Government-dominated Governance and the Double-edged Sword: A Critical Review of the Chinese Academic Discourse on Internet Regulation

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1. Introduction

Along with the rapid growth of Chinese netizens and the impressive development in information communication technologies (ICTs) in China, there has been an increasing academic interest in the Chinese internet, particularly in its potential of promoting social movements, democracy and human rights (Qiu & Bu, 2013; Yang, 2012). However, when it comes to internet policy and governance, the voices of Chinese scholars seem to be overshadowed in the English-dominated academic world. Compared to overseas studies, articles published in Chinese are found to be more conservative, less theoretical, and focus less on the political consequences of internet (Qiu & Bu, 2013; Wei, 2009).

What is the major discourse constructed around internet policy, and who are the major architects? Is there a debate happening among Chinese scholars in this authoritarian regime? Is there a different story from the international narratives about internet? This research aims to critically examine and analyze current research on internet policy written in Chinese and published on Mainland Chinese journals or as degree theses, complementing the global narratives from a fresh new angle.

Findings indicate that the Chinese academic discourse on internet governance is highly coherent. The construction of academic discourse involves not only scholars, but also a variety of government institutions. National government is regarded as the major subjectivity and the dominant player, while other stakeholders and the global arena are largely neglected. By depicting the internet as a “double-edged sword” in the first place,

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the image of government as the major and dominated player in the regulating framework is rationalized and legitimized.

2. Literature Review and Research Question

Scholars have noticed that academic interest in the Chinese internet is driven by a concern of the political implications brought by the information technology (Kluver & Yang, 2005). As McCarthy (2011) points out, the U.S. government has been depicting the internet as something inherently beneficial to democracy, human rights and freedom. While China under the authoritarian regime is regarded as one of the most ideal countries to test this presumption, a tension between the Chinese government and the citizens over regulation and censorship has been observed and discussed in the global academic field (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2012; Qiu & Bu, 2013; Wei, 2009; Yang, 2012).

The most recent and comprehensive review in the field is conducted by Qiu and Bu (2013), who presents an overview of 1,705 academic publications on ICTs in China. Qiu and Bu mainly focus on the themes of the literature, the researchers’ perspectives, theoretical frameworks, research objectives, subjectivity and methods, providing a detailed comparison between Chinese and English literatures from these aspects. Two sets of issues that structure the filed are further examined, including the levels of analysis and the agents of ICTs, especially the role of ICTs in media and social transformation. Qiu and Bu argue that more similarities are found between domestic and overseas publications, especially in the basic contents, units of analysis, and the study of subjectivity in regulation. However, there are still notable differences in methodology, theoretical application and research objectives. Most importantly, overseas researchers pay much more attention to the political consequences of internet, while domestic scholars rarely discuss them.

In an earlier research, Kluver and Yang (2005) examine 153 academic articles about the Chinese internet to discern the development of internet studies in a broader scope.
Through a comparison of the parameters, agendas and research foci between the Chinese academic discussions and the larger body of internet research, they find that within this particular research field, most attention has been drawn to two major topics: the government regulation of the internet, and the development of telecommunication and internet infrastructure. Another review by Wei (2009) focuses on a group of 69 new media research articles published in Chinese academic journals, mainly identifying their research agendas, theoretical applications and methodology differences. Findings indicate that a majority of academic research tend to study technological or economic issues rather than social and cultural problems related to new information technology. Besides, most Chinese literature rarely applies any theory in the analysis.

We should notice that among all previous studies reviewing internet research, very few of them actually pay attention to the academic discourse as a whole and regard it as the research object. None of the research focuses on the construction process and strategies of this discourse, not to mention the identities of the authors and their affiliations, and the symbolic and cultural meaning of internet as a technology. Besides, most previous reviews adopt quantitative and descriptive methods, depending their analysis on numbers but not digging into the words. Therefore, we still lack a deeper understanding of the current academic discussion on internet governance, especially on the image of internet as a new technology, and whether there are certain coherent processes and strategies to produce this discourse.

To help depict a more vivid picture of the current Chinese academic discourse on internet governance, this research attempts to find a preliminary answer of the following research question: how does Chinese scholars and other actors in the academic field perceive and analyze internet governance, surveillance, censorship and other regulating policies? More importantly, how does this discourse formed? This major question can be answered from the following sub-questions:

Q1: Who are the major actors constructing the academic discourse? How are their affiliated identities influencing the narratives?
Q2: What are the subjects and objects of internet governance discussed in this discourse?  
Q3: Is this discourse coherent, or are there any discrepancies?  
Q4: How is this discourse shaped? Are there any observable strategies?  

4. Methodology  

4.1 Data Collection  

To collect Chinese academic papers on internet governance, I used the Chinese National Knowledge Institution Database (CNKI) to get my research sample. CNKI is the largest full-text Chinese academic database, which covers more than 9,800 journals starting from 1915, including 1,934 core journals; it also collects doctoral dissertations and master’s theses from major graduate programs since 1984. Therefore, it is an ideal data source for grasping a comprehensive understanding of the current Chinese academic discourse on a particular topic.  

Combining the keyword “Internet” with different sets of other keywords, my query altogether returned 1373 entries. The keywords used included: management (guanli), surveillance (jianguan), policy (zhengce), censorship (shencha), freedom (ziyou), and governance (zhili)³. To exclude irrelevant results, this query was conducted within the following disciplines: Philosophy and Humanities; Social Sciences; Information Technology; Economics and Management Science. Using filtering criteria provided by CNKI, I only keep those results that belong to one of the following categories: academic journal articles; master’s theses; doctoral dissertations; presented paper at national or international conferences. Other types of resources such as newspaper articles and entries in yearbooks are excluded from the sample.  

³ The complete query entry in Chinese is: 题名=互联网 and 题名=管理 and 题名=互联网 and 题名=监管 or 题名=互联网 and 题名=政策 or 题名=互联网 and 题名=审查 or 题名=互联网 and 题名=治理 or 题名=互联网 and 题名=自由 and 专题子栏目代码=F+G+H+I+J (模糊匹配)
In the next step, to further ensure the academic quality of selected papers, I kept only articles that have been cited at least once at the time of the query, and then manually excluded articles on irrelevant topics, such as “Internet Engineering Projects Management” and “Internet in Library Management”. This left me 226 articles directly related to internet governance, among which 28 having been cited more than 10 times, 41 having been cited five to nine times, and 157 having been cited fewer than five times but at least once. The 226 articles, published between 1996 and 2013, composed my final research sample.

4.2 Data Coding

Coding was conducted for all entries in the sample by one coder. Firstly, basic information of the articles was identified, including titles, author names and affiliations, journal names, publication years, original keywords and abstracts. Then author identity was coded according to the nature of their affiliated institutions. All authors from universities and other research institutions were coded as “academic”; authors from government apparatus were coded as “government”; authors with background of business companies or non-governmental organizations were coded as “others”; those without identifiable affiliations were coded as “unknown”. Lastly, a few articles were co-authored by people from two or more different types of institutions, and those were coded as “co-authored”.

In the next step, the tone towards internet as a technology was coded in each article. Those emphasizing the bright side of the internet and only mentioning some weaknesses as the discussion basis of internet regulation were coded as “positive”; those elaborating on the problems and risks of the internet to grant legitimacy of regulation were coded as “negative”; articles discussing both the bright and dark sides of the internet and using words such as “a double-edged sword” “two-sided” “dual influences” were coded as “dual”; and lastly, those choosing not to elaborate on the nature of internet as a technology were coded as “neutral”.

Like in previous studies, this research also pays attention to the objects of the research. Those discussing the management of internet as a whole without specifying a particular subfield were coded as “general”, and other articles were coded according to the major regulation targets discussed, such as online videos, copyright, new media, cybercafé, e-commerce, IT industry, etc. Correspondingly, the subjectivity of governance was also identified based on the different governance frameworks analyzed. Here I did not simply code the subjects of governance, because the majority of sampled articles identify the government as the major actor. Therefore, I chose to code the articles according to the primary regulation framework discussed, including legal regulation, administrative supervision, technical control, industry self-regulation, and civil society participation. Evidently, the first three categories of regulating methods are majorly conducted by the government. Here multiple coding was allowed when an article discusses more than one framework.

Intercoder reliability test was conducted to avoid biased coding in content analysis practices (Lombard, Snyder-duc, & Bracken, 2002). A subset of 50 articles were randomly selected from the original sample and recoded by another coder who is a graduate student in Computer Sciences. The intercoder reliability calculated by percent agreement ranges from 0.76 to 0.98, showing a high reliability across all variables.

4.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Besides summarizing and analyzing descriptive data, this research conducts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2001; Lombard et al., 2002; McCarthy, 2011; van Dijk, 1993) for an in-depth understanding of the construction of academic discourse. A content analysis guide proposed by McCarthy (2011) was adopted and revised for the purpose of this research⁴. Following this guide, we can closely examine the logic and technique behind the narratives of each article, trying to explain the mechanism of the formation of the Chinese academic discourse and its relation with the power apparatuses.

⁴ See Appendix.
Based on the coded variables, we can contextualize the articles by identifying who is writing, what is the proposed regulation framework, how is the subjectivity proposed and legitimized, how is the regulating object described and justified, what is the tone when depicting the internet, and whether the narratives are coherent across articles. After outlining the context of each article, the next step is to macro-read the micro analysis (McCarthy, 2011). Important questions include: What are the verbs/adjectives used to describe the internet? What is the ideal state of internet, and how can we achieve it? What are the binary oppositions within the article, and how are they confronting each other? What is the foundation of internet governance? Among all relevant actors, who is under the spotlight, and who is invisible? By asking these questions, we are able to grasp the depiction in the Chinese academic discourse towards the information technology, and to understand the rationales and strategies to construct such a narrative.

5. Findings

5.1 The Timeline of Academic Interest

The sampled articles are published from 1996 to 2013, showing a suddenly increased interest after 2005, which reached its climax around the year of 2008 (See figure 1). We should note that because our selection criteria include the number of citations, this is only roughly reflecting the trend of academic interest but not an accurate presentation. For example, articles published recently may need more time to get noticed and cited within the academic field, so there are relatively fewer entries from 2012 to 2013 in the sample, which does not indicate a drop in academic interest.

Firstly we observed a steady increase in the first five years; then a little decline occurred from 2000 to 2005, nicely corresponding with the findings from both Qiu & Bu (2013) and Kluver & Yang (2005) in their reviewing of studies on ICTs. Another round of publication growth was witnessed afterwards, during which the number of published articles skyrocketed impressively and reached 35 pieces a year in 2008.
A closer look at the timeline of academic interest in internet governance reminds us of a similar trend in the activeness of netizens and the influence of online events. The steady growth in the late 90s reflects both the increasing number of netizens and the notable development and investment in ICT infrastructure. As Qiu and Bu (2013) argues, the relative decline between 2000 and 2005 was probably a result from the dot-com crash as well as the aftermath of Asian financial crisis. On the other hand, while there has been online activism emerging from grassroots BBSs as early as in 1999 (Yang, 2011), the year of 2005 might be special for it witnessed the rise of personal blogs, which later became a crucial frontline in spreading information and independent thoughts. Since then, the Chinese cyberspace started to become more vigorous with a surprisingly powerful influence in the real world. For example, in 2007, netizens actively participated in several social and political incidents by disseminating information online and joining demonstrations offline; those incidents include “the greatest nail house in Chongqing”\(^5\) and the “Xiamen anti-PX plant walk” (Yang, 2011). In addition, in 2007, the Ministry of

Information Industry and State Administration of Radio, Film and Television together implemented the Regulations on Administration of Internet-based Audio-Video Program Services\(^6\), which triggered a close discussion about the future development of online video services.

2008 was probably even more important because a variety of momentous events happened in the same year, including the Beijing Olympics, Sichuan Earthquake, Tibet Riot, Weng’an Riot in Guizhou Province, and non-political online incidents such as Edison Chen’s sex photo scandal. In 2009, Sina launched its micro blogging service Sina Weibo, which has now become a major stage of public opinions and an important battlefield between dissidents and the authoritarian regime.

The next year has drawn global attention when Google decided to pull out of mainland China as a protest to government censorship. More online incidents and movements happened in 2011 and 2012, such as the Wukan Protest, the Jasmine Revolution, the Guo Meimei and Chinese Red Cross Scandal, and the harsh critics on the Wenzhou Train Collision and the Beijing rainstorm accidents. In 2013, online activism is becoming more diverse and vigorous, and the elimination of online rumors is particularly emphasized in the state propaganda; as a result, the academic interest on internet regulation might stay at a relatively stable level.

5.2 Author Identity

Among the 226 papers, 55 are written by Government officials or researchers in government apparatuses, such as Central and Regional Communist Party Schools, Police Training Schools, the Propaganda Department, the State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT), and research institutions under the Ministry of Information Industry. Below is a figure showing the percentage of each group of author identity in the

research sample. The government-affiliated authors compose nearly one-quarter of all entries, which is impressively high in the academic field.

Is this a specific phenomenon within the field of internet governance studies, or does all academic disciplines have a high proportion of contributors with government-affiliated backgrounds under the authoritarian regime in China? To make a comparison, I drew a random sample of 300 articles from CNKI on all topics within the same disciplines and with the same selection criteria, and then labeled the author identity of each article based on the same coding principle. The result shows that the percentage of authors from academic institutions is much higher in a random sample than in the sample on internet governance, and the percentage of authors from state apparatuses are much lower in the random sample.

In the random sample, there are only 7% articles written by government officials or government affiliated researchers, while in the research sample, the percentage is as high as 24.34%. A two-sample z-test shows that this difference in percentages of academic and government affiliated authors between two samples is statistically significant and does not happen by chance alone.
I further identified the different government sectors involved. The following figure 3 shows the composition of government-affiliated authors. Within those articles written by authors with a government background, 22% (12 pieces) are from authors affiliated with the Ministry of Information Industry, which is an integral part of the State Council and “a regulatory body in charge of the manufacture of electronic and information products, the communications and software industry, as well as the promotion of informationization of the national economy and social services in the country”[7]. Another 22% of the sampled articles are written by authors from the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), including central and regional Public Security Bureaus, Police Training Schools and research institutes directly under the Ministry of Public Security. The major responsibilities of MPS include “prevention, suppression and investigation of criminal activities; fight against terrorist activities; ....security inspection on public information networks;…” and a lot more tasks related to the maintenance of social security and order[8].

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20% (11 pieces) of the articles are written by authors from the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), which is another branch under the State Council whose main responsibility is the administration and supervision of radio, film and television industries. There is a particular Department of Internet Audio-visual Program Management under the supervision of SARFT. Another 12.73% (7 articles) are from the Central Party School, the higher education institution that specifically trains officials for the Communist Party of China. It is coded as “government” instead of “academic” because the intent of its training is for the purpose of better political control rather than academic research.

Other relevant government sectors include the China Food and Drug Administration (CFDA), Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT), State Administration for Industry and Commerce (SAIC), Central Propaganda Department, Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the State
Council. This distribution reflects a fragmented yet strict management of the internet that involves different state apparatuses at the same time.

5.3 Objects of Internet Governance

Nearly one third (32.74%) of the articles regard internet as a whole and discuss the management of the overall system. 23 articles (10.18%) specifically discuss regulation of the creation and diffusion of online information; similarly, 18 articles (7.96%) focus on the management of online videos, and 15 articles (6.64%) focus on the supervision of new media emerged along with the development of information technology. 20 articles (8.85%) mainly discuss necessary approaches for the maintenance of cyber security, while 10 articles (4.42%) emphasize on the protection of the youth and college students. Other objects of internet regulation include copyright, e-commerce, online medicine trade and advertisement, privacy issues, cybercafés, IT industry, etc.
5.4 Regulation Frameworks

By identifying the regulation frameworks discussed in each article, we notice that a majority of sampled papers (71.68%) emphasize on administrative supervision, discussing regulation approaches directly implemented by the administrative departments such as the Ministry of Public Security and regional Public Security Bureaus, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television and its regional branches, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, and different levels of regional governments. A variety of administrative strategies are mentioned, including website and BBS registration and licensing system, real name registration system in Cybercafés, information censorship and self-censorship system on public websites, the establishment of a unified administrative institution for internet regulation, and the enforcement of current laws and policies.

On the other hand, 70 articles (30.97%) discuss the legal regulation of internet, including current domestic legislative status, overseas legislative experiences, and possible new laws specifically regulating a certain cyber subfield. In addition, 36 articles (15.93%) mentioned some forms of technical control as a regulation method, including the Great Fire Wall, censorship software such as the Green Dam, filtering system at the routers, techniques for identifying sensitive words or images, and Denial-of-Service (DDoS) Attacks.

Compared to the robust discussion on government-dominated regulation frameworks, the roles of the IT industry and civil society are largely neglected. Although 28 articles (12.39%) mention the role of IT industry, they mostly emphasize their obligation of “self-regulation” rather than participation in the process of internet governance. Only 18 articles (7.96%) mention the existence of civil society, but only regarding it as a supplementary role that should assist the government in internet regulation, without specifying any concrete and practical strategies.
### Table 2: Regulation frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Supervision</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>71.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Regulation</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Control</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Self-regulation</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society Participation</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>226</strong></td>
<td><strong>155.74</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 5.5 Depiction of the Internet

87 pieces (39%) of sampled articles do not indicate an explicit attitude towards internet as a technology. 36 articles (16%) show a positive tone when describing internet, regarding current problems as minor issues, while 21 articles (9%) mainly present a negative tone, focusing on the risks and stating all kinds of possible terrifying consequences. The rest 82 articles (36%) adopt a mingled standpoint, seeing the internet as something inherently intricate with a dual character and an urgent need to be regulated. Both the positive and negative consequences are emphasized, while the metaphor of “double-edged sword” is frequently mentioned to elaborate on the importance of the actor holding this sword.
5.6 Overseas Experiences

There are 29 articles (12.83%) focusing on international experiences in internet regulation, among which 8 got more than 10 citations and 4 others got cited 5-9 times. German is a popular example for punishing illegal information, including pornography, violence, racist remarks and Nazism. Singapore is also mentioned as a typical government-led regulation system. When it comes to the U.S., Patriot Act and Homeland Security Act are frequently cited to prove the necessity of legal and administrative regulation for the reason of national security. Other countries mentioned include the United Kingdoms, Australia, France, South Korea, Japan and Vietnam.

6. Discussion: Legitimizing the Government-dominated Governance

The involvement of government institutions in academic discussion may partially shape the academic discourse from the government interest. In fact, when discussing administrative supervision of the internet, the government sectors mentioned in the articles highly overlap with those that actually contribute to the construction of this academic discourse. The comparison between research sample and random sample shows that the presence of government-affiliated authors is more explicit in the filed of internet governance than in general social science studies. Not only do these authors with government background directly participate in shaping the academic narratives, their presence alone may to some extent affect the expression and communication by other scholars.

No matter in current practices or in the academic discourse, internet governance is undoubtedly dominated by the Chinese government. Although some articles mention the possibility of contribution from business companies and civil society, it is largely viewed as a complementary role with the obligation of cautiously regulating themselves rather than becoming part of the regulation subjectivity. It is regarded as natural and unquestionable that government should take the leading role; the question is just what and how much it should do. Besides, there is currently no NGO or grassroots
organization actively promoting internet freedom in mainland China. The absence of participation of civil society in real life may partially explain its absence in the academic discourse.

Moreover, there is hardly any debate on whether internet needs external regulation or not in the first place. McCarthy (2011) argues that the American foreign policy discourse surrounding the internet attempts to link this particular technology with values of human rights, freedom and democracy, creating a “technological closure” that conceal all possible problems and debates. On the contrary, the Chinese academic discourse tends to present the internet as a double-edged sword that inherently needs a powerful and responsible holder. When various negative influences of the internet are described with extensive details, examples and eloquent rhetoric, it feels justified and reasonable that government should stand out to act as the sword holder. A typical description of the internet is as follows:

“Although the internet provides us with great convenience in our work and life, those viruses, malicious links, illegal activities, unhealthy information, spam emails and leaking of classified state information have seriously threatened the security of the state and our enterprises and families. In particular, the spread of terrorism and fraud information and the leaking of confidential information have severely impacted the political and economic lives of our country.” (Hu, 2003)

Another article focusing on the role of Public Security Bureaus claims that “the interaction between virtual society and the reality has brought new problems to the construction of harmonious society. The public security apparatuses must …… govern the internet based on legal regulations and create a healthy and orderly internet environment.” (Qin, 2007) In this narrative, internet is regarded as a threat to the “harmonious society”, and the Public Security Bureaus, which basically means the Police Department at the regional level, is responsible of sweeping out bad information and creating a healthy online environment.
Based on the sampled articles, negative consequences of the internet include but not limited to the following categories:

a) Online security problems, such as viruses, malicious links, hacker attacks, and risks of privacy exposure.
b) Creation and dissemination of inappropriate contents, such as violence, pornography, and unhealthy culture that may harm the youth and corrupt the social environment.
c) Threats to state security and sovereignty, such as leaking classified information, inciting subversion of state power, spreading terrorism speeches and activities, or possible penetration of hostile ideology from enemies in the West.
d) Threats to social stability, including rapid diffusion of online rumors, and excessive public discussion and participation in political and social issues.
e) Scams, frauds, drug trades, violation to copyrights, and other illegal activities online.

Unlike the technological closure strategy observed in the U.S. official discourse, current and potential problems related to the internet are repeatedly emphasized and discussed, creating an urgent need for state regulation and technical control. Particularly, when other stakeholders are nearly invisible in the real world, the academic discourse tends to neglect them and focus on the government as the only possible savior.

Besides the dominance of government institutions and the absence of other stakeholders, another feather worth noticing in the Chinese academic discourse is the neglect of the global arena. None of the sampled articles mention anything about the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) or the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), which should be the most important international stages for discussion on internet governance. Although experiences from other countries are one of the most popular topics in this academic field, most articles tend to use them to justify and legitimize the government-dominated governance framework in China, claiming that it is an international consensus. Conflicts between the government and civil society in other countries are seldom mentioned; only
examples of good “self-regulation” and “cooperation with the government” are used to describe the role of NGOs and other stakeholders.

7. Conclusion and Future Directions

This research is a preliminary study of current academic discourse with a limited number of articles. Findings indicate a highly coherent narrative on the internet and the dominant role of the government. By depicting the internet as a “double-edged sword” in the first place, the role of government as a powerful regulator is rationalized and legitimized. While government institutions are regarded as the major regulation subjectivity, other stakeholders are largely invisible or displayed as a complementary role. Overseas experiences are cited to justify the role of government, while the larger global arena of internet governance discussion is basically ignored.

Future research should focus more on the role of authors affiliated with government institutions. In-depth interviews with those authors and other scholars would be helpful in understanding their real influence and contribution in the construction of current academic discourse. In addition, a more detailed comparison of government participation in the field of internet governance studies and other social science disciplines is essential to further explore the focus and intention of different government sectors. Moreover, further research on the Chinese official discourse on internet governance should be conducted for a comparison with the academic discourse and an examination of their connections.

References:


Appendix: Content Analysis Guide

Step One—Location and Context
1.1 What type of document is this? (Research Paper, Literature/Policy review)
1.2 What is the identity of the author? What institution does the author belong to? What background does this institution have? (Academic/ Government/ Business Companies/Others) Does it represent the view of the Chinese government? Is it
representative of personal academic opinion only? (If it has no personal author, does this make it seem more official/formal/authoritative?)

1.3 To whom is the author speaking? Is this document for a particular audience?

1.4 In relation to the other documents studied, does this document seem consistent with the others, or has the author specifically tailored their message to meet the approval of a given audience? (Consistency of message).

**Step Two—Representation of the Internet**

2.1 What does the document say in a straightforward macro-reading? That is, who is doing what to whom in the article? What is it about?

2.2 Binary oppositions—what are people/actions/events/places defined in opposition to?

2.3 What are the verbs/adjectives attached to the Internet? (For example, revolutionary, democratic, progressive, neutral?) What are the predicates and relations to other things and people? How, if at all, is the Internet related to other aspects of Chinese society?

2.4 Is the Internet accorded a positive, negative, or neutral value overall? What are the metaphors employed? What other texts are referred to in the document?

2.5 Is the Internet deterministic, a neutral tool, a biased but ambivalent technology? Is any kind of causation implied?

2.6 Is the Internet described as an actor/agent? A state of being?

2.7 Are there any clear unquestioned assumptions about the Internet?

**Step Three—Representations of IT Industry and Civil Society**

3.1 What are the verbs/adjectives attached to IT industry and civil society?

3.2 What is the implied relationship between IT industry, civil society and the Internet?

3.3 What is the relationship between IT industry, civil society and the government in internet regulation?

3.4 How detailed is the discussion on IT industry and civil society? Does the narrative mention any concrete practices or strategies that IT industry and civil society should adopt?
Step Four—Government Policy Practices
4.1 Does the document fit within a particular stain of Chinese political culture? Is it Universalist/Exemplarist/Crusading/Isolationist/Realist? Does it suggest universal values or culturally specifically values?
4.2 Does the document refer to particular political values that resonate within Chinese political culture? (For example, state sovereignty/Chinese characteristics/party-led).

Step Five—Disjuncture
5.1 Are there any elements of the discourse that do not fit together, or do not fit with the wider discourse? What are the inconsistencies or contradictions?