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Master's Thesis of International Studies

**China Without “Jasmine”:
Authoritarian Resilience in the Internet Era**

“재스민” 없는 중국:
인터넷 시대의 권위주의 탄력성

August 2018

**Graduate School of International Studies
Seoul National University
International Area Studies Major**

Heyun Jin

**China Without “Jasmine”:
Authoritarian Resilience in the Internet Era**

Thesis by

Heyun Jin

Graduate Program in International Area Studies
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**Graduate School of International Studies
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**China Without “Jasmine”:
Authoritarian Resilience in the Internet Era**

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“재스민” 없는 중국: 인터넷 시대의 권위주의 탄력성

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To my mother, Seok Myung-hwa,
who's given me unconditional love and support.

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ABSTRACT

China Without “Jasmine”: Authoritarian Resilience in the Internet Era

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The outbreak of the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa reignited the scholarly debates over the possibilities of democratization in some of the most “endurable” authoritarian regimes and over the relation between the internet and democracy. The Arab Spring revived the “cyber-utopianism,” which argues that the internet is a “liberation technology” that can spread democracy around the world. Meanwhile, the flame of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution faded fast, though the debate over China’s political future continued. This thesis attempts to answer the questions of whether democratization will be a likely scenario in China in the foreseeable future and whether the development of the internet has a determining role in bringing that scenario. It provides rebuttals to the “cyber-utopianism” and the prediction of democratization in China by using the theoretical framework of the political process theory. The evidence drawn from the survey data and the cases of social protests online suggests that the lack of insurgent consciousness, ineffective organizational structure, and impervious political control on the internet all render an internet-driven revolution in China rather inconceivable. It is individuals,

organizations, and the government, rather than technologies that decide who will prevail in a particular political context. China's political future depends on a series of "push" and "pull" factors that are complex, interconnected and subject to random future events.

Keywords: democratization, the internet, China, state-society relations, social movements

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Arab Spring and “China’s Winter”

From the Arab Spring to the Chinese Jasmine Revolution

On December 17, 2010, a 26-year-old Tunisian street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of the local governorate office in Sidi Bouzid after being mistreated by police (Abouzeid, 2011). Protests quickly spread from Sidi Bouzid to other major cities of Tunisia, reaching its capital Tunis in January. Large-scale strikes and street demonstrations made part of the country paralyzed. On the evening of January 14, President Ben Ali, the long-standing dictator since 1987, finally gave up the fight and fled to Saudi Arabia (Esposito, Sonn, & Voll, 2016; Lowrance, 2016). Neighboring countries soon followed Tunisia’s steps. In Cairo, Sana'a, Benghazi, Manama, Damascus, and numerous other places, protesters flooded the city streets, demanding regime change. Few had ever expected that Sidi Bouzid, an impoverished town in Tunisia’s interior, would be the genesis of the wave of revolutions that swept across the Arab world.

However, except for Tunisia, few countries have succeeded to overthrow the authoritarian government and replace it with a democratic one that could last. The Arab Spring subsided in the following year as many protests encountered violent resistance from authorities. In Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, anticipations for freedom and democracy turned into tumultuous armed conflicts and civil wars. In Egypt, after the January 25 Revolution, the disputes between the newly elected Islamist president Mohamed Morsi and the secularists lasted until another anti-

government protest in June 2013 removed Morsi from the office. Meanwhile, in the Sinai Peninsula, the armed conflict between Islamist militants and Egyptian security forces has continued up to the present. Seemingly, the downfall of an authoritarian regime does not necessarily lead to democracy and prosperity as expected by many.

The impacts of the Arab Spring went beyond the Middle East and North Africa and reached as far as China. In February 2011, inspired by the Tunisian Revolution, anonymous posts on the internet called for a Chinese version of the “Jasmine Revolution.” According to the organizers’ initial plan, people could participate by taking peaceful strolls at the designated places in 13 Chinese cities at 2 p.m. every Sunday. Watchful of the events developing in the Arab world, the Chinese government responded to such signs of a similar uprising expeditiously and assertively. Activists were arrested; websites were shut down; and foreign journalists were harassed (Thornton, 2015). The call for a revolution ended up attracting far more police than protesters. Consequently, the seeds of the “Revolution” were squashed before it could ever sprout. If an institutional change of the authoritarian regime was the goal of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution, then it has completely failed. But why could the “Jasmine” not blossom in China as in Tunisia and other countries of the Arab world?

Bruce Dickson (2011) ascribes the failure of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution to both state suppression and public indifference. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took lessons from the Arab Spring—small and isolated events could evolve into nationwide protests if not handled resolutely and promptly, and therefore, the CCP did not want to take any risk by underestimating the threats posed by the Chinese Jasmine Revolution. Moreover, the growing prosperity,

optimism toward future, and patience for political change can interpret most Chinese people's apathy toward the Chinese Jasmine Revolution or toward politics in general.

Steve Hess (2013) tries to explain the failed attempt of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution from a comparative perspective. He investigates the sources of authoritarian vulnerability and resilience in Tunisia, Egypt, and China, respectively. He has found that China's high level of government decentralization is not conducive to the national forms of social protests. Yanqi Tong and Shaohua Lei's (2014) study on social protests in China echoes Hess' opinion. They point out the multi-level responsibility structure of China's political system keeps the central government from shocks of social protests. The local governments take the blames for policy inefficiency and social problems and serve as a buffer zone between the central government and society, the role of which used to be played by rural collectives and urban work units.

Ongoing debates: revolutions, regime change, and the internet

What was unfolding in the Arab Spring renewed scholars' interest in the study of democracy and democratization in the Middle East and North Africa (Lamont, Gaenssmantel, & Harst, 2015). Particularly, the role the internet and social media played in disseminating information and mobilizing the public convinced lots of people that the internet was a revolutionary technology that could liberate people from repressive authoritarian rules. The Tunisian Revolution was celebrated by Western media as "Facebook Revolution" or the "Twitter Revolt" (Willis, 2016; Lowrance, 2016), which revived the debate in both academic and non-academic communities over the role and influence of the internet in regime change (Brown, Guskin, & Mitchell, 2012). Middle East specialists began to reevaluate the scholarly

consensus of how the world's most enduring authoritarian regimes might coexist with an information environment shaped by satellite television and internet-based communication tools (Thornton, 2015). The optimists contend that the advent of the internet around the globe present new possibilities for democratizing authoritarian regimes.

However, the liberating nature of the internet seems to have functioned differently across the world. The failed attempt of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution manifests the limitations of the internet. Some become skeptical about the notion of "liberation technology" and claim that the internet can favor autocrats as much as it can empower activists (Rød & Weidmann, 2015). From the modernization theory to "authoritarian resilience," enthusiasm for conjecturing China's political future has never faded, especially at a time when the "rise of China" becomes a trending topic among both intellectuals and the public. In contrast to the prediction of collapse and democratization made by many observers earlier, the Chinese Communist Party has survived long after the 1989 pro-democracy protests and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The remarkable adaptability of the CCP caught many by surprise. Nonetheless, like the Arab Spring and the fall of the Soviet Union, regime change often occurs in unexpected ways, triggered by random but interconnected events (Dickson, 2011). The debate over China's political future continues.

The following two sections briefly summarize the major arguments involved in the two debates mentioned above. One is over the prospects for regime change in China; the other is about the relation between the internet and democratization. Section 1.4 presents the research question and the hypothesis. Section 1.5 discusses

the theoretical and empirical bases of this thesis. The last section of the chapter sketches the arrangement for the remaining chapters and previews their arguments.

1.2 Debate Over the Prospects for Regime Change in China

Prediction of collapse and democratization

The first debate concerned here revolves around the question of whether the CCP regime is fragile and in danger of collapse or it is adaptable and resilient. One camp of the debate generally supports the prediction of collapse and democratization, whose reasoning, in some cases, dates back to the day of the modernization theory. The theory, first developed by Seymour Lipset in 1959, argues that economic development can lead to democracy (Lipset, 1959). Accompanying the industrialization and urbanization, social wealth accumulates and education spreads among the middle class, who serves as a revolutionary force for a democratic transition. This causal relation between economic development and democracy proves to be rather problematic. According to Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi's (1997) large-N analysis, democracies appeared randomly regarding levels of development; only a few countries in the world fit the modernization theory; and dictatorships did not necessarily fall for the same reasons in all countries.

However, especially in the 1990s, prominent American scholars made their predictions about China's future based on the logic of the modernization theory. According to them, as China's per capita income has been growing rapidly since the 1980s, wealthier and better-educated Chinese middle class now should have higher expectations for their government and feel impatient for political change. For once,

Samuel Huntington's "Third Wave" appeared unstoppable. Henry Rowen (1996) made a prediction that China would become a democracy around the year 2015 as there were "unmistakable signs of important positive changes" in China which he thought were certainly connected to the steady and impressive progress China was making in economic development. He urged Washington to integrate China into the world economy since he thought a richer China would become more democratic.

Even though most scholars today do not embrace the validity of the modernization theory on the part of the causal relationship between economic development and democracy, socioeconomic context remains a consequential factor in analyzing the Chinese politics. David Shambaugh (2016) holds that China cannot sustain its economic growth and prosperity without changing its political system. The emergent problem China is facing is its unbalanced economic structure. So far, China's economic growth has been depending on investment in fixed assets and labor-intensive and export-oriented manufacturing. As its labor costs grow, China's comparative advantage declines, which is pushing China toward the "middle-income trap," a lasting period of economic stagnation. Escaping this trap requires the rebalancing of the economy and fundamental changes in the political system.

Shambaugh (2016) suggests four alternative pathways for China's future: neo-totalitarianism, hard authoritarianism, soft-authoritarianism, and semi-democracy. He argues China has been moving from soft-authoritarianism toward hard-authoritarianism since 2009 and China today is more suppressive than at any time since 1992. According to Shambaugh (2016), if China remains on the current route, society will become more unstable and more unpredictable, which will lead to

economic stagnation and political decline. He believes that China is sliding back to the stage of “atrophy and ossification.”

Daniel Lynch (2015) shares similar concerns about China’s economy. His book *China’s Futures: PRC Elites Debate Economics, Politics, and Foreign Policy* investigates how the Chinese intellectual elites think about China’s future and suggests that those elites’ image about China’s future independently influences the route China will take. He concludes that the Chinese economists almost unanimously think that China’s economy cannot sustain itself without further liberal reforms toward stronger market mechanism. Even if the party-state could manage to restructure the economy in some miraculous way, the problem of an aging population will not be resolved easily. During times of economic stagnation, when both elites and the public deem the CCP as the fundamental obstacle to further development, the chance is that the precarious status of the CCP will be seriously threatened.

Gordon Chang’s book *The Coming Collapse of China* (2001), Susan Shirk’s *China: Fragile Superpower* (2007), and *China’s Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy* written by Minxin Pei (2006), all emphasize the fragility of the CCP regime and express pessimistic views about China’s political future, though their reasoning more or less varies. Among those scholars who are predicting collapse and democratization of China, most of them consider democracy as the most desirable form of government and authoritarianism as inherently incompatible with the free market and autonomous civil society. However, there are scholars who claim authoritarian governments, like the one in China, can be rather adaptable to new challenges posed by the growing middle class and a more plural society.

Prediction of resilience and survival

The other camp of the debate argues that China's authoritarian regime will remain resilient and survive the foreseeable future. The term "authoritarian resilience" was first applied to China by Andrew Nathan (2003). He observes that instead of riding the "Third Wave" of democratization, China's authoritarian regime has consolidated itself. The Chinese case turns out to contradict the conventional regime theory and the prophecy of the demise of authoritarianism suggested in Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and The Last Man* (1993). Nathan (2003) attributes the resilience of the CCP regime to its institutionalization, which includes four aspects: "the increasingly norm-bound nature of its succession politics, the increase in meritocratic as opposed to factional considerations in the promotion of political elites, the differentiation and functional specialization of institutions within the regime, and the establishment of institutions for political participation and appeal that strengthen the CCP's legitimacy among the public at large." Nathan feels concerned that the resilience of the CCP regime might suggest a "disturbing possibility that authoritarianism is a viable regime form even under conditions of advanced modernization and integration with the global economy."

Bruce Dickson (2016) acknowledges the resilience of the CCP regime. He and Dali Yang (2004) both challenge the notion that China is constantly in a state of chronic crisis in which the CCP, fearful of social unrests and hostile toward political reform, has to rely on repression and economic development to maintain its fragile monopoly on power. Dickson (2016) suggests that the prediction of democratization in China is problematic in three ways. First, some of those who predict democratization of China are turning legitimacy into a tautology. They claim that

only democratic government is legitimate. Since China is not a democracy, the Chinese government cannot be legitimate and should soon collapse due to the resistance from society. Other people also confuse their preference for what they wish to happen with their prediction of what is likely to happen. Second, they assume that the only alternative to the CCP's rule is democracy and democratization is a linear process. However, the end of an authoritarian regime is not necessarily the beginning of a democratic one. Lastly, they assume the Chinese public prefers democracy to the status quo.

Dickson writes in his book *The Dictator's Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party's Strategy for Survival* (2016): The first step to understanding the prospects for regime change is to recognize the CCP's strategy for survival, which is a combination of co-optation, legitimation, and repression. No regime could survive with only tools for brutal suppression. And economic growth is by no means the only source of legitimacy for the CCP. At the local level, the government is experimenting with new technologies to improve efficiency and transparency. At the national level, it is trying to provide more public goods in the areas of medical care, education, and employment. Horizontally, the CCP is incorporating new elites into its ranks, particularly the talents and expertise that can contribute to economic development. Since the 2000s, prominent business entrepreneurs have also been incorporated as part of the Party. Vertically, the CCP is promoting nationalism and traditional culture to compensate for the declining ideational significance of the socialist values. According to Dickson (2016), each element of the CCP's survival strategy presents a dilemma. It has to maintain the delicate balance between

minimizing the threats posed by its opponents through means of suppression and not alienating its supporters by using coercion in an excessive way.

Dali Yang's book *Remaking the Chinese Leviathan: Market Transition and the Politics of Governance in China* (2004) examines how the CCP leadership has strived to reform and remake the state institutions so that they could be more efficient and more responsive to the demands of and challenges in China's transition from planned economy to a more market-oriented system. Yang's study emphasizes the process of China's state building, which covers various issues, such as state-business relations, restructuring and downsizing of the bureaucracy, campaigns against corruption, fiscal reforms, administrative reforms, and attempts to enhance legislative supervision over the executive. Yang sets his study in the context of the bleak period after the crackdown on the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests when state agencies and military were extensively involved in business operations, the decentralized fiscal system put the government on the verge of bankruptcy, central authority was in decline, and political leaders lacked strong mandates. Changing economic conditions, effective leadership, and sense of crisis are three explanatory factors for China's success in rebuilding the state in the following decade (Lam, 2007).

There are several variations of Andrew Nathan's "authoritarian resilience." Baogang He and Stig Thøgersen (2010), and Jessica Teets (2013) use the term "consultative authoritarianism" to describe the CCP regime. Kenneth Lieberthal (1992) suggests China is an example of "fragmented authoritarianism," while the social protest specialist Xi Chen (2012) prefers the term "contentious authoritarianism." Bruce Dickson (2005) and Annie-Marie Brady (2007) coined the

term “popular authoritarianism,” which “combines one-party rule with close attention to public opinion.” What they all share in common is that they emphasize the adaptability of the Chinese Communist Party and are skeptical about the prediction of imminent democratization and collapse of the CCP.

1.3 Debate Over the Relation Between the Internet and Democratization

The internet as a liberation technology

Will the internet help topple autocrats or further cement their control? The second debate concerned in this thesis is over the relation between the internet and regime change. One camp of the debate agrees, though to varying degrees, that the internet empowers activists and facilitates organization of anti-government movements in authoritarian countries. They emphasize the “liberating” potential of the internet in non-democracies, especially its potential in mobilizing the dissatisfied and cynical public. According to Yongshun Cai and Titi Zhou (2016), the internet performs several functions in social protests: disseminating information, reducing participation costs, promoting collective identity, creating communities, facilitating the diffusion of protest activities, and helping attract international attention and support. Yongnian Zheng (2008) points out those who are optimistic about the impacts of the internet on political change claim that the internet is the precondition for political progress in that it reinforces the functioning of democracy and enhances citizen engagement with democratic affairs.

The optimistic views toward the political impact of the internet became prevalent in the early 2000s as the internet, still a novelty by then, was spreading all over the world. Lawrence Grossman (1995) even claims that following Athenian democracy and representative democracy, the technological change brought by the internet will bring the era of “electronic democracy.” In 1995, a senior official in the Pentagon once quoted a comment by *Rolling Stone* about the potential impact of the internet on authoritarian regimes:

“The internet is the censor’s biggest challenge and the tyrant’s worst nightmare... Unbeknown to their governments, people in China, Iraq, and among other countries, are freely communicating with people all over the world... The internet is clearly a significant long-term strategic threat to authoritarian regimes, one that they will be unable to counter effectively.” (Swett, 1995)

Peter Ferdinand (2000) argues that as a means of communication, the internet possesses the potential to transform politics way more revolutionarily than telephone or television because the internet has made the direct two-way interaction between politicians and citizens possible. According to him, this revolutionary effect will not only transform existing democracies but also force the internationalization of democracy. Ferdinand (2000) says one of the most remarkable effects of the internet has been its capability of spreading democratic ideas across the national borders. Moreover, the internet encourages the emergence of an international civil society since it can connect activists of individual countries, both democratic and authoritarian.

In the late 2000s, the optimism toward the political impacts of the internet began facing more powerful rebuttals as it turned out that the internet did not enhance citizens' political engagement and politician-citizen interaction as much as what "cyber-utopians" had expected in the 1990s and the early 2000s. Before the Arab Spring, few authoritarian regimes collapsed because of the increased domestic internet penetration rate. When the skeptical voices against the revolutionary nature of the internet became louder, represented by the public intellectual Evgeny Morozov and researchers including Ronald Deibert and John Palfrey from The OpenNet Initiative, loyal followers of the "cyber-utopianism" refuted their challenge with counterarguments.

Anupam Chander (2012) has responded to Morozov and The OpenNet Initiative researchers respectively. Chander (2012) rebuts Morozov's bleak accounts of the political future of the internet from three aspects. First, the Arab Spring manifests that the internet is central to the protest organization, information sharing, and self-empowerment. Empowered by the internet, even a small share of the population can cause great change because of the dissemination of information on a global scale. Second, the tools of communication, once dispersed via the internet, are difficult to remain contained within pure entertainment. The sacred and the profane are likely to mix in various measures. Lastly, in any case, the fact that the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 might not have been the result principally of the dissemination of information does not mean that information was irrelevant to the transformations that took place.

In response to The OpenNet Initiative's book *Access Controlled: The Shaping of Power, Rights, and Rule in Cyberspace* edited by Ronald Deibert, John

Palfrey, Rafal Rohozinski, and Jonathan Zittrain (2010), which focuses on censorship and government surveillance, Chander (2012) also provides three counter-arguments. First, access to information has undeniable power and is a key vector for change. Second, the internet facilitates “many-to-many communication” and is a far more powerful medium for dissent than the any other that history has ever seen. Lastly, authoritarian governments have shown that they in fact currently fear the internet more than they benefit from it.

More recent rebuttals to the “cyber-skeptics” are from Bryan Druzin and Gregory Gordon (2017), who apply the cascade theory to explain the liberating potential of the internet and the vulnerability of authoritarianism. The cascade theory tries to explain social imitation, in which individuals adopt the behavior of one another en masse. According to Druzin and Gordon (2017), a cyberspeech cascade occurs when expressions of contentious online speech trigger, intentionally or unintentionally, small shifts in public perception regarding the permissible limits of online expression that then proliferate into large-scale torrents of uncensored speech. Due to the decentralized nature of online communication, it is impossible for authoritarian governments to impose perfect censorship on the internet. As a result, the government relies more on self-censorship, which can suddenly collapse when cyberspeech cascade occurs. Druzin and Gordon (2017) imply that considering the limitation of human resources and surveillance technology, authoritarian governments like China, Iran, Egypt, Belarus, Bahrain, Syria, and Russia remain vulnerable to future cyberspeech cascades with more permanent consequences.

All above-mentioned arguments for the “cyber-utopianism” are summarized by Sara Mishra (2012) into three categories:

- (1) Information: How the internet is changing the amount of information citizens can access and the way they access it
- (2) Organization: How the internet facilitates effective communication and coordination
- (3) Networks: How the internet networks inherently resist state control due to their decentralized nature

These three categories constitute the primary causal mechanism between the internet and democratization as proposed by the “cyber-utopians.” In the following chapters, the thesis is about to argue against each of these components in a direct way.

The internet as a repression technology

The other camp of the debate agrees, to varying extents, that the internet serves as a tool of repression in the hands of authoritarian rulers and thus helps to impose further constraints on civil liberties and political rights. Like traditional media, the internet cannot escape from government interference (Boas, 2006). Moreover, the internet cannot be imposed on a particular country from the outside without the approval and support of the domestic government (Milner, 2006). The broadcasting and peer-to-peer mechanism of the internet can favor authoritarian governments as much as it can help anti-regime activists (Rød & Weidmann, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, the most prominent members of this camp include Evgeny Morozov, a student of political and social implications of technologies, and Ronald Deibert, one of the editors of the *Access* series, published by The OpenNet Initiative and MIT Press. According to *Access Contested: Security, Identity, and Resistance in Asian Cyberspace* edited by Ronald Deibert (2012), the latest volume of the *Access* series, there are four phases of cyber-regulation. The period from the

1960s to 2000 is called “open commons,” a period when state largely ignored the cyberspace. The second phase, “access denied,” started in 2000 and ended in 2005. During this phase, countries like China and Saudi Arabia blocked and filtered the internet. The third phase is between 2005 and 2010, and is referred to as “access controlled.” During this phase, the authoritarian governments went beyond blocking and began employing various tools of control and manipulation of information. After 2010, some developed countries such as the United States and the European Union are entering the fourth phase, “access contested,” when civil society has started to push back government controls in cyberspace. However, in most authoritarian countries, due to the lack of autonomous civil society, the tight control of the internet remains.

As summarized by Anupam Chander (2012), Evgeny Morozov’s (2011) arguments against the internet mainly consist of three aspects. First, Morozov (2011) coined the term “slacktivism” to describe his observation that the internet allows people to believe they are contributing to change when they are in fact tweeting into the darkness. The second is the “opiate of the masses” argument which contends that the internet is likely to distract the public from politics with consumerism, entertainment, and sex. The last is the argument of economic determinism. Morozov (2011) claims that historical change occurs largely because of economic, not technological, reasons, which seems to resonate with the followers of the modernization theory and some Marxists who emphasize the determining role of the means of production.

Marcus Alexander (2004) focuses on the political impact of the internet in democratizing countries and investigates the development of Russian internet policy.

He argues that the development of the internet in transition countries such as Russia does not necessarily help to increase freedom of speech or achieve further democratization. The rationale behind the “cyber-utopianism”—the internet can liberalize the flow of information, debilitate authoritarian control, and subsequently lead to democratization—does not function well in the case of Russia. Alexander (2004) concludes that the authoritarian government can adapt itself to new technologies and turn threats into opportunities. In a changing environment, neither the state nor society should be assumed as a static entity.

Espen Geelmuyden Rød and Nils Weidmann (2015) use the large-N analysis and a case study on Saudi Arabia to support their argument that the internet is a more repressive than liberating technology. By analyzing the data of authoritarian countries from 1993 to 2010, they attempt to answer two questions regarding the relation between the internet and authoritarian regimes. One is whether the level of repressiveness, which is measured by press censorship, is positively correlated to the government’s willingness to adopt and develop the internet, which is measured by a country’s internet penetration rate. The result is that the more repressive the authoritarian regime is, the more likely the regime is to adopt and expand the internet. Assuming that the authoritarian regimes are rational, their analysis indicates the internet can bring authoritarian regimes more benefits than costs.

The other question posed by Rød and Weidmann (2015) is whether higher internet coverage in authoritarian regimes improves the chance of democratization. Again, the result of the large-N analysis favors the notion of “repression technology.” Higher internet coverage in authoritarian regimes does not increase the chance for democratic change to occur. At least during its first two decades of existence, the

internet has not contributed to global shifts towards democracy. According to Rød and Weidmann (2015), authoritarian governments can use the “broadcasting mechanism” of the internet to propagate the “correct” values and block unwanted contents; with the “peer-to-peer mechanism” of the internet, authoritarian governments can identify individual dissidents and repress their attempts to oppose the regime.

A third perspective?

In the debate over the relation between the internet and regime change, there are scholars who lean to neither the notion of “liberation technology” nor the notion of “repression technology.” Jacques DeLisle, Avery Goldstein, and Guobin Yang (2016) argue that in some cases, simple dichotomies of “freedom of speech versus control” or “promoting democracy versus strengthening authoritarianism” are not sufficient to frame the understanding on the role and impact of the internet and new media. The space for online citizen engagement has expanded in many ways but has also contracted in other aspects. On the one hand, the internet and social media have provided effective mechanisms for critics of existing laws and legal institutions to articulate and disseminate agendas for legal reform, including systemic change. On the other hand, the Chinese government has adapted traditional law-employing techniques to meet the challenges of the internet era. By removal of certain websites and postings, suspension or cancellation of social media accounts, and criminal prosecution or administrative sanctions for behavior that would have been punished in the pre-internet world but now occurs partly online, the government can largely retain its authoritarian control in cyberspace.

Most scholarly views on the relation between the internet and regime change are less extreme than the terms “cyber-utopianism” and “cyber-dystopianism” have suggested since the real world problems, fraught with random but interconnected factors, tend to be more complex and dynamic than a simple dichotomy can comprehend. The artificial division of the two camps is mostly for the purpose of analysis. Some scholars, such as Jacques DeLisle, Avery Goldstein, and Guobin Yang, do not express clear inclination toward either camp of the debate. Among those who do have a discernable preference, they agree with the notion of “liberation technology” or “repression technology” to varying extents, and may not consider the positive or negative correlation between the internet and regime change as causal. However, with the case of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution as a starting point, the author of this thesis is mainly about to argue against the causal mechanism between the internet and democratization suggested by the “cyber-utopians” since the author’s interest lies in the question of whether the development of the internet has a causal effect on China’s democratization, which is also related to the first debate over the prospects for China’s political future.

1.4 Research Problem

The Arab Spring revived scholars’ interest in the relation between the internet and regime change, while the failed attempt of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution, which was initiated by anonymous organizers on the internet, not just discredited the “cyber-utopian” notion of “liberation technology” but also provoked renewed debate over China’s political future. This thesis attempts to answer the question of whether

the development of the internet has a determining role in bringing about democratic change in China. The independent variable is the development of the internet in authoritarian China, while the dependent variable is democratic change.

The preliminary hypothesis is that whether the development of the internet can have a causal effect on democratization depends on the specific political context. If the political and social environment is not conducive to fundamental change, the development of the internet may not lead to democratization. China's current political system may continue to exist without major challenge in the near future.

1.5 Research Design

Theoretical framework: the political process theory

Not a long time ago, the political process theory or political opportunity theory was primarily developed in and applied to democratic contexts (Tarrow, 2008; Osa & Corduneanu-Huci, 2009). David Meyer (2004) has traced the origin of the political process theory. In the earlier times, social movements were not considered by scholars as part of democratic politics. However, after the 1960s, a period when social movements were thriving across the advanced industrialized societies, political scientists and sociologists no longer define popular protests as “dysfunctional, irrational, and inherently undesirable” or consider their participants as “disconnected from intermediate associations that would link them with more productive, and less disruptive, social pursuits.” Instead, the protesting strategies are seen as a political resource to be strategically used by people that are poorly positioned to make claims on government through conventional, institutional means

(Lipsky, 1970; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Since then, researchers in this field have turned their focus from why protesting to how protesting, with a particular interest in the nature of the political context and activist grievances.

According to Meyer (2004), there is a curvilinear relation between political opportunities and protest politics. The particular political opportunities affect how activists frame grievances and select strategies. He defines the structure of political opportunities as “the available means for a constituency to lodge claims against authorities.” He also points out two types of studies where the political process theory is applied. One is longitudinal studies, which focus on the development of social movements. The other is cross-sectional comparative studies, which examine the curvilinear relationship between the political opportunities and protest politics across different contexts. Yet, both types used to be limited to advanced democracies. Up until Meyer’s article was written, few attempts had been made to develop the potential of the theory in non-democratic contexts.

Recently, more scholars apply the political process theory in non-democratic societies, including China (Osa & Schock, 2007; O’Brien & Stern, 2008; Osa & Corduneanu-Huci, 2009; Chen, 2012; Nesossi, 2015). Maryjane Osa and Cristina Corduneanu-Huci (2009) analyze twenty-four cases of occurrence/non-occurrence of social mobilization in fifteen stable authoritarian regimes to find a minimal set of conditions that facilitate social mobilization. They suggest five dimensions of political opportunities: state repression, elite divisions, influential allies, media access/information flows, and social networks. As a conclusion, they suggest that the greatest danger to the stability of authoritarian regimes emerges when society could surmount internal divisions and establish links between individuals and groups

and that free and uncensored media plays critical roles in confronting authoritarianism.

The applicability of the political process theory in both democratic and non-democratic contexts does have limitations. For instance, there are a variety of conceptions of political opportunities, each aiming to explain a particular case (Meyer, 2004). There is no consensus on which factor or combination is necessary or sufficient to initiate social mobilization, particularly in non-democratic settings (Osa & Corduneanu-Huci, 2009). Nonetheless, the difficulty in the generalization of the political process theory does not obviate its usefulness as an analytical tool.

This thesis employs the framework of the political process theory to analyze the role of the internet in social movements in China and particularly why the outcries for democracy such as the Chinese Jasmine Revolution have a pessimistic prospect in the near future. It focuses on the three components of the political process theory: insurgent consciousness, organizational strength, and political opportunity (Cragun & Cragun, 2006), which are in parallel with Kevin O'Brien and Rachel Stern's (2008) three dimensions—framing, mobilizing structures, and political opportunity. Insurgent consciousness is defined as the collective sense of injustice shared by movement members or potential movement members, serving as the motivation for movement participation; organizational strength is measured by whether there are strong leadership and sufficient resources; lastly, political opportunities refer to the receptivity or vulnerability of the existing political system (Cragun & Cragun, 2006). Each of the three components emphasizes one element of social movements, which is grievances, resources, and external constraints respectively.

Before applying the political process theory to examining popular protests and social mobilization in China, two things need to be clarified. First, as David Meyer (2004) has warned, analysts must explicitly disaggregate and specify the outcomes the political process theory is meant to explain. The theory can be used to examine either the political context of social mobilization or the policy influence of a social movement. As the Chinese Jasmine Revolution has never amounted to a sustained social movement, this paper primarily focuses on the political context rather than the outcome. Second, being aware of the controversies over the conception of political opportunities, the author is not going to prove that the combination of all three factors (insurgent consciousness, organizational strength, and political opportunities) is necessary or sufficient for successful social movements, as some have argued, but mainly tries to investigate whether the development of the internet is conducive to political liberalization or democratization in a specific political context.

Secondary analysis

This thesis focuses on the case of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution primarily for two reasons. When compared to other cases of social protests in China, the Chinese Jasmine Revolution is unique in at least two aspects. First, although there has been an increased number of social protests in China since the 1990s, most of them focus on short-term material issues, such as the welfare of the former workers of state-owned enterprises, compensation for acquired rural lands, and violation of labor rights in the private sector. These social protests usually do not have explicit political demands, do not challenge the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party or the central government, and are largely contained on the local level. Without clearly

shared goals or a coherent organization, these isolated social protests can hardly evolve into a sustained social movement.

However, encouraged by the Arab Spring, the Chinese Jasmine Revolution not only expressed a wide range of social and economic demands but also asked for fundamental changes in the political system, which blatantly challenged the legitimacy of the CCP's rule and the authority of the central government. The organizers used moral and nationalistic appeal to attract a wide audience with diverse backgrounds. They framed the "Revolution" as a cause that would bring benefits to all Chinese people. Therefore, the Chinese Jasmine Revolution can be considered as a failed attempt of initiating a nation-wide, cross-issue, and pro-democracy social movement, which has rarely occurred since the crackdown on the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.

Second, the uniqueness of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution lies in the fact that it is the first pro-democracy "movement" in mainland China that completely relied on the internet to mobilize the public. The number of the internet users in China has been growing since the mid-1990s. According to the China Internet Network Information Center, the internet penetration rate has reached 34.3 percent by 2010, which means that more than one-third of the Chinese population has access to the internet. What accompanies this development of the internet is the rising number of online protests (Tong & Lei, 2014). For many people, the internet serves not just as a means of communication, entertainment, or business transaction, but also as a free space for expressing frustration and demanding social justice. The initiators of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution were well aware of the opportunities the internet created and took advantage of it.

This thesis draws evidence from various sources, including the survey data on the public perception of democracy and regime support from the World Values Survey and Bruce Dickson's Public Goods and Political Support Surveys conducted in 2010 and 2014, the statistics about the development of the internet in China from the China Internet Network Information Center, and materials related to online protests from press release and academic publications. Due to the limitation of the resources for this research, the analysis in the thesis mainly depends on secondary data. Except for the Chinese Jasmine Revolution, other cases are selected to represent each aspect of the causal mechanism between the internet and democratization the "cyber-utopianism" proposes. Cases of popular protests asking for regime change are relatively rare in China, but the purpose of this thesis is not to investigate what constitutes an effective pro-democracy movement but to rebut the kind of technological determinism which argues that the internet causes democratization regardless of the variation in the political context.

1.6 Preview of Arguments

Before beginning the main argument, in Chapter II, this thesis provides a brief historical review of the development of the internet, major surges of social protests, and the rise of online protests in China. Next, it argues against the notion of "liberation technology" or "cyber-utopianism" and the prediction of collapse and democratization of the CCP regime within the framework of the political process theory. From the perspective of the "cyber-utopianism," the key causal mechanism between the internet and democratization include three aspects: the internet as a tool

of disseminating democratic values, the internet as a tool of facilitating effective social mobilization and organization, and the internet as a public sphere free from authoritarian control. According to the political process theory, anti-regime movements often succeed in a context where there is sufficient insurgent consciousness shared among the public, there is a strong organizational support connecting individuals and movement leaders, and the government is either vulnerable or receptive to political change.

From Chapter III to Chapter V, each chapter focuses on one of the three elements of the political process theory to rebut the three aspects of the causal mechanism in the notion of “liberation technology,” respectively. Chapter III examines whether the majority of the Chinese public shares democratic values and is critical of the current regime and whether the development of the internet has positive effects on the level of support for democracy or regime change. Chapter IV investigates whether an autonomous civil society is emerging in China in the internet era and thus can provide organizational support for anti-regime movements and whether the internet and social media are effective in mobilizing and organizing collective action. Chapter V examines the political context with more emphases on the reactions of the state. It answers the question of whether the Chinese regime is able to retain authoritarian control of the internet and to what degree. The three chapters respectively focus on individuals, society, and the state within China’s particular political context for anti-regime movements. The thesis concludes with remarks on China’s authoritarian resilience and its political future in the internet era.

II. AN OVERVIEW: THE INTERNET AND INTERNET ACTIVISM IN CHINA

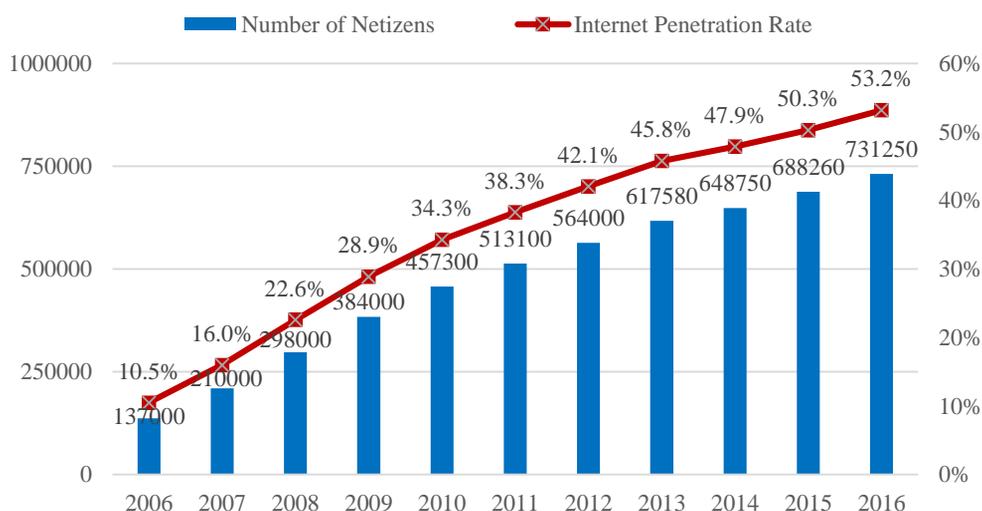
2.1 Development of the Internet in China

In the early 1990s, the use of the internet in China was confined to a few intellectuals who communicated with the outside world through emails (Yang, 2008). China did not build a fully functional internet connection until 1994 (Yang, 2008), and the internet began to become available to average urban consumers only after 1996 (Wilson III, 2004). According to a 2016 survey by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the number of China's internet users has been growing at a stunning pace during the last decade. It increases from 137 million in 2006, to 513.1 million in 2011, and to 731.25 million in 2016; the internet penetration rate (the percentage of the total population of a given country or region that use the internet) rises from 10.5% in 2006, to 38.3% in 2011, and to 53.2% in 2016 (CNNIC, 2017, see Figure 1). By now, over half of the Chinese population have gained access to the internet. In addition, the percentage of internet users who access the internet via mobile phones increases from 24.0% in 2007, to 69.3% in 2011, and to 95.1% in 2016 (CNNIC, 2017).

However, when we dissect the composition of China's internet users, it shows an uneven distribution among different social groups. According to the CNNIC's report of July 2011, the year when the Chinese Jasmine Revolution occurred, urban internet users account for 73.0 percent of the total, which is way higher than the percentage of urban population in China—50.6 percent (World Bank,

n.d.). It suggests that the internet penetration rate in rural areas is substantially lower than in urban areas. In terms of age, China's internet users concentrate in three age groups: 10-19, 20-29, and 30-39, each accounting for 23 to 31 percent of the total, collectively accounting for 80 percent of all users. Regarding educational level and

Figure 1. Size of China's Internet Users and Internet Penetration Rate



Source: CNNIC Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China (December 2016)

occupation, 77.8 percent of internet users have not attended college (including 4-year bachelor programs and junior college programs), and 29.9 percent of internet users are students, followed by the self-employed/freelancers (14.6%) and company employees (10.9%). In other words, the majority of China's internet users are urban and young; most of them are not college-educated and do not work in the state sector. Such characteristics remain evident in the updated 2017 CNNIC report (CNNIC, 2017).

2.2 Historical Review of Social Protests and Online Protests in China

Four surges of social protest

China has a long history of popular contention, which dates back to the imperial periods. Xi Chen (2012) suggests that there are four surges of social protest in the People's Republic of China (PRC) since its establishment in 1949, and the one we are currently experiencing is the most long-lasting wave of social protest in the PRC's history.

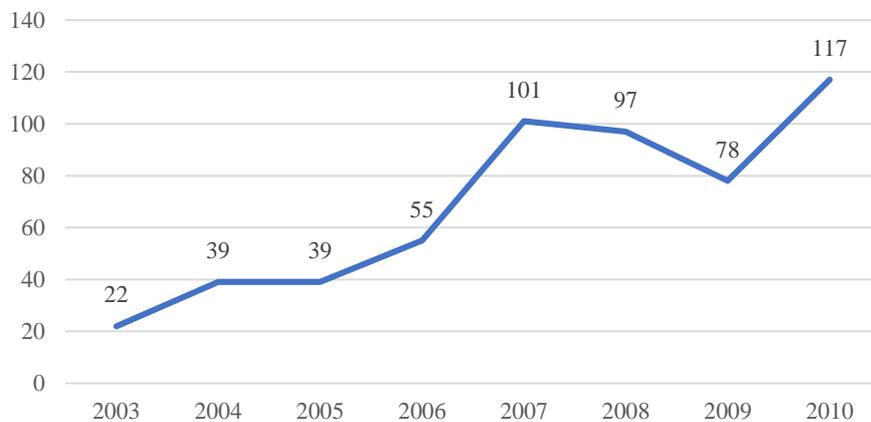
The first protest wave occurred from 1956 to 1957. During this period, partly encouraged by the Hundred Flowers Campaign and Mao's speech on "handling the contradictions among the people," massive labor strike exploded in urban China. According to Elizabeth Perry's (2002) study on labor strikes in Shanghai, almost half of the protests were driven by a demand for higher income or better welfare, while other protests were closely related to the newly emerging household registration system (Hukou system). Other than labor strikes, protesters also employed tactics including forcible surrounding of cadres, collective petition movements, and business slowdowns (Chen, 2012).

The second surge of social protest took place between 1978 and 1981, shortly after the end of the Cultural Revolution. In this period, the Chinese Communist Party initiated extensive campaigns and reforms for correcting the previous mistakes. A variety of issues were involved in the second wave of social protest. For example, in Hunan Province, three issues were central to the protesters: job-related demands by "sent-down youth," repatriated workers, and demobilized

army officers; disputes over waterworks and houses; and university officials' interference with local elections (Chen, 2012).

The third surge occurred from 1985 to 1986, which was substantially larger than the second one (Chen, 2012). In Hunan Province, the government reported 423 collective petitioning events from 1985 through the first eight months of 1986 (Chen, 2012).

Figure 2. Frequencies of Large-Scale Social Protest by Year, 2003-2010



Source: Tong & Lei (2014)

The current surge of social protest began in the early 1990s, which has lasted longer than any of the previous waves. During this period, the government coined the term “collective incident” (*qunti xing shijian*) for social protests. However, it remains unclear how the term is defined. Jinsheng Chen (2004) and Xi Chen (2012) point out “collective incident” can be a broader term than social protests, referring to many other social disturbances such as inter-village strife. According to the data provided by the Public Security Ministry, 87,000 “collective incidents” took place in 2005, as compared to 74,000 in 2004, 58,000 in 2003, and about 10,000 in 1994 (Chen, 2012; French, 2005). In 2008, the estimated number of such incidents is 127,000 (Tong &

Lei, 2014). Evidence from various sources and perspectives confirms the trend that social protests in China have increased dramatically since the 1990s (Chen, 2012).

Entering the 2000s, the number and scale of social protests reached a new height. Figure 2 presents the frequencies of large-scale social protests from 2003 to 2010. There is a significant increase in large-scale protests in 2007 and 2008, and the number becomes as high as 117 in 2010 (Tong & Lei, 2014). Moreover, in contrast to Mao's era, social protests since the economic reforms have been increasingly autonomous from the state.

Nonetheless, the upsurge of social protests since the 1990s does not substantiate the prediction that the CCP's authoritarian rule is about to collapse since most of those protests were not oriented to regime change. As Kevin O'Brien (1996) and Elizabeth Perry (2010) argue, most social protests in China operate within the boundary of the state, rely on officially established norms, and rarely challenge the legitimacy of the CCP and the central government. Sometimes, protesters make considerable efforts to show that their actions are not intended to subvert the authority of the state. In contemporary China, there are only two notable popular movements for democracy. One is the Democracy Wall movement in 1978 and 1979, in which thousands of people put up posters on a brick wall at Beijing's Xidan Street. The other is the 1989 pro-democracy movement, which almost shook the CCP regime to its foundations. Since the suppression of the 1989 protests, there has been no sustained pro-democracy movement with wide public support.

Social protests online

As the number of internet users in China has increased rapidly, more people started to engage in popular contention through the internet. According to Guobin Yang's

(2008) study, 1999 is a critical year for the development of the internet in China. Before then, there were only sparse reports of online protests. In 1999, large-scale nationalist protests occurred, both online and offline, against the bombing of the Chinese embassy in the former Yugoslavia by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Yang regards it as the most important formative event in the history of internet contention in China, after which the number of online protests has been growing rapidly. However, Yang has not explained the correlation between the 1999 protest and the growth of online protests.

In the author's view, the real revolution of internet activism did not arrive until the launch of Sina Weibo in 2009, a microblogging website and Twitter's Chinese counterpart. By December 2012, Weibo has 503 million registered users ("Sina Weibo," n.d.; Ong, 2013); as of the third quarter of 2015, Weibo has 222 million subscribers and 100 million daily users (Freier, 2015), and about 100 million microblogs are posted on Weibo every day (Cao, 2012). Before Sina Weibo and Twitter changed their word limit, both required each post could not exceed 140 characters. However, under the same word limit, the Chinese language could convey much more information than English (Lee, 2011). Compared to traditional blogs, Weibo posts are much shorter, encouraging users to make a statement without evidence or reasoning, not to mention any polishing of style (Tong & Lei, 2013). Unlike bloggers, Weibo users do not need to devote much time to editing their posts, and neither do they need to possess a certain level of writing skills (Tong & Lei, 2014). For most internet users who do not have time and patience to read lengthy blog articles, Weibo is an ideal alternative. Moreover, by simply forwarding other

users' posts to your followers, information can be shared and disseminated almost instantly.

Numerous online protests have occurred through the platform of Weibo. Yanqi Tong and Shaohua Lei (2013) select seven cases of online protests on Weibo between 2009 and 2010: "Feng Zhenghu Returning Home Incident," "Li Mengmeng College Entrance Exam Incident," "Yihunag Incident," "Shanghai Fire Incident," "My Father is Li Gang Incident," "Fudan Huangshan 18 Donkeys Incident," and "Qian Yunhui Incident." These cases suggest some common features of online protests. According to Tong and Lei, in order to mobilize the public, the initiator often frames an unjust event in a concise fashion, which in many cases is achieved by filling the public with rage against immoral behaviors of government officials. These microblog protests are effective in generating instant pressure from public opinion and compelling the government to make concessions or to even reverse its decisions.

III. INSURGENT CONSCIOUSNESS: THE INTERNET AS A TOOL OF DISSEMINATING DEMOCRATIC VALUES

3.1 “Cyber-Utopian” Perspective: Information and Democratization

One of the most visible changes brought by the internet is how it is increasing the amount of information people can access and the way they access it (Mishra, 2012). Before the arrival of the internet era, people access information about the outside world primarily through television, newspapers, magazines, radio, and in some cases, word of mouth. Except for word of mouth, all other channels are highly centralized, “one-to-many” type of mass communication. The information is produced in numerous large centers, namely, television stations, publishing companies, and radio stations. People away from these information-producing centers usually have few means to control the content of information or how information is distributed. Therefore, everyday citizens are passive recipients of information produced and distributed by the centers.

All authoritarian rulers are facing the fundamental problem of mass control to prevent the rise of popular opposition leaders and anti-regime social movements, and media’s potential role as a tool of mass communication and mobilization encourages authoritarian rulers to control the information flow, propagate pro-government contents, and filter out those challenging their legitimacy (Rød & Weidmann, 2015; Svulik, 2012). Due to the traditional media’s centralized nature, it

is relatively easy for governments to achieve this goal of mass control by imposing strict regulations on television and radio stations and publishers.

In terms of word of mouth as a primary means of accessing information, it is usually more prevailing in countries with limited literacy and a low penetration rate of television and radio. Even though word of mouth is much less centralized than other channels for accessing information since each citizen can influence the content of information and participate in the distributing process, it has a rather limited reach of audience, is slow in spreading the news, and is subject to distortion of information and low credibility.

The internet is transforming how information is produced and distributed. According to Milton Mueller (2010), unlike traditional media, the internet provides a “many-to-many” or peer-to-peer communication channel, in which each internet user is a consumer as well as a producer of information. The rise of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, and other online platforms where people actively produce and consume information, such as YouTube and Wikipedia, has truly revolutionized the centralized, “one-to-many” type of mass communication and has increased the amount of information people have access to.

Through the internet, instead of sitting in front of the TV at 9 o'clock every night to watch national news or learning yesterday's events on newspapers delivered every morning, people have more freedom to choose when to access information and from where to access it. Combined with the development of mobile devices and mobile networks, people can access their favorite contents from their favorite websites with cell phones, laptops, or tablets at any time of the day and anywhere they go. These technological advancements have made it possible that the anti-

government protesters in North Africa could live broadcast the ongoing events with a connected cell phone and people in as far as the United States could watch them in real time.

Therefore, the “cyber-utopians,” who are optimistic about the political impacts of the internet, argue that the internet can increasingly expose people of authoritarian countries to the Western lifestyle and democratic values. As Marc Lynch (2011) writes, with the internet, citizens in authoritarian regimes can learn more about the outside world and develop aspirations for domestic change. Moreover, as ordinary citizens participate in producing and distributing information via the internet, it becomes harder for authoritarian governments to control the flow of information and to suppress dissenting opinions. The argument of the “cyber-utopians” relies on the assumption that the internet can serve as a tool of disseminating democratic values, and ultimately, liberating society from the repressive state regardless of varying contexts where a particular regime rules and survives.

As examined in the following sections of this chapter, the internet does not necessarily help to increase the public support for democracy or decrease the public support for the regime. In China, the rapid development of the internet, as discussed in Chapter II, does not make the Chinese public more enthusiastic, or less skeptical, about the idea of democracy and democratization advocated by the Western world. From the perspective of the political process theory, in today’s China, the majority of the public is lacking insurgent consciousness, and even among those who are critical about the CCP regime, there is no consensus on the prospect of a democratic transition.

3.2 Public Perception of Democracy and Regime Support in China

Defining democracy

What is democracy? The first known use of the English word *democracy* was in 1539; the word is a derivative of Middle French *democracie* and Late Latin *dēmocratia*, which can be further traced back to the Greek word *dēmokratía* (“Democracy,” n.d.). In Greek, *demo* means the people, and *kratia* means rule or power. Therefore, the etymological interpretation of democracy is rule by the people. Defined by the most recent version of the Merriam Webster dictionary, democracy refers to “government by the people,” especially “rule of the majority,” or more specifically, “a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections.”

Democracy is one of the most contested concepts in political science. The most widely accepted definitions of democracy emphasize procedures instead of substantive policies or other outcomes that might be viewed as democratic (Collier & Levitsky, 1997; Baviskar & Malone, 2004). This procedure-centric conceptualization of democracy follows the original works of Joseph Schumpeter (1950) and Robert Dahl (1971).

According to Schumpeter (1950), “a democracy is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.” In other words, the democratic process involves the selection of leaders through competitive

elections and free votes. Schumpeter's (1950) interpretation of democracy is partly a rebuttal to what he calls the "classic doctrine," a view that democracy is a process by which voters identify the common good and elected officials carry this out for them. He argues that this common good is impossible to determine and elected officials do not necessarily represent the public interest. Instead, Schumpeter only focuses on the institutional aspect of democracy and insists that all political decisions are the products of the political competition.

However, Frederic Schaffer (1998) challenges the Schumpeterian definition of democracy. Schaffer argues, without purposes, institutions may lose their sense and democracy may deviate from its original essence. He suggests an alternative way of understanding democracy by examining the ideals toward which electoral institutions are oriented. Schaffer acknowledges the plurality and complexity of contexts and standards in different societies and rejects a universal definition of democracy.

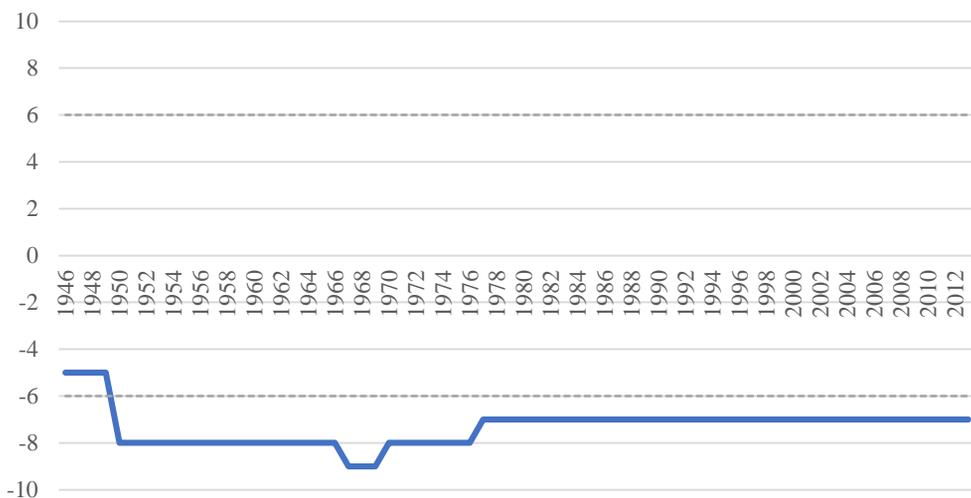
David Potter (1997) also prefers a definition of democracy far broader than Schumpeter's "procedural minimum." He suggests that a liberal democracy should consist of four elements: accountable government, free and fair competitive elections, civil and political rights, and associational autonomy, while a partial democracy only has a government with limited accountability to citizens, competitive elections that are unfree and unfair, curtailed civil and political rights, and more or less compromised associational autonomy. In terms of authoritarian regimes, as Potter (1997) points out, the government there is not accountable to citizens through elections; there is no competitive election; there are severe restrictions on civil and

political rights; and lastly, autonomous associations and organizations critical of the state are virtually non-existent.

China's level of democracy perceived by the world

As discussed so far, competitive elections that are free and fair are a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for being a democracy. Therefore, China is by no means a democratic country since its one-party rule is at odds with even the most permissive standard for being a democracy. Polity IV tracks countries' annual Polity scores from 1946 to 2013. A country is considered as a democracy when its score falls in +6 and above; it is an autocracy when its score goes under -6. China's Polity score (see Figure 3) begins at -8 in 1950 and reaches as low as -9 between 1967 and 1969. The score improves to -7 in 1977 and remains at that level until the most recent surveyed years.

Figure 3. Authority Trends of China: 1946-2013

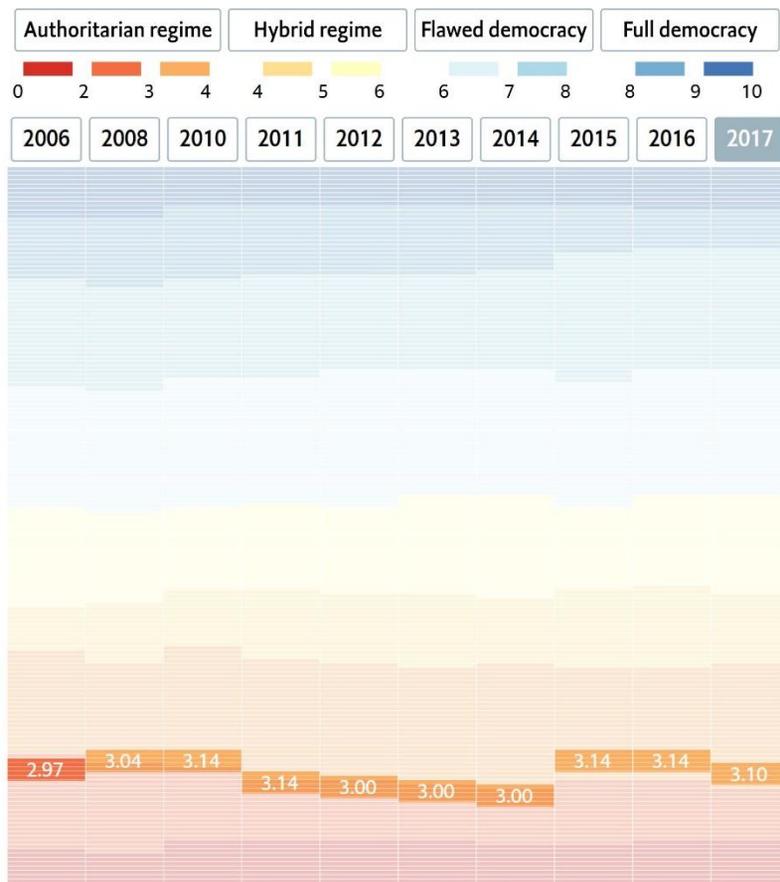


Source: Polity IV (2014)

Beginning in 2006, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has been publishing annual Democracy Index reports for 165 independent states and two territories. According to the EIU's official website, its Democracy Index is based on five

categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture. Based on its scores on a range of indicators within these categories, each country is classified as one of four types of regime: full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime, and authoritarian regime. The closer to zero the score is, the more authoritarian the country is in a certain category or in a general sense. From 2006 to 2017, China has been consistently categorized as an authoritarian regime (see Figure 4). In the EIU's 2017 report, China, with an overall score of 3.10, is ranked 139th among 167 states and territories and is one of the 52 authoritarian regimes.

Figure 4. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit (n.d.)

China's level of democracy perceived by the Chinese public

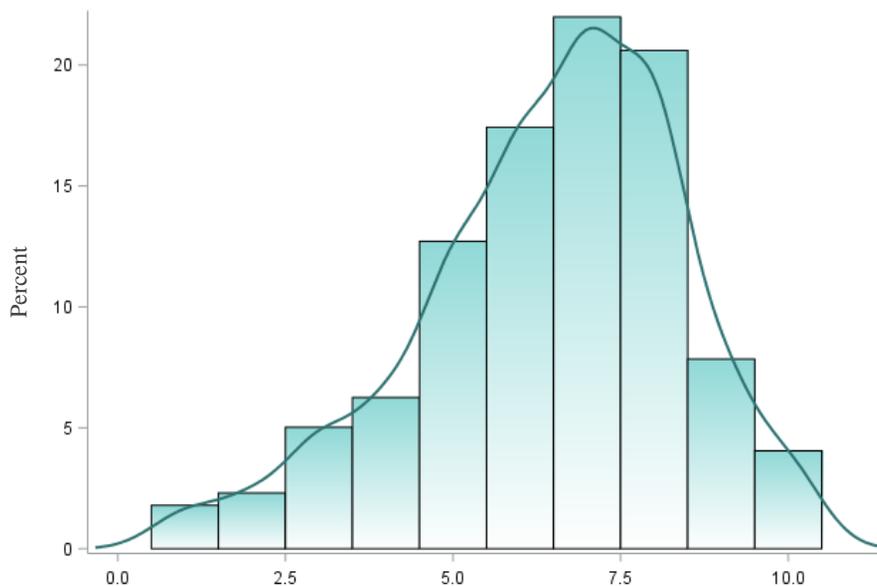
Intellectuals outside of China seem to have reached a consensus on the authoritarian nature of the People's Republic of China. Freedom House, the Polity IV, and the Economist Intelligence Unit unanimously classify China as an authoritarian country with limited freedom. If the majority of the Chinese public also shares this perspective, chances are the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party is facing a serious challenge. How does the Chinese public perceive the level of democracy in China? Do their perceptions conform with the mainstream views outside of the country? And if the Chinese public perceives China's level of democracy differently, what could be the reason? The following paragraphs attempt to answer these questions based on the survey data of the World Values Survey and the Public Goods and Political Support Surveys led by Bruce Dickson (2016).

The World Values Survey (WVS) is a global network of social scientists studying changing values and their impact on social and political life, carried out by an international team of scholars, with the WVS Association and WWSA Secretariat headquartered in Vienna, Austria (World Values Survey, n.d.). According to the World Values Survey, the method of data collection is face-to-face interviews or phone interviews for remote areas by professional organizations. Samples are representative of all residents above the age of 18 in the country surveyed. The analysis of this section is based on the World Values Survey's Wave 6 data on China, which was collected between 2010 and 2012, and includes 2,300 observations in total.

In the questionnaire of the WVS Wave 6 survey, question V141 measures the respondent's perceived degree of democraticness of China's political system.

The English version of the question is “how democratically is China being governed today?” and the respondents were asked to choose an integer number between 1 and 10, where 1 means “not at all democratic” and 10 means “completely democratic.” The survey result suggests that at the 95 percent confidence level, the average score of the question V141 is between 6.36 and 6.53, and at least 50 percent of the respondents chose a score equal to or greater than 7.0, which means the majority of the Chinese public perceive China as “democratic.”

Figure 5. Relative Frequency Histogram of Responses to the Question: How "democratic" is China?

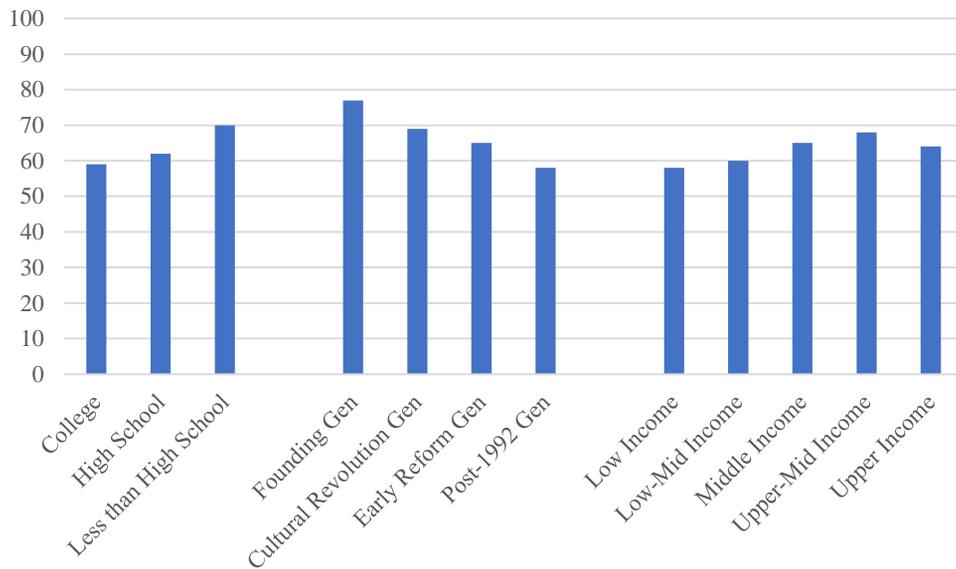


Source: World Values Survey

Bruce Dickson’s book *The Dictator's Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party's Strategy for Survival* (2016) analyzes two waves of the Public Goods and Political Support Surveys in 50 Chinese cities, conducted by the Research Center for Contemporary China of Peking University in 2010 and 2014. As shown in Figure 6, on average, the satisfaction with the current level of democracy in China scores between 60 and 70, which conforms with the conclusion drawn from the WVS Wave

6 survey that the Chinese public generally considers China as democratic. When considering different demographic groups, we can observe that the better-educated, younger, or poorer segment of society are less satisfied with the current level of democracy in China compared to those who have less education, are older, or have a higher income.

Figure 6. Satisfaction with Current Level of Democracy in China
(percent satisfied or very satisfied)



Source: Bruce Dickson, *The Dictator's Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party's Strategy for Survival* (2016); 2014 Public Goods and Political Support Surveys

The survey also asked respondents to rate the level of democracy in different periods of contemporary China (see Table 1). In 2010, the majority of the respondents think China's level of democracy is "somewhat low" or "little or none at all" in 1979 and the mid-1990s and is "somewhat high" or "very high" in 2010 and five years later. Similarly, in 2014, over 50 percent of respondents consider the level of democracy in 1979, the mid-1990s, and the mid-2000s as "somewhat low" or "little or none at all," while the majority of them (59.1%) think the present level of democracy is "somewhat high" or "very high." Moreover, there is a larger percentage of

respondents (83.1%) who think China’s level of democracy is “somewhat high” or “very high” in five years from 2014. The results indicate that the majority of the Chinese public thinks China is more democratic now than before and most of them believe China will become increasingly democratic in the future.

Table 1. Changing Levels of Democracy in Contemporary China

(0-10 scale; numbers in rows are percentages; boldfaced cells represent the majority of public opinion for those years)

2010					
Level of democracy in:	1979	Mid-1990s	Now (2010)	5 years from now (2015)	
Very high (9-10)	3.6	3.6	5.3	20.5	
Somewhat high (6-8)	25.5	39.7	50.1	55.4	
Somewhat low (3-5)	52.7	49.1	37.9	20.9	
Little or none at all (0-2)	18.3	7.6	6.9	3.2	
Average	4.4	5.2	5.7	6.8	

2014					
Level of democracy in:	1979	Mid-1990s	Mid-2000s	Now (2014)	5 years from now (2019)
Very high (9-10)	3	2.7	3.7	7.4	27.6
Somewhat high (6-8)	21.4	31.4	42.7	51.7	55.5
Somewhat low (3-5)	46.3	50.6	45.5	35.1	14.2
Little or none at all (0-2)	29.2	15.2	8.2	5.7	2.9
Average	3.93	4.67	5.34	5.9	7.2

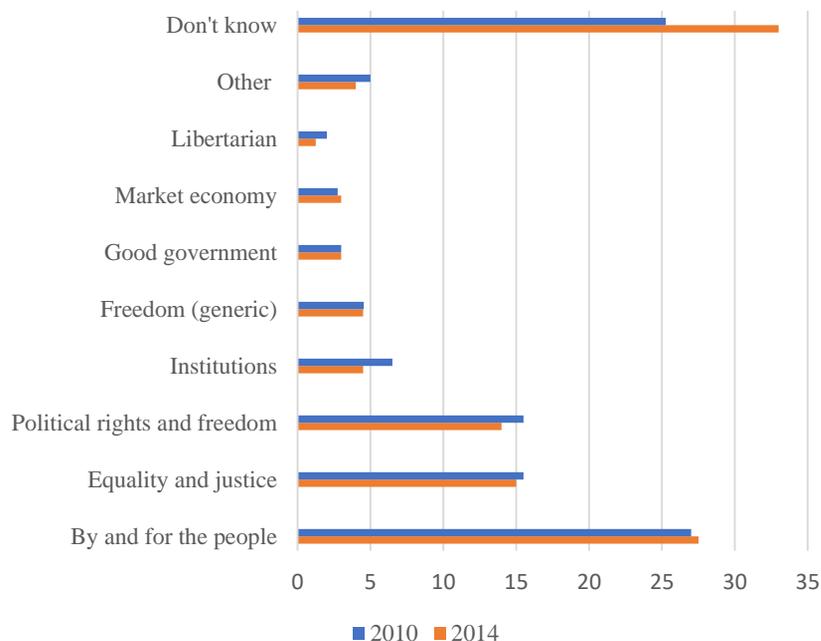
Source: Bruce Dickson, *The Dictator's Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party's Strategy for Survival* (2016); 2010 & 2014 Public Goods and Political Support Surveys

Alternative definition: democracy with Chinese characteristics?

Although outside observers unanimously perceive China as an authoritarian regime, according to the World Values Survey and the Public Goods and Political Support Surveys, the majority of the Chinese public thinks that China is at least somewhat democratic and it will be more democratic in the near future. The contradiction between the two perspectives results from the different understanding of democracy. Democracy, like other social constructs, is not supposed to be universal; its meaning and function vary across time and space (Möbrant, 2016).

In the Public Goods and Political Support Surveys, respondents were asked an open-ended question: “Everybody talks about democracy, but in your view, what does ‘democracy’ actually mean?” Although competitive elections are the sine qua non of democracy defined by most scholars, they are less consequential for the Chinese public (Dickson, 2016). According to Bruce Dickson’s (2016) survey analysis, only 3.1 percent of the respondents in 2010 and 2.9 percent in 2014 mentioned elections while defining democracy. Some respondents mentioned other institutional aspects of democracy, including rule of law, a multi-party system, and the presence of a legislature. Even after combining these responses into a single category of “institutions,” still less than 5 percent of respondents in 2014 defined democracy in such a way (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Popular Definitions of Democracy in Urban China
(percent who defined democracy with each term)



Source: Bruce Dickson, *The Dictator's Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party's Strategy for Survival* (2016); 2014 Public Goods and Political Support Surveys

Most frequently mentioned three categories are “by and for the people,” “equality and justice,” and “political rights and freedom.” Nearly 30 percent defined democracy as a government that is governed by and for the people, which focuses on the government’s responsiveness to public opinion and the interest, power, or authority of the people. Around 15 percent of respondents answered “equality and justice,” which mainly concerns the horizontal relationships within society, and another 15 percent answered “political rights and freedom,” which is related to the vertical relationship between the state and society. Other categories of answers include freedom in a generic sense, good government, market economy, and freedom in a libertarian sense. Yet, less than 5 percent of responses fall into each of these categories.

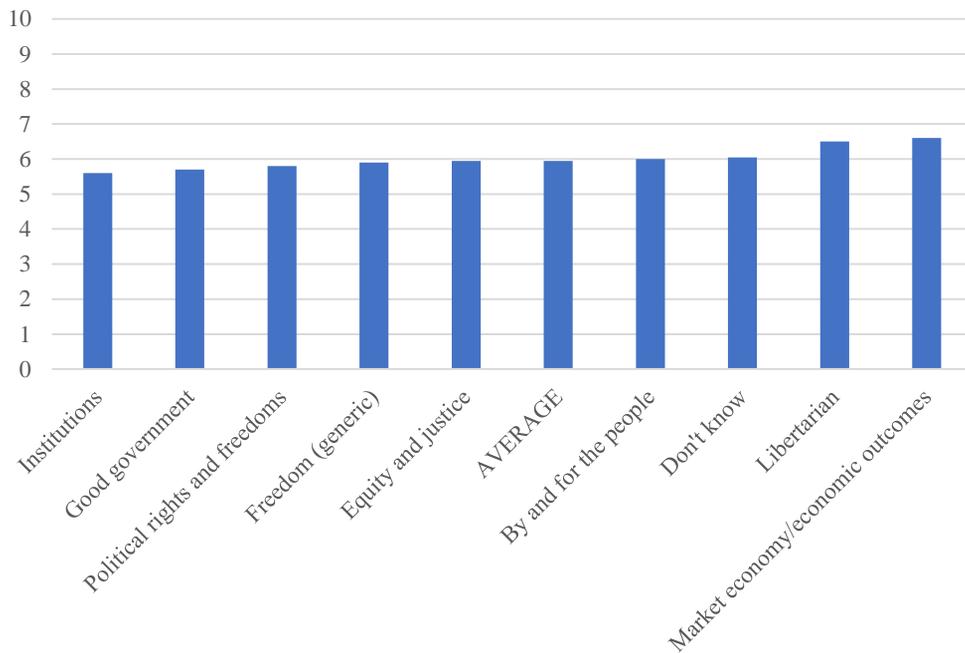
Therefore, the majority of the Chinese public values the ends of democracy such as a government by and for the people, equality, justice, and political rights and freedom. However, they do not consider many of the means of democracy, including rule of law, competitive elections, multi-party system, and representative legislature, which are deemed indispensable for achieving the ends of democracy by others, are a consequential part of democracy. This unique perspective has roots in their different understanding of the relationship between the state and society, their experience of socialization, and China’s political culture.

The original assumption behind the democratic design of a government is that rational individuals tend to maximize their personal gains and without checks and balances, politicians will abuse power for their own interests. There is a fundamental conflict of interest between the government and society. Only with rule of law, regular and competitive elections that are free and fair, freedom of expression,

and many other institutional designs, could a government be constrained effectively and be accountable to the public who has granted it power.

In contrast, many ordinary Chinese do not see the inherent conflict between the government and society. They tend to believe in the benevolent leaders who can virtually rule on behalf of society. Thus, institutional designs such as elections that encourage the government to behave in a desired way are seen as less important for them, since even without those institutions, a benevolent state can respond to the public demands and maintain justice and equality, and citizens can participate in politics in ways other than competitive elections or party politics.

Figure 8. Definitions of Democracy and Perceived Level of Democracy in China



Source: 2014 Public Goods and Political Support Surveys

Another factor affecting the public perception of democracy in China is the experience of socialization. In May 2013, the CCP's Document 9 announced seven topics that are forbidden in classrooms: universal values, civil rights, civil society,

press freedoms, judicial independence, past mistakes of the Party, and the newly wealthy and politically connected capitalist class. In the survey, the second most popular answer is “don’t know.” Many Chinese people have had limited opportunities to learn or discuss the meanings of democracy outside of the boundary defined by the state. National news and school textbooks selectively portray the image of democratic countries and associate democratization with disorder, corruption, and low efficiency.

Also, the Chinese political culture is averse to risks and instability. Having witnessed the varying consequences of the Arab Spring, many people are fearful that the Chinese state would collapse or violent conflicts would occur if China followed their steps. Most people prefer the status quo and think the multi-party system, competing interest groups, and demonstrations can lead to social chaos and instability (Dickson, 2016).

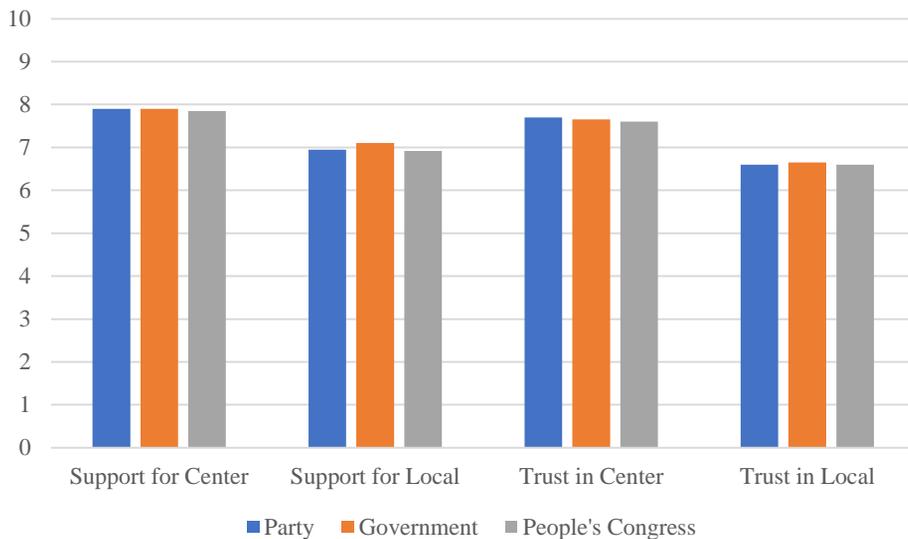
As shown in Figure 8, how people understand the meaning of democracy influences how they perceive China’s level of democracy. The respondents who think institutions are an important part of democracy have less favorable views on China’s level of democracy than those whose answers fall into the categories of “market economy/economic outcomes,” “libertarian,” or “don’t know.”

Regime support in China: long live the CCP?

The fact that the majority of the Chinese public thinks China is at least somewhat democratic and it will be more democratic in the near future suggests that they consider China is moving toward the right direction and are confident in the government’s ability and willingness to achieve further development.

Figure 9 from the Public Goods and Political Support Surveys shows the respondents' level of support and trust in the most important political institutions in China—the Chinese Communist Party, the government, and the People's Congress. Respondents were asked to use 0-10 scale to indicate their level of support or trust, and 0 means no support or no trust while 10 means total support or total trust. As shown in Figure 9, the level of public support or trust toward central institutions is higher than local institutions. However, in general, all three institutions—the CCP, the government, and the People's Congress—at both central and local level enjoy a high level of support and trust from the public.

Figure 9. Level of Public Trust and Support in Political Institutions



Source: Bruce Dickson, *The Dictator's Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party's Strategy for Survival* (2016); 2014 Public Goods and Political Support Surveys

To sum up, even though China is unanimously classified as an authoritarian regime by outside observers since there is no free election on the national level or multi-party competition, the majority of the Chinese public thinks China is democratic and becomes increasingly so because many ordinary Chinese do not consider institutions

such as elections and multi-party system as an essential part of democracy. People in China are optimistic about future and think that China will certainly be more democratic in the near future without a fundamental change in the current political system. The Chinese state, especially central political institutions, enjoys a high level of public support and trust. And all these conclusions are based on the surveys conducted between 2010 and 2014 when the internet has already been widespread among average households.

Seemingly, the rapid development of the internet in China has not changed the fact that most people in China do not accept the meaning of democracy defined by the West and other parts of the world and do not think China needs a fundamental change in its political system in the near future. Supporters of “electoral democracy” in China face both state suppression and public indifference (Dickson, 2016). Yet, as examined in Chapter II, the development of the internet has indeed brought about more online protests against the government. Does this mean that those who oppose the government online are simply minorities or that the internet is changing the public perception of democracy and the regime in a way that has not been captured by the surveys? The following sections closely examine the framing of issues in online protests and the motivation of protesters and attempt to answer why the Chinese Jasmine Revolution failed to stimulate public interest from the perspective of insurgent consciousness.

3.3 The Internet, a Game Changer? Protests on Social Media

The development of the internet and the rise of social media have changed the landscape of public engagement in social and even political issues. After its launch in around 2009, Sina Weibo soon became a popular platform for internet users to share information, exchange opinions, and at times, wage campaigns against social injustice and misbehaved government officials. Do these campaigns on the internet challenge the legitimacy of the government? Are people using online platforms such as Weibo to ask for democracy and regime change? The following analysis of three prominent cases reveals some of the general characteristics of online protests in China.

Case 1: Sun Zhigang incident

After graduating from Wuhan University of Science and Technology, Sun Zhigang first moved from Wuhan, Hubei Province to Shenzhen, Guangdong Province for a job opportunity (Zheng, 2008). In early 2003, he went to Guangzhou of the same province to begin working for a clothing company. On the night of March 17, 2003, Sun was stopped by local police outside of an internet café for a random identity check. Although he had a valid national identification card, a place of residence in Guangzhou, and a registered employer, he had not acquired a temporary residence permit in the city and was not carrying his national ID (Hand, 2006). Failing to provide his temporary residence permit, Sun was detained in a custody and repatriation (C&R) center on the suspicion that he was an illegal migrant (Hand, 2006).

Shockingly, Sun died three days later in the detention center's infirmary, at the age of 27. Sun's family traveled to Guangzhou to find out the real reason for his death. A postmortem examination at Zhongshan School of Medicine, Sun Yat-sen University showed that Sun suffered extensive bruising to his heart, brain, lungs, liver, and kidneys 72 hours before his death, while the detention center's infirmary had reported that his death was caused by a heart attack or a stroke (Yu, 2013; Zheng, 2003). After hearing the story from Sun's family, *Southern Metropolitan News*, a daily newspaper based in Guangzhou renowned for its investigative reporting, conducted its own investigation into Sun's death and published a full account on April 25 (Zheng, 2008). The exposure of Sun's case enraged the public and fueled vigorous discussions on the internet about the constitutionality of the C&R system, the prevalence of police abuse, and the due process of criminal investigation (Zheng, 2008).

Sun's death caused vehement online protests. The public demanded a fundamental change in the regulations that empowered police to arbitrarily detain migrants, most of whom, like Sun Zhigang, were born in poorer areas and came to cities for better economic opportunities. In May, under the enormous pressure of public opinion, central government leaders finally intervened, ordered Guangdong authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into Sun's death, and dispatched a special working group to supervise the investigation (Fan, 2003; Lin, 2003).

In mid-May, authorities formally acknowledged that Sun Zhigang had been wrongfully detained and arrested suspects who were involved in the beating of Sun (Hand, 2006). On June 27, two people found directly responsible for Sun's death were sentenced to death; ten accessories received terms of imprisonment ranging

from six months to life; and six local civil servants were sentenced to two to three years for malpractice but no police were indicted (“Sun Zhigang’s brutal killers,” 2003). Empowered by the internet, while paying close attention to the criminal investigation, the public also expressed their concern with the human rights violations and targeted on the C&R system. On June 20, Premier Wen Jiabao announced that the custody and repatriation system would be abolished from August 1, 2003 (Zheng, 2008).

Case 2: “My Father is Li Gang”

On the night of October 16, 2010, a college student called Chen Xiaofeng was skating inside the campus of Hebei University in Central China when a black Volkswagen Magotan driven by Li Qiming, a fresh graduate from Hebei Institute of Media, hit her and another female student. The impact sent Chen into the air and her body hit the passenger side of the windshield after she fell down. Chen immediately lost consciousness and died in hospital the next day. The 22-year-old driver Li was intoxicated and tried to speed away after the incident.

According to *China Management Time* reporter Wang Keqin’s Weibo post, when Li was intercepted by the security guards, he appeared indifferent and arrogant, saying “my father is Li Gang, take me to court if you dare.” It turned out Li Gang was the deputy police chief in Beishi District of Baoding, while the deceased victim Chen Xiaofeng was a poor farm girl (Wines, 2010). The tale of Chen’s death is precisely the type of intriguing socio-drama, in which a commoner was woefully wronged while a privileged offender was pulling strings to seek for impunity (Wines, 2010).

The government moved swiftly to restrict its media coverage and contain the story. However, at this time, the effort of censorship largely failed and “my father is Li Gang” became a popular internet phrase overnight. Millions of comments flooded Weibo, and the phrase became the code word for the “second generation of officials (*guan er dai*)” (Tong & Lei, 2014). Li Gang’s case was difficult to suppress partly because it personified a long-lasting grievance—the belief that the powerful can ignore the rules which the ordinary are forced to comply with (Wines, 2010).

Online, many people started to post sarcastic sentences using the phrase “my father is Li Gang.” On October 20, a blogger nicknamed Piggy Feet Beta announced a contest to incorporate the phrase into classical Chinese poems and there were six thousand people that replied (Wines, 2010). At Tudou.com, a Chinese video-sharing website, some creative internet user changed the lyrics of a popular song “My Name Is Xiao Shen Yang” and retitled it with “My Father Is Named Li Gang.” The phrase “my father is Li Gang” instantly became a way to express frustration and criticism toward the government and social injustice. As the public outrage was escalating, on October 22, China’s national television network CCTV broadcasted Li Qiming and his father Li Gang’s tearful apologies in an interview. Two days later, Li Qiming was arrested. He was sentenced to six years and was ordered to pay both victims compensations.

Case 3: Wenzhou train collision

Each year, thousands of millions of people in China travel by train. By 2017, high-speed rail has extended to 29 of 33 China’s provincial-level administrative divisions and exceeds 25,000 kilometers in total length, which accounts for around two-thirds of the world’s high-speed rail in commercial service (An, 2017). High-speed rail

developed rapidly in the past 15 years with generous government funding and the expansion appeared unstoppable until July 23, 2011, when two high-speed trains collided on the Ningbo–Taizhou–Wenzhou Railway in Lucheng District of Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province (“High-speed rail,” n.d.). The accident occurred when one train traveling near Wenzhou rear-ended another train that stalled in the middle of a bridge. The two trains derailed each other and four carriages of the rear train fell off the bridge, crashing into the ground over 20 meters below.

The accident killed 40 people and injured nearly 200. This was the first fatal collision that involved high-speed trains in China, though high speed was not the main cause of the accident since the crashed train was traveling at a speed no more than 99 km/h. Right after the collision, the Ministry of Railways said the first train seemed to have been stalled by a lightning strike (Chin, 2011). Three days after the accident, the state media reported that the government had reached a tentative agreement to compensate the victims’ families 500,000 yuan each but did not offer major new information about the cause of the collision.

After the accident, anger and skepticism exploded on the internet, especially on Weibo. Many people used social media to express their discontent with the government’s lack of transparency, questioning its intention when the fallen carriages were hurriedly buried and the rescue for survivors ended in haste. According to Josh Chin’s (2011) report on *The Wall Street Journal*, Weibo user Yan Youming posted on July 26: “In the eyes of the authorities, regular people will always be gullible three-year-old children.” Thousands of new postings on Weibo blamed the government for its opaque handling of the disaster. For some internet users in China, the accident and its handling by the government intensified a broader

sense of frustration and indignation about the government's inability after a series of corruption scandals and public safety incidents occurred. "When a country is corrupt to the point that a single lightning strike can cause a train crash, the passing of a truck can collapse a bridge, and drinking a few bags of milk powder can cause kidney stones, none of us are exempted," written by one Weibo user, "China today is a train traveling through a lightning storm. None of us are spectators; all of us are passengers" (Chin, 2011).

In response to the accident and the increasing public criticism, Sheng Guangzu, then Minister of Railways, initiated a comprehensive two-month review on the railway safety. On August 10, the government announced that it was suspending approvals of any new high-speed rail lines ("China freezes new railway projects," 2011). The investigation was completed in December 2011 and concluded that the cause of the accident was the malfunctioned signal systems which failed to warn the second train and some management failures from railway officials. For the first time since the development of high-speed rail, the maximum speed of high-speed trains was cut by 40 to 50 km/h. From July to September, ridership of high-speed rail in China dropped by about 30 million to 151 million trips (Rabinovitch, 2011).

Characteristics and limitations of online protests

The three cases presented earlier share some common features of online protests. As pointed out by Yanqi Tong and Shaohua Lei (2014), in order to mobilize public opinion, the initiator of online protests tends to frame an unjust event in a succinct way, which in many cases is achieved by filling the public with rage against immoral behaviors of government officials.

In the Sun Zhigang case, after *Southern Metropolitan News* boldly disclosed the cause of Sun's death, the public became furious at how local authorities unfairly treated migrant workers and how police arbitrarily used their power. The internet facilitated speedy dissemination of the news and lively discussions on the issue, forcing the central government to take actions and abolish the custody and repatriation system entirely. In the case of "my father is Li Gang," Weibo users were enraged by how the government and traditional media tried to cover up the story and enthusiastically demanded justice for the victims. Within a very short period, the sentence "my father is Li Gang" became a common satire on the privileged "second-generation of officials," who tend not to fulfill their social responsibilities or observe expected moral standards. Eventually, Li Qiming and his father Li Gang made a public apology on the national TV and the former received a sentence of imprisonment.

Similarly, in response to the Wenzhou train collision, people called for bringing irresponsible officials to justice. The attempts of cover-up and lack of transparency further angered the now better-connected public. With the tools of social media, ordinary citizens at the scene became journalists, informing internet users all over the country with firsthand information. Under watchful eyes, the government for the first time suspended its ambitious high-speed train projects and conducted a thorough safety review. In all three cases, the frustration and indignation of the public went beyond the incidents themselves, reflecting the deeper discontent of the public toward the unfair treatment to the powerless and the prevailing corruption and incompetency among government officials. But does this suggest the majority of the public want to replace the regime with democracy?

Most online protests in China are limited to random and isolated events and there have been few attempts to connect these isolated events and create a sustained social movement. In all three cases examined above, the discontented public did not ask for a fundamental change in China's political system. They did not pursue replacement of the one-party rule or establishment of democracy. The death of Sun Zhigang in custody, the death of Chen Xiaofeng after being hit by Li Qiming, and the fatal crash of two high-speed trains were all unexpected tragic accidents. Even though the public framed the issues as incidents of social injustice or government irresponsibility, they did not consider the authoritarian regime as the origin of the problems or regard democratic transition as a remedy.

Moreover, instead of asking for liberating society from authoritarian control, many protesters consider the involved officials as anomalous individuals and most of them desire intervention from a higher-level government or the central state. All three cases ended with the intervention of the central government, and people's interest toward the incidents faded quickly after an expedient compromise was made among the involved parties. Most of them went back to their everyday life until the next event triggered another public opinion turmoil. As Tong and Lei (2013) point out, most online protests in China belong to the "problem-solving" type and the public interest subsides instantly after the case reaches a conclusion; each case they have studied experiences a cycle of "concern → excitement → calming down → forgetting."

The emergence of microblog itself is a reflection of fast food culture among contemporary consumers—they rush through life in search of instant gratification (Blake, 2010); when stimulated, they tend to be impulsive and get excited easily; but

when things turn out to be more complicated than they have thought, they become increasingly impatient. If internet users engage in an incident with an attitude of watching for excitement, or they are more interested in vesting frustration than pursuing social justice in the long run, they will not form any common interest or bring a structural change effectively (Tong & Lei, 2013; Yang, 2008). Consequently, the seemingly revolutionary internet activism is not forming a continuous social movement in China.

3.4 The Chinese Jasmine Revolution and Insurgent Consciousness

With these characteristics of China's internet activism in mind, it is easier to understand why the Chinese Jasmine Revolution has failed to mobilize public opinions. Its organizers' first call on the internet tried to appeal to a wide range of audience by framing the issue from various angles. A long list of recent scandals and social problems in China was posted:

“Whether you are a parent of a baby with kidney stones, or are someone who has been forcibly evicted, or share a collective flat, or are a demobilized soldier, or a teacher at the cooperatively-run school, or lost your pension to recent bank buyouts, or a laid-off worker, or a petitioner... whether are a signatory of Charter 08, a Falun Gong practitioner, a Communist Party member, or a representative of a democratic party; or even if you are just an onlooker, at this moment, you and I are both Chinese people, and you and I are both Chinese people

who still have dreams for the future...” (Chinese Jasmine Revolution, n.d.; Thornton, 2015)

The organizers also proposed some slogans that participants could use during the protesting walk:

“We want food; we want work; we want housing!

We want justice; we want fairness!

Guarantee private property rights; preserve judicial independence!

Initiate political reform; end one-party dictatorship!

Deregulate newspapers; freedom of the press!

Long live freedom; long live democracy!”

(Chinese Jasmine Revolution, n.d.)

The initiators of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution were trying to build a collective sense of injustice among the public through such online posts. They attempted to arouse the public awareness of the severity of China’s problems in all areas, including social, economic as well as political spheres. After enumerating the problems, they tried to bring people together with a nationalistic appeal—even though we may be from all different walks of life and facing different types of troubles, we share one identity, that is, we are all Chinese. Among the proposed slogans, there were demands not only for subsistence like food, work, and housing but also for rather abstract objects like justice, freedom, and democracy.

The explicit appeals for regime change distinguish the call for the Chinese Jasmine Revolution from other cases of online mobilization. As discussed earlier, most people who participate in online protests do not fundamentally challenge the authority of the central state. In many cases, instead of regime change, protesters ask

for intervention from the state. The central state is considered as a benevolent parent-like figure who can bring justice to misbehaved local officials (Tong & Lei, 2014). As the previous section suggests and Bruce Dickson (2011) argues, the current regime of China enjoys a high level of public support and democracy is not perceived as the only path to China's future. There has been no sufficient evidence yet that the Chinese public universally embraces the notion of democracy.

Also, even though many people may share the opinions about food safety, land disputes, pensions, and labor rights, they probably cannot reach a consensus about political dissidents, Falun Gong practitioners, or political reforms. Unlike the cases of Sun Zhigang's death, "my father is Li Gang," or the Wenzhou train collision, in which public mobilization was easily achieved because of the strong consensus among the public around these single issues, the Chinese Jasmine Revolution quoted a wide range of recent events involving a wide range of people. Consequently, despite its appeal to nationalism, it made the consensus harder to reach. Moreover, the call for the Chinese Jasmine Revolution lacked a central issue that could bring drama and excitement, which has been an important element in the successful cases of online mobilization.

A comparative perspective

What is the role of the internet in social movement in other non-democratic contexts? Does the development of the internet have causal effects on regime change? To answer these questions and to highlight the unique nature of the political context where the Chinese Jasmine Revolution was situated, the following part briefly examines the case of the Tunisian Revolution as a comparison. Through a comparative analysis, the author expects to offer some deeper insights into the role

of the internet in social movement and the significance of the political context where the movement operates. The political process theory remains a useful theoretical framework to analyze the Tunisian Revolution.

Before the self-immolation of Bouazizi in December 2010, discontent toward Ben Ali regime had already been widespread. Sidi Bouzid is a small town in the southern interior of Tunisia, which has a long history of resistance to the national government and was once the locus of the most serious, organized and sustained social unrest during Ben Ali regime (Willis, 2011). In early 2008, protests and riots broke out in a number of small towns in the area when the hiring of the unemployed university graduates for a national phosphate company turned out to have been operated in a nepotistic way (Lowrance, 2016). Increased unemployment, soaring commodity prices, insufficient public services, and blatant forms of corruption had been fueling people's resentment of the regime long before December 2010; the Tunisian Revolution was only a culminating point of the mass struggle against the authoritarian government (Zemni, 2015). Different from China, the demand for regime change was mounting in Tunisia before the advent of the revolution.

By juxtaposing the political contexts of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution and the Tunisian Revolution, it is easy to identify both similarities and differences. By 2011, China and Tunisia had a similar internet penetration rate which was more than 30 percent, and a significant proportion of internet users in both countries have been students. In both countries, online media and social networking platforms have become more influential in people's lives than ever. Both countries were facing the problems of socioeconomic inequality and corruption. As a result, both countries had been experiencing an increased number of social protests by the time of the Arab

Spring. Moreover, both states adopted authoritarian methods to deter challengers and maintain regime stability, though they received contrasting results.

However, in China, popular protests rarely target the central government; many do not have explicit political demands; the purpose of them is mainly to receive material compensations or to realize justice in isolated cases. In general, the CCP regime in China enjoys a high level of public support, thanks to its remarkable economic reforms, among other reasons. In Tunisia, anti-regime protests have deep roots in history. Despite state suppression in most public spheres, universities and labor unions have provided relatively safe spaces for their members to express political criticism. The discontent toward Ben Ali regime was increasing as the government turned out to be incapable of addressing social problems that were affecting the key aspects of people's lives, especially the high unemployment rate among the young people. In China, steady economic growth, political institutionalization, and rising international status have been nurturing optimism, while in Tunisia, uncontrolled inflation, long period of one-man rule, and declining public confidence toward the government were creating pessimism.

3.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, despite the rapid development of the internet in China and increasing internet activism against the government, the call for the Chinese Jasmine Revolution could not efficiently mobilize people to join its anti-regime protests. Against the expectation of the "cyber-utopians," the development of the internet does not necessarily generate a more favorable perception of democracy or lead to

widespread anti-regime sentiment. Western democracy lacks appeal among the majority of the Chinese public and the current regime is enjoying a high level of public support.

Although the number of large-scale online protests has increased since the emergence of Weibo, protesters usually do not ask for regime change or democratization and consider social justice can be sought without a fundamental change in China's political system. Most online protests are limited to random and isolated events and public interest fades quickly after a single case reaches a conclusion with central interventions. Attempts at connecting those isolated cases are rare and therefore the internet is not nurturing sustained social movements aspiring to democratization. Fighters for democracy in China are facing the challenge from both the state and society.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH: THE INTERNET AS A TOOL OF SOCIAL MOBILIZATION

4.1 “Cyber-Utopian” Perspective: Mobilization and Democratization

For authoritarian regimes, one of the most direct, powerful and formidable impacts of the internet is its facilitation of speedy and often unexpected large-scale popular mobilization (Diamond, 2010). Even for some “cyber-utopians,” the development of democratic values and insurgent consciousness alone does not suffice to bring about a fundamental change in the political system. How to mobilize the like-minded individuals and tie them to the groups that organize collective action is crucial to any bottom-up revolution.

Before the internet became a popular way of communication, activists and organizers of social protest had to rely on traditional means, such as public speeches, telephone calls, and printed materials, to advertise their cause, attract potential participants, and coordinate their actions during the protest. They also depended on established institutions, including labor unions, professional associations, as well as their personal social networks consisting of family members, close friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. In an authoritarian context, where the free flow of information is restricted and political resistance against authorities is widely perceived as highly risky, preexisting personal social networks are particularly important to create ties between organizers and participants and to build trust among

them. Personal social networks can reduce barriers to participation by opening channels for uncensored materials to circulate, diffusing the risks of association, and even substituting for a public sphere (Vala & O'Brien, 2008).

Such a traditional way of mobilizing the public and coordinating collective action faces various obstacles. First of all, it has limited public reach. In an authoritarian context, anti-government activists have few formal channels to spread their messages. For most activists with an anti-government agenda, mass media such as television and newspapers is neither accessible nor affordable. Public speeches, phone calls, and printed materials like posters and pamphlets are not only costly but also vulnerable to government surveillance and suppression. Overly depending on established institutions and intimate circles also limits the scope of mobilization. Moreover, in many authoritarian regimes, civic associations are closely controlled by the government and tend to keep activists at a distance.

Second, traditional ways of mobilizing the public and organizing social protests rely on strong leadership and rigid hierarchy, which can restrict the free flow of information internally and increase the time for responding to unexpected development of events. Last but not least, it is hard to build trust beyond the activists' intimate circle. Timur Kuran (1991) uses the term "preference falsification" to describe the phenomenon that in situations where revealing one's true preference is risky, people tend to talk and behave in a politically correct way even though their genuine preference is the opposite to what they say and do. Because so many people do not reveal their true preference, those with a similar preference are not aware of each other's existence, are unable to estimate accurately how widespread the shared

preference is, and consequently cannot cooperate to realize their preferred outcome (Dickson, 2016; Kuran, 1991).

However, the advent of the internet gives many people hopes, among whom the “cyber-utopians” are the most optimistic. Howard Rheingold (2002) coined the term “smart mobs” to refer to a group of individuals who are connected and empowered by digital communication technologies and are able to communicate and coordinate efficiently during protests and other collective actions. Activists are no longer constrained by their personal social networks and established institutions. The public, now well-connected, can be reached by ambitious political activists with much fewer financial and temporal costs. Some capable activists and their organizations can also use the internet to find international allies and push their issues onto the global stage. Therefore, some “cyber-utopians” argue that a new global society has emerged (Tehrani, 1997).

The internet can also alleviate the problem of “preference falsification.” It makes it easier for people to learn if others are sharing similar preferences with them (Mishra, 2012). Increased communication can mitigate the uncertainty that often surrounds decision making and make people more willing to take actions. Lastly, unlike the traditional means of communication, the internet requires higher technological skills for authoritarian governments to control. Within a more decentralized organizational structure, the government may not be able to identify protest leaders or suppress collective action from a single point. From the “cyber-utopian” perspective, all these advantages of the internet help to mobilize and organize the like-minded individuals who believe in democratic values and share the anti-regime sentiment, and to bring about democracy eventually.

4.2 The Internet and China's Civil Society

Emerging civil society in China?

Does China have a civil society? Before answering the question, it is necessary to define what civil society is. There are at least three ways of interpreting civil society. First, civil society is defined as part of society, and it refers to associational life in which social members cooperate with each other for collective goals (Alagappa, 2004). Second, civil society is a type of society—a “good society” that promotes positive norms and values and achieves desirable social goals (Kim, 2017). Third, scholars consider civil society as a public sphere where individuals can freely express opinions, discuss social problems, and develop collective solutions (Wessler & Freudenthaler, 2017).

The third interpretation of civil society prevails among contemporary social scientists. Regarding civil society as a public sphere emphasizes its relation with the state and other social institutions. According to Philippe Schmitter (1997), civil society is a set or system of self-organized intermediary groups that (1) are relatively independent of governmental, production-related or familial social institutions, (2) are capable of deliberating about and taking collective actions in defense or promotion of their common interests, (3) but do not seek to replace any other aforementioned social institutions or to usurp political power, (4) but do act within pre-established rules of a “civil” or legal nature.

Depending on the social context, civil society varies in the degree of autonomy and self-organization, and its relationship with the state can be either contentious or cooperative. Furthermore, the existence of civil society is not a

prerequisite either for the collapse of dictatorship or for the transition to democracy (Schmitter, 1997). The “democratic effect” of civil society is conditioned by the response of the state, by the connection among civil society, political society, and legislatures, and by the specific international context (Alagappa, 2004).

If civil society is understood as a public sphere where the public can freely express its opinions, including criticism against political leaders, their policies, and even the legitimacy of the regime, China does not have a civil society. The party-state dominates the society and civic associations in China are tightly bound to it by legal and administrative regulations that govern them, by restricted financial autonomy, by the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party, and by the “double-posting” of personnel—government and party cadres are appointed to serve jointly as officials of the organization (Gallagher, 2004). Based on Bruce Dickson’s (2016) study on China’s NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), most of them, including some of the most visible and politically well-connected ones, are fettered by difficulties in registration as an NGO. A few of them that have managed to get registered are hampered by difficulties in carrying out their programs, even when their goals are non-political and service-oriented.

Yet, if civil society is defined in a broader term, which includes all social institutions, autonomous or not, that are non-production-related, nongovernmental and non-familial, then civil society is emerging in China. It coexists with the authoritarian government and focuses on non-political issues; it frequently cooperates and interacts with the state. While it does not aim at political change, it nevertheless serves the marginalized groups of people whose needs have not been adequately addressed by the state since China’s economic reforms in the 1980s and

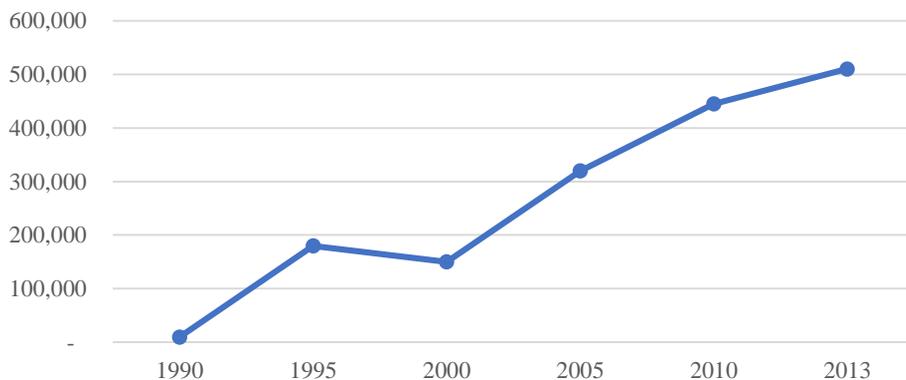
1990s eliminated comprehensive welfare benefits distributed through work units in urban areas and lifetime employment of workers.

The CCP is willing to utilize NGOs for providing under-served social needs but is also determined to suppress any organized challenge to its monopoly on the state power (Svensson, 2016). To survive in China's restricted public space, NGOs have to be cautious about the kinds of activities they engage in and support the political status quo. In general, China's civil society does not serve as a democratic force; on the contrary, it improves the quality of governance and strengthens the public support for the regime.

The Internet, civil society, and social mobilization

As illustrated in Figure 10, the number of registered NGOs (social organizations, non-state non-enterprise units, and foundations) increases from less than 10,000 in the late 1980s to more than 500,000 in 2013 (The Economist, 2014). The internet has played an indispensable role in this development (Yang, 2009). Before the 1990s, even the most broadly defined civil society was close to non-existence in China.

Figure 10. Number of Registered NGOs in China



Source: The Economist (2014)

Activists turned the organizational structures established by the state into resources of social mobilization (Yang, 2009). From the Cultural Revolution to the pro-

democracy movement in 1989, work units and schools offered an important social basis for movement organization (Calhoun, 1997).

In the early 1990s, voluntary organizations started to revive and new types of social organizations appeared, ranging from officially registered civic organizations to informal grassroots associations, student organizations, and leisure clubs (Yang, 2009). Although far from being an autonomous civil society, compared to the 1980s and earlier periods, these new organizations enjoyed a higher degree of freedom (Keith, Lin, & Lie, 2003).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the rapid development of the internet and the “negotiated” and “contingent” nature of China’s civil society have encouraged the further growth of nonregistered organizations, informal communities, and networks that have a presence both online and offline (Svensson, 2016). New NGOs emerged in response to recent socioeconomic changes in China. For instance, there are environmental organizations and organizations that are dedicated to helping migrant workers’ children (Svensson, 2016). By 2013, it is estimated that there are around one million unregistered but still active NGOs (Dickson, 2016). These unregistered grassroots NGOs, such as the Project A and Control Center (Orphan-Disability Group) and All Migrant Schools, cannot acquire funds through legal means, are vulnerable to government crackdowns, and often suffer deficiencies in visibility, transparency, and legitimacy (Klein, 2010).

However, the rise of the internet and social media has transformed the way many activists and NGOs communicate, network and mobilize (Wang, 2015). The internet has increased the visibility of some activists and NGOs and has strengthened their ability to advertise their causes and disseminate alternative opinions that

challenge official views provided by traditional media (Svensson, 2016). China's NGOs, especially those with limited resources, benefit from cheaper and faster communication facilitated by the internet. According to Marina Svensson's (2016) study on the role of social media for civic and political engagement and social mobilization, many Chinese NGOs have created Weibo accounts, though most of them have very few followers. As of October 2013, one of the environmental organizations with the largest number of Weibo followers is Green Peace China, which has around forty thousand followers. Labor NGOs have even fewer followers and often hesitate to use Weibo due to political reasons.

With the assistance of the internet and social media, activists and NGOs employ various strategies to mobilize the public. One strategy is known as crowd-sourcing. Activists and NGOs share the information about a project or campaign through social media and enlist the participation of a large number of people. Svensson (2016) uses the example of a campaign by Deng Fei in 2013 to explain crowd-sourcing via the internet. Deng Fei is a Chinese journalist and has 4.2 million followers on his Weibo account. He wrote a post on his Weibo calling for the public to participate his campaign of raising awareness on water pollution. Many people followed his instructions and submitted photos of polluted rivers in their hometowns, which led to the creation of a new NGO—China Water Safety Foundation.

Some cases of online mobilization also involve offline activities. One instance is the 1kg project—“take a kilo more on your back”—which asks people to take books and school materials to children in rural areas and then share that experience online (Svensson, 2016). Some activists and NGOs use Weibo to live broadcast their events, while others use it to recruit volunteers and new members of

the organization (Svensson, 2016). For instance, in Beijing and other big cities, many environmental NGOs began monitoring air quality and pollution levels with the help of volunteers recruited online (Xu, 2014).

However, the internet does not fundamentally change the state-dominated, “contingent” and “negotiated” nature of China’s civil society and it remains uncertain whether the internet is also effective in mobilizing the Chinese public to engage in political issues. As manifested by the *Southern Weekly* incident and the Chinese Jasmine Revolution examined in the following sections, there appears a wide gap between expressing criticism on social media and confronting the authority in the streets. Lacking a vibrant civil society, virtue ties among individuals formed on the internet are not supported by social ties, and despite lively discourse on social media, most online interactions are not anchored in an organizational structure that can effectively facilitate social movement offline (Tkacheva et al., 2013).

As discussed in Chapter III, lack of insurgent consciousness and preference for the status quo make calls for anti-government activities less appealing. The CCP’s suppression to any form of organized challenge to its political power further limits the potential of the internet for anti-regime mobilization, which is closely analyzed in the next chapter. The following sections are about to focus on the inherent defects of organizing and mobilizing the public through the internet. The next section begins with three cases of online mobilization: Xiamen anti-paraxylene (PX) movement, Chengdu anti-PX demonstration, and the 2013 *Southern Weekly* incident. One of the three cases was a success while the others were largely ineffective.

4.3 From Social Media to Streets: Mobilizing Online

Case 1: Xiamen anti-paraxylene (PX) movement

The first case occurred in Xiamen, a major coastal city in southeastern China's Fujian Province west of the Taiwan Strait, and one of the first four special economic zones (SEZ) in 1980. Xiamen's advantageous location, open economic policies, and cultural resemblance have attracted many Taiwanese investors. Xiamen is hosting several national-level Taiwanese investment zones, including Haicang, Xinglin, and Jimei (Gu, 2016). In February 2004, a Taiwanese petrochemical company, Xianglu Group, initiated a plan to build a paraxylene (PX) plant in Haicang, Xiamen. A total of 10.8 billion Chinese yuan would be invested, making it the largest ever project in the city of Xiamen (Huang & Chen, 2006). With an expected output of 800,000 tons and an expected contribution of 80 billion Chinese yuan to Xiamen's annual GDP, the project became an essential part of the 11th Five-Year Development Plan by the National Development and Reform Commission (Zhu, 2007a). In July 2005, the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) approved the environmental impact assessment for Xianglu Group's PX project in Xiamen.

Before the PX plant began operation in the summer of 2007, Zhao Yufen, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and a chemist and researcher at the College of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering at Xiamen University, submitted a petition to halt the construction of the PX plant in March 2007, with signatures of 105 CPPCC members (Gang & Bandurski, 2011; Cody, 2007). Zhao's petition suggested a relocation of the petrochemical plant since the current location was too

close to residential areas and the possibilities of leakage or explosion posed public health and the environment in serious danger. However, instead of acknowledging the petition, the construction was accelerated (Hung, 2013).

The local residents of Xiamen had no prior knowledge of or information about the PX project until Lian Yue, a prominent writer and blogger living near Xiamen, republished a critical news report about the project from *China Business Journal* via his blog on March 18, 2007, with his long comments titled “Xiamen Suicides” (Hung, 2013). In Lian’s blog, he exhorted Xiamen residents to spread the information and raise the public awareness of the danger posed by the project. A few other websites followed his step and brought the public attention to the issue. Soon, the issue became the subject of extensive discourse among the local residents and was hotly disputed on the internet (Hung, 2013). Intellectuals, real estate developers, as well as many other ordinary Xiamen citizens, began advocating anti-PX plant movement, demanding the local government to “return my blue sky” and “protect Xiamen.”

Initially, Xiamen government defended the project by claiming that the project strictly complied with the 2003 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Law and had received approval from regulating authorities (“Haicang PX,” 2007). In May 2007, the number of the anti-PX messages via email and cell phones surged as the public became increasingly frustrated by the inaction of the government. Xiamen residents became determined to take one step further. On around May 28, one text message calling for a street demonstration on June 1 reached about 1.5 million cell phone users in Xiamen (Hung, 2013). With the help of the internet and mobile network, the local residents were able to organize and wage a peaceful stroll

against the construction of the PX plant in the city. On June 1 and 2, around 10,000 local residents participated in the protest. They walked through Xiamen's commercial district and surrounded the city hall, holding up banners and chanting slogans such as "Boycott PX, protect Xiamen"; "Stop construction, no postponement"; and "Resist the PX project, protect city residents' health and protect Xiamen's environment" (Hung, 2013).

While the official media avoided reporting such anti-government protests, local citizens used the internet to live report this event to other Chinese outside of Xiamen and gave the demonstration a national coverage (Hung, 2013). Facing growing pressure from public opinions, the central government intervened and called for the implementation of the strategic environmental assessment (SEA) of urban master planning under the supervision of the SEPA (Gu, 2016). The local political leaders finally suspended the construction of the project. On December 5, Xiamen government published the SEA report and invited the public to comment on it through telephone, emails, and letters (Gu, 2016). This was followed by a public hearing, which was attended by over 200 participants including ordinary citizens and members of the Xiamen Municipal People's Congress and the People's Political Consultative Conference (Zhu, 2007b). A final decision to relocate the Xiamen PX project to the neighboring Zhangzhou was made on December 15, 2007, and was formally approved by the Ministry of Environmental Protection on January 20, 2009 (Hung, 2013).

Case 2: Chengdu anti-PX demonstration

Following the successful anti-paraxylene movement in Xiamen, citizens in other cities, including Dalian, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Beijing, launched their own

environmental campaigns successively against the construction of PX plants, maglev train systems, waste incinerators, and other projects with negative environmental impacts on the neighborhoods (Gilboy & Read, 2008; Johnson, 2013; Gu, 2016). Nonetheless, not all of them managed to receive the same level of public attention or achieve the expected outcomes. One of the disappointing cases is the anti-PX demonstration in Chengdu.

Chengdu's paraxylene project was initiated in 2005 as part of the PetroChina's plan to integrate refinery and petrochemical production. The project did not become a public concern until the company chose Pengzhou, a county-level city about 35 kilometers away from the provincial capital Chengdu, as the location of its new PX plant (Environmental Justice Atlas, 2017). The construction of production facilities was started in 2007 and was completed in 2013. When Chengdu residents learned the PX project would begin operation in 2013, like those in Xiamen, they became concerned about its detrimental effect on the environment and public health, especially in a region where earthquakes occur frequently (Cai & Zhou, 2016).

On the internet, the words about an anti-PX demonstration at downtown Chengdu on May 4, 2013, the anniversary of the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the fifth anniversary of a previous local movement against the project, were spread among the local residents (Mudie, 2013; "Chengdu anti-PX protest," 2013). Yet, the demonstration did not materialize after the local government outmaneuvered the protesters. The well-circulated message about the planned peaceful "stroll" at the city center alerted authorities, especially at a time when Chengdu was preparing for the upcoming Fortune Global Forum. Having learned the designated date and place

for the demonstration, the local government was able to deploy police and demobilize potential protesters in advance.

Fearful of large public presence on Saturday, May 4, Chengdu authorities decided to move the weekend forward for two days: students in Chengdu were required to attend class on Saturday and Sunday and employees of government-run work units were called for “urgent meetings” over the weekend (Coskun, 2013; Lim, 2013). Meanwhile, the city government was dissuading people from attending the demonstration through Weibo, WeChat, and text message (Coskun, 2013). Activists across the city were variously contacted, warned, or even detained; terms related to the proposed protest were censored on social media, such as “Chengdu PX project,” “May 4th + Jiuyan Bridge + take a walk,” “Pengzhou + PX,” and “Pengzhou + petrochemicals” (Coskun, 2013; Mudie, 2013).

On May 4, at the appointed hour and location, at least five different types of security forces were patrolling around (Lim, 2013). The periphery of the Tianfu Square at the city center was tightly guarded by police officers and was closed for visitors; Jiuyan Bridge was also closed and surrounded by blue aluminum walls which are usually used for construction sites (Coskun, 2013; Lim, 2013). As a result, although the messages for the proposed action were well circulated on the internet, Chengdu government has succeeded in preempting a large-scale demonstration against the PX project.

Case 3: 2013 *Southern Weekly* incident

The 2013 *Southern Weekly* incident was a conflict between the Propaganda Department of Guangdong Province and *Southern Weekly*, one of China’s most influential liberal-leaning newspaper based in Guangzhou. The dispute started when

the propaganda chief, Tuo Zhen, was accused of ordering changes to the paper's front-page New Year's message just a day before its publication on January 3, without the consent of the page editors who had already signed off on the page and went home after their three-day overtime work (Ng, 2013).

The original message, titled "China's Dream, the Dream of Constitutionalism," advocated a constitutional reform and expressed the hope that China would become a country ruled by law and the constitution (Richburg, 2013). It said, "Only if constitutionalism is realized, and power effectively checked, can citizens voice their criticisms of power loudly and confidently" (Richburg, 2013). However, under the supervision of then new conservative chief provincial censor, Tuo Zhen, contents about constitutionalism, democracy, and equality were hastily removed and replaced with commentaries praising the Chinese Communist Party, published under a new title "We are now closer to our dream than ever" (Richburg, 2013). Later, readers found multiple factual and grammatical errors in this modified version (Ng, 2013).

On January 3, some enraged journalists from *Southern Weekly* expressed their frustration through Weibo. Beijing's censors wanted to contain the issue and ordered all the Weibo postings related to the issue be deleted (Richburg, 2013). About 15 of the complaining journalists found their Weibo accounts shut down or muted (Ng, 2013). On January 4, around 50 editors and reporters who previously worked for *Southern Weekly* co-signed an open letter, demanding the resignation of Tuo Zhen and the restoring of the Weibo accounts of the affected journalists ("Ji Nanfang Zhoumo," 2013).

At the night of January 5, *Southern Weekly* called an enlarged emergency meeting for members of the editorial board. On the next day, Wu Wei, the administrator of *Southern Weekly*'s official Weibo account, was forced to hand in the password, and soon after the official Weibo posted a "clarification," passing the blame to the editors (Cao, 2013). Some of the *Southern Weekly* staffs went on strike (Wu, 2013).

A series of Weibo posts written by the journalists from *Southern Weekly* kept challenging the official statements about the incident. Despite strict censorship on the issue, media with different opinions, public figures, and anonymous users posted their supports or doubts about the incident. Internet users creatively employed various skills to bypass the filtering system, including the use of homophones, punctuation marks, reference items, word separation, and images (Chen, 2016). Over the week of January 2013, Weibo was filled with the logo of *Southern Weekly*; Weibo users changed their profile photos to the logo to support the newspaper (Chen, 2016).

Some supporters took their anger to the streets. In early 2013, hundreds of protesters gathered in Guangzhou to express their criticism against censorship and show their support for *Southern Weekly*. One of them held up a sign reading "Yesterday I was online; today I am at the scene" (Svensson, 2016). Another one protested in front of *Southern Weekly*'s office building by wearing a mask with three characters written on it— "*bi yan tao*," which literally means "avoid speech cover," a variation based on the Chinese word for condom *bi yun tao* (Chen, 2013).

However, the protests against the government and lack of freedom of speech did not lead to any change in the censorship system. Overall, the online protesters

who went to the streets were relatively few and the protests subsided as the public interest faded away. With the agreement of Southern Media Group to replace the Chief Editor of *Southern Weekly*, internal negotiations within *Southern Weekly* ensured that its journalists stopped discussing the issue and resumed their work (Chen, 2016). Although most journalists were not punished for their defiance, two activists supporting *Southern Weekly* were arrested with the paper's cooperation ("Ji Nanfang Zhoumo," 2013).

Characteristics and limitations of mobilizing online

The varying results of the three cases imply some characteristics of online mobilization in China. Different from campaigns and projects launched by China's NGOs, all three cases are explicitly political and anti-government in nature. The anti-PX protests in Xiamen and Chengdu blamed the local government for constructing petrochemical plants near residential areas and the protests in the *Southern Weekly* incident directly confronted the government for its heavy-handed censorship. However, the three cases had contrasting results. The Xiamen anti-PX movement eventually made the local government reverse its decision while the Chengdu anti-PX demonstration and the 2013 *Southern Weekly* incident did not yield the expected change. Although all protests were mobilized on the internet, attracted much public attention, and experienced varying degrees of state suppression, they differed in terms of organizational structures, which partly explains their different endings. By examining the three cases, we can summarize some of the limitations for online mobilization in China.

First, online mobilization faces the problem of what Yongshun Cai and Titi Zhou (2016) describe as common knowledge constraint. The messages calling for

collective action circulated on the internet are not only accessible to would-be protesters but also to the vigilant authorities. In the case of Chengdu anti-PX demonstration, after learning the proposed gathering time and locations from the internet, the local government was able to demobilize the public and deploy police in advance. Nonetheless, when the government is ill-prepared or slow in response to the upcoming demonstration, protesters may be able to outmaneuver the government. In the case of Xiamen anti-PX movement, although the government had the knowledge about the demonstration, for some reason, the local authorities did not respond assertively and expeditiously as Chengdu government did. The internet contention in China is usually reactive, episodic, and quick to diffuse; the effectiveness of it derives from its speed and unpredictability rather than organization and planning (Yang, 2008).

Second, online mobilization is decentralized and leaderless. The internet facilitates the adoption of decentralized, non-hierarchical organizational forms (Cai & Zhou, 2016). The organizational structure of online mobilization often appears leaderless since the initiators of social protest can keep themselves anonymous and the dissemination of information relies on hundreds and thousands of other anonymous internet users to repost and share the original message. In some cases, online protests are initiated unintentionally.

The “cyber-utopians” argue that because of this decentralized organizational structure, it becomes harder for the government to pinpoint the leadership of the movement and concentrate its efforts of demobilization on certain individuals. Even though this provides online mobilization with some flexibility, it also negatively affects the cohesion and consistency of the movement. In the case of Xiamen anti-

PX movement, the prominent scholar and CPPCC member Zhao Yufen and the influential writer and blogger Lian Yue served as opinion leaders. However, Chengdu anti-PX demonstration and the *Southern Weekly* incident were lacking such central figures to unify the opinions and lead the movement.

Third, online mobilization is facing the problem of fragmentation. The internet indeed helps movement activists to go beyond their intimate circles and organizations and reach a wide audience. However, internet users are by no means a coherent or homogeneous group. According to Yanqi Tong and Shaohua Lei's (2014) study on Weibo protests, successful online mobilization depends on the influence of opinion leaders, while different thought-camps have become more personalized and polarized.

The degree of fragmentation also depends on the type of the issue. In the case of anti-PX movements in Xiamen and Chengdu, it was easy for people to form a consensus on the detrimental impacts of the petrochemical projects near residential areas. Most people would agree that public health should enjoy a higher priority than economic development. But the issue of media censorship might be more divisive because people are not equally affected by censorship in their personal life. According to the study of Bruce Dickson (2016), although censorship has increased over the time, the vast majority of the internet users in China report not being affected by it. Only 2.9 percent of the surveyed internet users have frequently encountered the blockage of websites and merely 1.4 percent report that items posted or forwarded on social media have been frequently deleted. Although many journalists of *Southern Weekly* and some activists and sympathizers were unified against media

ensorship, a significant portion of the population do not feel this is an urgent issue to be addressed and are reluctant to commit themselves into this campaign.

Lastly, online mobilization is experiencing trust crisis. Due to the characteristics of online mobilization discussed earlier, the information disseminated through online channels is subject to distortion, fabrication, and deliberate manipulation. Since the organizational structure online tends to be decentralized and leaderless, it is hard for the organizers to control the flow of information closely. And in some cases, the spread of rumors makes the public lose faith in the authenticity of the information circulated online. As articulated in the next chapter, the Chinese government has so far managed to retain its authoritarian control on the internet and the public still tends to refrain from expressing their true preferences in political issues in fear of ex post facto punishment. The “preference falsification” remains a challenge in most political social movements in China. The case of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution further manifests these limitations.

4.4 The Chinese Jasmine Revolution and Organizational Strength

Despite numerous advantages of the internet as a tool for mobilization, the organizers of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution were facing organizational problems that are intrinsic to online mobilization. On March 1, 2011, the organizers of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution released an updated list of forty-one demonstration sites for the upcoming weekend, including 38 locations in the cities of mainland China, one site in Hong Kong, one in Taipei, and another in New York; some secondary sites were

also suggested in case the public access to the primary sites was blocked (Thornton, 2015). Those newly named sites outside of mainland China were part of the organizers' efforts to attract more international attention. Nonetheless, despite the global reach of their rhetoric, the organizers' practical ability to mobilize the Chinese public to participate in street demonstrations turned out to be inadequate (Thornton, 2015).

There appeared errors during the transmission of the original message. At least one widely circulated message from a user known as "cnjasmine" redirected would-be protesters to alternative sites not designated by the organizers (Chinese Jasmine Revolution, n.d.). It remains unclear whether the user was a knowing accomplice of the police trying to split and deflect the movement, or simply a misinformed activist (Thornton, 2015). For the protest on March 6, protesters were asked to gather near one of the fast-food restaurants in the designated shopping areas and "take a walk" or eat at one of the restaurants; the code of action was "the set meal No.3" at McDonald's or KFC (Thornton, 2015; Shi, 2011). Yet, separate announcements on other websites warned that the action codes for genuine participants would always derive from an agreed list of official CCP slogans that contained numbers, such as "two sessions," "three represents," "four adhere-tos," and "five stresses and four points of beauty," which created further confusion for would-be protesters (Thornton, 2015; Chinese Jasmine Revolution, n.d.).

Since online mobilization is decentralized and leaderless, the Chinese Jasmine Revolution lacked the coherence and consistency that could be more easily preserved through conventional way of mobilizing. The absence of strong leadership at times put potential participants into confusion. This problem appeared more

evident in the later stages of the mobilization when suppression from the state turned harsher and more aggressive. In the event of website hacking, the organizers lost communication with their sympathizers instantly. In addition, in cyberspace, where most people are hiding their real identities, state agents could easily infiltrate into the group of would-be protesters. Regardless of whether the user “cnjasmine” was disseminating misleading information deliberately or not, it manifests the weakness of online mobilization.

Last but not least, the organizers of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution were facing difficulties in gaining trust from the public. The Chinese internet users were suspicious of the call, in part, because many did not share its political agenda, and those who did share it were fearful of the high risk it might involve. Moreover, people in mainland China felt skeptical because the call originated from outside of China—both Tweeter and Boxun.com, where the first few messages were posted, are based in the United States (Thornton, 2015; Cai & Zhou, 2016). In a country where transparency is limited in all areas of society, conspiracy theory can easily gain traction. The fact that all of the organizers remained anonymous until the end could be another reason why people felt reluctant to trust them. Staying anonymous and abroad gave people a sense of lacking commitment and sincerity.

Although the internet helps protest organizers to reach their audience with minimal costs and to link individuals beyond geographic limitation, as discussed above, the organizational structure of online mobilization is facing a series of challenges. The development of the internet in China is not necessarily strengthening the mobilizing capacity of political activists, especially when the protesting involves high political risks such as in the case of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution.

A comparative perspective

In this part, we briefly compare the case of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution with the Tunisia Revolution from the perspective of organizational strength. Regarding the mobilizing structure of the Tunisian Revolution, the internet played important roles in disseminating information, rallying public support for anti-regime demonstrations, and coordinating large numbers of protesters. Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and YouTube allowed activists to circumvent heavily censored conventional media.

By 2009, the estimated number of internet users in Tunisia is around 35 million, with a penetration rate of 34 percent. The percentage of internet users is especially high among university students—91 percent of them have a Facebook account and visit it at least once per day, spending 105 minutes there on average (Schraeder & Redissi, 2011). In the initial stage of the revolution, videos about Bouazizi's self-immolation were uploaded to the internet and soon picked up by international news media like Al Jazeera and France24 (Lowrance, 2016). As many Tunisian households have access to satellite TV, the story was able to spread quickly (Ryan, 2011; al-Sharekh, 2011; Bashri & Greiner, 2012).

However, it would be mistaken to claim the development of the internet in Tunisia explained or embodied the revolution; most Tunisians were painfully aware of that they had lived under dictatorship before Facebook became popular, and the corruption and venality of Ben Ali and his family had no need to trend on Twitter to become a common knowledge (Willis, 2016). Indeed, the revolution could not have materialized without hundreds and thousands of valiant protesters going to the streets.

Student unions and labor unions played vital roles in mobilizing the public (Lowrance, 2016). The capacity to mobilize street protests built long before the

revolution was crucial to Tunisia's success (Lowrance, 2016). Unlike in China, the student unions and labor unions in Tunisia have been functioning as the gathering point for the organizers of anti-government movements for a long period. These relatively autonomous organizations provided organizational support for the Tunisia Revolution and reinforced the advantages of online mobilization. Nonetheless, in China, civil society is largely subordinate to the state and political activists do not have the organizational support that unions leaders in Tunisia have had.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the internet as a means of mobilizing the public and organizing collective action is not as efficient as what the "cyber-utopians" claim. Although the internet facilitates speedy mobilization and can reach a large audience with few costs, any information posted online is also available to the government. Moreover, internet users are not homogenous but rather fragmented, which is exacerbated by the lack of civic organizations that connect people with common interests in China. What's more, the decentralized organizational structure is flexible and hard to repress in some cases, but leaderless and inconsistent in other cases. Lastly, the surge of unreliable information is causing trust crisis on the internet.

Organizational structure is crucial to the success of any social movement. China's civil society is still dominated by the state and most NGOs in China are service-oriented and cooperative with the regime. Even after the advent of the internet, political activists and supporters of democracy do not have sufficient organizational support to deliver their goals and realize their ambitions. As

manifested by the Chinese Jasmine Revolution, the internet as a tool of social mobilization has inherent limitations. So far, the reality in China does not support the notion that an autonomous civil society is emerging in China's cyberspace or activists can always use the internet to mobilize the public effectively.

V. POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES: THE INTERNET AS A PUBLIC SPHERE FREE FROM STATE CONTROL

5.1 “Cyber-Utopian” Perspective: State Control and Democratization

The previous two chapters have discussed whether the internet is effective in disseminating democratic values and mobilizing and organizing collective action. They focus on the political impacts of the internet on individuals and organizations, respectively. The “cyber-utopians” argue that the internet increases the amount of information people can access and transforms the way people access it. They also claim that the development of the internet connects like-minded individuals and facilitates speedy, large-scale social mobilization. This chapter further examines whether the internet is creating a public sphere that challenges the authoritarian Chinese state. It partly overlaps with the previous two chapters but lays more emphasis on the receptivity or vulnerability of the existing political system and the government’s responses to the challenge from the internet.

From the perspective of the “cyber-utopians,” because of the “revolutionary nature” of the internet, it is more difficult for the state to execute central controls and block information, which as a result redefines the relationship between the government and citizens (Steele and Stein, 2002). Jessica Mathews (1997) contends that the hierarchical governmental structure with centralized leadership and decision making is simply incompatible with the decentralized, flexible, and parallel social

networks that the internet is creating. Many “cyber-utopians” ascribe the collapse of authoritarian regimes to the internet and claim that authoritarian rulers are inadequate or incapable to maintain their political control in cyberspace.

Peter Ferdinand (2000) uses the cases of Serbia and Malaysia in the late 1990s to demonstrate how authoritarian regimes become vulnerable and powerless in front of the internet. The Democratic Party of Serbia was one of the opposition parties in the 1990s and was once banned by the government from campaigning before elections. The Democratic Party of Serbia reacted by sending its campaign platform abroad so that its text could be broadcasted back to Serbia from a mirror site on the internet. Consequently, it managed to circumvent the authority’s censorship and conducted an effective campaign. Ferdinand (2000) argues that no matter how critical the Democratic Party might have been of the regime, the presence of the internet has made it impossible for the regime to silence all dissenting voices.

The other example used by Ferdinand (2000) is an episode in Malaysia in 1998. The then prime minister Mahathir Mohammed suddenly dismissed his deputy Anwar Ibrahim and had him arrested on a charge of sexual misconduct. Shortly after the dismissal, Anwar Ibrahim and his supporters launched a movement for political reform. They created websites to challenge the official narrative of the event and to mobilize the public support. According to Ferdinand (2000), their websites succeeded to bring public attention to the movement and inspired critics to gather around and protest without being fearful of what authorities would do. The active public participation and the open split among the ruling elites provided opportunities for political reforms.

A more recent argument appeared in an article from *The Economist* written by R. A. (2010). The author argues that networks based on the internet have quite clearly shifted the balance of power away from centralized authorities, and unlike a hierarchical system whose top leaders are vulnerable to suppression, the networks based online are more difficult for the government to break or shut down. When discussing new media empowerment and state-society relations in China, Zengzhi Shi and Guobin Yang (2016) argue that technological empowerment gives individuals, communities, and organizations that ask for change a space to develop their initiatives and leaves those who prefer the status quo no other options but to change.

The “cyber-utopians” celebrate how the internet is changing the way of communication and social mobilization and how it is creating a new space free from state control. They assume all authoritarian states are obstinate and incapable of adapting due to their centralized, rigid structure and will be weakened and ultimately collapse as the “revolutionary force” of the internet grows stronger. Nonetheless, many cases suggest that authoritarian states do not remain static in front of new challenges and some of them are able to turn threats into opportunities. The following sections are about to focus on how the Chinese state is responding to the internet and whether its authoritarian control has been weakened in cyberspace.

5.2 Solving the Dilemma: Opportunities or Threats?

Similar to traditional media, the internet is not totally free from state intervention. Helen Milner (2006) points out that the internet is not imposed on a particular

country from the outside; instead, the introduction and development of the internet depend on the approval and support of the domestic government. If so, what has affected the Chinese government's determination to develop the internet in the first place despite its widely recognized political potential? When the CCP transformed itself from a revolutionary party to a developmental ruling party after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Party leaders have realized innovation and technology are of vital importance for achieving economic growth and modernization.

According to Xiudian Dai (2003), following China's general strategy of scientific and technological modernization, government policies and programs to promote the development and application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) were initiated in as early as the mid-1980s. Among those, the 863 program or State High-Tech Development Plan is one of the most influential. It is funded and administered directly by the Chinese government with goals of stimulating the development of advanced technologies in a variety of fields and relieving China from dependence on foreign technologies (Wu, 2000). While the information revolutions were unfolding on a global scale, the development of the ICTs became one of the country's strategic priorities. In the 1990s, the government initiated the Informatization of National Economy program, which was incorporated into the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2001-2005; "Guomin jingji," 2001).

On October 2000, Premier Zhu Rongji said during a speech that great progress in improving productivity can be achieved... by combining informatization and industrialization, which reinforce each other and advance simultaneously (Zhu, 2000). Such optimism was partly influenced by the consensus formed among international organizations that the global informatization could provide great

opportunities for developing countries to develop economy and technology (Dai, 2003). During the early 1990s, the European Commission actively engaged in promoting the ICTs in developing countries to improve the efficiency of enterprise management and government operation, provide valuable economic information, and enhance their access to the international market (European Commission, 1997). The burst of the e-commerce bubble did not dampen the United Nation Development Program's confidence to sponsor a Global Digital Opportunity Initiative (Dai, 2003).

However, as discussed earlier, in the 1990s and the early 2000s, mainstream opinions in the international community, including media and intellectuals in the West, believed in not only the economic potential of the internet but also its potential for converting authoritarian regimes and enhancing existing democracies. After experiencing the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, the CCP has remained vigilant about retaining social and political control during the economic liberation. While the government was promoting the information industry and building infrastructures for the internet, it was well aware of the social and political challenge the "technological liberalization" might bring about.

With the spread of the internet and the rise of social media, authoritarian governments have less control over the flow of information. Alternative information from the internet is undermining the official narratives about current events and the government's propaganda scheme. Political activists and oppositions around the world are using the internet to disseminate anti-regime messages and mobilize the public. Authoritarian regimes including China and Saudi Arabia are certainly facing a dilemma between facilitating and sustaining economic development and minimizing the political potential of the internet.

As examined in the following sections, the Chinese government has established a sophisticated censorship system to control the flow of information and suppress anti-regime activists online. Yet, there is another dilemma in terms of political control in cyberspace. Excessive state intervention into the internet may frustrate ordinary internet users who are not political in the first place. As China's integration into the global economy deepens, excessive censorship can restrict its access to the world market, especially for the entrepreneurs of small and medium enterprises who cannot utilize foreign social media and search engines to expand their business online. As e-sport becomes increasingly popular among younger generations, limited access to foreign servers may disappoint some everyday gamers (Dickson, 2016). For students and scholars, it is difficult to look for the information provided only by certain foreign websites. When the frustration of these ordinary citizens accumulates, the chances are that they will become increasingly critical of the censorship and the government that has imposed it.

Therefore, when the Chinese government tries to limit the political potential of the internet, it has to consider how to suppress dissidents while not alienating its existing supporters. Seemingly, authoritarian control of the internet is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the high intensity of censorship and surveillance on the internet makes sure political opponents are kept silent and unfavorable information is away from the public sight. On the other hand, such censorship and surveillance undermine public support and impede socio-economic efficiency. The government must find a balancing point and exert just the "right" amount of authoritarian control in cyberspace, which is by no means an easy task.

5.3 Evolution of China's Internet Regulations

As information and communication technologies became a vital part of China's larger scheme of economic development and modernization, the Chinese government created new institutions, laws, and regulations. Before the economic reforms, the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication (MPT), an organ of the State Council, was responsible for managing the telecom sector. During the period of the economic reforms, the power of the MPT was gradually weakened as the telecom companies set up by other ministries started to challenge the MPT's monopoly over the provision of public telecom service (Zheng, 2008).

In 1998, the state leaders initiated a restructuring of central government agencies to prepare China for entering the World Trade Organization (Zheng, 2004). A new ministry, the Ministry of Information Industry (MII), was established during the Ninth National People's Congress by merging the former MPT, the former Ministry of Electronics Industry, and the Network Department of the former Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television, and Wu Jichuan, the minister of the former MPT, became the first minister of the MII (Zheng, 2008). In 2008, the MII was further merged with the Commission for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense to form the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT). The MIIT now is responsible for deciding China's industrial planning, policies, and standards, monitoring the daily operation of industrial branches, leading the construction of information system, safeguarding China's information security, and so on (State Council, 2014). Meanwhile, the regulation on media contents

belongs to the jurisdiction of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT).

With a more streamlined structure, the government actively uses legal and regulatory means to make the internet a driver of economic development and the nation's modernization while maintaining "state security and social harmony, state sovereignty and dignity, and the basic interests of the people" (Han, 2010). Based on the subject they are applied to, rules of the internet can be classified into three general categories. The first category targets the internet service providers (ISPs) that provide services for accessing and using the internet. According to Yongnian Zheng (2008), these laws and regulations govern a complicated four-tier system for internet connection. The first tier is the gateway for international wiring through which all traffic to foreign networks has to pass. The second tier is the networks that are directly wired through the gateway. The third tier is the networks that realize international wiring through the inter-wired networks. The last tier consists of internet users. The ISPs in each tier are required to get registered and are closely monitored by the government.

The second category of rules focuses on the internet content providers, including news website, social media, and other online platforms. The Administrative Provisions on Secrecy of Computer Information Systems issued in 1994 dictates that any information that is considered as "state secrets" shall not be discussed or disseminated and the distribution of information on the internet requires government approval. The Provisions on the Administration of Internet News Information Services enacted in 2005 has added two more categories of forbidden contents—information that incites illegal assemblies, demonstrations, marches, or

gatherings to disturb public order and information released in the name of unregistered illegal social organizations.

Furthermore, according to the regulation, only news originating from state-supervised news outlets can be posted online and websites that are not licensed news agencies are prohibited from performing any journalistic function (Mueller, 2012). The Article 20 of the Measures for Managing Internet Information Services stipulates that the internet content providers are prohibited from producing, reproducing, realizing, or disseminating information forbidden by laws and are directly responsible for contents published on their services (Mueller, 2012).

As social media including blogs, Weibo, and WeChat and video sharing websites such as Youku and Tudou became increasingly popular, the government regulations were trying to catch up with the new development. The Provisions on the Management of Internet Audio and Video Programming Services was issued by the SARFT and the MIIT in 2008. In 2017, the government updated again its rules on the internet and social media news, demanding that all online news broadcasters obtain licenses (Li, 2017). The updated rules incorporate fragmented regulations and provisions and provide a clearer scope of restrictions.

The third category of rules governs the end users. All provisions on forbidden contents that apply to the internet content providers also apply to individual internet users. For instance, violations of the rules of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee On Safeguarding Internet Security can occur fines, removal of the content, and criminal liability (Mueller, 2012). In 2016, the NPC passed the Cybersecurity Law which came into effect in June 2017. On the one hand, it aims to prevent internet fraud, hacking, and other criminal activities. On the

other hand, it further articulates the restrictions on the operation of network operators and internet-based companies. The law requires that all ISPs shall ask internet users to register with their real names and they shall save users' data locally (AccessNow, 2017). When requested by the government, they must cooperate with authorities and provide full access to data and unspecified "technical support" (Wagner, 2017).

So far, China's regulatory regime of the ICTs has become more comprehensive and more sophisticated. However, as Yongnian Zheng (2008) points out, the primary goal of this regulatory regime is to promote and manage a fast-growing industry, with development and growth as the central themes. The major function of the MIIT and former MII is managerial and administrative, but not political. The progress of this regulatory regime is in accordance with the growing market and the development of the information technology infrastructure. To strike the balance between economic growth and political stability, besides legal and administrative means, the CCP has been employing various strategies of authoritarian control in cyberspace.

5.4 Authoritarian Government 2.0: Political Control of the Internet

Many "cyber-utopians" assume that the power of authoritarian governments will be declining as the internet is providing a separate space for society which is independent of centralized state control. As discussed in the previous section, the Chinese government has managed to establish a complex regulatory regime to realize the economic potential of the internet while retaining its centralized control. The

regulatory regime provides the necessary legal basis for suppressing dissidents and protecting the CCP's vital interests. Yet, most of those laws and regulations on the internet are development- or technology-oriented and the government needs additional tools of authoritarian control to minimize the risk of a potential "internet revolution." As social media, including Weibo and WeChat, has penetrated into a large proportion of the Chinese population, the government is facing a series of challenges to deal with internet-based protests.

Since 2009, social stability has been incorporated into local officials' performance assessment. Local governments have major responsibilities for maintaining social stability within their jurisdictions. Since the resources of local governments are limited and excessive use of force will affect the public support and legitimacy, they have to selectively suppress social protests and employ different strategies to tackle different types of collective action. Overusing force wastes resources and can lead to counterproductive effect, especially after a protest has gained momentum, but being over-lenient may encourage more protests to occur, which will negatively affect the local officials' performance (Tong & Lei, 2014).

Yongshun Cai and Titi Zhou (2016) summarize that whether and how the government responds to internet-based protests are determined by three factors. First, the government has to be aware of the proposed action. If the government cannot effectively collect information about a potential social protest, it cannot make preparation in advance and will be in a passive position after the protest occurs. The second factor is the government's perception of the potential threat posed by the action. When the government believes that the level of threat posed by the protest is insignificant, it may refrain from using force or ignore it completely. The

government is usually more sensitive to political protests that directly challenge the local or central authority than to other protests that purely demand economic compensations. The last factor is the resources available to the local government. When a local government only has limited resources, such as police force and surveillance equipment, it has to respond to collective protests with more restrictions.

Four strategies of political control

Once the government decides to suppress a potential or an ongoing social protest, there are generally four types of strategies at its disposal. First, the government controls the flow of information through censorship. It blocks and filters information through the “Great Firewall of China,” which is a combination of legislative actions and technologies enforced by the government to regulate the internet domestically (Mozur, 2015). China’s sophisticated internet monitoring system limits users’ access to foreign information sources, blocks certain words from search engines, and helps to censor internet users’ comments on politically sensitive issues.

One example of this is the anniversaries of the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. The internet censorship is tightened each year around June 4, the day when the largest pro-democracy movement in the PRC’s history was violently suppressed (Ser, 2016). In anticipation of the 20th anniversary of the protests, the government blocked the access to numerous foreign websites that published articles about the anniversary. According to Telegraph and Fox News, the blocked sites included Twitter, Flickr, Hotmail, Huffington Post, Life Journal, and the MSN Spaces blogging tool (Zetter, 2009). Readers of the *Financial Times* and *The Economist* also found stories related to the protests missing from their pages (Zetter, 2009). The Chinese authorities have been trying to erase this historical episode from the history

of the PRC. Searching keywords related to the protests would fail to return any result even during normal times. On June 3, 2013, Weibo temporarily suspended the use of the candle tool, which some internet users might use to mourn the victims of the suppression in their Weibo posts (“Subtle censorship,” n.d.).

Second, the government conducts “astroturfing” or “reverse censorship,” secretly posting large numbers of fabricated social media comments as if they were the genuine opinions of average internet users (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2017). These fabricated opinions are part of the government’s effort to manipulate the general public in favor of itself and to distract public attention from collective action, grievances, or general negativity (King et al., 2017). Since 2008, the CCP’s media policy has evolved from the blatant repression of negative news coverage to more elaborate news-spinning operations (Bandurski, 2010).

According to the study of Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret Robert (2017), in order to manipulate public opinion, the Chinese government has long been suspected of employing as many as two million people to post a large number of regime-friendly comments on social media and online forums. This group of people are known by many as the 50 Cent Party, a name derived from the allegation that these commentators were paid fifty cents per post (Vembu, 2009). King and his colleagues (2017) conclude that the 50 Cent Party is devoted to engaging in cheerleading for the state, symbols of the Chinese regime, or the revolutionary history of the CCP.

The other two strategies of authoritarian control in cyberspace go beyond the internet. The demobilization of protest participants is achieved by the government through a combination of persuasion, buy-off, threat, and punishment

(Levitsky & Way, 2010). The government may deploy police in advance at anticipated demonstration sites to discourage would-be protesters to participate. It may also persuade, threaten, or even arrest protest leaders, its organizers, and political activists to obstruct their mobilizing efforts. According to Ivan Franceschini and Gianluigi Negro (2014), the government resorts to judicial intimidation to suppress dissenting voices, both online and in real life. So far, the Chinese government has detained people who dared to challenge the state by administering a criminal sentence possibly for slander or state sedition, or a one- to three-year “re-education” sentence of forced labor (*laojiao*), an administrative decision left to the discretion of the police (Franceschini & Negro, 2014).

In November 2009, Zhao Lianhai, a Chinese activist who campaigned for compensation for the victims of the contaminated infant formula, was arrested for “provoking quarrels and making trouble” (Yu, 2009). He founded a website, the “Home for Kidney Stone Babies Website” (<http://jieshibaobao.com>), to provide information for parents after it was found out that the infant formula made by Sanlu was intentionally mixed with industrial chemical melamine to increase the product’s protein-content reading (“China jails tainted,” 2010; Mueller, 2012). On November 10, 2010, Zhao was sentenced to two and a half years in prison (“China jails tainted,” 2010).

Another case happened in October 2010. Chen Jianping, also known as Wang Yi, a political dissident and human rights activist, was arrested for disturbing social order and was sentenced to a year of “re-education” in labor camp after she posted a sarcastic comment about the anti-Japanese protests in China (Shahid, 2010).

Her post suggested that the protesters should attack the Japanese Expo pavilion in Shanghai (Mueller, 2012).

The last measure the government uses to retain its authoritarian control on the internet is through its reputation for protecting its vital interests (Cai & Zhou, 2016). It is more indirect and subtler compared to the deliberate efforts of demobilization. The reputation that a strong authoritarian regime can always impose punishment on protest participants *ex post facto* becomes a state asset—it deters protesters from making regime-challenging claims or resorting to destructive action (Pierskalla & Hollenbach, 2013). In the following section, we further examine how the government is combining these strategies by analyzing the case of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution.

5.5 The Chinese Jasmine Revolution and Political Opportunities

The case of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution manifests many aspects of the previous discussion on China's authoritarian control online and offline. The initial response by the Chinese authorities was expeditious and overwhelming: the police rounded up lawyers, activists, and dissidents, and deployed a massive number of uniformed and plainclothes police officers to the pre-announced sites of gathering (Thornton, 2015; Cai & Zhou, 2016). Human-rights activists estimated that by the evening of February 20, around eighty people had been taken into custody, put under house arrest, or placed under various restrictions (Ramzy, 2011). After the post calling for a second gathering in 18 Chinese cities was released, the police turned even more

aggressive. Plainclothes security officers beat and detained at least four foreign journalists (Johnson, 2011; Thornton, 2015). What's more, local governments urged universities to prevent students from participating in the protests (Cai & Zhou, 2016). The Beijing police even banned the sale of jasmine flowers at various flower markets and demanded that flower vendors sign written pledges (Thornton, 2015; Cai & Zhou, 2016).

Since the Arab Spring, the internet censorship has been tightened. On as early as January 30, 2011, searches for the word "Egypt" on microblogs began to return automatic responses indicating either that the keyword could not be found, or that the results of such searches could not be displayed in accordance with local internet regulations (Reuters.com, 2011). Boxun.com, the website that posted the first call for the Chinese Jasmine Revolution, was hacked and knocked offline for weeks beginning in late February (Anna, 2011), which lasted until at least late April (Goodman, 2011). Soon later, online searches for "jasmine," "Wangfujing," and "McDonald's" failed to produce any result, too (Cai & Zhou, 2016; Pierson, 2011). Moreover, to appease some popular discontent, Premier Wen Jiabao held an online chat with internet users at 9 a.m. on the morning of February 27, the second proposed protesting date; he responded to several key issues mentioned by the organizers of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution in their posts, including inflation, real estate bubbles, and corruption (Xinhua News Agency, 2011; Thornton, 2015).

Having witnessed what happened in the Arab world, the CCP stayed highly alert, mindful of even the remotest possibility that the CCP would be challenged in a similar way. As Bruce Dickson (2011) points out, the CCP was reasonable to feel nervous—its leaders are well aware that small, isolated events can explode into

nationwide protests if not handled quickly and firmly. When internet-based organizers and protesters react faster than the government does after a triggering event or when the government is ill-prepared to respond to an imminent protest, the chance for successful online mobilization becomes higher (Cai & Zhou, 2016). The management of internet-based protests like the Chinese Jasmine Revolution well reflects the capacity of the authoritarian regime. The advantage of the internet can be counterbalanced by powerful authoritarian controls that keep adapting itself to the development of new technologies. The case of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution should be counted as a great success for China's massive security apparatus (Thornton, 2015). Despite the rise of internet activism in China, the Chinese government is able to maintain its authoritarian control in cyberspace by controlling the flow of information, manipulating public opinions, demobilizing regime challengers with both suppression and persuasion, and deterring political activists with the reputation for protecting its vital interests.

A comparative perspective

Ben Ali regime failed to respond to the revolution effectively. The government deployed hundreds of security officers to the streets and brutally attacked protesters (Esposito et al., 2016). On December 24, 2010, the police fired ammunition from the roofs of nearby buildings at protesters in Menzel Bouzaiane, killing two people; by the end of January, at least three hundred people were killed and more than seven hundred were wounded (Schraeder & Redissi, 2011). The police brutality fed online media with stories of state violence, which further enraged the public and helped to expand the demonstrations.

The government's attempts to impose censorship on the internet was also unsuccessful. In 2008, when the authorities blocked the access to Facebook, 300,000 Facebook users in Tunisia were frustrated and began to look for ways to bypass the government's censorship; facing strong public outcry, the government unblocked Facebook within a month (Willis, 2016). In 2010, before the revolution occurred, anti-censorship campaigns had begun taking shape as a somewhat cohesive movement. A Tunisian version of WikiLeaks, TuniLeaks, was created, which helped to turn public opinions against Ben Ali (Lowrance, 2016).

There are significant differences in the capacity of the government to manage public contention between the two countries. In China, the government is able to employ a wide range of strategies from information control to demobilization of protesters. Student unions and labor unions are under close surveillance and subordinate to state agencies. During the process of integrating into the global economy, China has been able to strike a balance between the needs for developing information technologies and connecting itself with the outside world, and the needs for limiting the political potential of the internet and retaining authoritarian control in cyberspace. However, in authoritarian Tunisia, the government's unrestrained use of force to confront the demonstration, inadequate initial response, and lenient control of student and labor unions and cyberspace all contributed to its ultimate demise. In terms of the government capacity of authoritarian control, Ben Ali regime is noticeably weaker than the CCP.

5.6 Conclusion

The “cyber-utopians” argue that because of the decentralized nature of the internet, it is rather difficult for authoritarian governments to maintain their political control in cyberspace. They contend that the internet facilitates the formation of a public sphere relatively free from state interventions. However, the internet cannot be imposed on a particular country from the outside without the permission and support of the domestic government (Milner, 2006).

During the Post-Mao period, the Chinese government has been actively engaging in building internet infrastructure and developing the information industry as part of its larger scheme of economic growth and modernization. Meanwhile, well-aware of the political potential of the internet, the Chinese government also established a comprehensive and sophisticated regulatory regime to control internet service providers, internet content providers as well as internet end users. Since a large part of this regulatory regime is managerial and administrative, the CCP is combining legal means with various strategies to retain its political control in cyberspace, including censorship, manipulation of information, demobilization of protesters, and reputation for protecting its vital interests. The contrast between the Chinese Jasmine Revolution and the Tunisia Revolution proves that the variation in the government’s capability of retaining authoritarian control in cyberspace significantly influences the result of such anti-regime movements. The development of the internet does not necessarily weaken authoritarian states.

Nonetheless, authoritarian regimes such as China do face challenges. They have to strike a balance between achieving economic development and minimizing

the political potential of the internet, between keeping supporters and eliminating opponents, between using force and maintaining social stability.

VI. CONCLUSION: AUTHORITARIAN RESILIENCE IN THE INTERNET ERA

Beginning as local protests in response to the self-immolation of a street vendor in Sidi Bouzid, the Tunisian Revolution instigated a massive wave of pro-democracy demonstrations across the Arab world, which has reignited the scholarly debate over the possibilities of democratization in some of the most “endurable” authoritarian regimes. Some observers, both academic and non-academic, ascribe this drastic change in the Middle East and North Africa to the development of the internet and social media. The Tunisian Revolution was celebrated by some mainstream media as the “Facebook Revolution” or the “Twitter Revolt” (Willis, 2016; Lowrance, 2016).

The “cyber-utopianism,” which emerged and flourished in the late 1990s and the early 2000s but was seriously challenged by critics and intellectuals including Evgeny Morozov and Ronald Deibert in the late 2000s, was revived after the Arab Spring. The “cyber-utopians” contend that the internet empowers anti-government activists and debilitates authoritarian rulers and start quoting the case of the Arab Spring to support their arguments (Chander, 2012). From their perspective, Sara Mishra (2012) summarizes the causal mechanism between the internet and democratization in authoritarian regimes: (1) the internet increases the amount of information the public can access and helps to disseminate democratic values; (2) the internet facilitates efficient communication and coordination and enables anti-regime activists to mobilize the public more effectively; (3) the internet creates an

unconventional public sphere that is decentralized and spontaneous, which centralized and sluggish authoritarian states cannot maintain their control of.

The flame of revolution seems to have reached as far as China. In February 2011, anonymous posts on the internet called for the Chinese Jasmine Revolution, mobilizing the public to take peaceful strolls every Sunday afternoon to protest against the government and demand freedom and democracy. However, such an initiative stimulated little public interest and suffered intensive government suppression. The Chinese Jasmine Revolution faded fast as the Arab Spring in many countries ended up armed conflicts and civil wars. Even though over one-third of the Chinese population had access to the internet in 2011, a penetration rate similar with Tunisia, the “liberation technology” was not able to fan the flame of revolution in China.

The debate over China’s political future dates back to the 1990s. Having witnessed the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, a number of prominent China scholars, such as Henry Rowen, Gordon Chang, and Minxin Pei, have predicted the Chinese regime would crumble in the near future. However, other China scholars believe that the Chinese regime is rather adaptable and can survive for another extended period of time. Andrew Nathan (2003) coined the term “authoritarian resilience” to describe authoritarianism in China. Against the logic of the modernization theory, the rapid increase in China’s per capita income during the economic reforms has not brought the country anywhere close to democracy. China has been constantly classified as an authoritarian country by the Economist Intelligence Unit and Polity IV. Debates over how long the Chinese regime can sustain its authoritarian rule and whether the

development of information and communication technologies will make a difference are still ongoing.

With the failed attempt of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution as a starting point, this thesis is trying to answer the questions of whether democratization will be a likely scenario in China in the foreseeable future and whether the development of the internet has a determining role in bringing that scenario. The political process theory provides an analytical tool for studying contentious politics in both democratic and non-democratic contexts, which is useful to solve these puzzles. According to Ryan Cragun and Deborah Cragun (2006), three factors in the political context affect the chance for an anti-government movement to succeed.

First, there should be widely shared “insurgent consciousness,” which serves as the motivation and starting point of a social movement. Second, the movement must possess substantial “organizational strength” to tie those motivated individuals together and coordinate their actions efficiently. Third, the success of an anti-government movement requires favorable political opportunities, which are related to the receptivity and vulnerability of the existing political system. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this thesis is not to demonstrate a combination of all these three factors determines the future of democratic movements. Rather, it aims to utilize this theoretical framework to examine the political impact of the internet in the Chinese context.

According to the “cyber-utopians,” one of the most significant changes brought by the internet is the increased amount of information people can access and the way they access it (Mishra, 2012). Traditional media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, is a centralized, “one-to-many” type of communication. However, the

internet, especially social media, enables decentralized, “many-to-many” kind of communication, where people are both consumers and producers of information. The “cyber-utopians” claim, thanks to the internet, people in authoritarian regimes would be increasingly exposed to the outside world and affected by the western lifestyles and democratic values. Therefore, they believe the development of the internet in authoritarian regimes helps to ferment insurgent consciousness among the public.

However, the analysis on China suggests that the recent development of the internet does not necessarily lead to dissemination of democratic values or formation of insurgent consciousness among the majority of the public. According to the Public Goods and Political Support Surveys conducted in 2010 and 2014 and the sixth wave of World Values Survey conducted between 2010 and 2012, even though outside observers unanimously depict China as an authoritarian regime, the majority of the Chinese public not only thinks China is at least somewhat democratic but also believes China is heading in the right direction and will be more democratic in the near future. The reasons why the Chinese public perceives democracy rather differently from outside observers lie in their distinct understanding of what democracy means.

As Bruce Dickson (2016) points out, the majority of the Chinese public does not consider the institutional aspects of democracy, such as elections and multi-party competition, as consequential. Most of them do not see inherent conflicts between the interests of the state and those of society, and therefore do not think checks and balances on authorities are of great importance. Their experience of socialization also contributes to their particular understanding of democracy. Education and official media often associate Western democracy with disorder and low efficiency

and render multi-party elections unfit for the Chinese context. Lastly, risk aversion as part of the Chinese political culture makes many Chinese wary of political change.

The 2010-2014 surveys also suggest that the Chinese regime is enjoying a high level of public support and such support is slightly higher at the central level than at the local level. Considering the majority of the public believes China is increasingly democratic, this result is unsurprising. Seemingly, the rapid development of the internet and social media has not changed the fact that most people in China do not accept the concept of democracy predominant in the West and do support the current regime.

Even though the launch of Weibo became a turning point in state-society contention, most of those campaigns and protests based on the internet did not challenge the legitimacy of the central government or the CCP and did not advocate any sort of democratic change. Although online protests sometimes managed to press the government for policy changes, they were spontaneous and limited to random and isolated events. Few of them could forge a sustainable social movement for systematic change in the political system. Like most protests in the streets, many online protests demanded interventions from a high-level government rather than the complete replacement of the political system. As a result, against the expectation of the “cyber-utopians,” in China, the internet does not serve as a tool for disseminating democratic values or creating insurgent consciousness among the public.

The second aspect of the political impact of the internet is the facilitation of fast and large-scale social mobilization. Even if a significant portion of the population possess insurgent consciousness, without an effective organization to tie those individuals together, anti-regime movement can hardly succeed. The “cyber-

utopians” argue that the traditional means of mobilization have limited public reach, are vulnerable to government suppression, and require strong leadership and rigid hierarchy, while the internet provides a tool of social mobilization that is less susceptible to government control, more decentralized, and more flexible, and can easily reach a wider audience with a low cost. Consequently, they contend that the internet has positive effects on the development of civil society and pro-democracy movements due to its potential for social mobilization.

The number of registered NGOs in China increases from less than 10,000 in the late 1980s to over 500,000 in 2013 (Dickson, 2016). If civil society is defined broadly, which includes all social institutions, autonomous or not, that are non-production-related, nongovernmental and non-familial, civil society is emerging in China. Nonetheless, if civil society is defined as a public sphere where individuals can freely express opinions, discuss social problems, and develop collective solutions (Wessler & Freudenthaler, 2017), then it is close to nonexistent in China. China’s social organizations are facing various barriers to getting officially recognized and delivering their missions (Dickson, 2016). They are tightly bound by the state and cannot serve as a democratic force (Gallagher, 2004). Moreover, China’s “civil society” helps to improve the quality of governance and reinforce the public support for the regime. Although the internet provides organizational resources for social organizations in China and increases their visibility and efficiency, it has not fundamentally changed the state-dominated, “contingent” and “negotiated” nature of China’s “civil society” (Svensson, 2016).

By examining the cases of online mobilization, including the Chinese Jasmine Revolution, we found the internet as a tool of social mobilization is not as

efficient as the “cyber-utopians” have expected. Also, there is a gap between expressing criticism on social media and confronting authorities in the streets. First, social mobilization on the internet suffers common knowledge constraint—whatever has been published online is not only available to potential participants but also to the government (Cai & Zhou, 2016). Second, online mobilization tends to be decentralized and leaderless, which at times causes the lack of adhesion and consistency. Third, internet users themselves are too heterogeneous and fragmented to be mobilized effectively. Lastly, movement organizers are facing significant challenges to build trust on the internet. In conclusion, organizational strength is crucial for the success of any social movement but the internet as a tool for mobilizing and organizing collective action is not always as efficient as what the “cyber-utopians” claim. Even after the advent of the internet, political activists and supporters of democracy do not have sufficient organizational support to deliver their goals and realize their ambitions. China’s “civil society” is still dominated by the state and NGOs in China are service-oriented and cooperative with the regime.

The third element of the political process theory is political opportunities. Even when the public shares insurgent consciousness and is well organized, the degree of government suppression and its receptivity to political change can determine the prospect of a pro-democracy social movement. Some “cyber-utopians” argue that the internet makes it more difficult for the state to execute central control or to block information, and therefore redefines state-society relations (Steele & Stein, 2002). They assume that authoritarian regimes are incapable of adapting themselves to new technologies, which provides political opportunities for pro-democracy movements. As manifested by the case of China, such an assumption is

far from reality. Similar to traditional media, the internet is not free from state interventions.

The internet cannot be imposed on a particular country from the outside without the consent and support from the domestic government (Milner, 2006). Most authoritarian regimes have voluntarily chosen to adopt the internet because information and communication technologies are an indispensable part of modern economy, efficient governance as well as a strong military. While dealing with the internet, those regimes are struggling to solve the dilemma between achieving economic development and minimizing political challenge, between retaining supporters and eliminating opponents. Certainly, the internet can be both opportunities and threats to authoritarian regimes. Since the economic reforms, China has realized such dilemmas and has endeavored to mitigate the political impact of the internet without impeding its economic potentials.

In the 1990s, as “a third wave of industrialization” unfolded on a global scale and China’s economic reforms deepened, the development of information and communication technologies became a vital part of a larger scheme of economic growth and modernization. The government actively engaged in building telecom infrastructures and gradually established a sophisticated regulatory regime for the internet with a streamlined governmental structure to maximize its efficiency. The regulatory regime governs all players in cyberspace, including internet service providers, internet content providers, and end users. However, even though this regulatory regime provides a legal basis for some sort of political control, its primary goal is to promote and manage a fast-growing industry with development as its central theme. The major function of the regulating authorities such as the MIIT is

administrative rather than political. In order to limit political challenge posed by the internet, the government combines legal devices with various tools of authoritarian control.

Due to limited resources and potential damage to legitimacy, the government has to selectively repress social protests. According to Yongshun Cai and Titi Zhou (2016), three factors affect how the government responds to collective action originated online: the government's awareness of the proposed action, its perception of the potential threat posed by the action, and the resources at its disposal. Once the government has decided to suppress a potential threat, there are four categories of strategies it usually employs: restriction on the flow of information by censorship, manipulation of public opinion by providing pro-regime information, demobilization of protesters through persuasion, buy-off, threat, punishment, or a combination of those, and lastly, the reputation for protecting its vital interests. Until now, China has been capable of retaining its authoritarian control on the internet while developing the information industry. Contrary to the expectation of the "cyber-utopians," the internet does not necessarily weaken authoritarian regimes.

So far, we have examined whether the development of the internet has a determining role in bringing democracy in China within the analytical framework of the political process theory. Lack of insurgent consciousness, ineffective organizational structure, and impervious political control on the internet all render an internet-driven revolution in China rather inconceivable. The failed attempt of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution reflects the success of the CCP's governing strategies. The message of the "Chinese Jasmine" had a very limited reach because of the intensive and timely government suppression. Moreover, the call for

democratization did not resonate with the majority of the Chinese public who feels optimistic about the future and appears patient for political change. The common knowledge constraint and distrust in anonymous organizers who were based abroad also inhibited any attempt at effective mobilization.

Since the onset of the Arab Spring, some media and scholars have been advocating the revolutionary potential of the internet (Franceschini & Negro, 2014; Lowrance, 2016). Yet, as manifested by both the Chinese Jasmine Revolution and the Tunisia Revolution, the “revolutionary potential” of the internet largely depends on the context where it operates, and the internet alone cannot constitute a revolution. As Larry Diamond (2010) points out, “when the social and political structure is not ripe for profound change, technology may not lead to democracy.” It is not technology, but individuals, organizations, and government that determine who prevails.

Recently, it was revealed that the data of up to 87 million Facebook users may have been improperly shared with Cambridge Analytical, an upstart voter-profiling company (Solon, 2018; Rosenberg, Confessore, & Cadwalladr, 2018). The data was allegedly used to influence voter opinion on behalf of some politicians including Ted Cruz and Donald Trump (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; Rosenberg et al., 2018). Therefore, online communication may not be as decentralized and open as previously expected. Rather, it can be controlled by major corporations that comprise users’ privacy and unscrupulous politicians who are willing to pay the price.

China’s WeChat was launched in 2011 and has become the country’s largest social network with 980 million monthly active users during the quarter ended

September 30, 2017 (Mai, 2018). In early 2018, one of the CCP's anti-graft watchdogs claimed that it retrieved deleted messages from a suspect's WeChat account, which caused privacy concerns among its users (Mai, 2018). Although the company denied the accusation of storing chat histories, it had previously confirmed that it shared private user data with the Chinese government (Mai, 2018; Mukherjee, 2017).

Meanwhile, the stories of the internet and social media fueling revolutions still continue. Beginning in December 2017 and continuing into 2018, a rare wave of public protests over economic hardship and lack of civil liberties have occurred in Iran and the battlefield is not only on the streets but also on the internet ("Iran Protests," 2018). A cyber battle is fought between the Islamic Republic and its critics in cyberspace ("Iran Protests," 2018). In Russia, thousands of protesters demonstrated in central Moscow against internet censorship and a government ban on the Telegram, an instant messaging service (Carroll, 2018). The Russian government's crackdown on the messenger has raised fear for further information control in the future (Carroll, 2018).

As China's integration with the rest of the world deepens, the "Great Firewall of China" may frustrate everyone, from professional gamers to global-minded entrepreneurs. The future potential of the internet as a tool for social mobilization remains uncertain. As one Tunisian cyber activist observes, before the authorities blocked access to Facebook, "most of the 300,000 (Tunisian Facebook users) were more interested in football, girls, et cetera; in 2011, these 300,000 people made a difference in the revolution" (Willis, 2011). Like the Arab Spring and the fall of the Soviet Union, regime change often occurs in unexpected and surprising ways,

triggered by random but interconnected events. The consistency of the CCP's response to signs of political protests indicates that it remains insecure about the stability of the regime (Dickson, 2011).

The political future of China is determined by various “push and pull factors.” Examined within the framework of the political process theory, whether the internet will be able to bring democratization in China depends on how insurgent consciousness, organizational strength, and political opportunities change. Generational replacement or traumatic events such as war and economic crisis can lead to change in political values and a decreased level of regime support (Dickson, 2016). The development of autonomous civil society and loosened authoritarian control both serve as the push factors for democratization. However, if the CCP continues to enjoy a high level of public support, restrict independent civil society, and retain tight authoritarian control, the internet is less likely to fully realize its “liberating potential” and the Chinese regime may remain resilient.

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KOREAN ABSTRACT

중동과 북아프리카에서 일어난 아랍의 봄은 가장 내구력이 있는 일부 권위주의 정권들의 민주화 가능성, 그리고 인터넷과 민주주의의 관계에 대한 학술적 논쟁을 야기하였다. 나아가, 아랍의 봄은 인터넷이 “해방적 기술”이며 민주주의를 전 세계로 확산시킬 수 있다고 주장하는 “사이버 유토피아주의” 담론을 부흥시켰다. 동시에, 중국 재스민 혁명의 불이 신속히 사라졌음에도 불구하고 중국의 정치적 미래의 대한 논쟁이 계속 전개되고 있다. 본 논문은 단기적 관점에서 중국에서 민주화가 가능한지, 인터넷의 발전이 중국의 민주화 실현에 결정적인 역할을 할 수 있는지에 대해 답하는 것을 목표로 한다. 따라서, 본 논문은 정치과정이론의 이론적 분석들을 통해서 “사이버 유토피아주의”와 중국이 곧 민주화될 거라는 예측에 반론을 제기한다. 설문 조사의 결과와 온라인 사회 향의의 사례 연구의 결과에서 얻은 증거를 바탕으로, 중국에서 인터넷이 주도하는 혁명은 이루어지기가 매우 어려울 것이라고 예측할 것이다. 부족한 반체제 의식, 비효율적인 조직 구조와 사이버 공간에서의 전면적인 정치적 통제를 그 근거로 삼았다. 또한, 분석을 통해, 기술보다 개인, 조직, 그리고 정부가 특정한 정치적 맥락에서 누가 우위를 점할지를 결정한다는 사실을 알 수 있다. 그러므로, 중국의 정치 미래는 미래 사건에 영향을 받는 일련의 추진 요인과 유인 요인이 어떻게 복잡하게 얽혀 상호 작용하는지에 따라 결정될 것이다.

주제어: 민주화, 인터넷, 중국, 국가-사회 관계, 사회 운동