
Introduction

THIS BOOK examines the complex relationships connecting information technology and politics in modern China. It has two parts: the first examines the impacts that telegraphy had on national politics in the last decades of the Qing dynasty, and the second focuses on the Internet and its impact on politics in China since the late 1990s. In retrospect, these two technologies fared quite differently in modern China. When Western countries tried to set up telegraph lines in China in the 1860s, they met strong resistance from the Qing court. It was not until two decades later that China finally set up its telegraph services. China's attitude toward the Internet has been startlingly different. By all accounts, the development of the Internet in China has been phenomenal, as shown by the number of Internet users, which had increased from a mere 620,000 in October 1997 to 94 million by the end of 2004.¹ In this volume, I aim to historicize the study of the Internet in China by taking the detour of first examining the introduction of telegraphy, and by so doing, revealing the paradigmatic shifts, to borrow Thomas Kuhn's term, that affect our views on technology and society in China. The first question that needs to be confronted is, why has so much attention been paid to the Internet in China today?

It is safe to say that no other technology has attracted as much attention and been as politicized by observers of contemporary China worldwide as the Internet. The development of the Internet in China is followed closely in Western countries and the increasing number of its users is periodically reported. Government regulations on Internet use are scrutinized and the use of technologies to censor and police the information

flow on the Net are protested. Government crackdowns on dissent activities in cyberspace are condemned and details of each case are gathered and made public both online and through traditional media. Hearings on the Internet in China have been held by both the U.S. Congress and human rights groups. In addition to the attention generated by journalists' reports and activist organizations, the development of the Internet in China has given rise to an increasing number of academic studies on the Internet in China, making this new and growing intellectual field as busy and active as the cyberspace it reports on.²

In the middle of conducting research for this book, I spent the year 2001 at a major research center in Washington, D.C., where I was not only surrounded by scholars but also had a chance to interact with politicians and journalists. Upon hearing of my research topic and acknowledging that my research was "very interesting," they often proceeded to ask me the same question: "Will the Internet change China?" This was a question that I found difficult to give a clear-cut answer to, because the way it was asked had obvious political implications. The assumptions of those who raised the Internet question with me were clearly grounded in the idea that the Internet may have a democratizing influence on Chinese society. Whether the Internet will change China is a political question as well as a scholarly one, and as we shall see, these two aspects have been increasingly intertwined in the field of Internet study.

Nobody would disagree that the Internet has had and will continue to have profound impacts on Chinese society, and that these impacts are being felt technologically, economically, and politically, as well as socioculturally. Western multinational corporations are helping China build an expanding network infrastructure and moving production facilities and even research and development centers there, and the Internet has created new behavioral patterns in how people communicate with one another, spend leisure time, shop and consume, buy and sell stock, commit crimes, and enjoy music and films, but the attention given to its economic, technological, and sociocultural aspects has certainly been dwarfed by that accorded to its political aspect in China. If we take a closer look at reports on the Internet in China, it becomes even clearer that the issue of the Chinese government's efforts to control it by blocking the free flow of information and suppressing political dissent online has been the focus of the attention.

This attitude toward the Internet in China reflects what I call the "monster complex" shared by many observers of China, who first see the

Internet as a benign monster that will break through the authoritarian Chinese political system with its incessant waves of free flow of information engulfing the legitimacy of the current regime. At the same time, they assume that the Chinese communists will see the Internet as an evil monster that, if not brought under total control, may constitute the biggest danger to their rule. Nonetheless, their control efforts will be in vain, it is thought, because the Internet, with its unique quality of being without a central structure and without hierarchy, is uncontrollable and will change the Chinese society anyway. This prediction has turned out to be just another case of political fortune telling, as is so often encountered by researchers on contemporary Chinese politics. The benign monster is not as powerful or omnipotent as thought, and worse still, unlike the initial response to telegraphy by the Qing rulers, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has adopted a proactive policy toward the Internet. Over the past few years, the PRC has successfully achieved phenomenal Internet growth without losing much control. Correspondingly, some observers have since shifted their attention to how the PRC has tightened its control on the Internet. With news titles such as "China Enacts Sweeping Rules on Internet Firms" from Reuters or the more eye-catching and misleading "Amnesty International: China Orders Death Penalty for Internet Use" from NewsMax.com, the PRC has been depicted as a monster intent on destroying the Internet in China.³

The politics of the Internet in China today is a legitimate and important subject. The question is, how to study it? The complex relationships between information technology and politics in modern China should serve to discourage people from making the kinds of simplistic and technologically deterministic statements and predictions that are too often heard in studies of the Internet in China. In believing that the Internet has the intrinsic power to democratize Chinese society, technological determinists base themselves largely on the ideological conviction that democratization is the path China should follow. The idea of the Internet's intrinsic democratizing function was widely accepted or wished for from the outset, and this optimistic belief in Internet technology persists. People have realized, however, that, while this technology can be employed to enhance democracy, it can also be used to maintain undemocratic regimes.⁴ So, even though we may all agree that China will change with the Internet, we still have to address the issue of what direction China will take and how the process of change will turn out.

To achieve a more balanced and sophisticated study of the Internet

and politics in China, we have to view the focus of current Internet research on China as a historically specific phenomenon. To Westerners, science and technology have been an important measure of human achievement, and they have been employed to establish and legitimize the ideological dominance of the West.⁵ In an earlier historical period, people focused on the “civilizing” or “modernizing” effects of science and technology. Today, employing a different intellectual paradigm, we emphasize the “democratizing” function of the Internet, a technology that is perceived as both a very good fit with and even an enhancement of liberal democracies and free market economies modeled on contemporary Western societies. Not surprisingly, when this technology is projected onto other societies, it is often gauged, consciously or unconsciously, by the underlining paradigm most of us have accepted and lived with. Most of us raise questions about the Internet in China using the dominant paradigm of our historical era of globalization, but we should keep in mind that the current paradigm is itself a historical entity and subject to change.

A little reflection will not only help us better understand why we are interested in studying political aspects of the Internet in China but also open up new approaches to study the issue. I believe that in order to get a more in-depth knowledge of the impact of the Internet on Chinese society, especially its potential for being used by Chinese to participate in politics and to promote democracy, we have to historicize our research by looking at how other, similar technologies fared in different historical contexts. After all, the Internet is only the latest development of so-called modern information technology. Since the mid nineteenth century, there have been numerous breakthroughs in the technological arena, starting with telegraphy and going on to the telephone, radio, television, the facsimile machine, and satellite TV, before finally reaching the era of the Internet in the 1990s. The appearance of each technology had impacts on society and politics, yet the earlier technologies have received far less scholarly attention, especially from a political perspective, than the Internet.

This study tries to historicize the impact that telegraphy and the Internet have had on Chinese politics over a span of one and half centuries. I have chosen these two technologies for two reasons. The first is that, even though they constitute two poles of the modern development of information technology, they have many similarities and have both had enormous impacts on human society. Technologically speaking, the ap-

pearance of telegraphy meant that for the first time in human history, a single technology overcame the vast distances separating people and potentially connected the whole world online on an instant basis, a characteristic vastly multiplied by the later Internet technology. Socially speaking, in retrospect, the impact that telegraphy had on Western societies was so profound that it cannot be dwarfed by the Internet. As pointed out by the communications scholar James Carey, the use of the telegraph facilitated the development of stock and commodity exchanges, enabled the birth of news agencies, and reshaped Americans' consciousness of time and space.⁶ The emergence of telegraphy was a huge event in the nineteenth century.

The second reason I have chosen these two specific technologies to study is simply my own personal interest. Initially, telegraphy and the Internet attracted my attention for very different reasons. The application of the telegraph in national politics first aroused my interest during the mid 1990s, when I was conducting research on anti-drug crusades in modern China. I was made aware that sending publicly circulated telegrams was one of the main weapons of nongovernmental anti-opium organizations in their fight against various schemes for profiting from the opium monopoly by different Chinese regimes in the 1920s and 1930s. These circular telegrams were usually reprinted by newspapers nationwide, and they were therefore very effective in mobilizing public opinion against the government plans.⁷ I was fascinated by this new genre of public text but disappointed by the fact that scholarly inquiry concerning the circular telegram was virtually nonexistent. From 1999 to 2003, I laboriously read about 100,000 pages of the *Shen Bao* from 1872 to 1912, in addition to other early Chinese newspapers. What I found was that the circular telegram was an important means of political participation and also was closely related to major events of national politics in the last years of the Qing dynasty. In the meantime, because I have been studying and teaching in American universities, I was exposed to the rapid development of the Internet earlier than most of my contemporaries in China.

After the development of the Internet took off in the late 1990s, optimistic predictions about its democratizing attributes attracted a large following. But the more I looked back at the history of the role played by the telegraph in modern Chinese politics, the less persuaded I was by these rosy predictions. The key was not the technology itself but how it was used by people. As we shall see, both telegraphy and the Internet have been used by different parties for very different purposes. Therefore

in order to get a more sophisticated view of the real impacts of these two technologies on Chinese politics, researchers should examine each of these phenomena in its concrete historical context.

To cover the entire scope of Chinese politics or all forms of information technology is a task beyond the scope of this book. In addition to narrowing down my discussion to only the earliest and latest cases of modern information technology, I shall focus my inquiry on their impacts on Chinese politics mainly from two angles: how members of Chinese society employ these technologies to participate in politics and how Chinese governments have tried to regulate and control them. While some political scientists insist that the term “political participation” is only applicable to the study of democratic polities, this study adopts a more recently developed and more encompassing definition that defines political participation as the “efforts of ordinary citizens in any type of political system to influence the actions of their rulers.”⁸ Even this definition needs some modifications when applied to the study of China, because in the late nineteenth century, most Chinese did not have a fully developed concept of citizenship in a modern state. They took part in national politics based mainly on the Confucian idea that “each individual is responsible for the ups and downs of national fortune,” most notably during the turmoil resulting from the disintegration of the Qing empire. So replacing “citizens” with “individuals” in the definition of political participation is more appropriate to this study.

As far as government control is concerned, there is considerable continuity between the history of telegraphy and the Internet. Just as the Qing court sought to regulate and control telegraphy, the PRC is keen to try to regulate and control the Internet—in each case, with an emphasis on trying to prevent the technology from becoming a threat to the government. Over 140 years, then, it seems that little has changed in this respect. Yet if we examine the two technologies in their respective historical contexts, the discontinuities become obvious. As we shall see in the following chapters, the anxieties and motives of the Qing court differed from those of the PRC’s leadership. Qing officials’ fear of losing actual control and the tangible benefits of telegraphy to foreign hands impeded their acceptance of this technology for two decades. In contrast, in today’s China, foreign control of the Internet is out of the question and a more confident Chinese state has quickly accepted this new technology and embraced its enormous technological and commercial potential. In the meantime, the government has been alert to the use of the Internet to access and dis-

seminate undesirable information or to promote political dissent in China.

However, despite the different historical contexts of these two technologies, each of them appeared and evolved in a time of accelerated change in Chinese society, the first from 1894 to 1911, and the second from the mid 1990s to the present. These are the periods on which this book focuses. The former period represented the last phase of the changes and crises that eventually brought down the Qing dynasty. The second period represents the continuation phase of the reforms that commenced near the end of the 1970s, and the Internet arose in the mid 1990s, at a time when China was increasingly immersed in a global market economy. In both periods, state control loosened to a certain degree, thus providing more room for political participation compared to the prior periods. Students of modern Chinese studies, including historians, political scientists, and anthropologists, have pointed out that during the late Qing period, China saw the emergence of a burgeoning civil society. But the development of a civil society in China was subsequently suppressed by the authoritarian nationalist and Maoist regimes. It was not until the reform era of the late twentieth century that China started to see the growth of a civil society again.⁹

So when dealing with the fact that political participation in these two periods expanded through the availability of new information technologies, should we adopt the concept and framework of civil society in our analysis? Although scholars engaged in Internet research have embraced the concept, and some have even imagined the creation of a “cyber civil society,” I remain skeptical as to the applicability of the civil society model to the study of modern Chinese society.¹⁰ After all, this is a concept used to analyze the fundamental structural features of modern Western societies. The transformations of Chinese societies in these two periods are complex, and they certainly do not follow the same path as the Western societies where civil society arose and developed.¹¹ It is one thing to notice some seemingly autonomous societal elements existing in late Qing or contemporary China, but a totally different thing to assume that a “civil society” exists or is bound to appear in China. Instead of examining technological advancement and expanding political participation from the preconceived angle of civil society, I shall therefore take another approach, which relies on concrete historical facts rather than on a pre-conclusive theoretical framework to reach conclusions.

In dealing with political participation in the two aforementioned time

periods in China, one cannot avoid the issue of modern Chinese nationalism. Although this term is also of Western origin, nationalism has spread throughout the world in the form of political movements and ideologies and become a global phenomenon. The deepening political crisis of the last two decades of the Qing dynasty saw the rise of modern Chinese nationalism, and the renewal of nationalism in China in the 1990s has been a staple of the Western media as well as in academia. Both telegraphy and the Internet have been closely connected with modern Chinese nationalism. The research reported in this book demonstrates that in the earlier period, individuals often issued circular telegrams during times of national crisis. Strong nationalist sentiment made these more appealing to their audiences and also legitimized the motives of telegram senders. In the case of the Internet, Chinese citizens used the newly accessible cyberspace tools, such as bulletin board systems (BBS), to vent their nationalist and anti-American sentiment in the wake of the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 and the U.S.-China military plane collision incident in 2001. Chinese nationalism is an issue that will be encountered and dealt with throughout this book, with a focus on its specific characteristics under different historical circumstances.

The anthropologist Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an “imagined community.” Nationalism is often emotionally charged because it is built upon the imagining of solidarity and comradeship among very different members within this imagined community. Newspapers, museums, and other forms of public display help to enhance the individual’s sense of belonging to a community using forms of psychological persuasion so strong that the individual is often willing to die for this community.¹² Telegraphy and the Internet have undoubtedly made nationalist emotions more publicly visible and widely felt, thanks to their key function in transferring information in a speedier way to a wider audience. With the appearance of modern newspapers, circular telegrams made urgent political news and opinions publicly known to a large audience beyond regional boundaries for the first time in Chinese history, thus helping to form an “imagined community” of the awakening subjects of the Qing emperor. On the other hand, burgeoning nationalist consciousness made political participation more emotionally engaging, therefore influencing others to feel the same way. Looked at from this perspective, nationalistic conversation in BBS forums is the latest development of community imagining, even though the conceived unlimited capacity of the Internet to reach the widest possible audience may in fact have made its audience

more scattered than expected and diminished its effects, as discussed in detail later in this book.

This research reveals that the most profound effect of the telegraph and the Internet on modern Chinese politics is that they helped to transform it into a far more public affair than ever before in Chinese history. Their capacity to speedily transfer information makes it more difficult for the government to control the dissemination of political information. With the rise of Chinese nationalism, and the dramatic transformation of Chinese society during these periods, individual Chinese were and are able to employ these two technologies to expand political participation. Nationalism often legitimizes this political participation, and the resulting societal transitions force the state to loosen political control to a certain degree. It is under these historical circumstances that modern information technologies have been able to play their roles in making Chinese politics more public. My focus is always on human agency rather than technologies, however. What I intend to show is that it was human beings who used these technologies in creative ways and under special historical circumstances that have made modern Chinese politics more public, not the technologies alone.

Public politics is certainly something of a rarity in Chinese society. Does the increased degree of participation in national politics by the public, and in a more public way, suggest that a public sphere existed in the late Qing era or is emerging in China today? Realizing the shortcomings of applying the concept of civil society to the study of Chinese society, some scholars have suggested that the concept of the public sphere is more applicable. "By 'public sphere' we mean first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed," Jürgen Habermas observes. "Access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens. . . . 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."¹³

History tells us that a "public sphere" such as that as defined by Habermas has never existed in Chinese society. At the risk of being too general, it can be said that the late Qing regime was authoritarian, as is that of the PRC, so there has never been a time in which individuals could express their opinions "freely," which is exactly why people were so enthusiastic and optimistic about the Internet when this new technology first appeared. People hoped this seemingly revolutionary and om-

nipotent technology would provide a way to break the ever-present government control of free expression of political opinions.

Even so the concept of public sphere, given its Western origin, can nevertheless be used as an analytic tool for this study if it is contextualized and modified. Reforms in the late Qing era were crisis-induced, and this is also true of the PRC, leading in both cases to profound social transitions, weakened state control, and increased political participation in an expanded public space, as shown by the circular telegrams reprinted in national newspapers in Qing China and BBS messages circulating in cyberspace today. However, although authoritarian governments realize that they cannot completely restrict public participation in times of political or foreign crisis, especially if the public is mobilized by nationalism, the space for it is both limited and selective. Both the Qing court and the PRC have sought to keep public space as circumscribed as possible and to prevent political participation from touching on issues that they are not willing to deal with, such as political reforms and freedom of the press.

To make a general statement, in both late Qing China and today's PRC, as a result of the historical conditions, a limited public sphere emerged in Chinese society, allowing individuals to express their opinions publicly on certain political topics. Telegraphy and the Internet undoubtedly enlarged the scope and effectiveness of political participation. But the availability of these technologies is not the reason why people are able to participate, why they want to participate, and what the outcomes of their participation are. One can only get answers to the above questions by looking into the complex historical forces in those two periods. It is politics that determines how a technology is used, not the other way around. This is not to say that politics and technology do not have an interactive relationship, but the political needs of a government or an individual are usually more decisive in determining how the technology is used. As this study shows, it would be naïve to conclude that telegraphy changed the course of modern Chinese politics. The same is true of the assumption that the Internet will democratize China. Technology facilitates politics; it does not dictate it. As shown in the latter part of this volume, contemporary Chinese politics has in fact, to a large degree, shaped the contour of online political participation today. By depoliticizing researchers' preconceptions and historicizing concrete technological cases, this study hopes to interpret how historical factors and agents shaped the relationship between information technology and Chinese politics at the turn of both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.



This book is the outcome of an intellectual experiment. It covers the telegraph and the Internet, two technologies with a timespan from the early 1860s to the beginning of the twenty-first century, and the two parts are written in very different ways. Although some of my colleagues advised me to publish each part in a separate volume, I decided to keep the book in its present form and leave it to readers to judge the benefits of having both the historical and comparative aspects in one volume. One thing that needs to be noted here is that this volume is not intended to be merely a comparative study of telegraphy and the Internet. As mentioned earlier, my aim in studying telegraphy was to provide a historical perspective to study of the Internet. It would be ideal if the many other media that appeared between the late Qing and today were also covered in the volume. Due to constraints of both time and ability, however, I deliberately limited the scope of my study to telegraphy and the Internet, and I hope that it will encourage broader coverage in the future. Historical study always brings some comparative perspectives when it is linked with contemporary issues; this volume is no exception.¹⁴

I wrote the first part of this book utilizing a historical perspective. In it, relying mainly on archival materials, I try to reconstruct the historical trajectory of the telegraph and its role in late Qing politics. Because the Internet has had only a very short existence and is continuing to unfold, the second part of the book tries to present a panoramic view (though limited and incomplete) and to cover multiple aspects and forms of online political participation by presenting a number of case studies. In this latter part, the materials derive mainly from the fieldwork I conducted between 1999 and 2002, when I made four trips to China and spent a total of twelve months there. The fieldwork was conducted using a combination of interviews, participant observation, and archival research. While historical and ethnographical methods are the mainstay of this book, it also draws upon methods and concepts from media studies, literary criticism, and political science.

Conducting fieldwork on and about the Internet has been a challenge to anthropologists as well as other researchers.¹⁵ The difficulties arise from the enormous amount of information that the Internet carries and the fact that it is in a constant state of flux, making cyberspace extremely fluid and, sometimes even puzzling. The Internet is thus a field site very different from those an anthropologist typically faces. In earlier times, when the anthropologist entered a community to study culture, he or she usually selected a group of people in a certain locale and stayed and in-

teracted with them for a prolonged period of time. That is how participant observation, the trademark of the profession, has been done. But since a community in cyberspace has no definite boundary, and its members can easily join and leave, what is the essential characteristic that defines it? The answer is social relations. As pointed out by Raymond Williams, the sense of community has to do with “the quality of holding something in common, as in community of interests, community of goods . . . a sense of common identity and characteristics.”¹⁶ From that perspective, this study has focused on those individuals and groups that have one thing in common—that is, they are all involved in online political participation, while their actual locales in cyberspace may not always be in the same spot.

In facing the vast and constantly changing world of the Internet, the question arises as to whether traditional ethnographic methods are applicable. In fact, many researchers value ethnographic methods in the study of the Internet. Some find Clifford Geertz’s influential view of culture as “webs of significance” to be quite “Internet friendly,” because one can study the Internet just like any other culture. “[O]ne can start anywhere in a culture’s repertoire of forms and end up anywhere else. . . . One has only to learn how to gain access to them,” Geertz observes.¹⁷ Confirming the worth of ethnographic methods in the study of online forums, the sociologist Lori Kendall has commented that “much as my personal biases lead me in that direction, I would never have the audacity to suggest that all social research projects ought to include participant observation. Yet with regard to research on interactive online forums, I recommend just that.”¹⁸

Though delighted by these observations, I proceeded with my own study cautiously, because I was dealing with an area in which I had never labored before. My primary approach has been to treat cyberspace as an extension or new dimension of the “real” world created by human beings. In spite of all the hype that hails cyberspace as something of an independent entity, it is always made by individual netizens who are issuers, transmitters, receivers, and interpreters of the data and information circulating in cyberspace on an interactive basis. As to the topic of my research, the most important questions for studying these online political participants are who they are, what position they hold, why they have adapted the Internet to politics, how they try to accomplish their aim, and what effect their activities have on politics in contemporary China. For these purposes, I conducted person-to-person interviews. If these were not enough or not available, I supplemented them with online in-

terviews. I employed traditional participant observation techniques to observe people's behavior in a monitor room and in an Internet café. In the meantime, I have spent countless hours "observing" online forums that I have been following. Most of the time, I just "lurk" around in the forum, but if needed, I also participate in the forums and interact with members. Both my online and off-line fieldwork experiences have been of help in producing this study.

To my surprise, the most difficult part of carrying out this Internet-related anthropological research is how to collect, preserve, and analyze the data. No matter how specific and well defined a topic is, the Internet researcher is always in danger of being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information he or she faces. The traditional way of writing up field notes is not that helpful, because it is certain to leave out most of the available information. The only option is to observe online forums as much as possible and continuously archive the important data, although this is more easily said than done. The difficulty is enormous. First, on the Internet, activity takes place and information flows continuously, and no anthropologist can conduct participant observation in cyberspace around the clock. My method was to observe several online forums relevant to this study at regular intervals, but placing special emphasis on significant historical events (e.g., the Taiwan election in March 2000, the U.S.-China military plane collision in April 2001, and the events of September 11, 2001). I decided to follow the Chinese online responses intensively for many continuous hours, as long as my body and schedule permitted. Secondly, since numerous online forums coexist in cyberspace at any given time, in order to cover multiple aspects of online political participation in China, I continuously had to move in and out of different online forums, which made the data I encountered more heterogeneous and voluminous.

My main method for managing the data was to download them into computer files and then view them as historical texts. In cyberspace, the boundary between real-time and archival data is very thin, because the incessant flow of data makes the real-time data archival in a matter of seconds. Furthermore, downloading online messages and texts has turned out to be a very effective way of preserving data in cyberspace because of the high turnover rate of online forums and their archives, in which whole volume of texts can be deleted by the touch of a fingertip on the computer keyboard. Many online forums do not provide file retrieval services; some of them regularly "refresh" out old archives. Even with those forums that do keep old messages in their archives (such as the Strength-

ening-China Forum at People's Daily Online), the difficulty is compounded by the fact that in Chinese cyberspace these forums are often monitored, and undesirable texts can be removed from the archive by the webmasters anytime. Therefore, the online forum archive is not a fixed entity, in its traditional sense, and the number of texts it includes can be altered significantly. To preserve online texts as closely as possible to their unaltered "real state" online, I have to constantly download important data simultaneously with observing the forum, hoping to keep them before the webmasters step in. For example, I downloaded the voluminous messages that appeared on the Strengthening-China Forum in the first hours after the news broke on September 11, while following the forum responses in real time. The saved files are historical materials in their own right, because they were deleted from the forum shortly afterward. Today, nobody would be able to retrieve them from the existing archive. Although laborious at times, this method works in the context of Chinese cyberspace to turn online texts into historical materials, on which the second part of this book is based.



Chapter 1 confronts the question of why it took two decades for China to adopt telegraphy in the late Qing era. As an alternative to the often-cited explanations that attribute the delay to the elite belief in Confucian cultural superiority or the popular belief in feng shui, I propose that political concerns, rather than cultural ideas, played a more critical role in shaping the thinking of Qing policymakers at the time. The Qing officials' anxiety to keep control of this technology (*quan*) and underestimation of its use (*li*) directly caused the belated adoption of telegraphy. The last part of the chapter gives a brief description of the development of a Chinese-run telegraph network in the 1880s and 1890s.

Chapter 2 discusses the impact of the telegraph on the nascent Chinese press in the late Qing era. As the case of *Shen Bao* shows, it was the appearance of modern newspapers, assisted by the telegraph, that resulted in general changes in ways of disseminating news and made possible the formation of large-scale public opinion. China's deepening crisis after the Sino-Japanese War caused the public to pay more attention to political news and prompted the emergence of the public telegram as a new genre of political text. The eventful years after 1895 provided the public telegram with a more receptive environment in which to flourish.

Chapter 3 analyzes the fact that even though the Qing court was quite successful in employing telegraphy as a new means of political gover-

nance early on, the decline of the legitimacy of the court made its control of this technology increasingly ineffective and open to challenge by the end of the nineteenth century. The Chinese elite in metropolitan areas used telegraphy to participate in national politics, as shown in waves of protest telegrams sent to Beijing by imperial loyalists in 1899 and 1900. The skillful maneuvering of the use of telegraph communications in the “mutual protection” scheme in 1900 provided a precedent in discussing and voicing differing opinions on significant policy issues by high-ranking officials. These cases signaled that the telegraph would play a more important role in national politics in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Chapter 4 presents brief historical accounts of the Boycotting American Goods Movement in 1905 and Railway Rights Recovery Movement in 1907–8, with a focus on how the public telegram was used as an effective means of conducting large-scale nationalist mobilizations by the Chinese elite for the first time. Public telegrams were sent by the newly established chambers of commerce and other organizations, and numerous telegrams between policymakers were made public, indicating the unprecedented degree of political participation mobilized by increasing Chinese nationalism.

Chapter 5 explores how the public telegram became such an important means of political communication, maneuvering, and mobilization in late Qing politics. On the one hand, the public telegram went through an “authority-enhancing” process that gave it enormous textual power and helped establish it as an authoritative and effective new genre of political discourse in China. On the other hand, the impact of public telegrams mainly derived from the benign “receiving context” that was the historical context of the New Policies and Constitutionalism. Public telegrams were skillfully aimed at this receptive audience, and their effects were strongly felt.

Chapter 6 starts with a brief review of how the public telegram fared in the politics of the PRC, and moves on to the development of the Internet today. While paying attention to the government’s efforts to regulate and control the Internet, this chapter points out that the PRC has been handling the Internet with a proactive policy—not only attempting to control its dissemination and content, but also actively promoting it. The case of the Strengthening-China Forum at People’s Daily Online shows that the government is proactively establishing a relatively controlled public space on the Internet by selectively opening up some previously

controlled space and trying to channel political discourse in the direction it most desires. In this new practice, the state takes initiatives that should be seen not as merely manipulative but also as innovative and experimental.

Chapter 7 focuses on one unique niche in Chinese cyberspace—intellectual web sites—to demonstrate the unfolding process by which the party state and intellectuals are trying to take their positions in cyberspace, a process that is full of conflict, negotiation, compromises, and sometimes even cooperation between the state and intellectuals. Based on the analysis of the evolution of three representative intellectual web sites, this chapter tries to show that the interactions between state and intellectuals on this new e-front are far more ambiguous and complex than a clear-cut picture of an authoritarian state versus a burgeoning civil society would suggest. So far, the proactive actions taken by both the state and intellectuals have resulted in turning intellectual web sites into an expanded space under more refined control.

Chapter 8 examines the political writings of so-called *minjian* (“private,” “nonofficial,” “independent,” or “marginalized”) online writers to illustrate how they have contributed greatly to the enlargement of space for political participation in China. The case of *minjian* online writers has shown that both the Chinese state and Internet users constantly negotiate new boundaries in this new domain. In the process, *minjian* online writers have adopted various strategies to fight against political pressure, mainstream prejudice, and inaccessibility of resources. Nonetheless, the extremely diverse positions taken by these *minjian* writers present a picture more complex than that expected by Internet utopians, reflecting the richness, fluidity, and complexity of Chinese cyberspace.

Chapter 9 focuses on the so-called “military web sites” in Chinese cyberspace to examine the complexity of contemporary Chinese nationalism. Pointing out the fact that the majority of military web site members are well educated and well informed, yet nationalistic and anti-Western, I argue that the key factor in shaping their nationalist thinking is the formation of a new interest-driven, game-playing paradigm in the past two decades that Chinese have used to interpret current national policies and international relations. Equipped with the Internet and this new paradigm, the more informed Chinese are, the more nationalistic they may become.

Finally, the book’s Conclusion summarizes the main topics discussed.