BEHIND THE GREAT FIREWALL: THE INTERNET AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN CHINA

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Communication)
in The University of Michigan
2009

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Table

List of Figures

Figure

List of Appendices

ABSTRACT

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The Internet has changed China profoundly. For the government, the Internet offers prospects to develop economics, education, and technology. For the public, the Internet provides unprecedented opportunities for the free flow of information and communication. Many believe that the Internet will ultimately bring democracy to China, one of the few Communist countries remaining in the world. Relying on multiple methods, including secondary analysis, survey, and in-depth interviews, this study is one of the first attempts to systematically understand how the Internet has been adopted in China, on both provincial and individual levels; and more importantly, how Internet use is associated with people's real world political lives. Ultimately, this research tries to understand if the Internet could bring a fundamental change in political system to China, and if so, how and when. This research concludes that the Internet is unlikely to offer democratic hope for China, at least not in the near future. Since the Internet is not

developed universally, and only a small portion of users are employing it for political activities due to individual characteristics and people's perceptions of Internet censorship, the Internet's mobilizing effects are rather constrained. Moreover, due to the rising nationalistic sentiments, the Chinese public were found to be willing to participate in government supported political activity and avoid protests. Nevertheless, the association between nationalism and political participation became less clear when political Internet use increased.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Today, any attempt to understand modern Chinese politics needs to include the Internet. In its momentous transitioning stage, China's economy, policy, culture and social life are all shaped by information technology, especially the Internet. According to China's leaders such as former premier Zhu Rongji, the Internet is what China needs for future economic development and integration into the global economy "…the Chinese government can be said to have displayed a great deal of vision in its policy of closing the gap with the industrialized countries by placing digital communications technologies at the heart of its development policy" (Dai, 2003, p. 25).

China has embraced the idea of informationization. China is one of the earliest developing countries to undertake the deep structural reform of telecommunication governance, including reorganizing the Ministry of Information Industry (MII). Information technology, especially the Internet, became the focus of the national Ninth and Tenth Five-Year Plans (1995-2005). Building an information society is viewed as one of the strategic developments for the industrialization and modernization of China. The approach is to employ the current digital network technology for commercial, political, and social purposes, and plans are being made to attract more domestic and international investment in the information and communication technology section. The government even uses the Internet to launch e-government through projects like

"Government Online." By making more government information accessible to citizens, the government aims to enhance the transparency of government activities and accountability of government agencies. Overall, recent Chinese economic development strategies are linked directly to the information revolution.[1]

These attempts have been very successful. According to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), ever since the Internet took root in China in the early 1990s, the number of Internet users grew from 620,000 in 1997 to 33.7 million by the end of 2001 and is estimated to reach 253 million by 2008 (CNNIC, 2008). However, the rapid Internet growth is not a universal phenomenon in China. A typical Internet user in China is educated, young, and lives in a big city. Only 25% of Internet users are from rural areas (CNNIC, 2008). The disparity is also salient in terms of regional comparisons. The Internet adoption is concentrated along the coastal provinces, whereas the inland western provinces lag far behind. This disparity reflects the existing regional differences in both the economic and social environments. What is really disturbing is that the digital divide observed today may widen even further with the present economic and social disparities, where knowledge intensive activities are increasingly important. Nonetheless, with its ever-growing application in China, the Internet has had profound impacts on China technologically, economically, politically, and socially. This is especially the case in urban areas.

Because of its intricate democratizing function and seemingly uncontrollable characteristics, the Internet has attracted much attention from observers of modern China particularly respective to its political impacts. As argued, the Internet creates "ideational

[1] See Harwit and Clark (2001) and Hughes and Wacker (2003) for more detailed discussion about the history.

pluralism" in China (Taubman 1998), expands venues of becoming involved in politics (Zhou, 2006), and helps strengthen ties of unofficial social organizations (Yang, 2003), which in turn fosters demands for more freedom and individual rights, and may eventually generate forces for democracy (Lacharite, 2002).

A good example of an online uprising event comes from the Sun Zhigang case ("Sun Zhigang's brutal killers sentenced", 2003). On March 17, 2003, college student Sun Zhigang was detained by the police in Guangzhou for not having a "temporary resident permit" that was required for all migrants who look for jobs outside of their hometown. He was severely beaten in the infirmary of a Custody and Repatriation (C & R) Center and died three days later while still in police custody. When authorities refused to investigate the circumstances of Sun's death, his parents took the case online.

The parents first posted his case and a petition letter on China's largest news portal www.sina.com. Then a reporter from *Southern Metropolis News*, one of China's most progressive papers, picked up the story (Pan, 2004). Within two hours after being posted online, this news item generated 4,000 comments from readers. Within days, thousands of Internet users had forwarded this news to online forums or email groups; many more protest messages appeared online grieving Sun's death and condemning police abuse. In the final approximation, nearly one million pages of comments were generated on sina.com. By this time, even the official media, including China Central TV picked up on the public outrage and heated debates over Sun's case and the Custody and Repatriation (C & R) system, the living conditions of migrants in the cities, and police corruption.

Although C & R centers were originally invented to provide shelters for homeless people, they later became means for local governments to detain migrants from other areas. Millions of poor or migrant workers were held. For many years, international human rights organizations and Chinese legal reforms' advocators have appealed to abolish the C & R system. Sun Zhigang's death finally evoked protests from the entire country. On May 29th, in an unprecedented appeal to the National People's Congress, four legal scholars called on the state prosecutor to investigate Sun's death. They had written to the government asking for abolishment of the temporary resident permit and migrant detention centers. Three months later, the government changed the C & R system into a voluntary service, and the officials responsible for Sun Zhigang's death were convicted in court.

Sun Zhigang's case shows how Internet activists can turn online uprising events into a real world political agenda. Without the Internet, stories like this could never be published in the traditional media that remain under tight editorial controls. Without the Internet, people could never exchange opinions and share views so easily. Furthermore, publishing politically sensitive stories online first would also reduce the risk of traditional media in reporting these issues. Although public politics continues to be a rarity in China, the Internet is able to break the top-down censorship and propaganda regime, and promote the bottom-up force to increase public participation in national politics.

Yet, questions remain. Is Sun Zhigang's case just a rare incident, or is it an indicator of an ongoing trend? In other words, is this a sign that the Internet will bring more opportunities for the Chinese public to participate in politics? Might it even nurture a fundamental political change? In order to understand the Internet's political

implications in China, this study relied on secondary analysis, first hand survey data, as well as in-depth interviews to analyze how the Internet has been developed and regulated by the Chinese government, how the information technology has been used by the public, especially for political purposes, how Internet use interacts with China's specific political culture, and ultimately, how the complex mix could possibly affect the political world in authoritarian China.

Conceptual Structure

In order to uncover the political implications of Internet use, this study reviewed several conceptual areas that are related to the Internet study in China. First, studies on the Internet's impacts on politics in both democratic and authoritarian contexts were explored to understand the rationales behind the mobilizing effects of the new technology. Second, the specific characteristics of Internet development in China were discussed. As an authoritarian country, the Chinese government welcomes the Internet for its economic and educational functions but worries the technology could erode the information control that has been executed with traditional media for years in China. Internet censorship of China has attracted numerous criticisms from Western scholars. However, will these censorship approaches succeed in controlling the Internet? More importantly, but perhaps often overlooked, how would these regulations affect people's ways of using the technology? Furthermore, with nationalism rising to be one of the most visible ideologies in China, whether the Internet would promote democratic values, or nationalistic ones is difficult to ascertain.

Political Implications of Internet Use

Optimistic scholars would argue for a positive linkage between the Internet and democracy (Tsagarousianou, Tambini, & Bryan, 1998; Alexander & Pal, 1998; Ferdinand & McCormick, 2000; Hague & Loader, 1999; Hoff, Horrocks, & Tops, 2000). Popular terms like "digital democracy" or "cyber-democracy" all reflect the belief that the Internet reinforces the democratic process (Alexander & Pal, 1998; Hague & Loader, 1999).

While many scholars have tried to understand the relationship between the Internet and political participation in a democratic context, they often times have found a null effect, or limited effects of Internet use on mobilizing the public (Bimber, 1998a; Hill & Hughes, 1998). Some say that active Internet users are people who are active even before their use of the Internet (Owen & Davis, 1998). Norris (1998) suggested this as well and found that Internet users who use the Internet for political purposes had higher levels of political interest, knowledge, efficacy, and were of a higher Social Economic Status (SES). Apparently, the rich information environment does not automatically translate into more knowledgeable users and more active ones. What is crucial, ultimately, is when and how it does.

Although these Internet studies have mostly been conducted in Western democratic countries, the Internet's mobilizing effects are even more celebrated in newly emerging democracies or authoritarian contexts (e.g., Spassov & Todorov, 2004; Simon, Corrales, & Wolfensberger, 2002). For instance, scholars have argued that the Internet had a crucial impact in the collapse of the Suhato regime in Indonesia (Hill & Sen, 2000). The Internet's inherent democratizing function has also frequently been mentioned in

studies of the Internet in China (Zhou, 2006; Zheng & Wu, 2005; Yang, 2003), where individuals were rarely able to obtain information and express their opinions freely before the Internet's availability.

Internet Censorship in China

In spite of its celebrated democratizing functions, several recent applications of the communication technology have also shown that the Internet can be used to maintain undemocratic regimes as well (Bimber, 2003; Kalathil & Boas, 2003). For instance, groups such as the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and German neo-Nazis have all been using the Internet enthusiastically to disseminate their messages. In China, too, the Internet is claimed to be used by the government to tighten information control (Zhou, 2006). Although technological determinism would argue that it is inevitable for new technology to drive the characteristics of societies (Smith & Marx, 1994), and we may also agree that in China's case, the society is bound to change with the Internet, it is still hard to say in what ways the Chinese public will use the information technology, and in what directions these changes will happen. After all, the Internet is only a technology. It is how the technology is used by people and society that determines its influences.

In China, where the Internet has been heavily regulated, it is not surprising to see that scholars are anxious to find out what role Internet control plays in the relationship between Internet use and political participation. Indeed, one look at the studies of the Internet and China shows that most studies are centered on how the Chinese government has been blocking the information flow online and suppressing dissidents (e.g., Chase &

Mulvenon, 2002). While some people are optimistic that the Chinese government's efforts will be vain (e.g., Xiao, 2005), others are not so optimistic (e.g., Beans, 2005).

The Internet presents the Chinese government with a paradox, where the goal of economic growth conflicts with the goal of political and ideological control. To ensure the legitimacy of the authoritarian rule, China has impeded Internet development by engaging in legal and technical control strategies. Yet, to maintain the growth of information technology, the Chinese government is not likely to have tight control at the expense of slowing down Internet development. As a result, although the censorship appears strict and abundant, it is not likely to be practiced firmly all the time. As Wacker (2003) pointed out, the most effective censorship is not by regulations, but through the means of self-censorship. This makes China a distinct case from most Western countries, where information control is not a major concern for Internet users. Although cyber optimists expect the Internet to fuel the democratic process in China, the perception and evaluation of the threat from government censorship may restrain people from using the net for certain purposes, especially political ones.

Chinese Nationalism

Another distinctive characteristic about China is its political culture. In Western democracies, individual autonomy, freedom of information and expression, and equal rights are highly valued. However, the Chinese public may sacrifice these values for strong defense and political leadership, a stable economy, and maintaining order. In fact, the so-called state nationalism, which claims that individual rights should be sacrificed for collective interests, is one of the most powerful political forces in today's China

(Friedman & McCormick, 2000). According to Zhao (2000b), Chinese nationalism, or patriotism as the Chinese government labels it, is "a result of a volatile mix of rising pride and lingering insecurity in response to profound domestic crises" (p. 254). As one of the most influential ideologies in today's China, nationalism is very likely to influence people's political lives. For instance, although both a nationalist and a democratic would be likely to become involved in political activities, a nationalistic person who values national interests and social stability over individual rights is not likely to support an immediate democratic revolution, which is more likely to be pursued by a democratic. In addition, according to Wu (2005), the Chinese cyberspace is full of nationalistic sentiments. It is possible that exposure to the Internet could also intertwine with people's political values and behaviors.

Research Question

This dissertation aims to answer two research questions. The first regards Internet diffusion. On the aggregate level, this study sets out to understand the Internet diffusion in China and macro-level predictors of these diffusion patterns. To what extent has the Internet been adopted in Chinese provinces? What are the important predictors of the adoption, including institutional level factors and individual factors? Is there a widening gap among the western, central, and eastern regions of China in adopting the technology? What could be done to reduce that gap?

Although it has been said that the Internet would reduce inequality by lowering the cost of information and thus facilitate disadvantaged groups to better compete in their lives (Anderson, Bikson, Law, & Mitchell, 1995), later studies have shown that

differential adoptions of the Internet across segments in the population increase inequalities between those who are already privileged and those who are already underprivileged (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001). Information is becoming an increasingly important component of the economy and has significant implications on inequality. As the Internet functions as a powerful information source, it is especially critical if certain groups are systematically excluded from adopting the communication technology.

Given that the majority of China's population lives in rural areas, what particularly striking is that the rural Chinese Internet users constitutes merely one quarter of the total Internet users. According to CNNIC's 2006 report, students are more than thirty times as likely as farmers to have Internet access. People from big cities like Shanghai and Beijing are more than eight times as likely to have Internet access as people from poor provinces like Tibet or Guizhou are. Moreover, fewer than 10 percent of websites registered in mainland China were owned by businesses and organizations in the western region ("Survey Shows China's East-west Digital Divide Growing", 2003).

Although telecommunications access has long been linked to economic growth in a positive way,[2] they could also marginalize the economically or educationally disadvantaged regions. The digital divide between China's east and west, urban and rural, may be a reflection of their existing differences in economic and social development, yet access to information and communication technology could broaden that disparity by promoting the information haves' levels of productivity, and simultaneously, their educational level. The Chinese government is starting to realize the gap and is claiming

[2] For instance, a positive correlation between telephone subscribes and GDP growth was identified (Hudsan, 1984).

to make efforts to close it.[3] Nevertheless, whether or not the gap will be closing soon remains to be seen. As Giese (2003) pointed out, although the government has engaged in strategies such as increasing Chinese language-based web content and encouraging the application of the net for more sectors, the digital divide is not likely to be alleviated without more systematic and stronger approaches.

Researchers have described the diffusion of the Internet in China and pointed out the divide between the east and the west, and rural and urban areas. However, little has been done to examine the trend empirically, what causes such trends, and what the consequences might be (Giese, 2003; Dai, 2003; Tan, 1999). Diffusion of a new technology is always related to many factors, such as the political system, regulation, government affluence and individual income, computer literacy, and so on (Hargittai, 1999; Wallsten, 2005, Robinson & Crenshaw, 2002; Lucas & Sylla, 2003; Norris, 2001; Goodman, Press, Ruth, & Rutkowski, 1994; and Kiiski & Pohjola, 2002). Scholars have also identified income and education as the most important individual factors of the digital divide in Western contexts (Norris, 2001). Drawing on the previous research, this study would be an early attempt to investigate the determinants of Internet connectivity in China including multiple factors on both individual and institutional levels.

Moreover, little work has been done to document the trend of the digital disparity in China. Is the gap narrowing with the intervention of the government? Or as the penetration rate of Internet access increases, is the gap reducing over time? While some

[3] For instance, see "China Striving to Narrow Digital Divide" or "Survey Shows China's East-west Digital Divide Growing".

predict that the current digital divide will close up as Internet diffusion progresses (Compaine, 2000), others point out that inequalities in access to information services such as telephone or cable are likely to persist since these services require continuous investments, unlike information goods (e.g., TV or radio) that only require a one-time purchase (Schement, 2001). Thus, it is important to understand the patterns of access disparities as they reflect changing factors like service availability or individual characteristics. Understanding these changing predictors of Internet adoptions will help create corresponding approaches in order to diminish these information gaps.

The second research question concerns whether or not Internet usage for political purposes correlates with various political outcomes. Cyber-optimists predict that the Internet has the potential to help the public become more knowledgeable about politics, more deliberate in expressing their political opinions, and more active in participating in political activities (Budge, 1996; Schwartz, 1996; Rash, 1997). However, evidence shows that the political consequences of the Internet usage depend on many factors, including the purposes of using the Internet, users' educational and age level (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001; Bimber, 2001; Norris, 2001).

In China, where information and expression have traditionally been censored, the public's perception of threats is also likely to have a critical influence in predicting the political and social outcomes of using the net. If the perceived threat is high, the public may limit their Internet usage to "safe" areas — politically benign ones. The perceived threat may be based on users' assessment of feasible censorship, their sheer fear resulting from hundreds of years of government suppression, their trust in the Internet, or trust in themselves in avoiding Internet monitoring. Consequently, the decision on whether or not

using the Internet for political purposes is not only dependent on individual characteristics, but also affected by the perceived threat.

Users' values could also alter their political attitudes or behaviors in association with Internet usage. As Inglehart (2005) put it, democracy depends on people's political values. As some political values motivate people to demand more freedom and democratic systems, others are conducive to authoritarian rules. For instance, nationalistic users might not want to criticize the state or sign a petition for certain public policies because they support strong government and social stability. Similarly, a user who holds democratic views is more likely to express his/her disapproval of social problems like corruption and would be more likely to participate in online/offline petitions against the government.

Operational Structure

There is great scholarly interest in whether or not the Internet facilitates China's democratization process. Earlier studies focused primarily on the Internet's physical networks and state censorship (Zheng & Wu, 2005). Few empirical studies have tried to directly tackle the relationship between Internet usage and mass political orientations in China. Varying from previous researches, this study has tried to systematically examine individual usage of the Internet – who uses the Internet for political purposes; how political usages of the Internet would affect the public's political actions in different ways; and how individuals' beliefs in nationalism and perceptions of censorship intertwine with Internet usage and political outcomes.

This study documents the state of Internet adoption in China. Macro level factors such as government policies or economic development as well as micro level factors such as education and income have been employed to understand the regional provincial digital divide and individual uses of the Internet. Although the growth of the Internet in China has been remarkable, its growth rate is likely to decrease due to the approaching saturation point in urban and wealthier coastal markets. The current positive Internet development may take a downward turn if the problem of the digital divide remains overlooked. In addition, it is possible that the digital divide in Internet adoption may reinforce the existing economic and political gaps between the wealthier coastal areas and urban areas, and poorer inland areas and rural areas by excluding certain groups from having access to the Internet.

This study is by nature preliminary, considering the fact that the Internet has yet to penetrate into the entire Chinese society and Internet services are ever-changing. But it will greatly advance the understanding of how the new technology interacts with the political society in a non-democratic country. Chapter Two lays out the theoretical framework and methods for this study. By theorizing relationships among main concepts, this chapter provides a theoretical foundation for later analysis. Also, different methods used in this study are discussed. As an ever-changing technology, no single approach is sufficient to study the Internet. By using secondary analysis, survey data, and in-depth interviews, this study relies on both quantitative and qualitative approaches to understand the political impacts of Internet use.

Chapter Three discusses how the Internet is developed in China. While some authoritarian countries may choose to have a totally controlled Internet regardless of their

economic and educational development, China instead allows a certain degree of competition in order to advance the Internet services. Indeed, realizing the educational and economic potentials in the technology, China has made steps to reform its government agencies to regulate the new technology (Harwit & Clark, 2001). By looking at the multi-level factors and the trend of Internet penetration, investigation of what determines Internet connectivity was performed. Subsequently, comparison of the extent of provincial disparities, and what might help to close the gaps was accomplished.

Chapter Four examines literature on Internet use and its political consequences. Since the Internet is studied most in the Western world, studies about the Internet in the developed and democratic countries were analyzed and applied to the Chinese context. Ever since the Internet was introduced to the world, scholars as well as activists have advocated the Internet for its rejuvenating potential for democracy. Nevertheless, the existing results in studying Internet effects are rather mixed. While some positive effects have been found for Internet use (Bimber, 1998), harmful consequences such as a displacement effect with traditional media use or time spent with family members and friends are also revealed (Nie & Erbring, 2000). A closer look at the Internet effect in political and civic engagement shows that this relationship depends on many factors, such as the characteristics of users and their different online behaviors (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). Clearly, the Internet effect is not the same for everyone and for every application of the technology.

With the original survey data, this chapter explored what individual level factors affect Internet adoption and use for political purposes in particular, and whether using the Internet for political activities might have impacts on users' political lives. By analyzing

patterns of Internet use and their political consequences, this study has attempted to understand what role the Internet plays in China's political world today, and whether any real political changes are expected to follow.

Chapter Five is devoted to Internet censorship. Although the Chinese government has often been criticized for its Internet control, the censorship is not so strict that economic and academic usages of the Internet would have been stifled (Zhou, 2006). Nevertheless, with the long existing history of censorship in China, as well as highly publicized punishments for violating Internet regulations, many users in China voluntarily engage in self-censorship to avoid any possible consequences (Sohmen, 2001). Thus, whether or not users realize the existence of censorship and the seriousness of it is likely to have significant impacts on how they use the Internet. It is also possible that when users have high levels of confidence in the Internet's uncontrollable nature or their own ability to bypass the censorship, they could ignore the censorship regardless of how it is perceived. As a result, when perceived threat is high and powerful, users would restrain themselves from using the Internet for sensitive purposes, such as voicing their political opinions about certain policies or political leaders.

Chapter Six investigates the origin and characteristics of rising nationalism, and more importantly, its implications for democratization in China. Many scholars have touched upon the issue of nationalism in China (Zhao, 2000a, 2000b, 2004a, 2004b, 2005/6; Downs & Saunders, 1998; Friedman & McCormick, 2000). These studies suggest that the Chinese nationalism is a special phenomenon that combines national pride and pragmatic concerns of enforcing national power and interests. It is partially state-led, but also appeals to the general public. By emphasizing China's economic

accomplishments in the past decades, Chinese nationalism gives priority to economic success and political stability. Originated from national pride n China's history and agony resulting from China's defeats by Western countries in the past century, the grassroots nationalism is most reactive when the national interest of China is threatened by a foreign force. Although research has been conducted to understand the Chinese nationalism, few have sought to examine the behavioral consequences of nationalistic beliefs.

In recent years, China has witnessed a few episodes of protests from its public. Demonstrations against Japan and the U.S. have attracted many people across the country. While previous studies have tried to understand the Chinese people's political protests and used protests as an indicator for political activism, such research has failed to see the distinction between political protests against a foreign force and a domestic one (e.g., Inglehart, 2005). Nationalists, especially the grassroots nationalists, tend to be active online and even participate in protests offline against a foreign force in order to fight for China's interests in world politics. But led by the state, the top down nationalists are not likely to put democratic reform before economic success and political stability on their political agendas, and would refrain from any forms of protests. Therefore, how strong a person believes in nationalism is expected to influence how they behave politically.

Chapter Seven reviews the results from in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are especially useful "when the topic being explored involves change, novelty, or uniqueness and the people being interviewed play influential or unique roles" (Poindexter and McCombs, 2000, p. 269). Understanding how users use the Internet in a detailed fashion, how they think about different forms of political participation, how they look at Internet censorship, how nationalistic they are, and how likely they would engage in

political actions, this chapter will shed some light on the complex dynamics of the Internet use and political consequences for Chinese users, which cannot be easily determined from a standardized survey approach.

Finally Chapter Eight concludes the dissertation by summarizing the findings, evaluating this study's contribution to Internet study in China, and discussing the limitations of this study.

CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & METHODS

This chapter constructs the theoretical frameworks for this dissertation and introduces the methods used to answer the research questions. To understand the Internet's political use and its consequences, the theoretical structure was divided into two stages. The first stage explains how the Internet is adopted and used on the provincial and individual level in China. The second stage studies the political implications of political net use on the individual level. The two-stage model was further expanded to two sets of models. The main relationship model hypothesizes the relationship between aggregate and individual levels of predictors and patterns of Internet use as well as behavioral consequences of using the Internet for political purpose, specifically. The second part refers to two moderation models, where perceived censorship and values of nationalism are expected to interact with various constructs in the main relationships.

The method section reviews secondary analysis and in-depth interviews, as well as survey research used in this dissertation. It also discusses the strength and weakness of each method.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the political implications of Internet use in China, the conceptual framework is summarized in a two-stage model (see Figure 2-1). Drawing upon the nested model in Norris' 2001 book, *Digital Divide*, the two-stage model includes multiple

level indicators to determine the diffusion on the Internet. Singling out using the Internet for political purposes on the individual level, this study specifically investigates the political implications of Internet use. The first stage shows the causes of Internet adoption; the second stage explains the consequences of it. Ultimately, this study aims at answering the question of whether the Internet facilitates or impedes the process of democratization in China. To fully understand the conceptual relationships, the two-stage model is further broken down into two sets of models: the main-relationship models and the moderating models.

Figure 2-1. The Two-Stage Model

The Main-Relationship Model

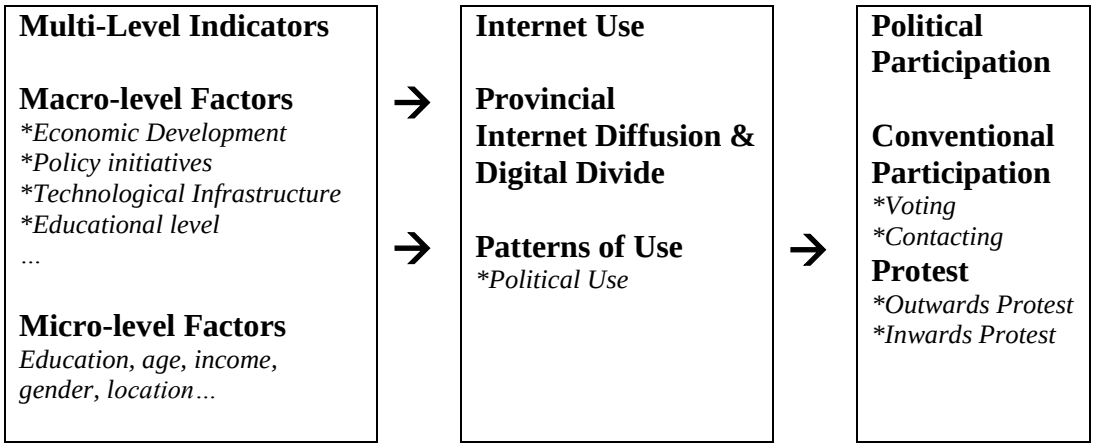
The main-relationship models (see Figure 2-2) are extended versions of the two-stage model. It illustrates the main relationship between multi-level predictors and Internet adoption/political Internet use, and the main relationship between Internet use and its political consequences on individual users. The multi-level factors include macro-level ones like economic development, policy initiatives, and technological infrastructure and individual level factors such as users' income, education, and how they perceive the Internet. While aggregate level predictors are expected to influence Internet penetrations across different provinces in China, the individual factors could be linked to diverse patterns of using the Internet.

As previous studies show, using the Internet for different purposes could vary the consequences of usage (Shah, Kwak, & Hobert, 2001). Thus, the distinction is drawn

between using the Internet for political purpose and non-political purpose. As Bimber (2003) discovered, certain groups are more likely to use the Internet for political purposes, such as young people. This is in part due to their reliance on the Internet as an information source. In this study, using the Internet for political purpose is singled out, since it relates most closely to the main question of this study: Internet and democratization of China.

The consequences of Internet use are examined through various political behaviors: traditional political actions that are supported by the government, and unconventional actions like protests against domestic or international forces.

Figure 2-2. The Main-Relationship Model



To fully understand the main-relationship model, the two main relationships are explained. First, a variety of factors that may influence Internet adoption are analyzed, including aggregate factors and individual ones. In China, where the economic development and political context are developed in a highly unbalanced way in eastern and western areas, the Internet adoption rates are expected to differ drastically in the west versus the east. This is to some extent due to the different macro-level environments,

such as the market condition and technological infrastructure, and is also caused by different user characteristics across regions. Although most studies on the digital divide are cross-national comparisons, the same logic could be extended to internal provincial comparisons within a country.

Second, to understand the main relationship between Internet use and political engagement, the concept of Internet use is revisited. Unlike traditional media, the Internet offers a variety of information, activities, and services. Research has shown that specific usage of the Internet leads to different results (Norris, 1998; Shah, Kwak, & Holber, 2001). For instance, informational use and communicational use might have positive impacts on users' political interests, but recreational use might not. That is why to understand the impact of Internet usage, one must first take into consideration patterns of Internet use and characteristics of users.

Internet Adoption

There are many factors that predict Internet adoption, both at the macro level and micro level. First of all, regulations of the Internet, especially the policies related to Internet accessibility and affordability are significant factors in determining Internet growth (Hargittai, 1999; Wallsten, 2005). According to Wallsten (2005), countries that regulate entry by Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have fewer Internet hosts and users, whereas countries that regulate Internet pricing have higher prices for Internet access.

Similarly, Robinson and Crenshaw (2002) identified that the Internet is more likely to be adopted in democratic societies rather than authoritarian ones. Others (Goodman, Press, Ruth, & Rutkowski, 1994) found similar positive influences of an

"open society". According to the modernization theory, an open society, most likely a democratic one, enjoys competitiveness both in both economics and politics, and property rights, which are crucial in developing information technology (Robinson & Crenshaw, 2002). Finally, limited evidence also suggests a positive impact of foreign investment (Robinson & Crenshaw, 2002).

Hargittai (1996, 1998) found that a country's human development level is related to its level of Internet connectivity. Factors such as adult literacy rate, education, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and life expectancy are all associated with Internet connectivity. In studying 18 nations, Hargittai (1999) discovered a highly significant influence of affluence (GDP) on Internet development; the same relation was later confirmed by Kiiski & Pohjola (2002). Lucas and Sylla (2003) also showed that general affluence is an important factor in developing the Internet in terms of building the telecommunication infrastructure and users' literacy levels. In studying the diffusion of telephone in Germany, Thomas (1988) found that the spread of technology is also dependent on existing technological and infrastructural factors. Logically, it is easier for an advanced economic and technological environment to provide sufficient resources to develop the Internet, as well as a mature market to distribute the technology, than an area with a less developed economy and technological infrastructure. Norris (2001) also found that economic development and R&D investment are important predictors of Internet adoption.

Other than political and economic factors, education, especially university-level education, plays a critical role in growing the Internet. On the individual level, those with a university-level education are more likely to have the knowledge and other resources

needed for adopting the Internet (Robinson & Crenshaw, 2002). At the macro level, an educated workforce with advanced technological knowledge can accelerate the pace of technological development, better utilize, and more extensively apply the technology in various aspects (Goodman, Press, Ruth, & Rutkowski, 1994; Kiiski & Pohjola, 2002; Robinson & Crenshaw, 2002).

Finally, individual factors such as income, age, or trust are also important predictors of Internet adoption (Goodman, Press, Ruth, & Rutkowski, 1994; Robinson & Crenshaw, 2002). Focusing on using the Internet specifically for political purposes, Norris (1998) discovered that political Internet users had higher levels of political interest, knowledge, efficacy, and were of higher Social Economic Status.

Provincial Digital Divide

The Internet is recognized by the government as well as the economic players for its financial value. Certainly, the Internet narrows the gap between China and the rest of the world in terms of providing information and channels of communication, and greatly enhances China's economic competitiveness. But will the technology reinforce the long-existing disparity between the wealthy coastal provinces and poor inland parts of China, and between the rural and urban markets?

It has been noticed that Internet development has left China an internal digital divide between "haves" and "have nots" (Harwit, 2004; Giese, 2003). For instance, according to CNNIC reports, the ratio of Internet access among the most developed parts of China such as Beijing and Shanghai is several times more than the poorest regions like Yunnan or Guizhou provinces. Until the mid 1990s, Internet development centered

around cities like Beijing or Shanghai. Even though the gap has been narrowing over the years, the inland provinces still have a long way to go in order to catch up.

As Harwit (2004) described it, there are two types of internal digital divides in China. The first gap comes from the rural-urban divide. With such a small percentage of Internet users from rural areas, the majority of rural residents still cannot afford Internet access. The second divide is a regional gap, mainly between the eastern coastal provinces and the inland provinces. Cities like Beijing or Shanghai have almost 50% of residences accessed to the Internet, but provinces like Tibet or Guizhou have no more than 10% of such residences accessed (CNNIC, 2008).

There are many reasons for the regional digital divide. Lower revenue from less developed areas is one of the main reasons why telecommunication providers are reluctant to go to these regions. Throughout the 1990s, China Telecom was the only enterprise to profit from the telecommunication sector development (Giese, 2003). According to Giese, using its monopoly, China Telecom was able to establish national telecommunication and data networks. But now the company is listed on the stock market and faces national control and forced price reduction, it has little incentive to enter new markets where the profitability cannot be guaranteed. The same is true for other network companies and especially Internet Service Providers (ISPs) who often avoid regions that show little promise of short-term profits.

While the commercial sectors have little incentive to narrow the telecommunications and Internet gap, neither is the government willing to sacrifice the pace of telecommunication development in wealthier areas (Hughes & Wacker, 2003). The government has launched several programs including the “Go West” project in trying

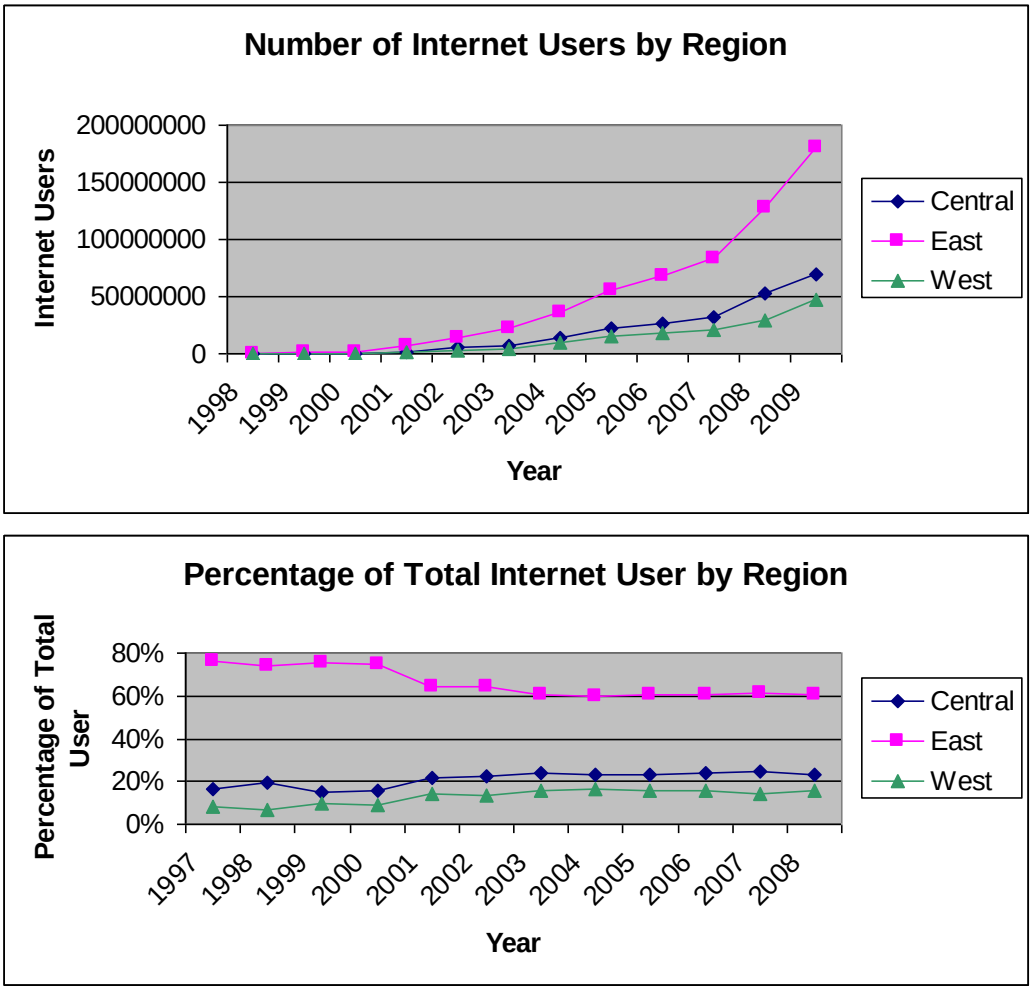
to help the west catch up with the economic development happening in the eastern part of the country. Nevertheless, other than laying approximately one million kilometers of fiber-optic cable and installation of satellite telecommunications, these projects mainly focus on the transport infrastructure (Giese, 2003).

In addition, in China where government plays a central role in the marketplace for information technology, government policies related to the Internet are likely to have a significant impact on Internet development. For instance, in less developed provinces, solving the basic survival needs might be more important concerns; but for more affluent areas, developing information technology such as the Internet is more likely to make the top agenda.

By and large, the Internet adoption rates have been increasing across regions. However, the disparities between different regions are still considerable. As the following figures (see Figure 2-3) illustrate, although the number of Internet users in various regions is increasing, the rate of growth is still the highest in the eastern region. Also, looking at the compositions of total Internet users in China, clearly the eastern proportion is not decreasing significantly.

Although many researchers have identified the gap between provinces, few have tried to systematically record or understand what caused such gaps. Is the gap closing up, and for what reasons? Are these reasons political factors, economic factors, educational levels, or perhaps a combination of all the factors? By employing a dataset with macro-level predictors on the provincial level, this study will be one of the first to understand at what dimensions and to what extent the provinces differ from one another, and what factors might have caused such discrepancies.

Figure 2-3. Provincial Internet Penetrations in China, 1997-2008



Source: CNNIC, 1997-2008

Internet and Its Political Impacts

The global nature of the Internet and its wide use in China have drawn international firms, human rights groups, international development organizations, political critics or researchers and many others' attention to the overall influences of the

technology. Millions of hits can be received when searching for China and the Internet with Google. It is interesting and important to see whether or not the Internet can and if so, will change the current political structure and public discourse in China. Being one of the few Communist countries and the largest one remaining in the world, many are anxious to see how communism will evolve there, and intrigued to evaluate what role the Internet plays in the process.

With its scope and great ease of obtaining information, communication capacity, and particularly its decentralized nature, the development of the Internet in China has made many believe that the Internet will greatly help advance freedom and democracy in China, where the state is still under authoritarian rule (Liu, 2001). As they argue, unlike other communication tools, the Internet can penetrate the information censorship employed by the Chinese government for years and break the official hegemony. The Internet is capable of exposing China's people to alternative norms, liberal values, and democratic principles that are not normally available through traditional media; consequently, Chinese people can make better judgments of political and economic issues and eventually turn China into a democracy (Taubman, 1998; Lacharite, 2002; Qiang, 2003; Chase & Mulvenon, 2002). Other scholars like Yang (2003), identified new ways to get involved in political activities, which are only made possible by the Internet. Voting is not available for most Chinese citizens and there are not a lot of institutionalized ways for citizens to participate in politics. However, the Internet has changed the situation—now online petitions, discussions of various social and political affairs, easy communication with media and even government officials have all become

possible. Indeed, survey results show that Internet users in China are likely to have higher levels of efficacy.[4]

Using a multi-dimensional approach to conceptualize Internet use, Shah, Kwak, & Holbert (2001) have uncovered four distinctive patterns of Internet use: information search and exchange; financial management; product purchase; and social-recreational use. Research shows that use of the Internet for information search and exchange is significantly correlated to participation in volunteer and other cooperative activities (Shah, Kwak, & d Holbert, 2001; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). Applying this finding in the Chinese context, it is expected that Internet users who use the Internet for political reasons are more likely to be engaged in civic or political activities.

On the other hand, cyber pessimist Hachigian (2001) made an observation that since most Internet users in China are young, well educated, and live in big cities, they have little incentive to risk their career and life by getting involved in politically sensitive online activities. What this argument implies, other than that political application of the Internet may not be a mainstream usage, is that if users do get involved in politically sensitive activities, the Internet might have a positive influence on political activism.

The Moderation Models

In addition to the main-relation model, this study took into consideration the specific political context in China: Internet censorship and the rising Chinese nationalism. The moderating models evaluate the moderating effects of perceived threat on political Internet use and impacts of nationalistic value on political participation.

[4] See more discussions on The World Internet Project.

Censorship and Perceived Censorship

The Internet has created a complex situation for the Chinese government. On the one hand, the government is convinced that the Internet will enhance the country's economic competitiveness. The Internet enables China to compete more effectively in the global market, thanks to its remarkable ability to enhance communications and its easy and cheap access to global information. On the other hand, the Internet has threatened the Chinese government's ability to insulate the Chinese people from certain information and ideas, including pornography, violence, and more importantly, political views that differ from the Central Communist Party (CCP) views.

The Chinese approach is to endorse and promote the Internet for economic, propaganda, and educational uses, while relying on a variety of high-tech methods and legal approaches to minimize the freedom of expression. Government monopoly is established at the level of International connectivity; ISPs, and users are required to register with the local Public Security Bureau (PSB), thousands of URLs are blocked, Internet cafés are heavily regulated, and severe punishments including fines and imprisonments are occasionally used as a warning technique (Sohmen, 2001). Technical approaches like filtering software and human monitoring of online behaviors are also employed to deter possible dissenting online behaviors (Zittrain & Edelman, 2002; Tsui, 2001). In addition to the traditional regulation and technological surveillance, the state also relies on self-censorship to maintain its political power (Cullen & Choy, 1999; Tan, 1999; Sohmen, 2001; Tsui, 2001).

Despite the seeming strictness of Internet control, in reality, the actual regulations of the Internet are not likely to be exercised so rigorously. There are two reasons to

believe that. First, as many scholars have pointed out, the Internet simply cannot be fully controlled (Tan, Mueller, & Foster, 1997; Hachigian, 2001; Qiang, 2003; Boas, 2004). With the sheer amount of information online, it would be unrealistic both financially and technically to censor all information or online activities. In addition, Chinese Internet users can attempt to circumvent controls in a variety of ways, from the use of peer-to-peer file-sharing systems to using proxy servers to enter the blocked URLs.

Second, as Boas (2004) pointed out, there is a difference between perfect control and effective control. Although perfect control is not possible, "the self-censorship that the regime promotes among individuals and domestic Internet content providers (ICPs) is the primary way officials control what Chinese viewers see" (Hachigian, 2001, p. 48). The Chinese government understands that in a country like China where people have lived with censorship for years, the sense of "insecurity" is deeply rooted in people's minds. In this sense, the objective sense of security that is determined by the reliability of technical functions and factual knowledge is not as crucial in determining people's online behavior, as the subjective sense of security, which is derived from individual perception and social norm (Wacker, 2003). Naturally, how the public perceives the censorship, and how they trust the Internet for its security would influence people's activities online. Thus, as the government's official newspaper, *People's Daily* puts it, the trick for the state is to cultivate a "firewall within one's head", instead of building an actual unbreakable firewall ("Party Daily calls for action against Internet pollution", 2001). This also explains why Internet-related arrests and penalties are often highly publicized. If the public believes that the government is capable of monitoring their online activities, both

ISPs and users alike are inclined to engage in voluntary self-control, which probably is the most effective element in Chinese Internet control strategies.

The theory of threat explains this phenomenon well. According to Singer (1958) and Pruitt (1965), perceived threat derives from the target evaluation of the threatener's intention to harm and capability of carrying out harmful acts. A threat can be subjective, in that individuals are different in dealing with possible threats. Paranoid people are more likely to perceive threats than others are. Characteristics of threateners and targets, and the content of threats can all mediate how threats are perceived. For instance, according to Milburn and Watman (1981), structural threats — ones embedded in the structure of a situation, such as the treat of arrest when you commit a crime, or threat of harming long-standing national interests, are the most credible threats. In a situation like structural threat scenario, the targets could still engage in punishable behaviors if they doubt the effectiveness of the possible punishment. When it comes to Internet censorship in China, it is reasonable to believe that users would perceive the censorship as a structural threat, partially due to the history of censorship in China, and partially due to the legitimate status of the government in executing such threats. As Asch (1952) and Kohler (1938) describe, when the position of the threatener is considered legitimate by the target, the threat itself carries a sense of "requiredness" or "ought".

Milburn and Watman (1981) draw a distinction between intended threat and perceived threat. The threatener may intend to communicate a threat, but an intended threat may not necessarily be perceived as one. Especially when the target possesses a sense of control in the situation, they may not act on the threats after all. For instance, when Chinese Internet users believe in the uncontrollable power of the Internet, or when

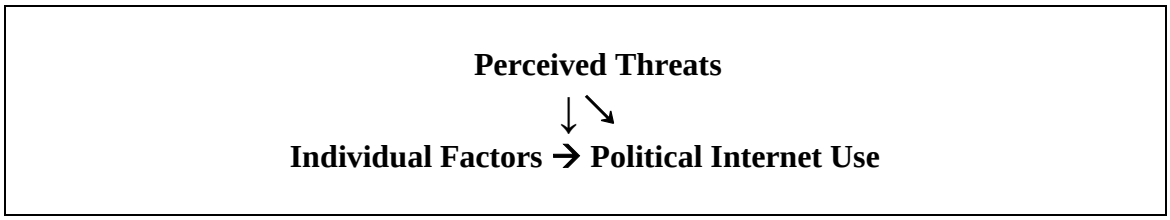
they believe that they have the necessary skills to bypass Internet censorship, they may choose to ignore the punishments for using the Internet for possibly dangerous political purposes after all. In contrast, when the perceived threat of Internet censorship is high and the trust of the Internet or themselves is low, users are likely to restrain themselves from using the Internet in potentially dangerous areas.

As the following figure (see Figure 2-4) demonstrates, perceived threats may have direct and moderating effects on Internet use. Perceived threats may influence the ways people use the Internet. When perceived threats are high and effective, users are likely to shy away from using the Internet for political purposes. In addition, as the previous section illustrates, political Internet use is determined by personal characteristics. For instance, users who are more educated, younger, and wealthier, and the ones who are interested in politics are more likely to engage in online political activities. But the influence of perceived threat can moderate the relationship between individual factors and Internet use. In other words, when perceived threat is low, young, wealthier, more educated, and more politically interested users are more likely to use the Internet for political purposes; when perceived threat is high, however, these relationships between individual attributes and political Internet use are likely to diminish or even reverse. More educated users may have achieved more compared to less educated users, and therefore have more to lose. Hence, when these users identify a high level of threat, they will avoid trouble by not using the Internet for political purposes, even though they may be interested in doing so otherwise.

Many efforts have been made to understand what determines various ways of using the Internet. It is not difficult to imagine that people who use the Internet mainly

for political purposes are different from people who use the Internet mainly for entertainment, but this difference may not be detected if the moderating effect of perceived threat is not taken into account.

Figure 2-4. The Moderating Model of Perceived Threats



Nationalism

"With communism discredited and democracy distrusted, China is in research of a new ideology…nationalism may be filling the gap" ("China saying no", 1996, p. 30).

To sustain the legitimacy of their rule, the Chinese government has resorted to promoting new ideologies or doctrines. Today's China can be said to be far from a socialist country. Socialism, communism, and Maoism all seem obsolete. Although the political system is still a one-party monopoly, the economy is a mixture of capitalism and state control. In order to build a new ideological foundation, the state has turned to nationalism in that nationalism represents the entire country instead of certain classes (Zhou, 2006). Indeed, nationalism provides a sense of solidarity that is badly needed in the country.[5] While nationalism has become one of the most visible ideologies in China today, many people, including the ones who believe in capitalism, tend to value economic development and social stability over democratic ideas (Friedman & McCormick, 2000;

[5] See Zhou (2006) and Zhao (2000) for more discussions about nationalism in China.

Downs & Saunders, 1998/1999). As Zhao (2000b) pointed out, many Chinese intellectuals emphasize that "they are patriots first and democrats second" (p. 22).

Nationalism has attracted great academic attention over the years, but there is very little consistency in defining the concept. In fact, many studies about nationalism focus on what the concept means, and where, when and how it originated. What has been agreed upon, however, is that nationalism is a modern phenomenon that is specially associated with the nation-state system (e.g., Emerson, 1960; Cottam & Cottam, 2001; Zhao, 2004a). It's becoming commonplace to treat nationalism as an enemy of democracy, especially since World War II, where nationalism seemed to be inextricably bound up with fascism. For instance, Vesna Pesic—a Serbian leading democrat has attacked nationalism for being ethnocentric and antidemocratic (Diamond & Platter, 1994). Disagreeing with the view that nationalism and democracy are mutually hostile, however, Nodia (1994) argues that nationalism is intertwined with the tradition of democracy, evidenced in the French revolution or the United States' Revolutionary War from the Britain, where nationalism was the core political force in building a democratic government. Nationalism and democracy could definitely coexist under certain circumstances. Nevertheless, even Nodia himself admitted that there are always tensions between democracy and nationalism, since democracy is based on the notion that government is only legitimized by the will of the people, whereas nationalism tends to subordinate individual rights to collective "national rights", which runs contradictory to democracy, fundamentally.

Although Chinese history stretches back more than two millennia, China has traditionally been governed by Confucianism and specific ethnic structures, which is not

considered a nation-state today (Zhao, 2004a). Along with many other Western ideologies, nationalism was first introduced to China in the 19th century. It emerged as a painful response to foreign invasion and maintained its powerful appeal in China's fight against international imperialism until 1949 when Marxism-Leninism became the official ideology. In the 1980s, however, Communist ideology faced a legitimacy crisis when challenged by liberal democratic ideas. The "three spiritual crises"—a crisis of faith in socialism, a crisis of confidence in the future of the country, and a crisis of trust in the party (Zhao, 2004a), troubled the regime so deeply that the restoration of state legitimacy became the most serious task for the Chinese leadership. The government needed a new ideology to integrate as many Chinese people as possible. Nationalism was their answer.

Nationalism has gained great popularity in China. Nationalistic books like *The China that can say no* became an instant bestseller in 1996; the nationwide outrage broke out after the May 1999 mistaken U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade; and protesters took it to street after a US spy airplane accident. These incidents are all indicators of growing nationalistic sentiments (Gries, 2004). China's nationalism has oftentimes been described as state-driven. It is partially true, since the state does play a proactive role in cultivating nationalism in the official propaganda. However, it would oversimplify the reality to believe that the rising nationalism in China today is entirely a government-led phenomenon. The state-driven nationalism in China must converge with the public on some grounds. Other than the historical and cultural dimensions, the most appealing feature of Chinese nationalism is pragmatism or instrumentalism.

According to Zhou (2006), what comprises the paradigm of Chinese nationalism are concepts like "comprehensive national power" –which emphasizes the economic

development of the country, "national interests" –which concern China's position in world politics, and "the rules of the game" –which conveys political, economic or social interactions with other countries as game playing. Under this "interest-driven" and "game-playing" paradigm, the Chinese nationalists consider national power as the top priority. To sustain that economic development, the internal stability is also a necessary condition. Since the United States is often perceived as impeding China's reunification with Taiwan and China's ascension as a major force in world politics, the democratic values and human rights that the United States endorses have stopped attracting the Chinese public as they once did. Although a democratic government is still desirable, the public in China may no longer recognize it as the most important goal.

Nationalism certainly plays an essential role in China's political world now. It is especially crucial to consider its impact in this study because like democratic values in the 1980s, nationalism has become the most celebrated ideology in China and has profound implications for political participation. For nationalists, democracy could be a chaotic force in today's China and even hinder China's economic development. As a result, they are more likely to comply with authoritarian controls in maintaining the social order. This theory is confirmed by a 2004 study that found a positive correlation between nationalism and political support (Chen, 2004). Findings from the Beijing survey (Chen, 2004) reveals that people who have strong beliefs in nationalism and preference for stability are more likely to be proud, respectful, and supportive of the political institutions in China.

Although there has been relatively little interest in understanding the participatory consequences of nationalism, Cottam and Cottam (2001) did identify a few behavioral

patterns of a nationalistic public. These include: 1) A greater tendency for political integration with the communities outside the official borders of the state but considered inherently part of their own existing. In terms of policy preference in China, a nationalistic Chinese would have a stronger will to include areas like Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau in a unified China. 2) A greater concern with protecting national dignity and a greater willingness to take action when threats occur. What this pattern implies is that a nationalistic Chinese would be more likely to be politically active, or at least reactive when he/she perceives threats from an outside force. 3) A greater likelihood to sacrifice for the greater good or collective interests. This could explain the results of the World Internet Project, which shows that 7.9% of Internet users and 7.4% of non-users in China agree that online political information needs to be controlled.[6] Apparently, for some people, individual rights such as freedom of expression could be sacrificed for greater goals such as stable political environment. 4) More likely to grant a nation-state's leaders the decisional latitude to take risks in defending state interests, but less likely to grant such latitude when the leaders accept defeats.

The 1999 Belgrade embassy bombing incident exemplifies the heated nationalistic sentiments in the Chinese public (Symonds, 1999). On May 8, 1999, an American B-2 bomber dropped five two-thousand-pound guided missiles that hit the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. Three journalists were killed, and twenty-three others were injured. While U.S. President Bill Clinton proclaimed the bombing as a "tragic mistake," many Chinese people believe it was premeditated. Protests quickly erupted throughout the country. At first, the government rejected American and NATO's apologies, which the public applauded; however, in the end, the Chinese government accepted the apology

[6] More results are available at http://www.worldInternetproject.net/.

and agreed to the compensation. It was at this point the government found themselves incongruent with the public, and they had to shut down the continuing protests against the United States and NATO.

During the protests against NATO and the U.S. in 1999, the protests did not only occur outside of the U.S. Embassy or Consulates, they happened online too. Flooded by emails sent from China, the White House website was temporarily shut down. Protesters hacked the U.S. Embassy's website in Beijing and wrote "Down with the Barbarians" on the homepage. Chinese chat rooms and websites were swamped with discussions of the incident.

When the Internet was first introduced to China, many assumed that the free flow of information would advance people's quest for a democratic reform. Ironically, what they have found instead, is that with the increasingly popular use of the Internet, users have relied on the newly accessible channels to voice nationalistic views, such as anti-Japan or anti-U.S. discussions, reunification with Taiwan, and redeeming the humiliations of the past and urging for a powerful future, resulted from recent economic developments (Zhou, 2006; Zhao, 2004; Zhao, 2000).

At first glance, discerning the differences between political actions caused by nationalism and political actions caused by democratic values is probably difficult. Ingelhart (2005) for example, has treated protests in China as indicators of pro-democratic actions. But a closer look at protests like those in 1999 reveals that it is quite different to protest against a foreign country and to protest against the Chinese government. When it comes to protesting against a foreign force, nationalists could be very active. But if the protest is against a domestic issue or a leader, it is likely that the

nationalists will restrain themselves from doing anything subversive in order to maintain the social order, which they tend to view as more important than democracy at the current phase.

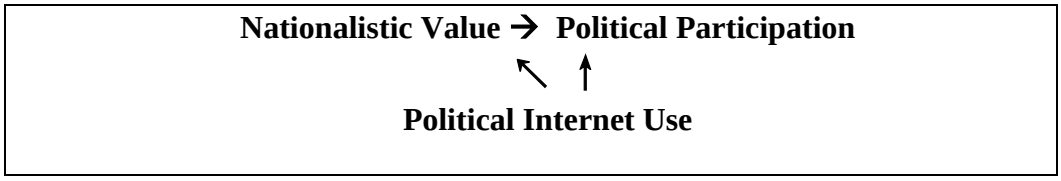
Indeed, drawing a distinction between "inward-directed" sentiments and "outward-directed" sentiments, John Comaroff and Paul Stern (1995) noted that inwardly, nationalism strives for solidification of a nation-state through the modernization movement or liberation from alien rules, whereas outwardly, nationalism could generate hostility toward other states—an extreme case would be the experiences of Germany and Italy in World War II (Carmaroff & Stern, 1995).

The state-led nationalism has opposed democratic values in a number of ways, including prioritizing pragmatic concerns like strong government, stable economic gains, and social order at the expense of democratization (Zhao, 2004a). Rooted in the century of China's defeats by foreign countries, grassroots nationalism reacts most strongly when the national interest is being threatened by an outside force. Protests against Japan in 1996 and 2005, the United States in 1998, or France in 2008 are all manifestations of the grassroots oriented nationalism.

As nationalism rises as one of the most influential values in China, it is important to understand its behavioral consequences. Likely, citizens who value national interests and social stability would engage in different political activities in contrast to democrats who favor a democratic political structure and individual rights. Moreover, the Internet use could work as a moderator between nationalism and political engagements. For example, the Internet could help disseminate grassroots nationalistic views that often criticize the government's International policies for being too soft. Consequently,

although state-led nationalistic people are more likely to support the state and less likely to support sudden political change towards democracy (Chen, 2004), their exposure to online critical coverage of the government's international policy may change the association between people's nationalistic ideology and political participation. Figure 2-5 demonstrates the direct effect of nationalistic values on political participation and the potential moderating effects of political Internet use.

Figure 2-5. Nationalism, Net Political Use and Political Participation



Research Methods

This section discusses research design, data collection, and the validity of the research methods used. Given the complexity of studying politics in China and the relatively new nature of Internet use, this study draws upon multiple datasets and methods to understand the Internet's political impacts.

Secondary Analysis

To answer the first research question about the Internet adoption and divide on the aggregate level, two existing datasets were used. The first dataset was obtained from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in China and is composed of macro-level indicators such as economic development, technology infrastructure, and educational level broken down by provinces in China. The most recent statistics were collected in 2007. The

second dataset is the CNNIC's annual report of Internet development. These reports run from 1997 to 2009 and were conducted twice every year. The number of users and penetration rates from each province in China are documented by these reports.

Using the combination of the macro-level predictors and Internet diffusion data, this study explored what institutional level factors explained Internet penetrations and the provincial variances of Internet penetration in China. Specifically, determinants of Internet connectivity in different regions were analyzed, so that possible approaches to close the regional disparity in Internet diffusion were discussed.

To understand what determines Internet adoption and use on an individual level, as well as the Internet use's political consequences, in-depth interview and original survey data were conducted and analyzed. Both the interview and survey were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Michigan. Both one-on-one in-depth interviews and survey interviews were conducted in the capital city Beijing and a western provincial capital Urumqi. These two cities were chosen because Beijing represents the area where the Internet is most developed and applied, whereas Urumqi is a western city where the Internet penetration rate is significantly lower. Political, economic, and educational levels from the two cities are vastly different, which therefore makes them appropriate choices for understanding different patterns of Internet adoptions. In addition, the political environment in the two cities is diverse, too. Beijing, as the political center of China, is much more liberal and open than the remote western city, Urumqi. It would be interesting to investigate if Internet use for political purposes has different implications in these two regions.

In-Depth Interview

In-depth interviews are particularly useful to elicit information in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view or situation. In-depth interviews are also useful for further investigation since they provide detailed contexts for standardized methods such as survey. Prior to running the standardized survey, in-depth interviews were performed to understand the main variables and their intervening relationships involved in this study. For instance, questions like how the Internet is used exactly by each individual, what factors are involved in determining what to do online, what nationalism or democracy means to the Chinese public, and whether or not the perception of censorship is really vital in determining people's political Internet use could be explored first. As a result, a clearer picture about the Internet in China can be drawn, and questions in surveys can be tailored to the specific characteristics of the Chinese public. Detailed knowledge of the respondents' Internet use habits and political behaviors offline enriched the understanding of the contextual factors of the two-stage relationships, and also shed some light on the impact of using the Internet on respondents' engagement in the political world.

To recruit participants for the interviews, 30 flyers were distributed in business districts in each of two cities: Beijing and Urumqi in February of 2007. In addition, the flyer was published on two Chinese websites www.sina.com.cn and www.tianyaclub.cn in February as well. These two websites are two of the most popular portals in China, and both have forums or bulletin boards for different regions. On these two portals, the flyer was specifically published in the board of Beijing and Xinjiang, of which Urumqi is the capital city. The flyer states that a graduate student is recruiting informants to understand people's media use habits, especially the Internet, as well as some of their world views.

Interested participants were instructed to contact a cell phone number listed on the flyer and meet with the interviewer at a later time.

Dozens of people contacted the researcher after reading the flyer either on the street or online. In the end, only Internet users were interviewed since Internet use is the focus of the study. After each interview, the informant was asked to suggest friends or acquaintances who might want to participate as well. To maximize the representativeness of subjects, 5 females and 5 males in each city, across various age ranges and occupations, were chosen to participate in the interviews.

The interviews were semi-structured and took place in public settings like coffee shop or tea-house. The interview conversations were audio taped. Before each interview, the informant was assured of anonymity and signed a consensus form. The researcher was the only interviewer.

I started the interview by asking informants to recall as much detail as possible about their Internet use habits. How long they had used the Internet on a daily basis, what they had used the Internet for, and if they had used the net for political purposes, what activities would they be most likely to engage in. Then, the interview proceeded according to various narratives of the informant. For instance, if the informant had used the Internet for political purposes, I would probe into a few issues that I perceived vitally important: how they perceive the Internet censorship and if the perceived censorship could affect their political Internet activities. Evaluations of all informants' nationalistic levels were attempted by asking participants to describe how pride they were of being a Chinese, if they thought China should become a stronger power, and how they looked at economic development and political stability versus democratization and freedom of

expressions. They were also asked about their opinions on political actions; if they would want to get involved in conventional political participation such as voting and contacting, as well as political protests. Their demographic information was also recorded at the end of the interviews.

Survey

The cross-sectional survey data were also collected in Beijing and Urumqi in June and July of 2007. To recruit participants, a similar flyer was distributed in the university district of two cities asking participants to answer a questionnaire about their media use and world views, which took about 30 minutes. Each participant was promised to be given $10 at the end of the survey. First, two hundred flyers were distributed in each city and then another two hundred flyers were distributed later to attract more participants. Interested informants were asked to go to a university classroom at night to answer the questionnaires in person, where the researcher was present to monitor the interviews. The participants were assured of anonymity and signed a consensus form as well. The data collection took one to two weeks in each city.

The Validity & Reliability of the Methods

To study political implications of Internet use in China validly and reliably, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. The two methods have their own merits and flaws. In-depth interviews are helpful in understanding the holistic situation of individuals but lack standardization and generalizability. Surveys are good in capturing relationships among important constructs in a systematic way, but often overlook the complex dynamics of human activities. Using the combined research

methods in this study, the validity of results can be increased, and reliability can be cross checked through different methods.

Ideally, a random sample should be used to understand Internet use and its political consequences. However, "obtaining a nation-wide probability sample of the Chinese population is both impossible and impractical" (Manion, 1994, P. 765). There are two reasons for this. First, it is very costly to generate a random sample; and second, survey research in China requires a permit from the local authority, which is difficult to obtain as the topic of survey is about politics. Thus, the most feasible sampling approach was to use a small convenient sample and not inform the local authority.

While the generalizability of the data may be constrained, the results of this study can still provide important insights and inferences about the patterns of relationships between Internet use and political activism. Furthermore, as Manion (1994) argues, although unrepresentative samples may not be reliable to evaluate single variables, like political participation, these samples can help make generalizable inferences about relationships among variables, such as the relationship between Internet use and political participation. An unrepresentative sample would pose a bigger problem when the sample has unusual values in the variables that are in the theorized relationships.

Concerns should be raised about the truthfulness of the survey answers since it is possible for respondents to conceal their true feelings or opinions in order to avoid possible trouble from the local authorities. To minimize political contamination of survey responses, precautions need to be taken to ensure the validity of the answers and safety for respondents. First, as one of the first scholars to collect survey data in China, Shi (1997) pointed out that attitude questions are usually more sensitive and more likely to

worry Chinese respondents than behavioral questions. Therefore, attitudinal questions were only asked when absolutely necessary in the survey. In addition, the respondents were offered confidentiality and encouraged to choose the answer, which was the closest to their true feelings.

Second, since residents of Beijing are considered to be the most politically outspoken in China (Shi, 1997), responses from Beijing and Urumqi were compared and examined to see if there were any differences in answering politically sensitive questions. If any differences presented between the two cities, it would reflect either their true attitudinal or behavioral differences or distinct levels of openness.

Finally, as Tessler and Jamal (2006) described in the data-collecting experiences in the Arab world, one of the key approaches to conducting surveys in a semi-democratic environment where people often fear and are skeptical of the survey researchers from abroad, is to network with the local academic institutions and elites. By associating himself with the local academic community, Jamal was able to build credibility for his projects and generate reliable responses. Since these survey interviews were conducted in a university classroom, Tsinghua University in Beijing and Xinjiang Agriculture University in Urumqi, two well-established universities in China, participants were under the impression that this study was in cooperation with the respected university.

Although it is often assumed in the West that Chinese respondents may not feel free to talk about their true opinions, more recent studies show that Chinese respondents feel much freer to express their views and feelings in surveys than expected in the West (Shi, 1997; Chen, 2004). As Chen (2004) argued, this is partially because the Chinese

regulations regarding survey research at the grassroots level are inconsistent and ineffective.

Having discussed the theoretical framework and methodology, the following chapters will explore different areas in understanding the Internet and political world in China. To estimate the political implication of Internet use, I first reviewed how the Internet has been developed in China.

CHAPTER 3
INERNET DIFFUSION AND PROVINCIAL DIGITAL DIVIDE IN CHINA

The past twenty years have witnessed an exponential growth in Internet diffusion in China. It's estimated that the number of Chinese Internet users reached 253 million by mid 2008, overtaking the U.S. as the country with the most number of Internet users in the world (CNNIC, 2008). The number of websites in China also reached 1.919 million by 2008, with an annual growth rate of 46.3%. Although the Internet penetration rate is relatively low, with two people out of ten using the Internet,[7] the growth rate is striking, considering that China is still a developing country, in which many citizens cannot make their basic needs.

Unlike some may have expected, the Chinese government is taking a proactive role in promoting the development of the Internet and regards the Internet as one of the top priorities on China's policy agenda. Information technology, especially the Internet, was the focus of the national Ninth and Tenth Five-Year Plans (1995-2005). The Internet was embraced particularly to help economic, educational, and social development in China. China is also one of the first developing countries to reform its telecommunication regulating agencies to facilitate the growth of the Internet (Dai, 2003). The highly rapid growth of the Internet in China, without doubt, benefits a great deal from these national policies and strategies.

[7] China's population is estimated to be at 1.3 billion (Worldbank, 2006).

Nevertheless, the result of Internet development in China is rather unbalanced. According to the CNNIC reports, Internet users in China are better educated, young, and live in a big city. Students are the largest group to use the Internet. The population in rural areas represents roughly 60% of the Chinese population, but only 25% of Internet users are from the rural area. Notably, the growing rate of Internet users in the rural area has been increasing rapidly in the recent years. In 2007, the annual growth rate for the rural Internet users reached 127.7%. Out of the 73 million new Internet users, 40%, i.e., 29.17 million, comes from the rural areas. The urban and rural difference seems to be closing, but remains evident.

Still, the provincial gaps between the coastline and inland are wide. The provincial-level cities like Beijing and Shanghai have almost 50% of the Internet users; whereas less developed provinces like Anhui and Gansu have less than 10% of the penetration rate within provinces. Scholars have warned that in the international digital divide, the disparity of information technology diffusion between developed and developing countries may deepen the disadvantage of developing countries (Rodriguez & Wilson, 2000). Applying the same logic to domestic China, the digital divide in Internet adoption could also potentially widen the gap between the developed coastline provinces and the inland west, and push rural areas further away from the cities.

Various factors contributed to the unbalanced fashion of Internet development in China, such as the economic condition, educational level, or government spending within distinct areas. Wealthier provinces or municipalities have a better infrastructure and educational system, as well as an open social environment to accept and develop the Internet. Less developed provinces, on the other hand, often lack the necessary economic,

educational, technological or social environment for developing information technology and are often short of sufficient demand. But how do the different provinces differ from each other? Furthermore, what exactly caused the gaps in Internet penetration across provinces?

To understand what determines Internet penetration and the digital divide on the provincial level, this chapter first reviewed the relatively short history of the Internet development in China. Then, macro factors that could influence Internet diffusion on the aggregate level were discussed. Finally, a secondary analysis using provincial data was conducted to analyze what factors are most important in facilitating Internet penetration rates in 27 Chinese provinces or municipalities; and what remedies could be applied to bridge the digital divide between rich coastal areas and poor inland provinces.

The History of Internet Development in China

Development of the Internet in China did not occur until 1987 when China built its first computer network — the China Academic Network (CANET, Cullen & Choy, 1999). The purpose of this network was primarily academic; it was aimed to provide research support for computer science studies. The network offered e-mail service with the international Internet through a channel provided by Kalsruhe University in Germany (Mueller & Tan, 1997).

Following the CANET, the local network of the Institute of High Energy Physics (IHEP), which is part of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), was established in 1988. The purpose of this network was to enable scientists at the National Science Foundation of China (NSFC) to participate in an international collaboration on high

energy physics, and also offer the scientists e-mail services (Taylor, 1997). In 1993, the IHEP network was directly linked to the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center for high physics international collaboration via a 64 Kbps leased satellite circuit from AT&T, and became the first official Internet link to the international Internet (Cullen & Choy, 1999). In March 1994, this link was formally provided with full Internet access, and in July 1994, the connectivity was changed to a submarine circuit through KEK (Yurcik & Tan, 1996).[8]

In 1989, the National Computer Networking Facilities of China (NCFC) within CAS launched another network, CASNET, which was a joint development of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Tsinghua University and the Beijing University funded by the State Planning Commission and the World Bank. This network provides the "most powerful computing capability for scientists in China", and was owned and administered by China's Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPT, Cullen & Choy, 1999). In September 1994, The Beijing University of Chemical Technology (MUCT) joined the CASNET to have full Internet connectivity via a 64Kbps MCI satellite circuit connected to CAREN (Consortium of Asian Research and Education Network) and JVNCNET (John Von Neumann Center Network-Princeton University, Yurcik & Tan, 1996).

In 1990, China registered its domain name as "cn" with the US Network Information Center (Cullen & Choy, 1999). Then the China Education and Research Network (CERNET) was launched in 1995 and was connected with more than one hundred Chinese Universities within the first two years (Taylor, 1997). While originally connected to the Internet through NCFC and CASNET, CERNET obtained its separate Internet connection via a 128 Kbps circuit in May 1995 (Yurcik & Tan, 1996).

[8] It's at national Laboratory for High Energy Physics, Japan

The first commercial network, CHINANET, was set up by the MPT in 1995 (Cullen & Choy, 1999). CHINANET functioned as a wholesale provider of bandwidth. Its customers were state corporations and private companies as well as wealthy individuals who were able to afford the rather expensive connection fees at the time. In addition, CHINANET also constitutes a brand name for the regional provincial telecommunications administrations (PTAs) to sell their own retail service provision (Tan, 1996a). CHINANET remains the largest network in China today (CNNIC, 2008).

Currently, China has eight interconnecting networks. As the dominant network, China Telecom's CHINANET has held nearly 54% of the nation's total international connection capacity (CNNIC, 2008), but CHINANET's share of bandwidth has fallen over the recent years.

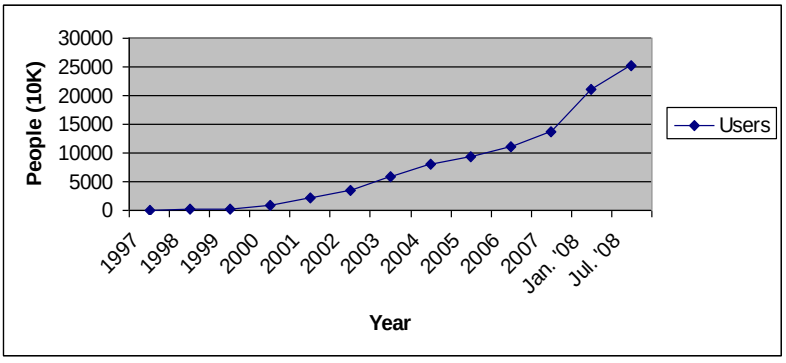
Before 1995, most of the networks in China were used primarily for academic and research purposes. However, the academic networks began to sell "shell accounts" to commercial users and provide email services and Usenet connectivity to bulletin board operators. Government organizations also started creating national computer networks for commercial use. In 1995, PTAs in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, Liaoning and Zhejiang all started commercial services under control of the MPT's regional companies. Subsequently, more private Internet Service Providers (ISPs) began offering full-fledged Internet services to individuals (Cullen & Choy, 1999). The desirability of ISPs was further strengthened by the explosion of Internet users in the late 1990s. Within the first month after CHINANET was launched, more than 800 subscribers signed up for the service (Tse & Tsang, 1995).

Internet Diffusion

Rogers (1983) defined diffusion as "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (Rodgers, 1983, p. 10). Rogers pointed out that the innovation spreads in an S-shaped curve. The number of adopters increases slowly at first due to uncertainty about the innovation, but as the innovation gains more exposure, the adoption rate increases rapidly until reaching a saturation point, at which point the curve flattens again. If China's Internet growth follows the S-shape closely, China is expected to be in a stage where the growth rate continues to climb (CNNIC, 2008).

According to the first national survey on the Internet in China, there were 820,000 Internet users by the end of March 1998. By the end of 1999, the Internet users had reached 4.5 million ("China's Internet Users Exceed 2 million", 1999).[9] According to the most recent report from CINNC (July 2008), the number of Internet users in China has reached more than 253 million, the number one in the world. Figure 3-1 shows the trend of Internet growth in China from 1997 to 2008.

Figure 3-1. Number of Internet Users in China, 1997-2008

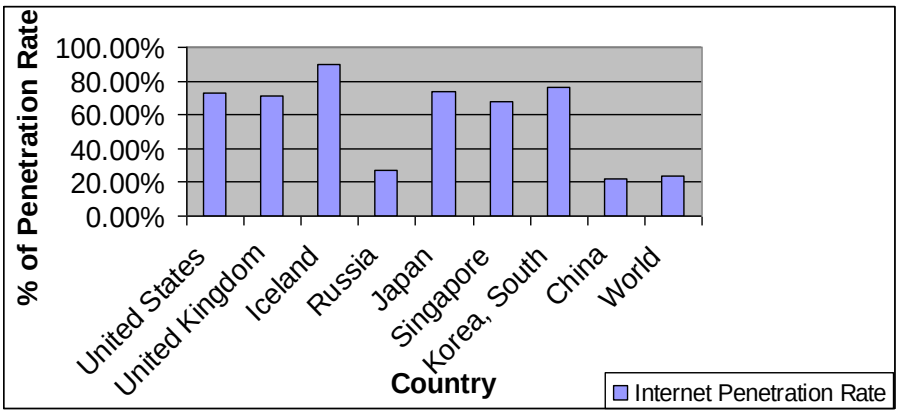


Source: CNNIC 1997-2008

[9] Source of these numbers is Xinhua News Agency.

Although the number of Internet users in China has continued to grow rapidly during the past decade, the penetration rate in China is still relatively low compared to more developed Western European, North American and various Asian countries. As Figure 3-2 shows, the penetration rate in China is slightly lower than the world penetration rate.

Figure 3-2. Comparisons of Internet Penetration Rates



Source: http://www.internetworldstats.com/, 2008

The increases in the number of Internet users are still skewed towards more developed areas in China. For instance, the number of new Internet users in Guangdong province was the largest among the provinces surveyed in 2007, showing an increase of 15 million new users in one year; followed by Jiangsu, Zhejiang having increases of 7.3 and 5.3 millions users, respectively. In terms of growing penetration rates, central provinces like Jiangxi, Henan, and Anhui all show growing rates higher than 70%. Nevertheless, in terms of absolute penetration rates, the penetration rates in developed cities like Beijing and Shanghai almost reached 50%, whereas the penetration rates in western part of China remain much lower, with Internet penetration rates of five inland

provinces below 10%. Table 3-1 illustrates how the concentrations of Internet users across the three regions differ.

Table 3-1. Internet Penetration Rates by Provinces or Municipalities[10]

Province (including four municipalities)	Percentage of Provincial Population	Percentage of Total Users	Number of Users (10k People)	Regions
Beijing	46.6	3.5	737	East
Tianjin	26.7	1.4	287	East
Hebei	11.1	3.6	762	East
Shanxi	15.9	3.7	183	Central
Mongolia	13.4	4	830	Central
Liaoning	18.3	8.4	1757	East
Jilin	15.9	7.2	1509	Central
Heilongjiang	12.5	4.1	866	Central
Shanghai	45.8	6	1256	East
Jiangsu	23.3	15.9	3344	East
Zhejiang	30.3	2.7	560	East
Anhui	9.6	0.7	144	Central
Fujian	24.3	2.6	15.9	East
Jiangxi	11.8	1.5	13.4	Central
Shandong	13.5	2.1	434	East
Henan	10.2	2.3	476	Central
Hubei	12.4	2.8	587	Central
Hunan	10.9	2.4	511	Central
Guangdong	35.9	4.6	956	East
Guangxi	11.9	3.4	706	East
Hainan	17.2	3.3	690	East
Chongqing	12.7	1.7	356	West
Sichuan	9.9	3.9	809	West
Guizhou	6	1.1	224	West
Yunnan	6.8	1.4	303	West
Tibet	12.7	0.2	36	West
Shanxi	13.9	2.5	517	West
Gansu	8.4	1	219	West
Qinghai	11	0.3	60	West
Ningxia	10.1	0.3	61	West
Xinjiang	17.7	1.7	363	West

Source: CNNIC 2008.

[10] The second column is the number of Internet users out of the total population within each province; the third column is Internet users out of the total Internet users in China.

The number of rural internet users increased sharply in 2007, with an annual increase rate of 127.7%, which is much higher than the increase rate of urban users (38.2%). Yet, although the urban-rural gap has narrowed, the majority of users still reside in urban areas (74.9%). By the end of 2007, Internet users in urban areas reached 157 million, while the rural users constituted only 52.62 million. The Internet penetration rate presented was 27.3% for urban residents and only 7.1% for rural residents (CNNIC, 2007).

In terms of access method, the 2007 CNNIC reports that by the end of 2007, 163 million Internet users (77.6%) were connected through broadband, 50.4 million Internet users (24%) used dial-up accounts.

Currently, the average cost of Internet access for home Internet connection is RMB 74.9 Yuan/month. The average surfing expense for Internet café users is 51.6 Yuan/month. Averaging access time is 16.2 hours per week.[11]

Based on CNNIC's survey on non-users, four main reasons prevent people from surfing the Internet: 1) lack of knowledge of computer or network; 2) lack of surfing equipment or Internet access; 3) no interest; and 4) poor quality of the Internet. As Internet development was once again given great priority in the 2006 Five-Year Plan, the government will continue spending great efforts to work on the access problem in the foreseeable future. In addition, the Ministry of Education has established guidelines to teach computer skills and Internet knowledge in schools in order to help children adopt the Internet (Fallows, 2008). With the assistance of proactive national policies, Internet growth is likely to persist in China.

[11]According to Chinese Statistics Yearbook 2007, the average monthly income per family is 1345 RMB.

Macro-Level Factors Influencing the Internet Growth and Digital Divide

In digital divide literature, a few factors that influenced the development of the Internet have been identified, including national policies, economic wealth, telecommunication infrastructure, affordability of Internet services, education, and other social/political factors (Hargittai, 1999; Norris, 2001; Robinson & Crenshaw, 2002; Lucas & Sylla, 2003; Dasgupta, Lall, & Wheeler, 2001). Although these studies mostly compared different countries, their results can be extended to understand provincial divides within China as well.

Telecommunication Policy

Past studies have suggested that among all the macro level factors influencing Internet penetrations, government policy is one of the most important predictors, especially the competition policy (Hargittai, 2000; Wallsten, 2005). In China, the government has given tremendous support to develop a telecommunication infrastructure. Starting from the mid-1980s, for example, the state has massively expanded telephone networks (Giese, 2003). In the Tenth and Eleventh Five-Year Plans (2001 and 2006) published by the Central Committee for CCP, clearly, priority has been given to the grand project of informatization. The plan includes widening of computer usage and digital networks (Giese, 2003). Ever since 1996, there had been a series of high priority projects proposed for the development of the information infrastructure — the "Golden Project". These projects were proposed and operated directly under the guidance of former Premier Zhu Rongji. The main focus of these projects was to expand the application of the Internet. In addition, projects like "Government Online" are also examples of the

government trying to proliferate the Internet content. Web content in the Chinese language has been enormously expanded and diversified, partially as a result of the authoritative encouragement. Although some authoritarian countries have controlled the Internet by limiting the bandwidth, China did not do so. The CNNIC (2008) reports the total Internet bandwidth of international connections as 368,927 Mbps.

The Beijing government also makes a remarkable effort to have a more competitive market for information technology. In 1993, the Ministry of Electronic Industry (MEI) began to compete with the MPT by launching a new corporation, called Jitong. The new company's original goal was to promote the "Golden Projects", which was meant to connect China's customs and financial networks so that better information and service could be provided for users. Jitong's ChinaGBN (Golden Bridge Network) was established in 1996. In 1994, the State Council approved Unicom as the second state-owned player. China Unicom's new network, UniNet was also created to compete with MPT's China Telecom (Harwit, 1998). This was a milestone in the development of China's telecommunication infrastructure since now there were two enterprises outside the realm of government ministries.

Since being established in 1998, the Ministry of Information Industry (MII) has had significant commercial interest in the Internet. The MII used to own and in many ways still connects to China Telecom, which owns CHINANET, the dominant network in China. There were many debates about whether alternative national backbones should be allowed to compete with China Telecom, without threatening national security (Sohmen, 2001). At that time, CHINANET was the only network that provided international connectivity to the private ISPs, and constituted more than 80 percent of international

connections by the end of 1999 (Anderson, 2000). Alternative networks such as ChinaGBN, which was affiliated with the old MEI, was still required to buy its international circuits through China Telecom. Finally, in 1998, Unicom was allowed to interconnect with the global Internet backbone. Unicom was authorized to participate in the Voice over IP trials and to deploy IP telephony service in over 100 cities. According to the MII, "China Telecom and China Unicom, the two telecom enterprises, will compete with each other according to new market regulations and rules of the games" ("Minister Wu Jichuan's new initiative", 1998, p. 4). By creating a competitor for China Telecom, the Chinese government hoped that better and faster services would be provided by both former monopolies, China Telecom and Unicom, in the telecommunications market.

After Unicom, several other backbone networks were launched, including China Communication Network Corporation (CCNC), which is sponsored by the Chinese Academy of Science (CAS), the Shanghai government, the Ministry of Railways, and the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT); China Mobile Telecommunication Network and China Satellite, which were both originally part of China Telecom.

By 1997, the government had started to consider whether competition should be allowed at the national level, and decided to allow a few domestic organizations to run an ISP as long as some minimum requirements would be met. At the same time however, the government was concerned about the national security issues because control of private companies would be more difficult compared to the state-owned ones. It was finally decided that only a limited number of government organizations have the right to

run Interconnecting Networks in order for the State Council to retain control of the international connectivity. Choosing the limited number of Interconnecting Networks provided challenges for the State Council. In the end, the State Council chose the China and Research Network (CERNET) and the China Science and Technology Network (CSTNet) for the research and educational community. Failing to become the only commercial Interconnecting Network, the MPT settled for being one of two commercial Interconnecting Networks; the MEI was selected for launching another commercial network (Sohmen, 2001).

The rapid development of the Internet in China today is certainly a result of these favorable national policies. However, while at the backbone level China engages "managed and controlled" competition, its rule that ISPs need to obtain government approval before operation commences and must lease global Internet access through government-controlled networks, will likely hinder the development of the Internet use. According to Wallsten (2005), higher ISP barriers are associated with fewer Internet users. He also suggested that Internet cafés would be more expensive to operate in countries where regulations are stricter and extensive.

While this study tries to understand the provincial gaps within China, the unit of analysis here is the sub national entity, which needs to operate under the given national policy regime. Being a province or a municipal city, these units cannot initiate their own major policy changes regarding Internet development. However, each province does have different foci for developing economics. For provinces containing numerous tourist attractions, investments tend to be more on tourist destinations' development. For provinces having natural resources, natural resources are emphasized more. For instance,

western provinces like Guizhou and Ningxia spend 5% of their government expenditure on agriculture and forestry, whereas an advanced city like Shanghai only spends 1% and 0.5% on these industries, respectively. Given the diverse rationale for promoting different productions or industries in a particular province, the Internet can receive varying degrees of government support.

Economic Factor

Other than government policies, the economic factor has been repeatedly identified as a major predictor in Internet development. The ***GDP*** was often used to measure the economic condition, and has been discovered as one of the most important factors in Internet development (Hargittai, 1999; Kiiski & Pohjola, 2000). Norris (2001) also identified economic development and R&D investment as important factors in Internet development. Unlike Western countries, where R&D investments are mostly from private sectors, in China, the primary R&D investment for the Internet is generally from either government or state sponsored universities, and therefore, more of a policy factor.

Moss and Townsend (1998) found that less urbanized, economically and socially depressed cities with less information infrastructure fell behind the rest of the U.S. in Internet concentration. ***Income*** level in an area is another common measurement for economic conditions. For instance, both Elie (1998) and Beilock and Dimitrova (2003)'s researches discovered that per capita income is a significant predictor for Internet adoption. Naturally, a country or an area would need enough money on an aggregate

level to develop the Internet and have wealthy enough customers to consume the Internet services.

A larger ***service sector***, which includes strong information science, technology, and other knowledge-intensive sectors in an economical dimension, could also help the diffusion of the Internet (Robinson & Crenshaw, 2002; Castells, 2000). This is because a complex service sector indicates a socially and occupationally specialized society, which requests and contributes to advanced communications and transportations (Bell, 1973). Oppositely, agriculture's importance in an economy is negatively associated with the diffusion of information and communication technology (Pohjola, 2003).

In China, the economic conditions within each province vary widely. The urban family income level for Shanghai, an eastern city, is more than twice that of Guizhou, a western province. The Gross Regional Product (GRP) ranges from 2 billion RMB in Guangzhou, a coastline province, to less than 0.03 billion RMB in Tibet ("China Statistics Yearbook", 2007). The variations in economic conditions are likely to create different demands for the Internet. When people have less money to spend, they would tend to spend it on more needed areas, such as food or clothes, instead of luxury information services like the Internet.

Telecommunication Infrastructure

The importance of the telecommunication infrastructure is revealed by many studies as well (Arnum & Conti, 1998; Corrocher & Ordanini, 2002; Dimitrova, 2002; Hargittai, 1999; Kiiski & Pohjola, 2001; Lucas & Sylla, 2003; Robinson & Crenshaw, 2002; Danowitz, Nassef, & Goodman, 1995). The most frequently used measurement for

the infrastructure is the number of ***telephones*** per capita (Beilock & Dimitrova, 2003; Clarke, 2001; Hawkins & Hawkins, 2003; Kiiski & Pohjola, 2001). In the earlier years, dial-up from telephone lines was the main mode for connecting to the Internet. Recently, broadband through ***cable line*** and ***mobile phone*** have started to compete with dial-up connections (CNNIC, 2008). Therefore, the telephone, mobile and cable infrastructures should all be considered as measurements for the telecommunication infrastructure.

In China, the telecommunication constructions differ across provinces partially because of geographic characteristics. The geographic features of provinces from east to central to west can be roughly described as plain, hill and mountain, respectively (Wang, 2002). The geographic accessibility is greatly associated with telecommunication access due to the associated levels of difficulties in constructing infrastructures in different provinces.

Social Openness[12]

Social openness could also help nurture the Internet development. According to Robinson and Crenshaw (2002), politically open societies are more accepting of technology because it could help political mobilization and global economic competition. Their study shows that the Internet is more easily adopted by democratic nations. Yang (2003) also argued that the civil society in China could facilitate adoptions of the Internet. Not only could the existing organizations provide a user base for the Internet, the

[12]The relationship between the Internet and an open society are probably reciprocal. As an open society provides user bases to help Internet development, Internet use could also strengthen ties of social organizations, and foster the openness of the environment. Nevertheless, at the early stage of Internet diffusion, the nurturing effect of open society on Internet adoption is likely to be more influential. As the Internet development progresses, however, the effect of Internet use on the openness of a society may become stronger.

dynamics of civil society—expansion of the public sphere and active participation in public life are also prerequisites for a live online environment.

While previous studies looked at democratic levels in different countries to understand the impact of social openness on Internet penetrations, the units of analysis here – Chinese provinces or municipal cities — have the same political system. However, this does not mean all provinces have the same level of openness. In China, while eastern provinces like Guangdong or Shanghai, with longer history and more frequent communications with the outside world, tend to be open and liberal, the inland provinces that are closed out from the outside longer tend to be conservative and more difficult to adapt.

One indicator for that openness is foreign investment. The Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (MOTEC) and the MII formally banned the foreign investment in telecommunication industry (Ure, 1997). Nevertheless, when China joined the WTO in 2001, foreign investment in the telecommunication section finally became possible (Allen, 2002). Higher levels of foreign investment could indicate a greater political/social openness to external changes, which are prerequisites for technological diffusions. Indeed, Robinson and Crenshaw (2002) found some evidence for the importance of foreign investment, as a measurement for the globalization variable.

Media or cultural industry could also be used to measure the openness of a society, since a liberal environment is usually more nurturing to diversified and liberal news, books, or other publications.

Education

The educational level of a society is also a major prerequisite for Internet adoption (Kiiski & Pohjola, 2002; Lucas & Sylla, 2003). First of all, an educated workforce has made the creation and advancement of information technology possible. Additionally, as Rogers (1983) argued, mass education lays ground for the diffusion of innovation by providing unified literacy and necessary technical skills. Also, as the educational level increases, so rises the demand for computer and information technologies (Robinson & Crenshaw, 2002).

Density & Urbanization

Other factors that have been identified to be potentially related to Internet diffusion are population density and urbanization. A dense population indicates a more developed history. According to Wheeler and O'Kelly (1999), a dense population forces occupational and technical specialization, which facilitate telecommunication developments.

Similarly, urbanization is also a good measurement for a mature economic environment. Dasgupta, Lall, and Wheeler (2001) for instance found that a larger urban population is positively related to Internet use. In China, the eastern provinces have the highest population density, followed by the central and western regions (Wang, 2002). As cities have the greatest population, these eastern provinces also have more urban residents as well. According to the CNNIC reports, the Internet penetration has been much higher in urban areas than rural areas for the past decade.

Finally, regional disparity is expected to exist among Chinese provinces. As discussed earlier, eastern provinces tend to be wealthier, of better educational level and

more developed, whereas western provinces tend to be poorer and less developed. Although much difference between the east and the rest of the country may be accounted for by the predictors discussed earlier in this section, some disparity may still remain unexplained by these identified indicators, such as historical or geographical factors. Therefore, the regional factor is also included in the analysis. It is expected to see much higher penetration rates of Internet in the east. Based on literature review expounded upon in the above section, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3a: The higher priority given to Internet development of a provincial policy, the higher its Internet adoption rate.

H3b: The more economically developed a province is, the higher its Internet adoption rate.

H3c: The better the telecommunication infrastructure of a province, the higher its Internet adoption rate.

H3d: The more socially/politically open a province is, the higher its Internet adoption rate.

H3e: The higher the educational level of a province, the higher its Internet adoption rate.

H3f: The higher the level of urbanization and population density of a province, the higher its Internet adoption rate.

As noted earlier, the Internet development in China is fast but heavily unbalanced. The Internet growth favors the more developed areas like Beijing and Shanghai, while leaving the inland areas to lag behind. To understand the Internet diffusion in China, one has to answer the question of what determines the Internet diffusion across different regions, and hopefully, some insights can be generated regarding what could be done to close the gap among provincial divides.

Method

This chapter looked at different macro level factors in predicting Internet penetrations across eastern, central, and western provinces. Data on Internet penetrations were derived from the CNNICs' latest report (January 2008).[13] The report is available at CNNIC's website. The 2008 CNNIC survey relies on a stratified random sample with telephone interviews (including mobile phones), and an online survey, where questionnaires were published on CNNIC and other ISP websites for people to fill out voluntarily. The total number of 46,300 respondents participated in telephone interviews, and 73,332 respondents participated in online interviews for the January 2008 survey. The CNNIC defines an Internet user as any Chinese citizen aged 6 or above, having used the Internet in the past half year. The CNNIC reports have been employed by many scholars to study the Internet in China (e.g., Wang, 2002).

Data for the independent variables come from the latest China's Statistical Yearbook (2007). Factors including measurements for economic wealth, telecommunication infrastructure, levels of education, and income level of a region were used to analyze what determines the Internet diffusion in 27 provinces and four municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing).

Dependent Variable The dependent variable is operationalized as percentage of Internet users out of the total provincial population. The populations in Chinese provinces are very diverse, ranging from 2.8 million in Tibet to 93.92 million in Henan. Using the percentage of Internet users out of the provincial population instead of the absolute number of users would better estimate the Internet penetrations across regions. The

[13] Although there is a more recent report (July, 2008), that report does not publish data across regions. Hence, the older version of January 2008 was used here.

penetration rates (Mean 16.99%, SD 10.33%) ranged from 6% in Guizhou to 46% in Beijing in 2008.

Policy It's not straightforward to measure policies across provinces since policy cannot be easily quantified. Naturally, if a regional government promotes technology, the Internet development is more likely benefited. Here, government expenditure on science and technology out of total government expenditure is used to measure how favorable a provincial policy is towards technology. As Norris (2001) showed, the expense on R&D is one of the top predictors of Internet diffusion.

The expenditure on science and technology per 10k people (Mean 28.97, SD 28.85) ranges from 139.25 (10k Yuan) in the coastline municipal city Tianjin to 7.31 in the central province, Jiangxi.

Economic Wealth Economic wealth is measured by Gross Regional Product (GRP) per 10k people in 100 million RMB (Mean 1.86, SD 1.21), the service sector GRP per 10k people in 100 million RMB (Mean 0.79, SD 0.72), and average annual income per household in each province (including both urban and rural).

The highest GRP is in Shanghai with 571 Million RMB, and the lowest is in Guizhou, a western province, with 61 Million RMB. The service GRP is highest in Beijing with 353 Million RMB and lowest in Guizhou with 24 Million RMB. The urban annual family income (Mean 12273.30, SD 3763.85) and the rural annual family income (Mean 3871.50, SD 1787.63) are still very different from each other. The scale on average household income was then created by summing urban annual family income and rural annual family income together (Mean: 16144.34 Yuan; SD: 5490.58 Yuan). The richest place, in terms of family annual income, is in Shanghai (Urban: 22808.57 Yuan,

Rural 9138.65 Yuan), and the poorest is in Guizhou (Urban: 9439.31 Yuan, Rural: 1983.62 Yuan).

Telecommunication Infrastructure Three measurements are used to measure the telecommunication infrastructure: capacity of long-distance telephone exchange per 10K people (Mean 0.41, SD 0.17), the length of optical cable line per area (Mean 1376.00, SD 1011.68), and capacity of mobile phone exchange per 10K people (Mean 0.50, SD 0.27). The best telephone infrastructure is in Beijing, and the worst is in Guizhou; the best mobile phone infrastructure is in Shanghai, and the worst is still in Guizhou; the best cable line infrastructure is in Shanghai, and the worst is in Tibet. In China, the top three methods of accessing the Internet are broadband (normally by cable line), dial-up, and mobile (CNNIC, 2008). Therefore, the capacities for the three methods are measured respectively.

Educational Level Marco-level education in each province is measured by the number of colleges for every 10k people (Mean 0.02, SD 0.01), and the number of enrolled students in the universities for every 10k people (Mean 141.65, SD 69.54). As CNNIC reports repeatedly show, among all professions, college students are most likely to use the Internet. The province with the highest number of enrolled college students per 10k population is Beijing, and the lowest number is in Guizhou.[14]

Political/Social Openness No good objective measurement is available for political and social openness. A previous study showed that foreign investment could indicate levels of openness in a given nation (Robinson & Crenshaw, 2002). Here, the foreign investment per 10k people in 100 million USD (Mean 0.16, SD 0.25) is used to

[14] The province with most universities per 10k people is also Beijing, while several provinces have the same number of universities per 10k people.

measure the openness and readiness to cooperate with foreign companies. The province that has the most foreign investment is Shanghai.[15]

In addition, the numbers of publications per 10k people including books (Mean 1.35, SD 1.76), magazines (Mean 0.07, SD 0.06), and newspapers (Mean 0.02, SD 0.02) are used to measure the openness of a province. It's expected that an open environment would encourage more cultural publications such as newspapers, books or magazines.[16]

Density & Urbanization Population density, which is measured by population divided by area (Mean 389.99, SD 533.64), and urbanization, which is calculated by the number of urban residents out of the total provincial population (Mean 46.42%, SD 15.15%), are also considered in the explanatory model. Shanghai has most density and urbanization, while Tibet has the lowest density and Guizhou has the lowest urbanization.

Region Chinese provinces are divided into twelve eastern, nine central, and ten western provinces (Wang, 2002).

Findings

In Norris's 2001 book, *Digital Divide*, she also analyzed multiple predictors of Internet penetrations of different countries. She used two methods in her book: simple correlation and multivariate analysis. In the simple correlation analysis, each of the predictors analyzed in her study was significantly correlated with Internet penetration. However, since many of these predictors are closely related with each other, the multivariate analysis found that only economic predictors were significant while others failed to make the final list.

[15] Multiple provinces have the same lowest amount of foreign investment.
[16] Shanghai has the most books and magazines. Multiple provinces have the least kinds of publications.

In this dissertation, similar approaches were used to understand the Internet penetrations across provinces in China. First, each individual measurement was correlated with Internet penetration. Second, to add one more dimension to Norris's approach, predictors were further broken down to seven different groups: policy, economic factors, education, telecommunication infrastructure, social openness, density and urbanization of a region, and area. Separate models with each group of predictor were run on Internet penetration.

Finally, to solve the problem of mulicollinearity among predictors using multivariate analysis, a hierarchical regression model was run with economic predictors as base predictors and other groups of factors explored upon the base. As Norris (2001) and Hargittai (1999) discovered, economic factors are the strongest predictors of Internet penetrations, and usually related to other predictors such as education or infrastructure. In Norris's 2001 study, when economic indicators and social or political development were analyzed together, only economic indicators remained significant. These results however, could be spurious due to the high correlations among predictors. Therefore, in order to tangle the complex interactions among multiple groups of predictors, a hierarchical regression model was more appropriate. It analyzed the effects of each group of indicators while controlling for the most important area of economic indicators.

Table 3-2 shows the results for the first two steps. In step one, each variable was correlated with Internet penetration in provinces separately. As the first column shows, except for the newspaper, all other variables are significantly related to Internet penetrations.[17]

[17] The item of newspaper variable was dropped from further analysis due to its insignificance.

Table 3-2. Predictors of Internet Diffusion

Predictors	***Pearson r***	***Models in Each Area***		***R^2***
		Standardized β	*t* value	
Economic Factors				***R^2=95.5%***
GRP	.93**	.11	.51	
GRP in Service Sector	.92**	.32#	1.77	
Annual Income per Family	.94**	.55**	3.05	
Policy Factors				***R^2=61%***
Government Expenditure on Science & Technology	.61**	.61**	4.13	
Telecommunication Infrastructure				***R^2=97.7%***
Telephone Capacities	.94**	.35**	3.21	
Mobile Phone Capacities	.97**	.60**	4.79	
Length of Optical Cable Line by Area	.68**	.07	1.20	
Educational Level in Province				***R^2=71.5%***
Number of Colleges	.69**	.33	1.35	
Number of Enrolled Students in Colleges	.68**	.42#	1.74	
Density & Urbanization				***R^2=90.2%***
Population Density	.72**	.14	1.19	
Urbanization	.90**	.79**	6.68	
Social Openness				***R^2=85.1%***
Foreign Investment	.83**	1.1**	4.89	
# of Books Published	.69**	-.01	-.03	
# of Magazines Published	.61**	-.31	-1.25	
# of Newspaper Published	.15			
Region				
East	.66**	.66**	4.71	***R^2=43.3%***

N=31

 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

Pearson R is as high as .97 for mobile phone capacities. These results suggest that all hypothesized factors – policy, economic condition, educational level, telecommunication infrastructure, urbanization and population density, social openness,

and region, are positively associated with Internet penetrations. However, as stated earlier, all predictors are also correlated with each other.

The second column reports the individual regression within each group of predictors: policy, economic factors, telecommunication infrastructure, educational level, urbanization and density, social openness, and region, respectively. As Table 3-2 shows, the only policy variable explained 60% of the variance in Internet penetration on provincial level. Economic factors explained 95.5% of the variance in Internet penetration. While annual income is still highly significant (β=.55), service sector GRP became only marginally significant (β=.32), and GRP itself became insignificant in this model. The telecommunication infrastructure explained a significant 97.7% variance in Internet penetration on the provincial level. Telephone capacity (β=.35) and mobile phone (β=.60) capacity are highly correlated with penetration rates, whereas cable line is not significant.

The block for educational measurements explained 71.5% of the variance in penetration rates. However, the only marginally significant variable is the number of students enrolled in colleges (β=.42). The two variables about urbanization and population density explained 90.2% of the variance. Only urbanization turned out to be significant (β=.79). For social openness predictors, although the entire block explained 85.1% of the variance in provincial level Internet penetrations, the only significant predictor is foreign investment (β=1.1). The regional factor is also highly significant, with eastern provinces are more likely to have Internet adoption than western or central provinces (β=.66). The regional block accounted for 43.3% of the variance.

By analyzing each group of predictors individually, step two suggests that among all the factors, the telecommunication infrastructure, economic factors, as well as urbanization and density are the most predictive indicators, followed by social openness, education, and policy.

Table 3-3. Hierarchical Regression Models on Internet Diffusion[18]

Predictors	***Models in Each Area***		***Incremental R^2***
	Standardized β	*t* value	
Economic Factors (Base Block)	***R^2=95.5%***		
GRP	.11	.51	
GRP in Service Sector	.32#	1.77	
Annual Income per Family	.55**	3.05	
Policy Factors			***R^2=.001%***
Government Expenditure on Science & Technology	.04	.43	
Telecommunication Infrastructure			***R^2=4.6%***
Telephone Capacities	.42**	3.07	
Mobile Phone Capacities	.74**	3.78	
Length of Optical Cable Line by Area	-.01	-.96	
Educational Level in Province			***R^2=.2%***
Number of Colleges	.02	.17	
Number of Enrolled Students in Colleges	-.06	-.61	
Density & Urbanization			***R^2=1.4%***
Population Density	-.13	-1.28	
Urbanization	.31#	1.93	
Social Openness			***R^2=.1%***
Foreign Investment	.08	.53	
# of Books Published	.04	.42	
# of Magazines Published	.06	.56	
Region			***R^2=.2%***
East	.06	.73	

N=31

 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

[18] The Beta reported for all predictors (excluding economic predictors from the base block) are upon entry Beta.

For the hierarchical regression models, each group of predictors was entered separately while controlling for the base economic indicators. Again, economic factors are used as base predictors, since it has been identified as one of the most consistent and important predictors of Internet diffusion (Norris, 2001). The predictors include government expenditure in technology & science, telephone and mobile phone capacity, number of enrolled college students, urbanization, and foreign investment.

As Table 3-3 indicates, the base block of economic factors accounted for a 95.5% variance in the Internet penetration. Among all groups of predictors, the telecommunication infrastructure added the most incremental R square (Incremental R^2=4.6%). Both measurements for the telecommunication infrastructure are highly significant with β =.42 for telephone capacity and β =.74 for mobile phone capacity at p<.01. This is in line with the previous analysis, which shows that the telecommunication infrastructure explained the most variance in Internet penetration. Urbanization is marginally significant with β =.31.

This study indicates that the major predictors for different Internet penetration rates across provinces in China are the economic factor, telecommunication infrastructure, and urbanization. The hypotheses about relationships between economic condition, policy, telecommunication infrastructure, education, social openness, density and urbanization, and region and Internet penetration rates were supported, but with different levels of strength. Although all factors are correlated with Internet penetration, economic factor, infrastructure, and urbanization appear to be strongest indicators of penetration across three models. This finding is in line with the CNNIC semi-yearly reports, where it has consistently shown that more urbanized coastline provinces with better economic

conditions and telecommunication infrastructures tend to have higher levels of Internet penetration rates.

In order to understand what factors need to be given special emphasis within each region, three separate hierarchical regressions with the economic factors as the base block and using the most significant variables from each group of predictors were run in three regions respectively: east, central, and west.[19] Although overall, economic factors, telecommunication infrastructure, and urbanization are the most important predictors of Internet connection, it is possible that, within each region, where political circumstance, economic condition, technological environment, and social openness are very diverse, Internet access might be explained by different factors. This expectation is supported by the analysis here.

As Table 3-4 indicates, each region has different significant predictors in Internet penetration rates. For instance, in the east, the economic factor alone explained 90.6% of the variance in Internet adoption, whereas in the western and central regions, the economic factor only accounted for 65.8% and 34.7% of the variance in Internet penetration.

In the east, the telecommunication infrastructure only contributed to an incremental 5.8% of the variance. With telephone capacity no longer a significant predictor, this finding suggests that most provinces in this region have reached a plateau, where comparable telephone infrastructures have been established across the eastern provinces. Mobile phone capacity (β =1.23) still has explanatory power in predicting Internet penetrations in the east, however. In both central and western regions, the telecommunication infrastructures contribute a significant incremental R square,

[19] Since the sample size is too small, only a certain number of predictors can be examined here.

suggesting how much predictive power infrastructure still has for these areas. Both telephone and mobile infrastructures are marginally significant in the western and central regions.

Table 3-4. Predictors of Internet Diffusion within Each Region[20]

Predictors	***East (N=12)***		***West (N=10)***		***Central (N=9)***	
	Std β	*t* value	Std β	*t* value	Std β	*t* value
Economic Factors (Base Block)	***R^2=90.6%***		***R^2=65.8%***		***R^2=34.7%***	
GRP in Service Sector	.34	1.52	.90**	3.97	.61	1.67
Annual Income per Family	.64*	2.85	-.24	-.94	-.15	.89
Policy Factors	**Incremental** ***R^2=0.1%***		**Incremental** ***R^2=18%***		**Incremental** ***R^2=1.9%***	
Gov Expend on Sci & Tech	.03	.21	.72*	2.59	-.14	-.39
Telecommunication Infrastructure	**Incremental** ***R^2=5.8%***		**Incremental** ***R^2=21.6%***		**Incremental** ***R^2=56.5%***	
Telephone Capacities	.21	.65	1.01#	2.25	1.03#	2. 65
Mobile Phone Capacities	1.23*	3.25	.56#	2.35	.96#	2.39
Educational Level in Province	**Incremental** ***R^2=1.3%***		**Incremental** ***R^2=9.9%***		**Incremental** ***R^2=10.6%***	
# of Enrolled Students in Colleges	-.23	-1.12	.33	1.56	.33	.99
Density & Urbanization	**Incremental** ***R^2=0.1%***		**Incremental** ***R^2=1.4%***		**Incremental** ***R^2=11.2%***	
Urbanization	-.06	-.35	.20	.50	-.57	-1.02
Social Openness	**Incremental** ***R^2=0.2%***		**Incremental** ***R^2=1%***		**Incremental** ***R^2=13.7%***	
Foreign Investment	.07	.44	-.11	-.43	.44	1.15

 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

[20] All Beta other than for base block indicators are upon entry beta.

Although the number of enrolled students in college is not significant in either of the areas, the education predictor adds another 9.9% and 10.6% of the variance in the western and central zones, respectively, suggesting how much incremental value the educational level of these regions could still help in predicting Internet adoption.

Perhaps the most surprising finding is that in the west, the policy predictor adds 18% of incremental R square and is highly significant (β =.72), demonstrating that more government expenditure in science and technology is greatly associated with Internet penetration in this region. In central area, too, both density and social openness add great explanatory power to Internet penetration, although the individual variables are not significant.

These findings suggest that although on an overall level, economic factor, infrastructure, and urbanization are the top areas to consider in predicting Internet development, within each region, the Internet connection is explained by quite different factors. Consequently, to speed up the Internet adoption rate and for western and central areas to catch up with the east, different regions should focus on different factors. In the east, household income is the single most important factor; in the central, infrastructure, education, density, and social openness need to be worked on; whereas in the west, the provincial government must invest more on science and technology and the telecommunication infrastructure in order to catch up with the eastern regions in Internet development.

These findings have important implications for government policies. This is especially true since as the Internet is still evolving, China is in the process of constant change and rewriting of telecommunication regulations. To speed up the Internet

penetrations across regions, policy makers should give special attention to diverse areas according to their different political, economic, and technological conditions. For instance, if the macro-level economic factor is the single important predictor for Internet connection, policies that regulate price for Internet access might not help the Internet adoption significantly unless the fundamental inequality in economic condition is addressed. But as our findings here suggest, the economic factors are not equally important to all regions. To develop the Internet in the west for instance, not only should the policy makers pay attention to economic factors and infrastructure, the policies that could have a strong effect on increasing Internet access appear to be investment in science and technology. Similarly, for the central area, the single important policy initiative should be the telecommunication infrastructure.

This study used provincial level data for analysis of the Internet access. Relying on three steps of analysis, the findings here suggest that residence within a metropolitan area with better economic conditions and telecommunication infrastructures is consistently associated with higher level of Internet adoption. The most important finding from this analysis confirms previous studies, and finds that the economic factors and technological infrastructure outweighed all others in predicting Internet adoption (Norris, 2001). Economic development, measured by per capita GRP, per capita service GRP, and household income, was consistently important across all three models, suggesting that more affluent areas have broader access to the Internet connection. The telecommunication infrastructure, measured by telephone, cable and mobile phone capacities, are also consistently associated with Internet connectivity. Thus, continuing economic development and the establishment of good telecommunications'

infrastructures will slowly broaden access to the Internet in China overall. Within each region however, different sets of variables stand out. If possible, the government initiatives should be tailored according to the diverse environments evidenced in each region.

Of course, as the Internet continues to be adopted, the future trend may change. For instance, with the cost of access declining every year, both rich and poor people could be able to afford the technology. Eventually, the gap between different regions may narrow. Nevertheless, for the time being, the general economic development, technological infrastructure, and urbanization could strongly predict the Internet access. To help close the digital divide, the government needs to pay specific attention to each region's diverse patterns. After all, as Williams and Edge (1996) wrote, "technology does not develop according to an inner technical logic, but is instead a social product, patterned by the conditions of its creation and use" (p. 866).

After reviewing the context of Internet development in China on the aggregate level, the following chapters tried to understand the main question of this study, specifically, would political Internet use mobilize users in real life? Furthermore, would any possible changes the Internet brought ultimately lead to democratization in China? Analysis began with the main dynamics among individual users, political net use, and their political participation in the real world.

CHAPTER 4
GOING BEYOND THE INTERNET?
IMPLICATIONS OF POLITICAL USE OF THE INTERNET IN CHINA

In January, 2009, a 24-year-old male, Li Qiaoming was detained in Jinning, Yunnan province for illegally logging trees. He was hospitalized on February, 8th and died four days later from brain injuries ("China netizens join probe into 'hide and seek' prison death", 2009). The Jinning public security bureau reported that Li was fatally injured while playing hide-and-seek with other inmates, one of whom allegedly punched Li when Li uncovered his hiding place. According to the official report, Li lost balance during the dispute with the inmate, fell into a sharp corner of the wall and the door, and consequently died. Li's parents did not buy the official report and neither did many other netizens. On Sina.com, the incident generated over 54,000 comments expressing suspicion and anger over the official report (Flanagan, 2009).

This is only one of the many examples where the Internet provides an alternative information source other than official reports, and facilitates public discussions on these public issues. Last June, too, the public was enraged by allegations of a cover-up over a 15-year-old girl's death. According to the son of a senior local official, a girl, Li Shufen committed suicide while a boy was doing pushups on a nearby bridge. The story and seeming immunity of the boy sparked massive rioting, where an estimated 30,000 people joined. Rioters torched the local police building and vehicles (Buckley, 2008). Despite the State censorship, the story erupted on the Internet, and pictures of people surrounding

the police building while police guarding the burning shell of the building and police vehicles were circulated on popular blogs.

Perhaps what is most interesting about these incidents is that the government started to take the online opinions seriously. In Li Qiaoming's case, shortly after the online discussions questioning the cause of his death, the Yunnan government announced that they would permit an independent investigation led by netizens. One of the active posters of a web forum dedicated to Li Qiaoming's case was selected to head the investigation committee (Flanagan, 2009).

It is hard to know whether the Chinese government is starting to include more of the general public in political matters, or whether this is a single gesture from the government in order to quiet down the potential riots. However, the Internet has proved to play an important role in China's political scene, as shown in several incidents. It publishes information that would otherwise be censored by the traditional media, provides forums for people to communicate and deliberate over public matters, and facilitates political participation, including permitted participation or even protests.

As the number of Chinese Internet users has grown exponentially in the past decade, the Internet has undoubtedly changed the landscape of political communication in China. Like Cavanaugh (2000) described, the Internet works as a political Wal-Mart, where users can find all kinds of political information, video clips, candidate speeches, issue positions, up-to-date results, and ballot information (Cavanaugh, 2000). In China, the Internet also brings a special hope, in that unlike traditional media that are tightly controlled by the Chinese government, the Internet allows its users to access information from alternative sources, express their political opinions more freely, and even help some

users organize political actions. Though the Chinese government is trying very hard to manage the Internet as it did with traditional media, many Chinese users can still find ways to circumvent the censorship.

This brings up the fundamental question of this study: Does the Internet offer democratic promise for China? There are really two parts to this question. First, how influential is the Internet? In other words, who is using the Internet? More importantly, who is using the Internet for political purposes? Then comes the second question: Would the political use of the Internet change these people's political behaviors in China? Would these changes then lead to democracy?

Although these questions bear important research and practical significances, very few researchers have attempted to empirically address these problems. There are several difficulties in conducting such research in China. First, the Internet is still at its early stage in China. The online environment is ever changing. New formats or contents appear almost every day. For instance, blogs did not gain popularity until fairly recently. In addition, the profile of Internet users in China is evolving. Not long ago, only privileged college students have access to the Internet, however now, according to recent CNNIC reports, more rural and less educated people have also started adopting the Internet. To systematically analyze something evolving so rapidly is rather difficult.

Second, the political life of Chinese people is still a sensitive topic. Even though China has experienced drastic changes economically for the past several decades, its political regime remains authoritarian. It is not easy to get truthful answers from the people when it comes to political topics. As a matter of fact, it is not easy to conduct empirical studies about political topics at all. Given the difficulties involved in studying

the Internet and politics in China, the current study managed to conduct a small scaled survey and in-depth interview. It is one of the few empirical attempts in trying to shed some light on political implications of the Internet in China.

In this chapter, I first reviewed literature on Internet use and its political consequences. Since not many researchers have studied China's Internet and politics, most of the literature reviewed here was accomplished in a Western context. By applying the results from Western literature to China, however, I could form some logical hypotheses about implications of political net use. Second, the few studies regarding the Internet and its political influences in China, specifically, were discussed. Although these studies are mostly descriptive, they offer a starting point to understand the nature, characteristics, and implications of political Internet use in China. The Internet has some special meaning in the Chinese context, where free flow of information was not available through traditional media. Therefore, the Internet may have different functions for Western users and Chinese users. Third, the literature on Internet adoption on the individual level was reviewed. The previous chapter discussed Internet penetration on the aggregate level; here I examined what personal characteristics would lead to adopting the Internet, particularly political use of the Internet. Last, findings from the survey data were presented to answer the two main questions of this chapter: What individual characteristics are associated with using the Internet for political purposes? How would political use of the Internet influence people's political participation?

Internet Use and Political Engagement

Scholars who believe in the modernization theory long ago contended that information technology is vital to democracy. Robert Dahl (1971) for example, argued that democracy is more susceptible to inequality of information and knowledge than inequality of wealth. More recently, the rapid development of the Internet has evoked various discussions over the impact of the new technology in politics. Some scholars believe in the Internet's force in revitalizing the democratic process. They argue that instead of passively receiving messages from an elite-controlled traditional news media such as television or newspaper, a rich Internet offers a unique opportunity for users to seek for more meaningful information, according to personal believes (Jacques & Ratzan, 1997). Users can use e-mail to directly communicate with elected officials, candidates, candidates' campaigns, and newsgroups (Grossman, 1995) and are able to express their concerns and opinions on issues through electronic bulletin board or news group discussion forum (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Moreover, the increased information and access online make it easier and less costly for web users to engage in political actions, for instance, now they can vote online (Owen & Davis, 1998; Hall, 1997). This process, it is claimed, would eventually shift the power in political life from elites to the general public (Delli Carpini, 2000).

Following these arguments, many empirical studies have documented positive evidence for the Internet's mobilizing power. Compared to non-users, Internet users are more politically interested and active (Bimber, 1997; Johnson and Kaye, 1998); politically knowledgeable (Hill & Hughes, 1998), politically efficacious (Bonchek, 1997), are more likely to donate money online (Bimber, 2001), and to vote online (Katz, 1997; Hill & Hughes, 1998; Bimber, 1997). In a 1998 study, Bimber (1998a) found that the

level of engagement and propensity to vote increased after individuals had Internet access, specifically suggesting that going online itself can foster political involvement, although this effect was only true for traditional participation.

Furthermore, the Internet may stimulate civic associations (Weber, Loumakis, & Bergmen, 2003). While direct political activity such as voting is one important aspect of a healthy democracy, participating in other sociopolitical organizations can also facilitate the democratic process. For example, Putnam (2000) points out that social capital — mainly interpersonal trust and social networks is vital for a smooth political life, since it provides means for the public to discuss and work on joint issues, therefore, increases the involvement in public affairs. Likewise, involvement in informal social associations is associated with political interests, political efficacy, and political participation (Kwak, Shah, & Holbert, 2000). While the current civic involvement is low in American society, some researchers advocate that the Internet can help build a sense of community in public life among Internet users. Since Internet communication is not constrained by geographical distance, it can enhance a sense of connectedness among people, which is a crucial element of democracy (Bimber, 1996).

Disagreeing with these optimistic views, some political observers fear that since the Internet offers more autonomy, users could only pay selective attention to opinions and views that conform to their existing views, which may weaken the political and cultural commonality that is created by traditional media, and cause fragmentation and polarization on societal level (Neuman, 2000). Referring to selective exposure, Shapiro (1999) also warned, "We can also build virtual gated communities where we never have to interact with people who are different from ourselves" (p. 25). However, some

empirical findings have shown that individuals expose themselves to both conforming and opposing views (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman & Robinson, 2001).

Drawing on the knowledge gap theory, other scholars were concerned that given the uneven levels of access to the Internet, the Internet will increase the knowledge divide between information "haves" and "have nots" (Norris, 2001). While privileged Internet users could obtain more information, become more interested and active, the non-users could become further disadvantaged in the information age.

The time displacement argument also states that the time spent on chatting, playing games, and surfing online could replace traditional face-to-face interactions and erode civic engagement, which in turn, is likely to hold back political life (Kraut et al., 1998; Nie & Erbring, 2000).

Some are concerned that the Internet would deepen the political cynicism or distrust that already exists in today's Western world. These warnings have been supported in several studies, which indicated that Internet users are more politically distrusting than non-users (Katz, 1997; Johnson & Kaye, 1998), and more alienated (Hill & Hughes, 1998).

Among all the research on Internet and politics, the large bulk of studies painted a rather unexciting picture, where the new media does not do much at all to people's political life. For instance, Hill and Hughes (1998) posit that the Internet merely allows people to do the same thing in a different way. According to these researchers, the Internet is essentially a self-selection process, where politically active people are still active online, and politically inactive people remain inactive. While Bimber (2001) reported that Internet users are more likely to donate money online, his finding also

showed that the Internet users are no more politically active than non-users. Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that deliberation in discussion groups was minimal (Wilhelm, 1998), and the democratic participation online was irrelevant to participation in the real world (Streck, 1997). A survey by GVU (1997) also revealed that although Internet users are politically active and become even more involved politically after adopting the Internet, they are not more likely to vote than non-users are. In studying the relationship between Internet use and interpersonal trust, Uslaner in his 2004 study concluded that there is no reason to link technology to civic engagement, in other words, "No matter what you do on-line, you don't become more (or less) trusting", or engage in more civic activities (p. 239). Another study conducted in Europe also found that the Internet is unable to make previously apathetic individuals become more politically involved, while it is not widening any gap between politically interested and not-so-interested people either (Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward, 2005).

These researchers argue that an increased access to political information and increased opportunity to political activity would not automatically transform to more participation. While the information environment may change, people's capacity and willingness to participate in political life may not (Bimber, 1998a).

Similar to these arguments, some researchers found empirical evidence that politically interested people would become more active with the Internet, whereas less politically interested individuals will become even more politically alienated (Murdock & Golding, 1989). As Norris (2001) expressed, "…the rise of the virtual political system seems most likely to facilitate further knowledge, interest, and activism of those who are

already most predisposed toward civic engagement, reinforcing patterns of political participation" (p. 228).

To summarize this empirical evidence, Owen and Davis (1998) and Hill and Hughes (1998) concluded that the Internet itself does not mobilize the public. The public is still doing the same thing online—active users are people who are active even before their use of the Internet. This trend, according to these researchers, will cause the broadening gap between higher and lower SES groups. Their claim finds evidence in Norris's 1998 study, where she found that Internet users who use the Internet for political purposes had higher levels of political interest, knowledge, efficacy, and were of higher SES. Therefore, it is not the Internet that helps people mobilize, it is the mobilized ones who choose to use the Internet.

Although it is true that early adopters of the Internet tend to have higher SES levels, the continuous penetration of the technology has changed profiles of adopters greatly. Like the CNNIC reports in China indicate, the users today have lower average education levels than previous years, and more rural people have started going online. When these less advantaged users go online, they probably will start using the Internet for various purposes, which could include political usages.

Moreover, as the Internet evolves into a full-fledged communication medium offering information, communication, entertainment, and so much more, the straightforward dichotomous definition of users versus non-users would inadequately depict the action of Internet use. Davis (1998) for instance, differentiated particular applications of the Internet, contending that certain people use the Internet to learn information, while others maintain relationships with family members or friends. Only

when they search for information online are they most likely to encounter opportunities for civic activities, and possibly political participation. Similarly, Grossman (1995) also believes that effects of Internet use would vary depending on different applications of the net. While entertainment usages of the Internet may not relate to civic or political participation, communicative, informational or political usages of the Internet are more likely to mobilize people.

Aligning with these positions, Norris and Jones (1998) also criticized the simple "hour-of-use" measurement for Internet consumption. They suggested that informational and communicative uses of the Internet may increase civic engagement, whereas recreational and entertainment uses may erode it. Their exploratory study was one of the first empirical studies to specify various applications of the Internet. Moreover, their findings identified four types of Internet users: "researchers", who use the Internet for investigative purposes and email; "consumers", who shop online and use the Internet as financial and travel resources; "expressives", who discuss or express opinions in chat rooms, discussion forums or other online groups; and "party animals", who go online to play games and to be entertained. Indeed, their findings support their hypothesis that "researchers" are more politically knowledgeable than other Internet users. In another study, Norris (1998) confirmed the finding that those who use the Internet for political purposes (seeking information, contacting officials, or discussing politics) have higher levels of political interest, knowledge, and efficacy.

These arguments were supported by Shah, Kwak, and Holbert (2001), where who also took into account of the complexity involved in Internet consumption, and differentiated multiple usages of the Internet. Their findings also suggested that while

recreational uses of the Internet are negatively related to production of social capital and civic engagement, informational uses of the Internet are positively related to civic participation as well as interpersonal trust. Studying Internet effects on political participation, Tolbert and McNeal (2003) also reported that Internet use was positively associated with voting, and this relationship was particularly strong when users employed the Internet for information gathering.

Using the political Internet usage specifically as a predictor, both Jennings and Zeitner (2003), and Gibson, Lusoli, and Ward (2005) identified that political net use had a positive impact on civic engagement, as well as mobilizing the ones who are normally less active. Similarly, Tolbert and McNeal (2003) and Kenski and Stroud (2006) identified positive associations between access to the Internet and campaign news and political outcomes. By differentiating different functions of Internet use, these more recent studies have been able to identify positive mobilizing effects of the Internet.

Internet use has rather complex dynamics. Not only it is used for information, or entertainment, it can be used for communication, expression, and numerous other purposes. The earlier findings about "non-effect" of the Internet seem to reflect the simple measurement of Internet use. By looking at political net use in particular, this study attempted to specifically understand the Internet's political influences.

Studies on Internet's Political Implications in China

Given the unique decentralized nature of the Internet, there have been tremendous research interests on whether or not the new technology could have political impacts in

China. Would the Internet, which offers free flow of information and communication, ultimately bring democracy?

Lessig (1999) claimed that what the Internet could do to free speech in authoritarian countries exceeds all diplomatic, economic, and military approaches the U.S. government has tried during the past 50 years. As Lessig articulated, as long as a country goes online, it must abide by the "First Amendment in code more extreme than our own First Amendment in law" (p. 167). It has been suggested by many scholars that the Internet and democracy could reinforce each other (e.g., Alexander & Pal, 1998; Hagure & Loader, 1999; Hoff, Horrocks, & Tops, 2000; Tsagarousianou, Tambini, & Bryan, 1998). Not only could the Internet improve democracies in democratic societies, some believe the technology may help transform an authoritarian society into a democratic one (e.g., Diamond, 1992; Schmitter, 1996; Linz & Stephan, 1996). Media have long been praised for their democratizing function. Huntington (1991), for instance, suggested that television played an important role in Eastern European transitions. Similarly, it has been speculated that the Internet helped bring down the Suhato regime in Indonesia (Till & Sen, 2000). In China, too, many scholars have claimed to observe that the use of the Internet by the mass public could potentially pose a threat to the regime (Chase & Mulvenon, 2002).

The Internet certainly brings a more open and free information flow to Chinese users. It also provides a forum for people to express, communicate, and even participate in the political world. The Li Qiaoming case is a perfect example illustrating how Internet users in China could obtain alternative information via the Internet, express their anger and suspicion, which eventually turned into political action that was led and participated

in by the general public – specifically Internet users. Now, as Internet users in China grow rapidly, more could participate in online political activities, which could lead to real world political changes.

Although there are great hopes about the Internet's power in mobilizing the Chinese public or even democratizing China, the lack of empirical evidence leaves these statements speculative at best. Recent studies on the Internet in China have mostly focused on its physical networks, state censorship, or case studies about the Internet's political impact on China's civil society. Zixiang Tan and Wu Wei are two of the earliest scholars to work on the development of the network in China (Tan, 1995, 1999; Wu, 1996). However, those works are almost completely technical, lacking discussion of socio political impacts of the new technology. Questions such as how people use the Internet and how that influences people's social or political lives remain unanswered.

Later works by Mueller and Tan (1997) present a detailed review of the physical network and content regulation of the Internet in China, but still leave political impacts of the Internet untouched. Moreover, since their work was done before the Internet really took off in China, they were not able to predict how widely the Internet has been applied in almost every aspect of people's lives in China, and how powerful the technology has become.

Unlike the earlier scholars, Taubman (1998) tried to understand how Internet development would change the authoritarian rule in China. He believed that governments who have tight control over information, ideas, or images are more likely to preserve their political power. As the Internet increases in popularity, however, the new technology is able to create what he calls "ideational pluralism", where multiple sources

of information and ideas become available to the public. As a result, the government hegemony can lose their monopoly over the public's ideologies and opinions, and non-democratic rules are likely to fall. Taubman also pointed out that the communicative function of the Internet such as email, chat rooms, and news group help people create informal social networks existing outside the realm of state control. People are presented with unprecedented opportunities to communicate with each other on social, political, and personal issues. Although these organizations are mostly apolitical, they are expected to build foundation for a real public sphere that did not exist in China anywhere else before, and push the boundaries of associative freedom. Taubman concluded that the Internet would diminish the state's control over ideologies and civil life in China, therefore helping to facilitate the democratic process.

Similarly, other researchers (Lacharite, 2002, Qiang, 2003) assert that China's "netizens" have begun to understand how to use the Internet to access a diverse range of information and perspectives, express their pro-democratic opinions, and communicate these ideas in anonymous ways. Eventually, their rising demands for greater freedom of expression will challenge the existing authoritarian rule, and facilitate the transition to a more democratic society.

Although seemingly appealing, Taubman's work and Lacharite's alike didn't even attempt to understand how exactly the Chinese public uses the Internet, ignoring the complex dynamics among the individual users, the Internet, and the state. Although it is clear that the Internet expands the freedom of self-expression for Chinese users, its exact impact on people's political life awaits more understanding.

Focusing on dissident groups specifically, Chase and Mulvenon's study (2002) centered on Internet censorship in China. Their research demonstrated that Internet use by dissident groups could challenge the state and enhance pluralism. In trying to understand the relationship between Internet use and the civil society, Yang (2003) also identified that the Internet fosters public debate and articulations; facilitates the activities of existing civic groups while creating new online organizations at the same time; and finally, the Internet could introduce new forms for political activism.

Unlike these optimistic researchers, Harwit and Clark (2001) argue that in China, only a small proportion of the population is using the Internet. Most of them are young, well educated, living in big cities, and have little incentive to get involved in any disruptive political discussions or participation that might endanger their future career. Additionally, most of the users employ the net for entertainment purposes instead of political reasons. Consequently, the current censorship employed by the Chinese government might be effective enough to put off any immediate political challenge.

Admittedly, the early adapters tend to be young and privileged, and are not interested in political application of the Internet. However, as the Internet has continued the rapid growth during the past years, nearly 50% of the population in big cities like Beijing or Shanghai has started to get online. Even though the Internet users are still early adapters, considering the large population in China, the profile of Internet users has been evolving over the years. Soon, the argument regarding privileged users not willing to risk their future might become obsolete.

Furthermore, despite the large portion of the population using the Internet only for entertainment purposes, many people still use the technology for political information,

deliberation or even action. One survey conducted by UCLA and the Chinese Academy of Social Science shows that nearly 80% of Chinese people believe that by using the Internet they can better understand politics, compared to 43% in the United States. Nearly 61% of Chinese Internet users think that by using the Internet, they can have more say about what the government does, compared to 20% in the United States ("Surveying Internet usage and impact in five Chinese cities", 2005). As Zheng and Wu (2005) pointed out, this distinction is caused by the different political systems in the two countries; in China, the Internet was probably the most important channel for the general public to become involved in politics.

In their study about Internet use and collective action in China, Zheng and Wu (2005) argued that the Internet has changed the relationship between the state and society in China, and greatly enhanced civic engagement, as well as political participation. They concluded that the Internet facilitates the free flow of information, provides an alternative information source, helps form a civic society and organize collective actions. They suggested that even though it is naïve to expect that the Internet alone will bring political democratization, the technology has certainly helped political liberation.

Clearly the Internet has changed the landscape of political life for Chinese users. But how exactly does the Internet relate to all kinds of political participation? While there is very sparse systematic research about Internet impacts on Chinese users' political lives in the real world, this study would be one of the first to offer some empirical evidence.

Use of the Internet for Political Purposes in China

The previous chapter addressed the Internet development and divide in China. The secondary analysis shows that the economic factor, technological infrastructure, and urbanization are all likely to have an impact on Internet penetration on the provincial level in China. On the individual level, the earlier studies on Internet adoption in the U.S. have shown that users tend to be male, younger, better educated, more affluent, White and urban (e.g., Hoffman, 1998; Katz & Aspden, 1997). China is still in its early stage in adopting the Internet. Although the absolute number of Internet users in China has topped the world record, the penetration rate is still relatively low compared to developed countries. Therefore, based on the studies from early adopters in the U.S., it is expected that the Internet users in China are also likely to have a similar profile.

These expectations are confirmed by the semi annual CNNIC reports. According to the most recent CNNIC report (2008), it was estimated that 57.2% of users were male and 42.8 % were female, which is close to the gender distribution in China. However, the January 2008 CNNIC reports that Internet penetration rates were still higher for males (17.7%) compared to females (14.1%) by the end of 2007. This is mainly caused by the different educational levels of males and females, according to CNNIC. The educational level of primary schooling and above in China is 53% for males and 47% for females. Nonetheless, the difference between male and female Internet users is narrowing as time passes.

The biggest age cohort of users was from 18 to 24, accounting for 31.8% of users. Among all the professions, students were most likely to use the Internet, comprising 28.8% of the users. Of users who have regular jobs, 41.8% worked for private enterprises. The educational levels of Internet users were higher than the general public. Since 1999,

however, the ratio of Internet users with college or above education has dropped from 86% to the current 36.2%. This partially attributes to the growing number of rural Internet users. Of the urban users, 37.6% have college educations, whereas of the rural users, only 13% have the educational level of college or above.

Marital status closely correlates with age. Due to the relative young age of Internet users, the majority of Internet users were unmarried (55.1%). For access locations, most users (67.3%) went online from home. This number has increased by 35.7% compared to 2006. Others use the Internet from Internet cafes (33.9%) or the workplace (24.3%). Of users who surf at Internet cafés, 74.8% have a high school education or below, representing a lower educational level than the general Internet user profile.

The applications of the Internet are listed below from high to low in terms of popularity: online music, instant message, online video, online news, search engine, Internet games, and email. The list shows that using the Internet for entertainment and communication purposes surpass information-seeking purposes. Unfortunately, CNNIC reports do not measure political use of the Internet.

In fact, very few studies have tried to document the profile of political users of the Internet. Norris (1998) identified that political Internet users had higher levels of political interest, knowledge, efficacy, and were of higher Social Economic Status (SES). In Bimber's 2001 study, he found that demographically, people who use the Internet as a political resource do not differ from the general population as much as one might guess. The only difference concerns education and income: political users of the Internet tend to be more educated and affluent, but the difference is not great. In the UK, Gibson, Lusoli, and Ward (2005) found that people who engaged in online political activity tend to be

male, highly educated, and of a high socioeconomic status. Although the findings are not entirely consistent, they indicate that the political net users tend to be male, more affluent, better educated, more politically attentive, and efficacious.[21]

Research Hypotheses

When examining the Internet and its political impact in China, I have singled out two questions. First, who is using the Internet, and specifically, who is using the Internet for political purposes? Second, how Internet use for political purposes affects people's political lives? As survey evidence in the Western context has shown, Internet users for political purposes tend to be male, better educated, more affluent, and more politically interested.

H4a: Male, better-educated, more affluent, and more politically interested individuals are more likely to use the Internet for political purposes.

As the literature review in Internet studies in the Western context demonstrates, using the Internet alone does not automatically lead to political activism. Findings have suggested that politically active users were active before they used the Internet, whereas inactive ones were not easily mobilized by simply getting online (Norris, 2001). However, a closer look at the Internet use experience reveals that different purposes of using the Internet matter. While using the Internet for entertainment purposes may not have any great impact on people's political lives at all, using the Internet for informational or political purposes are found to be associated with political participation (e.g., Tolbert and McNeal, 2003; Jennings and Zeitner, 2003).

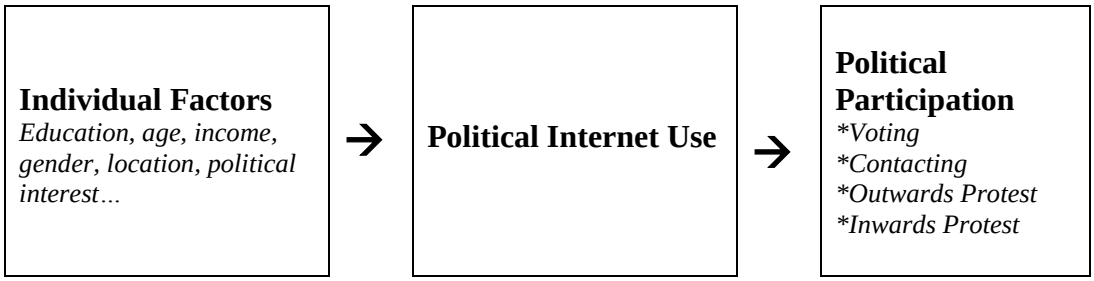
[21] Since there are a lot of missing values on the political efficacy variable, this variable had to be dropped from the analysis.

H4b: The higher the level of political net use, the higher the level of political participation.

Unlike democratic countries, where political participation is highly institutionalized and clearly defined, political participation in China is not as encouraged and sometimes even frowned upon. Nevertheless, studies on the Internet's political impacts in China seem to suggest that the Internet benefits all kinds of activities: civil activities from apolitical social organizations (Yang, 2003), individual political participation (Zheng & Wu, 2005), or even actions from dissident groups (Chase & Mulvenon, 2002). Therefore, the Internet is expected to have a positive association with all kinds of political participation, conventional or rebelling.

As Figure 4-1 demonstrates, the main relationship model entails that certain individual characteristics associate with higher likelihood of political Internet use, such as educational level, gender, age or political interest level. Subsequently, political Internet use also relates to real world political participation, including conventional participation such as voting or contacting, and unconventional protests.

Figure 4-1. The Individual Level Main-Relationship Model



Operationalizations

Political Net Use

To better grasp the essence of political net use, political expression online instead of obtaining political information is used. As Bimber (1998a) states, "It is not simply the availability of information that structures engagement; it is human interest and capacity to understand many complex issues" (p. 142). Robinson and Levy (1986) also suggested that political discussion about news was a more significant predictor of news use than simple exposure to the political information. Therefore, to express about politics is a better measurement than simple exposure to political information.

To measure political net use, respondents were asked to report on a 10-point scale how frequently they use the Internet for expressing their opinions about political issues (Mean=1.87, SD=2.75).

Political Participation

It's been identified that the most common and legal political activities in China include two choices: voting and contacting (Chen, 2004). In the late 1970s, CCP amended the electoral law for the elections of People's Congresses at various levels. According to this law, voters are able to nominate and select the final candidates for each contested seat. The voting process, including nomination of candidates, electorate deliberation and final selection of candidates, however, are closely controlled by the CCP (Halpern, 1991; Burns, 1995). As a result, all candidates placed on the ballot are CCP members or at least obedient to the party (McCormick, 1996). In addition, all electoral activities and deliberations are required to be carried out within a work unit under firm control by the election committees, which are dominated by CCP members (Shi and Lei, 1999). Voting behaviors often occur within work units, and are expected from CCP members.

Another common way of political participation is contacting. This study includes two measures of contacting: complaining to leaders or deputies at the People's Congress, or contacting the media. According to Tang and Parish's (2000) recent survey results, it is quite normal for people in China to contact government officials at various levels. They complain to leaders about issues ranging from wage, benefits, education, and community to government issues (Shi, 1997). Since these issues are low-politics issues and are not related to fundamentals of CPP rules, the government encourages the public to contact the officials. In fact, the government has set up institutions at various levels to receive complaining individuals and letters (Shi, 1997).

Media is another relatively neutral institution where the public can go and complain. Over the years, media commercialization coupled with increased editorial discretion has given the Chinese media increased freedom and incentive to challenge the party's propaganda (Liebman, 2006). The public often turns to Chinese media to report anything deemed unfair or unjust. When certain incident gains popular media pressure, the party interventions occasionally occur. Although complaining through the media is not encouraged by the government, it is indeed acknowledged and accepted as one channel for the general public to become involved.

Unlike traditional participation, protests, petitions, demonstrations or strikes are riskier and have the potentially dangerous consequences (Shi, 1997). Nevertheless, contrary to what many might expect, "Public protest in China is now anything but (rare), with such incidents numbering in the tens of thousands each year…" (Tanner, 2004, p. 137). According to the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), the nationwide rates of mass incidents experienced a 268 percent increase from 1993 to 1999 (from 8,700 to 32,000).

As Tanner states, these incidents take forms including small-group petitions, sit-ins and rallies, labor strikes, merchant strikes, student demonstrations, and even armed riots. Realizing that these incidents cannot be completely prevented, China's security leaders have acknowledged the magnitude of these occurrences and many of their true causes, relying on more sophisticated strategies to *contain* instead of *deter* these protests (Tanner, 2004).

Tanner (2004) pointed out that while the sizes and frequencies of these incidents are rising, these protests mostly focus on concrete local issues rather than broad systematic changes. There are two different kinds of protests studied here: inwards and outwards protests. Inwards protests happen when protesters try to fight against domestic policies or officials. These protesters do not act under permanent organizations; instead, they often claim the acceptance of the party's leadership, only wanting specific rights/benefits (Tanner, 2004). Another kind of protests occurs when China as a country is threatened by a foreign force, such as protests about Diaoyu Island or the 1999 U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.

Outwards and inwards protests are differentiated here for two reasons. First, the government does not encourage protests in general, but is more lenient toward protests against international forces. The Chinese leadership has occasionally acknowledged and encouraged protests towards foreign forces; for instance, the government tried sending messages to the public during the 1999 Belgrade bombing protests (Chase & Mulvenon, 2002). When it comes to domestic issues, the government tends to be more cautious and controlling. Although China's security leaders try to minimize popular anger through more moderate policing of protests, the inwards protest remains more sensitive.

Second, the inwards protests focus more on economic or individual interests, whereas the outwards protests tend to aim at fighting for the country's sovereignty. Furthermore, a nationalistic Chinese and a not so nationalistic Chinese might have very different reactions towards threats from inside and from outside.

Traditional Participation

Respondents were asked about three types of traditional forms of participation: voting for deputies to the local People's Congress, contacting leaders, local people's deputies or authorities, and contacting editors/reporters from the media about any issue. Of all respondents, 27.2% (n=114) voted for the people's congress, 16.7% (n=70) people reported having contacted leaders, local people's deputies or authorities, and 18.9% (n=79) reported having contacted media about an issue. An index was created for the three items for a traditional participation measurement (Cronbach α = .46; Mean: 0.28; SD: 0.35).

Political Protests

Outwards Protest Respondents were asked "Have you done any of the following things or whether you might do the following things under certain circumstances when your country is threatened by a foreign country: sign a petition, join a boycott, attend a demonstration, or join a strike.

Inwards Protest Respondents were asked the similar question, "Have you done any of the following things or whether you might do the following things when you object to a domestic leader or domestic issue: sign a petition, contact media,[22] attend a demonstration, or join a strike.

[22] When the threat comes from within, boycotting is not an appropriate choice to protest. Therefore, contacting media is used instead.

There were 42% of respondents who said they would petition against an international force (30% “No”, 28% “Don’t know”), the number was only 24% when responders needed to protest against the Chinese government (38% “No”, 38% “Don’t know”). Of all participants, 25% reported they would demonstrate against an international threat (42% “No”, 33% “Don’t know”), 15% said they would demonstrate against domestic policy or government (47% “No”, 38% “Don’t know”). Of all participants, 17% said they would go on strike against an outside force (49% “No”, 34% “Don’t know”), and only 11% were willing to go on strike against a domestic issue or government (59% “No”, 30% “Don’t know”). Those who would boycott another country’s products constituted 54% of the participants (19% “No”, 27% “Don’t know”), and 39% people would contact the media when concerned about a domestic issue (28% “No”, 33% “Don’t know”).

The index on outwards protest was created using the four measurements (Cronbach α = .62; Mean: 0.56; SD: 0.37). The index on inwards protest was created using the four measurements (Cronbach α = .68; Mean: 0.37; SD: 0.35).

The differences between protests against international and domestic issues are clear. People are more willing to engage in protests when they think they are fighting an outside force. They tend to feel more conservative when the threat comes from within. This is especially true for the question on strike.

Political Interest

Political interest was included as a control variable because prior research has shown the political significance of this attitudinal measure (Jeffres, Atkin, & Neuendorf, 2002). Respondents were separately asked to report on a 10-point scale to what extent

they were interested in national and local politics. Responses were summed to form an index (inter-item correlation = .76; Mean: 6.70; SD: 2.99).

News Media use

For both newspaper and television, respondents were asked on a 10-point scale how much time they spent on three categories of news content: international affairs, national politics, and local politics. A separate additive use index was created for newspapers (Cronbach α = .73) and television news (Cronbach α = .75). The scale on traditional news media use was then created by summing newspaper and TV news use together (Cronbach α = .82; Mean: 5.21; SD: 2.96).

Demographic variables

Key demographic variables, age (Mean: 29.16; SD: 9.47), gender (43.7% female), location (160 from Beijing and 258 from Urumqi), household income (Mean: 1542 RMB, SD=2364 RMB), party ID (19% CCP members, 34% Youth League members, 2% other party members, 34% no party affiliation) and education (mean: 14.37 years of schooling; SD: 2.48), were included as control variables.

Findings

Who uses the Internet?

The completed sample consists of 418 adult Chinese, which yielded a response rate of 52.25%. Out of the 418 respondents, 258 were from Urumqi, Xinjiang, a western city and 160 were from Beijing, the capital city of China. Among 418 survey subjects, 70.41% (N=295) were self-report Internet users.[23] Among the two locations, the Internet

[23] Internet user is measured by self report question, "Have you used the Internet in the last month?"

adoption rate for Beijing was 71.88%, slightly higher than the penetration rate in Urumqi, which is 69.77%.

The ratio of Internet users was much higher than the CNNIC reported 27.3% of Internet adoption rate in urban area (CNNIC, 2008). Four reasons may have caused the higher adoption rate. First, since the flyers for the survey were distributed in the university district in both cities, this survey attracted many highly educated people who either were college students or worked for the universities. As CNNIC reports consistently show, Internet users in China tend to have higher educational levels. Since universities provide convenient Internet access, it is much easier for college students or university employees to access the Internet. Second, although the survey flyer stated that both Internet users and non-users were needed for this survey, some non-users might still shy away since the flyer mentioned that the survey topic was about the Internet, traditional media use, and people's worldviews. Furthermore, the CNNIC surveys interviewed both adults and youths, whereas the current study only interviewed people aged 18 or higher. Adults tend to have a higher likelihood of using the Internet than youth, due to the higher level of education, computer skills, and income. Lastly, students are more susceptive to the $10 incentive this survey offered, and therefore more likely to participate in this study.

Consistent with the Internet users' profile reported by CNNIC, Internet users in this survey were also better educated (Mean=14.75, SD=8.28), younger (Mean=29.06, SD=8.27), had higher income (Mean=1786.98, SD=2692.77), and tended to be male (54.6% are males, 44.1% are females). CNNIC reports that the biggest cohort of Internet user ages from 18 to 24. This survey also identifies that 34.9% of users fall into the 18 to

24 age cohort, representing the largest age group. The educational level of these survey respondents is much higher than the CNNIC reported user profile. CNNIC reports that 37.6% of urban users had at least some college education, whereas this survey finds that 84.41% of users have at least some college education. CNNIC shows that 74% of users have monthly incomes below 2000 RMB. This survey reports that 82.9% had incomes below $2000. The large proportion of respondents having relatively lower income but much higher educational levels likely results from the big percentage of students in this sample. The survey also shows that 40.3% of participants were single (N=119) and 38.6% were married (N=114).

Who uses the Internet for political purpose?

Hypothesis 4a predicts that male, more educated, affluent, and politically interested individuals are more likely to use the Internet for political purposes.

Table 4-1. Individual Characteristics and Political Net Use

	Control Variables Only	
	Standardized β	*t* value
Age	-.21*	-2.9
Gender (High: Female)	.09	1.35
Education	-.09	-1.23
Income	.16*	2.35
Political Interest	.15#	1.94
Party ID (Low: CCP Member)	. 07	1.01
Location (Hi: Beijing)	.04	.66
Media Use	.13#	1.72
		R^2=9.3%

N=233
 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

As Table 4-1 shows, age (β = -.21) is negatively associated with political net use, suggesting that political net users tend to be younger. Income (β =.16) is also significant in positively associating with political net use, as expected. Political interest (β =.15) and traditional news media use (β =.13) are marginally significant in relating to political net use. Gender, and education are not significant here.

The reason that education is not significant may be attributed to the small variance in educational level in this particular dataset, as this sample has many college students or employees. These findings mostly confirmed earlier studies, where it has been suggested that young, wealthier, and politically interested people are more likely to engage in political use of the Internet (Norris, 1998).

Does the Internet affect political participation?

Hypothesis 4b predicts that Internet utilization for political purposes would lead to more political participation, including conventional ones like voting or contacting, as well as inwards and outwards protests. As Table 4-2 shows, age (β =.17) is significant with traditional participation, and residing in Beijing (β =.11) is marginally associated with traditional participation. Also, being a CCP member (β =.26) is strongly associated with participating traditionally. These findings are expected. Older people tend to be more conservative, and have a higher possibility of working in a work unit, where the conventional political participation takes place. Beijing residents have long been argued to be the most active among the Chinese public (Shi, 1997). Similarly, party members are more likely to get engaged in work unit organized activities, including voting for National People's Congress representatives. The control block explained 9.3% of the variance in traditional participation, while Internet use for political purpose adds another

0.4%. Internet use for political purposes however is not associated with traditional participation.

Table 4-2. Political Net Use & Traditional Participation[24]

	Control Variables Only	
	Standardized β	*t* value
Control Variables		
Age	.17*	2. 46
Gender (High: Female)	-.03	-.54
Education	-.02	-.28
Party ID (High: CCP Member)	.26**	4.12
Location (Hi: Beijing)	.11#	1.71
Political Interest	.08	1.1
Media Use	. 32	.82
		R^2=9.3%
Political Internet Use	.06	1.02
		R^2=9.7%

N=264
 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

Table 4-3. Political Net Use & Outwards Protest

	Control Variables Only	
	Standardized β	*t* value
Control Variables		
Age	.06	.88
Gender (High: Female)	-.06	-.95
Education	.07	1.09
Party ID (High: CCP Member)	-.03	-.45
Location (Hi: Beijing)	.002	.04
Political Interest	.16*	2.2
Media Use	. 07	.9
		R^2=6.1%
Political Internet Use	.09	1.44
		R^2=6.9%

N=237
 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

[24] Income is dropped from the control variables here because its un-standardized β is almost zero. It is also dropped for the following analysis.

Table 4-3 reports findings about outwards protest. The evidence indicates that the only significant control variable is political interest (β =.16), with more interest leading to more outwards protests. The control block explained 6.1% of the variance in outwards protest, while Internet use for political purpose adds another 0.8%. Internet use for political activities is not significant here.

Table 4-4 Political Net Use & Inwards Protest

	Control Variables Only	
	Standardized β	*t* value
Control Variables		
Age	-.11#	-1.66
Gender (High: Female)	-.07	-1.1
Education	.07	1.13
Party ID (High: CCP Member)	.07	1.02
Location (Hi: Beijing)	-.02	-.37
Political Interest	.17*	2.29
Media Use	. 11	1.49
		R^2=6.3%
Political Internet Use	-.06	-0.87
		R^2=6.4%

N=243
 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

As Table 4-4 shows, age (β = -.11) is negatively associated with inwards protests at p<.10. Political interest is still positively associated with inwards protest. The higher the political interests (β =.17), the higher the possibility of the users becoming engaged in inwards protest. Internet use for political activities is again not significant here.

Political participation is one of the most important constructs in studies pertaining to political communication. A healthy democratic society is based on active participation

from the public. Although China is not a democratic country with open elections, its political system has been liberalized over the years. The Internet is expected to be facilitating that process by providing not just more information and free exchange of ideas, but also better and diverse information, multifaceted and anonymous communication channels, and alternative participatory opportunities at lower cost, better speed, and greater convenience. More importantly, since China is a country without freedom of expression, the Internet is expected to provide alternative points of view that could differ from government propaganda; and it could be the only channel for people to show their voices and participate in the political world. However, the hypotheses concerning the political Internet use and political participation are not supported. Political net use is not associated with any one of the three types of participation analyzed here: traditional participation, inwards or outwards protests.

It is possible that due to the small sample size, some relationships simply cannot be identified, or, responders did not give honest answers to the survey. Since the political net use is measured by one single item, also likely is that all facets of Internet use for political application were not captured. As Shah, Cho, Eveland, and Kwak (2005) discovered, online information seeking fosters political discussion both online and offline, which in turn, promotes civic engagement. Since this study only analyzes the association between political expression online and political participation offline, it might oversimplify the complex process that entails information seeking, issue deliberation, as well as online and offline participation. Perhaps some linkage in the chain is overlooked, such as political discussion and online political activity; thus, the entire picture of Internet use and political outcome cannot be fully understood here.

Of course, the findings herein could also suggest that Internet use alone, even use specifically for political purpose, does not automatically transform into more or less political behaviors in the real world. Although the political activities online have already generated much attention from the government and the public, users are content with what they can do online, and online only. They are not pondering becoming involved in offline behaviors, at least for now.

This could be partially explained by the political environment in China, where serious danger could be resulted by active involvement in politics, both online and offline. As the Internet has been closely controlled by the Chinese government, when people perceive danger involved in using the Internet for political purposes, they may avoid it to stay out of trouble. Moreover, Chinese nationalism could lead people to obey the government order in focusing on economic development and social order. Thus, to fully understand political implications of Internet use, one must also consider the specific political environment in China.

Using survey data, this chapter tried to understand the main relationships among individual characteristics, political net use, and political participation. Unable to identify the direct influence of political Internet use on political participation, the next two chapters will discuss the specific characteristics of Chinese political culture in trying to uncover the potential moderating effects of perceived threat and Chinese nationalism.

CHAPTER 5
FEAR FACTOR? PERCEIVED CENSORSHIP & USING THE INTERNET FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES

The Internet has posed a dilemma for the Chinese government, who now must balance economic benefits and the possible political and social complications the Internet brings. In fact, this is not a problem only China faces. Any country, regardless of its ideology or political regime, has witnessed both advantages and harmful consequences that the Internet is capable of creating. On the positive side, the Internet provides an unprecedentedly huge volume of information, greatly lowers the cost of obtaining information, and helps communication become much easier, faster, and cheaper. On the negative side, harmful messages such as child pornography and violence are also easily accessible to the public. For the Chinese government, however, the greatest danger the Internet imposes lies at its threats to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) control over information flow.

China has a long tradition of controlling information to sustain its political monopoly. The earliest written record of censorship in Chinese history dates back to the Qin Dynasty (221-206BC), when books were burned and scholars were executed in order to maintain the hegemony of legalism (Wu, 2005). Under the current CCP governance, the media is also considered as the "mouth piece" of the party. As the former President

Jiang Zemin iterated, "Freedom of the press should be subordinate to the interests of the nation" (Neumann, 2001).[25]

However, with the ever-growing development of new communication technologies, especially the Internet, which is open, decentralized, and interactive, the control over information flow becomes increasingly difficult. Since the Internet was intentionally designed as a distributed network with no central node or hierarchy in order to facilitate communication in a nuclear war (Baran, 1964), it has been argued that the Internet is immune to any regulations. Former President Bill Clinton once claimed, if an authoritarian regime like China wants to control the Internet, they will find it really hard to do so – it would be akin to "trying to nail Jello to the wall".[26] Unlike traditional media that are under strict monitoring of the CCP, the Internet with its worldwide network provides alternative political views that may be widely divergent from the CCP ideologies or values. According to Taubman (1998), the Internet creates a condition of "ideational pluralism". It has been argued that the "key features of the Internet can be corrosive to the nondemocracies", the Internet provides "the means for undermining the pillars of nondemocratic rules", and the compatibility between nondemocratic rule and the Internet is "built-in" (Taubman, 1998, p. 256).

Nevertheless, despite of the new challenges posed by the Internet to information control, China has actively engaged in various methods in trying to maintain a controlled cyberspace. These Internet policies have generated extensive criticism among Western countries. The outcry became especially strong when popular websites like *The Washington Post* or CNN were reportedly blocked by the Chinese filtering software

[25] Transcripts of Jiang Zemin in an interview with Mike Wallace of CBS in Beidaihe,
[26] This is from an article adapted from a Clinton's speech in Washington D.C. on March 8, 2000.

(Kahn, 2002), or when Western companies including Yahoo! or Google engaged in self-regulation to coordinate with the Chinese government (Hu, 2003).

Will China's Internet regulation be successful? Will the Internet undermine the authoritarian regime in China? These have become the most discussed topics in China's Internet studies (Kluver and Yang, 2005). While many people believe that China's Internet control is doomed due to the nature of the Internet (such as Kedzie, 1997; Taubman, 1998; Barney, 2000; Franda, 2002), others argue that the Chinese government has been successfully creating an Internet environment under its cautious watch (such as Deibert, 2002; Boas, 2004; Kluver & Yang, 2005).

Notably, self-censorship has been exercised by many Internet users in China. Even when the government censorship is not perfect, what really matters is how these censorship approaches are perceived by the users. In other words, as long as the users assess that there is a real danger involved in accessing sensitive websites or publishing contradictory comments online, they are inclined to censorship themselves, no matter whether the state control is effective in reality or not. Perceived threats have important attitudinal and behavioral consequences. Studies have demonstrated that perceived threats can prime individuals' responses and cause them to take on more defensive postures (Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, &Woodand, 1995).

To understand the political Internet use in China, the question of censorship and perceived threats that accompany these censorships are impossible to avoid. Internet control in China has been widely recognized and discussed by Western scholars. Users can also sense it through blocked websites or online monitoring approaches. Highly publicized Internet crimes and Internet café crackdowns all have made it very clear to

Chinese users that their Internet use is controlled by the government. As one would expect, any Chinese users would use the Internet with a voice in the back of their heads telling them that they could be monitored, tracked, or even punished for whatever they do online.

Unfortunately, although a big bulk of published studies on China's Internet focuses on China's Internet control, very little attention has been given to how exactly the censorship influences people's Internet use. To fully understand the Internet's social and political significance, one must understand how people use the Internet individually in a censored environment. After all, the people are the ones changing the world, not the technology itself.

First in this chapter, the major government entities involved in Internet regulation will be introduced. As a relatively new communication technology, the Internet has been regulated by various regulatory entities as it develops. Each regulating agency has different angles in regulating the Internet, based on their own interests and policy emphasis. Numerous legislations or regulations have been passed by these regulatory entities over the years and many bureaucratic overlaps exist. Technological control methods will also be discussed. A summary of government censorship provides a regulatory background for the Internet studies in China. Understanding how the government manages the Internet sheds light on how people could perceive these censorship approaches, and how the Internet environment is structured by the government.

Next, by describing perceived threats, which are composed of perceived censorship and perceived security, discussion will ensue as to how these two constructs can relate to people's political Internet use in China. As a country where information has

been traditionally censored, China has given much thought to how to regulate the Internet. In fact, Internet censorship is so widely applied, it would be almost impossible for users not to notice these control approaches from time to time. With such a repressed tradition and the tight Internet control, the perceived threats from these censorships and the sense of security from personal computer skills or confidence in the Internet are expected to significantly change people's political net use.

Finally, using data collected in China, I would explore how Internet censorship influences the Chinese people's Internet use for political purposes. Would people try to avoid using the Internet for political purposes when they perceive a censorship for the Internet? On the other hand, would they be more engaged in using the Internet for political expressions when they believe that the Internet, as an advanced communication tool, could protect them from getting in any trouble? Ultimately, this section attempts to answer the question of if the Internet will change China politically, would the perceived threats from the general public get in the way?

Internet Control in China

Several government agencies have regulated the Internet at different points of its development. Each issued many regulations about the Internet. Before the regulations and control strategies are reviewed, the different regulatory agencies regarding the Internet are outlined.

Key Internet Regulatory Agencies

Sohmen (2001) once stated, "The question of who controls policy concerning the Internet in China is not a simple one" (Sohmen, 2001, p.18). Due to its diverse nature, the

Internet is subjected to regulation from various regulatory agencies, both horizontally and vertically. Things are further complicated by constant name changing or creations of new Chinese regulatory agencies.

In China, the State Council is the executive branch of the National People's Congress and the highest level of state administration. The State Council's power is broad and the regulations it issues and enforces cover the entire country (Chen, 1992). The State Council usually enacts its regulations through the ministries under it (Taylor, 1997). Before 1998, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPT), which was a functional organ of the State Council, was the major regulatory authority and telecommunication monopoly for all telecommunication industries in China. The MPT formulated policies as well as enforced them. In the meantime, the MPT tried to maintain control of the fast-growing telecommunication service market, where the Internet was considered as a value-added service (Cullen & Choy, 1999). Nevertheless, other branches of the government, especially the MEI regarded the Internet as one of information technologies and should fall within its jurisdiction.

To coordinate regulatory agencies with regard to Internet policy, a Steering Committee on National Information Infrastructure (SCSCNII) was set up by the State Council. The chair for the Steering Committee was Vice-Premier Zou Jiahua, and the first deputy-chair was MEI's minister, Hu Qili. Steering Committees are temporary regulatory authorities, which are commonly established in China when several bureaucratic bodies are involved in one particular area and rapid collective decision-makings are required (Sohmen, 2001). The major responsibilities of the SCSCNII were mainly at the strategic level, and are listed as follows:

1. To formulate guiding principles, policies, rules and regulations in the developing process of national informationization;
2. To formulate the strategy for developing national informationization and its overall and stage-by-stage plans;
3. To organize and coordinate the construction of important information projects;
4. To be responsible for the coordination and finding solutions for important issues arising from the computer networks and the Internet; and
5. To establish the standards for the technology and application related to information

(The State Council Steering Committee of National Infrastructure).

In March 1998, the MPT, the MEI, and parts of the Ministry of Radio-Film-Television (MRFT) were replaced by the Ministry of Information Industry (MII). The former minister of the MPT, Wu Jichuan, was appointed as head of the MII, other vice ministers and staffs were selected from both the MPT and MEI (Shi & Gelb, 1998). An important purpose of setting up the MII was to separate the regulator from the service provision under the MPT's umbrella, i.e., China Telecom. The Steering Committee was abolished and the MII is now the main regulatory agency for the Internet at the day-to-day level, and responsible for the following areas:

1. To formulate development strategies, overall policy and plans for the national information industry, telecommunications industry, and the software industry;
2. To draft laws and regulations governing the information industry, telecommunications industry, and software industry – to enact administrative rules -- to enforce these laws and supervise their implementation;
3. To make comprehensive plans for government public networks, broadcasting networks, and special networks of military and other public entities and to ensure proper technical and professional administration;
4. To formulate technological policies, systems and standards for the information industry and the broadcasting industry and the software industry -- to administer entry licenses into networks -- to monitor quality supervision and control;
5. To allocate, organize and coordinate available electronic bandwidth, domain names, and Internet addresses;

6. To supervise the telecommunications and information service markets -- to implement a business licensing regime -- and to formulate methods for interconnection between networks and the settlement of interconnection conditions;
7. To formulate pricing policies of the telecommunications and information services industries -- to supervise the implementation of pricing policies;
8. To plan, build and manage special networks that are used by the Communist Party and the government -- to coordinate these special networks, emergency networks, and other important networks -- to safeguard the security of state communications and information;
9. To guide and assist the development of the information industry according to the technological development policy -- to supervise industry structures, industry products, and enterprises -- to deploy resources in a rational way;
10. To promote research and development in the electronic information industry, telecommunications industry, and software industry -- to organize large scale technological projects and to assist in the development of national industry;
11. To provide professional administration assistance with regard to military electronic systems and to carry out research on development strategies and policies and plans related to military electronic systems -- to co-ordinate integration of MII plans and plans by the military and the national committee of defense technology and industry;
12. To assist the promotion of informationization of the national economy and national key research projects -- to guide, coordinate and organize development and utilization of information resources;
13. To organize and guide the sending, allocation and settlement of accounts by monetary means through postal and electronic information transfer systems;
14. To represent the government in joining relevant international organizations and in signing relevant international agreements -- to organize foreign technology exchanges;
15. To carry out research on policies in regard to telecommunications and information systems with the HKSAR (The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China), Macau, and Taiwan;
16. To compile statistics on the information industry and to report news about the information industry; and
17. To deal with matters assigned by the State Council

(Introduction of the Ministry, http://www.mii.gov.cn).

While the MII is the main regulator of the information technology sector, the Internet is so politically sensitive that other regulators, including bureaucratic agencies

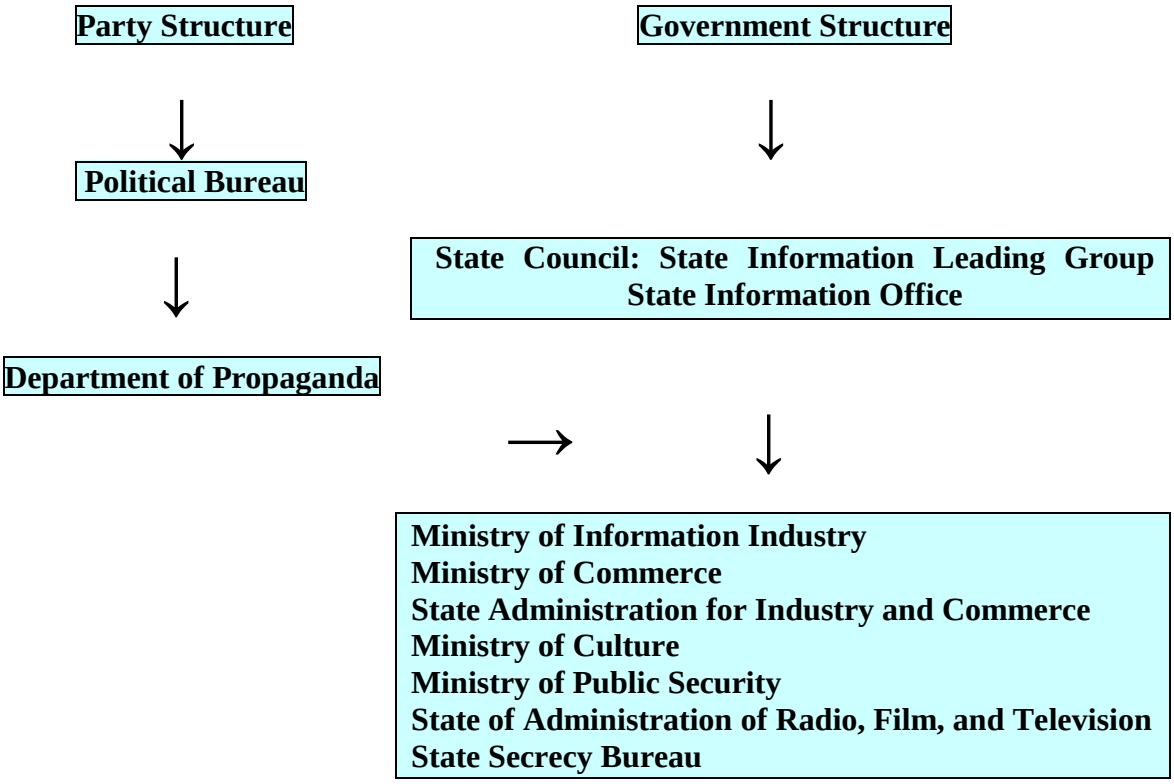
under the State Council and political bodies under the Central Committee of the CCP, are also involved.

The foremost organization for media control under the CCP is the Department of Propaganda (DOP) of the Central Committee of the CCP. The DOP reports directly to the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau on matters related to information dissemination and control. The Chinese Communist Party's Propaganda Department has issued unpublished rules regarding news content, which have been applied to online news as well (Sohmen, 2001).

Other than the MII and DOP, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) and the State Secrecy Bureau also play very important roles in the regulation of the Internet in that they deal with the surveillance of the computer network, registration of Internet users, and investigation of Internet crimes. In addition, the China Internet Information Center (CNNIC), which is part of the Chinese Academy of Science, is also involved in the regulation of the Internet in domain name registrations in China (Cullen & Choy, 1999). The State Information Office, which is the State Council's public-relations agency and news office, is responsible for drafting the regulations for Internet Content Providers (ICPs). Additionally, the official news agency, the Xinhua News Agency, is responsible for checking the online content from foreign sources. The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television is responsible for checking online broadcasting. The State Administration of Industry and Commerce supervises online advertisings. Other than these national level agencies, local level governments have also issued numerous regulations concerning Internet usage (Sohmen, 2001).

The following graph (See Figure 5-1) describes the power structure in regulating the internet.

Figure 5-1. Party and State Organizations Responsible for the Internet



Source: Adapted from Zheng, 2008.

When first introduced to China, the unique characteristics of the Internet caused some confusion, as it was not clear which ministry should be responsible to regulate the Internet. Consequently, there have been numerous overlaps of responsibilities among various regulatory agencies in the industry of the Internet. Moreover, there have been constant power struggles among these agencies. These problems have worsened due to

the rapid development of the Internet. The 1998 reform, where the MPI, MEI, and MRFT were replaced by the MII, was one of the government's first steps to deal with this complicacy. However, the business and regulatory functions of the MII still foster jealousy among other ministries. For example, it was alleged that in the case of China Telecom, which owns CHINANET — one of the few network organizations operating internationally under permits issued by the MII, the economic interest for the MII has constituted problems with regulation of the Internet. The MII may put its own interests above the overall interest of the industry, and issue regulations that will ultimately hinder the development of the Internet. In responding to those concerns, the MII had to give up the ownership of China Telecom to further separate its regulatory and operational functions. Nevertheless, the MII remains closely linked with China Telecom (Sohmen, 2001).

Legislations and Regulations

With the foremost goal of maintaining political control over the Internet, the Chinese government has relied on legislations, regulations over the network, ISPs, and individual users.

Legislations

The 1994 "Rule of Security Protection of Computer Information System" was issued by the State Council and became the basic guidance for the government to regulate computer networks. There are two major provisions in this rule: First, the regulation states that any network connecting to an international network must report such systems (Article 11). Second, transportation of computer media in or out of the country must be

reported to customs (Article 12). In addition, the regulation gave the MPT overall responsibility for the supervision of the Internet (Article 17, Zhang, 1997).

The first regulation specifically regarding the Internet was the 1996 “Interim Regulation on Administration of International Networking of Computer Information Networks”, which was issued by the State Council Steering Committee. These regulations were revised again as the “Computer Information Network and Internet Security, Protection and Management Regulations” in May 1997. Article 5 of the Interim Provisions assigned the Economic Information Joint Committee (the then SCSCNII) to supervise matters about international network connections; Article 6 requires that all direct international networking traffic must use channels provided by the MPT's national public networks (Cullen & Choy, 1999).

At the time, the MPT had been entitled monopoly over China's gateway to the international Internet. Moreover, all networks with international connections must be pre-approved by the State Council and regulated under the MPT, the MEI, the State Education Commission, and the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Foreign investment was banned. The rule further proposed a list of conditions, which must be met by entities in order to be granted the international connections rights. The conditions are as follows.

1. They have to be an enterprise legal person or an institutional legal person established in accordance with the law;
2. They have to have the necessary networking equipment, technicians and management personnel;
3. They have to have comprehensive safety and security control systems and technical protection measures; and
4. They have to comply with all other laws and regulations and other conditions set out by the State Council.

(Decision of the State Council on Revising the Interim Provisions Governing the Management of Computer Information Networks in the People's Republic of China Connecting to Internet, http://www.mii.gov.cn).

On February 13, 1998, the SCSCNII published the "Provisions for the Implementation of the Interim Provisions Governing the Management of Computer Information Networks in the People's Republic of China Connecting to the Internet" ("SCSCNII Provisions"). The SCSCNII Provisions basically repeat the previous regulations and requirements. On top of those regulations, however, the SCSCNII provisions strengthened the regulation of access by setting up a three-tiered system, which consists of international networks, interconnecting networks, and connecting networks (Cullen & Choy, 1999; Sohmen, 2001).

International networks are networks connecting China to the international Internet; interconnecting networks are the national backbone networks connecting to the international networks; connecting networks are the networks connecting to individuals and businesses. Therefore, at the international networks level, the government has an absolute monopoly power—access to the Internet is exclusively provided by the MII. At the interconnecting networks level, although commercial networks can get a license from the government, all of the backbone networks in China are under control of state-owned enterprises. At the lowest level, connecting networks also need to satisfy several requirements in order to apply for a license for connecting to the backbone interconnecting networks. The Interconnecting Networks are responsible for the ISPs they support, ISPs are responsible for their customers, and work units are responsible for their workers. With this mechanism, the Chinese government has successfully extended its regulation towards the Internet (Sohmen, 2001).

Under another regulation issued in January 1996 — "the Circular of the Ministry of Public Security on Entering on Record the Computer Information System Connected with Internet" (the PSB circular), ISPs and individual Internet users are required to register with the local PSB within 30 days of connection (Sun, 1996). ISPs need to provide information such as the location of its host computer, nature and scope of its networks. Information the Internet users need to provide include their level of education, background, a fee of 400 RMB, and signature of compliance with the regulation. Failure to complete the registration may result in punishment (Sohmen, 2001).

Apart from the Interim Provision, the SCSCNII Provisions, and the PSB Circular, the PSB issued one more provision in December 1997 in order to further maintain domestic and international security—the "Provisions on Safeguarding the Security of Domestic Computer Networks in Linking with the Internet (the PSB Provisions)". This provision indicated the responsibilities for the interconnecting networks, ISPs, and the Internet users when providing Internet access, service, and use:

1. They must assume responsibility for network security, protection and management and establish a thoroughly secure, protected and well managed network;
2. They must carry out technical measures for network security and protection and ensure network operational security and information security;
3. They must assume responsibility for the security education and training of network users;
4. They must register units and individuals to whom information is provided and examine the information provided and make sure that no prohibited information is provided.
5. They must establish a system for registering the users of electronic bulletin board systems on the computer information network as well as a system for managing bulletin board information;
6. They must keep records of any violations of the PSB Provisions and report to the PSB; and
7. According to the relevant state regulations, remove from the network any address, directory or server that has prohibited contents

(PSB Provisions, Cullen & Choy, 1999).

Regulating the Content

Other than regulating networks and individuals, the government also tries to control the Internet through content regulations. There were four great democracies recognized by the Constitution when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was first established: (1) to speak out fully, (2) air views freely, (3) hold great debates, and (4) write big character posters. Although the provision was repealed in 1980, the PRC's Constitution still grants "freedom of speech" (Reed, 2000).

The idea of freedom of expression, however, is viewed differently in China compared to most Western democracies. The Chinese government believes that individual freedom must be sacrificed for the common collective, and the rights are only ways to realize the state's objective (Reed, 2000). Consequently, individuals are not supposed to express views that contradict with the views of the CCP, which controls all facets of the government.

In the meantime, the CCP has traditionally utilized the press as its "mouthpiece" to disseminate its principles and values, and even to publish and interpret laws (Reed, 2000). Due to the importance of the media, the press has been subjected to censorship and editing controls. Since all media institutions used to be state-owned, self-censorship has been conveniently practiced by the press. Consequently, the flow of information is essentially one-way— top-down, only. Nevertheless, with the proliferation of more and more independent newspapers, journals and magazines, the strict control from the central government has been more difficult (although broadcasting and cable television are still entirely state-owned).

Extending the control over media coverage to the Internet, the government has also proposed regulations specifically regarding the content online. The 1997 Interim Provisions provide an extensive list of outlawed content. Article 5 outlines some specific contents that are deemed objectionable:

1. Materials inciting resistance or breaking the Constitution or laws or the implementation of administrative regulations;
2. Materials inciting the overthrow of the government or the socialist system;
3. Materials inciting division of the country, harming national unification;
4. Materials inciting hatred or discrimination among nationalities or harming the unity of the nationalities;
5. Materials containing falsehoods or distorting the truth, or spreading rumors, or destroying the order of society;
6. Materials promoting feudal superstitions, sexually suggestive material, gambling, violence, murder, terrorism or inciting others to criminal activity;
7. Materials openly insulting other people or distorting the truth to slander people;
8. Materials injuring the reputation of state organs and;
9. Materials encouraging other activities against the Constitution, laws or administrative regulations.

(PSB Provisions, Cullen & Choy, 1999).

Following the PSB Provision, many other agencies also issued regulations regarding Internet content. The wording may be different, but all have similar meanings. In January 2000, the State Secrecy Bureau (SSB) issued the "Regulations for Computer Information Systems on the Internet" (the SSB Regulation), which further restricts the control over content. The SSB Regulation specifically targets information in email, bulletin boards, chat rooms, and news groups (Sohmen, 2001).

In addition, the regulations demand that Internet Access Providers provide instruction about protecting secrets as an important part of the Internet related technical training. Violation of the regulations mentioned above can lead to fines or closure.

In September 2000, the "Measures for Managing the Internet Information Services" was issued by the State Council, which further shifted the responsibility over content to ISPs. Article 14 stated that the service providers must record their subscribers' access to the Internet, their account numbers, the Web addresses they call up as well as the telephone numbers they use, and store this information for sixty days. Article 15 repeats the information that is not to be produced on the Internet. Article 16 continues, expounding that if material under these categories is discovered, "it shall immediately stop the transmission, keep the relevant records, and report the situation to the relevant state authorities" (“China’s Internet regulations”, 2000).

When the Internet was first introduced in China, portals like Sina.com included dispatches from foreign news sources, such as Agency France-Press and Reuters (Rosenthal, 1999). However, later portals were advised by the government not to provide links to foreign news sources, even though some portals have foreign shareholders such as Sina.com (Foster & Goodman, 2000). Then in 2000, the Communist Party Propaganda Department issued rules to prohibit websites from hiring independent reporters, and using content or providing linkage to foreign news sources. In addition, traditional media is not allowed to use any content from the Internet (Sohmen, 2001).

As Sohemen (2001) observed, although many regulations have outlawed content like “damaging to national unity” or “disturbing to social order”, no definition has been given to “state security”, “state secrets” or “social order”. In the past, terms like “state secret” have been interpreted in many ways. The flexibility of the interpretation of those terms has been very useful in terms of control.

While these laws seem to be very strict, they may not be strictly enforced in practice. In China, many laws are only firmly practiced in the beginning, then after a while, the enforcement loosens up, until at some point the government feels it needs to remind citizens of these regulations, and pursues sudden crackdowns. For instance, Internet cafés are swept from time to time; the purpose is to remind the public that they are being monitored. When these actions are practiced, enormous media attention would also be given in order to maximize the warning effect (Sohmen, 2001).

Technological Approaches

Whereas most countries' access to the Internet is distributed through multiple national nodes and a combination of private and public providers, in China, ISPs and ICPs all connect to the global Internet through state-owned corporations (Higgins & Azhar, 1996). Such access has a hierarchy that allows for blocking controversial or politically contradicting information at the outer layer of control.

Other than legislations, the China government has also employed several technological approaches to control the Internet. In September 1996, the State Council ordered the MPT to block access to approximately100 Internet websites. The banned websites ranged from U.S. media sites such as CNN, some Taiwan and Hong Kong news media sites, and dissident websites, to sexually explicit sites (Brauchli, 1996; Arnold, 1996). In January 1997, however, it was reported that China had eliminated some of the blocking restrictions (Fletcher & Hsieh, 1997).

After 1997, it was reported that many websites have been blocked again. For instance, in August 2002, China blocked access to Google, one of the most popular

search engines in China. It was the first time that China had blocked a search engine. During the period of blocking, requests to access Google had been rerouted to another website that was run by CHINANET. Two weeks later, however, Google was unblocked (Tai, 2006). According to a 2002 project conducted by Harvard researchers, currently 18,931 websites were inaccessible from at least two different proxy servers within China on at least two distinct days. Among all the blocked sites, other than sexually explicit sites, human rights and democracy sites were blocked the most; thousands of sites about Taiwan and Tibet were also blocked; the other blocked sites included news, health, education, religion, and some government sites (Zittrain & Edelman, 2002). Despite of the wide-range scope of the blocking, the Chinese government's primary concern is still subversive views and dissident activities obtainable on the Internet.

Apparently, there are some people who are constantly updating and evaluating all the websites, since it does not take long for news sites with sensitive content to be blocked, such as the Slashdot website (Zittrain & Edelman, 2002). Many observers have noted the inconsistent blocking processes—there is no set pattern on what gets on the blacklist, when, and why. For example, while *The New York Times* is blocked, *The Washington Post* is not. Since each network obtains a different list, some websites may be unavailable from some servers, but available from others. Also, some Internet users have discovered that while CNN was blocked for a while, it was accessible again later (Shaw, 2002). The inconsistent blocking process has made some Internet users believe that the government is not making a serious effort to censor the net. Some commentators argue that the major function of the blocking skill is to warn the Internet users that the Internet can be controlled (Tsui, 2001).

Currently, China relies primarily on ISPs to control Internet usage, since as noted earlier, ISPs need to be responsible for how citizens use the Internet. By blocking the IP address of predetermined blacklisted sites, the ISPs are denying any requests to access those websites. In order to block the IP address, however, the ISPs have to program a large number of routers, which will inevitably slow down the transmission of data over the network. Also, considering the huge number of websites, predetermining all the objectionable content cannot be effective. As iterated by an Internet consultant, "New web sites come online everyday, old websites change their addresses. Content from one is mirrored on another" (Shaw, 2002). Finally, the router level blocking means that there are a number of ways for determined users to circumvent the blocks, including using proxy servers, requesting information by emails, accessing foreign ISPs, and so on.

Other than blocking the blacklisted websites, the government strengthened the control by employing filtering software to block websites that contain predetermined keywords. As Boas (2004) identified, beginning in 2002, the blocking has evolved, becoming more sophisticated, where keywords in the URL or actual webpage requested can be used for blocking, instead of using a preexisting blacklist of prohibited websites. Due to the inaccuracy of using keywords, the effectiveness of filtering programs is doubtful. A filtering program may mistakenly block helpful and important information. Humans sometimes operate the practice, too. For example, most popular bulletin boards in China have hosts to run these operations. Some hosts are paid; some are volunteers. They are responsible for monitoring the postings and delete anything they deem unacceptable. In responding to these control strategies, users sometimes use a symbolic device. For instance, instead of posting "1989 Tiananmen square incident", which they

know would be blocked, they would write “1989 Tian2An2Men square incident” so posts would not be deleted.

In addition to blocking and filtering websites, the MPS is also required to monitor the flow of online information. How extensive and frequent this monitoring is remains unclear. Yet, with the increasing usage of the Internet, the task can be expensive and cumbersome.

Numerous commentators have argued that the technological control of the Internet is bound to fail (e.g., Abbate, 1999), because the Internet was designed to circumvent any communication breakdowns. It is true that there are a number of ways to bypass the blocking and filtering, such as the employment of a proxy server or the utilization of a foreign ISP. Zittrain and Edelman (2002) and Chase and Mulvenon (2002) listed a number of ways of circumventing censorship. However, there are barriers to these circumvention technologies. For instance, dialing to a foreign IPS is very expensive and using encryption or a proxy server requires knowledge. While a “determined” user can certainly bypass the firewall, most users do not have the motivation to risk involvement in using these techniques or lack necessary knowledge and money. As Boas pointed out, there is a difference between “perfect control” and ‘effective control”. Never is it the goal of the authoritarian leaders to have perfect control that eliminates all demand for access to the Internet; they merely need “good enough” control to deter most Internet uses that may challenge the authoritarian regimes.

Self-Censorship by ISPs and Users

Sometimes the government falls back on the old method of intimidation to deter dissident behaviors. Because the precise identification protocols used by computers to connect to the networks leave an electronic trace, the PSB is able to monitor the individual account, from where the objectionable websites are assessed. Moreover, the penalties for violating the Internet regulations can be serious. For instance, violation of certain laws can result in up to 5000 RMB for individuals, and network licenses can be suspended. For offenses such as “leaking national secret”, penalties can be more severe (Sohmen, 2001).

Several cases have been reported over the years. For instance, in 1998, Shanghai police arrested a computer engineer Lin Hai. He was charged with "inciting subversion" of the government for selling 30,000 Chinese e-mail addresses to a New York based organization that distributes pro-democratic newsletters via email in China. He was sentenced with a two-year prison term (Eckholm, Faison and Miller, 1999). Other cases include a professor named Li Yibin who operated a website titled Democracy and Liberty and Liao Yiwu, who regularly criticized the government online (Zheng, 2005).

Although few users or private ISPs have been prosecuted over the years, this approach works effectively as a warning technique. Since there is a possibility of harsh punishments for anti-government online activities, many people would restrain themselves from getting involved in anything they consider dangerous. This is different from users in the United States or Europe, where users would rarely consider if their online behaviors or expressions would leave a trace, and whether this may lead to any penalties. Therefore, in this sense, the perception that one might be under surveillance is far more important in controlling one’s behavior than the actual surveillance.

Periodic crackdowns on the Internet cafés and chat rooms have encouraged ISPs or Internet cafés to police their own customers (Boas, 2004). In China, doing business is conditional upon maintaining good relations with the government. These intermediaries have both political and market appeals to comply with government regulations. In order to meet all the requirements, ISPs, ICPs, and Internet cafés set up their own monitors. For example, organizations like Sohu.com, a portal based in Beijing, have incorporated certain approaches to monitor the chat rooms and the bulletin boards, and delete materials that are mentioned in the 2000 PSB Provisions. Even foreign companies like Yahoo! signed a pledge to eliminate subversive materials from its website ("Yahoo's China concession", 2002). In Internet cafes, managers have appointed people to patrol the monitors and check what material appears on the screen.

Both ICPs such as Sohu.com and Internet Cafés have issued their own sets of guidelines for users. Sohu.com, for instance, gives the following message to clients who want to enter Sohu's chat rooms:

Please take note that the following issues are prohibited according to Chinese law:

1. Criticism of the PRC Constitution
2. Revealing State secrets, and discussion about overthrowing the Communist government
3. Topics that damage the reputation of the State
4. Discussions that ignite ethnic animosity, discrimination or regional separatism
5. Discussion that undermines the state's religious policy, as well as promotes evil cults and superstition
6. Spreading rumors, perpetrating and disseminating false news that promotes disorder and social instability
7. Dissemination of obscenity, sex, gambling, violence, and terror. Cyber-sex is not permitted within the English chat room.
8. Humiliating or slandering innocent people
9. Any discussion and promotion of content which PRC laws prohibit
10. If you are a Chinese national and willingly choose to break these laws, Sohu.com is legally obliged to report you to the Public Security Bureau.
11. Thank you for your cooperation

(Freedom of expression and the Internet in China, Human Rights Watch, 2001).

Harsh penalties and high-profile arrests work effectively as deterrence. Internet users in China commonly engage in self-control or self-censorship. Essentially, loosely exercising regulations is to the state's advantage. With a certain degree of vagueness, the Internet users and ISPs would always have to practice cautiousness when it comes to assessing the risk associated with radical online behaviors.

Consequently, when the users perceive a real threat, they would tend to avoid using the Internet for political purposes. On the other hand, when they have a sense of control or consider the censorship to be ineffective, they would ignore the threats and not self-censor. The question that really matters is not whether or not the political censorship of the Internet is perfect. Rather, the fundamental question that should be asked is whether or not the users perceive a real threat and how much sense of security they possess. Relying on research about perceived threat, the following section analyzes why perceived threat matters and in what way, in influencing political Internet use in China.

Perceived Censorship, Security and their Implications

So far, this chapter has reviewed the extensive regulatory agencies of the Internet, numerous laws and regulations that have been issued by these agencies, how regulations and laws are loosely interpreted, and how these censorship approaches are only sporadically exercised. Knowing well that no censorship is perfect, the government aims for an effective censorship instead. By provoking self-censorship, even imperfect

censorship of the Internet can work effectively in scaring people off from using the technology for politically sensitive purposes.

Politics has been a sensitive topic in China for years. The Chinese saying, "never talk about politics" indicates how conservative Chinese people can get about involving in politically sensitive matters and speaking out about politics. Even with the Internet, threats can be perceived easily. Internet users are well aware of potential consequences involved in using the Internet for political activities. Before going online, users need to sign an Internet Access Responsibility Agreement, where they pledge not to participate in any online activities that would endanger state secrecy or security (Shie, 2006). Violations of these rules can result in serious punishments. For instance, an activist, Wu Yilong was sentenced to 11 years in prison for distributing articles about the China Democracy Party on line ("In China, the Net grows up", 2000). As Chinese Internet users perceive different levels of threats, they may react differently depending on how they evaluate these threats. When perceived threats are high, they could refrain from using the Internet for politically sensitive purposes, in order to avoid any potential troubles.

Limited research has been done on perceived threat and its consequences in Internet studies, which is not entirely surprising. In democratic countries, the topic of perceived threats while using the Internet is not at all common, whereas in authoritarian countries like China, a study about government censorship is not likely to be permitted. Nevertheless, any serious attempt to understand Internet use in politics in China should consider the issue of perceived threat from the users' perspective and its attitudinal and behavioral implications. Fortunately, studies in social psychology in explaining the association between perceived threat and its attitudinal/behavior implications provide a

good theoretical framework for understanding perceived threats associated with using the Internet for political purposes in China.

Perceived censorship comes from evaluations of probability & consequence of Internet censorship, as well as estimations of the Chinese government's intention & capability to execute the censorship.

Where does *perceived threat* come from? According to Butler and Mathews (1983), perceived threats have origins from estimates of the *probability* of danger and estimates of the *consequence* of danger (Butler & Mathews, 1983). Both perceived probability and consequence of threats have been linked to psychological and behavioral outcomes like fear or approaches to cope with phobic objects (Menzies & Clarke, 1995; Zane & Williams, 1993; Williams & Watson, 1985). For instance, when someone perceives a higher probability of a danger or a more serious consequence of this danger, he/she is more likely to be frightened, and try to avoid this danger. If a Chinese Internet user does not perceive a serious punishment for criticizing the government online, or he/she does not believe in the existence of Internet censorship at all, this user would not refrain from posting articles online to criticize the government. Contrarily, when users do see the possibility of serious punishment associated with Internet censorship, they would stay away from any dangerous online activities.

Moreover, as Singer (1958) and Pruitt (1965) pointed out, perceived threat also derives from the target evaluation of the threatener's *intention* to harm and *capability* of carrying out harmful acts. The threatener, which can be a person or a social structure, is the Chinese government in the current study. In fact, the possibility of Internet censorship,

consequences of censorship, and the government's intention to censor are all correlated. A determined authoritarian government would rely on tight Internet regulation and harsh punishment to control the information flow. Indeed, this is mostly what the Chinese government has been practicing. On the other hand, however, if a target does not perceive a serious intention in the threat or he/she does not believe that the threatener can carry out the threat, he/she is likely to ignore the threat. In China, the government's intention to censor has been widely recognized by the Internet users. However, different people might have different evaluations about the government's capability to censor the Internet due to their individual backgrounds or skill sets. This leads to another component of perceived threat: perceived control or efficacy as many researchers have described, or as *perceived security* as I herein prefer to term.

Perceived security comes from the sense of control, and works hand in hand with perceived censorship in determining people's political Internet use.

As discussed earlier, when perceived censorship is high, people would self-censor. It seems natural that people take avoidant actions due to perceived threats; however, some researchers disagree with this theory. Bandura (1977), for instance, argues that perceived inefficacy is the main reason for both expected threats and avoidance behavior. According to Bandura, people would not avoid any potential threats if they judge themselves with capabilities of coping with the situation. Other scholars also echo that fear and avoidance behaviors, as psychological and behavioral outcomes, can both be results of *perceived control* over negative events (Barlow, 1991; Beck, Emery, & Greenberg, 1985). Indeed, experimental studies indicated that manipulations of control

have resulted in corresponding levels of anxiety (Geer, Davidson, & Gatchel, 1970; Sanderson, Rapee, & Barlow, 1989). More convincingly, Williams and Watson (1985) found that significant results from perceived probability and consequences of threats disappeared after the self-efficacy measure was added in predicting phobic behaviors.

Perceived censorship and perceived security are actually two aspects of the same matter. When people believe in their ability to avoid Internet censorship, for instance, even if they perceive a high possibility of Internet censorship with serious consequences, they would still ignore the threat and proceed as they wish. On the other hand, if an individual's own perceived security is weak, the perceived censorship could step in to become the main behavioral determinant.

Which construct is more important in predicting phobic feelings or actions? Would the Chinese users be more affected by their evaluations of perceived probability and consequence of threats, or their assessment about threatener's intentions and capabilities? Or perhaps the Chinese users are more susceptive to perceived security? While the existing literature is rather mixed and inconclusive, this study analyzed both constructs in predicting political net use in China.

When using the Internet for political reasons, the main threat derives from the government censorship. Thus, perceived probability and consequence of threats in the current study are essentially the perceived probability and consequence of Internet control, such as Internet monitoring and tracking, and penalties for violating Internet regulations. Internet users would evaluate the possibilities of whether personal behaviors online could be tracked or punished. In addition, perceived intentions and capabilities from the threatener reflect the estimate of the government's intention and capability to

censor. The Chinese government has demonstrated its determination of censoring the Internet by periodic crackdowns on Internet cafés or chat rooms, and filtering or blocking of the unwanted websites, which are easily detected by ordinary Internet users.

On the other hand, Internet users' perceived security derives primarily from personal computer and network skills, as well as their general confidence in the Internet as a technology, which allows circumvention of any censorship. For instance, a user who believes that the Internet can hide his/her identity, or he/she has sufficient skills to avoid the possible censorship, is more likely to ignore the threats associated with Internet control. Therefore, perceived censorship and perceived security work as two aspects of perceived threats; both have potential attitudinal and behavioral impacts on people's political net use. Notably, neither perceived censorship nor perceived security measure actual levels of censorship or people's concrete network skills; instead, they are measurements of people's subjective judgments.

Research Hypotheses

Social psychology studies on perceived threat demonstrate the origins of perceived threat and how such threats have the potential to affect people's attitudes and actions. Applying this research to the study of political net use in China, it is proposed that perceived threats have the potential of changing people's political net use, with higher levels of perceived censorship and lower levels of perceived security associated with a decreased possibility of using the Internet for political purposes. Therefore, perceived threats include two components, specifically, perceived censorship and perceived security. While perceived censorship originates from evaluations of a

threatener's intention and capability to threaten, as well as the possibility and consequence of the threats, perceived security comes from a target's evaluations of their control over the situation. Naturally, when people sense serious danger in a threat but lack the capability to cope with the danger, avoidance of involvement in potential troubles is most likely to follow. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H5a: As a user's perceived censorship level increases, the greater the decline of Internet use for political purposes.

H5b: As a user's perceived security level increases, the greater the Increase of Internet for political purposes.

As Chapter 4 shows, younger, wealthier, more politically interested users and users who employ traditional news media more frequently are more likely to engage in political net use. However, these relationships could be potentially moderated by perceived censorship and security. Indeed, Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, and Woodand (1995) found that perceived threats interact with individual characteristics in predicting people's judgments over tolerance. Apparently, not everyone is affected by perceived threats uniformly. Diversification of susceptibility to potential threats could result in varying subsequent behaviors.

Some individuals may be more conservative and protective of their safeties. For instance, older people and females may be less likely to become politically aggressive and more attentive to harmful consequences of political behaviors. When conservative Internet users perceive a high level of threats or low level of control, the likelihood of being affected by the perceptions of threats and engage in avoidant behaviors, such as not using the Internet for political reasons, increases. Thus, a high level of perceived threats

could reinforce negative associations between age, being female, and using the Internet for political purposes.

In an alternative scenario, some people may be more careful because they are more established and have more to lose. As Hachigian (2001) pointed out, successful Chinese Internet users are not willing to become involved in politically sensitive activities, due to the increased risk compared to others. Norris (2001) discovered that active Internet users tend to be of a higher social economic status and exemplify a higher level of political interests. In addition, political interest has been found to be positive related to use of the traditional news media (Delli Carpini, 2004). While better educated, wealthier Internet users, possessing higher levels of political interests and the habit of using the traditional news media could increase the use of the Internet for political activities in general, this group also most likely has established successful careers and maintains better financial status. Unlike Internet users in Western contexts who are free to engage in political activities on the Internet, the active Chinese Internet users must take into consideration Internet censorship. As a result of the perceived threats, the potential to use the Internet for political reasons could diminish significantly, even if similar profiles are shared with Western counterparts. Consequently, when this population perceives a higher level of threats, they would be more concerned about possible losses and try to protect personal interests, which in turn, may prevent them from using the Internet for political purposes.

In other words, whether education, political interest, income, or traditional news media use is positively associated with political Internet use essentially depends on the Internet users' perceived threats of Internet censorship. Without the perceived threats,

this is the population most likely to engage in political activities online. However, if this population perceives threats, they also represent the group most likely to stay away from political use of the Internet despite their otherwise high likelihood in participating in such activities.

Another scenario of moderating effects from perceived threats would entail the various levels of securities different groups may perceive. For instance, less educated, older, and female users may be less likely to understand the Internet-related knowledge and possess lower levels of perceived securities, which could subsequently lead to decreased utilization of the Internet for political purposes.

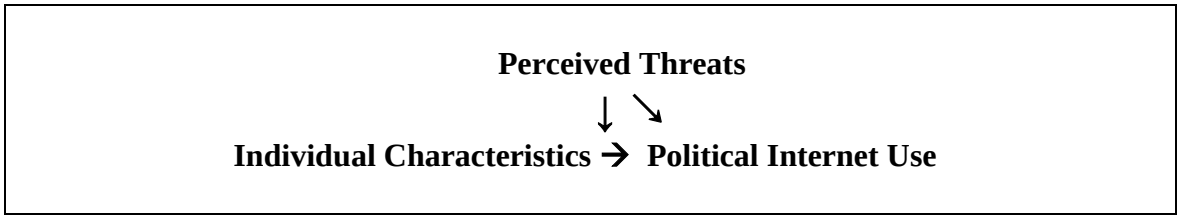
While people have diverse technological, educational, psychological, or financial characteristics, they are predisposed to differ in their responses to perceived danger. Various decisions over Internet use could be reached. Therefore, while younger, male, more educated, politically interested people who use traditional news media more have a potentially greater likelihood of using the Internet for political purposes generally; in China, these relationships may be contingent upon Internet users' levels of perceived censorship and security.

H5c: When perceived censorship is low or perceived security is high, male, young, better-educated, more politically interested individuals, and those who use traditional news media more often are more likely to use the Internet for political purposes.

When perceived censorship is high or perceived security is low, the positive associations between being male or young, education, political interest, and traditional news media use, and political Internet use are likely to disappear or reverse.

As Figure 5-2 demonstrates, the main relationship exists between individual characteristics and political Internet use; however, the connection is moderated by perceived censorship and security. Other than acting as moderators, perceived censorship and security could also work as direct influences on political net use. When perceived censorship is high and perceived security is low, they will lead to less use of the Internet for political purposes.

Figure 5-2. Perceived Threats & Net Political Use



Operationalizations

Political Net Use

To measure political net use, respondents were asked to report on a 10-point scale how frequently they use the Internet for expressing their opinions about political issues (Mean=1.87, SD=2.75).

Perceived Censorship

To measure perceived censorship, three aspects are identified: the probabilities of the censorship, the government's capability to censor, and the consequences of the censorship. Respondents were asked if they strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree with the following three statements: 1) The government can track you down on the Internet. 2) What you do online is always monitored by cyber-police. 3) If what you do

online upsets the government, you will be punished severely. A separate index was created for perceived censorship (Cronbach α = .74; Mean=2.56, SD=0.69).

Perceived Security

Milburn and Watman (1981) argue that an intended threat may be weakened in the target's mind when the target possesses a sense of control. Two aspects are identified for measuring perceived security. The first aspect specifically estimates people's trust in the Internet. When people trust the Internet's power in hiding user identity or defeating government censorship, with the Internet's sheer volume of information, fear of censorship could diminish. The second aspect evaluates users' judgments about their own technological knowledge for bypassing any attempted control. The higher the estimation of their technological ability, the less likely would users fear the censorship.

Responders were given three questions again: 1) Do you have enough computer knowledge to make sure that you will not be caught doing anything undesirable online? 2) The Internet is a technology that protects the anonymity of a users' identity. 3) There are so many people and messages online no one would notice what you do on the Internet. An index on perceived security was created (Cronbach α = .46; Mean=2.53, SD=0.62).

Political Interest

Political interest was included as a control variable because prior research has shown the political significance of this attitudinal measure (Jeffres, Atkin, & Neuendorf, 2002). Respondents were separately asked to report on a 10-point scale to what extent they were interested in national and local politics. Responses were summed to form an index (inter-item correlation = .76; Mean: 6.70; SD: 2.99).

News Media use

For both newspaper and television, respondents were asked on a 10-point scale how much time they spent on three categories of news content: international affairs, national politics, and local politics. A separate additive use index was created for newspapers (Cronbach α = .73) and television news (Cronbach α = .75). The scale on traditional news media use was then created by summing newspaper and TV news use (Cronbach α = .82; Mean: 5.21; SD: 2.96).

Demographic variables

Key demographic variables such as age (Mean: 29.16; SD: 9.47), gender (43.7% female), location (160 from Beijing and 258 from Urumqi), household income (Mean: 1542 RMB, SD=2364 RMB), party ID (19% CCP members, 34% Youth League members, 2% other party members, 34% no party affiliation), and education (mean: 14.37 years; SD: 2.48), were included as control variables.

Interactions between Perceived Censorship, Security & Demographic Factors

Perceived censorship and security may also interact with people's individual characteristics, which in turn could influence whether or not people use the Internet for political reasons. For instance, politically interested users are more likely to use the Internet for political purposes, but this tendency may become weaker when the user perceives a high probability and serious threat from the government censorship. To understand the moderating effects of perceived threats on the association between demographic characteristics and using the internet for political purposes, this study creates twelve interaction terms between perceived censorship, perceived security and users' individual characteristics. To reduce potential problems with multicollinearity between interaction terms and their components, all the component variables were

standardized prior to the formation of the interaction terms (Cronbach, 1987; Eveland, 1997; Jaccard, Turrisi, & Wan, 1990).

Findings

A hierarchical regression was run for political net use. The control block consists of seven variables, including gender, age, education, party ID, location of responders (Beijing or Urumqi), traditional news media use, and political interest. As table 5-1 shows, younger, male and politically interested responders are more likely to use the Internet for political purposes.[27] The control block accounted for a significant 11% of the variance for political net use.

Table 5-1. Predictors of Political Net Use

	Control Variables Only		***Control Variables + Censorship Scales***	
	Standardized β	*t* value	Standardized β	*t* value
Control Variables				
Age	-.19**	-2.79	-.16*	-2.56
Gender (High: Female)	-.14*	-2.26	-.11#	-1.86
Education	-.08	-1.31	-.12#	-1.93
Party ID (High: CCP Member)	-.10	-1.47	-.06	-.99
Location (Hi: Beijing)	.07	1.05	.06	1.00
Political Interest	.21**	2.89	.17*	2.50
Media Use	.11	1.41	.10	1.40
Perceived Censorship & Security				
Censorship			-.05	-.87
Security			.36**	6.19
	***R^2*=11%**		***R^2*=24.3%**	

N=242

[27] The findings here are slightly different from the findings in Chapter 4, because different predictors were used, therefore, the sample sizes are not the same in the two analyses.

 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

Hypotheses 5a and 5b predicted that individuals' perceived censorship and security should significantly relate to their political Internet use. Findings in Table 5-1 partially support the hypothesis. Variables representing perceived censorship and security accounted for an incremental 13.3% of the variance in political net use. The result shows that after considering the control variables, perceptions of security (β =.36) is still significant in predicting political net use. That is, the higher the perceived security is, the more likely it is for Chinese Internet users to use the Internet for political purpose, as expected in the hypothesis. However, perceived censorship is not significant in predicting political net use.

Table 5-2. Interactive Relationships between Individual Factors & Perceived Threats on Political Net Use[28]

	Political Net Use	
	Standardized β	*t* value
Prior Block (R^2)	24.3%	
Interaction terms		
Perceived censorship * Gender	-.10	-.63
Perceived censorship * Age	.06	.96
Perceived censorship * Education	-.13*	-2.07
Perceived censorship * Party ID	-.01	-.17
Perceived censorship * Media Use	-.06	-.96
Perceived censorship * Interest	-.03	-.47
Perceived security * Gender	-.03	-.16
Perceived security * Age	.10#	1.69
Perceived security * Education	.05	.84
Perceived security * Party ID	-.00	-.06
Perceived security * Media Use	.12*	1.99
Perceived security * Interest	.06	1.02

N=242

 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

[28] The Beta reported for interaction terms are all upon entry Beta.

Hypothesis 5c predicted that responders' perceived censorship and security also moderate the association between users' individual characteristics and political net use, which is measured by interaction terms. As Table 5-2 demonstrates, after considering the prior blocks with R^2 of 24.3%, the block of interaction terms accounted for an additional 4.1% of the variance in political net use.

For interaction terms between perceived censorship and demographic variables, one interaction term is significant at $p< .05$ in accounting for political net use. For interaction terms between perceived security and demographic variables, one term is significant at $p < .05$ and the other interaction term is marginally significant at $p < .1$. Findings on significant interaction terms between perceived censorship, security, and demographic variables are plotted in Figure 5-3.

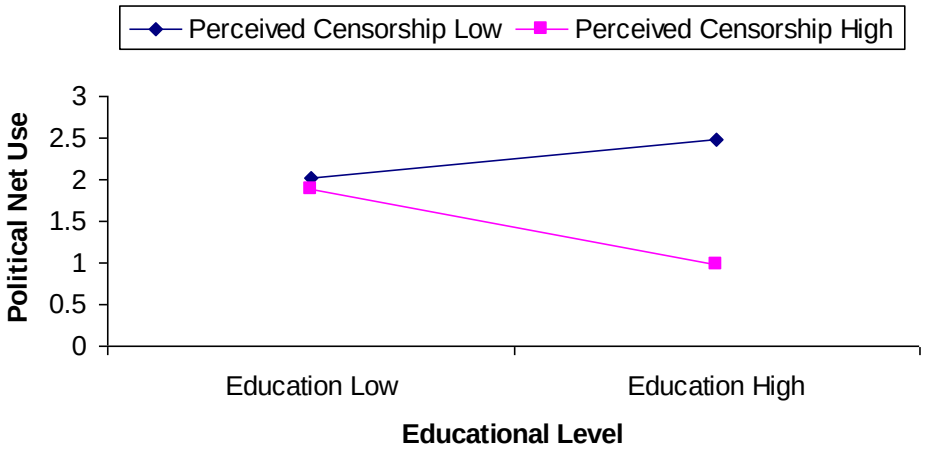
As Table 5-1 shows, when perceived censorship and security are not considered, education is not related to political net use. However, once the perceived threat measurements are included in the model, education shows a negative relationship with political net use, which is contradictory to the hypothesis. As Table 5-2 shows, the interaction of perceived censorship and education ($\beta = -.13$) is significant, suggesting that the main relationship between educational level and political net use is moderated by the perceived censorship. The significant interaction term indicates that more educated people are slightly more likely to use the Internet for political purposes, but this is only true when they perceive a low level of censorship (see the first panel of Figure 5-3). When the responders perceive a high level of censorship, the relationship is reversed. In other words, how education level is associated with net political use depends on the

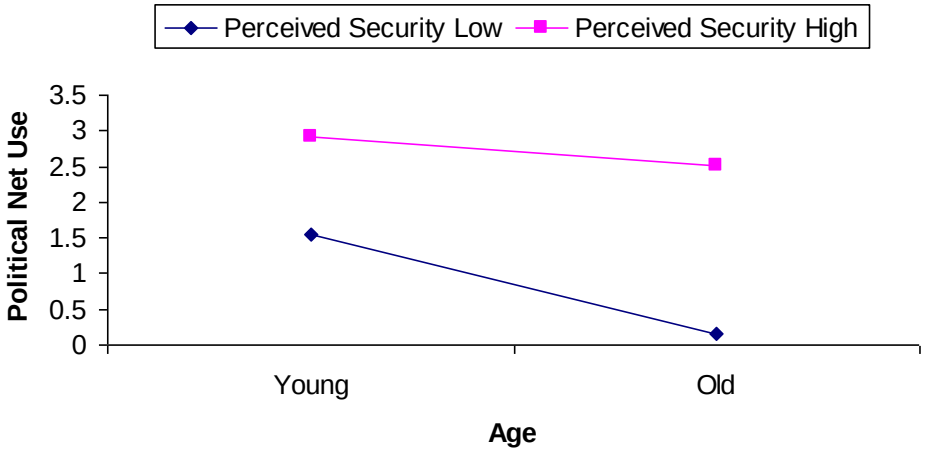
perceived level of effective censorship. This finding supports Hypothesis 5c on moderating effects of perceived censorship on users' Internet behaviors.

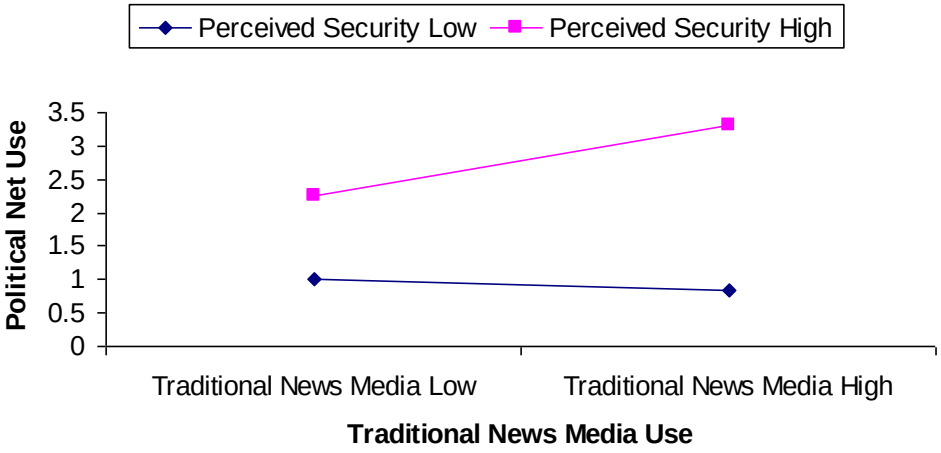
Age has a consistently negative relationship with political net use, before and after the measurements of perceived threats are considered. As people get older, the tendency to get more conservative and careful about what one participates in is a natural progression. Table 5-2 shows that the interaction of perceived security with age ($\beta = .10$) is significant. The second panel of Figure 5-3 suggests that older people are less likely to get involved in political usage of the Internet in general, but this relationship is stronger when the responders perceive a low level of security.

As Chapter 4 shows, traditional news media use is marginally significant with political net use. However, Table 5-1 illustrates that this main relationship is no longer significant in this analysis, suggesting the relatively weak association between traditional news media use and political Internet use. Table 5-2 indicates that the interaction of perceived security with traditional news media use ($\beta = .12$) is significant. As the last panel of Figure 5-3 reveals, traditional news media use is not clearly related to political net use when perceived security is low, but when perceived security is high, there is a positive relation between Internet political use and traditional news media use. The influence of traditional news media consumption can only be identified when responders perceive a high level of security.

Figure 5-3. The Interaction Terms between Perceived Threats & Demographic Characteristics on Political Net Use


Perceived Censorship Low
Perceived Censorship High
Political Net Use
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
Education Low
Education High
Educational Level


Perceived Security Low
Perceived Security High
Political Net Use
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
Young
Old
Age


Perceived Security Low
Perceived Security High
Political Net Use
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
Traditional News Media Low
Traditional News Media High
Traditional News Media Use

All three significant interaction terms support Hypothesis 5c, where perceived censorship and security are expected to interact with individual characteristics in predicting political net use. When perceived censorship is high, higher educated people are less likely to engage in political net use, contrary to the expectation of the main relationship. When perceived security is low, older people are even more declined to engage in political net use. When perceived security is high, traditional news media consumption can have a positive influence on using the Internet for political purposes. It is safe to conclude that both perceptions of censorship and senses of security have important influences on how people use the Internet, specifically, for political purposes.

Internet censorship in China has been studied by many scholars. Several scholars have reached the same conclusion that the current Internet control employed by the Chinese government has been successful in scaring people away from using the Internet for politically sensitive purposes (e.g., Hachigian, 2001; Shie, 2004). Furthermore, the success of China's Internet censorship is not only caused by the extensive legal and technological control methods employed by the government, but more importantly, the reason lies at self-censorship practiced by the Chinese public. As Shie (2004) argues, for instance, people are more interested in leading a better life than taking substantial risk to change the regime. If Internet users perceive threats associated with political net use, and lack sufficient confidence in the technology or themselves to circumvent the Internet censorship, they are likely to avoid involvement in troubling situations.

This is confirmed by the findings here. The analysis in this study suggests that better educated people are only inclined to use the Internet when they perceive a low level of censorship. When they believe that there is a high level of threats, they are less

likely to engage in political activities online. This could be caused by the fact that better educated people are usually more successful and tend to worry more about things they could lose. Similarly, older people are even more likely to stay away from political Internet use when they sense a lower level of control over the situation. It is likely that older people know relatively little about new technology and lack the confidence in the technology or themselves to bypass Internet censorship. Consequently, the negative relationship between age and political net use is strengthened if the perceived security is lower. People using the traditional news media more frequently are only more likely to engage in political activities online when their perceived control is high. It is possible that the ones who are more likely to use traditional news media are more conservative and lack the efficient Internet-related knowledge. For this population who does not usually have perceived security when using the Internet for political purposes, therefore, the positive influence of traditional news use on political net use can only be observed when perceived security is high.

The reason that perceived threat is not significant might be caused by the fact that almost all Internet users perceive some threats associated with political net use. The fact that the average political net use is only 1.87 out of 10 indicates how rarely people engage in political application of the Internet. It is possible that people can only be differentiated by their levels of perceived security.

This finding echoes Shie (2004) and Hachigian (2001) that few Chinese Internet users care to get involved in political actions. Although the profile of Chinese Internet users keeps changing, with more and more common people obtaining Internet access now, the Chinese government's control over the Internet is still likely to be effective in the

near future, limiting the political facet of the Internet use. Since Chinese users are willing to practice self-censorship and stay away from potential troubles, the mobilizing effect of the Internet could be rather constrained.

The political culture in China, such as Internet censorship, has shown some strong effect on citizens' political lives, as demonstrated in this chapter. Political values, too, may also influence people's political participation. While this chapter focuses on how individuals use the Internet for political purposes, the next chapter attempted to understand how political Internet use correlates with political participation in the real world. Although the Internet can certainly facilitate the political involvement, it does not necessarily lead to more political involvement offline. This may be caused by many reasons, one of which lies at Chinese nationalism. As nationalism becomes one of the most salient ideologies in China today, nationalists may be willing to avoid political actions that are not supported by the government, in order to maintain the ongoing economic development and political stability.

CHAPTER 6
CHINA'S NEWLY FOUND NATIONALISM IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET

On March 24, 2008, the Olympic torch was lit in Olympic, Greece and was supposed to be relayed through 20 countries before being carried into the opening ceremony in Beijing on August 8. Much to Beijing's surprise, several demonstrations disrupted the progress of the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relay in London, Paris, and San Francisco. The torch relay, which was meant to be a celebration of Olympic sporting ideas, turned into an angry contest between China's supporters and demonstrators who gathered to protest against China's recent crackdown in Tibet and its wider human rights record.

To get the torch safely to its destination, more than 2,000 police officers were deployed in London; however, many protesters broke through police barriers and attempted to snuff the torch's flame. Thirty-seven people were arrested as protesters (Burns, 2008). In Paris, despite the presence of 3,000 police along the route, the torch was extinguished at least three times. Some stops were skipped and the torch had to be carried on a bus several times to avoid protesters ("Protests cut short Olympic relay", 2008). In San Francisco, the only U.S. city on the 23-city global torch relay, both protesters against and supporters of China showed up along the route as police watched nearby ("Torch relay in San Francisco draws massive protest", 2008).

In response to these abruptions of torch relay, nationwide demonstrations against France were launched in China. Although the relay in London was also badly disrupted,

and thousands of protesters demonstrated along the route in San Francisco, events in Paris triggered anger in many Chinese most. A photograph of a man trying to grab the torch from a young, disabled, Chinese athlete girl in Paris was widely circulated. Protesters demonstrated outside the French Embassy (Drew, 2008). In several other cities, hundreds of protesters gathered in front of French-owned supermarkets Carrefour, waving flags, calling for a boycott, and opposing Tibet independence.[29] An Internet appeal circulated on chat rooms and bulletin boards, where users exhorted one another to fight back against Western countries (Drew, 2008).

Protesters had also been targeting at Western news outlets, especially CNN, for what was alleged to be biased coverage of unrest in Tibet (Jacob, 2008). In the U.S., Chinese protesters demonstrated in Washington, D.C., New York City, and LA calling for the dismissal of commentator Jack Cafferty, who in a discussion about China said the goods from the country were "junk" and referred to the Chinese as "a bunch of goons and thugs" (Pierson, 2008).

"Many Western people misunderstand China and Beijing's policy in regard to Tibet", Says a Chinese professor, "And this is made worse by the way the Western media portrays the country. I read news from the BBC and CNN very often and I feel stories crudely stereotype China". A Chinese lawyer also condemned linking the issue of Tibet to the Olympic Games, "The games should actually be a golden opportunity to improve communication between China and the rest of the world". He also believes that "there is a growing hostility towards China…this may be because China is developing so fast – at a

[29] Protests against "Tibet independence" supporters erupted in Chinese cities. Several reports are available from Xinhuanet.com.

greater speed than anyone could have imagined…so people feel threatened by our advance" ("Olympic protests: Chinese reaction", 2008).

"Nationalist sentiment is running high", as a Washington Post journalist observed from Chinese reactions to the Western protests (Drew, 2008). Indeed, whether it was the rally of Chinese people all over the world to protect the Diaoyu Islands after a Japanese group erected a lighthouse on the island in 1996, large demonstrations in major Chinese cities after the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia by the NATO force in 1998, or the largest protests to denounce Japanese textbooks that omitted any mention of Japan's wartime atrocities in China, all reflected outpourings of the Chinese people's nationalistic fury. As a *Washington Post* headline signifies, "New Nationalism Drives Beijing" (Pomfret, 2000).

Many scholars have also noticed China's increasingly nationalistic sentiments ever since the early 1990s (e.g., Unger, 1996; Zhao, 1997; Zheng, 1999). Some seem to fear that the rising China will pose a threat to other countries. Bernstein and Munro (1997) claim that "driven by nationalist sentiment, a yearning to redeem the humiliations of the past, and the simple urge for international power, China is seeking to replace the United States as the dominant power in Asia" (Bernstein & Munro, 1997, p. 19); Friedman (1997) warns that "an extraordinarily strong and sensitive nationalism infuses elite political circles in Beijing at the end of the twentieth century" (p. 5); Huntington (1991) predicts that China will resume their role of "preeminent power in East Asia" and "bring to an end the overlong century of humiliation and subordination to the West and Japan" (p. 229). Others however, believe that nationalism in China is conservative, pragmatic, and

reactive, instead of proactive, assertive, or aggressive as many Western scholars fear (e.g., Zhao, 2000; Ross, 1997).

The emerging trend of Chinese cyber nationalism in the past years has also attracted great attention. Nam (2006) suggests that increased Internet availability decisively contributed to the proliferation of Chinese nationalism. As Wu (2006) notes, Chinese nationalists around the world have been taking advantage of the Internet as a communication tool and platform to promote nationalism.

Nationalistic sentiments have important attitudinal and behavior implications. As a cultural, political, and historical phenomenon, nationalism makes individuals feel inseparable from their nation. This feeling however, is not transmitted biologically from one person to another; it is an "acquired character" (Hayes, 1928). Possessing nationalist proclivity, people would find gratifications from the glories of collective national identity and favor state government, national trade, or national cultures. In fact, empirical studies have shown that nationalistic people are more likely to have favorable leadership evaluation (Wu, 2005).

Moreover, when their nation interacts with other nations, nationalists would fight for national interests, as long as they see any potential danger coming from the foreign countries. The strike for political unity and independence can be seen clearly in the Chinese people's protests against Tibet independence movements. As Stanley Hoffmann (2000) commented on the power of nationalism, "[i]deologies need mobilized believers who will propagate it and do battle for it. Few ideologies have been so resourceful in their choices of vehicles of propagation" (Hoffmann, 2000, p. 198).

In this section, I attempt to explore whether there is a direct linkage between Chinese nationalism and people's political behavior outside of cyberspace, and what role the Internet plays in the mix. This chapter begins with a discussion on what nationalism entails. It continues by describing origins and characteristics of Chinese nationalism, from the perspective of state-led and grassroots. The state-led perspective believes that Chinese nationalism is a result of the CCP's nationalism campaign in response to its political legitimacy crisis. The grassroots perspective believes that nationalism is a natural reaction from the general public. I contend that the Chinese nationalism is essentially rooted in China's traditional culture and bitter history of defeats from the West, but the state-led campaign has definitely initiated and facilitated the resurgence of the nationalism in the 1990s.

Next, survey data were analyzed to understand the influence of Chinese nationalism. This section finds that nationalism interacts with using the Internet for political purposes, and has strong associations with people's political involvement that reaches beyond cyberspace.

What is Nationalism?

Although nationalist sentiments or national identities seem to be natural instincts today, nationalism is not a phenomenon that has existed for long. Nationalism made its first appearance in Western Europe several hundred years ago. Carlton J. H Hayes (1931) argued that nationalism appealed to European intellectuals in the 18th and 19th centuries mainly due to three reasons. First, intellectuals who fight for democracy find that democracy could most easily be established within national boundaries. Second, as these

educated ones became suspicious about supernatural religion, they need a new ideology to fill that spiritual void. Third, they needed a national state to promote human progress (Hayes, 1928). Nationalism has been linked to collapses of dynasties, the Enlightenment movement and the idea of public sovereignty, and the process of modernization (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983; Smith, 1995).

After the two World Wars, nationalism helped free a number of colonized nations to become independent states (Wu, 2005). The end of the Cold War precipitated another wave of nationalistic conflicts. Nationalism conveniently stepped in after Communism became obsolete in those former Communist countries. Meanwhile, fast economic developments and introductions of new communication technology have strengthened nationalistic attitudes in Asia and South America (Wu, 2005). Although nationalism is alleged to have led to aggression and war (Comaroff & Stern, 1995; Chafetz, 1996-7), the linkage between the two is far from convincing.

Over the years, nationalism has drawn many academic discussions, scholars have debated the definitions of this concept. Is nationalism an ideology, some historical movements, cultural factors, political events, or common beliefs shared by ethnic groups? As Anthony Smith (2004) describes, "nationalism presents great difficulties of definition, classification and explanation…there is no agreement even on basic definitions" (p. 108).

For some nationalism scholars, nationalism was created as a result of historical evolution through industrialization and modernization (Gellner, 1983), as well as the process of colonialism, imperialism, and de-colonization (Fukuyama, 1992). War has been singled out as the foremost important historical driver for nationalism. As Paul Kennedy (1989) argued, "The frequent wars induced national consciousness, in a

negative fashion at least, in that Englishmen learned to hate Spaniards, Swedes to hate Danes, Dutch rebels to hate their former Habsburg overlords" (p.70).

Others believe that nationalism has *cultural* and *ethnical* origins. For instance, it has been argued that nationalism in the West is civic nationalism based on ideas like liberty and equality, whereas in the East nationalism originated from ethnographic foundations and ethnic orientations (McCrone, 1998).

So what is nationalism? While originated and evolved in parallel to a series of historical events, nationalism encompasses cultural, political, economic, ethnographical, and ideological paradigms in establishing a collective national identity among people, promoting and protecting "the nation's integrity and uniqueness" (Hoffmann, 2000), and proclaiming "national self-defense" (Zhao, 2000) and "its superiority over other" (Hoffmann, 2000).

Chinese Nationalism

China does not fit in very well with the Western nationalism studies, which were primarily developed out of Western European countries. For example, Pye (1996) suggested that China is not a conventional nation-state; Joseph Levenson (1958) also believed that nationalism did not occur in China until recent history. Instead, culturalism, which represents a universal set of values, has been the primary focus of China's civilization. China would accept anyone who holds these principles. For China, nationalism has been a relatively new idea. It was only introduced in the late nineteenth century as a result of bitter defeats and consequent humiliations from Western imperialism (Ogden, 2002). Joseph Whitney (1969) describes it as a shift "from cultural

entity to political entity" as the Western notion of nationalism made obsolete the Confucian values that governed China for two millennia.

Although some argue that Chinese nationalism is mainly a result of government maneuvering, other scholars argue that the state-led perspective overstates the CCP's capacity in manipulating the Chinese people's minds and underestimates the Chinese people's autonomy (Wu, 2005). It is believed that instead of merely being led by the government, nationalism in today's China originated from grassroots movements among the Chinese people (Zhang, 1997; Wu, 2005). Wu (2005) suggests that nationalism comes from the shared memory of glory in ancestry and a deeply rooted sense of injustice and agony from imperialism invasions.

Nevertheless, undeniably, the government has made tremendous efforts trying to revitalize the ideology of nationalism in China. Not until the 1990s did nationalism regain its popularity. Nationalism's recent success has at least partially been attributed to the CCP's legitimacy crisis, as people were losing faith in Socialism, the CCP regime, and the future of the country after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident. The government found itself most credible when wrapping itself in the banner of nationalism, since nationalism appeals to most people in China regardless of their political beliefs or economic standings (Downs & Saunders, 1998/9; Zhao, 1997, 2000).

In the next section, Chinese nationalism is reviewed from two distinctive perspectives: grassroots and state-led. Chinese nationalism originated from China's bitter history of defeats by the Western countries. Then, as Communism became outmoded, the Chinese government tried to rely on nationalism again to legitimize its leading rule.

Grassroots Nationalism

The perspective of popular grassroots nationalism believes that Chinese nationalism is rooted in recent Chinese history (Friedman & McCormick, 2000; Wu, 2005). China was once a great empire that rivaled Rome (Edwards, 2004). Even until the1800s, China still led the world in total world exports (Bairoch, 1982). However, by the early 1900s, China had been defeated by the Western countries and Japan. For the past 100 years, China has been exploited, invaded, and even slaughtered with its people by foreign countries. As Wu (2005) described, Chinese people were agonized by the bitter history and sensed strong feelings of humiliation, which is even more painful when looking back at the glorious history of China. The so called "victimization complex" is not simply a cultural habit about face (Gries, 1999). It has its roots in the strong pride of China's past and equally strong anger and insecurity about more recent defeats. The past conflicts with the West also contribute to the suspicions towards Western countries' international policies, as some people believe that human rights and individual freedom are merely tools to extend Western hegemonic power (Ogden, 2002).

Indeed, some Chinese people, no matter whether they are communists or democrats, are nationalists first. As Zhao put it, "the pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in 1989, while confronting the government, claimed that patriotism drove them to take to the streets in the spring of 1989" (Zhao, 2000, p. 9). These shared mixed feelings of pride and agony make Chinese people especially susceptible to the government's nationalism campaigns. Although Chinese liberalists sometimes criticize the government, they are also defensive towards the Western countries, especially when they believe that the Chinese national interests are violated by Western democratic countries.

This feeling of threat becomes even more relevant as China's rapid economic development seems to alarm the West about China's potential threat to the rest of the world (Bernstein, & Munro, 1997; Chang, 2001; Gertz, 2000). The failure of China's bid on the 2000 Olympic game as well as the disputes with the U.S. regarding China's attempt to enter the WTO all appeared to confirm the Chinese people's belief that the West is afraid of the emergence of a strong China (Zhao, 1997). Zhao (2004a) made the comment that "At the intellectual level…the main discourse drastically shifted from enthusiastic worship of the West in the1980s to deep suspicion of the West in the 1990s" (p. 10). Similarly, Wang (1996) also observed that in a sharp contrast to 1989, talking about democracy and political reform could be regarded as unpatriotic; and nationalism has dominated students and scholars, if not the whole nation.

The rising nationalism sentiments are most clear during the time of crisis. For instance, in the summer of 1996, the long-time disputes between China and Japan over the Diaoyu Islands provoked widespread nationalistic sentiments and public protests in China (Downs & Saunders, 1988/9). Although the traditional media were not able to cover these events, students from several universities in Beijing used emails, BBS or chat-rooms to disseminate pertinent information, exchange their opinions, and organize unauthorized protests. In 1999, after the May 1999 mistaken U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, People became outrageous, believing that this incident was a deliberate act of aggression to China by the United States. Students and others demonstrated in front of several U.S. embassy and consulates in China, and threw stones and eggs to express their anger (Symonds, 1999). In the spring of 2005, the largest anti-Japan protest against Japan's United Nations Security Council (UNSC) accession and its

whitewash of wartime atrocities in history textbook caused millions of people in China to take to the streets. More than 100,000 people in Shanghai protested.[30]

The government realizes that nationalism is a double-edged sword. The controlled nationalism or patriotism that emphasizes loyalty and pragmatic concerns could help legitimize the ruling party, but at the same time, the state is starting to fear that the growing grassroots nationalism sentiments could turn into criticism on the government's foreign policies. The state has been cautious in controlling the grassroots nationalism. To maintain a good relationship with the rest of the world, the government has tried to restrain people from protesting against the U.S. or Japan during times of crisis. For instance, in the 2005 demonstrations against Japan, the government sent a number of text messages to cellular phone users in major cities warning against "spreading rumors, believing rumors, or joining illegal demonstrations" (Kahn, 2005, A3). "All this makes nationalism a particularly interesting force in China", a China observer commented, "given its potential not just for conferring legitimacy on the government but also for taking it away" (Kristof, 2001, p.1).

State-Led Nationalism

After the Soviet Union collapsed in the early 1990s, Communist ideology grew to be increasingly unattractive and outdated. The internal legitimacy of the Communism regime became the major concern for the Chinese government. The legitimacy crisis grew to be especially salient after the Tiananmen Incident in 1989. The CCP saw the urgent need for a new cohesive ideology, an ideology that can be shared by most of the people. Nationalism was their answer.

[30] See more information at 2005 Anti-Japan demonstrations, Wikipedia.

The Chinese government has employed a series of campaigns to promote nationalism. These nationalism campaigns covered many areas, including reintroduction of traditional and cultural values; reemphasis on the historical sufferings from Western invasions; and a focus on "national interests". Led by the Party, these campaigns often identify the nation closely to the Communist state. Nationalism sentiment is officially expressed as "aiguo", or patriotism (Zhao, 2005/6). As Zhao (2005/6) pointed out, Chinese patriotism can be understood as a state-led nationalism. These patriotism campaigns "appealed to nationalism in the name of patriotism as a way to ensure the loyalty of a population stewing in domestic discontent" (p. 135).

The government tried to define nationalism as independent of Communism or Socialism doctrines, but more to do with China's culture, history, and the ongoing economic development. To connect the CCP with China's non-communist history, the party tried to reconstruct a sense of national esteem and dignity by reviving traditional symbols like the Great Wall, and by promoting the CCP's image, depicting the party as a savior of China from humiliations of foreign imperialism (Zhao, 2004b).

The government also reintroduced Confucian values like hierarchy and harmony. Many destroyed Confucian temples have been rebuilt (Thomas, 2002). In October 1995, an international conference to celebrate the 2,545th anniversary of Confucius's birth was held. While Communist officials have never attended occasions like this, Li Ruihuan, a Standing Committee member of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee, among other officials, appeared at the conference. He made the opening remarks and praised the "ancient" and "brilliant" idea of harmony, an essential value in Confucianism, for its stabilizing effects, which are claimed to be prerequisites for economic growth

(Wang & Zheng, 2003). Tu Weiming (1993) notes that "traditional symbols are widely exploited to inspire nationalist sentiments" in the 1990s (p. xxi).

Every country's political ideology is deeply rooted in its traditional culture; China is no exception. The major part of Chinese civilization centers on the philosophical principles of Confucianism. Developed 2,500 years ago, Confucianism was used by the government to guide the everyday lives of both the ruling and the ruled. Confucianism considers the Great Harmony as the highest goal. To reach ultimate harmony, individuals have to fulfill their responsibilities, instead of rights, through virtues, instead of laws (Ogden, 2002). As Zhang Shichao (1999) illustrates, "Our state was founded on the idea that the interests of the common people are to be sacrificed for the benefit of those at the top of society" (p. 50). The vital qualities of behaviors, according to Confucian standards, are subordination, obedience, and loyalty to higher officials, father, older brother, and husbands. Naturally, one expectation of the Chinese people, embedded in this Chinese philosophy, is that the leaders and government should take care of them, like a father taking care of a family.

This cultural and historical influence in China is particularly evident when it comes to the relationship between rulers and the ruled. Hierarchic and obedient attitudes have been dominant characteristics for Chinese people; and the individual rights to criticize government, to participate in politics, and to be informed with government behaviors are rather constrained. Freedom is rarely a major theme in traditional China's political ideology. Unlike some Western philosophers whose concern is to restrain the government from controlling the people, Chinese Confucian thinkers, throughout history, have helped the government control the general people, and encouraged people to stay

loyal to the government. For Confucianism, the main concern is to maintain societal order and stability. At its very core, Confucianism awards rights hierarchically and unevenly (Ogden, 2002). Confucianism's emphasis on hierarchy and social harmony agreed well with the ruling dictators, who usually needed a doctrine to legitimize and secure their ruling (Wu, 2005).

The traditional values of Confucianism resonate with the state-led nationalism respective to several aspects. They shared some important common grounds, which could help explain the success in state-led nationalism. For instance, both ideologies single out the importance of a strong government. Second, sacrifices of individual rights for the collective goods are valued by both doctrines. Finally, loyalty to the ruling class and the nation is one of the most important tenets from both beliefs.

Nationalist intellectuals often believe that liberal Democracy simply will not work in China. For them, the individualism and liberalism that are central to Western democracy are considered detrimental to collective harmony valued by Confucianism, and therefore should be restrained (Friedman & McCormick, 2000). Aligning with nationalism, the majority of political elites and intellectuals in China also favor a strong government (Zheng, 1993; Zhao, 1997). The contrast between China's economic success and the former Communist Eastern European countries' financial hardship seems to confirm their opinions. These people concur with the government, and give high priority to economic development. They agree that politics must be subordinate to economics. When they believe that the democratic process is harmful for economics, they are willing to replace democracy with a tightly controlled authoritarian regime. In other words, they

propose that political reform can only be meaningful to the extent the economic development is facilitated and secured.

While democracy remains a long-term goal, in the current stage, many Chinese people support the official party line that a strong government is what China needs now, and sudden democratization may result in social disintegration, as witnessed in Eastern Europe (Zhao, 1997). Indeed, empirical evidence has shown that the Chinese people tend to admire and respect authoritarian leaders and a strong government more than democratic ones (Ogden, 2002). Additionally, nationalistic people are more likely to favor the CCP leadership than less nationalistic ones are (Wu, 2005).

Other than appealing to Confucian values and principles, the Chinese government has also launched a series of patriotic campaigns through media and schools since the 1990s. Students were organized to watch patriotic films and documentaries, and patriotic curriculum have been taught in high schools and universities (Friedman & McCormick, 2000). In 1994, a conference on education adopted Guidelines for Patriotic Education, which replaced the old Marxist indoctrination with patriotic programs (Friedman & McCormick, 2000). Marxism was eliminated from the high school curriculum and college entrance examinations, instead, patriotic programs like "I am Chinese", which features being proud of great Chinese achievements, were added. On June 28, 1990, the National People's Congress passed a National Flag Law, which commands a daily flag-raising ceremony at all government and public locations. All elementary and middle schools are asked to execute a flag raising and lowering ceremony. Patriotic education shows great success. A *Los Angeles Times* article cited a 1995 official survey that young

people in China now value patriotism much more than before, patriotism ranked from number five in 1984 to number two in 1995 (Chu, 1999).

The CCP leadership also portrayed itself as the protector of the country and of the Chinese people. As Jia (1999) pointed out, the term "national interests" was rarely used before the 1980s, and even when it was used, it was merely a substitution for interests of the ruling class. As ideological emphasis has shifted, however, the government has started to use "national interests" to defend its rule, especially in matters of international relations (Jia, 1999). The argument that every country acts upon its own national interests in international affairs, revoked Chinese intellectuals' suspicions towards Western countries, especially with the United States. The sanctions imposed on China after 1989, disputes over human rights, intellectual property, and Taiwan created a sense of crisis among Chinese people, and strengthened the CCP's leadership in struggling against the hostile international forces. One of the nationalism campaigns featured the so-called Guoqing jiaoyu, which literally means education in the national condition. The Guoqing jiaoyu clearly states that China's current condition is so unique that only one-party rule rather than Western style democracy would guarantee political stability and economic development in the current stage (Zhao, 2005/6).

In response to criticism of human rights issues in China, the CCP leaders reminded the Chinese people how Western countries had forgotten their principles of human rights while invading and exploiting China in the century of humiliation. To argue against the idea of having a democracy in China, the leaders asserted that China needs a strong government and forceful measures to maintain domestic order, which is a precondition for economic advancement (Zhao, 2000). It seemed that "if not for the

strong leadership of the CCP in fighting against these conspiracies, China would fall apart" (Zhao, 1998, p. 298).

These strategies have worked well. In 1989, many Chinese students and people trusted the West more than the CCP leadership as if the Western countries represented the Chinese interests better than the Chinese government, but now the concerns over social stability and a strong nation have overshadowed the idea of political liberation. People are beginning to accept the government's defender role (Sisci, 2001).

Chinese nationalism, being state-led, has two clear focuses, namely, loyalty and being pragmatic. The public loyalty to the government secured the regime's ruling status; and the priorities on economic growth and its prerequisite, political stability, justify the importance of a powerful government at the time being. It is claimed that only a strong government can maintain political stability (Zhao, 2005/6). The recent chaos in former Eastern European Communist regimes seemed to confirm these claims that Western style democracy does not work for all countries, and people need to stay subordinate to the strong government to have stability and prosperity.

Although the Chinese government is merely exploiting nationalist sentiments in serving its own purposes, the reintroduction of Confucian values and principles, the revoking of past defeats from the West and Japan, and emphasizing the pragmatic focus have worked effectively in eliciting the loyalty of Chinese people to the nation as well as the government (Zhao, 2005/6). Consequently, people are more likely to support the government's agenda on developing economics and maintaining a stable political environment, even at the expense of sacrificing individual rights, freedom, or democracy.

Nationalism is a relatively new idea to China, but it shares many principles with China's deep rooted traditional culture. The historical defeats by foreign countries have made the Chinese people keen to the ideas of nationalism, and the state-led nationalism campaigns have revitalized nationalism among the general public. Consequently, Chinese nationalism is not a simple product of state propaganda, it can also be observed in the popular society (Zhao, 2004).

By highlighting the principle of loyalty and the pragmatic focus on prosperity, the state-led nationalism has helped the CCP successfully fill the ideological void left by Socialism, and legitimized its rule in China. Today, under the influence of state-led nationalism, many Chinese people also value the strong government and the state priority on economic development and political stability. Grassroots nationalism, on the other hand, is most reactive when foreign forces potentially violate national interests of China. Incidents like anti-Japan, anti-U.S., or anti-France protests are all manifestations of grassroots nationalism, reflecting the Chinese people's strong will to protect China's autonomy and interests. Although grassroots nationalists support the Chinese government's rule in fighting against international forces, nevertheless, they sometimes criticize the government for its soft international policies. As a result, at times the grassroots nationalism ventures beyond the control of the Chinese government, and could even act as a rebellious force to the CCP rule.

Having divergent emphases, the state-led nationalism and grassroots nationalism could lead to various behaviors. For instance, while state-led nationalism places loyalty and stability above everything else, grassroots nationalism values China's independence and prosperity before supporting the Chinese government and maintaining the social

order. Consequently, state-led nationalists would avoid any potential uprising protests in an effort to preserve the political stability and economic advancement. Grassroots nationalists, in contrast, would be willing to engage in such actions if they believe that China's interests are in danger.

Research Hypotheses

As one of the most visible ideologies in China today, Chinese nationalism certainly has its impact on people's everyday political lives. Characterized as Confucian and pragmatic, state-led nationalists tend to be loyal to the government and support China's focus on economic development and political stability. In line with the official agenda, state-led nationalists are likely to participate in government supported activities, such as voting and contacting public officials, but stay away from unapproved political activities, such as protests. Rooted in pride in China's ancient glorious history and recent humiliations from the Western invasion, the grassroots nationalism reacts most strongly at times of international crisis. Based on the analysis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6a: State-led nationalism will be positively related to participation in traditional participation, and negatively related to protests.

H6b: Grassroots nationalism will be positively related to outwards protests.

Described as grassroots originated, outward directed, and culturalism driven, the emerging Chinese cyberspace has been used by nationalists to disseminate information and opinions (Wu, 2005). Active democrats or dissident groups also use the Internet to organize activities according to their agendas (Kalathil & Boas, 2003). Although many

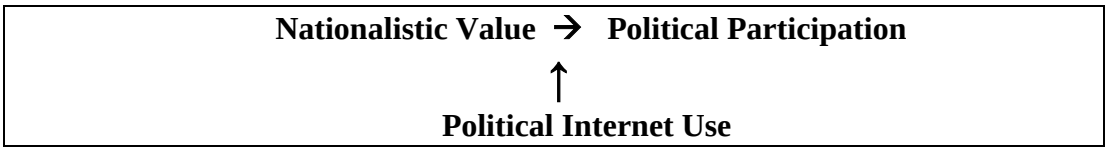
Western scholars have argued that the Internet would provide democratic ideologies to the Chinese people (e.g., Chase & Mulvenon, 2002), others claim that the Chinese cyberspace is flooded with nationalistic sentiments (e.g., Wu, 2005). Several scholars have attempted to understand the political discourse on the Internet by examining certain famous political forums (Wu, 2005; Yang, 2003). However, by singling out some specialized forums normally only visited by political elites, these attempts have failed to document how a regular Chinese Internet user would use the Internet for political reasons. Most Chinese users would probably never go to these highly political forums. As evidenced in Chapter 4, the average use of the Internet for political expression was rather low. After all, the Internet is only a medium, where both political and entertainment messages can be distributed by the Internet. Even among political messages, the Chinese users can be exposed to both nationalistic and democratic messages.

Although nationalists are more likely to follow the government's agenda and engage in permitted political actions while avoiding protests, exposure to alternative political ideologies on the Internet may change that. In other words, exposure to different messages online could alter the relationship between nationalism and political participation offline. While exposure to nationalistic views could strengthen the impact of nationalism on political outcomes; exposure to democratic views could potentially weaken or reverse that relationship.

Research Question: How does using the Internet for political purposes interact with nationalism in influencing political participation? Do the interactions differ depending on different types of political participation and nationalism?

As Figure 6-1 shows, nationalistic sentiments could affect political outcomes directly, and the political use of the Internet could either directly affect people's political activity offline, or through moderating the relationships between nationalistic values and political outcomes.

Figure 6-1 Nationalism, Net Political Use and Political Participation



The following section discusses the operationalizations of the main concepts and presents the results from the survey data.

Operationalizations

Political Participation

Political Net Use

To measure political net use, respondents were asked to report on a 10-point scale how frequently they use the Internet for expressing their opinions about political issues (Mean=1.87, SD=2.75).

Traditional Participation

Respondents were asked about three types of traditional forms of participation: voting for deputies to the local People's Congress, contacting leaders, local people's deputies or authorities, and contacting editors/reporters from the media about any issue. The percentage of people having reported voting for the People's Congress was 27.2% (n=114), while 16.7% (n=70) of respondents claimed to have contacted leaders, local people's deputies or authorities, and 18.9% (n=79) reported having contacted media

about an issue. An index was created for the three items for a traditional participation measurement (Cronbach α = .46; Mean: 0.28; SD: 0.35).

Political Protests

Outwards Protest Respondents were asked, "Have you done any of the following things or whether you might do the following things under certain circumstances when your country is threatened by a foreign country: sign a petition, join a boycott, attend a demonstration, or join a strike.

Inwards Protest Respondents were asked similar questions, "Have you done any of the following things or whether you might do the following things when you object to a domestic leader or domestic issue: sign a petition, contact media,[31] attend a demonstration, or join a strike.

Forty-two percent of respondents said they would petition against an international force (30% "No"); the number is only 24% when responders need to protest against the Chinese government (38% "No"). Of all respondents, 25% reported they would demonstrate against an international threat (42% "No"), while 15% said they would demonstrate against domestic policy or the government (47% "No"). Seventeen percent responded that they would go on strike against an outside force (49% "No"), and only 11% were willing to go on strike against a domestic issue or government (59% "No"). Fifty-four percent would boycott another country's products (19% "No") and 39% of the people would contact media when concerned about a domestic issue (28% "No").

[31] When the threat comes from within, boycotting is not an appropriate choice to protest. Therefore, contacting media is used instead.

The index on outwards protest was created using the four measurements (Cronbach α = .62; Mean: 0.56; SD: 0.37). The index on inwards protest was created using the four measurements (Cronbach α = .68; Mean: 0.37; SD: 0.35).

Nationalism

Nationalism represents an ideology that helps create a national identity and protect the nation's autonomy and interests. Two measurements are created to assess people's nationalistic levels in China. The first measure refers to grassroots nationalism, or a general sense of pride (Chen, 2004). Responders were asked, on a 0-10 scale, how much they agree that China should and will become a stronger power in the world (Mean 8.55, SD 2.69); and China should play a more important role in Asia and the world (Mean 8.93, SD 2.38). An index was created using the two (inter-item correlation = .72; Mean 8.69, SD 2.42). This scale would be referred to as grassroots nationalism.

Another measurement for nationalism focuses on the pragmatic side of Chinese nationalism. Relying on China's economic achievement to strengthen people's confidence in China, the Chinese government has effectively legitimized its rule with state-led nationalism. In the past decades, the state-led nationalism has thrived on the great economic growth. In fact, much of Chinese people's pride in China today may be based on the extraordinary economic improvement witnessed in the country. As a result, many Chinese people agree with the government that the political reform should be sacrificed for economic development at the current stage. Therefore, to measure the success of state-led nationalism, it is best to measure how much people agree with the government's agenda in prioritizing economic development and maintaining social order.

Inglehart (2005)'s measurements for materialist and post-materialist were modified and used here. Responders are asked to choose between democratic values against top-down pragmatic values from the state. When asked to choose between political stability and freedom of expression, 64.4% (n=270) chose political stability, and 6.9% (n=29) chose freedom of expression. When asked to choose between economic and democratic development, 67.8% (n=284) believed economic development is more important, and 8.8% (n=37) chose democratic development.[32] Choices for economic development and political stability were coded as 1, while choices for freedom of expression and democratic development were coded as 0. The two answers were then used to derive an average. The state-led nationalism index was created using the two (inter-item correlation = .18; Mean 0.90, SD 0.25).

Findings

A hierarchical regression was run for three measures of political participation: traditional participation that is approved by the government, protests against foreign forces that are at times permitted by the government but frowned upon, and protests against the domestic leaders or policies that are most feared by the government. As Chapter 4 evidences, political Internet use is not associated with any form of political participation. By adding nationalism into the mix, this chapter aims to understand if political Internet use has a direct or a moderating effect on political outcomes when the specific political culture in China is taken into consideration.

Traditional Participation

[32] The rest of the cases are missing values.

The control block consists of seven variables, including gender, age, education, party ID, location of responders (Beijing or Urumqi), traditional media use measures, and political interest.[33] The control block and political use of the Internet accounted for a significant 10.3% of the variance for traditional participation.

State-led nationalistic individual are hypothesized to be more likely to support the government. Wu's (2005) survey study also found a positive association between government support and nationalism. Since traditional political participation is endorsed by the government as ways of political involvement, state-led nationalistic people should be more likely to follow the government agenda and engage in these activities.

Table 6-1. Predictors of Traditional Participation

	Control Variables Only		***Control Variables + Nationalism Scales***	
	Standardized β	*t* value	Standardized β	*t* value
Control Variables				
Age	.17*	2.41	.15*	2.22
Gender (High: Female)	-.02	-.34	-.03	-.41
Education	-.05	-.74	-.04	-.54
Party ID (High: CCP Member)	.25**	3.82	.24**	3.70
Location (Hi: Beijing)	.11#	1.69	.11	1.67
Political Interest	.13#	1.74	.11	1.49
Media Use	.02	.20	.01	.19
Political Internet Use	.00	.07	.03	.41
Scales on Nationalism				
Grassroots Nationalism			.05	.71
State-led Nationalism			.13*	2.09
		R^2=10.3%		***R^2=12.2%***

N=242

 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

[33] The results are slightly different from findings in Chapter 4. This is caused by different predictors entered in the models and different sample sizes. This is also true for Table 6-3 and Table 6-5.

Findings in Table 6-1 support the hypothesis. Similar to Chapter 4, age (β =.17) and party ID (β =.25) are still positively associated with traditional participation. Being in Beijing (β =.11) and politically interested (β =.13) are also marginally significant in predicting traditional participation.

Variables representing two nationalism scales accounted for an incremental 1.9% of the variance in traditional participation. After considering the control variables, the scale on state-led nationalism (β =.13) is still significant in predicting traditional participation. As expected, state-led nationalists who tend to concur with the government are also more likely to engage in participation that is supported by the government.

As Table 6-2 shows, after considering the prior blocks with an R^2 of 12.2%, the block of interaction terms accounted for an additional 1.9% of the variance in traditional participation. The interaction term between grassroots nationalism and political net use is marginally significant (β = -.12, p<.051).

Table 6-2 Interactive Relationships between
Political Net Use & Nationalistic Values on Traditional Participation[34]

	Political Net Use	
	Standardized β	*t* value
Prior Block (R^2)	12.2%	
Interaction terms		
Grassroots*Political net use	-.12#	-1.97
State-led*Political net use	.05	.67

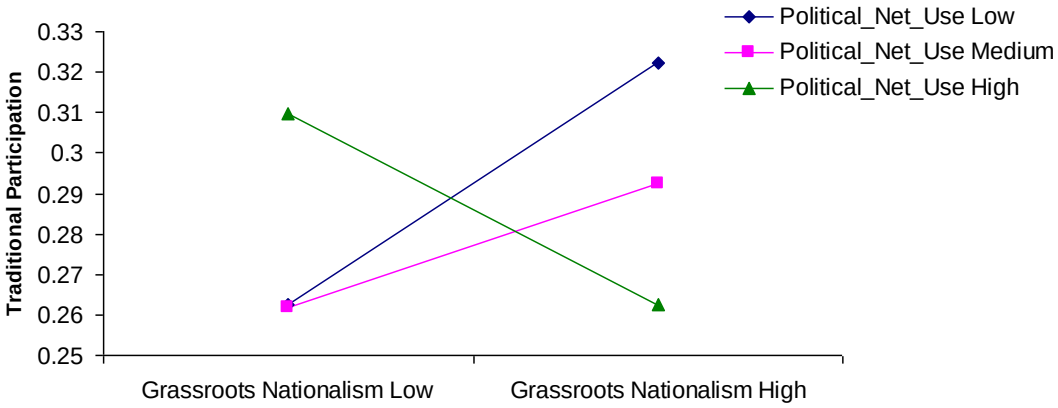
N=242
 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

Findings on significant interaction term between grassroots nationalism and political net use is plotted in Figure 6-2. The interaction of grassroots and political net use indicates that for people who only use the Internet for political purposes on a low or

[34] The Beta reported for interaction terms are all upon entry Beta.

medium level, higher grassroots nationalism leads to more involvement in traditional participation. However, if people use the Internet heavily for political purposes, the relationship is reversed, with higher grassroots nationalism leading to lower involvement in traditional participation.

Figure 6-2. The Interaction Term between
Grassroots Nationalism & Political Net Use on Traditional Participation



Analyses in Chapter 4 seem to suggest that there is no relationship between political Internet use and political participation. After nationalism is taken into consideration, however, the political net use appears to have an impact on political participation through its interaction with nationalism, depending on the intensiveness of political Internet use. This finding confirms the moderating effects of political Internet use on nationalism and political participation offline.

Grassroots nationalism is most likely to manifest when there is potential danger from abroad. It is not clear how grassroots nationalism relates to traditional participation. This finding here suggests that grassroots nationalism could also lead to more traditional participation when political Internet use is not high. This is likely since grassroots nationalism is only activated when there are threats from abroad; when such threats do

not exist, grassroots nationalists are also inclined to follow the government's agenda. However, this relationship only exists when the political net use is not high. As discussed earlier, nationalism could threaten the government's legitimacy, partially because the Chinese government's foreign policy has been criticized by grassroots nationalists for not firm enough. If Chinese cyberspace is truly flooded with nationalistic sentiments, as Wu (2005) claimed, then it is possible that heavy exposure to that content could lead people to disobey the government's agenda, and avoid conventional political participation such as voting and contacting.

Outwards Protest

Again, although the Chinese government has effectively used nationalism to legitimize its regime, a powerful force as nationalism has the potential of spinning out of control from time to time. During the Chinese people's demonstrations against foreign countries like Japan or the United States, the government has witnessed how nationalistic sentiments can turn people's anger against the government's "soft" international policies (Zhao, 2004). Although the government welcomes state-led nationalistic values on loyalty and "national interests", it fears that these grassroots nationalistic protests could hurt China's relationship with other countries, and as a result, threaten China's economic growth. As discussed earlier, the grassroots Chinese nationalists react most strongly during times of crisis. State-led nationalists, however, are more likely to support pragmatic priorities in maintaining fast development of economics, and therefore avoid outwards protests.

Table 6-3 shows the result for outwards protests. The control variables and political net use accounted for 7.2% of the variance in outwards protests. Similar to the

results in Chapter 4, political interest (β =.13) is marginally significant in predicting outwards protests. When two measures of nationalism are added, political Internet use (β =.12) is also marginally significant with outwards protests, suggesting a possible interaction between the two forms of nationalism and political Internet use. Two nationalism scales contribute additional 2% of the variance in outwards protests.

Table 6-3 Predictors of Outwards Protest

	Control Variables Only		***Control Variables + Nationalism Scales***	
	Standardized β	*t* value	Standardized β	*t* value
Control Variables				
Age	.09	1.34	.08	1.13
Gender (High: Female)	-.07	-1.1	-.06	-.94
Education	.08	1.21	.07	1.06
Party ID (High: CCP Member)	-.01	-.17	-.01	-.12
Location (Hi: Beijing)	.04	.58	.05	.74
Political Interest	.13#	1.68	.10	1.26
Media Use	.07	.86	.06	.81
Political Internet Use	.11	1.60	.12#	1.80
Scales on Nationalism				
Grassroots Nationalism			.15*	2.18
State-led Nationalism			.01	.13
		R^2=7.2%		***R^2=9.2%***

N=237
 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

The hypothesis states that a grassroots nationalistic responder is more likely to engage in outwards protests when they see a threat from a foreign force. A state-led nationalist, however, might act differently. This hypothesis is partially supported by the

findings presented in Table 6-3. After controlling for the demographic variables and political net use, the grassroots nationalism measure (β =.15) is still significant.

This confirms that grassroots nationalism reacts most strongly during times of threat. Rooted in China's histories, grassroots nationalists tend to fight against foreign power when they believe that China's interests or sovereignty are violated. However, state-led nationalism is not associated with outwards protests. The non-significant result could be caused by the characteristic of Chinese nationalism. As Zhao (2000b) pointed out, many Chinese people are patriots first. Although some state-led nationalists are likely to follow the government order and not participate in outwards protests, others may be willing to fight against international power over national interests. Thus, it is possible that there is no monotonic effect from state-led nationalism on outwards protests.

Table 6-4. Interactive Relationships between
Political Net Use & Nationalistic Values on Outwards Protest[35]

	Political Net Use	
	Standardized β	*t* value
Prior Block (R^2)	9.2%	
Interaction terms		
Grassroots*Political net use	.02	.31
State-led*Political net use	.05	.69

N=237
 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

The interaction terms accounted for another 0.2% in the variance in outwards participation. Neither of the interaction terms is found to be significant (See Table 6-4).

Inwards Protest

[35] The Beta reported for interaction terms are all upon entry Beta.

Inwards protests are the kind of participation the Chinese government objects to most. Although there have been events where public demonstrations push the government to change domestic policies, such as what happened in the Sun Zhigang accident mentioned earlier, these events are rarely covered by traditional media and concern the government most. State-led nationalism values loyalty and subordination, supports the official agenda of political stability and economical development, and therefore are less likely to participate in inwards protests.

Table 6-5. Predictors of Inwards Protest

	Control Variables Only		***Control Variables + Censorship Scales***	
	Standardized β	*t* value	Standardized β	*t* value
Control Variables				
Age	-.13#	-1.85	-.13#	-1.88
Gender (High: Female)	-.07	-1.13	-.07	-1.05
Education	.06	.90	.05	.78
Party ID (High: CCP Member)	.07	1.09	.08	1.19
Location (Hi: Beijing)	-.02	-.30	-.01	-.17
Political Interest	.18**	2.42	.17*	2.23
Media Use	.13#	1.66	.13	1.61
Political Internet Use	-.05	-.78	-.06	-.84
Scales on Nationalism				
Grassroots Nationalism			.07	1.04
State-led Nationalism			-.05	-.71
		R^2=10.6 %		***R^2=11.3 %***

N=226
 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

As Table 6-5 shows, the control variables contributed to 10.6% of the variance in inwards protests, while the two nationalism scales add another 0.7%. Similar to findings

in Chapter 4, age (β = -.13) is found negatively related to inwards protests, while political interests (β = .18) are positively related to protests against domestic issues or leaders. Traditional news media (β = .13) is also marginally significant in predicting more participation in inwards protest.

It is predicted that state-led nationalistic people are less likely to participate in inwards protests. However, the hypothesis is not supported here. Neither of the nationalism scales is significant, as shown in Table 6-5.

The interaction terms accounted for another 2.4% in the variance in inwards participation. As Table 6-6 shows, the interaction term between political net use and state-led nationalism (β = .15) is significant at $p < .05$.

Table 6-6. Interactive Relationships between Political Net Use & Nationalistic Values on Inwards Protest[36]

	Political Net Use	
	Standardized β	*t* value
Prior Block (R^2)	11.3%	
Interaction terms		
Grassroots*Political net use	-.02	-.35
State-led*Political net use	.15*	2.22

N=226

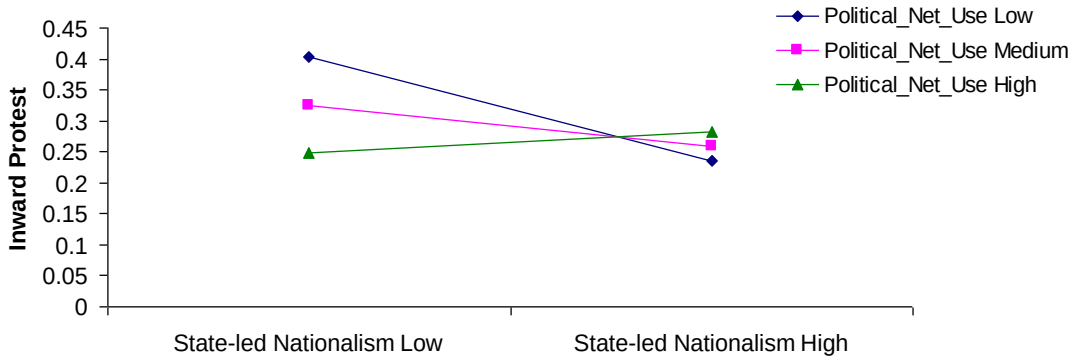
 # *p* <.10; * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

As Figure 6-3 shows, for people who do not heavily use the Internet for political purposes, as their state-led nationalism level goes higher, they are less likely to engage in inwards protests, as expected. However, this relationship disappeared if not reversed when the person uses the Internet for political application extensively. What this suggests may be that although state-led nationalism has a negative impact on inwards protests, its

[36] The Beta reported for interaction terms are all upon entry Beta.

impact tends to be offset by heavy political activities online. This finding is similar to the finding with traditional participation, where heavy use of the Internet for political purposes reverses the relationship between grassroots nationalism and political participation.

Figure 6-3. The Interaction Term between State-led Nationalism & Political Net Use on Inwards Protest



Before nationalism is taken into consideration, political Internet use does not have a clear impact on political actions in the real world, as shown in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, when nationalism is taken into account, political Internet use is indicated as having an impact on political participation through the interactions with nationalism. It appears that as Internet users are exposed to political expression extensively online, they would be less likely to follow the government's order in engaging in traditional participation or avoiding protests against domestic issues or leaders.

As the two significant interactions suggest, it is possible that the Chinese cyberspace is full of nationalistic sentiments that criticize the government for its international policies, or democratic messages where the government is usually portrayed as an authoritarian rule with no intention of democratic reforms. Thus, as people are affected by intensive exposure to these cyberspace depictions of the government,

grassroots nationalists could become less likely to engage in traditional participation, and state-led nationalists could become more likely to protest against the Chinese government or domestic policies. Indeed, Miles (2002) described China this way, "If public sentiment had to be judged by the outpourings on the country's numerous Internet bulletin boards, it would appear alarmingly chauvinistic and bellicose" (p. 15). As the Chinese government has been repeatedly criticized for its soft international policies by netizens, it is possible that the government would be deemed too weak to rule the country by the netizens. Thus, exposure to these negative depictions of the government online could lead to more protests and less approved participation.

Of course, without a content analysis of Chinese cyberspace, understanding why heavy use of the Internet for political purpose could reverse or weaken the taming effect of nationalism is not easy. However, this study here seems to suggest that more involvement in political expression online could lead to actions that diverge from the government's agenda.

CHAPTER 7
FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS WITH CHINESE INTERNET USERS

Many westerners assume that China's Internet users must take advantage of the freedom provided by the Internet to fight against the authoritarian Chinese government, and possibly work on a revolution towards democracy; and the Chinese users must be appalled by the government's control over the Internet. However, a study from Pew research center actually revealed that contrary to these assumptions, the majority of Chinese approve of Internet control and censorship. According to their survey studies in China, 85% of the participants think the government should manage or control the Internet (Fallows, 2008).

Why would Chinese Internet users welcome control from the government? Would the censorship make their Internet use more difficult? Would the Chinese users use the Internet to fight for democracy, or support the government? While the survey study in previous chapters analyzed the general trends in people's Internet use and political activities, this chapter relied on the interview approach to understand the individual cases about how the Chinese users use the Internet, and how that intertwines with people's values and political actions in the real world.

In the spring of 2007, I interviewed 10 Internet users from Beijing and Urumqi, Xinjiang, respectively. All interviews were conducted in a public space, such as a coffee or tea house. The researcher guaranteed the respondents' anonymity. Interviews were conducted in Mandarin, recorded on tapes, and later translated into English for analysis.

All these interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. These interviews started with questions about people's Internet use habits, followed by these users' perceptions of Internet control, their values, as well as their political lives in the real world.

Upon detection of the previously overlooked topics, new questions were added in later interviews. Similarly, some questions were later dropped if they did not seem to be relevant. For instance, questions regarding protests were later expanded, as the interviewees shared with the researcher many possible ways for protests, including petitions or boycotting, etc. Questions about conversation with government officials online were later dropped, since no one seemed to try to use the Internet as a tool to communicate with the government. In analyzing these materials, a summary was written to record recurring themes or significant ideas that emerged during these interviews. Common themes were identified to form the general theories about the research questions.

In the end, four major questions were explored in these interviews: 1) How do Chinese people use the Internet for political purposes? 2) How do people evaluate the Chinese government's control over the Internet? Are their perceptions of Internet regulations related to their political net use? 3) What are these Chinese people's values? Are they nationalistic? 4) How do these Chinese Internet users engage in political actions in their real life? Are there any influences from people's Internet use and their nationalistic ideologies on their offline political life? Relationships among different constructs were also explored through interview conversations. Insights generated from these conversations provided great help in developing the survey questionnaire, which was conducted after the interviews.

An in-depth interview was appropriate to help gauge people's political net use, their political values, and their political activities offline, sometimes even the only possible approach to study people's political activities in China. As Wimmer and Dominick (1997) recommend, in-depth interviews could yield rich information about respondents' opinions, values, motivations, and feelings. This approach could encourage respondents to give answers to subjects that could otherwise be considered too sensitive, like perceptions of Internet censorship or protests against the government in this case.

Out of the total twenty people interviewed, ten were from Beijing, and the other ten were from Urumqi, Xinjiang. The participants ranged from 20 to 67 years in age (Mean=38). Ten were female, and the other ten were male. One of the twenty (5%) participants had a graduate degree, twelve (60%) were college educated, and seven (35%) were high school educated.

These participants have significantly higher levels of education, due to several reasons. First, the flyer for the interviews explained that these interviews were about Internet use, and Internet users tend to be better educated. Second, the participants later revealed to the researcher that the reason they would like to participate in studies like these is that they understand social science research methods and how important these studies could be. Less educated people might not even comprehend why a graduate student from an American school would be interested in speaking with them about their Internet use habits. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that this population was not randomly selected, and is not representative of the general Chinese population.

Findings

Conversations with Chinese Internet users showed that the Internet clearly changed their horizon. Even though many of the participants said they do not express their opinions about political matters online frequently, they did enjoy reading other people's political discussions from the Internet forums. Unlike many Westerners might think, however, the Chinese Internet users in this study mostly support the government and think the Chinese government is trying hard to meet people's needs. Although all of the participants wanted a freer Internet, they believed that if anyone should control the Internet, it should be the government. Political activities in the real world were not common for these participants. The majority of the participants did not think voting was a valid way to get involved in politics. Contacting leaders on the other hand was meaningful to some extent. Protest was considered dangerous, although all of the participants claimed that they would boycott foreign merchandise if this foreign country threatened China's interests. All of the participants agreed that democracy is the ultimate solution for China. However, most of them did not think that democracy is worth sacrificing the current economic development and social stability.

How do Chinese people use the Internet for political purposes?

Ten out of twenty participants expressed that they browse political information online frequently. Although five people said they rarely pay attention to political information normally, they would also like to read more discussions online when major events happened. For instance, a 32-year-old female, who works in an American firm in Beijing explained,

> "Some news, such as negative coverage about government or some officials can only be available on the Internet. You can't get any of the coverage from TV or newspaper. The traditional media always cover Party conferences or international news. They don't have guts to

> report real scandals. Plus, it's interesting to read what other people think about some events. Some of the comments from netizens are really funny."

Most of the participants obtained their political information from Bulletin Board Systems (BBS). While BBS is a dying form of communication in many other countries, it is thriving in China. All of the participants had been to some major forums, including forums on big portals like Sina or Tianya. None of the participants had visited government websites recently, which were reportedly updated rarely. Some also expressed how much contribution they think the Internet has made to people's political life in China. As a 35-year-old male professional in Urumqi, Xinjiang described,

> "The Internet is truly amazing. You can clearly see that even the government pays attention to the online opinions now. This is the only place where people can express their opinions freely. And the Internet can make a difference in reality too."

Although most of participants gave a great deal of credit to the Internet, only three of them said they regularly expressed their opinions online. Some say logging in and expressing ones' views is too much trouble. Other feel they do not understand issues well enough to make a valid point online. As a 62-year-old retired female who lives in Urumqi claimed, "It is better not to get involved in other people's trouble". They are apparently cautious about what they do online, especially when politics are involved.

How do people evaluate the Chinese government's control over the Internet?

Seventeen out of twenty participants admitted that they had encountered some forms of censorship when they used the Internet, mostly blocked websites. Only three participants stated that they had been warned by someone not to post certain materials

online due to the sensitive nature, or their posts were deleted without their permission. One participant said that although she had never met any Internet police, she was certain that others must have. However, fifteen people believed that censorship does not make their online experiences any harder. For instance, a 20-year-old Beijing student said,

> "Ninety-nine percent of Chinese people don't use the Internet for political purpose. They go online for business, gaming, chatting or shopping. I don't look for information about China's politics, and I don't care if the government blocks some foreign websites, because we never go to those websites anyway."

When asked if they know how to get around censorship, seven participants believed that they know how, or they could ask other people to find out how. A 24-year-old high school teacher from Urumqi said,

> "You can always ask people you know from online about these stuffs, especially friends you made in Internet games or online poker playing, they know everything."

Others however, believed that they lack the necessary skills to bypass censorship or online monitoring. For instance, a 33-year-old female professional from Beijing admitted,

> "I know nothing about how to use a proxy server, or hide my IP. But I have never personally encountered any trouble online either. I always stay out of trouble. I won't participate in any discussions that are sensitive or might upset the government."

Clearly, the participants are conscious about Internet control from the government. Although most of them had not personally met any web police, they are careful about what they do online. When asked if there were a censorship free Internet, would they act differently online, all of them said they would. For instance, a 22-year-old college student

from Beijing claimed, "I'd definitely want to check out Youtube!" As a 37-year-old professional from Urumqi put it,

> "I love to post my opinions online. But now I can't type some key words, like Fa Lun Gong.[37] I have to use initials of each word or other code to write what I'd like to write. The Internet is getting freer these days. You can criticize corruptions of the government, one-child policy, etc. You won't believe how bold some of those comments are! But there are still things you can't talk about. I think the more the government tries to censor the Internet, the more people want to fight for the Internet freedom. I'd appreciate a more relaxed Internet, and I'm sure that day is not far."

Although all of the participants welcomed a freer Internet, they also believed that some control of the Internet is necessary. In fact, like a 67-year-old retired government official believed,

> "There are too many frauds or fake information online. And since children today grow up with the Internet, we need to have some way to protect children or other people from Internet predators. No one else could manage the Internet, except for the government."

Similar to the Pew study, participants in this study were also concerned about the safety of cyberspace and the government seems like the only choice when it comes to managing a complex communication media such as the Internet.

Are perceived threats associated with Internet censorship or security related to the choice of using the Internet for political purposes?

Out of twenty interviewees, five of them said they had never engaged in political activities online. As a 21-year-old college student from Urumqi said, "It has nothing to do with Internet censorship. I just have no interests in political issues." This seems to be the common feeling for half the interviewees. Although five of them said they would browse political information when highly publicized events happen, they also admitted that they

[37] A spiritual group banned by the Chinese government.

would not normally use the Internet for political applications. For these people, having no interest seems to be the most important reason for not browsing political information or opinions, and participating in online political discussions.

One 40-year-old accountant in Beijing had strong interests in political issues, but did not think she could have any meaningful inputs for others. For instance, she believed that,

> "I am very interested in current affairs and policies. I want to understand the future of this country. That's why I browse online a lot about political information. There is this website I go to almost everyday, and I pay close attention to discussions about government corruptions, financial industry reform, or policies about real estate. But I wouldn't post my opinions online. I don't think I understand these issues as well as others."

The influence of opinion leaders is clear on some people. As some participants have limited understanding about certain issues, they would like to learn what other people think. However, this 40-year-old female also admitted that an Internet with less control would give others more freedom to discuss political issues.

For the rest of the group however, the evaluation of Internet control appears to be an important concern when they browse online. For instance, as a 37-year-old professional in Urumqi said,

> "There are certain things the government has no sense of humor about. For instance, you can't criticize top leaders publically. Your posts for sure would be deleted right away. And you could run into trouble. Although no one knows how the web police works exactly, we all heard of stories where people were put in jail just for saying something candidly online."

The deterring effect of potential danger associated with political discussion online is clear. Several participants have mentioned that they would only discuss issues that would not upset the government. As a 44-year-old businessman in Beijing argued, "As

much as I want to see changes in the political systems in China, I know there is little I can do. Why risk my personal life for something that's going to fail anyway?" These concerns are especially clearly expressed by older people who have already established success in their careers and perhaps have more that they could lose.

Although seven participants claimed that they have enough knowledge to bypass government censorship, only two of them expressed interests in using their knowledge in the political area. It seems that for the respondents in this study, the technical concern is not a big determinant in deciding whether to use the Internet for politics.

What are these Chinese users' values? Are they nationalistic?

As nationalism has gained popularity in China in recent years, it has become a somewhat competing ideology as opposed to democracy. A democrat would put individual rights and freedom ahead of the country's stability and development, whereas a Chinese nationalist might have a different choice. When asked if China should become more powerful and have a greater influence in world politics, all of the participants strongly agreed that China should be more powerful. Like a 32-year-old female from Beijing put it,

> "Every country should develop to become a more powerful country. If you don't move forward, you would move backward. And China needs to protect its rights in international politics. Otherwise, countries like the USA would take advantage of us."

Participants were also asked to choose what is more important for China today, a political reform for a more democratic society, or developing the economy. Without exception, all participants believed that democracy is the ultimate solution for China; however, only three out of twenty participants believed that China should sacrifice

economic development and political stability for democracy. For instance, a 53-year-old male professional from Urumqi believed that,

> "China will become a democratic country one day, but it should not be now. China had gone through some tough time, and people's lives are just getting better now. If we had a drastic reform, China might collapse. That may be some other countries want. So better than talking about democracy all the time, what's more important is to get wealthier and stronger, have better education and healthcare. That matters more to the Chinese people."

Another 47-year-old female from Beijing also thought that China needs "Chinese democracy… Individual rights and freedom are alright, as long as they don't threaten the national interest". From these participants' comments, signs of the state-led nationalism are clearly visible. While democracy seems an ultimate solution, what these Chinese people appear to care more about now is a more developed China and better personal lives in financial terms.

How do these Chinese Internet users engage in political actions in their real life?

When first asked what kind of political activities they would engage in, most of the participants could not answer that question. Political activity is a fairly vague term in Chinese society. There is no popular way of getting involved in political life, such as voting in Western countries. Although eleven participants did vote for China's People's Congress, six of them believed that voting was useless, and three of them believed that although voting did not matter much, it was better than nothing. For instance, a 45-year-old newspaper editor from Beijing commented,

> "Most of voters don't know anyone on the ballot. The candidates are screened by the government; the voters can't decide who gets on these ballots. Sometimes even the ones who are on the ballots don't know how they get on there."

Another 35-year-old female from Urumqi argued that voting in its current format is rather insignificant, but it is still people's right to get involved in politics. Although voting is not appealing to the participants, fifteen of them thought contacting leaders personally would be useful in dealing with problems in their work or other matters. A 33-year-old female from Beijing claimed,

> "It all depends on the leader. If the leader is attentive and really cares about your situation, then communicating with the leader is useful. Otherwise, it's just a waste of time."

The majority of participants believed that resorting to the media to reflect issues could be a bad idea. "I'd only do it when there is absolutely no other way to deal with it", said a 28-year-old male from Beijing. Similarly, fifteen out of twenty participants thought protest in general is not a reasonable way to get involved in politics. Protests were described as "too emotional", "meaningless", or "could threaten the social order". When asked if they wanted to protest against the Chinese government if they see an unfair policy or situation, only one participant said he would get in the street and protest. Three other participants claimed that they would protest only if they knew for sure they would not get in any trouble. A 22-year-old girl from Beijing said,

> "If I see something really unfair or made me really angry, I might protest in street against the government, but only if I see people in street already so I know it's not illegal or anything."

Even though protest is a form of participation protected by China's constitution, it seems that many people believe it is illegal. Furthermore, it is clear that unless these protests are well organized by someone else and approved by the government, very few of the participants in this study would risk their safety against the government. On the other hand, all but one claimed that if China's interests were threatened by a foreign force,

they would not hesitate to boycott that foreign country's commodities. Seven people said they would try anything to fight against a foreign force, including petition, demonstration, strike, and boycotting. A 33-year-old professional woman from Beijing stated,

> "Every Chinese should fight against foreign bully. We Chinese have been beaten by the foreign countries for too long, and now as we are developing, we should show the world we are strong now, and they should not do whatever they want with us Chinese anymore."

The distinction in attitudes towards protest against the Chinese government and foreign forces is apparent. Part of the reason is that all participants have personally seen some form of protests against foreign countries. Two of them even participated in demonstrations against Japan in 2005. Protests against the government, however, are not something well publicized. Although the majority of the participants did not want to engage in protests in their real life, eight said they would want to sign online petitions. Clearly, when it comes to fighting against the big brother, the Internet might come in as the only choice where people can be heard.

Are people's nationalistic sentiments related to their offline political actions?

Seventeen out of twenty interviewees believed that China should focus on economic development now while maintaining a stable social order. The three people who preferred an immediate democratic reform did not buy the government's claim of developing economics for all Chinese people. For instance, as a 41-year-old engineer in Urumqi stated, a political reform should be the top priority in China. "We must change our political system first; otherwise, all the power and money just go to government officials".

The rest of the group, however, overwhelmingly supports the government's priority on economic development and political stability. Like a 45-year-old newspaper

editor described, “I wouldn’t go to the media to criticize the government, or protest, nothing good would come out of it”. He also believed that the Internet could be an unstable force sometimes. “There are so many stories online these days. Some of them might not even be true. Bust most netizens won’t bother to verify these stories. They just blame the government for whatever bad things that are going on”.

This newspaper editor, being a CCP member and clearly in strong favor of official agenda, is against protests in general; however, even he is willing to boycott foreign merchandise when threats come from abroad. Many share this editor’s opinion in believing the importance of stability. Like a 28-year-old college staff from Urumqi described, “We can’t afford any riot like what Eastern European countries went through. We have to be strong first”.

The influence of state-led nationalism can be easily detected in conversations with these interviewees. Protests, in general, were considered illegitimate forms of political participation; and respondents showed a clear favoring of economic developments over democratic ones. Also, everyone showed some level of grassroots nationalism, which was reflected in respondents’ willingness to boycott foreign merchandise or participate in other forms of outwards protests.

Although the majority of the respondents do not believe in protests, they do think public opinions need to be heard by the government. One executive who works for a big international firm said, “What China needs is organizations. One person can’t be heard, but if this one person represents a group, then the group can be heard.” The executive believes that the Internet could help create these organizations one day, “When the voice online is organized and valid, it could help monitor government behaviors”.

These views echo Yang's (2003) argument that the Internet is critical in helping strengthen ties of unofficial civic organizations in China, which in turn could promote demands for freedom and individual rights. Although the implications of Internet use might not be detected through political participation such as protests, they could be channeled into other outcomes such as creating a civic society, which did not exist in China before the Internet.

These interviews revealed some rather puzzling and compromised attitudes towards the Internet, politics, and China's future. All of the participants believed that democracy is the right future for China, and that the Internet could help them obtain more information and opinions, and express their own views freely on the Internet. They would want a freer Internet, but they are mostly content with the current Internet environment. They also believe that China's current task is to remain stable and develop the economy, instead of having a democratic revolution like what Russia went though. They don't have many choices in participating in politics in China, and most of them would stay away from dangerous forms of participation, like protests; however, all these attitudes change, if the target of the protest is a foreign force.

Based on these interview conversations, the researcher sensed a great deal of confidence in the government and the country's future. This could be caused by the ongoing state-led nationalism campaigns, and more likely, the result of the astonishing economic success China has witnessed over the past three decades. Perhaps this is why the Chinese public is willing to put up with the government's control and avoid any sensitive applications of the Internet, and sensitive actions in the real world.

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

On June 20, 2008, China's most powerful leader Hu Jintao visited the *People's Daily* on its sixtieth anniversary. One of the pre-planned features of this visit was for Hu to participate in online chat on the newspaper's website with Chinese netizens. This was the first time a senior party official had publicly tried communicating with the public using the Internet (Li, 2008).

The government had realized that there is no better way to find out what the public really thinks than by going online. Why is this the case? Apparently, as the traditional media are so tightly controlled by the government, the CCP leaders cannot find any criticism of the government or public officials from newspapers or TV programs. As a Chinese journalist Li Datong put it, "An effective government needs accurate information. But what if its own policy of media censorship makes that impossible?" Luckily, the Internet comes to rescue. Indeed, many senior officials have been reported to surf the cyberspace regularly. Hu Jintao himself claimed that he wanted to know what netizens are thinking about and take advice from them (Li, 2008).

It is truly ironic that the CCP leaders now need a free Internet to find out about real public opinions. The Chinese government has become famous for going through a great deal of trouble trying to control the Internet. Now, however, the Chinese government has found themselves in a dilemma where they have two conflicting goals: a

controlled Internet without a second voice, or a true information source and communication forum. China's leaders may never find out what the public really thinks if they do not stop their censorship, and it may be a price they are willing to pay today. Nevertheless, one must admit that it is already a progress for them to realize the significance of a true public opinion, which is only enabled by the Internet in China.

Even an article from the official newspaper, *People's Daily* acknowledged that people's expressions and exchanges of opinions online have become powerful social forces and promoted socialist democracy. Not only could the public enjoy the free information flow online, the government officials too could listen to the public discussions online and accept people's suggestions or comments ("Democracy in China's Internet politics", 2007).

The Internet has changed China's political discourse profoundly. More than ever the public has the ability to seek for political information, exchange opinions, and discuss political issues they are interested in online. On the other hand, many cases show that the government also takes the online public opinion seriously. There have been several incidents where the Internet discussions have changed the political agenda in the real world. Yet, the question remains, will the Internet bring democracy to China?

While many technological breakthroughs have lent hopes for democracy, such as radio or television, the Internet certainly has the most potential. This new technology offers almost unlimited information and communication with lower cost, higher speed, broader reach, and most importantly, minimal gate keeping from the government. Especially in a country like China, where the free flow of information and communication was not available prior to the Internet, the Internet has made a substantial

difference in people's political lives. However, this does not necessarily mean that the Internet will lead to democracy right away.

To tackle all these questions, this research relied on secondary analysis, survey of Chinese people, and in-depth interview of Chinese Internet users, in order to understand the political implications of Internet use from the following two perspectives: First, how is the Internet being used, more specifically, who is using the Internet for political purposes? Second, how does political net use transform into political actions beyond cyberspace? The previous chapters have examined how multi-level predictors could affect people's ways of using the Internet and how their political Internet usage could change their offline participation. Both perceived threats associated with Internet censorship and the rising Chinese nationalism, were evaluated in understanding people's online and offline political behaviors.

Based on the findings in this study, it is concluded that the Internet is not likely to bring democracy to China soon. In this chapter, the researcher reviews the main findings from the previous chapters, and answers the question why the Internet is unlikely to lead to immediate regime change in China. Then the theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed. The limitations of this research are also evaluated and suggestions for future studies are recommended.

Main Findings

To understand the democratic implications of Internet use, this research proposed a two-stage model. The main relationship model hypothesizes the aggregate and individual predictors of Internet adoption on the provincial and individual level, as well

as the impact of political Internet use on political participation offline. The two moderation models evaluate the two specific phenomena of Chinese politics: Internet censorship and nationalism. The moderation model on censorship proposes that the perceived threats associated with Internet censorship are likely to affect whether or not people use the Internet for politics either directly or through interactions with individual characteristics. The other moderation model predicts that as nationalism drives people to engage in corresponding political actions, political net use could alter that relationship.

Internet Adoption & Divide

There are now an estimated 258 million Internet users in China (CNNIC, 2009). As the Internet development exploded in China, the growth rate of Internet users in China has outpaced many other countries, including the U.S. (Fallows, 2008). Nevertheless, the Internet development in China is highly unbalanced. The penetration rates in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai have reached almost 50%, whereas in western and central regions, the penetration rates continue to remain low. The clear disparity in Internet adoption has generated many concerns from the Chinese government as well as scholars. The Internet offers promises for economic, political, educational, and technological opportunities, however, for the central and western regions of China that lag behind in terms of adopting the technology, the existing gap between these regions and more advanced eastern regions could even be widened. So what has caused the unbalanced fashion of Internet adoption within China?

As Chapter 3 demonstrates, many factors have contributed to the different Internet penetration rates in Chinese provinces, such as policy, economic conditions, educational levels, telecommunication infrastructure, population density and urbanization, as well as

social openness. However, not all factors are equally important in predicting Internet development in Chinese provinces. As Norris (2001) and Hargittai (1999) have discovered, among all predictors, economic conditions have the greatest influence in predicting Internet penetration. Measured by GRP, service GRP, and household income, the economic factors in this study also contributed to over 95% of the variance in Internet penetration rates. Economic condition is certainly the foundation for developing the Internet. A province needs to have enough financial power to build the information technology. At the same time, consumers in this province must be able to afford the Internet to maintain Internet growth. The evidence on the telecommunication infrastructures indicates that if a provincial government wants to rely on information technology to develop a technology extensive economy, it should give more attention to infrastructures, including telephone, cable, and mobile phone capacities. Additionally, urbanization is found to be positively associated with Internet penetration rates.

Perhaps what is even more interesting is that within each region, different determinants of Internet adoption have been singled out in predicting Internet growth. For instance, economic factors are the most important predictors in the eastern region; however, for the central region, the telecommunications infrastructure is the single most important determinant. Also, although the policy factor only contributed to 0.1% and 1.9% of the variance in Internet penetration in the eastern and central regions, it accounts for 18% of the variance in Internet adoption in the west. Clearly, to develop the Internet adoption, the local government needs to focus on different areas. For the eastern region, addressing economic development is the most important factor in developing the Internet; for the western and central regions, developing the telecommunication infrastructures is equally

important compared to developing economic conditions, if not more important. In addition, in the west, the government should invest more in science and technology in order to catch up with the east.

Political Internet Use & Perceived Threats

Chapter 4 examined the individual characteristics associated with using the Internet for political purposes. Similar to previous studies, this research confirmed that younger, wealthier, and more politically interested users are more likely to use the Internet for political activities.

In China, where media censorship has been practiced for years, the perceived threats associated with Internet control could also influence how the internet is used. These threats could come from the evaluation of the government's determination and ability to censor, the consequences of violating the Internet control, as well as users' perceptions of security, which entails their confidence in the Internet and their own computer skills to bypass possible censorship.

As results from Chapter 5 suggest, the perceived security has a positive impact on political net use. In other words, when users believe that the government cannot monitor their online behaviors, or they have enough knowledge to avoid possible Internet censorship, they are more likely to engage in political activities online.

Furthermore, three individual characteristics were found to be interactive with perceived threats. For instance, a more educated user is more likely to participate in online politics, but this is only true when he/she perceives a low Internet censorship. An older user is less likely to participate in online political activities, and this relationship is even stronger when the older person's perceived security is low. Consumption of

traditional news is only associated with political net use when users' perceived security is high.

These findings could be explained by Hachigian's (2001) argument that Internet users in China might have a lot at stake, therefore, they try to avoid potential risks associated with using the Internet for political purposes. When perceived threat is low or perceived security is high, educated users and the ones who like to seek for political information from traditional news are slightly more likely to participate in political activities online. However, this group also represents the population most likely to have a successful career worth protecting. Therefore, once this population perceives less security or more threats over the situation, they would rather stay away from possibly dangerous activities on the Internet. Similarly, since older people tend to have little knowledge pertaining to the Internet, their weak sense of perceived security would strengthen the existing negative association between age and political Internet use.

Perceived threats are clearly one of the key determinants for engaging in online political activities. Not only would individual characteristics like age, education or political interests affect people's patterns of using the Internet, whether or not they believe there is a real danger associated with political net use could also change their decision on using the Internet for politics.

Political Internet Use, Nationalism, & Political Participation Offline

Trying to evaluate the mobilizing effect of the Internet, the previous research has identified the informational or political use of the Internet as the most powerful mobilizing dimension of the Internet experience (e.g., Bimber, 2001). Applying the

previous findings in the Chinese context, this study has attempted to understand whether or not the political activity online would lead to political activity offline.

To answer this question, the current research looked at two forms of political participation: conventional participation including voting and contacting; and protests including inwards protests against domestic leaders or issues and outwards protests against a foreign force. As evidence in the Western context shows, more Internet use, especially political or informational use, leads to mobilization (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003, Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward, 2005). Nevertheless, Chapter 4 reveals that the political net use appears unassociated to any forms of political participation studied here.

So is the Internet use really irrelevant to political participation offline in China? Not even when the Internet is used for political activities? To fully comprehend the political environment in China, this study also examined the effect of rising nationalism. Nationalism is a relatively new ideology in China. It originated from the century of humiliation, when China was defeated by the West and Japan. Nationalism was revitalized by the CCP after the Tiananmen Square incident, to fill the ideological void left by the obsolete Socialism or Communism. The state-led nationalism speaks to the public for a number of reasons. It shares grounds with the Chinese traditional political culture, which values loyalty and obedience. In addition, it gives priorities to pragmatic goals such as political stability and economic development, which are also favored by the general public. Nationalism has been found to positively relate to political support for the government (Chen, 2004).

A state-led nationalist is hypothesized as being more likely to support the government by participating in conventional political actions while avoiding any protests

that are disapproved by the government, such as protests. The grassroots nationalism, on the other hand, is most likely to manifest when China's national interest is threatened by an outer force. These hypotheses were mostly supported by the findings in Chapter 6. The state-led nationalism is positively associated with traditional participation, and the grassroots nationalism is positively associated with outwards protests.

Going back to the original question on political implications of Internet use, it seems that the associations between nationalism and political outcomes depend on people's political Internet use. As discovered in Chapter 6, although grassroots nationalism is associated with more traditional participation when political net use is low or medium, that relationship is reversed if the political Internet use is high. Similarly, state-led nationalism is found to be negatively associated with inwards protests when political net use is low or medium. However, once political net use is intensive enough, that relationship almost disappears.

Although these findings are not entirely clear, it appears that the Internet plays an opposing impact to the official agenda. Heavy use of the Internet for political purposes could change the positive influence of grassroots nationalism on traditional participation and the negative influence of state-led nationalism on inwards protests. Of course, no conclusion can be reached about what the Internet entails without a content analysis of online information or communication. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that once the political net use becomes intensive enough, it could become a significant power, even competing with deep-rooted ideologies like nationalism.

Chapter 7 provided a holistic view concerning the Chinese public's Internet use, political values, and their political lives in the real world. The interview conversations

reveal that the influence of Internet use may not be so easy to detect. Not many people use the Internet for political purposes to begin with, and additionally, Internet censorship is likely to scare people away from participating in online political activities. As interview results from Chapter 7 suggest, political net use was certainly not the main goal of most users when they accessed the Internet. Yet, even the ones who did not use the Internet for political information and discussions had to admit that they relied on the Internet as their information source when controversial incidents or scandals occurred. This is because in China, where traditional media are heavily controlled by the government, the Internet is perhaps the only source that provides relatively uncensored information. Clearly, the Internet as an information source and communication forum has been greatly appreciated by the public.

The connection between political Internet use and offline political actions is not that easy to detect either. Although several respondents were willing to petition online, very few were inclined to take their actions to the real world. Compared to the Internet actions, which often protect people's identities, real world political actions require more active involvement and entail more danger. In China, where censorship and the associated threats are deeply rooted in people's minds, the Chinese public is rather cautious about their political behaviors, especially in the real world where they can be easily identified or tracked.

Moreover, as the rising nationalism appeals to the general Chinese people, the respondents were supportive of the Chinese government and their policies, and therefore were less likely to engage in any activities that would violate the government agenda.

To sum up all the findings, this study draws four conclusions. First, the Internet divide is still evident on both the aggregate and individual levels. Among Chinese provinces, more economically developed and urbanized regions with better telecommunication infrastructures are more likely to have higher levels of Internet penetration rates. On the individual level, younger, wealthier, and more politically interested individuals are more likely to use the Internet for political activities. Given that only a small proportion of users express their political opinions online, political Internet use is hardly a popular choice for Chinese Internet users.

Second, perceptions of threats associated with Internet censorship have a key impact on how people use the Internet. When perceived security is high, that is when the user believes in their own computer skill to avoid Internet censorship, or they believe that the Internet could hide their identities, they would be more likely to engage in political activities online. In addition, influences of individual characteristics on political net use could be changed when perceptions of threats are taken into consideration. For instance, better-educated users are only more likely to engage in online political activities when they perceive low levels of threats.

Third, nationalism as an increasingly influential ideology has a clear impact on people's political behaviors. As state-led nationalists, the users are more likely to participate in conventional political actions supported by the government. As grassroots nationalists, the users are most likely to react when they perceive a threat from a foreign force.

Finally, although there is no significant result directly associating political Internet use with political actions offline, using the Internet for political purposes could

have influences on political actions through their interactions with nationalism. As state-led and grassroots nationalism drive people to line up with the government agenda, heavy use of the Internet appears to suppress that taming effect of nationalism.

The explosion of Internet development has certainly lent some hope to democratize China, one of the few Communist countries remaining in the world. It has been asked by many, will the Internet bring democracy? The answer is probably no, or at least not in the immediate future. Although the Internet has reached almost 50% of residents in big cities, in the western and central regions, the penetration rate is still low. The current Internet users tend to be young, male, highly educated, and live in big cities. This portfolio does not represent an average Chinese.

When looking at using the Internet for political purposes only, which was found to be the most mobilizing dimension of Internet use, it is clear that only a small portion of the Internet users engage in online political activities regularly. Why? This is caused by many factors, including age, education, or political interest, as well as perceived threats associated with the Internet censorship.

Furthermore, for individuals who engage in online politics, they are not necessarily more likely to engage in democratic actions offline. They could believe in nationalism, and therefore want to support the government by avoiding protests against domestic issues. Even though heavy use of political activities online may change that relationship, one has to recognize how few people would participate in online political activities so heavily to begin with.

Based on this evidence, it is safe to say that the Internet is unlikely to bring any democratic revolution to China in the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, the Internet is

certainly able to provide people with more objective information and free exchange of opinions. In some cases, where people do feel the urge to discuss political matters online and participate in political actions offline, the Internet definitely facilitates that process. To the government as well, the power of online public opinions could change their real world political agenda. Although the influence of the Internet does not seem to extend significantly beyond the cyberspace at the time being, the free flow of information and communication provided by the Internet, as well as online political activities are already great advances in the progress of liberalization in China. Consequently, although a fundamental change in political system may not happen in China soon, the process of political liberalization, where more public could participate in politics and more voices can be heard by the government, is being realized.

Limitations of This Research

There are three main limitations of this current research. First of all, to study the Internet, which is still evolving, the results from this study can only be evaluated within the present context. As the CNNIC reports show, the recent new users come from rural areas and are not as educated as the early adopters were. The portfolio of Internet users could change rapidly within years. The online environment is changing as well. For instance, blogs only became popular fairly recently. New forms of online activities would continue to appear, which may eventually outgrow any of the existing Internet censorships. In that case, online political activities would be expected to increase, intensify, and diversify. Even the Chinese government has been evolving. The online environment is becoming much freer than before. The government is starting to see how

much value the Internet could provide. Although it is not likely to happen soon, perhaps one day in the future, the Chinese government could relinquish Internet control. It is quite possible that the results observed today will not be true in the near future.

Second, Internet use is a complex and dynamic process that embodies many phases. For instance, as Shah, Cho, Eveland, and Kwak's (2005) study indicates, seeking information online does not lead to civic engagement directly. Rather, the influence of online information seeking leads to political discussion and online civic messaging first, which in turn, leads to increased civic engagement. By looking at the association between political Internet use and offline political participation only, this study could have overlooked some important linkages in the complex process of Internet use. Particularly, since political Internet use is measured by a single item – political expression online, the multifaceted experience in using the Internet may not be fully captured.

The third limitation comes from the methodology. Only convenient samples were used in the survey study and in-depth interviews. Thus, results from this study could only be generalized in terms of relationships among different variables; any findings on individual variables cannot be extended to other samples (Manion, 1994). In addition, since the respondents in this study have a much higher educational level than the general Chinese Internet user, the same result is not likely observed with users who are poorly educated.

Finally, this study focused on the flow from Internet use to political participation, and inevitably downplayed the flow from offline political participation to online political involvement. In reality, political Internet use and political participation offline are probably reinforcing each other. For instance, it is possible that people who are active in

offline political participation are also more likely to use the Internet to obtain political information and opinion, express their political views or participate in political activity online. Emphasizing the one-way influence from Internet use to political participation, however, this study has attempted to understand the direction that bears more social significance in today's China. As Shah, Schmierbach, Hawkins, Espino, & Donavan (2002) discovered, a causal flow from Internet use to social and political engagements was indeed identified from these reciprocal relationships.

Being one of the few studies that attempt to systematically understand political implications of the Internet in China, the current research is fairly preliminary. Having said that, however, this current research has indeed provided some important insights on the topics. Several areas that were not examined or fully comprehended by this study need to be further examined in future studies. First, a systematic analysis of the online sphere is critical in understanding the exact impacts of Internet use. Although several studies have analyzed certain well-known online political forums (e.g., Wu, 2005; Yang, 2003), few have tried to understand how a regular Chinese Internet user employs the Internet for political reasons. What kind of messages would a Chinese Internet user obtain from the cyberspace? Is it overly critical of the Chinese government, as the current study seems to suggest? Second, to understand Internet diffusion, longitudinal data will be more helpful in explaining the trend of Internet development and varying effects of predictors at different stages. For instance, at the early stage of Internet development, telecommunication infrastructure and government policy may be more important, but as the technology advances, the individual income level may become more predictive in adopting the technology. Third, comparative study can help better understand the

political implications of Internet use. By comparing different countries, exactly how powerful the Internet is within a particular country can be better estimated. Fourth, the measurement of political Internet use should be expanded in future studies. The current research used one item to evaluate political net use, oversimplifying the multifaceted functions of Internet experiences. Future studies should include political information seeking, expression, or online political actions in order to fully capture the construct of political Internet usage. Finally, a representative sample should be used in the future, so that the more generalizable conclusions can be reached.

APPENDIX A
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE[38]

My name is Xiaoru Wang. I am a student at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. I am conducting a survey for my dissertation. I'd like to ask you a few questions about your media use habits and political/social lives. I want to assure you that all of the information you give me is confidential, and none of it will be released in any way that would identify you or your family. Your participation is voluntary.

This questionnaire shouldn't take longer than 30 minutes. Thank you very much for your time!

1). To begin, I would like to ask you some questions about your media use. How many days a week do you read a newspaper?

a. 7 days b. 6 days c. 5 days d. 4 days e. 3 days f. 2 days g. 1 day h. never (**GO TO Q.3**) i. Don't know

2). Where one means Rarely and ten means All The Time, how often do you read each of the following types of newspaper content? (0 Indicates Never)

											Never
a. News about international affairs?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0
b. New about national government and politics?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0
c. News about local government and politics?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0
d. News about societal issues?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0

3). On an average weekday evening, how many hours of television do you watch after 5 p.m.?

_____Hours _____Minutes
Don't know
Never watch (**GO TO Q.5**)

4). Where one means Rarely and ten means All The Time, how often do you watch each of the following types of TV programs? (0 Indicates Never)

											Never
a. News about international affairs?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0
b. New about national government and politics?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0
c. News about local government and politics?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0

[38] When responders were asked about political matters, questions were worded in a way that they refer to broad areas, such as government events, international news, or current affairs, not constrained to sensitive political issues only.

d. News about societal issues? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 0

5). What about the Internet? Have you used the Internet in the last month?
a. Yes b. No (**GO TO Q. 7**)

6). How often are you involved in each of the following types of Internet activities? Let's use a ten-point scale where <u>one</u> means RARELY and <u>ten</u> means FREQUENTLY; or tell me if you never use it for that purpose. On average, how often do you

NEVER

a. Use email to communicate with people you know?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 0
b. Follow news developments over the Internet?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 0
c. Search for information over the Internet
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 0
d. Express your opinion about issues and politics?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 0
e. Shop or make travel plans?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 0
f. Game and entertain
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 0

7). Now, I would like to ask you some questions about your participation in political life. Would you please tell me if in the past two years you have…

a. Voted for deputies to the local People's Congress? Yes__ No __ Don't know __
b. Contacted leaders, local people's deputies or authorities? Yes__ No __ Don't know __
c. Worked on behalf of a social group, cause or organization?
Yes__ No __ Don't know __
d. Contacted editors/reporters from the media? Yes__ No __ Don't know __
e. Donated blood, food, or clothing? Yes__ No __ Don't know __

8). Have you actually done any of the following things (or whether you might do the following things under certain circumstances) when your country is threatened by a foreign country (such as Diaoyu Island incident)?

a. Sign a petition Yes__ No __ Don't know __
b. Join a boycott Yes__ No __ Don't know __
c. Attend a demonstration Yes__ No __ Don't know __
d. Join a strike Yes__ No __ Don't know __

9). Have you actually done any of the following things (or whether you might do the following things under certain circumstances) when your object to a domestic leader or domestic issue (such as Sun Zhigang incident)?

a. Sign a petition Yes__ No __ Don't know __

b. Join a boycott Yes__ No __ Don't know __
c. Attend a demonstration Yes__ No __ Don't know __
d. Join a strike Yes__ No __ Don't know __

10). Where one means not at all interested and ten means very interested, how much do you say you are you interested in…

Don't know

a. National affairs?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 99
b. Local affairs?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 99
c. Talking to friends/family members about politics?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 99

11). On a scale of 1-10, where one means don't agree at all and ten means agree completely, how much do you agree with the following statements?

Don't know

a. People like you can have sayings about what the government does.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 99
b. Public officials care about what people like you think.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 99

12). On a scale of 1-10, where one means don't agree at all and ten means agree completely, how much do you agree with the following statements?

Don't know

a. China should play a more important role in Asia and the world.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 99
b. China should and will be a stronger power in the world in the future.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 99

13). Of the following two pairs of issues, which one do you think is more important in today's China (circle the one you think is more important, or don't know)?

a. Political stability vs. Freedom of expression Don't know
b. Economic development vs. Revolution to democracy Don't know

14). Now you will read three statements, which you need to evaluate.

a. Having a democratic political system is…
Very good ____ Good ____ Bad ____ Very Bad ____ Don't know ____

b. Democracy can have problems but it is better than any other form of government.
Strongly Agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____ Don't know ____

c. Having a stronger leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections is…
Very good ____ Good ____ Bad ____ Very Bad ____ Don't know ____

d. Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country
Very good ____ Fairly Good ____ Bad ____ Very Bad ____ Don't know ____

15). Now you will read a statement about the Internet. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements?

a. The government can track you down on the Internet.
Strongly agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____ Don't know

b. What you do online is monitored by cyber-police.
Strongly agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____ Don't know

c. If what you do online upsets the government, you will be punished severely.
Strongly agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____ Don't know

d. You have enough computer knowledge to make sure that you will not be caught doing anything undesirable online.
Strongly agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____ Don't know

e. The Internet is a technology that protects anonymity of users' identity.
Strongly agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____ Don't know

f. There are so many people and messages online no one would notice what you do on the Internet.
Strongly agree ____ Agree ____ Disagree ____ Strongly Disagree ____ Don't know

****
Because I try to get responses from people who come from different backgrounds, I would ask you a few questions that will help me make sure that I have reached people of different age, gender and so on.

16). What is your gender? Male ____ Female ____

17). What was your age on your last birthday? ____

18). How many years of school have you completed? ____

19). What is your marital status? Single ____ Married ____ Divorced ____ Widowed ____

20). What is your occupation? ____

21). What is your political affiliation?
Communist Party member ____ Youth League member ____ Other party ____ Non-party affiliation ____

22). What is your estimated monthly income? ____RMB

That concludes the survey. Thank you very much for your time and patience in answering those questions. Your answers will be kept confidential!

APPENDIX B
FLYER FOR SURVEY INTERVIEWS

Hi, I am a Ph.D. student working on my dissertation, which is about the Internet and China. I'd like to invite you to participate in my study. Both Internet users and non-users are needed.

In this survey session, I would like you to fill out a short questionnaire. You will get $10 if you complete the questionnaire! The survey is about your Internet use habits if you are an Internet user, your other media habits if you are not an Internet user, your world view, opinions about the media, and so on.

The survey won't take longer than 30 minutes. If you are interested in, please contact me at 13909910007 (phone number), we will assign a random number to you (so your identification information will not be disclosed), and you will then go to a classroom at Tsinghua University/Xinjiang Agriculture University, where the survey will be conducted. Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX C
FLYER FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Hi, I am a Ph.D. student working on my dissertation, which is about the Internet and China. I will need to interview 10-15 people individually, on their Internet use habits, world view, opinions about the media, and so on. Only Internet users are welcome to participate in the interviews. The study won't take longer than an hour. If you are interested in, please contact me at 13909910007 (phone number), we will then meet at a location of your preference. Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX D
DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDERS

Demographic Statistics of Survey Responders *vs.* General Chinese[39]

Variable	**Indicator**	***Survey Responders***		***General Chinese***
		M	**SD**	**M**
Age	Years	29.16	9.47	32.26
Gender		43% females, 57% males		48.5% females, 51.5% males
Education	Years of school completed	14.37	2.48	8.5
Income	In Chinese RMB	1542	2364	1345

[39] The demographic statistics of general Chinese is obtained from the Chinese Statistics Yearbook of 2007.

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