

NETWORKED CHINA

The Internet and digital media have become conduits and locales where millions of Chinese share information and engage in creative expression and social participation. This book takes a cutting-edge look at the impacts and implications of an increasingly networked China. Eleven chapters cover the terrain of a complex social and political environment, revealing how modern China deals with digital media and issues of censorship, online activism, civic life, and global networks. The authors in this collection come from diverse geographical backgrounds and employ methods including ethnography, interview, survey, and digital trace data to reveal the networks that provide the critical components for civic engagement in Chinese society.

The Chinese state is a changing, multifaceted entity, as is the Chinese public that interacts with the new landscape of digital media in adaptive and novel ways. *Networked China: Global Dynamics of Digital Media and Civic Engagement* situates the Chinese Internet in its complex, generational context to provide a full and dynamic understanding of contemporary digital media use in China. This volume gives readers new agendas for this study and creates vital new signposts on the way for future research.

Wenhong Chen is an assistant professor of media studies and sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research focuses on the social implications of digital media.

Stephen D. Reese is Jesse H. Jones Professor of Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin. His research interests include media globalization, sociology of news, and framing of public issues.

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NETWORKED CHINA: GLOBAL DYNAMICS OF DIGITAL MEDIA AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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*Edited by Wenhong Chen
and Stephen D. Reese*

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To Hao and Daniel

To the twins

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FOREWORD

This book is the result of a symposium organized by the two editors, Wenhong Chen and Stephen Reese. I had the privilege and honor of attending the symposium and reading the book manuscript. The symposium gathered some of the finest scholars working in the field of Chinese Internet studies and yielded a superb, agenda-setting volume.

If technological development may be studied in generational terms, then it is clear that the development of the Internet in China, as elsewhere, has undergone generational change. Online bulletin boards, personal home pages, and chatrooms were all the craze in the late 1990s. In 2002 and 2003, blogs began to catch on. Then came Sina Weibo, China's premier microblogging platform, until Tencent's WeChat arrived upon the scene as a serious business rival. Along with technological shifts, user habits change. People gravitate to different Internet or mobile platforms for different kinds of communication and interaction. Government attitudes and regulatory methods change, too. Bureaucrats in China find themselves constantly grappling with the exigencies that come with each new generation of digital media technologies, refining and modifying their strategies of regulating an ever-expanding cyber sphere.

Like generational change in human societies, generational change in media technology is marked by both change and continuity. A new generation necessarily carries the imprints of earlier generations even as it blazes out its own path. A consequence of twenty years of Internet expansion in China is that the Internet is no longer a bare-bones technology, if it ever was. Instead, it has become fully embedded and encapsulated in the thicket of Chinese politics, culture, and society. It is as if the tree of the Internet were now wrapped in a deep forest. As a result, the Internet scene in China today is much more labyrinthine than before. The area

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of civic engagement and activism, the central concern of this volume, has become an arena of contestation.

The authors in this volume study the Internet by situating it within its complex social and political environment, revealing a dynamic and sometimes treacherous terrain of contention and political negotiation. They show that the actors in these interactions not only include state agencies and citizens, but also domestic and international business corporations and civil society groups. The state itself is not a static and monolithic entity but is multifaceted and changing. The networks in an increasingly networked China are multiple but unstable and often in tension. Global connections and cultural interactions exist side by side with the risks and threats of polarization, disenfranchisement, disruption, and disconnection. Only by situating the Chinese Internet in its complex, “generational” context is it possible to fully understand why it is where it is today and where it might be heading tomorrow. For anyone interested in joining this quest of critical understanding, this volume has set up vital, new signposts.

Guobin Yang

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PREFACE

As part of the New Agendas series of the Moody College of Communication, this project draws on the expertise of our faculty, as we seek to showcase our own interests, attract the top young minds to Austin, and provide a catalyst for new paths of research in emerging areas. As it happens, we have begun to establish a growing community of scholars interested in communication and China, both faculty and graduate students. Like many universities, we have established collegial ties with Chinese academic institutions and begun to travel back and forth. All these developments have helped fuel an important research focus in our college, including among the editors of this present volume.

Wenhong Chen has both professional and personal interests in China and brings a network perspective to her broader research program. Stephen Reese came to his interest in China through a broader interest in journalism and media globalization, and he has shepherded previous volumes as coexecutive editor of the New Agendas series, along with dean Roderick Hart. Together, at Wenhong's instigation, we agreed that the time had come to combine our interests and began the process of identifying top young scholars who were carrying out research on the impact of digital media networks in China.

Our call for chapters brought more than 40 proposals. A global topic by nature, the project necessitated reaching out to scholars working both outside and within the United States, but we were able to bring nine of the 11 chapter authors to Austin October 17–19, 2013, for a conference we hosted with the same title. In showcasing these young scholars, engaging with them personally—and them with each other—we hope to have collectively crystalized themes and perspectives for future research. We would like to thank our authors for their commitment and trust, and we look forward to more collaboration in the future.

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We were especially pleased to enlist the help of the following distinguished senior colleagues as our keynote speakers: Zhongdang Pan (Wisconsin—Madison), Randy Kluver (Texas A&M), and Guobin Yang (Pennsylvania), who also graciously agreed to provide a foreword. We have benefited from the comments of our colleagues Iris Chyi, Tracy Dahlby, Joseph Straubhaar, Sharon Strover, and Karin Wilkins, in the Moody College, as well as Aynne Kokas (Virginia), Cindy Shen (California—Davis), and Cara Wallis (Texas A&M). We thank all of the authors who submitted a proposal.

Our undergraduate assistants Tianyuan He, Jason Kawalsky, and Emily Xiaoyige Wang as well as graduate students Kang Hui Baek, Hao Cao, Gejun Huang, Xiaoqian Li, and Fangjing Tu provided logistical or research assistance. Daniel Mauro performed proofreading and indexing. We appreciate the administrative assistance from Anne Reed and Genevieve Bittson in the Dean's Office, who helped with all the difficult logistics of holding a conference, which was made especially challenging because it included so many far-flung guests.

Wenhong Chen thanks her doctoral supervisor, Barry Wellman, who express-mailed a hard copy of a job ad from Toronto to Durham, which kick-started her journey in Texas. She appreciates many colleagues and students at Texas, whose support has made this journey meaningful. This book would not be possible without Stephen Reese's insight and wisdom. And most importantly, she thanks Hao and Daniel for their love.

Stephen Reese would like to thank Wenhong for proposing that he add to his role as series editor to actually venture a volume project of his own (why should other faculty have all the fun?). It proved to be a rewarding collaboration indeed, and he learned much through her expertise and their many conversations about China (among other topics). He also expresses his gratitude to his former doctoral students Jia Dai and Nan Zheng, who both represented in this volume. They have helped guide him into the complexities of China as trusted colleagues, and helped challenge him to grow in trying to understand one of the world's most challenging social systems. In the academic ideal to which we aspire and sometimes reach, together we all have learned from each other. As always, he thanks Carol and Daniel as well as Aaron and Kate, and their twins, his new grandsons, James and Daniel.

Wenhong Chen
Stephen D. Reese
Austin, Texas
October 2014

INTRODUCTION

A New Agenda: Digital Media and Civic Engagement in Networked China

Wenhong Chen and Stephen D. Reese

Networks of communication have created new geometries of public deliberation and forms of civic engagement around the world, resulting in new dynamics for social change. Nowhere today is this process more vividly revealed than in China, an economically powerful, media-saturated, and connected society, with a leadership seeking to maintain stability while balancing rapid development with social control. As an important case and site for research, China challenges traditional approaches to understanding communication, media, and society—and requires new perspectives to adequately grasp these complex phenomena. This introductory overview aims to provide a guiding framework for the investigations in this volume.

Digital media in China reflect many contradictions of the Chinese society: rapid diffusion but glaring digital divides, significant economic freedom but strict political control, new opportunities for civic engagement but with pervasive surveillance. The mix of politics with market and the unique Chinese culture have created a multifaceted Internet, sometimes reinforcing while other times restructuring political and social inequalities, making research interesting and challenging at the same time.

Chinese Internet research, a crucial theme in its own right in understanding digital networks, has grown quickly since the 1990s (see reviews in Chen, 2014; Kluver & Yang, 2005; Yang, 2014). Almost every twist and turn in the tension between an authoritarian regime and the dramatic growth of Internet users has caught the sociological and communicative imagination. Scholars have been especially divided, debating whether the unprecedented levels of access to and use of a global technology may contribute to political change or social upheaval. Much of this discussion has revolved around issues of censorship and authoritarian controls, particularly in well-publicized cases involving

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foreign news organizations and information technology companies. Although the state still has enormous power to manage information flows, this focus on the more visible examples of top-down regulation and control understates how networked technologies have helped create new forms of civic engagement from the bottom-up.

Journalism, as studied elsewhere around the world, has been the traditional media driver of citizen efficacy. And indeed journalists still have to deal with many political constraints in performing that role in China, but citizens the world over have been empowered to contribute to public discourse as never before (Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun, & Jeong, 2007). Indeed, Chinese citizens have become netizens (网民), media literate regarding the shortcomings of domestic and international news media as well as joining together to create their own forms of reporting. When online comments go viral via and beyond digital networks, they become “mass incidents,” potentially stability-threatening outpourings of social protests around corruption, threats to public safety, and other issues (Reese & Dai, 2009). As Reese (2009) observes, scholars need to recast their questions against the backdrop of these emerging deliberative spaces, “created by fluid networks of expression that don’t always track national boundaries or traditional distinctions between the political and non-political” (p. 358), or even between journalism and other social practices.

This book examines the implications of digital media and the emergence of a global/transnational media space for civic engagement in a networked China. It asks whether and how mediated communication facilitates new patterns of civic practices and political association, which may contribute to an informed, connected, and engaged public in China. It explores how people and organizations use digital media technologies to navigate and negotiate their social landscapes. It aims to reveal the transformative power and the limitations of digital media technologies. We present 11 theoretically grounded, empirically based chapters, ranging from anti-corruption cases, campaigns of independent political candidates in local elections, grassroots environmental movements, and struggles of civil society organizations, to civic participation in memes, Twitter, protests, and fan communities. Chapter authors from Asia, Europe, and North America have used a variety of methods, including ethnography, interviews, surveys, and digital trace data. Undergirding these dynamic relationships are networks, based on digital media, which provide the critical component for civic engagement.

We start below, in laying out the context for these studies, with a mapping of the terrain, focusing on the historical development and current patterns of digital media access and use in China, as the results of and response to persistent censorship and aggressive marketization. Then we introduce two central themes of the book that organize the chapters: the implications, conditions, and contradictions of digital media technologies for civic engagement; and the emergence, composition, and function of a glocalized media space straddling boundaries of geography and issues.

Mapping the Terrain

Digital Media Adoption and Inequalities

By 1978, the Cold War had isolated China for almost three decades and the Great Cultural Revolution had the country teetering on the edge of economic bankruptcy. Far from achieving Chairman Mao's ambition "to surpass Britain and catch up with the U.S." (超英赶美), China found itself left behind by the West and many of its Asian neighbors. In 1978, China began the still ongoing state-initiated, gradual, and experimental transformation from a command economy to a market economy. Since then, the state has introduced a series of policies to "strengthen the nation through technologies" (科技兴国), encouraging investment and technology transfer from international corporations and the global Chinese diaspora. In particular, the state has been utilizing modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) as an engine and a symbol of modernization.

On September 20, 1987, with support from a research group at the University of Karlsruhe, professor Wang Yunfeng and his team successfully sent what is arguably the first e-mail from China to the world, fittingly titled "Across the Great Wall We Advance to the World" (越过长城, 走向世界). In 1995, Shuimu Tsinghua, the first bulletin board system (BBS) in China, was set up at Tsinghua University, quickly followed by a few other elite Chinese universities. In the same year, Jasmine Zhang, a private entrepreneur, started Beijing Information Highway Technology Company (瀛海威时空), the first commercial Chinese Internet service provider (ISP) and the first Chinese Internet café, located in Zhongguancun, a district in Beijing that eventually evolved into China's so-called Silicon Valley. Zhang advertised on a huge billboard at the main gateway of Zhongguancun in 1996, asking and answering a bold question: "How far is China from the Information Highway? 1500 meters north" (中国人离信息高速公路有多远——向北1500米).

The rest is history. Although a relatively late starter, China has been catching up swiftly on the Information Highway. The number of Internet users in China increased from about 600,000 in 1997 to 632 million as of mid-2014, while the Internet penetration rate rose from 4% in 2002 to 47% in 2014, as documented by the semiannual reports issued by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 1997–2014). As the world's largest mobile market, there are 572 million mobile Internet users, accounting for 83% of Chinese Internet users. The rapid diffusion of social media platforms, especially Weibo (微博), has significantly changed the media and communication landscape.

There have been, however, sharp digital divides and uneven Internet access and use, structured by education, age, gender, and regional differences (Chen & Wellman, 2004; Nam, Kim, Lee, & Duan, 2009). A typical Chinese Internet user is well-educated, urban, young, and male. Uneven telecommunication

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infrastructure, as well as income and education gaps, have resulted in significant differences in Internet access and use between the richer coastal region and the poorer hinterland, along with the divide between urban and rural areas (Pan, Yan, Jing, & Zheng, 2011). While more and more people gain home access, Internet cafés (or net bars, 网吧) have been unique and popular venues for Internet access and use, especially among young, working- or lower-income people (Qiu, 2013). Education, age, gender, and region affect not only access to digital media but also implications for civic engagement. For example, to use the Internet for their causes, rural activists have to rely on third parties (Wang, chapter 4). Since its introduction by Sina in 2009, Weibo has become an important venue of alternative news and information, political expression, and collective action (Chen, 2014). Yet, more than 80% of original posts in Sina Weibo are generated by 5% of users (Fu & Chau, 2013). Weibo campaigners during local elections were primarily young, male intellectuals or grassroots elites in the most developed regions such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, and Zhejiang (Shen, chapter 6).

The Complicated State-Society Relationship

Compared to the relative economic freedom in China, the Chinese Internet has been under strict political surveillance and censorship. In terms of infrastructure, the state owns and controls the few access points that link domestic and international Internet traffic. It has built a Great Firewall—a massive maze of laws, regulations, and administrative practices—to monitor ISPs and users. Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have been blocked since the ethnic riots in Xinjiang in 2009. Instagram was banned during the recent pro-democracy mass demonstrations, Umbrella Revolution, in Hong Kong in 2014. The state filters or blocks foreign news sites, social media sites, and sites carrying politically sensitive topics. All domestic and international companies doing business in China have to submit to censorship, which eventually contributed to Google's withdrawal of its Chinese search engine from mainland China in 2010.

The iron hand of the state has become increasingly covered in a velvet glove as it develops more sophisticated tactics to take advantage of digital media technologies. For instance, censors prefer misdirection over blocking, trying to make users perceive outright censorship as network error (Wright, 2014). A massive crew of online mercenaries is paid to monitor undesirable information and post pro-government/party messages in the government's effort to manipulate the online public sphere. In more recent developments, these control efforts have become more personal, with several opinion leaders in the Weibo-verse publicly shamed, and confessing on national TV business wrongdoings or paying for sex. Several editors and journalists were arrested in 2014 for alleged extortion or defamation. Both have sent chilling effects. The threat of permanent or temporary shutdown has encouraged widespread self-censorship among domestic ISPs.

The relationships between and among the state, corporations, and the emerging civil society have been complicated as they align and compete for new roles and opportunities in emergent networks enabled by digital media. This can be seen from at least three perspectives. First, the state can be the suppressor, the target, and sometimes the ally of social movements. Second, the state and its policies are neither monolithic nor omnipotent. For instance, a field experiment reveals that the policy and technological architecture of the Chinese national-level filtering system differs in targets and effects from region to region (Wright, 2014). Third, various institutional and individual actors have multiple, overlapping affiliations, commitments, and positions more nuanced than a binary stance of either with or against the state.

Indeed, there is a coevolution. A development cycle Qiu (2013) identified for Internet cafés in China is applicable to other digital media technologies: first, academics or entrepreneurs introduce an innovation, which may range from a copycat of original products or services in the United States or other markets, to a genuine indigenous service catering to Chinese culture and custom; second, the novelty triggers a phase of wide adoption that eventually attracts state intervention; and third, a revival occurs after a period of consolidation.

A few Internet firms have grown so fast and big that the state has had to adjust to them, which may erode its hegemony. For instance, while the state has rapidly expanded its censoring capacities and undesirable Weibo posts can be deleted within half an hour, the time lag allows hundreds of thousands users to see and share those posts (Sullivan, 2014). The aggressive marketization and the intensive competition actually encourage Internet firms to test or push the boundaries of state censorship (Yang, 2009). For instance, Sina Weibo staff played the role of an organizing agent by setting up a page devoted to the high-speed train crash near Weizhou in July 2011, which triggered broader debates on national issues such as product safety, official corruption, and transparency (Bondes & Schucher, 2014).

An important premise for this volume is that, digital divides and political controls notwithstanding, digital media have opened previously unavailable space for citizens to seek information, share ideas, and shape public opinions. With the Internet giving millions of people a window to the outside world and more diverse perspectives, digital media have become the conduits and the locus where millions of Chinese engage in self-representation, creative expression, and civic participation.

Theme 1: Civic Engagement: Forms, Constraints, and Contradictions

The first theme embraces the new forms as well as constraints and contradictions of civic engagement enabled by digital media. We develop this theme starting with the big picture before turning to six specific cases, where we explore the issues, forms, and tactics.

Using a large-scale national random sample survey, Zhou (chapter 1) conducts a multilevel analysis of the relationship between Internet use and civic engagement and its variation by individual and contextual factors. Results suggest a positive relationship between Internet use and civic engagement (measured as voluntary association participation and opinion expression), which is moderated by political interest at the individual and the county levels, respectively. While a higher Internet penetration rate at the county level may indicate more local Internet users, greater exchange of information and opinion, and more opportunities for the formation of voluntary associations in the local context, it is not statistically significant to civic engagement. Zhou's chapter advances the debate on the Internet implications for civic engagement in China by highlighting the importance of contextual factors. As political interest plays a more important role than the access to the Internet in affording civic engagement, the results support the normalization thesis that the impacts of the Internet have tended to be most salient for individuals who are already more active and who live in a more active local context (Chen, 2014).

Comparing social and environmental activism in Shanghai and Xiamen with ethnic riots in Tibet and Xinjiang, Weber (2011) found that the outcome of Internet- and mobile-mediated collective action depended on the nature of the issue rather than on how skillfully technologies were employed. Issues that fundamentally challenge the legitimacy of the current political power are harshly suppressed while livelihood issues, environmental concerns, and civil rights issues were more negotiable. Accordingly, Weibo posts criticizing the state, top officials, or policies are often left undeleted, but posts calling for collective action are swiftly deleted. In terms of issues, environmental and anti-corruption cases have been considered less threatening to the state and thus open up a new space for promoting political accountability, as demonstrated in the ten anti-corruption cases in Dai, Zeng, and Yu (chapter 2); the three cases in Liu (chapter 5); and the environmental collective action in Wang (chapter 4).

Instead of organized or direct confrontation, connective action—self-organized personalized politics diffused via interpersonal networks enabled by digital, social, and mobile media—allows citizens to communicate, deliberate, and mobilize for new forms of grassroots civic and political activities (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011). Several chapters advance research on this kind of connective action by examining its mechanisms and contours in the Chinese context (Dai, Zeng, & Yu, chapter 2; Cheong & Chen, chapter 3; Wang, chapter 4; Liu, chapter 5; Yuan, chapter 11). In terms of mechanisms, digital and mobile media make the boundaries between the private and the public more porous and easier to switch (Liu, chapter 5). Digital media articulate lived, private experience and emotions in the public, allowing diverse voices to circumvent the strict scrutiny over traditional media and enhance the visibility of oppressed groups. Such infiltration and leveling up of the life world into the public sphere can trigger intensive public discussion and expression when individual grievances strongly

resonate with larger sociopolitical issues, such as power abuse or inequalities (Dai, Zeng, & Yu, chapter 2). Satires, parody, mockery, homonyms, and puns are the most prevalent tactics used as expressions of dissent—bypassing, testing, and pushing the boundaries set by the state. For instance, most environmental activism has been spontaneous and pragmatic, using a moderate repertoire of communicative tactics to target specific polluters, corporate practices, or officials, collaborating with rather than challenging the legitimacy of the state (Yang, 2009).

Online anti-corruption is perhaps one of the most visible and successful forms of digital activism in China. Dai, Zeng, and Yu (chapter 2) use the concept of subactivism (Bakardjieva, 2009) to capture new forms of participation in public affairs or civic activities at the level of everyday life afforded by digital media networks. Analyzing online discussion centered on ten high-profile online anti-corruption cases, Dai and colleagues shed light on the process and mechanisms through which citizens' expression of private concerns enters into public discursive spaces, as seemingly random exposure of private affairs sparks massive discussion and action on corruption. A "space of flows" (Castells, 1999), the dynamic arrangements of distributed yet simultaneous social practices supported by digital communication networks, enables and accelerates the circulation and interaction of distributed information and people organized around shared interests. It helps to link a variety of media spaces in order to form networked power that contributes to the downfall of corrupted officials.

Cheong and Chen (chapter 3) offer a unique perspective by examining how citizens—as producers, distributors, critics, and protestors—created and circulated two memes involving the notion of "mainland invasion" across multiple platforms in postcolonial Chinese societies, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, and their sociocultural implications across online-offline spaces. They theorize and demonstrate the creation, sharing, and remixing of satirical, emotionally charged, sometimes offensive memes as "middle-ground resistance" (Scott, 1995), an alternative form of civic engagement that can generate and sustain public discussion and political action on contentious issues filtered by mainstream media. The emotionally charged satirical discourse, as an alternative participatory form of personalized civic engagement that contests official policies and narratives, offers a middle path of resistance in societies with limited free press (Cheong & Chen, chapter 3). The derogatory portrayal of mainland Chinese may resonate with concerns about the rise of China or resentments of the inflow of mainland Chinese in Singapore or Hong Kong. While it may not change immigration policies in these places, the "locust" meme was a factor that contributed to the Hong Kong government's banning of mainland Chinese tourists buying and taking more than 1.8 kilograms of imported infant milk powder in 2013 (Cheong & Chen, chapter 3). The locust meme has appeared in recent protests in Hong Kong, including the Occupy Central protest in 2014. Such "weapons of the weak," however, can be a two-edged sword. Venting, vilification, and

polarization involved in these comments may offer psychological catharsis but reinforce prejudices.

Drawing on in-depth interviews in four villages in Anhui and Jiangsu, Wang (chapter 4) advances a refined understanding of structural constraints that hinder Internet implications. ICT use was limited due to villagers' limited literacy and knowledge, the lack of leadership and political trust, as well as the perceived high cost of ICT use and its limited impact in public affairs. Multiple players, local and global NGOs, mainstream media, and local government officials were important in the success of the environmental movement in Village Q. NGOs, after learning the villagers' story from national TV, helped local activists to use digital media technologies, especially mobile phones, for communication, evidence documentation, and information searching. The pressure from mainstream media on the one hand and interactions between the state and villagers on the other eventually pushed local officials from a passive to a more active stance on environmental protection, which resulted in the relocation of chemical factories and villagers' greater trust in the government.

Mobile technology's effects on protest participation have been a perennial theme in the mobile communication literature since Rheingold's *Smart Mob* (2002). Qiu (2008) further demonstrates that mobile communication is used to engage, compete with, or bypass traditional and digital media, speeding and scaling up the formation of civil society. Few studies, however, have systematically examined mobile communication and contentious politics in China. Drawing on interviews, Liu (chapter 5) fills this critical gap. The embeddedness of mobile devices in interpersonal communication networks, as well as the mundane, pedestrian, yet diverse use of such devices, makes them a powerful tool for protest mobilization. First, the conversational, expressive, peer-to-peer communicative pattern afforded by mobile phones can articulate everyday experience and channel participants' "unrecognized, suppressed, and marginalized" emotions for contentious politics. Emotional mobilization has been one of the major repertoires of digital activism in China (Yang, 2009). Mobile phones enhance interpersonal communication especially among people who share strong ties, which has been identified in social movement literature as a key mechanism of recruiting and retaining protest participants. Liu reveals that mobile communication helps to maintain *guanxi* (关系), the Chinese notion of strong interpersonal relations that entails reciprocity and obligation, a crucial condition for citizens to overcome great risks and costs associated with protest participation in an authoritarian regime.

The Internet affords a growing awareness and a new venue of experimenting with possibilities of action previously inaccessible. Shen (chapter 6) investigates emergent politicians running for seats in district-level elections of the People's Congress in 2011 and 2012. Without the backing of the ruling party, they were so-called independent candidates. Analyzing Weibo accounts and posts of 130 independent candidates, Shen examines the candidates' social media

practices and strategies for political expression and mobilization of the electorate, despite government censorship. Weibo posts of these independent candidates focused on election and social issues, offered opinions, questioned authority, and mobilized supporters but carefully avoided challenging the political status quo. Four types of candidates are identified: intellectuals, legal rights defenders, grassroots elites, and grassroots participants. The intellectuals tended to discuss more topics about the campaign, election law, and democracy, while legal rights defenders tended to be more cynical and angry. The dominant emotion expressed was anger, which might reflect authentic dissatisfaction but could be a strategy for gaining media and user attention. Shen also illustrates constraints of digital media for political participation. First, Weibo use had limited impact on the election result, as few independent candidates won, regardless of whether they had campaigned on Weibo or not. Second, lacking election success, a sign of the relative effectiveness of Weibo campaigns was whether the candidates drew mainstream or digital media attention: a quarter of them got mainstream media coverage while more than 60% were mentioned in online media such as blogs or discussion forums. Although the space offered by Weibo for independent political communication was precarious and subjected to state surveillance and crackdown—their Weibo accounts were often selectively and closely monitored—it did allow nascent politicians and their supporters to get around significant institutional and technical barriers, thanks to Weibo's relative affordability and accessibility compared to offline media or other digital tools such as BBS, IM, or Web sites.

Drawing on a case study of the 2010 dispute between the Global Fund's Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) and representatives from the Chinese government and civil sectors, Galler (chapter 7) provides a rich account of the mixed effects of ICT-enabled networks of transnational civil society organizations (CSOs) in China. Facilitating the flow of knowledge and funding, the entry of transnational CSOs in China has benefited Chinese HIV NGOs, while indigenous NGOs have also benefited from ICTs for lowered costs of communication. Thus, to a certain extent, digital media allow local actors to form and participate in glocalized networks—combining intensive local connections and extensive global outreach (Chen & Wellman, 2009), which may contribute to long-term collective action and activism through organization and capacity building. However, the extent to which such glocalized networks affect access and mobilization of resources for development and social changes is ambivalent. The resource dependence of Chinese CSOs on transnational CSOs, combined with state restriction that has intentionally kept domestic CSOs weak, exacerbates interorganizational competition. Furthermore, ICTs could discredit consensus-based deliberation due to a lack of governance structures or discursive protocols for consensus building (Galler, chapter 7). Such unintended consequences show that the Internet may lead to polarization and disenfranchisement rather than improved communication or collaboration.

Theme 2: Glocalized Media Space: Emergence, Composition, and Function

Our second theme is situated in a larger global context, especially regarding how global forces interact with local phenomena to form global/transnational media spaces straddling boundaries of geography and issues of their composition and functions. In particular, we use the term *glocalized media space*—conceived of as the interactions between and among local, national, regional, and international media producers, distributors, and audiences—to explore how it has changed the ways citizens and activists and their organizations interact and deliberate. The term *glocalized media space* highlights the multivalent, multidirectional relationships between the local and the global, which may include acceptance, resistance, and appropriation.

The rise of China as a major global power in the last several decades has generated greater global demand of news about China. Yet, there are considerable logistic and linguistic challenges regarding covering China, which have created unique opportunities for “bridge blogs.” Zheng (chapter 8) shows that as a form of global journalism practice, bridge blogs are operated by professional or citizen journalists or activists. As the name suggests, such blogs serve as bridges that connect otherwise disconnected components in the global media space and contribute to the transnational flow of news, information, and perspectives—especially in a time when many news organizations have to cut budgets and close foreign bureaus. They complement and compete with professional news coverage. Bridge blogs that occupy more central positions, however, are more likely to translate “Chinese media content into English,” exporting news and opinions on China—and made in China—to the world rather than engaging in original news-gathering or using “referral practices” (Zheng, chapter 8).

A glocalized media space becomes especially dense when major sociopolitical events attract tremendous attention from traditional and social media. One such event was the downfall of Bo Xilai, a prominent Chinese politician, charged and convicted for abuse of power. Building on theories of the global fifth estates (Dutton, 2009), Menchen-Trevino and Mao (chapter 9) compare topics and critiques on Twitter, both in English and Chinese, regarding the Bo case. Drawing on a dataset of over 10,000 tweets from January to March 2013, they demonstrate that English-language tweets were more limited compared to Chinese-language tweets. While tweets in both languages amplified mainstream journalism, Chinese tweets had more original commentary and were more likely to be critical of the ruling party and express skepticism of mainstream news media. In addition, political activists were only found in Chinese tweets. Contributing to these gaps are differences among users, mainstream media coverage, and the linguistic affordance of Twitter. English- and Chinese-language Twitter users differ in news tropes, background knowledge, and issue relevance. Mainland Chinese who have to get around the Great Firewall to use Twitter are likely

to be more engaged in political expression that is prohibited in China. Given the significance of the Bo case in China, Chinese-language mainstream media offered more detailed coverage than their English-language counterparts, aided in part by the greater expression afforded by the character-based Chinese language compared to English within Twitter's 140-character limit.

Recognizing that civic engagement can come from unexpected places and actors, a growing number of studies have examined the civic and political potential of entertainment media. Many fans have bypassed political and economic barriers to access foreign reality shows not broadcast in China. In the penultimate chapter, observing and interviewing moderators and members of post bars (贴吧, a type of organized online forum) of foreign reality shows, Zhang and Zhang's ethnography (chapter 10) directs attention to these fascinating yet often neglected fandom communities and their civic potential. More specifically, situated at the intersection of media globalization and civic engagement, Zhang and Zhang examine transcultural media fandom and its influence on fans' reception and appreciation of local and transnational popular culture, showing that online fandom communities facilitate members' resource sharing, identity expression, and social interaction. Furthermore, online deliberation on the originality, authenticity, and monetization of entertainment media leads to a corresponding critique by members of the inauthenticity (假) and overcommercialization in programming of state-controlled mainstream media, such as CCTV or the more marketized Hunan TV.

Discussion: The Power of the Internet, Pendulum and Incremental Changes


The intellectual curiosity about the power of the Internet in facilitating social movements and regime change in China has been further fueled by the Arab Spring in 2011. On the one hand, the impacts of digital media technologies have been celebrated as transformational. The alternative public sphere can bypass the agenda setting and censorship of the mainstream media; make previously unseen or unknown dissent, resistances, and alternatives visible; and push the government for transparency and accountability (Tong & Zuo, 2014). Serving as prime portals for global dissemination of self-expression of personal emotions, concerns, and opinions on public affairs, digital media enable myriad self-organized, networked forms of contentious politics, aggregating and scaling up many micro actions from ordinary citizens without conventional organization, as chapters in this volume demonstrate. On the other hand, years after the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street movement, and various other protests, enthusiasm for Facebook- or Twitter-type revolutions in China has faded—which highlights once again the importance of understanding the implications of digital media and technologies in specific social and historical contexts. For instance, due to a lack of institutional guidance (Galler, chapter 7), ICTs may lead to unintended

consequences such as polarization, disenfranchisement, and funding shortages. The absence of vibrant civic organizations hinders the transformation of reactive, local protests into a normative political agenda.

While the pendulum may swing one way or the other, most analysts have taken the middle ground, with guarded optimism that the power of the Internet will contribute to democracy in China in the long run—and that the Internet plays a facilitating role rather than itself being the cause of sociopolitical changes (Yang, 2009). Moving beyond a binary, linear approach, a more interesting and challenging question is how to advance a better understanding of the paradoxical patterns of digital media appropriation as well as their nonlinear, contingent impacts (Chen, 2014).

In our final chapter, drawing on both structuralist and culturalist perspectives, Yuan (chapter 11) provides a broader perspective on our themes by offering a critical review of the literature on mediated activism in contemporary China, especially the construction of the public in China's rapid modernization process that has yielded new dynamics of social structure and cultural agency. While the structuralist perspective examines mediated activism in the large sociopolitical context and the changing relationships between the state and society, the culturalist approach centers on the production, distribution, and consumption of media text and events and their impact on individuals' identity, subjectivity, and ethics. Yuan further advances a multi-institutional approach (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008; Yang, 2009), which helps to shed light on the historic and social significance of indeterminate, multivalent, tenuous outcomes in a mediated process in which power dynamics and cultural practices affect one another (Yuan, chapter 11).

The literature has offered rich accounts of the aesthetics, genres, and strategies of online activism in China (Yang, 2009), and by now it is hard to imagine that any significant civic engagement, social movements, or sociopolitical changes could happen without digital media. Yet, as Liu points out (chapter 5), while many studies have examined the usage patterns of digital or mobile media in collective action, few have empirically evaluated the broader contributions and impact of such collective actions.

The concept of liberalization—defined as the growing respect for and reinforcement of citizenship and rights (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Wang, chapter 4)—may help to capture such ramifications that are “not inconsequential” (Cheong & Chen, chapter 3). Used wisely, ICTs can contribute to liberalization, as cases in this volume have shown. For instance, the anti-corruption cases are relatively effective in terms of leading to the downfall—and sometimes conviction—of accused officials (Dai, Zeng, & Yu, chapter 2). Villagers' environmental activism, for example, helps to increase trust between the state and citizens (Wang, chapter 4). A global th estate enabled by digital citizen media increases public scrutiny and holds the powerful more accountable, as indicated by the Chinese court's unprecedented Weibo-cast of the Bo Xilai trial, almost

blow by blow, which has been interpreted as a calculated move for projecting transparency (Menchen-Trevino & Mao, chapter 9). Fan activism finds a way to get around state control, and the post bar-enabled fan communities prepare them for civil discourse and collaboration, nurturing civic culture in the long term (Zhang & Zhang, chapter 10).

New forms of communication, expression, and association notwithstanding, significant structural changes come from changes in power dynamics in the communication networks that have been “programmed” to favor the political and business elites. Online anti-corruption action is relatively effective because it happens to be aligned with the interests of the regime: it can be readily used for cleaning up corrupted middle-level officials (“catching the flies,” 打苍蝇) as well as for power struggles among the top leadership of the ruling party (“hunting the tigers,” 打老虎). While the ten cases studied by Dai and colleagues are more focused on middle-level officials, high profile anti-corruption cases involving top national leaders such as the Bo Xilai case and the unfolding case of Zhou Yongkang have recently emerged. It seems that the state may have learned from netizens to exploit the potentials of networked anti-corruption.

Conclusion: A New Agenda

The chapters presented here demonstrate the growing maturity and sophistication of the field and have pointed to promising venues for future research. First, it is crucial to understand the power of digital media in their complex diversity, as we examine the broader media landscape embedded in the Chinese social structure. While traditional and digital media in China are exploited by the state to enhance the rule of the Communist Party, a growing economy has created a vibrant marketplace for them to compete for audiences and advertisers. People use a repertoire of communication and media technologies for diverse purposes in a converging yet fragmentary media landscape. Growing repertoires of channels, platforms, media multiplexity, and multidirectional interactions between online and offline media call for studies that examine the implications of digital, social, and mobile media beyond a single, specific medium or technology. For instance, only in comparison do we learn that face-to-face meetings with local officials remained the preferred mode of communication of villagers (Wang, chapter 4). Shen’s research on independent candidates points to questions about interactions between and among candidates, their supporters, and distractors beyond the Weibo-verse (chapter 6). Zheng’s chapter on bridge blogs and the global media space suggests extending future analysis to offline networks of bridge bloggers and how they cooperate and compete with media organizations, activist groups, and NGOs across national borders (chapter 8).

Second, more research is needed to take into account mobile media use for civic and collective actions. The personal, pervasive, portable, and perpetual communication accommodated by mobile devices allows users to easily switch

between the most private and the most public spaces, and gives members of disadvantaged groups a more accessible tool for civic engagement. The Occupy Central protest shows that smartphones have become indispensable tools for the mobilization and organization of protests and demonstrations, bypassing the state control of mobile telecommunication networks.

Third, comparative studies can reveal variations of digital media adoption, usage, and impacts. For instance, investigating differences between independent candidates on Weibo and those political candidates on Twitter in Western democracies can generate novel insights (Shen, chapter 6). The complexities and challenges of cross-linguistic comparisons may require cross-cultural collaboration among scholars who speak different languages as well as cross-disciplinary collaboration among scholars fluent with different methodologies (Menchen-Trevino & Mao, chapter 9).

Fourth, the case study approach has dominated existing studies (Yuan, chapter 11), a perspective that often seems to fit the contingent and dynamic phenomena we seek to explain in the Chinese context. While the scope, process, and implications of each case can be interesting and important, the literature will benefit from more large-scale random-sample survey data, as well as mixed methods that integrate qualitative, quantitative, and digital trace data for a layered, generalizable account of digital media technologies in China and beyond.

The Communist Party has built its legitimacy on economic growth and political stability. Most Chinese citizens, in particular the middle class, have benefited from the prosperity gained through more than three decades of economic reform, although the wealth distribution has been far from even. The vision of building a strong, affluent nation, which Xi Jinping, China's current president, has articulated as the Chinese Dream, still holds different social strata together. However, the cohesion depends on the state continuing to fulfill its economic promise and manage the many potential challenges and threats to that dream.

Digital media technologies per se will not trigger revolutions or deliver democracy, at least not as popularly imagined in the form of dramatic and sudden regime overthrow. New geometries of public deliberation and forms of civic engagement enabled by digital communication and media technologies will contribute to social changes at many levels and forms, visible or less so. But how they do so will depend on the negotiation and struggles, oftentimes digitally mediated, among the multiple institutions involved: the state, corporations, and an emerging civil society. We hope this volume provides new agendas to explore these dynamics as we seek to better understand Networked China.

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