Network Power:

The Carrefour event, civil society and the lack of democratic development in China

by

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Abstract

The Chinese Communist Party regularly instructs owners and purveyors of mass media in China on topics it views as sensitive. In a recent general notice, media were notified that they were not to use the term ‘civil society’ as it was unacceptable for people to stand in opposition to the government. At the same time American sociologists, such as Yang Guobin, have identified the development of civil society movements as a consequence of the wide-spread use of information communication technology (ICT) in China. The identified civil society is argued to be part of a teleological socio-political movement towards democracy as it represents plurality in public political discourse and rights defense. By documenting the general content and implications of the high public presence during the 2008 patriotic debate over the boycott of Carrefour the social role of civil society in China will be brought into question. This argument adds to the current debate over Internet enabled civil society in China by rejecting the claim that the Internet has helped to establish new practices; the Internet merely eases and speeds up what people do in daily life. Rather than investigating a single association (of boycotters) and its one-on-one relationship with the state, this research focuses on the public environment that enables citizen mobilizations to occur, inter-public relations during the formation of new associations (such as the boycotters), and the result of civil society goal seeking when it runs counter to the government’s publicity. The presented evidence indicates that the political importance of civil society practice in China is not a social trajectory towards the establishment of democratic practices, but rather a more general shift in the struggle between empowered groups in the public and the state to dictate social norms.
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List of abbreviations

1. CASS- Chinese Academy of Social Science
2. CCP- China Communist Party
3. ICT- Information Communication Technology
4. OECD- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
5. WSIS- World Summit on the Information Society
1.0 Background

Daily life in China has become dramatically freer in the past three decades as CCP controls over public behavior and media have become less totalitarian. Print and broadcast media have been partially privatized and citizen to citizen communication has greatly increased from the days when the government constantly monitored and regulated public behavior.\(^1\) When China made the dramatic shift from a planned to a market economy many political and social theorists in the West saw this as an opportunity for individuals to organize and act separately from the state and erode the CCP’s monopoly over political power in China. This did not happen. The Internet presents a similar change to public life in China as it further adds to relatively unregulated-unregulatable public space for individual Chinese citizens to gather and organize. The patriotic boycott/protest and public debate over the boycott of Carrefour, a foreign retail chain in China, exemplifies how citizens are able and actively form associations for public action outside of state guidance. The following provides the historical and theoretical background for an investigation of whether Internet enabled action is leading to political change, such as democracy, in China.

1.1 The Carrefour event

The 2008 boycott of the French based multinational retail firm Carrefour in China represents a moment when the CCP’s power was challenged by its citizens. The boycott grew out of the world’s response to the riots which broke out in Tibet following the

\(^1\) Horizontal communication as opposed to vertical citizen to state communication
March 10\textsuperscript{th} Day of Resistance, Olympic sentiment and diplomacy, and the spontaneous nature of public opinion in a networked society. Described by sociologists Suisheng Zhao and Nyriri Pal, as “xenophobic antics”, and part of the development of global consumer activism in China, the 2008 patriotic boycott, and online debate thereof, of Carrefour was not a shining moment of civility in China.\footnote{Zhao. S.(2008), 54; Nyriri (2009).} However, as Canadian International Council (CIC) researcher Jeremy Paltiel notes, “popular nationalism has grown beyond the reach of the Party which has often struggled to restrain it” the Carrefour boycott exemplifies the presence of civil society (associations organized outside of the state’s guidance) in China.\footnote{Paltiel, 7.} Indeed a review of Chinese academia reveals that this boycott is known as the ‘Carrefour event’ and is used as a case study to argue why the government needs to take a more active role in engaging citizens through the Internet and guide social norms.\footnote{Li, 2008; Wen, Yong-Kang 2008; Han, Cheong and Stek (2009).} This investigation delves into the meaning of this boycott and the ensuing debate in so far as understanding socio-political life in China.

2008 was the first time that China hosted the Olympic Games. This honor was perceived as a moment to prove to itself and the rest of the world that China was once again a world leader.\footnote{Broudehoux (2007), 384.} This would prove to be diplomatically challenging for China because, “[w]hereas China expected the Olympics to enhance its prestige… foreign publics and governments… saw the Beijing Olympics as a promise by China to improve its human rights record”.\footnote{Han, Cheong and Stek, 361.} When the annual March 10\textsuperscript{th} Day of Resistance protests turned into violent ethnic riots, known by the Chinese media as the March 14th riots, China’s global public image lost its Olympic sheen as stories about human rights abuses...
surfaced. Politicians such as the president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, even argued the merits of boycotting the Beijing Olympics. These reports lead to human rights protests at European and North American locations of China’s “Journey of Harmony” Olympic torch relay. During the Paris leg, one protestors even struggled to get the torch from Chinese Paralympics fencer Jinjing. The altercation was widely reported as the ‘attack on Jinjing’ and viewed as a further public insult by the French.

The attack on Jinjing added to online discussion by nationalistic Chinese sparked by incorrect reporting by CNN on human rights abuses during the March 14th riots. On April 10th a 23 year old male user of China’s popular BBS thread publisher mop.com argued that France should be resisted and that Carrefour exemplified how foreign powers tried to bully China. This argument spread rapidly in Internet discussion. The following day Carrefour was thematically linked to the Tibetan demonstrations as the protest mobilization order claimed that LVMH had contributed Carrefour profits to support the Dalai Lama and Tibetan separation from China. The mobilization order called on people to boycott Carrefour by not shopping there on May 1st. On April 13th another youth, known by her blogger name ‘Kitty-Shelly’, began demonstrating outside her local Carrefour. On April 17th sina.com, China’s largest social media host, conducted a poll in their news section on public support of a boycott of Carrefour. Over 700,000 people took part in this poll and a majority reported that they supported the boycott. From May

7 Nyiri, I.  
9 Han, Cheong and Stek 364.  
10 Ni (2008).  
11 Xiong (2008).  
12 Blue Cat (2008).  
18th to May 20th multi-day protests took place outside of Carrefour locations in over 20 cities throughout China.

On May 20th reports claiming that Carrefour’s Chinese name Jia Le F) had become a blocked term on the popular Chinese search engine baidu.com began.\(^\text{15}\) These reports continued throughout the month with reports that google.cn was also censoring the term and that blog hosts were being asked to censor posts on the boycott Carrefour topic.\(^\text{16}\) The physical protests slowly died out and online interest, as determined by overall numbers of social media postings, dwindled.

\(^{15}\) Ramzy (2008).
\(^{16}\) Han Y. (2008).
During this boycott I worked as a language teacher in the northern capital city of Harbin and experienced the offline development of this movement. Sociologist Nyriri claims that police began dispersing protestors on May 1st; however I only saw three days of protest ending on April 23 with no police intervention. Despite this minor point of difference, my vantage point of the boycott, hearing about it by interested middle school and college students as well as middle aged and elderly professionals lead me to understand the social importance of the boycott in the same way as Nyriri; development of a nationalist consumerist ethos. It was not until I saw the physical protests and police surveillance, and later learned about the Internet censorship campaign that I began to understand it as an important window into Chinese state-society relations. This was a moment when China’s citizens wanted to take an independent and leading role in defining how China would respond and relate with the world; an opportunity taken away by the CCP.

1.2 Civil society in China

There is civil society in the People’s Republic of China. This can be observed even without venturing to the country by accessing websites and social media tools such as QQ (an instant messenger program) and investigating what is happening in real time, or what has happened in the past. The media we can access is not reviewed by the state’s mouth piece, state owned broadcast media, nor state owned media editors, but is the

17 Nyriri, 5; Nyriri’s account of the boycott’s lifespan is amongst the most detailed and can be referred to for more details.
18 Personal journal entries March 30- April 19(appendix A).
conversations, debates and public discourse dynamics of any public forum; and the Chinese are talkative. Once a closed society, China is now one of the most accessible nations in the world with the most Internet users leaving records of what ordinary people think and feel and do in everyday life in blogs and micro-blogs (‘tweets’).

True enough: popular social media sites Facebook and Twitter which have helped to connect the world and aide democratic revolution in other authoritative countries are blocked, the software and hardware which make up the ‘Great Firewall of China’ effectively filter search engine results and websites on restricted information (be it pornography or Falun Dafa documentaries). Website hosts who operate within China must agree to ambiguous duties under the “Public Pledge on Self-discipline for the Chinese Internet Industry”, and this policy has led to a general practice of ‘self-censorship’ on politically sensitive subjects by web hosts and users alike. However the diversity, resistance, cohesion and division which comprise the content of China’s Internet (accessible by the nation’s citizens) indicates that public, unlike political, life in China is largely created by the free actions of its citizens.

Now that the public life of Chinese citizens is no longer controlled as it was under Mao, and wealth and cultural life can be accessed by means other than the Communist Party, the question which is begged most loudly by government policy analysts and academics is: will China democratize? The CPP’s answer, as will be shown below, is that civil associations work in accordance with the state and those which do not

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19 Li and Rao (2010).
21 Meng (2010).
are not tolerated. If anything the CCP would say that the Internet improves their one party ‘democratic’ rule.\textsuperscript{22}

1.2.1 The current debate on civil society, the Internet and China

Outside of China, the discussion on the existence and function of civil society in China is currently dominated by American sociologist Yang Guobin and Chris Calhoun, a leading civil society and public sphere theorist who took part in the 1993 symposium on the socio-political causes and effects of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. Together they have documented how the Internet has helped to expand the public sphere in China as a ‘revolutionary technology’ supposedly aiding the social conditions for democracy by providing average citizens with the opportunity to actively participate, “in public governance and in the defining of everyday life”: civil society.\textsuperscript{23} In arguing that there is an effective public sphere in China Yang and Calhoun present what Charles Taylor calls a ‘strong’ definition of civil society.\textsuperscript{24} Most supporters of the existence of ‘strong’ civil society in China point to public ‘rights defense’ as a core element of participation in public governance leading to the foundation of democracy.

This academia supports the projections and intentions of western foreign policy research organizations such as the Canadian International Council (CIC), Research and Development (RAND), international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Most clearly articulated by US foreign secretary Hilary

\textsuperscript{22} Dong and Han, 17.
\textsuperscript{23} Dai, as quoted in Zhou (2005), 344.
\textsuperscript{24} Taylor, 98.
Clinton in a 2010 speech, is the argument that Internet freedom, in the form of unimpeded access to the Internet, will spread democracy. The ‘Jasmine’ revolution of Internet users across the Middle East and in China uses Facebook, Twitter and other social media to organize and promote pro-democracy protests. In Egypt and Tunisia these protests have led to changes in heads of state where as in Libya, Syria and Iran such efforts have led to violent conflicts between governments and their civilian populations. While attracting the attention of public intellectuals at first, Jasmine revolution efforts in China have failed to gain popular support. The question we are left with is, “If China has a flourishing online civil society then why are they not taking to the streets like citizens in other authoritarian countries?”.

Many Chinese, do not even know about the existence of a Jasmine revolution in their country; even though it serves as a general rallying cry for protests against housing demolition - a top public opinion concern. This may be because news media and online social media are heavily regulated by the CCP. Global Internet policy expert, Rebecca MacKinnon has furthered Kalathil and Boas’ paramount work *Open networks Closed Regimes*, by investigating how authoritarian governments do not see the Internet as a ‘democratic threat’, but use it as a means to reinforce their power over public life. While MacKinnon does not paint as bleak a picture as He Qinglian, a Chinese academic living in America who says there is no chance for independent civil society in China, and is supportive of Yang’s findings, she represents the other side of the ‘civil society on China’s Internet’ debate: arguing that there is no inherit social trajectory, such as democracy, from Internet use –that it is not a ‘revolution-causing’ technology.
What is common to most civil society research is that it identifies ‘emergent’ or ‘fledgling’ civil society on China’s Internet. Yang, in *The co-evolution of the Internet and civil society in China*, best described how the Internet provides space and opportunity for Chinese citizens to engage in public life outside the guidance of the state.\(^{25}\) Most of the research Yang refers to in demonstrating his point focuses on the decentralization of communication, creative plurality, and the lack of coherent content control on the Internet in China in 2003.\(^{26}\) Since then government control has greatly improved, but not at the cost of civil society, which has arguably strengthened during the same time period. This does not necessarily mean that the Chinese public found a foothold and is now refusing to be kicked off of it. The vigor with which the Chinese have adopted the Internet and the diversity they have quickly filled it with did not arise spontaneously. Just as Yang noted that civil society is more than just organizations, it is also more than the space where people act; civil society is composed of the ideas and visions which motivate people to associate, and this aspect has been missing from the debate.\(^{27}\)

1.2.2 Advancing the argument

Instead of claiming that the apparently ever more expressive and plural Chinese public signifies a novel shift in Chinese political expectations and relationships, why not seek a simpler explanation? There is nothing significantly novel about what motivates people, nor the manner in which society holds government accountable today than there was before. While there is a plethora of work on the increase in ‘rights defense’ as a new,
Internet catalyzed, pre-democratic form of public participation with the government in China, Michael Keane, of Queensland University of Technology’s Centre for Media Policy and Practice, argues that the concept of citizenship which these rights claims are being made through is a continuation of existing social ideas and not the introduction of a ‘western’ practice.\textsuperscript{28} What is occurring in China is not a fundamental shift in political power, but a gradual social reorganization to a society primarily based on networks of information communication, be it economic, governance, or cultural/identity expression. This shift to the informatization of society is supported by governments and organizations worldwide such as OECD and WSIS who are committed to building ICT infrastructure on as grand a scale as envisioned in Al Gore’s 1994 \textit{Information Superhighway} speech.\textsuperscript{29} Sociologist Manuel Castells has called the social change caused by ICT use “network society”; explaining that increased levels of relationships are based on networks of information communication and are not restricted by locality or social group membership but categorizable by communication frames.\textsuperscript{30} Some, like English sociologist John Urry, critique Castells’ networks as accurate descriptions of social patterns but based on ‘weak links’ and not an important trend in social organization power relations.\textsuperscript{31} Despite this resistance many, such as American sociologist Jack Linchuan Qui and director of sociology for China’s Academy of Social Science Li Peilin, have begun to identify the effects of ‘network society’ in China. Instead of causing novel changes to society, ICT

\textsuperscript{28} Keane (2001).
\textsuperscript{29} OECD (2011); Gore (1994).
\textsuperscript{30} Castells (2009).
\textsuperscript{31} Urry, 163.
allows individuals to do what they normally do, but vastly easier and faster; and in a way that leaves accessible records and makes it much more apparent.  

1.2.3 Networks as civil associations

Civil associations can form as ICT based ‘networks’ which arise out of public discourse topics. “Discourses... shape the public mind... -that is, the set of values and frames... in society [which] is ultimately what influences individual and collective behavior”.  

“Frames are neural networks of association that can be accessed from... language. Framing means activating… [semantic] neural networks”. One form of these networks is special interest publics which might be as momentary as a boycott movement, growing like the environmental movement in China, or as long lasting and institutional as the Feminist movement in the USA. Networks serve as material representations of social division along lines of information and interest.

Society has increasingly been viewed as the co-existence of numerous fluid groups rather than as a homogeneous whole. The importance of making this distinction was recognized by market economy interests when lifestyle distinctions, “demographic and behavior variables” amongst a population, were investigated by groups such as the Stanford Research Institute and used by advertising agencies to efficiently address market segmentation; lifestyle distinction has also been used to increase voter turnout in

32 Peilin (2006); Rao (2008); Ceng (2009); Qiu (2010).
33 Castells (2009), 53
34 Castells (2009), 142 italics removed.
35 Obadare (2005); Landes in Fraser (1992); Yang and Calhoun (2007).
36 Fraser (1992); Papacharissi (2002); Yang and Calhoun have noted that issue-specific publics are new to China (2007), 212.
American politics. Whether we address them as lifestyles, special interest groups or civil society, all these public associations are comparatively similar in network analysis - they are made of individuals who mobilize to form communication networks based on access, common interest and commitment to a discursive topic.

The power to “control the options of what networks can or cannot do” is at the root of this investigation into civil society. Civil society research traditionally makes analyses based on references to the ‘public sphere’ and focuses on the mechanisms which publics have available. The London School of Economics’ Civil Society Working Paper series researcher Ebenezer Obadare, states that it is the active and present social forces which shape public discourse in any nation which best describe the social role of civil society. Addressing the use of power to influence networks, Castells identifies ‘programming’ as a network effect on social thought and behavior. The power of ‘programing’ is, “the ability to generate, diffuse, and affect the discourses that frame human action”. While Castells argues programming often occurs organically he cautions, along similar lines to Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model of broadcast media, that programming can be conducted by the media on behalf of the political elite. This ‘programing’ is the ‘thought work’ conducted by the CCP’s propaganda department the aim of which is to control specific aspects of public discussion and opinion.

The ‘thought work’ conducted by the CCP’s propaganda department is essentially the creation of ‘communication frames’; this can be as piece meal and controlling as the

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37 Michman, Mazze and Greco (2003), 3; Curtis (2002).
38 Obadare, 5.
39 Castells (2009), 46.
40 Castells (2009), 53
41 Castells (2009), 160.
42 Brady, 59.
interpretation of current events or as extensive as creating a general social paradigm like the CCP has done with nationalism.\textsuperscript{43} Frame creation does not entail dominance over an issue of popular opinion. This is the ‘magic’ of the Internet, for it has provided new channels away from traditional broadcast controllers of the media and has catalyzed plurality and citizen participation in governance. Communications professor Zhao Yuezhi has documented how the Internet was used to do this in China by economist Lang Xiangping when he criticized the way State owned enterprises were being privatized in 2004.\textsuperscript{44} This division in public communication frames, when “two or more interpretations receive” attention in public discourse, is called “‘frame parity’.\textsuperscript{45}

Castells’ latest work, \textit{Media Power} is essentially an explanation of why communication frames represent active networks of individuals in society.\textsuperscript{46} Mainly with reference to American politics, he argued how communication networks could be identified and manipulated, but stressed the spontaneous nature of networked communication over its potential to be controlled by a few.\textsuperscript{47} The Carrefour event, as a microcosm of popular nationalism in China in general, represents a case which furthers his claim.\textsuperscript{48} It shows that in a country where public discourse is heavily regulated, new interpretations arise and can compete with the state’s framing. Civil society may be represented by the associations formed through networked communication and brought about by the interactions caused by frame parity as members of separate groups vie to assert their point of view in society.

\textsuperscript{43} Zhao (2000), 10.
\textsuperscript{44} Zhao Y. (2008), 287-338.
\textsuperscript{45} Castells (2009), 163
\textsuperscript{46} Castells (2009).
\textsuperscript{47} Castells (2009), 160.
\textsuperscript{48} Zhao S. (2008).
1.2.4 Nationalistic communication networks are just as important as NGOs

A nationalistic movement which turned out to be little more than online discussion amongst a few million Chinese may not be the most likely community to choose for a study on China’s civil society. Most current research on the subject highlights NGOs as the most important examples of civil society development in the nation. This work, however, is limited to those who choose a politically enthusiastic and committed lifestyle and does not address the dissemination of civil society practices in everyday Chinese life in the way a study of the sudden formation of a communication network can.

Nationalism, as a social force in public discourse, has been argued by Calhoun to actually weaken civil society. He claims, “it intrinsically undermines the capacity of a public sphere to carry forward a rational-critical democratic discourse”. However, as defined above, civil society is also the public creation of everyday life and in so much that nationalism is representative of identity politics and division in public opinion it too is the content of a civil society just as much as environmentalism or any other ideological movement.

1.3 A background of public discourse in China

One of the CCP’s most underrepresented triumphs is their spread of literacy amongst the peasantry. This coincided with the development of the Central Propaganda

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Bureau as literary lessons were coached in politically biased lessons. The practice of establishing literacy with ideas of patriotism and nationalism was re-institutionalized in the 1990s with a comprehensive elementary education program on China’s history and patriotism (following the supposed failing of Communism as a unifying ideology after the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests). The practice of teaching patriotism (the identification with social organization at the national level) alongside literacy is not unique to China as most education programs in OECD countries include narratives of nation building in their public education systems through curriculum courses such as history. Benedict Anderson in particular has demonstrated the generality of combining nation building with the spread of the written word. The CCP’s ideological and economically inspired effort to increase literacy rates in rural areas, during and following their rise to power, foreshadowed the economic infrastructure commitments they made to network the nation first with land-line telephones in the 1990s and cell phones and the Internet in the 2000s. At the same time as having policies to increase communication within the population as a whole, the CCP refuses to accept the rise of public groups which present communication frames not supportive of the CCP’s ‘political sphere’.

China’s public has been developing alongside the introduction of market forces, with call in radio/TV shows and netizens all engaged in discursive debate on topics that are no longer seen as divergent from the ‘party line’. The ‘party line’ is China’s governing party -the CCP’s position on any social institution or regulated aspect of life. During the Maoist era the ‘party line’ extended to all aspects of social life through a

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51 Peterson (1997), 118.
52 Zhao (1998).
54 Peterson (1997), 75; Harwit and Clark (2001); Qui (2010).
55 Shambaugh (2009); Zhao Y. (2008).
totalitarian form of social control. In the post-Mao years the ‘party line’ has been removed from most private aspects of Chinese citizen’s lives, but remains important in public communication such as public talks (art shows, marketing) broadcast media and Internet based social media.\textsuperscript{56,57} Some public communication is politically orientated and approaches the ‘party line’ barrier. Critiques against government power abuses, such as the death of Sun Zhigang, succeed best when they are represented as isolated cases of abuse and not systemic government issues.\textsuperscript{58}

Adherence to ‘the ‘party line’ imposes political limitations on social institutions and how issues are allowed to be addressed by the public at large (reported, published, blogged, or practiced) and what issues are available for discussion (those which do not oppose the party line).\textsuperscript{59} My investigation is of an instance not of the oft mentioned latter but of the former. The Carrefour event was brought into the public sphere by social media and quickly addressed by broadcast media through mechanisms aimed to exploit popular topics and increase the profitability of a website by increasing its traffic.\textsuperscript{60} The participants of the discussion were not coerced or forced to discuss the topic in any particular way. No key words or phrases, for instance, were censored until April 20th when ‘Carrefour’ was censored on search engines such as Baidu.com.\textsuperscript{61} The participants were able to engage in more or less rational debate expressing their opinions and ideas. The struggle was not over free speech as such but over how patriotism (a very important concept in Chinese conceptions of self and CCP legitimacy) ought to be expressed and

\textsuperscript{56} Shambaugh (2009).
\textsuperscript{57} Indicating that there are multiple publics in china Solinger (2006) and Hanser (2008) have documented that marketization has caused differentiation in China’s society as a result of marketization.
\textsuperscript{58} Zhao Y. (2008), Yang (2009), Qui (2010).
\textsuperscript{59} National education policies argue against spiritual practices.
\textsuperscript{60} Yang (2009).
\textsuperscript{61} Martinsen (2008).
who has the power and interest to form public consent on patriotism. Writing after the event Chinese scholar Li Chi, a professor of Law at the Jiangsu Police Officer College, characterized the Carrefour event as an emotional response to patriotism which fits a boxer model of Qing dynasty patriotic practices; and argued that this was undesirable. Li’s paper ended with a recommendation, similar to other Chinese scholarly works on the event, arguing that the government needs to improve its ability to correctly guide popular opinion so that there is less deviation from the ‘party line’. Current government public relations ideology can be seen in a speech by Yang Yanyin, Executive Deputy Secretary of the Working Committee of Central and Stat Organs, when she stressed that the government must listen to online opinion and use ICT to control public opinion. Along similar lines, Zhao Qiang, writing for the CCP journal Seeking Truth argues that a loss of control over public opinion will harm the ruling power of the CCP.

Two-way public engagement practices on behalf of China’s ruling CCP have evolved in the atrophy of the party that followed Mao’s death and the rise of public space. Citing the importance of the Internet as a forum for public opinion, Li Yanggui, head of Guangzhou’s City Inspectors Committee, announced the city’s use of Internet public commentators; additionally the Beijing municipal party school has started classes to train “bureau-level leading cadres” in the use of social media. These moves to engage public opinion in the new space opened by the Internet are explained by the party’s argument that it derives its mandate to rule from popular consent and that it is

62 Keane (2001); Nam (2006); Zhao S. (2008).
63 Li (2008).
64 Li and Yu (2008); Fang and Jie (2008); Rao (2008); Chenli and Wei (2008); Ceng (2009).
65 Bandrski (June 22, 2010).
66 Bandski, (November 2, 2010).
68 Banurski (March 3, 2011); APF (2010).
responsive to public opinion. The party further argues that it respects this mandate by granting its citizens the, “right to know, right to participate, right to express and right to supervise”. Events such as Lang Xianping’s public critique of State Owned Enterprise privatization, Sun Zhigang’s death and the tainted milk scandal demonstrate how online public opinion takes up government policy as an acceptable discursive topic. Over time the CCP has taken more control over the spread and development of online discussion topics that it views as threatening to its ideology. Topics such as ‘left wing’ patriotism are tolerated so long as they target foreign powers and do not disturb the peace. The problem with the increased presence of politically sensitive popular topics of discussion is that communication networks, the social organization effects of public discussion, are a form of social mobilization which represent interest groups that have the potential to vie for CCP held political power; such as the power to dictate the norms of the public practice of social institutions such as patriotism.

Evidence that the CCP is responsive to the nature of communication topics to spontaneously form networks is its practice to regularly instruct media outlets on issues it deems as sensitive. In recent months policy instructions from the Central Propaganda Bureau (now known in English as the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China) have been recorded and leaked to western media outlets. In addition to regular updates the Central Propaganda Bureau has also released general notices on media regulation. The most recent of these general notices included the instruction, “[d]o not

69 Dong and Han (2008) (appendix B no.10); Chinese Communist Party (1982).
70 Bandrski (June 22, 2010).
71 Zhao S. (2008).
72 Gries, 849.
73 China digital Times has released monthly updates on lists of instructions starting in May 2010 (Xiao (2010)), and China Media Project has documented journalist and blogger accounts of and reactions to them (Bandrski (January 11, 2011)).
use the term ‘civil society’ (gongmin shehui). ‘It is absolutely not permitted’ to stand in a position opposite to the government’.

\(^{74}\)CDTtranslator (January 13, 2011).
2.0 Methodology

The Carrefour event occurred as both ICT communication through online and cell phone activity and physical protests. This analysis focuses on the communication aspect of the event on the principle that social action in an information society is rooted in the speech acts which comprise public discourse. Speech acts contain three components,

“(i) locutionary- the utterance of an expression that contains a given sense and reference...; (ii) illocutionary- the act performed in articulating a locution... (iii) perlocutionary, which is the ‘consequential effects’... that are aimed to evoke the feelings, beliefs, thoughts or actions of the target audience.... [that is] to bring about something through acting in saying something”.

The networking effect of the ICT communication during the event is represented with quantified data. Using google.com the number of online posts (text based speech acts) dedicated to the ‘boycott Carrefour’ (dizhi Jia Le Fu which translates both as ‘resist’ and ‘boycott’ Carrefour) discourse was tracked. Blogs and bulletin board threads are specifically targeted because they represent public publication and are argued by political communication theorists Esarey and Qiang to be suitable for “measuring political

75 As quoted in Balzacq 4, 5.
76 Online research was conducted in simplified Chinese Characters and translations of phrases and quotations have been done by the author with the help of a native Chinese speaker and Google translate. Google was also used by Esarey and Qiang to gather data on Chinese Internet user practices (Esarey and Qiang , 307).

The actual numbers collected by this filtered searching do not accurately reflect all Chinese citizen social media discussion of the topic. First it includes simplified Chinese language discussions of people from around the world including Canada. Second while google.com’s ‘blog’ search filter does provide access to Chinese Twitter-esque Sina weibo (micro-blog) posts it does not include China’s facebook clone renren, QQ IM or QQ group bulletin board publication.

What google.com is able to do is to specifically track the number of social media web pages such as blogs and BBS threads that have particular phrases mentioned on them over particular periods of time even giving day by day accounts of published material using its different search functions and human discretion. While there may be some repetition in the pages which might be included on any two consecutive days, the data collection shows a noticeable pattern in key phrases associated with the Carrefour event and the days during which it occurred. The data shown in the charts below represent particular nodes in the Carrefour event network as it is only published material not viewership or information interconnection which is recorded. Thus while the data can be used to show broad strokes of the network formation it is far from providing accurate details. Using search engines to analyze the size of movements was also used by Chinese news media during the Carrefour event.
expression”.77 Focusing mostly on economic incentives Esarey and Qiang argue that, “blogs are freer from regular instructions that dictate content… [and] are, therefore, less affected by pressures to comply with regime priorities for media content”78. While using similar methods to survey public discourse on the Internet using google.com to track specific phrases, this investigation differs from Esarey and Qiang’s in that, instead of looking over a broad spectrum of individuals specifically mentioning ‘freedom of speech’ or ‘democracy’ regardless of context, it qualitatively analyzes a specific event.

Common key phrases such as ‘boycott Carrefour’, ‘do not go to Carrefour’ and ‘rational patriotism’ have been extracted from blogs and used as search terms to quantify the size and pattern of the discourse. This quantification shows a sudden rise, peak and decline of the number of speech acts involved in the discourse topics in 2008 during the time frame of the Carrefour event. This data identifies the high point of the event (the most people actively involved) to be just before reports of Internet censorship; sudden drops which might indicate censorship are evident.

Qualitative data is relied upon to show how participants represented their views and interacted with one another. Major themes presented are: the original blog post and the mobilization order which followed, early ‘rational patriotism’ arguments and the reactions against them, the Government’s public announcements and how they were interpreted by the boycott supporters, the online representation of physical demonstrations which were a part of the movement, and the arguments of public intellectuals for ‘rational patriotism’ during the decline of the movement.

77 Esarey and Qiang, 306.
78 Esarey and Qiang, 306.
With reference to speech act theory the utterances comprising the Carrefour event are collectively argued to exemplify civil society in China in 2008. The debate between separate sides of the public, and between the public and the state did not take the form of impersonal rational debate, but rather *ad hominem* attacks and polarized entrenchment; plural-*ization* did not lead to pluralism.
3.0 Presentation of evidence

This chapter documents the rise and network formation of the Carrefour event. The rise in the popularity of discourses, broadly represented by key phrases connected to the event, can be charted using secondary evidence gathered with the use of Google’s search engine. The content of qualitative primary evidence such as blog entries and comment posts is used to distinguish the division and interaction of the two primary groups involved in the civil society debate of whether or not Carrefour ought to be boycotted. Government supported broadcast media and censorship of ‘boycott Carrefour’ on search engines will be shown to coincide with the drop found in the charted network formation.

3.1 Representing the growth and decline of a digital discourse

Google.com was used to collect raw quantifiable data on the network formation of the Carrefour event. This was done using specific search words and phrases such as ‘boycott Carrefour’ to locate the existence of the public discourse which occurred during the time span between the original posting by ‘Water Baby’, on his response to the attack on the Chinese para-Olympic fencer Jinjing in France, to a few days after the popularly intended one day boycott. Google.com has search filters which can target results from specific dates and limit results to blogs (in much the same fashion it does for books or scholarly articles). Using these filters a representation of the network formation and decline can be made with reference to the number of hits returned from each specific search.

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79 Lazer et al., 2.
The time frame used to orient the search corresponds to the time lines of Chinese bloggers who recorded the main events of the movement. While not an internally cohesive movement commentators of the Carrefour event suggest that it was motivated by MOP BBS thread author ‘Water baby’ who first argued that the attack was an attack against China and that a patriotic response should include boycotting French based international firms. Kitty Shelley like-wise has been identified as the first to demonstrate outside of her local Carrefour store. The number of published social media sources which discussed boycotting Carrefour quickly grew following Kitty Shelley’s protest on April 13th.

Figure 3.1 depicts phrases which are associated with the pro-boycott frame demonstrating that there is a distinct rise in the active discussion of them in 2008 compared to other years. Two notable distinctions are “patriotism” and “patriotism’+ ‘boycott/resist’” both of which peaked in 2009. Figure 3.2 provides greater detail for the spikes in their public discourses presence; showing it to occur between the April 9th and May 4th time frame which was noted above.

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81 Shenyang (2008) (appendix B no.20) (appendix B no.20).
83 The second last promoted video on Lonely (2008) (appendix B no.17) is a broken link to a Chinese hosted posting of the video; XudeZhi (2008).
Figure 3.1
Search engine returns on the frequency of Carrefour event related terms

- "patriotism"
- "boycott"/resist
- Carrefour
- "boycott" + "patriotism"
- "Support China"
- "boycott Carrefour"
- "patriotic youth"
- "ational patriotism"
Figure 3.2
Spike in term usage during Carrefour event timeline

Days of the Carrefour event

Number of pages with the term

"resist"
"don't go to Carrefour"
"protest"+ "carrefour"
"boycott Carrefour"
"support Olympics"
"resist France"
"CNN"+ "patriotism"
"support China"
"rational patriotism"
Figure 3.2 shows that support for the Olympics and China online was influenced by the Carrefour event. Also, while many connecting key terms can be found for those who support the boycott, only one appears to be common for those who were opposed and it is the least popular of the terms surveyed.

Figure 3.2 depicts the phrase ‘do not go to Carrefour’ as one of the most popular topics associated with the Carrefour event. The dramatic drops in this topic on April 20\(^{th}\), 26\(^{th}\)-27\(^{th}\) and 30\(^{th}\) might represent an anomaly, or problem in the use of google.com as a data collection tool. These drops might also be explained as the result of censorship: bloggers prevented from publishing entries containing specific words and phrases or the outright deletion of blogs. The most dramatic dip, between April 20\(^{th}\) and 21\(^{st}\) occurred on the first day that censorship and ‘broken links’ were reported.\(^{84}\) The general decline in the term, however, is matched by a similar decline in the use of other terms in support of the boycott and the decline of the movement. That other phrases such as ‘boycott’ Carrefour’ do not show the same dramatic drops indicates that ‘Carrefour’ was itself not a wholly censored word in blog publishing as it was for search engine users.\(^{85}\)

3.2 Carrefour event breakdown

The dynamics of this movement are observed in a few key developments of the event. The patriotic motive behind the ‘boycott Carrefour’ network growth can be

\(^{84}\) Ramzy (2008).
\(^{85}\) Ramzy (2008).
identified in the utterances made by netizens as they passed on and defended the mobilization order. Early arguments against the boycott can be found in the blogs of two broadcast media personalities. Their arguments articulate what ultimately became the dominate discourse of ‘rational patriotism’. These posts also provide a sounding board against which many boycott supporters argued. When a representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spoke about the actions of Carrefour and the boycott movement her statements were used as a sign of support by the pro-boycott side. Online documentation of the demonstrations at Carrefour locations around China demonstrates the enthusiasm of the participants to meld virtual with physical assembly. These protests did not continue and reached their peak at the same time as the online discourse. State owned media began representing the views of public intellectuals, at the same time that their Internet censorship campaign began, providing an outlet beyond social media for the ‘rational patriotism’ discourse. These public intellectuals argued against the pro-boycott side depicting the reasons behind the boycott as unfounded. The arguments continued into social media where major public opinion leaders, such as Han Han drew, in numbers larger than those garnished by leaders in the discourse before (except Sina.cn’s opinion poll) and argued against the supporters of the boycott.\textsuperscript{86}

3.2.1 Those in favour

The following documents the general content of the Carrefour event’s online discourse. The ‘true’ start of this discussion has been cited as Water Baby’s reaction to the Tibetan protester who attacked a Chinese Paralympic torch bearer during the French

\textsuperscript{86} Han Han (April 23, 2008) (appendix B no.9).
leg of the Chinese Olympic torch relay which occurred on April 7th.\footnote{Shenyang (2008) (appendix B no.20) (appendix B no.20).} Explaining this, Shenyang, a 30 year old male blogger from Beijing, comments,

> “On April 10th at 10:45 morning, a 26 year old youth named “Water Baby” posted an article on the social network website “Mop” entitled “Resist France starting with Carrefour”. The topic of this post was rare at the time and Mop has claimed that this was the earliest to suggest a boycott of French goods. The reason for this post was that Water baby and his friends were discussing the Olympic torch relay and had been disturbed by foreign news discussing a “free Tibet” which they found out about on a QQ discussion group.”\footnote{Shenyang (2008) (appendix B no.20) (appendix B no.20).}

This original MOP post is still accessible. In it Water Baby explains that he will boycott Carrefour as a way to resist France. The post includes a history of Carrefour in China and a link to reports on bad business practices carried out by Carrefour in China.\footnote{Baby (2008) (appendix B no.1).} While this post is highlighted for generating a large amount of interest with over 300 comments, most of these comments have been deleted and early developments are inaccessible. The accomplishment of this post was to depict Carrefour -as what Dr. Chan, president of the marketing consultancy firm Asia Marketing and Management, would call, a marauding barbarian within China.\footnote{Explaining his position Dr. Chan argues, “[t]here is one thing many Westerners don't think about when they walk into China. What the Chinese people really want from Westerners is "acceptance." If you want to sell anything to the Chinese or, for that matter, build relationships with the Chinese, you must make your customers, contacts, associates, and partners feel you are not behaving that a "barbarian" or "marauder." … There is one thing about "acceptance" that only you can do: you have to be able to accept the Chinese as they are. You want to do business with the Chinese; you don't want to change the Chinese. The moment you make people feel that you're going to China to make the Chinese look and act and adopt the same values that you fine "superior," you'll be perceived as the age-old "barbarian" and "marauder" whom they've learned and taught to distrust” (Dan (July 17, 2010)).} This was achieved in three ways: (i) Carrefour was identified as a symbol of France and a means to resist French aggression, (ii) a link depicting Carrefour business practices which imposed harm on Chinese businesses (such as charging stocking fees for local brands) was posted as proof that Carrefour was no friend of China, and (iii)
Carrefour’s market entry and growth in China was documented signifying the ‘otherness’ of Carrefour in China’s market.

April 10th was not just the day when Carrefour became the symbolic target for reacting against the Olympic torch insult; it was also the day when the ‘mobilization order’ for the movement was released.\(^\text{91}\) A ‘mobilization order’ is a standard way of organizing people’s physical actions such as protests by providing general information as to why others should participate and giving a standard by which to participate.\(^\text{92}\) The mobilization order worked during the Carrefour event by informing others about the basic claims of the movement and organizing May 1st as a single day of action.\(^\text{93}\) There was also a variation of this message which called for a 17 day boycott.\(^\text{94}\) This message was copied and pasted on blogs, BBS comment threads and was also the primary message people would receive on their cell phones.\(^\text{95}\)

There are few online documented accounts of the protests complete with personal testimony of participation, and no news broadcaster has a complete list of cities where demonstrations took place.\(^\text{96}\) According to Chinese citizen blog accounts, protests first began with Kitty Shelley’s at a Carrefour location in Beijing on April 13th. Protests are reported to have begun in Dalian, Zhengzhou and Hefei on April 18th.\(^\text{97}\) Protests in Harbin did not begin until April 20th. There are no specified dates for the commencement of protests in: Changsha, Chongqing, Fuzhou Guangzhuo, Luoyang, Jinan, Kunming,

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\(^\text{91}\) Yu (2008) (appendix B no.30); Mai (2008).
\(^\text{92}\) The mobilization orders for the px demonstration and the Jasmine revolution are other examples of this form of organization (Fcf666 (2007) (appendix B no.6); China Jasmine Revolution Sponsors (2011) (appendix B no.5)).
\(^\text{93}\) A major day of holiday shopping in China (Trippon (2009)).
\(^\text{94}\) Yakoo (2008) (appendix B no.28).
\(^\text{95}\) Blue Cat (2008); Yakoo (2008) (appendix B no.28).
\(^\text{96}\) Mcdonald (2008); Ji and Li (2008); Reuters (2008).
Nanjing, Shanghai,. Suzhou, Tsingdao, Xi’an, Xiamen and Xuzhou.98

Those in favour of the protest did not believe they were opposing the government. On April 15th Foreign Ministry Deputy Director Jiang Yu presented the government’s point of view on the boycott Carrefour movement and its reflection on Sino-French relations. Asked whether or not China officially supported the boycott movement Ms. Yu answered,

“It’s true that some Chinese expressed this views and emotions in the past few days, but there is a reason for this. This is actually something the French side should consider. I believe the Chinese citizens will express their reasonable appeal in accordance with the law.”99

This position was seen by bloggers to support the boycott position by defending that there was ‘reason’ to their cause. That pro-boycotter’s found Ms. Yu’s comments supportive is found in this middle aged blogger’s claim,

“[d]uring the boycott Carrefour event, the government did not clearly state their position, but Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Jiang Yu’s comments no doubt played a role in fueling it. In dealing with this diplomatic dispute with France, the public’s patriotic demands appear in support of the government.”100

Few others would recognize any legitimacy in the protestors’ reasoning.

3.2.2 The rational patriotism movement

On April 14th the first notable argument against the boycott was reportedly forwarded to the Associated Foreign Press and widely reprinted.101 He Yangguang, a photographer for China Youth Daily, drew upon lessons from Mao Ze Dong and Deng Xiao Ping and China’s diplomatic relations with the West regarding Tibet to argue why

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98 Jinklink (2008) (appendix B no.14); Tan (2008); Child (2008) (appendix B no.4); Li and Ji (2008);
100 Qin (2008) (appendix B no.19).
he would not support the boycott. Arguing that ‘resistance' was not as powerful as dialogue he claimed, “[o]ur freedoms of speech and protest are written in our constitution, when people express themselves in public freely violence will be reduced and harmony will come. Worried about the emotional tenor of the debate, He ended his argument stating, if this boycott is put into practice it will be our first step to a more chaotic society!”.

This argument was quickly supported on April 15th by CCTV persona Bai Yansong. Bai repeated He’s argument against the emotional tenor of the boycott supporters stating, “[a]s for the individual, daily life should not be disturbed by politics; we should especially not punish ourselves for other’s mistakes. Such action gives others too much face”. By ‘punishing ourselves for other’s mistakes’ Bai was referencing an analogy from Confucius’ Analects which instructs a person to not resort to anger when harmed by another; which may be seen as a direct appeal to common sense notions of ‘civic’ behavior. The rest of his argument went on to claim that boycotting Carrefour would not satisfy the goals of the protestors, who were reacting against France as a leader in the public condemnation of China’s human right’s practices in Tibet, but would harm their fellow citizens whose livelihood depended on the company.

Both He and Bai’s arguments legitimated the boycotters’ sense of impinged dignity as a result of the attack on Jinjing. He did this cautiously:

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102 He (2008) (appendix B no.11).
103 He (2008) (appendix B no.11).
104 He (2008) (appendix B no.11).
106 Heng (2010).
“I understand this kind of indignant emotion, most people around my age were angry youth.” 107 Forty years ago, ‘When Chairman Mao waved his hand, I moved forward’: we were excited and loyal. The result was that we messed up the country and almost ruined ourselves.” 108

Bai in contrast was more direct claiming, “when I saw overseas Chinese spontaneously protect the Olympic torch I too was greatly touched.” 109 However, the thrust of their arguments is to reduce the role that emotional reaction ought to have in politics and public expressions of nationalism. Bai goes on to dismiss the enthusiastic boycotters as merely ‘jumping on the band wagon’ and praises those who refrain from anger saying, “[i]n spite of any trials or hardships, if you can remain smiling and enjoy the torch relay and the dream of the Olympic games then you are a strong person indeed”. 110

In addition to Bai and He, Jinjing, the Olympian who was first attacked, also spoke out against the boycott. State media reported that she, “openly expressed her hope that people seriously think before joining the call to boycott Carrefour because the first victims would be the Chinese staff”. 111 Jinjing, like He and Bai before her, failed to reframe the patriotic anger in China. Her April 16th speech was reported on mainstream news which presented her as a dedicated Olympian who had been turned against by the boycotters who labeled her a traitor; He and Bai were likewise ridiculed. 112

This negative reaction to the ‘rational patriotism side’ was not long lived. Television talk shows such as Qiang Qiang, A Tiger Yixi Tan, On the Scene and newspaper interviews such as “Nanfang Wang Southern Weekly” presented the ‘rational

107 ‘Fen qing’, a term which was used to describe those who enthusiastically took part in the cultural revolution
111 Xinmin (2008).
112 Hieruiw (2008) (appendix B no.12); Zhen (2008) (appendix B no.31) has recorded additional negative comments about Jin Jing; Gu (2008) (appendix B no.7).
patriotism’ position without generating the same type of negative reaction; as no reactive
defense of the boycott occurred.113 Bloggers such as ‘Across the Water’, a college
graduate from Hubei, posted the Nanfang intellectual forum conducted by Wang
Xiaodong, Jiu Junning and Hao Jian as representative of his perspective on the debate.114

Wang Xiaodong, author of *China Can Say No*, and *China is Unhappy* is one of
the most vocal public intellectuals in China arguing for a nationalistic response to
China’s treatment by western powers. While Wang argued against those who disagreed
with the boycott in his appearances in the *Nanfang Wang Southern Weekly* interview, *On
the Scene* and *A Tiger Yixi Tan*, after the first two appearances he wrote,
“I wasn’t enthusiastic about these boycott actions; I only express my opinion when the
TV or the newspaper interviewed me”.115 Speaking about his participation in the *A Tiger
Yixi Tan* debate Wang Xiaodong noted his lack of interest in the subject, “in fact, such a
topic is not interesting anymore. The May 1st boycott Carrefour action which Internet
users organized seems so childish now”.116

This lack of enthusiasm came from the one intellectual who was included in these
media debates and wasn’t wholly against the boycott,

“[a]part from me, there were also three so-called "intellectuals" in the control room. They
seemed to know each other, and they discussed the Carrefour boycott in extremely
dismissive tones. One of them, a college professor, had been assigned to the side
supporting the Carrefour boycott, but he wasn't too thrilled. I didn't know them, but I sat
watching the television as I listened to them berate the boycotters”.117

Writing after the event Wang again showed only nominal support for the boycott,
claiming that it was, “[y]oung Chinese people react[ing] strongly” to Western

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113 Wowcowb (2008) (appendix B no.26); Yixi (2008) (appendix B no.29); Martinsen (April 28, 2008)
114 In the waterside (2008) (appendix B no.13).
117 Wang Xiaodong translated by Martinsen (March 4, 2008).
intervention in Chinese affairs. Wang’s lack of support for the protesters during the boycott and representation of himself as an unenthusiastic defender against ‘bad arguments’ indicates that he was not a pillar of support for the movement. His presence added to what public rational debate there was over the issue but he made no effort to keep a pro-boycott frame alive claiming, “[t]here's nothing wrong with opposing the boycott against Carrefour, but you need to be more sophisticated in your techniques”.

Han Han, a famous author and prominent critic of the Chinese government in his blog fully supported the ‘rational patriotism’ side. He wrote that the patriotism expressed by the protestors was too radical. Furthermore, in responding to comments made about him by those in favour of the boycott, Han Han wrote that this kind of expression would harm the pursuit of free speech in China.

“Comment 11: At this moment, you pretend to be enlightened, you pour cold water on those who are acting patriotically. This is against popular opinion, and harms the free expression of others. The fact that this can be published shows that there is too much freedom of speech in China. You ought to be blocked.

Answer: On the one hand we want freedom of speech, on the other we want the state to persecute those who disagree with us. This harms not only others but ourselves as well.”

While not often in support of the government’s position, Han Han has spoken out against what he sees as overly patriotic Chinese on numerous occasions including the 2010 Diaoyu Island demonstrations.

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118 Beach (2009).
119 Martinsen (April 28, 2011).
120 Fan (2008).
121 Han Han (2008) (appendix B no.9).
122 Han Han (2010).
3.3 The government censored the debate

The Times reported on April 21st that, “posts calling for consumer action against Carrefour and videos of protests have now been blocked”.\textsuperscript{123} Blogger Tree Pool (no other information was included in the profile), likewise found that many links in and to patriotic blogs, “would not open, it is a sensitive period because of the Olympic Games… [and] Carrefour… therefore, some articles are deleted [or] blocked”.\textsuperscript{124} In addition online correspondent Han Yong Hong also reported, “the day before yesterday [April 19th], the people who called for protests have been blocked or deleted”.\textsuperscript{125} These reports of broken links and deleted posts were followed up with reports from the blog “Oh My Media”, and “Google Blogoscope” that ‘Carrefour’ was a blocked term on search engines such as baidu.com and goole.cn.\textsuperscript{126}

The initial reports of blogs being deleted blocked and containing broken links corresponds to the drop in the number of pages with Carrefour event related phrases (figure 3.3).
This action is consistent with government media policy designed to prevent large public discussion against the party line. It clarified what positions were acceptable in the debate: to oppose the boycott, or to not have an opinion. The censorship came at a time when Han Han, like many others, reflected, “[e]verybody is forced to take a side. If somebody chooses to boycott, he is hailed as a hero. If he objects to boycott, he is called a traitor. If he doesn’t say anything, he is called a coward”. 127 At this point few chose to stand up and ‘be heroes’, and interest in the topic quickly dwindled.

In the Carrefour event there were two primary positions, those who identified with the causes of the boycott, and those who argued for rational patriotism. The numbers of those who supported the boycott far exceeded those who opposed it. The discussion between the two groups was anything but amicable. Notable early nay-sayers like He Yangguang and Bai Yansong were vehemently opposed. The Olympian whose attack first sparked the boycott discussion was labeled a ‘traitor’ after she disagreed with the

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127 Fan (2008).
boycott. The passionate emotions of those who thought Carrefour ought to be opposed culminated in demonstrations in more than 15 cities throughout China. As the protest movement began to spill out of the digital bounds of the Internet and onto the street the movement began to die as suddenly as it arose. Public intellectuals who otherwise support resisting Western powers or speak in defiance of the government’s point of view offered little support to the boycott movement. Freedom of speech was curtailed through censorship of online public forums. While the boycott supporters first reeled against arguments opposed to the boycott, their voices were stilted in a wave of broadcast media which homogenized correct points of view on the issue. Therefore the decline in the overall number of webpages with speech acts regarding the Carrefour event most likely was the result of active and potential participants finding their viewpoints difficult to access because of mass media dominance and Internet censorship.
4.0 Analysis

The use of speech act theory allows the Carrefour event to be explained as ICT enhanced civil society in three ways: what enabled the event, what people intended to do during the event, and what the event reflects of Chinese society. This analysis will show that before becoming aware that their actions may run counter to government ideology Chinese citizens were actively engaged in civil society. Additionally both before and after the boycott movement became a sensitive topic public discourse did not occur in a democratic manner. The Carrefour event demonstrates the extent of influence in the daily lives of Chinese citizens but gives no indication of eventual political change in China.

4.1 Enabling conditions

The locution of the speech acts was made possible by the material and policy environment of communication in China. Without ICT these statements would not have had the same presence in public discussion. As explained in Chapter Two ICT such as cell phones and Internet have become a ubiquitous aspect of life, altering the manner in which people socialize, such as joining clubs, accessing entertainment, gaming, shopping, finding employment, interacting with the government and holding local authorities accountable.\(^\text{128}\) These self-organized associations that develop with the use of ICT networking signify only a small aspect of the greater shift in social organization which Castells’ claims to be occurring worldwide.

In addition to the material environment, which was made possible through government policy initiatives, it was relatively lax media restrictions regarding patriotic

\(^{128}\) Qiu, 2009; Zhao, 2008; Dong and Han 2008; Martinsen (2007); Custer (2011).
discussion, which allowed the utterances to exist long enough to reach a wide audience. If the framing of the issue had been otherwise, such as support of an independent Tibet, the discussion would have never made it past regularly enforced censorship.\textsuperscript{129} It is entirely plausible that the Carrefour boycott discussion was originally encouraged to exist because it reflected the adoption of core elements of the government’s nationalist ideology such as territorial claims and the defense of human rights practices, as there is no evidence of censorship until physical rallies began to be organized. However Chinese policy analysis of the event suggests that the main issue of this event (as far as the government was concerned) was the public’s spontaneous move to independently interpret ideology.\textsuperscript{130}

4.2 What the netizens meant to accomplish

The illocution of these speech acts, what people \textit{meant} in saying what they did, was the participants’ expression of the expectations they had of their relationship with a foreign multinational retail firm. The boycotters’ basic message was, ‘Carrefour typifies Western interference in China’s internal relations with Tibet and it is the duty of all patriotic Chinese to demand that Carrefour respect China with a one (or seventeen) day boycott’.\textsuperscript{131} This indicates that the public was consciously participating in a civil society movement, but not in terms of a struggle between the public and the state, but the public and the global economic order.

\textsuperscript{129} Wu (2005); Media publication on the Internet and access to it, is so severely regulated that farcical results sometimes occur such as bans on the names of political figures leading to censorship of words such as ‘carrot’ or ‘river’.  
\textsuperscript{131} The point that the claims that Carrefour, or any of its major shareholders, had donated profits from the store to Tibetan separatist groups was unfounded was not critically challenged until the debate had begun to die down.
The media frame created by the participants’ communication supported core elements of government nationalistic ideology such as a historical perception of humiliation at western hands, territorial claims over Tibet, and the defense of the government against western claims of human rights abuses to explain why Carrefour should be boycotted. These ideas were considered acceptable (safe enough) for public discussion by Internet users used to self-censorship; and Sina.com’s use of the topic for a front page ‘national’ public poll, popular national talk shows devoting episodes to it, and discussion of it by the likes of Han Han shows that the Carrefour event was part of popular culture at the time.\textsuperscript{132}

4.2.1 The mobilization order

The mobilization order which represented the primary expression of the Carrefour boycott movement depicts the main illocution of this public discourse. An illocutionary act is comprised of four ‘felicity conditions’: (i) the content of the utterance follows a meaningful form such as a request or statement and uttered by particular persons under particular conditions; (ii) it is reasonable that the utterance will cause change in the world that would not happen without the communication; (iii) sincerity that this change is desired by the speaker; (iv) the fulfillment of action following the speech act can be verified.\textsuperscript{133}

The following is a translation of the mobilization order:

“May 1 nationwide boycott of Carrefour. On this day we will not go to Carrefour. Carrefour is France’s largest supermarket chain and Louis Vuitton – Mott Hennessy Group has become the company’s largest shareholder. Louis Vuitton – Mott Hennessy Group, Louis Vuitton, Dior, Fendi Guerlain, Clinique, Kenzo, Sephora cosmetic stores,  

\textsuperscript{132} Sina (2008) (appendix B no.21).
\textsuperscript{133} Austin as quoted in Balsacq, 5.
and Hennessy and other wine, champagne and cognac brands have donated a lot of money to Tibetan separatists and are connected with the torch relay protests in Paris. There is no reason to send money to France on May 1, resist Carrefour. Ask them to look at the strength of the Chinese and our online community. Please reprint, put your name on msn, etc., etc., so that more people know.”¹³⁴

The ‘felicity conditions’ of the utterances of those who supported the boycott of Carrefour are: (i) young people who have been heavily socialized to be patriotic stated that they would boycott Carrefour and request others to do so in the wake of a perceived attack on China’s dignity at a time of great national pride; (ii) it is only through the popular passing on of the claim that Carrefour shareholders financially aided the Tibetan separation movement (the mobilization order) on online forums, on the Internet, news and in the streets that members of the public learnt about this issue and felt motivated to specifically boycott Carrefour; (iii) patriotism, love for one’s country, is an important component of public identification as being ‘Chinese’ and was used by supporters to explain the sincerity of their reasoning to join the boycott; (iv) the fulfillment of the action is presented with claims that the participants have done so and through taking part in physical demonstrations at local Carrefour locations and by explaining how they have not gone to Carrefour in their blogs.

Figure 4.1 shows that public interest in the topic peaked by April 18th and while this is when online discussion had led to organized physical protests, interest in the boycott (in terms of online public discussion) fell close to pre-movement numbers long before May 1st. The large numbers of boycott supporters did not accomplish their goal to boycott Carrefour on May 1st in a public manner.

¹³⁴ Blue Cat (2008) (appendix B no.2).
4.2.2 Typical civil society

It would be wrong to call this a failed attempt at civil society. There are many other forms of association and many other issues about which the Chinese continue to rally; and the trouble of expressively patriotic youth is still topical. Rather than failed civil society we might think of this as typical civil society in an authoritarian information society. Participants were united by stumbling about and following the trails of other likeminded netizens cities apart, not drawn together to form meetings in the traditional sense of democratic civil association. What is important for understanding networked civil society is the mechanism of association; having information pathways, based upon identity formation and expression available to follow and join. This is a basic element of

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135 Han Han (2010).
freedom, because while the effects of these associations can change the basic conditions of life in a society (as exemplified by the Arab spring) they are formed out of everyday practices of identity formation and expression rather than intentional goal seeking.\textsuperscript{136} In this sense the Carrefour event may be said to exemplify typical civil society in China.

4.3 What happened because people spoke

The perlocution of these speech acts, what \textit{occurred} because people spoke, was the creation of network associations both in support and in reaction to the boycott as well as the implementation of government censorship. Consciously or not the participants who supported the boycott were challenging the state by going against the ‘party line’, and even the law, by selecting targets for patriotic anger without state guidance, spreading rumors and forming unauthorized public rallies. The existence of such an intention is not important for, “[a]s Pouliot (2008:261) puts it, following Bourdieu.... [a] practice can be oriented toward a goal without being consciously informed by it”.\textsuperscript{137} What does matter is that many small and large associations, which can be grouped by their common cause of patriotically boycotting Carrefour, autonomously and spontaneously formed and lead to a public debate over patriotic expression and the government’s reaction.

As noted above there was an intentional civil society component to the Carrefour event; this was the international civil struggle against a market based political opponent. That the normative debate on patriotic expression and the public’s sudden self-

\textsuperscript{136} Klapper (2011).
\textsuperscript{137} Balzacq, 2.
proclaimed authority over it threatened the CCP’s powers is an additional way in which this communication event represents a moment of civil society.

4.3.1 Non-democratic public debate

The form of the public debate, the manner in which the communication took place, can best be described through the testimony of Chinese netizens at the time. In the days following the last wave of demonstrations and the decline in the numbers of posts dedicated to the subject, some bloggers began to struggle with their patriotism. Representative of this shift from certainty to uncertainty is Beijing actress and blogger Liou Wen, who, with a picture of two people with anti-CNN masks on, showed her commitment to defending China by resisting Western oppression, but felt compelled to critically think about boycotting Carrefour. Her struggle is summed up in the last paragraph of her blog where she questions what alternative there was to a boycott, “…if blindly boycotting is too aggressive, unreasonable and will not gain anything then I really want to hear if there is any better ‘rational’ solution”.138

This struggle indicates openness to a democratic discussion of ideas. Li Ouwen describes her personal convictions and recognizing the merits of the ‘do not boycott’ argument, openly questions what alternatives are available. This example represents the experience of only a few people; the general tone of the discussion was the type of tribal polarization which Kaiser Kuo, a leader in China’s Internet and entertainment industry, has identified in general Internet user discourse. Exemplifying the polarization, netizen

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reactions to He Yangguang and Bai Yansong’s stance against the boycott were emotional and did not discuss the merits of the arguments but consisted of personal attacks.

Chinese business consultant and blogger Guo Chu Van took the main point of Bai’s argument, that people were being led by the views of others, and used it against him,

“People who pretend to be very rational and very reasonable, and claim to think independently make me sad. As a public figure you should have a conscience and try to benefit China domestically. Do your journalistic duty and don’t make yourself out to be a politician or international relations expert”.

Another middle aged blogger from Beijing, Gu Qingsheng, following this line of debate, argued, that instead of reporting objectively Bai was muddying the public debate with his own opinions.

“…[T]he ‘Bai Yan Songs’ of China have lost their prestige. If you [Mr.Bai] reported the Lasa issue without delay and with an objective and accurate point of view, it would have prevented the foreign media from being able to seize a chance to exaggerate matters, and we would not be in such terrible situation [now]. However, they [the Bai Yansongs’] have not showed any self-criticism for their mistakes. As a journalist, do you even have a little of conscience left? No. It doesn’t matter if you don’t have any. Why do you come out and try to teach netizens a lesson without gaining their respect first?”

In the comment section of this blog, reactions like “Bai Yansong, you are not patriotic and have really disappointed me!” demonstrate the *ad hominem* nature of the debate. Additional comments such as “the government and their lackies think they are so smart but they keep ‘shooting their selves in the foot!’” further articulate that Bai’s view was not considered to be an authentic addition to the public debate.

In the days after the protests, as interest dwindled in the face of government propaganda efforts, boycotters became less extreme in the defense of their position. That there was no correlating rise in the ‘rational patriotism’ discourse and reports that online

139 Guo (2008) (appendix B no.8).
access to the debate was blocked indicate the Carrefour event was not ‘democratically’ resolved. While the government did not react in the same verbally aggressive manner as the boycotters, treatment of the debate on mainstream television, as summarized by Wang Xiao Dong, indicates that there was little tolerance of the boycotters and their position.
5.0 Conclusion

While Chinese netizens actively discuss political issues online neither they, nor their government, do so in a democratic manner.\textsuperscript{143} Rather, authoritative claims, such as “All Chinese people should boycott Carrefour” form bases of popular assent whose supporters aggressively clash with all who oppose them.\textsuperscript{144} This case study shows that media personas that enter into public debates with blogs rather than corporately do not appear to hold the same level of authority in the hegemony of public authority as newspapers and television programs; the public only openly attacked the viewpoints of the former. Each event in the Carrefour story, the emotional patriotic rallying for a boycott, physical protests, and censorship and authoritative ‘rational patriotism’ arguments from the media and influential public intellectuals, depicts attempts to assert communication power in an effort to gain acquiescence from others.

The Internet has not provided China with a ‘public sphere’. While Yang and Calhoun have identified the rise of a ‘green public sphere’ amongst Chinese netizens, the Carrefour event demonstrates that the powers the Internet provides to civil society practitioners do not inherently lead to the establishment of democratic traditions (such as accepting pluralism, legal mechanisms for protecting rights from government abuse, etc.). Although the Internet may not establish and entrench lines of division within society, the ability to spontaneously form special interest associations, such as the Carrefour boycotters, means there will always be new topics for which like-minded individuals can form lines of network distinction and fluidity in society

\textsuperscript{143} Papacharissi, 2002.
\textsuperscript{144} Han Han (2008) (appendix B no.9).


27. Fc666. 2007. “‘End of the world eagle alliance’ against the construction of PX project in Xiamen.” *tianya.cn.*

http://groups.tianya.cn/tribe/showArticle.jsp?groupId=6006&articleId=180043 (Accessed June 18, 2011).


   http://www.danwei.org/net_nanny_follies/carrefour_now_a_sensitive_word.php

   http://www.danwei.org/state_media/xiamen_px_sms_china_newsweek.php

   http://www.danwei.org/nationalism/talking_heads_spar_over_carref.php
   (Accessed April 2, 2011).


   http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/04/25/us-china-carrefour-


Appendix A: Excerpts from the author’s personal journal.

These entries were not generated as part of formal academic research but accounts of personal experience in 2008.

Names and places have been altered to protect identities.

March 31, 2008

My… students at ABC have been talking about Lhasa. Ted the 27 year old language/sports student who usually complains about the Beijing government didn’t say much of anything. Henry, a 58 year old middle management business man, gave a confidant rendition of the same kind of story one can see on the news. Jean, a 36 year old house wife with a university degree, spoke with concern. She thinks that there is more going on than she hears in the news in China but did not agree that Western news corporations were presenting the real situation either.

Sue, a 17 year old high school student, had the most to say. She claimed that the government was doing its best to work with people in Tibet and felt hurt that ethnically Han people were the target of attacks. She claimed that it was the Han and not Tibetan people who were the real victims and that Western news media was showing the situation in a way to keep China ‘down’ in the global order. When I asked her about where she went to learn and talk about this she said she would go online and read what people were saying in the QQ groups she belonged to. Henry felt that this type of information was not as reliable as television however and tried to explain to Sue that her point of view was too extreme.

April 12, 2008
Today one of my college students told me she hated France. When I asked her why she felt this way, she told me how so many bad things happened while the Olympic torch was there. I then asked her about England and America and while she sort of knew the torch run had been interrupted in these countries too she was mainly focused on France.

April 18, 2008

Jean told me about her friends on QQ spreading word to boycott Carrefour. She supports the boycott, which is easy for her as she can choose from many grocery stores to go to. She didn’t seem too knowledgeable about the whys of this boycott beyond the claim that the French disrespected China during the torch run.

April 19, 2008

My middle school students were riled up today. Three girls spoke with defiance about Carrefour. They told me of plans which they and their classmates had for the labour holiday. They planned to go in and buy many products but then leave them at the checkout. They also planned to go in and buy 1 yuan products with 100 yuan bills. When I asked them why they wanted to do this they replied with the story that France was disrespectful of China and that they had heard that Carrefour leaders had given the Dali Lama money to breakup China.
Appendix B: Screen shots of Chinese blogs used

1. Water Baby.
2. Bai Yansong

One person: not to be angry

I am not in Beijing on May 1. It is not because of restlessness, but try to do some preparations for the torch. Carrefour to go in a personal thing, even though many people did not go to the Beijing Carrefour boycott because they believe that one day, Carrefour will be to many people. As for the individual, the day should not have political consequences; more, the people are not to pass in front, which is equal to the other day the same. Moreover, Carrefour's employees are mostly Chinese, is not another internal struggle. "He, we do not, and we have those who not use the same way?"

In the Olympic torch relay, there are many in the event, did not do pretty badly. When I see the torch to the country, serious Chinese guarding the source of the torch, I...

3. Blue Cat

May 1 nationwide boycott of Carrefour one day

May 1 nationwide boycott of Carrefour day we do not go to Carrefour. Carrefour in France's largest supermarket chain, Louis Vuitton in France - Le Board Hennessey Group has been known by the second largest shareholder is the largest shareholder, Fox Louis Vuitton - Hennessey Group, Louis Vuitton, Dior, Ford, Guerlain, Chloé, Kenzo, Saphir cosmetics stores, and Hermès and other stores, champagne and cognac brands, Louis Vuitton Tang won up - a bit depends on donations of money, coupled with the torch relay in Paris to see the people of the French support the Tibet preferable, there is no reason to send money to buy their French goods, not May 1, collective Carrefour, ask them to look at the strength of the Chinese people on or that they can see the power of the netizens. Please respect, put on your mask, etc., etc., so that more people know, so that 5.1 Carrefour wants to come that day, so your mother arrival in China's Olympic Games.
4. Water Child

5. China Jasmine Revolution Sponsors
6. Fcfc666

The PE project in Xiamen against the construction people, invited reports and click here to support
Huaying Chen from Taiwan’s top most wanted by the reverse investment PE project, after June 1
this year, nine times of people of the WO lie Xiamen protest, 28 finally temporarily
postponed, decide after six months, please ring to make a professional evaluation rating
agencies re-start. Yesterday, the EIA report was finally issued, it seems that people have to
face once again Xiamen the way, but also for their own
survival and living environment and fight.
Against the construction of PE project, not only to confirm the people’s living environment, protect health — we know, Xiamen,
as the past few years, has received numerous awards, such as the most livable cities, health
tourism city, the United Nations Habitat Award , but who know and understand, the most recent
aluminium plant in Fujian Province rushed third! Xiamen has been published to give up the daily
pollution index? !
The proposed construction of PE project is to their products as Chen has
been invested by the built-in chemical and Dragon Xiamen resin material, in fact, are
highly toxic, not in Taiwan approved by the project. Now, four shopping chemical projects with
the above three projects compared to the pollution and toxicity is negligible, but in Taiwan,
et EIA has to use light to Taiwan, the island where land reclamation, in order to avoid
contamination, but we are talking about the project, toxic area, according to a report
Huaying Chen recent years, the approach of the Dragon Xiamen Chemical and resin plant, medical
residents to join the army, did not pass a body qualified! Dragon chemical and resin Xiamen

7. Gu, Qingsheng
8. Guo, Chu Van

10. Han, Yong-hong.

11. He, Yanguang.
12. Hieruiw

13. In the waterside

15. Kalieningna, Anna.
16. Lina.

17. Lonely, Female boss (red box added).
18. Maomy.

19. Qin, Jianzhong
20. Shenyang.

22. The boy.

23. Tree Pool.
24. Wang, Xiaodong.

25. Wen, Liou.
26. Wowcowb.

27. Xin, Left.

May 1 nationwide boycott of Carrefour day, the country will not buy French products

May 8-24, just three months before the Beijing Olympics. All do not go to Carrefour shopping on the grounds that Carrefour’s largest shareholder, Jean-Jacques de Dolle, France’s support for Tibet separatist very public, even the French President has thus declared boycott the Beijing Oly mics. That we now look at Carrefour boycott, with the Beijing Olympics with a long period, before a no after 17 days. Let them see the power of China and the Chinese network. Please forward to all our mobile phone, friends and other contacts, and let their families to join. Carrefour wants to come for 17 days!

Everyone who is not going to Carrefour, Carrefour is France’s largest supermarket chain, Louis V utton in France Mott Hennessy Group has been increased by the second largest shareholder is a largest shareholder, the French Louis V utton - Holz, house Hennessy Group, Louis V utton, Dior, Fendi, Guerlain, Clinique, Kenzo, Shiseido cosmetics stores, and Hennessy and other wine, champagne, etc., the boycott of Carrefour will cause severe damage to the French economy. Let us take an opportunity to see the streets of the French people support the 2D, there is no reason not to give for French people to send money to buy their products, not May 1, Carrefour group, ask them to look at China human power.

Let them see the power of the network. Please Zhu zhihong put on their own 00 and so on and so forth. Let more people know that Carrefour wants to come that day to 5:1.

30. Yu, Yeappy.

31. Zhen, Chende.