Online Public Opinion: Transforming Agenda Setting and Shaping the Public Sphere in China

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Abstract

Internet usage has exponentially grown in China since it was first established in 1993. The newest report indicates that 43.2% of the population in China is connected to the online world. The medium has re-shaped the Chinese society and the public sphere unprecedentedly in terms of public information sharing modes, communication habits and most importantly, expression of opinions. Traditional mass media is experiencing marginalization in terms of news events as Web 2.0 has developed as a huge "electronic plaza" in China where people from every walk of life can publish and exchange self-generated information in any form, comment about these information, express their petitions and complaints, elect their own opinion leader and set agenda for whole society. As Internet usage is on the rise in the country, we argue that the technology is changing the old mode of agenda setting for the society and hence transforming the reality of Chinese citizens. In detail we highlight how the setting of public agenda worked in the traditional media mode in China and how it is now altering under the new media (Internet) mode, along with the help of opinion leaders. Finally through discussion of Weng'an riot (2008), one of the first riots where information was spread via the Internet, we try to establish the agenda setting enabling power of this medium in a highly censored society like China.

Keywords: Agenda setting, Public sphere, Public Opinion, Spiral of Silence, China, Internet

Introduction

Technology will make it increasingly difficult for the state to control the information its people receive... The Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip.

-Ronald Reagan, June 14, 1989

Internet's influence on state power all around the world is something that everyone is taking great interest in. Politicians and sociologists have now started to believe in the power of the internet as a medium through which citizens exchange information, form an opinion regarding a matter, express their views, and eventually set an agenda for the whole society. One of the earliest communication researches in the United States, called "The Chicago School" based their ideas on Herbert Spencer's Organic Conception of Society and proposed that communication and transportation are like the nerves and arteries of the society. They believed that new communication technology would improve politics, revitalize democracy, and eventually lead to a society with "a great public of common understanding and knowledge" (Carey, 1989).

As witnessed in recent times, the use of the internet for communication has proven to be a powerful tool for social movements, as evident during the recent Arab Spring (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012), the 2011 riots in Britain (Kirkpatrick & Afify, 2011), protests at G20 meeting (Ems, 2010), in Iran (Burns & Eltham, 2009) and India (Ahmed & Jaidka, 2013). The medium is contributing to and developing a new era of participatory democracy and in doing so it is transforming public sphere and providing newer means of setting and discussing public agenda.

However this use in a complex society like China which faces extreme regulations on the freedom of expression through the internet, poses several questions for this transformation enabling nature of the medium. Since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power in 1949, the state has maintained a tough, if variable, degree of control over ICTs. The government's policy toward media and ICTs have in the past addressed the equilibrium between economic modernization and political control — a tension frequently brought up in present–day debate about Internet's development in China.

This article largely discusses how the internet is transforming the setting of public agenda in China and thereby changing the public sphere in the Chinese society. It begins by discussing how the medium is changing the face of public opinion in our societies and also how opinion leaders are making their presence and influence felt. Going on, with China as a backdrop we highlight how the setting of public agenda functioned in the traditional media mode and how it is now shifting under the new media (Internet) mode. Finally through discussion of Weng'an Riot, one of the first Internet-driven public involvements, we try to establish the transforming nature of this medium in a society like China.

In summary this article is an effort to understand how the internet, as a new mode of communication is breaking away from traditional roots of government-traditional media controlled agenda setting model and how this is now visible in the Chinese society, where it has empowered the reversal spiral of silence (discussed later).

The Changing Face of Public Opinion: Roles of Opinion Leaders and the Internet

Public Opinion can be summarised as the average beliefs of the adult population. It is a collection of opinions of the masses. Several scholars have applied different theories to define what public opinion but in most modern democracies, communication is mainly divided into two notions (Dahlgren, 1995):

1. Social Movements, that strive to change the opinion, and
2. Democratised Media, including computer-mediated communication.

Social movements discuss about an event and form their opinion about it, but they have to channel out their opinions, and they do it via the democratised media. In his work, "*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*" (Habermas, 1989), Habermas has mentioned about public sphere as a part of social life where people can discuss their political and social views. Traditional media (newspapers, television and magazines) faces some limitations as they are rarely used as a medium for a political debate, since no one wants to take a viewpoint publicly. One of the best examples to highlight the above argument is the state of an emergency in a nation. In the year 1975 in India, an emergency was declared under the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the government granted itself with all the controlling powers and the mass media was regulated and at some instances banned.Under

such circumstances, the power of the society was negated as there was no public sphere where the mass could exchange their opinions. But in this age of technological advancement, the commercialization of the internet has changed the situation for better and the citizens now have a platform where political opinions are fervently discussed and public agendas are set. It is here that every now and then we observe the influential roles of opinion leaders in the online as well as offline world.

The concept of opinion leadership aroused out of empirical research conducted primarily within the Unites States. The theory of *two-step flow of communication* propounded by Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz(1970) emphasizes opinion leaders to be the filters of ideas and information and engage with the media while their ideas are spread to the wider world of those who care.

The media-savvy influential and active leaders know and turn to the opinion leaders on their issues of interest. The most influential and active citizens become opinion leaders themselves when they are more plugged-in, more vocal and more engaged in the issues, as others tune to them for their point of view.The ideas of the opinion leaders bounce around the internet and are discussed by many. Even some government leaders tune into the debate and they follow what the opinion leaders are saying. Many government leaders become opinion leaders themselves on issues important to them. An opinion leader can make their opinions inform policy and influence the actions of legislators, get laws passed or change the rules for the government agencies.

Each new medium is first described and perceived as a novelty. Only a small group of people use that medium. As time passes by, it becomes prominent and there is a sudden widespread of its reach forming a mass media,as the case with the internet.

Internet has changed into a strong mass media entity and is characterised by roots that is true in nature to traditional media. Few being, that it is systematic, accessed by the masses and help shape the society's identity due to their range, reach, stability and repeatability. It transmits public information and is an extreme instrument of power, an open forum where public issues are greatly discussed.

Internet has become highly influential in the way traditional media acts and behaves. Two important aspects that define it are the 'Netizens' and the 'Public Agenda'.

Netizens are people who use the internet for a particular purpose and motive. These netizens can be classified into several groups in accordance with their motive on the internet. Netizens in 1996 was described by Hauben as the people who actively contributed online towards the development of the Internet. The internet bulletin boards are considered to be an 'agora' where these netizens actively discuss, debate, form opinions and spread news about various societal issues.

The Internet is now a public space where people and netizens have an opportunity to express their own opinions and debate on a certain issue. Moreover, the role of Internet as a public space is far active and practical than that of traditional media such as television, newspapers, and magazines because of the interactivity factor as discussed before.

Through the interaction of these netizens, various issues are discussed and this leads to setting of agendas. Hence internet acts as another medium, an important one, which influences the traditional media in setting an agenda. Agenda setting has been one of the critical themes in the field of mass communication effects research since Walter Lippmann delineated public agenda-setting in his book Public Opinion (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Rogers, Dearing & Bregman, 1993).

The Chinese Perspective

In order to research how online public opinion set agenda for Chinese society, it is necessary for us to compare two information dissemination modes in terms of traditional mass media and new media (Internet) which represent respectively two different political and social discourse systems essentially. In regular evolution pattern of communication, the mode of new media inevitably integrates all modes of old media. However, in modern times it is no longer a simple integration but a thorough revolution of communication in which information is relatively de-monopolized and traditional mode of agenda setting is unprecedentedly overthrown. Consequently, entire social discourse power is experiencing extensive reconstruction and redistribution, thus all actors in this system would try to reorient and redefine their new coordinates and mutual relations.

1. Public Opinion under Traditional Mass Media Mode in China

China is usually known as a country with a long history of Feudalism (from 221 BC to 1912 AD). But essentially it is a country with more than 2000 years' history of Despotism, in which state mechanism extended itself into every aspect of society and all the resources (intangible and tangible) had been highly monopolized and controlled by dictators and bureaucracies until the sunset of Manchu Dynasty. When Manchurian royal family members were debating with high rank bureaucrats of Han nationality on whether a constitutional monarchy must be established, Chinese bourgeois democratic revolution broke out in 1911. Consequently, these successors, Kuomintang (KMT) and local warlords brought to this country more chaos, replacing budding constitutional monarchy by authoritarianism. However, during the first half of last century in China, freedom of speech and press were guaranteed relatively.

Many opine that the situation got worsenedwhen KMT was driven to Isles by another political hooliganism bloc. The free world Karl Marx wanted to create eventually became the Gulag Archipelago of totalitarianism where the individual opinions of common people became weaker. Communists around the world who called themselves the loyal representatives and servants of proletariat and peasants, advanced productivity and culture finally degenerated and became new and worse totalitarianism tyrants and bureaucrats when they grabbed state power by violence and rhetoric.

In the context of Communist China, pen symbolizes propaganda and propaganda is an interest's entity or oligarchy bloc that persuades people to believe what they never believed before, even if those things are untrue. Since the foundation of Communist Party of China, the Propaganda Department had been a core organ. According to the documents of CCP, the Propaganda Department of the CCP committee is an integrated functional department in charge of ideological work. Its main responsibilities are:

  i.   Directing the National Theoretical Research, learning and advocacy
 ii.   Guiding public opinion, surveillance and coordination of the work of media
iii.   Guiding ideologies of cultural products
 iv.   Planning and deploying overall ideological and political tasks

In a nutshell, the Propaganda Department tells every social member what to think and what not to think through various media channels and hence mass media is eventually reduced to only a tool of propaganda. This is the primary attribute of media which exits in whole history of the International Communist Movement.

> *"There is no doubt, gentlemen that the legislator was not thinking of the free press when he spoke of the duty of denunciation. But neither did he think that this article would ever be applied to the free press. It is well known that under Napoleon there was no freedom of the press. Hence if you want to apply the law to a stage of political and social development for which it was not intended, then apply it fully, expound it in the spirit of our time, let the press have the benefit also of this concluding sentence of Article 367. Article 367, taken in the narrow sense of the public prosecution, excludes proof of truth and only permits denunciation when it is supported by public documents or already available judicial verdicts. Why should the press post festum, after a judgment has been pronounced, still make its denunciation? It is by profession the public watchdog, the tireless denouncer of those in power, the omnipresent eye, and the omnipresent mouthpiece of the people's spirit that jealouslyguards its freedom. If you interpret Article 367 in this sense, and that is how you must interpret it if you do not want to take away the freedom of the press in the interests of governmental power, the Code offers you at the same time a means of dealing with encroachments of the press. According to Article 372, in a case of denunciation, the proceedings and decision regarding the offence of calumny should be suspended during the investigation of the facts. According to Article 373, a denunciation which proves to be a calumny is punishable"* (Marx&Engels, 1848).

Literally, it seems that these notions of Karl Marx, who admired the freedom of press in Britannia, are very liberalistic and democratic. One reason is that Marx just used these ideologies of freedom to fight against censorship of Prussia regime and elicit sympathy and support from mass. However, the question is how to define people and proletariats? Who was

empowered to represent them? Divine right of communists? "People" is the most incredible and semantically empty word with multiplied and mutable meanings. Here "People" equals to "proletariats", and some elites and revolutionist from "proletariats" equal to "Party", because most proletariats were illiterates. So"Mouthpiece of the people" means "Mouthpiece of the Party (elites and revolutionist)".

Before the demise of Soviet regime in 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev loosened control of media and public opinion on Russia and Eastern European countries in his perestroika, directly leading to the disintegration of the Socialism camp and the Soviet Union, the first Communism regime around the world. The Chinese pupil always outdoes all its foreign masters. Inherited genes of despotism, CCP undeniably developed a set of better propaganda theories than its comrades in Eastern Europe, which could manipulate media, snuff and astro-turf public opinions more skilfully. Mao's death implied the end of despotism and red terror. From 1979 to 1989, Chinese people experienced an unprecedented thought liberation and freedom of speech and press. However, the Tiananmen Square incident on June 4th, 1989 made the CCP leaders again realize the potential of the mass media as a crucial tool of agenda setting (thought control) which was much more important than tanks and troops. A fortress is usually captured by rebel forces from its interior. Especially when journalists and editors of People's Daily and CCTV began to support dissidents and rioters, the demise of this regime approached and negative influence brought about was much more serious than that these senior statesmen had imagined. It was undeniable that 4 or 5 million troops could not resist 100 millions furious people "incited" by hostile forces. Thus CCP strengthened its ideological and political works and media control unprecedentedly. First, these manage layers are directly and compulsively appointed by Propaganda Department and Organization Department of all grades from local Party Committees to central Party Committee. Moreover, any private person who wants to start a newspaper or TV station must apply a licence from Press and Publication Bureau and Propaganda Department, however it is totally impossible.

According to Constitution of the People's Republic of China (NPC, 2004)**:**

Article 2

All power in the People's Republic of China belongs to the people.

Article 5

*The state upholds the uniformity and dignity of the **socialist legal system**. No **laws** or administrative or local **rules and regulations** may contravene **the Constitution**. All state organs, the armed forces, **<u>all political parties</u>**and public organizations and all enterprises and institutions must **abide by the Constitution and the law**. All acts in violation of the Constitution or the law must be investigated. No organization or individual is privileged to be beyond the Constitution or the law.*

Article 35

*Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy **freedom** of **speech**, of the **<u>press</u>**, of **assembly**, of **association**, of **procession and of demonstration**.*

Propaganda Department is an organ of CCP, so Propaganda Department must *abide by the Constitution and the law,* and *Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the <u>press</u>,* so the question is how can an organ of a party override the Constitution*?*

After reviewing the history of International Communist Movement, we may now know understand why the CCP controls mass media so firmly. Essentially, it is because the mass media is the most important tool in political agenda setting and Kaiserism construction - besides national violence machineries such as People's Armed Police (PAP) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Secondly, due do the prevalence of Croney-Capitalism, various interests groups which monopolize most resources and wealth of this country extensively uses mass media to defend their "legitimacy of illegal property right." Thirdly, mass media also is the cultural means that can be used to hoax the mass, aiming at internalizing imposed and external social identities, national identities and most crucially ideological identities and political identities. In conclusion, social, political, economical and cultural elites along with red aristocrats who control mass media monopolize discourse power in order to oppress, enslave and exploit other social members legally and publicly.
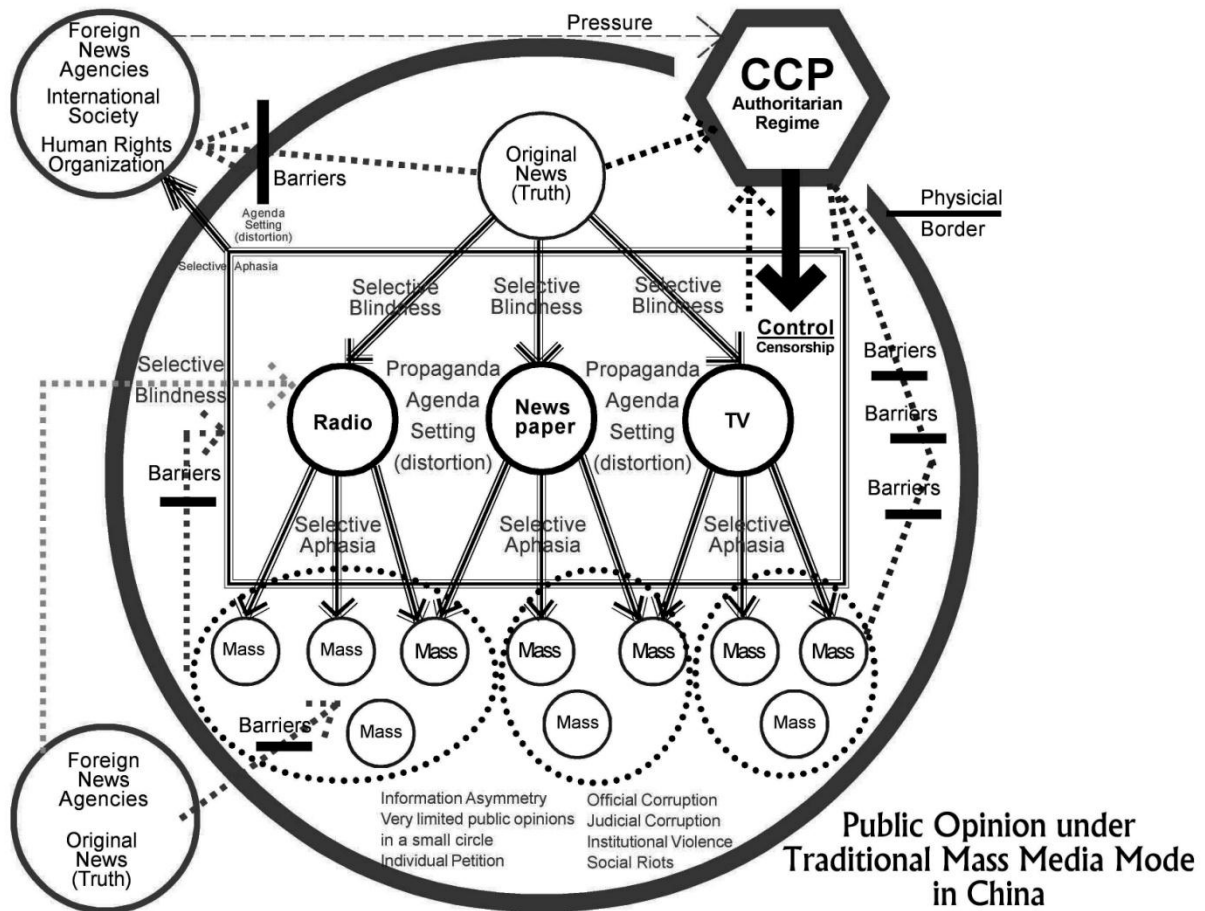
Fig 1. Public Opinion Model under Traditional Mass Media Modes in China

Practically, in this mode when a sensitive issue takes place few common people, who are in close proximity to it geographically, get to know the truth. These opinion leaders can tell this piece of news to their relatives, friends, yet this news would be disseminated in a very small social group very slowly. Most social members depend on the mass media, accessing to daily news and information. The information dissemination mode of information is "central structure to peripheral structure (asymmetry)" (see Fig 1).

In the mass media system, journalists are the first actors. According to propaganda disciplines and journalism regulations, when journalists are sent to obtain this sensitive news, they are told what to do and what not to do while interviewing and gathering material. When editors receive this news script from journalists, they usually receive a "standard" news script or a guideline about this sensitive news from Propaganda Department at the same time. The

content of what news is reported, the way in which it is reported (dictions and rhetoric), the size and fonts of headline, position, even layout colour, details of photos, everything must adhere to the strict requirements of Propaganda Department and main leaders. In a word, all reports must embody party spirit and give expression of voice of party to the masses. In all modesty, almost all sensitive and negative news and reports about scandals are filtered, diluted and distorted in this process of 'Selective Blindness' and 'Selective Aphasia' (Self censorship).

There are several negative results for the whole society in the mode:

i. *Information absence and distortion*: During SARS, many people did not know what was happening in China. *Great Leap* is another example where news of famine and high death-toll (30 millions) was held back because Chairman Mao did not want to realize his ludicrous great leap in terms of surpassing British and American Imperialists in 15 years.

ii. *Collective Power Rentalization*: Corruption has been institutionalized and public power has been privatized and commoditized, due to lack of supervision from public eye and democratic system. Scandals about officials and government are very difficult to be published in mass media, unless there are some political struggles happening in the centre.

iii. *Human Rights Crisis*: Because of information blocks, grassroots have very limited channels to express their opinions and grievances, maintain justice and protect their interests and more importantly organize themselves as groups with common purposes. Moreover, international human rights organizations have few evidences to accuse and boycott despotism countries. Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is a typical and extreme example. International society has limited knowledge of the predicament of common people.

2. Public Opinion under New Media (Internet) Mode in China

"The Revolution of 1848, which under the banner of the proletariat, after all merely let the proletarian fighters do the work of the bourgeoisie, also secured the independence of Italy, Germany and Hungary through its testamentary executors, Louis Bonaparte and Bismarck"(Marx & Engels, 1848).

Rightly so, repressors of revolutions are also the testamentary executors of revolutions. Empress Dowager Cixi ruthlessly suppressed *The Reform Movement of 1898*but later, she began to implement some quasi-reforms such as preparatory constitutional monarchy. After 1989, CCP did not abolish the reform and open policy because partly this was testamentary of dissidents and liberalists. Pragmatism as a mainstream guideline took the place of Communism completely when CCP leaders perceived that economic development are more decisive than political and ideological factors for social stability. Under this background, the internet as a kind of advanced productivity was introduced to China, with many high rank technological bureaucrats involved in this promising business. However, Marx's prediction that advanced productivity consequentially would pose a threat to non-advanced superstructure was finally realized.
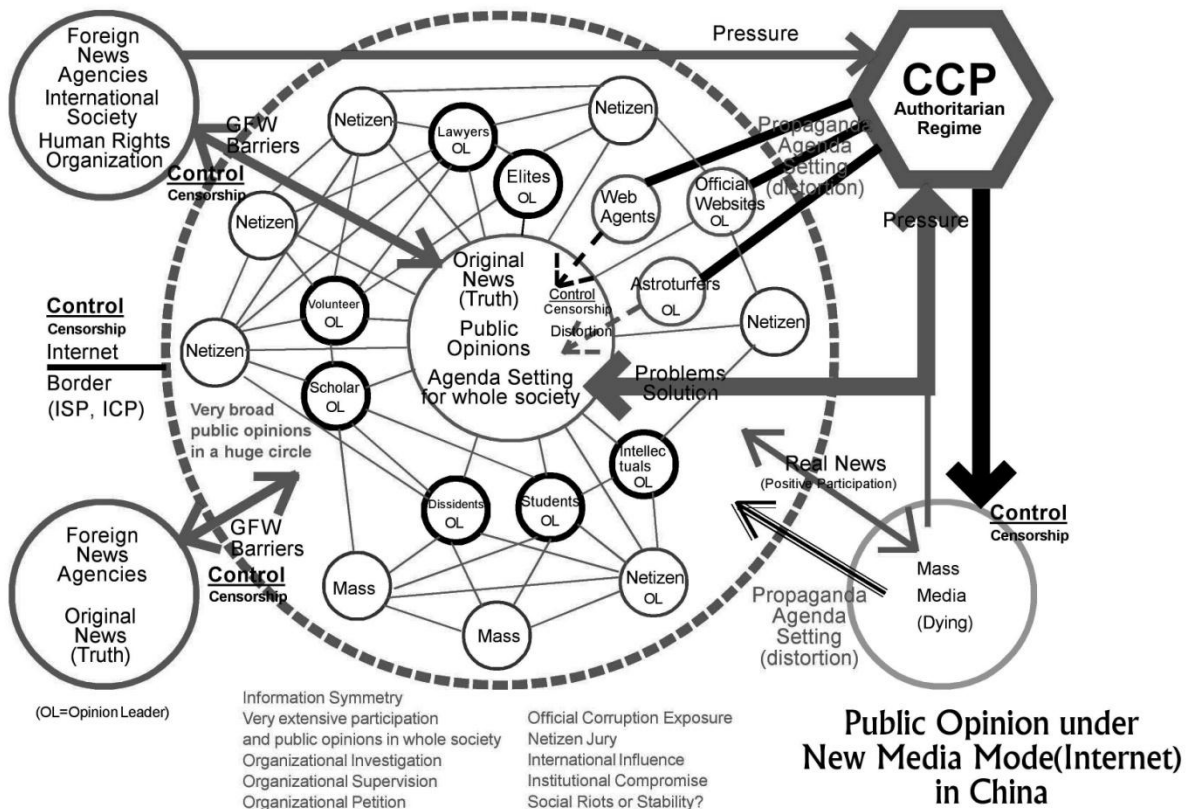

Fig 2. Public Opinion Model under New Media Mode (Internet) in China

In this mode, the Internet world is flat in which dissemination of information is less constrained by physical borders, space, distance, time and most importantly, existing social hierarchy, and information is relatively de-monopolized and traditional mode of agenda setting is unprecedentedly overthrown. Consequently whole social discourse power is

experiencing extensive reconstruction and redistribution, thus all actors in this system would try to reorient and redefine their new coordinates and mutual relations.

Though internet in China is facing stricter censorship than that in other regions, the CCP and the Chinese government can tolerate its existence provided that it does not act as a medium in criticizing CCP, central government and top leaders directly. It should also not instigate violent revolutions which aim at pulling down existing regime and social system and separating any parts from this country. For example, the internet in Xinjiang Autonomous Region faced a black out following a large-scale riot executed by Pan-Turkism separatists and *Jihadists*. What we need is a semi-open internet system with some base lines.

Guidelines on the Semi-Open Internet system

Practically, when sensitive or disputed news is exposed by the grassroots journalists, the witness, the victims, the insiders, the activists, the volunteers, the kind helpers, the curious and the commercialized mass media, it is published on various online communities almost instantly. Every netizen who has access to this news would expresses his or her opinion in a thread post and discuss about it with friends via social networking sites and blog sites. In this initial process, more and more public opinions would gather which are defined as crude public opinions and preparatory agenda setting. Essentially these public opinions are indecisive, perceptual, peripheral, immethodical, heterogeneous and even contradictive.
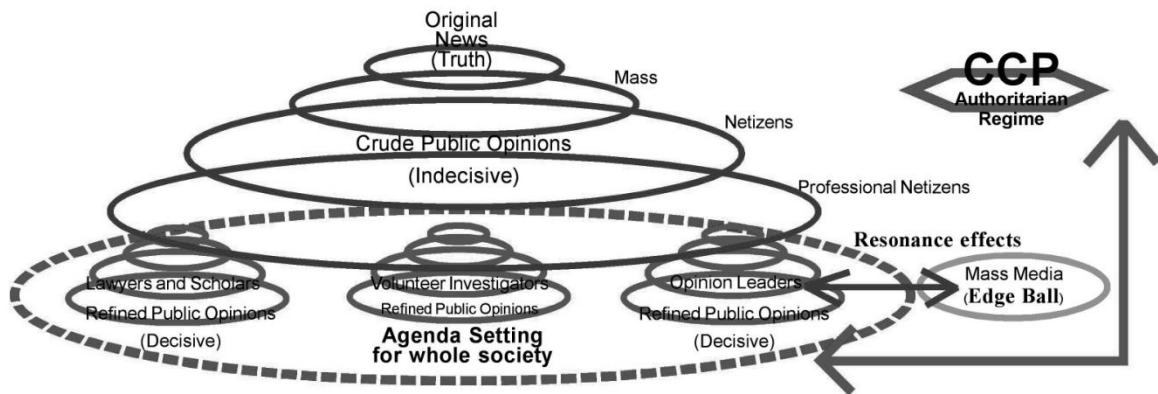
Actors in this news, especially the (immoral) power institutions on this phrase gradually begin to be the focus of netizens. They commonly have two kinds of responses in this mutual mode. The first, the wiser one, is starting up a series of PR campaigns actively as soon as possible to set new online agenda and eliminate negative influences, such as information release, negotiation with counterparts, partial compromise, scapegoat tactic and bribing ICPs. The second kind is traditional bureaucratic response which attracts and inflames most netizens. Some bureaucrats who fail to comprehend the psychology of internet and netizens believe traditional mode of agenda setting can be applied on internet naturally and that the government can set the agenda for internet, and internet can then, set the agenda for whole society. The biggest difference between internet and mass media is the disintermediation and diversification of resource and channels of information and knowledge. Exposure of habitual distortion of official information on the internet triggers more and more interest, wrath and

righteousness of netizens. After this fermenting phrase, original news becomes the focus of the whole netizens community soon.

Reversal Spiral of Silence

In the mode of Reversal Spiral of Silence, public opinions of netizens experience sublimation from quantitative change to qualitative change, and more and more public opinion leaders emerge from common netizens who are metropolitan bourgeoisies and professionals such as scholars, lawyers, public intellectuals, students, white collars and self-employed professionals. Moreover these public opinion leaders also are different from those opinion leaders in mass media era who are supported (elected) by common netizens and international society and have more influences on online communities. Thus more and more refined and decisive public opinions would gather and form a huge power to set agenda for whole the online community, and then this community (online/internet) setsan agenda for society. Consequently, online public opinions transforms to social public opinions which pose a great pressure to power institutions.

Fig 3. Reverse Spiral of Silence New Media Mode (Internet) in China

Online Sphere –Agenda Setting: The case of Weng'an Riot

On June 28th, 2008, an agitated mob torched a police station and a county government official building in South West China's Guizhou province while expressing their dissatisfaction with the medico legal expertise on the death of a local female student. Some government officials stated that some people who did not know the exact context of what had happened were instigated to mob the police station and the office buildings of the county government and Communist Party committee as they "smashed and torched many offices and some cars" (Xinhua Net, 2008).

In the beginning, the secretary of provincial party committee, Mr. Shi Zongyuan, asserted that the protests and riots were incited by very few people with ulterior motives." But soon he criticized the local officials' "rude and rough-handed solutions" in dealing with local issues to be the cause of the riots (Xinhua Net, 2008). It is speculated that the reason he changed his stance so quickly is pressure from media, especially the internet.

Zhou Shuguang, a self-claimed citizen journalist also known as "Zola" in the Chinese blogosphere, went to Weng'an to conduct a personal interview with victim's family. He used several internet communication tools like MSN, QQ, and Twitter and also his personal web page to post unofficial reports along with photos and pleas from the family of the victim. It was believed that this was the first time Twitter had ever been used to report a mass Chinese protest (Fowler &Ye, 2008).

In several popular forums or chat sites, including Kdnet, Maopu ,Strong Nation, Sina.com, Netese, and QQ, most of the users voiced their support for the Weng'an rioters, and they all supplied their own versions of information (including text, photos, and sometimes video files), different, or sometimes opposite to the versions supplied by the Guizhou police(Ansfield, 2008). Netizens even contributed money to bloggers for field survey, in order to find the truth.

Inthis case, it is safe to assume that if there were no internet and new mass media tools, local officials would could have easily blocked, censored and distorted the news and petition from victim's parents. Initially, the local Propaganda Department would announce a series of provisional journalism regulations to both of local and national mass media. Secondly, they

would cook a standard news script with a content such as *"these protests and riots absolutely were used and incited by very few people with ulterior motives.", "local government and main leaders were innocent and righteous."*.

Through the internet, people received undistorted information from online posts, photos and videos (such as image of thirty thousand people attacking government building) and direct interview of victim's relatives before government took censorship on the information portal. After the exposure of this incident, one noticed the change in attitude of the secretary of provincial party committee in few days, as online public opinions had set the agenda for the incident revolutionising social mass opinions successfully.

This provincial main leader who ever worked in propaganda system may have perceivedthat as a main leader of the province, he should not antagonize against overwhelming online public opinions and social mass opinions at a risky moment, and thereby quickly changed his attitude. If he insisted to assert this incident as "a riotsused and incited by very few people with ulterior motives', he would have undoubtedly classified himself into a group of local government officials who had a very negative image in public opinion, thus the result would have been the opposite as the netizens who thought he tried to shield his underlings would have directed their spearheads at him. The internet mass hunting would direct the official into bigger troubles such as corruption scandals that would be used as a weapon by his political rivals and competitors.

At this moment, criticizing the local officials and admitting truth cost him and CCP nothing, but appeased inflammations of public and restore general situation of social stability.

This incident is a typical case of how online public opinions set agenda for whole society and set political agenda for government, set judicatory agenda for court in which Chinese netizens played roles of volunteer investigators, legal aid suppliers and invisible jury.

Conclusion

The Internet is affecting every facade of the Chinese life influencing public opinion and rapidly shaping the public sphere. The speedy advancement of the internet has created new challenges in a nation where information habitually has been censored by the government.

The medium has decentralized and deregulated the traditional media mode, making governmental control more complex. This difficult control has led to a large scale involvement of the public in the societal sphere, as seen during Weng'an riots.

Large-scale online petitions and protests imply potential "chain reactions of nuclear fission", such as actual extensive petitions and protests; even larger-scale riots on streets which would trigger similar actions in the whole society. Nowadays CCP regime which has been deeply involved with globalization and has extensive economic interests could not withstand another Tiananmen incident. "Social stability" is the most crucial issue, so CCP top leaders have to soften their stances toward the internet and netizens, regarding online public opinions and intercommunicating with netizens in order to appease their anger and harmonize social relations.

On the other hand, the internet and globalization have eroded sovereignty and has massively influenced the domestic affairs of these authoritarian countries thathave been incorporated into international system as normal entities. Due to the internet, domestic incidentscan more easily develop to be international affairs than ever. An undeniable truth is standards of human rights in China and in Western countries are so different that these issues usually become the debating and bargaining focus. Today CCP receives more pressure from international society than ever, and this pressure urges CCP to solve such kind issue wisely and actively.

The Internet has indeed changed the whole atmosphere of public opinion in China and in the process it is relatively changing the trajectory of the public sphere and the process of agenda setting in the Chinese society. This maturity process is painful for some but has also led to the development of the public in China. However with the medium transforming and evolving at such a rapid pace, it remains to be seen what happens in the days to come.

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