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The Politics of Blogging in China

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University of Sussex

Thesis submitted March 2016 in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family – my father, my mother, and my sister.

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First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Sharif Mowlabocus and Caroline Bassett. Without their support and encouragement during my study, I would not have arrived at this stage – Thanks for your patience and inspiration. You have established not only my intellectual landscape, but also my endeavour to do this research. Thanks for your understanding of an international student, someone who has different cultural background, but your patience and understanding that have guided me through all the obstacles, difficulties, along with challenges I encountered. I would say, your supervision not only helps me improve my work; but also, you help me to believe in myself.

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Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted, either in the same or a different form, to this or any other University for a degree.

Signature.....

University of Sussex

Hai Tang

Doctor of Philosophy

The Politics of Blogging in China

Summary

This thesis aims to conceptualize the growing use of the blog as socio-political practice in an emerging Chinese public sphere. It is built on the study of three key blogs that, for different reasons, are held to be important in the recent history of blogging in China: a sexual blog (Muzi Mei's *Love Letters Left*, 2003), a journalist's blog (Lian Yue's *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent*, 2007), and a satirical blog (Wang Xiaofeng's *No Guess*, 2006-2011). I say they are important because the three blogs support my central argument of this thesis: blogging can be seen as a new form of political expression/participation in China. Such expression/participation is embedded in its creative challenges and negotiations pushing the political boundaries of tolerance subsequently operating within an authoritarian media system.

Through a combination of analyses, I explore how Chinese 'intellectuals' (loosely defined as educated, urban and middle-class netizens) use their professional skills, expertise and cultural capital in the public space of the Chinese blogosphere, how their blogs reshape the form of China's political culture, and how the blogosphere, through such interventions, proceeds in the development of political communications.

Through these analyses I address three key issues, all of which arise in these cases, and were drawn attention in the Chinese blogosphere from 2003 to 2011. Firstly, the rise of individualism in China, and the rise of peer-to-peer media means that bloggers who pursue self-expression simultaneously engage in political discourse through such self-expression. The three examples given in this study demonstrate that individual opinions across the blogosphere have significantly reflected public consensus and implicitly challenged orthodox political discourse. My chapter on Muzi Mei's sexual diary, for instance, explores this theme – a young woman's

sexual life, I argue, works as a controversy challenging to Chinese gender politics – and perhaps translates also to become political in other ways too.

Secondly, drawing on the concept of ‘blogging culture’, I argue that blogging has potentially reconfigured political information (taking people’s everyday lives as a starting point), increasing the visibility of political struggle and offering alternative modes of ‘public talk’. This can be seen in both the case of Lian Yue and Wang Xiaofeng – the former writes about a well-known government project – Xiamen PX event in 2007, presenting a radical practice of news reporting that has challenged the legitimacy of traditional sense of journalism in China. The latter uses satire to make fun of the State, Party leaders, mainstream media, policies and established ideologies, improving a previously restricted communicative environment towards more open.

Thirdly, the Chinese blogosphere has arguably created a new generation of elites – these ‘new’ elites are ‘ambiguous’ or ‘dissident’ elites in contrast to the older, more traditional understanding of an ‘establishment’ elite. In other words, even though the orthodox elite culture promoted by politicians, celebrities and cultural elites is still the mainstream in the blogosphere, such a ‘mainstream’ is gradually questioned, criticized and challenged by the commonly shared ideas, beliefs and values disseminated by Chinese radical bloggers such as Muzi Mei, Lian Yue and Wang Xiaofeng who are aware of new cultural, social and political contexts.

However, as this thesis suggests, political or political-based expression in China still has to constantly negotiate with ongoing censorship, along with an unstable discursive space and thus, can only enjoy a limited success. Therefore, the Chinese blogosphere, as a public space for political communication, still has a long way to go.

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Chapter One

Introduction: The Emergence of Blogging in China

Since the early 2000s, blogging has been steadily entering into the daily routines of larger segments of the population in China. According to China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 2010, p. 38-40), six out of ten Chinese netizens claim that they use the Internet as a powerful tool for blogging.

Blogging presents changes in terms of the political function of Internet-based communication, and tests the capability of online journalism to challenge news content and dissemination from this media channel (Yu, 2011). The content provided on the blogosphere also discovers how alternative information sources can potentially promote political participation (Leibold, 2011; Zhang Lei and Lou Chengwu, 2006; Zhou, 2009).

As a result, blogging contains transformation. The blogosphere, similar to other public platforms (e.g., BBS, online discussion forums) differs from the established media spheres in China, in that it aims to be more open and accessible to the public. At the very least, it hasn't been utilized to solely legitimate the power of authoritarian discourses. As Chinese scholar Zhao Qidi claims, its 'zero barriers' have built up a certain degree of respect for civic discourse (2009, p.69). Deng Hao, on the other side, argues that blogging has changed communicative ecology in China, that for media professionals and social elites used to monopolizing a power of discourse now has been changed – this power is also gained by individuals (2008, p.83) through accessing the blogosphere. Similar to Deng, Wang Lusheng (2006, p.74) highlights that the blogosphere empowers its space to every single netizen, which allows personal expression to be presented.

However, what is up for debate here is: who are ‘individuals’ in the Chinese blogosphere? Or, what expressions in the blogosphere can possibly make ‘the public’, or ‘the public talk’? One of the targets in this thesis is to answer the two questions.

Specifically, this thesis investigates the above aspects of blogging in China, through an analysis of three prominent individual blogs (which constitute the material for three case studies): Muzi Mei’s *Love Letters Left* (sexual blog) in 2003, Lian Yue’s *Lian Yue’s Eighth Continent* (journalist blog) in 2007, and Wang Xiaofeng’s *No Guess* (satirical blog) from 2006 to 2011. Broadly speaking, I will use tools of content and discourse analyses to investigate what the transformative potential of blogging is in China and, further, to reflect on how my study can be considered as a way to chart a new direction for future research into developing forms of political communication in China.

The study further explores a series of related and very specific questions: How is political communication manifested in practice by these bloggers? What role do these bloggers play in the blogosphere? And how do their blogs help form a public sphere in China? In doing so, it intervenes in debates around a series of large-scale questions concerning whether and how, and in what way the Internet-structured blogosphere has been the source of any particular democratic change in China.

My contention in this study is that the path to political participation has been reshaped via the emergence of the blogosphere. This path is not following a route towards a direct adversarial process vis-à-vis the State, but is constituted through bloggers’ successful efforts to create negotiations, and therefore, to push the political boundaries of tolerance subsequently operating within the blogosphere.

The contention is drawn upon literature about the public sphere and the rise of the network society (which will be discussed in Chapter 2). In this thesis the three selected bloggers are used for purposes of freedom of expression, and of exploring

how individuals becoming public representative of discourse. The two purposes involve the explanation of politics (personal as political or politics of living) and the public (representative public/new elites) in this Introduction, and thereby provide critical conceptions which can be used for the further examinations or rectifying the gaps in light of the two theories (e.g., a public sphere in Chinese contexts, an expanding concept of ‘flow’, see discussions in Chapter 2) practiced in China from this study.

In other words, this study specifically assesses the twofold political function of the three-blog studies. Firstly, by focusing on the individual blogs selected for study – respectively focusing on gender (sexuality), journalism (public journalism) and the use of satire, I aim to examine whether and how blogging about people’s everyday life matters for politics. I argue that blogging is indeed a new form of political communication, which can potentially transform bloggers’ everyday life (sexual life, living environment, watching mainstream daily news etc.) into politics and which can challenge constraint and be part of movements leading to increased freedom of expression.

Key in the design of my study is the types of interaction the bloggers are engaged with. The case of the *Love Letters Left* tells how the public reacted to a controversial sexual blog in 2003. The case of *Lian Yue’s Eighth Continent* shows how a journalist blogger encouraged his fellow residents to undertake political activities in 2007, and how this local protest was also connected globally. And the *No Guess* specifically illustrates how dissenting points of view are presented in an implicit way.

To a large degree, this thesis aims to examine how the personal becomes the political when personal discourse enters into the public sphere and becomes a matter for discussion, action and opinion. So I am not focusing just on how the bloggers have found freedom, but on how their work has helped shape a public sphere. For instance, in the case of Muzi Mei, I argue that the way in which sex and

liberation (of personal discourse) are being coupled together means that it is feasible to claim that Muzi Mei's legacy of blogging sexuality for not only female bloggers, but also radical bloggers more generally in China (since 2003). In the case of Lian Yue, I mention that his success is not only due to his passionate and critical writing, but the way (blogging format) his practices allow more freedom for journalism. In the case of Wang Xiaofeng, I argue that satirical blogging can be seen as something more than a humorous critique of Chinese politics. To some extent, it becomes a conscious political response to current CCP policies among Chinese *Zhishi Fenzi* (intellectuals).

Central to these bloggers therefore (as I have mentioned above) is blogging as a means of making 'publics' or 'public talk'. The three bloggers in my study share common features. They are professional writers. They have either publicized issues (sexual policies, the environmental crisis, the essential concept of established ideologies etc.) in society, or encouraged argument with/resistance to authority, and they take priority over attracting the widest readership possible. What I mean is that, these bloggers are not so interested in being 'the most popular' blog or undertaking 'fame-seeking' activities for their own sake. They were not very well known by the public before they entered into the blogosphere – they are average intellectuals (educated people), and belong to an urban Chinese middle class. Their blogs are more about everyday life and the politics of living in China.

Detailed analyses of these blogs will be offered in the following chapters (see Chapter 4, 5 and 6). But before that I am going to spend a little bit of time on the relationship between the communication system and changes of media policy in China, as this relationship forms a precondition of understanding of the above two conceptions ('politics' and 'the public') and the possibility for 'the personal becoming political'. I will then discuss the socio-political function of ICTs in China. This discussion may account for why blogs increase more opportunities for political expression than other media channels. Next, I am going to compare different online modes of political participation in China. This comparison is aimed at explaining what effect blogging has on everyday life ('life politics'/'politics of living') and

how it becomes an alternative approach for partaking in ‘Politics’¹. Finally, I will provide the definition of the concept of ‘the public’ in this thesis.

1 The Communication System in China

“China has a communication system with unique characteristics reflecting the influence of frequent political ups and downs, cultural traditions and economic conditions” (Chen, 1991, p.2). Since 1949 when the People’s Republic was founded, communication system has always been a means for the people of China to maintain a maximal awareness of the Party’s political line (Zhang Xingming, 2009). In Maoist China (1949-1976), a guiding principle of the government was the tight control of all parts of the social structure, from economy to ideology, across all institutions and organizations, and down to the level of the individual (Chen and Gong, 1997; Xin, 2006). As a consequence, the major function of communication was to publicize and propagate the Party’s political policies, explain their necessity, and establish their legitimacy (Xin, 2006; Zhang Xinming, 2009). This process of communication was in the manner of a top-down model. As Zhang Xingming (2009, p. 137-8) states: “The government decided all contents, and controlled all channels and diffusion scales of the communication”.

China’s reform policy after the 1980s has offered media opportunities to focus on the public interest (Lull, 1991; Xin, 2006), however; concrete guidelines and regulations have never prevented both the media and the public from the State’s control.

Generally, China’s State organizations with a censorship role are those acting under the leadership of the Party’s Central Propaganda Department². This department’s

¹‘Politics’ refers to the institutionalized politics or authoritarian ideologies, as conveyed through political system and mainstream media. It also relates to political actions (i.e., public aspects of assembly, strike and demonstration). The two sides are severely constrained by the State.

²The Central Propaganda Department changed its English-language title to be the Central Publicity Department in

role is to control the media sphere, including the General Administration of Press and Publishing, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT³), the Ministry of Culture (MOC), and the Ministry of Information Industries (MII⁴) and the like. The Central Propaganda Department tends to look at issues in relation to censorship from a macro level (e.g., topic in challenge to one-Party-State, or regional independence) and is concerned with overall trends in society. It has responsibility for censoring and monitoring national media such as CCTV and *People's Daily*.

Thus, the mainstream media act as an integral component of the national government system as a whole, operating with a high degree of centralization. Pan Zhongdang introduces a general background of China's media system:

China's party-press system is built upon the idea that the media is an instrument by which the party propagates its policy and ideology. A set of practices has long been accepted as journalistic routines. These include: the state subsidizes the media; party committees at various levels of the communist hierarchy oversee the media at their respective levels by appointing key personnel, deciding major topics for news coverage, and censoring journalists' work; the party's Propaganda Ministry controls media content; journalism education trains 'party propagandists'. (2000, p.256)

2 Changes In Media Policies in Chinese History

With such a pyramid-structured communication system, Chinese media has been historically expected to serve as the Party's "propaganda machine" (*Xinwen Chubanshu*, 1990), while the marketization after the economic reform has brought changes in China's media history.

1998.

³SARFT was officially launched in January 1986. It is now known as the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the PRC (SAPPRST), and continues to license and censor contents on broadcasting networks and to manage China's existing broadcasting infrastructure.

⁴MII was founded in March 1998. Its main function is to coordinate state policy on the construction and management of electronic media, the public telecom network and military telecom networks. Meanwhile, it also allocates and manages China's radio frequencies.

In 1979, the SARFT opened its first significant policy for accepting the advertisement on media. Following this policy, the press started to be classified into two types of paper: one for the Party organs, which are officially the mouthpieces of the CCP and operate under the severe supervision of its propaganda departments. Another for the commercial ones is licensed to publish their newspapers under various business organizations, government entities and social and scientific associations. In the 1990s, the number of profit-driven subsidiary weekend newspapers grew rapidly, by catering to the interest of the readers (Chan, 2003; Massey and Luo, 2005), the information published in this press carried less overtly ideological propaganda, though they are still highly regulated and far from a ‘free press’.

Meanwhile, official news organizations such as CCTV started to be given permission to recruit editors and journalists from all walks of life, on a flexible contract employment system. Since the mid-1990s, Chinese news broadcasts have invited *Zhuchiren* (anchor) to work across many channels in the nation’s radio and television stations such as the CCTV’s star anchors Bai Yansong, Jing Yidan, Cui Yongyuan and Shui Junyi. These anchors have created their brand programmes – *Dongfang Shikong* (Oriental Horizon⁵), *Jiaodian Fangtan* (Focus⁶), *Shihua Shishuo* (Tell It like It Is⁷) and *Xinwen Diaocha* (News Probe⁸). This new trend began to introduce an unprecedented level of debate and commentary into broadcasting (Xu, 2007), and led to an increasing interaction with Chinese audiences. It has stimulated an increased number of professional columnists and popular TV anchors, their role on pushing the quality of news, programmes and the ongoing professionalism in media practice (Xu, 2007).

⁵ The programme of *Oriental Horizon* began in May 1993.

⁶ The programme of *Focus* started in April 1994.

⁷ The programme of *Tell It like It Is* began in March 1996.

⁸ The programme of *News Probe* started in May 1996.

In the late 1990s, China's propagandists started to emphasize the importance of the Chinese media going online (Hartford, 2005; He and Zhu, 2002). Since then, more and more online media have been established. Take *Jingyang Wang* (Jingyang Net⁹), the online version of a popular newspaper *Yangcheng Wanbo* (Yangcheng Evening Paper) in Southern China, which attracts 400,000 readers per month due to it providing lots of information and linking to some Western media, according to He Zhou and Zhu Jiahua (2002).

From the above introductions we see that reforms in Chinese media have brought about three aspects of change. Firstly, commercial media have gained a financial independence, started searching for critical and open venues, or creating negotiation that can gratify public concerns. Secondly, the rise of the new recruitment policy in media administration has led to the replacement of ideologically competent 'reds'¹⁰ with professionally competent 'merits' (Bian, 1994; Chen and Gong, 1997; Sun, 2007), as Bian Yanjie argues:

[M]arket reforms did alter the basis of political mobility... The party now is interested in those with greater human capital (education) and less focused on criteria of ideological commitment. (1994, p.139)

Thirdly, online media not only appeared as a burgeoning electronic format, but also has increased the pace of interactive communications (see Hartford, 2005; Xin, 2006), in which public discussion becomes available. It is under these conditions that I am talking about the public (representative public vs. establishment elite) in this thesis and how their political communications operate (making public talk) in the Chinese blogosphere.

⁹See <http://www.ycwb.com.cn>.

¹⁰Reds in China point to two groups: people from families with Party members or revolutionary background (i.e., the Red Army), and people from countryside with poorer background but have joined the CCP or pledged their loyalty to the Party.

3 ICTs as a Source of Socio-Political Change in China

Before the late 1970s, China had long been portrayed as an exotic other in the Western world, as the former Maoist model of the State isolated China from communicating with the West. However, after the opening-up policy in 1978, China began to play a relatively more active role in engaging itself with the West. China's joining the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in 1980, and becoming a member of the World Trade Organization in 2001, transformed China from an isolated nation to a globalized State (Chan, 2003). As Chinese scholar Zhang Yongjin (2005, p. xiii) illustrates, "China has... become a significant global investor...The acquisition of IBM's global PC business by China's largest computer manufacturer Lenovo most recently best illustrates this point".

Not only in terms of economics, but also the hosting of Beijing 2008 Olympics particularly provided a great opportunity to improve communication between China and the rest of the world. Chinese historian Xu Guoqi points out,

Chinese participation and interest in modern sports are largely motivated by nationalism, but by importing sports from the West and taking part in world competitions, China has also engaged the world community. (2008, p.3)

Therefore, as Randolph Kluver puts, led by the ongoing reform and openness movement in China, Chinese society "has undergone radical changes, both in terms of its political and cultural frameworks" (2005, p. 299).

Take the Internet boom in China for example. Within the last three decades, China's leadership has given priority to the increased application of ICTs in the economy and society. The nation's economic strategy intends to accelerate Internet growth and develop the information industry. In 1986, the Communist Party

Central Committee and the State Council listed communications and information technology among seven priority areas for the nation's development (Ure, 1995, p.16). As Randolph Kluver notes, China spent US\$120 billion to upgrade its telecom and electronic communication sectors in 2006 (2005, p.303). In addition, the government launched an Informatization of the National Economy (INE) programme in 1997, and its Tenth Five-Year Plan¹¹ (Dai, 2005, p.9-10) in terms of economics has promoted this programme as a national strategic priority.

Meanwhile, with regard to online communication, radical forums and media reforms have created a Chinese characteristic online cultural sphere (Yang, 2003a), in which Chinese around the world have developed a presence marked by changes of Chinese culture and life to be the domain of the focus.

Besides its economic and cultural goals, China has certain political purposes in establishing the primacy of ICTs. A review of China's e-government project (Hartford, 2005) notes that the political goal of the Internet is to create an interactive space for citizens. Through sending messages to the mayor's mail-boxes, or using online official sites, citizens can communicate with local governors, exchanging ideas and opinions.

Chinese scholar Peng Lan (2005) argues that, ICTs change Chinese society in two ways: through technological syndication and via interactive participation. The former, in terms of the relations of technology-user and online-media, gave rise to new forms of communication, such as BBS (Bulletin Board System) and the blog, and the latter effectively brings about opportunities for personal expression and public consensus while putting pressure for changes.

¹¹The Tenth Five-Year Plan was from 2001 to 2005.

In the China Academy of Social Science (CASS) report, detailed data was offered by researchers Zheng Yongnian and Wu Guoguang, which led to the proof that,

In China, nearly 80% of the people think that by using the Internet they can better understand politics, compared to 43% in the United States, 31% in Japan, and 48% in South Korea...Also, nearly 61% of Internet users in China think that by using the Internet, they can have more say about what the government does compared to 20% in the United States, 24% in Japan, and 26% in South Korea. (2005, p.525)

In an interesting contrast, academic arguments among scholars, some focus on the exploration of political and social impact of ICTs on Chinese reality. For example, Christopher Hughes and Gudrun Wacker (2003) note that the Chinese government actively supports and promotes the spread of the Internet, yet is visibly concerned about the free flow of information as well as maintaining censorship over the Internet. ICTs, according to them, are “inherently political” (2003, p.4) and Chinese authorities can impose structure or routine on society, for instance, military training. John Ure (1995) argues that the potential of ICTs creates a more positive effect in China, but in turn causes a contradiction within China’s political and social structures. Ure further explains,

The contradiction between civil reform and political control now runs through all aspects of China’s economic and industrial development...Put simply, in an economy this is becoming liberalized and market-oriented, people need access to the means of communication and information technologies, such as computer networks, databases, international E-mail, and the freedom to use them as, when and how they are required. Currently, the shortage issue creates problems of access, and the control issue creates problems of usage. (1995, p.13)

By this account, the idea of technological determinism seems to be weakened by the Chinese case, for the political context in China, accompanied by its

authoritarian reactions that make its advance into the information age particularly dominant. Added to this is Kathleen Hartford's analysis:

Despite frequent policy changes and institutional restructuring, the main tenets of China's approach to Internet development remained constant: the state will retain ownership and control of the main infrastructure (backbone networks); ownership and control of access provider services should remain in Chinese hands; and on-line information and activities must conform to Chinese Communist Party restrictions. The three principles combined have brought intense involvement of state agencies in all aspects of the Internet's development. (September 2000¹²)

What is particularly interesting is that the Chinese government's investment in ICTs has become an obstacle to the democratic process, but in society it has been used as an advantage to democracy. For example, in China, active netizens interact and exchange information and opinion through blogs, discussion forums and specific community-based BBS. Chinese Scholar Yang Guobin (2003b), with his analysis of the discourse on *Qiangguo Luntan*¹³ (Strong Nation Forum) and the study of *Huaxia Zhiqing*¹⁴ (Chinese Educated Youth), argues that the Internet offers new possibilities for citizen participation. Craig Calhoun stresses that the dramatic growth in the population using ICTs and the large number of active participants have changed the nature of communication systems (1991, p.95). ICTs, up to a point, have transferred traditional top-down communication structure to be bottom-up or a two-way interaction (Chen, 1991, p.2). This is in contrast to the old State-owned media practice that includes newspaper, radio and television. A survey from CASS suggests another type of conformity in Chinese society that the Net is gradually becoming an alternative channel for political participation:

¹² See Hartford, K. (September 2000) Cyberspace with Chinese Characteristics [online]. Available at: <http://china-wired.com/pubs/ch/home.htm> [accessed 5 December 2008].

¹³ See <http://bbs1.people.com.cn>. *Qiangguo Luntan* is affiliated with *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), the leading official newspaper in China.

¹⁴ See <http://www.hxzq.net>.

Among Internet users, the Internet is replacing the traditional media as a source of news... [T]he communication platforms, such as BBS, blogs, and comments on the news, allow people to share views and information. According to the statistical results of the World Internet Project, more people in China than in other countries believe that the Internet will have a positive impact on political transparency. (CASS, 2005, p. iii)

To sum up, much of the debate about ICTs' influence has focused on the effective limits monopolized by the nation-State. These claims tend to demonstrate that ICTs have reinforced the authoritarian regime, rather than the promotion of democracy. Others, via the Chinese academy and official report, conceptualize the impact of ICTs as the interaction between the technology and its users. However, the impact of ICTs is not a purely technological event, neither simply a question of access, nor a usage of software.

On the one hand, the effect of the ICTs on participation or transparency implies that ICTs have created negotiations (i.e., critics of the government, tolerance of protest). However, such a negotiation has to follow a 'benign interaction' between media outlets and the Chinese political system. In other words, the relationship between media outlets and the Chinese political system, I argue, shows a gap between 'democratic process' and 'political participation'. This gap is based on democratic process always being in strict with the Party-State, and can be considered as a 'push' and pull' relationship (see Lull, 2006). According to James Lull:

Push refers in part of the idea that certain events can be introduced into the awareness of people without their asking or consent. (2006, p. 45)

While the 'pull' side, as James Lull notes,

Individualism, autonomy, freedom, and mobility comprise the dynamic essence of the 'pull' side of contemporary cultural experience. (2006, p.49)

The two terms, I argue, denote dynamic processes of interactions between the State and its citizens in China. Basically, the ‘push’ of the State can be stronger when its ideologies (e.g., law, education, moral values) and policies meet with much of the resistance. This can be seen in the next case-study chapters.

On the other hand, ICTs create an Internet-based space and closely articulate this space with various individuals and, further, mediate personal practices in terms of social, cultural and political aims. The concern is, with this in-between zone that social change and political culture (e.g., the dynamic process of ‘push’ vs. ‘pull’, and the searching for ‘benign’ interaction, will be explained in the next Chapter) is constructing, and it is in this vein that I am going to explain how to understand ‘personal becomes political’ in the Chinese blogosphere.

4 Comparing Participation Modes across the Media Spheres –

‘politics’ VS ‘Politics’

In the past three decades, China has witnessed Chinese people enjoying new economic and cultural freedoms. For instance, the growing consciousness of individual rights and self-protection via the legal system (Pei, 1998) is a means of civic participation in public affairs. Ding Xiaoli (2002) argues that the State now allows for the opening of increasing transparency of government and provides citizens certain opportunities for expanded freedoms in terms of cultural, social and economic fields. Take the use of ICTs for example, the rapid development not only creates various forums for citizen-based communications, but also generates a form of e-governing (Zhang, 2002).

Such a GOP¹⁵ attempts to clarify government functions, reconstruct government procedures and improve government management. As Jeffrey Seifert and Jongpil Chung point out:

The development of GOP aims to supply accessible administrative systems, which enable the public and various enterprises to gain access to and further share information available on the Internet (2009, p. 13).

Xinfang, which means “letters and visits” in Chinese, previously offline, has been strategically used for half a century to allow petitioners to report their grievances to top-ranking officials (Minzner, 2006). Now *Xinfang* goes online as a form of Governors’ Mailbox (see Hartford, 2005), allowing governors to listen to citizens, who in a sense of helping citizens defend their rights.

Other than GOP and Online *Xinfang*, People’s Representative’s blogs have drawn much more attention, due to their importance of facilitating communication between government and citizens, as Kathleen Hartford describes:

[G]iving local residents a conduit for communicating with their representatives before and during the meeting of local and national People’s Congresses, asking each other for help and information online, and interacting with government agencies via complaints, pats-on-backs, and requests for information in an environment that can be viewed by others. (2005, p.220)

The existing governmental portals and official news sites, along with People’s Representative’s blogs provide opportunities to foster the diffusion of governmental/political information; however, they also facilitate the development of centralized networks.

¹⁵ GOP: Government Online Project.

Firstly, government information systems are expected to reflect the core values of political participation. For instance, in the United States, e-government aims to “enhance the access to and deliver of government information and services to the public” (Seifert and Chung, 2009, p.5). However, the Chinese GOP, as Randolph Kluver comments (2005, p.307), is “primarily [the] venue for a propaganda battle, rather than a means of enhancing service to the Chinese citizens”.

Secondly, the aspect of service orientation is far off from the goal of citizen interaction. Kathleen Hartford takes online *Xinfang* as an example and notes that,

On the Guangzhou site, for example, users must “register” before they can send anything to the mayor’s mailbox. (2005, p.224)

Thirdly, the process and procedure of raising public issues or gathering public opinions are arguably appealing to transparency and responsiveness. As scholar Li Heran comments on the People’s representative’s blogs,

People’s Representatives are allowed to submit their viewpoints, proposals and suggestions to the government, according to public opinions. However, due to lack of critics and pressures, their approach can only be seen as providing the State with additional information (2008, p. 94).

The three models of participation, to some extent, are expected to expand government information but limit political conversation. In other words, Chinese people will always have difficulty in partaking in Politics (e.g., campaign, decision-making) as the authority has less intention to establish democracy. However, as Shen Fei et al. argue:

[W]hile acknowledging the repressive nature of the state power... the incremental structural change brought to society by the internet through

expanding users' social network could cultivate an active online opinion expression environment. (2009, p.467)

Take the blog, its active usage creates user-based contents, in which political opinions are involved and are quickly presented (Zhang Lei and Lou Chengwu, 2006; Zhou, 2009). For instance, when Zhou Xiang researches on the *NetEase* discussion of dismissal a Shanghai governor, she highlights that,

[P]osts with criticism of the government and officials accounted for a certain proportion of the sample... Although the group was small, the critical attitude toward the government is assumed to be very meaningful to Chinese people, considering the heavy censorship imposed on mainstream news media and the common journalistic practice of ensuring a coherent account whenever a sensitive political event happens in China. (2009, p.1016)

One of the features of the blog in China, if borrowing from James Leibold's words, "is chiefly an intranet of playful self expression" (2011, p. 4) – means Chinese bloggers are likely to talk about their leisure life such as travelling, or sharing common interests such as pictures and sports, or commenting on gossips, etc. on blogs (see Esarey and Xiao, 2008; Leibold, 2011, Zhou, 2009). However, as James Leibold notes,

[But] occasionally, discussion reaches a more serious level and can redirect public attention and anger at the state and political actors in the real world, empowering ordinary netizens to shape and, in some limited cases, alter government policies (2011, p.4).

By these accounts, for bloggers who want to express viewpoints on 'Politics', there are also alternative approaches such as choosing 'user-based contents'. The 'user-based' contents, I argue, are topics of people's everyday life, and are in association with 'discourses' of individual rather than 'official'. They represent personal expressions outside the dominant discourse, and appear as tactical means for the

expression of critique (either in the form of dissidence or in the form of resistance). As such, they take a different shape – as “nongovernmental discursive opinion” (see Fraser, 1990, p.75) in forming political communication in the blogosphere, and they are constitutive of ‘politics’ of blogging in this thesis.

5 The Conception of the Public in the Chinese Blogosphere

The term public (*Gong*) in Chinese context has always been seen as the opposite of private (*Si*). The *Xinhua Dictionary* offers, as its basic definition: “shared in equally by all” (2005, p.154¹⁶). It actually has been, historically, extended in a number of directions. For instance, *Gongzhong Yishi* (public-mindedness), defined by Liang Qichao during the late Qing and early Republican periods, advocating the importance of the concept of the public consciousness.

It was in his treatment of the ideal of [gong]... that Liang went beyond the traditional meaning of altruism to suggest subtly the connotations of popular sovereignty. Public-mindedness meant that everyone in the group had the right to govern himself; the right of self-government that everyone did what he should do, and was entitled to the profits he deserved. (Lian Qichao cited in Chang, 1971, p.104)

Gongmin (citizens) is used in Modern China (after 1949), and is used to modernize China’s legal system. In the Chinese context, however, the term *Min* is bounded by common interests and needs, and is regarded as a community that lacks knowledge (Xinhua Dictionary, p.337-8). In other words, if the notion of the *Gong* (public) is associated with *Min* (mass), it implies *Dazhong* (public masses), as Lei Guang explains:

In the communist parlance, however, *min* has acquired a class meaning. It came to stand for *renmin* (the people), which at various stages of the People’s

¹⁶ See *Xihua Zidian* (Xinhua Dictionary) (2005) Beijing: *Zhongguo Shangwu Chubanshe* (China Commerce and Trade Press).

Republic included, according to the official definition, the proletariat, the poor peasants, and other social elements supposedly supporting the Communist revolution. (1996, p.419)

Gao Juanjuan notes that, there are two groups of the public in China – the strong public and the weak public.

The strong public consists of certain interest groups who monopolize resources in economy and politics, and whose needs and demands can always be concerned... The weak public is on the opposite side. They belong to a weak group in society. As a result, their attention to public issues tends to be overlooked. (2008, p. 33)

Both Lei and Gao's explanation of the public imply a Chinese model of social stratification. Gao Juanjuan addresses the importance of the public for their proper economic backgrounds or political connections. However, her notion of the strong-weak dichotomy is predicted on an economic-political relationship, and is silent on alternatives or complications of the public in China, while Lei Guang's explanation of 'public masses', to some extent, links the word *Min* with *Minzhu* (democracy), as he argues:

Since the rise of the human rights discourse in the 1970s, *min* as *minzhu* has increasingly come to be understood as "individual citizens"... Such a definition has allowed activists to assert their individual, oftentimes parochial interests in the name of *minzhu*. (1996, p.420)

The shifting meaning of 'the public' has in turn illustrated a diverse type of *Zhishi Fenzi*¹⁷ (intellectual) in Chinese history. Public-mindedness represented the late Qing and early Republican intellectuals who started to contact Western ideas and wished to modernize China in democratic aspect. Public masses contextualized a class struggle (proletariat vs. bourgeoisie) ideology during Mao's area, and Mao's

¹⁷ In Chinese, *Zhishi* means knowledge, and *Fenzi* means a group of social members.

resistance of the intellectual group (see Hong, 1994, p.93-6). Individual citizens depict a strong self-consciousness in terms of intellectual thoughts, concerning individual rights and citizenship in contemporary China.

From the promotion of modernization reforms (in late Qing) to the class struggle movement (Mao's era) towards democratic expectation, Chinese intellectuals join with the masses, but have "bec[o]me a political concern at every level of government" (U, 2009, p.605). This 'concern', I argue, refers to Craig Calhoun's views. That is, intellectuals are "tired to be treated as the government's masses" but "asked to be China's citizens" (see Calhoun, 1989, p. 57).

In addition, the pursuing of individual rights and citizenship among Chinese intellectuals have transformed them into a meritocracy by replacing socialist redness (Bian, 1994; Chen and Gong, 1997; Lee, 1991; Sun, 2007), as Anne-Marie Brady points out:

Under this model, intellectuals... (both Party and non-Party members) have greater influence than perhaps any other time in CCP history. (2009, p. 450)

Specific understandings of the public manifest class stratification in Chinese society as a whole, and trigger the role of intellectuals from past to present, as Tao Dongfeng argues, they share bourgeois attributes that would benefit the nation's development on one side, but challenge to the socialist political ideology (1999, p. 2), on the other.

This 'challenge' can also be seen in the space of the Internet (i.e., the rise of the *Wangmin* – netizens¹⁸), particularly in Chinese blogosphere. According to those

¹⁸ *Wangmin* (netizens in Chinese) refers to the active users of the Internet after the 1990s in China. However, I argue the term *Min* refers to *Gongmin* (citizen) not *Minzhong* (masses).

scholars who believe that a public sphere is emerging in the blogosphere, the Chinese intellectuals have played a very important role in this process (Esarey and Xiao, 2008; Hartford, 2005; Sima and Pugsley, 2010; Yu, 2011; Zhang Lei and Lou Chengwu, 2006; Zhou, 2009). Yu Haiqing researches on j-blogging – journalists who write a blog in China, and notes that,

In blogging and other online activities, journalists...interpret news by assuming the roles of sentry, inquisitor and commentator in the newsgathering and digesting process. (2011, p. 389)

Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang (2008) focus on political expressions among an intellectual blogging group, aim at exploring how members of this community use satire and other forms of rhetoric to criticize the State. Zhou Xiang (2009, p.1016) analyses of the event – a dismissed governor in Shanghai, by collecting discussions on the NetEase, and argues that comments from its blog site offer “personal expression in political discussion and online civic messaging from diverse perspectives, relatively independent of official media”.

According to the CNNIC report, the Chinese blogosphere is comprised predominantly of educated netizens, with comparatively stable occupations.

Internet penetration rate among people with high school and junior college degree and above education background has attained a comparatively high level, and among people with junior college degree and above in particular, was saturated. (2013, p.24)

Internet penetration rate among students stays at a high level... Percentage of people of individually-owned business/freelancers ranked the second, reaching 18.1%. In companies and enterprises, managers account for 3.1% and general employees account for 10.1%... And among party and government organs and institutions, the leading cadres and common clerks account for 0.5% and 4.2% respectively. And professional technicians take up 8.1%. (2013, p.25)

All these suggest that the Chinese blogosphere consists of a diverse range of intellectual-based netizens; some of them have become key participants. They are, as Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang (2008) imply, rational speakers who are capable of making strong arguments or “validity claims”, to borrow from Habermas’s words (1990, p.58), towards reaching a consensus in the process of discussions. Additionally, bloggers, whose voices can be heard in the blogosphere, not only because they “spell out their arguments and critiques”, but also “the independence” they insist on, to borrow from Nick Crossley and John Roberts’s views (2004, p.5-6). This ‘independence’, I argue, is marked differently from the opinions published on mainstream media. In other words, bloggers are likely to provide more personal account of the contents. They exchange viewpoints on controversial issues. As scholar Wang Lusheng (2006) argues, the topic in a blog may refer to public issues which are of serious concern and are thus actively discussed. While the self-expression and the interaction between bloggers potentially contain a diverse range of criticism, mainstream media are not yet ready for bringing it to readers.

In this thesis, the blogosphere is aimed at being shown as increasingly digitized (see Esarey and Xiao, 2008; Yu, 2007), and gradually interactive (see Zhou, 2009) by intellectual-bloggers. By this I mean, firstly, the blog is seen as one of the sites on the Internet where mainstream media information and its ‘hegemonies’ (i.e., information was mainly disseminated by journalists, politicians and experts) are disrupted.

Secondly, the blogosphere is used as an important public space for netizens’ discursive practice. Blogging contents come from individual bloggers, some of them are impressive: their expressions and opinions are not only reposted by netizens but also by media. To some extent, they become public representative of discourse. The trend becomes a prominent theme, and brings about a new form of the public that I refer to in this study as ‘new elites’.

These new elites, as I will argue in the later chapters: firstly, their ‘rational discourse’, ‘independent opinion’ and ‘potential influence’ share similarly with Manuel Castells’s “networked individualism” (2005, p.12). However, in this thesis, I argue that these bloggers are not in pursuit of a new identity; rather, they concern the discourse and the expression. To the very extent that these bloggers are not only interested but also involved in the emerging issues of Chinese society. Their attentions have helped a certain issue to be well informed and become a means of raising public awareness.

Secondly, these new elites, I argue, are urban, well-educated, and middle-class Chinese. At some point, they still belong to a contingent group of ‘establishment’ elites such as ‘redness’ or ‘professionals’ (e.g., artists, journalists, scholars) in China; though, they are also average intellectuals who act as ‘ambiguous’ and ‘dissident’ elites, meaning they offer critical and independent thinking which point to the establishment and authoritarian ideologies. I address this specific point at length in the Conclusion, but after developing my framework and providing analysis of each case study in the following chapters.

6 The Structure of the Thesis

This introductory chapter (Chapter One) has presented brief previews of the principal themes in regard to the blogging culture in China, by discussing the change of the communication system, the critical usage of the ICTs, the limitation of political participation and the concept of the ‘representative public’/‘new elites’. Three core questions are proposed to define politics and the public in this study, and the aim is to explore to what extent individual bloggers, their role or the way of their expressions embeds political norms.

Chapter Two moves on to the literature review section. It primarily presents the view of the blog through two factors of discussion: the public sphere and the network society both in Western and Chinese context and thus argues a networked individualism work unique to China. Preliminary discussions on the relationship between the blog as an example of censorship work, and the blog as a democratic tool (the push-pull interaction) within the blogosphere lead to a general understanding of politics of blogging in China.

Chapter Three is a detailing of the methods that will be used in order to answer the research questions. The three case studies, as selected here, were chosen to investigate aspects of the rising phenomenon of the blogosphere, which, since it arrived in China, has been performing very differently from mainstream media spheres, especially in relation to political boundaries and how they are being challenged. This study focuses tightly on the blog material, but additional materials are used (discussions on website, media interviews, media reporting from both domestic and international sources) to form the secondary data for in-depth analyses.

The next three chapters aim specifically to analyse the three blogs, how they gained controversy and/or popular support from the public, and how they played (and continue to play) a leading role in offering opportunities for political communication.

Chapter Four examines a woman's sexual blog in 2003 – Muzi Mei's *Yiqingshu* (Love Letters Left, 2003). By illustrating controversial discussions from different media, and how their attitudes have been changing through critical or unacceptable towards tolerant and understandable from time to time (2003-2011), the Muzi Mei's sexual discourse shows potentially a political bargaining, not only to fight against orthodox sexual culture and gender policy in China, but also a legacy for more radical voices being heard in the blogosphere.

Chapter Five focuses on a journalist's blog in 2007 – *Lian Yue de Diba Dazhou* (Lian Yue's Eighth Continent, 2007). *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent* in 2007 was used to present a radical practice of news reporting that challenged the legitimacy of the

traditional sense of journalism in China. The challenge is based on the fact that journalists (columnists) in practices at the edge of journalism, where the struggles for alternative modes of knowing become visible, operate differently and have different kinds of reach than traditional publications. Analyses of both Lian Yue's blog and his columns in the print media, and the comparative contents from diverse media groups (domestic, local and international) indicate one way in which journalism is changing, under pressure from Chinese radical journalists who are aware of new cultural, social and political contexts.

Chapter Six continues the narrative of the growth of the political expression by describing a satirical blog – Wang Xiaofeng's *Buxu Liangxiang* (No Guess, 2006-2011). This chapter takes the always developing form of satire from its 'aggressive origins' (Western way) to kinds of entertainment (Chinese usage) as a standpoint, to examine why a satirical blogger is so popular, and how his satirical words can operate as a form of freedom of expression. From both content and discourse analyses on the blog I argue that Wang's satirical style combines old and new (i.e., hooligan), digital and traditional (i.e., spoof), official and unofficial (i.e., dirty words) etc. to make a new form of discourse. However, they are proved as an apt approach for expression, both teasing with mainstream media comments, and denying established ideologies.

In the concluding chapter (Chapter Seven), I again suggest that the use of the blog reveals an alternative public sphere (opposite media sphere) in China. Within the blog space, bloggers create the feature of individualism, practicing freedom of expression via diverse themes, and pushing their viewpoints towards public discussion. It is in these bases that I call them 'new elites'. In addition, their topic is actually about everyday life. It becomes a mainstream in challenge to the dominant political culture. Though a strong political censorship has never been far away from online communications such as blogging, the big State, its communication system is challenged by a growing network society, which I call the 'push' vs. 'pull' game is just about to play in China.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

1 Introduction

This chapter is based on the analyses of: (1) the public sphere, (2) the network society, and (3) how the two frames impact on contemporary studies of blogging in China.

At the beginning of this literature review, I look at Habermasian accounts of the public sphere. I argue that the Habermasian analysis of the public sphere is based mostly on the institutional level, aiming at accelerating democracy, but in its original form, Habermas's work cannot accommodate the unique situation of China. My interest, however, is to make the public sphere an entry point for setting up an investigation of the blog to argue with Habermasian theory. This approach is based on the work of Nancy Fraser (1990) and her argument that the public sphere can be constituted in discourses rather than tied to the State.

My next major objective in this chapter is to analyse online discussion spaces in China – online newspapers and portal sites, BBS and public forums as the models of public communication, for instance. I argue that their services of public concern may present both continuities and discontinuities to social mobilization and democratic process. The two sides, however, show “the rise of the network society” in general, to borrow from Manuel Castells's viewpoint (see Castells, 2000; 2005), which comprises the second part of the literature review.

But my focus is narrowed in a *Wangluo Shehui* (cyber society) in China – I mention, the blogosphere is structured as cyber society, where bloggers struggle for an independent public space, presenting their argument with dominant discourse.

Detailed argument will be presented in the third part of this literature review – through reading academic sources, I divide the China focus into two camps – blogs demonstrating burgeoning democracy vs. blogs ‘supporting’ the worst of China’s State censorship policies. My focus on the former tendency is exemplified by female blogs, news blogs and satirical blogs in China appearing as an alternative, I argue, they act as different forms of discourse, address issues of public interest, and debate with the establishment. All these are fused into “networked individualism work” (see Castells, 2005, p. 12).

2 Analyses of the Public Sphere

The blog, in aspects of interaction and participation, certainly raises the issues of the public sphere, which will be gauged in the following paragraphs.

2.1 Discussions of the Habermasian Public Sphere

Jürgen Habermas traced the development of a democratic public sphere in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England, France and Germany. In his influential work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas posits that early modern capitalism created the conditions for the “bourgeois public sphere” (1991, p.27) for public debate, and cites a number of conditions that allowed this sphere to operate: literary influences, coffee houses and salons, and primarily, the independent and market-based press. Habermas’s notion of the public sphere pursues a new sphere for individuals to exchange matters of public interest through rational communication (Fraser, 1997; Manning, 2001). Habermas believes

that democracy functions in a public sphere, and his theory is to designate the sphere as both sharing democratic tradition and a domain of equal conversation by providing critical reasons (Poster, 2001, p.179).

In the first modern constitutions the sections listing basic rights provide an image of the liberal model of the public sphere: they guarantee society as a sphere of private autonomy; opposite it stands a public power limited to a few functions; between the two spheres, as it were, stands the domain of private persons who have come together to form a public and who, as citizens of the state, mediate the state with the needs of bourgeois society, in order, as the idea goes, to thus convert political authority to “rational” authority in the medium of this public sphere. (Habermas, 1991, p.401-2)

The public sphere in Habermas’s claims explains two viewpoints: the first is the ‘public’ he focuses on, and the second is the purpose of the public in the public sphere. Habermas argues that private persons who consider them as citizens in society form the public. They tend to offer critical opinions, aiming at preventing the authorities from monopolizing and controlling personal expressions; thereby their critiques can be heard and accepted. As such, Habermas’ public sphere is ‘a sphere of private autonomy’, offering significant benefits in terms of a democratization of communication.

A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public...Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; thus with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely. (Habermas, 1991, p.398)

As such, Habermas’s highlighting ‘private autonomy’ (1991), to a larger extent, addresses those rational opinions deliberated by publics that aim to guarantee a free speech or freedom of expression. In other words, Habermas’s ‘democratization of communication’ is based on critical discussions being “free from domination by the state or any other organized system of power” (Mayhew, 1997, p.118). It becomes a

starting point for scholars to evaluate the democratic quality of communication systems, in which criticism is enabled to be disseminated and a democratic process is sustainable and developing.

Discussions on the public sphere as a space constituted by qualified democratization are various. Some highlight 'equal conversation'. Nancy Fraser, for instance, advocates that a public sphere is based on equality, allowing "both for strong publics and for weak publics" (1990, p. 77). Nicholas Garnham considers the public sphere as "an integral part of a democratic society" (1995, p. 251), that not only helps "individuals come together...in dialogue", but also inspires them "as equal participants in conversation" (Thompson, 1995, p.253), thus, connecting the public sphere with the private sphere into mutual social realms.

With the rise of the Internet has become a tendency to analogize dialogues that take place on the Web; the notion of the public sphere in terms of 'democratization of communication' is particularly revised. As Lincoln Dahlberg argues, the public sphere will be extended through the diffusion of new communication technologies (2001, p.630), as it promotes "rational-critical citizen discourse – discourse autonomous from state and corporate power through which public opinion may be formed that can hold official decision makers accountable" (Dahlberg, 2001 p.616). Rodney Benson argues, that "the internet is making possible new forms of democratic public expression" in the service of the public sphere (2009, p.193). The new forms of democratic public expression, on the one hand, as Peter Dahlgren argues, act as "the catalyst for the civic cultures", by "allowing engaged citizens to play a role in the development of new democratic politics" (2005, p.160). The term 'role' here connects with Mark Poster's comment that new forms of electronically mediated discourse should be taken into account (2001, p.181). On the other hand, as Brian McNair highlights that new media should be more independent so that they are capable "to monitor the activities of elite" (2006, p.239).

The above discussions, either aimed at building up an environment for widening public expression, or addressing the importance of a democratic society, have affirmed the public sphere for strong democracy – simply put, a public sphere in the Habermasian sense demands an assertion that the issue of the public sphere is at the heart of any conception of democracy (see Poster, 2001, p.178). The term ‘democracy’, as Mary Rankin notes:

We now elaborate by citing institutions and practices of Western democracy: private individual, group, and property rights; means and places of communication for forming and freely expressing public opinion; institutions and processes for individual and group political participation; legal guarantees of all these rights¹⁹, institutions, and activities; and constitutional limits on state power.” (Rankin, 1993, p. 159)

Take the new media, as they have created diverse spaces for interaction and communication, and have greatly changed the communication environment (dialogue) in the conventional media. Therefore, their relevance to democracy points to the increasingly significant role of individuals, who use the media and culture to promote public interests on one side, and engage more with politics on the other. However, or in Nancy Fraser’s argument, the public sphere is in the sense of a space for talking, while

it eventuates in “public opinion,” critical commentary on authorized decision-making that transpires else-where. (1990, p.75)

Fraser’s words stand “at the forefront of the evolving public sphere” (see Dahlgren, 2005, p.160) in this thesis, as they argue with the Habermasian public sphere, in terms of ‘democratization of communication’, by shifting the attention to discursive practice. The argument not only relates to criticism, to what extent it concerns with

¹⁹ In this thesis, I treat ‘rights’ as ‘political rights’. However, the Chinese people are seen as the Party’s ‘masses’, not as citizens of the nation (please see the Introduction, the discussion of the ‘Public’ part), so their individual rights are not completely guaranteed by the law.

the degree of freedom within a less democratic communication system (media), but also connects with the degree of civil society, its development is not yet to be realised outside China. In other words, if the State is not willing to inspire a discursive influence on political communication, how does the public sphere operate ‘democratization of communication’?

It is within these parameters that I am talking about a different (limited and restricted) public space of the blogosphere in China (within a controlled media system, and authoritarian regime). I call it (the Chinese blogosphere) a ‘public space’, or an emerging public sphere. This difference is embedded in the Chinese blogosphere not sharing a common set of conditions with the Western-based public spheres (e.g., similar or shared media systems, democratic regimes, mature civil society), so it sits at the boundary of the Habermasian public sphere.

As such, the term ‘blogging’ in this thesis is considered as: (a) to use the blogosphere to produce content that sees individual value; (b) the content is created by diverse topics, though, self-expression is the core purpose, and the pursuit of the publicness, of which the struggle for freedom of expression is the key component; (c) the self-expression produces individual discourse which is in contrast to the dominant discourse.

What has happened in the blogosphere relates to the Internet, especially the open access to ICTs (see discussions in Chapter 1), how it facilitates interactions between State and society that brings changes by affecting both (for instance, female blogs, journalist blogs – as individuals’ discursive practice, as well a path to political participation, will be discussed in the later part of this chapter), to borrow from Philip Huang’s views (1993, p.222).

To know what has been changed in this public space (the blogosphere), and the extent the changes may relate to the Habermasian purpose of the public sphere, we

need to know the short history of the development of the online public spaces in China, as the blogosphere shares similar historical transformations as these new media have had.

2.2 The Chinese Characteristic of the Online Public Spaces

The development of Chinese online spaces shows, as I will argue in this section, the continuities and discontinuities between older and newer forms of public communication. The continuity part is embodied in public opinion being formed by individuals' self-expression, through partaking in specific topics to make public talk, and further, to criticise the authority. However, this critique is aimed at exposing issues rather than challenging to State power.

2.2.1 The Public Spheres in Chinese History

The public sphere barely existed until late 1970s, when reform and open policy started to be implemented in China. However, in both the late-Ming and earlier-Qing dynasty and the Republic periods, debates and freer discussions did plant the seeds of a public domain in history (see Rankin, 1993; Furth, 2002; Schwartz, 2002). The former was argued by Mary Rankin as a "management" public sphere (1993, p. 167; p. 178):

The center of this sphere lay in the many faceted voluntary involvement of local elites in running local affairs outside of bureaucratic frameworks. (Rankin, 1993, p. 161)

And the latter, appeared in newspapers, journals and magazines such as *Xin Qingnian* (New Youth), *Meizhou Pinglun* (Weekly Critic), and *Geyao Zhoukan* (Folksong Weekly) in earlier twentieth century, as Charlotte Furth puts:

The leadership... came from China's newly modernized universities and schools... its goals was the establishment of a scientific and democratic 'new culture' purged of all relics of China's feudal past. (2002, p.13)

However, such public spheres were destroyed in the Maoist time. There were constellations of political forces around intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution, and any critical articulation was severely punished by the State. Such punishment has been used as a long-term Party rule for developing democracy in process, however, it was challenged by the students' movement in 1989, when radical scholars and young people 'produced' a place – Tiananmen Square, where “incorporated the imagery and representations of popular sovereignty” (Calhoun, 1989, p. 57) to present their viewpoints.

[T]here is the way in which the protest transformed Tiananmen Square from a state-oriented ceremonial space to a setting for popular discourse. (Calhoun, 1989, p.55)

With the development of the Internet in China, online spaces have been created as genuine places for public discourse. Frequent and active online communications have been established, either by small groups of like-minded people meeting for discussion, or by large audiences having words and spreading messages, by debating societal issues and events as their common interests.

2.2.2 The Online Communications as Public Spaces in China

The growing development of online communications can be seen as going through three stages in China: the beginning of BBS in 1998, the launch of public forum in 2000, and the emergence of blogging in 2002.

The BBS might be considered as a precious place where Chinese netizens could first think about issues and speak out their thoughts publicly, as Xu Congqing and Ruan Liyu (2009, p. 96) argue. The BBS was particularly aimed at civic virtue, taking the role of an “open public political square” (see Zhang Lei and Lou Chengwu, 2006, p. 100). *Xici Hongtong* (Xici Lane²⁰), one of the most popular BBS forums in China, had groups such as *Minzhu Luntan* (the Democracy Forum – focusing on China’s political reform, *Ziyou Luntan* (the Liberalism Forum) – concerning politics and *Sixiang de Jingjie* (the Plane of Thinking) – analysing Western political theories. These topical columns constantly offered radical-critical and independent contents (see Harwit and Clark, 2001, p.389) to attract more in-depth discussions.

Public forums are mostly built on Chinese portal sites. *Qiangguo Luntan* (the Strong Nation Forum) in the *People’s Net*, for instance, a website managed by the *People’s Daily*, as Zheng Yongnian and Wu Guoguang (2005) suggest, is much more liberal in the content than the *People’s Daily*, as more political discussions are allowed in its electronicforum than in its parent newspaper. A survey from *Strong Nation Forum* illustrates:

There are 2170 thousand registered members on the *Strong Nation Forum*... Over 68% of them have college degrees... Half of the users think that the forum is very important in their virtual life, and 40% are likely to discuss political topics. (Yu Jianbin, 16 March 2010)

Both BBS and public forums have broken the conventional way of communication. They have enabled not only media professionals and social elites, but also individuals to form dialogue with others. In pushing the two-way interaction (see Chen, 1991; Lax, 2000) this becomes quite a departure from the traditional attitude towards actively transmitting views and arguments to reflect public interest, and further cultivating public opinion.

²⁰ See <http://www.xici.net>.

In other words, both the BBS and the public forums show a continuity of the Habermasian public sphere in China, where public conversation has been built up, albeit online (e.g., media professionals, social elites and individuals come together to form public opinions). In addition, the inspiration of the ‘radical-critical and independent contents’, along with ‘more political discussions’ show the emergence of the ‘democratic public expression’ in China, where critical commentary is disseminated and public participation is shaped.

However, these transformations do not mean that online public spaces will not go on as usual as China’s press media. In other words, political censorship and the government’s central role are two keys to map the landscape of Chinese media. Take *Xici Lane* BBS: the website redesigned its pages in 2000, and was required to remove some of the existing opinions. Topics on the *Strong Nation Forum* focus more on China’s *Minzu Fuxing* (national revival), *Daguo Jueqi* (the rise of the great nation), *Zhongmei Duikang* (Sino-American Confrontation), and *Diaoyudao Guishu* (Senkaku Islands Disputes), all of which follow the Party’s mainstream discourse.

The two forums mentioned above, have illustrated an ongoing policy of media commercialization. They, however, belong to a dominant media culture, and are far from being free or enjoying autonomy. To put it another way, the lack of media independence or the challenge to independence by any media has prevented China from democracy promotion. Eric Ma analyses the function of the media commercialization in China:

Here we... see a Foucaultian bend: through the media, the state-market complex promotes regularly discourses which are restraining and enabling, disciplinary and satisfying. (2000, p.28)

Ma’s words also imply a ‘push and pull’ mode of media commercialization in China (see Lull, 2006). On the pull side, China’s ‘digital revolution’ cannot weaken the control (Esarey and Xiao, 2008; Leibold, 2011; Yu, 2007; Yu, 2011), as the

Party-State will continue its authoritarian rule in media management. As Kang Xiaoguang and Han Heng argue: “Its controls are very intensive and strong when it feels such are necessary” (2008, p.49). On the push side, I argue, in between policies of ‘restraining’ and ‘disciplinary’, Chinese people are searching for the way to think about politics, delicately pushing for the possibility of ‘enabling’ and ‘satisfying’. This is based on Nancy Fraser’s viewpoint,

The public sphere, in short, is not the state; it is rather the informally mobilized body of nongovernmental discursive opinion that can serve as a counterweight to the state. (1990, p. 75)

This ‘mobility’ is the feature of the blogosphere in China. That is, the blogosphere is developed as similar as the BBS and public forums for accelerating public expression, while it is intertwined with a unique censorship system, and is structured as an unstable public space. The fact that the use of the blog was declined after 2009 – both *Weibo* (microblogging since 2009) and *Weixin* (wechat since 2011) become increasingly attractive to Chinese netizens. In other words, in comparison with *Boke* (blogging), *Weibo* especially *Weixin* have been serving the much greater number of users accessing the mobile internet (i.e., to give lower income, rural or marginalized groups a voice); to some extent, they speed up the diffusion of information, addressing more issues in society.

In this sense, the blogosphere, to some extent, relates to what Manuel Castells calls a ‘network society’ – resulting from the interaction among bloggers, writing blogs to produce ‘nongovernmental discursive opinion’. However, this interaction is also in a dynamic process of constant conflicts or negotiations with the authority, its political ideologies, and dominant discourse on the Net. So the question remains, how this ‘dynamic’ affects or impacts on public critique and political participation, or simply put, what kind of critique and participation can be called as ‘available’ or at least ‘negotiable’ in the blogosphere?

3 Analysis of the Network Society

To answer the above question, I need to first look at the network society in China, as the growing public spaces, along with an active Chinese blogosphere on the Internet, as I mentioned in the previous part, can be regarded as what Manuel Castells (2000) calls “the rise of the network society”. How is this network society performed as ‘rise’? Where, or in which part is it different from Manuel Castells’s?

3.1 Discussions of Manuel Castells’ s Network Society

The notion of the network society in Manuel Castells’s description is a new society, which is constituted by the revolution in information and communication technologies (e.g., television, computer), including not only ICT infrastructure, but also economic strategy and social relationships. His concept of ‘network’ structurally describes all kinds of communication and transaction taking place in late 20th and earlier 21st century in the world. For the purpose of this study, I just focus on Castells’s computer-mediated network society, which is based on an informational society where “a solid information technology” at “infrastructure, production and knowledge” has been fully established (Cardoso, 2005, p.26). As Castells puts,

Interactive computer networks are growing exponentially, creating new forms and channels of communication, shaping life and being shaped by life at the same time. (Castells, 2000, p.2)

Castells argues that the fundamental component of the network society is a series of network enterprises (e.g., broadcasting system, telecommunications) constituted “on the political debate and power seeking” (2000, p.368). The information system in a capitalism-based society, for instance, interacts with markets, corporations and media, increasingly giving rise to the expression of decentralized forms of power (Webster, 2001, p.7). However, in an alternative system such as China, technology

is “fundamentally in the hands of the state” to prevent innovation from posing the threat to the authority in terms of “the potentially disruptive impacts... on social stability” (Castells, 2000, p.9).

In whatever system, Castells sees ‘the spaces of flows’ as a common symbol in the network society, albeit at the different level.

I have argued... that our society is constructed around flows: flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, flows of organizational interaction, flows of images, sounds, and symbols. Flows are not just one element of the social organization: they are the expression of [the] process *dominating* our economic, political, and symbolic life. (2000, p. 442)

In a sense, Manuel Castells’s network society focuses on various regimes, where power, technology and people interacted with each other, and is “increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the self” (2000, p. 3). The ‘Net’ points to new communication media as social organization, as well as the network formed by users for communities and social movements. The self relates to social activities taking place in dynamic networks for social change (see Stalder, 1998).

This Net-self-dichotomy seems to be a core theme throughout Manuel Castells’s network society. In other words, even though Castells’s ‘network society’ suggests an uneven spread of information technology around the globe, he insists that the Net appears “as a global relationship of dominant forces, inspired by a universal instrumental rationality” (Waterman, 2001²¹). However, the analysis of how this network structure may change the notion of the self is mostly lacking.

²¹ The article *The Brave New World of Manuel Castells: What on Earth (or in the ether) is Going On* is written by Peter Waterman (25 December 2001), and can be found at: <http://globalsolidarity.antenna.nl/castells.html> [accessed 13 June 2015]

My argument is in two folds. Firstly, Castells's dichotomy-based analysis is based on the network society being used more "as a tool of investigation and interpretation, than "as an ideological discourse that serves a performative, prescriptive function" (Barney, 2004, p. 181). His comparison between Capitalism and Stalinist society, for instance, argues different choices of decision-making in utilizing the network, and implies 'good' and 'bad' between the choices, but has not given specific analyses of the dynamics between ICT infrastructure and societal relationships. As Bruno Latour argues, in network society, there could be "an [social] actor whose definition of the world outlines, traces, delineates, describes, files, lists, records, marks or tags a trajectory that is called a network" (1996, p. 378).

In addition, Castells's network society is "manifested in the transformation of sociability" (2005, p.11), which connotes his view on the crisis of nation-states. Through instances of new social movements (e.g., feminist, environmental) taking place in the network society, Castells stresses "collective identities to participants" (Webster, 2001, p.6) and affirms their importance, as they have, to a larger degree, resulted in decentralizing or weakening the dominant role of the State. This mode, however, as Nicholas Garnham and others argue, cannot be adapted as universal (see Barney 2004, p. 179; Garnham, 2004, p. 177), as Darin Barney argues,

As an alleged fact, the Network Society becomes the standard for ... what we can reasonably expect ... At its most advanced level of articulation, the discourse of the Network Society not only normalizes present conditions, but also justifies political, social and economic measures that might otherwise be negotiable. (Barney, 2004, p.179)

Take China for example, controlling the network would make the authority a power-holder in the network society. However, as Darin Barney argues, power is not only an implement of monopoly, but also "a function of access to networks" (2004, p. 30). The rapid development of the Internet has increased possibilities for Chinese netizens to access to diverse online media, setting up a network of discourse for 'power seeking'. It is under this option that the relationship between

the Net and the Self can be understood as ‘different’ in comparison with Castells’s network society.

On the one hand, Castells’s network society is rooted in “the interaction between the new technological paradigm and social organization” (2005, p. 3), resulting in ‘flows of information’. However, what is happening in the Chinese network society, is not only a society of “the informational” (see Castells, 2000; 2005) but of “the message” or “the communication” (the use of the technology, see Lash, 2002, p. 2) in the process of interaction among the people. To put it another way, the network society in China see “flows of people²²” (see Fahmi, 2009, p. 89) as a symbol, bringing about the presence of an alternative mode of the ‘Net’.

On the other hand, Castells’s ‘spaces of flows’ include his analysis of the influence of the mass media: “[w]hat happens in this media-dominated political space is not determined by the media: it is an open social and political process” (1997, p. 312). This openness is advocated as the dominant value (Cardoso, 2005, p.49), and is measured on “[p]olitical opinions, and political behavior [being] formed in the space of communication” (Castells, 2005, p.14). It means “the freedom of the media to report freely and give opinions [freely]”, as Gustavo Cardoso (2005, p.61) puts. This obviously is not the case in China. Given the political viewpoints restrictedly expressed on media, the network society in China, I argue, shows rather “the spaces of resistance” (see Dhaliwal, 2012, p. 256; Fahmi, 2009, p. 90) – the extent that individual views produced by online communication differ from those in mainstream media may signal a broadening of challenge, to which the mainstream media have been taken as a key word of ‘resistance’. While this ‘resistance’, on the other side of the coin, represents such individuals’, their willingness to partake in the network, seeking changes through conflicts, as taking the role of developing the network society.

²² In this thesis, ‘flows of people’ mainly refer to an urban-based intellectual class in China.

The above two factors (the notion of ‘flows of people’ and ‘resistance’) are what I am interested in in this thesis, as they relate to a ‘political process’. To put it another way, my focus on the role of the network society in this thesis is based on two conditions: first, the network society in China is actually a media society (see Lush, 2002, p.2), but is distinct from the mainstream media. Rather, it is a *Wangluo Shehui* (cyber society – an informal online media society), utilizing the Internet as technology, but mainly as a space for communication. Secondly, this cyber society is not independent of the government, however, it contains actively “the social involvement of the citizens in everyday life”, if borrowing from Gustavo Cardoso’s views (2005, p.54), alternatively shaping a space for the rise of social openness and the conscious of citizenship. These are the ‘political process’ I am talking about, and I will discuss this cyber society in detail in the following section.

3.2 The Rise of a *Wangluo Shehui* (Cyber Society) in China

The rise of a *Wangluo Shehui* (cyber society) in China, as Jia Lu and Ian Weber argue, is “facilitated by new ICTs, creatively make use of the private space to win further concessions in the public sphere” (2007, p.941-2). It is a place where certain messages, such as critical debate and the articulation of social problems, are actively spread (Yang, 2003b, p. 474). Added to these is that, as Glenn Reynolds puts:

Most media celebrities, on the other hand, became famous because other people lacked access to the tools of the trade. That’s changing now. (2003, p.82)

As such, the term ‘rise’ contains ‘civic engagement’ and ‘political participation’, both are in opposition to mainstream media practice.

The arguments recall the public sphere theory. How it has been employed in the study of digital media matters to the Chinese cyber society. In other words, the Habermasian public sphere has provided some of the equal assistances to develop (besides democratization of communication provided by the Internet), I argue, a progressive cyber-based civil society, containing an intellectual-based participation. This means, Habermas's arguments about the public sphere as a specifically bourgeois category of analysis may help me explain the emerging 'new elites' (see Chapter 1) and the oblique forms of public critique and participation they shape in the Chinese blogosphere in this thesis.

Firstly, as Habermas puts:

We assume that a certain... bourgeois public ... as the basis for a consensus attainable at least in principle. Apart from introducing a greater internal differentiation of the bourgeois public, which by means of a more detail-oriented focus could also be accommodated with my model, a different picture emerges if *from the very beginning* one admits the coexistence of competing public spheres and takes account of the dynamics of those communication that are excluded from the dominant public sphere (1992, p. 425).

The previous discussion of the various public spaces can be seen as a new push for the Habermasian public sphere and the deepening of civic engagement in China. In other words, it is the coexistence of different sites, attracting an urban-based population as active participants that have deployed the nature of the public communication (see Calhoun, 1991; Yu, 2007), thus, formed a Chinese cyber society.

Secondly, Habermas's notion of 'representative publicness' "constitutes the historical background to modern forms of public communication" (1992, p. 426). He argues, "when bourgeois private people formed themselves into a public and therewith became carriers of a new type of public sphere.

As I have argued in the previous sections (also see Chapter 1), the Internet has created netizens as ‘new public’ (also see Leon Mayhew, 1997, Castells, 2000; Webster, 2001) of participants to gain a discursive influence on public communication. These new public, if borrowing from Raymond Williams’s views, are “characterized initially by an educated bourgeoisie interested in ... the critical discussion of cultural issues into a sphere dominated by mass media and mass culture (Ramond Williams cited in Habermas, 1992, p. 424). Apart from a political leadership, I argue that the new public represents a unique cultural elitism in the Chinese cyber society.

Pierre Bourdieu has a metaphorical term ‘cultural capital’, generally refers to the range of recognized and valorised cultural resources and powers expressed/used by elites to undergird their position in the hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1986, p.243). In other words, cultural capital consists of familiarity with certain tastes or styles, and seen by elites as dominance practiced in realms such as literature, theatres and museums (see Tondeur et al., 2010, p.153). However, the development of the Internet in China, I argue, not only sees “the possession of the means of ... using a machine (see Bourdieu, 1986, p.247), such a usage implies, the Net as cultural capital featured in building public space (i.e., an educational group who use the Net as a base to share their views, values and beliefs) and social value (i.e., intellectuals, their efforts – the political thinking/expression they put in can be possibly expanded towards influential – making public talk), as researcher Zeng Jun argues,

The blog expands a new cultural division in China, that is, celebrities, professional writers, and techno-cadres initiate a renewed rich popular culture, and construct a growing elite cultural community. (8 June 2009)

The ‘public talk’, or the ‘making public talk’, I consider it as “informal” ‘public opinion’, and is based on what Habermas has put: “those attitude and assessment that are taken for granted within a culture and that make up the lifeworld

constituting the context and ground of public communication”, and “are not fed into the circuit of formal, quasi public opinion making by the mass media” (1992, p. 440). In this thesis, I aim to show that blogging contents arguably emerge as ‘informal’ public opinion, which have dominated individual bloggers’ effort to practice freedom of expression. The practice, to borrow from Gustavo Cardoso’s term, relates to “unconventional political participation” (2005, p.55), and has disrupted the mainstream (see Yu, 2011; Esarey and Xiao, 2008).

4 Discussions of Blogging in China – Burgeoning Democracy VS State Censorship Policies

I have mentioned elsewhere in this thesis when understanding the Chinese blogging culture we need to bear in mind that blogs are inevitably associated with Internet censorship conducted by a repressive government (Jiang and Xu, 2009; Leibold, 2011; Shen et al., 2009; Zhang, 2002), “including using legislative power to restrain accessing sensitive content, exercising political control over internet service and content providers, and inducing self-censorship” (James Gomez cited in Shen et al., 2009, p.453) in China.

4.1 Censorship Policies of the Blogosphere

China’s censorship policies take many forms, including: (1) Keyword filtering – commonly barred blog postings include those with implicit or explicit words in relation to ‘Tibet’, ‘June 4’, top leaders or any dissidents involved in politically sensitive events (see Nordin and Richaud, 2014). (2) Popular blog sites (e.g., blog.sina.com.cn, t.qq.com) offer blogging spaces and social networking services, though technical employees are hired as part of the portals’ censorship policies to watch and delete ‘harmful’ contents; and (3) The blogging space serves as the public platform for personal expression, though self-censorship as a dominant ideology always comes first among Chinese elites.

For instance, Chinese scholars agree that netizens should be encouraged to publish their political viewpoints on the blog, though; their speech should not be against the nation's interest, as Zhang Lei and Lou Chengwu argue,

Bloggers' political expression should be framed within the legal system... This includes that they are willing to follow rules and regulations of the blog sites, by giving up some of their personal freedoms. (2006, p.102)

Scholar Deng Hao sees the blogosphere as an open platform for individual expression, though; he also highlights that discourse is in relation to selection of words and tone of the blogger.

The lack of a 'gatekeeper' system is the main problem of the blogosphere... Bloggers should realise that personal expression should be lawful not harmful to others ... This is the precondition of constituting a civilised and harmonious blogosphere in China. (2008, p. 86)

The awareness of self-censorship implies that the pursuit of an independent blogosphere and freedom of expression pose the most serious challenge to the Chinese authority. As Peter Lorentzen puts, "[t]he regime's response to those who critique or challenge the regime's core principles... is harsh and unequivocal" (2014, p. 411).

Democracy, in this sense, should have a clear distinction between the State and Chinese citizens. Not only blogs, in mainstream media and other communication channels, topics in relation to general election, or separation of powers are severely prohibited. In other words, freedom of expression that has the intention of denying or weakening the Party's legitimacy and reign should be forbidden or punished.

However, as Shen Fei et al. (2009, p. 467) argue (also see Drezner and Farrell, 2004, p.7-8), the blog's hyperlink phenomena has expanded bloggers' communicative network, where conversations and interactions cooperate with each other to create active opinion formers and attract active voices through a variety of means.

The constant 'censorships' and the desire for 'free speech' recalls a 'push and pull' relationship in China's communication system. In other words, dissident messages from the blogosphere are often attributed to a tactical manoeuvring by bloggers for getting stories/opinions out before officialdom can shut them down (e.g., the Muzi Mei and the Sun Zhigang case in 2003).

To respond to how this 'tactical manoeuvring' operates as means of dissemination of dissidence in the blogosphere, I will take active female blogs, journalist blogs and satirical blogs as examples, as their modes may shape a special form of political participation that can be installed in the Habermasian public sphere. But my argument is that, the means also provides an explanation of what the boundaries of censorship strategy at certain given moment by the State, and how Chinese netizens constantly use the boundaries to negotiate with the authority. In other words, with the growing use of the ICTs in China, netizens are encouraged to reveal issues or create critical messages, though they have to cautiously play with a sharp line between the permissible and the punishable devised by the authority, searching for a 'benign'²³ interaction (see Zhang Lei and Lou Chengwu, 2006) as a new value placed on freedom of expression.

4.2 Going to the Public through Blogging: The Active Female Blogs in China

Though censorship and self-censorship stay in the Chinese blogosphere, and greatly restrict open interaction and public debate in a wider scope. However, this is

²³ The term also implies the way in which netizens are seeking 'enabling' and 'satisfying' to avoid censorships.

criticized by active female bloggers in China, who use the blog, not to attract interaction, but to fight for the power of discourse.

The public sphere, as Nancy Fraser (1997) argues, is not only there to identify the space in which citizens deliberate about their personal concerns through communication activity, but also to designate their discursive practices as an effective realm as public opinion. This is the case of female blogs in China. The discursive practice by female bloggers, as Chinese scholars suggest, is to actively express gendered theme – gendered relations (e.g., sexuality and sentiment such as Muzi Mei and Zhuying Qingtong in 2003, and Liumang Yan in 2004) and lifestyles (i.e., Xu Jinglei since 2005), or the pursuit of feminism (i.e., Li Yinhe). The Chinese blogosphere suggested a significant influence of female bloggers at the early stage²⁴. Scholars Wu Xinxun and Li Xiaomei argue:

The blog has expanded a gendered discourse space, where housewives, who would not have a communicative space in the past, are now enabled to practice self-expression and self-dissemination via the blogosphere. (2007, p.15)

The context of gender blogs carries an implicit statement, as Chinese scholar Li Yinhe argues, that the situation in which women²⁵ were excluded in formerly authoritarian regime is over, now that their voices can be heard elsewhere (Li Yinhe cited in Chen Jia, 13 April 2004). In 2003, a young female blogger²⁶ wrote her sexual diaries, though banned²⁷ by Chinese censors, it attracted 10 million daily visitors (Miller and Shepherd, 2004) in that year. A movie star Xu Jinglei, her blog links both online chatting and the BBS services. In this way Xu has not only branded her blog, but also built up a series of communities on her *Laoxu Boke*²⁸.

²⁴ It was after 2004 that the male bloggers began to emerge (e.g., Anti in 2004, Keso and Wang Xiaofeng in 2005) in the Chinese blogosphere.

²⁵ Here, women mean *Funv* (e.g. housewife, mother) in Chinese. More explanations of the term can be found in Chapter 4.

²⁶ This is a story about Muzi Mei. The detailed analysis of Muzi Mei's *Yiqingshu* (Love Letters Left) will be presented in Chapter 4.

²⁷ 'Ban' here means '*Jinshi*' (forbidden) in Chinese. Muzi Mei started blogging in June 2003, but after five months (November 2003), her blog was taken down, and she was no longer allowed to blog on blogcn.com. The '10 millions' was the number of visitors during Muzi Mei's blogging periods.

²⁸ More information about Xu Jinglei's blog can be found at: www.blogs.sina.com.cn/laoxu.

As such, as scholars Wu Xinxun and Li Xiaomei have argued, female blogs in China seek to organize plural interests, besides developing an independent social space, they also aim to challenge to the direct political control.

Unlike male bloggers, Chinese women are likely to give a clear indication of their gender identity in their blogs... As such, they are not only to represent women as legitimate discursive producers in the blog space, but also aim to legitimize a new radical movement through effective discourses...for an independent sphere. (2007, p.15)

Bearing in mind, the individual practice of the discourse is always constrained by the political contexts in China. Lindsey O'Connor argues: "serious blogs are censored and political dissents hushed; netizens become absorbed in sex diaries". This 'absorb' in turn implies some of the Chinese female bloggers are "threatening the hegemonic discourses that circumscribes their gender identity as Women" (O'Conner, 2014)

The above arguments suggest that female blogs are engaged in a kind of 'gender power²⁹', reflected on their discourses. By sharing prospects of gendered themes, they foster a more friend-like relationship, creating or maintain a community of their own. It is through their blogs that Chinese women can see individual experiences from each other – sufferings, struggles, issues or problems etc., further, to seek or work for changes in society.

²⁹ More discussions on 'gender power', and its relation to gender politics will come in Chapter 4.

4.3 Blogging as Journalism Practice –

Journalist Blogs versus Established Journalism in China

The blogosphere emerged insomuch as akin to online newspaper and broadcasting in contemporary China. It provides a platform for the rise of online news offered by journalist bloggers. Chinese scholars (Liu Jin, 2006; Tang Min, 2006; Xu Xiaobo, 2007; Yu, 2011) argue that the shift from established journalism to online news sphere involves changes not only in information infrastructure, structural relationships among journalists, sources and audiences, but also the very definition of news.

Firstly, scholars suggest that the news blogs afford the possibility of new forms of mobilization. For instance, Liu Jin notes that news blogs pose a challenge to mainstream journalism by facilitating alternative methods of news production and dissemination.

News reporters use their blogs to post updated contents that expand on the regular news events. On the one hand, the blogosphere brings journalists into a larger community where meaningful posts are passed from one blogger to another and expands more discussions. On the other hand, links among critical comments inside the community will in turn encourage professional journalists to offer more in-depth and follow-up reportage. (Liu Jin, 13 August 2006)

Liu also predicts that the blog will become an efficient information provider, in conflict with press media in terms of news resource and opinion expression (2008, p.10). Two models – one is from a Korean journalist Oh Yeon-Ho's *OhmyNews.com*, and the other is Canadian journalist David Beers's *The Tyee* – have become influential among Chinese journalists. *OhmyNews* invites citizens to be news reporters, and gives free reign to post anything they like, either subjective or knowledgeable (Zhang Rongxin, 2008). *The Tyee* is succeeded in organizing or developing its wider communities for readers and, it always supports freedom of

expression (Tang Min, 2006). As such, a notion of ‘public journalism’ (Tang Min, 2006; Zhang Rongxin, 2008) has built up in China’s news blogosphere. Researcher Zhang Rongxin points out,

News blogs have formed a public journalism online and elicited a much broader space for public discussion and public participation...Journalist blogs and the emergence of online public journalism are additional complements to the mass media, in terms of news editing, news reporting and news judgement. (23 June 2008)

Secondly, scholars suggest that blogs, the means used by journalists, provide political sources (Huang Aijiao, 2010; Yu, 2011; Zhou, 2009).

[B]logging has been used extensively to engage with the news media, to criticise, supplement, comment, check and challenge the accountability of mainstream journalism. (Stephen Reese and Jia Dai cited in Yu, 2011, p.380)

The ‘political sources’ mean that, a range of information and public opinions on the actions of the government are able to be provided in journalists’ blogs. For instance, in August 2008, a reporter in his blog explored the essential reason for the Coal Mint collapse in Shanxi Province (see Wang Beizhen, 2008, also see Yu, 2011), and was drawing the attention of China’s previous Premier Wen Jiabao and leading to an immediate investigation.

Studies on news blogs suggest that blogs being used by Chinese journalists, mainly for their expression, interaction and news dissemination, all of which shared attributes in common with Western styles.

Firstly, blog is addressed in “Opinionated Journalism” (McNair, 2006, p.122) and used as an ad hoc dialogic media form (see McNair, 2006, p.124). Donald Matheson states that,

A number of prominent news-related weblogs are kept by professional journalists and a key discourse in their understanding of ‘blogging’ appears to be that of expressing experiences which find no outlet in conventional reporting. (2004, p.451-2)

Secondly, a tendency that Chinese scholars are likely to focus on case studies such as Korea’s *OhmyNews* or Canada’s *The Tyee* imply that, they see the two cases as ideal modes of journalism and expect to see support in return for their journalistic daily practice.

Thirdly, the effect of journalist blogs in political communication has been mentioned, though, it focuses more on how to compete with mainstream media in contents or forms. Thus, the political meaning of news blogs may remain unravelled. This means, on one side, journalism (investigative journalism in particular) is less independent in China. Though media reporting and news blogs have resulted in punishment of governors responsible for their mistakes, journalists too are punished for publishing the news (i.e. the Sun Zhigang case³⁰ in 2003). On the other side of the coin, there is often a gap between journalism and activism in China. In other words, Chinese journalists see themselves as observers in society. They are active in revealing issues, but not active in engaging social movements or advocating political changes. News blogs have no exception.

Even though, both journalist blogs and female blogs play a significant position in China. The two types of blogs represent a new and an expanded Internet culture in China. Firstly, the two blogs are aimed at being able to be more responsive to meet the needs of the public. Take the journalist blog, as Zhang Lan and Liu Guoliang

³⁰ The Sun Zhigang case was exposed while the journalist who reported the event was dismissed.

comment (13 February 2006), “it is achieved by providing timely information, by concerning public interests and especially, by publishing events which are filtered on mainstream media”.

Secondly, the two groups are not interested in campaign or social movements (see Castells, 2000), but aimed at making ‘public talk’, interpreted as a personal agenda with independent thinking, as Huang Aijiao (2010) and Liu Jin (2008) argue.

Implicit to this commitment is the incipient manifestation on behalf of personal rights and democratic consciousness. This viewpoint is supported by James Curran when he points out:

Concern with personal politics superseded interest in organised politics, while social recognition came to be viewed as more important than state redistribution. (2006, p.144)

The kind of ‘social recognition’ leads to a second shift, which I call ‘online amusement’ used and understood by bloggers and readers for airing political opinions.

4.4 Online Amusement and Satirical Blogs in China

For instance, Yu Haiqing, from analysing two spoof videos (A Hard Day’s Night, and Steamed Bun, see Yu, 2007) made by infamous bloggers, argues that:

In both cases, parodies of mainstream ideology, mockeries of blockbusters, and caricature of hot social issues and persons have characterised the production of spoofs through blogging. (2007, p.430)

Likewise, Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang note the skilful use of the blog such as “political satire, humorous adaptation of official media products... implicit criticism of the party or state structure, and explicit but guarded criticism” (2008, p.757) that has illustrated bloggers’ tactics and strategies in expressing political dissents. Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang define this expression as *Egao*, through which Chinese people express their cynicism (2008, p.765, also see Yu, 2007). An example is given to a promotion picture of the 2008 Olympics: the faces of the cartoon characters were replaced by comedians or stars from a popular TV show *Chaoji Nvsheng* (Super Girl).

Such an *E Gao* is not only used in movies, videos and pictures, but also used as wordplay to disrupt official language or political slogans. For instance, previous president Jiang Zemin’s ‘*Sange Daibiao*’ (the Three Representatives) was swapped to be ‘*Dai Sangebiao*’ (Wearing Three Watches) by a blogger³¹. The term ‘*Hexie Shehui*’ (harmonious society), set by previous president Hu Jintao (in 2005), has been changed to describe ‘a society of River Crab’ by Chinese netizens (see Esarey and Xiao, 2008; Nordin and Richaud, 2014). Even the dirty word ‘*Caonima*’ (Fuck Your Mother) used as argument, fighting or quarrel in daily life, now its homonymic saying – ‘*Grass-Mud Horse*’ has been broadly transformed online, used to depict people’s anger, complaint and dissatisfaction with the censorship system in China (see Steinmetz, 2013).

The content (i.e., the use of *E Gao*) or the discourse (i.e., the use of wordplay) which involves amusement “produces a comic effect”, to borrow from Yu Haiqing’s views (2007, p.430), implies how bloggers express their dissents, and the way they resist to the official (see Nordin and Richaud, 2014, p.2). It becomes a third category of individual blogs, which I define it as ‘satirical’.

³¹Wang Xiaofeng names his blog *Dai Sangebiao* (Wearing Three Watches). The blog will be discussed in Chapter 6.

In addition, the means (from personal expression towards public talk) invites ‘participation’, but also, it relates to what Manuel Castells calls “networked individualism”.

This is the emergence of **networked individualism**, as social structure and historical evolution induce the emergence of individualism as the dominant culture of our societies, and the new communication technologies perfectly fit into the mode of building sociability along self-selected communication networks... So, the network society is a society of networked individuals. (Castells, 2005, p. 12)

This ‘networked individualism’, I argue, concerns political involvement of the blog. In other words, I don’t only mention that the blogosphere principally advocates something proper like, to borrow from Howard Rheingold’s term (1999, p.279) a “citizen-operated” space. But also, I imply how individuals see the potential of this digital technology (blog) for political purpose, and how their writings have pushed this ‘citizen-operated’ function for discursive practice presented in the blogosphere.

5 Individualism Work in the Chinese Blogosphere

The ‘individualism’ in this thesis has three-fold meanings. First, bloggers, their topics and their personal discourses constitute, to borrow from Gustavo Cardoso’s viewpoint (2005, p.64), “individualized forms of expression”. Such individualism is realized by “pleasure, autonomy and a sense of self”, to borrow from Nicholas Stevenson’s words (1995, p.57) (e.g., blogs help participate in events (see Zhou, 2009), political values of journalist blogs (see Yu, 2011), and implicit and explicit criticism in blogs forms political expression (see Esarey and Xiao, 2008).

Secondly, blogs potentially show the “subversive” feature in revealing public demands for “popular resistance” of the censorship system (see Yu, 2007, p.430). This ‘subversive’ features in either alternative (see Yu, 2011; Zhou, 2009),

aggressive (see Zhao Qidi, 2009, Yu, 2007) or provocative (see Esarey and Xiao, 2008) roles of the bloggers in comparison with mainstream media reporters.

Though there is always severe State control in China, the dissemination of news, discussions of political events and critique with the authority has not been completely blocked, and one of the key reasons is that there are active ‘networked individuals’ (netizens, bloggers) access to the blog providing such possibilities. Their individual discourses are enabled to disseminate under China’s unique political climate, and have produced changes and challenges as major achievements, which the Chinese government should be apt to take credit for.

Thirdly, the satirical blogs, along with the female and the journalist blogs, offer individual bloggers’ practical alternative to show the development of the publicness in China. The term ‘publicness’³² is not just served as a goal such as influence or penetration; it also constitutes a new category of elites striving for freedom and democracy in the Chinese blogosphere.

6 Conclusions

To date, the analyses and discussions concentrate mainly on what a Chinese-based public sphere and network society are different from the Habermasian and Castells’s notions. In other words, this thesis concentrates upon the development of public opinion (individual discourses) within an informal public sphere (the Chinese blogosphere), and the impact of such opinion upon authoritarian discourses. The discussion of the three blog types will enable me to undertake critical evaluations of the blogosphere, to what extent it can: (a) facilitate the Habermasian public sphere, and (b) foster ‘networked individualism’ to make the public.

³² Publicness is in relation to the Chinese meaning *Gongzhong Xing* and *Gonggong Xing*. In this thesis, the selected blogs are of *Gongzhong Xing* – they are impressive and influential (‘making public talk’), but they also represent a kind of *Gonggong Xing* – a group of radical intellectuals who use the blog for free expression as their common goal.

In regard with the first point, the Chinese blogosphere and its blogging culture that interact with and shape each other within the context of cyber society show that the blogosphere is “both a media space and a culture space”, to borrow from Robert Hassan’s view (2004, p.47). As a media space, the State, netizens and the degree of civil society, along with the access to new media technologies affect and influence each other, playing a unique ‘push and pull’ game under a ‘benign’ interactive rule. As a cultural space, blogging merges other cultural phenomena such as historical change, literature forms of civic culture etc.

It is within these two sides that the socio-political value of the blog, and its relationship to the Habermasian public sphere (its reflections on ‘public opinion’, ‘bourgeois’ and ‘democracy’³³) can be discussed and understood in this thesis.

The second point is based on the existing research literatures; many analyses focus on journalists or females and see them as well-read or popular blogs (see Chen Jia 2003; Esarey and Xiao, 2008; Shen et al., 2009; Yu, 2011; Zhao Qidi, 2009). Some centre on special events (e.g., Muzi Mei and Sun Zhigang in 2003, Chen Liangyu in 2006; and Lian Yue in 2007, see Chen Jia 2003; Esarey and Xiao, 2008; Zhou, 2009) and mark the discussion as important, all of which yield the formation of specific blogging groups in the Chinese blogosphere.

My argument is that, the increasingly personalized nature of blogging contents and blogger events (e.g., Muzi Mei in 2003, Lian Yue in 2007) present a number of independent discourses of individuals (see Tang and Huhe, 2013; Yu, 2007; Zhou, 2009) – here, the discourse is not only a form of expression, it also contains argument, dissidence and conflict with the establishment. To what extent they

³³ I have mentioned in this thesis, that the precondition of democracy in China is based on the commitment of the leadership of the CCP – meaning the strategy of expanding public participation in political process does not include allowing critiques and actions (protestation, campaign or election) directly against the Party.

attract more opinions which may expand, if borrowing from James Leibold's term, "intellectual horizons" (2011, p.9), as Hanno Hardt argues:

...in a social and political environment that insists on the primacy of the individual, communication research has been concerned principally with understanding those whose economic conditions or social status produces aggregates of individual as audience or readers. These individuals' taste, attitudes, and behavior are measures of success for political and commercial interests and their need to know. (1998, p.51)

These are the focuses of my research and, following a discussion of methodology, I will explore these foci through three selected cases in the following chapters. The first is Muzi Mei's sexual blog *Yiqingshu* (Love Letters Left) in 2003.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

1 Introduction

I have argued in the previous chapter that the Habermasian concept of the public sphere represents a set of criteria to which most liberal democratic societies aspire but which an authoritarian State such as China would like to attain. Yet I have also argued the potential impact of the blogosphere in China that supports the notion of the Habermasian public sphere: (1) the freedom (though limited) that individuals have found when they communicate on this space, (2) the quality of the blogosphere is embedded in it produces not only public discussion but also rational-critical debates, and (3) the quality of the discourse ('nongovernmental discursive opinion) is given to diverse political-related views that are successfully expressed and disseminated.

The arguments explain the relationship between the blogosphere and politics (as the research title writes) in China, and will be examined via exploring Chinese bloggers, how they employ the blogosphere for their political demands (see Chapter 4, 5 and 6).

As such, it is important to touch on the question of who partake in the Chinese blogosphere in the Introduction. The question is raised to argue with the general perception among Chinese domestic scholars who admit that the blogosphere has expanded a democratic space for personal expression (see Deng Hao, 2008; Wang Lusheng 2006; Zhao Qidi, 2009), but who have not probed deeper into who the bloggers and what their expressions are – as the number of Internet users is 10% of

the total population in China. Bloggers cannot represent all classes – most of them are educated and urban netizens (see discussions in Chapter 1).

This study is also differentiated from other scholars (see Esarey and Xiao, 2008; Yu, 2011) who narrow their focus on one group of blogs (i.e., Yu Haiqing focuses on journalists blogs, categorising three types of bloggers among journalists to analyse how their blogs are different from their daily job); in my thesis, however, I argue that the stories about issues that have been raised and published on blogs by individuals³⁴ are various (e.g., women, journalists, lawyer, scholars, artists). Thus, my focus is given to bloggers who write their life experiences on their own blogs, but who become the (representative) public in the blogosphere (see discussions in Chapter 1 and 2).

Since personal blogs in China is diverse and numerous, it is quite impossible to present a statistical number of bloggers who discuss public/social issues in the blogosphere. Thus, I restrict my examination to three blogs³⁵ in this study: a sexual blog in 2003, a journalist's blog in 2007, and a satirical blog from 2006 to 2011. I consider the specific theme of each blog represents three aspects of the public sphere conception. In other words, the three blogging themes theorise my thesis within an understanding of an intellectual group, their blogs help to illuminate the possibility of the public sphere being extended through the blogosphere under China's present political conditions. On this basis, this chapter aims to outline how these evaluations are to be actually undertaken. With this in mind, I will express concerns in the following sections that I have not adequately explained here:

1. Why the three specific blogs are chosen, or what the criteria are for selecting these three?

³⁴ By this I mean, bloggers don't identify them as women, journalists, artists, etc. but bloggers in the Chinese blogosphere. However, the occupation of the three blogs is mentioned in this thesis (see Chapter 4, 5 and 6). The aim is to examine whether these individual bloggers are from a particular group in cyber society.

³⁵ I have mentioned earlier (see the Introduction) that the timeframe of this study is eight years (from 2003 to 2011), so the minimum number of choosing blogs is three.

2. Why the three themes (sex, ecology journalism, satire) are the ‘right’ themes to be exploring in terms of blog content?

In addition, content analysis and discourse analysis are used in this thesis, as they can ‘measure’ and ‘interpret’ (see Hesmondhalgh, 2009, p.120) the possibility of the blogosphere acting as an emerging public sphere in China, the question remains – how?

2 Why The Three Blogs Are Selected?

The three blogs are “selected purposefully”, to borrow from Michael Patton’s words (1990, p.169). According to Michael Quinn Patton,

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal of issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. (1990, p.169)

As I have stressed in the Introduction, this thesis aims to understand, in the period of 2003 to 2011, how the Internet-structured blogosphere to reflect and contribute to developments in China around democracy, democratic change, and changes in possibilities for public debates. The term ‘development’ becomes the ‘keyword’ for me to choose the blogs, and they should meet the following criteria:

The first is that the three blogs were arguably considered to be the most read and well-known blogs (from 2003 to 2011): a) during different time/periods, these three blogs were continually updated and visited by thousands or millions of readers daily³⁶. To some extent, they were considered as trend-setters – meaning their style

³⁶ Here, I exclude my selection from A-list blogs from mainstream media (i.e., Blog.people.com.cn) and popular portals (e.g., Blog.sina.com.cn, Blog.sohu.com). The former, I argue they may reproduce dominant

or discourse might become a representative in the Chinese blogosphere; b) they produced original works when covering the issues, which were considered by their readers³⁷ as reliable sources of information/opinion.

The second is that the three blogs can be drawn widely attention not only because of their popularity, but they are assessed by their writings within an everyday-life context for fulfilling “a desire for self-expression... (i.e., a form of political expression)” (see Ekdale et al., 2010, p.221). However, such an expression is not just used to explain the mood/motivation of a blogger (see Nardi et al., 2004), but to test the ‘pulse’ of the State (see Fahmi, 2009).

In addition, the three blogs represent “a series of blogger events” (see Yu, 2007, p.424), taking place in different periods that appear as the embracing of, or the celebration of a variety of tactical interventions in confronting with the State in an emerging public sphere (the blogosphere) from 2003 to 2011, influencing “the distribution of...social values (i.e., a form of political participation)” (see Ekdale et al., 2010, p.221).

Furthermore, the three blogs I selected in this thesis, they are based on the discussions of the three active groups in China – female blogs, journalist blogs and satirical blogs³⁸ are better presented as ‘networked individualism’ (see discussions in Chapter 2), addressing other subjects concerning daily life. In other words, they are selected for: (1) building up specific theoretical framework (e.g., sex, ecology journalism, satire); (2) using this to ask specific questions in relation to the material each case study provides (see chapter 4, 5 and 6).

discourse. The latter – as one of the policies of the sites is to invite celebrities to increase click rates. They are not what I need in this thesis.

³⁷ Including other media or other online spaces.

³⁸ This selection excludes blogging themes such as ‘sports’, ‘education’, ‘fashion’, ‘financial’, ‘travel’ etc., as they contain less political accounts.

Last but not the least, the three blogs presented as either a form of ‘freedom of expression’, or a form of ‘individual becoming public representative of discourse’ (see Chapter 1) from 2003 to 2011, they are used to show how the blogosphere has been opened for “a major breakthrough toward the formation of a Chinese public sphere” (Esarey and Xiao 2008, p.755, also see Conclusion). Such a form or the quality of discussion, however, is far from the Western mode of political conversation such as motivating political campaigns via blogs (see Meraz, 2007, p.63). In other words, to understand the ‘developments’ in China around ‘democracy’ or ‘democratic change’ cannot be completely conceptualised or theorised in Western ways (liberal). This results in a second aim of this study, for I am staging an engagement between Western perspectives and the Chinese practices of the grounded theories, and running through the three case-study chapters.

3 Why A Comparative Study?

The reason for this is in threefold. First, as each case (besides is based on Chinese language) elaborates on the specific theory (discourse of sexuality, the notion of the public journalism, and political satire respectively, see Chapter 4, 5 and 6), which is based on what is known of it (the history, structure and developments of the grounded theory) in a Western context.

However, they (the grounded theories) are not “self-referential or exclusionary” (see Totossy de Zepetnek, 2003). In this study, the exploration of the three themes in Chinese context is seen as a tool of communication, allowing me for analysis of changing issues (e.g., differentiation, restrictions and limitations) in-depth.

The process of ‘analysing of changing issues’ (exemplified by each case: gender politics, the rise of the public interest and freedom of expression) offer an alternative as well as a parallel evaluation of the three themes in this study. In other words, the three blogs cannot be taken at ‘face value’, rather, they are used to stress the need to look behind the themes (sex, journalism and satire) by rethinking the

public sphere: 1) whether it encourages women in participation (see Fraser, 1990); 2) would serve the public interest (see Hardt, 1998); and 3) of applying rational-critical approaches to a broad range of possibilities (see Fahmi, 2009).

By these accounts, the three themes in this thesis are based on the examination of the above three key critics, and are used to constitute three key analytical dimensions of the blogs, relating to how they (when taken together) help to shape a Chinese public sphere.

A key assumption behind this methodology is that understanding a different culture is important. Cultural origin differentiates China from outside world, in this thesis, for instance, the prerequisite of understanding the blogging culture requires the understanding of diversity and particularity of Chinese political culture. In turn, the built-in notions of specific terms (in Chinese) around ‘democracy’ such as ‘benign’, ‘freedom’, ‘harmony’, ‘push-pull’, ‘rights’, etc. are required to be explained, as they are the basic or founding element of the ‘differentiation’, resulting in an exclusion or boundary in comparison with other cultures. It is under this condition that how transnational notions of the Internet culture and how transnational thoughts of individualism being articulated in Chinese contexts can be understood.

This comparative study also emphasises the importance of looking back into history to understand blogging culture in China. In other words, the investigation of the blog (from 2003 to 2011) in this thesis, either in exploring its relation to everyday life or to people’s interests and needs, also requires broader investigations of developments of – if, regarding to the three themes – sex, journalism and satire within a Chinese cultural environment (e.g., education, law, propaganda, tradition).

For instance, sexual blogs have become popular in China since 2003 following Muzi Mei's blog³⁹, they show sustained discussions on the magazines in the 1980s and radio programmes in the 1990s (see Chapter 4) publishing sex topics, and their impacts on the Chinese women (not only changes of their lives, but in thinking about gender issues, gender power and gender politics) in the 21st century.

Likewise, journalist-blogs, to a large degree, followed by a sustainable media commercialization after the late 1970s that has developed journalistic practices in China (see discussions in Chapter 2 and 5), further, to seek possibilities for "journalistic autonomy" (see Tong, 2011, p.222). And satirical blog are impacted by the hooligan literature emerged in the late 1980s. They manipulate this style to the blogosphere and have maximized its popularity (see discussions in Chapter 6). The aim, to some extent, is to fulfil a desire of freedom of expression.

In addition, such a 'development' demands an exploration of bloggers, if based on debates or different perspectives, according to Zhou Xiang (2009, p.1006) and other scholars (Esarey and Xiao 2008; Leibold, 2011; Tang and Huhe, 2013): when they explore "the political potential of the internet", they compare the blogosphere with the traditional media, and suggest that this interactive platform seems to be more democratic, as it has promoted "highly opinionated and political" bloggers (see Zhou, 2009, p.1008). In this thesis, 'highly opinionated' is used to assess the three blogs, to what extent (either exceptional, representative, or ground-breaking) their expressions have been in confrontation with the State. For example, Muzi Mei is selected because her sexual topics were able to 'tackle the tense' (her self-expression in conflict with authoritarian discourse of sexuality, see Chapter 4). In 2007, Lian Yue's blogging indirectly resulted in an anti-PX protest being able to proceed in the city of Xiamen (see Chapter 5). And Wang Xiaofeng questions "the authority of mainstream media" and established ideologies (see chapter 6; also see

³⁹ Muzi Mei's blog was published on www.blogcn.com in 2003. Blogcn.com is the first blog site in China. It was established in November 2002, and ran by Fang Xingdong. The term 'blog' officially come into the Chinese netizen's attention after Blogcn.com published Muzi Mei's sexual diary.

Yu, 2011), by using mainstream media “for sources of ... pundit commentaries and mockeries” (see Yu, 2011, p.389).

Therefore, the three themes (see Table 3.1) are used to construct each case study chapter, consisting of the exploration of the issue, especially conflict of interests between public and public authority, and political implications behind the issue. In other words, this thesis is taken as an exploratory study, aimed at exploring how the three bloggers partook in the political discourse (from 2003 to 2011), and to what extent their own experience enriched Chinese people’s political life through blogging. As a result, both content analysis and discourse analysis will be applied in this chapter.

Table 3.1 Themes of the Three Blogs

Blog	Blog Description
<i>Love Letters Left</i> (Muzi Mei, June-November, 2003)	Contents were mostly in relation to Muzi Mei’s daily sexual life, experiences, and expressions of her emotions.
<i>Lian Yue’s Eight Continent</i> (LianYue, March –December 2007)	Most of the posts were about the PX Project in Xiamen. They described issues of the polluted Project with emphasis on criticizing local government and local media, and attracting wide attention to fight against the Project.
<i>No Guess</i> (Wang Xiaofeng, 2006-2011)	Topics are in a broad sense (e.g., cultural taste, quality of cultural products, social harmony), but covering the news from mainstream media (e.g., CCTV, Sina.com.cn). The blog provides critical comments on governors, government departments (i.e., the Ministry of Culture), and mainstream media (i.e., CCTV), etc.

4 Content Analysis

Content analysis has been used as a research method for communication studies. Recently, content analysis is frequently used to study blogs in political perspectives: to evaluate blogging for campaign management (Fahmi, 2009; Lawson-Borders and Kirk, 2005), to assess blogs in its various practice for journalism reform (Pedley, 2005; Yu, 2011), and to highlight the importance of the blog in political expression (Esarey and Xiao, 2008; Zhou, 2009). These studies use blog postings as the unit of analysis, which, in turn have examined the multiple roles of the blog in political communication studies.

Similarly, this study attempts to analyse the postings of the blogs (some of the postings are in the form of cartoons/pictures). This is to capture basic information about the blogs (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Intention of the Blog Authors in Different Times

Blogs	Topics of the Postings
Muzi Mei's <i>Love Letters Left</i> (2003)	a. Personality (Mainly in June 2003, 16 posts) b. Attitude of Sex (June – November 2003, 34 posts) c. Emotional Reactions (Mainly in November, 11 posts)
Lian Yue's <i>Lian Yue's Eight Continent</i> (2007)	a. Exposing the Official Cover-Up (March – May 2007, 53 posts) b. Exposing the Weakness of Xiamen Media (Mainly in June 2007, 54 posts) c. Exposing the process of Removing the PX Project (Mainly in December 2007, 32 posts)
Wang Xiaofeng's <i>No Guess</i> (From 2006-2011)	a. Comments on Events (80); b. Criticism of People (41) c. Criticism of Government Departments (68 posts)

4.1 Analysis of Blogging Posts

The content analysis, to borrow from Klaus Krippendorff's views, is used to explore the blog in three levels:

What they mean to people, what they enable or prevent, and what the information conveyed by them does. (2004, p. xviii)

In other words, content analysis is (mainly used in the case of *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent* and *No Guess*) is not just used to measure the original content. The degree of the contentanalysis is measured by the 'topic' (apart from the core theme), the 'intention' of the blogauthors, and the degree of interactivity (other sources in relation to the blog).

For instance, in the case of Wang Xiaofeng's *No Guess*, posts were generally assigned to oneof the following categories: Policies, CCTV news/programmes, Art and culture, Justice, Social affairs, Traffic and infrastructure, Education, Telecommunication, etc. (see Chapter 6).

It was then to assign to the category of 'critical-related' contents: whether the topic showed a conflict (personal vs. ideological), or whether particular issues were mentioned in that topic.

In addition, posts were particularly checked for the degree of the criticism: whether that criticism was targeted towards government departments (i.e., the Ministry Culture), and governmental policies, or towards specific persons (i.e., governors).

It is not sufficient to just analyse blog posts, as this thesis is not aimed at explaining what was written in the blog but to indicate the bloggers' role, and how they

provide opportunity for public debate and encouraging participation. This can be measured by checking the availability and actual use of the comments function on the blog.

4.2 Analysing Feedback and Comments of the Blog

Feedback and comments refer to news, viewpoints or opinions that discussed the outcome of blog. I call these the second data in this study (see Table 3.3). They are used to measure the degree of interactivity in this thesis.

Table 3.3 Sources of the Feedback and Comments on the Blogs

Secondary Data	
The Muzi Mei Case in 2003	<p>a. Sohu's Nationwide Discussion (November – December 2003) (98)</p> <p>b. Media Interviews with Muzi Mei (1) DW-WORLD.DE (2004, Germany) (2) Danwei.org (2006, Beijing) (3) <i>XinKuaibao</i> (2008, Guangzhou) (4) <i>South People Weekly</i> (2011, Guangzhou)</p>
The Lian Yue Case in 2007	<p>a. Live columns on press media (March –December 2007) Mainly Published on <i>Xiaoxiang Morning</i> and <i>Southern Metropolis Daily</i></p> <p>b. Comparative media reports (January 2007- May 2008) 1) International media reports (47) 2) Domestic media reporting (18)</p>

The above data were found by Google search (e.g., the Sohu discussion of the Muzi Mei's blog, and media interviews with Muzi Mei) and the LexisNexis database (e.g., domestic and international media comments of the PX Project, comments on Lian Yue and his blog).

My observations of the interactivity are basically conducted by asking specific questions according to the case. In analysis of the case of *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent*, for example, I asked, in what aspect the media talked about the PX Project. To answer the question, I classify the sources (media) into domestic and international groups. Then I code 'frame', 'theme' and 'discourse' (see Altheide, 1996) for specific analyses. The aim, on the one hand, is to explore whether information flow/public discussion was potentially managed by the blogger, or whether the information provided by the blogger is reliable than the official one.

On the other hand, is to explore differentiations among the media, not only in aspects of how they reported the event, but also in aspects of what their attitude to the key blogger.

As I have argued in the previous part in this chapter, the Chinese blogosphere has provided an opportunity for the voices and thoughts of individuals to be heard and seen. In this thesis, the three selected blogs share a common feature: their expressions are intended to engender a certain resistance/disrespect to the mainstream media content or authoritarian ideologies. In this sense, analyses of the three blogs are aimed at exploring how they interpreted their resistance of the dominant discourses/authoritarian ideologies to form the form of freedom of expression. The process of the "interpretation" (see Hesmondhalgh, 2009, p.120) requires a discourse analysis of the blogs (mainly used in analyses of Muzi Mei's *Love Letters Left* and Wang Xiaofeng's *No Guess*).

5 Discourse Analysis

The type of discourse analysis is diverse. Some focus on the interactions between readers, and aim at exploring the political function of the blogosphere (see Hookway, 2008). Some use hyperlinks (e.g., social media, other blogs) to highlight the significance of the digital media such as blogs (see Attwood, 2005; Fahmi, 2009; Reese et al. 2007). Some argue that discourse is more than spoken language,

therefore, they analyse discourse within a broader social context (see Howard and Hussain, 2013). According to Teun van Dijk:

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. (2001, p.352)

These theoretical perspectives suggest there is a political aspect to discourse between the dominant and the individual. In other words, the process of interpreting individual thoughts contains seeking where, when or how the dominant discourses involved. By this I mean, dominant ideologies can always make the way to the discourse (e.g., by media, politician, law, education) in China. As a result, discourse analysis in this thesis is not only to interpret the discourse, but the discursive practice by the bloggers: the sexual blog explored a single topic (sex) through a self-structured narrative, the journalistic blog reported an event from a personal perspective of a journalist, and the satirical blog freely mixes his humour, irony, sarcasm, and hooliganism with his very disrespecting to the authority.

In other words, I argue that the discourse is based on interpreting the ‘confrontation’ between the State and citizens, but is motivated/carried out by individuals’ resistance/disrespect to the authority. Bloggers’ discursive practice is based on a range of textual analyses deployed in this thesis, focusing on not only the content of the text but also the way in which the text is presented (Mitra and Cohen, 1999, p.181).

To examine the point, three critical fragments of discourse analysis are employed in this thesis: topic, tone and form. Topic relates to the content of the text. It takes as a thematic role to reveal “what is being talked/written about” (see Brown and Yule, 2008, p. 73) by the bloggers, while at the same time, it helps to understand what the ‘resistance’ is (i.e., in the case of *Love Letters Left*, Muzi Mei’s explicit sexual expression vs. authoritarian Chinese sexual culture) or where the resistance came from.

The tone and the form are the ways in which the text is presented. The tone is in relation to the analysis of how the bloggers interpret their viewpoints; it also interprets the reactions to a blog. Tone is interpreted as ‘marked’ units (e.g., rebellious, depressed, resistant, doubtful, critical, mock, ironic within blog contexts). Here, the term ‘mark’, as Gillian Brown and George Yule argue:

If ... the marking means anything, then some special, implicated, meaning ought to attach them. (2008, p. 159)

For instance, in the case of *Love Letters Left*, the Sohu discussion appeared at the time when Muzi Mei’s blog was just banned (see Chapter 4), therefore resulted in an overwhelming unacceptance of the Muzi Mei phenomenon. However, the various types of negative responses from the readers can offer further understandings of the original blog posts, exposing new information/messages of the blog (e.g., in understanding her theory of sexuality, in understanding the implication behind the confrontation, or what impact (positive or negative) it would probably bring to Muzi Mei).

The ‘marked units’ in relation to ‘some special, implicated, meaning’ also attach to the ‘form’.

In this chapter, the form refers to “the form of expressions” (see Brown and Yule, 2008, p. 171) of the blogs, and is used to interpret an account by looking at how the details of resistance/disrespect are framed: take the case of *No Guess* (see Chapter 6), Wang Xiaofeng’s hooligan expression is deployed by using key words (i.e., the homonymic use of the original term) and distortion (e.g., *E Gao*, dirty words).

6 Limits of the Methodology

To date, the analyses of the three blogs (besides concrete textual analyses of each blog) partially depend on sources that are affiliated netizens’ interactions (e.g., both

Muzi Mei and Lian Yue case), international media (e.g., the case of Muzi Mei and Lian Yue), and mediated interviews with the key blogger (i.e., Muzi Mei case). These sources provide additional, alternative, and in-depth point of views of the three blogs in this thesis (findings will be presented in Chapter 4, 5 and 6), including to confirm the popularity of the three blogs⁴⁰ (e.g., 10 million visitors for *Love Letters Left* in 2003, see Chapter 2; over thousands of readers every day for *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent* in 2007, see Chapter 5; 12,000 a day for *No Guess* in 2006, see Chapter 6) in different periods. However, the popularity referring to the actual proportion of the available audience of the three blogs is not very clear⁴¹.

The uncertain situation suggests an in-depth interview with the three individual bloggers, which is not conducted in this study. It partially because the mediated interviews with Muzi Mei, the international resonance of Lian Yue's blog, and the rich information rendered by the *No Guess* provide me an adequate means of re-understanding the influences of the three bloggers in different time: not only simply why the three blogs became politically meaningful in China, but what other potential impacts⁴² which may combine to make broader influence in the Chinese blogosphere (see discussions in Chapter 2 and Conclusion).

However, reading these additional information I can also see the difficulties concerning about the in-depth interview with the three bloggers in this study: the mediated interviews with Muzi Mei (2004-2008) implicitly shared her frightening/depressed emotions with the authority (she lost her job after her blog was banned in 2003). And she avoided mentioning the term 'politics' in the

⁴⁰ I should admit that these blogs came to my attention partially because they were very popular (Muzi Mei in 2003, Lian Yue in 2007, and Wang Xiaofeng since 2005) in my own social circles.

⁴¹ Besides CNNIC data (see Introduction), the Sohu discussion in 2003 (media workers, university staffs and netizens, see Chapter 4) and the June demonstration in 2007 (local residents in Xiamen, see Chapter 5) implicitly told what the primary audiences of each blog.

⁴² This relates to the 'intellectual horizon' or 'new elites' phenomenon discussed in the thesis. Also, if, to situate myself in this thesis: as a Chinese scholar, but particular as one of the intellectuals in China, I certainly hope this group, their use of blogs/the blogosphere, can bring more (democratic) changes in future.

interview (see the DW-WORLD.DE one) connoted her desire of giving a less genuine response to the questions.

Likewise, Lian Yue shut his month after the PX Project removed (also his blog on Bullog.cn was taken down in 2010), and Wang Xiaofeng prevents his satirical tone from anything inconnection with ‘political expression’ (some of his posts were removed⁴³). As a result, it is my responsibility to understand their situation and respect their decision⁴⁴.

Besides a lack of in-depth interviews, the sample of this study is small (three individual cases) and non-random (e.g., better educated people, living in big/developed cities). The two factors have been mentioned in both the Introduction and the Literature Review, however, partially put the three blogs in a minority of ‘elites’ which are more politically savvy and audience engaging than many of the others which primarily document ‘apolitical’ everyday lives or advertise commercial products. In other words, due to the very specific selection of the cases – the three representative blogs are drawn from an intellectual group while they have made use of the very potential of the blog to engage in politics, though, the result – blogging has a broad ‘effect’ on political expression/political participation in China, cannot avoid being biased.

7 Sources of the Removed Posts Relating to the Three Blogs

The blogosphere, as I have mentioned in the Introduction, employs hyperlinks not only to bloggers and blog sites, but also to websites such as portals and public forums. Links are centrally important to both bloggers and blog sites, as they create

⁴³ Though Blog.sina.com.cn reposts two of Wang Xiaofeng’s blog posts, five of Wang’s removed posts are reposted by Wang Xiaofeng himself on blog.caixin.com (see Chapter 6). This again suggests that Wang resists to use mainstream media or popular portals (such as Sina.com.cn) to post any comment.

⁴⁴ I contacted both Lian Yue (in earlier 2008) and Wang Xiaofeng (in earlier 2010) regarding the theme of the chapter, but I didn’t get any reply from them.

additional means to share stories, and disseminate radical thoughts and ideas. The provision of links of the three blogs includes the archive features of the forums (e.g., www.360doc.com, bbs.tianya.cn, www.douban.com⁴⁵), other blog sites (e.g., blog.sina.com.cn⁴⁶, blog.tianya.cn, ycool.com, blog.yasker.org, hi.baidu.com), and the reposting from both the author of the blog (e.g., Lian Yue⁴⁷, Wang Xiaofeng – www.wangxiaofeng.blog.caixin.com⁴⁸) and their readers⁴⁹. They constitute sources of finding the removed posts regarding the three blogs in this chapter⁵⁰.

The type of sources of re-finding the removed posts of the three blogs mentioned above suggests, social media and public forums such as Douban.com and Tianya.cn (where I found Muzi Mei's 61 posts) have been effectively in employing hyperlinks to blog posts. Meanwhile, the untaken reposts from social media, public forums and blog readers, I argue, concerns of the blog in terms of whether its critical commentary can be transferred elsewhere (see Fraser, 1990, p.75), or to what extent it can cultivate a reputation for trustworthiness and credibility (i.e., the case of Lian Yue, also see Reese et al. 2007) on one hand, and Chinese netizens – their attitude to nongovernmental discursive opinion (i.e., the Muzi Mei case), and their intention to question the objectivity or accuracy of mainstream news reports (i.e., the Lian Yue case), on the other.

⁴⁵ Douban.com is a social media launched in March 2005, providing information on books, movies and music.

⁴⁶As Sina is one of the biggest portals in China. Most of the bloggers launch their blogs on its blog site (www.Blog.sina.com.cn).

⁴⁷ Lia Yue's articles on press media were found on his blog and by Google search.

⁴⁸Caixin Media was established in January 2010, providing financial and business news, with very critical comments.

⁴⁹ I have mentioned in later chapters that some of Lian Yue and Wang Xiaofeng's postings are no longer available. By this I mean the posts on their own sites were taken down. However, the original posts are reposted by other bloggers (I re-find them by typing titles of the original posts through Google search), meaning they still can be found at other sites.

⁵⁰ How to find the removed posts is mentioned on footnotes in each chapter.

8 Conclusions

This chapter employs a series of qualitative approaches in an attempt to understand what the role of the three individual bloggers in China, and how they created political discourse in the blogosphere. In doing so, I use both content analysis and discourse analysis, along with the analysis of the second data (from 2003 to 2011). A content analysis of the blogs provides core themes of the blog, based on the “emergence of a Chinese everyday world and mass culture” (see Zhang, 2008, p.15). A discourse analysis, along with the second data collection provide richer accounts of the extent to which blogging potentially “democratizes communication of information” (see Leibold, 2011, p.2, also see Tang and Huhe, 2013), and the blogosphere plays as “a form of online political discussion in public life” (see Zhou, 2009, p.1008). However, such a ‘potential’ means the necessity to look at essentiality rather than accuracy in understanding, discussion and analysis of the blogosphere has increasingly exhibited its social functions – its roles in public discussion, public debates and public participation in general, and blogging has gradually promoted political communication in particular. The core factors that might shape the three selected blogs will be presented in case-study chapters (see Chapter 4, 5 and 6).

Chapter Four

Blogging Sexuality in China: The Case of Muzi Mei

1 Introduction

I think I am not just talking about my life and my stories in my blog. I mean, the sex part...I am more interested in what the sex topic would bring in terms of expanding discussion and exploration in society. In this sense, I feel like I am providing a space of power for the right to speak. (Muzi Mei, Interview with DW-WORLD.DE, 2004)

The speaker was Muzi Mei, who blogged about her sexual life in 2003, and who drew particular attention in that year in China. Sina.com.cn (see Zhou Qiong, 2003), one of China's biggest Internet sites, credited her with attracting 10 million daily visitors and another popular portal site, Sohu.com (see *Xinkuaibao*, 2003), said Muzi Mei was the most frequently typed name into its Internet search engine in that year.

From the year 2003 onwards, discussions of women's personal lives – the implicit and private events and in particular, sexual life – started becoming one of the radical themes among Chinese female bloggers. By this I mean, the Chinese blogosphere has produced a wave of female authors such as Muzi Mei, Zhuying Qingtong and Liumang Yan, whose views of sexuality were seen as departure from the official and the tradition, but who appealed to a wide readership of both men and women since 2003 (Chen Jia, 2004; Wu Xinxun and Li Xiaomei, 2007).

In this chapter I intend to examine the work of a controversial female blogger Muzi Mei in order to discuss the ways in which Chinese online culture was tackling the tense and fractious issue of female sexuality. This is one of the criteria that Muzi Mei becomes the first case in this thesis. Secondly, Chinese netizens first came to know of the blog format through the press coverage of Muzi Mei. Her *Love Letters Left* first appeared in 2003 and can be regarded as the first personal blog to become known nationally, expressing personal feeling, experiences and complaint (through her sexual life) in a casual and informal and provocative way. On the one hand, Muzi Mei's blog came at a time when the information landscape was changing in China. In other words, Chinese people started to search for information – not only from media reporting, but also from individual blogs. On the other hand, Chinese netizens started to practice in new media production at an individual level such as partaking in public discussions and airing their viewpoints.

Through a reading of Muzi Mei's *Yiqingshu* (Love Letters Left) in 2003, this chapter asks particularly: why was blogging about sexuality so crucial to Chinese society at this moment in time? And, further, what influence did Muzi Mei's blog have to broaden Chinese politics in that year?

Chinese scholars have drawn particular attention to female bloggers since 2003 (Chen Jia, 2004; Wu Xinxun and Li Xiaomei, 2007; Xiang Guoxiong and Zeng Xiaohong, 2005; Zhao Qidi, 2009). They have talked about the empowerment that the blogosphere brought about for Chinese women, especially how sexual bloggers became the 'impressive' public online, and what challenges and developments the sexual blogs brought in public life. Chen Jia (13 April 2004), for example, argues that when Chinese sexual bloggers go public, they change and broaden traditional sexual cultures towards being more open and diverse.

The traditional Chinese ethics strictly stress that women should avoid talking about sex in front of the public. However, Muzi Mei has subverted this strict

moral. Her sexual conduct, to some extent, argues that women can have different manners. (Chen Jia, 13 April 2004)

Xiang Guoxiong and Zeng Xiaohong (2005) argue that, rather than simply being titillating pornographic entertainment for the blogosphere, discussions of sexuality in women's blogs, along with the discussions of the conflict surrounding sexuality, tend to highlight the discursive power that the blogosphere offers women.

In China, the Internet is dominantly used by males... However, the blogosphere seems to be an exception. It has offered Chinese females an equal opportunity to air their opinions. In this sense, blogging is a means by which women can abandon the conventional restrictions and limitations, and their voices have been unprecedentedly considered and emphasized. (2005, p.104)

Meanwhile, Wu Xinxun and Li Xiaomei argue that the blogosphere has generated a new-liberal-feminist discourse in China.

In a society that lacks sexual freedoms and does not allow people to speak out their true emotion, their ideas represent the liberal sense that most Chinese women are expecting but always afraid of. We should say that sexual bloggers have done a lot for Chinese women. (29 October 2007)

Chinese scholars' researching on sexual blogs contextualize how this online form is articulating individual desires, conveying a sense of aspiration in pursuit of a discourse of power, and an increasing power of liberal women in China's modern society. However, I would add that the sexual blog emerged as a metaphor for political subjectivity in China. First off, the sexual blog acted as an alternative channel to publish individual (non-mainstream) perspectives. Second, various dissenting opinions on governmental regulations, for instance, are one of the political aspects that sexual blogs have captured. To some extent, sexual blogs have pushed a lot on boundaries concerning political censorship in the Chinese

blogosphere (Bowen, 2 October 2007). Third, sexual blogs, their discourse of sexuality being in conflict with the authoritarian one can be seen as a sign of Chinese women's pursuing freedom – both free choice of personal life and free speech in a public space.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part offers theoretical perspectives on sexuality, particularly how orthodox sexual culture impacts on Chinese women's sexual discourse. In the second part, I will use the year 2003 as a divider and analyze Muzi Mei and her *Love Letters Left*. It includes a simple introduction of Muzi Mei before 2003, analyses of Muzi Mei's sexual blog *Love Letters Left* in 2003 (the predominant challenges, expectations as well as critiques it had received). Added to this are the 2003 Sohu.com's nationwide discussions, and the media's interviews with Muzi Mei from 2004 to 2011. These sources provide the consideration of the political potential and the impact of Muzi Mei and her blog on sexual discourse in China, which I characterize as a bargaining with authority. I thus argue that the discourse of sex being presented by Muzi Mei on her *Love Letters Left* was implicitly connected to other issues (law, freedom of expression vs. censorship, gender politics etc.⁵¹), which coalesced to form a powerful critique of State power, patriarchy and sexual censorship. While debates on Muzi Mei's sexual blog exhibited a series of controversial expressions, suggesting that Muzi Mei's discourse of sex was intensely in conflict with a matrix of authoritarian discourses. But on the other side, her discourses can be seen as views “at an earlier time for dialectical thought” (see Foucault, 1977, p.33) as an alternative of Muzi Mei's participation in political life, something (her pursuing free choice of personal life and free speech) that happened in the Chinese blog world in 2003 in particular.

⁵¹ Unlike other bloggers (such as Zhuying Qingtong and Liumang Yan) using blog to show their naked bodies, Muzi Mei represents contemporary urban Chinese females, but her *Love Letters Left*, on the other hand, provides a broader discussion of sexuality as a discursive notion.

2 Sexuality, Women's Sexual Discourse

And the Control of Sexuality in China

According to Michel Foucault, the history of sexuality in the nineteenth century “must first be written from the viewpoint of a history of discourses” (1981, p. 69). He goes on to point out:

The society that emerged in the nineteenth century – bourgeois, capitalist, or industrial society, call it what you will – did not confront sex with a fundamental refusal of recognition. On the contrary, it put into operation entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning it. (1981, p. 69)

Foucault's notion of sex connects with and respects to ‘discourse’. Following Foucault, Roy Porter analyses the development of sexuality from the nineteenth century onwards in terms of its constructions of discourse (power, knowledge and pleasure) being widely disseminated and empowered, and argues “[m]ore discourse, more pleasure, more permissions” (1996, p.250). However, a proliferation of discourse about sex, in Porter's perspective, has not been translated into more liberal sexual attitudes, as he mentions:

What is surely at stake is not whether the silence was total, but the question of *who* was permitted to say *what*, and *who* was prohibited, or dissuaded, from saying *what*, and *who* had what kinds of powers to enforce the taboos. (1996, p. 253)

Building on Porter's argument, Ross Morrow adds that:

Discourses contain rules of inclusion, exclusion... which govern the content of knowledge, as well as rules about who can make knowledge claims, in relation to which domain and under what circumstances. (1995, p.16)

By means of research on discourses of sex and sexuality, Ann Brooks argues that the understanding of sexuality is in connection with specific needs (body, pleasure, knowledge, resistance and power) coming packaged as interactions or disruptions. Any concrete needs are constructed from a multiplicity of discourses (Brooks, 1997, p.190). Mark Poster sees Foucault's critique of Victorian sexuality (in terms of its punishments and prohibitions, and the language of sexuality) as a broad concept of sexuality; he thus allows us to see "the historical drama of sexuality" in relation to "a politics of a new discursive regime". What Poster prefers are multiple and diverse critical sexual discourses that amount to "a constituting of sexuality" (1996, p.270). All of which *are* used to examine Michel Foucault's target in *The History of Sexuality*.

[T]o examine the case of a society which has been loudly castigating itself for its hypocrisy... which speaks verbosely of its own silence, takes great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say, denounces the powers it exercises, and promised to liberate itself from the very laws that have made it function. (1981, p. 8)

The above theoretical and conceptual approaches have promoted a fundamentally Western construction of sexuality. That is, the power is not the force for repression, but for expression (also see Foucault, 1977, p.39). In other words, the process of the debate on sexuality can be understood as the way in which sex is put into discourse rather than ideology, producing the notion of the new sexuality out of the orthodox orders of alliance (see Foucault, 1997, p.41).

However, the concept of sexuality, as it has developed in China, has been grounded in the history of a Chinese-style sexual culture, as Elaine Jeffreys (2006) addresses. Much attention to sexuality was given to behaviour, to explore social constructs rather than its nature.

Historically, Chinese people were sexually restrained. Chinese culture has frequently found the enormous range of personal emotions and sexual experiences to be neither expressible in language, nor permitted to be brought to attention and discussed in the open (Liu Dalin and Zhang Hongxia, 2010; Zhang, 2005). The inherent Confucian ethical system has educated the Chinese people to respect and value chastity and to kept away from 'evil' and 'dishonour'.

Confucian-based virtues arouse from various kinds of relationships, yet have been historically considered to be functioning where moral order, harmonious social relations, and habits of self-cultivation are essentially working in familial, social and cultural arenas. (Liu Dalin and Zhang Hongxia, 2010, p.3)

Such a Confucian tradition has been applied to contemporary China in terms of compressing moral prejudices in wider society, legitimating forced familial harmony, and establishing the sexual policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Shen Junlong et al., 2003; Tu Keguo, 2010). In this sense, the supervision and control of explicit sexual life is necessary and important to the Party-State authorities, as Tu Keguo argues:

The function of a Confucian-based State is dominated by Confucian culture, and set as mainstream ideology of the nation in Chinese history. It aims to foster the sense of power, by enlightenment and edification, to try to build up the most significant tradition to impact China and Chinese people – in terms of national character, moral beliefs, and philosophy of life and so on so forth. (2010, p.63)

The Confucian tradition has a daunting effect on Chinese women in particular. For example, women's personal experiences of sex have hitherto been considered shameful within traditional Chinese society and have regularly been positioned as potentially harmful to familial and societal stability (Evans, 1997). An 'exaggerated' interest in sexual matters is deemed wrong and unacceptable because it may detract from Chinese moral education (Evans, 1997, p.75), and be criticized as similar to pornography or prostitution, all of which are understood as having negative effects on a range of social or moral issues such as juvenile crime rate (Anderson and Gil,

1998; Zhang, 2005) or spiritual pollution (Bakken, 1992, p.13). These negativities list the restrictions of freedom for Chinese women, and the extent of acceptance of women's freedom built by society. As Alicia Leung argues,

Within the dynamics of Confucian thinking, freedom entails neither legal rights nor psychological notions of self-expression and personal choice. (2003, p.362)

Meanwhile, the Chinese terms for “women” suggest a series of differences in the conceptualization of the female subject, and are performed as diverse images via female authors in their creative works (literature, painting, movie etc.). According to Tani Barlow (1994), *Nvxing* (female) refers to the essential feminine woman evoked in the individualist discourse of the May Fourth Movement (1915-1925). Fictions such as Bing Xin's *Liangge Jiating* (Two Families, 1919), *Zhuang Hong de Jiejie* (Zhuang Hong's Elder Sister, 1920) and *Zuihou de Anxi* (Final Resting, 1920⁵²) (see Le Shuo, 1998) related to ‘new (modern) women’, who stood up to be seen and heard in a public space in pursuit of individualism and equality.

By contrast the term *Funv* (women) was used to identify the collectivist woman of Maoist ideology, which publicly envisaged women in a series of female roles such as wife, mother, daughter and grandmother, all of which carried relative social obligations. Though during the Mao years, new socialist women were assigned equality, by virtue of them being declared upholders of half the sky (Liu, 2011, p. 52), they served the Party as great national guardians by acquiring a genderless self (Apter and Saich, 1994, p.). In the earlier 1950s, for instance, artistic works such as sculpture *Liu Hulan* (see Li Yizhou, 2005) copied images of the female in the old liberated areas in order to build up a new image of *Nv Yingxiong* (female-hero) in China, serving the revolutionary struggle of the communist leadership.

⁵² Bing Xin (1899-1999) is one of the most prolific women writers in China. The three fictions were published on *Chengbao* (Morning Paper) in Beijing.

Today, traditional roles for women are still prevalent in modern society, which continues to position them as the guardians of familial stability and marital harmony. As Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter state:

The assumption remained that it was women's responsibility to maintain a peaceful, harmonious family. (1988, p.337)

The specific terms for women manifested by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) served to control gendered discourse through political considerations while bodily and gendered interests have been excluded (Evans, 1997, p.192-4). As Esther Chow et al. argue:

The political path of national liberation allowed the CCP and the state a major role, limiting the abilities of the women's movement to achieve its goals and leaving women's cultural, psychological, and individual liberation not fully addressed. (2004, p.176)

China after reform has been rather different. Sexuality rapidly became the main theme, with diverse public opinions and attitudes serving to reshape the images of the modern Chinese woman. For instance, in the late 1970s, literary journals and novels celebrated romantic love as an ethical standard for sexual behavior. By the mid 1980s, women's popular magazines started to interact with readers, by publishing their letters for debating sexual topics such as extramarital love, divorce and premarital sex (see Honig and Hershatter, 1988; Shea, 2005, p.117). In the 1990s, sexual dialogues were organized in radio call-in shows (Erwin 2000; McDougall, 2005). Meanwhile, a new genre of writing about the female body, or the portrayal of privacy was produced by female authors such as Wang Anyi⁵³, Wei

⁵³ Wang Anyi is an active female writer in late 1980s, and is well known by her *Sanlian* (Three Loves) novels: *Huangshan zhi Lian* (Love in Barren Mountain), *Xiaocheng zhi Lian* (Love in a Small Town) and *Jingxiugu zhi Lian* (Love in the Beautiful Valley).

Hui and Mian Mian⁵⁴ (see Mitra, 2009). As such, various social taboos and gender stereotypes were subjected to revision and subversion.

Looking at the above examples we can see that, Chinese *Nvxing* during the May Fourth Movement called for an independent personality influenced by the Western liberal thought (see Leung 2003, p. 362) and aimed at rejecting Confucian values. *Funv* in Mao's area were built up as collective identities (e.g., female heroes, model workers) as part of the national image of socialist China. But such a 'collectivist tradition', as Alicia Leung argues, was governed by Maoist ideology, that individual interests should unconditionally devote to the dominant interests of the Party and the State (2003, p.362). However, women authors' portrayal of private experience in 1980s and 1990s catered to the rising tastes of a new readership sick of historical (Confucian tradition) or revolutionary models (Mao's era) of Chinese females.

In addition, changes during 1980s and 1990s, borrowing from Chow et al.'s words (2004, p.163), have been "characterized by the rise of women's consciousness about themselves as women... and the creation of new forms of activism to protect women's rights and interests and to embark on a new discourse on women". Through both popular media and female writers actively participating in a sexuality-based literature field, the elaboration of sexuality established an open and dialogical topic, and signified the beginning of an articulation of women as social subjects. As Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter (1988) point out, increasingly diverse forms of sexuality have weakened Confucian ideologies regarding women, and distinguished Chinese sexual culture from its conventional social and cultural practice. From my point of view, however, they articulate an additional threefold implication in gender politics. Firstly, they indicated an arena of resistance against historical gender values while at the same time, in pursuit of new gender identities (liberal, anti-conventional, feminine etc.). Secondly, the process of practicing new gender identities connotes an individualization, which started to reach a stage in Chinese history where in the

⁵⁴ Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baobei* (Shanghai Baby) and Mian Mian's *Tang* (Sweets) were two popular sexual fictions in 1990s in China. The two works were labelled as "*Shenti Xiezu*" (Body Writing).

above examples (the May Fourth ‘new women’ and the post-Mao era ‘beauty’ writers) began to exist as specific individuals, and became more or less detached from the mainstream socio-political frame of references (i.e. public representations such as good wife and wise mother). Thirdly, this individualization is supported by Chinese females from an intellectual group in urban areas who are aware of the rights of romance (sex as personal choice) and particularly, freedom of expression.

In earlier 2000s the Internet has been frequently used by Chinese female netizens for public sexual discussions. By means of freely exploring personal sexual experience, openly searching for sexual partners, and constantly subverting rules and regulations of sexual behaviors, the Internet has been heralded as the platform of new voices freed from ideological constraints (Deng Hao, 2008). However, early expectations that the Internet would bring freer discussions to China have perhaps been overly optimistic. Sophisticated filtering systems have increasingly been used to block searches for information particularly in terms of political and sexual topics (Lu and Weber, 2007; Xue, 2005; Zhang, 2006; Zheng and Wu, 2005). As Zheng Yongnian and Wu Guoguang put:

[T]he government has set up a series of Internet rules to regulate the rights and duties of channel providers and Internet service providers and users, and to supervise and inspect the international wiring of networks by censoring Internet content, governing operations of the Internet service, and regulating Internet users. (2005, p.517)

Likewise, sexuality, be it in terms of discursive self-expression, or in terms of individual pleasure, has faced continual restriction and control in China. For instance, an article from *Reuters* said that, the Chinese government had launched sustained campaigns to block pornographic sites and content in order to clean the Internet environment. A quotation from a Chinese governor Wang Chen, head of the State Council Information Office read:

As long as there are people with bad motives who want to spread violent or pornographic information, we will have to continue our campaign to resolutely crack down on the spread of such information. (*Reuters*, Reported by Blanchard, Mao and Kim, 30 December 2010)

Even though, or as Everett Zhang argues:

Yet, as any study of sexuality with a comparison between the current consumer culture and the Maoist period shows, it is hard to overlook the general tendency of the loosening up of state regulation on sexuality since the 1980s. (2005, p. 3)

As a result, I argue that certain elements, such as political mechanisms and ideology have served to limit a discourse on sexuality to Chinese women. Though different narratives of sexuality have been depicted in Chinese history, their liberal notions frequently function as a negative force in society and always operate in conflict with the official discourse (Beech, 2006; Evans, 1997; Honig and Hershatter, 1988; Shea, 2005; Zhang, 2005). The Muzi Mei controversy is a case in point.

To measure Muzi Mei's *Love Letters Left* and its influence in the Chinese blogosphere, this chapter draws upon a discourse analysis of a series of source lists such as Muzi Mei's sexual posts on *Love Letters Left* and controversial comments on her blog. I will first look at the *Love Letters Left* to discover how explicit sexual expression challenges authoritarian Chinese sexual culture. To analyze this further, I will consider Sohu's discussion of Muzi Mei to explore the public reaction to the blogger's sexual expression. Next, I am going to examine the development trajectory of the Chinese women's sexual discourse by identifying three major elements that define Muzi Mei's sexual expression via diverse media interviews: motivation, interest and influence.

Through these linkages, the discourse analysis aims to explore the nature and characteristics of this specific blogging culture within China: an increasing salience of radical factors in the structure of online culture generally, and an ongoing progress in the advance of liberal individualism, though the latter side is affected by both the acceptability and unacceptability in society, and by an often conflict with authoritarian State.

3 Who Is Muzi Mei?

I accessed the Internet in 1998. Apart from taking classes in the university, I was more likely to watch movies, go to the pub and have an affair with guys. (Muzi Mei cited in *Xiandaikuaibao*, Reported by Zhang Benfu, 13 July 2008)

Muzi Mei, whose real name is Li Li, was born in 1978. Li graduated from *Guangzhou Zhongshan Daxue* (Sun Yat-sen University) and in 2000 started to work for a magazine in Southern China. During her time at the magazine she wrote a series of sexual columns. In June 19 2003, Li used her net name Muzi Mei to publish her sexual diary *Yiqingshu* (Love Letters Left) on Blogcn.com, and quickly became a public figure in that year, as a *South People Weekly* reporter describes:

In the first decade of the 21st century China, Muzi Mei was marked as a signal and remembered by people for two reasons. The first was her advocating of the liberation of human nature. And the second obviously was her personal blog. (*South People Weekly*, Reported by Lehao, 19 February 2011)

In early 2004, Muzi Mei's *Love Letters Left* was published in book form in both Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as a French version in 2005. Meanwhile, she was invited to attend the Deutsche Welle Blog Awards (Germany) in 2004 as one of the judges. In 2005, she was invited to work on a website in Beijing and she now works as a portal site editor as well as a regular writer on sexual topics.

4 Muzi Mei's Conception of Sexuality and the Challenges Made Against her in 2003: *Yiqingshu* (Love Letters Left)⁵⁵

Before writing a blog, I wrote a series of sexual columns. I remembered that we were doing a programme on new media in our magazine, many of my colleagues started blogging, so did I. My blog followed my writing style of sexual columns, but it was more detailed, in relation to everyday life. (Muzi Mei cited in *Xinkuaibao*, Reported by Chen Yang, 28 March 2008)

Muzi Mei said this in an interview with *Xinkuaibao* in 2008. Five years previously, she posted *Love Letters Left* and was greeted with a lot of public attention⁵⁶. The posts Muzi Mei written in 2003 were many but here I have collected 61⁵⁷ in total. I classify her posts into four sections. What Muzi Mei mainly posted in June 2003 is the first section, and in this section, she tended to focus on her “characteristic”/“personality”. Not surprisingly, more than half of her posts talked about her understanding and attitude of sex (34), and her “attitude of sex” comprised a second part of the contents. The third, however, which she mostly posted in November 2003, comprised of her emotional reactions (depression, struggle and satire) (11). The remaining ten posts I shall categorize as other, which are general diaries of her journey in Hong Kong in August 2003.

⁵⁵ From 19 June 2003 to 13 November 2003, Muzi Mei's sexual posts appeared on Blogcn.com. I cannot provide the original numbers and posts here, as they have been taken down a long time ago. The archive of the content of Muzi Mei's *Yiqingshu* (61 in total) can be found at: <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/index.htm>.

⁵⁶ By ‘public attention’ I mean, Muzi Mei's blog won a large readership in 2003 (it was re-posted by Sina.com.cn). Her blog led to public discussions on Sohu.com (see the analysis in later paragraphs), and was labelled as the ‘Muzi Mei Phenomenon’ in 2003.

⁵⁷ As Muzi Mei's *Love Letters Left* had been taken down. Many of her original posts cannot be found now, however, these 61 postings contain her ‘themes’ of writing a sexual blog. In other words, these postings express not only a sexual story, but the way of how a blogger communicated and disseminated her viewpoints to the public.

4.1 Characteristic

In June 2003, Muzi Mei wrote frequently about herself, and what her personality sounds like. In *Chang K* (Karaoke⁵⁸), Muzi Mei said that she “cannot stay with ‘clean’ people”.

Sometimes I would like to imagine – to separate a ‘clean’ he and she, then drop them to a busy red-light district respectively, will they be miserable or happy? I certainly do not have an answer, but I guess they might imagine this kind of situation once in their life. (Muzi Mei, 23 June 2003)

Muzi Mei defined the ‘clean’ people as “good guys and good women”, but described herself as a “different” one:

We have different lives... The difference between me and these good people is that, they keep this life in their imagination but I free my imagination in practice. (Muzi Mei, 23 June 2003)

These ‘good guys and good women’ are also regarded as a “strong group/community” among urban Chinese by Muzi Mei – “They believe they are the truth” (23 June 2003).

However, I don’t like their confirmative ‘happiness’ – as they believe they set a ‘good’ example for others. And I am truly angry with myself – as I am tired of being asked “Aren’t you tired of being alone?”, or “Are you truly having fun when you are hanging around guys?” – This sense of oppression bothers me all the time. (Muzi Mei, 23 June 2003)

⁵⁸ Muzi Mei’s *Chang K* (Karaoke) can be found at: <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/>.

Here, Muzi Mei criticizes a typical group of modern Chinese middle-class thirty-somethings (who have stable jobs and lives in urban areas). This life and lifestyle is being constructed, formulized and perhaps popularized among Muzi Mei's contemporaries. "I don't like their confirmative happiness", and "They believe they set a good example for others" show Muzi Mei's 'contrary'/counter character – her resistance to these 'clean' people.

Instead, 'free' should be the term to describe Muzi Mei. Such 'freedom' implies two meanings in Muzi Mei's post: a failure of the 'good people' to be 'free' – their stereotyped image of a repressed sexual life in general, and also their misunderstanding of sex as a means of personal freedom.

The good people's 'stereotyped image of sexual life' in Muzi Mei's word is "happiness" (19 June 2003). But she uses terms such as "trance" and "suicide", in her entry of *Yi Zisha Duikang Tasha* (My Suicide against Being Killed⁵⁹), to highlight her rebellion and rejection of this middle class identity.

Every five hours I fall in a trance in a day, along with a strong feeling of suicide... or a mood of questioning about happiness... Why should I fall in a trance, think about suicide and question happiness all the time? (Muzi Mei, 19 June 2003)

Meanwhile, Muzi Mei's 'counter character' implies she is likely to connect more deeply with men. This can be seen on her *Ba Qingxu Choucheng Shiwu* (Eat My Emotions and Smoke My Pain⁶⁰), for instance, Muzi Mei wrote about her life at the university, when she smoked with some 'bad' boys.

⁵⁹ Muzi Mei's *Yi Zisha Duikang Tasha* (My suicide against being killed) can be found at: <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/>.

⁶⁰ Muzi Mei's *Ba Qingxu Choucheng Shiwu* (Smoke My Emotion to be Food) can be found at: <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/>.

For me, smoking was no longer a behavior of recording my emotion. What I needed was to be different, rebellious and unconventional. Indeed smoking made me happy – by smoking, I built up the great friendship with many boys. (Muzi Mei, 19 June 2003)

The three posts show that Muzi Mei is ‘different’ – she is ‘freer’ than other women but is likely to be a ‘bad’ woman. Muzi Mei’s difference is based on her contrariness to mainstream representations of the average Chinese women, by her frequently questioning the ‘happiness’ they own, and by her enjoying her “rebellious and unconventional” behaviors. In other words, she sees herself as a rebel (since her school days – smoking and being with ‘bad’ boys) on one hand, but being a rebel she also provocatively criticizes the lives of the ‘happy’ people – their assumed ‘happiness’ with the gender inequality and sexual repression of contemporary China. While at the same time Muzi Mei enjoys actively interacting with different guys. She never silences her great interest, wishes and grievances towards sexuality. And ‘sex’ is the freedom she has been pursuing. However, as Muzi Mei mentioned in *Chang K* (Karaoke), her ‘rebellious’ behavior is opposed to those ‘clean’ people’. She is being isolated from that big and popular community, and is frequently oppressed and ‘provoked’ by the so-called ‘good’ people.

4.2 Attitude of Sex

From July to November 2003, Muzi Mei’s *Love Letters Left* consistently featured writings on her attitude towards sex. I primarily classify her writing about sex into the following categories: “hobby” (10), “fun” (18) and “liberation” (6). One reason for this classification is that the three terms were frequently mentioned by Muzi Mei in her writings. In addition, the hobby-fun-liberation triptych represents three gradual stages of Muzi Mei’s evolving expression of sexuality in 2003, and also the growing politicization of her sexuality.

For instance, in a post entitled *Hanlao Baoshou* (Come Drought or Flood⁶¹), Muzi Mei named “making love” as her “humanistic hobby” (27 June 2003).

The partner I take in my hobby is the one I choose and always change. I rely on a large supply pool. I do not need to take any responsibility for them; neither should I give them love. (Muzi Mei, 27 June 2003)

As indicated by the post, for Muzi Mei, sex is nothing but a ‘hobby’. Within the hobby, Muzi Mei has her personal rules.

They will not cause me problems. They are like CDs, which will not make a sound unless I play them. (Muzi Mei, 27 June 2003)

For Muzi Mei, sex is casual and can be taken place at anytime and in anywhere. In her *Yi Che Wei Chuang Wo de Lixiang* (Take Vehicle as Bed: My Dream⁶²), Muzi Mei offered her experience on ‘car-sex’:

A poll from a portal site asked that, if there was no bed, where would be the favorite place for women to sleep? The answers were various such as bathtub, balcony, grass, sofa and floor. Surprisingly, over 40 percent of women chose to sleep in a truck... So, my conclusion is that, women are more likely to be a *Chechuang Zu* (car-sex group) than men. By the way, my first car-sex took place in a jeep. (Muzi Mei, 29 June 2003)

Apart from ‘casual’, Muzi Mei’s rules for sex emphasized an independent relationship with men that distinguished her sexual relationships from ‘true love’. This can be revealed from her post *Wo Shuoguo Zui Dongren de Qinghua* (The

⁶¹ Muzi Mei’s *Hanlao Baoshou* (Come drought or flood) can be found at: <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/>.

⁶² Muzi Mei’s *Yi Che Wei Chuang Wo de Lixiang* (Take vehicle as bed: My dream) can be found at: <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/006.htm>.

Most Beautiful Words for Love I Have Ever Said⁶³), where she considered ‘true love’ as similar as “True Lies” – “a woman needs an understandable guy to love her”, and “men always need worship” (Muzi Mei, 20 June 2003).

I said a couple of days ago. Of course I said to a guy, who met me online. The first was – “I know why I like you – who you prefer me to be is exactly the one I want myself to be”. The second, I said: “I prefer to meet you and ask for your signature”. (Muzi Mei, 20 June 2003)

From the above posts we can see that, while Muzi Mei enjoyed her hobby, she also acted as a game controller. In Muzi Mei’s description, however, there are many points (e.g., “I built up the great friendship with many boys”, “the partner I take in my hobby is the one I choose and always change”), in which she is a protagonist within the sex, and where, for Muzi Mei, sex implied no purpose whatsoever: it is purely pleasure, no procreation, no romance and no marriage.

Chinese traditional sexual ideology holds that men and women are fundamentally different in terms of roles and behaviors, men tend to be powerful and more dominant, while women are subordinate and should be inactive in a relationship (Liu Dalin and Zhang Hongxia, 2010, p.3). As Alicia Leung explains,

The imperial Confucian construction of women as subjects in society is defined in terms of their relations with men (mother, sister, wife) and thus casts women as secondary within the collectives of the family and the community. (2003, p.362)

In addition, the Confucian of Chinese culture has greatly influenced on the education of Chinese women. Traditions such as *Fuchang Fusui* (the harmony of a couple), *Xiangfu Jiaozi* (to stay at home to take care of the family), and *Xianqi Liangmu* (wise wife and good mother) become moral values for Chinese women to

⁶³ Muzi Mei’s *Wo Shuoguo Zui Dongren de Qinghua* (the most beautiful words for love I have ever said) can be found at <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/>.

abide by. For a long time, Chinese women were busy by the kitchen sink, or giving birth to their children and raising them, and ‘enjoying’ being subordinate in both family and society. In this context, Muzi Mei’s ‘hobby’ served to challenge male-centered sexual practices by advocating the recognition of an authentic female desire. She does no more than shift the exercise of being herself from the conventional role of public representation to restrict her. Muzi Mei is thus provocative. Neither does she like to give birth to her children, nor does she prefer to become a good mother in future. What she wants is to satisfy herself (via sex) in her everyday life.

But sex is not just a hobby; it also brought Muzi Mei lots of fun. In her *Come Drought or Flood*, Muzi Mei exemplified:

I used to go to a man’s flat for a hot shower when I was a third-year university student... I was so happy. That winter, I was the warmest girl in our dormitory. (Muzi Mei, 27 June 2003)

Here, Muzi Mei’s ironic expression – “the warmest girl” – might actually hinge on her ‘having fun’ with guys. In her description, she provided a woman-desired space for the enjoyment of sexuality.

I spent the night with him, wearing his clothes and eating his food... However, I didn’t even have to date him. (Muzi Mei, 27 June 2003)

Here, Muzi Mei is using her sexuality and her body as a commodity for exchange – sex for hot water, sex for clothes, sex for food, and sex for safety, seeks to provoke an argument that she sees the traditional gender norms (such as virtue, royalty in man-woman relationship) as worthless and boring, alternatively, she enjoys her own ‘happiness’.

Take *Dengshi Jiaohuan* (The Same Time Exchange⁶⁴) for another example, Muzi Mei wrote down the details about her conversation with a journalist from Beijing. In this text, Muzi Mei mentioned ‘sex’ three times.

Muzi Mei: Why are you so sure that I will accept your interview? I will not unless you have sex with me.

...

Muzi Mei: No sex I will be bored.

...

Muzi Mei: I will [do the interview with you] but it depends on how long you stay in my bed. I mean the longer the sex, the longer the interview. However, you should wait till I publish our story on my blog, and then your interview with me can officially be started. (Muzi Mei, 21 August 2003)

Given that Muzi Mei’s three times’ highlighting sex before an interview, her challenge to that reporter suggested that Muzi Mei did not really rely on her interest in sex, but aimed to achieve more fun.

Within the fun circles, Muzi Mei’s posts again contributed to challenging men’s power, especially men’s power over women. For example, her *Bupa Chuming Bupa Zhuang* (Don’t be Afraid of Becoming Famous⁶⁵) showed how she put pressure on a guy. The story started with a guy who met Muzi Mei in a pub, and asked the number (how many guys) that Muzi Mei slept with.

⁶⁴ Muzi Mei’s *Dengshi Jiaohuan* (The same time exchange) can be found at: <http://www.muzimei.org/19.html>.

⁶⁵ Muzi Mei’s *Bupa Chuming Bupa Zhuang* (Don’t be afraid of becoming famous) can be found at: <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/>.

“Sixty-five”, I said directly... I didn’t mean to care about their sexual life, but since they were likely to test my honesty, I decided to be very honest. (Muzi Mei, 29 June 2003)

The way that Muzi Mei’s ‘very honest’ about her sexual experience and her hobby of publishing her sexual experience on her blog did prevent many Chinese men from being closer to her.

“Are you going to have sex with me?” “No. I have physiological problem...You are too ‘famous’, and I am afraid of being famous”. (Muzi Mei, 29 June 2003)

Reading between the lines, what we see is how Muzi Mei was fond of sex (casual), and how she enjoyed her sexual life (controller, protagonist etc.). Her ‘casual’ mounts a series of challenges to traditional sexual ideology: she spoke out the truth of sexual pleasure and she desires natural and instinctive force of sex and lust. However, her explicit expression implies that her self-respect to an individual right (sex as nature), and her fight is against the obligations an individual should carry out in society (what is the law or tradition telling her as a good woman). As Pan Wenlan addresses:

Public authorities (legal system, for instance) cannot restrict one’s personal sexual activities, though, morality does have the certain binding. (2007, 103)

Among posts pertaining to “liberation”, Muzi Mei singled out three tiers of argument. The first, which was clearly mentioned on her *Feichang Nannv Feichang Supei* (Love Match⁶⁶), is about her understanding of sexual overindulgence.

⁶⁶ Muzi Mei’s *Feichang Nannv Feichang Supei* (Love match) can be found at: <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/007.htm>.

I once logged on to a website, clicked on a guy and asked: “Shall we?”... It just took us three minutes to decide to meet, very effective... During the night, the guy enquired about the “Sexual Overindulgence Phenomenon” in Guangzhou. I told him, according to a poll from a portal site, 38.6 percent of responses have claimed, as long as they have the need for sex, sexual overindulgence would not be considered as a big deal. (Muzi Mei, 29 June 2003)

Muzi Mei’s words (for instance, not ‘a big deal’) imply that she accepts sexual overindulgence. However, Muzi Mei’s ‘sexual overindulgence’ links sex with both love (emotional), and security (physical), thus the term ‘overindulgence’ is defined as ‘liberation’ of sex by Muzi Mei, and is distinguished from sex ‘overindulgence’⁶⁷ in Chinese dictionaries. Exemplified in her *Zaozai Sannianqian Wojiu Queli le Ziji de Xing Shijieguan* (I Built up My Sexual Ideology Three Years Ago⁶⁸), Muzi Mei said:

Prurient and unrestricted sex should be regulated within a category of protection. This is the precondition to guarantee that you are still healthy; at least it continuously offers you the chance for enjoying sex instead of regretting afterwards. (Muzi Mei, 6 November 2003)

Reading Muzi Mei’s posts I feel that she paid more attention to describing her feelings than simply the bodies in motion, and this feature distanced her from other sexual bloggers such as Zhuying Qingtong or Liuman Yan, who were likely to post nude self. In addition, as Liu Jianxin notes,

Muzi Mei... is representative of the ... urban women ... whose lifestyles are knitted closely with those of women worldwide... Liumang Yan by contrast depicts migrant women workers’ struggle in cities in the era of the computer, Internet, and social networking media. (Liu, 2010)

⁶⁷ In Chinese, it means *Fangzong* – a term negatively describes that somebody has had too much of something (for instance, over-drinking, lack of restricted sex) s/he ‘enjoys’.

⁶⁸ Muzi Mei’s *Zaozai Sannianqian Wojiu Jianli le Ziji de Xing Shijieguan* (I built up my sexual ideology three years ago) can be found at: <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/013.htm>.

Written in an entry entitled *Jiefang* (Liberation⁶⁹), Muzi Mei addressed:

When I write sexual columns, I think that “the liberation of human nature” is more important than just the body. However, it is difficult for people to find a true self in other everyday experiences than in their sexual intercourse. In other words, nakedness and sexual intercourse are the most effective ways to explore human nature. (Muzi Mei, 7 September 2003)

The three posts, either discussion of ‘going for casual sex’, the claim of sex as ‘the need’, or the way for ‘love the self’ contained Muzi Mei’s specific explanations of liberation. For Muzi Mei, the naturalness of sex might be her strongest argument, which implied her resistance of the authoritarian discourse of sexuality. Therefore, sex and liberation are being coupled together here. The ‘liberation’ implies Muzi Mei’s two expectations. First, sex should be openly expressed by Chinese women. Second, sex as a human nature should be treated as an individual right and be respected.

The appearance of Muzi Mei and her sexual blog recalled the liberal and independent personality of those *Xinnvxing* (new women, see Le Shuo, 1998) during the May Fourth Movement, and followed in the footsteps of body writing such as Wei Hui and Mian Mian (See, Mitra, 2009), who were in pursuit of the freedom of expression on behalf of sex before the new century. Muzi Mei’s postings contain complaint about moral prohibitions, a contempt of patriarchal ideology and a desire for freedom, all of which imply a discursive conflict (mainstream/dominant – Confucian tradition/State ideology vs. non-mainstream – individual), further pushed sex on the issue (e.g., cultural inheritance, law, sex education, see Pan Wenlan, 2007) that matter to most Chinese women.

⁶⁹ Muzi Mei’s *Jiefang* (Liberation) can be found at: <http://www.muzimei.org/25.html>.

4.3 Emotional Reaction

While there was a frequency of sexual posts on Muzi Mei's blog, of particular note was the number of her emotional expressions, which she mainly posted in November 2003. How Muzi Mei posted her emotional reaction to the comments of her blog differed. I classify this part into depression (2), struggle (6) and satire (3) respectively. For instance, a post entitled *Taoxin Taofei* (Pull out My Heart, Pull out My Lung⁷⁰) focused on her depression. Muzi Mei described this depression as "lonely".

I always feel lonely. Any guy who knows me, he won't be in love with me... If I need love, I have to put hundreds and thousands times more effort than average girls...I have to live like a killer – lonely and isolated. (Muzi Mei, 28 July 2003)

As noted previously, Muzi Mei's sexual expressions were greatly in conflict with the authoritarian discourses. The first, her words (the notion of free sex or casual sex, for instance) were contrary to Chinese traditional cultural values. According to Liu Dalin and Hu Hongxia,

The value target of Chinese traditional culture focused on order, harmony and stabilization in society. Therefore, there should be a set of norms to bind each other between people... Sex is no exception. (2010, p. 4).

Second, Muzi Mei's expressions (the liberation of human nature, for instance), to some extent, "transcended the extent permission of the code of ethics and legal restriction" in contemporary China, to borrow from Pan Wenlan's words (2007, p.

⁷⁰ Muzi Mei's *Taoxin Taofei* (Pull out my heart, pull out my lung) can be found at: <http://www.muzimei.org/13.html>.

104), and caused her in an “isolated” situation. In her *Zhaozhu* (Control⁷¹), Muzi Mei complained:

“Moral integrity” – when the term is used to question me, I feel helpless... To judge a person’s personal life by “moral integrity” can only take place in a socialist country. (Muzi Mei, 7 November 2003)

Clearly, Muzi Mei’s depression was embodied in her personal life in struggle with the reality, and her liberality being suppressed within the regime. In other words, Muzi Mei’s sexual expression, or her pursuit of a happy life is based on her own definition of ‘liberation’, and is against the ‘harmonious’ norms regulated by the State. In this sense, her behavior would be read as an ‘anti-harmonious-society’. In addition, her words criticized not only ‘good’ people’s ‘happy’ life, but also implicitly pointed to public authorities such as education, legal and propaganda systems, and were ‘judged’ as ‘moral integrity’. The post named *Seqing zhi Lu* (The Road to Sex⁷²) noted:

I am very famous now. I become a famous person because I slept with many guys, and I published my sexual stories on my blog. I believe that I will eventually be excluded by the regime. (Muzi Mei, 13 November 2003)

Linking Muzi Mei’s ‘will’ with her ‘sex for fun’ and her theory of ‘love’, they deviated from “the correct values of sex”, and were far away from “an ideal personality and fine qualities”, to borrow from Pan Wenlan’s words (2007, p.104). Thus, we saw an isolated Muzi Mei: the newspaper commented that Muzi Mei “destroyed the media’s harmony”, her work unit cancelled her sexual column, and her ex-sex-partner rejoiced in her misfortune (Muzi Mei, 6 November 2003⁷³).

⁷¹ Muzi Mei’s *Zhaozhu* (Control) can be found at: <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/012.htm>.

⁷² Muzi Mei’s *Seqing zhi Lu* (The road to sex) can be found at: <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/030.htm>.

⁷³ This post was entitled *11 Yue 5 Ri: Zhide Jizhu de Rizhi* (A remarkable day: 5th of November). It can be found at: <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/014.htm>.

As the above account (Muzi Mei's postings) suggested, Muzi Mei's depression came from the kind of power which is similar to what Foucault criticized as the 'repressive hypothesis' (the old/orthodox order). This power is located in the establishment of the public authorities (e.g., educational and legal systems) in China, and operates to prohibit, limit, censor and punish provocative individuals or groups such as Muzi Mei.

Two types of satirizing posts were written by Muzi Mei. One is about her sexual partners. An excerpted post appeared on her *Dangji* (Disconnection⁷⁴), detailing her statement of satire in terms of men's hypocrisy.

I keep receiving messages from different people all these days. One of them is my previous lover. We lost contact for years. But when I tried to meet him, I was refused... What a nice guy! (Muzi Mei, 12 November 2003)

Another excerpt from Muzi Mei's *Jiefang* (Liberation), addressed her disdain in terms of men's diverse dishonest acts:

I know guys better than average women. Many guys... they are so different when they are with me... For instance, a guy had sex with me just before his girlfriend came back a couple of hours ago, and claimed that his sexual partners were over forty. When this was published on my column, he denied... Another guy, who likes to go to my place in the afternoon, always leaves his condom in my room. However, he looks very 'innocent' in front of the public. (Muzi Mei, 7 September 2003)

Besides blogging about her sexual partners, Muzi Mei's satirical posts also pointed to those critical comments (mainly published in the mainstream media) on her. Take *Li Shijiang Caifang Muzi Mei de Yuangao* (The Original Draft of Li

⁷⁴ Muzi Mei's *Dangji* (Disconnection) can be found at: <http://www.eoooo.com/2011/2006-07/25141.shtml>.

Shijiang's Interview with Muzi Mei⁷⁵), Muzi Mei published two versions of the writings written by a newspaper journalist. The first one wrote:

"I used to think that Muzi Mei would be a "slut"; however, after the conversation I changed my mind. She is very smart – in her simple and easily understood way, she conveys to me the most profound truths of the sex and the morality. I found that she is a real self-conscious "bitch" – she shows her body to the public, not only to indicate her attitude but also to highlight her freedom and joy." (Li Shijiang cited in Muzi Mei, 7 November 2003)

The second one, published by Muzi Mei, explained:

This was what Li Shijiang's original draft of the interview with me, but he said he could not publish it on his newspaper because he was told that he must be against me. I totally understand. (Muzi Mei, 7 November 2003)

The posting is noteworthy because it illustrated a different attitude between media reporter and media report. The latter statement is actually quite ironic, as the simple assertion of free sex from Muzi Mei exceeded orthodox sexual entitlement. In addition to this is referred to censorship being framed as a cornerstone of Chinese politics, thereby allowing it to remain a firmer control, to borrow from Weber and Jia's words (2007, p. 785), "through a bottom-up approach to media management".

While the original views of the reporter demonstrated a series of affirmations, in terms of Muzi Mei's boldness/braveness of expressing her sexual experience, and in terms of her "exploration of women's consciousness (i.e., freedom) and exploration of issues facing them" (i.e., sexuality vs. morality), to borrow from Sabaree Mitra (2009, p. 14).

⁷⁵ Muzi Mei's *Li Shijiang Caifang Muzi Mei de Yuangao* (The original draft of Li Shijiang's interview with Muzi Mei) can be found at: <http://www.tianyabook.com/wangluo/muzimeiriji/013.htm>.

The Muzi Mei story recalled Foucault's theory of the 'discourse of sexuality' in *The History of Sexuality* (1981). According to Foucault, the process of talking, speaking and the narrative is "for transforming sex into discourse" (1981, p. 20).

Sex was driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence. (Foucault, 1981, p. 33)

Muzi Mei did it. Her sexual expressions affirmed a series of aspirations for individual success in pursuit of freedom, and conflictive potentials of the withdrawal of ideological controls. Yet the latter, I argue, connoted what Mitra calls "hiding meaning" (2009, p. 15). Let me explain these 'hiding' meanings in the following paragraphs.

First off, from Muzi Mei's earlier (mainly in June and July 2003) open narrative of her private experiences (hobby, fun and liberation) to her later (especially in November 2003) frequent description of her depressive emotions, hinted a strong sense of censorship, which gradually limited Muzi Mei to speak out her theory of sexuality in discourse.

Second, fair amount of Muzi Mei's *Love LettersLeft* talked about her relationship with men. This relationship, however, was based on how Muzi Mei played with men, or how she challenged to patriarchal ideology, implying a point of convergence between public and official anxieties about the destabilization, disruption and threatening of harmony (both family and society).

Third, some of Muzi Mei's expressions used a satirical tone and were loaded with *Shendong Jixi* (making a feint to the east but attacking in the west) perspective. Given in *Jiefang*, Muzi Mei noted:

I like to write them [men] on my sexual column as I like to socialize with them... I enjoy their feeling about me – be they afraid of me, hating me or angry with me... I'm always deeply "touched" by them. (Muzi Mei, 7 September 2003)

I would say the term "them" (men) is the *Dong* (east) Muzi Mei wrote, but it implicitly pointed to *Xi* (west) where Muzi Mei wants to attack: "to socialize with them" meant her 'resistance' of political ideology, be "afraid of me, hating me or angry with me" implied diverse 'ideological controls' on her, and "deeply touched" mapped Muzi Mei's own discourse of sex. Furthermore, considering an inevitable censorship environment in China, Muzi Mei's *Shengdong Jixi* strategy can be regarded as one of the 'safety measures' for her provocative speech.

While the three hidden meanings addressed here renders *Love Letters Left* the tension between (Muzi Mei's) discourse (of sexuality) and power (how discourse of sexuality in authoritarian use), as Foucault argues:

[W]e are dealing less with a discourse on sex than with a multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions. (1981, p. 33)

It is in this consideration – Muzi Mei's individual 'discourse of sex' vs. 'multiplicity of authoritarian discourses' that I argue that sexuality (discourse) is related to politics. Below I am going to examine how Muzi Mei's discourse of sex can be immediately translated into political discourses in China. Perhaps the controversial discussion of Muzi Mei on Sohu.com (November – December 2003) provided certain clues.

5 Freedom of Expression VS Internet Censorship:

The 2003 Sohu's Controversial Discussion on *Love Letters Left*⁷⁶

From November 3 to December 29 in 2003, Sohu.com provided a nationwide discussion about Muzi Mei's blog. It was entitled *Muzi Mei Xianxiang Yinfa Quanguo Dataolun* (The Muzi Mei Phenomenon Caused a Nationwide Discussion). There were 98⁷⁷ postings appearing on its site News.sohu.com. Sohu's discussion included three groups: "media comment" (30), "experts' opinion" (15) and "netizens' viewpoint" (53).

5.1 Media Comment

Two issues which received considerable attention from journalists were Muzi Mei's explicit sexual expression, and the possibility that it might have a negative impact on society, and blog sites' publishing Muzi Mei's diary based purely on increasing click rates that led to mainstream media's call for censorship. Lou Guobiao, for instance, a journalist of Rednet.cn, argued "that China has a long history of Confucian moral system⁷⁸; however, it is suddenly being destroyed by young people nowadays".

I agree that we should learn to respect people, especially their personal life. However, if her behavior is against the mainstream moral value, and it might cause the crime, shall we continue our 'respect' without a bottom line? I don't think so. (see News.sohu.com, 14 November 2003)

Some opinions pointed to Muzi Mei as violating China's 'sacred' laws. He Xiangdong, a journalist from *China Youth*, said:

⁷⁶ For all Sohu's comments on Muzi Mei, please see <http://news.sohu.com/1/1103/35/subject215663541.shtml>.

⁷⁷ This number is the total postings selectively published by Sohu.com.

⁷⁸ This moral system is based on the philosophy of Confucianism that sought to teach Chinese people the proper manner to behave in society (including the relationship between man and woman, husband and wife, parents and children, especially ruler and ruled). The aim is to promote a stable government.

Muzi Mei's diary involves netporn... to some extent, her words challenge people's tolerance and they are against the rules and regulations of General Administration of Press and Publication of People's Republic of China. (see News.sohu.com, 19 November 2003)

And a *Beijing Morning Post* reporter wrote:

I don't think that Muzi Mei's diary should be allowed to be published online, as I believe it is against the law. Also, I think blog sites, as an important form of online media, should take responsibility. (see News.sohu.com, posted by Zhao Zhongpeng, 16 November 2003)

Muzi Mei's 'negative impact', in the above three journalists' words, was the result of going against "the mainstream moral value", "the rules and regulations of General Administration of Press and Publication of People's Republic of China", and "the law", all of which represent "power mechanisms" in China, to borrow from Foucault's view (1981, p. 23), and function as administrative 'rulers' to manage/control media organizations (see Weber and Jia, 2007; Winfield and Peng, 2005).

Implicated in the above critics, on the other hand, revealed the basic principles of media management in China. As I have introduced in the Introduction, Chinese media act as the mouthpiece of the government. The 'moral value', the 'publication' and 'legal' systems mentioned by these journalists suggest they have given official criteria in the setting of the judgment on sexuality, and they are the ones that media should be 'responsible' for.

In this sense, Muzi Mei's sexual expression led some to question the 'responsibility' of the media implied, firstly, the mainstream media's self-regulation. As a journalist from *Youth Daily* said:

To freely offer information is important, however, freedom of publication does not mean the abusing of freedom. (Wang Xiaobo cited in News.sohu.com, 18 November 2003)

Secondly, a call for censorship was explicitly made. A comment from *Beijing Evening News* mentioned:

Muzi Mei's story may have increased clicking rates for commercial portals in pursuit of their profits, but this kind of blind pursuit will mislead people into thinking that the government authorities over news are turning a blind eye to the Muzi Mei phenomenon. (Wu Yong cited in News.sohu.com, 16 November 2003)

The two issues discussed by Chinese journalists are acting in the way of criticizing Muzi Mei and calling for (self) censorship as a way of regulating Chinese women's expression of sexuality – what they are advocating, had extended beyond the domain of media comments towards larger controversial opinions, from labeling 'liberation of the women' to emphasizing 'sexual education', and can be seen particularly in the experts' opinion.

5.2 Experts' Opinion

More than half of the posts (8 out of 15) in this category were from members of the academic elite. Five were from editors-in-chief of newspaper or magazines. Another two were managers of portal sites. They wrote about a variety of topics on Muzi Mei. A comment from Beijing University questioned Muzi Mei's concept of 'sexual liberation':

Indeed the freedom of sexuality does not mean casual sex. In this sense, Muzi Mei's sexual liberation seems stupid... Muzi Mei does not realize that sexuality also includes public morality and public morality in terms of sexuality always has a bottom line. (Xu Zhenlei cited in News.sohu.com, 18 November 2003)

One comment from People's University of China doubted about "the liberation of women" understood by Muzi Mei:

Muzi Mei... challenges to men by actively changing her partners. She does not realize that she copies a wicked conduct from bad guys, and she thinks this is the liberation of women. Ridiculous! (Zhou Xiaozhen cited in News.sohu.com, 17 November 2003)

Another comment from Jinan University summarized:

In a private space, to write a sexual diary is the basic right for a citizen. In this sense, nobody can blame Muzi Mei. However, Muzi Mei's sexual ideology has broken a historical standard life style and she would never prevent herself from moral criticism in the public space. (Ma Qiufeng cited in News.sohu.com, 13 November 2007)

From these posts we can see that, Muzi Mei's discourse of sex/sexuality (e.g., freedom/liberation, anti-conventional) was incompatible with the discourse of educational system⁷⁹, where sex is served to conduct moral and social order. Her discourse thus was described as "stupid" and "ridiculous", and directly taken as 'unacceptable'.

However, I argue that Muzi Mei was not 'wrong' to write a sexual blog – but, where she was considered as 'going wrong' by the mainstream Chinese media and academic elites was her discourse of sexuality in being so public and garner so much attraction. This is at the heart of politicizing of her work. She moves from being an individual to a 'representative'. By this, I mean the pursuit of sexuality as

⁷⁹ It would be too simplistic or biased to say that academics or scholars in China represent 'authoritarian discourse'. However, the education system belongs to the State – an overwhelming attitude against Muzi Mei implies that its power cannot be challenged.

a personal choice becomes an entry point for Muzi Mei's sexual life. It is also an entry point for the politics of her blog – She becomes a 'representative' of sexual blogger in 2003, as she acted as a representative of freedom of thought and expression of sexuality. However, this is the point at which she challenges and disrupts the discourses of the above two government departments. Thus, in mainstream media comments and experts' opinions, she represents a very 'negative' and 'unacceptable' woman in society.

However, Ma Jing, the director of *Law and Life Magazine* argued that Muzi Mei should be respected.

As we all know, Chinese people are less protected by the law... Then the media, in this way, should be a channel for disseminating modern thoughts rather than a follower. (News.sohu.com, 21 November 2003)

Ma's opinion was argued by Peng Bo, the editor-in-chief of *China Youth*, disagreed:

If media lose their conscience, violate a standard moral system, should they not be punished? ... Sex is beautiful, but Muzi Mei's words towards sex are not beautiful... I suggest that China should reinforce its sexual education in more serious and scientific ways. (News.sohu.com, 21 November 2003)

Debates between the *China Youth* and the *Law and Life Magazine* imbedded in rights concepts, implied the certain tolerance from the commercial media (such as *Law and Life Magazine*) on Muzi Mei event. The conflict opinion between the two directors hinted a broader consideration – whether the media should become a space/sphere of resistance (*Law and Life*), or discourse that was imposed by officials (*China Youth*).

5.3 Netizens' Viewpoints

Results showed that critical viewpoints contained a similar “negative impact” (17 out of 41) as media comment, followed by “a shameful lifestyle” (12 out of 41), and “absurd contents” (12 out of 41). For instance, some of the comments considered Muzi Mei’s open lifestyle as “ashamed”, and they resisted to accept.

I don’t know why Muzi Mei writes her sexual dairies on her blog, does she not feel ashamed? Does she ever think about the consequence before she publishes her stories? ... Personally, I think she does not deserve a happy life in future. (Yidian, 17 November 2008)

I am so shocked by her lack of shame, and I am really angry with those people who applaud Muzi Mei. (One anonymous netizen, 19 November 2003)

As for the critique of Muzi Mei’s “absurd contents”, one netizen argued with Muzi Mei in terms of her ideas of “frivolity” (“the better way to know a guy is to sleep with him” – Muzi Mei) and “devotion” (“it doesn’t work in sex” – Muzi Mei), and responded:

Muzi Mei, the better way for you is to hide yourself. (News.sohu.com)

These postings did not create a feeling of critiques of “absurd”, but attacked Muzi Mei by her disharmonious and dreadful conducts and the so-called social responsibility by portraying characters of women (particularly as a member of a family) with traditional ethics in China.

Except the remaining items I classify them as “other” (3), expressions of appreciation (9 out of 53) on Muzi Mei also appeared on Sohu.com.

I read all of her diaries and I admire her because she sees sex as a personal basic right which should be faced up to in modern society... Literally, Muzi Mei's writing is in an elegant style, and this makes the main reason for her blog to attract me... What we should do is to respect people and to accept changes in our lives. (Flyren1314, 17 November 2003)

Support Muzi Mei! For those people who blamed Muzi Mei, they believe that she challenges morality. But what is morality in a relationship? Morality is men's morality. The question is, if men can fulfill their sexual desires, why cannot we women? (One anonymous netizen, 18 November 2003)

Of course, Muzi Mei has the right to expose anything about her life, so what? I just don't understand why cannot people express themselves... and why so many restrictions? (Mei Wenhua, 21 November 2003)

Added to these was the concern of women for a sexual pleasure.

What appealed me are Muzi Mei's words. Either a fake happiness or pretended harm appears in her writing, along with no fairytale at the beginning or in the end. What I read is her soul and desire. (Shouzhu, 13 November 2003)

Unlike the groups of media comment and experts' opinion, netizens did not focus more on government policy, nor did they discuss deeply on the concept of sexuality. Rather, they provided opinions depending on their own interests (men, women, lifestyle etc.). In addition, the amount of supportive comment showed other factors of the *Love Letters Left* in terms of its sustained readership and increased influence, though the number was weak.

The scope of the Sohu discussion again implied an invisible power, and this power, if we take Aaron Bowen, “has taken on multiple different forms and been applied with varying degrees of consistency and varying degrees of effectiveness by the Chinese government” (1 October 2007). From the discussion we see that, a majority of critiques and resistance of Muzi Mei undertaken by journalists and experts, and this hinted that Muzi Mei’s anti-mainstream/dominant discourse (e.g., propaganda department, or educational and legal systems) of sex had touched on certain power – a particular term ‘bottom-line’ was repeatedly used to advance the core goal of repression of provocative expression from individuals and therefore, to educate the public.

However, in its different opinions, the discussion on Sohu’s forums delineated societal and gendered boundaries of inclusion and acceptability of *Love Letters Left*. In a sense, the supportive comments on *Love Letters Left* confirmed and validated ‘dissenting’ opinions on what Harriet Evans (1997) and Elaine Jeffreys (2006, p.8-12) have termed “sexual citizenship”, whether as a matter of individual argument, or as a metaphor for the opening up on discourse.

As analyzed above, the Muzi Mei’s blog and the debate over her *Love Letters Left* have developed my idea into another controversy over sexual expression. This is based on Aaron Bowen’s comment that “posting sexual content online can be a form of political commentary” (2 October 2007). In the case of Muzi Mei, despite claims to Internet censorship, I question instead whether Muzi Mei’s *Love Letters Left* carries with it not only a challenge to sexual and gender politics but also to wider political discourse in China? If so, in what terms, can Muzi Mei’s sexual expression serve as a means of this implication?

To answer these questions, below I provide examples of the different claims made by Muzi Mei in her interviews (2004-2008) together with relevant claims made in media reports (2008-2011) in order to provide evidence of my claim and offer an

alternative reading of Muzi Mei's sexual expression, particularly in its relationship to political life in China.

6 Re-Reading Muzi Mei's *Yiqingshu*:

Interviews with Muzi Mei (2004-2011)

In order to provide a clear way to understand Muzi Mei's sexual expression in a political sense, I identify three sections to analyze: motivation, interest and influence. The element of motivation, by which I refer to the discourse of sexuality, is Muzi Mei's use of the blog of sexual entitlement as a means of political communication. The association that I want to address relates to politics is that the *Love Letters Left* was given to be a liberal sense, an experience that potentially possessed a certain freedom of expression (explicit sexual expression). Influence as the third way, because the *Love Letters Left* being embedded in a private usage of Muzi Mei's blog had achieved a public controversy is indeed conceived of as an aspect of individualism, added to this was the diverse forms of censorship/repression that controlled Muzi Mei, not only in terms of her discourse, but also her daily life (see Chen Yang, 2008; Goldkorn, 2006; Zhang Benfu, 13 July 2008).

In December 2004, Muzi Mei accepted DW-WORLD.DE's interview in Germany. In the following two excerpts, answers from Muzi Mei were made by articulating the underlying motif of her blog.

Journalist: You mentioned that what you wanted were “free”, “time”, “health” and “opportunity”. What kind of opportunity do you want?

Muzi Mei: First, I need an opportunity for communication. Many people criticized my way of being famous. But I don't care. For me, to be famous

means I have more opportunities to communicate with people. If I were not Muzi Mei, I would never have this chance... Second, opportunity brings about a discourse of power to me – the more I say, the more people listen. (Reported by Xiao Yang, 3 December 2004)

Journalist: There is a saying that you represent the new generation in China, who has no chance to practice freedom of expression on politics. However, free expression on sex is available, to some extent, it is politically permitted. Through a challenge to societal value, do you think you actually challenged realistic political restriction?

Muzi Mei: What I can say is that I'm not interested in politics, nor did I choose the expression of sex because I was repressed for political reasons. If I want to talk about politics, I have my way to express, but it is definitely not the sex... I don't have the opportunity to participate in politics; how can I talk about politics? I would rather choose something to write with – it should be what I can feel, have experience with, and what I will discover. For me, politics is far away... but sex is in relation to everybody. (Reported by Xiao Yang, 3 December 2004)

Within the two excerpts, the issue of 'political participation' was raised here. Whereas citizens who seek a rational electoral system, an efficient participation in Politics, and an openness and transparency in media system, these cannot be applied to China (see Weber and Jia, 2007; Winfield and Peng, 2005). Rather than focusing on an impossible participation in big Politics, Muzi Mei raised questions about women's "ordinary little things of daily life", to borrow from Deng Hao's words (2008, p.85), to "deal with social issues" (see Bowen, 1 October 2007) and expressed views on Chinese gender politics via her avenue of discussion (sex).

'[A]n opportunity' implied as well how Muzi Mei gained a position in society via her communication, albeit negative.

The interesting part in this interview is that, Muzi Mei denied that she uses 'sex' as a topic to talk about 'politics', but she also admitted that she doesn't have a chance

to participate in ‘Politics’. The two points implicitly demonstrate that, Muzi Mei actually argued for the same point: the creation of political participation – meaning that the topic of sex/sexuality is, on the one hand, a participatory creation for Muzi Mei to ‘organize’ political-based discussions. On the other hand, it helped Muzi Mei to avoid severe political punishment (i.e., being arrested).

The fact that the Muzi Mei event was considered as a phenomenon in 2003, which referred to women who used their bodies to gain attention or fame (Zhou Qiong, 11 November 2003). However, I argue, this is not what Muzi Mei wants to be (being famous via showing bodies).

In 2006, Danwei.org interviewed Muzi Mei at her apartment in Beijing, talking about her popularity.

Goldkorn: Why do girls like to read your stuff?

Muzi Mei: Maybe because there are things that I understand more clearly. Or there are things that I have done but they could not do. Mainly, they think I am brave. (26 April 2006)

Firstly, “there are things that I have done but they could not do” not only argued that Muzi Mei has gone a step further than average women in sex, but also, in describing men-women relations in urban China, she demonstrated a non-mainstream (individual) discourse capable of being read of criticism of State discourse.

Secondly, the strength of Muzi Mei’s characteristic and her difference from the other women was made clearly on her *Love Letters Left* – she is a direct and forthright woman, not scared of having opinions of her own or of airing them

candidly. Then ‘brave’ in this sense also implied her inner thoughts and aspirations of free speech.

Thirdly, the ‘Muzi Mei Phenomenon’ includes not only how she was criticized as a negative example for Chinese women in 2003, as I have analysed in the previous part of this chapter; but also, how the push-and-pull relationship played out in the case of Muzi Mei: Muzi Mei appeared as an individual blogger, but her discourse of sexuality is in conflict with official media source. In other words, her sexual expression has threatened the dominant ideology concerning the assumption of not only morality and love, but harmony in particular. As a consequence, her blog was banned in November 2003, and she was not allowed to speak out her thoughts of sexuality loudly in public.

Therefore, Muzi Mei’s life had been disturbed, as both international and domestic media reported.

Recently I don’t think the Internet has been too interesting. You know, there is this slogan “Make a Civilized Internet!”... It makes me annoyed. (Muzi Mei cited in Danwei.org, Reported by Goldkorn, 26 April, 2006)

“My life was disturbed. I could not have a fixed time for work and going home. The press published the phone number of my work unit, which resulted in lots of phone calls disturbing both me and my colleagues.” (Muzi Mei cited in *Xinkuaibao*, Reported by Chen Yang, 28 March 2008)

“The Net is not just a tool but brings me about a real impact such as a challenge to societal rules”. Muzi Mei said. Her book form of *Love Letters Left* was translated in French, and screened outside. However, it was prohibited in China. “I don’t think it is fair”. (Muzi Mei cited in *Xiandaikuaibao*, Reported by Zhang Benfu, 13 July 2008)

Muzi Mei became a public figure; however, she was rejected to go to the pub, attacked by her sexual partner's wife, and she eventually lost her job and column. Muzi Mei once talked to her mother on the phone: "It's too complicated to explain. I can only say that, my lifestyle is different from average people. They want me out". (Muzi Mei cited in *South People Weekly*, Reported by Lehao, 19 February 2011)

What I want to address here is not how Muzi Mei has been 'excluded', as the above quotations illustrated, rather, how international, especially radical Chinese media (such as *Xinkuaibao* and *South People Weekly*) started looking critically at different levels of censoring Muzi Mei's sexual expression (e.g., 'annoyed', 'disturbing', 'unfair', 'out'), as an alternative means of Chinese media in dissatisfaction with their daily work (self-censorship policy) and political life (in pursuit of a free press).

In the interview with *Xinkuaibao* in 2008 and *South People Weekly* in 2011, Muzi Mei again highlighted her theory of sex.

I think your feelings and your emotions are very different. Sometimes we have feeling with guys; it may not mean that we like them... For me, sex doesn't have any purpose. I don't do it for business or money. Nobody would force me to have sex with him. (Muzi Mei cited in *Xinkuaibao*, Reported by Chen Yang, 28 March 2008)

An external sexual relationship is not wrong, I mean, if the couple can both accept, they can still keep a happy marriage. As for "integrity", my suggestion is that, one should be honest to herself – if the love stops, there is no need to stay. (Muzi Mei cited in *South People Weekly*, Reported by Lehao, 18 February 2011)

In accounts of Muzi Mei's emancipated expressions (i.e., free choice of sex/marriage), these words showed a continuing shift towards defining Muzi Mei as an "independent individual" and away from the "individualist virtues" such as

moral excellence or righteousness goodness, to borrow from Charlotte Furth's words (2002, p. 90). As Leahao describes Muzi Mei on *South People Weekly*:

For Muzi Mei, she is more likely to be a "writer". She brands herself "scum" and a "loose woman", as she claims: "I keep nothing except myself. Neither do I need to design an image for myself, nor should I emphasize a -ism for women. Basically, I exist but not for subverting morality." (18 February 2011)

The kind of "independent individual", in a sense, is not the same as the May Fourth and the post-Mao female writers, who were in pursuit of new identities (new women, and pure feminine respectively) through their discourses. What Muzi Mei presented is an independent thought of sex; she sees sex more "for pleasure" and "for leisure" than as "for family procreation" in her everyday life, to borrow from Pan Suiming's terms (2006, p. 30), and publicly published her ideas online. The purpose, to some extent, was to fight for a more tolerant space for her discourse.

Muzi Mei's influence in 2003, to some extent, was greatly associated with the individualized opportunities and practices supported by the blogosphere. Added to this was the means of interactive communication through that blogosphere that enabled Muzi Mei to build up a platform for public debates, though shortly, and she attracted mostly unwelcome attention. However, the case of Muzi Mei started to mark a turning point in hearing an individual voice from its silence in the public space.

7 Conclusions

The *Love Letters Left* was written ten years ago. However, the appearance of Muzi Mei's blog was crucial; on the one hand, it partially marked as a moment of historical transition, connected Muzi Mei with the female writers of the earlier 20th century and the post-Mao era, who promoted their voices to be heard via different

media (e.g., press, book). The Muzi Mei phenomenon, to some extent, developed their style (writing) and theme (gender), albeit through blogging, targeting at implement “female individualism”, to borrow from Angela McRobbie’s term (2006, p.63).

As McRobbie argues, the contemporary women in the West are in the process of having “a life of one’s own” (2006, p.65). On the one hand, women are required to “become more independent and able... to earn their own living” (McRobbie, 2006, p.66). On the other hand, this ‘individualism’ can be seen as an emerging “life politics” (McRobbie, p.66), presenting the role of women in public life: either by their provocatively playing with the stereotyped theory about women, (see McRobbie, 2006, p.63), or by their stressing “the enlargement of freedom and choice” (e.g., equality, participation, see McRobbie, 2006, p.65), they stick to their own desire.

In the case of the *Love Letters Left*, the ‘female individualism’ embodies in the above two factors. On the one hand, Muzi Mei has created an individual discourse on her *Love Letters Left*, and is in opposition to authoritarian discourse. The reading of Muzi Mei’s blogging showed her persistence of sexual freedom, while at the same time connoted her strong resistance against the dominant sexual culture. The two sides, to some extent, appeared to validate a variety of Foucault’s views:

[T]hat sexuality is a product of nature; that the notion of liberation is important in the struggle against power; and that subjects are self-conscious and autonomous agents capable of social change by understanding and resisting the repressive use of power. (Morrow, 1995, p. 19)

Take the Muzi Mei case; I do agree that the blogosphere offered *Love Letters Left* a discourse space (see Chen Jia, 2004; Wu Xinxun and Li Xiaomei, 2007; Xiang Guoxiong and Zeng Xiaohong, 2005) for challenging political discourses. But I also argue that it would be misleading to characterize such a challenge as a challenge to the discourse of power. In other words, the *Love Letters Left* included

two levels of conflicts. The first is *Huayu Quanli* (the right to speak) vs. *Huayu Quanli* (discourse of power), as Deng Hao explains:

Huanyu Quanli (the right to speak) is the legal right of a citizen for airing his/her opinions on national or societal events. *Huayu Quanli* (discourse of power) relates to power that used to influence action or decision-making. By relying on social environment and political system, this power determines the validity of the public opinion. (2008, p.84)

Muzi Mei's sexual expression, along with her call for developing more freedom in privileging Chinese women in their sexual life was actually illustrated her demand of a *Huayu Quan* (the right to speak). Her discourse was in conflict with mainstream discourses (e.g., conventional culture, education on sex, law, propaganda). The latter, in a sense, represents diverse forms of *Quanli* (power) for discursive control, as Muzi Mei claimed in her writing:

Blogging in China is more apolitical rather than political. Bloggers can either talk about president-election and political democracy, or criticize Bush, Blair and Putin for the World's ills in Western society; however, all these will be taken down in China. Therefore, the Chinese characteristic of 'forbidden' culture stimulates an 'allegorical' blogging culture. (Muzi Mei cited in DW-WORLD.DE, 3 December 2004)

Secondly, I argue that, the process of Muzi Mei's publishing her sexual stories, however, can arguably be regarded as the process of how she converted a *Huayu Quan* (a right to speak) towards a *Huanyu Quan* (a discourse of power). Through reading Muzi Mei's blog, we see how Muzi Mei's discourse of sexuality is in fight with mainstream discourses – she shows her resistance, resulting a nationwide discussion, be it critical or supportive, by becoming a sexual blogger, however, Muzi Mei's words were moving into a sort of power (though as non-mainstream – individual) that clearly had been thought of formerly as exclusively discourse (e.g., propaganda department in Mao's era, and previous mainstream Party-based

newspapers), and threatened both the authority and their fellow members. This is the new form of gender power I am talking about in this chapter.

On the other hand, Muzi Mei's sexual expressions contained issues (e.g., law, education, equality and freedom) that not only matter to Chinese women, but also to Chinese society, shaded the blog into a metaphor for a broader series of debates (exemplified in Sohu discussion), many of which were in relation to politics. In this context, blogging on sex became a politics of sex, articulated the theme of 'freedom' by Muzi Mei, in pursuit of her freer choice of sexual life, and her freer expression of sexuality, exerting a great influence on society.

The influence, however, includes a two-side implication. Bearing in mind, the need for free speech has always been in conflict with consistent growing power in authoritarian policing and control in China's media system. In other words, "Chinese censors can and will censor social as well as political content" (Bowen, 2 October 2007). The *Love Letters Left* showed how authoritarian discourse framed sexuality in the blogosphere. That is, as long as Muzi Mei continued to expose the dark side of society (men's dishonesty and hypocrisy, for instance) and the persistence of her challenge to authoritarian ideologies (freedom and liberation, for instance), she is seen as creating unacceptable.

Freedom of expression is embodied in interacting with people in a small group, or making it as a personal salon. However, care should be taken to ensure that your volume is not too loud or distracting, as freedom of expression will disappear while censorship emerges. When individual blogs start to challenge traditional media in the West, the blog in China is snaking its way forward. (Muzi Mei cited in DW-WORLD.DE, 3 December 2004)

Muzi Mei's words demonstrated that though the articulation of sexuality in contemporary China has moved from a set of silenced, closed and rigid subjects to ones that are more debatable, flexible, and exploratory, the articulation of sexuality

in *Love Letters Left* as a concept that referred to freedom of expression has been accepted as little as possible.

Yet, on the other side of the coin, the emergence of the blogosphere has constructed a new public space for bloggers to encourage freer expression, and further, to empower them in political life – and is a further factor of ‘individualism’ in this chapter. Muzi Mei, by carving out a space in sexuality and relating sexuality to broader Chinese politics, made her claims both visible and viable in the public eye. This in turn suggests that Muzi Mei, along with her *Love Letters Left* had not only established a new form of gender power, but also formed a bridge for later blogs, inspiring other versions of political-based topic to join the public discursive realm (blogosphere), and inviting more independent voices (non-mainstream - individual discourses) to be heard. Indeed, the blogosphere after 2003 has been extremely active – We see Anti’s blogging on topics of ‘Democracy’ in 2004, Keso’s blogging on ‘Free Information’ (via using ICTs) in 2005, Wang Xiaofeng’s satirizing mainstream news media in 2006 and Lian Yue’s reporting on the Xiamen PX Project in 2007. The next chapter will be based on this idea, by taking the issue of people’s living environment, explored by journalist blogger Lian Yue – how he reported news, how he organized public debate, and how his ‘individualism’ was embodied.

Chapter Five

Political Dissent and the Practice of Public Journalism

In the Blogosphere: The Case of Lian Yue

1 Introduction

Sometimes journalists are entrepreneurial in that they try to get the citizenry to care about matters which they did not care about before; this might be the case with the environmental issues in China. (de Burgh, 2003, p.806)

This case study explores the blogging of Lian Yue. In 2007 Lian Yue used his blog *Lian Yue de Diba Dazhou* (Lian Yue's Eighth Continent⁸⁰) to expose plans for a paraxylene (PX) chemical project to be built in the city of Xiamen, warning that the project could have a disastrous environmental impact. He used his blog to call on his fellow residents to speak out against that project. Over 11 months, Lian Yue's posts on the PX event constantly attracted viewers and comments⁸¹. Lian Yue's writing was considered as performing a civic duty. As an anonymous reader puts it: "Thank you, Lian Yue. That summer was full of cheating and threatening; your words led us to think about how significant our basic rights are, and how badly we need a civic life" (see Wang Bin, 12 November 2009). Lian Yue's work also did not go unnoticed by the mainstream media; a comment from *Southern Weekly*, read: "At a key moment, Lian Yue and Xiamen citizens gave their authority and its

⁸⁰ The original posts of *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent* is no longer available now (both <http://www.bullog.cn/blogs/rosu/Default.aspx> (since 2010), and <http://www.bullogger.com/blogs/lianyue/> (since 2013), because the owner (Luo Yonghao) has shut down the sites. Though, his posts still can be found at other sites such as Sina, Douban, Tianya etc.

⁸¹ Lian Yue's blog had attracted over thousands of readers every day since he started to blog on the PX event in 2007. This number is quoted from an article written on *Nandu Zhoukan* (www.nbweekly.com) – *Lian Yue: 2007 Zuojia Zhiwai de Shenghuo* (Lian Yue: A life besides writing in 2007), reported by Liu Tianzhao. The article can be found at: http://past.nbweekly.com/print/article/3804_3.shtml.

beneficial group a strong hit, which has greatly provided us a rational reason for expecting a better future in China” (see Li Zuole, 8 June 2007).

Lian Yue is one of the examples of influential journalists who became an active bloggers in China. In 2007, a journalist from CCTV⁸², Chai Jing, published a series of investigations on Shanxi’s severe pollutions on her blog *Chaijing · Kanjian* (Chaijing · To See⁸³). An editor from *Lifeweek* magazine, Wang Xiaofeng (see next chapter), uses his satirical tone to talk about various social issues on his *Buxu Liangxiang* (No Guess), and Lvqiu Luwei, a journalist from *Fenghuang Wang* (www.ifeng.com), blogs on *Fenghuang Bobao* (Blog Ifeng⁸⁴) to show her readers a real China. These journalists use the blogosphere to disseminate news and important events unpublished on mainstream media. Their blogs have increasingly become prominent in public life, and have a significant impact on Chinese news culture.

This chapter explores specifically how Chinese journalists use their blogs and how they perceive their professional skills for blogging on news and events for practice in journalism. Particularly, the chapter questions why their practice on blogs can be seen as political? Specifically, how do Chinese journalists present political dissent on blogs? And how are they political in ways that non-journalist blogs aren’t? This chapter draws attention to these questions, through an inquiry elaborating the political function of one journalist’s blog – that of Lian Yue, whose blog is *Lian Yue de Diba Dazhou* (Lian Yue’s Eighth Continent). As such, the arguments explored in relation to journalism in this chapter are threefold. Firstly, they contribute to assessment of how the crucial personal role played by journalist bloggers has transformed Chinese news culture towards critical journalism (Pugsley and Gao, 2007, p.457; Zhao Zhili, 2006), and they do that by providing new

⁸² CCTV: China Central Television Station.

⁸³ Chai Jing’s a series of reporting on Shanxi pollution can be seen on her *No Money No Good*, posted on 7 February 2007, available at: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_48b0d37b010007wx.html, and CCTV’s *News Investigation* programme (9 September 2007): *Shanxi: Duanbi Zhi Wu* (Shanxi: Breaking Arm for Pollution Control), available at: <http://news.cctv.com/china/20070909/101125.shtml>, and *Shanxi Shanxi*, posted on 5 December 2012 on *Chai Jing · Kanjian* (Chai Jing • To See), available at http://vip.book.sina.com.cn/book/chapter_221419_207577.html [5 March 2013].

⁸⁴ Lvqiu Luwei’s blog can be found at: <http://blog.ifeng.com/674832.html>.

material. Secondly, they show how additional news sources provided by professional columnists, editors and journalists form important component of news blogs; the process of digging out the news sources (using social media tools) has not only expanded traditional ways of news reporting (Huang Aijiao, 2010, p.83). To some extent, it also has potentially encouraged participation. Thirdly, they insist on sharing stories by criticizing government – censorship, making wrong decisions or irresponsibility to negotiate with political boundaries; journalists have created a new type of influence in the community of both journalists and the public.

One advantage of news blogs, as some argue, is that they have reported events faster than newspaper and television (Walker, 2001). They can provide quality journalism in terms of fact-based comments, up-to-the-moment stories and in-depth analyses (McNair, 2006). Moreover, as Mark Deuze (2003) suggests, although these news bloggers post their opinions on a personal level – they are more likely to write for the public than writing to the public.

A new “breed” of online news people, who produce content primarily for the WWW, can be seen as working under... kinds of online journalism. These journalisms can be located on a continuum range from purely editorial content to public connectivity based websites. (Deuze, 2003, p. 207)

News blogs can be situated within a shorter history of alternatives to established news forms in China, such as instant messages, radical discussion forums and online newspapers. They are produced as a form of online media and operate differently from the traditional media frames produced by other media formats (see McCoy, 2001, Steensen, 2009). This online media is, as Steen Steensen describes:

[O]ften marked by an attempt to establish new normative demands for the practice of journalism rather than building on traditional journalistic skills and craftsmanship. (2009, p.704)

In addition to changing journalistic skills, news blogs can be viewed as presenting a challenge to mainstream news culture (Yan Chunjun, 2003; Wang Lusheng, 2006) in China, as Yan Chunjun (2003) describes:

The blogging environment is a challenge to the practices of journalism, in which it will create a new generation of journalistic conventions and attack the old Chinese media system. (2003, p.29)

Turning from questions of highlighting professional skills, news blogs in China concern more on their function to journalism: the impact of blogs on Chinese news culture is also explained in general terms, by scholar Zhao Zhili, who suggests that:

The surge of attention to blogs has triggered the democratic potential of the blogosphere in terms of its unprecedented opportunities for public discourse and journalistic practice. (2006, p.25)

Thus journalist-bloggers are different from regular bloggers as they can be seen to be implementing, or be part of media transformation on one hand, and to be practitioners of public journalism on the other.

Therefore, Chinese news blogs are quite distinctive from traditional news reporting. Firstly, through reshaping news material in the text around new angles (Lasica, 1998), journalists may discover a new element of the news report when they practice journalism on blogs. In addition, blogs' hyperlinks allow journalists to extrapolate from the given facts and expand on them into a post. This is for the sake of good stories (Wall, 2004). The expansion of news and information into an online platform has also disrupted old patterns of reading and changed the relationship between audiences and news reporters. The two-way interaction conflicts with the traditional view of professional journalists as producers and readers as consumers, though the presentation of news content by journalists makes a professional claim

to know on behalf of the audience (Matheson, 2004, p.453-5). Steen Steensen notes that:

A journalist would, for example, perform one aspect of her role in interaction with sources, a different aspect in interaction with the audience and yet another aspect in interaction with in-house marketing personnel. (2009, p.706)

In other words, Chinese bloggers are changing practices of journalism and approaching it in new ways – e.g., three representatives of three different ways of doing this are:

1. Wang Xiaofeng, for example, is a magazine reporter as well as a well-known blogger in China. His blog aims to find out an alternative model for news reporting/judgment. Wang once commented on his ‘Massage Milk’ (<http://lydon.ycool.com>):

The blog is the tool for recording miscellaneous things, and I found that the blog was more suitable for me to relax... Having been a reporter at Lifeweek for several years, I have developed a psychological problem... I get very nervous because our editor-in-chief is difficult to hoodwink... After I started blogging, I have relieved my tense nerves and broadened my thoughts. (3 December 2004)

Wang also said that his blogging content is different from that which he published on the magazine, as he is able to choose the topic for publishing.

One of the characteristics of a blog is that it is completely different from the traditional media... For me, when I write for the Lifeweek, it seems that I am writing for my editor-in-chief. But when I write my blog, I am absolutely writing for myself... I have treated the blog as an extension of my work. I write about affairs that I cannot usually publish in the print media... Therefore, I set up a principle on my blog that my posts must be distinct from those which have been published in the Lifeweek magazine. (3 December 2004)

2. A popular blogger is Lvqiu Luwei, who is a star reporter of Phoenix TV. Lvqiu

on the other hand, observes that news discourse in blogging varies from traditional journalism. She posts her viewpoints on her 'Rose Garden' (<http://www.my1510.cn>), and implies that blogging provides personal opinion.

We can see that there is an interaction between traditional media and blogs in China. For instance, some news stories began with tips from bloggers. Though the traditional media outlet is likely to publish the news story by means of observing journalistic ethics and standards and deliberately verify information, so as to make a fair and balanced presentation, as opposed to taking sides... My experience of blogging is that there is a less restrictive requirement than that in traditional media... but the influence of bloggers is greater than traditional media, at some point. (6 December 2006)

3. Roland Soong is famous for his 'ESWN' (EastSouthWestNorth, <http://www.zonaeuropa.com>). His blog translates China-related news and offers observations with cross-cultural acumen. Roland Soong focuses more on event-centered news. "The information presented on my blog is partial, selective and idiosyncratic," Soong puts:

A blog is the effort of a single individual and may excel in some small niche subject area or in reporting a suddenly breaking incident. (Roland Soong cited in Raymond Zhou and Wang Zhuoqiong, 31 May 2006)

Despite their different tone and even informal approach, these blogs and the content in their blog post, if borrowing from Dong Guanpeng and Shi Anbin's view (2007, p.194), relates to *Minsheng Xinwen* (news about citizen's life/civic news), assessing the role journalists play in public life, and have a prominent political influence in society. On the one hand, they constructively, as Zhang Lei and Lou Chengwu (2006) suggest, invite discussions on public interests as well as enhancing surveillance of political behavior of officials.

On the other hand, the scope of 'public discussion' and the 'surveillance of officials' in China have always been in tension with principles of the mainstream news organizations and the authority, involving issues such as censorship and democracy. However, this conflict has always become the International media's interest. In this chapter, the international press coverage of the Xiamen event becomes my focus, as

they not just addressed issues, or indicated the social impact of the blog, they also acted as important markers of changes in reporting the China event. The example of Lian Yue is particularly used to clarify and develop the points.

Setting out to give new insight into how journalist blogs provide news information and that is very different from traditional news reporting in China, this chapter proceeds as follows.

The next section offers general background of media reform under a Chinese-characteristic media system. It also explains how this system limits and restricts journalistic practices.

The third and the last two sections use *Lian Yue de Diba Dazhou* (Lian Yue's Eighth Continent), Lian Yue's columns on the print media and three media groups' (domestic, local and international) reporting on the Xiamen event to illustrate how the news blog and its reportage of an environmental issue successfully practiced in public journalism, what role of press media in reporting on the PX Project, and what interested international media to report on the PX Project.

Finally, through listening to how international media comment on Lian Yue and his blog, my aim in the last section is to demonstrate the influence (not only domestically, but also internationally), especially the political value of Lian Yue's blogging on the 2007 Xiamen event.

2 News Dissemination, Media Control **and the Limitation of Public Journalism in China**

Public journalism, as a developing journalistic theory and practice, is widely discussed by scholars outside China. The social scientist Nancy Fraser (1990), who has engaged with the Habermas tradition but who has also gone beyond it, advocates public-minded journalists to consider four factors in their daily practice of journalism: to encourage the public to express social inequalities, to strengthen multiple discursive public spheres, to concern public interests, and to support public opinions as well as involving in decision-making (see Fraser, 1990, pp.63-77). Davis Merritt highlights public journalism in connection with democracy and public life, and writes,

Public journalism... builds on telling the news by recognizing (a) the fundamental connection between democracy and journalism, (b) the need for public life to go well, for democracy to fulfill its historic promise, and (c) journalism's rational self-interest, both economic and intellectual, in public life's going well. (1995, p. 114)

Paul Manning considers one of the professional qualities for a journalist is to think about the public “before party or personal interest”,

[N]ews journalists should have the task of gathering and communicating to the public, up-to-date information from home and abroad, in order to sustain political discussion and the democratic process. (2001, p. 2)

Western perspectives often prioritize four themes in public journalism research: public, public life, politics, and democracy (see Dong and Shi, 2007; Haas, 2007; Merritt, 1995). Their thinking, to some extent, has guided some of the actual practices in public journalism in contemporary China.

Chinese journalism has undergone great changes since the reform and opening up policy in the late 1970s. On the one hand, media commercialization has potentially weakened political control and brought about a certain degree of editorial autonomy (Winfield and Peng, 2005; Xin, 2006), as Betty Winfield and Zengjun Peng note:

Such new independence in media financial structures began to impact on media content and media functions as well as the relationship between media organizations and government. (2005, p. 260)

These changes have offered Chinese journalists opportunities to develop their independent discourse to interpret, justify and reconfigure the institutional space of their daily practices (Pan, 2000; Pan, 2009), as Pan Zhongdang exemplifies:

[T]he reforms have enabled different discourse to be available, including those of market economy and professionalism, and journalists draw inspiration from both in devising their practices. (2009, p. 106)

These political changes complement new media shifts – notably the need for interactivity between media reporters and active audiences, which digital and social media demands, encourages media organizations to support aggressive journalists for their good stories (Ma, 2000, p.22-3).

However, efforts of media reform for public journalism in terms of news autonomy, public concern and political criticism have not yet satisfied Chinese radical journalists. The previous example of the media's cover-up information on SARS in 2003, was a crisis of mainstream media credibility, as they completely followed the central government's strict guidelines to preserve social and political stability (Tai and Sun, 2007). Even the CCTV's popular television programmes such as *Jiaodian Fangtan* (Focus) and *Xinwen Diaocha* (News Probe) (discussed in Chapter 1),

explore “social conflicts and problems” while at the same time stressing “a positive standpoint” that “conform[s] to the criteria of television newsworthiness” (Sun Yunsheng cited in Dong and Shi, 2007, p.193). They are produced here as illustrations of the Party’s wish to achieve greater propaganda effectiveness through media use, and can be regarded as public journalism in form only, as Yang Yuerong (2007, p.97) argues.

The dissatisfaction of Chinese journalists falls into two categories. On the one hand, the State, to paraphrase Joseph Chan (2003), still expects its long-term propagandist piper to play its tune. Under such a restricted media system, public journalism can hardly be successfully performed in the way the Chinese journalists expect it to. On the other hand, as Jonathan Hassid argues, professional training in Chinese journalism officially demands that journalists should follow Dangxing Yuanze (the Party principle) (2011, p.816). This principle is embedded in detailed training curricula but is designed into two dimensions. In other words, as a professional reporter in China, s/he is firstly “required to take a training program in official ideology, media policies and regulations, journalism ethics, communication theory, and related topics” (see Hassid, 2011, p. 816). The former two contents imply the importance of the Party-State, and its dominant position among the press. S/he is then to be guided by “a code of professional conduct”, meaning that in journalistic daily practice, a Chinese journalist should “be truthful and honest” in reporting the news. As explained by *Zhonghua Quanguo Xinwen Gongzuozhe Xiehui* (ACJA, the All-China Journalists’ Association), an official media association, “fake news confuses public opinion and throws it into disorder... becoming a harmful and malignant cancer... on society” (see Hassid, 2011, p. 817). In this sense, however, the ‘truth’ and the ‘honesty’, when they are in conflict with the official ideology, or the CCP’s decision, they are directly translated into ‘fake’, ‘harmful’ and unprofessional. As Peter Lorentzen notes:

Critiquing the broader political system is much riskier, and criticizing the central role of the party is out of the question. (2014, p. 411)

Clearly, the standards of the journalists training in China are unwillingly to give sufficient media space to public service.

The Internet is the ground where many of these developments and tensions are played out.

The development and expansion of the Internet in China has contributed to an increase in both news reporting and information access (Ma, 2000; Massey and Luo, 2005; Zheng and Wu, 2005). More investigative reporting has been published and environmental issues have been concerned in the newsroom (Tong, 2007). For example, *The People's Daily*, an official organ of the Communist Party, maintains a website with interactive features between journalists and audiences as well as news archives, special columns for heated issues and events and discussion groups. These are all presented in the *People's Net*⁸⁵.

There are, however, similar limitations as to the extent with which Chinese journalists can utilize the Internet for their journalistic practices. The government has an ambivalent attitude toward the Internet (Bi, 2001; Harwit and Clark, 2001). In other words, the Internet is embraced by the government in terms of bringing about economic benefits, though it is deeply censored as the source of critical information in cyberspace. Measures of governmental control are mainly embedded in three parts. First, following the government policy of inspiring media going online, substantial mainstream media websites (e.g., *People's Net*, *Xinhua Net*, CCTV.com) are established to compete with commercial sites, as well as to control network content. Second, a series of rules are set up for both online sites and netizens to self-censor their Internet content, as Zheng Yongnian and Wu Guoguang (2005, p.517) argue, so as to minimize the 'harmful' effects of the Internet usage in China. As examples of this process, in the late 1990s, two popular commercial portals Sina.com.cn⁸⁶ and Sohu.com⁸⁷ began to catch the attention of

⁸⁵ Please see <http://www.people.com.cn>.

⁸⁶ Please see <http://www.sina.com.cn>.

⁸⁷ Please see <http://www.sohu.com>.

the public by providing real-time domestic and international news, as well as discussion rooms for political topics. However, under certain official regulations, these sites were forced to deliver news mainly by means of editing officially approved information (Xu, 2005). Third, not only domestic news sites, but also international papers are also filtered or blocked (Zittrain and Edelman, 2003) by the Chinese government, including, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and publications based in Hong Kong, as Harwit and Clark (2001, p.400) argue, in order to “prevent the most controversial foreign materials from reaching Chinese audiences”.

In these situations, online public journalism is shown to be practiced among various forces. With continued Party control, Chinese journalists’ critical ideals have to often negotiate with official ideological systems (Pan, 2000; Pan, 2009; Pan and Chan, 2003; Pan and Lu, 2003) for their maintenance.

So, how is China’s public journalism practice distinctive? One way to put this is to point out that while the Western model of public journalism focuses on its “participatory nature” in connection with “political/public issues” (Dong and Shi, 2007, p.193), the role of Chinese public journalists is, as Steven Dong and Shi Anbin argue,

to help the public voice their concerns while not making trouble for top Communist Party leadership. This approach has been central to the development of public/civic journalism. (2007, p. 192-3)

The fundamental conflict between news agencies (public and commercial) and the Chinese government is the *Houshe Lilun* (mouthpiece theory, Dong and Shi, 2007, p.192). In other words, the CCP – dominated media system keeps news organizations as its mouthpiece (Dong and Shi, 2007, p.192). On one side, “news headlines are determined by political guidelines” (see Dong and Shi 2007, p.188).

On the other side of the coin, the media should follow the core rule of *Zhengmian Baodao* (positive propaganda, Dong and Shi, 2007, p.189) from the central government. Thus, either freer utilizations of the alternative source of information, or critical expressions of the viewpoint are not completely available and permitted online in China. As a result, the use of the Internet in public journalism has not yet fully practiced in Chinese newsrooms.

However, media censorship has exhibited extreme forms of variations and discrepancies. Eric Ma mentions that Party newspapers at the central, provincial levels are intensively watched, while local papers, evening papers and cultural journals in coastal cities have gained a much larger degree of freedom.

Controls over less official media and the dissemination of non political information are relaxed, whereas the states still maintains tight control over political news. (Ma, 2000, p.22)

Added to this is the pervasive spread of ICT-based public spaces such as BBS and blogs disseminating significant news (though in an informal way) as outside of the direct political control. In blogging, journalists are not media-employers but bloggers who are freer to do “story selection and... news judgement, values and practices”, to borrow from Jane Singer’s views (2005, p.179). All of which in turn can contribute something new to how public journalism is developing in China.

Below, this is explored through a detailed case study of *Lian Yue’s Eighth Continent* and his writings about pollution and the PX Project in the city of Xiamen (from March to December in 2007). I intend to tell how he negotiated with the local authority, and how he made the covered-up information available to the public. Besides Lian Yue’s personal blog, I will use his columns written in the print media to examine in what way Lian Yue had built up credibility and accountability in news reporting, and how Lian Yue’s reporting was differentiated from mainstream journalism. In addition, comparative analyses of different media sources (local,

domestic and international) are used to find out the variation of their coverage and the differentiation of their function on the PX event.

3 Public Journalism in Practice: *Lian Yue de Diba Dazhou*

(Lian Yue's Eighth Continent) on Xiamen PX Project in 2007

There are many reasons for unrest in Chinese society and discontent is no longer muzzled by a system of comprehensive repression. (de Burgh, 2003, p.807)

Hugo de Burgh's perspective was supported by the case of the Xiamen PX Project in 2007. In that year, a Chinese media columnist Lian Yue and his media companions exposed that polluted project. They challenged the local government's suppression of PX-related information and successfully pushed the project to be removed.

Lian Yue's real name is Zhong Xiaoyong. He was born in 1970. Zhong worked as a journalist in *Xiamen Wanbao* (Xiamen Evening News), *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekly), as well as an editor for *Business China*. Like most bloggers, Lian Yue has used his blog as a journal to record events in his personal life, and to publish commentaries he writes for columns on *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekly), *Nanfang Dushi Bao* (Southern Metropolis Daily), *Chengshi Huabao* (City Pictorial), *Diyi Caijin Ribao* (China Business Network), *Waitan Huabao* (Bund Pictorial) and *Shanghai Yizhou* (Shanghai Weekly). In March 18, 2007, however, Lian Yue quoted a reportage of *Zhongguo Jingying Bao* (China Business) – *Xiamen Baiyi Huagong Xiangmu Anwei Zhengyi* (Safe or Dangerous: Debates on Xiamen's Billions Chemical Plant) on his blog. This report explained that a chemical plant was to be sited near the city of Xiamen and questioned the safety of the population

and the danger of pollution and poisoning. Lian Yue renamed this reporting as *Xiamen Zisha* (Xiamen Suicides⁸⁸):

“Xiamen is in danger. The PX Project must be stopped. It should be removed!” 105 members of CPPCC⁸⁹ National Committee called during the two meetings⁹⁰. Their signing for “The Proposal of Removing PX Project in Xiamen Haicang” becomes the most important bill in the conference. ([Zhongguo Jingying Bao], Reported by Qu Lili, cited in Lian Yue, 18 March 2007)

Lian Yue, a resident of Xiamen, instinctively felt the issue of the PX Project was serious, and the news from Qu Lili should be spread.

Zhao Yufen, one of the Committee members, explained to the reporter: “The P-Xylene (PX) is a hazardous chemical material. It can result in high rate of carcinogen, deformity and fetus. Xiamen is taking the risk, as the city is about to locate a chemical factory in a residential area – Haicang District, where it is only 10 kilometers away from downtown.

...

The officer of the National Environmental Bureau (China) Zhu Xingxiang expressed his understanding of how the project would bring about damages in Xiamen. However, he also explained his awkward position – as the project is approved by National Development and Reform Commission, the National Environmental Bureau has no power to remove it. ([Zhongguo Jingying Bao], Reported by Qu Lili, cited in Lian Yue, 18 March 2007)

From Qu Lili’s article we see that she defined the PX Project as dangerous, though, she also implied that the chemical factory was approved to be built in Xiamen. Lian Yue quoted Qu’s article because he was worried that Xiamen residents in Haicang area would be affected by this chemical factory, while he also realized that

⁸⁸ The original posting is no longer available, but it can be found at: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_499bf929010008x3.html.

⁸⁹CPPCC: Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.

⁹⁰The two meetings: National People’s Representatives Congress and National Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.

government officials prevaricated about the real problem of the project. He started to watch the event and expressed his aim – of working against censorship of the story.

Now the core of the event is that relevant information has been blocked from Xiamen citizens. Before yesterday's meeting of the Xiamen People's Political Consultative Conference, there were members who heard about the PX Project and the proposal by Zhao Yufen for the first time from me. That means the cover-up is very successful. So for the time being, the most important thing is anti-censorship. (Lian Yue, 29 March 2007⁹¹)

This was how and why Lian Yue started blogging on the PX Project in 2007. Based on the writing of the Xiamen event on *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent*, I will take a close look at the progression of the Xiamen case from March to December 2007. Roughly, I divide Lian Yue's reportage into three stages of 'exposing'. In the first stage, Lian Yue exposed the official cover-up in Xiamen. At the second stage, Lian Yue exposed the weakness of Xiamen media, and at the third stage, he exposed how a final decision was made on the PX Project.

3.1 Stage One: Exposing the Official Cover-Up (From March to May 2007)

On 29th March, 2007, Lian Yue posted the above words and titled as *Xiamen Renmin Zhemeiban* (What Xiamen People Can Do):

"Don't be afraid", Lian Yue persuaded,

This is a project objected to by 105 CPPCC members, among whom there are the most authoritative experts.

- The PX Project should be placed at least 100 kilometers away from cities to ensure safety.

⁹¹ The original post is no longer available, but it can be found at: <http://blog.yasker.org/archives/86>.

- Xiamen people are still deprived of the right to know the danger of the PX Project. This is counterevidence that the project is against people's will.
 - The project will lead to the recession of Xiamen's economy, the depreciation of properties, and the decrease of visitors. Xiamen people will also be viewed as weak and stupid.
 - The project will increase the possibility of getting cancer.
 - You do not have to behave very bravely. Just let people beside you know about this event, and you will not be held accountable for the death of Xiamen.
- (Lian Yue, 29 March 2007)

The warnings from Lian Yue were in detail. From a macro-side, as Lian Yue argued, the project would prevent Xiamen's economy from further developing. From a micro-side, it would cause disease. However, key issues in relation to the project, in Lian Yue's opinion, were governmental censorship, their irresponsibility and their lack of care about the public interest. Lian Yue's words hinted at his 'invitation' to fight against the project – “the project is against the people's will”, do not “be viewed as weak and stupid”, and “let people beside you know this event”, all of which implied his inspiration of taking the project from an 'undercover' position towards a more open one.

Buzhun Mai (Taking Down) was published in May 24, 2007, read:

The 2007 *Phoenix Weekly* (Vol.15), on its page 60, read – *Xiamen: A Chemical Shadow Covers an Island City*. As it reported on the PX event, it now has been taken down. Despite a disappointed reader reaction, authorities just shrug their shoulders and cover up the truth anyway. They don't know how else to create reliable news. In the case of the PX Project, they have often been reluctant to care about people's health. (Lian Yue, 24 May 2007)

Three days later, Lian Yue posted *Jiaoyu* (Education):

I gave a talk about creation and Zen with artists in a party... I put three words on the screen: polluted Xiamen, protect Xiamen and P-X-iamen. People kept coming, wondering who's so brave to talk about 'PX' in public— at the moment the two letters are not allowed to be said in Xiamen. (Lian Yue, 27 May 2007)

As State employees, Chinese journalists are fully aware of the instances of outspoken journalists being punished or blocked from publishing their writings (Muzi Mei, in the previous chapter, was a case in point). Lian Yue, however, seemed to consider Xiamen City Government's cover-up the PX Project too important to be ignored or hidden. His description such as “authorities just shrug their shoulders and cover up the truth”, and “don't know how else to create reliable news” in *Taking Down* showed his attitude. And his creative usage of 'PX' in *Education* declared that Lian Yue attempted to conduct his duty as a journalist on the subject.

April 8, 2007, Lian Yue posted *Yidian Shengming* (A Small Statement⁹²).

The aim of blogging is for nothing but safeguard my dignity... If editors don't like my writing, please don't publish it on your media. I can always find a space to publish my work, or I can speak out my words on my blog. But don't expect me to stop talking about the PX Project, as it relates to my daily life... For me, the PX Project is not just a polluted project. In fact Xiamen residents have the right to learn the truth, but their right is completely ignored by the local government. The key to my exposure on the PX Project is to ask certain governors, especially those who want to do more on environmental issues in China...to remove this project, as scholar Zhao Yufen and Tian Zhongquan suggest. (Lian Yue, 8 April 2007)

This statement, at the very least, implied Lian Yue's determination to challenge to local authority (for instance, “Xiamen residents have the right to learn the truth) and mainstream media (for instance, “I can always find a space to publish my work”) in

⁹² The original post is no longer available, but it can be found at: http://www.360doc.com/content/07/0414/23/142_448117.shtml.

publishing the PX Project. His aim, on the other hand, was to expand higher and wider attention to Xiamen event from his blogging.

The above contents of *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent* revealed that news coverage on the PX Project focused on 'exposing the official cover-up'. Either *Xiamen Suicides*, *What Xiamen People Can Do*, or *Taking Down, Education and A Small Statement*, all of which represented a diverse set of motivations described by Lian Yue in regards to the event – from telling about an immediate polluted effect of the project, to a deeper persuasion to resist the project. To Lian Yue, this beginning was to bring public attention. In other words, the pollution of the PX Project was not Lian Yue's final point, but the potential political issues (governmental responsibility and transparency) inside the project.

Due to Lian Yue's frequent posts on the PX event, his blog immediately attracted attention from Chinese netizens. They constantly expressed their shock at the severity of the environmental issue and at the audacity of local officials to cover up the event. For instance, when Lian Yue wrote *Xiamen Suicides*, netizens immediately posted their comments to tell their reactions.

One netizen Ganyu posted: "Suicide". Followed by netizen Xiamenzaiku's post, "Xiamen is crying, the public are crying." Netizen Haicangjumin posted: "The government is crazy for its GDP, regardless of people's suffer". Netizen Daniel posted: "Please save Xiamen" (see Lian Yue, 18 March 2007).

Later, when Lian Yue wrote *What Xiamen People Can Do*, netizen Yo posted: "It should be built in an industrial zone where no one is affected." Netizen Aishengming posted: "Don't put our live in danger." One anonymous netizen posted "At least leave few clean places for us to live". And netizen Zhichini posted: "No matter what happens, our basic rights should be safeguarded" (see Lian Yue, 29 March 2007).

In this section, Lian Yue's reporting focused on problems of particular concern to Xiamen residents. By paying more attention on exposing government cover-ups, Lian Yue's aim was to invite public discussion. Feedback from the netizens, to some extent indicated their environmental consciousness in general and their preparation for the fight for their individual rights (the right to learn the truth, the right to speak and the right to offer opposite opinions) in particular.

3.2 Stage Two: Exposing the Weakness of Xiamen Media

During Environmental Assessment Period (Mainly in June 2007)

As the PX event played out, the Xiamen authority insisted that the city's environment was fine and the project should be acceptable. While the title of *Bie Haole Shangba Wangle Teng* (Once on Shore, One Prays No More) on *Xiamen Ribao* (Xiamen Daily) wrote:

Everyone concerns about the environmental issue on the PX ... The fact that people do not know much about the PX, they are able to believe that it is poisonous... This is because some media functioned not very positive. Their negativity includes they exaggerated the harmfulness of the PX Project, and they violated basic principle of journalistic report on the truth. We are here to tell our residents, please believe our government and our mainstream media. ([Xiamen Ribao], Reported by Xia Zhongping, cited in Lian Yue, 4 June 2007)

The voice of the company, cited in *Xiamen Daily*, told at least three points of view. First, the local media initially denied the project to be hazardous. Second, the local media questioned about the trust in the reportage of the PX Project by media outside Xiamen. Third, the local media called for public trust in Xiamen officers. This demonstrated that the local media were cooperating with the local government on the PX event. On the contrary of the local media's reporting, Lian Yue offered three approaches to argue with the Xiamen media. Firstly, he focused on scientific

data collection to confirm the poisonous possibilities of the Xiamen chemical plant. Starting with his post – *Youdu Youkexue: Jiexialai de Gongzuo Anpai* (Poisonous VS Scientific: The Next Work Schedule⁹³), Lian Yue translated an article on ‘PX’.

PX is used to produce plastics, polyester and film... Short-term exposure to it can cause eyes, nose and throat irritation in human, and long-term exposure to it can damage the nervous system, or result in the death. (Lian Yue, 3 June 2007)

Besides scientific analyses, Lian Yue’s second approach was to question the local media’s accountability. This could be particularly seen in his *Xiang Xiamen Ribao Hanhua* (Speak to *Xiamen Daily*⁹⁴). In this blog, Lian Yue called reporters of *Xiamen Daily* ‘brothers’, showing his satirical attitude.

In the past three months you published commentaries, reported news and edited as many pages as you can. Unfortunately, I did not see any of your names on the page. If, you think you are completely right, why are you so afraid of posting your names? (Lian Yue, 7 June 2007)

Besides a mock debate at a guilty conscience of *Xiamen Daily*, Lian Yue also depicted the company as sort of ‘puppet’.

Do not use ‘political direction’ as an excuse... *China News Week*, a mainstream magazine, its cover story explicitly comments on the PX event as “governors vs. residents” but “both are winners”. It talks about “the power of text message”, and regards it as “public opinions in new media era”... Buy one and read it, then bravely tell people the truth, as your children need fresh air, and they need a better future in Xiamen. (7 June 2007)

⁹³ The original post is no longer available, but it can be found at: http://blog.tianya.cn/blogger/post_show.asp?BlogID=720094&PostID=9857866.

⁹⁴ The original post is no longer available, but it can be found at: <http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-323-17104-1.shtml>.

The third approach was Lian Yue's encouraging his fellow residents to fight against the Xiamen authorities. *Xiamen Shimin Yi Chubu Huosheng* (Xiamen Residents Have Primarily Achieved a Win) was posted in June 11, 2007.

I find that many residents are still very pessimistic... so, I'm here to cheer you up. If we log on the National Environment Protection Bureau, its commentary (June 7) read: "National Environment Protection Bureau will invite experts to redo Xiamen's regional environment assessment... which means, any chemical project, including the PX one, may be reconsidered." ... On 8th June, the site criticized: "Though the City Government held a press conference to delay the Project to May 30... there is no further essential reporting on the result of Xiamen's environment assessment... It seems that Xiamen people's basic rights have been suppressed by an authorial power, no wonder an environmental assessment takes so long, let alone to be publicized."

Lian Yue continued:

That's why I am optimistic. I'm happy that Xiamen people have been awake already... It is us [Xiamen residents] who have made the PX Project public. I believe that our opposite opinions to the authority will win much of the support. (11 June 2007)

In the case of Lian Yue, for instance, through his individual efforts to constantly criticise *Xiamen Daily*, in this way, Lian Yue brought up his own news and shared his insights. Therefore his blogging was correspondingly viewed by netizens as trustworthy in the reportage of the PX event. The way he exposed the event was greatly supported by comments from netizens, as one netizen Shidanla commented:

Lian Yue, please believe that science can supply strong energies to Xianmen residents who want to protect their home." (see Lian Yue, 3 June 2007)

National Development and Reform Committee starting to say NO to the PX Project is good news. I'm more confident of Xiamen's future. (Wennuan Chuntian cited in Lian Yue, 11 June 2007)

In such a series of reportage settings, Lian Yue's reporting covered perspectives of journalism of information (e.g., by including scientific data and non-local-media reporting as additional sources), and had taken the lead in further struggle against the PX Project. His leadership role was demonstrated by netizens' explicitly blaming Xiamen media. For instance, netizen Aixiamen satirically posted: "If you read newspapers these days, you will see how 'sincere' our governors are." Netizen Xiangxineirongzijimaibenzazhikankanba posted: "The Xiamen media disappoint readers too much!" Netizen Guanxihu posted: "I'm not going to subscribe Xiamen newspapers." Netizen @ posted: "Forget about *Xiamen Daily* and *Xiamen Evening News*. Their 'education' and 'shouting' are rubbish" (see Lian Yue, 7 June 2007). These responses of the netizens can be seen as the evidence of a growing dissent against the Xiamen City's PX Project.

3.3 Stage Three: Exposing the Process of Removing the PX Project

(Mainly in December 2007)

After six months widespread concern, a turning point in the official strategy arrived on 5 December in Xiamen. The City Government decided to collect opinions from its residents on the result of the environmental assessment of the PX Project.

Seeing the opportunity, Lian Yue posted *Qing Zhenxi Zhe Shitian* (Please Cherish the Ten Days⁹⁵) to encourage Xiamen people to engage in the activity.

⁹⁵ The original post is no longer available, but it can be found at: <http://ycool.com/post/4kzhazy>.

It is said that within this week, Xiamen residents can log on to *Xiamen Online* (www.xmnn.cn) to read the city's environment assessment result. Or, we can go to the local library to get the outlet and write down our critiques. Alternatively, we can call 0592 5745678 (8:00am-10:00pm), or send complaint emails to xmghhp@vip.sina.com, or post a letter to China Environmental Science Institute to express our dissatisfaction. (5 December 2007)

Two days later, the Xiamen government chose to set up a face-to-face conversation with local residents, as indicated in Lian Yue's *Wo Yi Baoming* (I Have Registered):

The environment assessment has been published in both *Xiamen Evening News* and *Xiamen Economy Daily*. We are also told that we are allowed to attend the meeting. If I am selected, I will bring your opinions... Please go to the registry as soon as possible, as we only have two days. (7 December 2007)

Lian Yue's open encouragement resulted in much of the support from Chinese netizens, as reported in *China Daily*.

Fifty-two of the 57 speakers at a public forum Thursday opposed the development of a chemical plant in the city of Xiamen, Fujian Province. Participants in the forum were chosen by lottery on Tuesday, under the supervision of the Xiamen notary office, from the 624 people who registered online or by calling a hotline number...A further 42 participants will get the chance to voice their views today. ([China Daily], Reported by Chen Jia and Hu Meidong, 14 December 2007)

In terms of their focus on the living environment, Xiamen residents strongly claimed that they opposed the project and showed their anger in the meeting. Lian Yue recorded reactions from the representatives on his *87.5% Daibiao Fandui PX* (87.5% of the Representatives Oppose the PX).

Number 25 and 28 raised the question of why a beautiful tourist city like Xiamen would want to expand its heavy industry – would the trade-off be worth it? ... Number 33 argued that the PX Project was in the flight path of a proposed airport, raising the possibility of a plane crash made more deadly by the chemicals released. (14 December 2007)

“But many voices directly questioned on the attitude of the government and the

local media”, Lian Yue said.

Number 11 argued that the PX Project is a wrong decision for the city government... Number 29 questioned the government on its shut down of its website, and number 31 blamed that the process of discussion on PX Project needs more transparency – ‘why has Xiamen media been so quiet?’ (14 December 2007)

From the above reporting we can see that, of those expressed, a vocal public opposed the PX Project. This result finally triggered the Xiamen government to remove the project from Haicang District. Fujian provincial government information office director Zhu Qing explained that the decision was made on the basis on an absolute majority of people against the project (see Zhu HongJun and Su Yongtong, 19 December 2007). This is the first time since the public participation process began that the Xiamen City Government had listened, respected and followed public opinions. In this sense, local government’s finally taking public opinions into account seemed to be a progressive turn, as Lian Yue blogged on *Xiamen Jingyan* (Xiamen Experience⁹⁶):

The year of 2007 is remarkable, as we make our voices heard, and participate in the PX Project and affect decision making. (27 December 2007)

Lian Yue rendered reasons for successfully removing the project in this post.

We win because we never give up our rights. The PX Project, as it has been greatly supported by the local authority, lest people would believe that Xiamen residents could be a winner. However, during the ten months’ fighting, Xiamen experts didn’t give up, radical media and bloggers didn’t give up, and the Xiamen residents didn’t give up. All of which help overcome all kinds of difficulties. (27 December 2007)

⁹⁶ The original post is no longer available, but it can be found at: <http://www.douban.com/group/topic/2390852/>.

In this part, Lian Yue's blogging on Xiamen PX event focused on his exposing the process of removing the PX Project: from his encouragement of public participation in earlier December, to his definition of public opinion on the PX Project as 'majority opposition opinion' in mid December, to his great enjoyment with Xiamen residents' final victory in late December in 2007. His reportage aimed at involving Xiamen residents in the effort to address their opposing views on the event. As Lian Yue highlighted in *Xiamen Experience*,

We should be proud of ourselves. We are citizens. We say NO while we don't agree, as we did in the Xiamen case, our rights and our feelings should be respected. (27 December 2007)

Jay Rosen described three dimensions of public journalism as "an argument, a practice, and a movement" (1995, p.22). From Lian Yue's three stages of 'exposing', we start to see a practice of public journalism in his reporting, if borrowing from Tanni Hass (2007, p.25-6), from "addressing citizen concerns" (Xiamen residents) to "promoting public deliberation" (critical views on local media) towards "develop[ing] a problem-solving model" (arguing and meeting with local government).

In addition to this, as illustrated by Lian Yue's reportage, started by his professional opinions (critical and authentic), and developed by his professional attitudes (insistent and responsible), all of which implicated Lian Yue's role as a new dimension of an 'opinion leader', to borrow from Dong Guanpeng and Shi Anbin (2007, p.183) and Tanni Hass (2007, p.150).

Lian Yue and his blogging on the PX Project through the three approaches showed a strong discourse power in connection with strong support from the public: from a fair amount of anxious residents fighting for the safety of their living space in the beginning, to the June 1 and 2 demonstrations in the mid process of the Xiamen

case, further towards overwhelming opposite votes from local people that finally pushed the local government to remove the PX Project, all of which asserted Lian Yue's function as an opinion leader in the Xiamen event.

4 Other Means of Reporting the PX Project: Lian Yue's Columns On the Print Media (from March to December 2007)

In this part, I am looking at mainstream media/traditional media writings of Lian Yue, alongside his blog posting, as blogging the PX Project was not the only resort that Lian Yue tried; the print media columns were other means where he used as well to publish his points of view. I categorize the content of Lian Yue's columns into two dimensions of comments: the first is in relation to China's environmental policy (March-June, 2007), and the second is in regard with a participatory consciousness among the public (August-December, 2007)

4.1 Layer One: Focusing on Social Issues behind Environment Policies in China (From March to June 2007)

Unlike his blog exposing each detail on the PX Project, the appearance of Lian Yue's column writings used a radical departure toward specific concerns on public security, public needs and demands, and rights and opportunities to public critique. That is – his mode of address was more general, and less concerned with local details. For instance, Lian Yue's *Gonggong Buhui You Anquan* (The Public Will Not Be Safe), which he published on *Xiaoxiang Zaobao* (Xiaoxiang Morning) in Hunan, read:

If you are a Xiamen resident, and you often read local newspapers, then you must be familiar with the PX Project. It is written on our provincial governor's work report, and is regarded as the largest investment industrial project... In this context, the call for 'removing the project' seems hopeless, as a short-term aim for increasing GDP is always supported by the top. To sacrifice public

security and long-term benefits means that... people are living in an insecure public sphere. ([Xiaoxiang Zaobao], Reported by Lian Yue, 22 March 2007⁹⁷)

Huanjing Wenti Yi Wufa Zaishi Huanbingzhiji (The Environmental Issue Cannot Be Treated as a Delaying Tactic⁹⁸) published on *Nanfang Dushi Bao* (Southern Metropolis Daily). In this article, Lian Yue wrote:

Chinese authorities are likely to keep sensitive issues dark from the public. For instance, fewer reports on environmental assessment can be read in media, let alone any dissenting voice can be heard in public... The fact that the environmental problem is getting more and more serious, and have led to damages and disasters one and another. To fight for a better life – this accords with the aspirations of Chinese people. However, their tolerance and resilience may be used as a delaying tactic, by some local administrators, to chase for their short-term GDP... Such a delaying tactic must lead China towards desperation. ([Nanfang Dushi Bao], Reported by Lian Yue, 16 June 2007)

Lian Yue's viewpoints on the two daily presses directed to the danger of environment policies in China. It seems to me; however, that Lian Yue's interest in writing the two articles was to speak to the public (audiences) rather than merely criticizing authorities (who make policies). His warning about the chemical project was just for "increasing GDP" aimed at telling his audiences that 'environment protection' is treated as nothing but a slogan in China. His words "used as a delaying tactic" aimed at warning the public that the need to change environment has not made out by authorities, though it is of public concern and in the public interest.

⁹⁷ The original post is no longer available, but it can be found at: <http://news.163.com/07/0322/09/3A6830SI000121EP.html>.

⁹⁸ The original post is no longer available, but it can be found at: http://big5.ycwb.com/sp/2007-06/16/content_1517133.htm.

4.2 Layer Two: Advocating for Public Participation Processes

(From August to December 2007)

Lian Yue's comments on the press included both his critiques (local media) and his appreciation (local people). The latter became a core argument through which Lian Yue aimed to address the importance of public opinion and public participation in the Xiamen event. Lian Yue's *XiamenShiming de Jingsheng Keyi Shenbao Shi* (The Xiamen Spirit Can Apply for World Heritage) was an example. In this article, Lian Yue named Xiamen residents as 'Xiamen Spirit', claiming his respect and trust in Xiamen people.

The first bill earlier this year was scholar Zhao Yufeng and her 105 fellow members' objecting to the Xiamen PX Project. Indeed the project is now defined as "unbalanced industrial zone" and "environmental threatening". In this sense, scholars were correct in predicting PX's giant pollution earlier this year. ([Nanfang Dushi Bao], Reported by Lian Yue, 24 August 2007)

Here, the word 'correct' suggested that Lian Yue trusted in Xiamen scholars on the PX Project. The implication is that Lian Yue believes that the local government was wrong.

However, no matter in the past several months or at present, we seem not to have heard any voice from our local media, except their 'appreciation' on the project. On the contrary, Xiamen residents keep making noises and their environmental consciousness will eventually win the final victory... I guess more and more people will like the city of Xiamen, not only in terms of its sunshine, beach and sand, but also in terms of its people. In respect of protecting the environment in China, nobody but the resident of Xiamen is the greatest. ([Nanfang Dushi Bao], Reported by Lian Yue, 24 August 2007)

Another example pertaining to this was written in his *Xiamen Hu Shibushi Zhilaohu* (Is Xiamen Tiger a Paper Tiger⁹⁹)?

I feel lucky that I can partake in a public event, by writing a blog, commenting on print media columns, expressing opinions via governmental mail-box, and attending face-to-face meeting with officers... I don't think these are difficult and impossible, though, I am always warned by friends, who kindly ask me away from the chemical plant, for they don't want me to take any risk... This is pathetic. It seems true that a huge communicative gap always existed between the Chinese government and the Chinese people. It is also true that critical opinions always result in fear and anxiety in China... However, through participating in the PX Project, we have seen great changes. For instance, the government finally opens the door to the public. At the very least, this has brought us a bit of hope in future. ([Nanfang Dushi Bao], Reported by Lian Yue, 11 December 2007)

In this part, Lian Yue's reporting mainly focused on his attitude toward public participation in the PX Project. From the two live columns we can see that, Lian Yue was happy to see that local people started participating in various activities to protect and promote their civic life (e.g., "Xiamen residents keep making noises", "through participating in the PX Project, we have seen great changes"). As one comment from netizen Xiamenren put: "Cannot believe we really have reached this stage. Thank professors, thank Lian Yue, and thank all residents who stand up for protecting Xiamen's environment." Netizen!!!! said: "I am proud of being a Xiamenese." (see Lian Yue, 24 August 2007). A netizen Xiamenshimindiqueshibucuoode posted: "I am happy that a city has its brave residents... I wish I can always see the hope in China" (see Lian Yue, 11 December 2007).

Both Lian Yue's live columns and his blogging were different from mainstream journalism. In the case of the PX Project, Lian Yue's blogging and his columns on commercial media proposed an idea of persuasion. He called for arguments (with

⁹⁹ The original post is no longer available, but it can be found at: <http://club.news.sina.com.cn/thread-120869-1-1.html?sudaref=www.google.co.uk&retcode=0>.

local authority), and participation (in the event) by citing media comments and experts' opinions, criticizing the weakness of the local media, and offering scientific data, all of which illustrated the fact that the PX Project was against the public interest. Though critique on Lian Yue's blog was more direct and explicit, turning individual action (to write a blog) into "collective power" (the process of opposition) to "achieve [a] common end" (removed the Project), to borrow from Leon Mayhew's words (1997, p.59).

In addition, we see neither reporting the official line nor *Zhengmian Baodao* (positive reporting/propaganda) on his blog. In reporting the Xiamen event, for instance, Lian Yue determined what was important and what should be disseminated. He regarded the Xiamen chemical plant and governmental 'desire' to build the project as two 'horrors', and he was desperate to see them explored.

Furthermore, Lian Yue not only offered journalism of information, but also journalism of conversation. His reporting (both the blog and the column) had a positive impact on "the civic knowledge" (pollution), "attitudes" (against authority), and "behaviors of citizens" (public participation), to borrow from Tanni Hass's terms (2007, p.21). His reporting on *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent*, along with his journalistic practice (live columns, for instance) hinted at his role as a journalist as well as a gate opener. The latter, simply put, means two kinds of 'invitations'. On the one hand, as I have mentioned in the earlier part of this chapter, Lian Yue's series of reports have invited both 'public discussion' and 'surveillance of officials' (local government). On the other hand, as I will argue in the latter part of this chapter, Lian Yue has potentially invited international media to join the debate.

Through reading Lian Yue's blogging about the PX Project and his columns on commercial media (e.g., *Xiaoxiang Morning*, *Southern Metropolis Daily*), I argue that the blogosphere (including commercial media organizations) in China, to some extent, is taking sustainable steps to facilitate an alternative public sphere for journalism, especially for public journalism. In the case of Lian Yue, he took the

blogosphere as “citizen-based venues for news reporting”, to borrow from Tanni Hass’s words (2007, p.22), by posting his live columns (offline) on his blog, his articles had been reposted by both online media and netizens. In this sense, the blogosphere assisted an interaction in between with Lian Yue and the public (audiences and local residents) – and it may also have enabled a more open series of debates to arise in a broader media ecology including the commercial media (the debate in the columns and the blogs intersected). It was this interaction that had pushed the PX Project publicly, awakened Xiamen residents and exerted pressure on Xiamen government.

5 Analysis of Diverse Media Reporting: How Domestic and International Media Covered the PX Event

This section will focus on the news coverage (65 articles in total) within two media groups (Chinese and international media) during a relatively short period (17 months). My goals in this part are in twofold. First, I aim to provide descriptive information on diverse media reports about the Xiamen event, and to examine precisely what kinds of message did these newspapers deliver?

Apart from an environmental focus on journalistic reports, I also aim to examine how “qualitative interpretation” (Rose, 2007, p. 60) was presented among the diverse news sources. Then qualitative content analysis (Altheide, 1996; Maxwell, 2005; Miles and Huberman, 1994) will be used in this section, relying on intensity of media coverage to understand how these sources differ in terms of themes, tone and expression (discourse) and with what frequency in reporting the Xiamen event (frame), particularly, to find out how these reports comment on the Xiamen event and what political function the media reporting had in 2007.

To answer these questions, I begin with listing relative news sources. This includes two-step process. First, I search newspaper articles from both national and

international news sources using the LexisNexis online database (see Appendix 1¹⁰⁰), by searching terms ‘PX Project’, ‘Xiamen Chemical Plant’, ‘Xiamen Demonstration’ ‘Environmental Impact Assessment’ and ‘Lian Yue’ to build a larger dataset. Second, I follow Lian Yue’s blog to collect news reports regarding the Xiamen event from domestic (6 in total, see Appendix 2¹⁰¹) and international media outlets. As important international press *Financial Times*, *Times*, *Economist*, *Reuters* and *Washington Post* were mentioned in Lian Yue’s blog, I then re-use the LexisNexis online database, along with accessing to these websites, by searching terms ‘Xiamen Chemical Plant’, ‘Xiamen Pollution’, ‘Xiamen Demonstration’ and ‘Lian Yue’ to get their specific reports (15 in total, see Appendix 3¹⁰²). In addition, I set up search parameters within one year and five months following the Xiamen PX Project, from 3 January 2007 to 1 May 2008. The article sources include 47 international and 18 domestic in total.

My analysis is based on the material set out in these 65 articles (see appendix 1, 2 and 3). My aim is to capture the “frame”, the “theme” and the “discourse” (Altheide, 1996, p. 28-33), operating around this story as it emerges in different media. According to David Altheide,

Themes are the recurring typical theses that run through a lot of the reports. Frames are the focus, a parameter or boundary, for discussing a particular event... Discourse refers to the parameters of relevant meaning that one uses to talk about things. (1996, p.31)

In this section, I will treat frames as specific thematic emphases/routine of the reports/structures that distinguish one media group from another. Themes ties to

¹⁰⁰ The articles are found by using LexisNexis online database. The international media include specialized (e.g., Chemical News & Intelligence, Chemical Business Newbase), commercial (i.e. Asia Pulse – a commercial news firm focuses on Asian companies, industries and provides updated investment information), social (i.e., China Herald – a Shanghai-based Dutch journalist blogs on China related news) and news media in India (see *Statesman* (23 January 2008) Asian Voices Making Room For Public Participation) and both UK and [accessed 1 November 2011].

¹⁰¹ The articles were mentioned in Lian Yue’s blog. I basically use Google search to find them.

¹⁰² The articles are found by using LexisNexis online database and by accessing to the listed press’s (mentioned in Appendix) websites.

meanings/angles in the reportage of the Xiamen events, and discourse relates to tones and expression (positive/negative).

5.1 Analysis Procedure

5.1.1 Frame

From the tables listed in the Appendix we can see that, a large number of international reports (47 in total) were involved in the reporting. This implied that the Xiamen PX Project, potentially as one of the cases of China, of destructions to the global environment, had made a global concern, as Jonathan Schwartz argued:

On the international level, China is damaging the global environment through escalating sulfur dioxide flows that contribute to acid rain and soaring carbon dioxide output that aggravates global warming. (2003, p.54)

However, news frames varied between Chinese media and their international counterparts. One different pattern was journalistic routine. As we can see in the following table (Table 5.1), the Xiamen event was actively reported by international media. The heavier period of the coverage appeared in May, June and July, when the PX Project was publicized (see Lian Yue's blogging at 3.1 – Stage One: Exposing the Official Cover-Up– March to May 2007), demonstrations were taking place (June 1 and June 2, 2007), and an environment assessment was proceeding, and the Real Name Registration policy was made (see Lian Yue's blogging at 3.2 – Stage Two: Exposing the Weakness of Xiamen Media during Environmental Assessment Period – June 2007). Substantial reports in Chinese media were written in June 2007¹⁰³ and in December 2007¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰³ The domestic media reports in June and July also include: *Guojizaixian* (CRI Online, 1 June 2007) *Xiamen Haicang PX Xiangmu Huanjian Zao Dangdi Juming Youxing Kangyi* (Xiamen Haicang Delays the PX Project: Delayed by Local Residents' Protest) [online]. The article can be found at <http://bbs.hbue.edu.cn/viewthread.php?tid=75134&extra=page%3D147> [accessed 27 July 2011]. *Shanghai Zhengquanbao* (Shanghai Securities News, 5 June 2007) *Zhongda Juece Rang Minzhong Canyu Caineng Tigao*

Table 5.1. Various News Agencies in Managing to Report on the PX Project
(March 2007-January 2008)

	International Media	Chinese Media
Journalistic Routine		
Heavier periods:	Get involved (8)	
May	Lots of the reports were given attention in this period (18)	
June		
July	Reported on the assessment while analyzed other subjects in relation to the Project (7)	Waiting for the result (5)
December		Attention were drawn upon the final decision (7)
Thematic Frame	Singapore group – Took the PX Project as an environmental event	Focused on reshaping the relationship between local government and its residents
	Western group – Considered the PX Project as a political event	
Frame Structure	Singapore group – Focused on how this pollution may affect PX Projects in other regions	To wait for final decisions on the event from the top
	Western group – Interested in exploring conflict interests (government vs. the public) and implications behind this conflict	

Xiaolv (Public Participation Help Boost the Effectiveness for Governmental Decision), posted by Lv Qing [online]. The article can be found at: http://www.360doc.com/content/07/0605/21/19076_540825.shtml [accessed 28 July 2011].

¹⁰⁴ The report in December also includes *China Daily* (14December2007) *Open Forum Held to Air Views on PX Plant*, reported by Chen Jia and HuMeidong. The article can be found at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-12/14/costent_6320406.htm [accessed 2 October 2009].

Hence, compared with international media reportage, a final decision to remove the PX Project was selected as important news in Chinese media, and December was recognized as the peak month of the Xiamen event.

Another differentiation was the thematic frame. June 2007 was productive in reporting on the PX Project, however, the key content in international media was quite diverse. The Singapore group (*Chemical News & Intelligence*, *South China Morning Post* and *The Straits Times*), which provided 9 reports in June 2007, mainly emphasized the environmental impact of the PX Project¹⁰⁵, and were reflected in their headlines and subheadings: *Clashes Mark Second Day of Chemical Plant Protest: Xiamen Residents Fear Factory Will Destroy Their 'Green' City*¹⁰⁶ (*South China Morning Post*, 3 June 2007), *Focus: China Steps Up Environment, Safety Watch*¹⁰⁷ (*Chemical News & Intelligence*, 13 June 2007), and *Firm Tries to Quash Fears over Chemical Factory: It Says Paraxylene, Used in Polyester and Fabrics, Is No More Dangerous Than Petrol*¹⁰⁸ (*The Straits Times*¹⁰⁹, 13 June 2007). While Western media put their interest on the protest by local residents were widely reported: *Chinese Protesters Turn to Texting*¹¹⁰ (*The Virginian-Pilot*, 3 June 2007), *Xiamen Mayor Says Street Protests "Inappropriate"*¹¹¹ (Reuters, 6 June, 2007), and *Protest in China: Mobilised by Mobile*¹¹² (*Economist*, 21 June 2007).

¹⁰⁵ In Singapore, the risk of the PX project is well-controlled, and managed as a mature and environmental safety project.

¹⁰⁶ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13129517600&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=76&resultsUrlKey=29_T13129494991&cisb=22_T13129517602&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=11314&docNo=99 [accessed 1 November 2011].

¹⁰⁷ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13129517600&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=76&resultsUrlKey=29_T13129494991&cisb=22_T13129517602&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=274985&docNo=87 [accessed 1 November 2007].

¹⁰⁸ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13129517600&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=76&resultsUrlKey=29_T13129494991&cisb=22_T13129517602&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=144965&docNo=88 [accessed 1 November 2011].

¹⁰⁹ This is a daily newspaper in Singapore, providing news/stories updates everyday.

¹¹⁰ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13158248103&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T13158248107&cisb=22_T13158248106&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=144571&docNo=17 [accessed 4 November 2011].

¹¹¹ It can be found at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/06/06/idUSHKG56299> [accessed 5 November 2011].

¹¹² It can be found at: <http://www.economist.com/node/9367055> [accessed 5 November 2011].

The third pattern pertaining to the frame structure of news reports was showed in Chinese media. Media commercialization has stimulated news production and journalistic transformation in China but media content is still under a great deal of control of the government. To put it another way, major topics for news coverage are normally decided by the authority (Pan, 2000, Yin and Payne, 2004). This can be seen in the case of Xiamen event: the article *Xiamen Environmental to be Assessed after Controversial Chemical Plant Suspended*¹¹³ was reported by Xinhua News Agency on 7 June, 2007.

May 30, the Xiamen city decided to delay the PX Project... as it was strongly opposed by local residents. It is said, that hundreds of local residents have expressed their claims via mobile phones. One popular message is “We want our life and we want our health.” The delay will result in economic loss... If the local government had publicized certain information earlier, the loss may not have happened. In this context, to make government affairs publicly is a win-win strategy. ([Xinhua News Agency], Reported by Lv Qing, 7 June 2007)

This article was published six months earlier than the *China Daily*’s: *Majority Oppose Chemical Plant*¹¹⁴ (12 December 2007), and ahead of both *China Dialogue*’s reportage – *Xiamen PX: A Turning Point?*¹¹⁵ (16 January 2008) and *Business Daily*’s reportage – *Making Room for Public Participation*¹¹⁶ (21 January 2008) 7 months. This suggested that the latter three media might wait for Xinhua,

¹¹³ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13129517600&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=76&resultsUrlKey=29_T13129494991&cisb=22_T13129517602&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8078&docNo=93 [accessed 1 November 2011].

¹¹⁴ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13129517600&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=51&resultsUrlKey=29_T13129494991&cisb=22_T13129517602&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=227171&docNo=75 [accessed 1 November 2011].

¹¹⁵ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13129517600&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=51&resultsUrlKey=29_T13129494991&cisb=22_T13129517602&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=299488&docNo=69 [accessed 1 November 2011].

¹¹⁶ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13129517600&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=51&resultsUrlKey=29_T13129494991&cisb=22_T13129517602&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=227171&docNo=67 [accessed 1 November 2011].

the official news agency, to cover a political sensitive aspect of the news first (e.g., “allowed public to participate the decision”, “make government affairs publicly”).

The above showed how Singaporean and Western (international) and Chinese media used different frames of analysis: the Singapore media focused on global pollution risk affected by the PX Project, the Western media were more interested in political activity in Xiamen, and the Chinese media were likely to concentrate on the responsibility of local government.

The broad frameworks discerned above enable me to re-code coverage of the PX Project for its immediate effects (local residents’ fear and their demonstrations), its deeper and more politicized implications for the governmental responsibility (environment protection vs. economic development), aggressive activity (demonstration and text message campaign) and governmental transparency (cover-up information and Internet control).

These overarching codes are expressed through sub-themes. Below I classify the coverage further, discerning eight themes arising in the coverage of the story in media content, and tracking these through time. These are tabulated in Table 5.2.

5.1.2 Theme

Table 5.2 Themes of (Both Domestic and International)

Media Coverage of the Xiamen Event

1. Introduction of the PX Project	Reporting on the background of the chemical plant, location, and the business benefit of this project.
2. Effects on lives of local residents	Reporting on how the PX Project affected the living infrastructure of Xiamen city (i.e. how the PX Project affected Xiamen residents' health, including their panic, women's pregnancy, and children's growing-up).
3. Governmental reaction on the PX Project	Reporting included government oversight (cover-up the pollution of the PX Project), and their aim of the PX Project (promotion of the GDP while people's living environment was sacrificed).
4. Focus on demonstration	Reporting on local protests and demonstrations on June 1 and 2 – how the Xiamen event decreased trust in government and local media reports, and the conflict between the public and the local government.
5. Public feedback of the PX Project	Specifically reporting on public reactions and their rejection to the PX Project.
6. Scientific analyses	Reporting on technical or other assistance provided by national or international experts, and the result of environmental assessment.
7. Real Name Registration	Reporting on policies of the networking management in the city of Xiamen, particularly focusing on the Real Name Registration.
8. Mention of Lian Yue's blog	Commenting and reporting on what Lian Yue had done on his blog, and the impact of his blog.

Overall, these eight themes represented a diverse set of issues/angles covered by Chinese and international media in regards to the PX Project. These themes emerge through the broader frameworks already set out above and already typified as

characteristically adopted by different media (international, ‘local international’ and Chinese).

I now aim to assess differentiation among the news sources (the way of description, in what tones and how to express) in the ways they construct stories articulating the eight themes. In fact I focus on five of the eight: these are – Governmental Reaction on the PX Project, Demonstration, Public Feedback on the PX Project, Real Name Registration and Mention of Lian Yue’s Blog. They are used for the following analyses. As themes such as ‘introduction of the PX Project’, ‘effects on lives of local residents’ and ‘scientific analyses’ may contain repetitive information offered by Lian Yue’s *Eighth Continent*, and are less relevant to my interest in the coverage of international press in this chapter. They are not selected here.

5.2 Analysis of the Four Themes

5.2.1 ‘Reporting on Government Reaction to the PX Project’

First, reporting contents that was coded under the ‘governmental reaction on the PX Project’ theme assigned critique, cover-up and culpability for the Xiamen government. Both Chinese and international media sources indicated in their reporting that there was enough criticism to go around.

The initial report of the PX Project, informing the public about the Xiamen scholars’ negotiation with the local government, was reported by *Di Yi Caijing Ribao* (China Business Network) – *Zhexie Tian Beihou: Zhuanjia yu Guanyuan de Duihua* (Behind the Bill: Dialogues between Scholars and Governors)¹¹⁷ (18 April 2007).

¹¹⁷ The article can be found at: <http://finance.sina.com.cn/g/20070418/02493511281.shtml> [accessed 27 July 2011].

In November 21, 2006, Zhao Yufen asked other scholars to write a letter to Xiamen government. At the end of November, a letter written by six scholars was sent to the city's Party secretary He Lifeng, along with specific sources and data in relation to PX and its potential pollution. ([Diyi Caijing Ribao], Reported by Shao Fangqing, 18 April 2007)

What 'impressed' *Diyi Caijing Ribao* was the reaction of the local governors.

In January 6, 2007, a special meeting was held in Xiamen Hotel. Scholars... insisted that the location [of the PX Project] was not appropriate... He Lifeng... highlighted that the PX Project was approved by experts from National Environmental Protection Bureau... The meeting finished at half eleven, however, governors did not take any advice from Xiamen scholars. ([Diyi Caijing Ribao], Reported by Shao Fangqing, 18 April, 2007)

In *Diyi Caijing Ribao*, the PX Project was commented as typical *Guanliao zhengzhi* (bureaucracy), criticizing the Xiamen government's abuse of power (for instance, "the PX Project was approved by experts", "governors did not take any advice from Xiamen scholars"). As similar as *Diyi Caijing Ribao*, *Dongfang Liaowang* (Oriental Outlook), wrote *Liuyuanshi Nanzu Xiamen Juxing Huagong Xiangmu* (Six Scholars Can Hardly Stop Xiamen's Giant Chemical Plant)¹¹⁸, and *China Dialogue* wrote *Planning Failure in Xiamen*¹¹⁹ to hint an indifferent attitude of the local government to the PX pollution respectively.

In May 5, reporters interviewed some teachers of a university in Xiamen, whose working place was only three kilometers away from the PX Project, but found that nobody knew that such a huge project would be located so nearby, let alone being asked for their advices... Scholar Zhao Yufen told *Oriental Outlook* reporter: "There is no sign to show that the National Development and Reform Committee will stop or remove the PX Project"... [A] governor from Xiamen City Propaganda Department said: "The Project is approved by central government. Xiamen is just to assist the work". ([Dongfang Liaowang], Reported by Huang Han, 26 May 2007)

¹¹⁸ The article can be found at: <http://digest.scol.com.cn/2007/06/01/20070601828084657250.htm> [accessed 27 July 2011].

¹¹⁹ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13129517600&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=76&resultsUrlKey=29_T13129494991&cisb=22_T13129517602&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=299488&docNo=76 [accessed 1 November 2011].

[T]he XiamenPX Project was proposed to be built only four kilometers from a middle school and a dormitory that is home to 5,000 students... Scientists say that a serious accident at the plant... would force the evacuation of Xiamen Island over only two bridges, resulting in a massive human disaster... However, the authorities did not offer any further response. ([China Dialogue], Reported by Liu Jianqiang, 12 December 2007)

Unlike in the Chinese media, the PX Project and the Government decisions to push it, were framed as a political event in the international media. *Newsweek*¹²⁰, for instance, noted that “political concerns may be predominating”.

With presidential elections coming up in March in Taipei, however, Beijing is treating everything Taiwan-related especially carefully, says Zhang Wensheng of Xiamen University. ([Newsweek]¹²¹, Reported by Ansfield, 17 December, 2007)

*AFX*¹²²’s *Chinese Local Officials Freeze 11 BLN-Yuan Chemical Plant Project*¹²³said:

The 11 bln-yuan Tenglong chemical factory, in which Taiwan businessman Chen Yu-hao has invested, was set to begin operating next year, producing 800,000 tons per year of the flammable chemical p-Xylene. City officials hope it will boost the city’s GDP by as much as 80 bln yuan a year to nearly 200 bln yuan. ([Beijing (XFN-Asia)], 31 May 2007)

While *Chemical News & Intelligence*¹²⁴, under its headline – *Dragon Group Faces 6-Month Delay at Xiamen PX*¹²⁵, implicitly told an issue of corruption.

¹²⁰ It is a news agency in the United States, providing in-depth analyses, comments and viewpoints about news, technology, business, culture and politics.

¹²¹ See *Newsweek* (17 December 2007) Where ‘Guanxi’ Rules: Party Politics, Cross-Strait Relations and Good Old Greed Still Trump Everything Else in China [online]. The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13129517600&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=51&resultsUrlKey=29_T13129494991&cisb=22_T13129517602&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=5774&docNo=74 [accessed 1 November 2011].

¹²² It is a UK-based agency offers a wide range of financial news services.

¹²³ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13129517600&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=76&resultsUrlKey=29_T13129494991&cisb=22_T13129517602&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=314633&docNo=100 [accessed 1 November 2011].

¹²⁴ It is a UK-based agency offers a wide range of financial news services.

The Dragon Group's paraxylene (PX) project will be delayed for at least six months pending a reassessment after close to 2,000 people protested outside the Xiamen government. The company was in talks with the government on... whether or not it will be able to obtain environment approval after the reassessment, a Dragon Group spokesmen said on Monday. ([Singapore (ICIC news)], 4 June 2007)

While international media considered the case as not only an environmental issue, but contained complicated government interest over the PX Project: China's central government's political relationship with Taiwan (see *Newsweek*), the economic benefit of the chemical plant (see Beijing (*XFN-Asia*)) and a hint of governmental corruption (see Singapore (*ICIC news*)) in Xiamen. All these were not shown in the Chinese media, suggesting that there are practical limits to journalists include the incapability of media policy allowing political viewpoints to attack the Party.

5.2.2 'Demonstration'

Second, reporting contents that were coded under the 'demonstration' theme were indeed greatly published by international media. The PX story was framed as a protest issue in the Western media. *The Economist* ran stories that included headline *China: Protest in China: Mobilised by mobile* (see Photo 5.1), *Washington Post* had its *Text Messages Giving Voice to Chinese*¹²⁶, and *Reuters* reported on its *Hundreds Protest against China Chemical Plant*¹²⁷.

¹²⁴ *Chemical News and Intelligence* is a Singapore-based specialist magazine. It publishes news on chemical, energy and fertilizer.

¹²⁵ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13129517600&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=76&resultsUrlKey=29_T13129494991&cisb=22_T13129517602&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=274985&docNo=98 [accessed 1 November 2011].

¹²⁶ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13157431581&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T13157431564&cisb=22_T13157431583&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8075&docNo=14 [accessed 3 November 2011].

¹²⁷ The article can be found at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/05/05/idUSPEK122797> [accessed 28 July 2011].

The text message in Xiamen, circulated in late May, called for a rally outside the city government's headquarters on June 1st to protest against plans to build a huge chemical factory. ([Economist], 21 June 2007)

It was a dramatic illustration of the potential of technology – particularly cellphones and the Internet – to challenge the rigorous censorship.([Washington Post], Reported by Edward Cody, 28 June 2007)



(Photo 5.1. Xiamen residents took to the streets in a protest march, taken by Wen Yunchao¹²⁸, 2007)

Angry locals had denounced the project as an “atomic bomb” threatening the seaside environment, and they claimed to have circulated nearly a million mobile phone text messages urging families and friends in protest against the plant. ([Reuters], Reported by Lan Ransom, 5 May 2008)

Reporting the protest affirmed the opposition that Chinese citizens demonstrated to the planned chemical plant, while raised a civil right issue in the PX story.

¹²⁸ The picture can be found at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/27/AR2007062702962.html> [8 August 2011].

The delay marked a rare instance of public opinion in China rising from the streets and compelling a change of policy by Communist Party bureaucrats. ([Washington Post], Reported by Edward Cody, 28 June 2007)

[I]t is China's online civil society that is leading the charge. ([Economist], 21 June 2007)

What is interesting to note here is the way in which words such as “such tactics inspire far less fear” (see *Economist*, 21 June 2007), “gave the demonstrators a power” (see *Washington Post*, 28 June 2007) are used to characterize the Chinese protesters. This is markedly different from the above reporting in the Chinese press, where public (experts, scientists and local residents) and public opinion are powerless.

On the other side of the coin, reportage in Western media emphasizing the prevalent usage of ‘mobile phone text messages’ mention that new media (e.g., the Internet, blogs, and mobile phones) may ‘pose an insurmountable threat to the Chinese authoritarian regime’, to borrow from Zheng Yongnian and Wu Guoguang’s words (2005, p. 510), meaning subsequent, or kinds of control will follow.

5.2.3 ‘Real Name Registration’

This can be seen in the ‘real name registration’ theme. This picks up the new laws in China on the real name registration policy and relates this to the pollution story. *Time Online* reported in its *China Moves to Ban Anonymous Posts and Chatting*¹²⁹, read:

¹²⁹ The article can be found at: <http://chinaview.wordpress.com/2007/07/06/china-moves-to-ban-anonymous-online-posts-and-chating/> [accessed 29 July 2011].

Internet users will have to provide their real names, backed up by data from their identity cards, when posting messages on more than 100,000 websites registered in Xiamen. ([Time], Reported by Jane Macartney, 6 July 2007)

Followed by *The Associated Press*, under its headline – *China: City Moves to Ban Anonymous Web Posts after Protests over Chemical Plant*¹³⁰:

A Xiamen official told local reporters the proposed regulation bar anonymous postings online and requires Web sites to approve all postings. ([Associated Press], 6 July 2007)

And *The Financial Times* weighted in, reported *China City to Tighten Internet Controls*¹³¹:

A Chinese city where residents recently held mass protests against a planned chemicals plant is preparing to tighten controls on the internet and force users to use their real names when posting messages on local websites. ([Financial Times], Reported by Mure Dickie, 8 July 2011)

Reportage on ‘Real Name Registration’ in China national media was very minimal, though *China Economic Review*¹³² offered its viewpoint, under its headline – *Xiamen to Tighten Internet Controls*¹³³:

Xiamen in southeastern Fujian province is preparing to require internet users in the city to use their real names when posting messages on online forums and blogs. ([China Economic Review], 9 July 2007)

¹³⁰ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13129517600&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=76&resultsUrlKey=29_T13129494991&cisb=22_T13129517602&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=304478&docNo=79 [accessed 1 November 2011].

¹³¹ The article can be found at: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/0790fcb6-2d7c-11dc-939b-0000779fd2ac.html#axzz1cn4jxBsS> [accessed 5 November 2011].

¹³² *China Economic Review* is a journal publishes works on economy of China and the world.

¹³³ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13129517600&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=76&resultsUrlKey=29_T13129494991&cisb=22_T13129517602&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=370155&docNo=78 [accessed 1 November 2011].

As seen above, generally, both Chinese media and their international counterparts tended to frame Xiamen's real name registration as part of a larger, systemic pattern of 'Internet control' in China. This 'control' in the Western media is depicted as compulsory (e.g., "have to", "requires... to approve", and "force"), while when it is mentioned in the Chinese media (e.g., "prepare to require"), it becomes necessary. Either way, however, proved that any movement in opposition of the authority should not be tolerated in China.

5.2.4 'Public Feedback of the PX Project'

Unlike a silent coverage 'The Real Name Registration', Chinese media voiced loudly on the theme of 'Public Feedback of the PX Project'.

China Daily, reported under its headline – *Majority Oppose Chemical Plant*:

Fifty-four of the 64 speakers who got a chance to air their views on the second day of a two-day public forum on Friday said they opposed the building of a chemical plant in the city of Xiamen, Fujian Province. A total of 107 people took part in Friday's event, following 99 who were present on Thursday. Of the 121 people who addressed the forum over the two days, just 15 came out in support of the idea to build an industrial zone focused on the chemical industry in the city's Haicang district. ([China Daily], 15 December 2007)

The Beijing News ran *China Daily*'s information under the headline *Over Half of Xiamen Representatives Oppose Chemistry Project in Haicang*¹³⁴:

We were noted that the decision ultimately rests with the city government. ([Beijing News], 14 December 2007)

¹³⁴ The article can be found at: <http://www.thebeijingnews.com/news/guonei/2007/12-14/021@090051.htm> [accessed 2 October 2009].

And *Business Daily* reported:

The PX plant project was suspended and moved out of Xiamen in response to strong opposition from local residents. ([Business Daily], 21 January 2008)

Reporting contents that were coded under the theme ‘Public Feedback of the PX Project’, however, underscored a different style of the Chinese media. Except *Business Daily* encouraged the ‘participatory’ tradition of journalism, to borrow from Dong Guanpeng and Shi Anbin’s view (2007, p.191), *China Daily* and *the Beijing News*, were very cautious.

One lesson from the PX project incident is that the country seriously needs a legal framework under which public participation becomes an indispensable part of policymaking. ([Business Daily], 21 January 2008)

The analyses of intensity of media coverage in terms of frame, theme and discourse in the case of the Xiamen event showed how the Chinese media and international counterpart handled their coverage of the story differently. The two media systems commonly highlight politics of journalism. The Western media reported the PX story as an important political event (involving protesters, text messages, and State control) with the demand for democracy in China. In contrast, this style of Chinese media report should generally follow the Party lines (e.g., lack political comments, waiting for the decision from the top) (see Beaudoin, 2007; Dong and Shi, 2007; Weber and Jia, 2007; Zhao, 1998).

The weakness of the domestic reporting in mainstream media included the lack of critical opinions and delay to provide up-to-date news. Here again the reason is because domestic media are under political pressure. This pressure comes from a

journalistic environment with insufficient newsroom protection (criticism), thus, the media are forced to publish safety news (i.e., positive reports). As Hu Shuli argues,

Most of China media outlets now struggling both internally, from insufficient management, and externally, from regulatory controls. (30 January 2014)

In addition to this, the missing of the news reports from local media hints that blockage to protest within a local government is on one hand, as they threatened to be blamed and exposed. Yet, the ‘magic’ of Lian Yue’s blog is that it invited trans-regional responses, and made the case nationwide. This has introduced a note of negotiation – a kind of pushing in China’s media management. In the case of the Xiamen event, while the authorities outside the Xiamen city had concerned about the polluted project taking place in Xiamen, they did not seem to consider it as subversive to their power.

Furthermore, both international and domestic media asserted the importance of the public opinion. In the case of the PX Project, to some extent, political participation was embedded in the public opinion (against the Project) that impacted on the governmental decision, and their tolerance of public’s collective action (protestation). The two factors attracted international media; this, turning the story into international news.

6 Analyses of Media Commentaries on Lian Yue and His Blog – Professional Perspectives (From May to December 2007)

The four themes of media coverage on the Xiamen event (Governmental Reaction on the PX Project, Demonstration, Public Feedback on the PX Project and Real Name Registration) are joined by a fifth, which concerns Lian Yue and his blog.

Whatever their opinion as to the desirability of his campaign coverage and reports in China and the rest of the world noted Lian Yue's role as an opinion leader in the Xiamen event.

This view that Lian Yue was playing a role as a leading opinion made in (journalistic) professional perspectives, rested on several claims. First, Lian Yue tactically aimed at 'making noises', as opposed to the authority, as both *South China Morning Post* and *Virginian-Pilot* commented:

Blogger LianYue, who wrote extensively about the plant earlier this year... said "As a Xiamen resident, I must speak out. You can't complain about the environment and then not do anything when something like this happens where you're living." ([*South China Morning Post*], Reported by Didi Kirsten Tatlow, 30 May 2007¹³⁵)

It is not clear who began the text message campaign in Xiamen. But well before it began, a prominent Chinese blogger, LianYue, had begun writing about the plant and organizing resistance to it... Lian posted a series of articles... calling on the people of Xiamen to speak out against the plant. ([*Virginian-Pilot*], Reported by Michael Landsberg, 3 June 2007)

Second, Lian Yue's blogging consisted of personal accounts, creating a form of discourse that allowed him not only to present his opinion but also to attract participants at local and national level through a personal voice. Mentioned in *Independent Media Weekly*, read:

In May, the journalist LianYue... blogged about the horrors he thought would be wreaked on his peaceful beachfront city by a petrochemical plant the government was desperate to see built. A few days later, someone sent an anonymous text message saying the construction of the plant would be like

¹³⁵ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13158349645&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T13158349641&cisb=22_T13158349647&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=11314&docNo=16 [accessed 4 November 2011].

dropping an atom bomb on Xiamen, and SMS messages started to fly around the town. This launched the biggest middle-class protests in China's modern history. ([Independent Media Weekly], Reported by Catherine Sampson¹³⁶, 6 August 2007)

Third, Lian Yue's blogging functioned as a forum for shaping public discourse, encouraging critical opinions counter to the official line. *South China Morning Post* cited Lian Yue's words,

"Look at what happened over the past half-year, and you'll find that Xiamen residents set an example of public participation for China. It became an effective way to restrict the power of the local government," Xiamen-based blogger Lian Yue said. ([South China Morning Post], Reported by Joey Liu, 19 December 2007)

In this way, Lian Yue's blogging took the role as, to borrow from Zhao Yiyang, 'Yulun Jiandu' (Supervision) (see de Burgh, 2003, p. 810).

Fourth, given the frequent information that Chinese government imposes control and censorship everywhere, Lian Yue's words and the change of Xiamen, though, offered international presses to see other images of China, as reported in *South China MorningPost*.

In March, 37-year-old LianYue began voicing concerns on his blog about a proposed paraxylene factory in Xiamen... Mr Lian said: "New media is becoming massive. The cost of keeping a lockdown on information is enormous. People who have even just a little internet experience can pretty much get any information you want." ([South China Morning Post], Reported by Goldkorn and Alexandra¹³⁷, 1 September 2007)

¹³⁶ It can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13158349645&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T13158349641&cisb=22_T13158349647&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=304098&docNo=11 [accessed 4 November 2011].

¹³⁷ See *South China Morning Post* (1 September 2007) Virtual Voices [online]. The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13158248103&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T13158248107&cisb=22_T13158248106&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=11314&docNo=11 [accessed 4 November 2011].

By using ICTs as a medium for dissent, Lian Yue and his fellow residents broke the political suppression of freedom of expression.

Finally, Lian Yue's blogging prompting Chinese netizens' participation implicated that his blog as a form of accountability (opinion) or accuracy (fact) for his role as journalist, helping rebuild public trust in journalism. Commented by *Times*, said:

Lian Yue... a writer and blogger who posted real-time footage of the march on his website, was swift to comment on the planned crackdown on anonymous postings. He wrote: "The awakening of public power can perform a key influential function in environmental protection. That small step for Xiamen's citizens should have become a giant leap for the progress of environmental protection in China" ([Times], Reported by Jane Macartney, 7 July 2007¹³⁸)

Regardless of the passion within which Lian Yue had blogged, across these articles we see that *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent* in 2007 became very influential.

Firstly, *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent* gained rapidly in reliability and credibility in 2007, with his independent reporting (frequency and up-to-date information). In preserving his resistance to the chemical plant, Lian Yue's blogging was quite different from mainstream news report. He moved away from traditional 'loyalty' to the Party towards being obligated to public interest. This radical reporting style, if borrowing from Tanni Hass's words (2007, p.145), showed a "different kind of news discourse than the one found in mainstream news media". The news discourse, along with Lian Yue's independent reporting, I argue, referred to the meaning of 'individualism' in this chapter.

¹³⁸ The article can be found at: http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/uk/nexis/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T13158349645&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T13158349641&csi=22_T13158349647&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=10939&docNo=12 [accessed 4 November 2011].

Second, *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent* aroused a large degree of public consensus. In preserving his ability to make further changes (e.g., protestation, removing the PX Project), Lian Yue not only advocated Xiamen residents to protect their living environment, but to improve their civic life. This shift is towards a form of journalism, that is, to borrow from Louisa Ha, based on the belief that:

News stories demonstrating excellence not only have to inform people, but also have to move people in a particular direction. (1994, p.70)

This ability differentiated Lian Yue from other bloggers. By this I mean, in reporting the PX event in 2007, Lian Yue was effective. This partially is because he is a professional journalist. He speaks for the public, he sharply criticized the Xiamen government, and used his blog as an opportunity for public debate.

Meanwhile, evidences in “text message campaign” and “middle-class protests” demonstrated that Lian Yue, especially his professionalism had a significant impact on the rising bourgeois class (I would loosely define this as *Zhishi Fenzi Jieceng* (intellectual class) in China, shifting his role from a journalist-blogger towards a public intellectual. This dimension of public intellectual is, as Chinese scholar Wang Xiaohua points out:

[S]parked by the active interaction of the Internet and its online communications in particular, the public intellectual in China take the much-qualified capability to criticize the reality, speak for the public, and to bring about influence on public opinions. Therefore, they shift the grounds for public debates and creating new inspirations for both intellectual power and civic culture in the cyberspace. (26 May 2009)

Lian Yue and his blogging on the PX Project gained large amounts of support from intellectually (educated, urban, and middle-class) inclined netizens. They referenced and engaged with Lian Yue in their constant critical messages to

Xiamen government and local media, in their well-organized June 1 and 2 demonstrations in Xiamen, and in further activities, that built towards a final success in taking away the PX Project, all of which expanded Lian Yue's credentials as a public intellectual in China.

In addition to this, the “text message campaign” and the “middle-class protests” in the process of the 2007 PX Project attracted attention from a wide range of international media, promoted a local event to be an international news on one side, and providing more political views on issues of civil society and democracy on the other. This in turn pushed Lian Yue from a journalist-blogger towards a political blogger. That is, to make public voices heard and public opinions become political action.

The 2007 Xiamen protestation is indeed politically meaningful; it was well-organized, peaceful and tolerated by the local authority. More important, it has led to an increase in environmental-related protests taking place (e.g., the 2011 Dalian PX protest, the 2012 Ningbo PX protest) in recent years, pushing the government to confront a growing civil society (public interests and their civic rights) and strong public opinions in contemporary China. I am not saying that all these can happen because of Lian Yue, in the case of the PX Project at least, Lian Yue's role as either ‘opinion leader’ or ‘public intellectual’ indicates that he is capable to translate his blog and his other writings from potential into actual political vehicle, he thus becomes an elite among the netizens.

7 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have discussed that the importance of the news blog as a new form of public journalism. It featured in two-fold. In the first place, public concerns tend to become the primary focus for Chinese journalists, driving their reporting on their blogs. In the second place, for journalist-blogs, blogging is not only a means of

practicing their professionalism, as Zhao Zhili argues (2006), but also a purpose of energizing them for public participation.

While blogs approach the public and get support via their communication skills, journalists' higher level or professional talent at commenting on societal events, expressing independent thoughts and news judgment they are potentially able to bring into blogging skills that make them the highly competent than other bloggers at particular forms of journalistic activity. That is they may add to the power of the personal voice (the skills of communication informing successful bloggers of many kinds), training in dealing in events, information, 'facts' and 'stories'. To talk in terms of competence does not imply a priori assessment of the power of journalists. I simply mean here that journalists focus more on particular kinds of work, and may organize their blogs in relation to a particular sense of responsibility or judgment that comes from their professional identity. In the case of the Xiamen PX Project, Lian Yue's blog had extended the narrow range of topics on the sensitive event and provided sources that were not featured in local and mainstream news media outlets. This in turn argues that news blogs encourage independent source as of information and independent investigation of the facts, filling the perceived inadequacies from the official information and its mainstream media institutions (see Zhang Lei and Lou Chengwu, 2006), while at the same time providing this information 'from a personal perspective' that invites identification with the writer.

Lian Yue shifted news delivery from traditional media to the Internet (blogosphere); he thus changed the rules of the game of journalism. The fact that the Chinese government has a history of less encouraging its journalists from reporting news that is deemed to be critical, sensitive and controversial (e.g., corruption, conflicts, or human rights issues). On the other hand, the authority has set a series of limitations on public debate, and has placed relatively little emphasis on achieving free speech or democracy in China's media sphere.

However, what I have found in the PX Project, Lian Yue's blogging contents is different from comments from mainstream media such as *China Daily* and *Beijing News*. *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent* revealed deep social conflicts between Xiamen people and their city government and therefore, criticism behind the conflicts had been explicitly expressed: Xiamen government's emphasis on economic development over ordinary people's benefits that had resulted in a failure of the government's leadership, on one hand, a negative mood of Xiamen residents toward the local officials, on the other.

Such a difference means that the need for news repair (Bennett et al., 1985; McCoy, 2001) is on target. The problem of the Chinese mainstream media in making news appears as, if borrowing from Stephen Reese et al.:

[F]or the most part, [they] simply engage the facts and information carried in news accounts, accepting them at face value and using them to form their own arguments, reinforce views, and challenge opponents. They rarely challenge specific reportorial techniques and larger media structures. (2007, p.257)

Lian Yue's Eighth Continent in 2007, on the other side of the coin, showed how a journalist-blogger engaged in an effort to assess the validity of a news story by linking the issues that the public would be concerned about, to the extent that Lian Yue holding positive attitudes especially in terms of credibility and responsibility (see Eksterowicz and Roberts, 2000, p.187), through which he attempted to make journalism "the medium of expression of a bottom-up political agenda", as Eric Neveu (2006, p.38) addresses.

This 'bottom-up political agenda' demonstrates, as I have argued in the previous part in this chapter, that Chinese journalist bloggers, at a more individualistic level, act as "voices of people", to borrow from Peter Pugsly and Gao Jia's view (2007, p.452, also see de Burgh, 2003, p.193; Hassid, 2011, p.830), recognized for their contributions in nationwide contests in pursuit of helping the process of public life determine the outcomes (Zhang Lei and Lou Chengwu, 2006) and thus solving public issues. The case of Lian Yue showed that, if borrowing from Tong Jingrong's

words (2009, p.608), he “concerned more with the public interest” and cared more about his “professional values instead of political safety”. In other words, Lian Yue’s talent is embedded in his distinguish between the Xiamen authority and the Xiamen residents, and in having expressed expectations of the latter.

In addition, as Jane Singer notes (2005, p.192-3) that, journalists can take advantage in terms of strengthening, expanding, and offering political views in the process of mass communication. In the case of the PX Project, viewpoints from *Lian Yue’s Eighth Continent* and Lian Yue’s live columns on Chinese commercial media criticized systematic problems (e.g., bureaucracy, crisis of mainstream media) within Chinese society, which consistently inspired public discussion and helped political actions (e.g., text message campaign, protests) successfully taken place.

In this sense, blogs may influence journalism (Matheson, 2004; Singer, 2005) in news repair, particularly on the rise of public journalism (Deuze, 2003) as a way of involving the audience in the practice of journalism. What was remarkable in the anti-PX case in 2007 was not only Lian Yue, but also how netizens and local residents, their text messages and protesting pressurized the authority and influenced decision-making. The two elements surprised the international media, and their reports ultimately made the case towards a global attention.

Furthermore, the impact of Lian Yue’s blog has recognized the value of the blogosphere in opening up a wider space for journalism, especially for news discourse. Given the tight political control of the mainstream media, there is indeed a tendency among Chinese journalists to see or perhaps wish for blogs as an alternative media space, in which they aim to reconfirm the legitimacy and validity of their own model of journalism (see McNair, 2000; 2006; Wall, 2004; Singer, 2005). In the case of Xiamen PX Project, for example, there seemed possible for both journalists and netizens to enjoy certain degree of political speech in the blogosphere. In this sense, the political value of the blogosphere is not only presented in its building a mediated space, allowing breaking news and the range of sources and opinions being disseminated and expressed, as Wang Lusheng argues (2006, p.75), but also in serving the purpose of helping individuals become public representative of discourse.

This in turn raises an expectation of reconstituting spaces for public deliberation, and new conditions for freedom of expression and information in ways difficult to control in China. But there are other approaches, something like Lian Yue's writing on the PX Project clearly challenged conditions limiting freedom of expression and information circulation in China – not by focusing on these directly (as abstractions) but by focusing on a local issue and the question of a local decision.

Other approaches also work around limitations preventing particular issues to be directly addressed. One of those approaches, as I will explain in the next chapter, is to adopt stylistic forms that enable ambiguous expression. In the next chapter I will take this up by considering the use of satire by Wang Xiaofeng.

Chapter Six

The Rise of Political Satire in the Blogosphere:

The Case of Wang Xiaofeng

1 Introduction

The Chinese blogosphere, as I have introduced in the previous two chapters (both the Muzi Mei case – Chapter Four and the Lian Yue case – Chapter Five), can be considered as a kind of special discourse zone. It attracts various open discussions that have challenged the legitimacy of the established ideologies. Muzi Mei's blogging on sexuality, and Lian Yue's blogging on the Xiamen event, for instance, demonstrate bloggers' great creativity in tactical subversion, critique, and exposure of personal life and public concerns. The tactical creation of the challenge to established ideologies also manifests itself, as I will mention in this chapter, to borrow from Paul Manning (2001), through the "entertainment values" that blogs engage. This produces another radical strand of the Chinese blogging culture, which I will label, borrowing Brian McNair's term – "the satirical column" (2000, p.67) in this chapter.

This chapter sets out to explore the following questions: what are features of satirical blogs? To what extent have satirical blogs transformed the ways in which political communications are conducted in China? In doing so, it intends to contribute to the continuing debates on the changing horizons of freedom of expression in China. Through a close textual reading of the popular blogger Wang Xiaofeng¹³⁹, who uses the pseudonym *Dai Sange Biao* (Wearing Three Watches) and names his blog '*Buxu Lianxiang*' (No Guess¹⁴⁰), I aim to provide a distinctive

¹³⁹ Wang Xiaofeng's blog can be found at: www.wangxiaofeng.net.

¹⁴⁰ See *Dai Sange Biao* (Wearing Three Watches) (4 May 2006) *Da Jizhe Wen* (1) (Interview (1)). In this post, Wang Xiaofeng explains how to understand the meaning of *Lianxiang* (guess) – "Good guess means creation, but bad guess brings distortion. Good guess means fun, but bad guess implies disaster. My *No Guess*, to some extent, it can be irony, also, it can be justice – depends on the way you guess". The post is available at: <http://www.wangxiaofeng.net/?m=200605&paged=6>. From Wang's words we can see that, Wang Xiaofeng

model of satirical blogging in order to examine its key features in general, and to illustrate its effective utilization in relation to political criticism in particular.

Mary Magistad notes that:

With some 500 million Chinese now online, news spreads fast; jokes spread faster; and good jokes at the expense of bad governance go viral. (10 January 2012)

Magistad's article *Why Chinese Political Humor is Spreading Online* was published on the World.org site and her words imply that expression in contemporary China has given opportunities for satire within the blogosphere. Satirical comments posted by bloggers and their followers allow for the construction of a networked community, in which jokes, irony and critique work together to unravel and comment on issues in Chinese politics, society and culture.

Andrew Jacobs comments on a well-known blogger's sharp tongue, and his capacity to employ satire in his barbed comments. Of Han Han's blog, he writes:

Mr. Han's tongue is careful to deliver his barbs through sarcasm and humorous anecdotes that obliquely take on corruption, censorship and everyday injustice. (12 March 2010)

He then puts:

In one recent post about redevelopment projects that often end in violence and forced evictions, he [Han Han¹⁴¹] suggested that the government build public

has never offered an answer to what his 'guess' means, instead, he leaves his readers to answer the question, according to their own understanding. But generally his words imply that nothing he writes on his blog is serious (politics), they are just jokes.

¹⁴¹The original post is Han Han's *Zhexie Gou Zhen Mafan* (These Dogs Are Truly Troublesome), and is available at: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4701280b0100g03k.html.

housing in the form of prisons. The benefits would be twofold, he [Han Han] explained: Tenants could make no claim on the apartments and those who make a fuss could simply be locked up in their homes. (12 March 2010)

Jacobs's example shows how dissent is voiced by way of satire on Han Han's blog. By using technical skills – sharp tongues to blame the redevelopment projects (“end in violence and forced evictions”) with negative metaphors (“build public housing in the form of prisons”), for instance, Han Han has created incentives and opportunities for his good joke. His aim is further criticism of the Chinese government and its real estate policies.

Both Magistad and Jacobs present a model in which political communication created by satirical expressions has extended its discussion and interaction boundaries beyond China's Internet-based public space such as the news forums (e.g., <http://bbs.163.com/> and <http://www.tianya.cn/bbs/>) and blog sites (e.g., <http://blog.sina.com.cn/> and <http://blog.sohu.com/>) being used for discourse platforms. Magistad claims that satire provides an additional channel for political criticism, while Jacobs highlights the fact that satire provides an alternative to conventional forms of public criticism.

Satire for political expression has also been widely discussed in the academic realm. Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang (2008) illustrate diverse forms of satire in the Chinese blogosphere, including implicit criticism (i.e., *Egao*) and explicit but guarded criticism to evaluate the degree of freedom speech. They argue that satire performs as either implicit or guarded, they sophisticatedly form the forms of political expression, especially in its critiques of the regime. Yu Haiqing's research focuses on journalists-blogging in China. She suggests that j-bloggers not only take the role of gate-watcher and gate-poker, but also as gate-mocker (2011), and have produced a series of contests with the mainstream ideology.

However, both scholars and media commentators realize that satire in terms of humour; mocking or jokes are not simply technical skills. Instead, they are closely intertwined with political reality (control and censorship) in China.

An example comes from Liu Dongdong, a journalist in China. By using a Chinese rock song but changing its original lyrics, Liu created a satirical song to attack a governmental ‘face project’¹⁴² – China’s high-speed train development (Magistad, 10 January 2010¹⁴³). Liu’s lyrics pointed to China’s 2011 severe train incident in Wenzhou¹⁴⁴, and implied that the government was responsible for the train’s security threat, the cover-up of information, and the manner in which this train crash was handled by officials and by the State-controlled press.

People of July got on the train; this was his first time seeing Tiananmen... People of July got on the train; he studies journalism at the university... People of July got on the train; he just paid his taxes... People of July got on the train; he brings a full-box of instant noodles.

The sunlight of July is so bright. Hundreds of people are gone without a trace...

The excavator is coming. People’s hands are chopped off. People’s heads are torn in half. My people are as soft as mud.

The media reaches out its hands; they gently pat us once again. The People’s Daily pats us the nicest.

We people have to thank the Party. (Liu Dongdong cited in Magistad, 10 January 2010)

The song’s effective creation of a double¹⁴⁵ meaning meant that it successfully avoided censorship and was widely sung, thus allowing for a degree of critical

¹⁴² A face project can also be called as image project, or administration project. It implies Chinese officials who are likely to build the so-called higher-grade projects to make a good impression or show their achievements, though, without thinking about people’s needs and public interests.

¹⁴³ The song is renamed as *Qiyue de Renmin* (People of July). The live performance can be found at: <http://www.theworld.org/2012/01/why-chinese-political-humor-is-spreading-online/>.

¹⁴⁴ The Wenzhou train collision took place on 23 July 2011. 39 people died and nearly 200 people were injured.

¹⁴⁵ Please see p.163, where I quote Steinmüller’s words – to say something but to mean it the opposite way. Here, ‘double’ means that the song has its dual meanings. One of the meanings should be understood in its opposite way. For instance, ‘My people are as soft as mud’ mentioned those innocent people who died in the accident are weak, pity and miserable. ‘People’s Daily pats us the nicest’ implied that People’s Daily, a State-owned newspaper, didn’t provide a trustworthy report on the accident to the public, and ‘We people have to

discussion online. As Hu Yong, an Internet expert and associate professor at Peking University comments:

Censorship warps us in many ways, but it is also the mother of creativity... It forces people to invent indirect ways to get their meaning across, and humor works as a natural form of encryption. (Hu Yong cited in Larmer, 26 October 2011)

By these accounts, satirical messages seem to have the effect of opening up critical channels of communication when issues come into play that actually matter to, and interest, Chinese netizens. This is based on Gregor Benton's viewpoints:

...the more cynical and far-sighted among them know that political jokes and the other small freedoms that irritate some zealots are a useful means of dissipating tensions and of keeping people happy...To permit the jokes against the state is...a clever insurance against more serious challenges to the system. (1988, p.41)

Satire, in its various forms, along with its 'safety measures' (e.g., tolerance/regulation of free speech, allowance for/suppression of free speech, within not beyond the limitations of free speech) in political criticism has resulted in a popularity ensuring that satire is constantly practiced within the blogosphere. However, I argue, it is not used to challenge to the regime, but to play with the censorship system in China.

I will discuss the viewpoints within two sides. First off, as I have noticed that studies/discussions on satire have emphasized the role (criticism, challenge) and the form (expression) rather than the culture and the transformation of a discourse of power for individuals. In other words, satire, either used for expression or criticism, needs to be augmented by insights from cultural studies. In this chapter I focus on

blogging that utilizes this cultural form and seek to better understand how it operates.

Besides a sharp tongue, a negative metaphor and humorous creativity used to shape good jokes, I also treat satire as an attitude of a blogger's indirect critique and denial, to borrow from Hans Steinmüller (2011, p. 25), "to say... something, and to mean something else, and possibly the opposite", as can be seen in Wang Xiaofeng's *Buxu Lianxiang* (No Guess) in the following paragraphs. While I argue that; the growth of satirical bloggers has mobilized support in practicing political expressions, it remains the case that this expression is capped within what is seen as acceptable limits under State authoritarianism. In other words, the implicit or coded meaning selected by bloggers for their satirizing is not used to seek political changes, nor is it their intent to explicitly attack or undermine the existing political system. It is indeed, though, used (through criticizing a specific ministry or department) to avoid political risks.

The setup of this chapter is as follows. I will firstly outline my theoretical framework, which makes a comparison between the Western perspectives of satire and the Chinese one. Considered in terms of how it functions in the hands of political commentators, and in terms of how it is distributed among different media forms, it can be said that satire has moved from its Western "aggressive origins" (Rawson, 1984, p. v) – both the concern to 'insult' and the power to 'kill', become a form of entertainment in contemporary China. In this chapter, the entertainment is embedded in two styles: spoof and wordplay. The latter appears to be more relevant to irony, sarcasm and pun.

Secondly, I will provide a short overview of satirical blogging in China. I argue that the increasing number of sites on the web have built up a deepening ICT network, and have offered diverse spheres for satirical bloggers. Satirical blogging contains various forms (e.g., sharp tongues, the use of cartoons and digital technology), the aim, apart from the expression, is basically to make fun of Chinese authority.

Thirdly, I will explore Wang Xiaofeng's *Buxu Lianxiang* (No Guess) as a prime example of a Chinese satirical blog. Working through this example, I will argue that Wang's satirical expression operates as a critique of social and cultural issues and illustrates the development of a form of political communication in China. In his work, I will argue, notions of a 'harmonized' society, structured by an established and supported ideology, are subverted through a series of ironies and disrespects of the establishment. The irony is in connection with Wang's satirical tones, and is defined as comic criticism. And the disrespect identifies a particular attitude with regards to Wang's hooligan-based satires (dirty words, homonymic mockery and spoof, etc.). Brief details of Wang's hooligan expression and its political meanings are appended in the latter part of this chapter. Through detailed analyses of these characters, the degree of political communication will be further explored. In other words, satire, offered by Wang Xiaofeng, is proven as an alternative approach for freer expression, but is connected with his passive attitude that only tends to play with rather than breakdown established ideologies. In short, Wang is not willing to build something that is politically new.

2 Satire, Its History and Its Political Function in China

The term satire can be defined as "the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues" (see Oxford Dictionaries¹⁴⁶). This definition covers a wide range of historical functions and transformations that connect satire with 'humour', 'critique' and 'politics'. For instance, when satire is used in literature in eighteenth century Europe, it is commonly classified as Juvenalian¹⁴⁷ (e.g., William Gifford, Charles Churchill) and Horatian¹⁴⁸ (e.g., William Combe, Christopher Anstey).

¹⁴⁶ The explanation of the term can be found at: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/satire?q=satire>.

¹⁴⁷ Juvenalian satire follows the tradition of Decimus Iunius Juvenalis, known as Juvenal, who wrote in the last first and early second century.

¹⁴⁸ Horatian satire follows the tradition of Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65- 8 B. C.), known as Horace, the leading

Authors of Horatian satires are likely to laugh at errors and fool people in their speech (Duff et al, 1964, p. 3; Dyer, 1997, p. 57). However, their laughs and fools, as Maria Plaza argues, are serious ironies they tend to claim in their writings.

Trusting the speaker in ... satires – the satiric persona – many critics have taken ... statements at face value and, as a consequence, see humour as a separable, ‘entertaining’ ingredient, which the reader would have to see through in order to grasp the serious kernel of the satire. (Plaza, 2006, p.1)

If we look at the traditional dichotomy of tragedy versus comedy, Juvenalian satire may be classified as tragedy and Horatian may be defined as comedy (Dyer, 1997; Knight, 2004). The two forms of satire contain humorous material that makes people laugh. The Juvenalian satire is a type of “true satire”, borrowing from Dyer’s term (1997, p. 57), is associated with ridicule and pessimism. Comparatively, the Horatian satire aims at “milder attack” (Dyer, 1997, p. 57), with playful critique.

But sometimes satire is indirect, loosely named as Menippean satire (Fletcher, 1987). Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) is an example. The story highlights a mode of exaggeration, as Claude Rawson introduces:

William Anderson’s interesting exploration of biblical resonances in *Gulliver’s Travels* is an exception, whose argument, however, seems flawed by an insufficient recognition that such collective aggressions, whether or not they are hedged by humorous undercutting or by angry hyperbole, are common in Swift’s writing. (1984, p. vii)

In a sense, satire, either implicit or explicit, is recognized by its ironic attitude. A well-known example of irony is from Shakespeare’s satiric drama *Julius Caesar* (1599), when Mark Anthony says “Brutus is an honorable man”, he actually means

the opposite. Such irony is more likely to be a verbal irony, normally expressed by the satirists' awareness of the lack of "human desires" (Fletcher, 1987, p. 2) in conflict with a series of "pretence, hypocrisy and artificiality" (Feinberg, 1967, p. 43) in reality. The method of irony rests on the aspect of 'wit', putting down others by ridiculing their essential attributes (Davis, 1993; Olson, 2001).

In addition to irony, satire can also be achieved through the use of sarcasm. It requires satire, to borrow from Charles Knight's words (2004, p. 201), "able to...offend", or radical (Dyer, 1997).

So far as satire appeared under different definitions in literary history in the West, it is in large part a mixture of irony and multi-voiced presentation. The latter, considers satire as "a discursive practice" (Simpson, 2003, p.8), performing discourse as an essential context for bringing about broad implications, especially for promoting the changing landscape of politics.

In the modern era satire continues to have a political role in contemporary Western media productions. Cartoons (i.e., *The Simpsons*, Ellis, 2008), TV shows (e.g., *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report*, Holbert et al, 2011; *Have I Got News for You*, see Goncalves, 12 September 2011) and comedies, all offer rich satirical potential. For instance, the UK's satirical magazine *The Spectator* is popular for its news reporting. It uses various tones to build a sense of humour or "entertainment" for telling stories. *The Spectator* aims at seeking changes in society (see Lubeck, 28 June 2011).

Particularly, each form possesses a variety of political subjects: increasingly turns to satire as a vehicle for political information, and is recognized as having some power. Stephen Wagg (1998, p.256) notes that the American liberal comedians'

satirizing of political leaders has “challenged the political and cultural constraints” of the mainstream news media.

The jokes the... comedians cracked therefore, simultaneously, raised questions outside of their immediate subject matter. Thus, for example, Bruce and Barr’s reference to the assassination of President Kennedy, besides being a comment on politics or class or the social experience of women or whatever, is also an assertion of the right to freedom of speech. (Wagg, 1998, p. 260)

British satirist Ian Hislop applies satire to both the magazine (*Private Eye*) and the comic programme (*Have I Got the News for You*), and points out that satire has brought about radical debates “to challenge the control of the elite” (Goncalves, 12 September 2011).

Thus, in media and its various ironies we also see a discursive satire, practiced by journalists, which they use to offer their narratives, attack their targets, and desire to fulfill social changes. For example, take columns in *Private Eye*, the only serious “satirical format” (see Simpson, 2003, p. 11) in the UK. We can see:

Regular columns developed, and today include “Street of Shame” on the excesses of British journalists, “Rotten Boroughs” targeting local council corruption and “Pseuds Corner” poking fun at pompous prose and corporate jargon. (Collect-White, 20 October 2011)

Titles and topics in brief illustrate a series of targets for satire (i.e., governor/corruption). In addition to the target, ‘serious’ is the key clue running through the magazine, providing viewers with the external cues or political sources.

Because of its satirical nature: sharp sarcasm, irony and ridicule, the politics of style in the West means as well, either to identify themes or to suggest values, satire

is not just the preservation of joke, humour and comedy, but is also used for a variety of criticism, and further, for a deep serious thinking about human society.

Similar to the West, China also has a long history of satire. Back in the mid eighteenth century, Wu Jingzi's ironic *Rulin Waishi* (The Unofficial History of Scholars¹⁴⁹) criticized a highly arbitrary examination system that rewarded candidates (e.g., Fan Jin, Ma Chunshang) who are infatuated with exams and a desire for titles (Shang, 2003; Slupski, 1989). Wu's followers (e.g., Li Boyuan¹⁵⁰ – *Guanchang Xianxingji* (Revelation of Officialdom), Wu Jianren¹⁵¹ – *Ershinian Mudu zhi Guaixianzhuang* (Strange Events of the Last Twenty Years), Liu E¹⁵² – *Laocan Youji* (Mr. Decadent) and Zen Pu¹⁵³ – *Niehaihua* (A Flower in the Sea of Sins), see Dong Bei, 2008, Epstein, 2005, p. 179, Paul Ropp, 2009), their satire were directed towards a series of 'reputations' deeply rooted in the Confucian-based ritual ideology such as "career, fame, wealth and rank" (Timothy, 2003, p.161), and their works became early satirical novels in Chinese history.

During the New Culture Movement¹⁵⁴ period (1917-1923), Lu Xun (1881-1936) appeared as a remarkable representative of satirists. Lu's realist fiction and topical essays exposed the ills, impotence, and inhumanity of an old Chinese society. Stories such as *Kuangren Riji* (Diary of a Madman, 1918), *Ah Q Zhengzhuan* (The True Story of Ah Q, 1921-1922), and *Na Han* (Call to Arms, 1923) are important as they operated as "a mirror of Chinese people's defective selves and the nation they constituted" (Chow, 2007, p. 423). Thus, the purpose of satire in Lu Xun's writing is to seek "a way to open up a new space not only for reshaping, retrieving the past but also, more critically, for engaging the present" (Tang, 1992, p. 1232).

¹⁴⁹ The author Wu Jingzi (1701-1754) is a late Qing satirical scholar who wrote about social criticism and cultural transformation during 18th century China.

¹⁵⁰ Li Boyuan (1867-1907).

¹⁵¹ Wu Jianren (1866-1910)

¹⁵² Liu E (1857-1909).

¹⁵³ Zeng Pu (1872-1935).

¹⁵⁴ The New Culture Movement is a sign of Chinese literature replaced by vernacular in all areas. Major reformers are Lu Xun, Hu Shi (1891-1962), and Chen Duxiu (1880-1942).

The Chinese literary satire of pre-modern and early modern times is closer to the Juvenalian tradition in the West. Though it poked fun at institutions or individuals, its tones were dark, and used metaphors as a style – Wu Jingzi’s satire being a case in point. He began with ritual ideology as a symbol of the resistance to the Qing Dynasty officials. Lu Xun’s satire showed sarcasm. He drew largely on the level of individual experience, creating characters that appeared ridiculous at face value yet implicating them as specific national issues untouched by other Chinese intellectuals. Embodied in the satirical spirit of the two writers is an indication of an attitude of the ‘resistance’ to both the ideology and the regime. They have become legendary among Chinese intellectuals.

Following the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (1921), *Manhua* (cartoons) were used as an alternative medium for distributing satirical material. During the first Civil Revolution period (1922-1927), the Party founded its first newspaper *Rexue Ribao* (Ardent Daily, 1925¹⁵⁵). Cartoons were regularly used to create an anti-imperialist sentiment. Meanwhile, *Manhua* (cartoon) was also used to “become a strong voice to support the Soviet [Union]” (Tian Xiurong and Chen Yan, 21 July 2010) during the Second Civil Revolution period (1927-1935). During this period, the first pictorial, *Hongxing Huabao* (The Red Star Pictorial, 1932) was founded. Later, its satirical form was used to ridicule anyone believed to be harmful to ‘the people’, ‘harm’ being guided and defined in Party by Mao’s 1942 “Mass Line” talks during the Yan’an Rectification Movement (1942-1944¹⁵⁶).

Satirical cartoons during China’s revolutionary times illustrate a connection between satire and ideology. They function less metaphorically than the Wu Jingzi and Lu Xun literature and instead become a major strategy for political propaganda, to borrow from Fletcher’s view (1987, p. 3), “between [the] dialogical and monological”.

¹⁵⁵ The *Ardent Daily* was the first Chinese Communist Party newspaper. It was founded in June 1925. The chief editor was Qu Qiubai.

¹⁵⁶ In 1942 (during Sino-Japanese War period, 193-1945), Mao Zedong gave a series of lectures called *Zai Yan’an Wenyi Zuotanhui shang de Jianghua* (The Yan’an Talks on Literature and Art). The talks thus became the national guideline for culture studies after the establishment of People’s Republic of China.

Satire being deployed as propaganda becomes a recurring trend in 20th century China, constituting both restraint and control in Chinese history. In the 1960s (Mao's era before the Cultural Revolution –1949-1966), China had several controversial works such as *Hairui Baguan* (The Dismissal of Hai Rui¹⁵⁷, written by Wu Han), *Zhu YuanzhangZhuan* (The Biography of Zhu Yuanzhang¹⁵⁸, written by Wu Han) and *Liu Zhidan*¹⁵⁹ (written by Li Jiantong). These writings had the effect of making the Party leaders feel ridiculed. Thus, they were defined as *Jiegu Majin* (using the past to satirize the present), and *FandangFanshehuizhuyi* (oppose the Party and socialism, see *People's Daily*, 1966).

During Mao's most powerful years, satire based on cartoons gave way to *Dazibao* (big-character posters) (Leijonhufvud, 1990, Zhang Zhenguo, 2006), reaching its zenith during the Cultural Revolution era (1966-1976).

The big-character posters were wall-posted handwriting papers. From the end of the 1950s to the early 1980s, it was one of the popular ways for Chinese people to express their opinions... but mostly, it was taken as a political tool, closely connecting with the class struggle and political violence in China's Cultural Revolution period. (Zhang Zhenguo, 12 May 2006)

¹⁵⁷ Hai Rui (1514-1587) is a Ming dynasty official in China.

¹⁵⁸ Zhu Yuanzhang (1368-1398) is the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty in China.

¹⁵⁹ Liu Zhidan is an important leader in Shanxi before the liberation.



Photo of 6.1. An example of *Dazibao* (big-character poster¹⁶⁰)

Dazibao was aimed at showing support for Mao's leadership and China's socialist project, which included opposing bourgeois ideology. Officials or intellectuals who did not follow Mao's guideline would immediately become the object of attack. This included the former politician and 'leader' Deng Xiaoping, who was used as a satirical target in big-character posters which accused him of "taking the capitalist road" (Liu Su, 12 May 2006¹⁶¹) at that moment.

The goal of the big-character posters was to "impose socialist orthodoxy and rid China of capitalist road". The youth particularly were encouraged by Mao to fight against *Zouzipai* (capitalist-roaders) in every sphere of Chinese society (Liu Su, 12 May 2006).

¹⁶⁰ More *Dazibao* can be found at: https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=%E4%B8%B0%E5%AD%90%E6%81%BA%E6%BC%AB%E7%94%B+%E8%BD%B0%E7%82%B8&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ei=s8bUpjmA4SpQXJsoGACQ&ved=0CAcQ_AUoAQ&biw=994&bih=589#q=%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%97%E6%8A%A5&tbm=isch&facrc=_&imgdii=_&imgrc=QI-acEv6zAhe3M%253A%3B1TLuDCV_SUtWCM%3Bhttp%253A%252F%252Fwww.stnn.cc%252Fglobal%252Fwg%252Fwg7%252FW020060512387486489459.jpg%3Bhttp%253A%252F%252Fwww.stnn.cc%252Fglobal%252Fwg%252Fwg7%252FW020060512_211452.html%3B400%3B307 [Accessed 21 September 2011].

¹⁶¹ See Singtaonet.com (12 May 2006) *Mao Xie Dazibao Pipan Liudeng* (Mao Wrote *Dazibao* to Criticize Liu and Deng), edited by Liu Su [online]. It can be found at http://www.stnn.cc:82/global/wg/wg2/t20060512_211400.html [accessed 21 September 2011].

Satirical works produced after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1976) were cartoons, and popular *Xiangsheng* (stand-up comedy), with the Gang of Four as an object of attack, exposing the Gang's crimes (Link, 2000). Though the object of attack had changed, the usage of satire in following the Party line remained the same.

Satire within Mao's governance can be loosely regarded as one of the formations of a discursive practice; however, this discursive formation is aimed at a political fight. It is politically aggressive, usually employing, to borrow from Fletch's words (1984, p. 8), "the use... of invective and mockery". Its critical character remains, though; this critique is not used for individual expression, rather, it must be guided by "the correct political line", to borrow from He Zhou's words (2009, p. 48) for achieving a series of political targets in different times.

While the Western perspective of political satire relies on its diverse political dimensions flexibly giving rise to the ways people judge values and post comments in matters of governance (Ibemema, 2001, p.18), the use of political satire and the masking of social critiques in China seem to be far from the Western styles. Firstly, unlike a Western-based media system (a free media, see Sparks, 1998, p. 16), the Chinese media are still severely controlled by the State, and therefore are not able to act as an essential platform for organizing political debates. Secondly, unlike the Western nations, Chinese society is based on the regime where political rights¹⁶² (e.g., regular elections, see Sparks, 1998, p.16; freedom of assembly, see Sparks, 1998, p.27) are absent among the public, as such, as Dahl argues,

Unless opposition can form opinion, publicise that opinion and coalesce its supporters into political parties, then it is difficult to see how even a minimal definition of democracy can be sustained. (Dahl 1991, p.10, cited in Sparks, 1998, p.27)

¹⁶² China (along with other authoritarian regimes such as the Soviets, Vietnam) have provided social and economic rights (e.g., the right to education, the right to healthcare, the right to work) but resisted political rights (e.g., the right to free speech, the right to vote) to their citizens.

However, since the advent of the reform policies, China has been gradually giving expression to individuals. Satire has been increasingly created in many places with forms such as *Liumang* (hooligan) literature, *Wenhua Shan* (cultural shirts), and the later on online *E Gao* (spoof), all of which are related to express ‘opposition’ to form opinions, and have brought about changes in political communication in China. For the benefit of the reader I will briefly outline and define these three forms of contemporary Chinese satire.

2.1 Hooligan Literature

The term hooligan in Chinese context translates as either *Pizi* or *Liumang*, as Liu Dongchao explains:

Liumang in Chinese directs to those goofs around, doing evil and searching for trouble. The hooligan culture, to some extent, represents a marginal culture, measured by anti- rules and regulations, destroys legality, normality and reasonability, and ‘harms’ to official language. (February 2002)

The beginnings of a contemporary hooligan literature can be marked by the publication of Wang Shuo’s¹⁶³ writing in the late 1980s. Wang Shuo represented a new generation who spent their childhood “in [the] both chaotic and mendacious” Cultural Revolution era only to then grow up in “the consumer culture of the Reform age with few of the ideological, intellectual or emotional qualms experienced by older generations” (Barme, 1990, p. 24-25).

Many of Wang Shuo’s works (e.g. *Wan Zhu* (The Operator), 1988, *Yidian Zhengjing Meiyou* (An Attitude), 1989, and *Qianwan Bie Ba Wo Dangren* (No-

¹⁶³ For more information about Wang Shuo’s novel and his writings please see <http://www.eywedu.com/Wangshuo/index.htm>.

man's Land), 1989) used 'play' as core feature and were regarded as an inversion of official language, as Wang Shuo wrote in his *Yidian Zhengjing Meiyou* (An Attitude):

'I'm in favour of literature serving the workers, peasants and soldiers'. The audience hisses.

'That's to say I'm in favour of fooling around with literature for the workers, peasants and soldiers'. Peals of laughter mixed with people whistling. (Wang Shuo cited in Barme, 1990, p. 38¹⁶⁴)

Here, Wang Shuo's 'in favour of literature' was actually meant to 'fool with literature'. This playful attitude, both appeared in the speaker and the audience, to borrow from Yao Yusheng's views (2004, p. 435), enabled Wang Shuo's work to "defy all the authorities, to challenge and subvert the dominant discourse", and, to "have fun".

2.2 Cultural Shirts

Wenhua Shan (cultural shirts) appeared in Beijing in the early 1990s. The designer Kong Yongqian is arguably the most famous producer at that moment. Kong's *Wenhua Shan* were designed with his handwritings, dressed in jeans and T-shirts, and sold in Beijing's street and clothing stalls. It had three features. The first was Kong's frequent usage of homophones. In one of Kong's designs, the term *Kong Long* (dinosaur) was written in its homophonous form *Kong Long*. The former is a surname of the Confucian clan (*Kong*), who is traditionally seen as the father of the philosophical school of Confucianism. The latter refers to Dragon (*Long*), symbolizing powers, along with strength and luck in Chinese culture. For instance, the Chinese proverb *Wangzi Chenglong*, meaning 'hoping one's son will become a dragon', is used to make a wish for one's children to become excellent or

¹⁶⁴ The original work *An Attitude* was published on *Zhongguo Zuoja* (China Writers).

outstanding persons. Here the *Kong Long* T-shirt implied a plural resistance: to get rid of Confucianism on one side, and to refuse to be a dragon on the other.



Photo of 6.2. An example of Kong Yongqian's design – *Daodi shi Shangban Haishi Liantaner?* (To work or not to work? designed by Kong Long¹⁶⁵)

The second feature was Kong's creative quotation of slogans. For instance, Kong Yongqian designed a T-shirt, copying words from *Lei Feng's*¹⁶⁶ *Diary*, "*Geming Zhanshi Shi Kuai Zhuan, Nali Xuyao Naliban*" (A revolutionary soldier is a stone, wherever he is needed, he will get there) (see Zhao Zilong, 28 December 2011). The sentence serves to install the belief that a soldier of China's army should be an "absolute sacrifice of the individual in favor of an infallible Party and Chairman" (Sheehan, 16 March 2013). The soldiers' unconditional 'obedience' implied the success of Chinese leaders' strong control (over the army, ideology and the propaganda system and the public), and is opposed/rejected by Kong Youngqian.

The third feature was Kong's clever imitation of other satirists' words. For instance, Lu Xu's *Zhi Cha Yiwei* (one taste closer), used as a title when Kong Yongqian posted a variety of names of Chinese medicine on his T-shirt. The design aimed at poking fun at the Chinese market, flooded with fake and poor-quality medications.

¹⁶⁵ The picture can be found at: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_7d1993290100y1gt.html [14 October 2012].

¹⁶⁶ Lei Feng was a soldier of the People's Liberation Army in China. He was characterized as the most selflessness person in Communist Party by Mao Zedong.

Kong's satire actually directed to the issues, regularly denied or ignored by the government since they launched economic reforms.

Satire in hooligan literature and Cultural Shirts shares more comic elements than tragic ones. Satire in hooligan literature uses the word 'play' as a starting point, along with a deprecating tone. Satire in cultural shirts, however, takes a similar role to the Western tradition of "quiet satire" (see Fletch, 1987, p. 15). For instance, both Wang Shuo (i.e., in favour of literature serving the workers, peasants and soldiers) and Kong Yongqian (i.e., *Geming Zhanshi*) used official slogans/terms, turning the authority and its State ideologies (when they were applied to literature and army, for instance) into figures of satire, to implicitly show a strong attitude of resistance to the establishment. They also claimed a sense of consciousness, as 1930's literature had done, that self-expression become a need, and should rise to unprecedented forces in political culture in China.

The previous ways of using satire in both hooligan literature (i.e., the use of 'play') and cultural shirts (i.e., homonymic mockery) have now migrated to the Internet. With an additional form of online satire – online spoof, these categories depict a series of possibilities tied to the practice of self-expression.

2.3 E Gao

'E Gao' or online spoof originates from the online video *Yige Mantou Yinfa de Xuean* (The Bloody Case over a Steamed Bun¹⁶⁷). The video was made by an ordinary netizen Hu Ge in 2006, and was produced to tease Chen Kaige's¹⁶⁸ film *Wuji* (The Promise). In this video, Hu kept the name (characters) and the sequence of Chen's movie, though exchanging Chen's love story to be his criminal one. As Yu Haiqing introduces:

¹⁶⁷ The original video can be found at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zw31CLGQeYc>.

¹⁶⁸ Chen Kaige is a well-known Chinese film director, and is one of the leading figures of the fifth generation of Chinese cinema.

The 20-minute long DV borrows video footage from the Promise but infuses it into the format of ‘China Legal Report’, a legal education programme by China Central Television (CCTV). It tells a story about the police investigating a murder case, using the format, style and language of the CCTV legal program. Even the insertion of advertisements in the program copies that of ‘China Legal Report’. (2007, p. 426)

Hu’s video was labeled as *E Gao* (spoof), an exaggerated form of satire which implicates, to borrow from Loonard Feinberg, “a playfully critical distortion of the familiar” (Feinberg, 1967, p. 19), as Gong Haomin and Yang Xin suggest:

Egao emerged as a technology-enabled cultural intervention at a particular social – historical juncture in contemporary China. As an individualized comic parody, it plays with authority, deconstructs orthodox seriousness, and offers comic criticism as well as comic relief. It provides imagined empowerment for the digital generation, exploring an alternative space for individual expression. (2010, p. 16)

By these accounts, online satire, in its self-expression in China, has witnessed the development, to borrow from Elizabeth Perry’s terms (2007, p. 10), from a previous “hidden transcript” of “unobtrusive dissent” from the official voice, towards a current enjoyment of offering opinions and debates on an individual-based level, as Chinese scholars Xu Congqing and Ruan Liyu argue:

Chinese society has long been full of hidden communication, usually whispered in private; however, it is no longer transmitted secretly behind the backs of the powerful, but publicly communicated in the networked space. (2009, p.97)

As a result, I argue that online satire has developed a new kind of hooliganism. This new hooliganism maintains a sense of irony, with comic criticism, and contributes to an attitude of satirists’ disrespect. This disrespect is driven by a desire on the part

of the satirists to both resist and deny established ideologies, and to seek an individual sense of freedom of expression.

For those who enjoy making fun of society, culture and politics, the Chinese blogosphere has served to develop a freer space for self-expression. This individualistic form, I argue, represents a certain awareness of netizens taking a step towards fighting for basic rights (speech, expression, etc.) as a standpoint, and should be realistically seen as a moment, or a step in the process, in which the concept of ‘citizenship’ can be said to begin to emerge in China.

The blogosphere has fostered a genre of bloggers who have become “a new wave of columnists”, to borrow from Mark Poster’s words (2001, p.4). However, in comparison with the Western attitude of use of the satire, where it is often deployed as “an instrument of aggression” (Rawson, 1984, p. v), the Chinese form of online satire can be considered as an instrument of entertainment (Chen Yunping, 2007; Wang Yifei, 2007), a kind of continuity with the eighteenth century literature (comic criticism), and radical sarcasm literature in 1930s as well as previous satires in hooligan literature and cultural shirts. As Chen Yunping explains:

The blog is a medium for entertainment...Blogs become public media and...provide us with a new space for public entertainment and a new era for sharing the entertainment... Blogs’ meeting people’s desire of self-exposure... challenge to traditions and the authority. (2007, p.7-8)

The entertainment factor, whether in forms of online *E Gao* and homonymic mockery, or satirical expressions, which I am going to analyze, diverts satire’s humorous nature, to make a point, by using vague and coded phrases, aimed at sarcasm or irony. And in doing so, enables it to escape from having to submit to certain political restraints. As a result, the label of ‘entertainment’ means that the satirical blog is impressive, appealing, and promoting changes. However, it is in

fact politically impotent in China. It plays or is playful about certain established ideologies, rather than directly undermining them.

3 Examples of Satirical Blogging in China

Satirical bloggers in China normally have their own blogs. They either appear on websites owned by media organizations (i.e., Xu Lai on ifeng.com: <http://blog.ifeng.com/1738385.html>), commercial websites (i.e., Han Han on Sina.com: <http://blog.sina.com.cn/twocold>), or independent blog servers (i.e., Wang Xiaofeng on Wordpress. org: <http://www.wangxiaofeng.net/>).

Alongside a diverse range of topics drawn from Chinese culture and society, Chinese satirical bloggers regularly discuss political subjects in their work, including reflections on government policy or commentary on political leaders. Typically, such discussions are carefully constructed so as not to invite close scrutiny and censorship from the State. Jasper Schlæge analyses why Han Han's satire is so popular in China, and argues that:

On the blog he [Han Han] debates many different things such as literature, movies, car racing, and the list continues. There is no topic too big or small to be discussed, but they have a thing in common namely that they somehow address social issues of China today... His language resembles spoken language, and often it is ripe with imagery such as when he likens government buildings to prostitutes because of their instantly recognisable style. This brings up another reason for its popularity: There is a strong element of criticism of the political system in his writing. (12 August 2011)

Another satirist Feng Xia (Crazy Crab) is known by his cartoon blog *Xie Nongchang* (Hexie Farm¹⁶⁹). In an interview with a Western journalist, Crazy Crab identifies his goal of blogging endeavours:

¹⁶⁹Hexie Farm's cartoon blog is available at: <http://hexiefarm.wordpress.com/>.

I started to draw *Hexie Farm* in late 2009. It's a series of political cartoons depicting a 'great, glorious and correct' era of 'harmony'... I know some activists and dissidents who clearly say that they are not against the government, but just want to seek justice or defend their property... To me, I'm drawing these cartoons just because I want to see how far I can go with my pen... (Feng Xia cited in Tom, 5 June 2012)

If Han Han's blogging work reflects those bloggers who use sharp tongues to directly poke fun at government policy, the example of Crazy Crab represents others who use cartoons to implicitly explore specific issues, and in doing so, test governmental action.

In addition to these two strategies, one vivid example of the satire is increasingly apparent in the Chinese blogosphere, and I'm going to spend the rest of this chapter exploring this form. Loosely defined, this form uses various digital technologies to air views that implicitly mock established ideologies. Wang Xiaofeng and his blogging on *Buxu Lianxiang* (No Guess) forms my key case in point.

4 Buxu Lianxiang and Its Satirical Style

The author of *Buxu Lianxiang* Wang Xiaofeng was born in 1967, when the Cultural Revolution was in its second year. He graduated from China University of Political Science and Law (Beijing) in 1990 and began his writing career working on music reviews for Chinese magazines while at university (1989). Since 1992, he has worked as a journalist for *Audio and Video World* (magazine, 1992), *Music Life* (newspaper, 1993), *Beijing Film and Music Publication* (1994), and *China on Broadway* (magazine, 1995-1997). In 2003, Wang Xiaofeng began working for *Lifeweek*¹⁷⁰, where he became a popular culture journalist in China.

¹⁷⁰*Sanlian Life Week* (<http://www.lifeweek.com.cn>) magazine is an influential Beijing-based weekly launched in

Wang Xiaofeng's first blog was started in September 2004, and lots of his posts were published on Ycool.com¹⁷¹. Wang named his first blog *Anmo Ru* (Massage Milk¹⁷²), where he shared the term *An Mo* (massage) with its homonymic word *Mo* (touch), and *Ru* (milk or cream) with *Ru* (you) in Chinese. To some extent, *Ru* (you) implicitly points to anybody or anything, celebrities, ordinary people and politicians, or news and policies, etc., when Wang feels entrust, he shows his disrespect, by playing with them in a pornographic way – 'Massage You' (touching you).

In May 2006, Wang left Ycool.com, and established his individual site www.wangxiaofeng.net by creating a new blog as *Buxu Lianxiang* (No Guess) on Wordpress.org. On his *No Guess*, Wang Xiaofeng names himself *DaiSangeBiao* (Wearing Three Watches). The '*SangeBiao*' (Three Watches) that Wang wears implicitly point to Jiang Zemin's political slogan *SangeDaibiao* (Three Represents¹⁷³). This homonym (watches – represents) again manifests Wang's disrespect – whatever they (their established ideologies) are, he doesn't really honour them. .

Wang's two blogs have made him one of the most popular bloggers in China, as David Cohen-Tanugi notes:

Wang Xiaofeng is a prolific writer whose daily blog entries occasionally add up to 8,000 words, and whose blog attracts more than 12,000 readers each day. (28 February 2007¹⁷⁴)

1995. The magazine is famous for its cultural articles, interviews with public figures (e.g. the column of *People in the News*) and well-known columnists. Readers are mainly higher educated intellectuals in China.

¹⁷¹Ycool Blog (<http://ycul.ycool.com/>) is a blog site and was launched in March 2004.

¹⁷² For more information about Wang's *Anmo Ru* (Massage Milk), please see <http://lydon.ycool.com/>.

¹⁷³ Three Represents: The Chinese Communist Party represents the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people.

¹⁷⁴ See *Where is China's Blogosphere Headed?* The article is written by David Cohen-Tanugi on 28th February 2007, Princeton.

Apart from his numerous posts, Wang is also celebrated for his satirical and playful blogging style.

A senior writer at Sanlian Lifeweek Magazine, one of China's best-selling magazines, Wang uses the better part of his blog to discuss cultural or social issues with no shortage of irony and humor. (see *Global Times*, 13 December 2009)

Time featured Wang as “the most respected blogger in China”, though, “precisely because he respects almost nothing” (see Lev Grossman, 16 December 2006).

As these comments point out, the use of irony and disrespect are key features of Wang's blog. These comments refer to the forms of satire which Wang Xiaofeng utilizes in order to transform his role from one of traditional media reporter towards that of a satirical blogger. But the question remains, how does Wang Xiaofeng perform satire in his work? In terms of critique on cultural or social issues, what department/whom does Wang Xiaofeng frequently disrespect? And does Wang Xiaofeng's satirical style associate his societal and cultural criticism on the *Buxu Lianxiang* (No Guess) with a specific political ideology or movement?

To answer these questions, or to provide detailed information on how much political influence the *No Guess* blog has in the Chinese blogosphere, both content analysis and discourse analysis will be used. According to David Hesmondhalgh:

[C]ontent analysis allows us to look across large numbers of texts. It is a quantitative method: that is, it involves counting and measuring quantities of items such as words, phrases or images. Qualitative methods, such as discourse..., by contrast tend to be based on interpretation, rather than on such measurement. (2009, p. 120)

Both approaches identified above by Hesmondhalgh have two functions in this part. In the first approach – searching representative samples, my aim is to find the angles/factors from which Wang Xiaofeng discusses, criticizes and satirizes events and issues. The search is framed by particular terms. Within the second approach – discourse analyses, my aim is to examine how Wang Xiaofeng's blogging content leads to a challenge to established ideologies. This analysis is framed by particular tones, and skills and forms that Wang has applied to *No Guess* blog.

The timeframe for the two analyses is a five-year period from 2006, when Wang Xiaofeng started blogging on *Buxu Lianxiang*¹⁷⁵(No Guess), to 2011. In this respect, this case study is unlike Muzi Mei's *Yiqingshu* and Lian Yue's *Lian Yue de Diba Dazhou*, both of which have been shown to impact on Chinese society at a particular time (2003 and 2007 respectively). *Buxu Lianxiang*, however, has provided a much larger data set for analysis as it is one of the most read blogs through all these years. It has permeated into Chinese society more deeply than the other two blogs.

5 Content Analyses: Frequently Used Terms in *Buxu Lianxiang*

On his *No Guess* (2771 posts in total), Wang organizes his posts into nine discrete categories: *T Xu* (T-Shirt), *Aige Huohai* (One by One Tease), *Wei Fenlei* (No Classification), *Za Tan* (By Talk), *Waili Xieshuo* (Absurd Heresies and Fallacies), *Yanzhe Liaowangta* (All Along the Watchtower), *Shuo Shu* (Introduction to Books), *Xianche* (Gossip) and *Yinyue Shijian* (Music Time) (See Table 6.1).

¹⁷⁵ Wang Xiaofeng's blog *Buxu Lianxiang* (No Guess) is available at www.wangxiaofeng.net/http://wangxiaofeng.blog.caixin.com/.

Table 6.1 Content of Nine Columns on Wang Xiaofeng's *No Guess* Blog

Category	Column
<i>T Xu</i> (T-Shirt)	Wang is running a T-Shirt business in his blog site. The column is used to collect patterns about the <i>No Guess</i> , from netizens who participate in the design.
<i>Aige Huohai</i> (One by One Tease)	This column records the fun moments when Wang Xiaofeng is with his friends after work. In other words, it is about how Wang makes fun with his friends.
<i>Wei Fenlei</i> (No Classification)	This column records Wang's personal journey, basically writes in prose.
<i>Za Tan</i> (By Talk)	Wang Xiaofeng uses this column to write his dissents, mainly pokes fun at mainstream news.
<i>Waili Xieshuo</i> (Absurdities and Fallacies)	The column is used to offer definitions or explanations on certain phenomenon, events and policies in China.
<i>Yanzhe Liaowangta</i> (All Along the Watchtower)	A fiction. Written from March 2010 to May 2010. Key words include idealism, friendship, revolution, death, desperation and growth.
<i>Shuo Shu</i> (Introduction to Books)	This column is used to introduce new books to Wang's readers.
<i>Xianche</i> (Gossip)	The column is about all kinds of casual talks. Topics include government, society, entertainment, sports, etc.
<i>Yinyue Shijian</i> (Music Time)	This column is used to introduce music, music festivals and popular band in the West.

Among these columns, Wang Xiaofeng uses *T-Shirt* (55 posts), *One by One Tease* (194 posts), *No Classification* (307 posts), *All Along the Watchtower* (58) and *Music Time* (47 posts) to talk about business and friends, publish essays and fiction, and introduce film and music to his readers respectively. Satire (the form of online *E Gao*, homonymic mockery with comic criticism or radical sarcasm, and disrespect attitude) is more or less inserted in Wang's *Absurdities and Fallacies* (24), *Introduction to Books* (81), *Gossip* (914) and *By Talk* (1091, 2110 posts in total). The latter two

columns are strongly connected with Wang Xiaofeng's satirical expression. Thus, my analysis will focus on the four columns: *Shuo Shu* (Introduction to Books), *Waili Xieshuo* (Absurdities and Fallacies), *Xianche* (Gossip) and *Za Tan* (By Talk).

To find out what terms Wang Xiaofeng is likely to mention on his blog, I take two steps. I first take all his blog posts of the four columns (2110 posts: *Absurd Heresies and Fallacies*, *Introduction to Books*, *Gossip* and *By Talk*). This is to get a general sense of what Wang is writing about on *No Guess*. In order to collect a more specific data for frequently used terms, I then list three satirized targets: in terms of specific actions, phenomenon or events, in terms of specific people (e.g., celebrities, netizens) and, in terms of specific government-based department. This is to find out what types of objects that Wang aims to satire. 189 posts are selected (See the appendix4).

Among the 189 posts I find that, from 2006 to 2011, Wang Xiaofeng retains his interest in focusing his satire on three targets: Government departments (68 posts in total), People (e.g., governors, celebrities, netizens, 41 in total) and Events (84 posts in total). The three targets also construct three significant segments that Wang has much to offer: in terms of common words such as *Guo* (country) and *Zhongguoren* (people of China), in terms of proper names such as *Chunwan* (the Spring Festival Gala), CCTV (China Central Television), *Wenhuabu* (The Ministry of Culture), *Xinwen* (news/journalism), *Jiaoyu* (education), *Zuqiu* (football), *Aoyun* (Olympics) and *Falv* (Law), and in terms of Chinese political terms such as *Hexie* (harmony), *Minganci* (sensitive words), *Gongzhen* (justice), *Pingdeng* (equality) and *Yanlun Ziyou* (freedom of expression). All of which are in relation to public authorities (e.g., CCTV, Ministry of Culture, Sina.com.cn, and Law) and dominant ideologies (e.g., *Sange Daibiao*, *Gaokao*, harmony, Olympics and patriot).

Among the 189 posts, almost every post uses the term *Guo* (country) or *Ren* (people). They become the most frequently used terms on *No Guess*. Culture (38) and News (31)/CCTV (26) become the most frequently used proper names (95

posts in total), and Sensitive Words (31), Harmony (25) and Freedom (25) are the frequently used political terms (81 posts in total, see Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 Frequently Used Terms on *No Guess*

Target► ▼Terms	Government departments/ Mainstream media	Officers, celebrities and netizens	Social Issues	Total
Common words:				
Country/People	68	41	80	189
Proper names:				
Spring Festival	5	2		7
CCTV	15	3	8	26
Culture	11	13	14	38
News	20	5	6	31
Education	2	2	4	8
Sports	5	6	2	13
Law	3	2	3	8
Political terms:				
Harmony	11	5	10	25
Sensitive words	5	7	17	32
Justice/Equality	7		5	12
Freedom	4	4	17	25

However, in opposition to the surface value of these terms either understood by ordinary Chinese, or used by authorities, in what ways has Wang Xiaofeng used these topics and terms in diverse and subversive ways in his writing? In other words, how does he define their implicit meanings? In addition, by challenging both official language and literature language, Wang Xiaofeng outspokenly posts

Zanghua (dirty words) on his blog: *Shabi* (idiot), *Naocan* (mental disability), *Zhuangbi* (pretending to be nobility), etc. The use of the dirty words, I define as one of Wang Xiaofeng's hooligan-based characters, as well as one of his playful attitudes. The question is: how do these dirty words help Wang Xiaofeng expose hypocrisy, reveal issues and provide satire on *No Guess* blog?

To answer these questions, I pick up Wang Xiaofeng's "Country", "Chinese People", "Media", "Harmony" and "Freedom of Expression", including those dirty words as his frequently used terms, as I think these terms vary from their original meanings, and can offer implications in a political sense. In order to examine how Wang Xiaofeng looks at these terms in a variety of ways (satirical tongues), and to understand the ways how Wang Xiaofeng satirically presents the terms (skills and forms), a critical discourse analysis (Paltridge, 2006, p.178-98) will be used in the following sections. Barbara Johnstone points out, that "the end goal of discourse analysis is... social critique" (2008, p. 30), the analysis of frequently used terms aims to result in explanations of how Wang Xiaofeng shapes his satirical style (both tone and attitude), and how the satire effectively associates with his questions about power and established ideologies.

6 Analyses of Discourse Samples of the Frequent Used Terms

On No Guess Blog

6.1 Country

The Chinese term *Guo* means country/nation in English. On his *No Guess*, Wang Xiaofeng gives *Guo* several meanings. Besides commonly considered as *Zhongguo* (China)/*Guo Jia* (country/nation), *Guo* is mentioned by Wang Xiaofeng as *Daguo* (big country/nation), *Guigu* (your honorable/sincere country) and *Qiangguo* (strong nation). What are the implications of these terms?

A post entitled *Gui Guo (Your Honorable/Sincere Country)*, Wang Xiaofeng's topic is about "an expensive (*Gui*) China".

Recently I am always questioned by some people with *Naocan* (mental disabilities) on why I'm likely to use the term "*Gui* (expensive) *Guo* (country)". (Wearing Three Watches, 22 February 2009)

In Wang's description, the original meaning of *Gui Guo* (Your Honorable/Sincere Country¹⁷⁶) is replaced by a negative meaning Expensive Country, and mentioned via specific examples.

This country is very *Gui* (expensive): in terms of housing, petrol, and privilege. (Wearing Three Watches, 22 February 2009)

From the above explanation we can see that, Wang Xiaofeng complains about an expensive China which, according to his post, details China from people's living expenses (e.g. high prices of housing and petrol) towards the *Quan Gui* (State power/official's privileges).

Take his *Guojia Xingxiang*¹⁷⁷ (The Image of a Nation) as another example, Wang Xiaofeng writes that:

It is no longer easy for a nation to retain a positive image in the world, as there is no secret under the sun. Whatever is happening in your sincere country, the world will know as soon as possible. (26 January 2011)

¹⁷⁶*Gui Guo* is a diplomatic term in Chinese, meaning Your Country. The term *Gui* (honorable/sincere) is used to show China's polite attitude to or manner of respecting other countries.

¹⁷⁷ The original posting can be found at: <http://www.wangxiaofeng.net/?p=7082/>
<http://wangxiaofeng.blog.caixin.com/archives/date/2011/01>.

The target of this writing is the *Chun Yun* (Passenger Transport during China's Spring Festival). Wang discusses the issue of Chinese travelers not being able to purchase train tickets in order to travel home for the holidays. In his post, Wang writes that "half of the front seats were reserved by ticket brokers" (26 January 2011). What seems ridiculous for him is that, the ticket office doesn't sell the tickets but scalpers do. The railway service being installed with scalpers who make tickets accessible is a good joke, suggesting that Wang Xiaofeng's satire is actually aimed at China's *Guojia Xingxiang* (national image), by taking *Chunyun* as an example as working "a hand in glove game", a "means of fortune", and "an interest in the chain" (26 January 2011). He then implies that, *Chun Yun* represents one of the group behavior of those in China's leadership positions, when it obtains a position of power, it immediately becomes corrupt.

On his *Wenhua Qiangguo*¹⁷⁸ (Strong Nation of Culture), Wang Xiaofeng mentions that:

China is a big country with a large population and dimension. Also, it is a historical country, and is one of the Four Great Ancient Civilizations. As a result, any civilization can be randomly ruined in sincere China. (2 November 2011)

In his post, Wang Xiaofeng's topic is about how China's civilization is 'randomly ruined', and he starts his controversy with culture. Wang's first satire is that, China's 30-year open policy has created nothing but commerce in the domain of contemporary culture. Wang calls it "a so-called *Shanzhai Wenhua* (cottage culture¹⁷⁹)" (2 November 2011). Wang's second satire associates with his question about China becoming a *Wenhua Qiangguo* (strong nation of culture).

¹⁷⁸ The original posting can be found at: <http://www.wangxiaofeng.net/?p=8015/http://wangxiaofeng.blog.caixin.com/archives/date/2011/11>.

¹⁷⁹ The Chinese cottage normally points to those fakes, stealing or copying in various forms, have no originality in general.

EST is one of the most popular suffixes in Chinese. We like to say that we have ‘the highest... in the world’, ‘the biggest... in the world’, and ‘the greatest... in the world’... So ... China becomes the biggest cultural country because we create the strongest cottage culture. (Wearing Three Watches, 2 November 2011)

Such a description employs a strong contrast between topics (strong nation – big country, historical country, and cultural country, etc.) and themes (weak culture – cottage culture). Wang’s topic is simply how China is getting stronger in the world (economy). His theme, though, points to the open policy and reforms in China that have tackled serious issues and led to tragic results (culture), and definitely turned out to be just the opposite of the nation’s wish. The contrast between the two factors here creates a sense of satire with verbal irony.

Such a contrast is also applied to his *Aiguo Liangezi Hao Ganga*¹⁸⁰ (The Term Patriot Is So Embarrassing), where Wang Xiaofeng ridicules the ‘movement’ of boycotting Japanese products in China as “the most immoral and incapable patriotism”:

From the top side, patriot means, you (people) are forced to love me (the country) whenever I ask you to do so... This implies an interest demand of having you work for me. From the bottom side, it means, I (people) should love you (the country) no matter I want to or do not want to...It shows the manner of the blinds. (Wearing Three Watches, 18 October 2010)

Wang then defends patriotism from a range of acid sarcasm: to boycott foreign products doesn’t mean to “rob your own people”, to fight for foreign bullies doesn’t mean that “innocent people should be bullied”, and to expect certain countries to treat China in a good manner means not to “ignore dignity in caring for the people” (18 October 2010).

¹⁸⁰ The original post can be found at: www.wangxiaofeng.net/?p=6632&cpage=2.

These four posts show Wang Xiaofeng's descriptions of 'China' in diverse descriptive angles, but basically in a negative tone. They implicate an opposite way of understanding the term. *Gui Guo* is more like a background description of China, revealing China's reality and its ongoing social and political issues. *Chun Yun*, *Wenhua Qiangguo* and *Aiguo* are inside stories which specifically explore systematic problems in China. Given the negative sides of the country (expensive – living with hardship), the authority (corrupting and privileged), and the culture (cottage), the Party's mission statement of *Sange Daibiao* (Three Representatives), presented by previous president Jiang Zeming – to “represent the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people” seems to be so much empty talk.

6.2 Chinese People

In this section, Wang Xiaofeng mainly focuses on two groups of people: the people he likes (e.g. Lian Yue, Ma Weidu, Wang Shuo, and Wang Xiaobo) and the people he dislikes. My focus is on the latter group, and on how Wang Xiaofeng describes these people. They are classified by Wang as netizens, celebrities, intellectuals and people who work for the government.

On his *Lun Ting Ni*¹⁸¹ (Talking about Supporting You), Wang Xiaofeng defines some Chinese people as “puppets”, with less “independent thought and abilities” (30 November 2011). He then uses a popular net phrase *Ting* to explain what the puppet likes to do.

“Ting Ni” on Internet means “I support you”. Specifically, no matter you were criticized, or you had done a right thing, some people would stand up and say, they are always on your side. (Wearing Three Watches, 30 November 2011)

¹⁸¹ The original post can be found at: <http://www.wangxiaofeng.net/?p=8137>.

In this post, Wang voices a number of tools (wall, blog, twitter, etc.) for *Pai Dui* (following the queue) during different time period to explain its function, and its attitude towards *Ting*.

During the Cultural Revolution, *Qiang* (wall) was used to follow the queue and determine the direction... Today's forum, blog and twitter act as the previous wall, though, you can follow the queue and post "I support you" online. (Wearing Three Watches, 30 November 2011)

Both *Pai Dui* and the tools for *Pai Dui* offer implicit meanings. *Pai Dui* (to follow the queue) implies to follow the Party line. Wall implies *Dazibao* (big-character posters) – the handwritten wall-mounted posters used during the Cultural Revolution and mentioned earlier in this chapter. These posters functioned as similar as the blog and the twitter for people to "determine the direction".

In this sense, *Ting* (support), according to Wang Xiaofeng, seems to easily bring forces about both "giving up judgment" and "following the common sense" (30 November 2011) to imply what people cannot say.

In his entry *Weishenme Xiangxin Mingren* (Why Do We Trust Celebrities?¹⁸²), Wang Xiaofeng's topic is in relation to the celebrity effect in China.

In my country, celebrities include: movie stars, experts, media professionals, writers, ugly politicians and those *Shabi* (idiots) who are eager to become public figures via media promotions. (Wearing Three Watches, 22 August 2010)

Wang's aim in this post is to point at the dishonest and hypocritical tendencies of China's celebrities. Marked by his several sentences – "the most incredible" and

¹⁸² The original post has been taken down, but the content still can be found at: http://hi.baidu.com/mercy_sin/blog/item/16ef9444c82d1f42500ffedb.html.

“spit out nothing but dentures” (22 August 2010), Wang offers a negative tone, and a publicly disrespect to celebrities (i.e., ‘ugly politicians’). In addition, by categorizing netizens into a group of celebrity, Wang Xiaofeng again shows his acid sarcasm: to believe that joining in a commercial medium space can greatly improve one’s reputation is, as stupid as; to believe both “the weight loss counterfeit” and “the germinal medicine” (22 August 2010) can work. Therefore, Wang use a dirty word to name these people *Shabi* (idiot).

In another entry entitled *Gongguan*¹⁸³ (Public Relations), in this post, Wang Xiaofeng’s writing starts with an event of hitting refrigerators of Siemens Company in Beijing. The event was launched by Luo Yonghao¹⁸⁴, who is a friend of Wang. In November 20, 2011, Luo and his friends went to Siemens Headquarters (Beijing) for quality complaints. Though Luo’s activity had gathered a crowd of onlookers, less attention was paid by the media. Wang explains this in his post: “I am informed that a Public Relations Firm – Blue Cursor comes to negotiate, therefore, no further information should be reported” (22 November 2011).

The media’s attitude towards firms such as Siemens led Wang to associate it with other events, for instance, the Sanlu dairy incident in 2008.

As a result, every time I watch a series of CCTV’s programmes on Mengniu and Yili¹⁸⁵, how original, natural and healthy their milk is, I feel sick. (Wearing Three Watches, 22 November 2011)

In Wang’s sense, Public Relations firms in China perform a similar role as CCTV as it can “immediately put out the ‘fire’ for the country” (22 November 2011).

¹⁸³ The original post can be found at: <http://wangxiaofeng.blog.caixin.com/archives/date/2011/11>.

¹⁸⁴ Luo Yonghao is a teacher in real life, but he launched a blog site at <http://www.bullogger.com>, and attracted lots of Chinese radical bloggers to join the site, including Lian Yue, Han Han etc. In 2013, the site was shut down by Luo, not because political reasons, but, less people do blogging now. Since 2009, netizens are more interested in *Weibo* (micro-blogging).

¹⁸⁵ Mengniu and Yili are two big dairy companies in China.

This writing, from the Siemens' refrigerators scandal to Wang's association with poisoned milk incident, from CCTV's propagandized programme to Wang's explanation of how a public relations firm takes on their 'duties' in China, show Wang Xiaofeng's satire, to borrow from Gong Haomin and Yang Xin's term (2010, p. 4), with "comic criticism". On the one hand, Wang's use of key phrases such as 'no further information should be reported' and 'feel sick', indicates his disappointment with media restriction and disapproval of State control. However, through setting up several objects of ridicule (e.g. dairy advertisements on CCTV, and the power of a public relations firm), Wang has successfully expressed his critical attitude. On the other hand, rather than seriously labeling how awful food standards are, how incapable the media are and how powerful the public relation firm is, Wang is in turn to articulate his critiques of the Chinese people, by paying a 'compliment' to them: they are "the best people in the world", and they can "afford any dismemberment and oppression" (22 November 2011). This illustrates a comic skill of Wang's satire.

On his *Biena Jizhe Budang Ji* (Don't Exclude Journalists from Whores), Wang's satire points to the *Hong Bao* (Red Envelope – with money in it¹⁸⁶) phenomenon among Chinese journalists. Wang calls the *Hong Bao* game "a 'win-win' strategy" that both commercial industries (pay money to get promoted) and journalists (receive money to offer reporting) are beneficial.

As a journalist, I have witnessed and heard too much. As a result, my critique is likely to point to the news media, an industry that I don't feel like a part of for a long time. (Wearing Three Watches, 25 May 2010)

Such a view reflects Wang Xiaofeng's anger with journalists of Chinese media, where media, media workers and the media market strongly share the view that money/benefit is a sort of 'driver' for media reporting. He thus ridicules journalists as "whores", as they always "offer good services" (25 May 2010). Phrases such as

¹⁸⁶ A *Hong Bao* (Red Envelope) is similar to a Western greeting card, given at Chinese New Year, birthdays or weddings, and is often packed with money.

‘covetousness’, ‘guilty’ and ‘shame’ capture the main reasons for Wang Xiaofeng’s sharp criticism of Chinese journalism.

The above examples, from criticizing netizens, celebrities and journalists, and a public relations firm, suggest an opposite way of understanding Wang’s posts. Take *Lun Ting Ni* (Talking about Supporting You) as an example. Here, Wang’s message shows his unsupportive attitude – he aims to encourage netizens to get rid of *Ting* and to play with the ‘queue’ (the Party line), in order to avoid being a ‘puppet’. In *Wei Shenme Xiangxin Mingren* (Why Do We Trust Celebrities?), and *Biena Jizhe Budang Ji* (Don’t Exclude Journalists from Whores), Wang’s message shows both his distrust of celebrities and his criticism of people who want to be a celebrity. The entry *Gongguan* (Public Relations), though it may give the reader an impression that Wang Xiaofeng shifts his attention to Chinese authority rather than the Chinese people, his posts are satirical in this way that I can see. Let me borrow Lu Xin’s argument to explain:

In Communist China, the political discourse formulated and enforced by the government was accepted by the vast majority of the Chinese people, and functioned as social and ideological control. (1999, p.489)

To some extent, both an opposition to the plain meaning of Wang’s words, and a shift of attention offer Wang Xiaofeng a convenient way of hiding his direct resistance with Party ideology and elites. The four posts either reject *Ting*, labeling politicians as ugly, or suffering with restrictions targeting media indeed work together to form Wang’s coded meaning, for instance, *Pai Dui* (to follow the queue) implies to follow the ‘Party line’, to put out the ‘fire’ means to cover up ‘incident’ or ‘scandal’, and “the best people in the world” suggests “the most powerful authority” hidden behind. These coded meanings, therefore, enable Wang to explain convincingly how he is emotionally tired of the State control.

6.3 Harmony

The Chinese term *Hexie* (harmony) is divided into two characters *He* and *Xie*. The first character *He* can be translated as the peaceful ideas of gentleness, mildness, and calmness. The second character *Xie* relates to the notions of balance and peace. This peace and balance is central to Confucian thinking of harmony, and has impacted China and Chinese people for a long history.

While there are not stirrings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, or joy, the mind may be said to be in a state of EQUILIBRIUM. When these feelings have been stirred and they act in their due degree, there ensues what may be called the state of HARMONY... Let the states of equilibrium and harmony exist in perfection, and a happy order will prevail throughout heaven and earth, and all things will be nourished and flourish. (Wright, 1953, p. 33)

The value of a ‘happy-order’-based on harmony in traditional China, or in a Confucian ideology, is called *Li* – a term in relation to rules and propriety that regulates the proper conduct among Chinese people. For instance, a popular Chinese proverb goes *Jiahe Wangshi Xing*, meaning if a family is harmonious, everything will prosper. Also, Chinese parents are likely to cultivate their children “a moral character, such as respecting elders” and “cooperating”, so that their children are able to build up “harmonious social relations” (Wang and Chang, 2010, p. 54) when they grow up. These attest to the fundamental importance of the *Li* culture from maintaining “harmony within a family” towards “attending wider social harmony”, as Hau Kit-Tai and Irene Ho (2010, p. 203) argue.

However, Chinese history has ample lessons to offer regarding the terrible consequences of social instability such as peasant uprisings and revolutionary movements throwing down the ruling dynasty, invaded and civil wars beating national strength, and political and societal chaos during the Cultural Revolution.

As a result, ‘harmony’ has been transferred into “stability” and considered as “the highest priority” by Deng Xiaoping (cited in Ramzy, 7 June 2012¹⁸⁷) after the 1989 event, however, as Austin Ramzy comments, “Since then, Chinese authorities have gone to great lengths to tamp down dissent” (7 June 2012).

Take the Internet: the governmental policy of scientific development has promoted China to a growing economy in digital technology. The use of the Internet offers opportunities for Chinese netizens to post their views, opinions and dissents online. The latter, however, has posed a great threat to that authority by increasing political protest and social instability. Therefore, more tightened control and censorship is accompanying on the Internet. Ian Johnson notes:

In China, the term [harmony] is sometimes used ironically as a verb to describe Web sites that suddenly disappear, “harmonized away,” and officially as a goal, a “harmonious society.” (18 January 2011)

Both Ramzy and Johnson see the Chinese government strongly insisting its control for achieving a harmonious society. The question is: do Chinese people trust this harmony, or, do they agree with their leadership? Wang Xiaofeng’s writing in relation to the term ‘Harmony’ may offer an answer.

Let’s take *Hexie Ziyaner* (The Phrase of Harmony) as an example of how a harmonious city (Beijing) looks.

I would like to ask, the so-called harmonious society you mention all the time, does it mean that anything, as long as it will not cause an offense to the eye, it is harmony? (Wearing Three Watches, 14 May 2007)

¹⁸⁷ Deng Xiaoping’s original words were “Stability is the highest priority”.

Wang Xiaofeng asks the above question to the mayor of Capital Beijing, Wang Qishang, on his *Hexie Ziyaner* (The Phrase of Harmony). In this writing, Wang's discussion of the definition of 'harmony' starts with a reflection on a series of advertisements for real estates in Beijing. The content of these ads, which include phrases such as "extreme respect", "luxury location" and "super enjoyment", were publicly declared "negative" and "sensitive" by the Beijing mayor, who claimed that such advertising "would destroy a harmonious society" (14 May 2007).

China's real estate marketing is dealt with differently by the real estate companies¹⁸⁸ and the people, however; in Wang Xiaofeng's writing, it is not the real estate marketing but Beijing's mayor who becomes the figure of ridicule, owing to his perceived hypocrisy. According to Wang, what the Beijing mayor is really concerned about is his own superiority in development projects. The high price of housing in Beijing suggests that local people have not yet benefited from recent real estate policies. In this sense, Wang's satire relies upon his ridiculing of the mayor for pretending to do something for the collective good of the Beijing city, whereas such 'goodness' is blocked, as it has something to do with the fact that the society is not completely harmonious and in which everyone is not perfectly happy (i.e., the development of real estate market resulting in rising price of housing vs. local people who really need a new place to live but have no money to buy). As a result, Wang's calling the Beijing mayor "Uncle¹⁸⁹ Wang Qishan" points to governors who like to address themselves as *Fumuguan* (Parent Officials). This shows his denial of Wang Qishan as a Parent Official, but a power hungry politician on one side, and his disrespect to Mr. Wang Qishan of his really just doing a 'face project', on the other.

¹⁸⁸ By 'differently' I mean, each side (real estate company vs. people who want to buy a house) thinks about the 'interest' differently. In terms of considering the benefit of the company (to sell more flats and houses), the seller (real estate companies) will always use beautiful words (ads) to attract people, however, these words would threaten people who truly want to buy the house, as they cannot afford that price. But either way, the government will always be the chief beneficiary.

¹⁸⁹ The Chinese family titles are divided up by generation. For example, aunts and uncles are grouped together under the parent's generation. Chinese governors always claim that they are the people's 'Parent Officials', and they always serve the people and represent the public interest. Wang Xiaofeng's using 'Uncle' to title the Beijing mayor shows his denial of this title.

*Huogai*¹⁹⁰ (You Deserve It), is a story about one's privacy in China, as Wang Xiaofeng posts:

I used to write an article about privacy, unfortunately, it was harmonized. Back to the Cultural Revolution period... a vice-president was killed by those Red Guards, and was judged as 'deserved'. Today, the role changes to be a vice magistrate, a corrupt official, as such, anything happened on this bad person can be exposed in public, including his privacy, because he deserves it. (17 August 2011).

This post, firstly, Wang's article about privacy "was harmonized" (*bei hexie le*) implies 'harmony' has another meaning, when it is described as 'taken down'. Secondly, the term 'deserve' is used by Wang Xiaofeng as an opposite tone. The previous vice-president was persecuted, though he did not deserve to die. A corrupt officer is criminal but his privacy should be respected. They imply that the Chinese society is absent from a humanized sense, as Wang writes in his post:

I read a story from *Xinhua Net: Vice Magistrate Infected with HIV, Women Cadres Ran to Hospital...* The news was quickly spread online...It seems that media pretty enjoyed making fun of the poor guy's misfortune. (Wearing Three Watches, 17 August 2011)

So, the term 'deserve' actually expresses Wang's denial on whether news media in China deserve a positive influence on their readers – to concern with a corrupt officer's personal life rather than his crime, this may be one of the 'harmonized' figures of Chinese media.

By taking the two examples – the Beijing mayor's attitude to the real estate advertisement and media's attitude to a vice magistrate; together we can see that Wang Xiaofeng's satire is aimed at ridiculing the group behavior of those in significant positions/departments under the leadership of CCP, by exposing their

¹⁹⁰ The original posting can be found at: <http://wangxiaofeng.blog.caixin.com/archives/23541>.

attitudes towards ‘harmony’. The common problem of the two examples is perhaps – that both the Beijing mayor and the media are actually aware of social issues (e.g., people’s complaints and officials’ corruptions), but they pretend to be blind to the unharmonious situation of their surroundings. As a result, the Beijing mayor manages anything that is sensitive to his administration, while media avoid commenting on anything that is sensitive to their propaganda officials and censors.

The term harmony is frequently mentioned on Wang Xiaofeng’s *Hexie Yu Bu Hexie* (Harmony and Improperly Fitting Shoes), where he comments on the shoe-throwing incident at Premier Wen Jiabao’s visit to the UK – when Wen was ‘attacked’ in earlier 2009 by the shoe, Wang compared him with the previous US President George Bush.

Unlike Western leaders *such as Bush who* are used to the speech under the fire; our leaders are accustomed to sweet languages. When they stand on the same stage, the difference is displayed. Look at Teacher Bush, who would have followed anything, from a shoe towards a Scud. In contrast, Premier Wen’s reaction seemed to be stuck in a Cold War mentality level, with a prediction in advance that the class enemy would come to sabotage. (3 February 2009¹⁹¹)

With comparative comments, Wang’s posts do not give Wen Jiabao, the Premier in China, a highly acclaimed words, as can be seen by Wang’s usage of the terms such as ‘uncomfortable’, ‘a Cold War mentality level’ and ‘class enemy’. This in turn illustrates a tragic image that China has showed the world a powerful transformation after the reform, though, Chinese leaders still frozen them in Cold War or Cultural Revolution era.

Wang’s description of the Wen Jiabao event, along with the previous two examples: both criticizing Chinese media of their no intention of reporting the corrupt

¹⁹¹ See *Dai Sange Biao* (Wearing Three Watches) (3 February 2009) *Hexie yu Bu Hexie* (Harmony and Improperly Fitting Shoes). The original post was published at www.wangxiaofeng.net/?p=2457http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_5db1da560100c751.html.

bureaucracy, and being disappointed by a governor's no intention of caring about people's true problem, continuously shows his denial of a 'harmonized' China, as Wang argues on his *Hexie Yu Bu Hexie* (Harmony and Improperly Fitting Shoes):

From a philosophical perspective, harmony is the unity of opposites... However, harmony in China is defined as a contradiction without opposite side... Our leaders... should learn to stay in the level of harmonious conversation when they face... more pairs of leather shoes with a parabolic trajectory... This could be called harmony as well. (3 February 2009)

At this point, 'harmony' becomes a means of satire which Wang Xiaofeng uses to laugh at an actually repressive-led 'peaceful' society. His laughing, along with his argument in opposition to a harmonized China is also given to his playful attitude to top leaders ('Teacher'¹⁹² Bush', for instance), and homonymic mockery (*Hexie* (fitting shoes) versus *Hexie* (harmony) at a repressed harmony inside China in comparison with a subversive reaction of harmony outside China, all of which demonstrate Wang Xiaofeng's further level of satire.

The three samples represent Wang Xiaofeng's satire on contemporary Chinese society. Through his diverse angles of debating on 'harmony' and 'harmonious society', Wang points towards both the internal and external contradictions of contemporary China. This contradiction is perhaps the main theme of his writing about 'harmony', and inasmuch as 'harmony' is so pervasive in China in a political sense, yet inasmuch as it is understood by Chinese people in a playful attitude, to some extent, the twofold may expand a further level of exposing the truth of harmony and struggles and conflicts between the State and society.

¹⁹² A teacher in China is not only an educator but also a mentor, and is respected by students. Wang's using 'Teacher' to title Mr. Bush, his tongue is absolutely playful.

6.4 Media/News/Journalism

In China, media have dramatically changed their discourse in recent years. Lots of news reports are becoming radical and critical. They aim to challenge to the role of the propaganda machine, to maximize public interests (Huang, 2007; Sun, 2007; Xin, 2006). However, the Chinese media maintain a set of issues such as the power relations still influencing the media, media still employing systems of self-censorship to minimize political risks, and the credibility of the news report is still in question.

Wang Xiaofeng sees these issues. Lots of his posts are satirical, and are given to the domain of the mainstream media organizations and popular commercial Internet portals such as CCTV and Sina.com.cn.

Written on *Women Dou Kan Xinwen Lianbo* (We All Watch News Broadcast), for instance, Wang Xiaofeng comments that the CCTV takes the role of “an education tool for the Chinese” (2 January 2008).

The meaning of ‘education’, as Wang quotes from netizens, refers to the CCTV News Broadcast Programme “never reports on an unimportant meeting” and “never gives an unimportant speech”, as well as the metaphor for the State’s image: “decisions are always right”, “leaders always smile”, “achievements are always great”, and “the future is always bright” (2 January 2008).

As a result of these quotations, Wang lends his disrespect to the News Broadcast Programme of the CCTV, which belongs to the Party-State, and which acts as a compulsory educator. In this sense, ‘an education tool’ becomes a coded meaning of ‘propaganda mechanism’, implying that “censorship on CCTV always works” and “people who watch *News Broadcast* are always cheated” (Wearing Three Watches, 2 January 2008).

From the above post we can see that, in talking about Chinese media, Wang Xiaofeng's words do not touch anything with government control/censorship. Some of his posts, for instance, *Dizheng Suan Tufashijian ma* (Is Earthquake a Breaking News? 4 July 2006), *Zhengmian Baodao* (Positive Report, 6 September 2006), *Hexie Xinwen Xiezuozhixinan* (Guidelines of Writing Harmonious News, 6 January 2007), and *Lishi* (History, 6 June 2007), though, expresses a wish for or aims to protect journalists more from harm or punishment.

Taking *Lishi* (History), Wang mentions:

On that day, *Chengdu Wangbao* (Chengdu Evening News¹⁹³) made a mistake, and now it seems that the mistake is very serious. (6 June 2007)

Considering a sensitive month (June) in China, Wang's comment on *Chengdu Wanbo*, with "no sense" and "nobody tells them" (6 June 2007) hints at a kind of intention: media should not expect too much to increase the possibilities of reporting on politically sensitive topics (June 4, for instance). However, the post is satirical because Wang identifies what the government concerns about the 'seriousness', either employed as sensitive words or events in media report, the young media workers perceives as less serious.

In September 6, 2006, Wang posted his *Zhengmian Baodao* (Positive Report). In this post, Wang explains what a positive report looks like. He takes the example of the Shanxi Coal Mine Explosion,

According to normal news, we may say "The Shanxi Coal Mine Explosion Caused 40 People to Lose their Lives". (Wearing Three Watches, 6 September 2006)

¹⁹³ On June 4, 2007, *Chengdu Evening News* was punished because of an article, entitled *Xiang Jianqiang de 64 Yunanzhe Muqin Zhijing* (Showing Respect to Those Strong Mothers Whose Sons Died in June 4 Event), was published on its advertisement page.

Written like this, as Wang comments, the title is “too negative” and will result in “too much negative effect”. So, Wang changes the title as “60 People Have Been Rescued in Shanxi Coal Mine Explosion” (6 September 2006).

Wang Xiaofeng’s explanation allows us to see conflicts of interest between media and their power relations as a result of pressures on the news. Under this pressure, news reporters have to find a way to balance their news. At this point, the function of the “positive report” fits what the Party describes as ‘harmonized society’.

The three posts, either the CCTV’s *News Broadcast* programme, the *Chengdu Wanbao* mistake, or the guideline of *Positive Report* tend not to ascribe responsibility for the spreading of the news, nor do they directly mention conflict arising among media, government and journalists. Instead, they present Wang Xiaofeng’s playful attitude to both media censorship and media ideologies, along with his comic critique on news credibility.

6.5 Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression in China never fails to fascinate the media and its audiences at both the domestic and international level. If we look at freedom of expression through the lens of quantitative increase, China owns the largest number of traditional and new media users in the world. The people of China may enjoy sufficient chances for expression. However, the government’s blocking of interactive sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter (have been mentioned in Chapter 2) has indeed decreased China’s degree of speech freedom in the world.

With whichever arguments, freedom of expression is seen as an individual’s political right, as Alan Knight argues, “which exists through practice” (2004, p.4). Though the notion of freedom has not flourished in China, the discourse on freedom of expression has been greatly interpreted by Chinese netizens. Through

lots of his posts, Wang Xiaofeng reveals in this part, the Chinese ideas/characteristics of the freedom of expression, and his attitude to it.

An entry titled *Zhidao de Taiduo Buhao*¹⁹⁴ (It's Not Good for You to Know Too Much), Wang notes that “critiques on football demonstrate the highest level of freedom expression in this country” (19 September 2010).

In Wang's opinion, the position of football in China, “is lower than volleyball, Olympics and gold medal, all of which represent a series of positive national images, and they are called ‘politics’”. Wang also notes, the authority allowing his people to have free talks on football, to some extent, is to “encourage people to ignore severe social issues such as the rising market prices, frequent traffic incidents, and the gap between the rich and the poor”. In other word, football has no Party line. Wang further satirically ‘suggests’, “free talks on football is an alternative way to show the Westerners, that the environment in China in terms of critique is much freer than the one they blame their presidents” (19 September 2010).

This post, through Wang Xiaofeng's ironic tone, reveals a sensitive relationship between freedom, expression and politics. In Wang's narrative, a sport representing the national image is ‘Political’ in nature. The point in turn implies that, expression refers to freedom should be apolitical (i.e., football), less important and less conflict with established ideologies. His “critique...is much freer” than the Westerners again embodies an opposite meaning, and is understood by readers that it could hardly happen in reality.

Despite the view that freedom of expression can be expanded if the topic is apolitical, Wang does see online discussions as a demonstration of a certain degree of democracy, as he claims on *Ni de Dipan* (Your Territorial), where he posts his comments on the Xiamen PX event in 2007 – when the Xiamen residents fought for

¹⁹⁴ The posting can be found at: <http://www.2c.cn/archiver/?tid-14401.html>.

their living environment and forced the local government to face the severity level of the poisonous project (see Chapter 5).

The PX Project wasn't reported by national media. Details we knew were from the Internet and mobiles... This time the Xiamen residents didn't keep silence, and netizens didn't keep silence. (3 June 2007)

From the above posts we can see that, Wang Xiaofeng does agree that freer discussion may play a role in challenging authority and supporting public interests. It follows, however, Wang's denial of a weak civil society that can play a role in shaping a long-term environment for freedom of expression. "For me, such an idea is something like a joke" (3 June 2007), reveals his pessimistic attitude.

Such a pessimistic attitude is also given to his *Zhe jiu Haoxiang Youren Yizhi Nage Qiang Zhizhe Ni Yiyang*¹⁹⁵ (It Seems That somebody is Pointing at you with a Gun), where he simply explains another option of freedom in China.

Freedom in China used to mean that, you are freer to do this, but you are not allowed to do that. Though, people now enjoy much of the freedom when they post views online, but they do not realize that such freedom is associated with relevant responsibilities. (Wearing Three Watches, 8 March 2011)

Here again, Wang Xiaofeng uses a coded meaning 'responsibility' to replace the demand of 'self-censorship' or 'self-regulation', In other words, Wang implies that free discussion in China, if borrowing from Alan Knight's view, "exists only because it is endorsed by governments" (2004, p. 34).

Taken together, Wang Xiaofeng's caution on freedom of expression in both the Xiamen case and the Gun case seems seriously argumentative. His tone (serious) is in contrast with the one on the Football case (entertaining). This serious mood

¹⁹⁵ The original posting is available at: <http://wangxiaofeng.blog.caixin.com/archives/16419>.

suggests Wang's ironic intent that freedom of expression is just a wish in contemporary China.

In the analyses of the above five frequently used terms, I have listed various samples, with specific objects (events, people and government-related organizations). I argue that the satire employed by Wang Xiaofeng's *Buxu Lianxiang* (No Guess) has negated established ideologies (e.g. the "Three Representatives", patriot, harmony, positive report, and freedom of expression) while constructing critiques characterized by resistance and denial. I then reserve the *No Guess* blog for three types of themes: airing views that implicitly critique and dissent from established ideologies, revealing systematic issues, and capturing ugly images of Chinese society. In addition, I find that Wang Xiaofeng's satirical expression always combines particular tones, to borrow from two Chinese idioms: *Zhenhua Fanshuo* (speaking truth the opposite way), and *Shengdong Jixi* (making a sound to the east but attacking in the west) (see Esarey and Xiao, 2008; Wang Xiaofeng, 13 April 2009; Wang Xiaofeng, 7 November 2010).

As I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Wang Xiaofeng's satire merges irony with disrespect. The irony is primarily in connection with his two tones, and the disrespect combines his comic critique with his playful attitude. This playfulness, which I will exemplify in the following pages, is his hooligan expression. It contains homonymic mockery, online spoof and the frequent uses of dirty words.

7 Analyses of Discourse Samples of Hooligan Expression

On *Buxu Lianxiang* (No Guess)

In an interview with Danwei.org¹⁹⁶, Wang Xiaofeng says:

¹⁹⁶ For more information on this interview, please see http://www.danwei.org/danwei_tv/vs.php

[Hooligan] is an expression of a scoundrel's attitude... it's a challenge to China's straight-laced earnest cultural tradition. (13 February 2007)

Part of Wang Xiaofeng's hooligan expression follows Wang Shuo's style of entertaining and satire, as Yao Yusheng points out, not only of being "playfulness", but also of fighting for "power and freedom" (2004, p.435).

The hooligan character in the *No Guess* blog is not only Wang's sarcastic language, but also digital images we can see. I categorize Wang's hooligan expression into three types: homonymic mockery, online spoof and dirty words.

7.1 Homonymic Mockery

In the Chinese context, a homonym is one of a group of words that share the same pronunciation but have different meanings (Xinhua Dictionary, 2005, p.483-4). For example, A popular blogger Xu Lai names his blog *Qian Liexian Yao Fayan* (Qian Liexian Wants to Speak). The title is a homonym of the *Qian Liexian Yao Fayan* (Pro-State Infection).

Take the word *He Xie* (harmony), it is a homonym of the term for *He Xie* (river crab) in Chinese. A 'crab' generally refers to bullies with violent power (Xinhua Dictionary, 2005, p.531¹⁹⁷). Since the Party-State raised its political slogan of *Goujian Hexie Shehui* (constructing a harmonious society) (Ni Minhsheng, 2009; Weber and Jia, 2007; Zhang, 2006), Chinese netizens now call themselves not as members of the harmonious society, but members of 'the river crab society'.

By the same token, Wang Xiaofeng uses homonyms in his blog. For instance, he uses *ZhongguoYidong* (China Mobile) to entitle *Zhongguo Yi Budong* (China No

[/http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/1LvD-3dAPMk](http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/1LvD-3dAPMk).

¹⁹⁷ See Xinhua Dictionary (2005). Beijing: The Commercial Press.

Mobile, 4 May 2006). He transfers *Guangdian Zongju* (The State Administration of Radio Film and Television of China) into *Guangdian Zong Ji* (The State Administration of Radio Film and Television of China Is Always So Worried, 15 August 2006). And he changes *Wenhuabu* (The Ministry of Culture) to be *Wenhua Bu* (Culture No, 25 July 2006).

I think China's Ministry of Culture should be renamed as Culture No. By No I mean, we say No to Chinese culture, or No culture in China. (Wearing Three Watches, 25 July 2006)

Wang is here talking about the issue of pirating in China, and in Wang's opinion, the Ministry of Culture has to take responsibility for the issue, as it has created nothing in the cultural domain but stupid rules and regulations to prevent people from watching and broadcasting audiovisual products outside of the domestic market.

Here, Wang replaces the word *Bu* (ministry) with its homonymic term *Bu* (no) to show his disappointment with Chinese officials in the Ministry of Culture, their mismanagement of pirate copies and their control of audio-video products. He thus implies further administrative reform in China. However, Wang Xiaofeng does not directly mention China's 'political system', but indirectly cites in the case of the Ministry of Culture, and criticized the department by ridiculing them as 'No'.

An entry of *Aoyun Changxiang* (The Olympic Imagination) in 2007, Wang Xiaofeng posts:

Sitting in a bus, and looking outside the window, I suddenly asked myself: what will Beijing look like in 2008? (27 March 2007)

Wang then offers readers ten images: Beijing is cosmopolitan because half of the residents are foreigners. It is spotless with a decoration of fake flowers. The sky is blue. No more traffic jams, no more criminals, no more noises, and all places are

well-regulated. People smile. Olympics is the only news for all of us. The Olympic Stadium is full of spectators (27 March 2007).

Thus, Wang draws a conclusion:

It would be great if we hosted the Olympic Games everyday, and we China will definitely attain the target of Communism soon. (27 March 2007)

A selection of the ten images gives an impression, I think, of their entertaining purpose. The entertainment part includes the infrastructure requirements (i.e., a blue-sky Beijing) and the political targets (e.g. no traffic jam, no criminals and no noise) are so unreal that Wang Xiaofeng would like to defend the Olympics as just a *Naoju* (an exaggerated comedy), by ironically imaging Beijing decorated with fake flowers and half of the residents becoming foreigners. The pictures will make people laugh not because they are funny but rather just jokes. Wang thus steps *Aoyunhui* (the Olympic Games) into the realm of homonymic mockery: *Nao Yun Hui* (noisy game).

7.2 Online Spoof

The online spoof in the Chinese context is called *E Gao*. It is, to quote from *Guangming Daily*, “a popular online creation, in the form of language, picture and animation, which comically subverts and deconstructs the so-called normal” (see Chen Jiu, Zhang Sheng and He Shuqing, 2007). Or, as explained by *China Daily* (see Huang Qing, 2006): “The two characters, ‘*E*’ means ‘evil’ and ‘*Gao*’ refers to ‘work’... combine to describe a subculture that is characterized by humor, revelry, subversion... defiance of authority”.

One of Wang Xiaofeng’s *E Gao* works is entitled *E Gao* (spoof), posted in 2008.

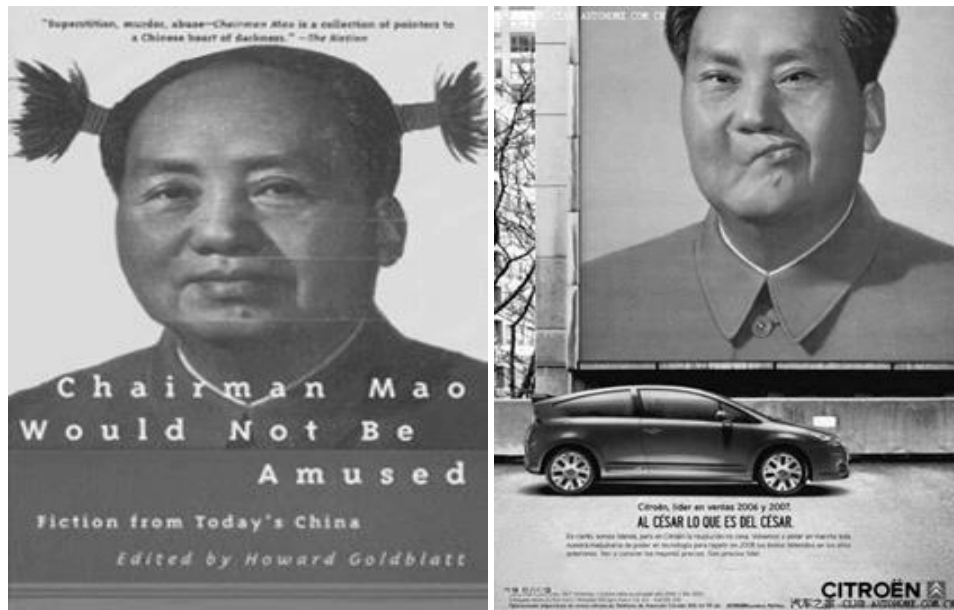


Photo of 6.3-4. *E Gao* – photos are provided by Wang Xiaofeng's *No Guess*

It is not allowed to tease the leaders in our country. I remembered that some one composed a song for mocking the county leader and resulted in being arrested. As a consequence, the Chinese 'envy' the Americans because their presidents would constantly be the object of much satire. (16 January 2008)

Wang Xiaofeng exemplifies how restrictive taboos worked to punish people in Mao's era, "For instance, a newspaper editor had to carefully place the 'Chairman Mao', 'Mao Zedong' and 'Long Life Chairman Mao' into one paragraph; otherwise he would be suspected as a counter-revolutionary and punished miserably" (16 January 2008).

The above pictures were made by Citroën Company. The advertisement is impressive; however, it led to a national protest in China, and the Citroën had to later apologize to the Chinese government. The reason is simple: Chairman Mao is so respect in China that nobody can amuse him. (Wearing Three Watches, 16 January 2008)

From his writing we can see that, Wang Xiaofeng's *E Gao* argues that messing with official content in a 'harmful' way is very serious in China. However, the post,

along with the spoofed pictures again shows Wang's hooligan style and his disrespect to the Chinese government. Yet Wang is also familiar with the rules of the "party line" (see Houchin and Peng, 2005, p.256). On his *E Gao*, by carefully selecting politicians, he chooses to laugh at a previous president, and this attitude does little to threaten the current Party leaders.

Unlike the Hu Ge's *E Gao* using a video to 'damage' Chen's film. Wang Xiaofeng's *E Gao* is more likely than the function of cartoons during the first Civil Revolution period (1922-1927). Yet, it retains Hu's 'exaggeration' and 'distortion', may treated as a new form of 'quiet satire'.

From the above analyses we can see that, Wang Xiaofeng offers a series of satires – his writing employs both critical and entertaining styles, by making fun of people or society to expose issues. Take *E Gao* for example, both the 'national protest' and Citron's apology, to some extent, imply Wang's satire, it seems that China has made a small problem (spoofed pictures of Mao) far greater than it really is (as a political event).

7.3 Dirty Words

The term 'dirty' in Chinese means unclean, spreading dirt and polluting. Dirty words appear as obscenity and vulgarity, or insults and slurs in Chinese language, normally used as slang, or epithets, as Chen Ke indicates,

When people prefer to air their grievance or walk off their anger, they choose 'dirty words', a term which represents blueness, rudeness, and less education, and break a healthy speaking base. (1995, p. 305)

Dirty words are frequently used by Wang Xiaofeng, not only in his posts, but also on titles: *Shabi* (Idiot, 28 January 2007), *Er* (Two, 6 April 2007), *Shier Bi* (Drama Queen, 4 November 2007), *Tubie* No. 1 (Fool No.1, 11 June 2008), *Cao* (Fuck, 21

May 2009), *Naocan* (Mental Disabilities, 8 September 2009), etc. Dirty words in Wang's writing contain both vulgarities and insults, used as a means of expressing his anger.

In his entry of June 30, 2006, Wang comments on a CCTV programme *Dajia Kanfa* (People's View), on an event of the Changde Public Security arrested an ordinary resident Xiaoniao, as Xiaoniao published an online post exposing a Mahjong center in the city's government office.

The title of Wang's post is *Zai Falv Mianqian Youxieren Gengjia Pingdeng* (In front of the Law Someone Enjoys Much of the Equality).

Both the *People's View* and the two professors seem to have ignored one point—the event is in relation to Changde's city government... My question is: if an ordinary resident was hurt, would the police ask the government to apologize? The answer should be NO. And if common people's rights cannot be protected as equal as governors, then I guess that the Law's equality means *Caodan*¹⁹⁸ (fuck egg). (Wearing Three Watches, 30 June 2006)

In the comments that follow, many readers post their blames and angers. One reader Qiantanyiyue posts: "The rule of the Police depends on three checks: checking out how important the governor is, how wealthy the person is, and how sensitive the message is". Another reader, Men, posts: "The law is to mediate the authorities' interests". One netizen YYCheng posts: "If this is the society which lacks morality and a legal system, then where comes the equality?"¹⁹⁹

Wang's anger with CCTV and the Changde government creates a condition for his dirty words as a specific type of hooligan.

¹⁹⁸ Wang's meaning is that China's legal system (Law) in terms of equality means nothing.

¹⁹⁹ For more opinions please see <http://www.wangxiaofeng.net/?p=193#comments>.

*Zanghua yu Zanghua Wenhua Shi*²⁰⁰ (Dirty Words and Cultural History of Dirty Words) is a book that Wang prefers to introduce to his readers: “Knowing another side of a language is as well interesting” (3 April 2008).

Wang’s post is written for those who complain about the abuse of dirty words on his blog.

I wouldn’t have judged those people as *Shabi* (idiot) if they do have a serious *Naocan* (mental disability)... Anyway, I do like linguistic violence, because I strongly feel that such a language can directly express my emotion...So, *Quni Made* (Screw You)! I’m not going to say anything sweet. (3 April 2008)

Though, the post does not indicate by names of who are regarded as *Shabi* (idiot) or *Naocan* (mental disability), it gives me an idea that Wang Xiaofeng is in the habit of using dirty words in defense of his viewpoints as well as in resistance with his opponents.

The above posts represent Wang Xiaofeng’s three hooligan modes as an expansion of his satire. There are stylistic as well as narrative differences between these texts. Loosely, homonymic mockery emphasizes comic criticism. Online spoof lays particular stress on exaggeration and distortion. And dirty words constitute a new sort of frame for Wang’s acid sarcasm. They are flexibly inserted to exhibit Wang Xiaofeng’s style of satire – resistant with disrespect, and critical with playfulness.

8 Conclusions

The popularity of Wang Xiaofeng’s *Buxu Lianxiang* (No Guess), as I have argued in this chapter, is because of his sophisticated usage of the satire. Wang’s satire, to

²⁰⁰ The posting can be found at: <http://www.readfree.net/htm/200804/4592231.html>.

some extent, aims at helping him achieve an independent thinking as well as a sense of cultural satisfaction.

Firstly, Wang's satire has been attractive as indeed has the Qing Dynasty (comic criticism) and the New Culture Movement (Lu Xun's radical sarcasm) literatures. His hooligan-based satires combine Wang Shuo's hooligan literature (play) and Kong Yongqian's Cultural Shirts (homophone), but develops them with digital technologies (*E Gao*). Wang's satire involves comic criticism, and has built up both a sign of resistance of the political regime and denial of the established ideologies on his *No Guess* blog. The blog content written by Wang Xiaofeng offers different interests and perspectives. By explicitly using dirty words, for instance, he shows his basic 'anti-' attitude (disrespect of the establishment), plays with authority and deconstructs orthodox seriousness.

Secondly, what the No Guess blog demonstrate is how major institutions such as (local) governments, State ministries and (Beijing-based) mainstream media act to set terms (e.g., harmony, patriot) and to emphasize the fact of their domination. Broadly, how the authority has been "setting limits" (see Williams, 1991, p.408) on issues of speech freedom. However, we also see how Wang's dissent that enters *Buxu Lianxiang* on issues, mainly of society and culture, directly argues with certain contents from mainstream media and political slogans. By using a personalized space, Wang has greatly made fun of the State, Party leaders, policies and established ideologies. At this point, Wang Xiaofeng's satirical blog stands for the perspective of fighting for the 'limits' on political expression. His dissidence and resistance gradually develop an open space for news and political commentary, albeit with caution.

Thirdly, instead of inserting direct critiques that would result in censorship and control, satire represents a kind of safety value that benefits Wang Xiaofeng by allowing his dissent to be published and delivered, as Brook Larmer argues:

To slip past censors, Chinese bloggers have become masters of comic subterfuge, cloaking their messages in protective layers of irony and satire. This is not a new concept, but it has erupted so powerfully that it now defines the ethos of the Internet in China. Coded language has become part of mainstream culture, with the most contagious memes tapping into widely shared feelings about issues that cannot be openly discussed, from corruption and economic inequality to censorship itself. (26 October 2011)

However, the commentary explosion in the blogosphere is an intelligible adaptation to an environment which is intensively manipulated by political elites, and this can be proved in either the previous Muzi Mei case or the Lian Yue event. In other words, political expression in China seems to be a compromise between what bloggers can possibly express and what the regime allows them to do: satirical expression is attuned to a multi-topical world where the mainstream media information, the political establishment and blogs all compete for attention. Yet the features of satirical expression have not actually changed the nature of political communication. The blogosphere is mutually constituted under the power of a State-owned media system, and the flow of the blogs is largely beyond the capacity of the State to regulate. Thus, political discussion is rather a 'protestation' against the overwhelming effect of authoritarian ideologies in China.

In the case of *Buxu Lianxiang* (No Guess), Wang Xiaofeng's satirical writings feature no matter 'speaking truth the opposite way', and 'making a feint to the east but attacking in the west', or otherwise homonym, spoof and dirty words offer evidence that a complex set of satirical tones and forms playing a significant role, as they are more than humorous critiques, to some extent, they can be seen as Wang's political reactions, or conscious political responses to State policies, though, they guarantee a certain self-control and restraint which appear as playfulness rather than aggression, and as critique rather than attack presented on the *No Guess* blog. They shaping a kind of mild form of dissidence, which the political authorities being able to accommodate is on one hand, and Wang's readers' understanding the meaning behind his facades in resistance with and denial of established ideologies is on the other.

As a result of Wang Xiaofeng's *No Guess* that uses satire, I have noticed the fact that Wang's critiques of society and culture frequently point to public figures and public authorities (e.g. celebrities, local governor, CCTV and Culture Ministry), and these have offered Wang an advantage in exploring problems of China, as well as an ability to criticise the Chinese society, Chinese authorities and Chinese culture from the inside. To a large degree, his viewpoints may arouse the consciousness among Chinese rational intellectuals to think about, whether blogging can also be used to achieve something outside of the blogosphere (e.g. more changes, political actions, as it were, see the Xiamen case in Chapter 5) (also see Dean, 2012). Yet Wang Xiaofeng's political criticism is limited to specific ministries/departments, and his words have barely offended the central government. This is partially because Wang is not willing to take any risk to be a 'political dissident'. Wang's blog shows quite clearly that he understands what sort of discussions the system could tolerate and what sort of comments they are bound to be censored. In other words, Wang's words always take the form of a 'benign' interaction with the Party-line – they barely challenge the basis of the propaganda regime. Meanwhile Wang is pessimistic about the progress of democracy (e.g., the discussion of freedom of expression, and the reflection on the PX event) in China. In this sense, Wang Xiaofeng's satirical *Buxu Lianxiang* is limited by its ability to effect a political dialogue, as he realises both difficulty and impossibility of the free expression of and open criticism with political issues in the Chinese blogosphere. In the case of the *No Guess* blog, Wang Xiaofeng's satire has exposed issues in China, however, the function of his satire seems to aim at making himself and his readers laugh or enjoying people/events he has made fun of, rather than encouraging radical and critical opinions – his satirical writing is venting, but is actually helping to maintain the status quo. Thus, his series of satires cannot be considered as a truly satirical blog, but a blog that uses satire as a mode of self-expression.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: The Meaning of Blogging Culture in China

Overall, this study has explored aspects of the developing Chinese blogosphere. It has done so through the development of a typology of blogging in China, which then enabled the selection of three key bloggers and investigation of their writings, their influence, and the ways in which their writing both enacts and represents the changing sphere of public debate in China.

At the heart of the thesis is a study of three prominent types of the blog that are constructed in the Chinese blogosphere from 2003 to 2011 – a sexual blog (Muzi Mei's *Love Letters Left*, 2003), a journalist blog (Lian Yue's *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent*, 2007), and a satirical blog (Wang Xiaofeng's *No Guess*, 2006-2011). Through reading the three blogs, I have provided evidences of (a) how these bloggers actively participate in political-related topics, (b) how their radical expressions, each differently articulated, have received nationwide attention. Further, (c) as I have argued in the previous three case-study chapters, I have shown how these bloggers exploit various critical and medium specific resources, both for the achievement of their individual goals and for one that they share: the establishment and maintenance of a media environment within which questions of public discourse and public power can be addressed. Finally, (d) through a close reading of these blogs and a consideration of their contexts I have suggested ways in which these blogs are 'political' and ways in which they may meaningfully intervene, indirectly, through satire, via various unexpected routes, in debates, shifts and developments in media freedoms and in discourses of democracy and public rights to speak in China.

These are key issues that I try to explore and explain in this study – the meaning of political participation, the feature of individualism, and the rise of representative publics (new elites) in the Chinese blogosphere. My interest in investigating the three issues is to evaluate the blogosphere, whether it can take the role of a public sphere, or alternatively, to question whether the Habermasian purpose of the public sphere can be developed through an authoritarian-based media sphere.

My conclusions are presented as follows:

Framed by the core themes that the previous three chapters have raised, this study thus reveals a particular cultural phenomenon.

First, from Muzi Mei's sexual expression (2003) in struggle with mainstream discourses, to Lian Yue's independent report (2007) in his fight against the official press (local media, Xiamen), and then Wang Xiaofeng's mature usage of tactics (satire) to explore severe issues, we see a sustainable development in opening up a discourse zone for individuals in the Chinese blogosphere.

This zone is political, but it is also articulated as a material media formation. That is, it is being helped by the utilization of ICTs. For this reason I set out to deal with the development of ICTs as a point of departure, to examine the criteria of the netizen access and communication in the political process, as well as to provide an angle of view to focus on politics in my thesis. My conclusion is that the use of ICTs in China is less credibly isolated from a political context; as such use has been potentially created in cyber society consisting of models of freer expressions intertwined with tactical and provocative means.

In other words, ICTs have indeed changed the relationship among the State, netizens and Chinese political culture. Take the three blogs; whether by using them

to take part in a wider expression for dissent, or revealing issues or encouraging critical opinions, they are transforming the right to speak up into a discourse of power and indeed often a successful one.

The three blogs selected in this study, which are thus both symbolic and material formations, thus point to the development of a new form of *Canzheng Yizheng* (political participation and political expression) in China.

It includes two-fold meanings. In the first place, unlike Western nations where campaign (see Fahmi, 2009; Hopkins and Matheson, 2005; Lawson-Borders and Kirk, 2005) and discussions on Politics (see Gil de Zuniga et al, 2009; Ekdale et al, 2010; Singer, 2005) are very open and, to some degree supported by the government and politicians, China has a very constrained political environment in history.

As an alternative, however, the three bloggers selected in this study have creatively grown a political capacity, gaining attention by taking their everyday life – sexual life, local environment, and daily news – as politics per se. In other words, bloggers' everyday life (see Dahlgren, 2005; Yu, 2007; Zhao Qidi, 2009) has become an alternative domain across which political arguments can be articulated.

Through different topics (sex, environment) and forms (satire) of blogging, these blogs have tactically altered conditions or premises of control or censorship from the top and in doing so have produced – and exploited – new conditions for writing and speaking. To a meaningful extent, they therefore each constitute a means of political communication in the blogosphere. These Chinese bloggers do more than exemplify the active usage of the blog form in providing information; through their radical motivation of speaking to the public they also mount a challenge to mainstream discourse.

The means are very different. The case of *Love Letters Left*, for instance, referred to Muzi Mei's direct dialogue between the authority and the public in promoting freedom of sexuality for females (women's life style, gender policies etc.). The case of *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent*, referred to Lian Yue's engaging Xiamen residents in discussions on issues of the poisonous project (governmental covering-up, the weakness of the local media etc.), and encouraging them to think critically about choices they can make together, as a local community (protestation, meeting with local authorities etc.), but one also making use of national and international exposure. The case of *No Guess*, on the other side of the coin, refers to Wang Xiaofeng's creative utilizing of a broad network around a shared interest (satire) in arguing with mainstream Chinese media information, therefore, revealing ugly images (corruption, injustice, censorship and control etc.) to resist established ideologies. Via exchanging views on matters of public concern or controversy in a process of argument, debate and critique, that is at once rational – but also emotional, indirect, disguised, ambiguous, they have creatively formed public opinions as well as contributed to emerging political discourses around the role of media in everyday life.

Second, the Chinese blogosphere provides an emerging individual “discursive practice” (Hall, 1997, p.222) that reflects public interest, public opinion and further matters to politics. Working within the framework of the communicative architecture of self-expression, the three blogs in different times have enabled the Chinese blogosphere to maintain its wider readership around the interaction with the bloggers.

This ‘self-expression’ is, to some extent, based on the Western conception of the emphasis on free and competent communication with individual and personal rights (Golding, 1995; Habermas and Rehg, 1998), and has proved particularly attractive to Chinese bloggers (Xu Congqing and Ruan Liyu, 2009; Zhao Qidi, 2009). Muzi Mei's sexual expressions, Lian Yue's substantial reportage, or Wang Xiaofeng's

satirical topics represent new forms of individual freedom within a social collective, which represents a new form of individualism, seeking to express an idea or point of public interest through personal engagement. They are part of the expanding Chinese blogosphere that is playing a role in pressurising the Party-State, as Xu Congqing and Ruan Liyu argue:

The emergence of the blogosphere has greatly liberated the discourse power for the public... It functions as a freer platform for communication, or a freer market of opinions. (2009, p. 97).

Such individualism is also embodied in two elements. On one side, Chinese bloggers represent a will to be identified as individuals. Practically at the core of the blogosphere is the individual person who acts as a blogger as well as providing personal information, as Xu Congqing and Ruan Liyu state:

In the blogosphere, either blog authors or blog readers and comment posters, they are able to take the role of independent persons to post opinions on events and topics. (2009, p. 97)

On the other side of the coin, they aim at bringing about “alternative sources of information and opinion that cannot find a home elsewhere in the media”, to cite Eric Alterman (2003). As seen in the case studies, Chinese domestic bloggers are increasingly using their spaces to call for a voice in the process around which they can build a consensus in struggle, negotiation and critique of the government. They provide independent opinions by means of conflict, resistance, and gate-watching as negotiate instruments with the authority.

The turning point is that, the conflict, the resistance and the gate-watching by sexual writer, journalist, and satirical blogger, all of who, as I have shown, overstep the boundary of what in past experience would have provoked heavy censorship or

punishment, is now being tolerated by the authority – and this is a crucial development in China.

In the context of the individual blogs introduced in the previous three chapters, it is striking that all move from both explicit and implicit statements of special interests towards a broader sense of public power. Muzi Mei's sexual expression (women's sexual rights) instigated her desire to struggle with her right to speak. Lian Yue's success relied upon his spreading words about official malfeasance, misleading reportage and political dissent. Wang Xiaofeng's popularity is in relation to his satirical style in mocking established ideologies. In this way, he surprises netizens frequently.

Thus although they represent the rise of new concerns with individual voice, the three blogs also represent the development of personal voices that connect to issues of common concern, implicitly offering political messages to the public, and potentially resulting in societal influence.

The influence of this study is thus located in two dimensions. In the first place, as can be seen in the three cases, the Chinese blogosphere is shown as part of an ongoing societal transition, a zone operating alongside as well as within the dominant political culture, where radical intellectual groups (educated, urban and middle-class Chinese) constantly fight for discourse power, public interests or against established ideologies. By using the blog, they execute political practice and challenge to State policies, thus, placing them in a position of impression and importance in China's *Wangluo Shehui* (cyber society).

This is one way the individual practices of bloggers here relate to and might produce new forms of common practice and contribute to the creation of a public sphere.

However, there is a twist here. What I am going to state in this conclusion is that, the pervasive Chinese blogosphere has arguably created a new generation of elites. These elites are not the same as those I mentioned in the Introduction chapter, either recognised as part of the minority of a small layer (labeled by the Party such as redness), or a category of special persons such as politicians, economists, scientists etc. They consist in intellectual groups, though; in the sense they are ambiguous and dissident elites.

By this I mean, the three bloggers all work as editors and journalists in China's publishing industry. To some extent, they have long made up part of the 'orthodox' elites, possessing significant amount of economic and cultural capitals as similar as others such as celebrities and State cadres. However, their unconventional manner and provocative expression have made them 'stars' or part of the system they are criticizing even if as those opposing it: in this thesis, the three bloggers have brought issues into the blogosphere and inspired dispute and debate on an array of topics such as sex and freedom, environment and civic life, and strong nation and cottage culture, etc., all of which suggest that they start to question the 'establishment'.

Meanwhile, the three bloggers selected in this study, arguably manifest their incentive to make each topic developed as a public talk. The *Love Letters Left* brought about debate, critique and controversy, however, as Zhao Qidi argues:

Female blogs, to some extent, have constituted a-sisterhood-relationship in society. This benefits Chinese women to know their common interests better, thus, to fight against discrimination such as injustice and inequality in reality. (2009, p. 69)

However, the popularity of the three blogs in different times address that they are translating into a competition against press media for producing political comments. Views and opinions from both *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent* and *No Guess* have

gained the power to penetrate into the heart of society, either by breaking official information or by organising public debates. The two elements have become an essential part of the ‘dissidence’, meaning they have become a kind of unofficial ‘official opposition’.

Added to this is that, the three blogs may not gather the full support of the public (i.e., the case of Muzi Mei), though, they culminate the public consciousness of having a civic life in China, and their viewpoints become increasingly significant that have greatly impacted on both public opinion and decision-making (i.e., the Lian Yue case).

But this has limits:

As I have mentioned in the case studies, this individualism/elitism has to be frequently in conflict with dominant culture and its severe regulations in the Chinese blogosphere.

The three blogs, and many others like them, indeed have heavy impacts in the Chinese blogosphere; however, their authors continue to take risks in fighting against dominant policies, authoritarian power and established ideologies.

Therefore, a negative consequence has also been reached. The *Love Letters Left*, the Xiamen case on *Lian Yue's Eighth Continent*, and some of the posts from the *No Guess* have been permanently taken down – although others continue to arise in their place. The practice of blogging, either in a sense of liberating individuals, or in pursuit of the freedom of expression has therefore been seen as politically difficult in China, as resilient, and effective, but also as having limits beyond which it is still not possible to go.

According to Colin Sparks,

Democracy, in the modern sense of the word, is literally impossible without the media. It is a characteristic claim of Western societies that they are democratic precisely because they have both regular elections and a free media. One of the charges brought against the countries of Eastern and Central Europe was that, whatever they claimed about themselves, they were not democratic because these two conditions were absent. (1998, pp.16-7)

Sparks' opinion points to a weak media system in previous East European nations, but which the Chinese system also remains. Therefore I argue that despite the tactical interventions of the bloggers, few opportunities can be offered to create a genuine political public sphere.

However it is important to go beyond simply looking at strategic strength and tactical weakness. In this final section I want to suggest a three pronged relationship is operating.

The conflict between what bloggers want to say and what they are restricted from saying reminds me to think about blogging in China as, to re-borrow from James Lull's view (2006), a culture of 'push' vs. 'pull'.

The Chinese 'push' side may be analogically deduced as regime, system, and tradition that are composed of varying degrees of power and privilege. The Real Name Registration policy, and the Party's political slogan 'harmonious society', forcing Internet sites to negotiate their living space (Xin, 2002), and leaving growing social grievances and unrest information covered up and unpublished, are examples of the 'push'.

In the process of the 'push' vs. the 'pull', bloggers, as Yu Haiqing comments:

[W]ho produce and circulate their... articles... online do not consider themselves, and are not considered by the state authorities, to be opponents of the system. (2007, p. 431)

As this study has illustrated, Muzi Mei's sexual expression aimed at encouraging a more liberal life, Lian Yue's critical expression targeted at preventing a nice living environment from being poisoned, and Wang Xiaofeng's satirical expression intends to deny or resist established ideologies. By forcing the Party-State to face a growing resistance and challenges, they are proved as alternative approaches for enjoying the kind of freedom (expression); on these blogs there seems to be an abstract understanding of how Chinese bloggers carry on critiques or arrive at political opinions which seems strangely entertaining and informal. Muzi Mei chose 'sex' as a start. Lian Yue used non-local media to criticize local (Xiamen) government, and Wang Xiaofeng's hooligan characteristic stays with his playful attitude rather than rebelliousness with the authority. In this sense, this 'enjoyment' is quite *Yuhui Quzhe* (meandering and circuitous).

The feature of a strong 'push' controlling a weak 'pull' shows not a simple cat-mouse game, but a three-leg relation, mobilized among centralization, decentralization and recentralization in the blogosphere.

To put it another way, the Chinese blogosphere comes to be considered as an alternative public space distinct from the mainstream media space. It not only allows us to see how political power is constructed, and what its dominant values are, but also at what points the two powers are challenged and resisted, as can be seen in the three cases.

Perhaps on this basis that Chinese domestic scholars, take Zhang Lei and Lou Chengwu, keep arguing:

It could be argued that the blogosphere has enhanced a special channel for the government to listen to diverse voices from the public. To some extent, it forms a benign interaction in the process of political communications. (2006, p.102)

This 'benign interaction' is worthy of further consideration. As I have mentioned in each case study, at certain moments and in certain situations, and in relation to the instabilities (different forms of blocks) of blogs, that would question the degree to which the blogosphere (as public sphere) is empowering political support (see Lawson-Borders and Kirk, 2005). As Scott Lash (2002, p.35) argues, politics should be in a way that allows individuals and groups to access to, and this is achieved when it takes place both in nation-State and the public sphere. In this sense, 'benign' seems to become a new bottom line for the government; the breakthrough to it – or perhaps the outcome of another question 'benign for whom?' will depend ultimately on Chinese netizens.

Thus, future study will need to connect the blogs with more directly radical topics (national political events, for instance), to examine whether and how the expressions can win ongoing influence (from forming the shape of public discourse towards more democratic changes).

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Appendix

1 The News Agency Source for the Stories across Individual Titles (1)

(44 in total, 3 January 2007-1 May 2008)

International Media	Chinese Media
Chemical News & Intelligence (Singapore) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. China to Move Contentious PX Project out of Xiamen b. Xiamen May Relocate Dragon's PX Project c. Xiamen City Consults Public on Patched Project d. Focus: China Steps up Environment, Safety Watch e. China's SEPA to Assess Xiamen Environment f. Dragon Group Faces 6-Month Delay at Xiamen PX g. Dragon Group Stops Xiamen PX Work after Protests h. Dragon Group Defends Fujian PX Project 	Xinhua News Agency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. China Focus: Locals Oppose Xiamen Chemical Plant at Public Hearings b. Xiamen Environment to be Assessed after Controversial Chemical Plant Suspended c. Xiamen to Build Advanced Manufacturing Base d. Residents Picked by Lottery for Forum on Xiamen Chemical Plant
South China Morning Post (Singapore) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. All Eyes in Xiamen on Chemical Plant Study: Residents Assess Effect on the Environment b. Virtual Voices c. Rise of 'the Mortgage Class' Tests Beijing d. Chemical Plant Might be Axed after Study: Xiamen Mayor Offers Protesters Some Hope e. Clashes Mark Second Day of Chemical Plant Protest: Xiamen Residents Fear Factory Will Destroy Their 'Green' City f. Surprise as Toxic Chemical Plant in Xiamen Is Put on Hold g. Chemical Reaction 	China Dialogue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. A New Frontier for Public Participation b. Xiamen PX: A Turning Point? c. Planning Failure in Xiamen

Associated Press (USA)	China Daily
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Thousands Demonstrate against Plan to Build Chemical Factory in Southern China b. Chinese city Suspends Work on Chemical Plant after Residents Send More Than 1M Text Messages c. China: City Moves to Ban Anonymous Web Postings after Protests Over Chemical Plant d. China's Environmental Watchdog Says Plans for Xiamen Chemical Plant May Be Scrapped 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Majority Oppose Chemical Plant b. Serve the People
BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific (UK)	China Chemicals Daily
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Chinese Websites Carry Video of Xiamen Protests, Government TV Announcement b. China to Assess Plans for Chemical Plant Amid Pollution Concerns c. China's Xiamen Holds Public Consultation on Chemical Plant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Xiamen's PX Project to Relocate to Gulei Island
The Straits Times (Singapore)	China Economic Review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Red China's Green Revolution: Fed up with Algae-Infested Lakes, Smog-Filled Cities, and Rivers Coloured black, Red and Green by Chemical Discharge, Ordinary Chinese Are Fighting Back in a Growing Tide of 'Green Dissent' b. Firm Tries to Quash Fears over Chemical Factory: It Says Paraxylene, Used in Polyester and Fabrics, Is No More Dangerous than Petrol c. City Demo over Chemical Plant Makes Waves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Xiamen to Tighten Internet Controls
Asia Pulse	Business Daily
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. China to Improve Environmental Assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Making Room for Public Participation

Newsweek (USA)

- a. Where ‘Guanxi’ Rules: Party Politics, Cross-Strait Relations and Good Old Greed Still Trump Everything Else in China

China Herald

- a. SEPA Critical on Xiamen PX-Project

Chemical Business Newsbase (UK)

- a. Xiamen PX Project Is Suspended

The Statesman (India)

- a. Asian Voices Making Room For Public Participation

AFX (UK)

- a. Chinese Local Officials Freeze 11 BLN-Yuan Chemical Plant Project

The Virginian-Pilot (USA)

- a. Chinese Protesters Turn to Texting

Total 32

Total 12

2 The News Agency Source for the Stories across Individual Title (2)

(6 in total, 18 April 2007-14 December 2007)

Chinese Press	Headline
<i>Diyi Caijing Ribao</i> (China Business Network)	<i>Zhenxie Ti'an Beihou: Zhuanjia yu Guanyuan de Duihua</i> (Behind the Bill: Dialogues between Scholars and Governors)
<i>Dongfang Liaowang</i> (Oriental Outlook)	<i>Liuyuanshi Nanzu Xiamen Juxing Huagong Xiangmu</i> (Six Scholars Can Hardly Stop Xiamen's Giant Chemical Plant)
<i>Guojizaixian</i> (CRI Online)	<i>Xiamen Haicang PX Xiangmu Huanjian Zao Dangdi Juming Youxing Kangyi</i> (Xiamen Haicang Delays PX Project: Delayed by Local Residents' Demonstration)
<i>Shanghai Zhengquanbao</i> (Shanghai Securities News)	<i>Zhongda Juece Rang Minzhong Canyu Caineng Tigao Xiaolv</i> (Public Participation Helps Boost the Effectiveness for Governmental Decision)
China Daily	Open Forum Held to Air Views on PX Plant
The Beijing News	Over Half of Xiamen Representatives Oppose Chemistry Project in Haicang
Total	6

3 The News Agency Source for the Stories across Individual Titles (3)

(15 in total, 30 May 2007 – 5 May 2008)

International Press	Headline
Financial Times (UK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Protest Threat Delays Chinese Plant b. China City to Tighten Internet Controls c. Property Power Brings Nimbyism to China d. China Must Come Clean about Its Poisonous Environment
Reuters (UK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. China Calls on Xiamen to Rethink Chemical Plant b. Xiamen Mayor Says Street Protest ‘Inappropriate’ c. China City Suspends Chemical Plant After Uproar d. Hundreds Protest against China Chemical Plant
Washington Post (USA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Protest Over Factory Spreads in China: Reports of Chemical Plant Relocation Spur Violent Confrontations With Police b. Chinese City Asks Public’s Input on Proposed Factory: Unusual Request, Accompanying Report on Environmental Impact of Chemical Plant, Follows Large Protests c. Text Messages Giving Voice to Chinese: Opponents of Chemical Factory Found Way Around Censors
Times (UK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Protest Bloggers Ordered to Come Out of the Shadows b. China Moves to Ban Anonymous Posts and Chatting
Independent Media Weekly (UK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. China Trembles at the Power of the Blog
Economist (UK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Protest in China: Mobilised by Mobile
Total	15

4 Headlines of Blogging on the *No Guess* (189 Posts)

Year	Events (80 Posts)	People (41 Posts)	Government Departments (68 Posts)
2006 (54 Posts)			<i>Zhongguo Yibudong</i> (China No Mobile, 4 May 2006)
			<i>Gegongsongde Yeyao Jingye Yidian</i> (To Praise or Eulogize Should Also be Professional, 4 May 2006)
		<i>Chuzu Siji de Bangyang</i> (A Model for Taxi Drivers) (6 May 2006)	
	<i>Guo Qi</i> (Flag, 14 May 2006)		
	<i>Haixia Liangan Xuerou Xianglian</i> (Cross Strait Is As Close As Flesh and Blood, 20 May 2006)		<i>Tong Gao</i> (Formatted News, 20 May 2006)
			<i>Qiu</i> (Ball, 12 June 2006)
	<i>Guanyu Hexie</i> (About Harmony, 13 June 2006)		

	<i>Shanghai Fenghui</i> (Shanghai Submit Meeting, 14 June 2006)		
			<i>Gongyi Guanggao</i> (Charity Advertisement, 18 June 2006)
	<i>Tiaodong Qunzhong Dou Qunzhong</i> (To Play Up Conflicts with the Public, 22 June 2006)		
	<i>Buyu zhi Ming</i> (Dishonor, 24 June 2006)		
	<i>Yixiang Buneng Qingyuan</i> (One's Own Thinking Cannot be A Wishful Thinking, 26 June 2006)		
		<i>Huang Jianxiang Fenge</i> (Huang Jianxiang is Crazy, 27 June 2006)	
			<i>Zai FalvMianqian Youxieren Gengjia Pingdeng</i> (In Front of the Law Some People Own Much Equality, 30 June 2006)
	<i>Daochu Doushi Yaoyan</i> (Rumors,		

	1 July 2006)		
			<i>Dizheng Suan Tufashijian ma</i> (Is Earthquake a Breaking News? 4 July 2006)
			<i>Youganyu Xinlang Jintian Fadong Qunzhong dou Qunzhong</i> (Comment on Playing Up Conflicts awith the Public by Sina, 5 July 2006)
			<i>Daoban</i> (Pirated Copy, 19 July 2006)
			<i>Wenhua Bu</i> (Culture No, 25 July 2006)
	<i>Shanqing Tangshan</i> (Dramatized Tangshan, 26 July 2006)		
	<i>Luxun zhi Si</i> (The Death of Luxun, 28 July 2006)		<i>Xinwen Sheying Yexing PS</i> (PS Is Also Popularly Applied to Photography, 28 July 2006)
		<i>Qishi Zhongguoren he Yidaliren Henxiang Bujinjin shi Zuqiu shang de Chouwen</i> (Just	

		Like Italy, Football Is Not the Only Scandal in China, 28 July 2006)	
	<i>Beijing Daodi Youmeiyou Wenhua</i> (Is There Any Culture In Beijing, 31 July 2006)		
	<i>Beijingren Daodi Youmeiyou Suzhi</i> (Do Beijing People Have Personal Qualities? 14 August 2006)		
			<i>Guangdian Zong Ji</i> (The State Administration of Radio Film and Television of China Is Always So Worried, 15 August 2006)
	<i>Hongse Jingji Moshi</i> (The Red Economy Mode, 22 August 2006)		
			<i>Zhongguo Zuqiu Yinggai Zheme Ti</i> (Football in China Should be Played Like This, 6 September 2006)
			<i>Zhengmian Baodao</i> (Positive Report, 6

			September 2006)
	<i>Mingan</i> (Sensitive, 8 September 2006)		
	<i>Huashuo Zanghua</i> (About Dirty Words, 10 September 2006)		
	<i>Mei Wenhua</i> (Uncivilized, 18 September 2006)		
			<i>Pan Changjiang Xinwenjiang Houxuan Zuopin Tuijie</i> (Selected Works from Pan Changjiang News Awards, 19 September 2006)
		<i>Guanyu Xinpusen</i> (About the Simpson's, 30 September 2006)	
		<i>Mingren Fensi Dabuquan</i> (Celebrities and Their Fans, 7 October 2006)	
			<i>Boke Shimingzhi de Beilun</i> (Debate on the Real Name Registration on Blogs, 24 October 2006)
	<i>Weishengzhi Shijian</i> (The		

	Event of Toilet Tissues, 26 October 2006)		
	<i>Zai Shanghai</i> <i>Kanbudao</i> <i>Zhongnanhai</i> (You Will Not See Zhongnanhai In Shanghai, 6 November 2006)		
			<i>Jizhe Jie</i> (Journalist's Festival, 8 November 2006)
			<i>Zhongguo Nide</i> <i>Diku Diule</i> (China, You Have Lost Your Underpants, 20 November 2006)
			<i>Shajiao Hexiequan</i> (What Is the Right of Harmony, 23 November 2006)
	<i>Qianwan Bieba</i> <i>Ziji Dangren</i> (Don't Treat Yourself As a Human Being, 25 November 2006)		
			<i>Shuo Jiju</i> <i>Wenhuabu de</i> <i>Huaihua</i> (Say Some Bad Words To the Ministry of Culture, 26 November 2006)
	<i>Gushi de Jieju</i> <i>Zongshi Youdian</i>		

	<i>Chuhuyiliao</i> (The Result is Always Unexpected, 2 December 2006)		
			<i>Wenhuabu de Luoji</i> (The Logic of the Ministry of Culture, 3 December 2006)
	<i>Daguo Buneng Jueqi</i> (Great China Is Not Rising, 7 December 2006)		
			<i>Jia Xinwen Yinggai Zheme Bian</i> (Fake News Should be Edited Like This, 8 December 2006)
			<i>Fuxing Nvzu</i> (Re-Strength Women's Football, 11 December 2006)
			<i>Buxu Fazhan Wenhua de Wenhua Bu</i> (A Ministry of Culture Where Culture is Restricted to be Developed, 13 December 2006)
		<i>Zuoge You Wenhua de Mingxing</i> (To be An Educated Superstar, 14 December, 2006)	

	<i>Zeren yu Yiwu</i> (Responsibilities and Obligations, 18 December 2006)		
	<i>Mengxiang Zaojian Xianshi</i> (Dreams Murder Reality, 21 December 2006)		
	<i>Wennuan de Zhongguo</i> (A Warm China, 29 December 2006)		
2007 (46 Posts)			<i>Quanli</i> (The Right, 3 January 2007)
			<i>Hexie Xinwen Xiezuozhixinan</i> (Guidelines of Writing Harmonious News, 6 January 2007)
			<i>Shajiao Sifa Hexie</i> (What is Judicial Harmony, 7 January 2007)
	<i>Liuxing Yu</i> (Popular Terms, 13 January 2007)		
	<i>Kouxiantang Shijian</i> (The Chewing Gum Event, 16 January 2007)		
	<i>Zhongguo Jueqi</i> (The Rise of China, 24 January		

	2007)		
		<i>Xingbake yu Rentong Wenhua</i> (Starbucks and Cultural Identity, 27 January 2007)	
		<i>Shabi</i> (Idiot, 28 January 2007)	
		“ <i>Ni ye tui Aoyun le</i> ” (“You Are Very Olympics”, 31 January 2007)	
		<i>Jingyingmen de Tuoyiwu</i> (The Elites’ Striptease, 8 February 2007)	
		<i>Mingren Mingyan</i> (Quotes From Celebrities, 21 February 2007)	
			<i>Chunwan: Shuiyao Zheyang de Mianzi Gongchen</i> (The Spring Festival Gala: Who Wants Such a Face Project, 22 February 2007)
	<i>Hexie Kouwu Jiemi</i> (Harmony Misunderstanding, 24 February 2007)		
			<i>Wo jiu Buxihuan</i>

			<i>3.15 Wanhui</i> (I Don't Like 3.15 Programme, 18 March 2007)
			<i>Gongping</i> (Justice, 26 March 2007)
	<i>Aoyun Shangxiang</i> (Olympics Imaginations, 27 March 2007)		
			<i>Zhenyi: Yi Liangjiafunv huo Ji de Mingyi</i> (Justice, On Behalf of Good Wives or Prostitutes, 4 April 2007)
	<i>Er</i> (Two, 6 April 2007)		
			<i>Yangshi de Wenhua</i> (The CCTV Culture, 21 April 2007)
	<i>Mingan Ciju</i> (Sensitive Phrases, 27 April 2007)		
			<i>Zhongguo Xinwen Heibanbao</i> (Chinese News Blackboard, 13 May 2007)
	<i>Hexie Ziyaner</i> (The Phase of Harmony, 14 May 2007)		

	<i>Ni de Dipan</i> (Your Territorial, 3 June 2007)		
	<i>Lishi</i> (History, 6 June 2007)		<i>Wanle de Gaokao</i> (The Wicked Gaokao, 6 June 2007)
	<i>Qian Guize</i> (Hidden Rules, 6 July 2007)		
			<i>Du Renmingribao</i> <i>Pinglun Wenzhang</i> <i>Yougan</i> (Comments on Articles of <i>People's Daily</i> , 11 July 2007)
	<i>Kan Zhonguo de</i> <i>Jiaoyu Dique</i> <i>Haisiren</i> (The Education System Murders the People of China, 12 July 2007)		
			<i>Guanyu Zhurou de</i> <i>Sikao</i> (Thinking About the Pork, 7 August 2007)
		<i>Tigao Boke</i> <i>Zhimingdu</i> (Be Famous in the Blogosphere, 12 August 2007)	<i>Wenti Jingji Xue</i> (Problems In Economy Theories, 12 August 2007)
	<i>Ruguo Er</i> (If Two, 21 August 2007)		
		<i>Yu Mou Tiyu</i> <i>Bianji Duihua</i> (Dialogue with A Sports	

		Journalist, 4 September 2007)	
			<i>Yule Zhengzhi</i> (Entertainment Politics, 6 September 2007)
		<i>Wenren Aoyun</i> (Intellectual Olympics, 8 September 2007)	
	<i>Kexue Zhiguo</i> (Use Science to Rule the Country, 24 October 2007)		
	<i>Shier Bi</i> (Drama Queen, 4 November 2007)		
	<i>Hu Jia Who Wei</i> (The Tiger Borrows Whose Ferocity? 19 November 2007)		
			<i>Jigou Shezhi</i> (Constructions of the System, 22 November 2007)
		<i>Huananhu</i> <i>Jingshen</i> (The Sprit of Huanan Tiger, 25 November 2007)	
	<i>Hexie Guolan</i> (Harmony Fruit Hamper, 30 November 2007)		

	<i>Yuren Wei Shan</i> (Pretending to Helping Others, 7 December 2007)	<i>Zhichi Yixia</i> <i>Lian Yue Laoshi</i> (Support Lian Yue, 7 December 2007)	
		<i>Zhao Benshan</i> <i>yu Chunwan</i> (Zhao Benshan and Spring Festival Gala, 14 December 2007)	
			<i>Hexie Shiwulian</i> (Harmony Food Chain, 16 December 2007)
	<i>Niaochao</i> (Beijing National Stadium, 26 December 2007)		
2008 (27Posts)			<i>Women Douaikan</i> <i>Xinwenlianbo</i> (We All Like to Watch News Broadcasting, 2 January 2008)
		<i>Laoshi</i> (Teacher, 10 January 2008)	
	<i>Da Guo</i> (Great Nation, 13 January 2008)		
			<i>Daodi Sile</i> <i>Duoshao Ren</i> (How Many People Are Dead? 03 February 2008)

	<i>Mingan Tidaici</i> (Synonymy of Sensitive, 6 March 2008)		
			<i>Guangdian Weishenme Zongji</i> (Why Is the State of Administration of Radio Film and Television of China Always So Worried? 12 March 2008)
			<i>Naocan Jizhe</i> (Journalists with Mental Disability, 21 March 2008)
	<i>Piyao Dagu</i> (A Great Nation with the Ability of Denying Rumors, 29 March 2008)		
	<i>Zanghua yu Zanghua Wenhua</i> (Dirty Words and the Cultural History of Dirty Words, 3 April 2008)		
	<i>Dizhi</i> (Resistance, 15 April 2008)		<i>Minhang Zong Ji</i> (Civil Aviation Administration of China Always Worries About Something, 23 April 2008)
			<i>Yi Zhengyi de Mingyi</i> (On Behalf of the Justice, 26

			April 2008)
	<i>Lun Zhuangbi</i> (About Pretending To Be Nobility, 8 May 2008)		
		<i>Jiucheng</i> <i>Wangmin</i> <i>Wuyiyu CCTV</i> (90% of the Netizens Are the Same As CCTV, 26 May 2008)	
	<i>Zhengzhi Sixiang</i> <i>Gongzuo Huibao</i> (Report of Ideological and Political Work, 3 June 2008)		
		<i>Tubie No. 1</i> (Fool No.1, 11 June 2008)	
		<i>Muyu de Juxian</i> (Restrictions of Mother Language, 21 June 2008)	
			<i>Ruhe Xie Tiyu</i> <i>Huabian Xinwen</i> (How to Write Tidbits on Sports, 6 August 2008)
			<i>Zuo Sohu de</i> <i>Wangbian Zhen</i> <i>Rongyi</i> (It Seems that Online News Editor is an Easy Job in Sohu.com,

			12 August 2008)
		<i>Wangluo</i> <i>Naocan</i> <i>Linchuang</i> <i>Zhengzhuang</i> (The Symptom of Online Mental Disabilities, 25 August 2008)	
	<i>Jinpai Daguo</i> <i>Budengyu Tiyu</i> <i>Daguo</i> (A Nation Leading In Gold Medals Doesn't Mean It Is A Sports Giant, 27 August 2008)		
		<i>Naocan Zhijian</i> (Broken in Brain But Firm in Sprit, 1 September 2008)	
			<i>Guanyu Xianzhi</i> <i>Shipin</i> (About the Restriction of Posting Videos, 6 September 2008)
			<i>Wo Weishenme</i> <i>Buxihuan Falv</i> (Why I Don't Like Law? 10 September 2008)
	<i>Beijing Ning</i> <i>Huilai le</i> (Beijing You Come Back, 23 September 2008)		

		<i>Buneng Yinwei</i> <i>Nishi Lingdao</i> <i>jiu Keyi ba</i> <i>Kucha Tuodiao</i> (You Cannot Take Off Your Underpants Even If You Are A Leader, 18 November 2008)	
			<i>Hongqi Xiade Dan</i> (The Egg Is Laid By Red Flag, 1 December 2008)
2009 (30 Posts)			<i>Mima Baohu:</i> <i>Women Dou</i> <i>Shenghuo zai</i> <i>Hanwendai</i> (Password Protection: We All Live In Cool Temperate Zone, 5 January 2009)
	<i>Hexie yu Bu Hexie</i> (Harmony and Improperly Fitting Shoes, 3 February 2009)		
			<i>Yangshi Daodi gen</i> <i>shui Youchou</i> (Who Is Exactly Hated By CCTV? 10 February 2009)
			Pi Chunwan (Criticize Spring Festival Gala, 11 February 2009)
		<i>Shuode Duo</i> <i>Chengken A</i>	

		(What A Sincere Speech, 15 February 2009)	
	<i>Gui Guo</i> (Your Sincere Country, 22 February 2009)		
			315 (March 15, 16 March 2009)
	<i>Nabuxing Bu Naer</i> (Where There is A Shortage, There Is A Fixing, 26 March 2009)		
	<i>Meitian Douguo Yurenjie</i> (Everyday is April Fool Day, 2 April 2009)		
			<i>Jia Xinwen</i> (Fake News, 1 May 2009)
			<i>Nanjing Datusha yu Wangluo Shimingzhi</i> (Nanjing Massacre and Online Real Name Registration, 3 May 2009)
	<i>Cao</i> (Fuck, 21 May 2009)		
			<i>Zhe Xinwen Xiede</i> (Such A News Report (7 June 2009)
	<i>Shanzhai</i> (Cottage, 11 June		

	2009)		
	<i>Lun Dixian</i> (About Bottom Lines, 8 July 2009)		
			<i>Caifang</i> (Interview, 12 July 2009)
			<i>Ruguo Fasheng zai Guiguo</i> (If This Happens In Your Sincere Country, 24 July 2009)
	<i>Lishi shi Zuida de Xugou</i> (History is the Biggest Liar, 25 July 2009)		
			<i>Guonei Xinwen</i> (Domestic News, 18 August 2009)
			<i>Yangshi Tiwen</i> (CCTV's Mode of Interview, 18 August, 2009)
		<i>Naocan</i> (Mental Disabilities, 8 September 2009)	
		<i>Wenti Mingxing</i> (Sick Superstars, 21 October 2009)	
	<i>Minganci Taiduo</i> (To Many Sensitive Words, 23 October 2009)		
	<i>Dazhong Daodexue</i> (Public		

	Morality, 9 November 2009)		
	<i>Yulu de Zhongjie</i> (The End of Slogans, 10 November 2009)		
	<i>Bi Zanghua Gengzang de</i> (Dirtier Than Dirty Words, 17 November 2009)		<i>Xinwen Jiaocai</i> (Journalism Textbooks, 17 November 2009)
	<i>Gui Guo</i> (Your Sincere Country, 26 November 2009)		
		<i>Mingxing Yao Zhongguo</i> (Superstars Shine China, 1 December 2009)	
	<i>Wo Danxin “Mama” Zhegeci</i> (I Worry About the Term “Mama” (29 December 2009)		
2010 (13 Posts)	<i>Youshihou Zhongguo hen 2012</i> (Sometimes China Is Very 2012, 17 January 2010)		
		<i>Xingxiang Dashi</i> (Image Ambassador, 7 February 2010)	
	<i>Niaochao</i> (The		

	National Stadium, 20 February 2010)		
		<i>Biena Jizhe</i> <i>Budang Ji</i> (Don't Exclude Journalists From Whores, 25 May 2010)	
	<i>Chaoxian</i> <i>Jingshen yu</i> <i>Zhongguo</i> <i>Jingshenbing</i> (The North Korean Sprit and Chinese Mental Ills, 18 July 2010)		
		<i>Renmen</i> <i>Weishenme</i> <i>Taoyan bing</i> <i>Shengshengde</i> <i>Aizhe Shabi</i> (Why Do People Hate But Still Love Those Idiots? 3 August 2010)	
	<i>Yazibibao</i> (An Eye For An Eye, and A Tooth For A Tooth, 5 August 2010)		
		<i>Wenhua</i> <i>Buzhang Tan</i> <i>Wenhua</i> (The Head of Ministry of Culture Talks About Culture, 7 August 2010)	

		<i>Weishenme Xiangxin Mingren</i> (Why Do We Trust Celebrities, 22 August 2010)	
		<i>Zhidaode Taiduo Buhao</i> (It's Not Good For You To Know Too Much, 19 September 2010)	
	<i>Aiguo Liangezi Hao Ganga</i> (The Term Patriotic Is So <i>Wenhua</i> Embarrassing, 18 October 2010)		
	<i>Huanying Asangqi lai Zhongguo</i> (Welcome Julian Assange To Come to China, 5 December 2010)		
		<i>"Xiansheng Ni Hao Meng Ao"</i> ("Sir" You Are Very Good", 19 December 2010)	
2011 (17 Posts)	<i>Tequan</i> (Privilege, 11 January 2011)		<i>Yazhou Zuqiu</i> (Asican Football, 11 January 2011)
			<i>Gongping</i> (Justice, 17 January 2011)
			<i>Guojia Xingxiang</i>

			(The Image of the Nation, 26 January 2011)
			<i>Chunwan (Spring Festival Gala: A Dirge, 15 February 2011)</i>
		<i>Youni Guizhe Zhonguo Renming Congci Neng Zhanqilai Ma (If You Keep Kneeling, How Can Chinese People Stand Up Ever Since? 26 February 2011)</i>	
	<i>Zhe jiu Haoxiang Youren Yizhi Nazhe Qiang Zhizhe Ni Yiyang (It Looks Like Somebody Is Pointing To You With A Gun, 8 March 2011)</i>		
	<i>Zhuangbi de Yishu (The Art of Play Pussy, 12 March 2011)</i>		
	<i>Maque Dagu (A Big Country Full of Sparrow (18 March 2010)</i>		
	<i>zunzhong (Respect, 2 April 2010)</i>		

		<i>Huogai</i> (You Deserve It, 17 August 2011)	
		<i>Ma Weidu</i> (Ma Weidu, 11 September 2011)	
		<i>Erdai</i> (Second Generation, 18 September 2011)	
	<i>Wenhua Qiangguo</i> (Strong Nation in Culture, 2 November 2011)		
		<i>Gongguan</i> (Public Relations, 22 November 2011)	
		<i>Lun Ting Ni</i> (Talking About Supporting You, 30 November 2011)	
			<i>Jiaoyu Haizi</i> (To Educate Children, 22 December 2011)