THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN CHINESE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL COMMUNICATIONS
APPARATUS USED DURING THE TIANANMEN INCIDENT OF 1976,
JASMINE REVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

With recent events like the Arab Spring, London Riots and Occupy Wall Street, research regarding the use of new technologies and their impact on social movements has become increasingly more important to explore. This thesis examines the use of technology in three separate Chinese revolutions by employing a historical approach using the theory of Robert Darnton (2000), that every age is an age of information. By examining the 1976 Tiananmen Incident after the death of Zhou Enlai, the 1989 pro-democracy movement and the Jasmine Revolution of 2011, this thesis addresses the issue as to whether or not the use of new technologies in current social movements is in fact something new. The following conclusion is presented: Technology's role in social movements is not polemic but fluid. It functions somewhere between technological determinism and cyber-utopianism. In our current society, despite positive media proclamations on the role of technology, people are still the driving force behind social movements.
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Introduction

The Arab Spring has prompted those who look at social media movements to reexamine the role that communication technology plays in revolutions. Before these events, social movements were seen as physical manifestations of grievances with specific policies and political institutions; after the events, commentators heralded the arrival of a new flowering of democracy brought on by the affordances of social media. However, with the influx of these so called “Facebook” and “Twitter Revolutions” one must begin to look closely at the role technology has played in the past to see if it has changed the social movements of today. Has technology really changed the way these uprisings occur and how people stay informed, communicate events and establish places and times to congregate? Disenfranchised citizens still gathered in the streets to voice their distaste for the current political systems during the Arab Spring even though there was an increased presence of social networking sites. It was not, as some argued, merely a way of allowing citizens to act out their grievances online (Danin, 2011; Witte, 2011; Morozov, 2011). One sees a similar debate following the so-called Jasmine Revolution, currently unfolding in China. To look further into how technological advances have played a role in the communication that led to social rebellion, this study will closely examine three separate rebellions throughout China’s recent history: The death of Zhou Enlai and the first Tiananmen Incident in 1976, the Tiananmen Massacre of 1989, and the Jasmine Revolution which began in 2011. By looking at these separate events across time, one will presumably be able to see if and how technology has changed the nature of rebellion, if at all.

One could say that the point of any public demonstration is to garner awareness of injustice and political wrongdoings. Demonstrations communicate a people’s desire to
establish a sense of transparency; they aim to bring consciousness to specific forms of corruption, repression, and exploitation. Technology and communications are not just important tools for those involved in the movement, but also help to spread the intended message to others who may not be aware. “An examination of these images and themes is crucial, because no matter how wide a range of techniques youth activists had at their disposal, and no matter how many traditions they could tap to aid their publicity efforts, their efforts would have proven in vain if their basic message did not move the members of their intended audience” (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 221).

There are numerous reasons to focus this study specifically on China. China has been a constant authoritarian power for more than five decades (Jaggers & Gurr, 1995, Freedom House, 2011). Regime and ideological identity have remained relatively consistent throughout the time period of this study. As such, dissent and democratic reform have been extremely difficult. In addition to political consistency, the first two rebellions shared a similar catalyst, groups mourning the death of a revered leader. The 1976 Tiananmen Incident began after mourner’s bereavements became political. These resistant attitudes were again echoed in 1989. People initially gathered at Tiananmen Square to show their support for the recently deceased Hu Yaobang (Dittmer, 1990). Examining the events in all three moments provides a good yardstick to measure continuity and change in the way that communication technology functioned in each.

With recent events like the Arab Spring, the London Riots and the Occupy Wall Street movements, it has become increasingly more important to look at the role that communication technology plays in social movements. To make grand claims that new technologies are democratic and can facilitate “civic engagement” and “collective action”
(Obar, Zube & Lampe, 2012) is only looking at technology’s function from one perspective. In order to truly understand technology, one must look at how it operates from multiple positions. Robert Darnton claimed, “I would argue that every age was an age of information each in its own way, and that communication systems have always shaped events” (Darnton, 2000, p.1). Therefore, one could argue that the technologies implemented in these most recent uprisings are simply building upon those technologies that were used in the past.

Technology itself denotes multiple instruments. The term technology is often implemented without actually defining what it implies. “In the late 20th century, there is only one thing most people agree about concerning technology—it is important. It is discussed almost as much as the weather, and sometimes it seems, with as little effect” (Kline, 1985, p. 215). Kline unpacks many of the different meanings and forms of technology in his article, What is Technology? The most traditional way to look at technology is through what Kline defines as manufactured articles, or products that are created by man that are not found naturally on earth. These materials range from the atom bomb, roads, the printing press, computers, clothing and so on. The process of manufacturing these materials is also a form of technology. Included in the process are equipment and those who use and operate the apparatus to make synthetic wares (Kline, 1985). The inclusion of people as operators of the apparatus is important in the sense that it demonstrates technology’s relative lack of autonomy. Kline also discusses the “sociotechnical system of use,” which he defines as, “a system using combinations of hardware, people (and usually other elements) to accomplish tasks that humans cannot perform unaided by such systems—to extend human capacities” (Kline, 1985, p. 217).
Knowledge, technique, and methodologies are also often considered elements or types of technology. Communications technologies do not differ much from their general counterparts; the main difference is that they assist in the realm of knowledge transfer (Roberts, 200). Information Communications Technologies (ICTs) are believed to facilitate communications both individually and on a grander scale (Gurstein, 2000). Modern ICTs have been said to provide a focused and cost-efficient forum for modern social movements; however, there is just as much negative research refuting this claim. Essentially ICTs allow individuals to communicate in a “low-intensity” environment beyond the scope of their immediate location (Garret, 2006).

As this project attempts to recreate a sense of the technological apparatus that facilitated the communication central to three Chinese social movements, it is important to consider these definitions and uses of technology. Technology is essentially anything and everything that is not human or naturally occurring; therefore, anything from the written word and petitions, to blog and Facebook posts, can be considered technology. Any way in which messages are disseminated and people are able to communicate (other than direct word of mouth) during these uprisings are essentially an element of technology. In this sense, one can follow Robert Darnton’s assertion that, contrary to the current assertion that our age of digital communication technology is the information age, every historical period is an information age. All that changes is the modes, speed and technology through which information is trafficked.

Technology, ICTs specifically, has been known to have close ties to political parties and political mobilization in relation to communications. Although there are eight noncommunist parties in China, even during the 1989 demonstrations, none of these
groups hold power within the political structure (Sullivan, 1995). The CCP (Chinese Communist Party) still monopolizes the government, media, and military. China has always been a country shrouded in intrigue. It could be argued that China’s ability to consolidate power over the past sixty years lies within the realm of international curiosity, and communication technology would certainly play a role in the distribution of information regarding this nation. China’s notion of the “Continuous Revolution” has been a source of fascination for many scholars since the time of Mao’s power.

Continuing revolution always took top priority on the political agenda by leadership consensus, and through this left ample room for disagreement over specific policy implications, it had a perceptible impact on the political atmosphere, at times seeming to make China the ‘spark’ in an international class war and generally giving her an international significance exceeding her economic or military capability (Dittmer, 1987, pg. xii).

Edward Said (1978) has said that the West’s fascination with the Orient has been one comprised of exoticism and the desire to dominate the region. This statement is an important notion with regards to understanding how the West has interpreted these movements and how they employ technology. China in one sense has replaced the Soviet Union as the Communist country that the Western world tends to approach with trepidation. This may be due to Said’s theory of exoticism: it is common to fear what one does not understand. In addition, the West seems fascinated with China’s continually changing political and economic domains.

One of the areas where dissent has traditionally manifested itself in China is in relation to the exploitation of labor. Indeed, the rights of workers to a better way of life than that afforded by dynastic rule, was the basis for Mao’s revolutionary movement. Yet despite the backdrop of a communist system, China is still prey to issues of labor and class
inequality. China is now a country with capitalist influences under the command of a nominally communist government. This has made the country the recipient of an influx of foreign capital attracted to its pools of cheap labor and relative political stability. Over the last 30 years, its economy has boomed. Communications technologies have been a great facilitator of China’s growing economy but at what cost? Poster asks, “Does the transformation of the technological and social apparatus imply a change in the form of symbolic interaction? Are the meanings associated with capitalist production a target of political strategy” (1981, p. 458)?

Yet communications technology is not merely a force of liberation: it can be a means for surveillance and control. Another reason to focus this study on China is to explore the role of political communications in a repressive culture. Are communications in these regimes different than other nations who are touted as having democratic discourse? In China, information is controlled and censored; citizens do disappear for voicing dissenting opinions. Technology may be enabling, but it is also incriminating. Traditional forms of communication, like word of mouth, may be safer in many respects but are they as efficient? The politburo places leaders in power based on internal decisions not privy to the input of the general public and there is almost complete censorship and control of the media (Domes, 1977). “Most Chinese writers today, including many of the best ones, write with political caution in the backs of their minds and with a shadow hovering over their fingers as they pass across a keyboard” (Havel, 2012, p. xiii)

China may not have freedom of speech but they do have the freedom to consume. In modern China, the focus of average citizens has less to do with issues of poverty and tyranny, as was the case in early movements including 1976. Now the focus is on achieving
the ability to purchase consumer goods (Poster, 2006). This notion is particularly connected to standard and quality of life. Chinese citizens can now play and focus less on labor; they have arcades and big theatres, personal computers and phones, why would they want to concern themselves with changing the system that provided these new forms of leisure? Poster, building on the work of Habermas, asserts that cultural beliefs are inherent in forms of tradition that may shift without any direct plan or policy intervention. As a result, repressive governments or any political system trying to maintain their legitimacy must rely on “manipulation” and “advertising techniques” to maintain the social system that gives them power.

**Methodology**

Many methodologies were used to recreate the communications apparatus behind the three social movements in order to narrate a complete story. Initially interviews and oral history were a large component of the thesis, but this later proved to be a difficult process as access to those who were aware of the movement proved to be limited. Ethnography is an important methodological practice because as stated by Barbara Tedlock, “ethnography involves an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller more meaningful context” (Tedlock, 2003, p. 165). IRB approval was obtained for specific questions that asked individuals to recount their experiences during each of the three social movements in addition to recalling how technology was used and messages were disseminated. The difficulties that arose with regards to interviews came about for numerous reasons ranging from location to the involvement of a controversial topic. People may have been fearful to voice their opinions.
For those who were willing to answer questions, their responses have remained anonymous, only being identified by their occupation throughout the paper or by their role as an interview subject.

Interview subjects were mainly contacted from within the United States, though I was able to contact a few citizens in Mainland China who had access to a VPN (Virtual Personal Network), therefore ensuring that any communications regarding these controversial topics would remain secure. Approximately 100 people were approached via email and word of mouth, and only 10 individuals were willing to be interviewed.

To remedy the lack of ethnographic data, a historiography became the foundation of the data collection. As the project attempted to recreate past events, gathering a strong historical foundation became necessary. “The purpose of history is to assess the past so that we may more effectively construct the present and the future” (Godfrey, 2007, p. 408). Two events from the past were utilized to explain the use of technology and organization of social movements in the present.

Research utilized both English and Mandarin sources. Having lived in China for three years and having a moderate understanding of reading and listening skills, the majority of the Chinese sources were translated personally. I was able to paraphrase the content from the Chinese-language documentary film, *Heshang*, into English. The use of quotations during this section is as close to the Chinese translation as possible.

**History of Events**

The original goal of this project was to look at three separate revolutions in China to track the progress and influence of technology over time. Though this is still the primary
goal of the thesis, there were some complications with the original design. To begin, due to China’s isolation in the 1970s, gathering information from this time period is difficult. Much of the information is hidden and those who are familiar with this time are not easily accessible. Secondly, the Jasmine revolution, which has occurred throughout the past two years, has been relatively insubstantial and overemphasized by the Western Media. However, despite these limitations, there is still a pattern that can be followed.

All of the events chosen for this study occurred after the communist takeover in 1949 to establish political consistency. China does have a rich history of social uprising and civil unrest before this period. These previous movements serve as a memory or rather starting point for many of the subsequent movements that will be discussed throughout this paper, thus demonstrating that communications surrounding past social unrest have been reused and adapted. The May 4th movement of 1919 will be discussed as a major influence throughout this project; however, to focus on events prior to the establishment of China’s communist government would create various issues regarding organization and even ideological confusion. There are many generational elements that will arise throughout this discussion as well, as many young people learned of these traditions of social unrest through educators and folk heroes, as well as from earlier generations of protesters (Wassterstrom, 1991).

Media and technology are often the main tools implemented in the dissemination of messages during social revolutions. They are often essential elements to the retelling and packaging of events (Bozell & Baker, 1990). Talcot Parson establishes a model of modernization that defines society, culture and social organization: technology, kinship, and the organization of socio-cultural development (Outhwaite & Ray, 2005). Given this
assertion, one could generalize the results of a study on technology to multiple countries as all nations share these common elements.

The first Tiananmen Incident in 1976 is a crucial starting point. After the death of Zhou Enlai, the people recognized the weakness and factionalism within the Party and took the opportunity to turn his death into a political statement. Mao’s death followed shortly after. In Confucius society, “political order grows naturally out of the moral character formed within the context of family life” (Slingerland, 2003, p. 2). For many, Zhou Enlai was deemed a father figure and therefore, properly mourning his death would have been regarded as an act of filial piety. Mao, the center of Chinese ideological innovation, had been ill for most of that year culminating in his death that same September. This marked the first time that succession would occur in China since the Communist takeover in 1949. Though Deng Xiaoping was not the appointed heir to Mao at the time, his reforming policies began to take root during this tumultuous time (MacFarguhar & Schoenhals, 2006).

Zhou Enlai was also known for his reforming policies and on the date of his death, January 8, 1976, mourners gathered at Tiananmen Square to show their support for the deceased leader; however, the revolutionary climax resulting from the people’s bereavements did not occur for another few months (Teiwes & Sun, 2004). This marked the first time in over 25 years that people gathered to voice their distaste for the government and present counterrevolutionary speeches (Domes, 1977). The Gang of Four, a radical group within the politburo that included Mao’s wife, increasingly gained power and influence as Mao’s health declined. They had become the bourgeoisie that they had supposedly defeated in 1949 (MacFarguhar & Schoenhal, 2006). As the Gang of Four gained more control in the wake of Zhou’s death and Mao’s continued ailment,
demonstrators, comprised mainly of students and young workers, began to gather in Tiananmen Square. On the 5th of April, violence erupted between the mourners and the government (Domes, 1977). The square was cleared of citizens and the memorials left in honor of Zhou were gone overnight. Two days later Deng was purged from office (Kissinger, 2011). The political unrest continued throughout much of the summer; rumors regarding the nature of Zhou’s death were rampant and there was still turmoil within the political system. This movement was not confined to Tiananmen Square and similar demonstrations occurred most notably in Nanjing (Domes, 1977). Mao died later that year on September 9, and was succeeded in power by Hua Guofeng. It was believed that Hua was chosen, despite his lack of experience, due to his loyalty to Mao; he belonged to neither of the opposing factions. However, months after Mao’s death, Hua positioned himself with Deng Xiaoping, now returned to political power, and had the Gang of Four arrested (Kissinger, 2011). More details regarding the outcomes of this uprising and the later ones, along with the dissemination of messages and the role of technology, will be further explored throughout the following three chapters.

The Tiananmen Uprising of 1989 is probably the most widely known modern Chinese social movement. Hints of unrest actually began in 1986 eventually peaking in 1989 with the Death of Hu Yaobang, who had been removed from his political post as a result of the 1986 student demonstrations. The original movement of 1986 closely mirrored the 1947 revolution that led to the communist takeover in 1949. Students took to Tiananmen Square to voice their aversions towards corruption, inflation, press restrictions, university conditions, and the lack of government transparency (Kissinger, 2011; Wasserstom, 1991). The demonstrators set forth demands and refused to leave until these
requests were fulfilled. Though the protests began in mid-April, by June the movement had spread beyond Tiananmen to 341 cities and the students in Beijing had taken over trains, schools and other public domains in addition to enacting a hunger strike. This all took place during the highly publicized visit of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev (Kissinger, 2011).

One of the major government players, Li Peng, the Premier of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), ordered the infamous crackdown of the movement on June 4. Two hundred individuals were killed as they attempted to block tanks and troops. Soldiers were also killed during this conflict. Political leaders secluded themselves for days until June 9, when Deng appeared on television followed by a “propaganda campaign” portraying the uprisings as a “counterrevolutionary revolt” (Dittmer, 1990). In the aftermath of Tiananmen Square, General Secretary of the Community Party and the successor of Hu Yaobang was dismissed. Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng remained in power; Deng eventually stepped down giving leadership to Jiang Zemin (Kissinger, 2011).

The final event deemed the Jasmine Revolution was highly influenced by the Arab Spring movements. Though much of the dissent has occurred online, the Jasmine Revolution has encouraged citizens to “walk” in public places to show their discouragement with the current regime (No awakening, 2011 Mar 3; Osnos, 2011, Feb 23). On February 20, 2011, citizens were encouraged through internet sources to take part in silent walk-pasts on that day and then a week later in public places throughout Beijing, Shanghai and other major cities. The government, anticipating these demonstrations, increased security at targeted locations and few protesters took part (No awakening, 2011 Mar 3). However, known dissidents have been detained in the aftermath of these online
movements including artist Ai Weiwei who was arrested at the Beijing airport on April 3 (China’s Crackdown, 2011, April 4).

Since the spread of the “Jasmine Revolution” to China, some of the country’s top defense lawyers have gone missing, while bloggers and other activists have experienced increasing forms of repression. Following the turmoil that arose after Tiananmen Square in 1989, China had begun to loosen restrictions; however, owing to the “Arab Spring” movements, China has tightened Internet censorship and cracked down on political debate in addition to hindering the sale of Jasmine flowers (Jacobs & Ansfield, 2011; China’s crackdown, 2011 April 4).

The 1989 rebellion and Jasmine revolution, and to some extent the Tiananmen incident of 1976, arose due to the tarnished reputations of China’s political power both domestically and abroad. The authorities feared that urban unrest would lead to mass gatherings that would turn into protest and, in all cases, did what they judged necessary to thwart disorder and rebellion.

**Theoretical Implications**

Given the nature of this study and its historical grounding, returning to the work of Robert Darnton validates that history provides an important context when looking at modern events. Based on Darnton’s claim that every age is an ‘information age,’ the invention of the printing press would have had as profound an impact on communications as the iPhone. Technology has always been a part of social movements; the apparatus has merely changed. Dissemination of information via word of mouth was historically a powerful tool to communicate current events and opinions unfavorable to those in power,
and based on research findings are still an important tool used today. Darnton claimed there have always been complex information networks in operation; they have merely differed in appearance and mode over time. He outlines four flows of information throughout France in the 1700s that are still in effect and relevant to information circulation today: Insider gossip, general rumor, rumor incorporated into manuscripts and/or print news sheets, and finally scandalous books created after the fact. This gossip could also surface in the form of poetry and song, which is particularly relevant to some of the communications throughout the three Chinese events.

Darnton also touches on the importance of group communication. “In short, the communication process took place by several modes in many settings. It always involved discussion and sociability, so it was not simply a matter of messages transmitted down a line of diffusion to passive recipients but rather a process of assimilating and reworking information in groups—that is, the creation of a collection consciousness or public opinion” (Darnton, 2000, p. 26). Building upon this work, Habermas’ theory on communicative action and the role of the public sphere also proves to be a useful instrument to outline the apparatus used to communicate throughout these events.

Making the link between Habermas’ work and China is not a novel idea. Craig Calhoun has been studying social thought and the public sphere, while also focusing on additional research on China for two decades. Calhoun asserts that a democratic public sphere is contingent upon “both the quality of discourse and quantity of participation” (Calhoun, 1994). Would technology in this regard increase the quantity of participation and to what extent would the quality of discourse produce similar results? Many have asserted that the decline in the public sphere occurs due to lack of reason (Calhoun, 1994).
Applying this to Marcuse’s theory that technology has made the irrational appear rational would demonstrate that technology would have a negative impact on discourse, implying that the communications transpiring throughout the Jasmine Revolution would be less efficient than that of the 1976 Tiananmen Incident (Marcuse, 1964).

Habermas, like many recent scholars have built upon the works of Marx. “For Marx, the impetus to rebel against the new system came directly from the new system; the only response possible for the workers was to liberate themselves” (Poster, 1981, p. 456). This said, one could speculate that the process of dissent and therefore revolution is dialectical. Many of the tools used against the communist regime since 1949 were the same used to place the current government in power. Mao claimed, “No political party can possibly lead a great revolutionary movement to victory unless it possesses revolutionary theory and a knowledge of history and has a profound grasp of the practical movement” (Mao, 1964, p. 7-8). The democratic movement of 1989 could be seen as an example of this principle. This also helps to substantiate Darnton’s theory that every age is an age of communication and technology. Poster maintains that the common thread in both Marx and Habermas is the role language plays and it’s position as an intermediary between technology and culture (Poster, 1981).

Habermas’ notion of the public sphere gave citizens the opportunity to communicate in a realm beyond the typical state sanctioned channels. Communicative reason, which was closely aligned with the concept of the public sphere was, “(relatively) ideology-free dialogue oriented towards genuine consensus with respect to uses of public concern” (Gardiner, 2004, p. 30). Much of the research concerning the public sphere in closed societies is connected with the rise and fall of the Soviet Union. (Outhwaite & Ray,
This analysis focuses on the transition from a highly controlled state economy to that of a more privatized infrastructure. Theories of democracy generally claim that the relationship between the public and the state are mediated through the public sphere. When the public sphere is closed, people are oppressed and oppression often leads to rebellion. (Outhwaite & Ray, 2005).

Habermas stated that “the crucial factor here is that we inhabit a world of morally mature post-traditional ethics, in which public debate is constrained by procedural rules. Social integration requires that we agree not over substantive matters of identity and opinion but on the rules through which public debate and conflict will be conducted” (Habermas, 1992, p. 170). In other words, society and the public sphere are seen as a system composed of multiple processes and links. Society and the ways in which they communicate are not homogenous and therefore, looking at only one form of technology throughout this project would prove to be in vain. The process of communicating within the public sphere requires a diverse and assorted citizenry in addition to the tools necessary to implement the different means of communication.

The 1989 movement was seen as an attempt to establish a public sphere beyond the confines of state control. However, there was little success as communications between disenfranchised citizens and the politburo were relatively mute. Attempts to create a public sphere were often thwarted because small groups emerged that focused primarily on dialogue amongst their individual party as opposed to establishing a communication network that would benefit the disenfranchised community as a whole. Calhoun (1989) addresses four issues relating to the public sphere and its role in the 1989 Pro-Democracy movement. The first incorporates the role of location, which is discussed in further detail.
in chapter one. The protest itself redefined the role of Tiananmen Square as a forum for communication, transforming the square from the center of state-controlled communications to the center of the people's message of dissent. Secondly, the international media outlined the campaign in Beijing as an international event expanding the public sphere beyond the borders of the capital and even the country. At the heart of the international media's intention was the internationalization of culture. The idea or rather fear that Western style imperialism would ensue as a result of the democratization movement was a concern for the government and a reiterated theme of many of the demonstrations that took place in China in the early 1900s. This later became the driving force behind the communist takeover in 1949 under Mao's leadership and has continued to be one of the primary vanguards of the current political regime (Wassterstrom, 1991; Calhoun, 1994). The final issue regarding the public sphere in China relates to the role of institutions. “There is the question of just what sort of social institutions could nurture a democratic public discourse in a country of more than a billion people, a question which turns, I think on relating the world of face-to-face directly interpersonal relationships to that of mediated indirect relationships” (Calhoun, 1989, p. 62).

The public sphere that Habermas has defined is a space for discourse that can lead to “qualitative social change” (Poster, 1981; Habermas, 1989). However, Habermas’s theory failed to imagine or rather omitted the context of how the public sphere would function in an authoritarian society. If a country is based on the principles of censorship and repression, it is not likely that an arena of public debate will move beyond these limitations (Poster, 1981). Habermas’ sphere works for democratic societies, but can it be applied to the uses of technology and discourse in closed regimes? “As the German
philosopher Jurgen Habermas argued in his 1962 book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the printing press helped democratize Europe by providing space for discussion and agreement among politically engaged citizens, often before the state had fully democratized” (Shirky, 2011, p. 34). If this is the case, there is a possibility that new technologies may help facilitate democratic change in authoritarian countries like China.

The mass social revolutions of 1989, China included, allowed individuals to rethink what a communicative civil society would entail (Outhwaite & Ray, 2005). Students involved in the 1989 Tiananmen movement were able to “translate collective anger into collective actions,” therefore utilizing this new emergence of a dissident conception into mass action (Wasserstrom, 1991). Yet these theories of democratic communication and public communicative action are all predicated on certain liberal tenents about rights that are in many ways foreign to China. Another theory that can help conceptualize the way in which messages and public communication get out *despite* the particularly Chinese form of authoritarian state control is that of Mikail Bakhtin.

Bakhtin’s concept of communications, one formed in response to living under the authoritarian control of the Soviet state, is more fluid than Habermas’. Bakhtin believed that, “everyday dialogue, living and real utterances, is structured by diverse intentions, different evaluations and a number of polemic qualities” (Gardiner, 2004, p. 30; Bakhtin, 1981). The driving force behind Bakhtin’s (1981) theory is that communication is constantly evolving in order to deal with power and thus a complex structure. Bakhtin’s consideration of communications and censorship is particularly relevant given the issues regarding China as discussed previously in the introduction. Paramount to Bakhtin’s argument on subverting the censor was the role of language. There is a multiplicity to
language that allows certain messages and meanings to pass through a censor. One of the primary examples of this multiplicity is parody, which will be explained in further detail in chapter three (Bakhtin, 1981; Gardiner, 2004).

Bakhtin's variance with Habermas stems from the role of power within the public sphere or “formalized language.” Habermas’ public sphere is often criticized as being too idealistic. He assumed that the communicative process would be rational and therefore, power within the sphere would be dispersed equally. In China and other countries with authoritarian regimes, this is obviously not the case. Power within both the political and communicative arena is severely unbalanced. Bakhtin by comparison developed a more realistic, albeit less developed, notion of power through his ideas of multiplicity and carnival refusing to succumb to the notion of “linguistic hegemony” (Gardiner, 2004). With this in mind, those disenfranchised citizens living under authoritarian regimes could use communications technologies and other forms of communications to subvert the dominant power and get their messages to others.

**Chapter Breakdown**

“Current technical developments in communication (based upon the convergence of computing and switched telecommunications) are legitimated in terms of a desirable move away from mass communication and back toward a form of interpersonal communication that are seen as inherently more desirable and liberating” (Garnham, 1992, p. 367). This concept served as one of the main organizing forces of the thesis, beginning with more personalized traditional forms of communications, then moving to mass media platforms, and finally to the individualized platforms of new media.
Chapter One focuses on the role of traditional communications beginning with the influence of symbolic dates and rituals. This section explores the position of mourning rights and violence among other factors including the May 4th movement of 1919, which impacted the dissemination of messages throughout Chinese social movements. Following this section the importance of location, specifically Tiananmen Square in Beijing, and the role of transportation in trafficking messages from this location to surrounding areas throughout the country will be discussed. Early written communications such as petitions are then considered followed by a look at posters, slogans and banners. These sections look at the role of the message in relation to communicating to a larger audience that was relatively illiterate. Chapter One then concludes with a look at poetry, music and other artistic forms, and their visual and mnemonic roles with regards to message dissemination.

The second chapter looks at the role of the mass media and the impact of technologies like newspapers, radios and television. The mass media in China allowed the country to open up to Western Ideas, which is the first section explored in this chapter. Though China began to become more receptive to outside influence, the government still controls most major media outlets. As such, the notion of monopolies is discussed. Following these sections, the individual influences of each of these technologies are discussed in this order: Telegram, telephone and the Fax; newspapers; radio; and finally television. The television section focuses primarily on the importance of the film Heshang and its role in the 1989 pro-democracy movement. Chapter Two concludes with the problems and power of the mass media.

The final chapter focuses primarily on the role of new communications technologies and the impacts these communications apparatuses have today. Chapter Three begins by
looking at the concepts of cyber-utopianism and technological determinism and their repercussions in the presence of consumerism. Following this section, the nature of blogs, Twitter and social networking are explored followed by a review of how rumor, humor and parody have been affected by these new media trends. A specific look on the Jasmine Revolution currently unfolding in China is also discussed. As this study focuses primarily on social movements in an authoritarian country, the role of the Internet and its effect on democracy is considered. The final two sections explore how technology is used by both sides, the government and dissidents to further their own agenda, and finally concludes with a look at protesting in a virtual world. This final section looks at how online dissidence is translated into a physical manifestation of the movement.
Chapter 1

Traditional Communications

China is a country deeply steeped in tradition, where filial piety creates a cultural tendency to look to the past for guidance. It is understandable that protesters would model their behavior upon those who came before in addition to traditional ceremonies. Popular themes and tropes that were present throughout all three movements have little to do with modern technology and show a connection to traditional forms of communication. This chapter explores the role of symbolic dates including those of past protests and official ceremonies incorporating traditional events and rituals. As mentioned in the Introduction, the repurposing of Tiananmen Square as a metaphor for dissent was a communicative action implementing the importance of location. Parallel with location, transportation has also played a significant role in early message dissemination. Written forms of communications were also crucial and this chapter will examine the function petitions played during the movements as well as slogans and posters, which have always been a prominent feature of Chinese demonstrations. Finally this section will conclude with theatrics. Wasserstrom (1991) has stated that Chinese protests are a form of street theatre. Theatre, poetry, music, sculpture and other aspects of the arts implemented in the communication of protest will also be examined.

The themes of “modernity” and “science” were taken from many of the motifs utilized in movements before the 1949 takeover. These were themes and concepts explored in the 1989 protest as well as components of the Jasmine Revolution. They were also two of the major themes of student protests of 1919. Petitions and posters used in many of the modern protests were also influenced by the May 4, 1919 movement and can
even be traced back as early as the Qing Dynasty. Many of the announcements during the 1989 movement at Fudan University alluded to the May 4th movement and other significant events. Students continually evolved and adapted many of the scripts from these former movements to connect with the tradition of Chinese unrest; doing so established a direct link to new cultural ideas, while mirroring events from the past. (Wasserstrom, 1991).

**Symbolic Dates and Rituals**

In the 1940s and 1980s student protesters generally staged protests on significant anniversary dates or revolutionary holidays. This was done to bolster their cause’s legitimacy. These protests would often take place during official ceremonies causing concern for the governing body.

I argue that these events, which like their precursors of the Republican era succeeded in raising serious questions about the legitimacy of China’s rulers, need to be seen as a continuation of traditions of student activism stretching back to 1919 and beyond. The students of the mid-to-late in fact took pains to present themselves as direct descendants of the May 4th activities. This was clearest exactly one month before the June 4th massacre, when Beijing students chose the seventieth anniversary of the 1919 student movement as the day to stage one of their largest demonstrations (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 18).

Mourning rituals are a crucial ingredient in these symbolic rites. In mid-April 1989, students in multiple cities, not just Beijing, organized mass mourning ceremonies for Hu Yaobang. Chinese mourning rights usually include funeral parades to honor the dead and in the case of Hu Yaobang’s funeral, the underlying elements of these marches were calls for democracy (Wasserstrom, 1991).

On the seventieth anniversary of the May 4th movement of 1919, crowds gathered outside political offices. Government officials were holding their own ceremonies to honor
the heroes of the 1919 movement to the backdrop of protesters chanting slogans addressing corruption and lack of reform. The following month, students took the opportunity to use the media attention surrounding Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev’s visit to China to make their message known to the global community. Protesters in Beijing and Shanghai mounted their own welcoming ceremonies for the leader as an attempt to upstage the official welcoming ceremony (Wasserstrom, 1991). Citizens were using the guise of state sponsored functions, or those that resembled official ceremonies as a means to disseminate their own message of dissent.

The May 4th movement of 1919 could refer to a time ranging anywhere from 1915 to 1922. It was a period considered to be a great turning point for the country during the 20th century. In 1989, student protesters used the anniversary of the warlord period rebellion to refer to their own frustrations with the current system. They used this past event as a model for classroom strikes, street side lecture campaigns and other demonstrations (Wasserstrom, 1991).

The ceremonies honoring May 4th and traditional mourning rights were always immensely connected. Funeral marches and marches in general were paralleled to the processions that marked the deaths of martyrs. Students would often wear black armbands during these events to symbolize loss. Whether this was to denote the loss of loved ones or to serve as metaphors for the loss of human rights is relatively unknown (Calhoun, 1994; Teiwes & Sun, 2004). During the Cultural Revolution the “Four Olds: old thinking, culture, customs, and ways of life” were banned. In 1978, these “Four Olds” began to see a revival. The reestablishment of these traditions occurred at the local level, they
were not nationally sanctioned events. However, many of the political rituals of the Communist Party were built on the religious ceremonies of the past (Feuchtwang, 2001).

The traditional ritual used to convey symbolism during the 1976 protests surrounded *Qingming*, also known as Tomb Sweeping Day. Unlike the connection to past revolutions, this day was significant because it was an established day to honor the deceased. Zhou Enlai’s death sparked fervors of renewed interest in the holiday that at one time was considered ancient and taboo. As early as March 19, mourners were placing *Qingming* wreaths honoring Zhou around Tiananmen Square and at different school locations. The wreaths alluded not only to Zhou’s death, but also were double entendres calling attention to class inequality. By the end of March, news of the “Nanjing Incident” had reached Beijing and more wreaths began to emerge in the square. Radical sentiments were publically aired out in wreaths and poems under the guise of the *Qingming* holiday. This type of veiled communication, as Bakhtin (1981) referenced in relation to Soviet control, was a useful tool for subverting the censor. Local authorities, attempting to quell the growing dissent, issued proclamations stating that the holiday was an outdated custom. “On the day of the festival itself, coincidentally the one non-work day of the week, vast numbers came to the square, perhaps one to two million people. With them came many more wreaths, poems, handbills and small character posters, as well as verbal declarations and outburst” (Calhoun, 1994, p. 472)

Tensions eventually grew within the crowd while security officials attempted to maintain order. Many of the speeches uttered the day of the festival were “emotional eulogies to the premier, but significant numbers carried political sting” (Calhoun, 1994). Before the crowd hostility occurred, officials banned the wearing of black armbands as well
as the placement of wreaths, mourning halls, and memorial activities; all traditions
associated with the Qingming festival. Citizens were also barred from handing out pictures
of the deceased leader (Teiwes & Sun, 2004). The state, in this case, realized that they
needed to control the double entendres by shutting down this avenue for the traffic of
information.

James Carey (1989) reflects upon the role of ritual as it relates to communications in
his book Communication as Culture. For Carey, the transmission of the message is not as
important as how it is constructed and maintained. This process is able to control human
action. For China, as stated above, many of the rituals that were utilized during the
communist regime’s grip on power were adapted from older religious observances. To
change the structure of ritualistic social life for the sake of a new political ideology could
have led to chaos. Instead the government was intuitive enough to realize that in order to
maintain a functioning social structure and to sustain their monopoly on power, they must
reestablish existing rituals to fit their new ideological needs. This same adaptation can be
seen in how dissidents modified existing communist rituals to assert their own message,
while still being relevant to the existing social structure.

Mourning rituals have always been an important component of Chinese social
movements. Not only did students use the May 4th model that were incorporated into the
funeral marches for Zhou Enlai in 1976, but these were also repeated in 1989 for the death
of Hu Yaobang. Both Hu and Zhou were deemed martyrs for the cause of reform and their
deaths gave both groups a reason to rally (Wasserstrom, 1991). The messages of mourning
rituals and the May 4th movement were disseminated through common anniversary dates.
Though the majority of the action was relegated to major city centers in Beijing and
Shanghai, on May 4, 1989, students demonstrated in 51 cities around the country. During this anniversary ritual, students used the opportunity to distribute handbills and pamphlets that addressed inflation and corruption. Students and mourners filled the streets of Tiananmen within hours of Hu's death and, in addition to handing out pamphlets, used the opportunity to voice their opinions on press restrictions, university conditions and the lack of government transparency (Dittmer, 1990; Kissinger, 2011; Calhoun, 1994).

Information gathered from interview sources provided a first hand account to some of the different forms of communications that were utilized in earlier protests. One individual who was present during the 1976 funeral parades for both Zhou Enlai and Mao later that year recalled the difference. He stated that both funerals were similar to Kim Jung Il’s death as it is an Asian tradition to publicly mourn deceased leaders. The distinction with Zhou Enlai’s death was that the people were not forced to mourn; the leaders passing genuinely saddened citizens. The individual speculated that this might have been because there was no television at the time so there was no need to construct a “show” for the outside world.

After the crackdown on May 4, 1989, the mayor of Shanghai gave an ambiguous speech that could have been interpreted many ways. The principal message was that citizens should no longer protest for fear that similar crackdowns would occur in other cities. The movement ended June 9th as it began, with funeral marches for the fallen (Wasserstrom, 1991). In this case, as in others, protest communication was mapped on to culturally sanctioned mourning rituals as a way to ensure that the message got out despite the presence of an authoritarian state control of media. Ritual communication, therefore, can have a decidedly polysemic function.
Rituals, including funeral rights, have always been an important feature of Confucian society.

Master You said, ‘When it comes to the practice of ritual, it is harmonious ease that is to be valued. It is preciously such harmony that makes the Way of the Former Kings so beautiful. If you merely stick rigidly to ritual in all matters, great and small, there will remain that which you cannot accomplish. Yet if you know enough to value harmonious ease but try to attain it without being regulated by the rites, this will not work either (Confucius, 2003, p. 5)

With these ancient traditions in mind, the students followed Confucius edicts by adapting rituals to suit their own functions, while also staying true to tradition. This would have spoken volumes to individuals who had once studied Confucius’ Analects that had been banned during the Cultural Revolution.

Originally, many of the temples were shut down or destroyed for the simple reason of land distribution. The communist government was attempting to establish a new sense of collectivization. In 1964 the largest campaign known as Wen Ge, The Cultural Revolution, under the façade of the Socialist Education movement, began to target religious and superstitious behavior and buildings with a new fervor. The religious rituals that the government converted to suit their political needs were performed more frequently than their religious predecessors (Feuchtwang, 2001). This process was meant to encourage mass mobilization; instead of affecting a small portion of the citizenry as the religious rituals accomplished, these political ceremonies impacted everyone. Such communicative acts were another way to establish symbolic control over people’s beliefs and create a citizenry that would not question the ideals of the government. Carey claimed, “We first produce the world by symbolic work and then take up residence in the world we have produced. Alas, there is magic in our self deceptions” (Carey, 1989, p. 23). Mao specifically
targeted the youth to fully administer his reformed symbolic ideology. "Children’s dances and songs were routines, performed in schools and in public displays. [...] For the whole rural population there was also a short period when festival processions had been replaced by marching to work accompanied by such instruments of procession as drums, cymbals, red flags, and slogans" (Feuchtwang, 2001, p. 220). Though many of these symbolic acts were successful in blindly mobilizing many for the communist cause, many of the children who performed these rituals during the late 1970s were the same students who took part in the Tiananmen uprisings and reestablished the idea of the march and the importance of communicative ritual to suit the needs of their own objectives.

Another symbolic event or ritual that was used as a means to traffic information despite state control of media throughout multiple movements was the action of writing in blood. Wasserstrom discusses some of the problems with assuming that the means any protester uses to communicate the message is natural; these methods are in fact relevant to different times and places. Western youths rely on different tropes like occupying school buildings and boycotts, something that is still common today as is evident by the Occupy Wall Street and other various Occupy movements. Chinese youths “routinely bite their fingers and write out slogans in blood, something Chinese students participating in both the anti-Japanese agitations of 1915 and 1919 and the popular protests of 1989 did to prove their commitment to a patriotic cause” (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 71). In 1989, student leader Chai Lin bit her finger to write a condemnatory message for Premier Li Peng and his reaction to the student movement. The most famous account of this action occurred in 1919 when a student wrote, “Return our Qingdao,” a reference to anti-imperialist sentiments, in his own blood (Wasserstrom, 1991). The theme of blood is an important
communicative tool in China. It is closely linked to the nation's view of patriotism and associated with the spilling of blood on Nanjing Road. The May 30th era movements that occurred during the Warlord period of China greatly played up the use of blood imagery and often tied the concept into many of the publications that were utilized in many of the written materials used to further the revolutionary cause (Wasserstrom, 1991). The implications for these actions are significant to the role of communications and historically grounding past events. François Furet (1988) acknowledges a similar connection with the idea of a continuity of the revolutionary frame in his discussion of the French Revolution. There is always a link to the past in the sense that those who currently protest the system are building upon the themes and notions that those before them utilized to establish the system of the incumbent power. The students most likely found out about these events through official government ceremonies for these were the same actions and heroes that the government idolized. Where the political authority saw the heroes of the past as the forefathers of their cause, the students who were protesting choose to read the actions of past activists as those who stood up to the current system.

When the state does respond to dissent by censorship or suppression, this also sends a ritual message. Similarly, when protest movements break from non-violent forms of communication it has a communicative function. The use of violent force either on behalf of the government or dissident faction is emblematic as it sends a message of unrest and often undermines the legitimacy of the movement or party. Low levels of violence have been successful for democratic transitions in multiple cases according to Huntington (1991); however, high levels of violence may account for an authoritarian regime's ability to retain power. Violence instills fear in people and despite any inner factionalism, has
proven to be a successful tool for the Chinese government over the years to reign in external turmoil (Huntington, 1991). Violence serves as an important communicative tool in oppressed societies. “The body that suffers violence negates the very possibility of communication” (Chopra, 2012, p. 158). Chopra believed that the notion of violence allowed, “Oppressed societies to secure the status of civilized nations.” It is able to do this through the communicative nature of violence, which is both “performative” and “representational.” For some, political power is the antitheses of influence and thus the ultimate form of domination (Frazer & Hutchings, 2008). This is evident by China’s increased use of violence to quell any social uprising therefore asserting their monopoly on political power and ideology. Yao Wenyuan, a high-ranking party member concluded that violence was an effective tool during the 1976 Tiananmen crackdown. Violence had been at the center of both the Tiananmen suppression and the Cultural Revolution and would be used again in struggles to come (MacFarquhar & Schoenal, 2006).

Violence cuts both ways as a communication strategy because incidents of it are often retold via word of mouth or captured in photographic images and spread through print and video news sources, communicative elements that will be explored more in depth in the following chapter. Violence is often used as the last mode of communication in most social movements. Scholars of repressive regimes have asked in the past whether violence is a notable tool for communication. “Groups that have adopted the language of violencia are claiming adherence to a set of values which they believe transcend those that they destroy” (Devereaux, 1971, p. 51). Fanon and others have claimed that violence is the most significant tool for those who are oppressed and the chief instrument for those communicating resistance (Frazer & Hutchings, 2008; Fanon, 1961). After violence erupted
in China on April 5, 1976, Tiananmen was cleared and day-to-day activities resumed. The same was true after the bloody crackdown on June 4, 1989, the difference being the death toll. Though some were injured in 1976 there were no reported deaths (Domes, 1977). On the night of June 4, 1989, there are estimations that 200 citizens were killed (BBC, 2011; Dittmer, 1990). Violence has even been present during the most modern movement despite its involvement largely taking place in a virtual realm. Discussion of violence in the case of the 2011 Pro-Democracy protests has been more concentrated on a few known dissidents like Ai WeiWei (Osnos, 2011, Aug 10). The online movement has prompted Chinese officials to target international media more than anything else. Suppression in this case, can be much more invisible than the suppression of public protest. In addition to arrests made on February 20, 2011, police detained an American journalist after plain-clothes officers at a Beijing shopping district beat him (No Awakening, 2011, Mar 3). The Foreign Correspondent’s Club of China has also claimed that international news staff from 16 news agencies has been assaulted by police or stripped of their equipment and detained (The People Doth Not Protest, 2011, Feb 28). Yet despite the media protest of the censorship, none was as high profile as the suppression of public protest, which could perhaps explain why social media can only ever be part of any protest movement.

The beginning of June 1989 marked the end of the multiple month impasses between students and the government. Shortly after midnight, a military jeep ran over four pedestrians just west of Tiananmen killing three. Rumor, a notion that will be explored in Chapter Three, spread regarding this event and the intentions of the driver: Was this an accident or deliberate? Initially troops that were sent to mitigate the movement were unarmed; though this did nothing to dilute the uprising. New troops were summoned and
this time they carried weapons. Soldiers acting in the name of marital law marched into the square firing automatic assault weapons into the crowd and surrounding buildings. According to research on violence as a communicative tool, this form of violence is often seen as a form of political domination and legitimacy (Frazer & Hutchings, 2008).

An interview subject, who was living in the United States at the time, recalls that his family neglected to tell him that both his mother and father, who were on their way to buy groceries, had been shot during one of these shootings. Not only was it hard for citizens to get information out of the country at the time, but anyone who had been wounded or shot during these assaults was considered a terrorist. For those wounded, this label helped to mitigate the trafficking of rumor. Without the resources to contact family or seek medical attention it was difficult to deduce what may have really happened to those who were injured, especially when most technological forms of communication were blacked out. The subject's parents both survived due to a family connection to a famous actress who used her celebrity to have a doctor attend to the victims without reporting the incident to officials. This story is not rare, and many of those who were shot later died of their wounds for fear that they would be thrown in prison if they sought medical help (Xiaobo, 2012).

Civilians were not the only causalities, it is estimated that around 20 soldiers were also killed during the crackdown. Activists torched military vehicles and tore soldiers away from their units often beating them unconscious and in some cases to death. Within China, the government later portrayed these dead soldiers as martyrs; however, in the Western world these stories are rarely told favoring the accounts of the pro-democracy movement supporters. A Chinese civilian familiar with the event, now a political science professor, said that many of the student leaders had left the square and found safe locations before
the violence erupted. Of the 200 civilians that were killed that evening, many of them were innocent bystanders and not the activists who had begun the movement (Zhang, 2001; Calhoun, 1994). For Fanon, violence on the part of the oppressed is necessary and the Western media’s coverage of the violent crackdowns during the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre choose to emphasis the wrongdoings of the government’s use of violence as opposed to those fighting for democratic ideals and those who represented the disenfranchised.

“Fanon attacks the realist account, which associates politics with violent domination, and argues for the justification of violent resistance” (Frazer & Hutchings, 2008, p. 93). The use of violence was a prominent communicative tool for both parties and the media framed this use based on the side it was willing to back. For the Chinese media, the use of violence against soldiers and the labeling of “terrorist” for anyone shot was meant to favor the ideology of political dominance, while the Western press chose to emphasize or rather ignore the use of violence on the part of protesters for the spreading of their own democratic views.

The role of violence and communications featured prominently in the student posters and lectures of the time. In the past, violence would end strikes and demonstrations often ended as soon as they began. This process of using violence was not unique to the communist government. Foreign authorities that ran Shanghai before the communist takeover in 1949 would often use violence to subdue anti-imperialist demonstrations (Wasserstrom, 1991). Though violence was common throughout China’s history and is still a function of suppression in modern movements, the scale of violence that occurred in 1989 is still unprecedented.
The final symbolic gesture was the hunger strike. This is a tradition that, though not well documented for either the 1976 or 2011 movements, received worldwide attention during the 1989 rebellion. Some believe the hunger strikes – like other rituals used for their communicative function - have a connection to ancient Buddhist traditions that often used fasting as a protest technique (Calhoun, 1994; Wasserstrom, 1991). Hunger Strikes were also prevalent in the May 4th movement and stories of heroes who fasted and denied themselves food in the name of a cause can be found throughout 2000 years of China’s history. “The hunger strike was a powerful challenge to the CCP’s image of itself as a party committed to ideals of self-sacrifice and selflessness (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 319). It was difficult to rationalize the hunger strikes of 1989 for some of the older demonstrators because these were the same ritual acts that members of the Communist Party implemented before the takeover in 1949. They did not want to admit that these were the same tools that had placed the current party in power. Yet it can also be viewed as another example of how communicative forms were reestablished to suit the needs of those protesting and to legitimize their particular cause (Wasserstrom, 1991).

These symbolic events and rituals had strong communicative power. In many cases these were familiar tropes that helped deliver alternative messages in ways that a large majority of the population could relate to and understand. Mourning rights and celebrations associated with official holidays already draw a significant audience when viewed in a traditional setting, but when a subversive political message is attached or encoded within the ritual, they have the potential to involve others both domestically and internationally. How the messages and meanings of these events, including the communicative action of violence, are disseminated to mass audiences will be explained in
Chapter Two as well as the roll of one-to-many forms of communication technologies. However, the technology explored in Chapter Two would have had little power if these original modes of communication were not so familiar. In addition to the familiarity of ritual and tradition, was the role location and transportation played in all three movements.

**Location and Transportation**

Much has been written about public spaces and communicative spheres from Habermas to Lefebvre. These spaces “allow citizens to insert themselves as agents of a community and nation into ‘narratives of public culture and civic responsibility” (Gardner, 2008, p. 2; Habermas, 1989). The most significant theoretical works on space are Lefebvre’s texts *The Critique of Everyday Life* (1991) and *The Production of Space* (1991). Lefebvre believed that citizens have become so occupied with “neoliberal values” that they “regulate” their actions and practices within public spaces. For Lefebvre, “meaning is defined as a habit of action, and this notion of meaning can be applied not only to linguistic expression but also to things like hats, tables, buildings, and squares” (Määttänen, 2007; p. 453). Marcuse (1964), Zizek (2011) and many other theorists have stated that the best way to thwart the system is to flip the dominant meanings through any mode possible. Instead of using Tiananmen Square for pro-government functions, the men and women who occupied the square in 1976 and 1989, in addition to the busy shopping districts nearby in 2011, used these spaces for opposing the dominant system and revolutionary functions.
Tiananmen Square, the location associated with all of these protests, is symbolic in many ways. Geographically, the Square is the center of the capital city. It is also the “window through which China showcases itself to the world” (Zhang, 2001). Control of the communicative function of the space, then, has always been central to the control of the political message, from Imperial times to the present. According to excerpts from the Beijing Municipal Party Committee, when the pro-democracy movement took over the square, it was viewed as a huge threat to communist ideology and organizational control. “The square has become like a great banner for democratic patriotism, the epicenter and heart of the national movement for democracy” (Zhang, 2001; Wasserstrom, 1991). It was for this reason that the regime went to such extremes to wrestle the meaning of the location back from the protesters.

Just as we see the communicative function of “occupying” serving such an important role today in America, the success of occupying the message of Tiananmen Square was that the participants of these movements used the location to proceed with their day-to-day activities while also making a political statement. “This dialectical movement permeates the everyday. It gives it life. The everyday is the space in which the dialectical movement advances or comes to a halt, in the unpredictable blend of opaqueness and transparency” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 10). Tiananmen’s significance plays a large role in providing legitimacy for the government. It has always been at the center of Chinese politics. Tiananmen 天安门 translates to the square of heavenly peace. In dynastic China, the leader was known as the heavenly ruler and received his power from a divine mandate. This significance carried over to China’s modern leadership (Calhoun, 1989). “By laying claim to the most sacred political location in the nation’s capital and by disputing the party’s interpretation of one of
the key episodes in its own story of the revolution, students challenged the CCP leadership’s claim to reside at the political center and to represent the nation’s core values” (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 318). The use of Tiananmen Square for the protesters to make their political claim was a powerful statement that not only challenged Mao’s use of the sacred space to assert his political ideologies but also had larger ties to China’s long history and the use of the space to maintain power.

Taking to the streets, as a communicative act commonly connotes dissatisfaction, whether it is a famous square or a walk through a shopping district. Populist anger, especially if it has no coherent agenda, can go anywhere in times of want (Rage Against the Machine, 2011, Oct 22). Marches around the square brought new awareness and subsequently new individuals to the cause (Wasserstom, 1991; Calhoun, 1994). The 1989 movement became known as the “Chinese Woodstock,” as a festive atmosphere was at the heart of the occupation. Music and dancing, with its ritual communicative function of celebration and joy, was often a part of the square’s daily activities during the months of habitation (Wasserstrom, 1991). Within the square, oral communication modes were successful. There were seated talks, lectures, and theatrical productions in addition to call and response dialogue. It was more than just chanting slogans and served more as a conversation between the leaders of the movement and those involved (Wasserstrom, 1991). Though the foreign press helped to disseminate the message of the student movement, it was not as powerful as the voices of the students and the others involved (Calhoun, 1989).

There are conflicting accounts of the group dynamics and how this dynamic impacted the traffic of information as people came and went from the central location.
Some felt that the movements in 1976 and in 1989 were unsuccessful because the group was addressed as a mass, a problem in a communist country where the people protesting are often fed up with being referred to as a generalized herd. However, for a time, when the movement was most successful, smaller groups of friends and like-minded individuals would gather for discussions and strategy meetings (Calhoun, 1989).

Of all the events related to the protest movements, it was the clearing of the massive square that received the most attention. This again reinforces the importance of location, and control of the message associated with it, in protest movements. Both sides knew how important it was to occupy the space with their message and were willing to use or withstand violence in order to do so. On April 5 1976, around 6:30 p.m., Beijing mayor Wu De, in a final attempt to peacefully remove the occupants, pleaded with those remaining. Police eventually charged the crowd around 11 p.m. and after a brief period of violent clashes the square was evacuated (Teiwes & Sun, 2004; MacFarguhar & Schoenhals, 2006). The clearing of the square in 1989 was more chaotic and involved extensive roadblocks (Calhoun, 1989). Getting messages and information out during each of these withdrawals was arduous, as each time lines of transportation and communication were blocked.

Transportation, moving people to and from central locations that are crucial for the deliberation of purpose and the communication of message, is an understudied, yet extremely important mode of communication when the availability of other media is limited. James Carey (1989) emphasizes the importance of transportation claiming, “communication is a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people” (p. 13). Dominating the ideas of space beyond the centralized movement played a monumental role in disseminating the message beyond the
square. “Although messages might be centrally produced and controlled, through monopolization of writing or the rapid production of print, these messages, carried in the hands of a messenger or between the bindings of a book, still had to be distributed, if they were to have their desired effect, by rapid transportation” (Carey, 1989, p. 12-13). The Chinese state tacitly acknowledges this importance by severely restricting the movement of subjects. Before the Cultural Revolution, citizens who wanted to travel for business or personal reasons had to request a letter from the authorities. Without this letter, they would be unable to buy a railway ticket or book a hotel (Garside, 1981). Access to information is significantly impacted by the ability to travel. In the American Supreme Court case Aptheker v. Secretary of State, it was stated that, “freedom of travel is a constitutional liberty closely related to rights of free speech and association” (Velvel, 1966, p. 35). By restricting travel through the strict adherence of documents and passports, the Chinese government was able to restrict the flow of information. The United States and other countries have also used these tactics to suppress communications produced in locations that are deemed to have opposing political ideologies (Velvel, 1966). However, despite these limitations, travel was still a highly successful means for transmitting counter-revolutionary messages.

Traveling to issue petitions was one of the earlier forms of physically transporting the message. Message dissemination via physical travel has been around in China for centuries and closely mirrors the notion of religious pilgrimages. Buddhist and Taoist traditions are heavily aligned with voyages associated with petitions, though in these cases it was a matter of petitioning to the gods and not terrestrial leaders. Banners were often
used during these pilgrimages to demarcate the travelers’ place of origin (Wasserstrom, 1991).

The train system was perhaps the most important mode of transportation with regards to the distribution of information. The railway system in China was linked to economic stability; as it was the main form of transportation for industry, specifically coal. One of Deng’s reforming policies included the improvement of the railway system, which at the time of Deng’s succession to power was one of China’s weaker infrastructures. As Beijing was the capital, the railway system was centralized around this city (Macfarguhar & Schoenhals, 2006). Returning to the idea of space, the fact that this mode of travel and location was a central transportation hub, and the reality that many of the protests originated in Beijing and spread beyond the square is not surprising. The train system thus provided a strong matrix for message distribution. One of the interviewees discussed that those who were using the train system to disseminate messages were probably those who were already traveling these routes for business. Transportation in relations to message dissemination is often overlooked as it generally represents day-to-day travel for business and manufacturing. As Deng Xiaoping’s reforming policies opened China up to more commerce, it became easier to utilize this already existing network of travel to spread counterrevolutionary messages from one city to the next. A second interviewee who took part in the Shanghai demonstrations of 1989, said that participants found out about the occurrences in Beijing through travelers and international radio stations as phones were rare and the official newspapers and television programs did not cover much of the protest.

The 1976 Tiananmen Incident began in Nanjing. News of the events that transpired in the south had already made their way to Beijing and other cities by word of mouth and
slogans painted on busses and railway cars (Teiwes & Sun, 2004). A number of the interview subjects confirmed this information. Again, official modes of transportation and communication were repurposed by dissident movements in order to thwart the attempt to censure dissent.

Similarly, in 1989, the information about events in the capital spread out through state transportation systems and the protests quickly spread from Beijing to 341 other cities. Student protesters took over trains, schools and other public domains (Dittmer, 1990). After the 1989 massacre in Beijing, continuing protests in the capital would have been suicide. However, the unrest continued in cities like Shanghai and Wuhan. Yet like all modes of communication, the ability to control the flow of transportation works both ways. Protesters in these cities attempted to control this flow in a way counter to the state’s best interests, bringing business and transportation to a halt by using the vehicles to barricade major throughways. They also obstructed railway traffic. The objective of this general transportation strike was to pressure the government to give in to demands so they could get back to business. Not only did this impact the flow of information, but the restriction of everyday modes of trafficking goods also communicated a message. In this case, the absence of transportation helped to traffic information about the social movement. There were other reasons for erecting barricades throughout these cities so as to prevent a repeat of the massacre in Beijing (Wasserstrom, 1991). In Changsha, roughly five hundred students marched down Wuyi Road, the city’s main street. When they reached the railway station, they rushed in with banners, wreaths, and placards and began shouting slogans as they stood or sat on the railway tracks. Students shouted, “If Li Peng dared to open fire on the people, why can’t we lie down on the rails?” (Zhang, 2001).
The transportation network established by the rail and bus routes allowed propaganda teams around the county to communicate beyond singular locations. Students would attach loudspeakers to vehicles and drive them around the cities summoning others to the cause of revolution. To confirm that transportation played a noteworthy role in the revolution, it was estimated that during a May 25 meeting in Tiananmen Square, 216 universities were represented from 27 provinces. Shortly after the student movement in Beijing began, leaders would send delegates to other areas to spread the message and *chuanlian* or network (Zhang, 2001). Though this tactic is a safe way to spread the message, as it is more difficult to intercept the intentions of an average traveler than a letter, phone call or blog post, there were still some complications to this method of dissemination, such as issues of dialect. Though written forms of Mandarin were at the time standardized, there were still a variety of dialects complicating verbal communications among the dissenters.

Given China’s multiple spoken dialects, the only true lingua franca in China is the written form of the language, which became unified under Mao’s leadership (Hongchen, 2009). Students traveling to other provinces with city dialects had trouble communicating with the *laobaixing* 老百姓, essentially known as the common people. Accounts of misunderstandings between students and villagers were typical (Wassertrom, 1991; Zhang, 2001). To communicate with the masses, written forms of communications like pamphlets and petitions were often implemented; however, these transmissions were generally intended for educated audiences (Zhang, 2011).

To convey the message throughout the city, not only did activists use loud speakers affixed to vehicles, they also implemented the use of bicycles to spread news of the events.
This was also a tactic implemented in the May 30th movement during the early warlord period thus creating historical precedent for its use in later demonstrations. During one of these bicycle demonstrations in 1989, approximately ten thousand students from eleven universities rode around on their bikes distributing petitions and other printed materials. Students also stopped at a number of media facilities to chant slogans finally concluding their journey at the People’s Daily, China’s official newspaper. (Zhang, 2001).

**Early Written and Printed forms of the Apparatus: Petitions**

Historically, petitions and transportation worked in an almost symbiotic fashion. The role of petitions as a mode of communication began early on in China’s tradition of social movements as a component of marches. “Marches of one sort or another have accompanied most modern student movements, but the specific way they are carried out varies considerably depending on the historical and cultural context” (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 74). At the end of the marches, students would present petitions to government authorities in an official capacity. They would kneel outside government buildings and hold the petitions over their heads hoping that the government would in turn find it difficult to ignore large crowds of people and amend specific policies. Most of the images found showing these petitions are simple hand written documents with several characters (Wasserstrom, 1991). The simplicity of this message could point to either a tribute to the modes of communications their revolutionary predecessors used, or more simply demonstrate that the uses of communicative technology implemented during dissent were simple, yet effective. As such, when acts such as these are undertaken in the present, they are understood as part of this tradition.
During Gorbachev's visit, for example, students formed a petition to request his presence at their university. When he did not reply, students at Peking University suggested creating a petition to begin a hunger strike while occupying the center square to greet the Soviet Leader. Students also requested that Wan Li, who worked with then General Secretary Hu Yaobang, speak at either the square or at a university in support of the student cause. The former official was in North America at the time on an official visit and upon his return flew into Shanghai where he was met by Jiang Zemin and persuaded to stay away from the protests (Zhang, 2001).

Posters, Slogans and Banners

Slogans, posters and banners, like petitions, have been a significant part of the Chinese communications apparatus for centuries. They are effective because they are visible to many, anonymous and available throughout many sites. According to Darnton's model of a communication circuit, plaques, posters, pamphlets and other manuscripts and printed news were present in streets and markets; cafes, taverns and public gardens; salons and private circles; printing shops and bookstores; and finally homes, libraries, and reading groups (Darnton, 2000). They were visible in many settings to many people. Many of the slogans used in the social movements explored throughout this paper were based on Confucius proverbs. “If the slogans student protesters shouted and the speeches they gave had not moved their intended audience, it would have been impossible for these youths to gain the amount of popular support that they did” (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 200). These forms of communication were a popular and familiar way to communicate with their intended audience.
The invention of printing technology was revolutionary in itself. Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979) considers this innovation to be a modernization of tradition. Just as Carey cites transportation as having this effect on the dissemination of tradition and messages, the production of these communications and the use of print have also impacted the nature of dissent and revolutionary action. In Vietnam, a country similar to China religiously, traditionally and politically, many of the books and printed works published between 1920 and 1945 were done illegally.

Vietnam in the twentieth century saw the rise of a print culture: print increasingly supplanted oral modes of communicating information. I will argue that the developments of this print culture, while occurring at the same time as the rise of nationalist and revolutionary movements, was a distinct process that should be understood on its own terms. I will also examine how the rise of print culture was linked to the elaboration of distinct Confucian, communist, and Buddhist realms of discourse. These realms were constituted, in part, as reactions to the colonial practice, administration, and law. Law determined the framework of an emergent public sphere and established the grounds for censorship (McHale, 2004, p. 7).

This occurred in China, much before this reference to Vietnam, during the Warlord and Nationalist periods. Underground printing presses were used to disseminate pamphlets and newspapers that were anti-Japanese and pro-communist and may have led to the favorable political opinion that helped support the communist takeover in 1949 (Wasserstrom, 1991). The notion of law however, is the most important takeaway of McHale’s statement. Perhaps it was easier to produce these printed texts under colonial powers; however, it became much more difficult to produce these printed texts once a nationalist government like the CCP came to power. It may be for this reason that many of
the pamphlets, posters, and petitions prevalent during the 1976 and 1989 protests were handwritten.

There were a variety of posters utilized during the rebellions, all of which are longstanding forms that date back hundreds of years. Small character posters *xiaozibao*, were often written in pen or pencil on pages torn from notebooks. Its larger cousin *da zibao*, large character posters, were often done in the calligraphic tradition in black ink with a brush. Though there were some elaborate posters, most were plainly done and simple. Leaflets and wall posters were key tools used to impact the minds of the *laobaixing*. The posters, being a written form of communication, were generally intended for a literate and educated audience, so repetition became the basis to appeal to the less scholarly audience members. During one of the marches 20,000 copies of a leaflet titled, “*Gaotongbao shu*” were disseminated to the people (Wasserstrom, 1991). It is unknown what individuals did with these pamphlets, as information regarding dissent in China is often hard to ascertain. One of the interview subjects destroyed the photographic evidence he had obtained during the 1976 movement for fear that he would be punished if any of the visuals had been found. It is most likely that the average citizen, afraid of being caught if in possession of one of these pamphlets, acted in a similar fashion.

In excerpts from the Beijing Municipal Party Committee and Beijing’s People’s Government’s “On the true nature of the turmoil,” many of the themes addressed were discussed. The memo stated, “the square has become like a great banner for democratic patriotism, the epicenter and heart of the national movement for democracy” (Zhang, 2001). The symbolic nature of the space alone had become a beacon for the cause of the democratic movement. It was difficult for both the Western media and the Chinese
government to ignore this blatant message and it was for this reason that one could surmise that the eventual crackdown occurred. This symbolic banner had been growing in recognition for months and it was becoming more difficult for the CCP to maintain political control and legitimacy in the face of this counter-revolutionary message.

The most significant display of mass poster demonstrations occurred after the Tiananmen Incident of 1976, as the Democracy Wall Movement was sparked by an increase in the courage of the people. The movement in 1976 demonstrated that it was possible to voice dissenting opinions. The wall in which these written sentiments were placed was about two hundred yards long and 12 feet high. Posters were placed near the road closest to the municipal bus depot again tying transportation into the apparatus of dissemination. During four months in the winter of 1978-1979 “voices came from that wall which were heard around the world” (Garside, 1981). Some of the posters referenced the 1976 demonstration, while others criticized current and past leadership. An account from a foreign journalist living in Beijing at the time summarizes the atmosphere of the Democracy Wall.

On this drab stretch of brickwork over the weekend of 17-19 November a poster appeared criticizing Mao by name. In a total of four and a half years in China, I had never seen or heard Mao criticized by name in public, not had any other foreigner in Peking. Yet here in the heart of the capital in a most public place someone had displayed a poster that, commenting on a recent play about the Tiananmen Demonstrations that dared to say ‘In 1976 after the Tiananmen Incident, the Gang of Four made use of the prestige and power of Chairman Mao Zedong’s mistaken judgment on class struggle and launched an all-out attack on the cause of the revolution in China (Garside, 1981, p. 212).

The Democracy Wall movement following the 1976 uprising was significant because it marked a new openness in regards to expressing counter-revolutionary viewpoints. These
posters, which would have gotten the authors imprisoned or at sentenced to death, were now able to remain posted for many to observe. Many of them criticized Mao’s beliefs and blamed the Cultural Revolution for China’s current weak economic standing (Garside, 1981).

One of the most famous posters of this time was titled *Democracy must judge Despotism*. The poster inferred that this movement had links to the traditions of the orators of London’s Hyde Park. A poet from Guiyang pasted a ninety-four panel big-character poster titled *God of Fire Symphonic Poems*. Hundreds gathered to read the posters or have the posters read to them and they were allowed to do so at leisure. No law-enforcement cracked down on the gatherings or messages (Garside, 1981).

Most of the readers were working men under 35. They would often copy the texts as they had begun to do during the *Qingming* festival of 1976. One of the interview subjects stated that he burned his notebooks containing copies of the poems he had inscribed during the 1976 Incident for fear that someone would report him to the authorities and he would be arrested. The mood during the Democracy Wall movement was a bit more open. There was generally silence unless a friend read one of the excerpts to an illiterate companion. The Democracy Wall movement also marked the beginning of the influence of the foreign press, as a few of the observers were Western newspaper journalists (Garside, 1981). One foreign reporter said, “In 1976 I had to turn to other foreigners, to Chinese outside of China, or to an embassy library, protected by diplomatic privilege for confirmation that the past had indeed been the way I remembered it.” (Garside, 1981, p. 93). Chinese citizens were not allowed to talk to foreigners at the time, though this did change in the 1980s (Garside, 1981). Though the restrictions applying to foreigners are
more lenient today, there is still an 11 o’clock curfew for any foreigner living in China and hotels require passport copies for any non-Chinese individuals staying at Chinese establishments.

Chinese citizens in Beijing around the time of the Democracy Wall movement were excited to see the foreign journalists. They would often approach these professionals to voice their appreciation, a sentiment that carried over to later protests. Foreign journalists allowed others to learn about the internal activities of a country that had been closed to outside scrutiny for years. Though this is speculation, it is possible that while the international audience was gaining their first glimpses into Chinese dissent, many of the actual citizens in villages and other cities were ignorant of the Wall because few Chinese publications covered the story (Garside, 1981). However, those who traveled to Beijing and then returned to their hometowns could have brought the messages of the movement back to their local residences. The movement and location, though centralized in Beijing, became an icon for those who thought change in China could be possible.

The first uprising of the Tiananmen Incident occurred in Nanjing on March 24, 1976 when the Nanjing medical institute personnel laid a wreath at the Revolutionary Martyr Cemetery near the city. Students also began to put up slogans that stated, “Defend Zhou Enlai with our lives” around downtown. Citizens believed that Zhou was not being properly mourned and the government’s response to his death was tarnishing his reputation. An article was published stating that Zhou was a capitalist in support of Deng, further upsetting many of the mourners. Wang Hongwen, after monitoring the protests for two days, ordered that the posters be removed and that counterrevolutionary opinions would not be tolerated (Teiwes & Sun, 2004).
Within hours of Hu Yaobang’s death, students filled the streets and covered city walls with posters and slogans. In the days that followed, the movement had become highly organized (Zhang, 2001). Slogans are one of the most basic and successful means of promotion given their segmented nature. “Derived from the Gaelic phrase *slugh gairm*, meaning “battle cry,” slogans sum up the benefits of a product in an easily remembered few words (Ghanem & Selber, 2009 p. 17; Lane & Russell, 2001). The slogans associated with the 1989 movement were trying harder to garner international interest. Activists waved banners in multiple languages including French “Vive la liberte” and English, “Give me liberty or give me death” (Calhoun, 1994; Wasserstrom, 1991). These slogans would have resonated with Western audiences given that these phrases had close ties to their own revolutionary histories.

One of the subjects interviewed stated that many of the slogans dealt with corruption and that at no point were the demonstrators talking about changing the system. He recalled one of the prevalent slogans concerned income inequality and the divide between academics and business: “The more you teach the skinnier you become.” This was in reference to the fact that many of the Chinese involved in the movement worked hard and still made barely enough money to survive. Like the Occupy Wall Street movements of today, they were fighting for income equality. This phrase known and retold by many, also showed how effective and durable slogans were passed via word of mouth and thus disseminated to a wide audience.

Even during the highly computer driven protests, slogans are still a major component of the movements. In an article published by *The Economist* last September, citizens were seen holding a banner that stated 还我世代美好家园: “I also want a better
home for future generations” (the new middle classes rise up, 2011, Sep 3). Protests in China are gaining more global attention resulting in foreign influences. In Luoyang China, a group of elderly have been gathering at Zhouwangcheng Square to voice their opinion on the growing inequality associated with China’s push towards capitalism. One old man declared, “this is our Wall Street” to a group of other elderly citizens. Some individuals, including these elderly, are actually nostalgic for China’s communist roots. The growing gap between the rich and poor in China has continued to grow. Some of the slogans that have been implemented during this demonstration have included illusions to the Occupy Wall Street movement: “Resolutely support the American people’s great Wall Street revolution” and “We belong to the 99% who will no longer remain silent” (long march, longer memories, 2011, Oct. 22). Once again there was an evident connection to the past though in this case one associated with the West’s revolutionary history. Slogans, as seen both in the Democracy Wall movement in China and the current movements around the globe today, illustrate this constant connection with former methods of communications.

In addition to written slogans, many other visual forms were utilized to help communicate with the laobaixing. The students in charge of the anti-government propaganda knew of the language difficulties mentioned earlier. They understood that to achieve the support of the masses largely comprised of the laobaixing they would need to incorporate both oral tools like street corner speeches and utilize cartoons to support the written slogans (Wasserstrom, 1991). Li Peng was drawn as a gorilla following in the traditions of past activists who would often incorporate animal imagery into posters. Smashed bottles were also used as a metaphor for Deng Xiaoping as his surname sounds like small bottle if other tones are employed (Wasserstrom, 1991). Photographs, portraits,
postcards, movies, and slide shows were also used. Pictures were more powerful in communicating acts of violence to the general public. “Educated youths and other intellectuals used symbolic acts and pictures of objects with powerful folk resonances to further reinforce the idea that students were bravely protecting the nation from evil foreign powers and domestic traitors” (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 222). The poster of Li Peng was a hand written notice with a crude image of Peng and a gorilla. The poster claimed to be a copy of an official news release. The notice itself was seen as a parody and eluded to Peng, as a “monstrous cold-blooded beast” that could take on human form and had recently escaped from the zoo. This form of parody, that was often copied and disseminated by others either via written replication or photograph, was a prime example of Bakhtin’s (1981) theory and a way to subvert censors.

Themes of blood were often harnessed as a repetitive and useful communications tool. In Nanjing, students covered posters with the character 血 xue, blood, in red to represent the blood of martyrs. After the June 4, 1989 massacre in Beijing, protesters displayed bloody t-shirts taken from the victims (Wasserstrom, 1991). Students and other citizens also placed wreaths and a white banner with specs of red at the edge of Tiananmen Square. These red specks were intended to represent blood (Zhang, 2001). “Rather than focus on a few key images and slogans that seem to sum up the ‘crisis of 1989,’ we should highlight the diversity of the symbols and street theatre performances that made the People’s movement such a powerful and dramatic event” (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 327). Slogans were just one aspect of the movement in addition to other forms of less overt communications that were actualized. The final section explores the role of poetry and
other arts returning to Wasserstrom’s idea that Chinese protests were a form of street theatre.

**Poetry, Music and the Arts**

Theater and the arts have been a defining element of the technological apparatus (Wasserstrom, 1991; Yaron, 1995). The idea of political theatre is closely related to the notion of morality and a “knowledge of persons.” When performing or attempting to garner outside attention the possibilities of reflecting ones true reality are often skewed (Yaron, 1995). This may account for why confusion arose due to the democratic underpinnings emphasized by the Western media in the 1989 uprising, in addition to why some of the protesters may have also carried signs in foreign languages. As previously mentioned, relating to the audience was the primary function of any movement. Incorporating forms of entertainment was not just a way to garner audience attention, but it was also a successful tool to mask some of the anti-government messages from the authorities.

It has become commonplace in recent decades for journalists in the West to speak of politics and theatre as analogous and related genres of activity. This is only natural; from Classical Greece on, dramatic performances have played crucial roles in political life reflections or critiques of systems of power relations, and political philosophers beginning with Plato and Aristotle have taken tragedy and other dramatic forms seriously (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 3)

Students were actors using drama, often Classical Confucius plays, as a tool for dissent. One of the first examples of language in the arts came during the Baihua or plain speech movement. Mao attempted to equalize the classes by unifying the written language shifting
from traditional to simplified characters in the hopes that this would make it easier for the peasantry to become literate. Intellectuals realizing the potential began writing poems and stories in the vernacular as opposed to the traditional classical speech. However, despite this move, only a fraction of the *laobaixing* was able to read these literary works (Wasserstrom, 1991).

When news of the 1976 Tiananmen Incident reached the capital from Nanjing, the number of mourners increased. The grieving gathered at the Monument to People’s Heroes in Tiananmen Square to leave wreaths and poems. These tokens, accolades to Zhou’s ideologies, contained implicit criticisms of Mao and Jiang Qing (Kissinger, 2011). Using allegory was a way to get around censors. The wreaths were just as equal in their support of Zhou as their criticism of the Gang of Four and Mao’s wife Jiang Qing (Domes, 1977; Bakhtin, 1981). In an attempt to reestablish order after 1976, The CCP used entertainment to convince the people that the government was still in power. Operas honoring revolutionary heroes were put on during revolutionary holidays to create a renewed sense of nationalism. One of the interview subjects, a former Chinese ballet dancer, recalled the atmosphere in the art world after Zhou’s death. During the Cultural Revolution, Zhou was known as the protector of the arts. He encouraged artists and was seen as a father figure in the community knowing personal details about individuals. The government strictly controlled the Chinese Dance Academy with Mao’s wife at the head as she was a former movie star. At the time of Zhou’s death the interview subject, a child at the time, performed a dance for Zhou Enlai. This may have been the government’s way to remedy the news stories that had supposedly ruined the leaders reputation.
The 1989 dissent was more bold and undeniable. “While Zhou’s mourners in 1976 had veiled their criticisms of Mao and Jiang Qing in allegorical references to ancient dynastic court politics, the demonstrators over Hu in 1989 named their targets” (Kissinger, 2011, p. 409). Perhaps one reason for this new overt behavior has to do with the increase of Western influence from 1976 to 1989, an area that will be explored in more detail in Chapter Two. Instead of hidden poems, the protesters during the 1989 movement were creating giant sculptures to serve as visual symbols for the movement thus conveying the message to a wider audience, as a sculpture could be understood by the illiterate laobaixing. (Zhang, 2001).

The Goddess of Democracy was a female statue made of plaster and holding a torch. The figure, which was displayed in the heart of Tiananmen Square resembled the Statue of Liberty and became the movement’s focal point (Zhang, 2001; Forges, Ning & Wu, 1993). On the night the statue was created, students from the central academy of arts worked on the sculpture until around 10:30 p.m. The atmosphere was quiet until the goddess was finally revealed and the crowd became exhilarated. During the unveiling of the statue, stage performances and revolutionary songs ushered in the new symbol. The government later issued a statement that said the erection of the figure violated sanctioned mourning activities (Zhang, 2001). The Goddess of Democracy was yet another foreign influenced novelty in the 1989 arsenal. It was used as a symbol alongside banners that read “glasnost” and “people power” (Wasserstrom, 1991). The Goddess of Democracy was in itself a form of political theatre for the very fact that from the beginning, the creators of the statue were looking towards the future at its inevitable destruction.

The statue of the Goddess of Democracy was a monument that was intended to be destroyed, because its monumentality
would derive from such self-sacrifice. In this way, this statue separated itself from those permanent ‘revolutionary monuments’ whose photo images fill a tourist guide or a textbook. These permanent monuments are the consequences of revolutions—like the Monument of the People’s Heroes built to mystify a glorious past—but not revolutions themselves.’ This analysis makes sense, but we should not let it obscure the equal truth that the statue was an act of theater, presenting the student movement as the monumental equivalent of a government (Calhoun, 1994, p. 116)

The statue gave the movement a powerful hold over the government. Whether the CCP chose to allow the Goddess to stand or to be destroyed, these actions had serious communicative consequences for both scenarios for a government so focused with the image of their own revolutionary history.

Artists and students have been wielding the tools that shape the communications apparatus for quite some time in China. “Despite periodic efforts of the CCP to make drama serve narrowly defined “revolutionary” goals, dissident artists have produced a number of powerful plays and movies that used historical analogies and thinly disguised references to political figures to attack leaders and orthodox policies” (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 4).

Unknown poets, whose work was passed among to dissenters and whose posted work, in the form of posters, often became copied, came to be the heart of the 1976 movement. In 1989, musician Cui Jian was a major influence performing for the students at Tiananmen Square, more on this will be discussed later. While dissident artist Ai Weiwei has been the center of attention for much of the Western media coverage for the Jasmine Revolutions.

There has been a long history of music in protest. The use of drama, rhythm, and melody bridged the cultural gap between the student protesters and the laobaixing. A Chinese student now living in the U.S. remembered a story her father had told her about
music. Students would exchange songs back and forth as a form of competition. This was worked in as a style of protest. The students would sing one part and the soldiers would answer back. It was a group effort and a cultural understanding that brought these two contradictory singing groups together. National and popular revolutionary songs were often repurposed to encompass the message of the movement. Of these popular songs *Internationale* was probably the most instrumental during the first two movements. In the course of the Democracy Wall Movement, following the 1976 Incident, a crowd gathered in front of the Great Hall of People to sing *Internationale* and the National Anthem. When the singing brought government officials to the windows of the building the protesters began to shout slogans pleading for freedom and democracy finishing the display with a final chorus of *Internationale*. (Wasserstrom, 1991). This song was later banned in 1989. The CCP was so scared of symbols associated in any way with the people’s movement that it banned all impromptu singing of one of the party’s most revered songs. This act of blanket suppression of public music performance shows just how effective music was as a way of disseminating both the message and affective glue for the protest movements.

Music is political by nature; whether that was the artist’s original intent, the song is already a part of an existing musical culture.

In one sense, then, music emerges as always already grounded in the social, as an avenue of cultural condensation or social and political engagement. In piecing together the typical arguments of music and social protest, however, a number of issues tend to surface with regularity (Peddie, 2006, p. xvii).

Music is a prime example of Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of subverting the censor. The difficulty with looking at protest music from a strictly Western perspective is that it negates matters of authoritarian censorship or rather accentuates them. Western
audiences assumed that there was major musical censorship in the Soviet Union during the 1980s. Yet this was not the case, and is also apparent when looking at China (Ryback, 1990; Ramet, 1994; Pekacz, 1994). Music for these former and current communist states functions in the same way the U.S. music industry works; most companies, even if controlled by an authoritarian power, are looking for the best way to sell products. This is most evident with the case of Cui Jian after the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations.

Cui Jian and other politically dissident musicians showed their support by playing at the 1989 rallies. “Nothing to My Name,” Cui Jian’s most famous song, became an anthem for the student protesters. The song encompassed elements of individuality, a concept unknown to many of the citizens who were demanding more political rights and better academic conditions (Matusitz, 2010; Liu, 1989). “Nothing to My Name” was similar to *International* in many respects. When stanzas were compared side by side many of the lines appeared to be mirror images of each other (Calhoun, 1994). Though the tune of Cui Jian’s song was different, there were similar tonal qualities. Music, according to Darnton was the “greatest mnemonic device.” Poems written during France’s revolutionary period, “were composed to fit the rhythms of popular tunes, and they circulated by means of singing, along with the songs that came from the court and that had provoked the investigation in the first place” (Darnton, 2000, p. 25). Music was powerful because it allowed these dissident messages to be easily recalled and thus reiterated at later dates.

The government controls the music industry in China. This creates an interesting dynamic for artists like Cui Jian because of their relative success. The government, realizing that Cui Jian was a popular figure amongst those who objected to some of the current political policies, used his influence to polish their image after the uprisings that
ended in June 1989. Knowing that their international image had been tarnished, authorities allowed Cui Jian to tour and thus rebuild their reputation and raise money prior to the 11th Asian Games (Chong, 1991). The government was attempting to project an image of openness after the June crackdown and used a popular dissident musician to spearhead this campaign. Essentially the CCP attempted to use tools and members associated with the dissident movement for their own purposes to regain a positive image. More on the notion of using the tools of the opposite party to further the ideals of the other will be addressed in detail in Chapter Three.

The role of music has not been limited due to new media in the most modern revolution, though it has changed. One prominent example of this relates to a song that dates back to the Qing Dynasty. Because of the way in which a video of a song can be framed or repurposed, nothing is neutral. A video of President Hu Jintao and African exchange students singing the traditional folk song “Molihua,” translated as jasmine flower, shot prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, has been banned from the Internet due to its association with the online “Jasmine” movement (Jacobs & Ansfield 2011; China’s Crackdown, 2011, April 4). The fact that a song from the Qing Dynasty has reemerged as a potential threat to China’s political authority because the song’s title shares a common word with a global online movement demonstrates not only the importance of looking at all forms of communications implemented during social movements but also looking at connections to the past.
Summary

In regards to the physical presence and past influences of the 1976 and 1989 movements, these events were similar in many respects. What made them different was the level of violence and its communicative function in regards to legitimacy for both the dissenter and the government. Location and public space played a crucial role in each. The square in 1976 was cleared with little bloodshed and no causalities while the 1989 evacuation is one of the most infamous events in modern history. One reason for this may be the influence of the Western media in 1989, which was not present in the previous movement. There were no video cameras, plus radio and telephones were still relatively uncommon. The soldiers who carried out the massacre were isolated from media. Those soldiers who were following the media in addition to experiencing the protest atmosphere first hand had trouble enforcing martial law as many of them were sympathetic to the cause. The head of Beijing command was jailed for eight years because instead of implementing the annihilation of the movement, he checked himself into a hospital. Not able to gain support from the local armed forces, the Politburo brought in troops from another location to put a stop to the demonstrations. These soldiers were ushered in from the north after a long period of isolation where they had been bombarded by extreme propaganda messages. On the day of the crackdown, they had been given amphetamines and sent out into the crowds (Woodcock, 1990). The extreme measures taken by the state show the extent to which public protest is an effective way to raise support for dissenting political movements despite an authoritarian control on media.

Yet the characterization of media control only works if one focuses on forms traditionally labeled mass media. It has been shown that students and other
disenfranchised citizens utilized caricatures, songs, plays, slogans and posters capitalizing on popular figures from lore that semi-literate and illiterate members could understand and relate to.

Time and again, by employing the broadest possible array of communicative techniques, packaging their message in forms easily comprehended by all strata of society and exploiting symbols with powerful emotional resonances for the laobaixing, educated youths succeeded in convincing large segments of their audiences that the youth movement was serving the interests of the nation as a whole rather than merely the interest of the educated elite (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 226-227).

The relationship between the poor and protest is not lost in an argument involving the role of printed and transportation forms of the technological apparatus. As was demonstrated by this chapter and will continue to be a theme throughout the next two, is the fact that the poor do not have the same education and access that the elite and educated have in order to organize mass protests. These social movements were still in the hands of the elite reifying much of the Confucian system that was at the heart of the movement.

There was no one element that had a significant impact on the technological apparatus over the others. Means of dissemination was most effective when multiple elements were used in conjunction. In a way, many of these elements were so closely related that is hard to separate each mechanism as serving distinct functions. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the same was true with new media technologies that were common in 1989 and even still significant today. Television, radio and other forms of mass media were all intertwined in message dissemination during these Chinese social movements.
Chapter 2

The Role of Mass Media

Though the previous chapter showed that the distinction between the forms known as mass media and traditional forms of information and message dissemination are blurry, much emphasis in scholarship has been placed on the role that modern mass media forms have played in contemporary revolutionary movements. When new technologies like the fax machine and television were introduced into the dissident arsenal they were used in much of the same way as older forms of transmission like word of mouth, transportation, and printed mediums. The major difference with these new technologies dealt with the potential size of the audience. With mass media, or one-to-many communications platforms, the dissemination process was now potentially open and could be interpreted by more than just the immediate crowd involved in the movement. The size, scope and temporality of the media public shifted Mass media from both domestic and foreign sources began playing a larger role in the communication strategy of the protest movements shortly after the 1976 revolution and came to fruition in 1989. Millions of people watched the dramatic events in Beijing's Tiananmen Square and the VOA (Voice of America) played a significant role in feeding Chinese citizens vital information during one of the most consequential political struggles (He, 1996). In this sense, global media provided a backchannel through which information could briefly escape censorship.

As a result of the images, film and sound made available on the international market, the actions of the government and the protesters were now open to scrutiny from an international audience. Different techniques began to be incorporated by the protesters and the regime, and new themes were stressed in order to reach foreign audiences as
opposed to focusing energies on communicating with the *laobaixing*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many of the slogans employed by the demonstrators in 1989 were written in foreign languages. Why would this have been necessary if the demonstrators were not trying to appeal to a foreign public? In the past, the organizers of the demonstration tended to incorporate patriotic messages as did their predecessors, but this shifted to some extent with the emergence of these new technologies (Wasserstrom, 1991).

In the past, location has served as one of the most important aspects of any political movement. Harnessing the symbolic nature of the city center, especially Tiananmen Square, was always crucial for the traffic of information by way of older forms of communication. New mass media technologies changed this and made the focus of urban movements a spectacle that could be disseminated to both foreign and rural settings. Whereas cities are comprised of neighborhoods with particular characteristics and ethnic grouping, radio and television changed the spatial relation of audiences, and undermined these groupings. This changed the socialization process and the way in which dissent was communicated to the populace. The 1989 events particularly reflected this shift. As He wrote, if it were not for the “attractive involvement of both the Chinese national news and the international news media, this conflict could never have reached this magnitude or cause such an extensive impact on the Chinese people and on people around the world” (He, 1996, p. 1).

**Opening up to Western Ideas**

International media and the one-to-many communications platforms widened the public sphere.
As recent events in China have shown, all political actors are now playing on a world stage and employing, in spite of the problems of linguistic and cultural translation, a world language of symbols. To claim the Enlightenment project, our misplaced ethnocentric gilts, as exclusively (and detrimentally) Western, for instance, or to claim rationality as to those of other cultures or subordinated social groups who are fighting our common struggle to understand and control the world in pursuit of human liberty (Habermas, 1992, p. 369)

As mentioned earlier, Said (1978) has explored the complications of looking at the Orient through a Western lens. There were enough complications communicating with the laobaixing and domestic residents in other regions, but now there was the added obstacle of communicating to the world. As China began to reemerge in the global community following the Cultural Revolution, they became increasingly more scrutinized by the outside media. With this opening up to external sources came new opinions and information for those living within China’s borders It was no longer an issue of convincing their own people that the party’s hegemonic ideology was correct, now it was also a matter of convincing the global community.

There were exchanges of ideas moving in both directions. Foreign business was flourishing and “foreign experts,” a term the Chinese use to identify most foreign English teachers, were becoming more common. There were now tourists and translations of literary and scientific works (Calhoun, 1989). Western ideas of individualism began to flourish in the intellectual and scientific community creating a “sense of cultural crisis” with the anti-intellectual collective ideas of the Communist Party. China had always struggled with this concept of foreign ideas and Deng Xiaoping’s reforming policies complicated the notion of modernization in relation to Western technology and influence. “It is a crisis with old roots. Since the late Qing dynasty, Chinese people have struggled to understand their
country in relation to the world—a much larger, more diverse, and more powerful than traditional Chinese culture acknowledged” (Calhoun, 1989, p. 215). It became increasingly more difficult for the Chinese to define themselves amongst the rapid increase of globalized concepts and technology.

China’s new fervor with foreign ideas came around the spring of 1978 when Deng Xiaoping began a twelve-month period of foreign diplomacy that encouraged rigorous foreign-policy initiatives. Chinese delegations traveling to Western countries during these measures, were “the first such visit to an industrialized democracy since 1949” (Garside, 1981, p. 341). This new political and military relationship between China and outside countries signaled a new “spirit of trust and openness to foreigners.”

Before the Tiananmen Incident, the objective of the communist party was to structure all aspects of Chinese culture. After the Cultural Revolution, only those philosophies and arts deemed appropriate by the Party were allowed in public. Beyond the realm of ideas, another radical claim during the Cultural Revolution was that Western technology only benefited capitalism and was a tool the West used to dominate other regions. However despite this claim, technological imports continued to grow following the 1976 Incident (Teiwes & Sun, 2004). This growth accelerated as China became a major global producer of communications technology.

After the 1976 uprising and the deaths of Mao and Zhou, modern art and Western entertainment began to enter China’s borders (Garside, 1981). With cultural liberalization, the revolutionary posters of 1976 were replaced by film advertisements of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Foreign orchestras became common in Chinese theatres. Beryl Grey, a British dancer born in Shanghai, brought the London ballet and performed a modern dance
piece that would have thrown Mao’s wife, a patron of the arts during her reign into a frenzy given its Western influence and lack of traditional Chinese culture (Garside, 1981). One of the interview subjects, a dancer, said that even though China was beginning to open up economically, they were still not as accepting of modern dance. There was still an underlying desire to control the arts for political, cultural and emotional reasons.

China’s television screens, for the first time, allowed documentaries about foreign countries made by foreigners, foreign plays that had been translated into Chinese, and foreign films. During the winter of 1978-1979 television programs on the mainland carried a program from Taiwan, a province that generally was not showed or discussed with mass audiences due to the regions political opposition. Not only were residents viewing this on television, but the show also depicted a priest in a temple and was intended to promote tourism. To mark Deng Xiaoping’s visit to the United States prior to the 1989 pro-democracy movement, Beijing radio stations played an hour of American Music for interested listeners. Included in the playlists were songs from Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. Television audiences also had the opportunity to explore the home of an IBM executive (Garside, 1981). “Nineteen seventy-eight saw the start of a long-term strategy of tapping China’s vast potential for earning foreign exchange from tourism” (Garside, 1981, p. 350). Thus the media landscape that was so heavily controlled during the 1976 Tiananmen Incident was vastly different than the one that emerged after 1978 and the increased inclusion of Western media, people, ideas and capital.

The large and small character posters that emerged throughout Beijing and Nanjing after Zhou’s death in 1976 were a reaction to the controlled media. There was no other way to communicate their message to a large number of the public; there were no open
letters to the editor or op-ed sections available to voice the positions of those who wanted change. In 1989, the CCP claimed that foreign reporters were responsible for inciting the riots. This claim, though having much larger implications for the propaganda machine of the government, may not be too far from the truth. Media plays a significant role in the regulation and development of social conflicts. According to Wang Juntao, a leader of the student movement, the original demonstrations began with simple requests for better food in the cafeterias and improved dormitory conditions. Regular citizens were upset due to inflation; this mutual discontent with the government and the death of Hu Yaobang fueled the protests. Once the protesters knew they had the ears of the international media, they used this to mobilize global opinion against the government. The story of the pro-democracy movement was on the front page of most international newspapers for weeks. The American press especially played up the nostalgia for their own 1960s peace movements. Chinese activists were seen displaying a “V” with their fingers in many of the images that were broadcast out of the country. For the Chinese this symbol means victory, but for many Americans that gesture represented peace. There was now a familiarity with the movement despite the different cultures and language, though this may have been one of the reasons the foreign and American Press in particular played up the calls for “democracy” when in reality that was not the movement’s main objective (Calhoun, 1989).

Within China, foreign radio became a major tool publicizing the events of the protests in Tiananmen and surrounding areas. Reports beamed back from the VOA and BBC, “were especially important sources of information after martial law was imposed; students brought transistor radios out to the barricades to tune into them on the nights of May 20 and 21” (Calhoun, 1994, p. 209). Reception was only difficult to obtain for three
days when jamming “made reception intermittent at best.” For a time, the domestic press accurately reported on the events of the movement. Many of the journalists even took part in the movement carrying signs that read, “Don’t believe what we write” and “we print lies.” Print and radio reporters appeared to join the protesters and were then followed by television anchors (Calhoun, 1989). Perhaps this sequence can be explained by the fact that print and radio journalists would have been harder for officials and average citizens to recognize, as their printed and spoken words are what are recognizable. The brand for television reporters however, is their face. It would be hard for these individuals to deny that they were involved in the movement if questioned later.

Foreign press presentations appealed substantially to Chinese citizens living abroad. It was a glimpse into their homeland that was illuminating and at times horrifying. A few of the subjects interviewed were living in the United Stated during the 1989 movement. The dancer (an interview subject), said when he watched the events on television in the U.S. it did not seem real. Many of those living overseas were the initial forbearers of the concept of democracy. The telephone in this case became the technological equivalent of word-of-mouth. Instead of using the traditional local verbal channels, overseas Chinese citizens contributed to the circulation of the dissident message. They helped spread the concept of democracy when talking with family and friends in addition to writing translations of Western social science, literature, and science texts. Though different, the Chinese living abroad were generally seen as a single community; however, during the twentieth century many had spread out or integrated into Western communities. The news coverage of the 1989 events brought this group back together (Calhoun, 1989).
Despite the more extensive coverage associated with the introduction of the foreign press, there were foreseeable problems. Many of the Western reporters knew little of the country and seemed to barely have a grasp on the cultural implications of the events. Foreign journalists generally shied away from speaking with the Chinese demonstrators directly not realizing that many spoke at least limited English, as the movement was comprised largely of students who had learned English in school. Instead the reporters relied on the commentary of academics living in the area and other Westerners or foreign reporters who were moderately familiar with the area for explanations. Many of the foreign reporters had to ask Yuan Mu, the government's spokesman, why there were so many references to May 4th, not realizing that this was an influential event for not just the protesters but the entire country (Calhoun, 1989). As a result, outsiders skewed many of the motivations behind the proceedings that shaped foreign opinion. It is unknown whether or not this information impacted the flow of word-of-mouth communications within the square. Though this is speculation, these forms of reporting by foreign reporters were more likely intended for a foreign audience. The Chinese citizens who did learn of these reports most likely had family members or ties to Western countries and learned about these stories through telephone and letter correspondence.

The most prominent foreign reporting came from the photojournalists who were able to immortalize the massacre through powerful visuals. The images of the bloodshed in the wake of the massacre helped Moscow come to the realization that their own concerns with political unrest in Eastern Europe needed to be contained (Kramer, 2003). Photography became a powerful tool for foreign journalists to sell newspapers to Western audiences. Benjamin discusses the advancement of photography with the rise of the
bourgeoisie. Photography, even in the photojournalistic perspective is not objective as it is also a commodity. The foreign photographers were taking pictures of the movement to sell to newspapers; therefore, they were capturing images they knew would captivate audiences abroad even though these images may not have been very representative of the actual events (Benjamin, 2008). Without pictures of the droves of people camped out in Tiananmen holding banners, the images disseminated to communities worldwide would not have been as meaningful. The image of the solitary man standing before the tanks in Beijing in early June came to symbolize the movement and the heroic resistance of the Chinese people (LeMahieu, 2011). This however, was a misrepresentation of the communal movement and Chinese culture.

Western reporters often tried to showcase the stories of individuals, which was not only in opposition to Chinese culture, which favors the collective, but also the movement. Like the Occupy Wall Street movement it was about enacting change and not individual leadership. This emphasis on individuality essentially undermined the substance of the broader social movement. Ted Koppel focused much of his coverage on Chai Ling whom he referred to as the “the student commander” exaggerating the role of the student leader (Calhoun, 1989). Individuals involved in the protest often did not understand the new Western ideas that had been incorporated into the movement. On the Eve of Gorbachev’s visit, the CCP met with student leaders and asked them to abandon the square. After negotiations, many of the students and other protesters were willing to vacate. They took a vote, and the movement leaders not understanding that the decisions were made by a majority in favor and not a unanimous decision, remained in the Square. New and more extreme students came from other cities by train and took over the moderate student
message. It was at this point that the protesters turned from peaceful to violent (Declassified-Tiananmen Square, 2008). Even *mingzhu*, the Chinese word that closest resembles the concept of democracy, is one of those words that cannot be translated directly because it is more reminiscent of a Confucius system than Western politics.

Though all messages are polysemic in nature, the mixed intentions of these ideas became more overt in 1989. There was now one meaning for the West and one for the Chinese. The Goddess of Democracy for example, though at first glimpse was an almost exact depiction of the Statue of Liberty, also closely resembled statues of Chinese revolutionary heroes. It was likely this was the connection most Chinese were more familiar with as opposed to the Western symbol of freedom (Wasserstrom, 1991). As stated in the previous chapter, the communicative intentions of the Goddess and its relationship to revolution, both in the perspective of the movement and with the CCP’s past, was profound.

Thus in the past, not only did the students of 1989 produce spate texts to appeal to different audiences, they also created texts whose resonances depended on the cultural background of the observer, just as the references to ‘national extinction’ and representations of tortoises that filled Shanghai student propaganda of the Warlord era had different connotations for native and foreign citizens of Shanghai (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 314-315).

The influx of mass media technologies exaggerated the polysemous nature of the dissident messages, which became more prevalent in these modern social movements.

The differences between the 1976 Tiananmen Incident and the 1989 pro-democracy movement are telling. There was little Western media involvement in the 1976 movement and though there were injuries, there were no reported deaths. In contrast, television allowed the world to watch the events that transpired on June 4, 1989 where at least 200
were killed and many others were injured. Though this is speculation, perhaps less foreign media involvement leads to lower levels of violence. Within the Chinese perspective, the government felt they needed to save face. The world watched as their political way of life became threatened by a democratic movement; the quick and easy option to be rid of this threat, as demonstrated by Yao Wenyuan in 1976, was violence (MacFarguhar & Schoenhal, 2006). The government, probably relying on methods of containment from the past, was more concerned about losing face before their own people rather than the foreign audience that emerged post 1976.

**Mass Media Monopolies**

At present, there is no political, social or religious organization in China with the capability to challenge the CCP’s monopoly of political power and their grasp on media control. The media in China is owned and operated by the communist government (He, 1996). It is hard for individuals in China to voice dissenting opinions directed at the government. The Chinese proletariat is seen as a collective and it is perhaps this fact that hinders the creation of a Habermasian public sphere. Individual activists have been using hand written press releases and faxes to disseminate information but these methods pale in comparison to the domination that the central party holds over China’s national television, newspaper, and radio conglomerates. In the 1970s and 80s, the bulk of the Chinese population still consisted of the peasantry who were more or less content with the political situation. In 1978, following the first social movement addressed in this analysis, China had less than one television receiver per 100 people and access was largely confined to urban areas (CIA, 2012). Statistics regarding the number of televisions and radios
present in China at the time of the 1989 uprising are difficult to obtain, as China does not have an open policy regarding access to information. The media landscape of China today is much different as there is more access to television and the Internet is a flourishing source of information. The Internet will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter. The new class of independent private producers who had emerged in the wake of Deng’s reforming policies were those who had good reason to oppose the current political regime. These citizens demanded a bourgeois class with democratic ideals because with less government monopolies, they would have increased access to more business opportunities and therefore, make more money. Therefore, they had the ability to own forms of media like radio and television. Another emerging class consisted of the techno-bureaucrats; those individuals who had begun to rise within the political hierarchy because they possessed the technological skills that Deng favored. For the most part, these citizens had aligned themselves with the Party; however, in 1989, they too wished for a reduction of Party control (Yu, 1990). This emphasizes not only on the significance of group dynamics in China’s political system but also the increasing role technology played under Deng’s power and the emergence of capitalism, which will be explained in further detail in the subsequent chapter.

Editors in most Western newspaper industries have control over the content that is addressed in the editorial section. In these systems, content and space is determined by advertising as opposed to government influence. The role of the editor in a government run system is not necessarily that of a decision maker but rather that of an enforcer of the Party’s ideology. Around the climax of the 1989 demonstration, editors began to check themselves into hospitals in order to avoid the precarious position in which the movement
had placed them. In many respects, the editors of the major newspaper and television departments supported the movement. They too wanted more freedoms including a freedom of the press. Other demands made by the protesters are listed in Chapter One. However, they knew that they were still employed by the government and any hint of dissident behavior could result in the loss of their job, or worse, imprisonment. Eventually Yuan Mu was appointed the head of the media apparatus on May 20th shortly before the massacre. After his appointment, the brief glimpse of a more open press system that had begun to emerge in the weeks prior to this succession vanished. As the operator of China’s own memory hole, Yuan Mu would later be instrumental in spinning and re-writing the events of the June 4th massacre to create a history that was more sympathetic to the Communist Government (Calhoun, 1989).

For a brief moment, the realization of an open press system seemed possible. The People’s Daily and CCTV, China’s domestic television station, showed remarkable boldness in their coverage of the events (He, 1996). The media attempted to serve the people and circulate meaningful and factual information instead of serving as the mouthpiece of the authoritarian government.

Immediately after the massacre in Beijing on June 4, 1989, Chinese authorities exploited their monopoly of the mass media in order to blur the difference between black and white. They constantly repeated how cruelly the so-called thugs had treated the martial-law troops and tried their best to hide the truth about how the troops had wantonly slaughtered people. But despite the government-imposed lockdown on alternate sources of information, the troop’s cruelty could be gleaned in some accounts that appeared at the time (Xiaobo, 2012, p. 4).

Any form of control is going to hinder a media message. The Western media held on to the democratic underpinnings of the movement because they knew that was what their
audience would most relate to. Foreign reporters did not take the time to understand the movement or the culture and even neglected to report that some of the 200 who died on June 4, 1989 were soldiers that civilians had killed. On the opposite side of the spectrum were the communist run media machines, who for a fleeting moment, demonstrated that it was possible for China to have a less partial press system, one that could possibly incorporate the open discourse Habermas laid out as necessary for a functioning democratic public sphere (1989). It is difficult to recreate the communicative apparatus by only looking at one media perspective. This was one of the difficulties with recreating the 1976 technological apparatus because there were few if no Western media accounts outlining the events that transpired. In 1989, the media machine was highly polarized with the actual incident somewhere in between the two sides of the story. The following sections will begin to focus on the specific media instruments.

**Telegram, Telephone and Fax**

The telegram was one of the first technological innovations reputed to change the nature of communications. Carey (1989) discusses this transformation in his text *Communication as Culture*. In this work, Carey states that the telegraph was one of the first known technologies to separate communication and travel, though the telegraph’s roots can be traced back to the railroad system. Before this period, messages were disseminated via word-of-mouth or through the post, all modes requiring time and transport. The telegraph, after early advancements, allowed communications to occur more rapidly across further space. As early as 1919, the telegram was being utilized by Chinese activists to communicate across long distances and coordinate efforts with members of similar interest.
groups in other cities. Civic associations had sent telegrams to Beijing asking for information regarding the rumors that Japan may procure control of Shandong province after WWI. These early telegrams were influential in disseminating the messages that began the legendary May 4, 1919 movement, which as mentioned earlier became a powerful model for all subsequent demonstrations. News of police brutality occurring during a Beijing demonstration reached Shanghai later that evening via telegram. A professor involved in the demonstration read the telegram to students at an early morning assembly the next day. These reports of violence inspired the slogan “Chinese do not hurt other Chinese,” a slogan and notion that was carried on during movements for the remainder of the century (Wasserstrom, 1991).

Telephones were still relatively uncommon during the 1976 uprising according to many of those interviewed. However, this is not to say that they did not serve an important function. The modern economy was built on the premise of working phone lines; therefore, making it difficult for governments to censor phone communications without simultaneously halting most business. This is still true today as China is becoming increasingly more reliant on mobile phones for communications and business. After the 1989 massacre, it was difficult to get access to a telephone and if one was able to get through, it was difficult to maintain a conversation without interruptions and dropped calls. When there was phone access, Western academics living in the area would call friends around town and in surrounding regions to crosscheck the various reports circulating via word of mouth and radio among other sources. This matrix of communications later became the foundation of many of the foreign news reports surrounding the 1989 demonstration and crack down (Calhoun, 1989).
Oversea Chinese students attempting to communicate with friends and family on the mainland relied heavily on telephones. This was an important flow of information as it provided the West with accounts from China, but also provided the mainland with analysis of the events that were generally absent in the domestic news (Calhoun, 1989).

Fax machines were said to have contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union; however, definitive proof of this statement is hard to find. Faxes were sent and received during the 1989 movement and are probably even employed in movements today. Fax machines helped to contribute to the flow of information across borders between organizations and individual activists (Schulz, 1998). Even the fax machine and the notion of transmitting written and printed communications had its roots in earlier forms from carrier pigeons to the postal system. The fax machine is closely aligned with the telephone system as it uses many of the existing infrastructural networks established by this medium (Petroski, 1996). This may have been one of the reasons fax-machines were not as widely used during the social movements in question, as this network would have been closely linked with government control. Though there were fax machines in China in the 1980s, few students had access to this technology and as such served a very minor function in the spread of information. Faxes were probably most prevalent among overseas students (Calhoun, 1989).

Mobile phones, though generally considered a new technology even by today’s standards with the advancement of the smart phone, are so closely related to the traditional telephone that to include them in this section with the evolution of the phone would be a logical progression. Telephone lines and fax-machines alike would have been linked to an infrastructure tied to existing train routes (Carey, 1989). Mobile phones
however, use an entirely different system of transmission via satellite, which is harder for governments to censor and control. Mobile phones not only facilitate communications, but they also document events and help to coordinate action. According to Shirky, mobile phones and similar portable technologies will be a staple in future movements (2011). Though mobile phones are helping to organize demonstrations, they are not a replacement for real-world action. More relating to this issue will be addressed in the following chapter.

In an interview with a Chinese International Affairs professor, he discussed the role of mobile phones in protest. Obviously there were no cell phones during the 1976 and 1989 protests, information was disseminated via word of mouth and official news releases, and yet these demonstrations were still relatively structured. Mobile phones have been implemented during the Jasmine movement, which will be addressed in Chapter Three. If this were to happen on a larger scope there could be profound implications. Online discussions and mobile phones are now incorporated into the revolutionary discourse. It becomes harder to censor information when there are a variety of modes available to facilitate dissident dialogue. Though postings and messages may eventually be censored, anyone can still access the information in real time prior to the message’s edit or deletion.

**Newspapers**

Newspapers have always played a prominent role in Chinese social movements, even prior to the communist takeover in 1949. During the demonstrations prior to the communist takeover, “Newspapers were early supporters/promoters of student movements” (Wasserstrom, 1991). This did change after 1949 when the most prominent papers fell under the control of the Communist government and the movements were
generally criticizing the authority’s policies. *Subao*, an international settlement paper was one of the first newspapers to carry revolutionary content in the early 1900s. The paper's main function was to serve as a mouthpiece of the movement publishing stories about student protests, student grievances, and school strikes. During the 1919 movement, *Subao* and other alternative newspapers defended student actions, reporting that students were not protesting just to skip classes and highlighted the principles the students were supporting. Students did not want to be portrayed as endorsing frivolous passions and newspapers helped to provide a sense of legitimacy to these past student movements (Wasserstrom, 1991).

After 1949, the number of alternative newspapers that published dissident notions was effectively zero. In 1989, *The People's Daily* did run a two-page photo spread showing how information, which seems critical of the protests, can actually be sneaked out under the guise of criticism. The newspaper piece featured a worried mother questioning the motivations of her hunger-striking child (Calhoun, 1989). Though this was documentation that the state-run media acknowledged the protests, it was a complete turnaround from the past in terms of encouraging the students participating in the movement.

Early during the 1989 demonstration on the suggestion of Li Peng, Deputy Chief of Propaganda, Zhen Jianhui authored an editorial in *The People’s Daily* entitled, “The Necessity for a Clear Stand Against Turmoil.” This was later broadcast on national television and radio programs the following evening. Stories and personnel navigating across mediums is not surprising considering any story whether composed by newspaper, television or radio is going to reiterate the governments views. “The Necessity for a Clear Stand Against Turmoil,” “scapegoated” government officials in addition to reporters and
editors, some of whom may not have been sympathetic to the movement previously, that then took to the streets in support of the dissident mission (Zhang, 2001).

Despite government control of the state-run paper, *The People’s Daily* did manage to undermine the more politically enforced messages. Editors would incorporate flowery borders in addition to “inappropriately provocative headlines,” to undermine the message’s credibility. This probably had the intent of signaling to the reader that these stories were not to be taken seriously. One example included the use of an abnormally bold font for the headline, “Students in Seoul stage hunger strike to protest government repression and massacre.” However, after the restructuring of the editorial staff in May, those who had creatively displayed these stories were punished (Zhang, 2001).

Other newspapers were quoting the information from other papers for lack of any other sources. “The *Hong Kong Standard* quoted Xinhua news agency quoting the *Guangming Daily* to the effect that students had returned to classes in Beijing” (Calhoun, 1989, p. 61). Not only is this an example of the utter confusion and lack of professionalism to locate credible sources, but the author who was present at the time of the movement certified the initial claim to be false. Newspapers were merely reporting rumor, a topic related to Darnton’s theory on technology that will be explained in further detail in the following chapter. The rumors that were often reported were also one sided; they were coming from government circles and not the protest (Calhoun, 1989).

Western newspapers were also influential throughout the 1989 protest and did carry stories pertaining to the Jasmine Revolution. The *Washington Post* predicted that the 1989 protest would lead to the downfall of the communist government (Zhang, 2001). Western papers are known to sensationalize the future of authoritarian regimes during any
time of crisis predicting that protests will herald in a new era of democracy. This is rarely
the case. The same papers that predicted the fall of the Communist Party of China in 1989
were the same to foresee democratization in Egypt after the Arab Spring movements. It is
plain to anyone who follows current events that there is still a long road for Egypt to travel
before democratization will develop despite the overthrow of Mubarak.

Reuters made their own political statements by suggesting that the implementation
of Martial Law was a mistake and the only way to remedy the situation was to call for the
removal of Li Peng. A French paper anticipated that the 1989 turmoil would affect trade.
China’s trading partners for fear of instability would turn elsewhere. Given China’s current
economic standing, this was obviously not the case. The Russian media was more timid in
its coverage of the events due to its own resemblance to the regime and the onslaught of
dissent. Newspapers from Taiwan and Hong Kong, in addition to those in the United States,
continued to report misrepresentations of the events (Zhang, 2001). Essentially the
Western media was more concerned with reporting the news that had outcomes they
preferred as opposed to actual affairs.

Chinese journalists used a variety of techniques to attempt to circumvent the
censors and report the most accurate news to their readers. This not only addressed that
journalists like those protesting in Tiananmen and throughout China were discontent with
the current system, but that they wanted to preserve their “journalistic integrity” during
the coverage of the rebellion. The success of those few days of relatively impartial
reporting was a group effort. No single person could have pulled off the feats of covering
such a large event. The goal of Chinese coverage for however short amount of time was to
create an informed citizenry free of the confines of government propaganda (Calhoun,
1989). “Though interesting and significant, however, this resistance is not the same as the creation of media adequate to sustain rational-critical debate over public issues” (Calhoun, 1994, p. 208).

One of the major players in newspaper distribution was *Xinhua*, China’s wire service. *Xinhua* plays an integral part in the hierarchical media system. The agency claims that it serves the people and the government simultaneously. They are responsible for catalyzing the message for the rest of China’s media outlets for politically sensitive events (Xin, 2008). In 1989, *Xinhua* was functioning much more than a wire service, the agency was also responsible for the intelligence gathering of many of the other government institutions. The content contained information about the political leanings and actions of many of those involved in these government agencies to see if they had ties to the movement. These reports were never intended to be disseminated to the people as wire services are set up to do, instead these reports were for the eyes of top officials only. Others were also monitored including students, professors, military officers and troops, workers, farmers and even street peddlers. More than 100 reports were also composed on the reaction of the foreign press to the death of Hu Yaobang and the subsequent protest (Zhang, 2001).

Newspapers were not the only publications to bring awareness to the 1989 movement. Almost a decade after the incident, a group known as the Tiananmen mothers compiled a booklet concerning the massacre and the victims. The compilation contains the histories and photographs of 155 victims who perished during the massacre (Xiaobo, 2012). Despite much of the Western media’s predictions that the 1989 massacre would lead to the downfall of the communist government, it is obvious that this was not the case. The CCP maintained their power and therefore their control of the news media and
publishing industry. A book like the one assembled by the Tiananmen mothers would therefore not be a domestic publication and was printed by a Hong Kong company under a new title “In search of victims of June Fourth 1989-1995” (Xiaobo, 2012). Moving from written communications, to oral and visual, this next section will begin to explore the role of radio, broadcast, and television.

**Radio**

Radio is a largely influential component to the first two movements. “Radio allowed the introduction of other cultures in a manner outside the control of parents and others. The youth culture and popular music of the 1960s were deeply affected by radio listening contributing significantly to forms of popular culture that would take by storm not only the United States but much of the world” (Poster, 2006, p. 26). The role of Western influence, which is a large component of radio, has been discussed previously so this section will focus primarily on dissemination.

In 1976 Wu De, used broadcast platforms to disseminate his evacuation notice. He declared that the Tiananmen Incident was a “counterrevolutionary” action and demanded that the masses in the Square leave immediately (Teiwes & Sun, 2004). Within China by the time the 1989 movement occurred, there were two opposing media factions with strong control: The domestic media controlled by the Communist Party and the VOA, the democratic mouthpiece of the United States (He, 1996).

Prior to the death of Hu Yaobang and the student demonstrations in 1989, the VOA audience of China had risen considerably due to the normalization of Sino-U.S. relations. The Chinese government had even stopped jamming many VOA channels in 1978 shortly
after the Tiananmen Incident of 1976. The timeliness of VOAs information was a critical element. There were thousands of protesters in Beijing alone, in addition to those around the rest of the country and globally; thus, the need for information regarding the movement and the government was constant. This “loose organization of the movement” meant that organizers, participants, and other supporters needed information about the movement of others involved as well as the actions of the government so they could respond promptly (He, 1996).

Chinese radio spun the demonstrations as a negative counterrevolutionary movement, while the foreign media was promoting the ideals of the democratic movement. At the time of the 1989 Tiananmen movement, when radio was a prominent means of gaining access to information, most cities were served by one government controlled radio network. This changed shortly after the movement with the introduction of East Radio and other programs that would have established a sense of competition both ideologically (diverse viewpoints) and financially. This competition could have the potential to shape content (CIA, 2012). The democratic messages sent into Communist China at the time of the occupation of Tiananmen were just as blatant forms of propaganda as the Chinese Government’s media message (He, 1996). Ultimately there were no non-partisan press systems during the three social movements. The coverage was so polarized to one side or the other and radio was no different. The demonstrators who did not understand the meaning of the VOA, the democratic messages disseminated by the Western press, began fighting for an ideal that was not a part of their original demands (He, 1996).

Throughout the 1989 demonstrations, the BBC and VOA continued to circulate news in both English and Chinese throughout China even after martial law had been imposed.
For three days during the militaristic type dominance, these Western radio stations could still be heard faintly (Calhoun, 1989). Though transportation was utilized as a means to distribute the revolutionary message to regions beyond the square, especially during the 1976 revolution, 1989 communicated the message in a more timely fashion by exploiting the now more open radio system. Though there were undertones of a democratic message, stories generated by the VOA were relatively factual and event-oriented, with little analysis given by radio anchors. The reason for these neutral accounts was due to safety concerns and for the opportunity to remain on air. The VOA operated under the scrutiny of the Chinese government and as such, did not want to upset the sole authority that could shut the radio station down (He, 1996).

The Chinese government of course had a different opinion regarding the objectivity of the VOA believing that the programming was not providing solely information driven content but rather inciting many of the dissident feelings. Particulars from actual government documents came out in 2001 in response to their reaction to the VOA. “Everyday it airs three programs, totaling ten hours or more, manufacturing rumors and inciting turmoil” (Zhang, 2001, p. 421). These differences of opinions regarding objectivity between the two ideological sides, the VOA’s Western interpretation of “objectively” reporting facts and the Chinese view that this was rumor, demonstrates the divide between the cultures and media.

The VOA is the U.S. government’s only international radio station with global reach and as such is a major channel responsible for spreading the United State’s political ideology to authoritarian regimes. Right from the founding of The People’s Republic, the VOA’s Chinese-language service has been an instrument of the U.S. government’s
psychological warfare against the country. In the 1950s the VOA was known throughout the world “as the American government’s tool for overthrowing Communist parties and as the headquarters of rebellion.” In the late 1970s the VOA sought to reshape its image and change their propaganda strategy. Instead of just utilizing overt propaganda messages, the VOA attempted to incorporate more fact based information and report a more professional news product.

After the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and the United States, the VOA began to offer music, English lessons, and feature programs that introduced American life. The aim was to please listeners and to attract an audience. But this programming change signaled no change whatsoever in the goal of bewitching the Chinese audience, or “getting the audience to accept our viewpoint.” (Zhang, 2001, p. 340).

Radio broadcasts were also influential in many of the wall posters that emerged on college campuses. These posters were a rundown of the latest events that the students had heard from the VOA (Zhang, 2001). Just before the infamous June 4th evacuation, the central Chinese government had received over thirty reports from the foreign news scrutinizing China’s recent performance. Leaders found these reports to be “superficial” and “extreme” (Zhang, 2001).

After the 1989 massacre, the English-language section of China Radio International was the first to announce the news of the crackdown at 6:25 a.m. on June 4th. The anchor relayed eyewitness accounts of the machine gun killing and of cars running over soldiers and civilians. The broadcast urged listeners both domestically and abroad to protest these horrible violations of human rights. This was the last time that particular news anchor was ever heard on the radio again (Aikman, 1990; Zhang, 2001).
Television

Television is similar to radio in many respects. The timeliness and access to information is almost equivalent with the exception of the introduction of television’s visual storytelling. However, unlike radio, television was not as prominent during many of the earlier revolutions. “But we suffered for lack of television and newspapers; we huddled around radios trying to hear the BBC or VOA above the static and squeals of the jamming. Only two weeks prior we had enjoyed the freest press in the history of the People’s Republic of China” (Calhoun, 1989, p. 54).

Television, like radio allowed for international integration at a rapid speed and like radio, did not require a literate audience. Television was watched by the entire family or with friends shifting the family oriented conversational activities that were common before the introduction of television. Television brought culture into the home and provided new topics and avenues for discussion (Spigel, 1992; Outhwaite & Ray, 2005). Since there were so few stations in China and this is still relatively true today considering satellite television is banned, the population generally watches the same programs. “Watching television was almost always a social experience in China, one shared with family, neighbors and friends. Viewing was thus often accompanied by active dialogue, debate and collective interpretation” (Calhoun, 1994, p. 231). As China’s television stations are largely controlled by the state, there is little program diversity beyond the scope of what the CCP would deem appropriate. Therefore, a large number of people would have the same familiarity with the diminutive number of programs available. This type of television viewership is very different to television consumption in the United States where there are
more likely smaller groups of individuals watching a number of different shows due to the
density of program diversity.

In this sense, television greatly reshaped the boundaries of the public sphere. It
brought in new ideas and popular culture became more prominent. However, both liberal
and conservative scholars believe that television has corroded the public sphere. “It is an
almost reflex-like, parenthetical explanatory catchall, as in the claim of New York Times
media and politics reporter Michael Oreskes that ‘the first generation raised with television
is a generation that participates less in the democracy than any before it” (Garnhmam,
1992). This statement is easily refuted and not applicable to a country like China that did
not precipitate democratic practices in the first place. Television is viewed as a medium
that “mesmerizes viewers psychologically,” and as such potentially creates passive viewers
that are unlikely to challenge the dominant public opinion addressed on screen. However,
this is not necessarily the case as demonstrated by the passage below:

Furthermore, the often conflicting perspectives that television articulates do not simply stand alongside one another in the
popular consciousness, unanalyzed and uncriticized by viewers. Television exaggerates and intensifies each stream of
information in the ideological flood that it cumulatively delivers to its audiences, producing an electronic amplification
of contradiction that has dramatically altered the nation’s cultural and political contour (Lull, 1991, p. 209).

Though there may be no direct link between television and the rise to physically dissent,
what is evident is that it is not a one-dimensional medium pushing passive spectacle. Even
in the United States there is evidence to suggest that television’s potentially negative
impacts are deceiving. Voting rates were just as low in the 1920s as they were in 1984. A
more definitive claim is that television has led to a reduction in the quality of news content.
Though this is still debatable, the emphasis on visual communication and the short sound
bite news cycle has dramatically changed the way citizens consume news and therefore participate in public discourse (West, 2011).

Many of those interviewed mentioned that the average Chinese citizen has always been media literate in the sense that growing up in a controlled media system, they were able to learn to read between the lines. This was also a concept addressed by Bakhtin (1981) in regards to populations living under oppressive rule. “Television does not just serve the government in China and the manipulation of program content certainly does not guarantee that people will interpret messages as they are intended to be understood” (Lull, 1991, p. 1). In a way, it could be argued that television in China helped strengthen the public sphere because the family and community could use these skills to analyze what the real message was beyond the propaganda machine (West, 2011).

The most powerful example of the influence of television on Chinese social movements would have to be the film *Heshang*, or River Elegy. One of the interview subjects who was only eight-years-old during the Tiananmen Demonstration in 1989, remembered members of his family discussing the television series. Years later when he was studying in the United States, he watched the film for himself and finally understood how significant and influential the film was to the movement. The film was broken into six separate sections equaling a total hour in length. It is estimated that around several hundred million Chinese viewers watched the film during the two times it was aired before the authorities finally banned the program (Calhoun, 1994).

The introduction of the film begins by asking if history has conditioned the people to be complacent. Part one entitled *In Search of a Dream* discusses the role of agriculture and production. The Chinese social structure was based on production; therefore, there was no
chance for democracy and freedom. The Yellow River, the heart of Chinese agriculture was used as an allegory for the people and of what needed to be changed (Xia, 1988). Many of the images throughout the film demeaned the farming peasantry who were often depicted without teeth staring blankly into the distance wearing old Mao suits. The filmmakers felt the solution to China’s problems was the creation of an industrial civilization.

The second section was titled *Destiny* and claimed that land life was the heart of China and juxtaposed images of the dirty yellow river with clear shots of the ocean, which was used a metaphor for what China should seek to become, flourishing in trade. China’s sense of history was fatalistic. The Great Wall was not viewed as a great historical monument but rather one of isolation with isolation being seen as one of China’s major problems (Xia, 1988). This section also discussed the role of science and democracy, concepts that were later featured prominently in many of the banners and slogans of the 1989 movement (Calhoun, 1994). Credit was given to the West for being successful at trading and dominating the seas. However, by asserting this claim, the filmmakers were ignoring a large part of China’s history where the nation did dominate maritime trade under the command of Admiral Zheng He. They also did not take into account that the West thrived because of colonialism and slavery, aspects of trade that Zheng He did not encourage during his authority (Levathes, 1994). Throughout the film, capitalism is essentially heralded, there are a few sections where the economic policy is viewed negatively, but this is generally in reference to Western capitalism.

*The Spark,* part three, looked at how the printing press helped the West conquer feudalism in a short time; however, China, the first country to develop printing on a mass scale did not see this same “knowledge explosion.” Intellectuals in China are spiritually and
economically oppressed and many die in their prime. This claim was not too far off given the slogan mentioned by one of the interview subjects in Chapter One regarding work and education. In 1978, China tried to reinforce socialist reforms attempting to reestablish their legacy of labor. Though as Chapter One suggests, this was also around the time of the Democracy Wall movement, so there was some semblance of openness that began to emerge. The section concluded with the phrase *women zai shizi lukou*, “we are at a crossroads.”

Following up with the previous section, part four, *New Era*, focused on the industrial revolution in China. Poor countries like China were producing the raw materials for the industrial revolution in Europe barely reaping any benefits for their own people. China missed the opportunity to capitalize on this economic trend and Western economies were now back to bully. The film surmises that China’s biggest problem is the population. The peasants are backwards, and for the country to move forward, industry and urbanization must occur. This, however, is contradictory to what many theorists, Lefebvre included, believe regarding agricultural ways of life. These communities produce a more favorable public sphere and community based communications networks because they are more personal.

*Sorrow*, the fifth section, discussed the corrosion of the Confucius system. It worked at first but then crumbled. This is an interesting perspective considering that many of the policies the 1989 demonstrators were attempting to promote were reincarnations of the Confucius political and intellectual system. The film concludes with the section *Blue Sky* beginning with wide shots of the ocean. It claims that capitalism leads to scientific advancements and democracy. The ocean was responsible for the success of the West,
what happened to China? The Yellow River can no longer represent China and its people, they must look outward to new avenues of expansion like the Shenzhen economic zone. The montage of images of the ocean and coastal cities was accompanied by upbeat music that then shifted to more ominous music as the film cut to articles discussing the impediments of democratization (Xia, 1988).

*Heshang* was shown on the state run television station. It was considered by many to be one of the most significant products that influenced the demonstrations a year later. “One of the effects of the reform era’s relative openness was that information from abroad revealed how China had suffered—and perhaps, said the critics, still suffered—from government attempts to limit Western influences” (Calhoun, 1994, p. 29). The fact that the state controlled media allowed this film to air in the first place, despite being taken off the air shortly after they realized the implications of the message, does suggest that the 1980s were a reforming period for China.

As the aftermath of the Tiananmen massacre showed, however, the environment was initially to reassert solid control of this medium. And because it is the main medium of national communication, opposition—even clear memory of the events of April to June 1989-has been seriously hampered. Moreover the spread of television has not been accompanied by any comparable development of intermediate associations of central control. Only in such associations is it likely for citizens to engage in discourse (Calhoun, 1994, p. 202).

The Chinese people were able to take a medium that was considered to corrode the democratic system in the West and provide a catalyst for genuine discussion. Though there were some obvious biases, the Chinese were able to use their skills of reading between the lines to utilize the information provided in the film, again reiterating Bakhtin’s idea that in
oppressed societies individuals will still find a way to gather information. The film itself was able to do something that students from the May 4th movements struggled with: outline the message in a way that was understandable for all, including the laobaixing.

The government had an obviously negative reaction to Heshang. Documented in the minutes of a government meeting during the heart of the 1989 movement, many of the politicians voiced their opinions. “That TV film River Elegy that was so popular last year was aimed at glorifying him [Zhao Ziyang]. Comrade Xiaoping never appeared in it—only Zhao. I was against it from the start. What’s this ‘blue’ civilization, this ‘sea’ civilization that they praise? It’s a bandit civilization-bandit logic—that’s what! When a TV show like this gets shown—even shown twice!—what do you think it’s all about if not building a Zhao Ziyang cult?” (Zhang, 2001, p. 258). The act of removing the program from the air after two showings most likely caused more of a negative reaction towards the government than had the CCP allowed the program to continue its run. In a country where censorship is prevalent, blocking information that was once accessible does not go unnoticed.

After the Massacre on June, 9, Li Peng’s government had stabilized and reestablished power; political leaders had secluded themselves up until this point. Deng appeared on television that day followed by a “propaganda campaign” portraying the uprisings as a “counterrevolutionary revolt” (Dittmer, 1990). In the minds of members of the CCP this was a marker of the continuous revolution; the continuity of controlling ideas was paramount to the party’s ideology. The government was once again using the state controlled media outlets to spread the dominant message and television was an easy medium to do so. Television programing after the crush of the movement, was comprised of mindless soap operas and kung fu movies, there were no news broadcasts, not even lies
(Calhoun, 1989). Two CCTV news anchors were fired after they wore black and “assumed an uncharacteristically doleful expression as they read the news of the crackdown” (Zhang, 2001). Others at the station were fired for similar reasons.

To get actual news broadcasts some rented hotel rooms owned by Hong Kong companies to get cable. Journalists in Hong Kong did have more freedom due to British colonial power. On occasion these reporters were able to write politically critical articles for mainland audiences via intellectual journals. One of the reasons these publications were allowed to pass through the censors was that the sheer number of articles coming from the nearby island was too extensive to track (CIA, 2012). The extensive amount of content associated with mass media may have be one of the reasons dissenting information was able to bypass censored control. Cable news was reported every half-hour, though this was a luxury not afforded to most of the citizens. Western news television was carrying information disseminated by “eyewitnesses” but these were actually reports given from the Westerners who had rented the hotel rooms and not from those actually at the heart of the movement (Calhoun, 1989)

**The Problems and Power of Mass Media**

To conclude this section, the various problems associated with these mass media apparatuses will be discussed. Xenophobia was probably one of the biggest concerns. Not all of the messages disseminated through the media apparatus either by the people or the government were positive or beneficial (Teiwes & Sun, 2004). As demonstrated by *Heshang*, the peasantry was often portrayed as backwards and ignorant. Even before the first Tiananmen Incident in 1976, the sentiments towards the West were often those of
distrust. In 1973, The Ministry of Machine Building proposed purchasing a line of color televisions from abroad. The Gang of Four who believed this was “worshipping foreigners” shot the purchase down. Mao allowed these xenophobic sentiments to continue (Teiwes & Sun, 2004).

There was a long-standing tradition of not accepting Western technologies as part of the policy established by the Cultural Revolution; however, as political authorities and Chinese entrepreneurs came to embrace Deng’s reforming policies this began to change (Teiwes & Sun, 2004). Demonstrated in the next chapter this may have actually been a mistake as the revolutionary sentiments prior to China’s new technological prowess have severely dwindled. New media technologies, including the Internet, have also contributed to more severe negative feelings towards the Japanese. “Public opinion may create an enabling environment for a more assertive government policy, even if the government is not particularly keen on it. China’s popular media and Internet websites sizzle with anti-Japanese vitriol. Stories related to Japan attract more hits than any other news on Internet sites and anti-Japanese petitions are a focal point for organization on-line collective action” (Leibold, 2011). Western media during the 1989 protest though not xenophobic, only focused on the faults of the government while idolizing the students (Calhoun, 1989). While this was an understandable prejudice, it did fail to comprehend the full picture of the movement.

The power of the mass media to consolidate public opinion was most prevalent after national events. The media coverage of the Earthquake on July 28th 1976 was no exception and Hua Guofeng, chosen as Mao’s successor due to his loyalties to the chairman (Forster, 1992) demonstrated his true leadership abilities during the earthquake, providing
necessary support and aide to the victims. This nationalist mobilization was mirrored in 2008 after the Sichuan earthquake.

Mass media has significantly implemented the tools of public relations. After Hua became the successor in 1976, the politburo set up a campaign consisting of fifty or so officers and men to promote the notion that Hua was in fact the true political heir to Mao and to arrest the Gang of Four (MacFarguhar & Schoenhal, 2006). The Politburo took the opportunity to spin the defeat of the Gang into a positive message for the people and the international community stating that with the demise of the Gang, the Cultural Revolution was officially over. They also used Cui Jian after 1989 to promote China’s “progressive’ image to the global community.

According to Habermas (1992), cultural beliefs persist through tradition. Tradition is often enforced through public relation campaigns. “They [traditions] rise and fall without planning or intention. Hence the state must resort to ‘manipulation’ and ‘advertising techniques’ in a losing struggle to maintain the legitimacy and cultural value of the social system (Poster, 1981, p. 463). Mass media technologies did help the CCP disseminate their political ideology through propaganda that could now reach a wider audience than it had been capable of doing in the past; however, this level of mass dissemination was not one-sided. As Bakhtin (1981) has asserted, when censorship is present, the oppressed population will find new and creative ways to disrupt this blockage of information. Using traditional tropes in conjunction with mass media, the dissident community was able to spread a counter-revolutionary message in films like Heshang and through other forms of broadcast media.
Summary

Even though mass media was more successful at disseminating the message to more people and at faster rates, face-to-face communications were still important to the analysis of the information. These apparatuses also neglected to relay the entire story. “No one could really know the whole story, of course, but the only possible approach to a ‘complete’ view depended on the role of telephones and mass media (as well as a face-to-face network of gossip and discussion) in synthesizing the reports of many witnesses” (Calhoun, 1989, p. 55). One could argue that the Chinese people, living under censorship, had developed a sophisticated awareness of the incompleteness of all media and worked to triangulate and accumulate many different sources of information through various media and modes of trafficking information.

Television, Radio, and newspaper helped to fuel the protests but they were not the sole mechanism of the movements. They were adapted to suit many of the older forms of protest that were established by previous movements. *Heshang* influenced many of the themes and slogans of the 1989 movement but it was not the lone catalyst. These new technologies were incorporated into the protest, while many of the past forms of dissemination still thrived despite these new technologies. Communicating to large groups has its benefits but there are just as many detrimental. The final chapter explores how the Internet, which has been heralded as a revolutionary new tool, has also been adapted by dissidents. One possible difference is that the mass media technologies addressed in this chapter still promoted a physical protest, whereas new media technologies have the potential to bring the movement to a virtual space.
Chapter 3

New Media, New Revolution?

New media technologies have been praised in the last decade for creating a more transparent and open environment (Diani, 2000; Bimber, 2001; Nye, 2002; Hinderman, 2009; Diamond, 2010; Morozov, 2011; Fox & Ramos, 2012; Oxley, 2012; Wheeler, 2012). While there are many affordances, one thing these technologies allow people to do is to communicate directly with those having similar interests. Yet this focused connection made possible by these new technologies often warps perceptions of events, messages and meanings, the outcome is ambiguous and our perspective on them should be less celebratory and more ambivalent. As such, the benefits they bring for participatory democracy or for authoritarian control are not very different than those ushered in by new technologies of the past like television and radio; the essential difference lies in the speed in which these new technologies are able to aggregate and disseminate messages. This chapter seeks to explore how new technologies and social media have shaped the nature of revolution by exploring the extreme opinions of cyber-utopianism and technological determinism, which have essentially driven this modern technological debate. In addition, rumor and parody, though both important elements throughout all three events, but more prevalent with the advancement of technologies, will also be explored. Finally the role technology plays in the democratization process dramatized in the so-called “Jasmine Revolution” will be examined.

The use of the Internet and computers is not unique to the Jasmine Revolution. Computers and a basic form of the Internet were utilized as far back as 1989, though the availability was limited. This online network served to connect students and academics;
“This was a sort of halfway form between personal network links and mass media” (Calhoun, 1989, p. 60). In addition to these virtual connections, personal links were also important to reestabishing a democracy movement after the crackdown.

While new technologies have sped up the process of person-to-person communications and the aggregation of information, it does not speed up everything, for example, the ability to speed up economic recovery; issues like this take time (Rage Against the Machine, 2011, Oct. 22). The twenty-four hour news cycle goes through breaking news at a rapid pace. Viewers accustomed to this type of consumption tend to get disinterested quickly due to the instantaneous information and the sheer amount of content that can be produced at these expeditious speeds (Bimber, 2001). With the onslaught of new technologies that cater to this fast-paced media consumption is it possible that the nature of protest will change? Instead of lasting months and focusing on specific causes, will protests be short and sporadic? In addition to the speed and content, will new media and the news spectacle it offers also begin to foster false expectations of how change works, expecting the process to be as quick as the technologies?

New technologies often inflame passions, divide people, and raise questions regarding personal and societal impact. By their very nature, they are disruptive because of their ramifications for the way society and government function and the manner in which people act with one another. Proponents of technology tout a range of benefits, while critics worry about negative consequences for social life, political institutions, and individual values (West, 2011, p.2)

These new technologies may potentially delegitimize social movements in the future. Though the uprisings of past movements were emotional, they took time and as a result tended to be more organized. With this organization came a sense of credibility. New
technology’s drive towards instant gratification could potentially lead to false realities of how political systems, media and culture all relate.

There are pros and cons associated with all new technologies. In the realm of new technologies and social networking platforms, some of the positives, those having a favorable impact on current institutions and individuals include: the ability for governments and other organizations to perform faster, smarter, and more efficiently. People in turn can use these technologies to improve transparency, participation and collaboration, and when governments and the private sector collaborate, they can stimulate an array of innovation. Negative outcomes, those that have had a detrimental influence, include the notion that citizens must now be more vigilant of the security and privacy threats posed by digital developers. Technology also has difficulty driving isolated change, thus involving and influencing other sectors; difficulties combining technology and policy in addition to protecting social and individual rights and values, while also promoting innovation (West, 2011).

Because of the sheer mass of information available, the Internet has been prophesized to be the great knight capable of slaying the Chinese censorship dragon. Dissidents like Liu Xiaobo and others can now access information, communicate with friends and compose open letters and edit manuscripts (Xiaobo, 2012). This may in fact be the case but are all these conveyances revolutionary and will they lead to mass protest? The Internet is said to encourage “free assembly in cyberspace” and promote the “power of public opinion,” but public opinion is not always rational and with these increases in discursive freedom comes the potential for increased surveillance. (Xiaobo, 2012). The most prominent example of
the Janus-faced problems of the Internet relate to the ways in which technology also 
extends the power of the Chinese regime to censor and monitor its people.

The “Great Chinese Firewall,” the nickname given to the Chinese censorship apparatus, 
was first coined by Wired magazine in 1997. Though this elicits the appropriate imagery of 
China’s past isolation with the construction of the actual Great Wall thousands of years 
earlier, the imagery of this barrier may prove to be a hindrance to scholars who are looking 
at online censorship. There are now new ways for the government to expand the wall in 
addition to ways for citizens to climb over. The Internet is a complex system according to 
Lokman Tsui, and looking at Chinese censorship in the sense that it only creates a barrier 
from obtaining certain information is to revert back to Cold War tactics. Thus this 
perspective would only look at Chinese censorship through a strictly Western lens 
(Morozov, 2011). The lens is anti-communist connecting it with anti-Soviet rhetoric of the 
past, yet China’s relationship with censorship as addressed earlier, has deeper historical 
roots that stem back to Imperial times. It is important to keep in mind that while 1989 did 
mark the fall of the Berlin Wall, the CCP still maintained power despite the 1989 
Tiananmen protest. Fax machines and copiers, which, supposedly brought down the Soviet 
Union have few similarities with the Internet. These former technologies can only function 
in two ways, as an article to be read and then passed on. The Internet serves more 
functions than just this basic tandem process. The copy machine cannot spy on citizens, the 
Internet can (Morozov, 2011).

The Chinese Internet, like the Internet worldwide is a complex system of 
communications that serves politics, entertainment, education, etc. To label the Chinese 
Internet as a strictly censored medium is to miss the larger picture of how the tool is
actually used for dissent despite the continuity of regime censorship. “Media stories and survey reports have perpetuated two misleading images of the Chinese Internet: one of control and the other of entertainment” (Yang, 2009, p.1). As they did with other forms of media or communication before, dissidents have been creatively subverting many of the censors through the use of humor and parody, a concept that will be explored later in the chapter. The question remains, what happens to social organization and the public sphere when interactions and social movements move from the physical realm to online?

Habermas (2006) recently redefined his notion of the public sphere, saying that in liberal societies, online communications corrodés the public sphere by focusing on specific issues as opposed to the larger body of discourse. Though it could be argued that the increase of information that new media provides could help to contribute to the community’s public good; this however, only looks at the nature of the information, while disregarding the influence of communicative acts in cyber space. Online behavior ignores or in some cases over-emphasizes the emotional and social connection that the traditional public sphere tends to encourage. This may be one reason the Jasmine Revolution has not been as prominent. The technological determinists tend to overuse the hive and mass mentality terms, which does hinder the overall understanding of online culture.

Because this public sphere is digital, it is different from the agora, the town hall, the coffee shop, the salon, and other territorial locations that are associated with the emergence of public spheres in modern society. The public sphere on the Internet is heavily mediated by information technologies, so that copresence of participation is possible under strict limitations (Poster, 2006, p. 41).

Communicating virtually is different than communicating in the physical world.

Communications in the virtual world are characterized by “textual, aural and visual uploads”
(Poster, 2006). It is difficult to imagine a cohesive public sphere in the virtual world because it is difficult to connect the individual identities produced online into a unified system of discourse (Crossley & Roberts, 2004). This online environment does have the potential to teach democratic discussion in a virtual world, but it has yet to manifest itself as a cohesive reaction in the physical world or public space. A disconnect between the virtual and physical world of protest still seems to exist, but this is not to say that it does not have the potential to come to fruition in the future.

Like television before them, the online components of protests have become a spectacle. It is now possible to follow and tweet about these movements live, as if they were the Super Bowl or the Grammys (Morozov, 2011). An observation made by the Financial Times said that there are now “crowds of onlookers” in China’s public sphere. It seems that more people are watching as opposed to becoming involved (Hille, 2011). As will be described later in this chapter focusing specifically on the Jasmine Revolution, it is difficult to distinguish who is actually protesting in these physical spaces as opposed to those acting as passive observers. It has become a revolution comprised of “clicktivism:” people can now sit back and “like” what they feel is important as opposed to actually participating and facilitating necessary change. The movements of 1976 and 1989 demonstrated that no matter which media was used to communicate, the ultimate outcome of these communications was the culmination of individuals protesting in a physical space risking potential violence or imprisonment. A message more durable than a blog or Tweet, China’s online blogging system Weibo, which is literally translated as microblog, is the primary means of communication within the country’s borders. As much of the dissident communications are spread via Facebook and Twitter, two blocked sites, the necessary
information is not getting through to the people and has not directly led to any mass physical protest (online censorship, 2012 Jul 10).

**Cyber-utopianism, Technological Determinism and Consumerism**

Countering the common sense dialectic of enlightenment tied to technological progress, Marcuse (1964) claimed that increases in technology had made possible, “the great vehicle of better domination.” Social media has kept society so mobilized that control becomes second-nature, especially when people are less aware this is occurring. Hillary Clinton, one of social media’s great spokespersons, has claimed the opposite. During a speech at the Newseum in Washington she stated, “Even in authoritarian countries, information networks are helping people discover new facts and making governments more accountable (Clinton, H. 2010, Jan 21). These two extremes represent the thrust of cyber-utopianism and technological determinism. In reality, the role technology plays probably falls somewhere between these schools of thought and the thoughtful onlooker should remain ambivalent about the potentialities and affordances.

U.S. policy makers have been outspoken advocates for social media and its roll in subjugating authoritarian regimes. Though there have been positive views regarding new media technologies and the opening of authoritarian countries, there is still the problem of access. If people in the Middle East and China do not have access to the Internet, how can it be emancipatory? The countries where Internet use has risen have invested in the technological infrastructure. When state and private sector investment increases, the prices for access drop, making it easier for the average citizen to gain access and also to create online content more suited to their linguistic and cultural preferences (Wheeler &
Mintz, 2012). Some authoritarian countries may be more willing to invest in the IT infrastructure because it provides an illusion of transparency. They know that with new ICTs (Information Communications Technologies) people will have more access to information, but the government will also have equal opportunity to control information and track content while projecting the image of openness. Despite these dismissive implications, Wheeler and Mintz (2012) still believe that the Internet can build civic engagement by bringing new social groups together. In repressive regimes, citizens do have more access to information and sources that they may not have had in the past and even find new outlets for self-expression.

China is a complicated authoritarian system to evaluate considering that they are a technologically advanced country unlike many of the authoritarian regimes that have recently experienced major dissent. The Beijing Consensus has provided their citizens with such a rapid increase in prosperity that they have not needed to focus on democratic institutions (Morozov, 2011). In an interview with a Chinese economist, he said that the difference between the protests in the Middle East and China has more to do with the country's economic standing than technology. The Middle East is still a poor region, while China has a booming economy. “Today’s authoritarianism is of the hedonism—and consumerism—friendly variety, with Steve Jobs and Ashton Kutcher commanding far more respect than Mao or Che Guevara” (Morozov, 2011 p. ix). There are some interesting statistics to back up this claim. “The launch of the Steve Jobs biography in China drew thousands of shoppers, emptying most of the Chinese book shops’ inventory and guess what, all 250,000 Chinese edition copies of Jobs’ authorized biography [were] sold within a day of its release” (Chang, 2011, Oct. 26). The average Chinese citizen is probably more
enamored with the patron of Western consumerism, Steve Jobs, than they are with the father of their modern nation, Chairman Mao. Having been a teacher in China for three years, most of my students were more familiar with Kobe Bryant than Zhou Enlai. The influx of content associated with new technologies demonstrates how it is now virtually impossible to control culture in these current conditions of information inundation.

The fall of the Soviet Union was facilitated by outside sources. They were tempted by Western consumer goods like blue jeans. This is hard to replicate considering that most of today’s Western goods come from China (Morozov, 2011). Did the message of Heshang and the desire to dominate Western capitalism backfire ultimately hindering political change in the name of economic prosperity? Western society has taken the credit for the peaceful transition of the Soviet Union, but this is a boisterous accreditation. “As a result, many of the Western strategies tried back then, like smuggling in photocopiers and fax machines, facilitating the flow of samizdat, and supporting radio broadcasts by Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America, are giving much more credit than they deserve” (Morozov, 2022, p. x). Is this what is to be expected today and in the future with Western policy makers and social media technologies?

The Google Doctrine has been at the forefront of cyber-utopianism. This doctrine is defined as, “the enthusiastic belief in the liberating power of technology accompanied by the irresistible urge to enlist Silicon Valley start-ups in the global fight for freedom” (Morozov, 2011 p. xiii). This is an appealing prospect for many Western policy makers who are looking at this new age of social media with the same “revolutionary potential” that those in the corporate sector beamed with in the late 1990s. Knowing what happened with the dotcom bubble then, is this really a safe bet for political regimes now? (Morozov, 2011).
The Western media seems to be playing up a lot of the dissident feelings of those in authoritarian countries. In China, there has been some unrest with the Jasmine Revolution, but it is nothing in comparison to the revolutionary atmosphere produced by the Tiananmen Incident of 1976 and the pro-democracy demonstration of 1989. Speaking with contacts in the mainland, the idea of the Jasmine Revolution is feeble and nonexistent among the average citizenry.

The idea of the Google Doctrine stems from Cold War policy and tactics. Figureheads like Thomas Friedman are spearheading this drive to push these same tactics today, buying into the belief that they were successful in the past. But as mentioned previously, this credit is exaggerated and this is a new time with new technology. “According to Krugman, too many Western observers, with Friedman as their cheerleader in chief, were falling under the false impression that thanks to advances in information technology ‘old-fashioned’ power politics become increasingly obsolete, because it conflicts with the imperatives of global capitalism” (Morozov, 2011, p. 6). These new technologies can be seen as taking away the political power that older forms of communications had once established for themselves. Though there was certainly a monetary element to many of the technologies utilized in the past, it was often overshadowed by the communicative function of the actual apparatus.

These new media technologies, in addition to garnering an overemphasis on their monetary value and function, can also function to empower negative agents. Al-Qaeda has been successful in using many of these new technologies more so than the Chinese populace and even some Western countries. The power of technology is not one-sided and the Google Doctrine tends to ignore the negative features of this so-called revolutionary
technology. However, this also ignores the other end of the spectrum and the complete opposite view of technological determinism.

Technological determinism, and the idea that our world has become dominated by instrumental thinking is at the essence of Adorno (1991) and many of the early theorists' arguments. Technology creates an atmosphere of blind obedience and conformity. According to these scholars, technology has corrupted culture and we need to return to a more technologically absent era. This argument like that of cyber-utopianism is a bit extreme and does not take into account that any era is truly devoid of technology according to the definition provided in the introduction. Everything man-made is technology, therefore the written word, the printing press, orchestras, etc., all of these aspects Adorno revered, would be deemed technological apparatuses. Technology has not advanced to the point where it is completely autonomous, as in functioning without human agents. People are still instrumental to technological advancements. “This view assumes that technology produces its own effects. It leaves out the values and practices of the people using the technology, or the history, culture and political economy of technological development and use” (Yang, 2011, p. 1044).

Consumerism also plays a leading role in the new media argument, both as a force driving the development and consumption of technology. Nowhere is the force of consumerism more obvious than in China, which under Mao was fiercely anti-consumeristic. Where the representation of collective identity was used to dominate the poster art of the People’s Republic, the images of individual consumerism and capitalism are rampant throughout China’s city centers. Advertisements placed on the barns of rural farming communities are signs promoting the same types of ideologies as the Tiananmen
movement and this may be why the Jasmine Revolution has not been successful. The Western media played up their own ideologies during the 1989 movement and though the protesters did not get democracy, they did get the capitalistic sentiments emphasized by Heshang.

Marcuse (1964) flipped the criticism of Cold War regimes by Western powers on their heads and warned against the perils of extensive consumerism claiming that this makes a people one-dimensional. Dissidents today have the potential to lose sight of the multifaceted communicative power of these new technologies. Technology does not in itself create change; it is the message disseminated by these apparatuses that has revolutionary appeal. The success of any revolution is communication, and China must incorporate old and new methods; communications technology must be culturally significant, but at the same time needs to be fluid.

Yes, communications technology has facilitated rampant consumerism and perhaps a less informed citizenry, but it has also served as a bridge that facilitates conversation between the government and the public in all societies, not just democratic or authoritarian. China does have a censored Internet, but they have always grown up in a censored society. Hopefully the people will hold on to the skill of being able to read between the lines as many of the interview subjects had alluded to.

**Blogs, Twitter and Social Networking**

Social networking sites have been at the top of the new media communications argument about the Jasmine Revolution. Blogs according to Yang have created a “digital society,” which “can challenge cultural stereotypes [and] correct misinformation (Yang,
Evgeny Morozov (2011), author of *The Net Delusion*, quoted the sentiments of Ronald Reagan and other Western policy makers. “Let them tweet, and they will tweet their way to freedom . . . If the Soviet Union couldn’t survive a platoon of pamphleteers, how can China survive an army of bloggers” (p. xii)? The survival of China’s ruling party in the face of these claims may point to the fact that, more than creating space for dissenting voices, social media creates too many voices to facilitate successful political opposition.

China is currently one of the largest consumers of technological goods. As of 2012, there are 96.5 color televisions per 100 households and 55.5 mobile telephone subscribers per 100 people (pocket world in figures, 2012). The electronic information industry continues to grow. In 2010, the country contained over 1.1 billion phone users (this statistic includes fixed-line and mobile phone users). China not only produces and manufactures most of the new technologies used around the world but they are also among the largest consumers (prlog.org, 2012). Chinese bloggers and users of the Chinese language equivalent of Twitter, *Sina Weibo*, are more active than those in the United States. A “figure for that first second far surpassed the highest number of messages per second on Twitter, which occurred last December, when the company reported 25,088 messages per second during the television broadcast in Japan of a beloved anime film” (Goodman, 2012). This statistic demonstrates that even though new technology is commonly utilized in the authoritarian country, most individuals seem to be more occupied with entertainment than revolution.

During the Iranian demonstrations of 2009, the West focused too much on technology thus ignoring the people behind the movement. Tweets alone do not topple
governments. “Bloggers are seen as new solitary activists—an overly idealistic and probably wrong characterization shared by democratic and authoritarian governments alike” (Morozov, 2011). This relates to an argument pertaining to the quality of bloggers. It is simple for people to become solitary activists in the comforts of their home sitting behind a computer screen, but what about those in authoritarian countries where the Internet is highly monitored? These activists can easily be tracked and thrown in jail and worse killed. The Internet will most likely inform others that a dissident has been imprisoned but this does not change the fact that the dissident is now locked up.

Though blogs and social media may be used for dissidence, they are also used for a variety of other communications as mentioned earlier. According to a recent study, around 13 percent of the posts created on Chinese generated websites have adopted a critical attitude towards Chinese politics and government (Leibold, 2011). In comparison to the amount of other content available online, it is difficult to determine whether these blogs are actually viewed. A critical blog post with one reader might not make much difference in the larger political discussion. The Chinese blogosphere is heavily saturated with “shallow infotainment,” if not more so, than political discussion. China has become, per Marcuse, more and more one-dimensional. This tendency in the face of market liberalization and the rise of consumerism needs to be addressed alongside discourse championing the democratic potentials of new media. An informed public sphere does not necessarily incorporate people’s opinions on great travel locations and favorite music (Leibold, 2011). There is simply too much information to create a realistically literate public space either online or in public. “1.6 billion weblog pages are viewed and 10 million posts are written each day” (Jin, 2008, p. 11). The Chinese Internet seems to be more driven by
entertainment than current events. Though the Internet and smart media aggregation has brought like minded individuals together, it has not yet succeeded in bringing large groups of people together in the name of social change.

The issue of the creation of a virtual community is still debatable. People do have access to more information and connect with others more easily and at a faster pace. Borders are blurred online and the possibility of an emergent global community is there. However, it can be argued that new media technologies are homogenizing information, which would result in a polarized and less informed citizenry. To add to this claim, Oxley (2012) argues that partisan media is the same or similar to media content in authoritarian countries. This is especially true when citizens only consume news based on their individual ideologies as opposed to receiving information from more broad and inclusive sources. People are “uninformed” and “misinformed” and these misrepresentations can influence opinions toward policy, a feature which is often paramount to the democratization process.

Scholars have referred to this notion of homogenized media content as personalized spheres of information or rather the “daily me” among other terms (Sunstein, 2007).

Broadly speaking, each of these authors identifies as a central component of the new information atmosphere the ability of citizens to tailor very specifically the news and information they receive to their own personal interests and ideologies. In other words, people can navigate the news in which they are interested and completely avoid information or viewpoints that run counter to their preexisting perspectives (Fox & Ramos, 2012, p. 12)

Joseph Nye (2002) has argued that “narrow-casting” of news can “fragment the sense of community and legitimacy that underpins central governments” (p. 10).
These new technologies are creating an online “gated community.” There is still a hierarchy of communications within these new technologies where those on top challenge unfavorable opinions. The average citizen does have more opportunity to voice their opinion, but with homogenization and individuality plaguing the public sphere simultaneously, can a cohesive message truly be disseminated online? “Even the speed and brutality with which the party-state crushed China’s stillborn ‘Jasmine Revolution’ hasn’t dampened this enthusiasm” (Leibold, 2011, p. 1036).

Despite many of these new uses of technology there are still some old methods of communicating with the audience. Twitter does follow along the lines of the slogans of the past. Given Twitter’s character restrictions most tweets serve as a virtual slogan. Another element that has continued throughout the span of these revolutions but has been adapted to suit the dissemination elements of new technologies is rumor, humor and parody.

**Rumor, Humor and Parody**

The spread of rumor and gossip is a part of any society regardless of political, ideological or technological setting. Darnton (2000) claims that rumor was a significant feature in the technological apparatus of Eighteenth-Century France. Rumor-mongers “claimed to know, from private sources (a letter, an indiscreet servant, a remark overheard in an antechamber of Versailles), what was really happening in the corridors of power—and that the people in power took them seriously, because the government worried about what Parisians were saying” (p. 2). Contemporary China is no different from 18th century Paris in this respect.
If we look back at the 1989 events, before the deluge of misinformation facilitated by the Internet, rumor surrounding the lead up and throughout the actual movement was rampant. There was constant gossip regarding corruption and nepotism. One of the most significant reports was that recent college graduates who had been allowed to choose their own occupations for a short time would now be assigned their job as had been done in the past (Wasserstrom, 1991). This rumor was partially true. Initially the police monitoring the riots did not carry batons and the government was worried that the students would use this information to exploit the situation. The Xinhua news agency was encouraged not to publicize this information and facilitate any rumors regarding security. There were also a number of reports that some of the students who participated in the hunger strikes had died from starvation. Students claimed they had first heard the reports from the VOA and wore black armbands and took part in funeral rites to honor those students. Whether or not any student perished as a result of the hunger strikes has never been confirmed (Zhang, 2001). An interview subject also remembered a rumor involving Li Peng. One story he recalled claimed that the leader had been shot in the leg at the Great Hall. This news was later recounted and was accredited to an individual who just wanted to test the Chinese rumor mill and how fast the message would spread. It became increasingly difficult to justify many of these messages as a result.

Location and rumor are also highly connected. The Square was used for counterrevolutionary propaganda, which did thrive on rumor. They implemented loudspeakers that were illegally installed and disseminated messages using this system throughout the event. These reports were often distorted broadcasts from the VOA and non-mainland newspapers. Among the rumors was the announcement that elder party
leaders opposed martial law and had asked to leave the party. And as mentioned before, the students were not entirely promoting a peaceful demonstration. They would often use rumor to insight violence to promote more popular support from the Western media who were obviously favoring the perspective of the dissenters (Zhang, 2001).

The ideal public sphere is devoid of rumor and “truth, freedom, and justice” are an important basis for the analysis of the public sphere that was created during any of these movements. However, even speech that is blatantly meant to deceive is attempting to capture a larger truth (Poster, 1981; Habermas, 1989). The reason this section is incorporated into this chapter on new media has to do with the speed and resources that accompany rumor and these new technologies. “False rumors and conspiracy theories alike are as old as human societies, but the speed, reach and filtering power of the Internet has caused them to spread like wildfire throughout networked societies” (Leibold, 2011, p.1031). The Internet and specialized blogging communities have also been responsible for polarized beliefs that make it easier to silence alternative views (Leibold, 2011). This capacity to echo rumor in a viral way by way of communications technology has made misinformation a crucial factor in manufacturing and maintaining dissent amidst the Jasmine Revolution.

Stan Abrams (2010), a Chinese law expert has said that the Chinese government has spent an escalating amount of time and resources to thwart Internet rumors, a task he believes only exacerbates the gossip. This money could be used in more beneficial ways to actually support the public good and promote more legitimate legal institutions. “Directed at the right source, they [rumors] can be a powerful form of digital activism, but all too often they result in petty ill-informed and harassing witch-hunts based on innuendos, half-
truths and bizarre conspiracy theories” (Leibold, 2011, p. 1032). By its very nature, rumor has always been intended to be trafficked to a large number of people; however, the same problem regarding an excess of communicative tools in relation to new media seems to once again be an issue. With more information online, there will proportionally be more rumors and this could potentially create untrusting media consumers.

The availability of unreliable content flooding the Chinese Internet has just fueled more argument: “There are no rules of conduct, no preconditions or demands for logic and consistency” (Zhang, 2010). As a result, people have begun to lose faith in the reliability of Internet content. The cyber-utopian scholars believe that the quality of these untrustworthy blogs will increase when the quality of bloggers improves, but when will this happen? (Guo, 2007).

Cast in this light, it is easy to understand why nearly 84 percent of respondents thought that content on the Internet should be controlled, with 83 percent identifying violence, 65 percent malicious speculation, and nearly 30 percent online chatting as in need of control, and 85 percent looked to the government to censor this content (Guo, 2007, p.10-15).

Internet rumor, once it is reported on in the press, is also disseminated through newspapers. An article published in The People's Daily claimed that the unrest surrounding the Iranian elections was the result of American cyber warfare propagated by YouTube, Twitter and blogs that spread rumors creating factionalism. The China National Defense, the official newspaper of the Chinese military, also ran a similar story that included the Moldavian protests citing that in both the Iranian and Moldavian examples, unrest was incited by “Internet-enabled foreign intervention” (Yang, 2011).
Though humor and parody are different instruments implemented in dissent, they both use an almost entertainment like quality to attract audiences. Sometimes rumors do incorporate humor, but the opposite relationship may also exist, such that they are not mutually exclusive. Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) wrote that carnivalesque messages thrive in oppressed societies because it serves to make the unbearable comical and inverses the nature of dominance. Habermas viewed this type of communications as “parasitic” due to his belief that these instruments compromise the integrity of open discourse (Gardner, 1981). Bakhtin’s theory seems more reasonable and applicable to the use of humor and parody throughout Chinese dissent, especially in relation to new media.

Wang Bo, better known by his nickname Pi San, has created short animated films critiquing the political system. His cartoon character Kuang Kuang uses humor to subvert the censorship controls established by the Chinese government (Larmer, 2011, Oct 26).

No government in the world pours more resources into patrolling the Web than China’s, tracking down unwanted content and supposed miscreants among the online population of 500 million with an army of more than 50,000 censors and vast networks of advanced filtering software. Yet despite these restrictions—or precisely because of them—the Internet is flowering as the Wittiest space in China (Larmer, 2011, Oct. 26).

In order to undermine the censors, other agents using humor online have put their criticisms in the mouth of a mythical beast, the grass-mud horse to bring a carnival atmosphere to dissent. A video on YouTube involving the animal and a subversive version of a children’s song has had almost 1.4 million viewers. The humor of the animal – and its effectiveness as a pathway to promote dissent - lies in its linguistic similarities to an obscenity if the name of the creature, cao ni ma, is said using different tones. Xiao Qiang, a
professor of journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, was quoted in *The New York Times* as saying the grass-mud horse “has become an icon of resistance to censorship.” Though the beast incorporates a childish tune, serious scholars as well as the general population have enjoyed and supported the message (Wines, 2009, Mar 11).

Humor as opposed to rumor has drawn more attention and support from the general population. The Chinese people have been able to create a cyber-community through comedy in a way that mirrors Bakhtinian theory of side-stepping censorship. “By using code-words, satire, humor, and other rhetorical techniques, Chinese bloggers are, ‘speaking truth to each other and by doing so in a widely accessible manner, are speaking truth to power’ representing ‘a major breakthrough toward the formation of a Chinese public sphere, albeit a virtual one” (Leibold, 2011, p.1029). Voci argues that though this may not fit into a neatly defined category of resistance, it has still proven to be a useful tool for creating dissident opinion in a virtual world (2010). However, it should be noted that none of these uses of the carnival apparatus have been directly applied to the Jasmine Revolution.

**The Jasmine Revolution**

The Jasmine Revolution, as the current democratic reform movement is known in China, borrowed its name from Tunisia. Shortly after the Arab Spring movement began, calls for a Chinese Jasmine Revolution began to appear throughout the Chinese Internet, the first recorded incident occurred on February 15, 2011 (Lee, 2011). The Tunisian movement began after President Ben Ali stepped down from power, essentially serving as the catalyst for the Arab Spring and eventually expanding beyond the Middle East to influence the Chinese dissident movement (NPR, 2011). Like the government reaction to
the awarding of the Nobel Peace prize to jailed activist Liu Xiaobo, the Jasmine Revolution has been played up in the media, while in reality the movement has been relatively stagnant. At the Nobel award ceremony for Liu, the medal was placed in a small box on an empty chair with the initials LXB. Within hours of this occurrence, the Beijing authorities blocked the words “empty chair” from the Internet (Liu, 2011). There were no major incidents of a physical protest or significant unrest that followed this action. The term jasmine flower has also been blocked from the Internet garnering the same lack of physical reaction as the “empty chair.”

A Twitter feed posted in mid-February, made by an anonymous individual, reported that further details about a physical movement would be announced in the days to come on a different website. Boxum, a U.S. based Chinese language news portal, received the notification that a demonstration would transpire the following day at 2 pm in various locations throughout the country. The proclamation requested individuals to occupy town and city squares and other densely populated areas. After the initial posting, the website that carried the statement fell under scrutiny (Lee, 2011)

Though this movement has been relatively virtual, there have been some physical manifestations. On February 20, 2011, citizens were encouraged through Internet sources to take part in silent walk-pasts through major shopping centers and city squares and then a week later in more public places throughout Beijing, Shanghai and other major cities (No Awakening, 2011, Mar 3). These “strolls” were different from other pro-democratic movements in China because they were not asking for overt messages or shows that would include marches and banners. Instead, as quoted from an open letter, “we invited every participant to stroll, watch or even just pretend to pass by. As long as you are present, the
authoritarian government will be shaking in fear.” The concept of strolling was utilized because it is essentially a loophole in the legislation that states that individuals cannot demonstrate without government approval. Given the country’s authoritarian leadership, the chance of receiving this permission is minimal (Osnos, 2011, Feb 23). However this returns to a point made previously in the chapter regarding passive participants. How is one able to tell the difference between those who are “strolling” as an act of defiance and those who are just legitimately passing through? The government anticipating these demonstrations, increased security at targeted locations and few protestors actually took part (No Awakening, 2011, Mar 3). However, known dissidents have been detained in the aftermath of these online movements including artist Ai Weiwei who was arrested at the Beijing airport on April 3, 2011 (China’s Crackdown, 2011, April 4).

A second protest was scheduled the following week and marked the first appearance of the movement originators. The post, also dispatched on Boxum, requested on the behalf of the movement leaders, that if the government refused to release a number of jailed activists, there would be another demonstration February 27. In the second post, the initiators also asked other activists to change their online profile image to a jasmine flower (Boxum blog post, 2011). What should be noted is that these original messages were originally disseminated via Twitter and then carried by Boxum, both having U.S servers. Though these messages are intended for a Chinese audience they are not originating in the country, again pointing to outside influences, which are becoming increasingly more common in dissident communications given the global nature of online servers.

After the initial postings, an entire website materialized strictly devoted to the Jasmine movement. Molihua.org, the Chinese name for the Jasmine Revolution, continued
tracking and posting information regarding the movement. If 茉莉花 molihua is typed into a Google search engine, this site is the first to appear on the list of web addresses. The website was supposedly created on July 29, 2011 and will expire the same date in 2012. Throughout the course of this research, the website was kept up-to-date and announcements generally incorporated recruiting information and posts about other walks.

In addition to the molihua.org website, the organizers seem to have other online outlets. For instance, based out of Taiwan, there is a Facebook page dedicated to the movement. This seems to be the logical location for the page to originate as Facebook is blocked on the Chinese mainland. The page has 2,287 “likes” with 12 currently talking about the topic. Under its causes the organizers claim they are building the strength of the revolution on Facebook. The question is, where are these “likes” coming from? This is another example of clicktivism at its finest. Few if none of the individuals “liking” the movement on Facebook can actually participate in these physical strolls as they do not have easy access to the Chinese mainland, and those on the Chinese mainland do not have easy access to Facebook. Individuals clicking a “blue-like” button on a website are not going to create the same emotional connection that provided the intensity and camaraderie as the 1976 Tiananmen Incident or the 1989 Pro-Democracy movement. Not having occupied the space and provided an icon for the movement, the traffic of information does not amount to anything substantial. Tang Baiqiao, an activist originally from Hunan province who participated in the 1989 movement, sponsors the page. The creators of the Jasmine Revolution have credited their ability and intention to remain anonymous to new communications technologies. By remaining in this virtual space, the organizers do not have to reveal their identities thereby keeping themselves relatively safe from political
persecution, which could potentially lead to new forms of anonymous guerilla movements. While there is something to be said about eliminating a hierarchy to create a truly democratic movement, the organizers are asking average citizens to risk arrest without a guarantee that these organizers are also putting themselves at risk. The overseers of the 1976 and 1989 movements also remained relatively in the shadows, but it was clear that they also put themselves in harms way alongside the citizens they encouraged to fight for a cause.

Like their predecessors before them, the one thing that is clear is that the administrators of the Jasmine Revolution are technologically savvy; they know how to use whatever communication technology is available to get the message out and thwart the censors. They have been smart about using technologies that are less susceptible to the Internet censors (Goodman, 2012). But the 2011 demonstrations show that there is not only a disconnect between the virtual and physical world of this protest, but that the surveillance of the Internet is perhaps more possible than other earlier forms of trafficking information. For instance, there were more security forces in anticipation for the demonstrators than activists themselves. The calls have also been made using sites that are either blocked or unfamiliar to Chinese citizens; therefore, the information is only accessible to those who know how to bypass the firewall. In addition, there is still the question of whether or not people would actually respond to these calls (Johnson, 2011).

What is unique to the Jasmine Revolution, as opposed to the previous two events, is the extent to which it shows the influence of and the potential capacity to rally the emerging middle class. The previous two revolutions were more divided along intellectual and ideological lines; however, now the disenfranchised community incorporates a more
diverse population defined more by their economic status as opposed to their educational or ideological background. The middle class has the potential to stimulate political change. Yet despite China’s immense economic achievements, there is still discontent among citizens, especially those in this new social and economic class (the new middle class rises up, 2011, Sep 3). This emergent income group has increasingly utilized China’s booming economy and therefore has access to these new technologies. If this class can get past the rumor and entertainment ridden message that is now prominent in the Chinese online media sphere, the possibility for change may be realized. Though this has yet to happen, the potential is there and if the middle class does rise to the occasion, in the future the Jasmine Revolution may become more than just a Western media-hyped movement. Even if the movement did gain more attention, there still remains the problem of whether or not democratic change could occur. There is also the matter of lacking a unifying catalyst like the death of a leader, as was the case with the previous two movements.

When looking at the evolving media landscape and its effects on politics, it is of value to look at how the system has progressed overtime. In the 1990s, most citizens received their news through the radio, newspaper or a television broadcast. By the early 2000s, however, this had drastically changed, as there were now a number of other media outlets and new tools for gathering information. New technologies are not radically changing the way that information is trafficked and are certainly not without fault. The cost of access to these new sources of news and information have the ability to alienate the working class who may be unable to afford the latest smart phone or personal computer. The middle class and elites are the ones who have the most access to this information. Like other democratization theories, technology’s positive impact on democratization also has
its weaknesses. “Certainly, a ‘digital divide’ continues to exist, characterized by substantial discrepancies in Internet penetration that exist around the world” (Fox & Ramos, 2012, p.5).

**The Internet and Democracy**

The protests that resulted in the stepping down of political leaders in Tunisia and Egypt, which became known as the Arab Spring, are reminiscent of the Iranian protests of 2009. Citizen-generated videos and commentary played a role in promoting and exposing the presidential election corruption. State Departments everywhere have taken notice. In fact, in the summer of 2009, the U.S. State Department asked Twitter to postpone a network upgrade to prevent the disruption of citizen activism in Iran (Fox & Ramos, 2012). “Yet the degree to which the new media environment fundamentally alters political outcomes and brings citizens closer to democratic ideals—such as increased levels of political participation, a more responsive government, and freedom of expression—is much less clear” (Fox & Ramos, 2012, p. 2). There is more information as a result of these new technologies and it is uncertain that individuals and groups alike have the patience and understanding to put these resources together in a meaningful and productive fashion.

This “lightening” of information in the online public is evident with the readership and content of Chinese blogs. Most Chinese blogs discuss travel plans, tell jokes and share photos. Chinese blog content is really no different than that of their Western counterparts. The time spent on the Internet in China is mainly driven by entertainment content and people are only consuming the information they find relevant to their own views. For someone like Thomas Friedman, this would count as proof that the revolution has already
happened. But consumerism and entertainment are not a sufficient substitute for
democratic participation and social change.

Many news blogs lack the same structure that traditional news media has
established. There is no hierarchy; therefore, no editor or fact checker will handle the
information before publication. This results in a lack of writer accountability and accuracy
(Davis, 2009). Do knowledge levels that would increase citizen engagement also rise in the
new media environment? While looking at education, knowledge and the new media
environment, Prior (2007) concludes that “choice” is the reason political knowledge has
not increased as political information has become more available.

Technology in the Arab World has been at the forefront of this political discussion.
Wheeler and Mintz (2012) have written extensively on the role of social media and its
ability to mobilize masses and demand more government accountability. The analysis of
Wheeler and Mintz’s case studies demonstrate that there have been dramatic changes in
social practices that have even lead to a more engaged citizenry. Asef Bayat (2010) is not
as convinced that these changes will happen smoothly with the influx of new technologies.
“Reform of authoritarian states would require distinctly laborious struggles, the
significance and difficulties of which one cannot discount” (p. 248). From this, one can
surmise that though new technologies may create a more conducive environment for
democratization to occur, there are still other factors and influences that must be
considered. “A more nuanced and realistic view of political change in authoritarian
contexts is one that acknowledges the importance of social norms, whereby change in
society’s sensibilities is a precondition for far-reaching democratic transformation” (p.
In Bayat’s view, an active citizenry is the most crucial element for democratization reform.

**Using the tools of the enemy against the enemy**

At the heart of science and technology, modern politics and domination, lies control and surveillance (Outhwaite & Ray, 2005). It would be naïve to believe that the use of technology is completely one sided: just as activists use it to disseminate messages, so do governments. There is the obvious example of the state-owned media addressed in Chapter Two, but what is implemented by governments using new media tools is more subtle. The government’s use of the Internet is made easier by a few ideas addressed by the RAND research group. The Internet did alter the relationship between the government and dissenting groups. Dissident groups have more access to information and tools of dissemination, but at the same time, the government now has the ability to closely monitor these groups more thoroughly. Secondly, though China has a technology savvy population, there still exists a digital divide, which hinders the application of new media technology. RAND statistics show that the Internet is primarily dominated by young, highly educated men. Though this statistic is relevant, it is not something new. The past movements, largely composed of male students, also would have been dominated by a similar demographic. Perhaps the most significant finding of the RAND study is the connection between governments and the online commercial sector. The government has somehow convinced these companies to implement their own self-censorship. With the exception of Google, though for some time they too were guilty of this passivity, few companies have
been willing to stand up to the government and its dominant presence in the online community (Woodcock, 1990).

Using the tools of the opposition is not a concept strictly associated with new technologies, though the concept is more prevalent today. Past examples of this go as far back as the May 4th movement of 1919. Western religion was a huge area of contention in China during this time of increasing imperialism. Chinese students who studied under Christian pastors learned to use the rhetoric and oratory skills of this group to speak out against them during the massive movements. Creating messages that looked like official statements and were even posted in similar locations was also a tool implemented by the activist groups. These official looking notices often attracted average citizens who felt obligated to read anything that appeared to be issued by official sources (Wasserstrom, 1991).

The government in turn implemented counter strategies against the dissenters. Ignoring the obvious, the use of violence during the Tiananmen Square Massacre, the CCP would often issue statements labeling these movements as counterrevolutionary and unpatriotic. In conjunction with these ominous statements they would organize their own counter movements nearby the actual demonstrators to help garner support for their own causes. The use of outright lies and cover-ups was also a useful tool for the CCPs message dissemination (Wasserstrom, 1991).

The Internet is simply following in this tradition, though its effects and uses have become more amplified. Privacy becomes a large concern regarding new technologies and people are therefore, less likely to adopt these new technologies for fear of the monitoring associated, which in turn slows innovation (West, 2011). “There is also a trade-off between
privacy and security. It is possible to improve computer security by more monitoring of suspicious activities. But opening up back channels to surveillance comprises personal privacy makes individual confidentiality more difficult to maintain” (West, 2011, p.177),

However, given China’s past history with controlled media dating as far back as Imperial authority, there may not have been any expectation of privacy to begin with. This is not to say that Chinese surveillance is acceptable, the government is still investing a lot of money into monitoring media content. In essence the increased amount of censorship and surveillance associated with these new media technologies may potentially be what drives the creativity to subvert the censor and thus reify the communicative functions of the past. The technology itself does not bypass surveillance, it is the content created by individuals.

Though there is a fine line between security and privacy, the government tends to cross this line more so than activists. The CCP has been known to pay bloggers to prowl dissident websites and chat rooms to look for information that could aid the authorities in their search for dissidents. There are anti-censorship programs available, but where Hillary Clinton will publicly announce her enthusiasm regarding new technologies and their ability to facilitate democratic change, the U.S. government is less open about maintaining their political ties. The surveillance industry is booming, some analysts estimate that the sector brings in between 3 billion and 5 billion dollars a year (Elgin, 2011, Dec. 14). One of the reasons these anti-censorship technologies have not been overly promoted is due to the U.S’s desire to maintain their economic relationship with China (Shirky, 2010).

Diamond (2010) stated that “liberation technologies” allow citizens to interpret the news, facilitate government accountability, and mobilize protests in addition to many other
positive factors. However, he goes on to claim that authoritarian countries, like China and Iran, have been able to circumvent these potentially positive outcomes of technology through control of the Internet. “Ultimately, however, not just technology but political organization and strategy and deep-rooted normative, social, and economic forces will determine who ‘wins’ the race” (p. 70). As in the political movements that came before it in 76 and 89, there is still a continuous power struggle between the political ideology and the drive towards reform.

**Protesting in a Virtual World**

In a world where people can now sit comfortably at their desks behind computer screens and consider themselves politically active, why is it that a group of people are still taking to the streets to make a point? Lefebvre wrote *In the Production of Space* that, “social relations, which are concrete abstractions have no real existence save in and through space” (p. 404). The revolutions in China seem to bear this out. If, as Lefebvre argued, space is perceived in relation to the body, it is “lived and produce” therefore, one could make the argument that an uprising is an extension of a physical entity. A Twitter feed cannot be understood except through its relation to real space. The more it is divorced from it, the less its impact on the tweet receiver. “Accurately speaking, you cannot perceive social relations, they can only be thought of. And if you cannot perceive them, then we have the question of how they are experienced” (Määttänen, 2007, p. 459). Evidence that meaning is more easily comprehended through physical space as opposed to virtual space is evident when comparing Tiananmen Square of 1989 to China’s current Jasmine Revolution or lack thereof. Millions of people filled Tiananmen Square and other
areas in 1989, yet the current online movement to spread democratic ideals through China has been relatively unsuccessful. In respect to being a part of an actual movement, a physical body living outside your office window is a lot harder to ignore than a Facebook post.

The idea of space is an important unifying concept. “The movement lost coherence and intensity as a function of distance from the Square” (Calhoun, 1989, p. 55). This relationship to symbolic location seems to be the unifying theme of Chinese social movements. However, the problem of population is an issue in China. How can a single square create a space of discourse for more than a billion people (Calhoun, 1989)? In this sense, if used correctly the idea of protesting in a virtual world may provide cohesion and a unifying platform to a protest on a larger scale.

Falungong, a Chinese religious movement has been one of the first social groups to redefine dissidence in a virtual space. Unlike past protests, the technological apparatus implemented by Falungong had few connections to the past despite their continued initiatives to occupy physical spaces. In a recent protest, there were no banners and slogans only a crowd of elderly female followers who refused to communicate with the foreign press. The CCP was shocked that they had no prior knowledge of the demonstration. The movement was organized under the nose of the government by incorporating the use of the Internet and wireless phones. This movement was unique because many of the modern movements since 1989 have tried to amass foreign support especially during the visits of top officials. This has been the case of the most recent news-making dissident, blind lawyer Chen Guangcheng, who made his famous escape from house arrest during the visit of U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton (Chen, China and America,
The Falungong movement stayed largely contained within China and to an even smaller scale the group. The average Westerner also does not have an idea of what Falungong stands for. When a group of ten Americans was asked what the group was, most had no idea and two guessed that it is a Chinese cult.

For dissidents, students and other social groups, online platforms do allow their messages to be disseminated on a global scale. Though this was the case with the one-to-many platform utilized in 1989, e-mail and BBS (Bulletin Board Sites) offer a two-way communications system that is more associated with the notion of a Habermasian public sphere. These modes of communications do provide a greater opportunity for “organization with greater ease and rapidity than ever before,” but the potentialities of the technology can be used by the regime as well to squash dissent. (Woodcock, 1990).

The use of Cold War tactics has also been applied to the concept of dissent in a virtual world. “Freud would have had a good laugh on seeing how the Internet, a highly resilient network designed by the U.S. military to secure communications in case of an attack by the Soviet Union, is at pains to get over its Cold War parentage. Such intellectual recycling is hardly surprising” (Morozov, 2011, p. 40). Mark Palmer, of the National Endowment for Democracy and Ronald Reagan’s ambassador to Hungary during the last years of communism, has been an outspoken advocate for Falungong. At his insistence, the U.S. government gave the group $1.5 million to promote the group’s online movement. This is reminiscent of the actions Western policy makers took during the Cold War when they encouraged the use of the new technologies of the 1980s (Morozov, 2011).

Has this Western emphasis on technology and online communications instead of focusing on people gone to far? Wired Italy, went so far as to nominate the Internet for the
2010 Nobel Peace Prize. Perhaps the most shocking aspect of this nomination was that the Nobel committee did not object (Morozov, 2011). The Nobel Peace prize is intertwined with political intentions. To China, Liu Xiaobo is a criminal, he broke Chinese law and it is understandable why they would want to cast this man as an enemy who appears to be anti-nationalistic with his spreading of pro-democratization rhetoric (Li, 2010). The CCP, used their print English-language mouthpiece, *The China Daily* to voice their issue with the award.

‘I think it is difficult to maintain China-Norway relations as well as they were in the past, because the Nobel Committee conferred the Nobel Peace Prize on a convicted Chinese criminal, and the Norwegian government publicly expressed its support for such a decision,’ said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu.

She urged the international community not to hold double standards with regard to the rule of law, since many other countries including the United States and Britain also have similar laws against subversion (Li, 2010).

Whether or not Liu Xiaobo deserved the prize or not, is not relevant to the recreation of the technological communications apparatus; however, what is significant is that he has sacrificed his freedom for the sake of something he believes in. By doing so he became an icon and image that could be exchanged and trafficked through the myriad of channels of communication that make dissent possible. The Internet cannot do this alone. Who would go up to accept the award? Liu Xiaobo was imprisoned during the same year the Internet was nominated; therefore, requiring the placement of his “empty chair,” but this seems more reasonable than giving the award to an inanimate object. Would Watson, the Jeopardy robot, accept the award on the Internet’s behalf or perhaps Al Gore would make an excellent stand in? There is still also uncertainty to whether or not the Internet is truly a
place for independent thinking and peaceful collaboration; as seen in previous chapters, the Internet has promoted xenophobic attitudes and single-minded discussion.

Summary

New media has the potential to be liberating but it also has the potential to be one-dimensional and confining. In the past, China’s threats were coming from beyond its borders, but with new technology there are increasing threats from within. The CCP is beginning to realize that blocking websites does little to curb the attitudes of the people (Shirky, 2011). These new technologies create interesting dilemmas and questions that will need to be explored in the future. Is the Internet really changing the way people dissent in China and is this trend only unique to this particular nation?

Before new media technologies can be praised as these infallible democratic bastions that facilitate open political systems and engaged citizenry, all sides of the debate must be explored. Research has either been overly positive or extremely pessimistic regarding new technologies, where in reality, it probably functions somewhere in the middle. It is still too soon to predict if new media can radically change the way in which protest and political movements operate. Thus it is important to continue with any research that seeks to explore this topic and those of similar interest.

The new media environment has changed radically the very nature of the production and distribution of news. What is less clear is the extent to which—if at all—these changes better inform consumers of news. Moreover, although the research does not substantiate claims about the democratic-enhancing effect of the new media on politics, much of this research was conducted before the advent of some of the newest tools, such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. As the new media era continues to evolve and the tech-savvy younger generations replace their older counterparts, it is critical to continue to examine the extent to which the new media environment advances
political information and democratic ideals (Fox & Ramos, 2012, p. 14)

The biggest difficulty for researchers will be to keep up with the new technologies as they are emerging faster than anyone can predict.
Conclusion

Presently, the protests that have been successful in China have related to environmental issues. Perhaps the focus on this individual topic, one that is directly related to people’s lived experience as opposed to a broad range of grievances, contributes to the movement’s successful outcome. The CCP has been increasingly more open to certain public protests concerning these environmental issues alongside problems of corruption as they try to polish their image for the global community. Protests help to reveal local officials known to abuse their power. Though China is more receptive to some of these demonstrations, any authoritarian regime’s response is going to be narrowed if these uprisings begin to occur more frequently and without merit.

China’s solution to the increased amount of public interest and dissatisfaction has been to spend more on infrastructure, pollution control, health care and education in rural areas in addition to pursuing the replacement of corrupt and abusive political officials at the local level (Rowen, 2007). In mid-August of last year, demonstrators took to the streets in Dalian, a wealthy port city associated with the rising middle class, to voice their concerns regarding a chemical factory that had been damaged by a storm, forcing the government to shut down the factory (The new middle class rise up, 2011, Sep 3). There seems to be a new willingness by China’s middle class to confront the government over environmental issues. The middle class in any country is more known to emphasize free speech and fair elections than the poor, who are generally more concerned with freedom from poverty and generally more occupied with the daily struggle of survival (Huntington, 1991; The new middle class rise up, 2011). The fact that China has a growing economy and an emerging middle class helps to strengthen this argument.
Perhaps the success of these environmental movements lies in the size of the protest. These movements have been relatively small in size making it easier to assemble a cohesive community that facilitates communication. One of the strengths of the first two movements, the sheer size of the gathering, may have also been their downfall. As the size of these protests began to grow, communications and community began to weaken. But the size of the gathering may be irrelevant as long as the communicative network among those participating in the movement remains stable and intact.

The technological apparatuses discussed throughout this paper have experienced their own Darwinian evolution, and perhaps China’s continual revolution will eventually lead to a gradual reform evolution. “Habermas writes about long lasting and gradual, that is and evolutionary correction of the existing state” (Mitrovic, 2011, p. 221). As new technologies become incorporated, the public sphere will also adapt. Communications is constantly evolving to match social and environmental conditions (Poster, 2006). Throughout these continuing adaptations, the formation of a community is still at the heart of all of these movements regardless of what technologies are implemented (Wasserstrom, 1991).

New technologies, despite the accounts of journalists who have championed the Arab Spring, do not necessarily lead to revolutionary behavior. In fact, in China’s growing modern society a new form of dissident that derives its foundations from the past has begun to gain influence. Avant-garde art curator Johnson Chang has attempted to recreate an entire ancient village, with traditional ceremonies and crafts associated with the time as a form of protest to China’s industrial boom. “China has seen both extreme communism and extreme capitalism in the past 100 years. No other country has tried to cut off its
history more radically” (Perrottet, 2012, p. 74). Younger generations are more caught up by Western consumerism than their own past. Though it is important to look forward, it is also just as necessary to know where one has come from. China’s traditional hutongs, traditional ancient communities, that once lined Tiananmen Square, are being destroyed at an alarming rate (Perrottet, 2012). If there is a growing amount of discussion relating to the loss of dissident voices and the imprisonment of activists, there should be equal concern for the loss of one of the oldest cultures in the world. The destruction of these ancient traditions and architecture was not just the fault of Mao and the communist government. In fact, this process began during the process of Westernization in 1911 (Perrottet, 2012). One could make the argument that ancient traditions began to falter in the presence of the modern social movement, which seemed to begin with Chinese Westernization. This push to return to old artisan crafts and traditions relates back to the incorporation of art from the first chapter. The movement is a dialectical hybridization of older and newer forms, using traditional content like rituals and architecture but via newer modes of communication. “Art has a special role in society,” said Chang in an interview with The Wall Street Journal Magazine. “It provides a public space where reflection is possible and criticism can be launched (Perrottet, 2012).

Technology has not changed the fact that people will continue or cease to protest. There are problems and benefits with the use of any form of technology ranging from the creation of paper to Twitter and Facebook.

Every historical era has seen major conflicts over technology innovation. The printing press is thought to have been disruptive to the established religious and political order of medieval Europe. In a world where knowledge was controlled by Kings and Popes, Johannes Gutenberg’s invention reduced the costs of information and
facilitated broader production and dissemination of knowledge. Its emergence laid the communications groundwork for what became major upheavals in religious and governance” (West, 2011)

In this sense Darnton’s (2000) claim is correct. Technology has been both a burden and a blessing to all sides of the social movement for centuries.

Because they have been so heavily used as symbols for dissent, the past revolutions have achieved an almost myth-like quality. Like all myth, there is no true content, what matters is how they are used. Good and moral messages are extracted and used in future movements without necessarily exploring the true history of what actually occurred. However, this is one of the problems with oral communications. As stories are passed from one generation to the next, the story is often distorted and exaggerated. New technologies do help preserve a more accurate picture of events because all sides utilize them. In time, knowledge of the 1976 revolution may only be accessible in dusty textbooks and newspaper clippings that are mostly written in Mandarin therefore inaccessible to a broader public. What is clear is that these myths and traditions have been recycled to suit the needs of modern protests. “Throughout the past seven decades, writers, activists, and propagandists have continually set about transforming the flesh and blood student protesters of history into mythical heroes. In the process these mythmakers have often oversimplified both the protesters themselves and the meaning of key events” (Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 323). It is safe to assume that since this is the case with the people involved in the protest, the same mythical qualities may also be applied to technology; especially when technology helps perpetuate these myths.
Technology has definitely sped up expectations. As soon as dissent occurs, the media seems quick to label these as “spring” time movements. The Beijing Spring became synonymous with the 1989 pro-democracy movement. And though the citizens in many Arab Countries spoke out and were able to overthrow corrupt and stagnant dictators, there has still been no peaceful or clear endpoint. Egyptians have once again taken to Tahir Square to voice their distaste with the most current presidential election (Bradley, 2012). The media is constantly looking for the next big story, and the Western media in particular seems to want to encourage all countries to go through the process of democratization in a month. Change takes time, even when new and faster technologies are used.

Morozov succinctly summarized the problem with looking at new technologies as facilitators of democratization. In many of these authoritarian countries people are looking more for increased transparency as opposed to a complete regime change. “They deserve a voice, but not a vote” (Morozov, 2011, p. 5). Having a voice has been at the root of Chinese protests since 1912. The people want a voice but they also want control, in the great Confucius tradition, the intellectual elite should make the decisions. Even the democracy movement of 1989 was not arguing for a one person, one vote system, but a structure more along the lines of scholarly leadership that would in turn influence the people as it did in the past. Western policy regarding new technologies and authoritarian governments needs to move away from this concept of cyber-utopianism. Technology cannot change the world without people.

Instead, we’ll need to opt for policies informed by a realistic assessment of the risks and dangers posed by the Internet, matched by a highly scrupulous and unbiased assessment of its promises, and a theory of action that is highly sensitive to the local context, that is cognizant of the complex connections between the Internet and the rest of foreign policymaking, and
that originates not in what technology allows but in what a certain geopolitical environment requires” (Morozov, 2011, p. xvii).

One of the interview subjects claimed, “the young people are the main force of any movement.” When looking at the students of today you see the difference. These students do have the potential to use new technologies to create and challenge civic movements; however, today's Chinese students are not interested. And in fact, these students are among some of the strongest defenders of the regime. Why would they question the government that gave them an improved quality of life? These students seem to want a material life-style and the CCP has provided one. The Chinese University system is now similar to the U.S. system of education in many ways. More young adults now attend college and the process is not as selective. The quality of education has decreased, and as such has produced lower expectations.

New forms of communications whether the printing press, the fax machine or social networking sites have always been heralded as the future of revolution. The fax machine was said to have brought down the Soviet Union and Twitter and Facebook supposedly brought democratic ideals to the Middle East. In a few years, one could easily predict that the new and latest form of technology is going to be the next bastion of freedom. This is not to say that these new technologies do not have the potential to change public discourse, but what this study has demonstrated is that new technologies are often incorporated into older forms of protest. Darnton is correct in asserting that every age is the age of technology and people will find new ways to communicate using these devices. There will still be slogans, theatre, traditions and music and these elements will be adapted to suit these forms of dissent. Technology's role in social movements is not polemic but rather
fluid. It functions somewhere between technological determinism and cyber-utopianism. This paper does not seek to predict the role of technology in the future, for circumstance always have the potential to change. However, in our current society, despite positive media proclamations on the role of technology, people are still the driving force behind social movements.
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