

On Chinese Cyberspace Governance Model from the Perspective of Xi Jinping's Thought on Cyberspace Governance

Zhi-chun LEI^{1,*}, Jun CHEN² and Dong-jing ZHANG¹

¹School of Marxism, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, 430074, China

²Organization Department, Wuhan Institute of Technology, Wuhan, 430205, China

*Corresponding author

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Abstract. Since China's access to the Internet, the Chinese governments are always playing a leading role in the governance of cyberspace by using a regulative way, which formed the traditional cyberspace governance model. However, such model has many disadvantages and leads to many problems in the governmental practice. In order to solve these problems, the governance model should renewed from the perspective of Xi Jinping's thought on cyberspace governance, that is, the "one main power and three auxiliary participators" cyberspace synergetic governance model.

Introduction

The Internet today is growing at an incredible speed in ways that have enormously expanded people's work and living spaces. Cyberspace has become a new homeland for human beings, a place where all countries are getting increasingly interdependent, and a community of intertwined interests and shared future. In recent years, the number of Chinese netizens is growing rapidly, and China's Internet penetration has also been increasing (see Fig.1 below).

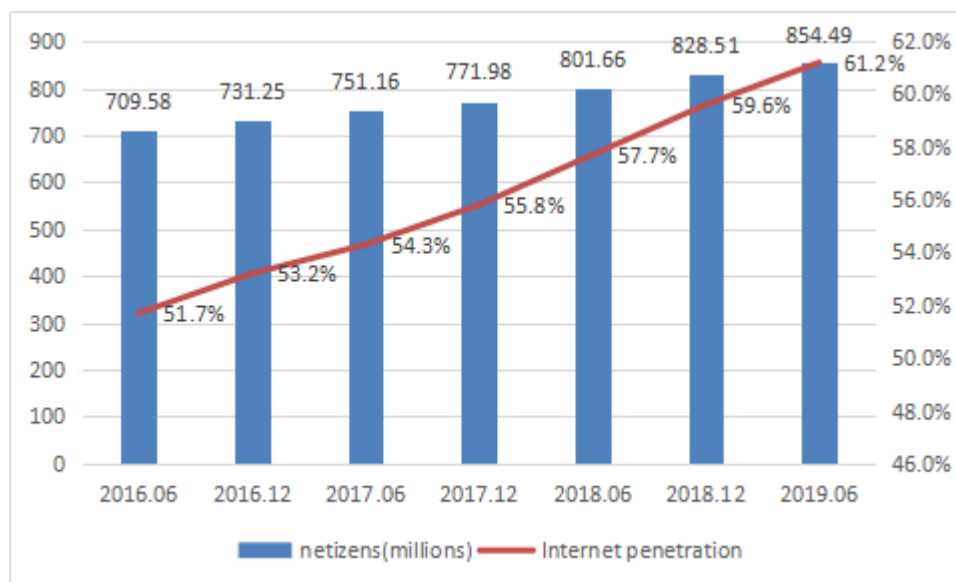


Figure 1. Chinese netizens and Internet penetration (2016.06-2019.06).

[Sources: "The 44th China Statistical Report on Internet Development" by CNNIC]

At the same time, however, the development of the network has also brought many social problems. Therefore, since China's access to the network, Chinese leaders have attached great importance to the issue of cyberspace governance, and copied the model of social governance at that time into the governance of cyberspace. However, with the development of the times, China has set a higher goal for the governance of cyberspace, that is, to build China into a country with strong cyberpower from a large network country, and to enable hundreds of millions of people to

get satisfaction from the development of Internet. The traditional model of cyberspace governance cannot meet such requirements. How to govern the cyberspace under the new network environment and realize the interests of the people is a great project, and great projects cannot be separated from the guidance of great theories. Based on the goals and requirements of Chinese cyberspace governance, China should choose a new model from Xi Jinping's thought on cyberspace governance.

Xi Jinping's Thought on Cyberspace Governance

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, President Xi Jinping has repeatedly stated the extreme importance of cyberspace governance, pointing out that the Internet is the "biggest variable" faced by CPC in long-term governance, emphasizing that cyberspace governance affects all walks of life and thousands of families. So Xi has repeatedly emphasized the need to explore the inherent law of cyberspace governance as one of the important tasks to improve the ability of governing the country. Xi Jinping's thought on cyberspace governance could be concluded as followings:

Upholding the People-centered Development Vision throughout Cyberspace Development

The people-centered philosophy of development is the fundamental value of Xi Jinping's thought on cyberspace governance, which highlights that development depends on the people, development is for the people, and development achievements should be shared by the people. Xi has stressed that the people-centered philosophy of development must be carried out in cyberspace governance, calling for the consensus among all the people and their participation in cyberspace governance, in order to improve their well-being and realize the solemn promise of "letting the fruits of the Internet development benefit the 1.3 billion Chinese people".

Implementing the National Cyber Development Strategy

China's Internet initiatives have developed very rapidly, with steady progress having been made in cybersecurity and IT application. Yet despite these notable results, China is still facing a number of problems and falling short in internet development and cyberspace governance. The Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee and 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) have both laid out plans for implementing the national cyber development strategy, the "Internet Plus" action plan, and the national big data strategy. It is important that these plans are carried out effectively.

Calling for All Stakeholders Including the Government, Enterprises, Social Organizations and Netizens to Take Their Shared Responsibility

It's rather important for governance to accumulate consensus and share responsibility among all stakeholders, and build up an operating system with close internal relations among them, which could promote all stakeholders to exert their advantages.[1] Xi stresses many times that a governance system should be built up based on collaboration, participation, and common interests, so that all stakeholders including the government, enterprises, social organizations and netizens have the chance to take part into it to make joint efforts to take their shared responsibility.

Creating a Clean and Righteous Cyberspace Environment

In consideration of the tight relationship between internet and the interest of all the people, Xi has highlighted the necessity of a cyberspace environment that is safe and manageable as well as open and innovative, pointing out that a clean and healthy cyberspace is in the interests of the people, while a foul and unhealthy one serves no one, so China must improve management of cyberspace and work to ensure high quality content, creating a healthy, positive culture that is a force for good. Xi suggests that the cyberspace be imbued with positive energy and mainstream values, in the hope of creating a clean and righteous environment.

Exploring Multiple Measures for Cyberspace Governance

Cyberspace governance is a long-term and arduous task. Xi stresses that multiple measures should

be explored to build a scientific and effective and comprehensive cyberspace governance system. In general, it's necessary to focus on the overall layout and overall promotion taking account of both the current and the long-term interests, both international and domestic interests; it is also necessary to achieve joint efforts of the on-liners and the off-liners, to make good use of technology and talents, and to govern the cyberspace by morals and by law. Through these multiple measures, China could build national cyberspace development strength and achieve good governance.

The Traditional Cyberspace Governance Model and Its Disadvantages

In the process of the continuous development and upgrading of the Internet, China has been always actively governing the cyberspace according to the traditional cyberspace governance model.

The Formation of the Traditional Cyberspace Governance Model

Some scholars argue that the traditional Chinese cyberspace governance model could be named for “Multi-regulators Model”, in which the Chinese governments play leading roles. The forming of this model has gone through four stages (see table 1 below):

Table 1. The four stages of Chinese cyberspace governance.

Stages	Foundation stage	Initially forming stage	Relatively mature stage	Upgrading stage
Years	1994-1998	1999-2004	2005-2013	2014-
The Leading Role	Information Work Leading Group of the State Council	the Ministry of Information Industry	The State Council Information Office	Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission

①Foundation stage (1994-1998). During this period, China made great effort to build Internet infrastructures and the basic regulating system. The Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, the Ministry of Electronics, the Information Work Leading Group of the State Council and Chinese Academy of Sciences were the four main regulators of Internet affairs, of which Information Work Leading Group of the State Council played the leading role. ②Initially forming stage (1999-2004). At this stage, the Ministry of Information Industry dominated the Internet regulation, which was combined from the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, the Ministry of Electronics, while the State Council Information Office, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Culture, the State Administration for Industry and Commerce and other departments also played certain roles in the regulation of the Internet. In addition, Internet Society of China, inaugurated in 2001, makes efforts to promote development of Internet and construct an advanced information society. Thus, besides the governments, there were other regulators in Internet regulation. ③Relatively mature stage (2005-2013). It was the golden time of China's Internet development, because the number of Internet users has increased significantly. The State Council Information Office played the leading role. However, with the emergence and popularity of we media, it became rather hard for the governments to regulate the cyberspace. ④Upgrading stage (2014-). The core task of cyberspace governance is to create a clean and righteous cyberspace environment. The Central Internet Security and Informatization Leading Group was set up in 2014, designed to lead and coordinate Internet security and informatization work among different sectors, as well as draft national strategies, development plans and major policies in this field, which was renamed for “Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission” in 2018. Meanwhile, China laid out plans to perfect the cyberspace governance system.[2]

The Disadvantages of the Traditional Model

Though the traditional model has made great contribution to the cyberspace governance in China, but it is undeniable that this model has many disadvantages:

The Imbalance of the Governmental Subjective Structure. In the traditional model, governments are the main governmental subject. Although Internet industry associations, Internet

enterprises, and individuals are gradually taking part in the governance of cyberspace, but the unitary structure of the governance subject hasn't got radically changed, which has led to the following problems:

Firstly, governments are the main governance subjects, which means that they often need to play the role of "firemen" in cyberspace governance. With the rapid development of Internet, the number of Internet domain names and websites in China is increasing year by year, and the objective scope of cyberspace governance is expanding. However, the staffs in each government who are in charge of cyberspace governance are not enough and most of them are lack of necessary professional knowledge. So it's very difficult to achieve the expected goal only relying on the governments.

Secondly, the lack of sufficient opportunities for the people to participate in cyberspace governance will not only weaken the initiative of the people, but also deepen the mistrust between the people and the governments.

The Prevalence of Opportunistic Behaviors. In the traditional model, Internet enterprises seem to be the subsidiary "tool" of governments, and they are in hierarchical relationship, which leads to the information asymmetry between the two parties: Comparing with Internet enterprises, governments usually have information advantage. It may lead to the rent-seeking behaviors of some government staffs, which will do great harm to the public trust in government.[3]

On the other hand, some Internet enterprises, such as some Internet service providers (ISPs), may evade network supervision. Some ISPs may stop Internet service when the governments carrying out special actions to fight against the illegal websites and harmful contents, but continuing providing such harmful and illegal service after the special actions or providing such harmful and illegal service through overseas servers.[4]

Laying More Emphasis on Regulation but Less on Rights Protection. The goal of cyberspace governance is to realize the interests of the people and let them share the achieves of Internet development. Therefore, the rights of the netizens must be fully protected. But some scholars criticize that Chinese laws and regulations lay more emphasis on regulation, but less on rights protection, which leads to the imbalance of the rights and duties of the netizens.[5] Such law system is not conducive to fundamentally realizing the interests of the people.

Disorder in the Guidance of the Public Opinions Online. The Internet is just like a double-edged sword: it provides convenient ways for the netizens to express their opinions, which is the right way for them to have freedom of speech and to form the public opinion, while it may also make the guidance of the Internet public opinions in disorder. Some scholars argue that the appearance and popularization of populism and other ideological trends online have greatly promoted the emergence of irrational political subcultures, which seriously impacts the political dominate culture of China.[6]

“One Main Power and Three Auxiliary Participators” Cyberspace Synergetic Governance Model as a Solution

To solve the problems above, a new model should be built from the perspective of Xi Jinping's thought on cyberspace governance. According to this perspective, the design of the new model should satisfy the following points: first, the governmental subjects should be multiple, including all stakeholders; second, all stakeholders act in synergetic ways; third, the interests of the people should get satisfied and their rights should be respected. So we think "one main power and three auxiliary participators" cyberspace synergetic governance model may be an appropriate solution.

The Structure of the New Model

The structure of the new model should at least contain three elements: the governmental subjects, the governmental objects and the governmental methods.

The Governmental Subjects. Different from the traditional model, the governmental subjects of the new model include are multiple, including the governments, Internet enterprises, Internet associations and the netizens. These subjects all have their own advantages (see Table 2 below). Of

all these subjects, the governments play the main role, and the other three are auxiliaries but also play important and irreplaceable roles.

Table 2. The own advantages of the four subjects and the division of their responsibilities.

	Advantages	Responsibilities
Governments	authoritative, powerful	designing at the top level and overall planning, laws and regulations making, fighting against illegal speech and behaviors
Internet Enterprises	professional, flexible, owning the most social capital	providing Internet products, assisting the supervision of the Internet
Internet Associations	self-organizing, independent	rules making, supplying public service
Netizens	with huge quantity, flexible	supervision of power and public opinion forming

The Governmental Objects. The governmental objects could be divided into three categories: the first category is the construction and management of Internet infrastructures and facilities; the second category is the governance of production and life practices online, such as e-commerce, e-government and so on; the third category is illegal speech and behaviors.

The Governmental Methods. Providing order through regulation is important for cyberspace governance, but the self-discipline of all stakeholders is also an important goal of the new model. In order to achieve these goals, multiple measures should be taken: first, governance by law. All governmental systems should clearly be built by law, making power-right and right-right in good balance. Second, governance by moral. Xi pointed out that the implementation of law relying on moral support, and moral cannot be separated from law, so that the two should keep in consistent pace in cyberspace governance.

The Important Characteristics of the New Model

The new model has following important characteristics:

Under the Leadership of Party Committees. The leadership of Party committees is the most important guarantee of the development of China, so is it to cyberspace governance in China. When governing the cyberspace, all actors must closely follow the Party’s political line, strictly observe its political discipline and rules, and closely align themselves with the Central Committee in terms of political stance, direction, principle, and path. The leadership of Party committees could guarantee the effect of cyberspace governance for the following reasons: first, Party committees are the leading force of cyberspace governance who make top-level design; second, Party committees are the coordinators who are responsible for coordinating the relationship and the disputes between all stakeholders; third, Party committees are the motivators who stimulate all actors to participate in cyberspace governance.

Laying Emphasis both on Order Maintaining and Rights Protection. Synergetic governance could on the one hand promote stable, regular and predictable behaviors, and on the other hand, it could reduce uncertainty through collaboration, which helps maintain good order online and create a clean and righteous cyberspace environment. Moreover, good order and a clean and righteous cyberspace environment do not mean the sacrifice of rights but rather make it easier to protect the rights of the individuals and to realize the interests of the people.

Based on Collaboration, Participation, and Common Interests. The new model should be established based on collaboration, participation, and common interests, that means, under the new model, Party committees exercise leadership, governments assume responsibility, non-governmental actors provide assistance. The leadership of Party committees is the most important guarantee for a good governance in cyberspace; the governments and non-governmental actors could reinforce each other in synergetic ways.

Conclusion and Discussion

From the perspective of Xi Jinping’s thought on cyberspace governance, “one main power and three auxiliary participators” cyberspace synergetic governance model may be a good solution for

covering the disadvantages of the traditional cyberspace governance model. How to arrange the supporting system and mechanism of this new model must still be discussed.

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