NEW MEDIA IN NEW CHINA:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEMOCRATIZING EFFECT OF THE INTERNET

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INTRODUCTION

With spectacular economic and social development, China entered the stage of globalization, with which China has been transitioning from an “old China” to a “new China” accompanied by developing an extensive and highly advanced system of new media.

However, the rapid development of economy and society has also brought various problems, such as widespread pollution, social stresses, and widening disparities between the newly rich urbanites and poverty-ridden peasants. Meanwhile, as the average individual’s income levels and education levels have risen greatly, Chinese citizens are enjoying greater prosperity and also more personal freedom and access to information than ever before, achieving greater civil liberties and human rights. With regard to the Chinese media, even though they are still largely controlled and restricted by an authoritarian Chinese Communist Party (CCP), their demands for freedom and autonomy in reporting are growing. Neither Chinese citizens nor Chinese media can be silenced, persuaded or controlled as they were when the former Chairman Mao Zedong led China. China is facing a struggle between an autocratic government trying to perpetuate itself and a restive population who is better educated, more affluent, and tuned in to the outside Western world. The current Chinese media underline the key to ameliorate Chinese current social problems and resolve the contradiction between the Chinese government and Chinese citizens because they can provide a free exchange of uncensored information.

China reflects a typical single-party socialist republic in which the party maintains a permanent monopoly on power, and the political system restricts the freedom and
autonomy of the Chinese media, including both traditional media and new media. In old China, Chairman Mao required that all traditional media, including newspapers, radio, magazines, and even television stations should be arms of the state and serve as mouthpieces for the government. Consequently, Chinese media are fragile under the shadow of China’s political system and its legacy.

China ushered in a reform era after the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping proposed to carry out economic reforms during the 1970s. In the early 1990s, under the advocacy of another Chinese leader Jiang Zemin, Chinese traditional media were expanded, accompanied by the global digital revolution and technological innovation. China, with these reforms and an opening-up, transitioned to a more modern China, influenced by the wave of new media in the early 1990s.

New China contains complexities. As Chu and Cheng (2011) have noted, “It [new China] has been ‘riding a double juggernaut’ (the introduction of modern capitalism and of cyberization at almost the same time), but the modernization of the country has been accompanied by a new ‘rule by morality’”\(^1\). New China is a modern nation with a booming economy yet still under authoritarian political controls. According to Chu and Cheng, “liberation discourse” and “control discourse” constitute two primary aspects of the discussion on new China: the first one integrates citizen’s freedom of speech with technological advancement; the latter one discusses how successful the CCP utilizes its great achievement in developing the economic growth of the Chinese media.

Chinese new media have developed for over 20 years since the early 1990s. For the

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Chinese new media, the year 2009 marked an important turning point. It was that year that Sina Weibo, the most famous Chinese micro-blogging website, launched its first tested version on the 14th of August. The public debut of Sina Weibo opened a new page for the Chinese new media era, because Sina Weibo has become a brand-new symbol of Chinese domestic social networking service with “Chinese characteristics,” which refers to two Internet phenomenon including “human flesh research” (Renrou Sousuo, below as RRSS) and online anonymity on Chinese new media platforms, since August 2009.

Compared with other domestic social media sites launched before 2009, Sina Weibo has changed the theoretical framework for Chinese media, by reshaping public opinion and challenging the party’s censorship policies and propaganda system, while altering partly the relationship between the government and the media.

This paper analyzes the emergence, development, and future of Chinese new media, especially the Internet, through discussing the restrictions that Chinese media faced under the Kaiserism of the Chinese government in both old and new China. It will additionally illustrate how the property of new media accomplishes successful communication through creating “meanings” on various aspects and compare the performances of new media and traditional media during two periods, the year of 2008 and the period from 2009 to 2012. In both of these periods, the fragility of the Chinese media system mirrors China’s political system, while highlighting the demands of Chinese citizens and media towards greater freedom and autonomy. The struggles between China’s censors and citizens are all listed and analyzed.
The first part of this paper focuses on the relationship between the new media and democracy. In order to explain the association, this thesis looks at new media for democratic empowerment, the communication theory raised by Harold Innis (1999), and his formulation that media and communication are related to the growth of civilization. In this part, the positive influences that new media have brought to democracy are also addressed, underscoring and substantiating the fact that new media affect culture to the point of creating new civilization. This aspect lays the foundation for the whole paper through illustrating the role of new media in the transformation of civilization.

Before the emergence of Sina Weibo, the year 2008 marked a representative year standing for the state of Chinese new media under China’s dictatorial political system from the early 1990s to 2008. Even though Chinese new media had been developing for almost 20 years in China, they still have critical limitations in reporting news event. In the second part of this paper, the developments of 2008 explain how information on Chinese media, including both traditional media and new media, has been controlled and restricted by China’s censorship machine and propaganda system. This section considers three major news events in China during 2008—the worst protests in years against Chinese rule in Tibet in March, a devastating earthquake in Sichuan Province in May, and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games in August. Through investigating the news reports of these three events and how China’s government censors worked to control and filter the news, the media—government relationship is revealed to the public. Under the shadow of China’s dictatorial political system, the system of Chinese media is fragile.
However, newly developed media are democratically empowering Chinese media. Various pressures have arisen for greater media freedom in China when the rest of the world pays attention. Under the pressure of negative feedback and criticism from international reports with respect to its approach to some disasters that occurred in 2008 and before, the Chinese government experienced challenges in media control of the Sichuan Earthquake and the Beijing Olympic Games. Additionally, as Chinese journalists rose to unprecedented heights of professionalism in reporting these events through the media, especially on new media, the traditional controls over information on all media became a nearly impossible task for the Chinese government. In 2008, compared with traditional media, the Chinese new media unveiled their progressiveness in reporting news events. New media have enabled Chinese citizens to challenge the authorities and promoted democracy through making uncensored information be exchanged freely.

The discussion in the second section paves the way for the illustration in the third part, which traces the emergence and development of some Chinese domestic social media sites from 2009 to 2012. Facing the great challenges from the uncensored information that was exchanged freely on Chinese new media in 2008, China’s censorship machine has been operating ever more efficiently on the information on new media since 2008 as it has blocked more and more non-Chinese popular social media sites to smother any hint of anti-government sentiment. This trend however furthers the possibility and chance at the emergence and development of some Chinese domestic social media sites with “Chinese characteristics.”
In order to satisfy Chinese people’s demand for social media sites and supervise every user’s move online, the Chinese government has allowed the emergency and development of Chinese domestic social media sites with “Chinese characteristics,” which is represented by Sina Weibo. The widespread use of these social media sites changes the theoretical framework for the media of China, reshapes public opinion, and accomplishes successful communication in the aspects of politics, social life, culture, and economy.

The third part then analyzes what are “Chinese characteristics” on Chinese domestic social media sites by discussing how RRSS and online anonymity influence Chinese citizens’ activities online separately. The development of Chinese domestic social networking services, such as Sina Weibo, in a sense, leads Chinese new media to usher in a new era, transforming China greatly through challenging the party’s traditional censorship policies and propaganda system, while partly changing the relationship between the government and the media.

The third part also attempts to place the Chinese domestic social media sites within the theory of ritual view and encoding/decoding that James W. Carey (1989) and Stuart Hall (2003) use separately. This will explain how Chinese domestic social media sites with “Chinese characteristics” accomplish successful communication by discussing these social media sites’ enormous impacts on Chinese politics, social life, culture, and economy, which influence Chinese domestic social media sites conversely. Meanwhile, it inquires into the future of Chinese new media through investigating the nature of the Internet itself, including the Internet’s highly addictive nature and inexorable violent
tendency, while predicting the Chinese government’s long-term Internet plans in which the government should find a balance between satisfying their audiences and satisfying (or at least placating or not antagonizing) government officials.

This paper introduces the changes of China’s political system and censorship system and the state of the Chinese new media, in accounting for the chronological development. The current social problems existing in contemporary China and the contradiction between the Chinese government and Chinese citizens might not be resolved completely by the free exchange of uncensored information on Chinese new media. However, the unrestricted information on Chinese new media has greatly pushed Chinese society forward and changed the relationship between the government and citizens. Even though the CCP’s dictatorship on media will remain for a long time, the freedom of speech on the part of Chinese new media has liberated Chinese citizens greatly through furthering civil liberties and human rights. The purpose of this paper draws a blueprint for the Chinese government to utilize social media sites with “Chinese characteristics” to serve the political system more effectively and provide China with the courage to face hardships, while never-forgetting the conviction of creating and maintaining a “harmonious society”\(^2\) (a phrase frequently used by China’s President Hu Jintao). This

\(^2\) The phrase commonly translated as “harmonious society” in the Chinese political context is not really what English speakers consider “harmony” with its musical origin and societal use as an indicator of peaceful existence. Rather, the original Chinese phrase, harmonious society, more literally translates as maintaining social order through hierarchy. This indicates the cultural shift in mindset that Western readers may need to make to bring a sympathetic reading to this writing, as this work is grounded in a Chinese perspective. For example, there is no ‘legitimate’ opposition allowed to form in China, and as such, there is no empowered citizenry in the sense of American democracy. Rather, political activism is seen as antinationalist, and treated as a direct attack on the state. Because of this, even simple acts of public Internet information sharing should be considered by readers from the perspective of a lone opportunistic actor, rather than activity in a public sphere.
blueprint also incorporates the goals of achieving societal brilliance at a fast pace in heading for a better future stage by stage.
PART 1

NEW MEDIA PROMOTE DEMOCRACY

INTRODUCTION

At present, new media not only change original methods of communication, but also transform the culture in human’s contemporary society, so far as to alter human’s living and survival patterns and create new civilization through changing the relationship between the broadcasters and audiences.

According to the National Communication Association (NCA) Report *Communication: Ubiquitous, Complex, Consequential* (NCA, 2011), four challenges exist for communication in contemporary society, one of which is to maintain and enhance a vigorous and self-renewing democracy. Communication in our contemporary society engenders new media by pursuing and achieving democracy, reflecting one common goal in terms of new civilization for the current world. Thus, democracy partly emerges from new media. Meanwhile, freedom of speech on the part of new media promotes the continuous advancement of democracy.

Analyzing the relationship between new media and democracy proves useful towards emphasizing the importance of using new technologies wisely in contemporary society. In this part, how new media affect culture to the point of creating new civilization is illustrated through analyzing the communication theory raised by Harold Innis (1999). The influence of freedom of speech on new media and its impact on democracy is investigated on the basis of three important aspects. The future of democracy in the context of new media is also discussed in order to explore a way for
people—the subject of communication—to realize how to use new media in a scientific and reasonable manner to maintain and enhance a vigorous, self-renewing democracy in the coming days.

THE COMMUNICATION THEORY OF HAROLD INNIS

Harold Innis (1999) advocated that new media lead to the emergence of new civilization as the result of cultural change. “We can perhaps assume that the use of a medium of communication over a long period will to some extent determine the character of culture to be communicated and suggest that its pervasive influence will eventually create a civilization in which life and flexibility will become exceedingly difficult to maintain and that the advantages of a new medium will become such as to lead to the emergence of a new civilization,” claimed Innis. According to Innis, the property of new media exerts a significant influence of culture communicated in the dimensions of time and space. To some extent, the property of new media determines the culture’s characteristics, and as a result, affects our perception and mental structure as well as social organization and culture, which can be seen as the result of the bias of time or space dimensions. There must be a balance between time and space, since excess in any bias will lead to an inhibition of creativity and cultural monopoly, which are undemocratic and destructive phenomenon.

Media can play a profoundly dominant role in shaping and balancing the power in civilizations. Innis (1999) stated that time-binding media must be durable, symbolic, oral, and easily adaptable and expressed in community. The dissemination of culture on time-

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binding media is related more to time than to space, particularly if the medium is heavy and durable and not suited to transportation. Space-binding media are portable, temporary, explicit, literary, inflexible, and individual. The dissemination of culture on space-binding media is over space instead of time, particularly if the medium is light and easily transported. For example, clay tablets are a time-binding medium, because the written language on them is able to store information that can be disseminated to later generations, but this medium is not as portable as space-binding medium, such as parchment and paper, which are lighter in weight.

Innis (1999) pointed out that there needs to be a balance between time-biased mediums and space-biased mediums, once one outweighs the other and becomes predominant, a civilization is, in all probability, destined to fail. In the words of Bogart (1998), “the existence of an advanced and diverse media system does not guarantee that it will serve democracy.” Innis claimed that the transformation and development of media might cause cultural regression if time biases or space biases in communication give rise to the degeneration and disintegration of culture, such as racism, hegemony, and expansionism, in which undemocratic impressions emerge.

Empires can be largely divided into two types, one of which is called “Religious Empires” that has a bias toward time; the other called “Political Empires” which lay particular emphasis on space. Western countries in contemporary society belong to political Empires in which the representative system is “besieged by various undemocratic trends, such as the decline of legislatures and the growth of secretive

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military and policing agencies and other forms of state censorship." At the moment, some Western industrial countries prefer paying more attention to space-biased media, which favor long-distanced communication and expansion, to expand territory and rights and to control other countries’ politics, economy, resources, and culture. For instance, with the help of the current fact that people rely heavily on digital technologies in politics, economy and culture, Western industrial countries expand and invade oversea markets by virtue of advanced informational economy; international enterprises earn profit by drawing support from globalization of information and the culture of developed countries takes the place of developing countries’ culture by the use of cultural hegemony. All of these examples reflect an undemocratic phenomenon, which is the result of Western countries’ tendency toward space-binding media rather than time-binding media.

Time-biased media help culture, inherited from generation to generation, stimulate religious development and maintain authority for keeping the empire prosperous, but they cannot disseminate information to further afield. Space-biased media favor long-distanced communication and imperial expansion, but they cannot last for a long time. New media keep balance between time-biased and space-biased media through overcoming the limits of time and space. As a new form of civilization in contemporary society, democracy reveals the development of human society on the aspects of advanced politics, economy, and culture, especially on the aspects of civil liberties, human rights, and freedom of speech. The free exchange of uncensored information on the part of new

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media furthers democracy by offering consumers the right to choose information freely to satisfy consumer’s demands, which makes free-thinking and free-speech possible, cultivates consumer’s individualism, and provides consumers with an emotionally pleasurable experience online.

NEW MEDIA PUSH ON DEMOCRACY

The new media’s published information leads to the globalization of communication in contemporary society. Facing a hyper aggressive wave of communicational globalization, some scholars in media studies, media activists, journalists, and artists assert that centralization and monopolization caused by communicational globalization will absolutely result in media hegemony. Nevertheless, the globalization of communication is an inevitable consequence engendered by human’s scientific and technological development. It cannot be changed; moreover, it results in positive influences on democracy. The new media’s increased utilization of freedom of speech pushes the construction of democracy in three primary ways.

Offering users the right to choose information freely

“Freedom” is always closely combined with “democracy,” and the property of new media makes “freedom” more possible for their users through transforming the limits of time and space. The serial motion of transmission, reception, and feedback bring the possibility of carrying out a means of communication and transportation at the same time, yet not at the same place. The traditional single-line communication has been replaced due to the fast message transmission that guarantees the affiliation of news that
consummates the exchange of public speech. The users of new media have the ability to anticipate the communication, as well as to understand the communication more effectively. They are now capable of being the sponsors, participants, and coordinators of events at the same time. What’s more, users are able to control their media consumption. They can not only receive signals or messages but also offer feedback to transmitters, while they are free to choose information depending on their own interests and needs. Especially for the users of social networks, they feel much more emancipated to choose information on the Internet than on the cell phone, television, or other new media. Because the network has features such as hyper-connectivity, hyper-identification, virtual-reality, always-on and never-alone, it is the technological basis for the organizational form of the network. Under the influence of the property of new media, almost everyone, living in every corner all over the world, is able to share the same information at the same time, resulting in mass media’s social functions, such as “filter of information,” weakening and even possibly disappearing.

**Making free-thinking and free-speech available**

Free-thinking and free-speech distinguish two of the new media’s biggest advantages of communication. However, the freedom that people generally pursue is not only part of daily activities, but also embedded in ideology. In the dawn of new media, people’s dreams of getting ideological freedom emerge beautifully by changing the communication mode. Instead of transmitting signals or messages on a single line, successful communication on new media occur in the interaction between the transmitter and audience. The users of new media not only receive messages freely to meet their
inalienable rights to learn facts and truth from fiction, but also gifts feedback and the ability to actively express their own opinions. On the Internet, the representation of new media, everyone can be his/her own publisher who has no need to be investigated based on politics, technology, discourse, or logical ability; furthermore, the user has no limitations resulting from income or educational levels. Most everyone possesses an equal chance to engage in dialogue or conversation in virtual space. The Internet has brought the growth of a new form of journalism and has led to an increased freedom of speech that is unattainable on other media, especially traditional media. For instance, the growth of weblogs/blogs, forums, newsletters, and personal homepages has provided the users an affordable way to voice their own concerns, views, and interests. Every user can have their say regardless of whether it is accurate, valid, or worth reading online.

**Providing users more participatory rights**

Participatory rights equate the ultimate achievement of citizen’s rights. In the age of new media, the development and proliferation of the Internet has improved technology that fosters everyone’s participation and increases the citizens’ rights most conveniently. As a political tool, the Internet raises citizens’ interests in participating in countries’ domestic and external affairs due to its features of randomness and stealth. Pertaining to the aspect of economy, communication on new media results in globalization of communication that leads to globalization of economy in which enterprises all over the world participate in international business with the aid of new media. Additionally, globalization of economy pushes toward globalization of culture in which the communication on new media illumines respect to cultural diversity in order to achieve
the goal of democracy. People of distinct cultural backgrounds in various nations participate in sharing and exchanging diverse opinions, which ultimately integrates the myriad cultures to have less or no difference. In conclusion, new media offers people all over the world to have the profound ability to participate in discussing and sharing information with one another regarding politics, economy, and culture without the limits of time and space.

**THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW MEDIA**

Over a long period of time, Western civilization has been proudly influenced by communication, which has played an important part in its development as well. According to Innis (1999), for the last 1000 years, the Western world has enjoyed a continuous advancement of civilization on the aspects of citizens’ civil liberties and human rights. However, history confirms that no civilization will survive forever. The development of modern civilization shares a close relationship with the properties and influences of media. New media’s communication of information can change power dynamics and political relationships and possibly create positive influences on democracy and coming civilizations. Focusing on the conviction of a harmonious society and ever-growing democracy underscore the best way for people to develop a deep realization about new media and how to maintain and enhance its democratic qualities in the days to come.

What roles will new media and new civilization, such as democracy, play in the future? Traditional and new media will develop together on the basis of competition and integration. New media will not only be enhanced by technology but also relate to
cultural advancements as well. It will prove again that scientific and technological progress, which brings revolutionary changes to the globe, reflects the primary force propelling the development of civilization. As “the fourth medium,” the Internet will be unbelievably immediate, interactive and wide-ranging. It will develop quickly and its influence will involve every aspect of social life. Due to the properties of new media, the digital and cultural divides will be lessened and even removed in the progress of globalization towards achieving the goal of democracy. People will increasingly share responsibility to enhance exchange and cooperation on the road to promote common prosperity of the online virtual world as well as real society and to construct a bright future globally for a harmonious Internet civilization.

New media are not strictly the subject of communication; they cannot decide the properties of communication by themselves. The broadcaster and receiver of information distinguish the authentic subject of communication, and they will need to use new media in reasonable and advisable ways. Hence, countries and governments should utilize new media to strengthen cooperation in politics, economy, and culture, while being careful to restrain hegemony, expansionism, and racism, and to lessen the widening gaps between the rich and poor.

The authorities should issue related laws, policies, and rules to purify disseminated information online, standardize communicational paths, and create a healthy environment for audiences for new media’s lasting development. Individuals should also form scientific views as an aspect of new media’s influences and use new media in reasonable ways, and confront illegal activities that would cause bad consequences to democracy.
Western industrial countries should not treat new media as expanding tools and should keep balance between time-biased and space-biased media, rather than sustain any given bias. Countries in which digital technologies are not universal should encourage their citizens to use new media to connect with other countries frequently, which will lead to the development of politics, economy, and culture. Apart from that, as Zhao (1998) has noted, “in the area of communication, a broad definition of democratization means that it is necessary to struggle not only for freedom but also for equality and for a sense of community.”

Society should lessen the valley between the rich and poor and between developed countries and developing countries through offering all audiences the equal chance at information and knowledge, which can be accomplished through new media being distributed evenly. Thus, the freedom of speech available in new media should cultivate the continued development of democracy vigorously, reinforced by fighting against hegemony, expansionism, and racism in order to usher in a far more progressive civilization for future generations.

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PART 2

2008 IN RETROSPECT:

FRAGILE CHINESE MEDIA UNDER THE SHADOW OF CHINA’S POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

The year 2008 marks a never-to-be-forgotten year for both China and the West. The existing system of Chinese media, at that time, including both traditional and new media, underwent a great interplay of influences stemming from three major news events in China that caught the eyes of the whole world. They were the violent protests against Chinese rule in Tibet in March, the catastrophic earthquake that struck Sichuan Province in May, which killed an estimated 70,000 people, including thousands of school children who were crushed by collapsed buildings, viewed by some critics as the result of sub-standard construction, and the Beijing Olympic Games held in August that attracted a worldwide audience.

Through the coverage of these three events, the fragility of the Chinese media system, controlled by China’s dictatorial political system, was exposed to the public and the world. The government’s oversight of the media, domestically and abroad, restricted the expression of the Dalai Lama and the discussion of the protests in Tibet as well as the school building’s shoddy construction and the subsequent protests by parents regarding the Sichuan Earthquake, the controversial costs of the Beijing Olympics, and other sensitive topics. These restrictions occurred on both traditional and new media. Since 2008, China’s censorship machine has been operating ever more efficiently on the media, especially on new media, in order to smother any hint of anti-government sentiment.
Up until 2008, Chinese new media had developed for almost 20 years in China beginning with the global digital revolution and technological innovation in the early 1990s. Similar to the Chinese traditional media, Chinese new media have limitations on reporting news events due to China’s censorship machine and propaganda system. In this section, the year 2008 signals an important year to illustrate the state of Chinese new media under China’s dictatorial political system from the early 1990s to 2008. By introducing the background of China’s political system, how China’s censors operate, the features of Chinese media, media reports of these major stories, and the reactions of the government, it is possible to systematically analyze Chinese media and its governmental impact on Chinese society today. Moreover, the illustration, of how the free exchange of uncensored information on Chinese new media has challenged party’s censorship policies and propaganda system, highlights a critical discussion on why China’s politics need greater freedom of speech on new media in particular in order to witness the progress of democracy in China.

PROTESTS IN TIBET

The 2008 Tibetan unrest unveils a series of riots, protests, and demonstrations that started in the Tibetan regional capital of Lhasa. In mid-March, Tibetan rioters attacked Han and Hui civilians. Beforehand, Chinese security forces tried in vain to prevent the continuing protests for weeks. Many Chinese thought that their government appeared weak and cowardly.

In order to demonstrate the party’s resolve to the citizenry, Chinese officials and state news media castigated the Dalai Lama as “a terrorist jackal wrapped in a habit” and
“a monster with human face and animal’s heart,” blasted the foreign news media as biased against China, and called for a “people’s war” to fight separatism in Tibet. It seems that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) concerned itself with rallying domestic opinion by responding by stoking the deep strains of nationalism in Chinese society. Pandering to national pride and insecurities, the party used censorship and propaganda to position itself as the defender of the motherland.

However, the party blocked most of the reports of Tibetan grievance and its own role in the crisis. During the riots, the Chinese state news media inundated the public with so many reports from Lhasa about the suffering of Han Chinese merchants and the brutal deaths of Chinese victims, but failed to cover Tibetan grievances. “The Dalai Lama is trying to separate China, and it is not acceptable at all. We must crack down on the rioters,” said Meng Huizhao, 52, an office worker. Similar to Mrs. Meng, most vocal Chinese and the domestic media supported the government’s stance.

In the article A Not-So-Fine romance, a New York Times correspondent in Beijing, Nicholas Kristof (2008, April 3) stated that “it would be convenient if we could simply denounce the crackdown in Tibet as the unpopular action of a dictatorial government. But, it wasn’t. It was the popular action of a dictatorial government, while many ordinary Chinese thought the government acted too cowardly, showing far too much restraint toward ‘thugs’ and ‘rioters.’” China and the United States, as Kristof noted, clashed

mostly because of competing narratives. “To Americans, Tibet fits neatly into a framework of human rights and colonialism. To Chinese, steeped in education of 150 years of ‘guochi’ or national humiliations by foreigners, the current episode is one more effort by imperialistic and condescending foreigners to tear China apart or hold it back.”

In a sense, the Tibet crisis touched directly on the raw nerve of separatism at the core of Chinese nationalism. The enormous domestic media attention on Tibet focused the public on “how the issue is being treated abroad.” Chinese media commentators accused foreign news coverage of being more sympathetic to Tibetans in Lhasa than to the Chinese who lost their lives and property in the riots.

Chinese authorities did not allow foreign media to enter the region. According to The Guardian correspondent Tania Branigan (2012, February 3) reported that Chinese officials cut off mobile phones and Internet connections to areas where Tibetans were shot dead amid unrest. The government blocked foreign broadcasters and websites and denied journalists access to areas of unrest. In addition, Chinese domestic media downplayed the riots. China failed to provide an even-handed report abroad about Tibet. As Lee Chinchuan (2003) pointed out, the party leaders used the media to rally Chinese nationalism against any perceived challenge to China’s national sovereignty or international status and this reveals a standard practice of Chinese media.

Despite the Chinese officials and state news media controlling the media coverage of the sensitive Tibet situation, personal freedom to criticize the government has grown

http://www.nytimes.com

10 ibid.
considerably. Dr. Liu Xiaobo, a democracy fighter—a liberal dissident and government critic—said that he was very shocked by the language the Chinese officials and state news media used concerning the Dalai Lama. “They are talking about a ‘people’s war,’” said Dr. Liu, “That is a phrase from the Cultural Revolution.” As Dr. Liu exemplifies, increasing numbers of Chinese can express opinions that diverge from the party line, even when the issue is as sensitive as the Tibet policy in private conversations, suggesting that there is greater media freedom in China today than in the old days of Mao Zedong.

However, Dr. Liu claimed that the true nature of the government hasn’t changed at all. “The government’s attacks on the Dalai Lama and its censorship of state news media coverage was the same strategy it used during the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in 1989 when it jailed pro-democracy leaders as ‘black hands’ and did not televise video of soldiers firing on students,” said Dr. Liu. Thus, Under the CCP’s monopoly of power, certain views still cannot be publicly expressed.

**EARTHQUAKE IN SICHUAN**

On the afternoon of May 12th, 2008, an 8.0-magnitude earthquake struck Sichuan Province, a mountainous region in Western China. It was the deadliest earthquake in three decades, killing about 70,000 people and leaving over 18,000 missing. In the earthquake, thousands of school children were crushed as the floors collapsed in a deluge.

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12 ibid.
of falling bricks and concrete. In contrast with its tight control of media coverage of the riots in Tibet just two months earlier, Chinese authorities were simply unable to control the media reports of the Sichuan earthquake.

Entirely state-controlled unveils a typical feature of Chinese media. Yet, Chinese media took a firm stand on openness and intensity about this massive disaster. Even though the powerful propaganda department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCPC) ordered domestic news media not to send any reporters to the disaster zone, two reporters, Song Yu and Juliang Wang, journalists of the Shanghai newspaper *The Oriental Morning Post*, arrived at the heart of the disaster zone and published an article the next day. Following the newspaper *The Oriental Morning Post*, more news media simply ignored the government’s instruction.

*The Washington Post* journalist Maureen Fan (2008, May 18) stated that journalists who arrived in the disaster area broadcasted nearly nonstop live television footage, quickly updated death tolls on the Internet, and printed bold newspaper editorials calling for greater standards for industry and other reforms. A Shanghai reporter, who arrived early on the scene, described his trepidation at having violated the censor’s orders. “I was afraid they would track me down,” said he, “But then I found it was fine, not just me, a lot of reporters were actually doing the same thing. Everybody was free to move and free to write whatever they could.”

China’s censors typically operate in secret, but the government authorities eased off media controls with respect to the coverage of Sichuan earthquake. There are some

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reasons that made the government officials open gap in media controls. One of the reasons is that the Chinese government drew some lessons from negative feedback from international reports about its approach to some disasters that previously occurred.

On Wednesday, July 28th, 1976, after another deadly earthquake razed Tangshan in the northeastern province of Hebei, the death toll of 240,000 was treated as a state secret for years. However, the CCP doesn’t appear to always remember the lessons of Tangshan. During China’s second-deadliest natural disaster of recent years, flooding on the Yangtze River—partly caused by government inaction—killed thousands in 1998, officials barred foreign journalists and failed to update casualty figures. Similarly, during the SARS epidemic of 2003, the officials sought to cover up the casualties. As Nip (2012) pointed out, “the news was reported in the officially sanctioned perspective.”

In January of 2008, a snowstorm buried much of southern China in snow and ice and crippled the nation’s rail system. However, the government was slow to respond to the disaster and the country’s news media were slow to pick up on the scale of the crisis. And in April of 2008, when China’s worst railroad accident in a decade occurred in Shandong Province, killing 72 people, propaganda officials barred reporters from some affected areas and the central government tightly controlled main news organs from providing unbiased reporting.

To a certain degree, freedom of speech on new media has prevented some countries from insisting monopolization and hegemony. The Internet can be a democratically empowering platform announcing one country’s domestic affairs to the whole world.

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According to Hardt and Negri (2001), public opinion dramatically affects the decisions nations make. As the democratization of the new media develops, any dictatorial activities such as locking news or persisting hegemony, willfully and arbitrarily, will suffer objections from other countries.

While facing disasters, the CCP has been more concerned with promoting a false image of stability than with the common welfare, Chinese propaganda officials jumped in quickly, and much local news coverage was late and lacking in details. The Chinese government endured criticisms from the West over its handling of all of the disasters aforementioned. The antecedents made the Chinese government realize that covering up was not an option. Under the pressure of the two bruising months of criticism of Tibetan unrest and the forthcoming Beijing Olympic Games, the government could not afford another round of criticism. The CCP leaders were anxious to repair the public-relations damage they had suffered internationally as a result of the previous disasters. They were keenly aware that the tactics they took in the coverage of the Sichuan Earthquake would be closely watched at home and abroad. Thus, the coverage of the Earthquake seems more unfettered.

Shi Anbin, a professor of media studies at Tsinghua University in Beijing, stated that he thought the international uproar after the crackdown in Tibet had an impact on CCP leaders. “My judgment is that the government has drawn some lessons from negative feedback,” and “I think it reflects a trend of Chinese openness and reform.”

Media reports about the Sichuan Earthquake were almost universal in their praise for

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the speed and efficiency of the Chinese government’s rescue effort, making Chinese citizens feel more secure in the government’s reaction to the huge destruction. The government made an aggressive rescue effort, dispatching tens of thousands of troops and promptly sending Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, to the disaster zone, accompanied by reporters. The media reports both from the West and domestically built a positive image for the CCP and showed that Chinese leaders thus far had scored some unusual public-relation successes.

In contrast to the lack of unbiased coverage of previous disasters, the Chinese government took rapid actions, with uncharacteristic openness, in responding to the earthquake. Within hours, Prime Minister Wen was on a plane, President Hu was chairing an emergency meeting of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) of the CCP, and thousands of soldiers and police were dispatched. After an initial deployment of 5,000 troops, the number was ramped up to 100,000 within three days (“China's earthquake: Days of disaster,” 2008, May 17).

What’s more, Chinese officials welcomed foreign aid in the form of material and cash instead of refusing support from abroad. The Chinese government in fact received an earthquake team from Japan; President Hu discussed the disaster on a telephone conversation with George Bush and thanked him for American offers of help. Amid the nationwide shock at the scale of the disaster, the open attitude the Chinese government took when they were faced with the Sichuan Earthquake made the upsurge of anti-China sentiment triggered by events in Tibet appeared to be abating. As Nocholas Zamiska (2008, May 20) stated, “the clamor of criticism that had been dogging China over human-
rights issues and its policies toward Tibet has suddenly been silenced."\(^{16}\)

Due to the fact that scores of Chinese reporters broadcasted live from the quake zone and that foreign correspondents were given unrestricted access, the substantial reports about the earthquake reflected the Chinese government policy that focused on the relief efforts, without any criticisms of local officials and school construction.

The images of Prime Minister Wen visiting earthquake sites within a day of the disaster, directing aid workers, and comforting parents and victims showed a new face of China. “Hang on a bit longer. The troops are rescuing you,”\(^{17}\) Prime Minister Wen, wearing a hard hat and holding a bullhorn in hand, shouted as he ducked into the wreckage of a hospital where scores of people were buried. “Grandpa Wen” was a constant presence on the Chinese media, revealing a public face of a huge relief effort that moved tens of thousands people all over the world. Through allowing reporters to publish similar content and images to the public, the Chinese government not only showed a new face that revealed its public-relation successes to the world, but also called for Chinese citizens to unite.

Praise for the government’s emergency response and effective rescue filled Chinese websites and chat rooms. Even on Tianya, a popular forum where anti-government postings sometimes find a home, users shouted down those who criticized Prime Minister Wen and the military’s delay in reaching some quake victims. “Those who can only do


mouth work please shut up at this key moment,”18 said one posting. Another writer praised the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), saying: “whenever there’s a life-or-death crisis, they’re the ones on the front line. We certainly can overcome this catastrophe because we have them.”19 It seems that no one actually cared about the factual reasons that contributed to the countless student casualties.

The Chinese government enjoyed broad public support for its handling of the earthquake. The Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon of the United Nations praised Chinese government’s emergency response (Yardley, 2008, March 31). However, angry parents could not be ignored by the Chinese media. Most parents thought that it was not a natural disaster; the substandard school building stole their children because the building material did not meet professional codes. They blamed the loss of their children on substandard construction and government negligence.

The parents’ statements were supported by Shanghai Securities News that demanded the construction of buildings better able to withstand earthquakes. “If buildings were constructed strictly according to proper standards, most of the buildings should survive an earthquake like the one in Wenchuan (the hypocenter), and the casualties wouldn’t be so numerous,”20 said the paper in an editorial, noting that 95 percent of earthquake casualties were caused by the collapse of the buildings. The Southern Weekend, an investigative weekly newspaper in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, also stated similar

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19 ibid.

content on the topic of poorly-built schools in their news reports. Its report included an interview with the deputy head of Sichuan’s Education Department, Lin Qiang, who said the collapses could not be blamed on the quake alone (Mitchell, 2008, June 1).

As parents at numerous schools began to speak out, the question of whether official negligence and sub-standard construction contributed to the student deaths turned public opinion from praising government’s rescuing effort to querying of the real reasons that caused countless student casualties. With the Beijing Olympic Games approaching, this issue increasingly looked like a time bomb for Chinese authorities, and they scurried to defuse it (Hooker, 2008, July 11). The government essentially banned domestic media from reporting on the subject of “school collapses,” “claims of shoddy construction,” “parent protests” and “the deaths of children” in the domestic press; Paramilitary police officers blocked foreign reporters from demonstrations. The government sought to maintain the fantastic image it just engineered and attempted to sustain the positive reviews at home and abroad pertaining to its official rescue effort.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the government promised to hold an investigation into the collapse of schools. But even nearly 10 months after the earthquake, the Chinese government still refused to divulge the facts of why and how many children died in the rubble. Wei Hong, the Executive Vice Governor of Sichuan, pointed out that “there was still no final number for children’s deaths and that experts had concluded that the intensity of the quake, and not poor construction, was the main reason for the high death toll.” Even in an article of Xinhua News Agency (the official press

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agency and the largest news agency in China) (2009, May 22), it reported government efforts to check the safety of school buildings across the country, and only in the last paragraph of the article was there a mention of parents’ complaints about school construction in the earthquake area. No one has been charged as a result of those complaints. Anger over the number of children killed and the government’s failure to hold an inquiry into the reason why almost 12,000 schools were destroyed or damaged had been rising ahead of the sensitive first anniversary of the earthquake. In an attempt to silence protests, the Chinese government detained some parents in a so-called “black jail” or unofficial prisons (Eimer, 2009, May 8).

Huang Qi, a human-rights campaigner, was arrested while he was advising parents who lost children in collapsed schools how to pursue legal action against local governments. He also wrote about it on his website. Mr. Huang had already spent five years in prison for campaigning on behalf of parents who lost children in the 1989 government crackdown on the Tiananmen Square Demonstrations (Hooker, 2008, July 11; Anderlini, 2008, August 4). Liu Shaokun, a teacher at Guanghan Middle School, was also detained and sentenced to a year of re-education in a labor camp for “seriously disturbing social order” and “illegal possession of State secrets.”22 Mr. Liu posted Internet pictures of collapsed schools and photos that expressed his anger at “the shoddy ‘tofu’ buildings.” He additionally visited parents who had lost children in the earthquake and told them they should protest at government offices (ibid.). Another activist, Ai Weiwei, one of China’s

from http://www.nytimes.com

22 Mr.Liu Shao Kun Released to Serve His RTL Sentence Outside of Labour Camp. (2008, October 16). FIDH. Retrieved from http://www.fidh.org/-english-
most prominent and provocative artists, spoke out about how the government had handled the Sichuan tragedy as well. On his blog, he criticized the government’s management of the response to the disaster and chided officials for covering up the objective situation. The irony was that as an artist who helped design the Olympic National Stadium, known as “The Bird’s Nest,” Mr. Ai still vowed to stay away from the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics (Barboza, 2009, March 19).

Similar to the democratic fighter, Dr. Liu Xiaobo, these three critics fought for personal freedom and human rights and called for no autocracy. They gathered and published information about substandard school construction through various means. However, in order to portray China in a positive light, the government moved to shut down and detain all three of them.

The transparency of government information does not exist in China. The authorities are supposed to make public any information involving the vital interests of citizens, but information has been withheld when it relates to state secrets. Although Chinese media responded quickly and more efficiently during the Sichuan Earthquake, no major improvement in content occurred as the media remained heavily censored.

THE BEIJING OLYMPICS

Many people including Western journalists thought that the “dazzling management” of the Beijing Olympic Games showed an ascending China (Rich, 2008, August 23). A University of Maryland study of 68 newspapers, in 10 languages, in 29 countries, and across 6 continents, found that these leading newspapers all over the world reported the Beijing Olympics as a sporting event rather than as a political power game. Among the
front-page stories in the study, the reports were overwhelmingly positive (45 percent) or neutral (40 percent) and focused on the Games and not the politics; Only 15 percent that covered the first week of the Games were negative in tone (Melki, 2008, September 15). The coverage of the Sichuan Earthquake earlier had won China much needed global sympathy, and large crowds, a spectacular four-hour opening ceremony, impressive Chinese athletes, and a new Chinese superpower of the Games won China global admiration.

Nevertheless, a lot of the world’s media turned the Games into an international anti-China campaign, including the protests against Chinese human rights record during the global torch relay. As the Olympic Games approached, the steady criticism of China on myriad issues—suppression of the protests in Tibet, charges against the treatment of the Dalai Lama, crackdown on dissidents, bans on domestic and Western media from reporting on the subject of “school collapses” in Sichuan Earthquake, global warming, air pollution, and human rights abuses—had increasingly been reported and interpreted by much of the world’s media.

The overall expense of the Olympics underlined one of the most controversial issues that endured sharp criticisms from the foreign news media, despite the fact that the Chinese government wanted to present a welcoming impression to the outside world. China spent $42 billion in total on the Olympics. Some of the money was spent on the infrastructure projects with long-term value, but some of the spending still drew criticisms of wastefulness. China has dramatically raised large sectors of its people’s living standards through its rapid economic growth and development over the past 30
years, but tens of millions are still miring in poverty due to unfit health care and other social-welfare programs that lack sufficient funding.

At home, Chinese critics satirized that the government’s spending principle is “politics first, economics second.” In addition, after the Sichuan Earthquake’s devastation, only three months earlier, many Chinese people thought that the government had to calculate more carefully and budget strictly to save any possible money for the earthquake relief in Sichuan Province. Abroad, critics worried that Chinese government’s big budget would raise the stakes for future hosts of Olympics. Holger Preuss, a professor of sports economics at Johannes Gutenberg University, claimed that future hosts of Olympics would not be able to match Beijing Olympics in budget. “Many [International Olympic Committee (IOC)] members are already thinking we have to find a way to reduce the size of the Games to make more cities able to really host the Games.”

No doubt, the Beijing Olympics brought significant pressure to other future hosts, in the negative.

However, the organizers of the Beijing Olympic Games did not respond to any questions or criticisms with respect to costs. In order to showcase China as a modern, confident, and nonthreatening emerging world power, while also validating the party’s hold on power through the Olympics, the CCP leaders punished “undesirable” news media with a variety of approaches, including the suspension of a tourist publication *Time Out Beijing* two months before the Beijing Olympics opened and removing the *Beijing...

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News from newsstands and censoring its website after it published a photograph of some wounded victims of the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations (Jen, 2008, August 4).

Foreign journalists faced even worse troubles while reporting on the Olympics than Chinese reporters who aggressively covered sensitive topics ranging from official corruption to human rights. A British television journalist was detained by police as he witnessed a pro-Tibet demonstration on the Olympic Green. This journalist’s detention made the relationship between Chinese authorities and international journalists tenser. Foreign media worried that Chinese authorities would revert to the tight control it traditionally keeps over the press even though the Chinese government vowed before the Olympics to give the foreign media unrestricted access to China during the Games (“Uneasy Relations between China,” 2008).

Foreign journalists began to protest the Chinese government when they found that many websites were blocked. To mollify the foreign journalists, President Hu held the first press conference he had ever given for foreign journalists and promised the websites would be open to them. A few days before the Games opened, some previously banned websites were suddenly accessible (Blumenstein, Baston, & Flower, 2008, December 17). However, good times did not last long. The Chinese authorities restored some of the blocks in December 2008, arguing that some websites violated Chinese law. Liu Jianchao, a spokesman for China’s Foreign Ministry, said that the Chinese government had a right to censor websites that violated the country’s laws, including those suggesting that there were two Chinas (Bradsher, 2008, December 17).
Following the press conference, some public protests were officially allowed at the Olympics, yet the Chinese government required citizens to register before protesting. So long as the petitioners obtained a permit application five days in advance, demonstrations were allowed. Some Americans, without permits, who tried to protest the events over Tibet were arrested and deported, for “disturbing public order.” Chinese who wished to protest less-heated and even non-political issues such as land compensation in their home cities found their attempts to get a protest permit effectively blocked (Wong, 2008, September 12).

The Chinese Authorities’ pledge to a free media during the Games turned out to be just a slogan without any practical application. The coverage of athletes and gold medal face-offs were acceptable, but stories about pro-Tibet protests and other sensitive topics were off-limits. No real increase in freedom of speech in China occurred, despite the hopes of the IOC, that awarding the Games to China would encourage the government to improve its free speech and human rights records. Roseann Rife, the Deputy Director for the Asian-Pacific Program at Amnesty International, pointed out that the “arbitrary blocking and unblocking of certain sites does not fulfill the duty to comply with international standards of freedom of information and expression.”

The Beijing Olympics failed to expand free information and speech in China.

Yet, the Beijing Olympics proved to be a spectacular success for China Central Television (CCTV), which is the predominant state television broadcaster and the chief propaganda arm in Mainland China. The Olympics were bonanza for CCTV. According

to Barboze (2008, August 22), 840 million Chinese watched the opening ceremonies, with an estimated 97 percent of TV sets in China tuned in. Even though NBC counted a mere 29 million viewers in the United States, CCTV achieved rating records everywhere, reaping $394 million in Olympic advertising revenue.

Fostering a more open and more modern China signaled the reasoning that supporters used for choosing Beijing as the Olympic host—perhaps even a more democratic one. Actually, the Beijing Olympics was supposed to show a new China in the dimensions of harmony, democracy, confidence, and tolerance. Before the Games began, Liu Jingmin, the Beijing Deputy Mayor in charge of the Olympics, said that the long-range effects of the Games would be good for democracy in China. “If people have a target like the Olympics to strive for, it will help us establish a more just, harmonious, and democratic society while helping to integrate China into the world.”

Nicholas Kristof (2008, August 17) failed to get through the official barriers to get a protest permit during the Olympics, but he still believes that some democratic changes are coming to China. “My hunch is that in the coming months, perhaps after the Olympics, we will see some approvals granted” and “China is changing: it is no democracy, but it’s also no longer a totalitarian state.”

CHINESE MEDIA VERSUS CHINA’S POLITICS

The politics of China take place in a framework of a single-party socialist republic. The CCP dominates the state and society in China. The party is committed to maintaining

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a permanent monopoly on power and is intolerant of those who question its right to rule. China’s contemporary political system restricts the development of Chinese media, including both traditional and new media.

The old China utilized the traditional media, which primarily consisted of newspapers, magazines, radio, and even television to achieve its political goals. Controlling the information on media has always been an import plank of CCP rule, enabling the party to “guide public opinion” with its version of events and to rally Chinese nationalism against any narratives that might challenge party positions, actions, sovereignty or international status through its censorship policies and propaganda system (Lawrence & Martin, 2012, May 10). Especially when facing major accidents, epidemic diseases and natural disasters that contribute to significant casualties, the party has almost always covered up the scope of the catastrophes by promoting a false image of stability and prosperity.

China’s censors furthermore operate in secret. No written record of their mandates exists because the orders are issued verbally to senior editors of thousands of newspapers, websites, and television outlets. The powerful propaganda department of the CCCPC does not have a public address or phone number and does not answer queries about its operations. In general, the editors of the publications select the reporting topics cautiously, protecting themselves from violating the principle of censorship, because they will definitely be punished, replaced or sometimes prosecuted if they disregard the rule or the spirit of propaganda guidance (French, 2008, May 18).
State-control reflects a most typical feature of Chinese media as television constitutes the most tightly controlled traditional medium (Shirk, 2010). The journalists of CCTV, who operate multiple channels on numerous platforms and serves as a tool of the CCP, “disseminate government news bulletins and often get approval for ‘exclusive’ interviews with important public figures”\(^27\) to relay “party-approved messages”\(^28\) to Chinese citizens.

The party’s monopoly on power also reveals an important aspect of controlling information on new media. However, an apparent paradox in China has emerged. Wacker (2003) offered an argument for this view: on the one hand, the Chinese government encourages the spread of the Internet; while, on the other hand, the authorities believe that they can monitor and censor those aspects of activity in cyberspace that it sees as destabilizing, dangerous or “unhealthy.”

In 2008, the government directly blocked websites that discussed the Dalai Lama, the protests in Tibet, the parent protests of the school building’s shoddy construction during the Sichuan Earthquake, the cost of the Beijing Olympics, and other sensitive topics. Since mid-2008, China’s censorship machine has been operating ever more efficiently in order to smother any hint of anti-government sentiment.

Since December of 2008, the government’s oversight of the information on the Internet has been increasing markedly due to the fact that some Chinese highly-regarded intellectuals led a pro-democracy movement named Charter 08, calling for an end to the


CCP’s monopoly on power. Unfortunately, this group’s website, bulldog.com, was shut down ultimately. Following the shutdown, the government censors began a campaign. They shut down more than 1,900 websites and 250 blogs, including online discussion forums, instant-message groups and even cell phone text messages in which political and other sensitive issues were broached. The government also required all new Chinese-made computers to install the “Green Dam Youth Escort” filtering software in 2009 for monitoring users’ every move. In addition to its most technically sophisticated Internet firewall and intrusive software, the government also employed people, known derisively as “50 Cent Party” members, to monitor and delete objectionable content and then earn 50 Chinese cents per posting from the government; tens of thousands of others were paid to "guide" bulletin board Web exchanges in the government's favor (“Internet Censorship in China,” 2010, March 22).

These three critical events that all occurred in 2008 tested China in a constellation of ways, one of which was to the country’s sometimes sophisticated, sometimes heavy-handed propaganda system. In placing the surrounding events of the Sichuan Earthquake under the microscope, China’s propaganda system shows its imperfection. The government switched its propaganda policies immediately after they found that they could not control the coverage simply as they did with the report of the Tibetan protests. Of note, China’s censors found themselves uncharacteristically hamstrung when they tried to micromanage news coverage of the earthquake.

China’s censorship policies result in a silence so similar to its propaganda system. Fang Lizhi (2011), the former Chinese dissident, stated his viewpoint about the
mutability of China’s censorship policies with the following analysis: “The regime’s curbs on the Internet today range from filtering out large numbers of ‘sensitive’ terms to simply unplugging the Web in an entire region for weeks on end. When Beijing hosted the twenty-ninth Olympic Games in the summer of 2008, the authorities, with their international face at stake, loosened Internet controls temporarily, but as soon as the Games were over they returned controls to normal.”²⁹

Meanwhile, China’s national censors suffer the challenges of a free exchange of uncensored information on new media. Despite the information on Chinese media being wholly controlled by the national censors, the commercialization of the industry has brought racier content and more aggressive headlines as news organizations compete for readers and advertising dollars due to the economic reforms. The skyrocketing usage of new media indeed has disintegrated the efficiency of national censors.

In addition to the rise of commercially-driven media, the reduction of state subsidies to traditional media and the rapid spread of new information technologies has influenced the Chinese media landscape to become more increasingly diverse, ending the party’s ability to control public discourse as comprehensively as it once did (Lawrence & Martin, 2012, May 10).

In contrast to the old days of Mao Zedong, more Chinese see China as in transition from a system of public ownership to one in which private ownership plays an increasingly important role. This private ownership includes the privatization not only of housing, land and other properties, but also of the increasing freedom to express personal

opinions that diverge from the party line and even social content as sensitive as the three events that happened in 2008. The emergence of new media enables the Chinese democracy fighter and liberal dissident to use new media to broadcast their critiques against the government’s autocratic rule. In other words, new media offer platforms for the contemporary Chinese to pursue the “privatization of expression.”

Chinese history has largely shaped China’s current political system. Due to the fact that the nation was invaded by numerous foreign powers, the national humiliations by foreigners has made the government worry that Western capitalist countries will mingle in the nation’s affairs again. So, the party uses its monopolistic power to intercept coverage related to the sensitive topics in order to keep the country’s politics stable. Chinese media, especially traditional media, serve as a mouthpiece for the party. However, the emergency and development of the uncontrolled information on Chinese new media, in a sense, challenges the party’s censorship policies and propaganda system, while partly changing the relationship between the government and the media.

Take the Sichuan Earthquake as an example. Chinese new media played significant roles in broadcasting information about this disaster to the public. According to Fan (2008, May 18), shortly after the quake struck at 2:28 p.m., Chinese new media vied with one another in reporting this catastrophic disaster. The news page of the popular Sina.com website reported within minutes that office buildings were shaking in Hunan Province. Following Sina.com, the website of the official New China News Agency reported that tremors had been felt in the suburbs of Beijing at 2:46 p.m., 10 minutes after vibrations from the quake were registered in the capital. By 2:53 p.m., less than half an
hour after the quake rocked Sichuan Province; an online New China News Agency report had named Wenchuan County as the epicenter. Subsequently, CCTV began to broadcast live.

Compared to Chinese traditional media such as television, Chinese new media took action more quickly in reporting the event, resulting in information being more transparency. Various websites devoted special sections to the story. The public posted information online through instant messaging, blogs, forums, and Bulletin Boards System (B.B.S.).

During the earthquake, under the influence of the news reports on Chinese new media, Chinese traditional media also began to report more transparent news. The coverage was mostly focused on the rescue effort. Mothers wailing over the bodies of the children, emergency workers scrambling across pan-caked buildings, a grim-faced political leader comforting the stricken victims—such scenes were played nonstop on Chinese national and local televisions. In the news reports A Rescue in China, Uncensored, Andrew Jacobs (2008, May 14) pointed out that “the rescue effort playing nonstop on Chinese television is remarkable for a country that has a history of concealing the scope of natural calamities and then bungling its response.”

The expansive coverage of the quake’s disaster on Chinese traditional and new media, inevitably, mobilized a tearful public to donate blood, money, and labor. The result of this newly-transparent-reporting was a united China in fighting against the natural disaster, while giving the nation a good look at the scope of the problem, from

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scores of collapsed schools to the desperate need for doctors. The coverage also encouraged citizens to query the government’s role in the tragedy, to interrogate the rescue effort, and to press government officials who prefer to control the narrative themselves.

Thus, through the effects caused by the news reports on Chinese new media in the coverage of the three major 2008 events, the leadership of Chinese government might reconsider how they should handle these things generally if they found that greater openness serves their interests better. This is also a good opportunity to establish a system that will encourage the press to report in a timely and open manner. The director of the East Asian Institute in Singapore, Yang Dali, claimed that the Chinese government might realize that the openness and accountability could support its legitimacy, lessen the disparity between urban rich and the rural poor, and promote the nation’s harmonization. “I think they seem to be aware that a disaster like this [Sichuan Earthquake] can pull the country together and bring them support,”31 said Mr. Yang.

31 ibid.
PART 3
LOOKING BACK FROM 2009 TO 2012:
NEW MEDIA IN NEW CHINA

INTRODUCTION

The coverage of the aforementioned events showcases the competitive strengths of new media on the aspect of speed, depth, and transparency in spreading information. Facing the great challenges from the information transparency on new media, China’s censorship machine has gradually ramped up during the period of 2009 to 2012 as the party has blocked more and more non-Chinese popular social media sites, such as Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Wikipedia, and Flickr.com.

This more strict censorship system brings possibility and chance to the emergence of a batch of Chinese domestic social media sites with “Chinese characteristics.” China’s national Internet policy is simple: block and clone. In order to satisfy people’s need of social networks and keep the servers in Beijing in that they can access the data any time they want, the Chinese government has cloned every site that was blocked by them. Soon afterwards, Chinese domestic social media sites with “Chinese characteristics” emerged.

In a sense, Chinese new media ushered in a new era from 2009 under the leadership of these domestic social media sites with “Chinese characteristics,” which are represented by the most famous Chinese micro-blogging website—Sina Weibo. Sina Weibo launched its first tested version on the 14th of August. From then on, it has become a brand-new symbol of Chinese domestic social networking service with “Chinese characteristics” and opened a new page in the Chinese new media era, through changing the theoretical
framework for the media of China, reshaping public opinion, challenging the party’s censorship policies and propaganda system, while altering the relationship between the government and the media partly.

In order to expand civil liberties and human rights, Chinese netizens (Internet + citizens) raise their voice on domestic social media sites, accomplishing successful communication that changes communication from the traditional single line to the new bidirectional line, which has eroded the government’s upgraded controls over the Internet, and has made new China to be a more modern and democratic “harmonious society” in this globalized age.

This section analyzes how these social media sites evolve and change the theoretical framework for the media of China through illustrating how they reshape public opinion and challenge China’s censorship machine. It then analyzes the “Chinese characteristics” of Chinese domestic social media sites through discussing how RRSS and online anonymity influence Chinese netizens’ activities online. As part of the discussion of “what is successful communication” on the basis of the theory of ritual view and the theory of encoding/decoding by looking at theorists ranging from James W. Carey (1989) to Stuart Hall (2003), Chinese domestic social media sites with “Chinese characteristics” successful communication are analyzed on the aspects of Chinese politics, social life, culture, and economy. The future of online China is also investigated by paying particular attention to the nature of the Internet itself as well as the discussion of the Chinese government’s long-term plans for the Internet.
NEW MEDIA IN NEW CHINA

The escalating control on the Internet from 2009 to 2012

In old China, the former Chairman Mao Zedong took complete control of the mainland. His regime brought the Leninist concept of press that required that all newspapers and broadcasters become arms of the government to serve the aims and goals of the state. Today, the spectacular economic and social development has catapulted China onto the stage of the globalized world, and with globalization, China has been transitioning from an “old China” to a “new China.”

Through committing themselves to market reforms while continuing to restrict political freedom, CCP leaders spare no efforts to block and censor the vast information flows from inside China and the world at large. However, with the explosion of new media coming in from the West, the authorities have begun to lose their monopoly and control over public communication. Despite new China being accurately described as “authoritarian capitalism”—mostly because of CCP rule—its theoretical framework for the media has still evolved and changed (Pan, 2008).

Today, as the individual’s income and education levels have risen greatly, Chinese citizens enjoy greater prosperity and also more personal freedom and access to information than ever before. New media, such as the Internet and cell phones, enable far greater access to information, including news and views often critical of China’s political and censorship systems. By utilizing new media, Chinese people are achieving the dream of communicating among themselves and dissidents are also able to organize and resist government policies. The emergence of information on new media, despite, sometimes
still being state-owned that forbids political discussion of sensitive topics, has reshaped public opinion in new China.

Under the influence of the free exchange of uncensored information on new media, the CCP can no longer completely suppress the most unflattering news. For example, as I stated in Part two, during the Tangshan Earthquake, the news of the disaster was not reported in China and did not reach the outside world until much later. However, with the help of free communication on new media, another deadly earthquake that occurred in Sichuan was fully reported in China and throughout the world despite officials’ best efforts to downplay the story. Chinese media practitioners themselves insisted on reporting the story with the help of millions of Chinese, who used new media such as cell phones and Internet, to rapidly spread the news to a vast Chinese public eager for all the details and who additionally called for aid from the outside world.

However, the grand occasion of unfettered freedom of speech on new media regarding the Sichuan Earthquake was fleeting. Government officials still refused for months to permit reporting of protests over shoddy school construction, which potentially caused the deaths of thousands of young students. The three previously-mentioned events of 2008 presented great challenges to Chinese media. How the media dealt with these challenges provides clues and insights to the development of communication on new media in new China. Facing the great challenges for the more personal freedom and access to information on new media, during 2009 to 2012, the Chinese government’s sovereignty on new media, especially on the Internet, had become stricter as the party blocked more and more non-Chinese popular social media sites.
From the years of 2009 to 2012, even though the Chinese government encouraged new media use for education and business, it has also tried to block some social media sites, material deemed subversive or obscene. The government also tries to block Internet users in China from seeing U.S. based sites and has begun requiring Chinese sites to confirm the identity of users. The restrictions once viewed as temporary—like bans on Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Wikipedia and Flickr.com—are now considered permanent by the Chinese government because these U.S.-based sites are treated as tools of the United States government in playing roles in manufacturing Chinese social disorder.

In 2009, after the protests in Xinjiang and Iran, the restive region in China’s West, the Chinese government’s control on the Internet ramped up. During the summer of that year, the Chinese government first shut down the entire Internet in Xinjiang Province and later opened only a small part of the Internet sites, before restoring “normal access” in May 2010 (Heacock, 2009, July 6; Lewis, 2010, May 14; “Xinjiang,” 2010, March 23; Summers, 2009, December 6). In August 2009, the government warned of the challenge posed by sites like Twitter and Facebook, which had been blocked days after riots in Xinjiang by the authorities. In January 2010, after Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton announced a new United States policy to counter online censorship abroad, an editorial published by the People’s Daily charged that the United States had used the Internet—YouTube and Twitter in particular—to stir up “online warfare” against Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president (Wong & Barhoza, 2011, January 31).

In early June of 2010, the Information Office of the State Council published its first
ever Internet White Paper to outline the official views of the Chinese government on the current status and the future of the Internet in China. In Section III of the white paper, the citizen’s “freedom of speech” is guaranteed by the Chinese government. However, in Section IV, which covers Internet security, the government sets various regulations, which are the legal basis for the protection of Internet information security within the territory of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), to limit the scope of “freedom of speech” (Xinhua News Agency, 2010, June 8; Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2010, June 8). This obvious contradiction, along with other similar illogicalities, has propelled accusations against China of “doubletalking” or of “networked authoritarianism.” The definition of “freedom” in the phrase “freedom of speech” is narrow. In the white paper, the Chinese government stated its intention to keep regulating, censoring, and controlling the part of the Internet that can be accessed from within China’s borders.

In February and March of 2011, after the so-call “Jasmine Revolution protests” in several Chinese cities, the Chinese government appeared to have stepped up its censorship of electronic media. Lafraniere and Barhoze (2011, March 21) wrote in the New York Times that “A host of evidence over the past several weeks shows that Chinese authorities are more determined than ever to police cell phone calls, electronic messages, e-mail, and access to the Internet in order to smother any hint of antigovernment sentiment. In the cat-and-mouse game that characterizes electronic communications here,

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analysts suggest that the cat is getting bigger.”34 The Chinese authorities ramped up Internet censorship and deployed huge numbers of police to planned protest sites. No protests occurred again.

Following the extensive attempts by the Chinese authorities to crack down on the “Jasmine Revolution,” in March 2011, the Chinese government interfered with Google’s email system. Google accused the government of disrupting its Gmail service in the country and making it appear to be technical problems at Google—not government intervention. After closing its Internet search service, Google began directing users in China to its uncensored search engine in Hong Kong, where Google operates under separate rules from Mainland China. According to Rushe (2011, March 20; Tran 2011, March 21), this government blockage, which exhibited a tighter Internet control than ever before, was designed to attack the Gmail accounts of Chinese human rights activists to prevent social unrest. Concurrently, other websites were suddenly blocked for reasons no ordinary user can fathom. Facebook and YouTube have been blocked in China up today. LinkedIn was temporarily disrupted for a day during the height of governmental concerns over Internet-based calls for protests in Chinese City in February of 2011.

Chinese new media have developed for over 20 plus years in China. After the economic reforms, proposed by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping during the 1970s, China ushered in its reform era. In the early 1990s, under the advocacy of another Chinese leader Jiang Zemin, Chinese traditional media were expanded through making a profit in the new market place, accompanied by the global digital revolution and technological

innovation boom. China, with the implementation of reforms and opening-up, transformed to the new China through being caught up in the wave of new media in the early 1990s. From then on, Chinese became familiar with digital products such as communication satellites, computers, the Internet, email, cell phones, CDs, DVDs and all that went with them, including numerous weblogs/blogs, forums, newsletters, and personal homepages.

However, how far China will go to clamp down on the information on new media is unclear. Few analysts believe that the government will loosen controls any time soon, with events it considers politically sensitive swamping the calendar, including a turnover in China’s 18th National Congress in November of 2012 (Lafraniere & Barboze, 2011, March 21).

**Chinese domestic social media sites with “Chinese characteristics”**

The Chinese government’s tighter control of the Internet led to the emergence of a batch of Chinese domestic social media sites with “Chinese characteristics” that refers to two phenomenon that include RRSS and online anonymity. In order to satisfy people’s needs for a social network and controlling the server from Beijing so they can access the data any time they want, the Chinese government cloned every site that was blocked by them and then some domestic social media sites manifested.

The effort by Chinese authorities to control communication may be stronger but the real new media will make it increasingly difficult, because Chinese netizens have great demand for the Internet. Since 2000, the Internet has emerged as an important communications medium in China. The Internet signals a new form of new media and
one the greatest all-time innovations in China. It was first opened to the general Chinese public in 1997, two years after its introduction in 1995. The Internet has grown phenomenally in China. In 1997, there were just over 600,000 Internet users, some 4,000 domain names, 1,500 .cn websites, and the total bandwidth capacity of the Chinese Internet was 25Mbps (China Internet Network Information Center [CNNIC], 2007). However, at the end of June 2012, 15 years later, the 30th statistical report on Internet Development in China released by CNNIC shows that the number of netizens in China had crossed the half billion mark, reaching 538 million, with the mobile netizens achieving 388 million, larger than the population of the Untied States where the Internet was invented. By month’s-end, there were over 8.73 million domain names, 2.5 million .cn websites, and the total bandwidth capacity of the Chinese Internet was 1,548,811Mbps (CNNIC, 2012).

Additionally, in order to catch up with the trend of the global digital revolution and the rapid development of the Internet, Chinese netizens are badly in need of developing domestic social media sites with “Chinese characteristics,” which have become the chief sources of getting news and have developed to be the primary platforms for voicing opinion after non-Chinese social media sites were blocked in China. Chinese netizens are seeking far more freedom and autonomy to prevent the government from regulating information and limiting the expression of online opinion through expressing and sharing information on domestic social media sites, while they are more aware of their rights, more anxious to obtain openness and truth, and more empowered to seek justice and effective change on these sites.
RRSS on Weibo

Weibo, China’s equivalent of Twitter, reflects the Chinese words for “micro-blogs” in which the content is controlled by various self-censorship policies and methods. Among all Chinese Weibo services, Sina Weibo is the most visited one, which launched its first tested version on the 14th of August, 2009 and has used the domain name weibo.com for the service since April 2011. It had more than 300 million registered users until the first quarter of 2012 (Russell, 2012, May 16). In a sense, the emergence and rise of Sina Weibo marks the start of a new era for communications in new China.

Weibo, in the words of Kuhn (2012, October 5), has become “a kingdom of debate and criticism” and “a radically new form of public supervision” because “when millions of Weibo users focus on an issue, an influence group is formed.” Every user of Weibo can engage in the discussion of public affairs and even promote social reform through pressuring government policies. Since its public debut, Sina Weibo has become a brand-new symbol of Chinese domestic social networking service with “Chinese characteristics,” opening a new page for the Chinese new media era through changing the theoretical framework of the media of China. Moreover, it has reshaped public opinion, challenged the party’s censorship policies and the propaganda system, while altering the relationship between the government and the media as well as the citizenry.

In June 2011, a 20-year-old girl, named Guo Meimei, with the Sina Weibo’s user name of “Guo Meimei Baby” sparked massive cyber controversy after flaunting her high-roller life on Sina Weibo, posing with a white Maserati, sipping a drink on a business-

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class flight, and then identifying herself as a “Commercial General Manager of the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC)” — a claim that had apparently been verified by Sina Weibo. According to Fauna (2011, June 29) and Beech (2011, July 12), due to a lack of transparency, RCSC, a state-run and largest charitable organization, was not trusted by many Chinese. Guo’s action and the unknown relationship with RCSC aggravated the contradiction between the Chinese people and the RCSC, provoking Chinese netizens to unprecedented anger. The online fury even spilled over into the real offline world, entangling the RCSC. Although the RCSC denied any links to Guo almost as soon as the controversy began, donations declined sharply.

What prompted Chinese netizens mostly was the self-described commercial manager of the Red Cross living such a luxurious lifestyle. In order to explore more information and address problems that the official government structure is unable or unwilling to handle, Chinese netizens employed a massive RRSS. They tracked down Guo by employing as many netizens as possible in the search.

Baidu Baike, the online encyclopedia hosted on the web servers of China’s largest search engine, compares RRSS to “normal” search engines like Google or Baidu (China’s equivalent of Google) by pointing out that RRSS is far more reliable and far reaching, as they rely not on mere computer algorithms, but rather on the voluntary contributions of thousands of Chinese netizens who contribute their own, personal, offline knowledge (“Renrou,” 2009). In other words, RRSS is used to describe a search that is human-powered rather than computer-driven.

On the evening of June 21, only two hours after the first netizen exposed Guo
Weibo’s life, including her alleged connections to senior members of the RCSC and affiliated organizations, she was exposed completely to the public. Through RRSS, netizens discovered that Guo’s lavish life was a result of corruption of RCSC top leaders and the misuse of donations to the RCSC. Under the pressure from the public, the RCSC reported Guo to the police on June 24. Two days later, finally, Guo apologized online for her “stupid and ignorant behavior” and “made-up identity.”

As a typical phenomenon of the social media sites with “Chinese characteristics,” RRSS plays a positive role in pushing Chinese civil society towards more democracy, transparency, and openness. RRSS’s aim is to identify specific offline individuals usually in order to target these individuals for some form of punishment. These specific offline individuals include all kinds of people, such as “cheating spouses, corrupt government officials, amateur pornography makers, Chinese citizens who are perceived as unpatriotic, journalists who urge a moderate stance on Tibet and rich people who try to game the Chinese system.” Political issues or other things that violate the moral code are what Chinese people would like to fight for through the RRSS.

During the process of investigating Guo, in order to punish her, Chinese netizens posted all of her information available to them online, including plenty of her pictures in which her extravagant life was unveiled, hoping to attract the sympathy of other netizens and to supervise RCSC with the help of an online community. As there are many aspects of life on and off the Internet that the government is unwilling, unable or maybe just


uninterested in trying to control, the vast majority of what people do on the Internet in China, including RRSS, are ignored by censors and unfettered by government regulations. During the episode of Guo, Chinese netizens dared to discuss the sensitive issues such as public trust, the accountability of charities and the accountability of philanthropic organizations online without the control, oppression, and punishment from the government.

The unrestricted information on new media plays a significant role in Chinese philanthropy. Through calling for donations on new media, RCSC collected more than $735 million after the Sichuan Earthquake (Wong, 2011, July 3). As an increasing number of Chinese enter the middle and upper classes, most are willing to be devoted to the public good, but meanwhile a majority of them have misgivings about the impartiality, efficiency, and transparency of Chinese commonweal organizations. “Guo Meimei Baby” scandal provoked much widespread instigation of state-run charities on Weibo. RCSC and other state-controlled charitable organizations are accused of non-transparent operations and misusing donations. However, thankfully, the query from the public on Weibo will supervise and urge charitable organizations to initiate reform to build an open system for obtaining credibility from the public and to develop toward a transparent way in the future.

Due to the RRSS, the Chinese Internet seems a wild place with many sites of controversy and hostilities, but some “Chinese characteristic” social media sites, such as Weibo are also places where such wideness is unconstrained by the censors, instead, it is permissible and even encouraged by the state, so long as it brings benefits to the ideal of
“harmony” offline. The authorities have kept control of the U.S. based sites, but it is possible for Chinese domestic social media sites, which have been able to retain a level of independence, to provide platforms for Chinese netizens to make noise about exposed topics. Weibo, as a typical “Chinese characteristics” social media site, can be used by the central government to improve the relationship between themselves and its citizens, creating a state system that is open, fair, and just.

**Anonymity on B.B.S. and QQ chat**

Online anonymity underscores another typical phenomenon of the “Chinese characteristics” social media sites. It allows netizens to use pseudonyms to create and experiment with multiple independent identities within myriad contexts but concurrently escape the imagined, ever-present gaze of the panopticon (Foucault, 2012), because the anonymous netizens have freedom from being identified and from the personal accountability that identification affords.

Chinese Internet culture is completely distinct from the one of United States. What remain most vital in China are the largely anonymous online forums, where RRSS begins. Because their users who perceive themselves to be anonymous have confidence that their actions on forums will not be traceable to their physical person, to their persistent, offline, indexical identity (Phillips, 2004), these forums have evolved into public spaces where there are much more participatory, dynamic, populist and perhaps even more demarcation than anything on the U.S. based Internet. Free from the fear of consequence, the netizens are far more likely to make statements that they otherwise might not make for fear of prosecution.
Before the world-wide web arrived, B.B.S. was popular in China in the early 1990s. Now the word B.B.S. is used by the Chinese to describe any kind of online forum. The B.B.S. of China’s two powerful sites Mop.com and Tianya.cn, which were built in the early days of Chinese Internet, cover half of Chinese online forum users (their online forum traffic rank 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} separately in China) and have held strong positions for years (“Mop.com,” 2009, May 18). The users of both B.B.S. find broad-based communities and share information with their pseudonyms in the public sphere online. Even though anonymity on these two B.B.S. affords abuses of human body and spirit, such as those from lone, unaccountable bullies engaged in flaming (Alonzo, 2004) or the nameless, vengeful online and offline crowds of RRSS, it also protects vital outlets of truly creative, democratic discourse (Akdeniz, 2002). It is almost certain that the opening discussion on B.B.S. would mark a noticeable improvement for freedom of speech in new China.

The QQ chat also lies at the core of how Chinese netizens establish their identities online. In China, the first step for many Chinese netizens is the acquisition of an anonymous QQ number. QQ, which started out as a Chinese form of an online chat service comparable to ICQ or MSN, assigns its subscribers a random number as their identity, which then serves as reference point that can be used to sign up for other websites (“Tencent,” 2012a). During the registration process for a QQ number, the required information, which doesn’t need to be linked back to the user’s offline persona, is not much: it only requires the users to provide their display name, birthday, gender, and place of residence (“Tencent,” 2012b). The users can then add a “screen name” instead of
the random number as their virtual name online, which can be changed at will by the user.

In contrast to Europe and North America, in China, netizens who engage with the Internet fundamentally avoid the establishment of a link between their offline individuals and their online identities. Kong (2007), Wang (2002) and Yao-Huai (2005) reasoned that Chinese netizens feel uncomfortable when required to provide their offline identity information because they feel that the exposure online violates their privacy, endangers their offline lives, and makes them feel uncertain of being investigated by the authorities.

SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION ON CHINESE SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

The ritual view and the encoding/decoding view of communication

Instead of transmitting signals or messages on a single line, successful communication reflects the interaction between the transmitter and audience. In old China, the party utilized traditional media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and even television that are all tightly controlled and in fact owned by the ruling CCP, to advocate its domination strategy. Having a monopoly of sovereignty, the party speaks to its citizens—it is exclusively one-way communication.

During this one-way communication, the audience—Chinese citizens—cannot share information proverbially or give feedback to the transmitter—traditional media controlled by the party. These single-line communications, in which dissidents have no platforms to publish their opinions against government policies on the media, serves for the autocratic government and assists the party to achieve its arbitrary dictation.

Compared to traditional media, new media not only allow smaller groups of people
to congregate online and share information but also allow more people to have a voice in their community and in the world in general. In other words, communication on new media is not only efficient—the value of productivity and instrumentality, but also attractive, which means symbolic and cultural. The “meanings” revealed by the communication on new media show symbol and culture through the ritual view of communication (Carey, 1989) and the theory of encoding/decoding (Hall, 2003).

James W. Carey (1989) presented a view of communication as ritual, which is directed not toward the extension of messages in space, but toward the maintenance of society in time, which is not the act of imparting information, but the representation of shared beliefs. In the ritual view of communication, breaking the limit of time and space is the representation of shared beliefs, because the audience can participate in communication activities and give immediate feedback about the signals or messages. That is to say, successful communication is sharing the “meanings” of cultural ceremony and the representation of shared beliefs, and the “meanings” is created by the public rather than transmitted by the transmitter. Obviously, Carey pays more attention to the “meanings” of social culture that is contained in the communication behavior, which is relevant to human being’s social life. Successful communication, in Carey’s opinion, underlines cultural ceremony that embodies and leads to the sharing of “meanings” with human beings.

Stuart Hall (2003) introduced the theory of encoding/decoding. According to Hall, instead of possessing “meanings,” an object owns “meanings” through conception and symbol existing in the representation system. Producing “meanings” depends on the
practice of interpretation, which is sustained by people at one end actively using the code and putting things into the code, and by the person at the other end interpreting the code—decoding the “meanings.” Hall treats the production established by television organizations as open text, analyzes its possibilities in the process of circulation and distribution, and raises the theory of production “meaning” of decoding. Things, objects, and events in the world do not have in themselves any fixed, final, or true “meanings”; It is us—humans from various cultures in society—who make things meaningful and give them significance. Successful communication, in Hall’s opinion, is “meanings” that can be produced by audiences’ reception of and interpretation of signals or messages. In the theory of encoding/decoding, consumers’ interpretation of information as a process of reproduction, then the “meanings” are formed.

The ritual view of communicaiton and the theory of encoding/decoding reflect a feature of the communication on new media—producing “meanings,” since “from clocks to telegraphs to radio and television, new media have always woven themselves into everyday life, interfering with existing patterns of spatiotemporal organization, generating new rhythms and spaces.”

The “new” of media for us is not on account of “new storage” of media, but related to the “new forms” and “new methods” of communication in the digital world.

“Successful communication” on domestic social media sites

With social and economic transformation, Chinese citizens have a rising yearning for greater civil liberties and human rights through achieving successful communication,

which focuses on producing “meanings.” Due to the nature of interaction, new media, especially the Internet, provide platforms for Chinese citizens to obtain bi-directional communication, which is the “new form” and “new method” of communication in new China.

The Internet White Paper also focuses on the obtaining and sharing of information on the Internet, which is regarded as one of the key benefits of the Internet for the people in new China, as “the Internet has become an important channel for people to obtain news” and to share this news with others while “fully enjoy[ing] the freedom of speech on the Internet.”\(^\text{39}\) The Chinese Internet is built around the exchange of information and opinions, and it emphasizes the feedback mechanisms, which is supported by the RRSS and online anonymity through Weibo, B.B.S., QQ chat, and other new media platforms.

Downey (2010, March 3) has offered a statement on the importance of the Internet for Chinese netizens: “The word ‘Netizen’ exists in English, but you hear its equivalent used much more frequently in China, perhaps because the public space of the Internet is one of the few places where Chinese people can in fact act like citizens and debate sensitive topics.”\(^\text{40}\) Through the Internet, more and more Chinese netizens collect and share information, establish businesses, realize their aspirations, and get to know each other better. Not only in participating in communication activities together, Chinese netizens also give immediate feedback after they interpret the signals or messages they receive online. For example, soon after the earthquakes hit Wenchuan in Sichuan


Province, netizens used the Internet to spread disaster relief information, initiate rescue efforts, and express sympathy and concern after they read news reports about the deadly disaster online. In the progress of “receiving—sharing—interpreting—giving feedback,” an all-to-all system in which Chinese netizens interact freely with many other similar-minded netizens in the familiarity and anonymity of the Internet—is built. Meanwhile, the “meanings” of the information on the Internet—making new China be more democratic, free and open—is created by Chinese netizens from various cultures, including official culture and folk culture, and revealed on the aspect of Chinese politics, social life, culture, and economy.

**The aspect of politics**

China’s censorship policy influences Chinese social media sites to be a pathway of public opinion but the nightmare of Chinese officials. Although under the supervision of the censorship policy, the 300 million Weibo users still can create a very powerful energy of politics, which has never completely happened in Chinese history.

With Weibo, where the information has become more transparent and more direct, China has a new army of micro-bloggers ready to offer ideas for improving every aspect of politics. The sensitive topics like corruption, with a number of local officials having been forced to resign after being exposed online, and the frequent clashes between residents and local governments over forced demolitions are now widely debated. In addition, since "the Internet has become the most powerful media in every government
official’s daily life,"\textsuperscript{41} Chinese official government authorities have opened Weibo accounts in succession to communicate with the public and seek feedback from them.

\textit{Anti-corruption}

The power of the Internet lies in its use as a new platform for dissent against the state (Chase & Mulvenon, 2002), and in furthering the relationship between government and its citizens as a constantly evolving “game” between control and resistance, or as “contention” (Yang, G., 2008, 2009). In this cat-and-mouse game, the government is keeping a tight control over the Internet and censoring everything it does not like, while netizens employ “tools” such as RRSS and online anonymity, to escape from government control. This evasion of government surveillance is in turn the starting point for netizens to access or disseminate “true” information about China and the world to evade the control of the government’s propaganda machine (MacKinnon, 2007).

\textquote Jürgen Habermas (1989) stated that Internet constitutes a “public sphere” in which individuals and institutions emerge and interact. In Habermas’s view, “the public sphere represents a space in which questions can be raised and negotiated publicly, freed from the constraints of tradition and power.”\textsuperscript{42} On the Chinese “free” Internet, which has become a public space for debate in new China, netizens obtain information and then distribute it to other netizens for sharing, so as to create associations of savvy Internet users in the public sphere, with the goal of organizing a grassroots resistance movement.


against the Chinese state (Tai, 2004). In Habermas (1987) own writings, he argued that “the core of the public sphere comprises communicative networks amplified by a cultural complex” in which “a public of citizens of the state” can “participate in the social integration mediated by public opinion.”

This integration of public opinion is supposed to lead to the legitimization (Habermas uses “legitimation”) of the state through its citizens (Habermas, 1976; 2006). Using the new forms of associations based solely on the Internet, Chinese netizens are empowered to participate in the social integration while challenging the CCP’s hegemonic rule over the provision of information and constructing personal identities to affect party rule (Giese, 2006; Goldsmith & Wu, 2006).

While Chinese government authorities have been willing to allow netizens to form online lynch mobs to punish their targeted ordinary citizens, a number of RRSS have been used to attack local government officials as well. The local officials targeted by RRSS were mostly accused of corruption and a number of them lost their positions or have even been arrested on the basis of evidence produced by RRSS, which relies on the voluntary contributions of thousands of Chinese netizens who are sharing information and contributing their own, personal, offline knowledge in the online public sphere to push the progress of democracy in China.

A senior official with the Panyu District Branch of the Guangzhou Municipal Urban Management and Law Enforcement Bureau, by the name of Cai Bin, came to the attention of Chinese cyberspace when he was investigated for his official corruption. According to the news reported by some news media (Agence France-Presse (AFC), 43

2012, October 11; “Official,” 2012, October 11; Xinhua News Agency, 2012, October 11), Chinese netizens found that Cai owned millions of dollars worth of property. Angry netizens started RRSS on him and soon uncovered that Cai, who earned about only 10,000 Yuan a month, had 21 homes valued at 30 million Yuan ($6.4 million) and failed to report all his holdings as required by the state. Subsequently, Chinese netizens found pictures of his properties, some of which showed his luxury homes, then posted the pictures on the Sina Weibo. Although Cai denied allegations in a telephone interview on CNC (“Official’s housing scandal,” 2012, October 14), he was suspended from his post after authorities found a document posted by a whistleblower on the Internet was authentic. Later, the inspection authorities of Guangzhou used their official blog to announce the decision to suspend Cai and to demonstrate their commitment to conduct further investigation. According to Guo Xuanyu, a spokesman for the Panyu District Party Disciplinary Committee, Guangdong authorities have set up an investigation team and they have confirmed that most of the net sayings are true based on their latest probe. Guo said that Cai would be transferred to the judicial authorities if corruption and other illegal issues are substantiated.

Cai is the latest one in a series of Chinese officials who have been targeted by the netizens and later investigated by disciplinary watchdogs over the past three years. Just in September this year, another official in the central Province of Shanxi, Yang Daicai, was sacked after Weibo users posted photographs showing him wearing a number of very expensive watches, which are unaffordable on his government salary (Xinhua News Agency, 2012, September 21). In new China, the Internet has become an effective tool
for anonymous grassroots people, through sharing and interpreting officials’ information and other evidence, to help fight government corruption. Besides, the local government’s speedy response and their feedback about the investigation of corrupt officials on their official blog reveal another representation of shared beliefs on new media.

Compared to other online pressure groups, the participants in the RRSS against government officials and institutions focus more on the collection of evidence rather than the harassment of individual officials. They do not rebel against a corrupt system, but instead support the system by alerting it to localized problems. Chinese netizens use the Internet to circumvent local authorities and to make direct contact with higher levels in the hierarchies of power in China, thus providing a new form of communication between the government and citizens.

The Chinese central government applauded the perseverance of the netizens involved in the RRSS and encouraged them to continue their efforts. The head of the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP), Liu Binjie, even supported RRSS as a crucial feature of democracy in China. “Internet supervision is playing a very important role in promoting democracy and ensuring the people’s right to know, which should be fully encouraged and supported,” said Mr. Liu.

**Anti-seizure**

On the morning of June 20, 2008, President Hu began his first online chat with Chinese netizens via his “strong country” forum of *People’s Daily Online*. When he answered a question, which was raised by a netizen called “little flaming dragon,” about

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his review of many suggestions and proposals from netizens on the web, President Hu said:

“We pay great attention to suggestions and advice from our netizens. We stress the idea of ‘putting people first’ and ‘governing for the people.’ With this in mind, we need to listen to people’s voices extensively and pool the people’s wisdom when we take actions and make decisions. The web is an important channel for us to understand the concerns of the public and assemble the wisdom of the public.”

For President Hu, the Internet signals “a channel where the president can find out what netizens’ concerns are, and a way to gather their opinions.” This means that the Internet provides channels of communication between netizens and the central government by-passing local levels of government. Meanwhile, this statement made by President Hu encourages Chinese people to use the Internet to air their grievances with officials and promises that the central government will pay attention to their online posting of problems.

A great number of complaints among Chinese Internet users may not bother the national censors, but probably make the targeted local officials aroused and then addressed by the central government. It is difficult for Chinese local authorities to block information about serious public controversies online, as the information is spread by an incredible amount of anonymous netizens who share the information with other similarly-minded netizens without the limit of time and space, rather than by well-known dissidents.

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who can be kept under watch and whose information posted online can be controlled by
the local authorities before the information spreads out.

In 2007, a netizen, who used “Zola” as his Internet user name, went from an
unknown vegetable seller to a celebrity as “China’s first citizen blogger” by posting a
“toughest nail-house (a Chinese neologism for homes belonging to people who refuse to
move out and make room for estate development)” story about a battle between
developers and citizens in the southwestern city of Chongqing on his blog. Zola’s
reporting on the Internet about a couple, who simply refused to move from their nail-
house despite compensation offers, was supported by most of netizens online. According
to Xinhua News Agency (2007, April 3) and Bandurski (2007, March 30), and on
Chinese portal websites like Sina.com, 85 percent of those surveyed showed support for
the couple. Zola gradually turned a local story into a national controversy through
attracting so much national attention that the National People’s Congress passed China’s
first property law—giving private property sustainable protection against local authorities
who wished to develop it.

In 2011, there were four million rural families who had their land taken by local
government, which nearly tripled the number from four years earlier, and there have been
frequent reports of landholders being crushed under bulldozers, tortured, sterilized or
thrown into cement mixers (Garnaut, 2012, October 14). Until today, a number of
citizens are still engaged in struggle against the local developer/government for stopping
them from razing their home. In 2012 alone, there were over 150,000 social protests
In the battle of land disputes, residents grab the developer in a weak spot even though they have no special background; local developers evict all the residents and begin excavation regardless of the residents’ will; the central government fails in their supervision duties. The national government often stay out of such local controversies and scandals and do not interfere with the netizens exposing the issue of land seizure on new media, where the authorities can find out what netizens’ concerns are, leading citizens, with their civil liberties and human rights, to think deeply about issues by themselves in the position of local developer/government, resident, and central government separately.

The Internet has had a big impact on local controversies and made it hard for local governments to quiet people’s dissent. It provides a convenient safety valve for the authorities, allowing people to express grievances without taking to the streets or going to Beijing to petition the central government. Michael Anti, who is a key figure in China’s new journalism for exploring the growing power of the Chinese Internet, pointed out that “micro-blogging is really changing the pattern of how we follow news, and how news is leaked.” While giving a speech at the TED Global 2012, Anti (2012, July) noted that during the cat-and-mouse game, there is not only one cat. Instead, the Chinese central government is the central cat; local governments unveil many local cats. However, the server is only in the hand of the central cat. Weibo has become a convenient tool for the political fight. If the top leaders were fed up with some officials working in the local

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governments, they just need to call for netizens to criticize the targeted people online. For top leaders, public opinion provides a good excuse for them to punish the targeted officials and force them to have no ability to do anything except apologize to the public.

But, there are limits. Hu Xijin, the editor of the CCP-owned *Global Times* Newspaper, argued that “Weibo has some problems,” since its users “intentionally say very extreme, very crass things in order to increase their number of fans or re-tweets.”

If the scandal seems to have some negative influences that threaten the general public order or the impression of a “harmonious society” in China, the national government would not sit by and allow events, such as the land dispute event that occurred in Chongqing, to damage its image. It would send out officials and guide how the issue should be handled. Generally, the central government uses Chinese new media to report disturbances and thereby put pressure on local governments to remedy the situation, but not to fight against itself.

**Official Weibo**

The Internet has been seen as a tool, allowing for new forms of interaction, by political actors in Chinese society. Researchers have studied how some CCP officials have employed their technological knowledge to promote political reforms (Lagerkvist, 2005), both within the party and without. Others have focused on how various government institutions are using the Internet to improve their interaction with and responsiveness to ordinary citizens (Hartford, 2005). The Internet has changed not only

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the ways lots of people think and work, but also the attitudes of leaders and officials to public opinion.

Weibo has become a prime platform of open expression and reflection of public opinion. The Chinese official departments, from local governments to the police force, have opened Weibo accounts to communicate information to the public, and in some cases to seek feedback. According to Sina.com, government Weibo accounts totaled over 25,000 by the end of June 2012 (Yu, 2012, July 26). “We welcome people to take part in the debate,” said Chen Cheng, who runs an official micro-blog for the city of Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, “as long as what people say is in accordance with the law, anything is allowed. If citizens discover something uncivilized in the city—rubbish, too much noise—they can tell us.” Undoubtedly, the government should use Weibo to regularly update information that is of public concern and initiate debate on current issues. Concurrently, the government officials should listen to the people on Weibo, since rapid and reasonable response to valid criticisms is better received than censorship.

According to Shenzhen Daily (2012, June 27), in Shenzhen (a city in Guangdong Province), netizens found that there was some room for improvement in a new way for them to interact with city agencies on Shenzhen government’s Tencent Weibo. The Weibo attracted 110,000 followers in the following days of its June 18, 2012 debut. Similar to the local government in Shenzhen, Beijing and Shanghai governments obtained one million and three million netizens separately in weeks after their government Weibo were launched. Compared with traditional media, district government

micro-blogs receive much better reviews as they allow government agencies to release information about political affairs, city news, public services, and emergence responses which arouse netizens’ interest and spur comments.

Weibo is also a public sphere for the public to supervise the government. On October 13, 2012, a Weibo user named “Tinaandddavid” posted a status about a situation that her husband witnessed in Shanghai when authorities did nothing to a drunken foreigner who attempted to pick up a 5-year-old girl and inveigle her into the sex trade one night. Netizens’ outrage flooded the Weibo after the original post was re-tweeted and rapidly spread out. Only after the post had received growing interest by a great number of Weibo users, Shanghai authorities promised netizens that they would investigate and inform them of any details once they had made any headway.

Similar to Twitter, Weibo users can mention (@username) the official government accounts to let them know about reported cases. But compared to the number of Weibo posts and the diversity of opinions they have bred, the responses from official agencies are far from prompt or adequate. In other words, the government’s Weibo is still at an initial stage of “release” instead of “response” and only a few government agencies are responding to netizens’ questions. The government’s response time depends on how many people notice, circulate, and respond to the original posts. When the Big V (users deemed exceptionally viral and influential) share or even post the original complaints, reactions from government agencies seem to be expedited. However, the number of the posts, which attract Big V’s attention, is not much; Chinese officials and government agencies still need to keep up with the public’s demands on Weibo by themselves.
Learning Weibo and other Internet applications should be a required course for them in the future.

For most of the past 5,000 years, China’s rulers have been following the maxim “Heaven is high and the emperor is far away,” leaving local officials to work with a high degree of autonomy. In new China, the uncontrolled information on new media, which has become new and democratic elements in China’s politics, is accepted and to some extent supported by the central government as a balancing pressure for local politicians and party members. Across the country, online petitions have promoted police to reopen closed cases, forced authorities to cancel unpopular development projects, and influenced the party’s national leadership to fire corrupt local officials. “The Internet is introducing a new measure of public accountability and civic action into China’s [...] political system.”\(^{50}\) As the past few years have shown, the communication on new media has been given the power and the willingness to help the central government know the public mood and punish some local officials who are not following policies through citizens’ feedback on local government corruption, crime, criminal liaisons, etc., offering a bridge between the central government and the people and paving a free, open, and democratic way for the future of China’s politics.

**The aspect of social life**

A second aspect revealing “meanings” of the communication on Chinese new media focuses less on the political implication of the Internet, and more on social organizations and movements that are attempting to employ new forms of technology and new methods

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of communication to reach wider audiences. Civic associations are using the Internet to increase their reach at a lower cost than previously possible and are therefore becoming more visible (Yang, G., 2007). Similarly, non-profit organizations are using the new form of technology to make their causes known to more people through broadening their public appeal online (Yang, B., 2008), so as to call for more people to engage in collective action (Zheng & Wu, 2005).

Aside from serving formal institutions and associations, the Internet in China is providing ordinary citizens with the means to voice their feelings and to gather large groups of people both online and offline without the organized support of either governmental or non-governmental institutions (Wu, 2007). In this kind of unsupported and initiative activities of large numbers of netizens, new forms of organization and new methods of communication are emerging that alter the way Chinese citizens interact with each other and with their government (Yang, 2003).

The majority of RRSS are started by specific individuals who are trying to locate other specific individuals. However, most of the largest RRSS in Chinese cyberspace are not initiated by individual netizens, but by groups of netizens who become enraged over or interested in a story spreading on the Internet and decide to do something about it.

In one early but very famous case in March 2006, a nurse from the north of China decided to rid herself of her frustrations over a failed marriage by allowing a camera man to video her while she crushed a small kitten’s head with her stiletto heels (Shanghai Daily, 2006, March 16). The video was uploaded to the Internet, causing a huge stir among animal lovers both in China and abroad (Daily Telegraph, 2006, March 4). An
RRSS was started and both of the woman and the cameraman were suspended from their jobs and had to publicly apologize after they were eventually identified by angry Chinese netizens, while the media and animal-welfare activists used the episode to lobby the Chinese Central Government for the enactment of animal protection legislation.

The influence that arose from the reports on new media in this event opened the prelude of “warfare” between Chinese animal-welfare groups and the abusing-animal group/individual. Flor Cruz and Shao (2011, October 20) reported that, in October 2011, nearly 800 caged dogs, which were loaded onto trucks in Zigong in southwest Sichuan Province and headed to various restaurants in southern Guangxi Province, were rescued by a Chinese animal-rights protection group, the Qiming Center, in the city of Zigong. The group dispatched a team of five to block the dog trader while posting Weibo online for calling for help from animal-loving netizens. With the help of Weibo, a lot of animal lovers drove to the scene from various parts of the country and raised funds from animal lovers who paid attention to this event on Weibo. After a standoff and negotiation, the group paid the dog trader 83,000 Yuan ($13,000) to secure the caged dogs’ freedom. Up until today, on the center’s official blog, the group still frequently updates the dogs’ latest conditions and solicits donations or voluntary assistance from animal lovers.

In addition to posts seeking support from netizens for opposing abusing-animal activities, there are also lots of posts posed by people who have impressed by someone they have encountered, and who then turn to the Internet to share this with others. If many other netizens sympathize with the original poster’s impressions, they proceed to
spread the story across Chinese cyberspace and RRSS are started to identify the targeted person the original poster encountered.

On January 26, 2009, a netizen called “alucard77117” heard a young girl playing the guitar and singing in the Xidan underground tunnel in Beijing. He liked the performance so much and thus videoed the girl and uploaded the video titled “Xidan underground tunnel girl sings ‘Angel’s Wings’” to the Youku (China’s equivalent of YouTube). In the days after being uploaded, traffic to the video swiftly increased. Furthermore, various famous B.B.S. discussion forums and websites immediately reposted this video, while this video’s star was named “Xidan Girl” by the vast majority of netizens. By February 3, the videos was watched by over three million people and netizens began RRSS for more information about the girl, hoping to uncover the “Xidan Girl” mysterious veil (Fauna, 2009, February 8). According to RRSS, this girl’s real identity had gradually emerged from the water. Ren Yueli, which is her real name, is a Beijing drifter and has been singing in the subway station for years. But, this video totally changed this ordinary citizen’s life, winning her a post on the Spring Festival Gala on CCTV, which boosted her fame even further. She has even published an autobiography and held a book signing ceremony in her hometown Zhuozhou, in Hebei Province (Farrar, 2010, April 2).

Another story about how ordinary people became an overnight sensation with the help of new media occurred in 2010 in China. Two migrant workers, Wang Xu and Liu Gang, became known to every family thanks to the online exposure of the homemade video recording their heart-rending duet “On a Spring Day,” which was uploaded onto Youku by one of their friends. One August day in 2010, as Li (2012, May 25) described,
Wang went to the dorm of Liu for a drink. Fuelled by Dutch courage, they began singing and were filmed on a friend’s mobile phone. The lyrics of this song, which have been recognized by many as a portrait of the migrant worker’s life, captured many grassroots people’s feeling and moved countless Chinese people to tears. After the clip was posted online, it attracted millions of viewers and these two grassroots singers became famous overnight. Subsequently, their duet video on Youku caught the attention of the national TV channel CCTV. Along with the Xidan Girl, they won a slot on CCTV Spring Festival Gala. Chinese netizens called this phenomenon as “a renaissance of grassroots culture.”

**The aspect of culture**

Besides being concerning about politics and social life, the Chinese Internet has also become both an expression of and a way to share Chinese culture. Compared with traditional media, the Internet spreads the voice of ordinary people faster and with lower cost. Netizens employ the Internet as a folk political space to protest against the government’s surveillance and satirize online censors through decoding Chinese-style humor online. Netizens share and interpret the playful, sarcastic, and even vulgar Chinese languages to develop an Internet culture, which is a combination of Chinese official culture and folk culture, to develop a democratic and modern society.

Internet parody, called “egao” in Chinese, has become an Internet culture in China during the past few years. The word “egao” means “evil joking” but refers to messages that include prankish or ironical elements. Looking at online parody can provide us with

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a new sight for understanding how Chinese official culture is challenged by Chinese folk
culture online.

Chinese official culture, which is also called hegemonic culture, infiltrates every
corner of the Chinese Internet. For Chinese authorities, the Internet, on the one hand,
gives them a window into public opinion they never really had before; on the other hand,
it makes them feel uncomfortable with public scrutiny and public ridicule. Thus, the
Internet is still subject to tight government control in China. Since many foreign websites
are blocked in China, including human rights sites, news sites, and popular U.S. based
social networking sites, the Chinese government allows the emergency and development
of extensive Chinese own cloned local version of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube that
are more easily monitored and subject to government restrictions.

However, this official culture has been challenged by Chinese netizens online, who
employ folk culture to resist the authorities’ dictatorship through Internet parody.
Novelist and political writer George Orwell (1945, July 28) treated joke as a tiny
revolution. In defining “humor,” he noted that “you might define it [humor] as dignity
sitting on a tin-tack. Whatever destroys dignity and brings down the mighty from their
seats, preferably with a bump, is funny. And, the bigger the fall, the bigger the joke.”

For Chinese netizens, Internet parody represents this kind of folk “humor” that has the
ability to satirize the “dignity” of CCP and its censorship system, while eroding the
party’s hegemony through its destructive and sometimes revolutionary nature.

52 Orwell, G. (1945, July 28). Funny, but not vulgar. Retrieved from
http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/essays/orwell_2.html
Meanwhile, the Internet is an inherent part of folk culture and its subversive nature has the ability to overthrow official ideologies and initiate bottom-up changes. Chinese netizens build their own world versus the official world through deconstructing the pretentious, hypocritical, hierarchical, and serious official culture, but also regenerating a newborn folk culture online. The Internet, according to Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), “celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order” and “marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.”53 The flexible, grotesque, and sometimes absurd use of language by Chinese netizens makes laughter liberating, demonstrating netizens’ demands for freedom of speech as a natural right of citizen in the folk political space of the Internet. Therefore, the Internet creates a folk political space allowing suppressed voices to be heard.

Bakhtin’s concept can be useful in analyzing Internet parody on the Chinese Internet because the Chinese Internet’s dispersive nature allows temporary freedom and liberation for Chinese netizens to express their voices online even though under the control of the Chinese government that produces its pretentious official culture persistently and systematically. The following Internet cases in China will help us to understand how Chinese netizens, in the postmodern era of the Internet, protest against the surveillance of the state and social injustice through verbal subversion, dissolving the seriousness and morality of state decrees and the state media, thereby subverting state power organs’ credibility and authority.

An Internet phenomenon that emerged from January 2009 in China was the creation of mythical creatures using nonsensical words as their names that sound like especially vile obscenities in the Chinese language. “Cao Ni Ma” (grass-mud horse), which is a pun on a familiar Chinese obscenity, has become the most influential of these newly created mythical creatures. The alpaca is chosen to serve as Cao Ni Ma in spoofs because of its comical appearance which seems like 囧—a new word created by Chinese netizens to refer to something particularly astonishing or bewildering. Having the appearance of an alpaca, Cao Ni Ma is said to be a courageous and tenacious animal overcoming the difficult environment and living a carefree life in the “Malegebi” desert, which sounds similar to another obscene Chinese phrase.

Later, Cao Ni Ma emerged to fight another mythical creature—the evil “He Xie” (river crab), which sounds like “harmony” in Chinese language and refers to the “harmonious society.” He Xie, often portrayed as wearing three wristwatches in reference to the “Three Represents” promoted by former President Jiang Zemin, has now become a code word, an adjective and also a transitive verb in Chinese to describe censors who constantly “harmonize” Internet blogs and forums (Henochowicz, 2012, March 21; Xiao, 2007, August 28). In other words, it has become a synonym for censorship. The story of Cao Ni Ma struggles against the evil He Xie actually illustrates the war between “online deviance” and “online censorship.”

The idea of Cao Ni Ma versus He Xie caught fire after netizens made a video depicting the grass-mud horse at war with and eventually defeating the river crab.
Netizens continually expanded the lore of Cao Ni Ma by creating catchy songs and fake nature documentaries on Youku and other video sharing sites (Hecochowicz, 2012, March 7). The lyrics of the catchy song describe how Cao Ni Ma achieves victory: “They [Cao Ni Ma] defeated the He Xie in order to protect their grassland; He Xie forever disappeared from the Malegebi,” the desert. In spreading this song far and wide, which is clearly subversive to most Chinese intellectuals, Chinese netizens can flout authority and mock official language around censorship and political correctness by the words of these online “resistance discourses.”

Cao Ni Ma sounds like a nasty curse in Chinese language, but its written Chinese characters are completely different, and its meaning—taken literally—is benign, preventing this resistance words from being censored online and leaving the readers to interpret its obscene meaning for themselves (Martinsen, 2009, March 12). The beast Cao Ni Ma has not only dodged censors’ computer, but also eluded the government’s own ban on so-called offensive behavior. Through being decoded by netizens, Cao Ni Ma becomes metaphor of the power struggle over Internet expression.

The phenomenon of Cao Ni Mao seems juvenile, but it resonated strongly among Chinese citizens from serious scholars to usually politically apathetic urban white-collar workers who are pursuing freedom of speech. Xiao Qiang, an adjunct professor of journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, who oversees a project that monitors

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Chinese websites, regarded grass-mud horse as “an icon of resistance to censorship.”

The example of Cao Ni Ma is something that, in China’s authoritarian system, passes as subversive behavior and represents “meanings” of Chinese cultural ceremony shared by netizens on a political level. Chinese netizens used these mythical creatures to response to the backdrop of the government’s effort to censor the Internet through an impish protest—combining innocuous Chinese words to mean things that have subversive meanings. In addition to indicating the ingenuity of Chinese netizens and making government censors look ridiculous, the popularity of Cao Ni Ma also raised real questions about China’s ability to slow the flow of information over the Internet—a project on which the Chinese government already has introduced firewall and software to weed deviant thoughts from the world’s largest cyber-community.

**Qi Shi Ma**

In May 2009, Chinese netizens created a new mythical creature called “Qi Shi Ma” (horse of deception), which sounds like 70 kilometers per hour (KPH) in Chinese language, while using Chinese characters meaning “the horse bullying the honest [of the world].” The parody refers to a 70 KPH traffic accident occurred on May 7, 2009 in which a Chinese pedestrian, Tan Zhou, was killed on a downtown Hangzhou crosswalk by a rich college student Hu Bin, who drove his Mitsubishi through a red light.

Hu Bin’s dangerous speeding and the reactions of his friends, who joked with each other after the accident, soon, angered the public. What especially made netizens become outraged, according to Chan (2009, May 13), was that the public did not arrest the driver.

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immediately, but instead, after interviewing Hu Bin’s friends, claimed in a rush that the suspect was driving at 70 KPH—just 20 KPH over the speed limit in the zone of the incident—when he hit the victim. However, many witnesses, who estimated that the speed of the car was at least 100 KPH, told local media that Tan was bounced five meters into the air before landing on the ground 20 meters away. Chinese well-known writer, blogger and professional racing driver Han Han stated on his blog that the speed was at least over 120 KPH at the time of impact.

There was a wild speculation that the driver’s mother was a high-ranking official in Hangzhou, and netizens expressed their concern that the driver’s rich and powerful family might have already bought off the police. After public outrage flooded the Internet, Qi Shi Ma was created. According to Hudong.com, a user-editable online Chinese encyclopedia, netizens made up a legend for Qi Shi Ma:

“[Qi Shi Ma] once roamed freely before being trapped in the Well of Commerce (Jiao Jing) (sounds the same as “traffic police” in Chinese language), which was in the ancient Qiantang, the current Hangzhou, and sealed by centuries of grass-mud horse excrement. It was customary for the rich in Qiantang at that time to cast their treasures into the well when faced with difficulties to protect themselves from evils and disasters. Finally in May of 2009, the horse of deception burst free again to cause mischief.”

The creation of this mythical creature conveys people’s outrage and anger towards the police in particular and the Chinese authorities in general. People paid great attention to this event because resentment for the rich and powerful was at its peak among Chinese citizens at that time. China Daily (2009, May 16) reported that, in order to mask their protest, people made products and merchandising about Qi Shi Ma online and offline.

The T-shirts with “70mph” were sold in Hangzhou stores. Under the pressure from the public, the police had to arrest the driver, publicly apologize for the initial handling of the case, and make new announcement confirming that the driver was driving at a speed between 84 and 101 KPH when the accident happened, so that the driver should take full responsibility. Later, an agreement was reached between Tan’s family and the driver, who agreed to pay 1.13 million Yuan ($164,800) in compensation (Wang, 2009, May 21).

In the Qi Shi Ma parody, the victim—with whom almost all netizens sympathized—was defined as “honest”; the police—who always ask for bribery and bring disaster on the world in Chinese citizens’ opinions—were described as “evils.” The netizens oversimplified the discussion of this accident: the rich man was automatically identified as the bad guy while the poor man as the honest and good. This oversimplification made the “decoding” of this event lack reason and accuracy, but on the other hand, it neatly revealed the tension among contrasting social classes and the credibility crisis of officials in China.

**Ye Gao: the adult version of being “very yellow, very violent”**

The phrase “very yellow (pornographic), very violent” became one of the most popular phrases on the Chinese Internet in 2008. Based on the reports from Kennedy (2008, January 8) and Zhejiang Online News (2008, January 7), this phrase originated with a Beijing-based Chinese primary school student Zhang Shufan, who was interviewed by the CCTV news program Joint News Broadcast on December 27, 2007 on the dangers of online pornography. During the interview, this 13-year-old student stated
that “the last time when I was searching for information, one window popped up. It was very yellow and very violent. I hastily closed the page.” After the interview was broadcasted, the expression “very yellow, very violent” immediately became a popular catchphrase, which was used by Chinese netizens to satirize government’s hypocritical purpose of interviewing that little girl who could not coin such an adult-like phrase on her own. In most of the netizens’ views, Zhang Shufan was a puppet for the Chinese government and CCTV to support the new regulations on Internet. Videos, photographs, spoof cartoons, and comments poured onto the Internet overnight.

The adult version of being “very yellow, very violent” that gave rise to another round of fun egao (or spoofs) targeted at CCTV and the national anti-pornography campaign emerged on an interview on the Network News, Focus Discussion, and News 1+1 programs of CCTV. China’s Internet Illegal Information Reporting Center (CIIRC) criticized Google’s search engine for its erotic content and demanded it to clean up its search engine. During this interview, an adult, Gao Ye, a college student, was asked his opinion about “Google China disseminates large amounts of pornographic and vulgar information.”

Similar to the 13-year-old girl, Zhang Shufan, Gao Ye expressed his own antipathy feeling to the online pornography. He stated that:

"I feel that the pornographic or obscene information on the Internet is particularly harmful. The harm becomes especially big when it is linked by Google. There is a fellow student of mine. He had been somewhat curious about this sort of thing. So he visited pornographic websites and he ended up being very absent-minded (xin shen bu ning) for a while. Then the state began an anti-pornography campaign. He did not go there for a while and he

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got better. Then he found out that when he went through search engines such as Google.cn with many users, he could still reach these kinds of websites. So he went back to visiting those many linked websites. He suffered a relapse."\(^{58}\)

The interview with Gao Ye spread instantly on the Internet and various parody comments were posted about him. Netizens titled Gao as a “pure and innocent university student” and “male version of Zhang Shufan.” Meanwhile, Gao’s phrase “xin shen bu ning” (absent-minded) became popular overnight. Through RRSS, netizens found out later that Gao had been an intern at CCTV’s Focus Discussion program, outraging netizens as they queried Gao’s motivation in speaking for the government (Martinsen, 2009, June 24). What’s more, netizens also wrote a sarcastic letter to Gao Ye on Hudong.com (Fauna, 2009, June 21; “Gao Ye,” 2009; Dwang, 2009, June 20).

The sudden popularity of these phrases can be understood as a collective parody of the netizens satirizing the state’s repeated efforts to “clean up” the Internet and the CCTV’s complicity with it by staging news. In this online parody game, because Chinese netizens distrust their state media and realize that everyone can become a target and everyone can target others, they decided to create ties and form a coalition to oppose the authorities’ control over freedom of speech.

**The Green Dam Girl**

In 2009, the Chinese government released a controversial web filtering software called Green Dam Youth escort. The original plan called for it to be installed on all computers sold but this requirement deeply angered both domestic and international computers makers. While Government authorities justified that the software aimed to

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filter “unhealthy” pornographic information in China, critics argued that it was meant to censor politically sensitive information. Users voiced their anger in forums and blogs, circulated petitions condemning the plan, and called for a boycott of the Internet on the day the filter was introduced, July 1, 2009.

“Spoofing is a very classical Chinese Internet culture.” Chinese netizens absolutely would not let the disgusting Green Dam software off the hook. Thus, Chinese netizens created “Green Dam Girl” to ridicule the government’s efforts to censor the Internet. There are at least twelve versions of the Green Dam Girl.

Chinese blogger Hecaitou stated that the images of Green Dam Girl “show the creativity of the post 80s generation.” In his personal blog, he posted eight versions of Green Dam Girl, one of which holds a rabbit (the Green Dam software’s mascot), wears a hat with a River Crab logo and a red badge asserting ethical and moral conformity, which is called “zuofeng” in Chinese (alluding to various government regulators hired to promote ethical and moral principles during the last few years), and carries a bucket of glue or paint, together with banners to close down profane websites (Hecaitou, 2009, June 14). Another version features the Green Dam Girl dragging the grass-mud horse along in chains, suggesting that the latter has been tamed, with the Green Dam Girl saying “I am a rich girl worth 400 million Yuan (alluding to the amount of money the government paid for the Green Dam software) and the no-good information is very disgusting,” while the grass-mud horse states that “I am just an alpaca” (ibid.).


Chinese netizens condemned the restriction of freedom of speech online through Anti-Green Dam movement (spoofing activities), including parodying the Green Dam logo, advertising imagery to give it sexual meaning, and creating the Green Dam Girl cartoon. By transforming something that the government considers serious into something funny, netizens successfully downplay the importance of what the government considers significant and reveal the stupidity and hypocrisy of official state culture.

The aspect of economy

The new media’s communication, which has the ability to shatter the constraint of geography, overcomes distance, and flattens the world by becoming instruments and engines that promote the economic development of China, especially as the Chinese government hopes to leapfrog European and American advances and to become a developed country with the help of new media. Meanwhile, for non-democratic countries, such as China, “human rights violations are assumed to change for the better” when these countries “are absorbed into networks of international norms and when economic development takes hold.”61 For the Chinese government, the freedom of speech on new media is an important part of a nation’s well-being and is therefore regarded as important to a nation’s security, leading the Chinese government to actively promote the use of new media by Chinese people. If the Chinese government wants to continue high rates of economic growth and become the world’s second largest economic nation, they need to keep a high new media penetration rate and push Chinese companies to the cutting edge of technological innovation.

High Internet penetration rate

New media are commonly used in places with higher economic development, higher concentrations of creative class jobs, more openness to diversity, higher levels of high-tech industry, higher rates of innovation and higher levels of human capital (Florida, 2010, October 27). However, the introduction of the Internet has also had an impact on China’s less developed areas, such as rural areas, on the aspect of economic development (Zhao, 2008; 2009). The Internet in China has been developing along with the country’s reforms and opening-up. As China’s economy continues to make swift progress and people’s demands for digital products keep increasing, the Internet has reached many people, no matter which regions they are living in, who in turn make higher demands on it. The introduction and popularization of the Internet in China eliminates the poverty in certain impoverished regions, narrows the disparities between newly rich urbanites and poverty-ridden peasants, and promotes the economic development in both developed and less developed areas.

At present, China has more than 500 million Internet users, which represent a penetration rate of a mere 38.3 percent of the entire population of 1.3 billion. Even though certain backward areas are still not able to afford computers or have access to the Internet, Chinese companies must realize a similar Internet penetration rate as the U.S. (about 76 percent in 2012) (“New Media Trend Watch,” 2012, August 8), which will bring increased business and market opportunities to them.

Hence, in addition to promoting Internet development and application, raising the Internet’s accessibility of the population in the coming years and connecting themselves
to the potential Internet users in less developed areas of China are currently urgent matters for Chinese companies, because in the long run, new media, especially the Internet, may have the strongest impact in the rural areas of China.

**Technological innovation for Chinese companies**

In a networked authoritarian state, there is no guarantee of individual rights and freedoms on new media. However, consumers still have the ability to voice their opinions about companies and brands online. The CCP leaders should realize that they cannot control everybody all the time if they are going to be a technologically advanced global economic powerhouse.

Internet, as the representative of new media, now has more users in China than the entire population of the United States. What’s more, China has the world’s most active social media users. According to a new McKinsey survey, with 91 percent of respondents saying they visited a social media site in the previous six months compared with 70 percent in South Korea, 67 percent in the U.S. and 30 percent in Japan (Chiu, Lin & Silverman, 2012, April). As a result, most marketers and businessmen are therefore trying to find a way to engage with the increasingly affluent social media users, who are potential consumers of theirs, so as to expand product and brand recognition, drive sales and profitability, and engender loyalty.

Social media use technology to enhance the ability of people to interact with other consumers, who increasingly go online to discuss products and brands, seek advice, and offer guidance. In the business world, the “meanings” shared by social media users is created by effective interaction, which means establishing trust communication channels
that support and enable collaboration, and that build engaged teams by removing barriers and frustrations created by traditional structures.

Social media especially in the form of collaboration have the promise of creating more efficient companies through business collaboration, unlocking companies’ hidden knowledge through universal interaction, lowering the cost of software through open source collaboration, obtaining relevant information more quickly through search engine, and making companies more agile and responsive through the requirement of speed in spreading information.

Social media also enhance companies’ abilities to have conversation with their consumers. It is important for companies to have two-way conversations that involve consumers, rather than carrying on a monologue. In order to obtain successful communication with their consumers, companies should engage in interesting topics, which are determined by companies through observing consumers’ posts. Additionally, daily online monitoring of conversations can be a crucial crisis management tool to alert companies on critical customer service issues. Because of the speed of information dissemination across the social media, there is virtually no control over the comments and feedback of consumers, investing time, effort, and money to monitor the conversations between companies and consumers on the social media on a daily basis that can assist companies to avoid complaints and manage crisis.

“Giving feedback” also provides an important part of successful communication. Companies can now use social media as tools to gather qualitative feedback from consumers. Social media mining is cost effective; meanwhile it is able to generate a large
sample size needed by companies. By collecting, gathering, and sieving out representative data and comments, companies can effectively revamp their brand image, strengthen their brand associations, and even shift their brand preferences. Moreover, companies can give feedback to consumers’ reviews and opinions about their brands by someone who is always on the lookout for feedback or comments from consumers and someone who is working to update and fill the company’s digital ecosystem with new content, so as to respond to the situation before it gets out of hand.

In order to craft marketing strategies that take advantage of social media’s unique ability to engage with customers, Chinese companies have to identify exactly how, when and where social media influence consumers through identifying social media’s four primary functions—to monitor, respond, amplify, and lead consumer behavior (Divol, Edelman & Sarrazin, 2012, April). For Chinese companies, social media can no longer be run solely by managers in marketing or public relations. Instead, they should be built up with the help of a clear framework and an advanced system to assist top executives of the companies to evaluate their investments in operating social media platforms and scale their social presence on these platforms so as to create new brand assets and open up new channels for interactions.

In new China, communication via social media is having destructive effects on traditional advertising media since more and more audiences have become more networked and attentive to one another. In other words, compared with the information on traditional advertising media, the communication on social media has a greater influence on purchase decisions. Chinese consumers prize peer-to-peer recommendations
because they lack trust in formal institutions. In general, they rely on word-of-mouth from their friends and families (F&F), many of whom share their opinions and give feedback about the products or services through social media platforms (Magni & Atsmon, 2010, April 30; 2012, August 22). The broadcasting of Companies’ brands information through interaction among friends and families on social media platforms can achieve greater effects than on traditional advertising media in terms of higher brand exposure and more brand identity awareness.

In order to use Chinese social media to create meaningful value for the businesses, Chinese companies should realize that word-of-mouth, which is a local phenomenon in China, is an essential brand-building tool for them. They should use the social media platforms, where Chinese consumers share their opinions about the products, to engage the vast and increasingly affluent online audience who uses social media as a vital source of information for brand and product decision. Moreover, for building brand and product recognition efficiently, Chinese companies should wage a battle in a growing scale. They need to initiate investments in a few geographic markets first, in which the economy is developed and the social media can influence consumers’ purchasing decisions greatly. After their brands are known among consumers living in these areas, the companies then can expand their market to other developing regions of China.

The rise of Chinese social media Weibo, which is changing communication in today’s China in terms of speed, choice of language, and even openness (Tang, 2012, September 5), raises a question on how Chinese companies should be communicating since the traditional style doesn’t align with a platform like Weibo. Through Weibo,
companies’ brand value can be maintained and enhanced by genuine interaction within the target audience, rather than through “zombie followers” (automatic reposting from dummy accounts) or the “internet navy” (paid posters). So far, according to Tse, Xu and Cainey (2012), there are more than 30,000 companies that have begun promoting themselves through Weibo, including massive traditional retailers. Beijing’s Xidan Department Store, the Shuang’an Department Store, and Modern Mall all opened their official Weibo accounts at the beginning of 2011, but so far each of them has only attracted 20,000-30,000 followers and merely posted sales promotions, which are not enough to develop the marketing potential of social market.

Weibo’s shelf-life is much shorter than the one of traditional media. Companies need to constantly and systematically monitor their Weibo accounts through listening to and responding to their audience fast. Especially during a time of corporate crisis and scandal, fast corporate responses and even efficient apology communications become more pronounced. If the company receives complaints from their consumers on Weibo, they might risk escalating the complaints into nasty public relations issues in just a few hours, because they can make a follow-up to such negative complaints immediately with real-time online monitoring.

Choosing the language is also a challenge for many Chinese companies conditioned to communicate with an official with a cold tone. Twitter has a limitation of 140 characters, which means only a short sentence with a linkage in English. But on Weibo, unlike on Twitter, 140 characters means a paragraph, a story and even a news reports in Chinese language, offering more possibilities for companies to diversify the style and
tone of the language. In order to attract audiences who in turn will engage and participate, Chinese companies need to choose conversational and informal language, which sounds approachable and warm, to engage their followers in conversation on Weibo.

In addition to speeding up the interaction with consumers and choosing suitable language on Weibo, being genuine and open is also an important question for study or discussion for many Chinese companies, many of which are known for “zero tolerance” when they come to bad news, negative feedback or criticism in the public domain. For these companies, in order to build brand advantage in the current keen business competition, they have to understand exactly how to engage with honest and authentic communication.

Facing the challenges brought by the new media era and the eager adoption by Chinese consumers of homegrown social media sites, the capability-building strategies on social media are vital for Chinese companies—whether multinationals or locals—to gain insight and engage with a vast and increasingly affluent market, while adapting and succeeding in current commercial competition in a globalized age on the aspect of supply chain management, stakeholder management, quality control of products and services, improvement of company reputation, enhancement of customers’ acceptance of brand value, and public relations capabilities specifically directed to social media. In a fast-changing and dynamic market like China, companies that want to tap into the power of social media should utilize new media to manage and maintain the relationship with their customers and suppliers through designing processes for information release and public
relations, and setting up an all-around crisis management mechanism so as to promote corporate values and enhance brand identity of themselves.

THE FUTURE OF NEW MEDIA IN NEW CHINA

The future of online China, and maybe—given the sheer weight of numbers of Chinese Internet users—the future of the Internet in China in general, will depend to some extent on the nature of the Internet itself and the Chinese government’s long-term plans for the Internet.

The nature of the Internet itself

In general, the development of the Internet on the aspects of politics, social life, culture, and economy in China are all based around the assumption that the introduction of the Internet is good and will have positive effects on Chinese individual citizens, on Chinese companies, and on the Chinese government. However, discussions of the Internet as a new form of media in China are not always positive. Many studies on the Chinese Internet have attempted to define and document what has come to be known as “Internet addiction” (Cha, 2007, February 22; China Daily, 2010, February 3; Fryer, 2010, January 23; Griffiths, 2005, October 10; Tian, 2010, January 4). The Internet is dangerous for young people and the danger is seen in Internet’s highly addictive nature. Young Chinese see the Internet as “fun” or a “game” (Barboza, 2007, February 5) and they assume that their online behavior will not have any consequences for their offline lives and therefore engage in far more risky actions online than many of their peers in other countries. For Chinese youth, the virtual world provides a venue for expressing...
autonomy that is not available to them in the real world and in the virtual world; Chinese youth can do as they choose without concern about the impact of their behavior on others (Jackson et al., 2008).

In contrast to the Internet users in other countries, Chinese netizens are less connected to the World Wide Web, and therefore less influenced by global Internet trends. Instead, Chinese netizens have developed their own Internet culture. They do not project their offline identity onto their online actions, and instead attempt to hide their offline identity behind online forms of anonymity. However, this doesn’t mean that there is no relationship between online community and offline society in China. Instead, on the Chinese Internet, online interactions and activities often influence offline events, and online information is beginning to change people’s perceptions, identities, and relationships offline.

The Internet is not merely a “tool” used in offline society, but also an independent “space” for political, social, cultural, and economical discourse. As a typical product emerged from this online public space, RRSS created platforms for Chinese netizens to obtain freedom of speech and democracy, but also brings Internet violence, which is Chinese Internet’s other nature, leading to great damages to Chinese individuals both online and offline.

Through RRSS, the Chinese netizens post information online for seeking help from the online community to punish someone who wronged them but sometimes this kind of punishment gets out of hand. Occasionally, one of these personal requests for vengeance or punishment of an individual “evil person” catches the imagination of the online
community and causes the formation of large mobs of Chinese netizens to “hunt” for the “guilty” individual. Once the “target” has been tracked down, RRSS leads to a severe harassment of this individual, their family, their employer, etc., with often-drastic consequences for the targeted individual.

In the story of that 13-year-old girl, Zhang Shufan discussed earlier, anonymous netizens began RRSS on her and posted all sorts of her personal details online, including her date of birth, school, academic grades, awards, commendations and so on, and even the name of the hospital where she was born. Anonymous netizens even drew a cartoon depiction of a crying Zhang Shufan with her shirt falling off her shoulder and saying “Very yellow, very violent” with the CCTV logo, promoting her father to respond in kind with an open letter. Some netizens opposed this kind of human flesh search targeting at a lovely little girl and felt that singling out one individual for abuse by an entire community of online mob was irresponsible and unfair (Martinsen, 2008, January 16). The Internet violence has led to a severe molestation on Shufan Zhang’s day-to-day life.

The future development of the Chinese new media cannot avoid the negative effects resulted from the nature of the Chinese Internet. In one sense, the real-name system has the ability to prevent Chinese netizens from Internet addiction and Internet violence. The opening discussion on Weibo, undoubtedly, is a noticeable improvement for freedom of speech in China though; the Chinese government ordered Weibo users in the capital Beijing to register with their real identities to post online, so as to prevent so-called rumors on the site (Lee, 2012, May 2). The other major cities are expected to follow soon.
Registering real identity will require each service provider to have an administrative license. If a service organization doesn’t have license or spread information related to pornography, gambling or other harmful contents, they will lose their license. Real-name system online might be seen as another crackdown on freedom of speech in China, but it is meant to ensure “the privacy and secrecy of individuals, corporations and the nation” through decreasing and to some extent eradicating Internet addiction and Internet violence. Netizens are much less likely to do anything wrong because they know they will be identified by authorities if they disturb the social order or encroach on other citizens’ human rights (Humphries, 2012, June 7).

**Government’s long-term plans for the Internet**

The creation and maintenance of a “harmonious society” has been one of the main aims of the Chinese central government (Xinhua News Agency, 2005, June 27). The concept seeks to combine the continuing rapid development of the Chinese economy with gradual political reforms designed to “forge an ever closer relationship between the people and the government,” while promoting “stability and unity.” Thus, the government aims to maintain public order while pushing the country towards ever-greater economic prosperity.

As a result of this aim, the Chinese government, who thinks that law and order are important to achieve stability and unity, regards the Internet as an electronic public space.

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in which a police force is needed to keep order. The Chinese police’s conventional role of maintaining social order and public security is extended from offline to online. This means that the myriad actors and activities on the Internet—content providers, websites, blogs, B.B.S., Internet cafes, and individual Internet users—are all under the jurisdiction of the Internet police.

While the political structures in China is changing and officials at all levels of the Chinese state are showing a willingness to reform China (Buxi, 2008, July 10), any public outpouring of criticism against the CCP or the central government online seems unacceptable. The Ministry and several other government agencies have an elaborate system to keep unwanted topics off the Internet, including pornography and references to such taboo topics as democracy, freedom, and gambling. The netizens are supposed to remain quiet and obedient, and the Internet companies have to serve two masters: on one hand they need to keep users happy, but on the other hand they are obliged to obey the law in China as well. Both Chinese netizens and Internet companies are compelled to explore the elasticity of their boundaries.

However, Chinese authorities have two main problems in controlling the Internet, one of which is the high speed of communication via the Internet and the other is the vast size of the Internet. The Internet has grown so quickly and so big in China that the government cannot keep ahead of all the illegal sites (Barboze, 2006, March 8). One more problem for the Internet censors points to the fact that there is not a clear policy about what is banned from the Internet except for the “double T” (Taiwan and Tibet). The growth of monitoring agencies has moved control of Chinese new media from the
ideological areas to structural rules less connected to political policies, making the guidelines less clear to both the controllers and the controlled (Pan, 2000). The government should realize that Internet censorship may be political, but it’s not high policies.

Additionally, as the number of Chinese Internet users continues to increase and the Internet technology keeps developing, the Chinese government has to reconsider how the Internet policies and legislation, which ranges from mass closings of Internet cafes to the installation of control mechanisms on computer terminals, will influence the maintenance of a “harmonious society” and the nation’s image in globalization. The Internet has so much to do with freedom of speech. It has become a prominent forum where the public can make its opinions known to the government, building a bridge between the governing and the governed. The Chinese government should realize that “it is impossible for them to control the Internet unless they shut it off—and they can’t live with the consequences of that”\textsuperscript{64} and the openness and transparency are the only way to achieve a “harmonious society”.

Today, there are more than 500 million Internet users in China. Based on these figures, increasing numbers of scholars believe that ever more Chinese people are taking advantage of the Internet to express and discuss their own views on social matters, which in turn contributes to the Internet becoming a public sphere that will enhance and promote democracy in China (Buchstein, 1997; Dittmer & Liu, 2006; Froomkin, 2003; Wu, 2007; Zheng, 2008). Phrases such as “online activism” (Yang, G., 2009), “cyber

rights” (Godwin, 2003), or “liberation discourse” (Damn, 2009) are employed in a liberal democratic sense, thus associating technological advancement with the emergence and development of a civil society in China.

According to Donald and Keane (2002), the future development of Chinese new media, especially the Internet, may be still under the jurisdiction of Chinese sovereignty within the Chinese territory in the long run. However, new media, especially the Internet, however they are defined, may very well be developing into the “public sphere” that is essential to any democracy as the Chinese government gradually becomes aware that the Internet will bring revolutionary change to China and the implementation of a powerful, sophisticated, and far-reaching filtering system on the Internet will threaten the stability of the country. Meanwhile, the free exchange of uncensored information on new media that can be likened to the frontier of the media will bring a new “openness” and new “freedom” resisted or not by the authorities, to China.
CONCLUSION

China’s political system underscores the fact that the CCP dominates state and society in China through its permanent monopoly on power. The government’s autocratic rule is also embodied in controlling the coverage of the Chinese media. The party leaders utilize Chinese media to unite people for fighting against any challenges to China’s national sovereignty or international status.

The three events that occurred in China in 2008 show us a “truth” that Chinese media system is fragile under the shadow of China’s politics. Chinese authorities not only control the domestic media on the coverage of sensitive event but also require that the foreign providers must comply with restriction designed to suppress political dissents and to track down offenders.

Michael Anti (2012, June) calls China as a BRIC country. BRIC is abbreviation of Brazil, Russia, India and China. The emerging economies of these countries are really helping the revival of the world. But at the same time, he ridicules that China is also a SICK country, which means Syria, Iran, China, and North Korea—the only four countries have no access to Facebook in this world. Anti’s statement is a metaphor of the current state of new media system in new China—accompanied by dramatic economic and social development, the information on new media is still under the strict control of the government.

Over the past years, the metaphor of cat-and-mouse-game has been adeptly used to describe the continuing fight between Chinese government censorship—the cat—and the netizens—the mouse. In the opinion of many, China has the most sophisticated media
censorship system in the world, aiming at both traditional media and new media. Chinese traditional media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and even television serve as tools for the party. Combined with the government’s tight control on traditional media, the Chinese new media surveillance program has also limited domestic debate on issues such as China’s human rights record and personal freedom of speech, which are deemed as “interrupting social order.” Responding to the threats posed by unrestricted Internet access, the Chinese government has a system to blacklist certain search engines, websites, and keywords that have been dubbed the “Great Firewall of China.” This is a sophisticated nationwide firewall designed to block access to materials considered to be subversive or pornographic in real-time, and which can be quickly tweaked by the insertion of additional keywords. In China, using the Internet means lots of monitoring and content filtering.

However, even within the climate of state censorship, Chinese social networks are still booming. As China’s 500 million Internet users rapidly adopt social media, the government has to constantly strive to exert its control over the Internet, blocking content it deems politically sensitive as part of a vast censorship system. The Chinese government employs an army of thousands to police the Internet (Mozur, 2012, July 3). They establish an Internet police bureau to check chat lines, look for spikes in Internet traffic, monitor and screen websites and blogs for sensitive material, and block access to violators. Besides the army, “50 Cent Party” members are also hired by the government to monitor and delete objectionable content online. China’s Ministry of Public Security (MPS) has established a system of online reporting centers that encourage citizens to
report harmful information ranging from sites displaying pornography to banned political activities. Moreover, China imported advanced technology, including the software Green Dam Youth Escort, to block access to overseas websites regarded as threatening. The government purchased much of its filtering and spying equipment from the American companies like Cisco Systems, Juniper Network and Dynamic Internet technology, which provide the “backbone” of Chinese Internet support (McMahon & Bennett, 2011, February 23).

In new China, the exchange of uncensored information on new media reflects a new kind of revolution for Chinese citizens, because their mindsets and lives have been challenged through the domestic social media sites with “Chinese characteristics” which provide the voiceless people a channel to make their voice heard. At present, a petition system, which is without the supervision of judicial system, exists on Chinese domestic social media sites and provides a platform for Chinese petitioners, victims and peasants to petition the central government online instead of taking the train to Beijing. Grievances just need to be tweeted to complain on social media sites such as Weibo, and by some chances, what they post might be picked up by reporters, professors or celebrities who are Big V on Weibo, attracting the attention of the whole public. Meanwhile, the exchange of uncensored information on new media reveals a new kind of revolution for China’s propaganda system which has been shaken by the information on social media, and for the relationship between the government and the media that has been changed partly as well. Even though the government wants to control the Internet, it cannot escape increasingly relying on the Internet. Almost all government agencies and city offices
have maintained their own websites and often blogs, as well. The Internet has become a key for the government to monitor what its citizens are concerned or riled up about.

In 2008, compared to Chinese traditional media, Chinese new media reacted to the emergency far more rapidly and duly reported more in-depth news from multiple angles and transferred information more transparently on more democratic channels. The virtues of the news reports on Chinese new media have enabled Chinese to be together and help each other in front of calamities, encouraged citizens to query the government’s big tragedy and censorship system bravely, while also motivating the nation to think deeply about a greater openness, transparency, and accountability revealed on new media would serve the party’s interests better, keep the political situation far more stable, and bring more benefit to the Chinese populace. Under the influence of the communication on new media, the CCP can no longer completely suppress most unflattering news. Facing the great challenges of freedom of speech on new media, Chinese government’s sovereignty on new media, especially on the Internet, has become more and more strict since 2008 as the party blocks more and more non-Chinese popular social media sites, including Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and so on.

In old China, media are arms of the government to achieve the authorities’ dream of domination. In contrast with the old days, accompanied by dramatic economic growth, rapid social development, and higher educational level that brought by China’s socialist reform and opening-up, in new China, an increasing number of Chinese sought to possess personal speech freedom to express their own opinions. The emergence and development of Chinese domestic new media enables Chinese individuals to obtain their “privatization
of expression” in a virtual world and reshapes public opinion in China. Compared with in 2008, during 2009 and 2012, Chinese domestic new media with “Chinese characteristics” develop further and accomplish successful communication to prevent the government from regulating information and limiting the expression of online opinion and challenge the national censorship machine.

Carey (1989) and Hall (2003) presented “what is successful communication” to us on the basis of the ritual view and the encoding/decoding view of communication. Before, it was very much one-way communication in old China, the government disseminated information to the public. But the Internet is different. It is created, for the first time, a sort of equal two-way communication. In the serial motion of transmission, reception, interpretation and feedback, the “meanings” of the communication on new media is created by Chinese netizens on the aspect of Chinese politics, social life, culture, and economy, promoting the development of the democracy and assisting Chinese netizens to be more aware of their civil liberties and human rights.

In the case of that strict censorship system that led Chinese critics to complain about their due rights angrily, the government has to realize that its contemporary political system will harm the construction of democracy in China and the openness and transparency are the only way to build a “harmonious society.” New media affect culture to the point of creating democracy, because they are places for citizens to let off steam, and also platforms that allow the government to get a read on what is going on across the county. Lacking transparency and openness will lead to the clamor of criticism about CCP’s policy. Meanwhile, the developments in information and communication
technology will result in economic benefits, including stimulating economic growth, increasing productivity, creating jobs, increasing the quality of services, and improving the quality of life, In order to showcase China as a democratic, open, modern, confident and nonthreatening emerging world power, the government needs to have a positive attitude towards the development of new media in China and to improve people’s free speech and human rights records through relaxing restrictions on the information on Chinese new media.

At present, more and more Chinese intend to embrace freedom of speech and human rights as their birthright. Even though the information on Chinese new media is still restricted by China’s contemporary political system, in some day in the future, it might influence the politics greatly through playing a gradually visible role in debating, recommending, and influencing particular policy actions, and as well might give the Chinese a national public sphere to prepare for the future democracy. Tai Zixue (2006) stated in the book *The Internet in China* that “a nation’s information policies reflect its economic, social, cultural, historical, and political circumstance, and are motivated by domestic as well as global drivers in the areas of innovation, economic growth, and competitive edge.”

In the future, China’s censorship policies over the communication on new media will not avoid being influenced and changed. Meanwhile, China’s development on the site of politics, social life, culture, and economy, and China’s construction of democracy will impact as well as be impacted by the communication on new media more and more inseparably, which will make this country be more

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competitive in the globalized world and perhaps achieve the noble and lasting dream of a harmonious society.
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