
The cultural public sphere in cyberspace:

A case study on a Chinese online forum

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Introduction

□ Theoretical framework:

- Public sphere: “a network for communicating information and points of view” about common good (Habermas, 1989)

□ Main features of a genuine public sphere: (Habermas, 1989; Calhoun, 1992)

- Focusing on discussing issues of common concerns to the public;
- Inclusive in principle & equally accessible to all;
- Rational-critical deliberation;
- Deliberation should be solely judged on the validity and rationality of the communication

□ Framework for analyzing Cyberspace:

the democratizing function of Internet?

Background of this study

- Internet & China : role of shaping democracy?
 - Famous for online chase, collective attack, and lack of rationality
 - Youth participation (raging youth?)
 - Sun Zhigang Event; Strengthening-China Forum
 - The most benefit: broadening the space for civic engagement (Zhou, 2008)
 - What is the real situation of China's cyberspace?
 - Case study:
 - an online forum in China <http://tieba.baidu.com/f?kw=lost>
 - when a new regulation policy was issued.
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Objective of this study

- Method: qualitative and quantitative.
 - Content analysis,
 - Discourse analysis,
 - Social network analysis.

 - The real discourse process on cultural policy:
 - “quantity of participation” : dominance degree of honored members
 - “quality of public discourse”: degree of verbal conflict and rationality
 - Are the participants in the forum are just passive consumers of cultural product?
 - What are their main views about the new issued policy?
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Some main findings (cont'd)

- Quantity of participation:

Table1 descriptive information for dynamics process

Descriptive data	Mean	S. D.
dominance of honored member	.25	.34
Verbal conflict degree	.11	.14
Rationality degree	.11	.15

Some main findings (cont'd)

□ Quality of public discourse:

Table2 dominance degree in discussion

Dependent variable: dominance degree in discussion			
	Beta	t	p
Status of the poster	.167	3.658	.000
Rationality degree	-.009	-.038	.969

Table3 verbal conflict degree in discussion

Dependent Variable: conflict degree in discussion			
	Beta	t	p
Status of the poster	-.053	5.985	.006
Rationality degree	-.214	-2.208	.030

Some main findings (cont'd)

□ Social network structure

- Network size: 420 nodes

 - 31 honored members*

 - 239 ordinary members*

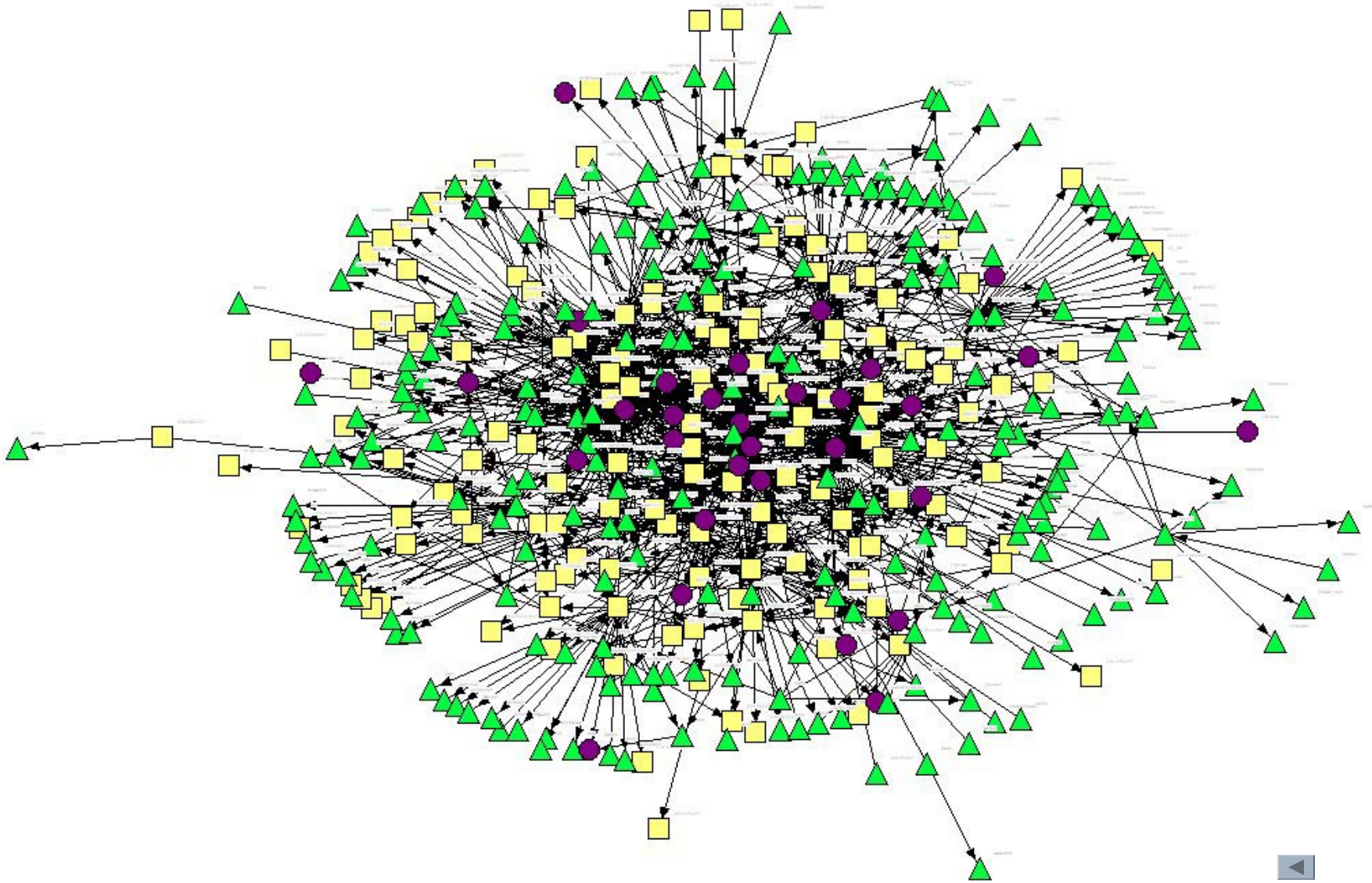
 - 150 IP participants*

- Honored members as a cohesive clique in the network;

- Active ordinary members & IP participants

 - some of them also shown in the core of the network;*

 - taking initiatives to issue a discussion*



Some main findings (cont'd)

- Statement1: censorship is meaningless, evil and detrimental.
 - *rangefan: “I still could not understand this stupid policy. One day Internet will become useless.”*
 - *Shangshandaye: “Don’t worry. This so called regulation is temporary. Remember the ban policy about online cartoon? We can still watch it online. Did the regulation work?”*
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Some main findings (cont'd)

- Statement2: The new regulation policy is criticized because of its wrong emphasis.
 - Lengxuedongwu2008 *'I feel confused by this regulation notice. Why use the word license? They should pay more attention to **copyright**, not the low level of license.'*
 - Chem_Market *'I think the authority should aim at the **commercial use** of online drama, not our sharing behaviors. Some producers use our resources to **make pirated version for profit**.... I find that many people regarded this banning policy as a joke. This attitude is not advisable as a citizen. In a word, the authority should differentiate commercial and non-commercial conduct and **focus on piracy and infringing**.'*
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Some main findings

- Statement3: Overseas drama is helpful to enlighten local drama industry.
 - 116.228.160.* *‘Due to lack of talented person, invest, competitive environment and sense of quality, local drama is under development. The popularity of online oversea drama can afford some **stimulus** and local drama industry should learn the **innovation spirit** and try different styles.’*
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Conclusion and Limitations

- ❑ A limited public sphere was found.
 - ❑ Participants are not just passive consumer of cultural product.
 - ❑ They are speaking to the government power, but in a one-way communication paradigm.
 - ❑ **Implications for policy-maker:** what is the effective and right way to adopt ICTs?
 - ❑ Limitations of this study: time bias; measure of dominance, rationality.
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