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Project description *Challenging state power in China: The formation of new citizen norms in emerging civil society*

Social activism is gaining power by new communications technology in China. The purpose of the project is to investigate challenges against Chinese state power emanating from civil society and actors inside the party-state apparatus, resulting from formation of new citizen norms and social media. The project is guided by the research question: How is the balance of power between Chinese civil society and party-state institutions changing under pressure from ongoing globalization, increased use of communications technology and social activism? Empirical evidence is collected in four issue-areas of crucial importance: The social arena of new citizen activism; Party-state institutions and government bureaucracy; Mainland Chinese business communities; The expanding arena of transnational Chinese networks and Chinese citizens.

Preliminary findings

In this project fieldwork has so far been conducted from 2010 through 2012 in China (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou Province, and Shandong Province) to interview informants in the vibrant Internet and communication technology sector of the economy, government officials and state-supportive NGOs, journalists and social activists. Thus, studies of two of the issue-areas under investigation have been completed so far. For the remaining period of the project, I will scrutinize how transnational human rights activism impact on emerging civil society inside Mainland China and what the responses the party-state are and entail. The project's preliminary findings – so far published in five articles and one forthcoming – has revealed the ideational, legal, and quasi-legal, and practical political limits of citizen activists, business people, and state officials for a rapid transformation of state– society relations. Likewise, a continued "freeze" on more autonomous social mobilization of citizens and the opening up of a public sphere seems increasingly harder and untenable to maintain. Ongoing processes of negotiation, cooperation, and contestation *within* current state–society arrangements in China are generating increasing awareness on the part of authorities at different administrative levels how to better accommodate social and political conflicts. New social norms formed by Chinese youth and through new forms of citizen activism are increasingly challenging – but, crucially also impacting – state power. In both professional and private capacities the agents and agencies of the party-state are transforming their political outlook.

In China, social governance strategies in China has since the beginning of the 1980s catered to the perceived needs of modernizing the economy, developing a knowledge society, and maintaining sociopolitical stability. The latter need is concerned with inhibiting and forestalling social protest, collective action and political opposition to postpone democratization of the Chinese nation-state. Yet, what Manuel Castells has called a "space of autonomous communication" (2012) is clearly nascent in China today. The preliminary findings of this project show that due to social, ideational and technological changes and pressures, a new rationale for governance is in the offing – propelling more inclusive politics in China

Publications

* "From shadows to limelight in the Chinese countryside: the Wukan rebellion revisited," *Democratization*, forthcoming 2014. (peer-review)

* "Loyal Dissent in the Chinese Blogosphere: Sina Weibo discourse on the Chinese Communist Party," (co-authored with Gustav Sundqvist) *Studies in Media and Communication*, Vol.1, No.1, June 2013. (peer-review)

* "The Wukan uprising and Chinese state-society relations: toward 'shadow civil society'?" *International Journal of China Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2012. (peer-review)

* "Principal-agent dilemma in China's social media sector? The party-state and industry real-name registration waltz," *International Journal of Communication*, No.6, October, 2012. (peer-review)

* "China's Authoritarian Information Order: Dealing with New Media Capitalists and Emergent Civil Society," in *Information Orders and New Communications Technology: Democratic Hopes and Authoritarian Pitfalls*, Stockholm: UI Occasional Papers, No. 10, pp. 42-56

* "New Media Entrepreneurs in China: Allies of the party-state or civil society, in *Columbia Journal of International Affairs*, Fall/Winter 2011, Vol.65, No.1.