After mobile phones, what? Re-embedding the social in China's digital revolution
After Mobile Phones, What? Re-embedding the Social in China’s “Digital Revolution”

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Abstract
"After Bicycles, What?" was the fundamental developmental question posed to the Chinese by the Canadian communication scholar Dallas Smythe at the dawn of the reform era in the late 1970s. Since then, China’s information policy in three decades has been characterized by a well-recognized and seemingly paradoxical pattern of development. On the one hand, access to telecommunication and media infrastructure has been expanded enormously, although unevenly among the population. On the other hand, the regime of state control over content, infrastructure, and access has also been strengthened. This paper explores the internal logic of this seemingly contradictory development by re-embedding the analysis of access and control in the social domain. In particular, it describes the enormous social tensions that have been engendered by launching a state-led and market-driven “information revolution” in the context of a “counterrevolution” in the social domain. The resulting developmental condition of “one country, four worlds” within the framework of a single nation state has posed profound challenges in governance, and thus necessitated the state’s relentless efforts in maintaining social stability through a fortified regime of information control. The paper then reviews the multi-faceted struggles that have been waged by various social forces in rearticulating and reinserting the social in the Chinese developmental agenda and discusses the implications of the Chinese state’s recent reclaiming of the social in its developmental strategy for a post-reform information policy regime.

While revolutions existed before Twitter, political movements are social phenomena, governed by the laws of social networks and accelerated by social media. While revolutions existed long before Twitter, political movements are clearly social phenomena and therefore governed by the laws of social networks and accelerated by social media. In light of what’s happened over the past few weeks, it seems like a good moment to reflect on the similarities of how technology and social networks played a part in the protests of both 2004 Kiev and 2011 Cairo. The Orange and Egyptian Revolutions. Kiev’s Independence Square in 2004 and Cairo’s Tahrir Square in 2011.