The Effects of the Internet Firewall on the Development of Chinese Democracy
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C-Thesis
Author: Jichen Zhao
Tutor: Jonas Ewald
950803-T011, jz222bg@student.lnu.se
Abstract:

As a special censorship system, China’s Internet firewall plays an important role in Chinese society. The Internet firewall is a controversial social action in China’s democratic development. The Internet firewall efficiently protects China’s economic environment. Similarly, because of its rigorous censorship and guidance of information, it makes controversy about its role in the development of democracy in China.

The Internet firewalls in China largely limit Chinese media freedom, information freedom and public opinion freedom, that through a regulatory and directional approach. At the same time, with the continuous emergence of new media, to some extent, new media also impacts the review of Internet firewalls. This study has studied the function of Internet firewalls that through the analysis of literatures, and hopes to draw the conclusion that the effects of the Internet firewall on the development of Chinese democracy. This study first analyzes the literature through discourse analysis and structured focused comparison analysis, and then analyzes the function of Internet firewall through function analysis theory.

The results show that China's Internet firewall is closely related to China's special political and economic structure. It may lead China to a deliberative democracy, but under a special political and economic structure, it is accompanied by great uncertainty. According to this study, a means of deliberative democracy is being established by the Internet firewall, but because of its continued existence, the special political environment in China may persist for a long period.

Keyword: internet-firewall, Chinese democracy, freedom, media, Internet, censorship system, deliberative democracy
Introduction
Amartya Sen believes that democracy is a universally applicable value, but the definition of democracy varies according to the context, which has led to diverse social actions in various countries (Sen, 1999). In the era of the Internet, a new round of democratic discussions has arisen. The Internet firewall is a controversial social action in China’s democratic development. According to one theory, the firewall efficiently protects China’s economic environment and promotes the development of Chinese democracy. According to another theory, the Internet firewall controls foreign information and public opinion, thereby greatly affecting the development of democracy in China.

The study aims of this thesis that to explore the effects of Internet firewalls on the Chinese democracy and hope to gain a new understanding of Chinese democracy.

Research Problem
China economic development is a concern of global reach; it powerful effect on the international relation and become the hard core of global trade (UNDP, 2015, p. 16-17). According to China’s National Bureau of Statistics data of 2016, China’s per capita GDP has reached 8,000 US dollars, compared with 1980 increased by 123 times, indicating that China’s economic liberalization and living standards of the extreme increase. The issues about further opening the market, raising economic freedom are still concerned by the government (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Similarly, with the economic development Environmental degradation and a series of social problems are highlighted in Chinese society. In particular, the rapid development of the Internet economy in the past decade has brought more industrial restructuring and employment opportunities, and at the same time, it has also reflected more demands for democracy. The effects of economic development on Chinese society are partially a function of the social system, gender, poverty, power, access to and control over resources. Since China’s reform and open up, more research points out the importance of democracy about next step development of Chinese economic because democracy will give more social vitality to economic growth (UNDP 2015, p. 14).

Huntington argues that the effects of economic factors on the transformation of democratization is obvious. Whether it is the rapid development of the economy, the stagnation of economic development or the emergence of an economic crisis, the emergence of these economic factors can play an important role in the transformation of democratization (Huntington, 1998, pp. 34-50). Robert J. Barro (pp. 112-114, 2001) points out that improvement in living standards promotes democracy and urbanization, which have a positive correlation with the promotion of democracy as well as some variables of economic development, such as economic liberalization, the rise of the middle class and the popularity of education, all of which are standards used to measure the democratic process. In contrast, Amartya (xxxx) Sen’s theory of “development as freedom” is based on his research on poverty, economic inequality,
economic rights and justice. Regarding equality in economic activities, democracy and freedom are the most important factors in promoting further economic development in addition to justice, human rights and the concept of democracy. Many economic technocrats recommend the use of economic incentives (which the market system provides) while ignoring political incentives (which democratic systems could guarantee). This stance leads to a deeply unbalanced set of ground rules. The protective power of democracy may not be missed when a country is lucky enough to face no serious calamity when everything is going smoothly. “Economic needs” may require the exercise of political and civil rights. Therefore, the transparency of the government and the construction of civil rights in economic development are necessary to promote the long-term protection of democracy in an authoritarian country such as China (Sen, 1999, pp. 2-4). While these views indicate the relationship between democracy and economic growth, research is lacking in some countries such as China that are overgrowing. The voices of opposition and questioning still exist, and some neo-Confucianists and authoritarians believe that economic development will consolidate the authoritarian government in China’s environment. In studies of the development of democracy in China, the Internet firewall is a “hot topic”.

The development of the Internet economy is an essential pillar of China’s economic growth. In this context, the “Great Wall” of the Internet firewall effectively guarantees the development of the Internet economy in China. However, the problem is that it is also an essential factor that affects the process of China’s democracy. The development of Internet media marks that the commercialization of Chinese media has entered a new phase, and a more open open network space has been demanded by many. As a governmental initiative, Internet firewalls effectively link some variables related to the development of democracy, such as media, information and public opinion. Since China’s reform and opening, the Internet firewall has become a particular government action. The study of Internet firewalls is an essential springboard for observing China’s democratic environment and analysing the development of democracy in China. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to explore the effects of Internet firewalls on China’s future democratic development.

1. Purpose of the research

The research will first attempt to compare the different definitions of democracy in order to understand the accepted definition democracy in China. Second, the research will further analyse the effects of the Internet firewall on China’s democratic development. In this step, the research will focus on three fundamental phenomena: the influence of the Internet firewall on information freedom; the influence of the Internet firewall on media freedom; and the influence of the Internet firewall on the freedom of public opinion. Internet freedom is an essential measure in this research. Third, I will try to derive new understandings and explanations based on this research by using the abduction approach to gain an accurate understanding of the issue of democracy in China. Thus, the following research questions are posed:
RQ1: What are the functions of the Internet firewall?

RQ2: How does the Internet firewall affect freedom in China?

RQ3: What effects will the Internet firewall have on the development of democracy in China?

2. Relevance of the study

As a product of handling economic issues and maintaining political power after China’s reform and opening up, the Internet firewall reflects the relationship of democracy in China at diverse levels. In China, the relationship between democracy and economic development is a multidimensional problem. From a macro perspective, there should be a positive correlation between economic growth and democracy. Therefore, the study of network firewalls is important for a breakthrough on the micro level. It links with the Internet, which is closely connected to China’s economy and to the media. A critical issue is the particular institutional framework and the cultural matters in China's economic development both of which have a political tendency, that is, they are affected by economic development and the rule of a one-party governmental system. These phenomena predict democratic trends and issues that need to be considered in depth. According to Adam Przeworski (2011, pp. 2-4), democracy can emerge in an economically developing country, but it may not exist for a long time. At the micro level, the Chinese government’s prudent handling of power, corruption and the media environment has served to maintain its prestige. The Internet firewall is a part of government regulations, and it has a significant social function. Therefore, research on China’s Internet firewall could lead to insights into the country’s structural problems and lead to valid conclusions.

Hence, the research on the Internet firewall can be extended to its effects on the media, public opinion and free information. All these aspects are closely related to the development of democracy. Through the analysis of these phenomena, I hope to gain a new understanding of the development of democracy in China.

1.4 Outline of the research methodology

The research methodology chosen for this thesis is a qualitative desk study using the abduction approach. The abductive approach is based on comprehensive and extensible reasoning, and it requires experimental proof to ensure the correctness of the results. Abduction can provide a deep understanding of specific events or cases, and a new understanding can be gained by re-associating them with the general structure and theory. In other words, we can seek the association of particular cases and public situations through abduction and obtain new understandings of special cases (Gabbay, 2003). This method is consistent with our opinion about democracy in the specific circumstances of China. Under the general framework, the current understanding of this problem is manifold but inaccurate. Therefore, this method can
help to focus on the existing theoretical structure and phenomena and apply them to Chinese situation to gain a new understanding.

In the literature research, I use critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is used to explain the social essence concealed by rights and ideologies. In this thesis, the use of CDA is conducive to performing a dialectical analysis of textual language in the context of different powers. Such analyses can identify the power relations expressed in the different literatures of the East and the West. Some researchers connect the critical discourse method to critical theories by examining the multi-domains of literature and a variety of detailed elements to analyse discourses, which is an important method of critical discourse research (Fairclough, 2013). Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to identify and analyse the literature that is the most relevant in framing the discourse on the Internet firewall and democracy.

The literature will be collected and collated to carry out a structured focused comparison (SFC) analysis of the Eastern and Western discourse on the topic to derive reasonably balanced definition of democracy. In analysing the effects of the Internet firewall on the development of democracy in China, I will collect data and literature based on the fundamental phenomena previously discussed, namely media freedom, information freedom and public opinion freedom. The data used for the study will be based on secondary sources. Thus, the findings of the study will be limited to the data collected by others on the topic. Most of the literature reviewed for this study is included in the Linnaeus University Library System and China’s academic system. The data used in this study are mainly derived from the statistics of the UNDP, China’s National Bureau of Statistics and some recognized agencies. Because this desk study is based on the existing literature, the CDA method FSC methods are used for the initial analysis and collection. I then will use a theoretical framework for the further analysis.

1.5 Theoretical framework

The Internet firewall as a political action. To examine its effects on democratic development, I use Merton’s functional analysis theory. The problem in this research is how to define positive and negative functions. I define them here as follows. Because the thesis examines the effects of Internet firewalls on Chinese democracy, I will define the negative functions, such as the destabilizing factors of Internet firewalls, including the desire of the people for information freedom, media freedom and the freedom of public opinion. I also will define the positive functions, such as the stability provided to the current social framework, including the protection of economic growth, the suppression of social rumours and the safeguarding of the current government’s credibility. Through the analysis of the literature collected, it is determined that if the negative functions outweigh the positive functions, the Internet firewall has positive effects on China’s democratic development. If the positive functions are greater than the negative functions, then the Internet firewall has negative effects on China’s democratic development.
In this thesis, based on the preliminary analysis of the literature, the functional analysis theory is combined with the abduction method proceeding from the social function of the Internet firewall by analysing its positive and negative functions, and then applying the results to the concept of democracy to obtain a new definition.

1.6 Delimitations and limitations

1.6.1 Delimitations
In collecting the literature about the definition of democracy, I considered only a few of the mainstream theories and controversies. Because democracy is a broad concept, unique explanations of it can lead to deviations in the research. In addition, I will briefly analyse the background of the economic development of China after its reform and opening. However, I will not elaborate or discuss it in depth because the focus of this thesis is the issue of democracy.

In terms of the data collection, the development and iteration of the Internet industry, the media, public opinion and free information have been rapid. Therefore, I consider only the data on the most recent 10 years, that is, the data before 2007 are not considered. In addition, the data are limited to those related to China's Internet firewall in order to obtain valid research information. The emphasis is on the analysis of the literature. In addition, the thesis studies the influence and significance of the Internet firewall on China's democracy. Therefore, no conclusion will be provided regarding whether it should be cancelled or not. Moreover, no attempt will be made to answer the question of whether China will move toward democracy. In summary, this article is a study of meaning and not of direction.

1.6.2 Limitations
In any study on the issue of democracy, there are bound to be many economic, cultural and political variables. Although this thesis focuses on qualitative methods in studying the effects of Internet firewalls on democracy, it is tempting to analyse additional variables. In addition, the discourse analysis of the literature does not provide an in-depth understanding of the environment in which I live, which may allow me to deviate from the main analysis of the literature. Because my first language is Chinese, it may be possible to perform a stronger analysis of Chinese documents than of English documents, which may also lead to deviations in the literature analysis. However, inaccurate language may be the biggest limitation of this study. Although there are very few ethical considerations to consider in conducting a desk study, as a Chinese who studies a democracy based on nationalist ideals, I need to overcome the tendency to nationalism in the study in order to conduct a rational analysis.

1.7 Structure of the thesis
The purpose of the first chapter is to introduce the thesis by stating the research question and describing the research methods and theoretical framework. The second chapter discusses the methodological framework, including the research methods and
the data sources. The third chapter describes the theoretical framework; this chapter focuses on the application of the framework of rational choice theory in this thesis. The fourth chapter provides the literature review. This chapter focuses on the generalization and speculation of the previous scholarship. The fifth chapter presents the findings of the desk study. The sixth chapter discusses the answers to the research questions. The seventh chapter provides the conclusion, including a general discussion of the results of this study.
2. Methodological Framework

This chapter will focus on describing the research methods used in this thesis. I will first describe the methodology and show how it was used to answer the research questions. I will then describe in detail the implementation of the methodology in this study.

2.1 Methodology

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the nature and significance of social phenomena. The research on the influence of the Internet firewall on the economic, cultural, and political development of Chinese democracy has exploratory and explanatory ramifications. Hence, this thesis uses qualitative research methods. Because of the reality of China, the field interview methods may yield inconsistencies. Hence, the research methodology chosen for this thesis is a qualitative abductive desk study. Desk studies are often understood as critical reviews of available literature. Jackson succinctly defines the desk study as “the process of obtaining published second-hand data”, which identifies the two most important features of desk research (Jackson, 1994). Merely evaluating and aggregating data do not necessarily enhance or expand existing knowledge systems and theories, and Jackson’s definition is not exhaustive, accurate, or simplistic. Remenyi also made it clear that desk research must be based on the critical assessment of existing theories and ideas and not only the apparent value of second-hand material. In fact, the desk research method is not only a tool for testing the rationality of the theoretical structure but also can be the main research method of the research project (Remenyi, 1998). In this study, I will combine this approach with CDA and my theoretical framework.

A central topic in the study of human reasoning is the interpretation of construction. Broadly, abduction is conducted to solve the inference process of a complex observation. Abduction is important in the process of building the disciplines of comparative logic. Abduction involves reasoning from the phenomenon to the explanation, but it is not aimed at deriving a specific conclusion. Abduction can provide a deep understanding of specific events or cases, and a new understanding can be obtained by re-associating the phenomena with the general structure and theory. In other words, we can seek the association of special cases and general situations through abduction and derive new understandings of such special cases (Gabbay, 2003). The application of abduction is an effective process of explanation. For example, in examining the phenomena of network firewalls, the desk study can be conducted to explain the internal relations involved in the development of Chinese democracy as well as their influence and significance. The process of including and excluding different interpretations requires the construction of a model of reasoning. In this thesis, this mode of reasoning is reflected in the exclusion or inclusion of different interpretations of various concepts of democracy and the analysis and comparison of related phenomena (i.e., media freedom, public opinion freedom, information freedom). The rationality of their existence embodies the construction mode of abduction. Under the guidance of this mode, combined with the theory of
functional analysis, I will examine the function of the Internet firewall, analyse its function and effects on the three phenomena and then used abductive reasoning to identify its effects on democracy.

Abduction involves the selection and construction of inference. The choice concerns the construction of the model for effective exclusion, but it does not mean that other options cannot lead to results. However, in the current thesis, abduction is the best choice (Gabbay, 2003). Therefore, I chose media freedom, information freedom and public opinion freedom as the main research phenomena.

2.2 Method

This study is divided into three steps. In the first step, I carry out the preliminary collation and analysis of the literature. Then I analyse the current mainstream controversy over the definition of democracy to derive an acceptable definition of democracy in China. In the second step, based on the initial analysis of the literature, I apply the theoretical framework to analyse the three key phenomena that are the most relevant to Internet firewalls and Chinese democracy: media freedom, freedom of opinion and freedom of information. In the third step, I derive an understanding of the effects of the Internet firewall on the development of democracy in China, and I draw conclusions based on the findings of this study.

The aim of the research method is to explain the findings, conduct analyses and derive conclusions based on the understanding and insights of the people involved (Aspers, 2007:33). In order to analyse and understand the literature and data in this desk study, I use the method of structured focused comparison analysis because it allows for an exploration of the complexity of human behaviour and relations. This method allows the systematic comparative analysis of the elements chosen for exploration in this study. Furthermore, it yields high conceptual validity because the variables are finely shaped and differentiated, taking into account the complexity of the social world. This method leads to analytical richness rather than broad representativeness. The method also has weaknesses and limitations (George & Bennett, 2005: p23), which lead to potential biases in selectivity, the question of degrees of freedom, the potential lack of representation and case independence. George and Bennett (2005, p. 67) explain that structuring, the focal point of comparison approach, was originally designed to assess foreign policy issues. Although individual case studies were popular in the mid-20th century, scientists quickly realized that individual case studies were not the best choice (ibid., P. 68). Consequently, George and Bennett established criteria for case studies to ensure fair comparison in a single case study. Such criteria are at the heart of the structured, focused comparison method. It is also important to keep in mind the possible equivalences of “multiple causes” that cannot be eliminated using this method (ibid.: 157).

Therefore, with regard to RQ1, I will conduct the comparative analysis of several important theories of democracy in the East and the West, that is, the issue of the definition of democracy. In addressing the second research issue, the study of three
related phenomena of the Internet firewall (i.e., media, public opinion, free information) also require a comparative analysis of selected data and literature. As mentioned above, because Internet firewalls are interlinked with many other social groups, this thesis focuses on the parts that are related to media, free information and public opinion in the Eastern and Western literature and data. Finally, I will apply CDA to the literature collected in this desk study.

To compensate the lack of a structural focus analysis, I will use CDA as supplementary method. Regarding the application of CDA, “From a discourse analytical and socio-political point of view it is tempting to study the relations between discourse structures and power structures more or less directly. This will often be effective and adequate. For instance, we may assume that directive speech acts such as commands or orders may be used to enact power, and hence also to exercise and to reproduce dominance. Similarly, we may examine the style, rhetoric or meaning of texts for strategies that aim at the concealment of social power relations, for instance by playing down, leaving implicit or understating responsible agency of powerful social actors in the events represented in the text”(Dijk, 1993). Dijk suggests that the purpose of a CDA study is to explain the social essence concealed by rights and ideologies. In this thesis, CDA is conducive to the dialectical analysis of textual language in the context of different powers. CDA can be used to identify the dialectical power relations in the different literatures of the East and the West. CDA is used to examine the similarities and differences between economic development and democratic relations in the Eastern and Western contexts. I will attempt to use objective and accurate CDA to analyse and understand the topic, analyse the shortcomings of the existing theory and to understand the development framework that pertains to China.

CDA requires several forms of detailed text analysis. Specifically, it includes a cross-cultural analysis of the text (i.e., how different types, words and styles are combined), and it is combined with language and other forms of semiotic analysis. The data that are collected depend on the study’s objectives (Fairclough, 2013). Some researchers connected the critical discourse method to critical theories from the multi-domain and a variety of detailed elements to analyse discourse, which became an important method of critical discourse research (Fairclough, 2013). Fairclough argues that the goal of critical discourse analysis lies precisely in the denaturalization and transparency of the ideology in discourse. The challenge of this thesis is therefore to identify the documents that are the most relevant in framing the discourse on the Internet firewall and democracy. To address this issue, I will combine CDA with the structural focus of comparison to collect the data. I will attempt to understand the different semantic environment of the East and West. I then will focus on the selection and comparison of the literatures of the East and West to derive an acceptable definition of democracy in both realms. Then I will apply the theory of functional analysis to analyse the function of the three phenomena in Internet firewall.

As I discussed above, after collecting and analysing the literature, I will conduct a second analysis using the theoretical framework based on which I will draw
conclusions. The combination of CDA and SFC is intended to strengthen the application of either method. Because this desk study examines a wide body of literature, combining these two methods will allow me to analyse and refine the literature accurately, which will facilitate my use of the theoretical framework to do a secondary analysis and avoid a generalized conclusion.

2.3 Resources

The literature and data collected for this case study will come from second-hand sources, including academic books, reports, empirical research projects, peer-reviewed scholarly literature and journals as well as texts, photography and videos produced by the movements. News articles, theses and documentaries will be used to supplement the information. Because of the nature of their investigations and their wide availability, these sources are suitable for this study. In addition, the main sources used to collect the literature and data in this study are the Internet and book indexing, which are in the Linnaeus University Library System and other authoritative academic websites. Here I would like to mention the resource collections of Chinese literature and data. Most of the Chinese literature and information collected in the research were from Chinese academic databases, such as cnki.net. The Chinese texts in this thesis will be translated into English. The data were collected from UN statistics and the China National Bureau of Statistics as well as several recognized institutions.

2.4 The case study

In this study, in addition to searching for discourses common to democracy in the East and the West, a case analysis is important. As mentioned earlier, this article focuses on the three phenomena that are the most relevant to democracy: public opinion, free information and the media. The reason is that they are the most relevant phenomena to democracy and Internet firewalls. First, from the perspective of rational choice, the media, public opinion and free information play important roles in the Internet age, and they are highly relevant to many aspects of building a society. In addition, they serve as an important manifestation of the degrees of freedom and democracy. Here, freedom is used as a measure of consideration, and I will derive its interpretation and meaning through the analysis of the degree of freedom and the common discourse of democracy in the East and the West.
3. Theoretical Framework

As described in the methodology section, in this section I will highlight the theoretical framework of this study. The theoretical framework of this research focuses on the functional analysis theory. The theoretical framework in the research will be applied in the secondary analysis of the literature based on the results of the preliminary collation and analysis of the literature using the by CDA and SFC methods.

In abduction research, a reasonable theoretical framework is necessary. In this thesis, I use Merton’s functional analysis theory, specifically positive and negative functions. Regarding the applicability of functional analysis theory in this study, my understanding is that the development of democracy shows changes in social structure, and the Internet firewall as a social action has a social function. Through the analysis of the social functions of the Internet firewall, the influence of Internet firewall on the social structure can be examined.

Merton believes that social forms or cultural forms have both positive functions and negative functions, which causes a systemic imbalance or reduces the adaptability of a system. An analysis of the function should also be linked to a time frame because an event may have a positive function in the short term and a negative function in the long term. It is for this reason that Merton pointed out the need to develop a principle to evaluate the net balance of various functional outcomes. Studies based solely on the functional consequences would inevitably make some mistakes and would not be of any great value (Wang, 1998). The applicability of this theory to this study is obvious. As a social action, the Internet firewall has a huge social function. Morton pointed out that in the analysis of a social structure, we should pay attention not only to the positive functions of social actions but also the negative functions. Negative functions can be used to assess the potential source of social change. The research on the positive functions and negative functions of social action are indispensable in the study of social structure (Wang, 1998). The advanced nature of functional analysis lies in its concern not only for the stability of the social structure but also for the changes in the social structure. Hence, the effects of the development of democracy can be derived from the changes in the social structure.

In this thesis, the research problem concerns defining positive and negative functions. I define them here as follows. Because the thesis examines the effects of the Internet firewall on Chinese democracy, I will define the negative functions as the destabilizing factors in Internet firewalls, such as the desire of people for free information, freedom of the media and the pursuit of freedom of opinion. I will define the positive function of the Internet firewall as the stability factors in the current social framework, such as the protection of economic growth, the suppression of social rumours and the safeguarding of the current government’s credibility. Through the collection of the literature, it is determined that if the negative functions outweigh the positive functions, the Internet firewall has positive effects on China’s democratic development. If the positive function is greater than the negative function, then the Internet firewall has a negative effects on China’s democratic development.
I summarize the functional analysis of this study using Merton’s functional analysis theory as follows: 1) describing the items and mechanisms of functional analysis; 2) focussing the functional analysis on the objective consequences of institutionalized patterns of action; 3) understanding the multiplicity of objective consequences with particular attention to the potential consequences beyond the participant’s awareness; 4) in conjunction with the time factor, obtaining a functional assessment of this consequence based on the relationship between a particular consequence and the corresponding system and determining its functional nature (positive or negative); 5) clearly defining the scope of the system and the range of groups involved in a given consequence and recognizing the possible change in the functional nature of the specific consequence in relation to different groups. In this study, functional analysis is used in the literature collection and analytical methods of CDA and SFC to determine the corresponding literature of this desk study. Based on the literature on democracy and Internet firewalls, the analysis will be conducted to determine the positive and negative functions of information freedom, public opinion freedom and media freedom.

In addition, as an extension of positive and negative functions, Merton puts forward the notion of manifest functions and latent functions by distinguishing subjective attitudes and objective consequences. He insists that the function of a practice is an observable result; therefore, it should be distinguished from the motivation for the practice. Merton acknowledges that the functions of some practices are realized both by and for the individuals involved in the practice, which he terms “manifest functions”. However, there are other functions that do not participate, which Merton terms “latent functions”. The “latent function” is often an important factor in social change. (Wang, 1998) The analysis of “manifest function” and “latent function” can help sociological studies to analyse many social behaviours, especially those that fail to achieve prominence. Merton explained it by using the metaphor of a rain-soliciting ceremony. According to Merton, in the rain-soliciting ceremony “pray for rain” was the manifest function, and the maintenance of tribal cohesion was the latent function (Wang, 1998). This metaphor demonstrates that the analysis of unintended consequences can be explored to explain the underlying causes of social behaviour. In my opinion, as Merton describes, time is a potential factor. In determining the latent function, this study not only analyses the current functions of the Internet firewall, but also considers its implicit functions in the time level. With its development over time, has the Internet firewall further increased the people’s desire for freedom and democracy? Or has it made the public more supportive of the government over time? The exploration of these question will further explain the effects of the Internet firewall on China’s democratic development.
4. Literature Review

Different understandings of the concept of “democracy” will lead to completely different discussions. Eastern and Western scholars have a wide range of understandings of democracy. Similarly, a different understanding can lead to different views of the Internet firewall. This chapter focuses on an overview of the literature collected in this desk study, including the controversy over the mainstream in democratic development and the previous research on Internet firewalls.

4.1 Mainstream debate on the theory of democracy

Because the research questions posed in this thesis are closely related to the definition of democracy, I collected literature on the definition of democracy. The debate on democracy mainly concerns the issue of elections and freedom. According to Max Weber, the universal vote, the fight for votes, and the freedom to organize are of little value in themselves unless through these systems, powerful politicians are willing to take responsibility. Democracy is but a rational instrument for building society (Weber, 2010). In Schumpeter’s definition of elitist democracy, the democratic theory that prevailed for thousands of years and that led people to be the masters of the “people’s sovereignty” was transformed into “competitive elections”. Democracy is the process by which voters elect politicians to make decisions. Politicians making decisions, which is how the legislature legislates, is not a category of democracy. In this way, Schumpeter offered a simple reversal: in the traditional theory of popular sovereignty the people are their own masters. Schumpeter points out that the electoral process is the first and the people are the masters of the second. Through the efforts in several generations of Western social sciences, “Schumpeterian democracy” was the most systematically elaborated and affirmed in Schumpeter’s dichotomization of the “new theory of democracy” and “competitive elections”. Freedom and democracy are the basic criteria for the definition of whether there is democracy or not; otherwise, the system is totalitarian or authoritarian (Held and Schott, n.d.). Based on freedom and elections, Amatias Sen explains democratic values more deeply. He mentions that democracy has many demands, which include voting and respecting the outcomes of elections. However, they also demand the protection of all kinds of freedoms, respect for the legislature, guaranteed freedom of expression and impartial news and impartial comments without governmental scrutiny. If the different parties in an election fail to get enough opportunities to express their position or the voters have no access to a free press and cannot consider the opinions of different candidates, such elections would be even more detrimental even though they were regularly held. Democracies need an entire of mechanisms (Sen, 1999). This thesis attempts to find a theory of democracy that is suitable for China. These studies do not combine with China’s situation.

It is not easy to apply the theory of elitist democracy to China’s specific circumstances. Cohen, from the perspective of rational choice, contributed the following understanding of democracy: “When democracy is the choice of free
rationality between equal citizens, that will get legitimate result. If there is deception and inequality or sentiment in the election, the legitimacy of democracy will be greatly reduced” (Cohen, 1998). Regarding the critique of elitist democracy, the most accepted idea in recent years is deliberative democracy. Joseph M. Bessette is the first to use the term “deliberative democracy” in an academic sense. He advocated the participation of citizens in opposition to elitism’s interpretation. John Dryzek points out that the negotiation of democracy leads to continuous attention to the authenticity of democracy, that is, the extent to which democratic control (i.e., the implementation of sovereignty over the people) is substantive rather than symbolic and that citizens have the ability to participate in the democracy. Regarding Chinese literature on the study of deliberative democracy, professor Lin Shangli of Fudan University, in his book, *Consultative Politics: A Consideration of the Development of China’s Democratic Politics*, proposed the following: The realistic conditions for political development in China, its historical responsibility and basic political concepts, and the decision on the procedures for the development of China’s democratic politics must be negotiated for value preference. Therefore, the development of consultative politics in China through political resources, social resources and institutional resources provided by the united front should become the important task and goal of China’s democratic politics in the new century. To achieve such a goal, the transformation and development of the party’s leadership system and governing style are of paramount importance. According to the Chinese scholar, Zhang Xiaodong, deliberative democracy perfects the understanding of the democratic process. In deliberative democracy, public policy is formed by open discussion and not by giving the power of public decision-making entirely to the elite through elections. Deliberative democracy emphasizes the solutions to the problems of social management through public consultation, in which organized citizens’ groups can make decisions by understanding and coordinating their respective interests through mutual communication and consultation. Deliberative democracy is a collectivist democracy that is applicable to China. In China, it may be more valuable to develop a deliberative democracy rather than an individualist electoral democracy.

Although both theories have been questioned in China, which form of democracy is more adaptive? The Chinese government’s attitude toward deliberative democracy is still relatively positive. Habermas and Anthony Giddens advocate the profound analysis of the electoral democratization of representative elections. They insist that in the Internet age, the deliberative democratically oriented “dialogue-centric” consultative democracy should be replaced by a “voting-centred” representative system. The Chinese government promulgated the “Opinions on Strengthening Political Consultative Work” in 2010, which is a definition of the development and direction of democracy by the Chinese government. For the first time, the “Opinions” clearly put forward the following: “The people’s full consultation on major issues before the major policy-makers through elections, the exercise of their voting rights, and consensus on commonalities as far as possible are two important forms of socialist democracy in our country”. The salient feature of this important thesis is that it emphasizes deliberate democracy as an important form of democracy that goes hand in hand with democratic elections. Furthermore, deliberative democracy was
mentioned. In recent Chinese governmental documents, Xi Jinping points out that the development of deliberative democracy requires the expansion of the people’s orderly political participation to ensure that the people widely participate in national social governance in order to form political stability and unity. As a set of institutional systems, of course, socialist deliberative democracy needs to be further improved. However, it has been integrated into all aspects of China’s democratic system and democratic life in the course of long-term explorations and practice, and it has become a strategic foundation for the country’s democratic construction and development (Xinhua News Agency, 2017). However, it is still worth discussing the Chinese government’s dialectical definition of democracy.

4.2 Previous literature on Internet firewalls

The literature on the relationship between Internet firewalls and democracy evidences contradictory points of view. Guangchao Feng provided a detailed analysis of China’s Internet censorship (i.e., the Internet firewall). Similar to many other researchers (see e.g., Barme, 2013; Pang, 2012; Sun, 2010; Qiu, 2009), Feng observed that there is a disagreement in the relations of the Chinese government regarding the need to promote marketization and contain cyber objections. He investigated how the Chinese state censors the Internet by tracing the trajectory of mechanisms to block non-grata websites. According to Feng, the Chinese government uses diverse methods to control the Internet with systematic collaborations from local authorities at various administrative levels. He also found evidence that the government had customized blocking strategies for what it considered important websites. The efficacy of China’s Internet censorship system has been questioned. According to Barne, “While state censors were quick to block undesirable information from the Internet, netizens were just as fast in getting around the blocks to publicize their causes and protests” (Barme, 2013: 129). Consequently, some researchers (see Song Shi’s contribution or that of Chin-fu Hung, 2012) remain optimistic: “The Internet is facilitating political liberalization in Chinese society. The mushrooming online discussion forums and blogosphere have created and nourished a ‘virtual’ space for Chinese civil society to emerge. Providing a platform for the public to express opinions and discuss (current) affairs, the cyber community has not only pushed for associative and communicative freedoms, but has also catalysed greater changes towards a new chapter for China’s state-society relations in the Internet age” (Hung, 2012: 168).

Shirazi et al. (2010) investigated the relationship between the global expansion of ICT and the level of democracy within nations. They analysed archival data on 133 countries from 1995 to 2003, which was the period of explosive ICT expansion. Some important findings of their study are the following: (a) there is a growing digital divide in democratic freedoms among countries; (b) in spite of rapid ICT expansion in some countries, Internet filtering is having a significant effects on democratic freedoms: “It is important to note that most of the countries located in the low performers category, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Tunisia and China, impose heavy and systematic censorship on Internet and other ICT media (…). In addition, there are a number of countries whose ICT infrastructures are highly developed but rank below
the world average on democratic freedoms. These countries include some of the Middle East countries of the Persian Gulf region such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates as well as Singapore in Asia". (Shirazi et al., 2010: 27).

These opposing positions supported the practicality of my study. However, they have raised the following question: Has the Internet firewall system really promoted the development of democracy? The Economist does not think so: “The tyranny of China not only survived the Internet, but the country has shown that great technology bends technology to its own purpose, giving it greater control over its own society, and restrain the regime for others” (The Economist, April 5, 2013). They called it “adaptive authoritarianism”. In an objective explanation of the problem that Internet firewalls impede the development of democracy, Bauwens stated that subtle controls such as Internet firewalls encrypt the people’s objections, a move that will keep the political stability of the authoritarian government, which will not be conducive to the development of democracy (Bauwens, 2005). Although the existence of the Internet firewall limits the opposition, it stimulates the need for human rights and increases the risk of government control (Morozov, 2011).

In addition, the establishment of Internet firewall is the main means for the Chinese government to protect the development of domestic Internet companies. Ni Guangnan, a member of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, believes that while safeguarding security, the network security review system has raised the threshold for foreign companies to enter China, and it will also become an anti-sanction weapon in the face of unfair trade in China. Based on the maintenance of safety and social stability, different reviews of Internet security have been adopted for information technology products and their suppliers (CCTV, 2012). Many magazines and media outlets have used Google to stop using China as a reference. For example, the BBC reported that China’s Internet firewall caused Google to withdraw from the Chinese market and establish Google China. This change cannot enable Google to demonstrate its powerful information search capability and create sufficient conditions for the development of Baidu, a Chinese search engine company (BBC, 2010). David Talbot reported a research on the protection of China’s Internet companies. Although Internet firewalls protect the development of the Internet economy in China, they form an alliance of businesspeople and politics, thus restricting the freedom of the people (Talbot, 2010). Economists pointed out that China’s Internet censorship system is a means of trade protection at the expense of the people’s freedom in the wave of globalization and its existence protects the competitiveness of companies such as Alibaba and Tencent in global trade (The Economist, 2016).

Some definitions are based on the discussion of Internet freedom. I also collected literature on Internet freedom. There are many kinds of literature about the Internet firewall’s restriction of the people’s freedom. According to Lokman Tsui, the Internet was initially designed with an open, decentralized, and libertarian spirit. However, in China, this intention changed quickly because of the market, which increasingly seeks to regulate and determine the development of the Internet. Foreign social media such as Facebook and YouTube cannot be used directly through normal channels. The
Chinese government establishes a “panoramic surveillance” model to control the people’s freedom to access information (Tsui, 2003). Regarding the control of media freedom, Zhao Yuezhi, a Chinese scholar, pointed out that Internet firewalls in China have allowed media information to be filtered and screened, especially the news about major political interests, leaving people free to the margins of the truth (Zhao, 2010). In addition, regarding the use of the Internet to control public opinion, Zhao Dingxin, a Chinese scholar, observed that the Chinese government’s censorship system makes statements that can cause social movements to remain hidden on the Internet. While controlling online rumours, it also controls the atmosphere of public opinion (Zhao, 2012). People who hold the opposite view think that restrictions on freedom are the means of safeguarding sovereignty. Some literature on nationalism considered that the restriction of freedom is a way to safeguard sovereignty (jiang, 2010). In a 2008 survey conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project on Chinese Internet users, almost 85 per cent of Chinese respondents said they thought the government should be responsible for managing and controlling the Internet. What is the reason for this overwhelming consent to state control? This paradox may be explained partially by the unquestioned faith in the Web as a tool against tyranny in the West, in part by Beijing’s ability to adapt, and fundamentally by the broad public acceptance of the state as a provider of social goods, a guarantor of social order and a preserver of public values (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2008).

There is little literature on the measurement of the degree of freedom in China. However, in the opinion of Guo Bingyang, there is now more give and take between the government and citizens compared to the pre-Internet era. Netizens have a greater degree of freedom than previously. They enjoy many more benefits and conveniences afforded by the Internet, and sometimes they can even influence policy-making. However, in China, the boundaries of political discourse and action are largely prescribed by the state and enforced behind the scenes with cooperation of the Internet companies. With the expanded toolbox of sophisticated censoring techniques and technologies, modern authoritarianism differs from its classic counterparts in that it grants a much greater degree of freedom to its citizens, including political freedom, to diffuse radical opposition and enhance its rule (Yang, 2009).
5. Findings

In this chapter, I first will briefly introduce the background of the Internet firewall, and then I will conduct a preliminary analysis of the literature by applying SFC and CDA. This analysis will be structured according to three aspects: information freedom, media freedom and public opinion freedom. The findings of the initial analysis conducted in this chapter will be included in the application of the theoretical framework in the next chapter.

5.1 Background

The “Great Firewall” of China is a general term used to indicate that it is a system that enables the Chinese government to police the country’s Internet borders (including the administrative review system). This system was started in 1998. The Internet in China, in addition to being a powerful propaganda apparatus for the state and extremely profitable for business, has also proved to be the single most accessible source of alternative political views and thus a major threat to the regime. Clearly a double-bladed sword, the Web embodies a serious discursive force to be reckoned with, especially because China boasts the world’s largest cyber community of 538 million netizens at the latest count (CNNIC, 2012). An effective and adaptive censorship project was developed, untold riches were expended, and countless software algorithms were written and continuously updated to block undesirable websites, both domestic and overseas (Hays, 2011).

Structurally, China’s Internet censorship, similar to all forms of traditional media censorship, exerts control in a top-down fashion (Harwit and Clark, 2001; Qiu, 2000). The state machine is wary of scanning terms in cyberspace that are considered inflammatory or provocative. There are six state-owned Internet operators (CNNIC, 2012), which tightly control China’s Internet bandwidth and gateways. Two are major telecom companies: China Telecom (hereinafter referred to as Telecom) and China Unicom (hereinafter referred to as Unicom). China Mobile, China’s largest mobile phone operator, also has the lion’s share of wireless Internet users. Other professional operators have their own backbone networks and international gateways. They are mainly used for scientific research, such as the China Science and Technology Network (CSTNET), education, such as the China Education and Research Network (CERNET) and foreign trade, such as the China International Economic and Trade Network (CIETNET). In China, the Internet firewall system is based on a semi-enclosed model. Because of its strict hierarchical design, the Chinese Internet is an intranet, rather than the open network model of the Internet with which Westerners are familiar. Boas (2004) found that the Internet connectivity between China and the world is usually managed centrally through government-controlled gateways. In contrast, in most democracies, individual Internet service providers have different connections with the global Internet. However, Xu Zhiyuan and other Chinese scholars (2011) found that China’s filtering system is in fact fragmented, and border gateways play the most crucial role. The main method used to control the Internet firewall relies on IP address blocking, URL and domain filtering, keyword reviews,
and reviewing the online bulletin board system (BBS). The level of censorship of Internet firewalls in China sometimes changes. Although the reasons are not clear, they are linked to political action, such as the general election of the Chinese Communist Party. However, the act of over-blockading is rare, and some foreign websites that are censored can be used normally. However, if this is the case, it is likely that the censors wish to be politically cautious or correct (Xu, 2011).

5.2 Media freedom

In this section, I conduct a preliminary analysis of the collected literature on the effects of the Internet firewall on media freedom in China.

5.2.1 The commercialization of media and the rise of Internet media

Since the Tiananmen Square movement in 1989, the Chinese government has increased its control over the news media. With the deepening policy of reform and opening, the government has gradually transformed the media from being state-controlled state into commercial operations. This media reform appears to have enhanced media freedom. The analysis revealed the following positive effects. Yang (2006) noted the effects of media reform, namely media commercialization, on the operation of traditional media and the Internet industry in China. Since the late 1990s, when China gradually started its media reform, the media had received little or no funding from the government. Two of the most significant effects are that audiences and advertisers affect the programming (Papacharissi, 2002). According to Tai (2006), “media can no longer afford to ignore public information demand and interest when eyeballs and circulation define the success and failure of media enterprise“. Because of this, Internet media came into being. Yang (2006) perceived a connection between online political discussions, especially contentious ones, and the media business. He indicated that in the age of the attention economy, sensitive topics and contentions increase online traffic, in another words, attention. Thus, this thesis argues that in order to keep the attention of their audience, traditional media and ICPs and ISPs are actively involved in sensitive discussions initiated by Internet users. An American representative of the Chinese-language portal Sina.com stated, “We are playing that role, to let people talk about sensitive issues but also to help the government manage the flow of ideas” (Tai, 2006). Quoted by Yang (2006), an editor from Sina.com described their strategies regarding radical verbal exchanges in their BBS forums as follows: “We let it follow its natural course in the initial period, to wait and see how the relevant agencies respond. If those agencies require us to exercise limits, we will follow directions. If the relevant agencies hold a supportive attitude or remain noncommittal, then we will make a big deal of it” (Yang, 2006). Although the party and the state have always encouraged the media to carry out market-oriented reforms, the protection of the freedom of speech cannot keep abreast of the times. To maintain political stability and show the legitimacy of the ruling party, the party and the state have set many restrictions on the freedom of speech. Such restrictions may be the most fundamental obstacle to media development.

The government’s control of the media is continuous, which is reflected in reports of
major political news, such as the 2008 poisonous milk powder. Some online media exposed the state-controlled shares of milk powder companies, thereby condemning the government for its lack of supervision. At first, the Internet censorship tolerated it. However, when the media coverage became deeper, it was discovered that the interests of political families were implicated in the state-controlled shares in these companies. This revelation led to increased Internet censorship, and all news that included “political families” was subjected to rigorous examination. Consequently, in less than three days, the information about the contaminated milk powder on the Internet disappeared. This incident took place in the first few months of the Beijing Olympic Games. Subsequently, the government arranged a large number of reports on the preparations for the Olympic Games and the aid to the earthquake-stricken areas. It declared that the reports of “political families” were rumours. This action increased the cohesion of the government (Castellino and Green, 2010). In addition, reports on anti-corruption issues on the Internet are generally brief and concise, and the details of judgments of criminals are never reported in depth. Because of this issue, the Internet firewall serves to review the media in advance. All media are exhorted to establish a governmental image of anti-corruption and disregard the elements of a party struggle (BBC, 2015). The contaminated milk powder incident demonstrates that the effects of the Internet firewall on media freedom are subtle and that political news reports the “vague truth” behind the apparent freedom of the media.

In addition, because of the commercial reform of the media, most Internet media in China are concerned about entertainment news coverage. The government also encourages this coverage, and the censorship of entertainment news is the weakest part of China’s Internet firewall. In this respect, the government has greater tolerance and the media enjoy more freedom. In China, the development of the entertainment industry is an important measure of promoting economic growth. However, it does not rule out the review of political entertainment programs. One of the few Hong Kong news media accepted in Mainland China, Phoenix Satellite TV broadcasts a commentary on television talk shows, namely QiangQiang. Chinese users knew this programme as representative of the freedom of speech in China. However, a month ago, it was forcibly removed because some previous programs did not pass the current review. Its previous videos were also deleted from the Internet. Although China’s major websites reported its news, they did not include the specific reasons. The elimination of QiangQiang demonstrates that the level of censorship of China’s Internet firewall varies according to the political situation in China. It also reflects that the new government has increased its control over the media. Since the administration of Xi Jinping, the Internet has seemed to be reviewed more rigorously than previously. According to the Reporter Protection Commission, press reviews by writers and journalists since 2015 have been censored, and some have been defined as “reactionary rhetoric”. In addition, some news sites were rectified (Yang, 2016).

However, the commercialization of the media has given rise to a large number of new media, and their degree of freedom has been considerable. Most government censorship focuses on sources that target ordinary people, such as television shows. Some information sources target elites; for example, academic journals, niche
magazines and educational websites have a significantly high degree of freedom. For example, citizens who can speak English have more access to sources of information online, as most of the regime’s censorship is targeted at Chinese sources. Even state-owned English language news organizations, such as *The China Daily*, have a great degree of freedom of expression because of their predominantly foreign audience. The English language websites of major international news organizations are generally not blocked by web filters or at least not as comprehensively. In this regard, however, the new media are expanding opportunities to change the information landscape within China, as several websites have motivated citizens to post Chinese-language translations of international news (Lewis, 2013).

The emergence of new media has given rise to the resistance of censorship. Overall, the new media have apparently widened the ability to criticise the Internet censorship system at least in some segments of society. In many cases, the new media promotes access to information and provides a discourse channel to express the criticism of important Chinese policies. This virtual area has greatly influenced the public voice, leading to increasingly open discussion of political factions over the past decade. For example, the *People's Network* launched a critical forum, which allows Internet users to express their criticism of government policies. In 2003, *The People's Daily* selectively reported the incident of the corruption of Mr. Bo Xilai, which involved a member of the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau. Although it did not specifically cover the legal judgment process, the report sparked a discussion about political factions on the forum, which spread throughout the social media (Lewis, 2013). In a purely virtual world, citizens use new media to observe official misconduct and mobilize public opinion. A prominent example is the “Shaanxi Tiger” case. In 2008, Zhou Zhenlong, a farmer in Shaanxi province, claimed to have seen rare South China tigers in the wild. The Shaanxi Provincial Forestry Bureau immediately supported his story. Pictures were posted online, presumably to promote tourism in the region. However, critics of Internet users said that the photos had been tampered with, which triggered a national scandal (Magnier, 2008). This kind of virtual surveillance is becoming more common as citizens increasingly use digital technologies and open-source information online as well as form an online accountability mechanism for the government. However, some studies have shown that the political criticism in the new media in China has an extreme colour in the public.

Without the Internet firewall, the guidance and control of the new Internet media could easily lead to populism. To a certain extent, the Internet firewall restrains the growth of populism (Lewis, 2003). This question needs to be considered in the study of democracy in the Internet age. However, the Internet firewall also plays a role in guiding political discourse by establishing blind faith in the media. This guidance is based on nationalism. Nationalism tends to manipulate media, praise state achievements and cover up inequalities. By eliminating the differences between “nation” and “state”, the government continues to promote the Chinese citizens’ love of their country, which is subtly transformed into the support of the Chinese Communist Party (Jiang, 2010). The question of whether the Internet firewall
eliminates populism or instills nationalism has become the predominant issue in discussions about the Internet censorship system in the recent literature.

In addition, there is a media field that is almost uncensored. The role of social media in the Internet age is enormous because of the timeliness of social media, and the Internet firewall’s review of instant messaging is almost non-existent. Alternatively, instant messaging will evade review at the time. This situation has profoundly affected the freedom of information and the freedom of public opinion, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

5.2.2 Summary
How do we understand the rapidly growing Internet media and the relationship between the censorship system and democratic development? The development of Internet media has allowed a variety of change mechanisms to take place simultaneously, resulting in an interactive and diverse public domain. Although the Internet firewall limits the freedom of the media, it also promotes the emergence of the vertical accountability mechanisms advocated by deliberative democracy. The discourse analysis revealed that the expression of “Chinese democracy and freedom” in the Western literature is not moderate. Similarly, discourses such as “nationalism” in the Chinese literature present similarly extreme propaganda. According to Lewis’s research on China’s Internet online discourse (Lewis, 2003), the existence of Internet firewalls has a positive function. For example, for the ordinary, that can guide people should not be too extreme discourse online. Moreover, it is not hard to see that the advent of new media has allowed mush room for the freedom of information and the freedom of opinion. At the same time, however, the new media play a significant role in inducing populism. How should the functions of the Internet firewall be defined? The functional analysis will be performed in the next chapter.

5.3 The effects of Internet firewalls on the freedom of information

In this section, I will conduct a preliminary analysis of the literature on the effects of Internet firewalls on the freedom of information.

5.3.1 Selective access to external information
In an undemocratic country or an authoritarian country, the effective control over the access to and proliferation of information is a necessary means of maintaining the stability of the regime. The control exerted by the Chinese government is structural. Although the global media are increasingly controlled by the largest multinational media groups, their presence in China is still limited. They can succeed only if they follow the rules of censorship, but they may fail if they object to them (Liu, 2011). The best examples are the exit of Google from China and the establishment of Google China. As a global technology powerful company, Google contravened the Chinese regime. The Chinese government banned Google’s free search business and decreed that all searches must be reviewed. However, under the enormous commercial pressure of the Chinese government, Google relocated of its search engines to Hong Kong in 2010 to avoid censorship, which was celebrated as a move in favour of free
speech. In the context where the revolutionary role of social media in the so-called “Arab Democracy Spring” was amply vaunted, it behooved Google to re-examine its role in China, specifically its decision to launch its Chinese search engine, Google.cn in 2006. The Chinese Google site, Google.cn (Google China), was a controversial issue because it exposed the willingness of corporations to censor materials that were deemed objectionable by the Chinese government for the sake of profit. Many people and organizations, including Reporters Without Borders, criticized Google, arguing that the company was taking an immoral position that could not be justified. However, Andrew McLaughlin, the senior policy counsel for Google, argued that the limited access to content was better than no access at all (Kim, 2012). Many Chinese scholars think this was China’s means of information control, but it also protected the interests of the Chinese Internet companies.

Hence, Baidu has gradually monopolised the online search companies in China. Currently, Google.cn simply provides a login page that sends users directly to uncensored Hong Kong sites. However, for mainland users, specific searches that contain sensitive terms are still blocked by the Internet firewall. The other 50 major Internet multinationals, such as Microsoft and Yahoo, continue to comply with Chinese regulations and provide censored search engines. However, Baidu monopolises 90% of China’s netizens (Jiang, 2010). Moreover, YouTube and Facebook do not work properly in China. Despite the news that the social media Facebook may be relocated because of Chinese Internet censorship to business in mainland China, its resumption of services in China is almost impossible. The BBC divulged that Facebook was developing a special software to meet China’s censorship requirements. However, China’s long-standing Internet rules, combined with the refusal statement by Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg, made it impossible for the company to connect with China (BBC, 2016). Furthermore, the Chinese government and Internet companies formed a coalition of interests that enhance the control and examination of information. This coalition makes it very hard for Chinese netizens to receive the message that the Chinese government is positioning “sensitive issues”, such as the Tiananmen Square incident, the Democratic Movement and Liu Xiaobo. Academic studies on democracy are also subject to censorship. The freedom of access to information is an important hallmark of democracy. Continued Internet censorship and intervention can create distortions that undermine democratic practices and cause negative feedback. However, such negative feedback was also defined as “reactionary” discourses and then automatically disappeared.

Regarding external information that cannot be covered on the Internet, the Chinese constitution has established norms governing endangering national security, disclosing state secrets, subverting state power, endangering national unity, undermining national honour and interests, inciting ethnic hatred or discrimination and endangering national unity, Disseminating rumours, disrupting the stability of the social order, spreading obscenities, pornography, gambling, violence, savagery and terror; abetting crime; insulting and slandering others; and violating the lawful rights and interests of others (Xu, 2010). The wide range of Internet information prohibited by Chinese law and the government’s ability to arbitrarily interpret and enforce laws
in this area led to the suppression of objections that are expressed online. This approach both safeguards social stability and sacrifices the freedom of citizens.

In China, the Internet firewall is used to propagate nationalism, ideology and cultural information, which strengthens the political legitimacy of the party. This discourse includes one-sided explanations. This governance has led to concrete and benign results. To establish a “socialist democracy” in China, the party and the state have increased the governance in several key ways: using the Internet to enhance the efficiency of bureaucracy; talking about the people’s congress and the rule of law; observing intra-party democracy. The Chinese government has established some effective public institutions to maintain the richness of this information (Zhang, 2010). As mentioned in the previous section, when the Chinese government reviews external information about some topics as “democracy and freedom”, it always uses the discourse of the “protection of sovereignty” to evade it. Nevertheless, the Chinese people have made progress in obtaining information in recent years.

5.3.2 The rise of Instant messaging software and social media

The use of the Internet censorship system to protect China’s Internet industry development is of great significance. China has the world’s most active environment of social media. More than 600 million people use it in blogs, social-networking sites, micro blogs and other online communities. This number of users is roughly equivalent to the combined populations of France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. In addition, China’s online users spend more than 40 per cent of their time online on social media, a figure that continues to rise rapidly. This explosive growth shows few signs of abating, a trend that is at least partially attributable to the fact that it is harder for the government to censor social media than other information channels. That is one critical way in which the Chinese market is unique (Chui, 2012). Figure 1 shows the increase in the number of netizens from 2009 to 2015.

![Figure 1. Place the figure caption here (Source: CNNIC)](image_url)

The Chinese government is wary of efforts to break the confines of the Chinese
cyberspace, and has hinted that the use of virtual private networks (VPN) to access banned websites could be considered illegal. However, with the development of online social media and instant messaging, an increasing number of young people use VPNs to break through network firewall restrictions to obtain external information. In addition, as an increasing number of Chinese work and study abroad, the Chinese government cannot completely block the entry of foreign information. In this wave, Chinese youth are the main force in absorbing external information. Among the Internet users in China, those under 35 years accounted for 69% of the total (CNNIC, 2016). Some “sensitive information” was spread privately through the instant messaging software. Although the Internet firewall blocked and deleted this information, it continued to be disseminated (Chui, 2012). Thus, information in China has become more diverse; many media professionals have expressed the belief that the Internet has dramatically changed the nature of access to information. For example, one of China’s writers has received far less censorship online through social media. In his opinion, censors may delete one-third of his editorials published in traditional media, but he simply posted the full text of the editorial online on social media. Many other journalists have told similar stories, stating that they regularly publish more “sensitive” content in their edited and published publications. This approach, combined with the online forums of media experts, such as The Journalist’s Home, has facilitated horizontal exchanges and information sharing among actors in this important institution (Lewis, 2013).

The largest Internet instant messaging company in China, Tencent has become an indispensable part of Chinese information dissemination through its mainstream product WeChat. According to the latest statistics in 2017, there were 938 million active users of WeChat. The reason is that almost all Chinese smartphone users use WeChat. Combined with 120 million foreign users, WeChat created a new era in China’s information dissemination (CNNIC, 2017). Although the Chinese government has increased its censorship of WeChat, according to the censorship system reform in 2016, the censorship of sensitive words is no longer transparent. In the past, if a message was filtered, WeChat users would get a hint, but now the censorship is quietly applied. WeChat comes with a browser that screens a series of gambling, pornographic and illegal religious websites for Chinese users and news sites that may hold a critical position in China. Although WeChat shields Chinese users from these websites, overseas users can access these websites without receiving any secure browsing warning message. Thus, communication seems unreliable on WeChat, but it is also a constraint imposed by the government. Hence, the uplifting examination is over, reflecting the erosion of the authority of government information. The government cannot fully review video communications and voice chats (BBC, 2016).

Because social media and instant messaging software are relatively independent during the censorship process, the Internet censorship system has begun to include compromises. Although Internet firewall reviews and interventions play an important role in limiting the dissemination of certain types of information, these examples also highlight the ability of social media to access information rapidly even under open and intense censorship. The development of social media has affected the government
by leading to the loss of information authoritarianism. In the past, censorship was focused on “information control”, but it emphasizes “information guidance”. The government realized that it could not completely prevent or stop the spread of sensitive information and free thought. Therefore, it adjusted its policies and paid more attention to strengthening domestic management rather than completely reviewing foreign information. Hence, the government uses official media or official people for political advocacy in social software in order to encourage the people’s trust (Bandurski, 2009). Much of the literature mentioned that the government has ongoing controls and censorship. This section has highlighted how censorship is in many ways a reaction to the expansion of information access afforded by social media. It is clear that social media have driven the major expansion of information availability and spontaneous horizontal sharing among the public. Despite sophisticated regime controls, the information revolution is ongoing.

However, social media can be used to spread extreme ideas, such as extreme xenophobia and hatred. This capability has a profound relationship with China’s current social gap. Intellectuals and elites have a rational grasp on using information, but for ordinary people, rumours and extreme information on social media could easily lead to populism, would have negative effects on social stability. Some scholars focused on the Chinese cultural traditions. For example, some neo-Confucianism scholars expressed that the Internet firewall has an important role in Chinese society because it guides people in the age of instant messaging to make right choices of information and resources. Although such guidance is nationalistic, it may be the only way to achieve democracy in China (Zhou, 2015). Therefore, their emotions make it impossible for the Chinese people to think rationally about democracy and freedom. The Internet firewall will continue to delete, guide and circumvent information. Although the Chinese public understands the message about democracy, it will remain silent.

Summary
In the process of collecting the literature on the freedom of information in China, I found that the control of external information is still the foundation of the Internet firewall. It is constructed by “information authoritarianism”. However, although the preliminary analysis indicated that China’s “information authoritarianism” appears indestructible, the advent of social media seems to have loosened the constraints. However, the democratic discourse remains hidden and silent in these external messages. Sensitive vocabulary and excessive criticism of the government’s remarks still cannot be fairly and widely communicated on the Internet. Although China has the greatest number Internet users in the world, its netizens are compromised. Internet users selectively promulgate information and automatically ignore some sensitive words. In a word, China’s rapidly growing Internet industry can now be seen an opportunity for gaining access to more information, and this trend seems irreversible in the current period. Whether this nascent deliberative public sphere will increase or be crowded out by narrow ideological voices will depend on state policy and citizen norms. In the meantime, the Internet firewall will continue to exercise its functions.
5.4 Public opinion freedom

As the impetus of social movements, public opinion is an important part of the development of democracy in China. In this part of the initial analysis, I will discuss the literature on the effects of the Internet firewall on public opinion.

5.4.1 Public opinion vitality

As mentioned earlier, with the development of the Internet, the flow of information gradually became free. Information now circulates, and public opinions are now expressed on electronic bulletin boards that have a nationwide reach, such as the Tianya Club (since 1999), blog-hosting portals such as Sina.com (since 2007), and micro-blogging services such as Sina Weibo (since 2010). According to a September 2016 report by the official China Internet Network Information Centre, Internet users in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) numbered 768 million in the national population of about 1.35 billion (CNNIC, 2016). In its 2016 report, Sina Weibo showed an average of 298 million active users in each month (CNNIC, 2016). The Internet media have gradually become the main part of social public opinion. The rise of such online platforms has given Chinese netizens an unprecedented capacity for self-publishing and communication, albeit within a heavily censored environment. The instantaneous, interactive and relatively low-risk nature of blogging has empowered netizens to voice political opinions, form social connections, and coordinate online (and sometimes offline) collective actions. The Internet firewall continues to review social platforms, sensitive words and other illegal content.

However, Chinese netizens still exist in a closely monitored environment. In order to avoid the censorship of sensitive words, many Internet users use coded language or metaphors to express political terms. The government’s pervasive and intrusive censorship system has generated equally massive resentment among Chinese netizens. The Internet has become a quasi-public space where the dominance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is constantly being exposed, ridiculed and criticized by jokes, videos, songs, poems, jingles, fiction, sci-fi, code words, satire and euphemisms. Consequently, Chinese cyberspace has seen the emergence of a new political discourse. Largely invented by young gadflies, a surprising number of these terms have begun to be spread widely. Liberals, ultranationalists and even The People’s Daily have used them (Xiao, 2013). The metaphorical discourse adds vitality to the expression of public opinion in China. The metaphorical discourse sometimes plays games with the Internet firewall to avoid censorship, which has led to a peaceful change in the Internet firewall in which users are not forced to delete information. Through Weibo, public opinion is increasingly able to mobilize social movements. For example, in 2016, the Lianyungang municipal government decided to build a nuclear power plant near an urban area. The plan for this nuclear power plant aroused much discussion on the Internet. The discussion focused on the issue of the disposal of nuclear waste because the government did not give a clear solution to this issue. The consequent health concerns were expressed by Lianyungang’s citizens. Finally, under the catalyst of public opinion expressed on the Internet, Lianyungang citizens launched a parade to urge the government to stop the nuclear power station project.
After three days of demonstrations, the Lianyungang municipal government abandoned its nuclear power plant project. The municipal government issued several announcements on Weibo, confirming that it had stopped the nuclear power projects (BBC, 2016). This incident shows that the Internet media have begun to monitor the government and have gradually formed a vertical monitoring system. Another effect is that the public opinion expressed on the Internet has gradually exposed the problem of corruption at the local level. For example, in 2011, corruption emerged in China’s Red Cross. This incident was first discussed in entertainment gossip. Internet users speculated about the relationship between the chairperson of the Red Cross and his female star lover. However, as the problem emerged, netizens became aware that the Red Cross Society had huge corruption problems. In response to public opinion, the Central Government investigated the Red Cross (Xiao, 2013). To cope with the increasingly tense public opinion, the government took several measures, such as the forums at all levels of government were opened to increase the public’s enthusiasm for discussing politics on the Internet. Provincial, city, and county governments now feature online government portals at rates of 100 per cent, 93 per cent, and 69 per cent, respectively. In addition to increasing the amount of information that is available online, government networks have also created spaces for public discourse, including e-consultation functions such as Q&A sessions with government officials, repetitions, e-discussion features such as real-time “gov. chat” between citizens and policymakers, and policy discussion forums. Local citizens have more access to government information, services and the means to articulate their rights and seek social justice. As a result, citizens have gained access to local politics and therefore increased their political knowledge. By granting limited public spaces, these government networks have helped deflate social tension and re-establish state legitimacy (Jiang, 2010). The main measures of the Internet firewall are to review and guide public opinion.

5.4.2 Guiding public opinion

When Internet firewalls change from “censorship” to “guidance,” their effects on public opinion are enormous. As mentioned earlier, too much nationalism led ordinary Internet users to response radically to political problems. For example, in 2016, Taiwan’s Apple news sent a message that attacked China’s Internet censorship on the Facebook homepage, arguing that Chinese netizens cannot go global, rebuking the Chinese government for its lack of democracy and advocating Taiwan’s independent statehood. The message was forwarded to Weibo by Chinese students studying abroad in response to the stance that Taiwan’s independence was a violation of China. The incident was discussed on Weibo, and many young Chinese users used the VPN login to Facebook, commenting on the Apple News Facebook homepage, which caused the Apple news Facebook server to crash (Yang, 2017). The issues reflected in this incident are complex. First, many people in China support Internet censorship. Second, ordinary Internet users in China have irrational motives, which could lead to an overwhelming atmosphere of public opinion. Third, under the political environment in China, the public cannot distinguish between the party and the state. Fourth, the groups gathered on the Internet are differentiated. They are characterised by homogeneous and inter-cluster heterogeneity, which leads to the phenomenon of
group identity without the proper guidance of public opinion. Group polarization would result, thus leading to populism. In the Chinese opinion of the Internet, at the grassroots level, the pent-up frustration caused by perceived foreign disrespect of China is invariably channelled through the catharsis of nationalism. Western leaders’ meetings with the Dalai Lama were framed as a gesture of open provocation. Popular protests against foreign powers, such as the anti-Carrefour rally against the French disruption of the Beijing Olympics torch relay in 2008 were delicately sanctioned by the state. Books such as *China Can Say No* (1996) and *Unhappy China* (2009) became instant bestsellers, transmitting popular anger at the perceived unfairness of the West, particularly the US’s criticism and containment of China (Jiang, 2010). Regarding core political issues, the Internet firewall plays a leading role in guiding public opinion.

The role of Internet firewall guidance is to unite the party and the country. Recently, the government advocated the revival of Confucianism on the Internet. The revival of Confucianism was aimed at enhancing the country’s image as the ultimate caretaker of Chinese society and manifesting China’s cultural heritage. From the government’s point of view, Confucianism has both intrinsic attraction and outward attraction. Confucianism advocates that the social order is stable, citizens obey and love the family and the state, and the government’s official ideology is social harmony. The spread of Confucianism can increase the country’s cohesion and allow the government to find an excuse to block individuals or groups that challenge authoritarianism. Although neither the Constitution nor other legal provisions clearly define “social instability”, such challenges are often considered a cause the disruption of the social order (Chen, 2015). Moreover, in many Neo-Confucian discourses, the guidance of Internet public opinion and the revival of Confucianism are the keys to the democratization of Chinese politics; obviously, this conclusion is in line with the Chinese government’s goals. However, most of the Western literature holds that the Chinese government’s rejuvenation of Confucianism has a positive effect on the removal of communist ideology (Chen, 2015). Nevertheless, the guidance of public opinion on the Internet may lead to another kind of authoritarianism, which complicates the issue of Chinese democracy. This complexity derives from the authoritarian nature of Confucianism itself. Through the Internet, the government seeks to make Confucianism respected in public opinion. Internet users once again enhance cultural self-confidence. This kind of cultural self-confidence caused the rise of the public opinion that questioned the ideal of Western democracy. A “democratic road with Chinese characteristics” was mentioned on the Internet (Zhao, 2012). Although such discourse may indicate that the Chinese people have started to seek democracy, the current effect seems vague.

**Summary**

It cannot be denied that public opinion of China’s Internet is actively expressed. The review of Internet firewalls has become increasingly inclusive and local political issues can be exposed. The public can use metaphorical language to ironise the political system and trigger social movements. However, the role played by the Internet firewall in guiding public opinion is still strong and highly effective.
Nationalist propaganda and the promotion of the revival of Confucianism have created a special political atmosphere. The Chinese people appear to be more supportive of the government, and the propaganda of some Western democratic discourse is questioned. Although public opinion calls for democracy, the Chinese approach to it is mentioned. What effects will the Internet firewall have on China’s democratic development? These effects will be analysed in the next chapter.
6. Analysis

In this chapter, the findings derived from the case studies will be analysed, discussed, and evaluated according to the existing literature and research. I will use the theory of functional analysis to analyse the effects of the Internet firewall on China’s democratic development. Specific analyses will be conducted to determine the positive and negative functions of the Internet firewall. The findings of the functional analysis will contribute to understanding the effects of the Internet firewall on China’s democratic development. As described in Chapter 3, the research problem concerns the definition of positive and negative functions. I define them here as follows. Because the thesis examines the effects of Internet firewalls on Chinese democracy, I define the negative functions as the destabilizing effects of Internet firewalls, such as the desire of the people for free information, freedom of the media and the pursuit of freedom of opinion. I define the positive functions as the effects of the Internet firewall on the stability of the current social framework, such as the protection of economic growth, the suppression of social rumours and the safeguarding of the current government’s credibility. According to Merton, the functional analysis should be combined with the social structure. Merton believes that the functional analysis of a social action should be combined with the social model. The maintenance of the stability of the social model is a positive function, and the destruction of social stability is a negative function of the social model (Wang, 1998). In addition, media, information and public opinion are at the centre of democratic development. The findings of the analysis will contribute to understanding the effects of the Internet firewall on the development of democracy in China.

6.1 Positive function

The positive function of Internet firewalls is obvious in national institutions and structures. According to the analysis, the explosive growth of Internet access and use across China, the tools used by the authorities to control the content and flow of information and the emerging dynamics between Chinese Internet users and censors shows that the expansion of the Internet and Internet media is changing the rules of the relationship between the state and the society. The government is increasingly taking note of and responding to public opinion that is expressed online. This trend will surely continue, and online public opinion will playing an important role in the future development of Chinese society. Faced with this situation, the government and many websites have hired staff that manually read and review the content. Tens of thousands of overseas-hosted websites have also been blocked at the gateway level of nine countries in which China’s Internet is connected to the global network. Sites hosted in China that violate acceptable content may be warned or closed, threatened or intimidated. Individuals who spread Internet content that the authorities consider harmful may be held in prison. Such content, including sensitive words, such as “subversion”, is usually related to national security. The positive function of this measure is its effective control of the information and media.

In terms of maintaining national security, the Internet firewall plays a positive role.
Through the control of information, the government can effectively obtain the source of information and management according to category. By censoring the system’s control over the media and selectively introducing foreign media, the Internet firewall functions to make most of the media the mouthpiece of the government’s propaganda. In a democratic social structure, media have a binding effect on the government. Obviously, the censorship system has made the Chinese media tend to report only commercial and entertainment news. Although the advent of new Internet media appears to have broken some of the information blockades, the Internet censorship system still has a huge guiding function. In China, many scholars and writers are critical of the government. However, the government is very clever in classifying them on the Internet platform. Remarks are deleted if they involve the core issues of the country, such as the regime of disagreement. Hence, Chinese netizens assume that talking about divisions and regimes is incorrect, and the vitality of discursive politics is absent. In addition, under such censorship and guidance, not only is the political vitality of intellectuals suppressed but also, ordinary people tend to accuse intellectuals of referring to state separatism as well as more extreme statements that make personal attacks on political reformists (He and Warren, 2011). Thus, most people maintain a political silence. Women and the public hold the power of the Internet, which results in a sense of urgency and the lack of rational thinking. Thus, public opinion on Internet is controlled.

In the public domain, the positive function of the Internet firewall is also obvious. The Internet censorship system continues to hamper the clarity of sensitive “core” issues, such as the truth of some political events and the truth of major social events. Although the government cannot stop this information from being disseminated in the new media, the dissemination in private tends to be prone to erroneous rumours, leading to inaccurate information and creating a sensational effect on the government. Weibo is the main actor in the public domain of the Internet in China. The communist ideology continues to be criticized and challenged in the public domain. The government reshapes its credibility through nationalist propaganda and attempts to resurrect Confucianism. Hence, public opinion has a strong nationalist tendency, and ordinary people uphold the government. Moreover, Western democratic thinking seems to be unacceptable to the public. More than 70 per cent of the people supported the Internet firewall (He and Warren, 2011). Thus, the Internet firewall has different influences on all levels of society in China, and it has a positive function in safeguarding the stability and sovereignty of the country. However, this study aims to study the effects of Internet firewalls on the development of democracy in China. I will combine Merton’s theory of functional analysis with a focus on analysing the negative function of Internet firewalls, and I will try to analyse the effects of these functions on the development of democracy in China over time.

6.2 Negative function

The negative features of the Internet firewall include its increasingly wide tolerance. The exploration of literature on the new media showed that the Internet firewall actually has a greater tolerance for new media. For example, when citizens use new
media to observe official malfeasance activities and thereby mobilize public opinion, the rapid dissemination of information cannot be controlled by the Internet firewall in a timely manner. The Internet firewall can only tolerate such public opinion. An example is the Wenzhou high-speed rail accident in 2011. On the first day of Wenzhou’s high-speed rail transit in June 2011, 49 people were killed when a railway accident resulted in a train collision. However, the government only reported 19 deaths. The families of the deceased disseminated news of the government’s malfeasance via Weibo. It was suspected that the Ministry of Railways was fraught with corruption in the construction of the railway, which reduced the quality of the infrastructure. The news immediately affected public opinion, and the government had to admit the mistake and charge the minister of the Ministry of Railways with corruption (Lewis, 2013).

The main point is that the Internet firewall leads to the propensity for anti-firewall measures. The Internet firewall mobilizes the exploration of external information. In the process, people use VPNs to “roll over firewalls” to gain external information. Because a large proportion of Chinese and foreign Internet users have scaled the GFW by using various tools and applications, the government has retaliated by strengthening its Internet firewall and tightening its controls. In addition, China’s increased censorship has fostered a backlash. Many Internet users who were previously not interested in politics have become more active in resisting the controls and choosing to protest (Yang and Liu, 2014). Under the censorship system, in the new media, citizens can comment on policies online through forums and blogs. If they do not involve core issues, online comments and deliberations are feasible. This inclusion of online commentary has led to the gradual formation of a mechanism of vertical accountability. Hence, the citizens’ right to know has been acknowledged. Although it is not comprehensive, the VPN and other methods can be used to cross the firewall and objectively promote the access of Chinese citizens to external information.

In terms of public opinion, there has been an increase in the interaction on Weibo although it takes a significant amount of time to censor content on the Internet firewall. However, it has inspired some people to satirise tyranny by using metaphorical language. To a certain extent, such satires have stimulated some people to think about democracy. The pluralism of public opinion is the symbol of the democratic development of the country. According to the collection and arrangement of the literature, although the existence of the Internet firewall has promoted a nationalistic orientation in public opinion, the atmosphere of public opinion in China is still quite pluralistic. Discussions of democracy are ongoing although most focus on the critique of democracy, which promotes public thought about the topic. In addition, because it can disclose corruption, the Internet firewall attempts to guide public opinion in a direction that consolidates government authority. However, it serves to encourage people on the Internet to start discussing factional politics, such as the fight against corruption by political opponents (Yang and Liu, 2014). The greatest function brought about by the review of Internet content review is its containment of populism and promotion of nationalism. Thus, the Internet environment is devoid of an populist
Another role of the Internet firewall is to guide the media to emphasise the entertainment industry, which contributes to the market economy. Debates about entertainment and business in the media often lead to political thinking. The Internet firewall did not stop the development of new media is censorship system. This finding shows that the Internet firewall is used to protect domestic Internet companies. However, it does not exert high pressure in controlling the flow of information and public opinion. The Internet firewall does not have enough capacity to solve the contradictions between economic development and information dissemination. Although Internet firewalls prevent ordinary citizens from gaining access to information, the freedom of intellectuals and business elites to access information is much higher than that of the public. Key universities and large commercial companies enjoy a relaxed review. The reason is that the Chinese government needs human resources and a commercial development strategy. Moreover, key universities and large commercial companies conduct learning and exchange activities with other countries (Zhou, 2009). In other words, the different treatment of elites and ordinary Chinese citizens indicates that the deployment of the Internet firewall reflects social differentiation in China. The possible result of this differentiation is that a group of intellectual elites and business elites will emerge in China to promote China’s further development.

The findings also indicated that the Internet firewall has caused foreign students and staff members to discuss this issue. The discussion of authoritarian rule and democratic freedom regarding the Internet firewall has stimulated people’s attention and their reflection on the issue of democracy. These discussions have been spread privately through instant messaging.

Manifest function
As discussed in Chapter 3, as an extension of positive and negative functions, Merton put forward the notion of manifest functions and latent functions by distinguishing between subjective attitudes and objective consequences. He insisted that the function of practice is an observable result and therefore should be distinguished from the motivation behind the practice. Merton acknowledges that the functions of some practices are realized both by and for the individuals involved in the practice, and he calls this function “manifest function.” I hope in this part of the analysis based on time, the potential effects of Internet firewall on the development of democracy.

We mentioned before that at present China is most likely to move toward to deliberative democracy. Habermas motions, Internet as the most important public domain in the present society, the Internet should be an important role in the process of deliberative democracy: surveillance of the socio-political environment; reporting of political events likely to impinge on the welfare of the public; advocacy of a plurality of social voice both official and informal; facilitating a dialogue between social actors; and holding public office holders to account (Habermas, 1996). These standards reinforce the concept of deliberative democracy and further highlight the
importance of the Internet in building public discourse and accountability. The Internet is an important condition for today’s democratic consultation in society. The public forums of China as the place for citizens to express their opinions and opinions, I will compare the recent ten years’ literature of public forums and social movement to analysis Internet’s social mobilization and social consultation ability under the Internet censorship system.

According to CNNIC, the number of bloggers has increased by 20% from 2008 to 2012, but the number of bloggers decreased by 5% from 2012 to 2017 due to the presence of Weibo. In addition, the number of forums for government agencies increased by 30% from 2008 to 2017, with an average monthly active number of 17 million. In addition, from the year of 2008 to 2017, the online bulletin board has been growing rapidly by 60%(CNNIC, 2017). This shows that the platform for public communication under the censorship system of the Internet has been growing. In addition, the average number of offline activities launched on the public platform from 2008 to 2017 is 200,000 (including commercial activities). Among them, major rights activist movements and protest movements (e.g., the Lianyungang nuclear power plant mentioned earlier) avail one a year on average (CNNIC, 2017). This shows that under the censorship system, the social mobilization capability of the Internet in China is still significant.

It can be seen that under the Internet censorship system, China still has the key element for promoting deliberative democracy. The largest manifest function of Internet firewall is the guiding function of public opinion. Although it is more effective to stop the tendency of populism, excessive nationalist propaganda may go to the other extreme with the growth of time and affect government decision-making. There is no conclusive literature in this regard, but based on the main literature, Internet firewalls do not give full control over people’s freedom and China is becoming a trend of deliberative democracy online. What’s the latent function of Internet firewall? According to the collected literature, the existence of the Internet firewall is determined by the traditional Chinese culture and social system. Its existence makes the Chinese people hold the view of Chinese criticism when dealing with the issue of democracy. On the whole, it may make China’s democratic development has taken a unique road.
7. Conclusion

This research uses a qualitative approach to explore the effects of China’s Internet firewall on the country’s democratic development. Internet censorship has far-reaching effects on China’s online environment. Through external and internal scrutiny, it forces the Chinese people to accept external information. By controlling the media, the Internet firewall makes it impossible for some foreign media to enter China. However, the government has also encouraged the commercialization of the media to ensure the rapid development of the domestic Internet media. In this respect, the Internet firewall has played a protective role in the domestic economy. The Internet firewall blocked Google and global information companies from gaining control of the information disseminated in China. The Internet firewall controls public opinion through the censorship of sensitive words and the guidance of its expression. However, the findings of literature analysis showed that the Internet firewall is tolerant in some cases. With the development of new media and the upgrading of technology, Chinese users privately transmit external information through social media. They use VPN technology through the firewall to obtain external information. Regarding this behavior, Internet censorship has not been increased but has become more inclusive.

In addition, although the Internet firewall continues to be used to review and guide media is has become more forgiving of the new media. It cannot be denied that public opinion is increasingly expressed on the Internet, censorship throughout the Internet firewall has become more inclusive and local political issues can now can exposed. The public can use metaphorical language to ironise the political system and trigger social movements. However, the role played by the Internet firewall in guiding public opinion is still strong and highly effective. Nationalist propaganda and the promotion of the revival of Confucianism have given Chinese public opinion a special political atmosphere. The Chinese people appear to be more supportive of the government, and the propaganda in some Western democratic discourse is questioned. Although public opinion calls for democracy, the Chinese approach is advocated. The other main finding is that the Internet firewall can play a positive role in discouraging online rumours. Although it also affects the spread of democratic ideas, it cannot be denied that the Internet firewall plays an important role in maintaining social stability. The Internet public domain has become increasingly open, and the number of Weibo users is increasing yearly, which will further strengthen the function of the Internet to exchange information.

Although the Internet firewall review opposes the government’s remarks, it does not completely limit its criticism of the government. Increasingly, forums and online messages have developed to open a way for the development of deliberative democracy in China, and an online system of civic engagement and vertical supervision is taking shape. Nevertheless, the guiding function of Internet firewalls may lead to the public trust in authoritarian governments. However, because it is an important political action of the government, the Internet firewall has represented a contradiction between economic development and democratic development since its
implementation. According to this study, a means of deliberative democracy is being established by the Internet firewall, but because of its continued existence, the special political environment in China may persist for a long period.
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