

Chapter 2

Context of Networked Public Communication

Studies on networked public communication should pay attention to specific historical and social context. The chapter first explains the transition of human society from mass society to network society, and the new media landscape following the transition. Then it concludes the rapid development of ICT in the 21st century in China as well as the motive of the Chinese government to promote ICT. The chapter finally elaborates the formation and features of networked public, the subject of networked public communication in contemporary China, as well as the significance of networked public communication to “non-networked public.”

2.1 Social Shift and Mediascape

2.1.1 Mass Society

A town, such as London, where a man may wander for hours together without reaching the beginning of the end, without meeting the slightest hint which could lead to the inference that there is open country within reach, is a strange thing. This colossal centralisation, this heaping together of two and a half millions of human beings at one point, has multiplied the power of this two and a half millions a hundredfold; ...these Londoners have been forced to sacrifice the best qualities of their human nature, to bring to pass all the marvels of civilisation which crowd their city; ... The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels. The hundreds of thousands of all classes and ranks crowding past each other, are they not all human beings with the same qualities and powers, and with the same interest in being happy? And have they not, in the end, to seek happiness in the same way, by the same means? And still they crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and their only agreement is the tacit one, that each keep to his own side of the pavement, so as not to delay the opposing streams of the crowd, while it occurs to no man to honour another with so much as a glance. The brutal indifference, the unfeeling

isolation of each in his private interest, becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space.

Engels¹ sketched with simple strokes London, the capital of the Great Britain, where people there once believed the sun would never set on their Empire. Although he did not use the term of “mass society”, he captured the transformation of European society in the 1800s from observing common people’s life in the city considered as the heart of the then capitalist world. Industrial revolution and capitalism brought about the improvement of productivity and the increase of population while urbanization began to make people have a new life style. High population density existed simultaneously with apathy among people. Pursuing efficiency became a principle, and order and rule became more and more important. Although cities were bustling with people with unprecedented density, communication and interaction among them were too little.

German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies then used the famous notions of “Gemeinschaft” and “Gesellschaft” to distinguish the societies before and after the transformation in the nineteenth century in Europe. In the so-called Gemeinschaft, or community, people lived in small towns or villages with very close interpersonal relationship and were regulated by traditional customs and unwritten norms, where interdependent individuals were closely tied on an interpersonal network by family, custom, and fixed social roles. People in Gesellschaft, or modern industrial society, followed rational choice principles rather than traditional custom. Individuals living in an indifferent atmosphere shouldered less responsibilities and obligations (Baran and Davis 2004).

Echoing the dichotomy, Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist, coined another dichotomy in his famous book *The Division of Labor in Society*: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. From Durkheim’s perspective, a pre-modern community was like a machine, operated in order and never to change. Individuals in such a society turned out to be screws and gears under the control of collective opinion and traditional custom, and their freedom was restricted. The latter treated the modern social order as organism with life and potential to grow and reform, in which individuals grew and changed with the whole society like a cell in organic body with meticulous division. Specialization, division of labor and mutual dependence are the features of an organic solidarity (Durkheim 2000).

These theories corroborates with Karl Marx’s prediction in *Manifesto of the Communist Party*: “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind.”

While Tönnies put more emphasis on the charm and magnificence of the order and custom in the community before social transformation, and Durkheim stressed more on the growth and freedom of the modern society, scholars after them gradually started to look at the merits and demerits brought about by social

¹Ma Ke Si En Ge Si Quan Ji (Complete works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, in Chinese), Volume 2, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1957, p 303–304.

transformation in a more critical way. For instance, Fromm (2007), German psychologist and an early member of Frankfurt School, pointed out that the development of human society is similar to the growth of an individual by reviewing the historic process of Europe from mid-ages to modern times. Humans, on one hand, spent 400 years destroying the medieval world to get rid of the constraints of traditional order, so that humans gradually captured freedom, courage to growth and ration. On the other hand, humans lost the sense of safety stemmed from previous relationship and the fixed position in the closed society—“In the increasingly individualized process, people were beset by feelings of insecurity, insignificance, and doubts about their position in the universe, the meaning of life, as well as more and more feeling of powerlessness and insignificance.”

Fromm observed the gradual, long-lasting effect of social transition on individuals' personality structure from a psycho-analysis angle: “freedom and independence” and “loneliness and discomposure” are two sides of a coin. Freedom of an individual was suppressed further with the rise and crisis of capitalism. Increasing loneliness and hesitation as well as the feeling of insignificance and powerlessness became a hotbed of authoritarianism due to individuals' psychological escape mechanism. Tracing the roots of totalitarianism is to eliminate the reproduction of the Nazi nightmare.

Fromm's thinking influenced the research on the root cause of anti-Semitism personality that Adorno participated in (Adorno 1950). Arendt, the political theorist, wrote in her classical works *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that “atomized” individuals who felling lonely and redundant became the hotbed of totalitarianism tyranny, and she attributed the loneliness of the individuals to capitalist mode of production as well as “modernity.” (Arendt 2008)

All the above theoretical notions noticed the change of humans' way of group living in the process of social transition in Europe. In other words, under industrialization, urbanization, and modernization, the group existence of “mass” emerged in human history, with features including: a large scale, atomization, anonymity, rootlessness, alienation. It is not hard to find that “mass” and “modernity” are closely associated in many aspects while “mass society” and “modern society” are similar in many theories. The study and contemplation on “mass communication” is inseparable with “mass society” theories.

Although theories of mass society are no longer dominant in the academic field with the prosperity of communication studies and limited effects theories in the US, the mass communication mode on itself remained to be a dominant paradigm in the social media system in the twentieth century. “Modernity” was still vital and mass society has not yet disappeared in a real sense.

2.1.2 Network Society

Information technology revolution is one of the most significant factors to transform mass society. As for the human society after the mass society, Daniel Bell

named it the “post-industrial society” in which energy and resources do not play a decisive role (Bell 1984), Jean Baudrillard used “Hyperreality” and “implosion” to refer to a consumer society with signs and images as its core (Baudrillard 2000), and “post-modernity” and “post-modern society” were also extensively discussed (such as Harvey 1990; Lash 1990; Giddens 1991; Jameson 1997; McRobbies 2000).

Manuel Castells convincingly demonstrated the coming of “informational society” in his works: *The Information Age Trilogy: Economy, Society and Culture* (Castells 1996, 1997, 1998). In his opinion, the informational society may have diversified culture and institutions, but “informational” denotes the special attributes of social organizations: information production, processing, and transmission become fundamental sources of productivity and power. In a new information “development mode” (a concept paralleled with “production mode”), productivity is sourced from technology that generates knowledge, processes information, and conducts symbolic communication. Knowledge and information are undoubtedly critical to all “development modes,” but the difference of information “development mode” lies in: the knowledge action oriented to knowledge itself is main sources for productivity.

Informational society is in a form of network. Castells concluded by exploring multiple human activities and experiences in the emerging social structure:

As an historical trend, dominant functions and processes in the Information Age are increasingly organized around networks. Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture. While the networking form of social interests expressed through the networks: the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power.

Presence or absence in the network and the dynamics of each network vis-a-vis others are critical sources of domination and change in our society: a society that, therefore, we may properly call the network society, characterized by the pre-eminence of social morphology over social action (Castells 1996, p. 469).

Although the Internet and other ICT networks are material foundations for a “network society,” the “network” from Castells’ perspective is not the Internet, communication networks or physical networks in a narrow sense; but it, in a much broader sense, includes corresponding social production/consumption patterns, information flow patterns, and institutional structure. Network is a group of nodes linked with each other, and the organization logic and a basic form in the contemporary time. Networks have an open structure, are able to be unlimitedly expanded; and, therefore, a social structure based on networks is an open system with great dynamic and able to innovate, but it does not threaten its equilibrium. In the network society, production and consumption, culture and power, time and space have undergone a transformation, such as “space of flows,” “time of no time,” and “real virtual culture.” From a broader historical perspective, “network society represents a change in the nature of human experience.” Computer-mediated communication system, namely media, is only one of the many social networks. Other networks include the global financial networks, political networks ruling the EU, the world’s drug trade networks, global new media network, and etc.

Nonetheless, communication and media are critically important, because network society is established on the interaction of ICT and society as a whole. The establishment of network society is based on the opposition of Net and Self, and the opposition of instrumental global net and the culture construction of identity. “Nowadays the communication realm, including the new media and the horizontal networks of communication in the new technological environment, is the field in which power relationships are played out. Communication is the center of politics in our world.” (Castells 2006)

In a network society, capital is centralized and globalized, while labors are localized, fragmented in organization, versified in existence, isolated in collective activity. The capital and labor tend to be in different spaces: “spaces of flows” and “spaces of places”. Human society gradually builds around the binary opposition of Net and Self, with one end the instrumental global net selectively connect or disconnect Self, group, community or even the nation, the other end the identity becoming the main or only source of meaning.

In a world of global flows of wealth, power, and images, the search for identity, collective or individual, ascribed or constructed, becomes the fundamental source of social meaning. ...Yet identity is becoming the main, and sometimes the only, source of meaning in an historical period characterized by widespread destructuring of organizations, delegitimation of institutions, fading away of major social movements, and ephemeral cultural expressions. People increasingly organize their meaning not around what they do but on the basis of what they are, or believe they are (Castells 1996, p. 3).

In mass society, the relationships grounded in family, background, blood, locality, etc., gradually fade away, and move toward glocalized social network (referring to Wellman’s argument in last chapter). However, in network society, people could construct self-centered network more freely with multi-choices. Therefore, one of the most important standards for “connection” or not is identity. Traditional organizations have been weakened as so, but it is how “networked public” is grounded.

Identity in the networked society is as crucial as Anthony Giddens mentioned in his work, that in the post-traditional society, self-identity becomes a reflexive project. We create, maintain, and revise a set of biographical narratives, which are the stories of who we are, and how we came to be where we are now. “Self-identity, then, is not a set of traits or observable characteristics. It is a person’s own reflexive understanding of their biography” (Gauntlett 2002).

What to do? How to act? Who to be? There are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity – and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behavior (Giddens 1991, pp. 53, 70).

2.1.3 Mediascape

The so-called mediascape refers to a description and summary of a social panorama at a certain time and a certain place from the perspective related to media. The following five perspectives on today’s mediascape are relative to networked

public communication. Although originated from overseas, these ideas can more or less reflect the status in China in the globalization wave. Nevertheless, we need to be cautious to the difference between the reality in China and abroad.

2.1.3.1 The Second Media Age

Philosopher Mark Poster put forward the idea of “the second media age” as early as the middle of 1990s when the Internet was far from popular. Compared with the first media age when the “broadcast model of communication” was popular in most time of the twentieth century, the second media age is considered by Poster a substitute mode formed through integrating information highway and satellite technology with television, computer, and telephone in a gradually growing process. A system integrating producers, distributors and consumers is taking place, and it is a new configuration of communication relationship, in which, the concepts of producers, distributors and consumers no longer have distinct boundaries, but feature a two-way decentralized communication (Poster 1995).

Poster’s idea is still convincing today. For instance, Chinese scholar Yong Hu (2008, pp. 78–85) described the new media system in the contemporary society as “shared media,” which is defined as a media system “based on various digital technologies, incorporating producers, distributors and consumers, and delimitating traditional information agent” with three features of hyper text, multi-media and interactivity.

Poster’s proposal of “second media age” indicates that a new paradigm should be adopted in an entirely new context. Compared with traditional theoretical paradigm (such as Marxism that concerns liberation from structural oppression or liberalism that worries about infringement of individual freedom), the new paradigm does not admit the existence of “rational, self-disciplined” subject as a prerequisite, but pays more attention to how the multiple, decentralized subject to be constructed and how the identity to form, with more linguistic orientation when considering social problems. This way of thinking is still enlightening today. He also believed that mode of information corresponding to this era is like mode of production to the Marx’s era, which implies an approach to dividing historical period in accordance with symbolic exchange. When observing the contemporary society, the mode centered with action should no longer be adopted; rather, communication itself and the forming process of subject should be noticed. The well-known modern subject has been replaced by the mode of information as a multiple, dispersive and decentered subject, and an unstable identity (Poster 1990).

2.1.3.2 U Time

Ubiquitous time (U Time) as a term is frequently mentioned in the decision-making and practice of government in many countries. Japan took ubiquitous network as an IT strategy for the nation in the twenty-first century and its Ministry

of Internal Affairs and Communications budgeted 73.3 billion Japanese yen to promote an overall development of the nation through implementing “U-Japan.” Japan has till now been a nation that has the largest penetration rate of mobile Internet with the highest level of application. South Korea worked out “U-Korea” strategy in 2004, in a bid to help establish a “society with ubiquitous network in which all the people can enjoy the convenience that modern information technology brings about anytime and anywhere.” By the beginning of 2007, the penetration rate of broadband in South Korea had ranked first on the globe, 48 million people had owned 40 million mobile phones, and the penetration rate of 3G mobile phones had surpassed 50 %. The convergence of radio/television and telecommunications is around the corner in the nation (Zhang 2007).

U time is also the description to how diversified media have been highly integrated and penetrated into people’s daily life and experience. Walter Lippmann’s “the pictures in our heads” as a metaphor represents the perception of scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century of the relationship between media and reality, while the ideas of “simulacrum” and “hyperreality” put forward by Baudrillard or Castells’ “real virtuality” displayed how scholars in the U time experienced in the relationship between the so-called “reality” and its symbolic simulation or representation.

Scott Lash, the British sociologist, talked about U times in one of his lectures at Tsinghua University. He believed that when humans’ way of communication became immersively ubiquitous, the communication studies would shift from the previous paradigm of sociology and linguistics to mediaology. Why mediaology rather than media in the vision of sociology? It is because, in Lash’s opinion, media in the U time have their unique characteristics and logic, more and more space becomes media space, people can easily separate themselves from the environment and conduct long-distance communications, escape from traditional social logic and norms, and finally form a new behavior mode.

2.1.3.3 Convergence Culture

Media convergence has been frequently mentioned by academics and industry in the past decade, for example *Convergence Culture* was published by Henry Jenkins from MIT. Convergence not only involves technology but also industry, culture, and social transition, including flow of content across multiple media platforms, the co-operation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. The process of media content across different media systems, economic systems, and national boundaries depends on the active participation of consumers to an extreme extent. “Convergence” should not be considered as a technological process in which media devices provide multiple mediation functions; on the contrary, it represents a sort of transformation of culture: consumers are encouraged to seek new information and create links in the diffusive media content.

The core of the so-called “convergence culture” is “participatory culture.” Media producers and consumers should be treated as interactive participators today. Of course, companies, and media practitioners still have greater power than individual consumers and even a group of consumers. Some consumers are more capable to participate in newly emerged culture than other consumers.

Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others. Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives. ...Collective intelligence can be seen as an alternative source of media power. ...Right now, we are mostly using this collective power through our recreational life, but soon we will be deploying those skills for more “serious” purposes (Jenkins 2006, pp. 3–4).

Convergence is top-down process driven by enterprises, but also a bottom-up process driven by consumers. The convergence of enterprises exists simultaneously with the convergence of grass-roots. Media companies are learning how to promote the flow of content across platforms so as to expand their profit and market and enhance the support from their audiences. Consumers are learning how to use multiple media technologies and self-control the media flow while interacting with other consumers (Jenkins 2006).

2.1.3.4 YOU Time

“You” were chosen as *Time* magazine’s “person of the year” in 2006. The cover of the magazine’s December issue featured a computer monitor made from a reflective material that could reflect the image of whoever picks up the magazine, while previous “person of the year” is often famous figures. The feature story of the same issue explained why “You” was chosen as the “person of the year”:

And we didn’t just watch, we also worked. Like crazy. We made Facebook profiles and Second Life avatars and reviewed books at Amazon and recorded podcasts. We blogged about our candidates losing and wrote songs about getting dumped. We camcordered bombing runs and built open-source software.

America loves its solitary geniuses—its Einsteins, its Edisons, its Jobses—but those lonely dreamers may have to learn to play with others. Car companies are running open design contests. Reuters is carrying blog postings alongside its regular news feed. Microsoft is working overtime to fend off user-created Linux. We’re looking at an explosion of productivity and innovation, and it’s just getting started, as millions of minds that would otherwise have drowned in obscurity get backhauled into the global intellectual economy.

Who are these people? ...The answer is, you do. And for seizing the reins of the global media, for founding and framing the new digital democracy, for working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game, TIME’s Person of the Year for 2006 is you (Grossman 2006).

The idea may be exaggerate to some extent, but it triggered extensive attention and recognition for its reflection of the reality. Just like the concept of Web 2.0, even if it is used for commercial exploitation, transition of the Internet it described

is not illusory. High-level interactivity, customization, collaborative production, free information, user-generated content, social networks, and making friends—all these elements make the Internet more open, mutual benefiting, and prosperous. Web 2.0 is centered with individuals while at the meanwhile emphasizes social and group features, strengthens the communication capability of common people, and promotes the prosperity of networked public communication with extensive influence on the whole society.

In addition, trust on “You time” is stemmed from basic democratic ideas in the Western society. Stengle, editor of *Times*, said

...that individuals are changing the nature of the information age, that the creators and consumers of user-generated content are transforming art and politics and commerce, that they are the engaged citizens of a new digital democracy.... Some have called it an “amateur hour.” And it often is. But America was founded by amateurs. The framers were professional lawyers and military men and bankers, but they were amateur politicians, and that’s the way they thought it should be. Thomas Paine was in effect the first blogger, and Ben Franklin was essentially loading his persona into the MySpace of the 18th century, Poor Richard’s Almanack. The new media age of Web 2.0 is threatening only if you believe that an excess of democracy is the road to anarchy. I don’t (Stengle 2006).

2.1.3.5 Digital Divide

The reason why “digital divide” is pointed out is to indicate social differences and inequality still remain grim even in today when ICT and media system are developing rapidly. We have not leaped to and it is quite difficult for us to live in the rosy heaven. Many places in the world are quite far from the landscape described by the above-mentioned ideas, and it is even completely alien in the eyes of many people. It is also part of the mediascape.

Although there are 1.5 billion Internet users, 75 % of the world population has no access to the Internet. Figure 1.1 charts the penetration rate of the Internet on the globe, while Fig. 2.1 charts the penetration rate of mobile phones. The large difference with regard to the penetration rates between the developed and developing economies is a strong proof of the existence of digital divide.

The digital divide also exists in a city, a province or a nation, which is reflected by the inequity of access and also the inequity of usage (Noriss 2001). Those who cannot have digital devices or enjoy information service and those who can access the network but lack adequate skills and literacy, just as Castells pointed out, are being excluded by the increasingly networked and globalized world, turning to be victims of poverty, violence, and crime.

On the other hand, despite the existence of the digital divide, the fact that some proportions of the population do not have access to information infrastructure will not hinder the judgment that we are in a network society. The size of the population is not the most critical standard to evaluate the actual power and influence of a certain group in a society, while the system and logic of a society is usually not decided by the majority of the population.

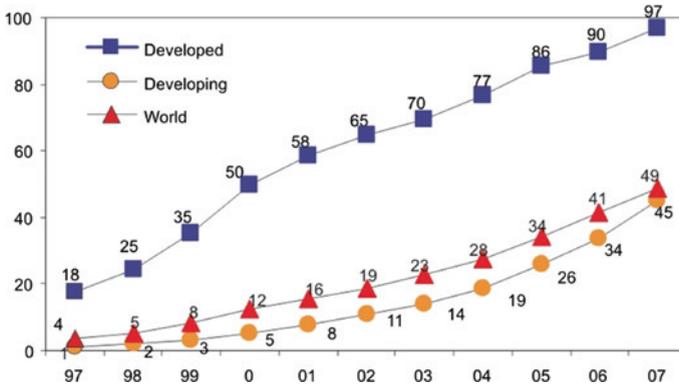


Fig. 2.1 Mobile telephone subscribers per 100 inhabitants. Figure is quoted from ITU. Market Information and Statistics. [2009-04-02]. <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/>

2.2 China's ICT in the Twenty-First Century

China, as an undeveloped nation in modernization, achieved high-speed development in economy in the 20 years after its reform and opening-up. The rapid development of the ICT industry not only becomes an economic growth point for its national economy, but also pillars the growth of other industries. The emergence of networked public and the rise of networked public communication cannot exist without the base and social cultural environment brought by ICT's rapid development. The motives that Chinese government supports and promotes the development of the ICT industry with great efforts as well as the changing of its development strategies for the industry have inherent connection to the context of networked public communication.

2.2.1 What Is ICT

ICT, a short form for information communication technology, is the organic integration of the services and application of telecommunication, information, and IT. It may incorporate more industries or social departments in the future with the integration of technology and media.

The world wide popularization of the concept ICT owes a lot to the promotion of International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a large transnational organization with 145 years of history, 200 member countries, and 700 sector members. It even describe itself as a United Nations specialized for information and telecommunication technologies and is "committed to connecting the world."

ICT formally appeared in the theme of 34th World Telecommunication Day, 2002, for the first time, which read "ICT for all: empowering people to cross the

Digital Divide.” In 2004, ITU once again selected a theme concerning ICT on the 36th World Telecommunication Day—“ICTs: leading the way to sustainable development.”²

The former Ministry of Information Industry of China, which is now merged into the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT), had held summits or high-level conference titled “ICT China” for several consecutive years since 2005, inviting related governmental departments, leading enterprises in the field of information and communications, leaders of associations in the industry. With years of advocating and promotion, the concept ICT is well known in China.³

ICT industry in China was under the administration and control of the Ministry of Information Industry before the establishment of MIIT. In the organizational reform launched by the State Council, the former Ministry of Information Industry and the State Council Informatization Office were replaced by the newly established MIIT and the latter took over all their responsibilities. Among the 15 main duties that MIIT holds, 13 directly concern ICT.

2.2.2 The Development History of ICT in China

The development of ICT in China can be divided into four stages.

2.2.2.1 “Golden Projects” Period

Commencing in 1993, the “Golden Projects,” represented by the “three-golden-projects,” raised the curtain to develop ICT in a large scale in the nation.

The “Golden Bridge Project,” one of the “three-golden-projects,” is for the construction of infrastructure so as to promote the informatization of national economy in China, which is also an information transmission and processing platform for the “Golden Card Project” and the “Golden Custom Project.” It is the key network for the realization of informatization in the nation and a significant part of the information super highway in the nation. The “Golden Custom Project” is a national economic and trade information network project. The “Golden Card Project” starts with electronic monetary projects, planning to propel and popularize financial trading cards among 300 million urban residents in a period of about 10 years and finally entering an electronic money era. Besides the above-mentioned “three-golden-projects,” the “Golden Projects” also include “Golden

²For more information about the profile of ITU, please refer to its official website at <http://www.itu.int/>.

³Another popular concept in China is TMT (the acronyms of Technology, Media, and Telecommunications), which reflects the convergence of related industries. However, it is mainly preferred in the industrial and investment sectors and less popular than ICT, which is universal and widely used in all sectors of the society.

Intelligence Project,” “Golden Enterprise Project,” “Golden Tax Project,” “Golden Transportation Project,” “Golden Agriculture Project,” “Golden Library Project,” “Golden Health Project,” and “Golden Shield Project.”

Echoing the vision of “information super highway” originated in the United States, the series of “Golden Projects” strive to lay an all-around foundation and a framework for the development of ICT in China.

2.2.2.2 Period of System Reform in the Telecommunication Industry

Although the growth speed of the ICT industry in the last 20 years is triple that of GDP in total in China (Zhao 2007a), strictly speaking, however, the all-around rapid progress of ICT in a real sense in the nation was in the last 10 years, which benefits from the measures under the system reform of the telecommunication industry. The Ministry of Information Industry was established in 1998. Since then, the government function is separated from enterprise management and the regulation on pricing is relieved.

The year of 2000 is an epoch-making year for the telecommunication industry in the nation, which witnessed the end of the “joint operation of posts and telecommunication” and the “combination of government functions and enterprise management.” Established in May 2000, China Telecommunication Corporation (China Telecom) is so far the largest fixed network and data communications operator in the nation, boasting the largest scale of fixed phone network and data communications network in the world.

China Mobile Limited (China Mobile), established in 2000, features at present the largest mobile communications network and customer scale on the globe through being listed on the New York Stock Exchange and the Stock Exchange of Hong Kong Limited, a series of capital operation, as well as merger and acquisitions. China Mobile Communication Company Limited (“CMC”), a subsidiary of China Mobile, is so far the largest telecommunication operator in the globe in terms of the market value and is one of the most valuable Chinese companies listed on the overseas stock markets, with an annual turnover of 412.3 billion yuan in 2008, a net profit of about 112.793 billion yuan the same year, and a market value of about 1,559.5 billion Hong Kong dollars on December 31, 2008. By contrast, the market value of Google, a start-up favored by the capital market and a leading company in the field, is less than half of that of China Mobile at the same time. Either Google’s global revenue or net profit is only one third of that of China Mobile in 2008.

In accordance with the “System Reform Scheme in the Telecommunications Industry” approved by the State Council in 2001, the former China Telecom was separated into new China Telecom and China Netcom Group (China Netcom). Free competition was encouraged between the two groups in a bid to cope with international competitive pressure that the telecommunication industry would meet after China’s entry into WTO, though the two groups reached a “co-operation agreement” by themselves to stop the competition and thus created a regional

monopoly structure later. China Railway Communication Co. Ltd.⁴ (China Railcom) and China Jitong Communications⁵ once participated in the competition for a certain time.

At the threshold of the new millennium, a worldwide frenzy of the Internet and information technology undoubtedly made impact on the decision making of the Chinese government and civil investment. Although there were indeed bubbles in an economic perspective, objectively speaking, it greatly promoted the prosperity of the telecommunication network and other information infrastructure. The conditional competition structure, such as administrative licensing and interference as well as regional monopoly, and market orientation established through the system reform in around 2000 was a significant prerequisite and basic assurance for the prosperity of ICT in the years that followed.

2.2.2.3 Tenth Five-Year Plan Period

From 2001–2005 was the Tenth Five-Year Plan period in China. At the beginning of the Five Tenth-Year Plan, the CPC leading nucleus set out a strategy to promote industrialization and modernization through informatization in the nation. The fifth plenary session of the 15th Central Committee of CPC attached great importance on informatization and considered it as a national strategy. At the 16th National Congress of CPC, IT was positioned as “a logical choice” to accelerate industrialization and modernization of the nation. Jiang Zeming stressed in his report on the 16th National Congress of CPC that “it is, therefore, necessary to persist in using IT to propel industrialization, which will, in turn, stimulate IT application,” “blazing a new trail to industrialization” and that “we must give priority to the development of the information industry and apply IT in all areas of economic and social development.”⁶

Adhering to the strategic thoughts, the total revenue of IT industry in China reached 4,400 billion yuan in 2005, which is 4.6 times of that at the end of the Ninth Five-Year Plan. The value-added of the IT industry grew to 1.3 trillion yuan and accounted for 7.2 % of the GDP, compared to that of 4 % at the end of the Ninth Five-Year Plan.

Electronic information manufacturing industry became the largest export industry in China, with an export value of 268 billion yuan taking 35 % of the total export value of China. The production and sales volume of mobile phones stored

⁴The former China Railway Communication Co. Ltd. (China Railcom) was established in 2000 and was mainly engaged in fixed phone operation and cable broadband services. It was merged into China Mobile in May 2008.

⁵China Jitong Communications was established in 1994 and was responsible for the construction and operation of the “Three Golden Projects.” It was merged into China Netcom Group in October 2001.

⁶See *Full text of Jiang Zemin's report at 16th Party Congress IV*. Xinhua.com. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2002-11/18/content_632554.htm.

program control exchanges, color TV sets, computers in China ranked first in the world. The market share of laptop computers produced by Chinese companies, and subsidiaries of foreign companies in China took up 55 % of the sales volume in the whole world, flat panel TV took up 30 %, and microprocessors took up 20 % (Ministry of Information Industry 2007; Zhao 2007a).

In the Tenth Five-year Plan period, fixed assets investment of the telecommunication industry amounted to 1 trillion yuan in accumulation and a telecommunication network was established with leading technologies in the world. Figures 2.2 and 2.3 reflects the construction of communications infrastructure starting from 1990, in which the mobile phone exchange capability and the length of long-distance fiber-optical cable had obvious increase in the Tenth Five-year Plan period.

In the 5 years, the number of the Internet users increased 37.6 % per year in average and amounted to 110 million in 2005, leaping to second spot in the world. The number of users going online through broadband grew rapidly, with a total number of 64.3 million in 2005. Population coverage of radio and TV reached 94.6 and 95.6 %, respectively, and cable TV users reached 128 million. Fixed phone users increased 100 million per year in average and reached 740 million in 2005, ranking first in the globe. 97.1 % administrative villages in China had access to phone services the same year.

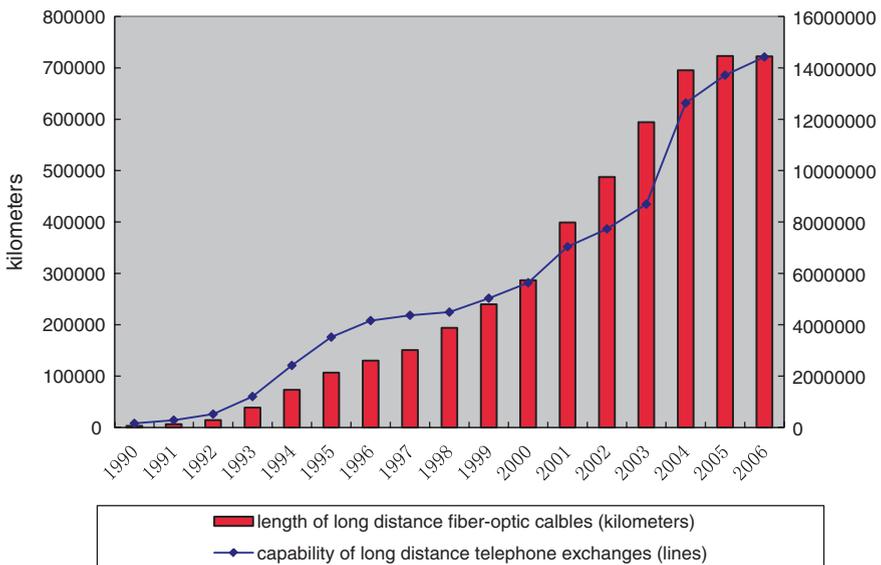


Fig. 2.2 The capacity of long-distance telephone exchanges and the length of long-distance fiber-optic cables (1990–2006). Data from: “China Statistical Yearbook 2007”

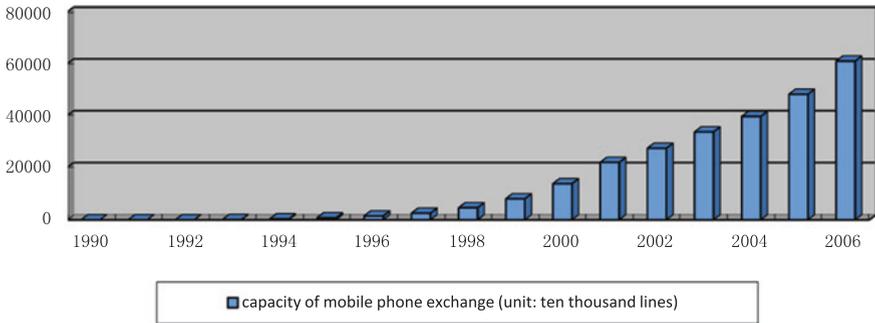


Fig. 2.3 Capacity of mobile phone exchange in China (1990–2006). Data from: “China Statistical Yearbook 2007”

2.2.2.4 Eleventh Five-Year Plan Period

China obtained significant development on ICT in the Tenth Five-Year Plan period and the sector of ICT became a vital pillar and driver for the growth of economy in the nation. Therefore, the Chinese government carried forward the strategy in the Tenth Five-Year Plan period in the following 5 years. The document “State Informatization Development Strategy (2006–2020),” jointly released by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council asserts that the development of IT is “strategic measures,” “urgent need,” and “logical choice.”

Informatization is the development trend in today’s world and a significant power to propel the economic and social transformation. Vigorously promoting the process of informatization is a strategic measure concerning the overall construction of modernization in our country as well as an urgent need and a logical choice to implement the scientific development concept, construct a well-off society in an all-around way, establish a socialist harmonious society and build up an innovative nation.

Related guiding principles and plans also included the “Plan of the Information Industry in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan Period” launched by MIIT and the “Plan for Informatization of the National Economy and Social Development in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan Period” issued by the National Development and Reform Commission. The main objectives of the development of informatization are in the three key areas: “propelling the transformation of economic development mode, promoting the construction of a harmonious society, and booming advanced culture.” The documents also pointed out that the basic conditions of the “information industry, network infrastructure and information security” are significant supports for the development of informatization.⁷

⁷Translated from answering of questions from journalists on the “Plan for Informatization of the National Economy and Social Development in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan Period” by a lead of the National Development and Reform Commission. Available at: http://www.gov.cn/zwhd/2008-04/17/content_947090.htm. [2008-04-20].

Besides the guidance and strong support of the national administrative authorities, the rapid growth of economy was also a catalyst for the development of ICT in China. GDP increased at an average speed of over 10 % per year from 2004–2006, when economy in China ran in high gear and the government encouraged “slowing investment and stimulating consumption.” The income and consumption level was improving and consumption demands were large enough to guide the basic constructions of ICT and its application services.

Accordingly, the rapid development of ICT infrastructure and the application services in the industry held up the biggest groups of Internet users and telephone users in the globe.

In the first half of 2008, the number of Internet users in China surpassed that in the US for the first time, ranking first in the world. By the end of 2009, there had been 384 billion Internet users in China, and the Internet penetration had reached 28.9 %, above the global average. There was an increase of 86 billion Internet users in 2009.

By December, 2008, fixed phone users in China reduced to 340 million, with a decrease of 24.83 million over the same period of the year before, while mobile phone users increased by 93.92 million and reached 640 million over the same period of the year before. The coverage rate of fixed phone network came to 25.78 % and mobile phone 48.54 %. In December, 2009, telephone users in China amounted to 1.06 billion in total, among which 310 million were fixed phone users and 750 million mobile phone users—mobile phone users took up 70.4 % of total phone users.⁸

The revenue of main operations of the telecommunications industry reached 842.43 billion yuan in 2009, with an increase of 45.3 % compared to the revenue of the industry in 2005, the last year of the Tenth Five-Year Plan. Fixed assets investment in the telecommunications industry amounted to 1,114.54 billion yuan in the fours from 2006–2009, surpassing the 5 years’ total investment of 1 trillion yuan in the Tenth Five-Year Plan.⁹

In the electronic information manufacturing industry, China was still a “world factory” and a real No. 1 manufacturing country in electronic products such as mobile phones, personal computers, color TV sets, digital cameras, and laser disks which, respectively, took up 49.9, 60.9, 48.3, 80, and 85 % of the total volume in the globe. The trade value of electronic information products in China accounted for more than 15 % of that in the globe.¹⁰ However, among these products, those

⁸Data from the “Monthly Statistical Report in the Communications Industry” and “Accomplishment of Main Indexes in the Communications Industry” in 2008 and 2009, released by MIIT.

⁹Data from the “National Statistical Report of the Telecommunication Industry 2009” released by the MIIT. [2010-06-12]. Available at: <http://www.miit.gov.cn/n11293472/n11293832/n11294132/n12858447/13011909.html>.

¹⁰Data from the “Economic Operation Report in the Electronic Information Industry 2009” released by MIIT. [2010-06-12]. Available at: <http://www.miit.gov.cn/n11293472/n11293832/n11294132/n12858462/13009463.html>.

of foreign enterprises grabbed a major market share. For example, mobile phones produced by foreign invested enterprises accounted for 83 % of China's total volume of the exported mobile phones in 2008. Mobile phones produced by Nokia, Motorola, Sony Ericson, and Sumsung took up 71.5 % of the total export volume.¹¹

Although, affected by the international financial crisis, the increase of profit in the electronic information industry slowed down, profit in the mobile phone manufacturing turned negative in 2008, and the production of personal computers, laptop computers, and computer monitors declined month by month; electronic information industry was still strong, prosperous source for profit within the ICT industry in China in terms of total production value. In 2009, main operation revenue above scale in the electronic information industry reached 6,081.8 billion yuan.¹²

Adding to the economic prosperity, the development of the telecommunication industry in the Tenth Five-Year Plan period displayed a trend of ubiquity—efforts to diminish digital divide, dominance of mobile communications and data services based on mobile phone terminals, and the embrace of the 3G era.

China Mobile invested accumulatively 13 billion yuan between 2004 and 2006 to carry out “Cuncuntong Telephone Project,” aiming to connect every village in China to telephone networks and reduce regional imbalance of ICT infrastructure. According to the statistics of MIIT, among the 70,000 villages with no access to telephone services, China Mobile had opened services for 29,773 villages by September 30, 2006, increasing the telephone coverage at the administrative village level by 4.3 %.¹³ By the end of 2009, almost all administrative villages had benefited from the project. Every 100 people in China owned 79.9 telephones and the telephone penetration reached 99.86 % in administrative villages in China. 93.4 % of villages with 20 households or above had access to fixed telephone services. In view of the possibility that fixed telephones and public phones can be shared, we can tell that almost all Chinese were covered by telecommunication networks (see Table 2.1). The Internet penetration reached 99.35 % at the township level and 91.5 % at the administrative village level.¹⁴

¹¹Data from the “Review of the Development of Mobile Phone Industry in 2008 and the Forward Look in 2009 in China” released by MIIT. [2010-06-12]. Available at: <http://www.miit.gov.cn/n11293472/n11295057/n11298508/11993684.html>.

¹²Data from the “Economic Operation Report in the Electronic Information Industry 2009” released by MIIT. [2010-06-12]. Available at: <http://www.miit.gov.cn/n11293472/n11293832/n11294132/n12858462/13009463.html>.

¹³chinamobile.com: “Assist the Construction of New Socialist Countryside—the Cuncuntong Telephone Project”. [2009-04-01]. Available at: <http://www.chinamobile.com/cr/P040201.html>.

¹⁴“Cuncuntong Telephone Project Over-Fulfilling Annual Quotas in 2009” released by MIIT. [2010-06-12]. Available at: <http://www.miit.gov.cn/n11293472/n11293832/n11294132/n12858447/12965551.html>.

Table 2.1 Telephone penetration in China (2002–2009)

| Index | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Telephone penetration (including mobile phones) (telephone per 100 inhabitants) | 33.60 | 42.16 | 50.03 | 57.22 | 63.40 | 69.4 | 74.3 | 79.9 |
| Mobile phone penetration (telephone per 100 inhabitants) | 16.10 | 21.02 | 25.91 | 30.26 | 35.30 | 41.6 | 48.5 | 56.3 |
| Proportion of administrative villages with access to fixed phone services (%) | 87.90 | 89.94 | 91.18 | 94.40 | 95.90 | 99.5* | 99.7* | 99.86* |

Data from: 2002–2006 data from “China Statistical Yearbook 2007,” 2007–2009 data from statistical materials released by MIIT

Data marked with * represent the “proportion of administrative villages with access to phone services (%)”

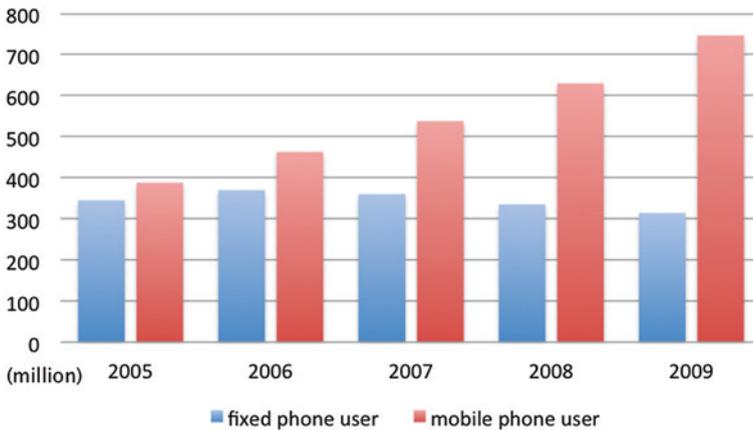


Fig. 2.4 The proportion of Mobile Phone Users in China from 2005–2009. Figure from the “National Statistical Report in the Telecommunication Industry in 2009” released by MIIT

The notion of “mobile” is worth noticing in telecommunication industry. In 2004, the number of mobile phone users in China began to surpass that of fixed phone users. From 2007, the number of fixed phone users began to decrease (Fig. 2.4). Mobile phones were not only communication tools, but also movable terminals for data and information service. And the latter function became the most significant revenue source for the telecommunication industry.

On May 24, 2008, a report was launched in joint efforts by MIIT, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Finance, announcing that the telecommunication industry in China was to be restructured again—the structure was changed from the co-existence of the previous six

telecommunication operators of China Telecom, former China Netcom, former China Mobile, former China Unicom, China Satcom and China Railcom to the “division” by the present three giants: China Telecom, China Mobile, and China Unicom (China United Network Communications Group Co. Ltd.).

On January 7, 2009, China Mobile, China Telecom and China Unicom obtained license of 3G mobile network issued by MIIT, which marked China's entry to the “third generation of mobile telecommunications” era. And a new competition structure emerged. Yizhong Li, the former Minister of MIIT, anticipated on a press conference held by State Council Information Office that investment in 3G in China would reach at least 200 billion yuan in 2009. And top levels of China Telecom and China Unicom publicly supported the anticipation.¹⁵ In a longer term, Jinqiao Chen, deputy chief engineer, China Academy of Telecommunication Research under MIIT, predicted the 3G industry chain would trigger about 2,000 billion yuan of social investment in the 3 years that followed, and the three giant operators' investment for construction of 3G networks would reach 280 billion yuan in the 2 years that followed.¹⁶ It can be told that 3G industry chain would become a new, strong economic growth point in the ICT industry in the years that followed.

ICT, at its present development level, incorporated every social sector into the process of informatization, with no exception of communications and media. Media are the extension of human beings, and communication is in essence interpersonal behaviors, which drives various new possibilities after being expanded and strengthened by ICT. Media environment ubiquitous and the overlaps of social networks and information networks are the products being shaped by the integration of ICT with media and communication.

2.2.3 Comparison Between the Development of ICT in China and the Globe

A brief comparison on the access to and the application of ICT between China and the globe is made below to provide a better and comprehensive understanding of the development of ICT in China.

There are many indexes to evaluate the ICT access. Here in this book the following indexes are adopted: the number of fixed phones, the number of mobile phones, and the Internet users among every 100 inhabitants. Figure 2.5 reflects the three indexes in 2007 in the developed economies, at the global average level, in emerging economies and in China, respectively.

¹⁵3G Business Equaling 13 Three Gorges Projects and Investment from Operators Surging, *Communications Information News*. Reprinted by ifeng.com. [2008-12-17]. Available at: <http://finance.ifeng.com/news/industry/20081217/264051.shtml>.

¹⁶ 3G business—a trillion yuan cake to be divided. *Dongfang Daily*. Reprinted by ifeng.com. [2009-1-7]. Available at: <http://finance.ifeng.com/zq/zqyw/20090107/30346.shtml>.

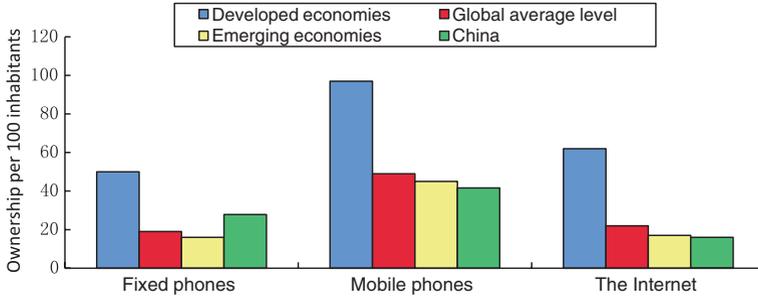


Fig. 2.5 Penetration level of ICT infrastructure in 2007. Data about China in Fig. 2.5 quoted from “China Statistical Yearbook 2007” and other data introduced from ITU, Market Information and Statistics. [2009-04-01]. Available at: <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/>

It is not hard to find out that China topped the world and even ranked first in terms of both the scale and quantity of ICT infrastructure, but at the meanwhile, ICT penetration of China is not prominent in the world resulted from the large population, wide gap between the rich and the poor, and the imbalance of regional development as shown in other sectors in China. According to the development curve and figures, China was much lower than those of the developed economies on the above three indexes and was close to the global average level and those of other emerging economies. However, the development of ICT grew rapidly after 2007, surpassing the global average level with regards to the ownership of mobile phones and the Internet penetration.

Meanwhile, what Fig. 2.5 reveals also confirms the importance of the concept of “mobile”—figure of mobile phone penetration is much higher than the other two indexes in all regions in the world, with that of the developed economies at nearly 100 % and the emerging economies close to 50 %. With the coming of the 3G era, the rapid development of mobile Internet and the decrease of mobile phone bill would turn mobile phone users directly to the Internet users in the years that followed, resulting in another explosive increase of Internet penetration in the globe. The trend would help narrow the “digital divide” in terms of the infrastructure and basic access. The industry, culture, and the society would feel even stronger impact.

Besides “access,” “usage” is another significant index to evaluate the development level of ICT. How users use ICT to satisfy their demands is up to many factors such as information literacy, culture custom, and social rules. Below is a comparison of different usage behavior between Chinese Internet users and those in other parts of the world, based on two research programs.

The “World Internet Project (WIP)”,¹⁷ a large-scale collaborative research program involving scores of countries, usually publishes reports on individual countries or regions. However, in December 2008, it released the global findings on the

¹⁷Please refer to WIP website at: <http://www.worldinternetproject.net/>.

usage of the Internet for the first time—the “World Internet Project—International Report 2009.” It summarizes how the Internet was used and how it affected a variety of beliefs, attitudes, and behavior around the world.

By analyzing data from the report, the following conclusions could be drawn concerning Chinese¹⁸ Internet users' behavior.

First, the Internet was considered as an important information source, but with very “cautious” attitude to the reliability of online information.

When answering the question “how important is the Internet as an information source?”, 54 % of Internet users in urban China considered the Internet is “important,” with another 27 % who considered it as being “very important.” Respondents of the two categories in total accounted for 81 %, second only to Columbia (86 %), equal to that of the United States and a little bit higher than other nine countries or regions.

However, as for the question “how much of the Information on the World Wide Web overall is generally reliable?”, in ten WIP countries or regions reported, over 40 % of the Internet users trust only half or less of online information. Urban China ranked first in the list, with 70 % of urban Chinese Internet users saying half or less of online information is reliable and 16 % saying only “a small portion” or “none” of the information online is reliable. Other countries and regions in which high percentages of respondents trust about half or less of online information to be reliable were: Sweden (64 %), Canada (62 %), and Australia (60 %).

Second, searching product information and purchasing online is not popular.

Although, in the mind of many people, taobao.com, dangdang.com, and other e-commerce websites are very popular, as high as 42 % of the urban Chinese who go online have never used the Internet for any product information. The percentage in urban China is much larger than that of the US (6 %), UK (10 %), Czech Republic (13 %), Sweden (14 %), Hungary (15 %), New Zealand (17 %), and Australia (17 %).

As for buying online, more than half of the users in seven countries or regions have never purchased online. 63 % of urban Chinese who go online have never bought online—Although it is not the largest percentage, it is much higher than the countries in which buying online is popular such as the US (12 %), UK (21 %), and Sweden (25 %). With regard to the online buying frequency, the top four countries with the highest percentage of users who buy online on a weekly base are the UK (18 %), the US (14 %), Australia and the Czech Republic (12 %). The corresponding percentage in urban China is only 6.4 %. The four countries that rank top four in terms of the percentage of users who buy online at least once in a month are: the UK (47 %), the US (46 %), New Zealand (40 %), and Australia (38 %), with urban China at 11.4 %.

Third, online banking, online payment, and other online financial behavior are not popular.

¹⁸Data in the report concerning Chinese Internet users could only represent users in urban China, but not all Chinese Internet users, probably due to the methodology of drawing samples for conducting the studies in China.

Online payment is the most frequent in Sweden and 70 % of users reported go online to pay bills at least once every month, followed by Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the US ranging from 50–60 %. The percentage of urban Chinese users is about 11 %, which has a very large gap with the top five countries. 78 % of urban Chinese users have never paid bills online, only second to Hungary (89 %) and Columbia (85 %). The percentage of users in Sweden who have never paid online is only 22 %.

The highest percentages of using online banking services at least monthly were reported in New Zealand (78 %), Sweden (77 %), Australia, Canada, the US, and the UK, also ranging from 56–60 %. However, only 22 % of urban Chinese users who go online use online banking services at least once on a monthly basis, while 67 % of them have never used online banking services. The latter is only lower than that in Hungary and Columbia, comparing to only 20 % in Sweden and 31 % in the US.

Fourth, less students in urban China find information for their school work through Internet.

In ten of the countries and regions reported, more than 70 % students go online for school work at least weekly. In nine countries or regions, more than 30 % of student users go online for school work daily. The highest daily use of Internet for school work was reported in Australian at 62 %, while the percentage is only 9 % in urban China.

And, 84 % student users in the US go online for information related to their school work at least weekly, whereas the rest 16 % go online at least monthly. No student user who never goes online for school work or does so less than monthly was reported. By contrast, 26 % student users in urban China never go online for school work or do so less than monthly.

Fifth, watching/downloading online videos, listening to/downloading online music, and other entertainment behavior are very popular.

In all countries or regions reported, only in urban China do more than 30 % of the Internet users watch/download online videos at least weekly (figure is actually as high as 37 % in urban China), while only 17 % of the Internet users in the US download/watch online videos.

41 % of the Internet users in urban China never watch/download online videos, while more than 60 % of Internet users never watch/download online videos in the US and Canada, with more than 70 % in Australia and New Zealand. In consequence, the popularity and frequency of listening to/downloading music in urban China ranks first in all countries or regions reported.

Generally speaking, the report demonstrates that China has the largest Internet user group in the world who prefer to use the Internet for entertainment. The Internet usage for learning, obtaining information, commerce of everyday life and finance is relatively not popular and frequent, which still has a wide gap with developed countries or regions in North America, North Europe, and Western Europe. It should be noted that, according to the latest statistical data from CNNIC, commercial use develops the fastest among the 16 categories of Internet use in China. The top three categories of Internet use with the largest growth rate

of users in China were online purchasing (with a growth rate of 31.4 %) in the first half of 2010, online payment (with a growth rate of 36.2 %) and online banking (with a growth rate of 29.9 %). Purchasing online surpassed the use of “forum/BBS” that was Chinese Internet users' favorite online activity (CNNIC 2010b). All these show that habit of Internet users in China has changed, and the Internet is playing more and more important roles in all sectors with close relations to common people's everyday life.

In another cross-country study, the researchers conducted surveys on 2,000 youth Internet users (aged 16–25) in the US and China so as to find the differences in Internet behavior between them.¹⁹ The report of the study released in the end of 2007 revealed that:

- Almost five times as many Chinese as American respondents said they have a parallel life online (61 vs. 13 %).
- As many as 80 % of Chinese respondents agreed that “Digital technology is an essential part of how I live,” compared with 68 percent of Americans.
- Chinese youth are twice as likely as young Americans to say they would not feel OK going without Internet access for more than a day (25 vs. 12 %). And more than twice as many Chinese youth admitted they sometimes feel “addicted” to living online: 42 versus 18 % of Americans.
- More than 5 times as many Chinese respondents agreed that “I have experimented with how I present myself online” (69 vs. 28 % of Americans). And more than half the Chinese sample (51 %) said they have adopted a completely different persona in some of their online interactions, compared with only 17 % of the US youth.
- Fewer than a third of the US respondents (30 %) said the Internet helps their social life, but more than three-quarters of Chinese respondents (77 %) agreed that “The Internet helps me make friends.” Three times as many Chinese as Americans (32 vs. 11 %) were willing to admit that the Internet has broadened their sex life.
- Almost 73 % of Chinese respondents said they go online to share opinions, while only 43 % of the US respondents agreed that “I often use the Internet to find the opinions of others or to share my opinions.” Chinese respondents were also more likely than Americans to say they have expressed personal opinions or written about themselves online (72 vs. 56 %). And they have expressed themselves more strongly online than they generally do in person (52 vs. 43 % of Americans).
- Chinese respondents were almost twice as likely as Americans to agree that it is good to be able to express honest opinions anonymously online (79 vs. 42 %) and to agree that online they are free to do and say things they would not do or say offline (73 vs. 32 %).

¹⁹The study, known as “Young Digital Mavens,” was conducted in a joint effort by IAC and JWT. Available at: <http://iac.mediaroom.com/index.php?s=43&item=1455>.

In almost every aspect, young Chinese are more devoted to the online life than their American peers. Chinese youth are more used to expressing their emotions, expanding self knowledge and feelings through the Internet. They are more likely to believe remote interaction are not virtual and can equally create intimacy, establish communities, and help with social life. They are also keener to express their opinions and listen to others online, if they could be anonymous.

Reasons of many aspects lead to the differences concerning the Internet behavior and feelings, such as the pressure brought by the political and speech environment in China, stronger needs of people living in a transforming society for information and opinions, lack of social activities and interpersonal communication resulted from the one-child policy and high pressure for study in China. The Internet provides new possibilities and opportunities to compensate, leading to differences in behavior and feelings.

In fact, users' expectations for the Internet in China are quite different from their US and European counterparts.

According to an online survey conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in 2003 that contained four questions related to respondents' view to the political influence of the Internet, respondents highly expected the Internet will bring more freedom of speech and participation in politics. 60.8 % of the Internet users and 61.5 % of non-Internet users agreed very much or agreed "people have more opportunities to criticize the government via the use of Internet." 79.2 % of the Internet users and 77.4 % of non-Internet users agreed very much or agreed "people can have better knowledge of politics via the use of Internet." 72.3 % of the Internet users and 73.3 % of non-Internet users agreed very much or agreed "government officials can have better knowledge of public perceptions." 71.8 % of the Internet users and 69.7 % of non-Internet users agreed very much or agreed "common people have more opportunities to express their concerns for politics via the Internet." According to Fig. 2.6, most respondents in

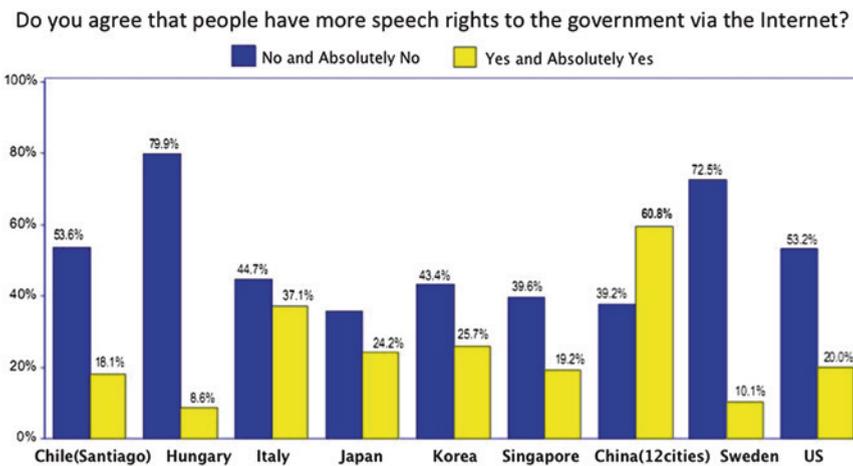


Fig. 2.6 The contrast of Internet users' views on "criticizing the government via Internet" in the countries and regions reported. Quoted from Guo (2004)

all countries reported except China disagreed that “people have more speech rights to the government via the Internet,” compared to more than 60 % respondents in China who agreed the statement. Liang Guo, a researcher with CASS, explained, “this reflects that most of the Chinese reported do not think they can express their opinions to the government policies. And this also casts new light on the users’ strong expectations that the Internet may possibly contribute to encouraging free speech to government performance” (Guo 2004).

Professor Guo conducted another survey on “the Internet use and its influence” in 2007, which showed a great many differences between the Internet users in China and the Western countries. Take examples. 84.8 % of the respondents in China agreed that government institutions should play a main role in the Internet administration and control, which is followed by Internet companies (78.8 %), parents (67.5 %), schools (64.1 %), and Internet café (59.2 %). By contrast, according to the survey conducted in 2007 by Oxford Internet Institute, 97 % of the respondents believed parents should play main roles in Internet administration and control, and schools, Internet companies, and governmental institutions follow (Institute for Social Development, CASS 2007).

In the 2007 survey in China, four questions concerned politics, which shows 30.3 % of the respondents believed the Internet enables common people with more political power; 47.9 % of the respondents thought common people have more rights of speech to government performance with the aid of the Internet; 75.1 % of the respondents agreed the Internet help them with better understanding about politics; 59.3 % agreed that the Internet makes the government officials care more about the views of common people (Institute for Social Development, CASS 2007).

Comparing findings in all previous surveys, we can observe that respondents’ positive attitude to the Internet in terms of its actual effectiveness to trigger changes to political participation is declining obviously, although they showed consistent, positive attitude that the Internet can help them know politics better (Fig. 2.7).

Many scholars engaged in the studies of the Internet have noticed the differences between China and Western countries with regards to the use of Internet. Yong Hu (2008, p. 24) deemed that “in a country with comparatively well developed democracy and adequate political freedom, the Internet is only one of the channels of information communication and social mobilization. While in China where public sphere is not adequate enough, the Internet may possibly become the only channel for common people to resist official information monopolies and make their own voice.” According to Hu’s quotation, Johan Lagerkvist, a Sweden scholar states that the Chinese society needs BBS, chat rooms, and blogs to be a stage for expressing the public opinion online. And the same need actuates the opinion and the possible mobilization around the opinion, which make the party and the nation alert to the usage of Internet.

Of course, the difference in political contexts is only one of the elements that result in the unique way of using ICT in China. The researches mentioned above remind us to observe and examine the differences between China and the western countries, instead of directly applying Western theories to our studies.

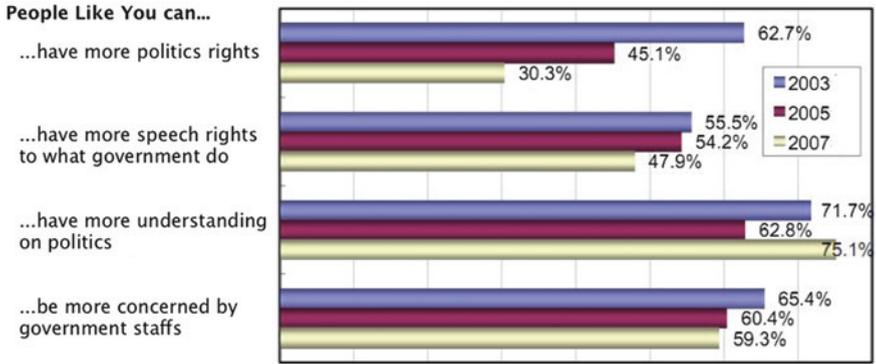


Fig. 2.7 Contrast of the three previous online surveys. Figure quoted from Institute for Social Development, CASS (2007)

2.2.4 Reasons for Chinese Government to Develop ICT

The rapid development of ICT in China benefits from the support and promotion of the government. The reasons for the Chinese government to develop ICT include demands in the following three aspects: national defense, economy, and politics. Meanwhile, recent administrative policies and development strategies concerning the ICT industry, such as strict regulation on online contents and the promotion of “integrating the networks of telecommunications, radio and TV, and the Internet,” also satisfy the above-mentioned demands in the three aspects.

(a) Demands of national defense: assuring national security and rising peacefully

From the “Opium War” till the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Chinese people had been experiencing foreign invasion, civil unrest, and national decline in a period lasting almost a 100 years, which brought about the lingering sense of crisis and competition. From “saving the dying nation and seeking for existence” and “saving the country and saving the people,” to “surpassing the UK and US” through to “standing in the world,” all these slogans with historic prints hinted the Chinese people’s worries about “being beaten if lags behind in the world.” The sense of crisis and competition almost internalized in the mind of Chinese from generation to generation through national education system, media message, and the cultural heritage.

After 1949, China began to pursue modernization and intended to catch up with the world. The “Great Leap Forward in 1958” expected to establish a modern socialist country through self-owned science and technology innovation and industrialization. The success of the “two bombs and one satellite” shocked the world in 1960. The first computers and software programs designed all by Chinese scientists were born to meet the enormous computing needs during the research which is the beginning of China’s ICT.

After 1980, many countries took the development of high technology as a significant national development strategy and spent a large quantity of capital as well as put great amount of human resource. The “Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)” proposed by the US, the “EURECA Program (Enhancing University Research and Entrepreneurial Capacity)” put forward in Europe, and the ten-year plan for science and technology worked out in Japan, all push forward the development of high technology in the globe.

To keep pace with the global trend, China launched the “National High Technology Research and Development Program” (known as the 863 program that was named after the date of March 1986 when the program was raised and approved. 863 is in the Chinese date format). Given limited economic capability, China worked out a guideline for the program as “aiming to limited goals and emphasizing identified priorities.” The program focused on the research and development in the fields of bio-technology, space technology, information technology, laser technology, automatic technology, energy technology, and new materials. It was expected to make a breakthrough within 15 years, while fostering talents, laying a foundation for future economic development and national security, creating conditions to apply stage achievements of the program to other promotion or application projects, and commercializing technological achievements for economic efficiencies.²⁰ CPC and the government called on all people in China to learn and work for the “four modernizations” in agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology.

The “Gulf War” burst out in 1992 provided an opportunity for China to witness an “information communication war”—what the Americans did in the war such as the information/news censorship, live TV broadcast, onsite reports, and the strategy of “3CI” on the battle field (control, command, communication, and intelligence) (Mattelart 1994, pp. 117–121) greatly astonished Chinese leadership and strengthened their belief and concerns on ICT in term of its strategic significance. In the middle of the 1990s, the idea that the most important feature of modern wars is “information war” was widely discussed among military experts and mass media (Zhao 2007a).

In the perspective of national security, China has long considered the telecommunication industry as lifelines of the country. Therefore China has been very cautious in liberating the telecommunication market and kept absolute control over the major telecommunication groups. The Internet, being the extension of traditional communications industry, has a similar situation in terms of its construction and supervision.

National defense has close relationship with informatization, IT and ICT, which could be seen from the organizational structure of government departments. Besides the responsibilities of the former Ministry of Machinery and Industry and the Ministry of Information Industry, the newly established MIIT in 2008 after the system reform in the industry also took over the responsibilities of the former

²⁰Please refer to: <http://www.863.org.cn/> and the entry of “863 program” in Wikipedia. Available at: <http://zh.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=863%E8%AE%A1%E5%88%92&variant=zh-cn>.

State Commission of Science and Technology for National Defense Industry and turned the latter to the present State Administration of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense under the administration of MIIT. MIIT also remains two titles of China National Space Administration and China Atomic Energy Authority, and shoulders the responsibilities of the above-mentioned institutions, including “working out and organizing the implementation of plans, policies, and standards for the high technology sectors such as bio-pharmaceutics, new materials, air and space, and information technology,” “organizing and coordinating the revitalization of equipment manufacturing,” and “organizing and working out significant plans and policies concerning the development and innovation of technological equipment.”

(b) Economic demands: boosting economic development

In 1978, the practice of “taking class struggle as the key link” was replaced by the “central tasks of economic construction” and “promote productivity,” which became the above-all goals of the nation and a new center of life for common people in China. After the reform and opening-up, the new popular expressions such as “crossing a river by feeling for the stones,” “it doesn’t matter whether the cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice,” and “socialism with Chinese characteristics” assured that the “modernization in China is a socialist one but not a capitalistic one” in principle. The ideological disputes are weakened and a great attention is attached to the flexibility of means and forms under the goal of enhancing economic development.

“Science and technology are primary productive forces” is one of the most impressive expressions in people’s mind. The rapid development of computer science and information technology propelled all countries in the world to take “information society” as a well worth and feasible goal. As a paradigm of social development, “information society” suits social development in a depoliticized perspective and keeps in line with CPC’s emphasis on “scientific rules” and “scientific development”.

Having experienced the liberation of culture and thought in the 1980s, economy in China witnessed a boom prompted by the market economy and information technology in the 1990s. “Golden Projects” starting with the “Golden Bridge Project,” “Golden Custom Project,” and “Golden Card Project” propelled China’s informatization in an all-around way. The “Golden Bridge Project” aimed to establish a “national public economic communications network,” connecting thousands of large- and medium-scale enterprises to the international information high way. The “Golden Custom Project” was dedicated to boosting foreign trade through a “national economic and trade information network,” providing information services for departments including customs, foreign trade, foreign currency administration, banks, and tax authorities. The “Golden Card Project” focused mainly on financial transaction card and electronic currencies. Obviously, the “Three Golden Projects” as the early form of the ICT industry in the twenty-first Century directly serves economic needs in China.

After that, China attracted large quantities of foreign investment, equipment, and technology, for a “world factory,” and became the No. 1 in the electronic

information manufacturing field in the world. In the 1990s, China underwent the structural reform in the telecommunication industry that brought about immense growth in the infrastructure construction and economic efficiencies as well as increased the proportion of the ICT industry in China's national economy.

ICT was confirmed as the prerequisite and assurance to realize the "four modernizations" and this strategic thoughts last to today, known as the strategy of informatization. Jiang Zemin, former President of China, definitely indicated, "None of the four modernizations can be realized without the fuel of informatization." The Fifth Plenary Session of the 15th Central Committee of CPC stated, "Vigorously propelling the economic and social informatization is strategic measures concerning the overall situation of the modernization construction." The 16th National Congress of CPC stressed again the necessity to "persist in using IT to propel industrialization, which will, in turn, stimulate IT application," to blaze a new trail to industrialization, and to "give priority to the development of the information industry and apply IT in all areas of economic and social development."

In 2001, National Informatization Leading Group, the highest ICT strategic coordinating organization in China, announced at its inaugural meeting that it will take market evaluation as the primary concern in a series of guidances, that is, all practices will be "market oriented and demand-led."²¹ In real practices, market orientation and the pursuit to profits was overwhelming as the following cases showed.

In 2001, following the "System Reform Scheme in the Telecommunication Industry" approved by the State Council, the former China Telecom was separated into new China Telecom and China Netcom Group (CNC), aiming to strengthen the two groups' competitiveness through encouraging free competition between them in order to cope with the international competitive pressure that the telecommunications industry would meet after China's entry into WTO. However, the two groups reached a "co-operation agreement" (known as "South-North Agreement" or "Non-competition Agreement") several years later, decided that starting from March 1, 2007, the two companies would stop developing new users in non-dominant areas (including traditional fixed-line subscribers, Dalingtong (a market name in Chinese for the 3G services applying the CDMA 450 and later SCDMA 400 technologies) subscribers, Xiaolingtong (a market name of PHS in Chinese) subscribers, other PHS subscribers, broadband subscribers, call center, and all types of customers). Thus the regional monopoly structure was developed, let alone consumers' "rights for free choice of commodities or services" enabled by the "Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Consumer Rights and Interests." Legal scholars submitted a joint letter to the MIIT, requesting investigation and punishment to the actions "detrimental to public interests." However, there seemed to be no further progress.²²

²¹National Information Technology Leading Group convened first conference. *China Youth Daily*. December 28, 2001.

²²China Telecom and China Netcom's south-north divide policy got attack again. *PCHOME*. (2007-05-23) [2009-04-01]. Available at: <http://article.pchome.net/content-344998.html>.

Some scholars asserted that China's "digital revolutionary" seemed overly weight toward economic factors and its development strategy was investing enormous capital to the construction of information highway rather than to basic education (Zhao 2000, 2002). Some claimed that in the reform and opening-up process, China, made a world record in the speed of constructing telecommunication networks, but the nation lagged behind as the last one in Asia in terms of its investment in public education (Mukherjee 2006). The development of ICT, especially that of the telecommunication networks, assisted the transformation of transnational capital to flexible production. The investment of transnational capital also embodied the extreme imbalance between China's coastal regions and its central and western parts (Zhao 2007a).

(c) Political demands: promoting harmony and maintaining steadiness

In a broader sense, everything is connected to politics—the demands of national defense and economy also serve the demands of politics. As for the ruling party, enhancing national defense, uplifting comprehensive national strength through economic growth, and protecting national sovereignty and international image in the international competition are not less significant political demands than coping with the internal affairs such as propelling modernization to keep pace with international development trends, improving people's living standard, and reinforcing the legitimacy of the ruling.

From the "central task of economic construction" and "release and develop productive forces" at the beginning of China's reform and opening-up to the series of ideologies of "building a well-off society in an all-around way," "balanced and sustainable development", "scientific development concept" and "building a harmonious society": all these follow the principle as Hu Jintao stated in his report to the 17th National Congress of CPC (Hu Jintao 2007)—regarding "development" as "the top priority of the Party in governing and rejuvenating the country" and "firmly committed to the central task of economic development and concentrating on construction and development." As we mentioned above, ICT played significant roles in the "social development" and "economic construction" in China.

If politics is understood as the superstructure determined by base, the political demands to develop ICT in China considers the two aspects of "promotion" and "control".

"Promotion" implies the motives to compensate and correct the unfairness and imbalance resulted from the overweight to economic development in the past. "The new governance of Hu and Wen" modified the "development" with "scientific" and "balanced and sustainable," adding emphasis on "people foremost," "harmony" and the striving to "narrow the gaps in regional development and between the urban and rural areas" through an "overall consideration." All these reflected changes in thoughts on governance. In order to improve people's livelihood, new government policies focused on public services, including "giving priority to education," "creating more employment opportunities," "deepening reform of the income distribution system," "accelerating the establishment of a social security system covering all urban and rural residents," and "establishing a basic medical and health care system" (Hu Jintao 2007).

Accordingly, the development of ICT is gradually adjusting to the current political ideology and background of the times. Take an example. The “Cuncuntong Telephone Project,” invested and carried out by China Mobile starting from 1994, helped the vast majority of the 70,000 administrative villages that had no access to telephone services before get connected to telephone networks. According to the latest statistics, the growth rate of Internet users in rural areas is much higher than that in urban areas in recent years. That is not saying that the development of ICT in China is already fair, or has diminished imbalance, or is completely oriented to public interests. However, at least, it showcases that the government has cared more about these important development principle and, thanks to the efforts from academic sectors and the media, more and more people pay attention to the development of ICT from these angles.

The promoting function of ICT also includes “developing socialist democracy.” Hu Jintao (2007) pointed out in his report to the 17th National Congress of CPC that “we must expand the citizens’ orderly participation in political affairs at each level and in every field, and mobilize and organize the people as extensively as possible to manage state and social affairs as well as economic and cultural programs in accordance with the law” and “we need to improve institutions for democracy, diversify its forms and expand its channels, and we need to carry out democratic election, decision-making, administration and oversight in accordance with the law to guarantee the people’s rights to be informed, to participate, to be heard, and to oversee.” The empowerment of ICT is helpful to reach the above-mentioned goals.

As for “control,” it is a significant function and goal of every regime. From coordination of government institutions at every level, effective running of armed forces, court of justice, police, and prison that working as state apparatus, to ideologies including the establishment of the education system and media system, to media and speech regulation, agenda setting and public opinion guiding, and supervision on communications and media—all are closely related to ICT.

Chinese government’s pursuit to “control” is under the pressure of a transforming society that strives for legitimacy of the ruling, social support and the maintenance of a steady development environment. Many aspects showcase the appliance of ICT to “control.” Putting forward and implementing national electronic administrative framework in 2006 can be considered as an effort of the government to improve its administrative capability through ICT. The “Golden Shield” project of informatization in the public security field all over the country starting from 1998 and the team building of cyber police in recent years aim to, through ICT, improve the control and reaction capability of the nation in the fields of national and public securities. A team known as “online commentators” was built in recent years to supervise public opinions. The development of a “public opinions supervision and control system”²³ was carried out to forecast public opinions as weather

²³People.com: “forecasting public opinions as weather forecasting does.” (2008-07-03) [2009-04-01]. Available at: <http://yq.people.com.cn/htmlArt/Art32.htm>. “Chengdu Yibao Xunteng Technology Co. Ltd.” (成都易宝讯腾科技有限公司): “TRS public opinions supervision and control system”. (2008-10-17) [2009-04-01]. Available at: http://www.cdsuntun.com/cpjs/dlcp/trs/200810/t20081017_2654.htm.

forecasting. The pursuit of overseas landing of Chinese TV channels and planning on overseas TV news channels of China is to strengthen the international communication power so as to control and affect the information flow between China and other parts of the world.

2.3 Networked Public and Non-networked Public in Contemporary China

2.3.1 Composition of the Networked Public

What kind of networked users constitute the networked public and what are the demographics of the networked users in contemporary China?

In this study, networked users refer to active media users mutually connected with other networked users using ICT. While in China, the most popular digital medium is mobile phones, which had been owned by 750 million users by 2009. Therefore, the total number of networked users in China will not exceed the range in estimation.

Generally speaking, the 750 million mobile phone users can be counted as networked users, but not necessarily positive and active ones. 277 million among the 750 million users go online through mobile phones and the rest majority conduct interpersonal communication through phone calls and text messages. The same 277 million mobile phone users are also included in the 420 million Internet users (CNNIC 2010b). Comparatively speaking, the 420 million Internet users are more positive and active networked users and networked communication is mainly conducted by some of these active participants.

Since the statistical differentiation between the Internet users and the Chinese public has drawn wide attention and been discussed in a broad range (e.g., Zou 2008; Hu 2008), this book will spare no more efforts on this. Popular views believe that the Internet users in China are younger and better educated, compared to Chinese residents as a whole, and there exists differences between the urban and rural areas, genders, and eastern and western regions. Internet users who tend to speak actively in network communities are mostly “young, unmarried males with higher education” (Hu 2008, p. 200).

The author agrees with these ideas and would like to raise two more propositions.

First, the composition of the Internet users in China is dynamic, so we should not only pay attention to the present figures but also follow its development and change.

By comparing previous reports on the development of the Internet in China released by CNNIC, we will find that Internet users aged 18–24 took up the highest percentage in 2006 at 35.2 %, while those aged under 19 increased to 35.6 % at the end of 2008, ranking first among all groups. That is to say, among the Internet users in China, there are quite a lot of high school students or secondary

professional school students. However, at the end of 2009, the proportion of the Internet users under 19 declined to 32.9 %, while the percentage of internet users aged 20–39 rose to 50.1 %. The percentage of Internet users aged 30 or above increased from 32.9 % in 2008 to 38.5 % in 2009, through to 41 % in 2010. This shows that the Internet is penetrating to younger users, while keeping a high penetration rate in older users.

A noticeable fact is that among the 126 million juvenile Internet users, 4.2 million were under ten at the end of 2009 according to *Report on Juvenile Internet Use in China (2009–2010)*.²⁴

If divided by vocation, students rank the first, accounting for 33.2 % of the total Internet users in China at the end of 2008, 28.8 % in 2009 and 30.7 % in 2010. In terms of education background, 63.8 % of the Internet users had the background of senior high school or secondary professional education or even below at the end of 2007, which increased to 72.8 % in 2008, 75.8 % at the end of 2009, and 76.8 % in 2010. So in fact the Internet users as a whole in China were not “well-educated” as estimated.

Male to female ratio of Chinese Internet users were 52.5:47.4 at the end of 2008, and 54.2:45.8 at the end of 2009. According to *China Statistical Yearbook 2008*, the male to female sex ratio of Chinese population was 51.5:48.5 at the end of 2007, which was very similar to the ratio of Chinese Internet users. The gap, in terms of the number of Internet users, between urban and rural areas as well as between the eastern and western areas was narrowing in China.

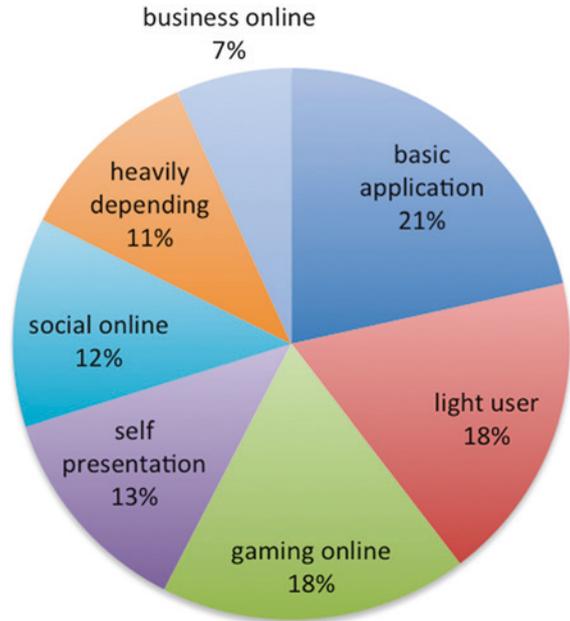
Secondly, we should pay attention to the differences within Chinese Internet users. Networked public communication is diversified from the subject, behavior, to effects. Specific analysis should be applied to specific issues. The demographics of total Internet users cannot simply substitute the demographics of a specific niche group of the networked public.

The Internet users were divided into seven categories based on their online behaviors for the first time in the annual report released by CNNIC in January 2009. They are: heavily depending, social online, business online, basic application, self presentation, online gaming, and light user (see Fig. 2.8). Different categories differed in their online time length and the way of using online applications. Although they were all networked public, the online gamers and light users that took up 36 % of the Internet users in total were less active and influential. While users that belong to the categories of “heavily depending” and “social online” are most active networked public.

Undoubtedly, the population and composition of the networked public are changing in China, and the changing may be fierce given that China has just crossed the take-off point. At the beginning of 2005, there were only no more than

²⁴Over 126 million Internet users are juvenile in our country. *China Youth Daily*. (2010-06-19) [2010-06-20]. An article with the same title also available at: <http://tech.sina.com.cn/i/2010-06-19/09024325650.shtml>; www.gmw.cn: “Juvenile blue book: 4.2 million Internet users are under 10 in China”. (2010-06-18)[2010-06-20]. Available at http://www.gmw.cn/content/2010-06/18/content_1154569.htm.

Fig. 2.8 The categories and scale of the Internet users in China. *Source* from CNNIC (2009)



50 million broadband users in China, taking up 45.5 % of all Internet users. At the end of 2009, 8 % of the Internet users in China were connected to the Internet only through mobile phones, and the 97.9 % of the rest went online by broadband, totaling 346 million users. At the beginning of 2005, active bloggers amounted to 1.8 million in China, taking up no more than 2 % of total Internet users, while at the end of 2008, 57.7 % of the total Internet users in China had their own blogs. Bloggers reached 220 million or more and 145 million kept active and updating their blogs (CNNIC 2005, 2007, 2010a, b). The enormous changes indicate that it is hard to anticipate the composition and features of the networked public in the years that follow.

2.3.2 The Significance of Networked Public Communication to Non-networked Users

Although this book aims to explore and analyze the emergence of “networked public communication” as a new dominant social communication mode, it does not intend to use “networked public” as a universal concept. Therefore, another important problem is who are not networked public in China? And what does the so-called “networked public communication” imply to them?

In the past 20 years, the gap between the wealthy and the poor has been widened with China’s reform and opening-up. Some scholars described the

situation in China with “one China and four worlds” (Hu 2001) or “fractured society” (Sun 2003, 2004a, b, 2006). These are important context of the networked public communication.

Obviously, in the current society of China with apparent inequalities and imbalances, the “networked public” as a concept cannot cover all residents. The existence of digital divide leaves at least more than half of the population in China unable to be networked public. Although farmers, workers in the service industries and migrant workers take the highest proportion in the total population, the percentage of them who go online accounted for only 6.9 % among total Internet users in China in 2008; figure increased to 9.6 % in 2009, and 9.5 % in 2010. Even so, the percentage is quite imbalanced with their population scale. Even if they became networked users, the penetration of the Internet applications among them is much lower, especially in the application of e-commerce and financial services (CNNIC 2009, 2010a, b).

According to Manuel Castells, information technology has brought the reconstruction of the society and the network society, and at the same time has created inequity and poverty by “exclude” certain people and certain areas out of the Net.

Social exclusion is often expressed in spatial terms. The territorial confinement of systematically worthless populations, disconnected from networks of valuable functions and people, is indeed a major characteristic of the spatial logic of the network society (Castells 1998, p. 169).

However, this does not mean that networked public communication is a completely isolated social field, nor does it mean networked public communication only matters to the networked users.

First, Chinese government has been vigorously propelling the informatization in rural areas, taking it as the key task in the infrastructure construction. Government departments and telecommunication enterprises actively promoted the projects to provide fixed phone services in natural villages and broadband services in administrative villages, striving to realize the goal that “every village has access to fixed phones service and the Internet” in 2010. The urbanization and extensive flow of rural populations in the cities and towns enables more rural population to access to the Internet.

Secondly, the popularization of ICT makes ICT hardware and access fee to the Internet more affordable. “Culture of free service or products” is very popular in the Internet, while the trend of Web 2.0 is to make all online services simple and easy to use and lower the threshold of access. Consequently, more and more people in the middle sized and small towns or villages can use various ICT, so people are networked to various extend. Household broadband fees or payment for Internet access in an Internet cafe was not expensive, so the Internet was an affordable and exciting entertainment for young people in small cities and towns. The youth even found they could surf online even if they were not able to type (Guo 2004).

Internet cafe as public resource are of vital help for labors and unemployed workers to access to the Internet. The number of Internet users who got connected

in Internet cafe surged from 600,000 to 135 million starting January 1999–December 2009. Similarly, mobile phones, Xiaolingtong, text messages, pre-paid SIM cards, and other medium- or low-end communication technologies helped the working class and other information poor in China enter the “network society” (Qiu 2009, pp. 21–50). CNNIC report in 2009 indicates that the percentage of labors that go online through mobile phones was even higher than those who are office clerks. According to the 2010 statistics, the Internet users who go online via mobile phones took up a higher percentage in the groups of unemployed, farmers, and migrant workers, compared to the situation among total Internet users (CNNIC 2009, 2010a).

At the end of May 2010, workers went on strike at the Honda Lock auto parts factory at Foshan and Zhongshan cities. About a thousand workers organized actions, communicated with each other, and released information to media, the public, and the society mostly via mobile phones, Tencent QQ, online forums, blog websites, video websites, and other ICTs. Although the industrial workers in the early of their twenties had no high education background and with low wages, they were very skillful in applying ICTs, becoming networked users, and protesting for their interests. *New York Times* commented that it might not be possible if the Chinese government had not made a concerted effort in the last decade to shrink the country’s digital divide by lowering the cost of mobile phone and Internet service in this country—a modernization campaign that has given China the world’s biggest Internet population (400 million) and allowed even the poorest of the poor to log onto the Internet and air their labor grievances.²⁵

ICT will continue to diffuse in China, enabling increasing number of people from various tiers to become Internet and mobile phone users. This, certainly, does not mean that they are networked nor will they necessarily become networked users or constitute the networked public. How to help the Internet users who are workers, farmers, or the unemployed widen their Internet usages besides chatting, playing games, or entertainment and improve their knowledge about the Internet as well as how to expand their social network and social capital in a bid to fight for their own interest are key to the transformation from non-networked users to networked users.

Jianbin Guo (2003, p. 181) accounted an impressive story at the end of his doctoral thesis, which goes like this: after Guo taught a young man of Dulong ethnic group how to log online and helped him register an email account, the young man “was eager to have a try with the most advanced technology he had learned and send an email. But, he had no email address of anybody else and had no idea where and to whom he could send the email.” This is a metaphor on the gap between “an Internet user” and “a networked user.”

Third, the networks where the networked users exist are not only the Internet or information networks, but also integrate social networks. China now is a country with high level of social mobility. Large numbers of college students and young

²⁵Barboza, D. & Bradsher, K. *In China, labor movement enabled by technology. The New York Times.* (2010-06-16) [2010-06-18]. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/17/business/global/17strike.html>.

migrant workers in big cities are originally from rural areas. They provide links for non-networked users to connect to the networked public communication. Non-networked users essentially tend to form multiple social networks based on common interests and resistance to outside pressure. As Jianrong Yu (2003) described, farmers from different areas were linked through presenting petition to a higher level of government and they called themselves “lianwang” (networked). When the individuals in a social network become networked users, or get access to the networked public communication sphere through an interpersonal link with other networked users, they win new discourse tools and space.

Fourth, networked public communication and the relative social media is essentially a venue where multiple forces fight for their own interests, a place where different powers play games, and a “space of flows” that is hard to regulate and control. Reviewing various issues in China in the past years, we can find that even if farmers’ or labors’ protest against grievances mainly concerning environmental protection, house demolition, distribution mechanism, and grass-roots administration or election could not be covered by mass media including traditional media and Internet media at the very beginning, these movements usually caused extensive attention in society through the channels of networked public communication. Some even were reported on a front page of foreign medium, which forced domestic or local media to report under pressure.

Partially, not all networked users are “power elites” with high income and high social status, while most of them are farmers or workers, or urban middle class who also feel life pressure or are experiencing grievances. The latter are of like mind with the former and identify the former with the depressed and bullied, and so participate in related networked public communication. Meanwhile, quite a lot of intellectuals including journalists, lawyers, or scholars and even government officials, who sympathize with the disadvantaged groups, understand social contradictions and conflicts in environmental protection, land administration, property rights, and human rights with great concern, as well as are willing to speak for the disadvantaged groups, adding their good competence in networked public communication. Last but not the least, in a society with more abundant information and easier access to advanced communication technologies, the civic awareness, rights consciousness, and the media literacy of people even in lower tiers have edged upwards—they do not only understand but also begin to actively participate in power games in the media sphere. Related cases are increasing.

Therefore, the networked public communication is not merely a phenomena or sphere related to the “networked users” or “the networked public.” No matter how the material base that networked public communication depends on is developed and constructed for whatever goals, networked public communication together with mass communication have become the dominant communication paradigm in the current society and it becomes an applicable tool and a sphere for interactions for people in all tiers, even if they are still not networked users. The fundamental framework of ICT and other social contexts are still significant, for they affect the feature of individuals—to be interactive or to be reached.

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