CONSTRUCTING AND DISSEMINATING SUBALTERN PUBLIC DISCOURSES IN CHINA

WEIYU ZHANG

Abstract

What is the democratic potential of the Internet? Using subaltern public spheres as the theoretical framework, the Internet is expected to empower the subordinated social groups and extend the inclusiveness of democracy. Rear-Window to Movies is a Chinese online discussion group, which focuses on the topic of movies. I used this case to answer my research question: *How does the online discussion group function as a subaltern public sphere?* My research found that the online discussion group supported the concept of subaltern public spheres instead of a unitary public sphere. The online subaltern public sphere provided a safe discursive space for the subaltern public, who was movie fans from the underdeveloped middle class in China. The subaltern public used online spheres to exchange their opinions and critically debated on issues that they were interested in. They successfully constructed their own discourse, which is different from the market discourse and counteracts the domination of the state discourse. In addition, the impact of these discursive practices was disseminated into the offline world by various methods. On the one hand, RearWindow users took use of social resources including those from the commercial forces to show movies that could not be reached through the official channels. On the other hand, the interaction with mass media also helped making the subaltern discourses more and more audible. However, both methods have their own limitations, which might harm the subaltern public sphere as well.

Weiyu Zhang is a PhD student at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania; e-mail: wzhang@asc.upenn.edu.

Introduction

What is the democratic potential of the Internet? Much interest has been shown on the possibility of the Internet in enhancing or decreasing communal spirit and values (Rheingold 1993; Smith and Kollock 1999; Wellman and Gulia 1999) and whether the Internet could assist individual autonomy and freedom (Adams 1998; Berry and Martin, 2000; Turkle 1995). Different from both above, a deliberative democracy approach examines the Internet as the means for an expansion of the public sphere of rational-critical citizen discourse. As Gimmler (2001) pointed out, the Internet might strengthen deliberative democracy in two ways: First, the Internet technology supports an unrestricted and equal access to information; second, the Internet facilitates the opportunity for interaction. Both access and interaction are fundamental for deliberative democracy since deliberation is a discursive process, which highlights the role of open discussion.

It is Jürgen Habermas (1991, 1998, 2001) who set up a solid theoretical frame for deliberative democracy. Some Internet researchers directly applied Habermas's frame to their studies (Dahlberg 2001; Fung and Kedl 2000; Gimmler 2001; Porter 2001; Slevin 2000; Tanner 2001; Wilhelm 2000, 35). Other researchers (McDorman 2001; Palczewski 2001; Travers 2003) adopted the critiques on Habermas from the theorists of subaltern public spheres (Calhoun 1992). However, the second cluster of research is relatively rare and I intend to contribute to it by providing a case study of a Chinese online discussion group. I begin by reviewing literatures and constructing my analytical framework. My attention then turns to the specific online subaltern public and its counter discourse. While the Internet provides alternative ways of organising public interaction and dialogue, online subaltern publics remain largely invisible to non-participants (Travers 2003). In this article, I argue that on-line subaltern publics are possible to transcend boundaries between insiders and outsiders and influence the wider publics given appropriate resources.

Public Sphere, Subaltern Public Spheres and Their Online Versions

Which kind of deliberative democracy does the Internet favour? In other words, does the Internet favour a unitary public sphere Habermas (1991) preferred or multiple subaltern public spheres Fraser (1992) supported? While the concept of public sphere was rejuvenated via Habermas's work, the concept of subaltern could be attributed to Gramsci and post-colonialist studies. As Said (1988, vi) pointed out, "[t]he resonances of the word subaltern derive from Gramsci's usage in the *Prison Notebooks* in which, …, he shows how wherever there is history, there is class, and that the essence of the historical is the long and extraordinarily varied social-cultural interplay between ruler and ruled, between the elite, dominant, or hegemonic class of the subaltern and, as Gramsci calls it, the emergent class of the much greater mass of people ruled by coercive or sometimes mainly ideological domination from above." Based on such an understanding of subaltern, a group of South Asian scholars (e.g., Chaturvedi 2000; Ludden 2001) interested in the postcolonial and post-imperial societies of South Asia in particular and the developing world in general took a historical approach from below, focusing more on what happens among the masses at the base levels of society than among the elite.

Subaltern scholars are concerned not only with political *acts*, but also with political *rhetorics* and *discourses*, which are also the focus of the theory of public sphere. Fraser's critique on Habermas carries on the legacy from Gramsci and subaltern studies, which calls for the attention on the masses instead of the elite, on the differences instead of the commons within the public sphere(s).

Habermas's public sphere is universally accessible, which means all the social members should and could take part in one discursive sphere in spite of their different social status. However, full accessibility was in fact not achieved and social inequalities were hardly eliminated. At least the feminist counter public (Fraser 1992) and the oppositional public of the working class (Negt and Kluge 1993) were not included in the bourgeois public sphere. In addition, in a single public sphere bracketing social inequalities, it is impossible to reach the *real* deliberation because such bracketing usually works for the advantage of dominant groups when deliberation is used to obliterate the voice of the subordinated (Fraser 1992). Habermas assumed that discourse in the public sphere should be restricted to deliberation about the common good, and that appearance of private interests is always undesirable. What account for a matter of common good are decided through discursive contestation. However, the bracketing of inequalities puts the subordinated in an inferior position in this contestation. Discursive contestation was governed by protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlations and markers of status inequality. Although bracketing of social inequalities prevents formal exclusions, it brings informal impediments to participatory parity. Subordinate groups sometime cannot find the right voice or words to express their thoughts, and when they do, they find they are not heard.

Feminists like Fraser criticised the exclusion of women and questioned the sincerity of rationality in the bourgeois public sphere, which is based on the fictitious universalism. However, they do not deny the significance of rationality and want to recover the *real* deliberation within subaltern public spheres. They adhere to norms of procedural rationality as the best institutionalised process for excluding violence from their social arena (McLaughlin 1993). Another common ground Habermas and Fraser shared is the recognition of the trichotomy of civil society, the state and the market economy. Both of them think that the three parts are and should be clearly differentiated. While Habermas stressed the antagonistic relations between civil society and the system world which includes the state and the market economy, Fraser is more flexible when considering their interactions. She noticed that there might be positive interaction among the three parties, especially the possibility of cooperation between subaltern public spheres and the market economy.

To know how subaltern public spheres interact with other forces, I will introduce the internal/external analysis from Felski (1989) and the resource approach proposed by Squires (2002). Felski (1989, 168) argued that the feminist public sphere, as a kind of subaltern public spheres, "serves a dual function: *internally*, it generates a gender-specific identity grounded in a consciousness of community and solidarity among women; *externally*, it seeks to convince society as a whole of the validity of feminist claims, challenging existing structures of authority through political activity and theoretical critique." However, not all the subaltern public spheres could achieve the two functions successfully, especially the external function. Squires (2002) suggested that since subaltern publics emerge out of various political and cultural contexts, we need to differentiate subaltern public spheres

using internal/external function as the criterion: How do they respond to dominant social pressures, legal restrictions, and other challenges from the dominant public, the state and the market economy?

Squires distinguished three types of subaltern public spheres: (1) enclaved public spheres which hide counter hegemonic ideas and strategies in order to survive or avoid violence and disrespect from the state and the dominant public, while internally producing lively debate and planning; (2) counter publics whose discourse travels outside of safe, enclaved spaces to argue against dominant conceptions of the group; and (3) satellite publics which seek separation from other publics for reasons other than oppressive relations but is involved in the wider public sphere discourse from time to time. Definitions of counterpublic spheres and counter discourse in this paper agree with Squires' conceptualisation, in other words, counterpublics and their spheres are one type of subaltern public spheres, featured by their direct and oppositional engagement with the discourse from either the dominant public or the state or the market economy. Counterpublic spheres are those subaltern public spheres which emerge in response to a decrease in oppression or an increase in resources, especially independent media resources such as the Internet.

The counterpublic sphere seems to be the optimal choice for a subaltern public sphere. However, it may not be prudent at all time for all publics. Instead, the members of dominant publics may monopolise the opportunities for inter-sphere discussion created by counterpublics. Members of marginal publics who test the waters in dominant publics or state forums may not be considered equals. Furthermore, counterpublics are affected by their interaction with the wider publics, often in ways not of their choosing. The state and the market economy can undermine counterpublic discourse, performances, and movements: While the state censors and attacks counterpublic and its discourse, the market economy often appropriates selected aspects of counterpublics' imagery, opinions, ideas and performances in ways that harm counterpublics. For instance, Larry Gross's historical review (2001) on queer movement shows how gays and lesbians tried to enter the mass media public sphere by making themselves attractive to advertisers. However, although queer people have gained visibility, they have not overcome the stereotyping in the mass media. More importantly, Gross noticed that as the mainstream media increased the coverage of queers, the mission of the lesbian and gay press became less clear. The faint visibility in the mass media even deceives the subaltern press to give up their struggle against stereotyping and seduces them to change into fashion magazines. Therefore, a careful evaluation of the external function of subaltern public spheres should be made.

When relating the subaltern critiques to the studies of online public spheres, we can find that although the Internet is the most open medium, it cannot guarantee universal access. On the contrary, *digital divide* based on income, education and race continues to be problematic although the whole access is quickly rising (Luke 1998). In addition, the power of the state (Slevin 2000) and the commercial interests (Kitchin 1998) are trying to control the access and put censorship on the Internet. Not only universal access is not realistic now, but also deliberative discursive interaction on the Internet is problematic. It was found that reactionary and hostile attacks that voice polarised and extreme positions dominate the online discursive space (Buchstein 1997). Participants could not detach themselves from their preferences and resulted in a discourse of "flamings, exclusions, and persuasions" (Fung and Kedl

2000). Without universal access and widespread deliberation, it seems that currently, the Habermasian unitary public sphere is hard to emerge on the Internet.

Direct evidences about online subaltern public spheres are sporadic. Admitting the unequal access and surveillance from the government and the commerce, Palczewski (2001) asked readers to notice the attempts some websites have done for the formation of counterpublics. Although online counterpublics have not yet convinced the dominant social order to change, they are still meaningful because they validate group members' sense of identity and worth. McDorman (2001) thought the expansion of the Internet presents conditions favourable to a broad range of counterpublics after he conducted a detailed study on the website, Right-to-Die. He concluded that the Internet offers potential for counterpublics to resist the state control. The website encouraged not only more meaningful individual participation but also a more egalitarian dialogue. Increased participation and dialogue enhance the prospects of successful mobilisation against the state. Feminism scholars like Travers (2003) found that feminist activity in cyberspace subverted traditional and exclusive public spaces and created parallel subaltern feminist counterpublics. In addition to the three studies above, there are plenty of indirect evidences about the online subaltern public spheres, which are studies about marginal groups using the Internet. Minority ethnics (Arnold and Plymire, 2000; Mallapragada 2000), gay people (Burke 2000; Shaw 1997), and fans groups (Pullen, 2000) met their peers online and tried to use the Internet to exchange their voices and create their self-identity.

Fostering subaltern public spheres reflects the potential of the Internet in expanding the democratic inclusiveness. My case study examined how one Chinese online discussion group acted as a subaltern public sphere through the analysis of its internal and external function. A set of research questions (RQ) were asked:

1. Who had the access to the online subaltern public sphere and who participated in it? If the Internet at least has the potential of universal access, we should have seen a variety of participants in such an online sphere. If the sphere is actually subaltern, we would find a limited access which is issued to people who share a common interest. Answering this question can help us to address the first disagreement between Habermas and subaltern theorists, which is about the universal access of public sphere.
2. What was the subaltern discourse and how was this discourse constructed? Both Habermas and subaltern theorists put a lot of emphases on the procedure of discourse construction. They consider a rational-critical discourse as necessary for the health of public sphere(s) and subaltern theorists specifically pay attention to the equality during such a discursive process. Examining the internal process of construction of subaltern discourses could clarify the Internet's advantages and disadvantages in terms of fostering rational and equal discussions.
3. How did the online subaltern public disseminate the counter discourse into the whole society? What were the consequences of the dissemination? These questions are directly related to subaltern theorists' concern, which is about the interaction between the subaltern public and other social actors, including the wider publics, the state, and the market economy. Such an analysis shows us whether the theoretical hypothesis regarding the external function of disseminating subaltern discourses is empirically supported.

Public Sphere and Subaltern Public Spheres in China

The significance of subaltern public spheres is often manifested through their relationship with the dominant public sphere, which is mass media in advanced capitalist societies. Fenton and Downey (2003) argued that the intensification of globalisation, the rise of neo-liberalism and a decline of trust and social democracy result in instability in the dominant public sphere. Under these conditions, counter public spheres are able to open up symbolic contests in the dominant public sphere, increase participation in civil society, and as a consequence, extend democracy. However, the China case does not fit this model since there is not a developed civil society in China and nor are a dominant public and its sphere.

Civil society is often embodied by social organisations, and especially, the non-governmental organisations. Studies on Chinese social organisations show that legal organisations such as trade unions, business associations and professional associations are limited in facilitating the civil society in China due to their dependence on the state, both economically and administratively (Wank 1995, 75; White and et al 1996, 63-68). At the same time, mass media, which is the popular format of the dominant public sphere in Western countries, cannot afford a discursive space where societal members can exchange their opinions in China. As Zhao (2001) argued, although the market reform brought more autonomy to Chinese mass media, freedom of press is still under state repression while commercialisation further subjects media outlets and journalists to the power of money. In other words, Chinese mass media function as a communication vehicle not for the public, but for the state and the entrepreneurial forces. Therefore, due to the lack of development of a civil society and its public sphere(s), the subaltern public spheres in China have other significances, which are the "training ground for a critical public reflection" (Habermas 1991, 29). In small-scale but open discursive spaces, Chinese citizens exchange information and opinions, learn the public use of reason, and become connected and organised. All of these are initiatives for a well-constructed public sphere. Chinese subaltern public spheres are thus the birthplaces of the third voice in addition to that of the state and the economy and consequently, this third voice might change the whole society.

The online discussion board I am discussing is called "RearWindow to Movies" and often called "RearWindow" for short. RearWindow is one of the 110,005 (updated on October 10, 2003) discussion groups on a bulletin board system website named Xicihutong (xici.net) in Mainland China (http://b2467.xici.net). It is one of the biggest discussion groups on xici.net, which has more than 5,000 users who put this group in their favourite lists. RearWindow was established at the end of 1998, by a movie fan called VCD. After eight years' development, RearWindow has become one of the most popular online movie discussion boards in China.

Why did I choose a discussion board on movies to answer my question about political significance of the Internet? First of all, movies are considered as cultural products and it is not a coincidence that cultural products become the focus of early public spheres. Habermas used the concept of literary public sphere when he described an early form of the political publicity (Habermas 1991, 29). In the institution of art criticism, including literary, theatre, and music criticism, the lay judgment of a public attained enlightenment and became organised. In addition, the cultural aspect of the public sphere did not lose its significance even after a

political public sphere emerged. The concept of cultural public sphere was first suggested by Frands Mortensen, who claimed it to be spatially situated in museums, churches, exhibitions, concert halls, cinemas, libraries, sports grounds and theatres (Mortensen 1977).

Previous studies on Chinese cultural resistance to the domination from the system world suggest the existence of subaltern publics in China. Researchers considered rock musicians, avant-garde artists and their audiences as subordinated in their relationship with the state and the economy but active in uttering innovative voices (e.g., Kloet 2005; Salmenkari 2004). Taking rock music as the example, Chinese rock culture reached its popularity in the early 1990s and it was considered as "a popular expression of anger (and) deviance" (Baranovich 2003, 36). Kloet (2005) listed a set of figures which suggest that the audiences, the number of releases and the performances all indicate the continuous popularity of rock although rock culture was seriously endangered by the forces of commercialism after 1995. Due to the fact that media coverage on rock music is restricted and legal music market is dominated by Hong Kong and Taiwan pop, rock music fans turned to alternative resources for information and products such as *dakou* (aka the cut CDs and tapes) and niche media (e.g., *Music Heaven*). The latest development of the Internet further supports rock culture by providing a space for exchanging music reviews and buying rock music releases. However, these studies seldom examined Chinese alternative cultures from a clearly defined public sphere approach. In addition, the impact of the Internet has not been fully discussed yet.

As one of the most broadly accepted cultural forms, Chinese movies hold a problematical status, which is no less illuminating than rock culture or avant-garde arts. The complexity exists in the power relations among the state, the economy (both the local and the global one) and the emerging civil society. The earliest policy on movies in P. R. China followed the principle that artistic practice was regulated as a propaganda tool for state governance (Chu 2002). The state government controlled all areas of film production, from script development to technical competence, distribution and exhibition. The film industry in China started its process of marketisation in the late 1980s and the government first introduced the reform by encouraging the financial autonomy of film distributors and exhibitors (Zhu 2002). Further production reform was initiated in the early 1990s but the problem of low productivity and lack of creativity of China's centralised studio system could not be solved when the state continued to dictate production targets, refusing to relinquish control of film content. Since 1995, Chinese government reacquainted the import of Hollywood films in order to deal with the crisis of Chinese movie industry. Hollywood's high-cost production not only restored Chinese audiences' theatre-going habit but also became the new standard measurement for quality films in contrast to the state-dictated ones. Another significant policy change in 1995 was that the state relaxed its production licensing policy, extending the right to produce feature films from 16 state-run studios to 13 provincial level studios. Furthermore, private investors were granted the right to coproduce with a studio. The production reform directly led to a temporary proliferation of Chinese domestic film production, most of which were cheap knockoffs of Hollywood entertainment films. Meanwhile, these low-quality entertainment pictures provoked the government's sanction, namely, a campaign to criticise "spiritual pollution" which

refers to gratuitous sex and violence. In order to reach the dictated production target of 10 quality domestic pictures per year, the studios restored the practice of self-censorship, slating predominantly mainstream propaganda films.

Till now, the government still controls film content tightly through the strict censorship process. All the scripts must pass the censorship before they could be shot. All the finished films, no matter who funded them, must pass the censorship again before they are released. The government has the power to change their decisions even after the film has passed the censorships. Independent movies or banned movies or underground movies are those produced out of such an institution. Chinese independent movies emerged in 1990s and the producers are the young directors educated by the state-funded universities and originally expected to work within the institution. However, this group of young directors could not get the chance to make their movies due to the financial crisis of studios. In addition, they wanted to make personalised movies instead of ideological ones. As a result, they obtained funding from alternative sources including individuals, international movie festivals, and investments from foreign film companies. Many young directors produced their first movies with very little money. For example, Wang Xiaoshuai made his maiden work "The Days" with 100,000 RMB only. Then they attended international movie festivals and competed for the prizes, which exposed them to more alternative financial sources. Wang Xiaoshuai raised 3,000,000 RMB when he produced his third movie "Beijing Bicycle". Some investors of independent movies made profits through the distribution in countries other than China. Other investors like the film festivals did not expect to get the money back at all. This institution provided a living space for the Chinese independent movies.

However, Chinese independent movies encountered their own problem which is that these movies hardly reached their local audiences at the moment when they were produced. For a long time, independent movies were simply an avant-garde art and circulated in a very small group of professionals. Some former independent directors such as Zhang Yuan no longer endured that their movies were not watched by normal Chinese and returned to the state-controlled institution to make ideological and commercial movies. It is the pirate movie industry which brought these banned movies to the vision of normal audiences. Wang and Zhu (2003) pointed out that film piracy in China is partly a by-product of the strict state control on film production and distribution system. In addition to the banned access to independent movies, quotas are set for importing foreign movies and lengthy censorship process often delays the Chinese releases months behind their US releases. While the demand for movies far surpassed the supply, it's not surprising that the pirate movie industry survives in spite of the government's effort of curbing piracy. Let alone the fact that the copyright law lacks local enforcement. Pirate movie industry provides banned movies in a way summarised in Wang and Zhu's (2003) article: The demand for independent movies above ground is first transferred to the underground suppliers; then the domestic underground producers look for sources within China and if failed, they turn to overseas (e.g., a popular pirate version of independent director Jia Zhangke's movie *The Platform* is its Japanese counterpart); and finally from overseas the goods are smuggled back into domestic underground. The Internet could not only provide a space for audiences to exchange their private viewing experience of these banned movies

but also function as a channel for the communication between the aboveground consumers and the underground providers.

The discourses around Chinese movies reflect such a power competition: State-controlled discourse propagandises its ideological films and prohibits the dissemination of uncensored films. Commercial discourse which adopts the Hollywood mode claims that box office ratings should be the criterion to judge quality movies. Independent moviemakers have to cater the Western taste to gain financial support and thus, promote a Westernised judgment about quality Chinese movies. The critical publics struggle with all these discourses and try to figure out their own quality films. The online movie discussion board is an important indicator of the existence of such a critical voice, manifesting the emergence of subaltern publics and their engagement with the state, the domestic economy, and the global economy.

To discover the complexity of the online subaltern public sphere, this study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data.

1. Content analysis of postings on RearWindow[1];
2. Discourse analysis of selected postings on RearWindow;
3. An online survey of RearWindow users[2];
4. In-depth interviews with 14 interviewees[3];

In order to know who have the access and indeed participate in such an online public sphere (RQ1), survey is the best way to collect the basic demographics of users. But if we want to know why users are a certain group of people, we need to know more about the context of the online sphere, including its location on the net and its management style. Interviews obtained from both the administrative figures and the normal participants help me to understand why some people attend and some not. My second RQ mainly addresses the discursive formation process, which could be best approached from content analysis and discourse analysis. While content analysis provides general information about topics and amounts of discussions, discourse analysis allows me to examine the subtle ways of arguing and counter arguing. RQ3 concerns the interaction between online sphere and the offline world, which is materialised as the interaction between online participants and offline social actors. Interviews with both of them provide me a two-side interpretation of their interaction and help me to evaluate both the benefits and harms this interaction might bring to the subaltern public.

Constituting the Subaltern Public: Access to RearWindow

To know why a movie discussion board could be called subaltern, we need to know who have the access to the board and who participate in it. As Tanner (2001) concluded, there are four categories of barriers to Internet access, which are legal, architectural, economic, and educational barriers. Legally and formally, RearWindow is open to any person who wants to participate since the website where the board dwells in, xici.net is a legally registered Internet content service provider. The architectural format of RearWindow is also relatively open: Users can take a very easy registration process which costs about 30 seconds to get a nickname and a password, which give them the right to post articles on boards. Nothing is required if you only want to read postings on open discussion boards. However, education and economic status remain as the significant barriers to access to the

Internet. Among Chinese Internet non-users, two in five (40.8%) did not have access to the Internet since they lack the knowledge of the computer or the Internet. One in four (27.7%) had no access because they did not have the hardware[4]. In addition to these four barriers, I found that the accessibility of RearWindow is further constrained by contents and managements. Movies as the only topic exclude the Internet users who do not like watching movies. The eclectic style of management excludes movie fans at two extremes, which are either the professionals or the entertainment pursuers. As the boardmasters implied, their principle of management is to keep a balance.

> *Lvzi* (the primary boardmaster): You cannot define exactly who our users are. I feel that on a macro level, I must keep the balance. … I do not want RearWindow to be very professional and at the same time, I do not want it to be a discussion board only for commercial movies. (January 29, 2003)

> *X-Camoufleur* (the assistant boardmaster): RearWindow is more adiaphorous than other websites. We try to keep the balance. … Do not make a parade of your talents and at the same time, do not copy others. (February 3, 2003)

My survey results support the claim that RearWindow is indeed a limited discursive space for one group of people, who could be described as movie fans in the underdeveloped middle class, which are young adults who have better education and income than average (See Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison Between RearWindow Users and General Internet Users in China

	RearWindow Survey[2]	CNNIC Survey[4]
Aged between 18 and 35	99.5%	64.5%
Education at University/College level or above	97.3%	56.5%
Students	37.8%	28%
Monthly income lower than 500 RMB	26.8%	40%
Monthly income higher than 1000 RMB	63.1%	39.1%

The middle class is often considered as the dominant public in Western societies. But in China, the underdeveloped middle class is not dominant at all. The concept of the underdeveloped middle class came from He Qinlian's analysis (2000, 94) on Chinese stratification. He argued that there is a pyramidal social structure in China, with tiny and highly overlapping and interlocking political and economic elite at the top, then an underdeveloped middle class, the vast majority of Chinese workers, rural migrants and peasants at the bottom, and the unemployed urban workers or pauperised peasants at the margin. The top elites are made up of a small number of people who possess political, economic and intellectual resources. This one percent of the employed population is the real dominant class in China. The counterpart of the Western middle class, the so-called petty bourgeoisie (*Xiaozi*) in China, is still underdeveloped. They only occupy four percent of the total workforce. They do not have much political and economic resource even though they are well educated and progressive in spirit. Therefore, in terms of accessibility and members' demographics, users of RearWindow form a subaltern public. I will discuss the subaltern nature further when analyzing the discourse on RearWindow.

Constructing the Counter Discourse:
The Internal Activities of RearWindow

The Counter Claims About Movies on RearWindow

Content analysis shows that film reviews were the most popular postings on RearWindow, which reached 67.3%. Informational postings occupied a significant portion, 21.9%. Other postings were all less than 5%, which include relational postings, task and advice, management and intrusion. 74.2% of the film reviews got replies with comments. 77.3% of the respondents of my survey have participated or observed the discussions on the board. From these numbers, we can find that although there are diverse discourses on RearWindow, discussions about movies have a leading role. The counter discourse emerges during these discussions and in order to isolate individual claims, I used key words including Chinese films, Chinese directors, Chinese actors, Chinese movie prizes, pirate movies, and specific movie titles like *Hero* to search all the postings. In addition, corresponding open-ended questions were asked in the online survey to see whether the claims were widely acquired.

As I mentioned before, RearWindow discourse is embedded in the power relationships of Chinese movie industry. Discourses from different powers perform and compete with each other. The discursive competence focuses on one question—which kind of films could be called quality films. The state discourse claimed that audiences should be oriented. In other words, the government decided which kinds of movies are permitted to release. Thus the government controlled the production and distribution and became the dominant discursive producer of Chinese movies. The first government claim is "developing the mainstream melody, promoting the diversity" (Zhu 2002), which means the ideological movies should be aided and at the same time, commercial movies are allowed. The second claim is "arts for socialism and arts for the people", which obviously promotes that movies should be helpful in facilitating the ideology of socialism. The third claim is often considered a counteracting to the above two ideological ones: "let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thoughts contend". This *double-hundreds* discourse implies that movies other than the ideological ones should be allowed. In order to define which kind of films are quality films, the state established three film prizes, which are Golden Cock Prize, Baihua Prize, and Huabiao Prize. Through these three state-controlled prizes, the state reinforced its definitions about quality movies. In addition, reports and reviews of the prizewinners in the state-controlled mass media helped to disseminate this discourse. The discourse formed on RearWindow usually referred to the state discourse and voiced alternative views about Chinese movies. The discourse is made up of a system of statements.

Statement 1: Chinese movies are in trouble because of *the state-controlled institution*.

Although the state discourse admitted the difficulties that Chinese movies are encountering, it attributed these difficulties to pirate VCDs and DVDs. In comparison, RearWindow discourse claims that it is the state-controlled institution that impedes the development of Chinese movies.

> *Luping*: It is a long way for the institution to reform. However after the entry into WTO, no reform means a collective suicide. The results of a perfect reform have some characteristics:

Persons with competence become active.
Life Time[5] is shown publicly.
Censorship is cancelled.
Foreign movies are not dubbed.
(http://www.xici.net/board/doc.asp?id=90000&sub=4&doc_old=1 July 7, 1999)

Statement 2: Censorship is *bad* and *useless*.

Censorship as the reigning tool of the state is described as necessary by the state discourse. The state discourse emphasises that censorship could be beneficial for either the movie industry or the audience. Discourse on RearWindow counterattacks such a statement. Censorship is considered both evil and weak.

> *Fenghuochuanshuo*: I have once been to the Film Bureau. … To tell the truth, my impression of the Film Bureau is that this is the concentration camp for Chinese movies. I had to return to the street so that I did not feel as choky as when I was there.
> (http://www.xici.net/board/doc.asp?id=689043&sub=4&doc_old=1 June 11, 2000)

> *Respondent #240*: Censorship is meaningless. We can watch the banned movies even if they did not pass the censorship.

Statement 3: The state film prizes are *bad* and *not worth caring.*

The state film prizes are the main method that the government uses to promote its quality movies. RearWindow users question the credibility of the film prizes and debase the taste of the prizes. In the online survey, most of the respondents said that the mainstream films are not worth watching. Two extreme words are cited, which are 'shit' and 'rubbish'. The second popular attitude is that "it has nothing to do with me": I do not care about it and I have not seen such movies for a long time.

> *Fenghuochuanshuo*: Its (Huabiao Prize) taste decides that it cannot reflect what people think. It cannot guide the market and reflect the box office either. This kind of prize is a waste, which has no meanings at all.
> There are actors who buy votes for Baihua Prize. It lost its poor self-respect and said nothing for the representation of the audiences.
> Golden Cock has become an ill cock. Its influence gets weaker. Not only are the sponsors hesitant to fund it, but also the actors are hesitant to attend it.
> The most salient truth is: Prizes cannot promote the box office sale and cannot reveal the quality of films. Prizes have become a lampoon and a senseless game within a small faction.
> (http://www.xici.net/board/doc.asp?id=492453&sub=2&doc_old=1 May 8, 2000)

Statement 4: Independent movies are *good in general* but *being banned* has become a word of *sales promotion*.

I supposed that RearWindow users would classify independent movies as the quality movies in their minds. In fact, users are very strict in judging what a quality movie is. Answering the open-ended question about independent movies, they said that most of the movies were good but they were aware of the fact that "banned" has been used for sales promotion. From this statement, we can see that the subaltern public discourse is not subordinate to any grand discourses including that of independent movies. In this sense, the discourse on RearWindow is autonomous.

> *Respondent #12*: Most of the banned movies are quality movies, which were treated unfairly.

Respondent #29: Quality movies are easily banned. Some people make use of such a view and sell their movies under the name of "banned movies".

Respondent #61: We must treat the banned movies individually. We must know whether it is a real art or just a camouflage to catch attention.

Statement 5: Private Movie Watching is *definitely good* but *limited*.

Private Movie Watching (PMW) is a unique phenomenon in China. Since the distribution of movies is controlled by the state, all movie shows, which are out of the official channels, are called Private Movie Watching. This kind of activity is often held by the people who have access to independent movies. PMW challenges the state domination and is often disturbed by the government. For example, activities are terminated under the excuse that the bars, which showed movies, do not have the right to do such a business. Therefore, support for PMW reflects the competence with the state domination. Quite a number of audience watched independent movies through PMW. RearWindow users thought that PMW was good because it could popularise quality movies. In addition, participants with similar tastes could communicate with each other. There are persons who said that it benefited the development of Chinese movies. Meanwhile, they realise that this kind of activity was limited to a certain amount of people, although the limitation had nothing to do with its good nature but with the unstable organisation.

Combining the five statements together, there emerges the counter discourse of RearWindow: *Chinese movies are in trouble due to the bad and useless institution of censorship—quality movies are banned and bad movies are released. However, we are not afraid of the censorship since we can watch independent movies through Private Movie Watching and pirate movies.* In comparison, the state discourse is: *Chinese movies are in danger because audience buy pirate VCDs and DVDs and do not go to cinemas. Quality movies get the prizes and bad movies are banned. Activities that promote independent movies are discouraged.*

From the analyses above, we can see that RearWindow discourse is formed mainly in competence with the state discourse. It proposes another system of statements and meanings. More importantly, the discourse provides a new subject position for the RearWindow users. The addressee of the state discourse is *receiver* while that of the market discourse is *consumer*. However, RearWindow discourse defines the audience as *reviewer*, who can distinguish what is good and what is bad. In the state discourse, audiences are ignorant and should be told the good and the bad. In the market discourse, audiences are voiceless and they only need to make the action of "buy" or "not buy". However, in RearWindow discourse, audiences have the loudest voice in judging the quality of films. The counter discourse further manifests the subaltern nature of RearWindow. However, in order to understand RearWindow as a public sphere, how the counter discourse is constructed becomes an important issue. Is the discourse constructed through an open discussion in which participants use their public reason to communicate with each other, or a monopolistic process in which a few participants dominate?

The Deliberative Procedure on RearWindow

To examine the rational-critical discourse on RearWindow, I chose one of the hottest debates, which is about "whether Chinese movies are a kind of politics", and analyzed related postings to see how participants used reason in their argu-

ments. This debate began on July 9, 2002 and lasted for about two weeks. There are in total 56 pieces of relative postings left, among which 39 were posted by different nicknames. More than half (58.5%) of the postings were written as a reply to statements made by other users, no matter whether supporting or opposing. 73.6% of the postings got disagreeing replies. We can see that open dialogue or reciprocal conversation is the mainstream during the debate. A great majority (81.1%) of the postings demonstrated the reasons why they supported or opposed one opinion. Among these postings with reasons, 75.5% of them provided valid claims that are criticisable. "Criticisable" (Dahlberg 2001a) is judged by two steps: The first step is to see whether the poster talked about his reasons as the only truth that everyone should agree with. If not, I examined whether there were replies criticising these reasons. Both "with the reasons as only truth" and "without critiques" are sorted as "not criticisable".

67.2% of the survey respondents agreed that "the goal of discussion is to achieve mutual understanding", including totally agree (19.1%) and basically agree (48.1%). The boardmasters also tried to pilot the debate to mutual understanding by deleting postings that made personal attacks and requesting the participants to transcend the success/failure mode of debate.

> *VCD*: Debaters have expressed their opinions and clarified their positions. Thus the debate has reached the essential level. I think there is not a true answer. (http://www.xici.net/board/doc.asp?id=17911019&sub=24&doc_old=1 July 11, 2002)

Although there is a rough consensus about the goal of debate, participants had deep disagreements on whether Chinese movies are a kind of politics. Two main views emerged in the debate. The first view is that Chinese movies should have political significance, or a Chinese movie that challenges the state domination could be called a quality movie. This kind of view was often supported by a group of participants who are called academicians, including professors in universities and professionals within the independent movie industry. On the other hand, a group of folk movie reviewers, who are much more familiar with the netiquette than academicians, claimed that Chinese movies should reduce their political sensitivity, or a quality Chinese movie must in the first place have the art value. Academicians have advantages in information about Chinese independent movies, which could be used as powerful proofs for their arguments and theoretical training, which strengthens their ability of debating. In contrast, other users only have their personal experiences and do not have any inside stories. In the meantime, folk movie reviewers know how to use the Internet effectively to express their opinions. For example, one folk movie reviewer *Gu Xiaobai* abdicated his position of boardmaster in order to keep an equal status with his opponents during the debate, which gained him a lot of compliments. The favours from other Internet users supported folk movie reviewers to debate against academicians notwithstanding that they have less offline resources. My survey shows that 77.2% of the respondents agreed that the debaters were equal.

Despite the subaltern nature of RearWindow, participants did not treat their discourse as a predetermined consensus. Instead, they actively constructed it through frequent confrontation of disagreements while applying public reasoning, providing factual evidences, and sharing personal experiences in their attempts to convince others that their position had merit. When a counter discourse is

constructed through this deliberative procedure, it is ready to face the challenges from the wider publics.

Disseminating the Counter Discourse: External Activities of RearWindow

A subaltern public sphere is enclaved if it does not have any external functions (Squires 2002). External activities help a counterpublic to convince the wider publics the validity of their counter claims. Private Movie Watching (PMW) is one of such external activities. RearWindow participants made use of various social resources including bars, universities, emporium and formal movie theatres to support PMW. Interacting with mass media is the other way to disseminate RearWindow discourse. However, both external activities are at the same time beneficial and harmful, which involve dangers that might impede the progression of the counter public sphere.

Private Movie Watching

PMW showed movies that are inaccessible through formal ways such as movie theatres or legal VCDs or DVDs. The organisers collect these movies from the pirate movie industry and more often, through their personal relations with directors and producers. PMW became a nationwide phenomenon in 2000. At that time, many cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Nanjing, Wuhan, Chengdu, Kunming, Shenyang and Taiyuan had their own PMW. Quite a number of audiences watched Chinese independent movies in this way. 35% of my survey respondents said that they once attended such activities.

As one of the four most important PMW in the country[6], PMW of RearWindow was first organised by *VCD* (the founder of RearWindow) and his friends, from June 2000 to December 2002. But the activity ceased at the end of 2002, right before the 16th People Congress because the state strengthened its control during the sensitive period. However, when the state control loosed, RearWindow boardmasters re-organised their PMW in a bar from the late 2003. The vicissitude of Chinese PMW (See Table 2) reflects the flexibility of the subaltern public spheres. When the oppression decreases, the subaltern public spheres make use of various social resources and exerts external function actively. However, when their activities provoke hard oppression, they turn back to focus on their internal activities, which could keep their discursive spaces safe.

Despite the relatively easy access to movies, most of the organisers do not have the resources for showing movies, which at least need a large, empty space and some showing machines. That is why PMW must cooperate with other social resources. In the following paragraphs, I will compare the advantages and disadvantages of different recourses. PMW of RearWindow mainly cooperated with two kinds of social resources: universities and commercial entities. Some active RearWindow users who were undergraduate students initiated the collaboration with universities. They often asked University Student Unions to be the cooperator so that they can rent or borrow the establishments in universities. The movie show is open to the public although the main audiences are students. Idiosyncratic movies were accepted more easily at universities than in other places. Nearly all the European art movies were shown at universities (See Table 2). More importantly, the state often

gives more freedom to academic activities since the influence of these activities is limited. Watching movies at universities could take the mask of academic activities. However, the collaboration is not stable due to easily changeable university policies. For example, the renovation of the establishments, the beginning of winter or summer vacation, the 16th People Congress, and even the approaching of final exams could be the reasons of terminations.

Table 2: Private Movie Watching Organised by RearWindow

Locale	Time	Ticket Fare	Movies Showed	Reason of Termination
Multimedia Centre in East-Southern University	June 2000 to August 2000	5 RMB per person	European art movies	Renovation of the centre
Xindingtai Emporium for Electronic Products	August 2000 to March 2001	Free	Japanese movies, Korean movies, and others	Bankrupt of the emporium
Multimedia classrooms in East-Southern University	September 2000 to February 2001	Free	European art movies	Closure of the classrooms during winter vacation
Multimedia Centre of East-Southern University	March 2001 to August 2001	2 RMB per person	European art movies, Taiwan movies and Chinese independent movies	Closure of the centre during summer vacation
Worker Movie Theatre	November 2001 to August 2002	10 RMB per person (50 free tickets, 20% off for students)	Korean movies, Taiwan movies and Oscar winners	Change of the theatre manager
Amphitheatre in Jiangsu Broadcasting University	November to December 2002	1 RMB per person	Taiwan movies	The 16th People Congress
The BanpoVilliage Bar	November 2003 to now	Free	Chinese independent movies and European art movies	N/A

Compared to universities, commercial corporations are more predictable in their requirements for PMW. Their principle is to attract consumers and make money. *Xindingtai* is an emporium, which sells electronic products, including VCD/DVD players, speaker system, and TV/display. Chinese movie fans are its potential consumers since they watch movies a lot at home and need these products. *Xindingtai* and RearWindow agreed that *Xindingtai* would provide showing machines and the space, a small theatre for previewing electronic products, while RearWindow was responsible for looking for movies, organising shows and making advertisements on the Internet. After the bankruptcy of *Xindingtai*, RearWindow cooperated with *the Worker* Movie Theatre, which is a state-owned movie theatre. Chinese movie theatres had to survive by themselves after the state stopped funding them. At that time, the entire Chinese movie theatres were stagnant and so was *the Worker*. Thus the manager of *the Worker* wanted to cooperate with RearWindow and he expected that RearWindow could bring young movie audiences to the theatre. After half a year's collaboration, *the Worker* found that they could not make money from the collaboration since RearWindow users were just a small social group and not the young audiences they expected. They became very passive in aiding the movie shows and the manager who decided to cooperate with RearWindow was

transferred to another movie theatre in suburb. The collaboration had to end. The ongoing PMW is held in a bar called *BanpoVilliage*. RearWindow showed plenty of Chinese independent movies and European movies there. The bar made profits from the audiences' purchase of drinks and foods and the fare is totally free.

From the above analyses, we can see that despite the profit-pursuing nature of commercial power, it is possible for a subaltern public sphere to cooperate with the market economy. However, this collaboration often means that the subaltern public sphere must fulfil some requirements of commercial entities. For example, RearWindow showed more commercial movies in *the Worker* Movie Theatre than in universities. But the organisers thought as long as these compromises are negotiable, collaboration is possible.

> *Lvzi* (the primary boardmaster): There are some bars that want to cooperate with us. But we must talk about which kind of movies will be shown, whether the show will be charged, and which kind of people they want to attract.

The Interaction with Mass Media

The interaction between subaltern public spheres and mass media is significant because mass media are the main channels through which subaltern discourses could reach the wider publics (Felski 1989). The close relationship between RearWindow and mass media could be reflected in the components of users. There are 11.9% of the users who are news editors or reporters, which ranks third in the occupation category. That is why the interaction between RearWindow and mass media often occurs at the personal level. For instance, the boardmasters introduced the board on newspapers or editors recruited authors on the board. It is RearWindow that provides the opportunity that they can meet each other, which is rare in the offline world.

RearWindow is primarily used by mass media as a news resource. Mass media reported the activities of RearWindow such as PMW and asked the boardmasters or active participants for interviews. Meanwhile, the interviewees from RearWindow took use of these chances to propagandise the discussion group. A lot of national media have reported RearWindow, such as *Nanfang Weekend* and *Hunan TV*. Although most news reports took RearWindow as a newly emerged phenomenon that could bring people benefits, some of them talked about RearWindow from an official point of view with caution.

> *Jinling Evening*: The boardmaster is VCD and the core members of the organisation have developed into more than 30 persons. … The government department must pay attention to the administration of these civil organisations and their activities.

The other form of collaboration between RearWindow and mass media is that mass media recruited authors from RearWindow. At the same time, the posters who became media authors made their own reputation from the collaboration, and more importantly, disseminated their discourse to the wider publics. More than half of RearWindow users (51.1%) have contacts with mass media, and 18.3% of them are media authors, including regular and irregular ones. Among this 18.3%, 12.6% said that the editors forwardly contacted them through the Internet. The RearWindow users have established collaboration with all kinds of mass media, from the national ones to local ones, and from the mass ones to professional ones.

Mass media staff prefer looking for authors from RearWindow because Internet

users are a part of their targeted clients. Online writers who are favoured by Internet users would attract the same people in the offline world as well.

> *Ju* (editor in chief of Star Media): Why did I pay attention to the Internet? The first reason is that I recognised its importance. The Internet users are vogue youths who are overlapping with my targeted readers. … I must make my readers overlap with the Internet users and then the Internet users will buy my newspaper. (January 30, 2003)

The second reason is that the Internet is considered as a new medium and the language on the Internet is considered as the texts most in fashion. A lot of entertainment newspapers and magazines want to catch the fad through the using of Internet writers and articles.

13.5% of the respondents knew RearWindow through mass media. So we can say that the reports on mass media made RearWindow more popular. However, there are risks to be the highlights of mass media. It may draw the attention from the government and incur strict control. Furthermore, media outlets were often out of the control of RearWindow participants. 64.2% of the media authors agreed that there are differences between online postings and writings for mass media. They found that they must obey some rules of mass media and cannot write as personally or freely as on RearWindow. Their opinions are selectively disseminated to the wider publics.

> *Vian* (active participant): I was disgusted with the editors who often asked me to provide some sexy photos of the stars when I wrote about the Korean movies for them. … It is totally impossible that the media do not have any limitations. There are definitely guides that forbid some discourses. We were once to be the guests in a radio program; I saw that the guidelines were posted on the wall, indicating what kind of things could never be mentioned. All were there. It was serious. (February 5, 2003)

> *Leon* (editor of Orient magazine): The authors from the Internet like writing things with an unconstrained style. … Some authors could write very good articles online, but I felt that these articles are not appropriate to publish in the magazines. In addition to the inappropriate style, the contents of the articles are often inappropriate to publish in magazines. For example, the articles about movies talked about the sensitive topics like religion or polity. You can speak about it freely on the Internet but cannot on mass media. Mass media pay attention to the leadership effect and they must have the "correct propaganda guide". (January 28, 2003)

Due to the double-edged effect of collaboration with mass media, 67.8% of the respondents thought that RearWindow should keep a distance from mass media and should not contact mass media on its own initiative. 15.8% of the respondents thought that RearWindow should cooperate with mass media forwardly and acquire media exposure as often as possible. Only 2.7% of the respondents thought that RearWindow should totally isolate itself from mass media.

The Chinese mass media are semi-governmental and semi-commercial (Zhao 2001). The governmental part often rejects and distorts the discourse from subaltern public spheres while the commercial part is more open to diverse discourses. For example, *Maxiangxin* is the editor of Nanfang City Newspaper, a highly commercialised news medium and she told me that reports about PMW, independent movies, and critiques on state-controlled movie prizes are all allowed to appear on her newspaper. However, she admitted that she tried to avoid the so-called sensitive topics such as the June 4 student movement. In contrast, movie magazines that are

under the administration of the Film Bureau are forbidden to mention independent movies in any cases. Since Chinese mass media are still under the control of the government, the freedom of the commercial part is limited. Whenever the state strengthens its control, the commercial part would easily betray its cooperators, the subaltern publics.

In the case of RearWindow, we can see that online authors have become an important discursive creator in the field of movies in China. They have introduced to the public quality movies other than those defined by the state and the market economy. At least, they proposed alternative criteria that normal people could use to judge what quality movies are. However, their discourse has to be processed by the gatekeepers in mass media. The radical aspects of the discourse are adjusted and the wider publics could not know the original discourse from the subaltern public sphere. It is very possible that the wider publics cannot understand the counter-claims well due to the incomplete information.

Discussions and Conclusions

The case of RearWindow to Movies indicates that the Internet did not show much potential in fostering the Habermasian unitary or single public sphere. Instead, it can effectively support the development of subaltern public spheres, based on which minority groups could construct their own counter discourses and disseminate them into the outer world. RearWindow users successfully developed their counter discourse to compete with the state and the commercial discourse on Chinese movies. The discourse provided normal people an alternative system of meanings and a new subject position, the critical reviewer. Since Chinese civil society is developing, the practice of deliberation in subaltern public spheres could function as the training school of being reasoned citizens.

Different from the historical development of civil society in Western world, Chinese civil society is emerging not along with but outside of the market economy due to the fact that Chinese economic reform was initiated and led by the state and thus highly interconnected with the state power to form the system world at the very beginning of its birth. Habermas (1991) considered civil society as oppositional to such a system world and emphasised their antagonistic relationship. In contrast, subaltern theorists are more flexible in this aspect because they recognise the inequalities within civil society and the possibility for minority groups to make use of the market forces to leverage them. Actually, RearWindow users took the advantage of market economy and other social resources to disseminate their counter discourse. Social resources including universities, bars, emporium, and movie theatres supported Private Movie Watching, which is an important external activity of the online subaltern public sphere. Although RearWindow users had to make some compromises during the cooperation, commercial powers brought more benefits than harms to the subaltern public sphere. RearWindow's mobilisation of these resources reflects the flexibility of the relationship between the market economy and the civil society, which is possible to be a cooperative one rather than a definitely oppositional one as Habermas implied.

Habermas's critique on current Western embodiment of public sphere, the mass media, is often considered as sharp and accurate. Differently, subaltern theorists recognise the limitations of mass media channels as well as their benefits. The

analysis of external activities of RearWindow demonstrates that it is possible for subaltern publics to transcend boundaries between insiders and outsiders and influence the wider publics by using mass media. RearWindow users have introduced definitions of quality movies other than that of the state and the market economy to the wider publics via the collaboration with Chinese mass media. In addition, more and more Chinese people could know what a critical discourse is, which is meaningful for the development of public sphere. However, the counter discourse from RearWindow was under the surveillance of the gatekeepers. It is common that mass media editors and reporters blocked or distorted the original discourse, which might result in reduced influence on fostering critical thinking, or even misunderstandings from the wider publics. Thus RearWindow has an ambivalent relationship with mass media, due to which both internal and external activities could be at risk.

So which role does the Internet play in such a formation of subaltern public sphere? Could the same process happening in RearWindow take place offline without the Internet? What is the difference between the RearWindow participants and rock music fans, who are also considered as subaltern to the mainstream ideology? RearWindow shares the subaltern position with rock culture but unlike rock fans, RearWindow participants do not focus on establishing and maintaining a special emotional bondage which can support a subcultural identity. Instead, RearWindow is primarily a discursive space for rational-critical debates among social members who hold different points of views regarding Chinese movies. Such an open discussion process needs a material support which can accommodate a large number of opinion holders, which most traditional media such as music journals cannot do. Considering the state and the commercial domination in nearly all public spaces offline (e.g., mass media and streets), the Internet is relatively free and capable to be the public space for the publics. RearWindow cannot exist without the Internet and subaltern public spheres cannot exist without a discursive space which is open to all the members of that subaltern public and favourable towards diverse opinions.

To answer the grand question of the democratic potential of the Internet, the theory of subaltern public spheres is one of the ways to understand the Internet and its political implication. However, the significance of the Internet is closely related to the social groups we are talking about and the social context the groups exist in. The Internet is an indispensable and exclusive base for the Chinese online discussion group I am discussing, largely because in China, there are few discursive spaces for common people to take part in. At the same time, the underdeveloped middle class in China has grasped some social and economic resources, which make their external influence on the wider publics possible. Future studies on the democratic aspect of the Internet should clarify that in which kind of societies, and for which publics, the Internet can interact with which parts of the offline world to improve which kind of democracy.

Notes:

1. The first posting on the board appeared on December 20, 1998. There were in total 16,595 postings till April 19, 2003. Among these 52 months, I decided to choose four months as the sample, one month per 13-month section. Since I wanted to examine the evolution of the discussion board and compare postings through the time, I used the random digits method to choose one number from 1 to 13. The online random digits generator (http://www.random.org)

generated "2" as the number and I found out the second month in the four 13-month sections. Finally I got January 20 – February 19, 1999; February 20 – March 19, 2000; March 20 – April 19, 2001; and April 20 – May 19, 2002. To make the analysis more sensitive to the latest changes of the board, I selected one additional week from April 13 to 19, 2003. During these periods, there were in total 1,255 postings, including 47 in 1999, 154 in 2000, 501 in 2001, 463 in 2002, and 90 in 2003.

2. On April 21, 2003, I posted a message about my survey on RearWindow to invite responses to the questionnaire. Later I asked the board administrators to put this message on the head of the board and mark it as "Jian" (recommendation) or "Gao" (announcement). Thus the postings could be kept on the top of the board for one week. During the survey period, I responded to questions and discussion that arose on the board about the survey. One week later, there were 255 responses to the questionnaire and the "Jian" mark was cancelled. I posted a message on the board on April 27, 2003 announcing that the survey had finished. One hundred and eighty-five valid responses were received.

3. There are two interviews conducted through emails while others were face-to-face interviews. Interviewees include six boardmasters and sysop, five active participants, and three media staff.

4. Semi-annual Survey Report on the Development of China's Internet (January, 2003).

5. A banned movie by Yimou Zhang.

6. Huang Xiaoxie. The Watchers of Chinese Movies. *Nanfang Weekend*. March 19, 2001.

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Communication and Peace

2007 EURICOM Colloquium on Communication and Culture

Piran (Slovenia), September 13-15, 2007

Communication and Peace is the topic of the September 2007 EURICOM colloquium in Piran, Slovenia. In a world divided by ideological, ethnic, and economic conflicts, communication functions as a vital means of exchanging ideas, addressing frictions, and settling hostilities. The colloquium invites participants to consider forms and functions of communication in the process of negotiating peace, to question the role of media in the (re)production of conflicts and their resolutions, and to reflect on the importance of dialogue in making sense of disharmony and producing closure. Who are the partners in communication and how do they use language (or imagery) to succeed or fail in their quest for peace and how does the process of communication unfold in local, national, or international arenas of human conflict?

The colloquium is dedicated to the memory of Michael Traber, a co-founder of Euricom, who devoted his life to the idea of peace and communication.

Suggestions for papers are invited until January 15, 2007; final papers are due by July 15, 2007.

Send abstracts or any requests for further information to:

Hanno Hardt (hanno.hardt@fdv.uni-lj.si)
Slavko Splichal (slavko.splichal@guest.arnes.si)