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中文摘要

　　所有的現代政治均奠基於哈柏瑪斯稱之為「公共領域」（亦可譯為「公共性」）的社會本體論上。公共領域是一個概念領域，公民在其間可以理性地彼此討論政治議題。古典的政治領域概念主導了對於政治的現代理解。網際網路則帶來了政治參與的革命。網際網路提供了發表和獲得訊息、組織和參與政治活動的新途徑。在網際網路上當然沒有絕對的言論自由，然而其已較任何之前的媒介要自由了。這些特徵使許多觀察者認為網際網路是一種新公共領域。當議會或報紙上的公共討論等舊公共領域沒落之際，網際網路創造了公共討論的新場域。有人希望奠基於網際網路的政治活動能夠越來越重要，甚至於能成為民主化和政治轉型的力量（例如在中國）。在本計畫中我們探討了這個假設，我們的結論是：我們對網際網路作為公共領域抱持懷疑的態度。

關鍵字：公共領域、政治、民主、網際網路、社會本體論

英文摘要

　　All modern politics -- all politics of the post-Enlightenment world -- is based on a certain social ontology. This is the ontology described by Jürgen Habermas as a "public sphere," *Öffentlichkeit*, a conceptual space in which citizens participate with each other in rational discussions about political issues. The classical conception of the public sphere is what underlies our contemporary understanding of politics. The Internet has brought about a revolution in political participation. The Internet provides new ways to publicize and to obtain information, to organize and participate in political activities. Politics on the web is easy, relaxed and entry levels are low. On the Internet, speech is not free to be sure, but it is freer than in all previous media. These features have led many observers to identify the Internet as a new "public sphere." While the old public sphere – parliaments or public discussions in news papers – has lost much of its importance, the Internet has created new venues in which public discussions can be pursued. The hope is that this Internet-based political activism will become ever more important and eventually a force for democratization and political change (in China for example). In this project we investigate this proposition. To anticipate our conclusion: we are sceptical regarding the possibility of the Internet functioning like a "public sphere."

Keywords: public sphere, politics, democracy, internet, social ontology

一、報告內容

Introduction

The "classical conception of the public sphere" comes mainly from theories of Jürgen Habermas. Early theoretical statements of this classical conception were presented by Ferguson, Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel.

The classical conception of the public sphere is what underlies our contemporary understanding of politics. We believe issues can be publicly discussed, rationally scrutinized and voted on through democratic procedures. We believe politics allows for equality and for reason. As a result the viability of post-Enlightenment politics rests heavily on the viability of this ontology. To the extent that the ontology is proven faulty or irrelevant, the modern conception of politics will be undermined.

The aim of this project is to better understand the contemporary transformations which the traditional notion of the public sphere is undergoing and the implications this has for our understanding of some of the key concepts of political life -- democracy, power, human rights, etc.

The methodology will be traditional comparative content analysis of scholarly texts. The project will rely on traditional procedures of inter-textual comparison and analysis.

Conclusions and discussions

An ontology of the public sphere in a traditional sense

In the Western tradition, the notion of a public sphere is always modelled on a city-square, a large, open, yet bounded, space in which people can assemble. There is a classical precedent for this.[1] All self-governing city-states throughout history have had their squares. The citizens of Athens would meet on the *agora*; the citizens of the north Italian city-states of the Renaissance would assemble in the *piazza*; and citizens of the new American republic – at least in New England -- would meet up on their village greens.

The city-square metaphor makes it easy to visualize society. With our own eyes we can see the people assembled before us. This is the body politic, the citizenry, the nation, gathered in one place, as one mass, with one person more or less indistinguishable from another. Looked at in this way, it is obvious that every citizen has the same rights and status as all others. It is easy also to visualize collective actions. In the city square we govern ourselves. In this way, starting from the square metaphor, we are able to deduce the entire vocabulary of democracy and republican values.

The metaphor also indicates what the dangers are.[2] A mass of people gathered in one place can easily be manipulated by demagogues. The republic, even its defenders have warned, is wont to become corrupted over time.[3] Dictatorship and

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1   Pocock.
2   Cf. Tocqueville.
3   Compare J. Peter Euben, "Corruption," ed. Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson

despotism are ever-present dangers and eternal vigilance is therefore the price of liberty.

This republican, city-square-based, model was in the eighteenth-century imported from the classical city-states to the vastly different setting of north-west European states like France, Germany and England.[4] In contrast to the classical city-states, these were large monarchical states with few traditions of self-rule; here people were subjects, not citizens; economically they were not commercial societies, but feudal and agricultural. Despite this highly unfavorable socio-cultural setting, the republican ideals flourished. That is, the ideals flourished *as ideas* while the political practice remained quite different.[5] To make this transposition even marginally plausible, the tradition had to undergo a number of transmutations.

In Britain members of the landed aristocracy happily identified themselves as the functional equivalent of the free men of Athens.[6] Their estates, they argued, provided them with independent bases of power, and parliament gave them a forum which resembled the *agora* where they freely could debate the issues of the day and make decisions in the common good. Yet if the parliament was a public sphere it was a public sphere of a Lilliputian size with only a fraction of the public present. On the other hand, direct democracy was never going to work well outside of relatively small city-states. The solution to this problem was found in the idea of representation.[7] Instead of direct democracy there would be representative democracy. Instead of people ruling themselves, they would elect representatives who ruled for, and over, them.[8]

In addition there was the press. The first daily paper, the *Daily Courant*, appeared in England in 1702, and a number of other papers soon followed.[9] The annual sale of newspapers in England reached 7.3 million in 1750 and fifty years later it had more than doubled. For their readers the newspapers had a dual function. While they reflected the affairs of the community, they also allowed the community to reflect on its affairs. From the middle of the eighteenth-century all major events – revolutions, wars, discoveries and inventions – were quickly and extensively reported in the pages of the press.[10]

Relying on these widely shared reports, people began thinking together. In the

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 220-246.

4 Springborg, 1987: 414-23. "Germany" here refers to the German speaking states of the Holy Roman Empire.

5 J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, Revised (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

6 Pocock, 1975/1998: 361-421

7 Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

8 Benjamin Constant, "The Liberty of Ancients Compared with That of Moderns," 1816, http://www.uark.edu/depts/comminfo/cambridge/ancients.html; Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2006).

9 Bob Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press: Britain and France 1620-1800*, 1 (Routledge, 1996); Eckhart Hellmuth, ed., "Journals and Public Opinion: The Politicization of the German Enlightenment in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

10 On England, see Peter D. G. Thomas, "The Beginning of Parliamentary Reporting in Newspapers, 1768-1774," *The English Historical Review* 74, no. 293 (October 1959): 623-636; on France, see Harris.

pages of the press different views were expressed but also subject to scrutiny, critique and restatement.   This was the metaphorical city-square where political agitators, *Schriftstellern* and philosophers propagated their ideas, attacked the authorities and each other.   Reading their daily papers – newspaper reading, said Hegel, has now replaced the ritual of the morning prayer[11] – people participated in these debates and gradually acquired the ability to reason coherently about common affairs.[12]   In this way a reading public was created which was stable in time and bounded in space. This was the "nation" to which every reader belonged.[13]

Yet the newspaper, just like the parliament, was never literally a city-square.   It too was a a representative institution.   Although the right to freedom of speech pertained equally to all citizens, you needed access to a newspaper in order to express your views.   Only a very select group of people owned newspapers and only a slightly larger group made it past the editors who decided which material that was fit to print.   The rest of the people were readers and not writers.[14]

Transformations of the public sphere
Is the internet for example a new public sphere? - Ontologies of the Internet
There are indeed aspects of the Internet which resemble the metaphor of a city-square.   A discussion in a BBS, or a chat forum, is not identical to a face-to-face interaction to be sure, but it nevertheless allows you to feel the – digital -- presence of others.   Most Internet activity, however, is not of this kind.   Much of the Internet is instead best compared to a network.[15]   The web, after all, is a web; the net is a net. Each IP address is a node in a vast system where all nodes are connected to each other through a variety of pathways.

These differences in ontologies have far-reaching implications for politics.   In a network, you are always dealing with one person, or a couple of persons, at a time. You never see society as a whole, only individual members of it, and all relationships are local and personalized.   Political discussions in a network will for that reason not address all of society.   It is rather a matter of talking to a few individuals and convincing them of the validity of your opinions.   How far the network extends we

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11   The Hegel quote is from Benedict Anderson, [1982], *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, New Edition* (London: Verso, 2006) p. 000.

12   Habermas, 1962/1989: 89-102. Compare the notion of "public opinion," understood as a collective verdict reahed after a collective process of deliberation. Keith Michael Baker, "Public Opinion as Political Invention," in *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) pp. 167-68.

13   Anderson, 1982/2006: 000.

14   Since newspaper-reading in the eighteenth-century often took place in public – in coffee-shops, taverns and *salons,* the content of the newspapers were often publicly debated.   Yet, this was clearly not a perfect solution since the customers of coffee-shops, taverns and *salons* themselves were far from representative of the population at large. Compare Habermas, 1962/1989: 000-000.

15   Compare Sally Wyatt, "Danger! Metaphors at Work in Economics, Geophysiology, and the Internet," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 242-261. Neil Weinstock Netanel, "Cyberspace Self-Governance: A Skeptical View from Liberal Democratic Theory," *California Law Review* 88, no. 2 (March 2000): 395-498; Edward J. Malecki, "The Economic Geography of the Internet's Infrastructure," *Economic Geography* 78, no. 4 (October 2002): 399-424; Samuel M. Wilson and Leighton C. Peterson, "The Anthropology of Online Communities," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 449-467M; John C. Doyle et al., "The "Robust Yet Fragile" Nature of the Internet," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 102, no. 41 (October 11, 2005): 14497-14502.

will never know since we only are familiar with our own, local, part of it.

Getting things done, in a networked environment, is not a matter of making universal appeals for contributions but instead a matter of knowing the right people. You use the phone rather than the megaphone; you pull strings rather than crowds. Although the numbers you obtain in this way may be small, you are less likely to run into problems of collective action since people will be connected to each other through expectations regarding mutual cooperation.[16] The network is more flexible than a formal organization and far less easily monitored. Networked actions can take place in secret whereas actions on the city-square never can. In a network it is easier to avoid the prying eyes of the government and the censors.

Many aspects of the Internet are indeed best described as networks. Social networking sites like *Facebook, Myspace* and *Twitter* are essentially collections of high-tech Rolodex cards. By constantly updating information about yourself, uploading pictures and transmitting short messages, you make sure that your friends stay in touch. The network created and maintained in this way can then be mobilized for assorted off-line activities. In addition, some more traditional web sites have been able to create online communities which have network-like effects. If used skillfully, the web site of a popular politician can prompt sympathizers to donate money, and time, canvassing support for the candidate.[17]

However, the network metaphor should not be overworked. It applies above all to the hardware structure of the Internet. It is computers rather than human beings that are connected to each other in networks. The human experience of using the Internet is generally quite different. Going from one web site to another, looking things up as they occur to us, is not a matter of establishing and maintaining a network, but instead best compared to a physical movement through space. We are walking, foraging, hunting; at each fork in the road, we make a choice, and in this way we gradually come to trace a path through the landscape. This is a topographical metaphor and not a network metaphor.

Let us compare Internet use to life in an endlessly large forest.[18] In the forest there are places that we visit regularly – the river where we get water; the clearing where we pick berries; the hut where we spend our nights. Yet our search for food often takes us away to new locations. Because of its size, our knowledge of the forest is limited. The explanation for why we are in a particular location is simply that another, nearby, location took us here. To improve our ability to search, we may climb up to the top of a tall tree or a hill. Perhaps we may spot something unexpected in this way, but our searches too are necessarily limited by our physical location.

This is an imaginary world to be sure, a *Gedankenexperiment*, but it may remind us of Henry David Thoreau's life in Walden Pond, Locke's description of life in the American "state of nature," or the first section of Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins*

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16   Maybe Castells discusses collective action and network theory.
17   Green, 2008.
18   Compare, for example, Simon Schama, "Living in the Woods: Laws and Outlaws," in his *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage, 1996) pp. 142-53.

of Inequality.[19]   Societies of hunters and gatherers -- in Siberia, the Amazon, southern Africa and Southeast Asia – have also adapted to a forest life of this kind.[20]

If the forest has a large enough number of inhabitants, they can certainly be said to form a kind of society.   Perhaps we band together with others on hunts and foraging expeditions.   These are pockets of social activity but nothing like the interaction taking place in a city square.   The forest surely has social networks too, but they are stretched by space and by the infrequency of the social interaction. Most communications will not, for example, take place through face-to-face interaction but instead by people leaving signs behind them for others to interpret. We put a stone on top of another or draw a circle with a line through it on a gate. People who pass our way will interpret these signs and add their own.[21]

Life in the forest is non-political in the sense that no authority can lay claims to sovereignty over it.   There are no bureaucrats and no priests.   There is in fact only a very basic division of labor and as a result there is a high degree of social equality. There is violence to be sure, but it takes the form of personal vendettas rather than full-fledged warfare.   Collective actions, including violent ones, are difficult to organize since it is easy to escape one's social obligations by disappearing into the bush.[22]

The Internet, we argue, displays features of these three ontologies.   A few aspects of the Internet may remind us of a city-square.   Some Internet-based activities are carried out in the form of networks.   But the predominant metaphor is topographical, describing a step-by-step progression through an only partially known landscape.

The Internet & Chinese society

The last question concerns how the Internet can be expected to function in China. This is an empirical, but as we have seen also an ontological, question.   There is a large literature on the structure of Chinese society, and as next to all authors make clear, there is no place for a metaphor like the city-square.   In fact, Chinese cities had few squares, and space in Beijing was always strictly segregated and controlled by the police.[23]   In China there has traditionally never been any talk of "citizenship,"

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19   I see man, said Rousseau, "satisfying his hunger under an oak tree, quenching his thirst at the first stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal; and thus all his needs are satisfied." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, [1754], "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," in *On the Social Contract: Discourse on the Origin of Inequality; Discourse on Political Economy* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983) p. 120. On Locke's use of anthropological examples, see Herman Lebovics, "The Uses of America in Locke's Second Treatise of Government," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47, no. 4 (December 1986): 567-581.

20   A seminal, if not uncontested, account is James Woodburn, "Egalitarian Societies," *Man* 17, no. 3 (September 1982): 431-451.

21   Compare the signs traditionally used by hobos to communicate with each other. To denote, *inter alia*, "a kindhearted woman lives here," "fresh water, safe campsite,"   "religious talk gets free meal." See Henry Dreyfuss, *Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols* (New York: Wiley, 1984) pp. 90-91.

22   Compare. Rousseau's celebrated story of the "stag hunt." Rousseau, 1754/1983: 142. According to Embree, the possibility of escaping into the jungle provided traditional Thailand with a "loose social structure." John F. Embree, "Thailand: A Loosely Structured Social System," *American Anthropologist*, 52. pp. 181-93.

23   Alison Dray-Novey, "Spatial Order and Police in Imperial Beijing," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 4 (November 1993): 885-922. Tiananmen Square was created by the Communists and

of "rights," of "self-determination," or indeed of a "public sphere."

Chinese society has instead always been understood as a network where individuals, and their families, are connected to each other through friendships and mutual obligations.[24] There are lineage- and surname associations, guilds, and religious brotherhoods, Triads and criminal gangs.[25] The network spreads out widely across time, incorporating dead ancestors as well as members of future generations. But the network also spreads out across space, including the emperor as well as the humblest peasant. As always these networks are local and personalized. Since many of the relationships are hierarchical – bonding people of different status – it is impossible to endow all participants with the same rights. Instead there is an emphasis on the obligations associated with each relationship. As long as only each individual fulfils his or her personal obligations, society as a whole will be well organized and at peace. Communist China broke with the traditional ontology by introducing spatial metaphors. Yet the square, in Mao's version, was not the *agora* of the Greek city-state but instead the Red Square of the Soviet Communists.[26] In one campaign after another, comrades were called out to participate in "mass actions." As several studies make clear, however, the network structure of Chinese society has persisted to this day.[27] The Communist state was run through networks of personal loyalties to powerful individuals, and ordinary people survived hardship by relying on their family and friends.[28] Rapid economic development has, if anything, strengthened this traditional pattern of social interaction.

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modelled on the Red Square in Moscow.

24　The classical statement is Xiaotong Fei, *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). For elaborations, see Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

25　See, for example, Lloyd E. Eastman, "The Yin Side of Society: Secret Societies, Bandits, and Feuds," in *Family, Fields, and Ancestors: Constancy and Change in China's Social and Economic History, 1550-1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1988), 217-40.

26　How Tiananmen Square was remodelled as a copy of the Red Square.

27　Thomas Gold, Doug Guthrie, and David Wank, *Social Connections in China: Institutions, Culture, and the Changing Nature of Guanxi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

28　Yang, 1994.

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三、計畫成果自評

　　We liked to get a 3 years project. But we got budget only for 11 months. So we could perform only the part about the classical conception of the public sphere. Even so this project proceeded very well and we developed some new ideas. We also discuss some possibilities of new public sphere (we focus especially on the internet). At least one English paper and one Chinese will be published: A Public Sphere in China?: An Ontological Investigation of the Internet; ＜傳播與消費社會中的公民政治＞.