This thesis titled
After March 14 Tibet Riots: A New Wave of Chinese Nationalism

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ABSTRACT

LAI, YANG, M.A., June 2010, International Development Studies

After March 14 Tibet Riots: A New Wave of Chinese Nationalism (87 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Jie-Li Li

The thesis is a case study of the Chinese nationalist movements after the Tibet riots in 2008. It is a qualitative research study. I use critical theory to analyze the stimulus of the movement, the new characteristics of the movement, as well as its impact to the country and international society. My study indicates that narrative bias in China and the West has been the main obstacle for dialogue between China and the West, as well as China and Tibet. Hence, more communicative actions are necessary for conciliation.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Triggered by the Tibet Riots in the spring of 2008, nationalist movements in China have developed to a stage where new characteristics have been observed. The riots in Tibet on March 14, 2008 and the following boycott of China by Western countries sent Chinese nationalists, both home and abroad, to the streets as well as cyberspace to demonstrate and debate. They uttered a clear voice to the world as a powerful reaction to the biased Western media reports of the Tibet issue. In this dramatic scene, both the Western and Chinese people ask the same questions: Why don’t they believe us? Why do they hate us? Again, the discussion about Chinese nationalism – whether it is manipulated by the government or not, whether it is “rising” or not – has become the focus of the spotlight.

My paper is a case study to record and examine the Chinese nationalist movements after the 2008 Tibet riots from the perspective of critical theory. There are three interrelated research questions I intend to address. First, how did the Tibet riots serve as a catalyst for the new wave of Chinese nationalist movements? Second, is the movement a top-down movement organized or manipulated by the government, or a bottom-up movement for Chinese people to utter their voice? Third, how are the new characteristics of this movement as different from the past and what its lingering impact?

In order to give answers to these questions, I use the critical theory of narrative bias and communication to analyze these events. I will discuss the changing attitude and behavior of Chinese nationalists in this movement, including the social and cultural backgrounds, in which this new nationalist movement emerged and developed. I will
further discuss the emergent participants, the new appeal of the nationalist movements, and the new communication tools people used to demonstrate their opinions and emotions.

Necessary background knowledge of the Tibet riots will be provided in the discussion through the details of micro actions. However, my thesis will not focus much on “the truth of Tibet,” or whether Beijing’s policy in Tibet is proper. Rather, it will try to examine the attitudes and behaviors demonstrated by the Chinese nationalists and the reasons why they adopted these particular attitudes and behaviors. In this study, March 14 will be used to refer to a series of events around the topic of the Tibet riots in 2008.1 Rather than being restricted to what happened in Tibet on that day, the echoes from Chinese nationalists awakened by the riots will be examined and discussed, in order to find the new characteristics of this wave of nationalist movement in China. The terms “Tibetans” and “Westerners” will be used in the general meaning.

In addition, my paper will not suggest whether nationalism in China is “rising.” The power of nationalist sentiments should neither be underestimated, nor exaggerated in the illusion. Hence, this thesis uses a macro and historical comparative perspective to examine the 2008 nationalist movement and views it in the context of nationalism and ethnic conflicts in the globalization era, where we have begun to see more inter-group clashes among various communities with different cultures and ideologies across the world.

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1 March 14 is the starting point of the 2008 Tibet riots in Chinese state chronologies. On this day the extreme violence hit Lhasa, the capital city of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). However, in most foreign reports, the starting point is March 10, the anniversary for the exiled Tibetans and the Dalai Lama. As I discuss the related Chinese nationalist movements in which the first version was widely accepted, I choose March 14 as the coordinate for my study.
The Personal Inquisitiveness

The direct incentive that motivates me to focus on the issue of Chinese nationalism is the 2008 Tibet Riots and the nationalist movements that followed. For the first time during this period, I was shocked to recognize the political affiliation and national identity held by my peers. That spring was my last term at the undergraduate level in Wuhan, one of the major cities in China. At that time, my major was English Language, and I chose English literature to be my study approach. Aside from writing my senior honors thesis on Aesthetism, I spent time reading and writing novels online. For a university student, the most convenient and popular way to get information is the Internet. Student dormitories do not have televisions. Radio is somewhat out of date. Anyway, these are not important, because one can easily get a huge amount of information with a computer and the Internet. Most Chinese university students have their own private computer in the dormitory, and they spend time searching and reading news, blogs, books, watching videos, participating in discussions in various online forums, chatting with friends with instant messaging service, etc. It is the era of using the Internet for information exchange, and online life has been an important part of everyday routine for these students.

Although I kept focusing on the political and social issues as personal interests, in most of my time as a student, I felt that there was a distance existing between daily life and political incidents. However, that feeling was overturned by the March 14 Tibet Riots. As any other significant social event, the riots quickly became the hot topic in cyberspace; in portals, online forums, blogs, and chat rooms, netizens discussed the riots
and “Western media’s biased report” everywhere. It was so serious that not only those on online forums with political themes got involved in the discussion, but those on forums dedicated to topics unrelated to politics become drawn in as well. In a female literature online forum that was my haunt, I was surprised to see people (some of whom are my friends) discussing and debating about the events. The members of that forum, most of them girls in their twenties, gather to discuss their shared interest in fiction writing and reading. In their daily discussion, various issues and news in daily life are also referred to. Like many other young Chinese, they usually tease or criticize the government’s authority and policies. However, regarding the Tibet issue in 2008, there appeared an overwhelming predominance of voices supporting the government. A wave of nationalist movements was spreading. For the first time in my life, I clearly realized that “the West” as a whole (not the U.S. or Japan only) was strongly and widely challenged, and there were many people in China dissatisfied and angry with the way they were treated by the “international community.”

The above experience was really shocking. University students, the Internet, a one-party authority, a developing country without a mainstream value, and the era of globalization – all of these may suggest a tendency toward anti-state sentiment, which indeed exists in China. However, why did people choose to stand on the side of government and challenge the West this time? Liberals in China once enjoyed a high reputation as the heroes who challenge the government with “universal value.” However, their reputation was also greatly shaken within the debates: when China was placed in the role of colonist, and the Tibet issue was so deeply connected with the arguments of
human rights, freedom and democracy, an irreconcilable conflict between the beliefs of “universal value” and “national interests” was produced. Many of these liberals indicated that the 2008 nationalist movement was the result of the government’s successful brainwashing of the young generation. Nevertheless, to what extent does such a conclusion coordinate with the reality?

I myself witnessed and experienced the fierce debates between the nationalists and liberals on the issue of March 14, the development and the whole process of the 2008 nationalist movements, and the conflicts between ideologies, as well as the collapse of credibility of Western media during that spring. My friends fiercely debated online about the issue and even split with each other over different opinions. Students were doing surveys on the campus to ask everyone’s attitude towards the Tibet issue and Western media. The national flags spontaneously bought by students hung around outside the dormitory buildings. University students also went to the nearest Carrefour on May 1 to boycott the foreign enterprises that were regarded to be supporters of the Free Tibet Campaign. All of these incidents pushed me to confront the conflicts of cultures and identities within the process of China’s integration into the world. The process has lasted for centuries, yet still does not see an end. I was familiar with the process, yet for the first time in my life I clearly recognized the huge gap existing between China and the West.

All of this raises a series of questions. Which way will the new generation, who enjoys the Western lifestyle of consumption but embraces nationalism, lead the country? How will this generation preserve the nation in an era of globalization? After the new
generation enters into society and gradually takes the place of the elders, what kind of changes will occur in China?

To answer these questions will take a long time, in order to observe the whole movement and draw an appropriate conclusion. My study is motivated by my curiosity to set out to record the movement, which has left me with unforgettable memories of that spring, from a participant-observer’s perspective.

Literature Review

As one of the most important events in 2008, the Chinese nationalist movement was widely covered by the media and discussed from various perspectives. Nevertheless, for academic research, it is still a new topic. Only limited literature covers the topic.

Zhao Yifeng’s senior honors thesis (2009) is a rough description of the student nationalists in China. As suggested by the title “New Students, Old Loyalties,” the thesis concentrates on discussing how and why the students keep loyalty to their country while enjoying a Western material lifestyle. The author indicates the preconception held by American scholars and journalists about China and Chinese students is biased.

Nyiri Pal (2009) and Last Moyo (2009) discuss topics related to the nationalist movements in their essays as well. Nyiri Pal concentrates on the consumer boycott against Carrefour as a part of the 2008 nationalist movements, and discusses the event by relating it with other cases of consumer boycotts in China. He suggests such boycotts are grassroots movements. On the other hand, Last Moyo uses the theory of cosmopolitanism as the basis for discussion to analyze how media promotes ideologies. He compares the
news reports from CNN and Xinhua on the Tibet riots, and indicates that both of the media outlets frame the event from certain perspectives to advance certain political interests. CNN uses human rights as a political tool to maintain the existing neoliberal world system, while Xinhua is the agent of the Chinese government to protect the state interests. Last Moyo also criticizes cosmopolitanism for representing the Western neoliberal values as universal.

These studies provide an important contribution to my study of the 2008 nationalist movements. Nevertheless, none of them provides a large picture of the movements. Zhao’s work does not relate the movement with the background of the Tibet issue, and only focuses on the reflections of the Chinese students. Nyiri Pal’s work is an examination of a single segment of the movement, while Last Moyo’s essay concentrates on two media outlets for discussion. What voice exists besides the Western media and Chinese official propaganda? Who are the other participants of the nationalist movements besides the students? What kind of impacts will the movement have in the future? Different voices and dynamics need to be covered in a breadth study of the whole event.

Theoretical Perspectives

*Critical Theory*

Critical theory is developed from Marxist theory. Both of the theories regard modern society as coercive and dehumanizing, and indicate the importance of emancipation. However, there are notable differences as follows: for Marxist theory social change and society are driven by struggles to control material production, but for
critical theory, modern society has developed into a society that is dominated by signs and texts. The real battle in modern industrial society is the battle to control symbols and ideologies. In Antonio Gramsci’s theory, the ruling social class is hegemonic; it not only controls the state in the level of property, but it also dominates symbols and ideology, and assumes the role of culture propagator to shape the civilians’ minds through an inconspicuous and indirect way. The famous metaphor of Weber’s “iron cage” is applied to the critical theory by changing the bars of rational and legal authority into comfortable and pleasant illusions, which are produced by the “culture industry” – a term used by Theodore Adorno.

The culture Industry produces an ideology by itself through the means of T.V., movies, radio, music, advertisements, magazines, and newspapers, etc., to “churning out a never-ending supply of mass-produced, standardized commodities” (Appelrouth & Edles, 2007, p. 85). The so-called free choice is based upon the standardization of choices. The customer is not the subject, but the object. The customers are standardized to accept the products being promoted to them. Individuality is damaged by this standardization, as Max Horkheimer indicates in his book *Eclipse of Reason*:

“The machine-made incentives to self-preservation actually accelerate the dissolution of individuality. Just as the slogans of rugged individualism are politically useful to large trust in seeking exemption from social control, so in mass culture the rhetoric of individualism, by imposing patterns for collective imitation, disavows the very principle to which it gives lip service” (Horkheimer, 1947, p. 158-159).

The culture industry administers dominant discourse. Advertisements lead people to believe they can buy everything, including values of freedom and hope. Even fashion
products and spirituality products are sold and promoted in the same way. In the modern industrial society, people are losing the ability to think critically, and each individual is becoming a “one-dimensional man” that is satisfied with the one-dimensional standardized thought and behavior. Individual space has been invaded by technological and social control. Herbert Marcuse raises the following question: “Can one really distinguish between the mass media as instruments of information and entertainment, and as agents of manipulation and indoctrination” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 8)? Marcuse further argues that:

“One-dimensional thought is systematically promoted by the makers of politics and their purveyors of mass information. Their universe of discourse is populated by self-validating hypotheses which, incessantly and monopolistically repeated, become hypnotic definitions or dictations” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 14).

Hence, people in the modern industrial society are living in an intangible cage constructed by culture and ideology hegemony. On the other hand, Jurgen Habermas indicates a way for emancipation from this modern slavery by advocating use of the public sphere and communicative action.

According to Habermas, the public sphere is a social space where people can carry on free and open rational discussion. The public sphere is:

“A network for communicating information and points of view (i.e., opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes); the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions. Like the lifeworld as a whole, so, too, the public sphere is reproduced through communicative action. The public sphere is differentiated into levels according to the density of communication, organizational complexity, and range – from the episodic publics found in taverns, coffee houses, or on the streets; through the occasional or
‘arranged’ publics of particular presentations and events, such as theater performances, rock concerts, part assemblies, or church congresses; up to the abstract public sphere of isolated readers, listeners, and viewers scattered across large geographic areas, or even around the globe, and brought together only through the mass media” (Habermas, 1996, p. 360).

In the past decade, the arena for communication has been greatly expanded by computer and Internet technology. In cyberspace, people all around the world are now able to participate in discussions and debates, and are introduced to various opinions. The Western-based international corporate media now has to confront critics with a different cultural background who are sensitive to the existing notion of West-centricism. To some extent, it has revived Habermas’s public sphere.

The battle of ideological hegemonies not only exists inside a specific country, but is a world-wide competition. How do we define “development?” How do we define “universal value?” And finally, how do we define “social progress?” Although people call for a multi-dimensional understanding to deal with different cultural social situations, the dominant notion of mass media, the main battlefield for conflicts between cultures, is still West-oriented and reinforces neoliberal values for the existing world system. (McMichael, 2004; Huntington, 1996) For the semi-periphery countries, challenging the hegemony of the core states not only means seeking material re-distribution, but may also mean challenging the ideology hegemony kept by the core states. When the “international society” is still a synonym of “Western society,” “international media” becomes a synonym of “Western-based media” and struggles for discourse rights will not see an end.
Critical theory is related to my topic – the 2008 Chinese nationalist movements – at three levels. First, the narrative bias in the West is the stimulus of the movement. Second, the movement reflects the battle of discourse on a global scale. Third, cyberspace, as a new arena for communication, provides the space for a bottom-up nationalist movement, and provides an opportunity for the conciliation between China and the West, as well as between China and the Tibet. I will further discuss these three points in the following chapters.

**Chinese Nationalism**

Chinese nationalist literature developed during the 1990s and consolidated during the discussions based on several conflicts during 1995-2005 between both China and the U.S. and China and Japan. The publication of *China Can Say No* [*Zhongguo Keyi Shuo Bu*] and several large-scale demonstrations against the U.S. and Japan have been the focus of Chinese nationalism studies.

Literature on Chinese nationalism usually covers four topics. First, Chinese nationalist literature includes the argument of Chinese nationalism as either a modern conception or an ancient one. Second, these works consider whether contemporary Chinese nationalism is a top-down ideology or a voice from grassroots operations. Third, people argue that Chinese nationalism is “rising” as an aggressive enthusiasm. Fourth, scholars work to detail the characteristics of Chinese nationalism.

Generally speaking, people achieve consensus on two main points of contemporary Chinese nationalism. First, China’s history plays the core role in shaping
Chinese nationalism, which includes the memory of China’s bright past in the ancient
time, as well as the feeling of national humiliation in the modern and contemporary era
since China was defeated and invaded by Western Imperialism during past centuries.
Second, Chinese nationalism is the core ideology of the country. One new approach of
literature on Chinese nationalism also further indicates that nationalism is a product of
government manipulation. Meanwhile, case studies of the 1999 and 2001 anti-U.S.
protests, as well as the 2003 and 2005 anti-Japan protests, depict the landscape of popular
nationalist movements in China during the last decades as a challenge to the quite
prevalent idea of top-down nationalism.

Chinese nationalism is a complicated term to define. Most of the time, people use
the term without clear definition of the terms “Chinese” or “nationalism.” Both of the
words lack a precise and clear definition. Arguments of culture, ethnicity, territory
boundary, history, ideology, etc, are closely related with the definitions. To define the
terms also requires a definition of “China,” “nation,” and “nationalist,” as well as
distinctions between “nationalism,” “patriotism” and “racism,” “nation” and “state.” And
any of these definitions could be a topic for an entire book.

In my study, I will typically use the word “Chinese” in the dimension of cultural
identity, for China is regarded as “a civilization pretending to be a nation-state” (Pye,
1990, p. 58). I do not use the term Chinese by ethnic dimensions because China is a
multi-ethnic country. The official definition indicates there are 56 ethnic groups within
China as the members of Zhonghua minzu (the Chinese people). To use “Chinese” as the
synonym of “ethnic Han” is improper. In the case of the Tibet issue, not only Han
Chinese were involved in the riots, and not only Han Chinese participated in the nationalist protests. On the other hand, Chinese is not used as the abbreviation of PRC because overseas Chinese also participated in the movement.3

One very interesting phenomenon is that many Chinese nationalists usually do not regard themselves as a “nationalist,” for the word nationalism (minzu zhuyì) is generally used as a synonym of “racism.” The distinction between the two terms is clear. These nationalists accept the belief that “fifty-six ethnic groups belong to one family,” and believe racism will only split the country. The words “patriot” and “patriotism” (aiguo zhuyì) are preferred, and in most literature, people use patriotism as a synonym of nationalism. However, in the official definition, patriotism is under the guide of CCP, which is not widely accepted by the nationalists: the identity of the nation is prior to the party, not the other way around. Such a belief is reflected in the popular statement: “I love the country, but not the party.” To make a distinction between the identity of the state/party and the identity of the nation is essential for defining Chinese nationalism. Hence, in my paper, I will use “nationalism” to tag the 2008 movement.

Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature. It is based on both first-hand and second-hand resources. I myself took the role of a participant observer during the movement. I also will use case study and content analysis in my research.

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3 Again, it is also difficult to define “overseas Chinese.” In this thesis, I will use the term to refer to the community which includes Chinese students studying abroad and Chinese migrations all around the world. It is difficult to further define the group structure of the community population. However, according to the data, various ages and backgrounds of Chinese people participated in the protests.
First-hand resources for discussion include newspaper articles, magazines, online forum posts, blogs, videos, personal memoirs, etc. Most of the data I collected comes from the Internet. The 2008 nationalist movements greatly depended on Internet technology for information exchange and communication. Marches and demonstrations were also organized by mobilizing people through the Internet.

When people discuss cyberspace nationalism in China, they will usually select the online forums famous for their political themes as a representative sample. However, as these forums usually have a certain current of political affiliation, many different voices might be covered. For example, when people usually consider the netizens in China as groups of male university students, how do the female students feel? When people talk about the opinions from liberals in China, how are those nationalists feeling? The data I collected comes from a variety of media. Beginning in March 2008, I started to keep record of materials related to Chinese nationalism, including discussions on online forums both with and without a political theme, voices from the “left-wing” or “right-wing” or “centrist,” actions of people both domestic and abroad, media reports written by both Chinese and foreign journalists, etc.

On the other hand, the materials concerning all that occurred during the Tibet riots also need to be carefully combed and selected. Because of a lack of reliable first-hand and neutral information resources, one has to compare data from different media to draw a relatively rational conclusion. I collected the original data whenever possible, and also referred to the conclusions made by scholars in the area of China Studies, which were posted in the form of interviews and blogs online. Data from the most influential Western
media outlets, including CNN, FOX, *The New York Times*, etc, are used for discussion of mass media bias and dominant discourse. These media outlets did not have journalists in Tibet when the riots occurred and had to depend on second-hand information. On the other hand, James Miles of *The Economist* was staying in Lhasa and saw the riots firsthand. So his report has been important evidence for people’s judgment on the event of March 14.

Journal articles and books, as the secondary resources, are also used for my analysis. They can be roughly divided into three themes: 1) The Tibet issue 2) critical theories of narrative bias and ideology hegemony in the contemporary industrial society, and 3) works on Chinese nationalism. Although my research does not often refer to “the truth of Tibet,” it is still very essential to the background knowledge for any further discussion and evaluation of the following Chinese nationalist movement. In this part, I will cover the official attitude of Beijing and Dharamsala and the conclusions drawn by scholars who hold diverse perspectives (Yan, 2000; Sautman, 2006; Yeh, 2007; Barnett, 2009), as well as the field report written by independent writer and non-government organization in China. (Wang, 1998, Gongmeng, 2009)

Critical theories are used to analyze how the mass media helps mold the audience, as well as the ideology and culture conflicts between hegemonies. The concepts of the culture industry, ideology hegemony, the public sphere and the CNN effect are used to explain the “biased” narrative perspective maintained by Western society on the Tibet issue, as well as the strong reaction expressed by the nationalists in China.
For the Chinese nationalism study, I reviewed Chinese nationalist literature, including scholars’ efforts on characterizing Chinese nationalism, as well as the case studies of former popular nationalist movements in China. (Zhao, 2004; Wu, 2007; Zhao, 2002; Gries, 2005; Jia, 2005; Carlson, 2009; Liu, 2006) Popular nationalism in China is usually regarded as the product of state manipulation; hence, a discussion about the possibility of spontaneous bottom-up nationalism is necessary for my study. To trace back the nationalism in China to the time before CCP came to power, I review the works of nationalists in the early 20th century. Furthermore, I also discuss traditional Chinese culture as the initial dynamics of Chinese nationalism, as well as the external stimulus that evokes the nationalists’ enthusiasm. Gregory Fairbrother’s quantitative research on the effects of political education on Mainland Chinese students’ national attitude is also a good study to demonstrate the students’ ability to think independently and critically, even when the education system is controlled by the government.

As I have already discussed in this thesis, literature about the 2008 nationalist movements are limited. However, by limiting the publication year to the time period after 2008, I searched several articles on this topic through Google Scholar. Last Moyo (2009), Nyiri Pal (2009) and Zhao Yifeng (2009) provide strong supplementation for my study, and the material they have used also helps enrich my reference list.

By case study and content analysis, I give an in-depth discussion of the first-hand material. In the case of a video made by a Chinese nationalist, I analyzed the source materials and scripts used by the video-editor, as well as the channels to promote the video and its idea to the world. The tools for information exchange and communication
were an interesting aspect while I was observing the nationalists’ action. The nationalists’ action usually had multilateral participants in different countries exchange information through various communication tools, all in one case of communication.
CHAPTER 2: MARCH 14, 2008

2008 Tibet Riots

The Tibet issue has long been one of the most complex and controversial topics in China. Disputes over sovereign territory, ethnicity, religion and cultural differences, and differing ideologies and identities, are intertwined with the vestiges of events such as Western colonialism and the Cold War, the impact of globalization and free-market capitalism, and realistic considerations of geopolitics, all molding the issue into a deadlock. It is difficult or imprudent to make a simple division of “good and evil.” Instead, a more complete vision is necessary to understand the issue.4

When researching the Tibet issue, one will find at least two different versions of the “truth.” Beijing and Dharamsala each provide their own versions of the truth, because both governments claim sovereignty over Tibet and regard one another as enemies.5 The 2008 riots in Tibet are no exception to the multiple “truths” from Beijing and Dharamsala.

According to Dharamsala’s version, the riots began as a group of monks conducted a peaceful march to celebrate March 10 as the anniversary of the Dalai Lama and to protest against Beijing’s rule in Tibet. It was impossible for the monks to get the government approval for the demonstration; therefore, it was stopped by the police. Monks who were suspected to be leaders of the march were arrested. Radio Free Asia

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4 To learn more about the deadlock of Tibet, check the book *Tianzang: Xizang de mingyun* written by Wang Lixiong.

5 Including the term “Tibet” used by the two governments has two different meanings. In Beijing’s version, Tibet is used to refer to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), covering the territory of 1,220,000 square kilometers. While Dharamsala claims the sovereignty of Cholka-Sum, including TAR, Qinghai Province, and areas in Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan Province. The territory is twice the size of TAR. The different definitions lead to many misunderstandings when people talk about the Tibet issue; for example, the argument of the ratio of Zang (the Tibetans) to the Han Chinese population in Tibet.
reported that the 17 people who were arrested were abused and in severe condition. Further reports indicated that police arrested 500 students at Tibet University. Protests, as well as the conflicts between police and protesters, went on in the following days around the area of Lhasa and Qinghai Province, and finally led to the riots on March 14 when laypeople joined in. The original report from CNN described what happened on March 14 as:

“Monks from Ramoche Temple attempt to hold a protest march, but police block streets and prevent the demonstration. Laypeople join in and scuffles break out. There are reports of protesters setting fire to vehicles, shops and a main market in Lhasa” (“A Timeline,” 2008).⁶

In this news report, no further details were reported on the extreme violence against the civilians. In a post from the famous Tibetan woman poet and blogger named Woeser, it was indicated that hundreds of Tibetans were shot to death in the two months since March 13.⁷ (Woeser, 2008)

Beijing offers a different picture. Official news outlet CCTV (“The Lhasa Riots,” 2008; “18 Civilians,” 2008) stated that the protests started on March 10 were not “peaceful” because monks attacked the police. In the officially defined “Vandalism Burning Incident” on March 14, rioters fiercely attacked the police and civilians, and set fires to vehicles, houses, shops, and even schools and hospitals in Lhasa. According to the official figures, 18 civilians and 1 police officer were killed in the riots; 623 people, including 382 civilians and 241 police officers, were injured. Official news indicated, “China's public security and armed police have exerted the highest restraint. They did not

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⁶ CNN gets their information from the institution run by Dharamsala and the International Campaign for Tibet.
⁷ Woeser is famous for her support for Dharamsala. Her blog, written in Chinese, is one of the most influential blogs written about the Tibet issue. She is also an author for Radio of Free Asia. Her husband Wang Lixiong is one of the most famous Chinese writers who works on the Tibet issue.
use any deadly weapons, not even when their own lives were threatened” (“The Lhasa Riots,” 2008). Instead, they rescued civilians from the riots. The news reports, following the tradition, did not treat the riots as a case of ethnic conflicts; they instead regarded it as “the plot by Dharamsala to split China.”

The Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile were accused of planning and organizing the violent riots, while the Chinese government was accused of using its security force to kill Tibetans. Both sides denied the charges. Both sides reported the riots with different accents: Dharamsala emphasized the coercion of the police force to subdue the protesters, but evaded the topic of Tibetans killing civilians. On the other hand, Beijing condemned the extreme violence against the innocent civilians and “the Dalai Lama’s plot to split China,” but evaded the possible ethnic hatred from the Tibetans against China. There were even more rumors about “the Chinese police dressed up as monks to attack the civilians” or “the Americans sponsored and planned the riots in Tibet” spreading among the supporters of Dharamsala or Beijing. It is difficult to know which version offered more truth about the riots.

However, according to the reports from the foreign tourists and journalists, at least the myth of “the peaceful Tibetans as Buddhists,” which Western society accepts, was overturned: Tibetans attacked civilians in Lhasa. James Miles’s report proves the violence the Chinese media reported. He is a journalist for The Economist who stayed in Tibet when the riots occurred:

“What I saw was calculated targeted violence against an ethnic group, or I should say two ethnic groups, primarily ethnic Han Chinese living in Lhasa, but also members of the Muslim Hui minority in Lhasa. And the Huis in Lhasa control much of the meat industry in the city. Those two groups were singled out by
ethnic Tibetans. They marked those businesses that they knew to be Tibetan owned with white traditional scarves. Those businesses were left intact. Almost every single other across a wide swathe of the city, not only in the old Tibetan quarter, but also beyond it in areas dominated by the ethnic Han Chinese. Almost every other business was either burned, looted, destroyed, smashed into, the property therein hauled out into the streets, piled up, burned. It was an extraordinary outpouring of ethnic violence of a most unpleasant nature to watch, which surprised some Tibetans watching it. So they themselves were taken aback at the extent of what they saw. And it was not just targeted against property either. Of course many ethnic Han Chinese and Huis fled as soon as this broke out. But those who were caught in the early stages of it were themselves targeted. Stones thrown at them. At one point, I saw them throwing stones at a boy of maybe around 10 years old perhaps cycling along the street. I in fact walked out in front of them and said stop. It was a remarkable explosion of simmering ethnic grievances in the city” (“Transcript: James Miles,” 2008).

James Miles’s narration certifies the Tibetans’ violent attack against ethnic Han and Hui. Furthermore, he also answers the question of whether the government used military force as they did in the case of Tiananmen Tragedy:

“…at the earliest stages, was complete inaction on the part of the authorities. It seemed as if they were paralyzed by indecision over how to handle this…And then (on March 15) being able to move in gradually with troops with rifles that they occasionally let off with single shots, apparently warning shots, in order to scare everybody back into their homes and put an end to this. There clearly was a small scale clash going on between Tibetans and the security forces. But on the second day things had calmed down generally compared with the huge rioting that was going on…on the Friday. And the authorities were responding to these occasional clashes with Tibetans not by moving forward rapidly with either riot police and truncheons and shields, or indeed troops with rifles. But for a long time, just with occasional, with the very occasional round of tear gas, which would send and I could see this, people scattering back into these very, very, narrow and winding alleyways. What I did not hear was repeated bursts of machine gun fire, I didn't have that same sense of an all out onslaught of massive firepower that I sensed here in Beijing when I was covering the crushing of the Tiananmen Square protests in June, 1989” (“Transcript: James Miles,” 2008).

8 The Tibet riot is often treated as a conflict between the Han and Zang (the Tibetans) ethnic groups, although ethnic Hui had also been target of ethnic violence. It is interesting that people usually forget other ethnic groups within the Tibetan area, but simplify the issue as the conflict between the powerful Chinese and untenable Tibetans. For example, Woeser referred to the ethnic Hui in her post only once as “Huis’ shops are burned and Muslims are attacked,” without any follow-up report.
Miles’ experience is generally consistent with Beijing’s version on the point of the military’s performance. The government’s reaction is restrained, although there are different framings about why the government did not respond to the riots immediately with gun fire. For example, Miles explains it as “the police were paralyzed by indecision over how to handle this.” The government argues that it reflects a rational attitude toward the situation, while among the supporters of Dharamsala, this could reflect the possibility of a plot by Beijing. On the other hand, Miles indicates that what he saw cannot provide enough information for a whole picture. He also says he did not see the evidence for “the Dalai Lama’s plot.”

Reports and reviews of the riots published lately define the riots as the explosion of ethnic hatred generally due to the inequalities in wealth, as the identity of Tibet as a special community has strengthened during the past decades. (Barnett, 2009; Gongmeng, 2009) However, partly due to Beijing’s consistent attitude toward the Tibet issue, defining it as a political issue but not an ethnic or religious issue, and partly due to intervening from the international society, the focus of the Tibet issue in China shifted from the internal conflict to external conflict.

The Distorted Media Reports and Boycott against China

If both of the versions – the voices from Beijing and Dharamsala – were regarded as political propaganda, then the Western mass media should keep a more neutral attitude when producing their news reports. Nevertheless, as the Dalai Lama and exiled Tibetan government win much more sympathy and support in Western countries, their version is
adopted when the Western media reports on the riots. For instance, the article “A Timeline of Tibetan Protests” posted on the CNN website is an arrangement of information provided by an institution run by the exiled Tibet government. In the news report CNN broadcasted on March 14, 2008, the journalist called Tibet a “country,” although CNN’s editorial policy defines Tibet as the autonomous region of China.

Last Moyo pointed out that CNN “did not do much to explain the legal statues of Tibet in international law. Instead, it concentrated on the political drama of the Chinese military incursion into Tibet, which it claimed was akin to ‘a war’ intended for ‘a long occupation’ of Tibet” (Moyo, 2010, p. 196). On the other hand, when CNN did not get the first-hand reports of the riots, they used videos and pictures taken in India to fill the blanks: when the voice-over talked about the demonstration in Gansu Province where there is a large Tibetan population, the video was actually broadcasting a scene of Indian police arresting protesters.  

The Western-based international corporate media outlets widely used misleading videos and pictures. According to the information the website Anti-CNN (run by the Chinese student volunteers; I will discuss it more in the following chapters) provided, FOX, the Washington Post, The Times (UK), RFI (France), Bild (Germany), RTL (Germany), N-TV (Germany), N24 (Germany) used pictures taken in Nepal in their reports of the Tibet riots in China. CNN was also criticized for editing photographs to frame the story: a photo used by CNN in a report of the riots portrays a scene of some Tibetans throwing stones at a truck, yet the original picture was edited. The altered photo made it appear that the truck was chasing the protesters. Berliner Mogenpost was

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9 Check the video on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ge5SEPvRUtI
criticized for explaining a picture of Chinese police rescuing civilians as arresting protesters. ("We Just Want the Truth," 2008)

The distorted media reports further strengthened the existing Western public opinion on the issue of Tibet: the miserable Tibetans are peace-lovers under the coercion of an autocratic colonial regime. With anger and sympathy, the large-scale boycott against China was spread among the Western countries. The supporters of Free Tibet campaign organized marches to protest Beijing’s role in Tibet. As the riot was regarded as a protest to the Olympic Games in Beijing, even the sport event became politicized as a test for the country to be accepted by the international community, and was regarded as a good opportunity to increase pressure on Beijing. Olympic torch-relays were disrupted by the pro-Tibet protesters in London, Paris, San Francisco, New Delhi, Nagano and Seoul. In Paris, radical Free-Tibet supporters tried to grab the torch from the torch bearer – a girl in a wheelchair. The relay had to change the route in some cities to avoid similar chaos to Paris. Furthermore, Hollywood stars and politicians called for boycotting the Beijing Olympics. Whether or not to attend the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games or not had been an important means for the political leaders to express their attitude toward China. Suddenly, China was placed in a position against the world as an evil colonist.

Response from China: The Angry Nationalists

In China, the reports from the Western media on the riots and the Olympic torch-relay caused a great uproar due to their sympathetic emphasis on the calls for Free
Tibet, their criticism of human rights in China and Beijing’s colonial rule in Tibet, as well as their lack of condemnation toward the extreme violence against Chinese civilians. The Western mainstream media outlets were accused of being “global network of liars” for their misleading pictures and videos in the reports. (CTGZ, 2008)

Both at home and abroad, Chinese people, especially students, organized to protest the biased media reports. The earliest campaigns started in cyberspace and had a clear appeal of seeking the discourse rights on the Tibet issue in the international society. New communication tools, including blogs, online forums, instant messaging services, YouTube, PowerPoint, etc., were widely used in this process to promote the nationalists’ ideas and mobilize more people to participate in the protest.

The major events in 2008 spring nationalist movement included the website Anti-CNN, the video “Tibet was, is, and always will be a part of China” posted on YouTube, marches organizing overseas Chinese to support the Olympic torch-relay and to protest the Free-Tibet Campaign all around the world, demonstrations against the insulting remarks made by CNN commentator Jack Cafferty, the boycott of French enterprises that were suspected of supporting Dharamsala, and the online campaign of “Red Heart China.”

After the riots, the Chinese government tried to close off the region of Tibet and control the in and outflows of information. The official media of China kept a conservative notion while the foreign media fiercely criticized Beijing. The fight back against the Western media was the grassroots, originating from people who were dissatisfied with the “slow and unproductive” response of the official media. Information
of the violent attack against Chinese civilians and the distorted Western media reports was spreading in cyberspace.

For example, Jin Rao, a Tsinghua University graduate, founded Anti-CNN on March 18 in Beijing. According to the introduction of the website, Rao saw an article on the distorted Western media reports posted on the university BBS and felt angry due to the reports’ prejudice. He then came up with the idea to create a website and sent out an open letter to appeal to people for help collecting the distorted news reports. The purpose of the website was presented as follows:

“This website is established to expose the lies and distortions in the western media. The site is maintained by volunteers, who are not associated with any government officials. We are not against the western media, but against the lies and fabricated stories in the media. We are not against the western people, but against the prejudice from the western society. You are welcome to deliver new materials & images to us together with any suggestions, corrections and opinions. And you are also welcomed to distribute this PPT file freely to your friends, let them know the truth as well as this simple email: anti-cnn@anti-cnn.com” (“We Just Want the Truth,” 2008).

The website immediately won people’s support and was forwarded by online-forums, blogs, as well as instant messaging services. The misleading pictures and videos were provided by the overseas Chinese and students, and forwarded by online outlets. The largest Chinese-language online forum, Tianya, forwarded the collections in a post named “Shocked! This is how the Western media broadcasts the Tibet riots!” on March 17. It gained 2,770 replies and more than 220,000 hits and was further forwarded by other online forums. On March 21, overseas Chinese students sent a letter of protest to Western media as a response to Anti-CNN, fiercely arguing that the news outlets were the new “Joseph Goebbels” tainting the words of “freedom,” “democracy” and “human
rights” by their distorted reports. In the following days, some of the media accused of making distorted reports gave replies, including RTL, N-TV, The Washington Post, BBC, and CNN. On March 26, both Chinese and Western mass media started to report on Anti-CNN. In the foreign ministry spokesperson’s regular press conference on March 27, a foreign journalist raised a question about whether Anti-CNN was supported by the government, which reflected the great influence of the website. (“Anti-CNN,” 2010)

The video “Tibet was, is, and always will be a part of China” was posted on YouTube on March 15 by a 21-year-old overseas Chinese student living in Canada, whose nickname was NZKOF. It gained more than one million hits and 72,000 comments in three days (“Xizang wen ti,” 2008), thus expanding the arena for protest to the most influential online video-sharing website in the world. It is very interesting that YouTube was screened by the Chinese government after the riots. It was said that Beijing wanted to prevent the civilians from seeing the protesters in Tibet because it would suggest a “disharmonious society.” However, for the nationalists, YouTube was an important tool in fighting the Western prejudice.

Overseas Chinese, including students and migrants, were the participants of marches to protest Free-Tibet and to support the Olympic torch-relay. Their protests were not covered much in the Western media reports of the torch relay, as the book China in 2008: A Year of Great Significance indicates:

“While the pro-Tibet crowd garnered most of the media coverage, protesters weren’t the only ones along the parade routes. Instead, small numbers of protesters were often greeted by thousands of overseas Chinese who waved flags, cheered the torch, and, occasionally, got into scuffles with anti-China demonstrators” (Merkel-Hess, Pomeranz & Wasserstrom eds., 2009, p. 69).
The torch-relay started on March 24 in Olympia, Greece. Anti-CNN recorded the activities during the torch-relay in fourteen countries and more than thirty cities in April and May 2008, including demonstrations in Germany, the U.K., Ireland, France, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, the U.S. and Canada. On April 6, thousands of Chinese people took to the streets for the torch-relay in London. In Trafalgar Square, when the Free-Tibet supporters stood in the fountain in the middle of the square to display the flag of Tibet, and were thus the focus of cameramen, a young Chinese man also jumped into the pool with the national flag in the freezing cold. The scene was later regarded by the Chinese media as one of the most touching moments during the Olympic torch-relay. In Canada, tens of thousands of overseas Chinese participated into the protests in Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa and Montreal with the slogan “Listen to Our Voice.” The Chinese Diaspora in the U.S. protested through letters, marches and demonstrations all around the country. In a program broadcasted by CNN about the 2008 Olympics on April 9, CNN commentator Jack Cafferty referred to the Chinese as “basically the same bunch of goons and thugs they’ve been for the last 50 years,” which immediately caused protest by overseas Chinese. It is reported that more than five thousand people participated in the protest against Jack Cafferty in Los Angeles making it one of the largest protests in the history of the Chinese Diaspora.

In China, Chinese nationalists started to call for the boycott of French enterprises in response to the especially unfriendly attitude expressed by the French politicians and media. The French supermarket Carrefour became the major target, as the shareholders of
its parent company were accused of supporting the Dalai Lama. On the other hand, with more than one hundred outlets in the major cities in China, Carrefour “was an obvious target because of its visibility and accessibility” (Nyiri, 2009, p. 2). The call to action in cyberspace turned into reality on April 13, when a young woman went to the Carrefour in Beijing with the poster of “the truth of Tibet and the hostility from France.” She then described her experience in a post that day on Tsinghua University’s school BBS, which won netizens’ support. Her post was forwarded by online forums, instant message services, as well as cell phone text messages. Thousands of protesters gathered in Carrefour stores in many cities. The Chinese government indicated that “the French side should do some deep and hard thinking about it,” and later called for “rational patriotism” when the boycott movement heated up. Although the boycott has turned out to be one of the most controversial issues within the nationalist movements, it was also regarded as “perhaps the most successful of any such initiative in China in recent years” (Nyiri, 2009, p. 5).

One of the major online campaigns of the nationalist movements was the activity of “Red Heart China” (hongxin Zhongguo) using instant message services. A message was forwarded from one user to another to mobilize people in April 2008: “Add (L)China before your MSN name and show our unity to the world! Please forward the message to your friends.” In the MSN system, (L) is used to insert the image of a red heart. Hence “(L)China” means “love China.” MSN has 15 million users in mainland China. According to a newspaper report posted on the Xinhua Website, more than seven million MSN users participated in the action to express their support for China in one week.
The number of participants means half of mainland China’s MSN users were mobilized to participate in the “patriotic action.”

The Chinese nationalists’ sentiment and action explored in spring 2008 was a great shock to the country as well as the international society, breeding both positive and negative criticism. In the next chapter, I will discuss the incentives of the movement from the perspective of narrative bias and conflicts between ideologies.
CHAPTER 3: NARRATIVE BIAS IN THE WEST AND MOBILIZATION SPACE FOR BOTTOM-UP NATIONALISM IN CHINA

Chinese nationalists argue that the Western mass media is brainwashing their audience by presenting biased reports on China, while people who stand on the side of Dharamsala hold the opinion that the nationalist movements in China are manipulated and controlled by the government, and that the nationalists are brainwashed by the CCP’s authority. Both of the points of view sound reasonable: violence against civilians indeed occurred in Tibet, and Western media outlets used misleading pictures in reports without careful consideration. Whether the mistakes were unintentional or premeditated, they were accepted by their audience; Beijing has a tarnished credit on the censorship of domestic news reports and is always criticized for its violation of free speech and human rights. In the case of the 2008 Tibet Riots, the local government closed off the area of Tibet and refused foreign media from entering. All of these actions put the government at a disadvantage because it was accused of “covering up the crimes.”

Against such a background, nationalist movements that formed after the Tibet riots developed into a battle for discourse rights in international society, rather than focusing on the domestic ethnic conflicts. On the other hand, with the lack of first-hand, diverse sources of detailed instant ground reports, the task of “restoring the truth” was difficult. Information was more or less, unintentionally or intentionally, culturally or politically, distorted when it passed through various channels. Nevertheless, for the people involved in the debates and conflicts, “what is true” was no longer important; instead, “what is believed as true” and why people made such judgments became the
focus of the whole event. During the whole process, mass media has played a key role in affecting public opinions and judgments. In this chapter, I will discuss the narrative bias existing in the West, which breeds a stereotyped image of China and Chinese people. On the other hand, I will also examine the space in China for communicative action, which is the necessary condition for bottom-up nationalist movements which reflect the shared voice from the grassroots.

Narrative Bias in the West

According to the critical theory, because of the dominant discourse and narrative bias molded by the culture industry which is controlled by the dominant class, people living in modern capitalist society are losing the ability to think and criticize independently while holding on to the belief of being free.

Generally speaking, mass media, the key player in the culture industry, still plays an essential role in transmitting information and shaping, reinforcing and changing public opinion in today’s world. Paolo Mefalopulos’s book of development communication indicates that although communication studies “downgraded the influence of the media, giving more relevance to the role of interpersonal communication,” “none of the newly emerging theoretical approaches questioned the overall validity of the one-way, and usually top-down, flow of information” (Mefalopolus, 2008, p. 46-47). The mass media has decisive power, especially when the audience lacks the necessary background knowledge and the media enjoys high credibility: people know nothing beyond the range of the camera lens. (Lampton, 2001, p. 278)
The term “CNN effects,” used by David Lampton, is an example of cultural industry and narrative bias. It is a term that describes a complex reality through “real-time” images. Through television, these images, captured at the moment and position of the event, can be presented to all corners of the world; through the prevalence of the images, it becomes easier for the audience to experience the event. (Lampton, 2001, p. 264) Furthermore, “once such an event occurs, it tends to persist; the images persist until an equally powerful set of images displaces them” (Lampton, 2001, p. 267). The term “CNN effects” does not imply that the media is telling nothing about the “truth.” However, the news outlets usually make reports from a chosen angle as defined by the strategy of “media framing,” which limits the audience from learning more about the dynamics and tensions behind the reported social incidents. Once the angle is fixed, the pattern and theme of narration is fixed, and the audiences feel comfortable with the familiar notion and emotion to examine a certain tagged incident, person, community, or country.

In the case of China, unfortunately, the Tiananmen Tragedy has been the most powerful image of the country in Western society in recent decades. The image is so negative that the credibility of the Chinese government is widely questioned, and people who cannot forget the image refuse to accept the fact that various social changes have gradually taken place in China in the post-Tiananmen era; the country was ambered twenty years ago. As a result, it is not surprising to see that false pictures are widely adopted in the Western reports of the Tibet riots without doubting their authenticity: Chinese police are seen as the force that will arrest or even shoot protesters; the
government in Beijing will oppress every voice that criticizes its role; therefore, the supporters of government policies, or people who agree that the government is telling something true, must be running dogs of the government or brainwashed puppets.

The CNN interview of *The Economist* journalist James Miles is a good example of the West’s distrust of the Chinese government. The interview is designed and conducted with the assumption that the official Chinese version is false. Questions asked included: “How easy was it for you to see what you wanted to see?” “In some reporting, information coming from Tibetan exiles, there was keenness to report it as Tiananmen [so what is your opinion?]” “Would be false to suggest there was heavy-handed security approach?” “So you weren't expelled? It [the permit to stay in Lhasa] just ran out [and you left the city]?” (“Transcript: James Miles,” 2008) The questions refer to the idea that the Chinese government does not allow reporters access to what they would like to see. The second and third questions infer that the riots might be interpreted like the Tiananmen Tragedy, with the Chinese government being oppressive toward the Tibetan victims.

Hostility and prejudice from the West is not new to the Chinese people. However, in the case of spring 2008, the widely quoted misleading pictures are something unexpected. It means the news reports are not just “framed,” but starting to go against the principle of honest journalism. When the false scenes were broadcasted to the whole world with “CNN effects” for the need to fill the story into an existing framework, the impact was huge. However, Eric Olander, as a former staff member at CNN, explained
sharply in a blog comment that the misuse of images was not a part of “some elaborate plot of Imperialism” because:

“If there is anything to reveal about the American news media it is that it’s filled with people who are overall quite mediocre in their knowledge of international affairs, especially China. The vast majority of news producers, writers and even reporters at big cable news networks in the United States can be best described as people who ‘know a little bit about everything and nothing about anything.’…They don’t care about Tibet, China or pretty much anything else other than what will generate ratings. It's that simple. There is no conspiracy or hidden agenda, period... end of story” (“My Chat,” 2009).

However, his comment further reflected the influence of narrative bias: wrong pictures were widely adopted but no one asked the basic question: What really happened in Tibet? Or at least, the news reporters maintained the belief that their story would be well accepted by their audience: THAT IS China – we have already predicted everything.

On the other hand, with long years of successful engineering, the Dalai Lama has won inestimable international reputation as a humble saint. The myths of Holy Tibet as well as Tibetans who are contented in poverty and devoted to all things spiritual are also widely accepted by the international community. I always remember an incident happened when I talked about the subject of this thesis in class. One of my classmates uttered words in shock: “What? The peaceful Tibetans? They attack people?” With the long-time promotion of the idea of peaceful Buddhists, the extreme violence committed by the Tibetans is quite unbelievable for the audience. That is also one of the major criticisms from the Chinese against Dharamsala: why do people sidestep the negative face of the traditional Tibetan culture and society? The charge of “ethnic genocide and cultural genocide in Tibet” is also widely accepted by the Western society, although the
population, life expectancy and literacy rate in Tibet have greatly improved during the past decades under the government of Beijing.\(^\text{10}\)

The media’s framing strategy also reflected in the report of the Olympic torch-relay. Although the number of overseas Chinese cheering the torch usually exceeded the Free Tibet supporters, the journalists focused the lens on the latter, producing an image that no one supports the Olympics in Beijing. The traditional international mass media – the arena for making one’s voice heard – has already been dominated. Illusions are strengthened in the routine reports. On the website of Fox News, the headline says “we report, you decide,” – but how? Behind the illusion of free-choice, exists the fixed ideology and standardized products.

With the confidence of “truth” and “justice,” people in the Western countries expressed their sympathy towards the Free Tibet movements and condemned the Chinese government, although they may not have even known where Tibet is. In an interview of people marching for Free Tibet in the U.S., the interviewees could not point out Tibet on a map of China, but insisted “It doesn’t matter where Tibet is to me, it’s important what’s going on there” and “we just want justice and freedom” (“Free Tibet,” 2008). Without even the minimum background knowledge, the “justice and freedom” can only be a loud but feeble slogan. People who are haunted by narrative bias produced through mass media are satisfied with a clear and short answer provided by their media, without

\(^\text{10}\) The total population of Tibetan increased from 2.8 million in 1953 to 4.6 million in 1990 in TAR. Infant mortality rate fell and life expectancy increased greatly for the improving of health and living standards. Tibetans also have a higher birth rate and total fertility rate than the Han nationality. The One-Child Policy to control birth rate is never impelled to the Tibetans, which is condemned by Dharamsala as the policy to “slowly annihilate the Tibetan race”. In contrast, rural Tibetan families have four to five children on average. (Yan, 2000)
recognizing they are losing the opportunity for discovering the complicated tensions exiting in the reality.

Mobilization Space for Bottom-up Nationalism in China

Besides the myth of Tibet and the image of a tyrannical government, there is another stereotyped image of “the brainwashed Chinese people” repeated in the media reports. An Australian professor fiercely criticized the overseas Chinese nationalists’ demonstrations and made the following assertion in an interview:

“It has been a great source of regret to many of us that the strident and vociferous activities of large mobs of Chinese ‘patriots’ since London and Paris have so profoundly tarnished the image of China’s young people internationally… …Given the lack of media freedom or true transparency in the Chinese public realm, claims that assert that individuals are able to represent anything but personal opinion are, needless to say, risible” (Merkel-Hess, Pomeranz & Wasserstrom eds., 2009, p. 77-78).

In another article from *The New York Times*, the author tried to explain why the young Chinese students expressed loyalty to the government:

“The most obvious explanation for this is the education system, which can accurately be described as indoctrination…Then there’s life experience – or the lack of it – that might otherwise help young Chinese to gain a perspective outside the government’s viewpoint. Young urban Chinese study hard and that’s pretty much it…As for political repression, few young Chinese experience it. Most are too young to remember the Tiananmen massacre of 1989 and probably nobody has told them stories…the nationalism of young Chinese may soften over time. As college graduates enter the work force and experience their country’s corruption and inefficiency, they often grow more critical. It is received wisdom in China that people in their 40s are the most willing to challenge their government, and the Tibet crisis bears out that observation. Of the 29 ethnic-Chinese intellectuals who last month signed a widely publicized petition urging the government to show restraint in the crackdown, not one was under 30” (Forney, 2008).
Furthermore, the belief of manipulated top-down nationalism in China is also the conclusion of the new literature on Chinese nationalism in recent decades. Essays supporting the idea generally focus on discussing the influences of one-party authority on the reign of China, and Beijing’s efforts to control the information exchange, including media and the education system. The basic idea is that the authority uses nationalism as new ideology to retain its legitimacy after the bankruptcy of communism in the post-Tiananmen era. As Allen Carlson observed:

“virtually every study of Chinese nationalism published over the last decade has agreed that on the heels of the suppression of the student-led protest movement in the spring of 1989, and the subsequent collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Beijing intentionally worked to manufacture a particular strand of nationalist sentiment that positions the CCP in the role of rescuing China from its past humiliations. This instrumentalism forms the second core facet of Chinese nationalism…Moreover, in the literature such efforts are generally seen as having successfully dominated virtually all post-Tiananmen discussions of nationalism and patriotism within China” (Carlson, 2009, p. 23).11

Hence, anyone who wants to suggest that there is bottom-up grassroots nationalism in China usually has to explain the feasibility of free discussion and information exchange in the country. This is also what I have confronted in my writing. I do not tend to deny the power of top-down promotion of official ideology, or indicate that people who support Dharamsala are just deceived by media illusion. Rather, I want to point out the existence of another aspect: the initiative action in a seemingly passive situation, which I will discuss after I address passive obedience in a seemingly initiative situation.

11 Allen Carlson’s paper “A flawed perspective: the limitations inherent within the study of Chinese nationalism” makes a review of the existing literature of Chinese nationalism.
To discuss communication, we have to examine “who” “where” and “what” to say. The idea that information is strictly censored in China, and that one cannot hear dissenting voices against the state at all, is quite popular among the critics. However, it does not correspond to reality. People who criticize the censorship of information in China usually hold an image of an Orwellian society from the novel *1984*, without recognizing the fact that regulations are not so rigid on the empirical level. They also fail to recognize the existing strong anti-state tendency of the media and public opinion in China: people are willing to criticize the government and the hegemony of the official ideology. The common belief that the Communist Party can and is controlling and manipulating every voice in China, in Wu Xu’s words has, “overstated CCP’s capability and moral appeal in shaping and manipulating Chinese people’s minds” and “underestimated Chinese people’s wisdom and autonomy in forming public opinion” (Wu, 2007, p. 124). The authority of government is ideally maximized, while the motility of citizens is minimized.

Zhao Dingxin’s study on the relations between the media/public opinion and the state institutions suggests different traditions in China and the West. He indicates that both the media and public opinion are conservative conformist institutions in the West, while both the media and public opinion act radically against institutions in China. (Zhao, 2001, p. 321) The media and public opinion in the West share a similar identity and values with the state: Western capitalism and democracy. However, lacking mainstream values, the media and public opinion in China “tended to be uniform and biased against the state” in the post-Mao era. (Zhao, 2001, p. 326) Journalists and intellectuals are
regarded as heroes if they suffer political pressure or punishment from the government for their anti-establishment discourses. (Zhao, 2006, p. 281)

For instance, one of the most influential newspapers in China is Southern Weekly (or Southern Weekend). In it, one will find articles on various social and political issues reflecting negative incidents in Chinese society and criticizing government policies. The newspaper, with a history of 25 years and top circulation, enjoys the highest reputation and credibility for its liberal ideas. Correspondingly, the tension between public opinion and the state also contributed to the high credibility of Western media in China before the 2008 Tibet riots, which can explain why many Chinese people were “shocked and sad” as their first response to the biased media reports. In an open letter from overseas Chinese students to the Western media, its writers stated:

“We belong to the new generation of Chinese Youth. With an ideal vision we come to the Western countries to study science and technology, as well as the Western law and democracy. We also hope we can contribute to the friendship between China and the Western countries, and promote the modernization of China. We live in the world of which you defined as a land of ‘democracy,’ ‘freedom,’ and ‘human rights.’ We do not have any government background, so please do not describe us any more as ‘manipulated by the authority.’ We love the value of ‘democracy,’ ‘freedom,’ and ‘human rights,’ we belong to the new generation of Chinese citizens on behalf of the new Chinese civil society… However, our belief of ‘democracy,’ ‘freedom,’ and ‘human rights’ has been smashed by your reports on the Tibet riots. Our view of the world is suffering torture…Why do you regard the extreme violence of kill and fire as ‘peaceful demonstration seeking for democracy, freedom and human rights?’” (“Zhongguo hai wai liu xue sheng,” 2008)

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12 A note in Zhao Dingxin’s book The Power of Tiananmen: in the 1990s, the activities of intellectuals “would no longer be so interfered with as long as they were not intended to overthrow the government” (Zhao, 2001, p. 337). It coordinates with the situation today. Between the two extremes of “overthrow the government” and “support the government,” there is latitude for discussion and criticizing.
It is possible that the letter exaggerates the students’ feelings. However, the narration of “a smashed view of world” and “hurt feelings” repeatedly appears in people’s comments and posts online. On the other hand, there are also a number of people who expressed their surprise and criticism as “why didn’t you notice it before? You are so naïve! How could you give credit to the journalists more than they deserve? They are just the same.”

Although the Chinese government still controls the general direction of mass media reports (which are teased and criticized a lot by the citizens), the flexibility of publication is increasing. Books and newspapers with liberal tendency are allowed to sell in the bookstores. On the other hand, the development of computer and internet technology greatly expands the latitude for speech in China. With the support of the Internet, people can get the information they need, although they may have to use more complicated ways than Western netizens do. For example, the publication of a number of books is prohibited in mainland China. However, online private bookstores can help the reader order them, for the sellers may come from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan or the U.S.; electronic versions are also shared online. Based on a loose sense of copyright, free downloading of copies of books, videos or software is a common phenomenon in China, which greatly promotes information exchange. An online forum or blog could be screened or even forced to close by online censorship for extremely radical ideas; however, it can use servers in foreign countries to continue its operation, and its audience can use proxy to visit the site. By modifying the keywords, like adding an asterisk between characters or using homophonic words, discussions and information about
sensitive topics like Tiananmen Tragedy can also be posted online. To imagine China as a desert of a single official propaganda would not conform to reality. Indeed, the new sphere for public discussion with loose censorship, naturally, first attracts people with anti-institution tendencies. On the opposite side of the official propaganda, people who approve of the Western ideology usually have high education and social positions – like journalists, intellectuals, lawyers, etc. – and once dominated the sphere and instructed the public opinion with their former influence in traditional media and real life.\(^{13}\) Hence, a special tension appears in China: when the liberals and the anti-establishment discourses are marginalized in the official propaganda, they occupy the remaining part of the space for discourse. Their credibility had not been openly and widely challenged until the collapse of the Western media’s credibility in 2008.

Furthermore, the supporters of top-down nationalism in China also:

“largely overlooked the fundamental debate in the broader field over the extent to which nationalism is best understood as a primordial or a contextual phenomenon. While the former of these positions has garnered little support in recent years, the contention that nationalism exists apart from any particular historical moment within a people/nation/state’s historical development continues to constitute a specific pole in general discussions of nationalism” (Carlson, 2009, p. 24).

In a word, these supporters ignore the influence of historical background on shaping the collective memory and underestimate the emotion of community identity.

Scholars usually achieve consensus on the components of the internal dynamics of Chinese nationalism: the collective memory of China’s brilliant past as the center of the world in every sense, as well as China’s feeling of being defeated and humiliated by Western imperialism in past centuries. Indicating these internal motivations of Chinese

\(^{13}\) In the context of Chinese society, they are regarded as the right-wing liberal “elites.”
nationalists is already somewhat cliché. However, when I read the essays, newspaper articles or blog archives about Chinese nationalism, I notice that the tendency to treat the contemporary Chinese nationalist movements as relatively isolated segments is quite strong, especially when people have achieved a consensus that nationalism in China is manipulated and produced by the existing authority. Such a finding is impressive, even astonishing. It is difficult to neglect the nationalists’ enthusiasm centuries before the CCP came into power, especially when one reads those predecessors’ works about society, history, politics and international relations. Their appeals and ambitions have been repeated in a similar way by the later followers.

In Axel Schneider’s study of modern Chinese historians, he indicates that “there is no doubt that saving the nation is the primary issue for the majority of modern Chinese intellectuals and politicians; no view of history, political or philosophical ideology will be widely accepted unless it is helpful for the goal” (Schneider, 2008, p. 254). With a similar notion, Xu Wu argues that nationalism is not the CCP’s new ideology as an exit strategy, because the party’s legitimacy, from the very beginning, has been based upon its nationalist credentials. (Wu, 2007, p.124) The influence of having been a weak and partly-colonized country in past centuries should never be underestimated for China and its people. It is quite disputed whether nationalism in China could be traced back to ancient times. However, at least people can achieve the consensus that China has developed into a nation-state since the collapse of Qing Dynasty, with the background of encountering the West – a totally different but powerful enough civilization.
Scholar Ray Huang made his famous metaphor as a conclusion of the sharp distinctions of cultural background between China and the West: “A beast cannot act as a bird unless it thoroughly remolds itself.” The remolding process of China, both physically and psychologically, is filled with conflicts and struggles of ideologies and identities. The process of integration into the international community has lasted for centuries, without seeing an end. Hence, the successors of nationalist movements can easily find their echo in history, to save and revitalize the Chinese nation from the May Fourth Movement onward, from the works of Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Chen Yinqu, Fu Sinian, Hu Shi and most of the elites and scholars, and from the entire country’s fight against imperialism in the 20th Century. Both the KMT and the CCP also regard nationalism as a core ideology. In such a background, to sum up nationalism in China as manipulated by the CCP in the recent decades is quite wrong, because except for the official text books, people can also draw on various resources for nationalism prior to the current government.

To further analyze the internal motivation of Chinese nationalism, more cultural and historical reasons are introduced for the discussion. Various modifications have been used as the prefix of nationalism in China, including “Confucian,” “face,” “pragmatic,” “Han,” “patriotic,” “defensive,” “wounded,” etc. (Carlson, 2009; Wu, 2007, p. 122) I would like to indicate a key fact that helps the construction of the national identity: the relation between “jia” (the home) and “guo” (the country) in China.

Nation can be defined as an imagined community sharing the same identity. The general habit to relate family with country – to say family is a small country, and a
country is a big family – helps the shaping of belongingness to the whole country/nation. In modern Chinese, the word “country” (guojia) is combined by two Chinese characters: “guo” (the country/state/nation) and “jia” (the home). It implies the idea that people will love the country as they love their home.

Such belief is supported by the traditional social structure. Traditional Chinese society is constructed by classified personal relationships which are guaranteed by relevant morality. The core of these relationships is “xiao” – the filial piety to the father, and “zhong” – the loyalty to the friend. Other relationships are extended from these two basic principles. “Xiao” as the vertical dimension and “zhong” as the horizontal dimension organize the whole social and political system. The whole country is regarded as an extended family which is operated and directed by personal morality. Although the traditional political system has collapsed, the cultural influence of the two dimensions of contemporary China is still powerful. The relationship between home and country is still rooted in people’s minds. It is reflected in a song “Guojia” that celebrates National Day of PRC in 2009. The lyrics emphasize the belief of regarding the country as an extended family: “It is said a country is huge (dou shuo guo hen da) but indeed it is a home (qi shi yi ge jia) I love my country (wo ai wo de guo) I love my home (wo ai wo de jia) I love my country (wo ai wo guojia).” In the video “Tibet was, is, and is always will be a part of China” made by student NZKOF, we can also find the sentence “this is our country called home and no one can ever, ever break it apart.” In another famous video uploaded in 2008 spring “2008 China Stand Up,” the author CTGZ wrote “everywhere

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14 To learn more about the tradition between “jia” and “guo”, check the works of Fei Xiaotong, Liang Shuming and Feng Youlan, as well as Shen Yi’s paper “Historical Sociology Analysis on the ‘Clan-dynasty’ Relationship: With additional discussion on macro construction of ‘differential mode of association’” (2008).
we stand up, for we love China, our motherland, we will stand up and hold together always as one family in harmony.” When the authors were writing down these sentences, it was believed that such expression would be effective and meaningful for their potential audience. It connects the individual and the community together, which is especially essential for the shaping of community identity: the abstract and macroscopic “guo” – the country, is transformed into the specific and microscopic “jia” – everyone’s home.

China is not a static or solidified world; rather, a huge amount of information exchange is circulating every minute within it. As a semi-periphery country lacks solid mainstream value, space is left for severe conflicts and debates over ideologies within the country. China is already a big player in the world. However, with a different culture, the country is marginalized in the Western-based international community. China is regarded as the opposite side of “the West.” Chinese people hold confidence, but that confidence weakens when people compare China with the West. As a result, inside the country, ideologies conflict with one another: nationalists believe the country should keep developing in its own step (their idea may be similar to but not exactly coordinate with the government’s attitude); while liberals argue that the country should accept the Western ideology to achieve success. The uncertainty makes the Chinese people more sensitive and skeptical towards the ideology hegemony. It is in such background, CTGZ indicated that “because we are in such a system, we are always asking ourselves whether we are brainwashed, we are always eager to get other information from different channels. But when you are in a so-called free system you never think about whether you are brainwashed” (Osnos, 2008). Competitions of thoughts leave space for arguments.
To observe the underlying dynamics and tensions behind the iron curtain, rather than simply defining the nationalists as “brainwashed supporters to the authority,” it is essential to understand the 2008 Chinese nationalist movement. The mobilization space existing in Chinese society provides the arena for a bottom-up nationalist movement, which is based upon free communicative action.
CHAPTER 4: NEW CHARACTERISTICS

Although the world has become more heterogeneous, the economic, political and cultural development of the society and the world is still defined by the Western model. With such a background, the battle of ideologies has been a world-wide competition in the era of globalization. The mass media instructed by the Western standard has produced a top-down flow of information to promote its ideology and symbols to the whole world. They make the judgment of what is true and what is heard and accepted by more people around the world. Hence, for the people holding a different version of “truth” with a weaker voice, the impact of the Western mass media will be regarded as information aggression or cultural aggression.

Again, when we discuss the challenge against the world ideological hegemony from the semi-periphery countries, the three essential factors need to be re-examined: who, where, and what to say. The information resistance is generally carried out through communication, especially at the grass-roots level.

As I discussed in the last chapter, narrative bias in the West has been the external stimulus for the Chinese nationalist movements. On the other hand, the space for information exchange and communication, as well as the internal dynamics of Chinese nationalism, encourage the development of nationalist movements in China. Nationalists now seek an arena for their voice, which introduces new characteristics to the movement. To regard the wave of the 2008 Chinese nationalist movements as “new” suggests many implications. First, the group structure of the nationalists is new. University students born after 1980 who are known as “the April Youth” and overseas Chinese are the main
participants of the movement. Second, it is the first time that Chinese nationalists have declared to fight for their discourse rights in the international community. Last but not least, new communication tools are widely used by these nationalists in this fight to demonstrate their opinions and emotions.

These three new characteristics are coincident with one another. With the spread of new communication tools, information exchange can take place more easily and widely on a global scale. Young students and overseas Chinese are the most globalized groups of Chinese who are familiar with the new communication tools and international media. These two groups are also sensitive to the importance of discourse rights in the international community while directly experiencing two different culture backgrounds. Like Benedict Anderson’s bilingual intelligentsias in the last wave of colonial nationalist movements, these participants use the knowledge learned from the West to contribute to their nation. (Anderson, 1991)

New Communication Tools

Bottom-up nationalist protests against the West in 2008 are closely related to the Internet. People obtain information online, which allows them to make an immediate response and forward it to others. New communication tools, including blogs, online forums, instant messaging services, YouTube, PowerPoint, etc., are widely used in this process. The reach is so powerful that it develops a great force to challenge and resist the traditional mass media’s impact: when the traditional arena for uttering one’s voice has
been dominated, the late-comers need new communication tools to convey their feelings and beliefs.

One website that gained a high reputation and can be regarded as the representative of Chinese students’ nationalist enthusiasm in the 2008 protests is Anti-CNN. The founder, Jin Rao, is a 23 year-old university graduate living in Beijing. After his post and call for help, more students and overseas Chinese participated in the construction of the website and helped collect the distorted media reports in various countries and upload the information online. As already discussed, the impact of the website was introduced in the second chapter of this thesis. Because of their work, more people began to question the credibility of the Western media. A slogan “Don’t be like CNN” (zuoren bie tai CNN) quickly became popular. Anti-CNN further offered online forum services on March 28 and more than 100,000 people registered within two months. (“Anti-CNN,” 2008) The website further works as a more general forum for communication between nationalists as well as media criticism – focused primarily on monitoring Western media reports on China. After 2008, the website now uses a new domain name: ACCN, which means “Access China Communication Network” with the appeal to “promote China, and communicate with the world.”

More online forums were also involved in the discussion on March 14 and the protest. Different from Anti-CNN – a newly-founded website with a specific theme by the students – CChere is an online forum founded by overseas Chinese for comprehensive discussions in 2003. Many members on this website are working in Western countries and are familiar with Western culture and history. In the case of March
14, netizens in this forum collected Western publications and opinions that showed China to be positive on the Tibet issue. They also wrote about and shared the strategies and skills to effectively promote their ideas about “the truth of Tibet” to the Westerners. Because of their overseas experiences, these netizens are more proficient in collecting information, as well as in translating and expressing their opinions. For example, one netizen posted his analysis of The Economist’s report “Lhasa under Siege.” He translated the article and analyzed the words, pictures and writing skills used by the journalist, indicating that “same facts but different choice of words will leave a totally different image” (Houjibofa, 2008). Another person discussed how he successfully made a presentation on the Tibet issue to his American friends. The article was named as “Anti Free-Tibet starts from me.” The materials he used to support his idea varied, including maps, photos, and books that were published by the West, as well as declassified U.S. government documents. At the end of the article, the writer uploaded the materials and PowerPoint he used in the presentation for sharing. (Xixingdefeng, 2008)

Online blogs also actively played a role in the posting and forwarding of critiques and news about the riots and followed events to show the bloggers’ attitudes and opinions. Hecaitou, one of the most famous bloggers in China, posted a blog diary to argue that the Western people’s reaction towards the Tibet riots was more of a hindrance than a help for the mediation of ethnic conflicts. According to this article, he was inspired by a forwarded blog diary written by a Chinese in Britain. (Hecaitou, 2008) More than one hundred comments listed after Hecaitou’s post discussed the topic from different perspectives, and some of the readers also requested the right to forward the article. In
another famous blogger, Drunkpiano’s, post, she made a reply to someone’s blog diary that criticized Hecaitou’s article as “particularly silly,” and supported the idea that the Western media and supporters of Free Tibet were just making things worse. (Drunkpiano, 2008) In a short time period, international and multilateral instant information exchanges are presented on the platform of blog online.

Videos and YouTube are also used by youth who are more familiar with the new global communication tools. One of the most famous videos produced in the case of March 14 is “Tibet was, is, and always will be a part of China.” NZKOF presented his ideas about Tibet in the seven-minute video by using well-organized maps, pictures, lines and music. The ideas expressed in the video are quite familiar to the Chinese: pictures and maps were used to show China as a multiethnic country, and that Tibet has been a part of China since 1271 AD, far before Europeans discovered the U.S. and Canada. The author referred to British colonial rule and the theocratic regime in Tibet before 1950, and indicated that the CIA funded the Dalai Lama’s movement. After showing pictures of today’s Tibet to prove the great development in that area, the author blamed the Western countries that want to divide China up like another Yugoslavia. Pictures of the violent riots on March 14th were used to criticize “fair” Western media reports. At the end of the video, NZKOF expressed his resolution of protecting the country as “our home.” NZKOF said: “I want our voice to be heard by the world” (“Xizang wen ti,” 2008), and YouTube is the very platform for the grassroots nationalists’ voice. The video was distributed on the Internet and people were encouraged to watch it and leave comments to support China: because of the video’s high view count and ratings, it was put on the homepage of
YouTube, so more people could see it. As a subsequent event, YouTube was accused of deleting the comments that supported NZKOF and editing the view count so the video could not stay on the homepage. In reaction, the message was also forwarded online to mobilize more people to “fight with the double standard judgment towards China.” It made the whole event more like an online fight for information spreading.\(^\text{15}\)

Instant messaging service is used to send information on an individual level. In recent years, its function of mobilizing people in collective actions has caused more attention. Chinese netizens usually use Tencent QQ and MSN for instant messaging.\(^\text{16}\) In the case of spring 2008, the online campaign of “Red Heart China” mobilized more than seven million MSN users. In a follow-up campaign of “online torch relay” based on Tencent QQ, sixty million people are reported to have participated into the campaign.

With 448 million active accounts (one user can register for more than one accounts) and 61.3 million peak concurrent users, Tencent QQ is the most popular instant message service in China. (“About Tencent,” 2009) It offers another influential form of information exchange: QQ Groups. Every user of this software can create groups that allow 100-200 people to be members of long-term group online-chatting. Each group has a number, which can be added to every user’s contact list. QQ Groups usually have a theme: amateurs of Chinese literature or film, students in a same class, or fellow villagers working in the same city. As users usually participate in several groups with different

\(^{15}\) The video can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U7ayJABEax0. The original video was deleted by YouTube and the link I provide is a re-uploaded one. People argue with and even insult one another with different positions on the Tibet issue in the comments. It seems there still is long way to go to achieve Habermas’s “rational discussion,” but at least we see the platform for communication.

\(^{16}\) According to China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC)’s report, by the end of June 2009, the population of netizens in China is 338 million. By the end of 2008, 75.3% of the netizens in China uses instant message service. (*Zhongguo hulianwangluo fazhan zhuangkuang tongji baogao*, 2009)
themes, the software generates a huge net of communication. Messages like “love China” or “Anti-CNN” are posted in chat groups so every group member will see them and then forward them to other groups he/she participates in. Hence, large-scale mobilization is realized by the simple idea of copy and paste. QQ Groups are also used to organize offline activities when the theme includes a certain group in a same city. In the case of March 14, the protests against Carrefour in major cities in China were organized by more than thirty QQ Groups. The numbers of QQ Groups for the protests were posted online, so people interested could participate in the group discussion. QQ Groups might be the most convenient way to plan actions with the least limitation of space, time and funding.

Furthermore, a noteworthy fact is that Chinese nationalists are flexibly using various communication tools in one single case of protest. They receive and send information through various communication channels. A typical process of information exchange might be like this: an overseas Chinese student watched local television and found that the media was using a misleading picture. He/she recorded the news and sent it to the website Anti-CNN by e-mail as a new evidence of the media bias. The staff of Anti-CNN posted it on their website. The post was forwarded later by the visitors to other online forums. The visitors of online forums forwarded the message by instant message service to their friends, or posted the message on their own blogs. The message might be chosen as the material for montage-making by editors like NZKOF. The video would be uploaded to YouTube, and then people all around the world would see it. With the support of the Internet, the complicated communication process with international and multilateral participants is carried out with high efficiency in a short time period.
Based on the process, the following question is raised: Did the government manipulate Chinese responses to the Western media?

Protesters “are keen that the outside world not views them as brainwashed government agents” (MacKinnon, 2009). The introduction page of Anti-CNN emphasizes “the site is maintained by volunteers, who are not associated with any government officials” (“We just want the truth,” 2008). This corresponds to the organization members’ conversation with former CNN TV journalist Rebecca MacKinnon, emphasizing that “they take no government money” (MacKinnon, 2009). The website of CChere is often screened by Chinese cyber censorship for its discussions of politically sensitive topics, even though the forum does not have a liberal tendency. The bloggers Hecaitou and Drunkpiano are famous as independent writers with liberal tendencies. It is also difficult to explain why YouTube was screened after March 14 if the government wanted to use it as a tool for propaganda. Without MSN and QQ users’ support, it is difficult to imagine how the large-scale mobilization could be realized: if these users did not think the message was important, they would not forward it at all. Furthermore, the government’s reaction during the incidents was criticized by these protesters as weak, slow, not powerful or effective enough to strike back at Dharamsala and the West. In the days after the riots, the mainstream media in China began to use the information collected by the online volunteers to fight back. Similar to its attitude in the Sino-U.S. conflicts in 1999 and 2001, Beijing’s interventions were to call for “rational patriotism” to appease the nationalists’ anger. In various aspects, the grassroots volunteers went farther than the government, which was proved in Chinese nationalism literature: nationalism is indeed a
double-edged sword for the government, because it is difficult to tell when the nationalists will start to attack the government, or greatly hurt the existing business cooperation between China and the West. (Zhao, 2002; Gries, 2004; Jia, 2005; Liu, 2006; Wu, 2007) In the case of the Carrefour boycott, when the protesters called for extending the boycott movement from one day to three weeks, the government expressed anxiety and asked for “rational patriotism” to keep people’s enthusiasm acceptable: Carrefour maintains 40,000 jobs for Chinese employees and sells products made in China. (Nyiri, 2009) China’s economic success is achieved by the integration into the world market. For the consideration of “a harmonious society,” any extreme reaction or emotion is not safe for the state.

New Participators

The main participators in the 2008 nationalist movements who best utilize the new communication tools are students and overseas Chinese. Depending on their multi-lingual and multi-cultural background, these people belong to the group that directly confronts with the prejudice against China within the Western society. People usually do not notice their own identities until they meet a group of “others.” In the case of March 14, what the overseas Chinese watched on television, heard from the radio, saw in the streets, and discussed in the workplace or classroom, was reminding all of them about the differences between their opinion and Westerners’ opinion of the Tibet riots. From this perspective, it is noteworthy, but not surprising, to see that the people with the
most opportunities to access Western civilization are the main participants of the 2008 protest.

“The April Youth” might be the most important community shaped by the movement. This is a newly-created term to refer to those young participants, both domestic and abroad, born after 1980. Young adults born after 1980 belong to the most globalized generation in China. They are regarded as “unburdened” for they do not have the experiences of the Cultural Revolution or the memory of the Tiananmen Tragedy. Living in the period of “the rise of China,” rather than regarding themselves as the victims of the country, they have great confidence in the country and civilization. On the other hand, this generation is also well-educated and familiar with the Western consumer lifestyle, as Yunxiang Yan described:

“They grew up drinking Coke and eating hamburgers, quickly developing a taste for hip-hop, and watching NBA games…a quarter of them have learned a foreign language (mostly English), more than 40 percent have had fourteen or more years of education, and they make up about 40 percent of China’s 100 million Internet users. We also know that the current generation of youth, urban and rural alike, has grown up without much influence from Communist ideology. This generation is open to new ideas, is uninterested in party politics, and yearns for freedom and individuality” (Merkel-Hess, Pomeranz & Wasserstrom eds., 2009, p. 34).

Before March 14, the labels of the post-1980 generation gained from the Chinese media were mostly negative: fragile, selfish, lacking a sense of responsibility, materialistic and hedonistic. In the elder generations’ eyes, these young children are too “open” or “unconventional” for being shaped in a society open to the West, and too self-centered as the only child in the family. However, it is this generation who expressed political identity through actions in the nationalist movements and are thus shaped into a community. Jin Rao, NZKOF and CTGZ, the participants of “Red Heart China,” the
university students who went to the streets in London, Paris, and Washington D.C. to support the Olympic torch relay, or those in Beijing, Wuhan, Hefei, and Kunming who boycotted foreign enterprises, all belong to this generation.

This community is shaped by participating in communication. As Benedict Anderson (1991) has indicated, a nation is an imagined political community that is both limited and sovereign. As a modern product, the formation of national consciousness is greatly impacted by the boom of print capitalism, which, indeed, means tools of communication in the modern era. Printed books, newspapers, and radios as well as television later on participated in the formation. A consciousness is shaped in the population that there are numerous people in different geographical locations, but that they are doing the same thing at the same time point. Although it is impossible for a person in a nation to meet all the fellow-members, he/she is confident of their existence and actions. In the era of the Internet, we now see the new communication tools of computers and the Internet helping to shape the national community. In his video, NZKOF said, “We know this is our country called home and no one could ever, ever break it apart.” By saying this, NZKOF maintained a great confidence of people’s shared attitude and behavior within the same community – China – although he did not have face-to-face contact with them. He expressed his national identity through new communication tools to the entire world. Correspondingly, by watching the video and adding comments, people with the same identity confirmed their identity and Anderson’s “deep, horizontal comradeship” of community (Anderson, 1991, p. 7). In an interview, NZKOF recalled his experience after he uploaded the video to YouTube:
“I went to sleep in 2am and got up after four hours. It’s incredible. I received more than five hundred emails. I checked the website of YouTube and was completely touched. All the Chinese people around the whole world were supporting my video. Echoes from U.S., Canada, U.K., France…were a hundred times stronger than I had ever expected. I am especially thankful to the overseas Chinese. No matter we were born in the country or grow up abroad and wherever we go, we know we are the Chinese” ("Xizang wen ti,” 2008).17

After reviewed these young students’ enthusiasm, an interesting question about this generation is to what extent the young adults are influenced by the government-controlled education system? We have read the articles asserting a result of indoctrination in the last chapter.

In 1991 and 1994, the Chinese government embarked on promoting education in patriotism, especially among students. The goals of the campaign were “to rejuvenate China’s national spirit, to strengthen the unity of the Chinese people of different ethnic groups, to reconstruct a sense of national esteem and dignity, and to build the broadest possible coalition under the leadership of the CCP” (Zhao, 2004, p. 9). The expected ideal result of the campaign was a mixture of nationalism, patriotism and socialism. This government policy was regarded as a strategy to gain legitimacy by using nationalism to fix the decline of communism as the main ideology.

Specifically, the target group of the policy is the generation born after the 1980s. Children in China typically begin attending school between the ages of five to eight. In 1991, children who were born between 1983 and 1986 become school-aged; while in 1994, children who were born between 1986 and 1989 reached the age for compulsory education. On the other hand, this generation is not old enough to share the memory of Tiananmen Tragedy in 1989. Furthermore, as the economy in China started to boom

17 NZKOF migrated to Canada with his family when he was fifteen years old.
in 1992, they do not have much memory of extreme poverty, which was the collective memory for their parents and grandparents.

He Qinglian is a supporter of the idea of manipulated nationalism and students. In an essay, she indicates that the patriotism expressed by the supporters of the Olympic Torch Relay is a result of CCP’s education – to brainwash the people to unconditionally support the authority. She makes an analysis of the Ideological and Political Education (sixiang zhengzhi) textbook used in junior schools to prove her opinion: the text implies the relation between people and party as child and mother. The education of patriotism serves for strengthening the authority of CCP. (He, 2008) The essay was later forwarded by a Chinese liberal blogger as a rare article that discussed the quality of textbooks in China. (Ranyunfei, 2009)

However, He’s conclusion is based on a single variable: students study the textbook and were brainwashed. No other variables are added into the consideration. There is no reaction or interaction, and neither the variables of personality, family education, social impact, or any other information channel for communication. Furthermore, she cannot explain the fact that only the national identity is widely accepted among students, which I referred to in the first chapter: the popular slogan of “love the country but not the party” (ai guo bu ai dang). The courses of ideology education are the least popular ones among the students, according to Zhao Dingxin’s study, which is a common phenomenon in Chinese schools. (Zhao, 2001; Zhao, 2002) On the other hand, the strong anti-state tendency in the population should also not be neglected. An author from The New York Times noticed the anti-government tendency among the elder
generations: “It is received wisdom in China that people in their 40s are the most willing to challenge their government” (Forney, 2008). However, these people are the parents and teachers of the younger generation. How could the everyday influence and vivid interactions between the two generations be neglected when people discuss about the issue of education?

Gregory P. Fairbrother’s study on the effects of political education on Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students’ national attitudes includes two findings. First, the school education is effective: students from the mainland are patriotic under the education of patriotism, while students from Hong Kong tend to be neutral about the education of denationalization. Second, students from both mainland and Hong Kong exhibit resistance to schooling and recognize the state’s efforts to control. According to the quantitative data, “50% of mainland students characterized schooling as indoctrination and 66.1% believed that their personal observations of Chinese society differed from what they had been taught in school”(Fairbrother, 2003, p. 613). The questionnaire was conducted in 1999-2000, at that time the development of Internet in mainland China was still in its early stage. The percentage of students who expressed resistance or curiosity is quite considerable. From one perspective, it has already reflected the students’ ability to think independently and critically.

On the other hand, not only the “angry youth” from mainland China, but also those elder Chinese went to the streets for demonstration. The new and elder generations are cooperating to fight against the media bias. They collect and provide the original materials broadcasted by the local media, and use the Internet to change information with
nationalists in the homeland. They also march and protest inside the Western countries. Sasu, an IT engineer and one of the most famous writers of CChere living in Japan, recorded his experience in Nagano in a blog post, “Passion at 35 years young: the report of torch-relay from Japan.” People went to cheer the torch-relay in San Francisco, including university professors, engineers, business people, and old immigrants. Even people from Taiwan participated in the march, with the national flags of Republic of China – the flag of KMT. These people do not have identity of CCP; however, “beyond the party, there is nation.” (Sasu, 2008)

There is also the voice from the liberals. Drunkpiano indicates the media distortion in her blog:

“In many media reports, the number of death is put after the sentence ‘troops opened fire’, which left the impression that the death is the result of ‘troops opened fire.’ In a foreign online forum, I see a foreigner said ‘Ten were burned to death! Boycott the Olympic Games!’ Obviously, he thought the dead were Tibetans…Reports from The New York Times have a clear tendency. For example, in a report of the ethnic conflicts between Han and Zang ethnicities, the author quoted many bad words against the Tibetans from the Han Chinese, but did not quote any personal abuse from the opposite direction. It impressed the readers that the Han Chinese discriminate and hate the Tibetans, but Tibetans are free from ethnic hatred” (Drunkpiano, 2008).

Hecaitou’s blog argues:

“The Westerners always keep prejudice against Chinese. They always regard Chinese as uncivilized and blinded, never believe many Chinese know as much as they do, and even can visit more websites. They confidently bend over to help the poor Chinese people, to educate them without regarding them as a living person with emotions and thoughts. Without respect and equality, how can understanding be achieved? This time, again they will be surprised with the reactions from China, and say it is the success of brainwash. However, they will never think over their actions means what to the Chinese…Thanks to their ‘help’, the Chinese people are gathering together under the national flag for not being insulted…They are producing an enemy, an Asian orphan” (Hecaitou, 2008).
In a word, the identity of nation is not the identity of state or the identity of party. New participants in the movement are gathering and fighting for the national identity. Furthermore, as the Western media reports are greatly distorted, the fact that people did not support them does not mean that they are the running dogs of the Chinese government. Without understanding the distinction, one cannot understand the 2008 Chinese nationalist movements.

New Appeal: Listen to Our Voice

Based on Marx’s critique of capitalism, critical theory focuses on discussing the role of symbols and ideology as the sources for hegemony. Using critical theory to analyze the case of Chinese nationalist movements after the 2008 Tibet riots, we can draw the conclusion that the appeal for seeking discourse rights in the international society reflects the conflicts between ideology hegemonies as a global competition. Mass media and cyberspace provide the arena for such competition. Moreover, the position of a country in the world is not only determined by its economic power, but also by the influence of its culture and ideology.\(^\text{18}\)

To promote the ideology, people in the community should first recognize the importance of uttering their own voice. The new appeal of Chinese nationalists was created through the experience of being isolated and silenced by the international community when the Dharamsala version of the Tibet riots was transmitted to the whole world. Before the March 14 Tibet riots, many Chinese citizens did not know about

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\(^{18}\) In the post-Cold War era, the conflict between ideologies is weakened. It is difficult to give an exact definition of the ideology maintained by China, for the country lacks of solid mainstream value. However, I tentatively use the word “Chinese culture” to refer to the mixed ideology: a mixture of Chinese pragmatism, Confucianism and nationalism.
Western mass media and deified it as representative of justice with an abnormally high credibility. However, through the West’s portrayal of the riots, their image was thoroughly broken. They were angry to see the fact that the world condemned the victims of the riots while showing sympathy to the killers. Although China has achieved great economic progress and acted as a strong player in the world, its voice is still limited when encountering the West. As a result, nationalists in China find it is important and urgent to participate more in worldwide communication and utter their own voice.

NZKOF said: “I want our voice to be heard by the world” (“Xizang wen ti,” 2008). Jin Rao defined the appeal of Anti-CNN as “fighting for the discourse rights of China in the world” (“Anti-CNN,” 2008). Overseas Chinese students held the slogan of “Listen to Our Voice” in their marches. All of these reflect these nationalists’ strong sense of participation in global communication and their desire to challenge the traditional West-oriented flow of information. Their voice, in the case of 2008 spring, is urging the Western media to take off their tinted glasses and write more neutral reports about China and Tibet. Behind it is the ambition of redefining the relations between China and the West: a semi-periphery country’s urge for a higher position in the world system. When the student Li Huan made his speech in the demonstration in Paris, he talked about the overseas students as “the bridge for communication and information exchange between two different worlds” (Gu, 2008). Heicaitou argues that with no equality there is no understanding. Drunkpiano indicates that people should feel angry with the distorted media reports whether the producer is the Chinese government or the Western media. All of these imply the appeal for an equal position when China
encounters with the West. These people refuse the exiting mode of worthy and unworthy victims. It is interesting to see that the participants are not challenging “freedom, justice, human rights and democracy;” rather, they are challenging the pattern that the West is the only one who is qualified to define the words.\textsuperscript{19}

In the long run, these changes are important for the political and social development of China, as well as its self-position and role in the international society. The voice of these grassroots nationalists is different from the Western media or Chinese mass media that have either liberal tendencies or are filled with official propaganda. Although these nationalists are on the same side as the government, their voice is also different from Beijing’s official propaganda. From one perspective, many people hold a positive attitude towards the movement because it raises more people’s citizen consciousness and sense of responsibility and participation, which may help the shaping of civil society in China. It may also contribute to the reconstruction of mainstream value in Chinese society.

\textsuperscript{19} The arguments usually include these concerns: whether partial freedom is freedom, whether human rights can be further divided into several stages, whether a country can have democracy without a Western party and voting system, etc.
CHAPTER 5: IMPACTS AND CONCLUSION

It is too early to fully evaluate the impacts of the 2008 Chinese nationalist movement. Participants, especially the new generation’s challenge towards the domestic and foreign liberals, the alignment between the nationalists and the government, the collapse of Western media’s reputation, and the Chinese nationalists’ strong appeal to make their voice heard – all of these may imply the possibility of different and great changes for further development and integration. Both positive and negative aspects are observed. It might be a dangerous signal for fierce conflicts in the future, or it might be the first step for better communication between China and the West, and between the Han and Zang (the Tibetan) nationalities. In this chapter, I would like to indicate several possibilities, and make suggestions for future study on the topic.

Narrative Bias in China

As I have discussed in the previous chapters, China is a semi-periphery country without a solid mainstream value. Such a circumstance gives space for debate and communication between different ideologies. However, does it mean that is no narrative bias in China?

Indeed, the emancipation from ideology domination is still difficult to realize. Narrative bias in China can be observed in a shared belief on the Tibet issue: the Tibet issue is defined as a political issue first. People more or less neglect the ethnic dimension in their discussion.
There have been several waves of Chinese nationalist movements in the past decades. However, the 2008 Tibet riots that lit the fuse of nationalists’ enthusiasm are different from any of the previous ones because the riots are an internal ethnic conflict, rather than a conflict between two countries, like the Sino-American conflict in 1999 and 2001, or the Sino-Japanese conflict in 2003 and 2005. People are familiar with these conflicts as the example of popular nationalism in China. In these cases, it is not necessary to define the term “nation” is used in which dimension. State, nation, ethnicity – the three terms can be regarded as a whole. On the other hand, the conflicts do not place China in the opposite position against the international community, or indicate China is in the evil position as a colonist. From this perspective, the riots in Tibet have provided a platform to better exhibit the conflicts of state identity, national identity, and cultural identity in China today.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to state that with the interference of Western countries, the focus of the riots within China quickly shifted to the conflicts between China and the West, rather than the conflicts between the ethnic Han and Zang (the Tibetan) nationalities. The West, not Tibet, was regarded as “other.” Moreover, people who support Free Tibet campaign, no matter what their nationalities, were regarded as “the Westerners.” Those Tibetans who fight for independence are not ethnically but politically recognized as separatists at the instigation of Western Imperialism. When the appeal of the nationalist movement developed into “listen to our voice,” the ethnic dimension within the riots was deliquesced. A corresponding judgment made by some liberals is that there is no Tibet issue but only a democracy issue in China, which also
ignores ethnic or culture dimension of the conflicts. Hence, the Tibet issue has been defined by Chinese people as a political issue related to the West and Westernization and is consistent with the government’s definition and official propaganda.

According to Last Moyo’s study, the official media agent Xinhua “unlike CNN, never made any reference to Tibetan autonomy or human rights violations by China, except only in counter-discourses that portrayed these claims as false or as a plot by the Dalai Lama and ‘his backers’ to ‘split China’” (Moyo, 2009, p. 200). For many nationalists in China, the belief of a “plot” of the cooperation between Dharamsala and “the West imperialism” has been proved and enforced by the Western media and politicians’ performance. For example, NZKOF and CTGZ’s videos spearheaded their attack on the West to accuse them of disrupting the development of China. The transfer of focus leads to the new appeal of the nationalist movements. The impact is that when people argue their voice is not heard, it is difficult for them to remember there might be a third-party voice. Furthermore, nationalists’ ideas are broadcasted by the new communication tools, and are also later encouraged later by the traditional mass media. Within the process, new narrative bias is produced. It is difficult to re-fix the missing link of ethnic dimension under such circumstance.

On the other hand, another reason to explain why people do not consider the ethnic dimension of the Tibet issue relates to the critical theory of narrative bias in the Western society, namely that the myth of industrialization and free market and the belief of market economy and wealth accumulation can help solve every problem.
Chinese nationalists are sensitive to maintaining distance from official propaganda, and are able to use critical theory to argue that there is narrative bias in the West-oriented international community which in turn breeds prejudice against China. However, at the same time, they keep a paradoxical attitude towards the Tibet issue. Many Chinese nationalists hold an optimistic notion of Tibet issue, believing modernization and industrialization can resolve the existing problems in Tibet. Indeed, they are no exception to being trapped by narrative bias of the modern society. It is the dilemma of identity confronted by the semi-periphery countries. It might be easier to argue the value, ideology, and religion of the core states, but is difficult to abandon the idea of social progressing as well as the belief of technology. China’s miracle of economic development is based upon the industrialization and market economy. Nationalists are proud of the nation’s economic achievements and regarded it as the success of “Chinese culture.” The history of the great empire gives them confidence for the country’s future: China should regain its deserved high position in the world. With such a belief, Chinese nationalists do not resist the idea of social progressing, but only challenge the way to achieve it.

In the case of the Tibet issue, many nationalists recognize the official policy of investing in Tibet – a huge amount of infrastructure constructions, free market policy, developing the travel industry, etc. – as what the government does to the rest of the country. In the video made by NZKOF and the website Anti-CNN, the achievements – road, airport, railway, hospital, school, the improvement of average life expectancy, literacy rate and income per capita, etc. – are used to prove the good performance of the
government. Indeed, even the Western countries cannot deny these achievements, because these exactly accord with their definition of development. However, does it mean a solution to everything?  

To regard the Tibet issue as a political issue rather than an ethnic one, and to emphasize external interference rather than internal hatred, has both positive and negative influences. The positive side of such cognition as the ethnic hatred from the ethnic majority group Han against the ethnic minority Zang (the Tibetan) has not yet spread throughout the country. The identity of Chinese nationalists – domestic and overseas, young generation and elders – is the identity of “Zhonghua minzu” (Chinese nation) with the belief of “fifty-six ethnic groups belonging to one family.” With such recognition, the extreme racist ideas and ethnic violence lack the nutrition for further expansion. These ideas win time for peaceful mediation in the future, and are positive for the psychological ethnic reconciliation.

However, the defect of such recognition is also the missing of ethnic dimension. It is dangerous to use the separatism to conceal the false policy. In the report from the NGO Beijing Gongmeng (The Open Constitution Initiative, 2009) of the cause of riots in Tibet 20 For the countries and regions not in the core position, it is rather difficult to achieve equilibrium between “tradition” and “modernity,” “localization” and “globalization.” For those liberals who keep a different attitude, they believe voting system and Western-style democracy is the solution for every controversy. The traditional lifestyle and ideology of Tibet is regarded as beautiful but need renovation. Indeed, even the Dalai Lama himself also admits the old theocracy regime should be given up and replaced by Western democracy. For the overseas Tibetans, how to reserve their nation and culture while embracing the Western lifestyle is also a challenging issue: these exiled Tibetans loathe the idea of being assimilated by the Chinese, but keeping a different attitude towards being assimilated by the Western society.

Emily T Yeh’s study on the Tibetan Diaspora exhibits the frictions within the Tibetans, which is usually regarded as a pure community without internal diversity. However, according to her study, culture authenticity for the overseas old exiles and Tibetans in Tibet is different. The former’s embrace of Western culture, for the later, is a sign of betraying the tradition. On the other hand, the former believes they are the representatives of the original Tibetan culture, arguing that the latter is “too Chinese.” An example is the use of language: for the exiled Tibetans, using a mixture of English and Tibetan language is acceptable, while a mixture of Chinese and Tibetan language is the evidence of Chinese colonization. (Yeh, 2005)
in 2008, the local government’s performance is criticized as depending on condemning separatism to hide their incompetence. The fact that the bureaucracy uses separatism to conceal the ethnic conflicts is also reflected in Wang Lixiong’s writing of Tibet. On the other hand, the emphasis on the political dimension of the Tibet issue also obfuscates citizens’ understanding of existing conflicts in cultural and economic dimension, including the problems on ethnic identity, religion, custom, education, economic structure, and so on. As it is pointed out above, what Chinese people fiercely argued with each other in 2008 was not about Tibet, but about “the West.” They talked a lot of “dialogues between China and the West,” but did not refer to the “dialogues between China and Tibet.” It in fact did not touch the real point much. When people fight to get other to “listen to our voice,” it is also necessary to consider if they themselves are listening to the voice of others.

Policy Implications

The 2008 nationalist movement in China is another landmark in the landscape of political history. Scholar Gan Yang even indicates that the movement is the most exciting and important moment in the centuries of Chinese history. This is because it means the appearance of a new generation of confident and independent Chinese on the global stage, which openly and widely challenges the cultural hegemony of the Western

21 The international Chinese magazine Yazhou Zhoukan (Asia Week), which is produced in Hong Kong, holds the notion of preserving unity of China but criticizes the current policy and measures carried out by the government. It is the similar perspective kept by many relatively neutral people: indicate the government should carry out a more proper and effective policy to deal with the ethnic conflicts in Tibet, but do not agree with the independence of Tibet. They point out that government should stop the charges against the Dalai Lama and separate him from other radical ethnic organizations, like the Tibet Youth Congress. The latter respects Dalai Lama, but does not agree with a peaceful “middle way.” They indicate that they can take whatever means as long as it is useful to win independence.
countries in the area of communication. (Gan, 2008) My thesis has made a brief review of the movements, and discusses the incentives and the new characteristics of the nationalists’ fight from the perspective of critical theory. By reviewing the movement through the micro actions of the nationalists, I challenge the popular idea of viewing the movement as a manipulated chaos. By examining the movement from a macro, historical perspective, I extend the application of critical theory to the international level.

By examining the communication approach of the event of March 14th, we have seen how the movement was stimulated and influenced by global-based media. Misunderstandings were produced by the narrative bias in China and the West, as well as by the unequal positions of the countries in the world. It provoked the Chinese nationalists to fight for discourse rights and a higher position in the international society. To achieve their goal, nationalists used new communication tools to resist the top-down information aggression. Through this event, we can see that the Chinese nationalists’ reaction has forced the Western society to hear the voice of China, and to recognize that there is a different perspective of explaining the Tibet issue. It might be difficult or even impossible to draw a conclusion that can be accepted by both sides. Nevertheless, in the era of globalization, the only possible way to break the illusion of narrative bias and emancipate people from the culture industry is more and deeper communication.

The recognition of discourse rights impacts Chinese people’s view of the world and China, which may further influence the political tendency and international relations of the country. Communication is participation. Chinese people begin to learn that they should positively participate in international politics and cultural communication if they
want to be recognized and heard. The traditional inward and isolated attitude cannot help further the development of the country or save the nation in the era of “denationalization.” Further communication and deeper understanding between different civilizations is always important in dealing with the ethnic conflicts. On the other hand, the learning of the style for international communication might also be the dynamic for China’s integration into the international community.

Nationalists in China notice the narrative bias produced by mass media in the Western countries after the 2008 Tibet riots, and start to challenge the top-down flow of information. However, when they turn back to think about Tibet issue, the idea of social progressing and belief in technology still play a decisive role to influence their decision. On the other hand, civilians in the core states react by the prior belief of the “truth,” without noticing they are losing the opportunity to study deeply about the dynamics behinds the event reported by the mass media. Narrative bias both in China and the West have been the obstacles for communication and emancipation. Without realizing this, the conflicts between people with different ideologies will never see an end.

There are some suggestions. For the West, if the international community wants to intervene in the Tibet issue, a more objective and impartial attitude should be held to create a better environment for discussion. The West also needs to rethink the existing notion of West-centricism, and the influence of narrative bias created by the distorted mass media. For China, nationalists should keep a rational attitude toward the West, and not simply regard the existing ethnic conflicts as “the plot of Western imperialism.” It is essential for both China and the West to realize the differences between themselves and
narrative bias existing in both sides through much more effective communication with each other, and the first step for communication is always to hear the voice from one another.

Future Studies

The 2008 nationalist movement in China is a large-scale and long-period process which includes a series of events related by various topics. It was triggered by the Tibet riots, and focuses on the battle for discourse rights in international society. The battle continued to April for the torch relay, to May for the earthquake in Wenchuan, and to August for the Summer Olympic Games. It is further echoed in summer 2009 by the riots in Xinjiang. To achieve their goals, Chinese nationalists still have long way to go; the whole process, its dynamics and its development should be a good case for political and social study in China, the largest developing country in the world with a tough path to transition and integration.

My study reflects only one perspective of the whole event. To continue my discussion with the perspective of critical theory of narrative bias, I find it is necessary to further examine the history of Chinese nationalism, focusing on the shaping process of the existing national identity: to what extend power has influenced knowledge by producing narrative bias with cultural industry?

There are lots of other questions of the 2008 nationalist movement left for further study. These questions will refer to different academic areas, including political science, sociology, development study, international relations, and communication studies and so
on. After the Chinese people notice the importance of discourse rights and start to positively participate in the battle, to what extent will it affect the political environment for China and the world? Within the country, how will the new generation either fight or cooperate with the elder liberals who hold the position of elites? The nationalists ask for the opportunity to utter their voice to the world, which inevitably requires a loose environment and easy way for communication. However, will this finally clash with the government’s restriction for information exchange? The new generation greatly depends on the Internet and enjoys the free boundary of communication. Nevertheless, after 2009, the government increasingly strengthens the restriction on the network management, which causes netizens’ strong dissatisfaction with the government. The grassroots nationalists already criticized and complained the government’s reaction in 2008 Tibet Riots; will the alignment break up in the future?

By viewing the issue from a global perspective, we discover the hegemony of Western mass media. There is a top-down flow of information that is not only distorting the image of China, but is also explaining events that happen in the whole world from a West-centric perspective. People living in developing countries may feel marginalized by this perspective, especially when their explanation of an incident is different from the West’s version. To a great extent, television sets and Western media outlets like CNN have created a world in which people are not created or treated equally. However, will the prevalence of the Internet and new communication tools gradually lead to the end of CNN’s world? The Chinese government stresses the construction and promotion of the Internet in China, which has directly contributed to the sense of participation in
communication. Can the experience of participation be further introduced to other countries in the developing world to catalyze the bottom-up flow of information that resists the traditional Western top-down information aggression, and hence shaping the world into a more multi-cultural one? This question might imply Samuel Huntington’s idea of “clash between civilizations.” Nevertheless, as the trend of globalization is unstoppable, the only measure that may reduce more severe conflicts is increasing communications between different countries and cultures.
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