Beijing and Shanxi Province were put under control. There is no mass infection. There are no cases of Atypical Pneumonia in other provinces.' When I learnt to this news, news from Singapore confirmed that one Chinese citizen from Fujian province who travelled to Singapore for family reunification was found infected with SARS. I also knew that tourists or businessmen who recently travelled to Guangdong Province caught SARS. We all know that Guangdong province has a large mobile population. SARS exploded before migrant workers coming back to their hometowns [for the Chinese new year]. How could [SARS] only infect those from Hong Kong, Taiwan or other countries?

After telling you all these, you can deduce a horrifying number [of SARS infection in China] by yourself. Rumours stop only when [SARS information becomes] open and truthful. I

definitely disagree with the accusation that China has concealed [SARS information]. However, no matter how much the government explained, no matter how much the government did in dealing with this crisis, there is still room for reflection. Without seeing persuasive factual evidence, foreigners and ordinary people like me may still estimate the development of [SARS infection in China] based on the information we obtained.

Certainly, it is also possible that the government has been dealing with SARS crisis in such a casual manner because [they know] the high self-healing rate of SARS. Nevertheless, the high rate of self-healing of SARS is a double-blazed sword. On the one hand, this fact [high rate of self-healing] can alleviate [psychological] pressure on those who unfortunately caught SARS; on the other hand, many poor families who cannot afford seeing doctors in China might lead to an uncontrollable massive explosion [of SARS]. The government needs to make efforts in publicising information [concerning SARS], and guaranteeing all those who develop [SARS] syndromes can seek medical treatment! The most horrible thing about SARS is not its lethality, but its high rate of infection!

[SARS] is a significant test for the Chinese government in dealing with crisis. It will affect China's economy and reputation greatly in a long run. What we have seen so far is only the tip of the iceberg – some international sports games and conferences scheduled in China were cancelled. Let all of us wait and see how things are going to develop.

Updated news: It is officially confirmed that SARS cases were found in Hunan Province. This fact proved that my worried are not unnecessary or based on mere assumptions.

316