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How Does the Internet Influence International Politics? – Take China as an Example

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to discuss about the potential impact of the Internet, as an indispensable part embedded in today's human society, upon the international politics. There are two key points to emphasize on: How the Internet might influence the macroscopic power distribution, and how the Internet might exert its impact upon the domestic politics of a state, then influence its foreign-orientation. The article takes China as a case for study. On the one side, China's military-based cyber-power has been developing at a fast speed estimated by some scholars, and the information technology is well utilized to support conventional military power, both of which lead to the suspect and countermeasures by other countries, and there might be a security dilemma based on the information technology, similar as any other technologies in the history influencing power distribution. On the other side, the Internet also motivates China's development of economy. However, it makes less impact upon China's domestic politics, as the public tends to be accustomed to the narratives and images projected by the government, whose mechanism will be focused on and illustrated in detail in the article. The situation of the Chinese Internet determines that an "information-driven democratization" is not likely to happen in China. The authoritarian operation of the Internet guarantees China's political order to a degree, but it might reinforce the divergence of the identity and interests between China and democratic countries represented by the United States. In China's special case, the Internet plays a pessimistic role in its foreign relations on the whole, referring to three major theoretical frameworks of international relations research.

Introduction

The information revolution in the last two decades is a far-reaching phenomenon for human society, and the Internet is the most important and representative product of such a

revolution, which has been utilized in almost every field including daily communication, media, finance, military and education.

The Internet, as a type of technology, has the natural feature of neutrality. It does not bring about political impact on particular international institution, regime and norm. The impact of the Internet on international politics depends on how national-level actors and individual-level actors utilize it, and such a process is so-called cyber-politics. As Nazli Choucri points out: “Cyber-politics...refers to the conjunction of two processes or realities — those pertaining to human interactions (*politics*) surrounding the determination of *who gets what, when, and how*, and those enabled by the uses of a virtual space (*cyber*) as a *new arena of contention with its own modalities and realities* (Nazli Choucri, 2012: 63-69).” In short, the Internet, depending on how it is utilized, could exert two different kinds of impact: The first is power distribution, in which Internet’s nature of a technology weighs more while the second is idea construction, in which the content that the Internet bears and disseminates weighs more.

China has the largest online population (632 million in 2014) in the world, as it has well embraced the information revolution and the number of Internet users has experienced an exponential growth in the last decade (Lardbucket, 2014). In the meanwhile, China is a typical authoritarian state. The country is ruled by a single political party that uses censorship extensively in an effort to maintain control. China is also a rising great power, and cyber security is a high-level agenda in the relationship between China and the U.S.. Given these special characteristics, China is a good example for researching the impact of Internet at both two different levels, that is, to what degree could China extract power from the new information technology and exert it for national interests, and, to what degree would China’s domestic politics and diplomatic orientation be influenced by the expected reconstruction of identity and idea as a result of Internet-based interaction.

Internet as a Source of Military Power

Technology is one of the major factors of power distribution. On one hand, the growth of productivity and upgrading of industry driven by the advance in technology would greatly enhance the economic power of a state as the vital component of national power, and on the other hand, it endues the state with material capabilities that have always played a crucial role in a state-centric and military-oriented perspective on national security (compare Knox and Murray, 2001: 102-121; Van Creveld, 1991: 70-78). In history, for example, the creation and use of longbow greatly help disadvantaged England to defeat France in the Battle of Crecy (1346). The invention of the steam engine gave rise to the Industrial Revolution in Britain and it has afterward become the hegemony based on the strong economy and advanced firearm and battleship in the 19th century. The monopoly of nuclear technology made the U.S. embarked on a peak power in the mid-1940s while correspondingly, it felt greatly threatened to witness the Soviet Union manage to make the nuclear weapon and proactively send the first artificial satellite to the space in 1950s. One important reason of the collapse of bipolarity system after WWII is Soviet Union's falling behind in hi-tech including computer, biological engineering and material (Pan Hong, 2000). To sum up, the advancement in technology would prop up the state to occupy the better position in the international system, vice versa.

Information technology is one of the most significant technologies in 21st Century, and its potential impact on military and international security has been especially considered by governments. The accumulation and operation of cyber-power have become a realistic agenda in international politics. In North America, Europe, Russia, China, and other parts of the world, governments are setting up new units and employing personnel for monitoring, analyzing, and countering the perceived risks and threats of the global network society (Li Zhang, 2012: 801-807), which includes so-called Intelligence gathering war, psychological warfare and electronic warfare (Eriksson, 2006: 211-244).

So far, the U.S. is overwhelmingly predominant in cyber-power with the advance in information resource and advance in information technology. The U.S. controls the fundamental resources of information technology and the Internet. Ten root name servers,

which is essential for the infrastructure for the Internet, were located in the U.S.; The U.S. also controls other network resources. It has world's most influential search engine Google, the largest portal Yahoo, the largest video site YouTube, the largest social network site Twitter and Facebook. Intel has monopolized global computer chips, Microsoft control of the Personal Computer's operating system, and ICANN controls domain names of the global network ((Zheng Lilong & Yuli, 2012). The U.S. is also the main source of the world's innovation of information technology. According to the statistics of World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the U.S. ranked first in the field of computer technology with 191,835 patents from 2003 to 2007. The U.S. is the first state developing cyberspace strategy in the world. Its cyberspace strategy includes five specific elements: national interests, national objectives, readiness strength, strategic resources, and strategic environment (Zheng Lilong & Yuli, 2012).

However, there are suspects that China will challenge the U.S. in this field as a part of the scenario of the Sino-U.S. strategic game, and there are sufficient motivations for China to do so. Robert Lai describes China's information capability as a "hidden dragon". China's People Liberation Army (PLA) has actively engaged in information warfare (IW) development in an early-middle period of information revolution (Robert Lai, 2013). Since 1991, China has increasingly funded, developed, acquired, and fielded advanced cyber technology in its government, military and civil sectors...It is a deliberate attempt to develop a cyber-warfare capability as an asymmetric means to fight and defeat the United States' superior military power (Jayson M. Spade, 2011). In 1996, Wei Jincheng, a Chinese military strategist wrote to use the Internet as a platform to engage in warfare without stepping out of the door in the Liberation Army newspaper, and with such a strategic scheme China has incorporated IW as an integral part of revolution in military affairs (Robert Lai, 2013). At present, China has developed strong capability of cyber-power: "Concerning GhostNet, it has 1,000 compromised computers in 103 countries which is targeted a network of high-value targets and has a covert design with advanced bot-net capabilities...Cyber Security Forum Initiative(CSFI) discovered China's advanced technique of Layer 7 DDoS Attack (L7DA) in 2009...There is also evidence indicating China has made a great advance of C4ISR

(Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) capabilities (Robert Lai, 2013).

In China's case, the Internet seems to constitute the necessary condition for a power distribution between China and the U.S., the existing hegemony. The gap of information technology between China and U.S. shows a seemingly diminishing tendency, which has been pushed forward by China's long-term strategic investment in cyber-power. The potential benefits for China include: "Deterrence through infiltration of critical infrastructure; benefits from military technological espionage to gain military knowledge; and industrial espionage to gain economic advantage (Magnus Hjortdal, 2011: 1-24)." It is believed that China has a greater interest in keeping the gap between U.S. and China narrowing and using cyberspace offensively than other actors since it has more to gain from spying on and deterring the U.S. than the other way around (Magnus Hjortdal, 2011: 1-24). The U.S., with the strongest cyber-power, is on the other hand is angry about China's technological espionage and deeply worried about China's revision of power balance in this field and the likelihood of a comprehensive cyber warfare, in which China has the "ability to do economic harm and damage critical infrastructure; disrupt communications and information systems necessary to support conventional armed conflict (Jayson M. Spade, 2011)."

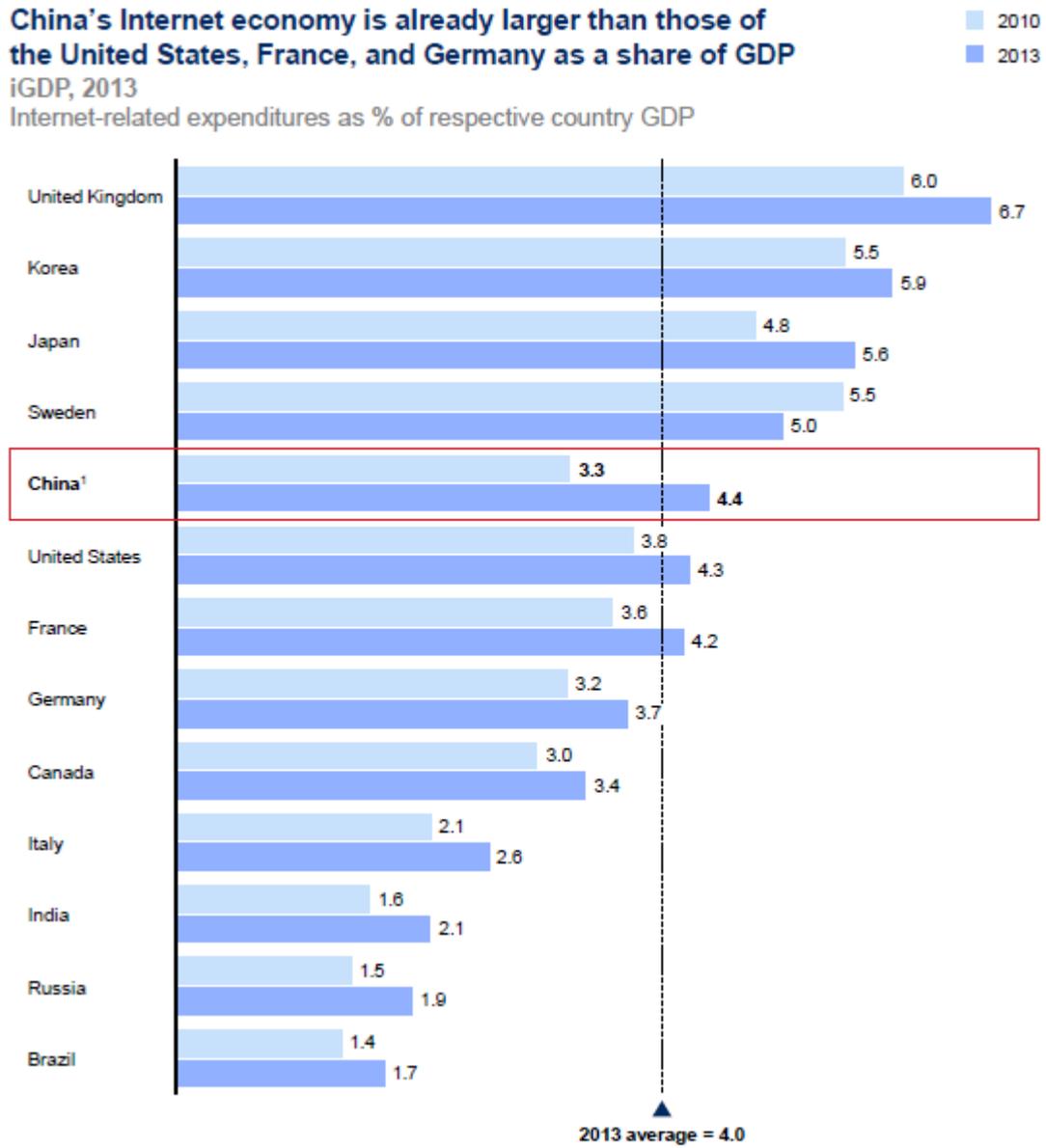
China, however, has an official stance that "the nations of the world should cherish the value of cyberspace...and should firmly oppose the militarization of the Internet...China advocates for the peaceful use of cyberspace (Li Zhang, 2012: 801-807)." If it is true that China does not conceive the information technology as a preemptively offensive power, it might feel its purpose (mainly defensive) highly distorted and it is itself that most likely to become the victim of a potential cyber-warfare. One fact is that China itself is facing serious cyber-attacks. "According to the annual report of the National Computer Network Emergency Response Technical Team Coordination Center of China (CNCERT or CNCERT/CC), the security situation of Chinese public networks and critical infrastructure is serious...the Ministry of Defence website and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) military networks

suffered 80,000 attacks per month which were launched from outside China (Li Zhang, 2012: 801-807).” In addition, “China is aware that the United States and other Western countries are actively using defense contractors such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, and Raytheon for cyber-weapon development and deployment. These groups of companies... have formed a “cyber-security military-industrial complex” to ...break into and degrade or destroy an enemy’s computer network...(Li Zhang, 2012: 801-807)” In this sense, China has reasonable rights to develop countermeasures to protect national security and interests, but it would inevitably cause the countermeasures by the U.S..

Internet as an Engine of China’s Economy

The Internet plays a momentous role in China’s economic growth. Apart from 632 million Chinese Internet users, there are 700 million active smart devices, 300 billion US dollars of 2013 E-tailing sales and 4.4% size of China’s Internet economy as a share of 2013 GDP—which is higher than the United States or Germany. The Internet development will help China 1.) Shift toward a model of economic growth that is based on productivity, innovation, and consumption; 2.) Make more efficient allocation of capital which can potentially contribute RMB 450 billion to 1.5 trillion of the Internet-fueled GDP increase through 2025, reduce financial costs and expand into new markets; and 3.) Create convenience and generate substantial consumer surplus, which stimulate the explosion of huge domestic demand (Jonathan Woetzel et. al, 2014). What's more, the Internet enhances China’s engagement in economic globalization due to the implication of information technology including realization of the benefits of targeted incentives in specific tasks or segments of the traditional business, aggregation of users/consumers to create new and diverse markets consisting of consumers who may be geographically dispersed and direct and instantaneous communication with the supplier and just-in-time delivery by the supplier (Lawrence J. Lau & Kwoh-Ting Li, 2000). For example, many Chinese small and

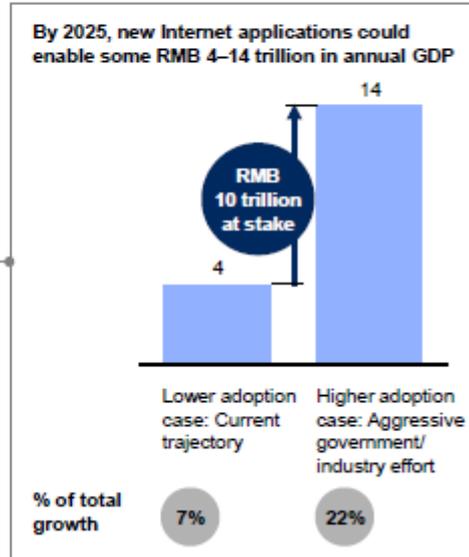
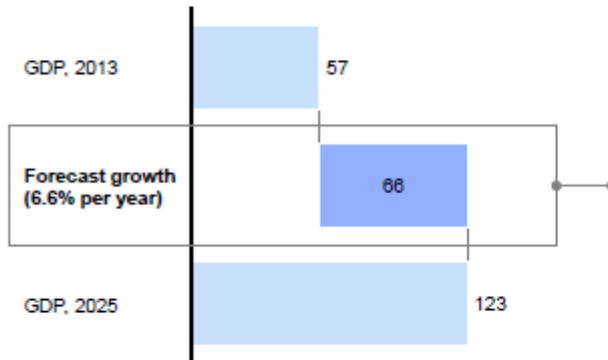
medium-size enterprise are becoming “micro-multinationals” that sell to overseas customers on B2B marketplaces (Jonathan Woetzel et. al, 2014).



The speed and extent of Internet adoption will shape China's future economic growth

RMB trillion

China's GDP is expected to more than double between 2013 and 2025



Figures above: Internet's impact upon Chinese economy

Source of the figure: Jonathan Woetzel et. al: "China's digital transformation: The Internet's impact on productivity and growth", McKinsey Global Institute

In a short conclusion, China seems to have a positive prospect in power distribution thanks to its adequate utilization of the Internet. Its military power is improved by information technology and, what's more important, the wide use of Internet significantly propels the economic growth of the state. This prominent rising power in the 21st century is tightly linked with the most important technology in the age, and a stronger China has the potentiality to change the contemporary international system. However, the Internet seems to become a miniature of the inevitable security dilemma and confrontation between challenging state and existing hegemony. With the rising of China, so-called Thucydides Trap seems to work as the U.S. has a severe concern of its world leadership. Although China has made an advance, the gap between China and the U.S. might be still large since China's capability might be overstated and U.S. capability might be underrated. However, the U.S. still tends to feel a sense of threat concerning the prospect of inevitable confrontation between challenging state and existing hegemony. With a profound identity defining itself

unshakably leading power, the U.S. is expected to focus more on countermeasures against China's advancement, but such effort is highly possible to be offset by China based on same consideration. Therefore the Internet might play a subtle role in Sino-U.S. relation, and it requires intelligence from both the Chinese government and American government to escape from the zero-sum game in the new age. Depending how on U.S. and China define their own identity and how these two states interact with each other with the identity, the competition of information technology might be intensified, or mutual trust and cooperation over Internet might be realized through deep exchange of military and institutionalization of cyber-governance with improved norms and provides a framework for managing new technology so that it becomes possible to transcend the "Thucydides Trap".

Internet as a Platform for Social Construction

Apart from power distribution, another type of Internet's impact on international politics ensues from the "use of virtual space as an arena of contention between different modalities and realities (Nazli Choucri, 2012: 63-69)". Information content on the Internet consists of words and pictures that can be disseminated by the ICT (Information and Communication Technology) as elements used to form a public image and influence public image and influence public sentiment, with corresponding effect on public trust, legitimacy and appeal (Masahiro Kohara, 2012: 84-96). Such reconstruction of social reality might lead to the transformation of identity, gradually or radically, and a different identity determines different interests and behaviors of a state in international politics.

There are a large number of researches on the Internet's effect of democratization, which implies both the transformation of regime, a political process, and transformation of identity, an intersubjective process. For scholars who is optimistic about Internet's effect on democratization, the basic logic is this: For one thing, the internet enables the individual within a state to interact with individuals or entities in the other part of the world directly. In this situation, the sense of "imagined communities" is reduced and he is likely to construct a

new identity beyond old national identity defined by the geographical scope and cultural recognition. For another thing, the internet, especially online forum and social network site (SNS), could integrate the demands of different interest groups, focus on the latest political developments, and provide a platform for public debate and output strong social force aggregated by mutual-recognized will. In short, the Internet could decrease the political loyalty to the state and promote the formation of a civil society. It plays a role of seeds implanted into the authoritarian iron curtain (compare David Bollier, 2006; Helen V Milner, 2003: 42-55; Eriksson, 2008: 211-244; Lawrence J. Lau & Kwoh-Ting Li, 2000: 132-158).

The Arab Spring in 2011 provides a valuable case about how the usage of Internet contributes to the great change of society and the regime, what's more, how such a process ultimately expanded over territory and exert great influence on the geopolitical situation. In his article, Catherine O'Donnell illustrates the role of social media in the uprising by studying the case of Tunisia and Egypt.

“Political discussion in blogs presaged the turn of popular opinion in both Tunisia and Egypt. In Tunisia, conversations about liberty, democracy and revolution on blogs and on Twitter often immediately preceded mass protests. 20 percent of blogs were evaluating Ben Ali's leadership one the day he resigned from office (Jan. 14), up from just 5 percent the month before...Subsequently, the primary topic for Tunisian blogs was “revolution” until a public rally of at least 100,000 people eventually forced the old regimes remaining leaders to relinquish power.

In the case of both Tunisia's and Egypt's revolutions, discussion spanned borders. In the two weeks after Mubarak's resignation, there was an average of 2,400 tweets a day from people in neighboring countries about the political situation in Egypt. In Tunisia after Ben Ali's resignation, there were about 2,200 tweets a day...throughout...were drawn into an extended conversation about social uprising. The success of demands for political change in Egypt and Tunisia led individuals in other countries to pick up the conversation. It helped create discussion across the region...social media...altered the capacity of citizens to affect

domestic politics. Online activists created a virtual ecology of civil society, debating contentious issues that could not be discussed in public (Catherine O'Donnell, 2011)."

There are hypotheses that similar story will also apply to China. For example, Stanley Rosen and Patricia Thornton believe that a public spheres created by the Internet for democratization can develop in authoritarian societies like China, even under the censorship (compare Stanley Rosen, 2006; Patricia Thornton, 2010). However, regardless of the prosperity of the Internet in China, there is no any signal of an Internet-driven democratization so far. Central government still holds paramount power tightly and soundly, pushes forward reforms and major policies exclusively complying with the consideration and determination of top leadership with Xi Jinping as the center. No evidence support that the Internet exerts a major impact on the authority and decision-making process from the bottom-level.

There is even no evidence supporting the hypothesis that a pluralistic ground has come into being on China's Internet. In fact, according to Cai Cuihong's research, Chinese Internet users tend to express homogeneous support to Chinese government's foreign policy. For example, in the incident on September 7th, 2010 that a Chinese fishing-vessel clashed with a Japanese patrol ship in the sea area of Diaoyu Island, there is a strong and unanimous collective support to a hard approach by the Chinese government. Same stories also happen in agendas such as China's artificial islands program in South China Sea, Xi Jinping's meeting with Shinzo Abe and China's territorial disputes with South Eastern states.

Compared with the US, which also has a large online population but instead has highly-diversified public opinions about foreign policy, China's online consensus seems to be peculiar and perplexing. The only term patriotism or nationalism is too over-simplified to explain such a fact about China's Internet. It is a kind of cognitive laziness and stereotype as nationalism is exactly an emblematic result of social construction as a component of the predominant image and common cognition. If nationalism itself always predominates, Chinese internet users have sufficient reasons to keep hatred of Russia similar as Japan since both two states once invaded China and caused tremendous damage in history, but the

ironical fact is that Russia is much more popular (66 percent positive response and 23 percent negative response) than Japan (35.5 percent positive response and 41.7 percent negative response) according to the survey by Pew Research Center, and Putin is highly popular among Chinese (According to survey by China's famous media "Today's Topic", Putin enjoys support rate above 90 percent for consecutive 2008-2014, which is even higher than Putin's best score in Russia --84.7 percent) while Abe is highly unpopular.

To illustrate the whole story of China's Internet and consensus, the following part of this article would try to and illustrate three models of information exchange at different levels and explain the basic principles of an information-driven social construction.

The Principle of Truck, Barter, and Exchange of Information

The multi-centric, global environment of Internet enables everyone is both a potential producer and a consumer of information (Shanthi Kalathil, 2011), and Internet could be regarded as a market in which individual has the natural propensity to truck, barter, and exchange not material goods, but information. The exchange of material goods is an objective process while the exchange of information is more about psychological cognition. The Internet's trait of real-time communication determines that every individual is able to receive information and produce information at the same time, and their psychological preference will influence how particular information get distributed and how such information construct public images online.

The psychological cognition of information is a complicated process in which many variables get involved. A primordialist view will consider the ingrained cultural background and inherent personal characteristic as the fundamental ground for individual's preference. It makes sense to a certain degree, but studies of communication, social psychology, and behavioral economics illustrate that preference of receiving and reproducing particular information hinges on the way above all that an individual-level unit interacting with other information sharers.

On the Internet, influential media plays a much more crucial role than individuals with regard to the power of agenda-setting. Agenda-setting refers to the "ability of the news media to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda (McCombs, M & Reynolds, A, 2002)." That is, if particular information item is covered frequently and prominently, the audience will regard the issue as more important, vice versa. It is in this sense that Maxwell McCombs says "The power of the news media to set a nation's agenda, to focus public attention on a few key public issues, is an immense and well-documented influence (Maxwell McCombs, 2006: 1-18). Also, news media has the capability of shape so-called framing effect, whose basic implication is that "how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences (Dietram A. Scheufele & David Tewksbury, 2006: 9-20)."

The exchange of information between individual-level actors is like a reciprocal process of barter while the exchange of information between individual-level actors and organizational-level actors (medias and opinion leaders) is more like an asymmetric interaction between retailers and wholesalers in the distribution chain and the former is more susceptible to the latter. How an individual-level actor filters, receives and spreads information to a great degree depend on how the media exert agenda-setting effect and framing effect on him, put another way, how the media selects particular information for audiences to know and how the media organizes the information in specific terms.

It is a subtle process for individual-level actors to produce and reproduce the information. To understand the mechanism in detail, some traits of the Internet ground should be reviewed. The first is a virtual and ambiguous identity. Its influence is multi-dimensional. "If an individual creates a virtual identity that is different from their real life identity, it can take a lot of psychological effort to maintain the false identity. In addition, one of the two options will occur, the identities may converge into one, making the virtual and real identities truer, or the individual may simply toss out the virtual identity, and start over with a new one...In regards to the formation of an individual's identity in virtual worlds,

we have inferred that exploration, which motivates such formation, may play a more dominant role than it does in the real world (Junglas et. al, 2007: 90-96).”

Adrian has referred to virtual worlds as “domains of liquid identity” because you never really know “who” the individual is and the virtual identities can be quickly “self-defined rather than pre-ordained (Adrian, 2008: 366-374).” Boon and Sinclair go on to say that, in regards to virtual worlds...it is almost impossible to tell the real identity of a user and...It provides a very real disconnect from the real” (Boon & Sinclair, 2009).

Another basic trait of Internet is the real-time communication and huge flow of information, which is usually beyond human’s instant thinking capability to follow and tackle deeply and rationally. Such a fact determines the wide use of so-called fragmentation reading and heuristic, which is an approach to problem-solving, learning, or discovery that employs a practical method not guaranteed to be optimal or perfect, but sufficient for the immediate goals. Like what social psychologists and behavioral economists reveal in individual’s propensity in market, there will be three major effects with regard to information processing in a virtual space where human reason is more difficult to reach: 1.) Priming-effect, which refers to an implicit memory effect in which exposure to a stimulus influences a response to a later stimulus ((Dietram A. Scheufele & David Tewksbury, 2006). 2.) Confirmation bias, which refers to the tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions, and individuals incline to discredit information that does not support their views (Plous Scott, 1993). 3.) homophily and social proof, which refers to the tendency of individuals to associate and bond with similar others in fear of social isolation.

To make a short conclusion, the basic mechanism of information demand and supply is that: Influential online media and opinion leaders project preferred agendas and images in particular framework to the audience and once the psychological preference of an audience gets framed, it is usually enduring and he tends to interpret information received and produce new information under the vested framework, and that’s why Nicholas Westcott says: “information technology have the potential to fractionate the public because they

allow individuals to customize the information they receive (Nicholas Westcott, 2008: 12-14).”

Given the mechanism of information distribution clear, a prudent exploration of external regulation and intervention into its operation is further needed to explain China’s specific case. According to the degree of state intervention, there could be three-level states of the “market of information.”

Laissez-faire Model

The Laissez-faire refers to a system in which transactions between private parties are absolutely free from government interference. A state of Laissez-faire on the Internet is that public images are exclusively directed by the demand-supply mechanism of information in a global sphere. The power of agenda-sitting and framing is therefore highly diversified. The fractionalization takes place as individuals tend to be accustomed to the image projected on them over and over again. The competition between different socially constructed images will be usual and intensive, and no opinion could be predominant enough to exert a monopolistic influence.

Import Substitution Model

The term 'Import Substitution' generally refers to a policy that eliminates the importation of the commodity and allows for the production in the domestic market and development of infant industry (Bruton, 1989: 20-34). Reflected in China’s Internet, the establishment of Great Firewall is the bold signal for China’s Import Substitution Strategy (ISS) in this field. On one aspect, internet enterprises and industries, which are important components in China’s blueprint of building up an “Innovative Country”, has been prospering in the last decade thanks to such a protective barrier against the competition from foreign internet enterprises such as Google, Facebook and Yahoo. On the other aspect, the online discourse system of China is directly separated from remaining part of the world.

As mentioned above, previous researches indicate that there is a paradox of identity ensuing from the division between real space and virtual space. An individual who has an access to the Internet still pertains to his state politically, culturally and geographically, however, as he commences interaction between any other parts of the world through the Internet, he plays a role of the global citizen beyond territory as a matter of fact. The stronger interaction he makes with outside world, the more propensity he has to construct a new identity no longer loyal to the state and attribute himself to particular transnational groups online. It is in this sense that the Internet erodes the sovereignty of a state and national identity of people. However, in China, such a backdrop obviously does not exist with cyber-seclusion.

Given the isolated system of online-discourse, there is no information flowing from outside to compete for the market share of consensus directly. China's domestic discourse system on the Internet, therefore, operates in a very different pattern from Laissez-faire. Assumes no other variables are intervened by authority, there would be a state of semi Laissez-faire. The consensus will still be in intensified competition and fractionalization happens as different groups within the state expresses different political appeal and attract the recognition from different individuals that receive their version of the story. The process of recognition, as mentioned above, is a subtly psychological process, and in a semi-laissez-faire the historical, cultural factors weigh much more based on three reasons: 1.) Old narratives are much less susceptible to disturbances from outside. 2.) The entrenched, intersubjective social norms and images are less changeable and easier to be projected and spread over and over again to expand its influence through all-day interaction. 3.) The isolation itself implies a strong sense of nationalistic attribution to the internet user. A nationalistic/conservative/right-wing narrative generally become more competitive in this situation.

Central-plan Model

According to the explanation of B. Goudzwaard, centrally planned economy refers to "a type of economy that gives the government total control over the allocation of resources. A

planned economy alleviates the use of private enterprises and allows the government to determine everything from distribution to pricing. Planned economies basically give the government dictatorship-type control over the resources of the country (B. Goudzwaard, 2003).” Despite of the variety of media based on Internet, China’s distributive system of discourse is highly central-planned as Chinese government is still the magisterial conductor behind the curtain. Therefore the real situation could only be interpreted by a central-plan model, in which Chinese government directs the information resource through two mechanisms: Negative Approach (containment of unwanted information) and Positive Approach (project images through agenda-sitting, framing and re-framing).

A great number of researches have indicated how the strict online censorship assist the government to control Internet and media. Vi L. Nhan in his work investigates in the method of control and summarizes it into three main categories: 1.) Legal and institutional approach, which refers to the utilization of laws and administrative regulations, such as the Article 53 of Constitution, which calls for all citizens to “protect state secrets, cherish public assets...respect public order and social morals” (Article 53); 1997 Criminal Law, which further prohibits media freedom by making it a crime for any individual or organization to “divide the nation” or “destroy (national) unity, and specific items in the regulation prohibit private ownership of direct international connection, and state that all direct linkage must go through the state-owned Internet Service Providers (ISPs): ChinaNet, GBNet, CERNer or CSTNet, which also requires all users to register to obtain Internet access, and deems “harmful information” that is...“subversive” as forbidden. 2.) Political approach, which refers to the control directed by Central Organization Department and the Central Propaganda Department through so-called propaganda circulars. 3.) Economic approach, which refers to the consistent centralization of political control over the management of media as well as elimination and consolidation of controversial or vulnerable media, and it becomes possible for the government to control economic lifeline of media. 4.) Technological approach, which requires website operators and ISPs to keep records of content and user identities, and to hand these over to authorities when demanded (Vi L. Nhan, 2008: 36-51).

Apart from such a containment of information impeaching authoritarian governance, the government actively engage itself into image construction and project it on public. On the whole, there are three major approaches. 1.) Utilize the official media to address agenda-sitting and framing, 2.) Order private media to follow the regulation of propaganda to set up public agendas and describes the story in certain ways. The “Party principles” of media prescribes that news media must reflect the Party’s guiding ideology, news media must disseminate the Party’s programs, policies, and directives and news media must accept the Party’s leadership and subscribe to the Party’s organizational principles and press policies (Vi L. Nhan, 2008: 36-51). 3.) Wide practice of so-called online consensus guiders, which produces an effect defined here as “reframing” and is the most distinctive and effective method of cyber space domination and orientation.

The consensus guider, usually refers to the online commentator, is a group of people that manipulate the flow of information to promote the diffusion of certain agendas and affect the dynamic information of public opinion on the Internet through a series of planned online operations (Wu Mei & Cao chengyu, 2011). An article in Global Times describes the operation of online commentator in a countryside of China: “They are occasionally trained by rednet.cn, a forum run by the Publicity Department of CPC Hunan Provincial Committee, teaching recruits how to become a Web correspondents and delve deeper into policy issues. There are more than 100 correspondents in the county, mostly working in their spare time...This group goes online as ordinary users. They then try to put the best face possible on government policies, or praise the virtues and achievements of role models. Their supervisors give them detailed instructions on how to complete each article.

Several days ahead of China's 2008 National Day celebration, 20 commentators in Hengyang, Hunan Province were given an urgent assignment to write 1,000 posts on the discussion topic, "Emancipating minds and development of Hengyang." Local government leaders had solicited advice from netizens and wanted to counter any negative replies with positive comments. Each commentator had to edit and post more than 60 suggestions and offer advice, based on propaganda materials they had each received. Comments between

100 and 500 Chinese characters in length were to be posted on rednet.cn. They were encouraged to sign up under many IDs and post no more than five comments for each user name. There was even a guidebook of Dos and Don'ts on writing articles properly to shape public opinion (Global Times, 2010).”

It is not hard to see that such Internet commentators are well-organized, well-trained and well-disguised. Their real-time comments play a role of re-framing particular agendas that could either further support the framing effect of particular information items well consistent with official propaganda or make up for information items that fail to exert a good framing effect or even deviates from official spirit. Due to the propensity to fragmentation-reading and the pursuit of homophily, the framing effect by such commentators is likely to be even more important than information from an agenda-sitter itself, as Internet users prefer pithy information, and they are keen on realizing what other people are thinking about and try to bring himself into correspondence with them, and a prime-effect might stimulate him to reproduce the information in the same way as professional commentators do. Theoretically, more online commentators are mobilized to reframe an agenda, more possible a normal Internet user suffers the illusion of seeing common cognition and stimulate the production of the effect of priming and homophily, and if the government has sufficient reserves of such commentators to mobilize, it could dominate the public consensus efficiently and tightly at any point it wants.

The central-plan model explains why an Internet-driven democratization does not happen in China, because all hypotheses about Internet's positive role in such a process has two basic preconditions. The first is Internet is well-connected to external world beyond national boundary and has capability free from interference to form a pluralistic ground for civil society, and the second is that Internet users tend to recognize the value of democracy and are highly rational to the degree that they are capable of being immune from a government-oriented public image against civil spirit.

At this point, the panorama of Chinese Internet has appeared. It is a closed system where no information from the external world is able to flow directly in and compete. Under the system it is the government, instead of diversified media gatekeepers and opinion leaders, that grasps the power of agenda-sitting. The so-called fourth estate is not independent but subordinated to the authority to put forward public agendas and narratives in certain terms to serve as a tool for projecting images that favor the loyalty to official ideology and entrenchment of the authoritarian governance. The consecutive effect of agenda-sitting and framing makes Internet users accustomed to official narrative and they tend to reproduce information consistent with images already constructed in the brain. In addition to the mobilization of online guiders of consensus that produces a reframing effect, the government-oriented information and narrative occupy a monopolistic position, which explains the high degree of homogeneity concerning major agendas such as China's territorial disputes with Japan and Southeast Asian countries.

It does not mean that Chinese Internet users are totally deprived of ability of independent thinking or are becoming more aggressive, but the traits of the Internet itself and the Internet in China including seclusion, virtual identity, fragmentation reading and high-level priming effect guarantee the monopoly of official narrative, which has characteristics such as pro-nationalism, pro-collectivism, and anti-political liberalism. It manages to produce a spiral of silence which excludes ideas and images inconsistent with official orientation. The whole mechanism of so-called "spiral of silence" is described by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in the following arguments:

- 1.) We can distinguish between fields where the opinions and attitudes involved are static, and fields where those opinions and attitudes are subject to changes... Where opinions are relatively definite and static – for example, "customs" – one has to express or act according to this opinion in public or run the risk of becoming isolated. In contrast, where opinions are in flux, or disputed, the individual will try to find out which opinion he can express without becoming isolated.

- 2.) Individuals who, when observing their environments, notice that their own personal opinion is spreading and is taken over by others, will voice this opinion self-confidently in public. On the other hand, individuals who notice that their own opinions are losing ground will be inclined to adopt a more reserved attitude when expressing their opinions in public.
- 3.) It follows from this that, as the representatives of the first opinion talk quite a lot while the representatives of the second opinion remain silent, there is a definite influence on the environment: an opinion that is being reinforced in this way appears stronger than it really is, while an opinion suppressed as described will seem to be weaker than it is in reality.
- 4.) The result is a spiral process which prompts other individuals to perceive the changes in opinion and follow suit, until one opinion has become established as the prevailing attitude while the other opinion will be pushed back and rejected by everybody with the exception of the hard core that nevertheless sticks to that opinion (Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, 1993: 43-51).

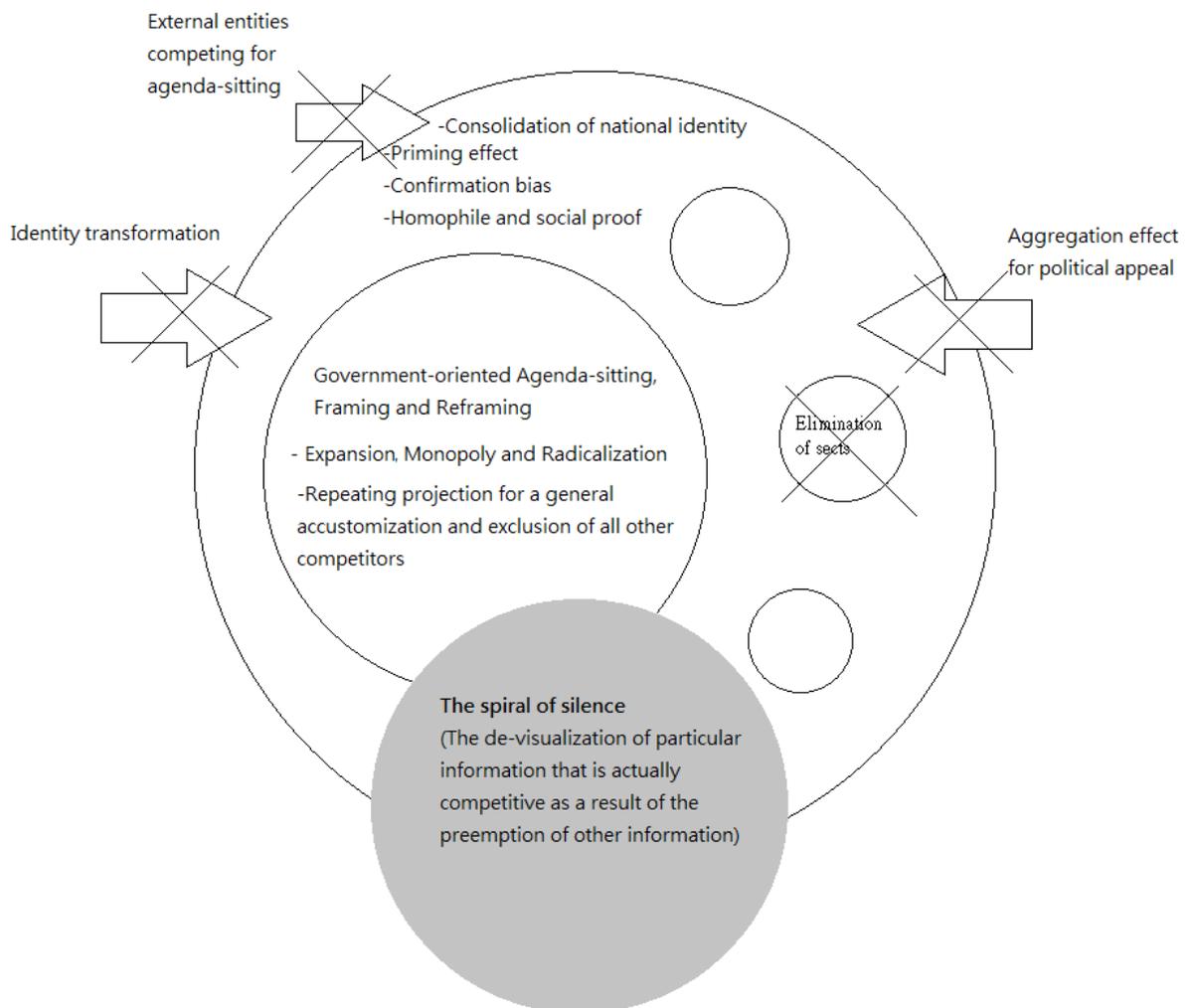
Two examples illustrate the universal existence of the spiral of silence on Chinese Internet. First, according to the observation of Cai Cuihong, there is exactly division in public consensus about agendas such as Sino-Japan disputes over Diaoyu Island at the very beginning when the agendas are just put forward on the Internet. There are opinions supporting the hard approach by the government while others are more prudent and skeptical. The latter usually become invisible in a very short period of time, but a tracking of the posting record of users in the latter group shows that their comments are not deleted by the third party. The second typical example is about a Taiwan singing star named Fan Weiqi. She was strongly condemned by Internet users on 3rd September, 2015 because she posted a photo of her children on the Weibo (most influential SNS in China) instead of sharing information of China Victory Day Parade as other celebrities did on that day. The basic logic of denouncement could be summarized as she should above all care about major events of the country rather than family trifles. However, there was a large-scale reflection on the

Internet in later few days whose basic logic is that Chinese are supposed to care about major events but it is unreasonable for us to force others to do so, and such a statement has similarly won great support, which demonstrate the very existence of diversified opinions but they were just scarcely seen on the day of parade.

The same scenario, interestingly, was played again on 13th November when a series of coordinated terrorist attacks happened in Paris, France. While other celebrities were engaged in sharing information about pray for Paris, Fan untimely posted a photo of her children again, and it again induced fierce accusation by Internet users. Such a reference case is especially valuable as it to a certain degree show what kind of power lead to the disappearance of opinion diversity, is it a mainly hard power that directly repress and delete competing information, or a persuasive power attracting normal users to follow the government-oriented narrative and squeeze out competing information against such a narrative? The case seems to support the latter.

There are evidences indicating that organized online commentators were deployed in Fan's first case by checking the attacker's account information and posting record. In fact, commentators were ordered to regard the parade as a major battlefield for consensus and deployed ubiquitously on that day to support the priority of parade in consensus and rectify untimely agendas from influential media and opinion leaders. As for the Paris attack, however, there is no evidence indicating an official intervention and Chinese government has no reason to mobilize such resource against a public figure at that point as the significance of a terrorist attack in Paris can never be on a par with Tiananmen Parade. Government expresses the support of anti-terrorist always, but it cannot be a prior agenda of propaganda as it has nothing to do with the long-term legitimacy of the party and short-term stability of Chinese society. However, the public did the same thing again even without the reframing effect by commentators. Given the variable of Chinese government intervention controlled in this case, the most possible explanation for it is that: The public is accustomed to the image projected by the government and then initiatively disseminate information with a conspicuous mark of government-oriented ideology. The common point

between the public cognition about Victory Day Parade and Paris attacks is that they should be both the highest priority to be focused on since the government and majority was focusing on it. Such a pursuit of homophily makes it possible for Internet users to initiatively prevent agendas and information of “less priority” from appearing. It is worth noticing that “priority” itself is a typical output of social construction without any strict standard, it could be influenced by education, culture, custom, etc., but in China’s case the government has asymmetrical power to decide what “priority” is, and the operation of central-plan model of information distribution is to support such a priority by repeating cycles squeezing out other narratives and images until they become invisible.



Central-plan model of online information distribution in China

Conclusion

The real situation of the Internet in China determines that it falls short of leading an information-driven transformation in China's domestic politics. On the contrary, the Internet is utilized by the authoritarian government to amplify the ideological power and "right images". It could be regarded as a skillful state-craftsmanship of Chinese characteristics as China put the firewall into practice as early as 2002 when there were only 80 million Internet users, which is only about one-eighth of the number at present. If China chose to keep the Internet open, information from outside would have the propensity to upset the government-led narrative in a breeze just like multinational corporations dominate the market of a state open to foreign countries without even basic industrial system, and Chinese government might face serious challenges to its legitimacy and political order.

Francis Fukuyama, who is famous and controversial for his book "The End of History?" published in 1989 claiming that: "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government (Francis Fukuyama, 1989)." Fukuyama reflected his opinions in later years seeing the failure of the democratic regime in countries like India, Ukraine, and Brazil. In his latest work "The origins of political order" he emphasizes that power must be produced at first (political order) to constrain power (democratization). The construction of a modern political order in the framework of Max Weber (modern law, state, and bureaucracy) should be the priority for a state. The over-emphasis on check and balance of power, he thinks, is the ideological root for the so-called political decay of the U.S..

In the light of preserving political power and order, China's intervention into the Internet seems to be rational and forward-looking. In the next decade from the establishment of the Great Firewall, China was rapidly engaged in economic globalization and has achieved a remarkable development under the orientation of the government. Few

scholars systematically focus on the role of Internet in China's development. Generally speaking, the restriction over it guarantees the legitimacy and political order in such an information-rich age, and it has become a propellant of China's economic strength and military power. The rise of China is tightly related to both the information revolution itself, the economic globalization driven by the revolution and its selective use of the information technology.

With the rise of China, there is the challenge that how China and the U.S. could properly handle the relationship with each other, and their interactions significantly influence the whole international system. Concerning the issue of the Internet, different traditions of US foreign policy defined by Walter Russell Mead would determine different approaches toward China. For example, the Hamiltonian might urge the government to develop the countermeasure to China's development of cyber-power as it damages economic interests of U.S. companies while the Jacksonian might have the same proposition on guard against a potential military cyber-attack to the America. In the meanwhile, the Wilsonian might demand the government for urging China to deregulate the Internet to guarantee citizen freedom and managing to institutionalize the world governance of the Internet, which a Hamiltonian might also advocate based on the consideration of economic win-win with China (Walter Russell Mead, 1994: 1-17).

As for China, there is low possibilities for it to transform its identity aggressively as the Internet is utilized not to deconstruct but entrench its old identity based on a very different pattern of information exchange from other areas in the world. The division between the identity of authoritarian state and identity of liberal state might increase the mutual suspect between China and not only the U.S. but also other states, together with China's expansion of power it might give to an intensified security dilemma and dim the prospect of international security. A conflict between China and the U.S. is most likely to happen when China holds the identity of "new regional hegemony" and the U.S. holds the identity of "uncompromising world hegemony" and "the guard that protect and enforce democracy, freedom and international security", which could all be influenced by information

technology and the Internet. The Internet, in this case, is a component, a miniature and an X-factor of the relationship between major powers. It's complicated role in the interactions between states in a new age waits for further research with more detailed data, more advanced theoretical framework and more precise interdisciplinary study to reveal.

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