



## **Inside-Out and Outside-In: The Making of a Transnational Discursive Alliance in the Struggle for the Future of China**

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This article explores the making of a transnational discursive alliance championing the language of freedom and aiming at bringing their particular notion of democracy to China. The analysis is based on the following four case studies: Google’s withdrawal from China in 2011, the Chinese Jasmine Revolution from 2011 up until now, the Bo Xilai Event in 2012, and the anti-censorship activism centering on the liberal Chinese newspaper, the *Nanfang Weekend* in early 2013. I first describe how this transnational discursive alliance came into being through these four cases, and then analyze the impact it has had on China’s public sphere and domestic politics. I conclude with a discussion of the class orientation of this alliance’s universalistic claims to democracy and constitutionalism.

Witnessing the political changes in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union during the late 1980s and 1990s, Francis Fukuyama exclaimed in his book *The End of History and the Last Man* that, in the foreseeable future, the world “will be divided between a post-historical part, and a part that is still stuck in history” (1992, p. 276). A post-historical era is ideally defined by a Kantian international *alliance* based on “the need for democratic states to work together to promote democracy” (ibid., p. 281) and global peace. Since the dawn of the 21st century, it has been a common belief that the Internet and other new media are providing people in the Middle East, Africa, or Latin America with unprecedented opportunities in their pursuits of liberty and democracy.

No wonder, then, that China is supposed to be included in the social media-driven democratization trend. Early in the 1989 Tiananmen Square movement, a transnational alliance had emerged and begun to function. Following the protests in April 1989, many established intellectuals and students leaders relied on a “sympathetic international media,” to “promote their messages” (Zhao, 2001,

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p. 30). At the end of May 1989, citizens in Hong Kong spontaneously launched fundraising events in support of protesting students in Beijing, while after the June 4 suppression, the famous "man-versus-tank Beijing street scene" was fossilized by the transnational mainstream media into a "perfect signifier" (Zhao, 2008, p. 4) for of an urban young man in pursuit of democracy and freedom in an authoritarian China. This image has since established the tone for the transnational media in reporting protests in China. In the meantime, the fugitive intellectuals and student leaders got financial support from international human rights associations, democracy-promoting NGOs, and Western governments, and thus organized the China Support Network and China Alliance for Democracy. Those veteran human-rights and democracy activists overseas grew into influential anti-CCP dissidents, and continued to enjoy the media spotlight in Western countries into the 1990s. Nowadays, with the explosive growth of social media, this transnational alliance, while still tied up with its history and ideology, is seeking to reenact its glorious past through new means.

With the deepening of neoliberal economic reforms, "a reconstituted and transnationally-linked capitalist class" (ibid., p. 345), as Yuezhi Zhao calls it, has already come into play in the communicative struggles over the future directions of China's transformation since the middle of the first decade of the new century. This "entrenched iron triangle ruling class bloc" is made up of China's globally integrated state managers, newly enfranchised capitalists, and their media and intellectual supporters. This class quickly rallies "around the objective of social containment" against the popular classes or anti-neoliberal alliance, while pressuring the leadership to "hold back on any radical reorientation of the reform process" (ibid., p. 351) and building hype for its primary economic and then political demands. Tacit collusion between this vested interest group and its middle-class followers in supporting further marketization, industrialization, and urbanization, and in embracing the global capitalist integration, should be taken quite seriously.

More recently, a transnational discursive bloc—consisting of liberal journalists, public intellectuals, and lawyers—has emerged. Beginning with the Google withdrawal event, their demonstrated ability to effectively hijack the Internet-sphere of BBS and blogs has become remarkable. Then, they took Twitter and the recently emerging microblog to be the favored platform for anti-governmental social mobilization, an effort which culminated in discussion surrounding the 7.23 train accident of 2011 and the Bo Xilai storm in 2012 (Wu, 2012; Zhao, 2012).

Their slogans are those of universalism, democracy and constitutionalism. Members of this growing transnational discursive alliance take themselves to be or have no qualms about being called "liberals," and they have doggedly launched a virtual war against left-leaning online voices over fundamental issues concerning socialism, market, or political reforms. The prolonged and transnational war, more like an unevenly-structured play that has ostensibly both its loyalists and imprecators, aims at winning over the hearts and minds of the majority of Chinese netizens.

In fact, the alliance finesses their anti-government polemics into a language that is not so arcane and complicated as to be incomprehensible to their targeted audience: China's middle class and young college students. In other words, this transnational discursive bloc acts as "word (or idea) warriors" who, reversely quoting Sartori's argument, "well [know] that in the end what sticks are names, not the

demonstrations or explanations given for them,” and that what they can do is to “coin epithets and repeat them incessantly” in an attempt to “short-circuit thinking”(1987, p. 482).

In this article, I present four case studies of this transnational discursive alliance in action. I describe how the transnational coalition gradually comes into being in each case, and then I analyze the influence it has had on Chinese politics and domestic public opinion. Toward the end of the article, I offer a critique of this alliance’s claim to democracy and reveal its compositions, class orientations, and limitations.

### **From Google’s Withdrawal from China to Pro-Nanfang Weekly Protests: Inside-Out or Upside-Down?**

In early 2010, Google staged a high-profile withdrawal from the Chinese market and presented it as an act of defiance against China’s intolerable censorship. The act brought into the global spotlight that China is a non-democratic state where people cannot enjoy their right to freedom of speech. Significantly, echoing Google’s message, some Chinese netizens and Google users voluntarily gathered at Google’s Beijing headquarters, giving tribute with flowers and candles in mock mourning for Google’s departure from China. Three years later, in a similar episode—this time involving a domestic media outlet—hundreds of people assembled outside the headquarters of the Nanfang newspaper office to lay flowers and show their respect and support for journalists and editors whose New Year message had reportedly been castrated by Guangzhou propaganda officials.

On January 13, 2010, David Drummond, Google’s chief legal officer, posted a document entitled “A New Approach to China” on Google’s official blog, indicating that Google was quitting China and offering the reason that Google had “evidence to suggest that a primary goal of the attackers was accessing the Gmail accounts of Chinese human rights activists.” Later on, Google said that two schools were involved in the recent targeted phishing assaults: Shanghai Jiaotong University and Lanxiang, “a huge vocational school that was established with military support and trains some computer scientists for the military” (Markoff, 2010).

Google’s allegation reverberated immediately from the United States to liberal opinion-leaders in China. In the U.S. and global public arenas, then-U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton vocally condemned Chinese Internet censorship and President Obama quickly backed her up through his spokesman Bill Burton one day later. For their part, transnational media outlets such as the BBC, Reuters, *Financial Times* (FT), and *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) all hailed Google’s decision as a bold act in defiance of Chinese state censorship and cast Google as a democratic fighter. The uniform position of the U.S. business, political, and media establishment was immediately taken up by vocal liberal voices inside China. Google’s self-positioning as no longer “doing the dirty work for Chinese dictatorship,” encouraged a young generation of Googlers to struggle for freedom of speech. It is hard to confirm whether or not Google and the U.S. business, political, and media elites sponsored or made promises to celebrity bloggers in China to boast of its integrity. However, the mainstream transnational media did focus on the great blow struck for human-rights activism, as well as on the Chinese Googlers’ revolt and their “legitimized”

indignation. In turn, the furious pro-Google Chinese leveraged those foreign reports to boost their own position, thus turning themselves into an *inside-out* and bottom-up discursive force.

Influential Chinese public intellectuals and journalists quickly rallied behind Google after its bombshell announcement. Indeed, Evan Osnos, the Beijing correspondent of *The New Yorker*, claimed in his online column "Letter from China" that "barely any of them would actually believe that Google's withdrawal would be a healthy development for China" (Osnos, 2010). Furthermore, those "journalists" or "public intellectuals" despised the ordinary people for being indifferent about Google's quitting or not sharing their perspective on the case. Han Han, one of the most influential young writers in China and a celebrated public intellectual, wrote the following in a widely circulated blog article: "Google maybe overestimates or expects too much from the Chinese netizens who place less value on freedom, truth and justice than picking up 100 RMB on the road" (Han, 2010). In a typical example of intellectual vanguardism, he saw the Chinese people as being more obsessed with their real estate pursuits or even cyber-game gadgets than universalistic ideals. A famous female reporter from Phoenix TV, Rose Luqiu, hoped via her blog that Google's great symbolic power and its flinging away could have initiated those "without faith or believing only in money," a strong innuendo about China, to be aware that "no concession should be made as far as principles are concerned" (Luqiu, 2010). Here, the assumption is that, while the "faith" in and "principles" of freedom and democracy are what Rose and her likeminded fellow journalists and liberal intellectuals hold dear, they are alien to the rest of the Chinese population.

Echoing the sentiments of domestic liberal elites, cyber-protests flourished inside and outside of China. Twitter users reacted aggressively to Google's withdrawal by putting the hashtag *#GoogleCN* in front of their updated tweets, and soon Google became the hot issue around the Twitter-sphere. Portal sites and large BBSs within China (e.g., Sina, Sohu, Tianya) were inundated with tubthumping posts, comments, and messages yelling things like "Don't go, Google!", "No one sleep tonight because of you, Google!", or "Please stay, my far-flung friend, Google!" Then, a signature petition for retaining Google was launched, while posts were sprouting about how to search those politically-sensitive contents through Google (Washeng, 2010). Ironically, these discussions transmuted into a round of fandom/cult online bickering that centered on the efficiency of search and the user-friendliness of Google versus Baidu, its Chinese competitor. For their part, Google fans rained accusations against Baidu and its ignominious role as an agent of thought control for the Chinese government in exchange for commercial profit and even comprehensive monopoly in China in a "Google, Pure Man" over "Baidu, Real Charlatans" dichotomy. These Google fans denied that they were agents for Google, while remaining hyper-vigilant about the allegations online against them that they had served as accomplices to the foreign hostile forces. They resolutely denounced the conspiracy theory as the product of Spartanism, parochial nationalism, or even great-power chauvinism. Moreover, commentators such as Phoenix TV's Anthony Yuen and Prof. Jin Canrong from Renmin University of China, who questioned Google's motives, were severely condemned as despicable (Tiger, 2010).

Protests continued. The passionate and chivalrous pro-Google youngsters, since the morning of January 13, 2010, partly organized through Twitter, had assembled to lay floral bouquets, candles, and even bows in front of Google's office in the Tsinghua Science Park in Beijing, with reporters from the *Los Angeles Times*, TVB, and Hong Kong's Ta Kung Pao present as an expression of solidarity with them.

Attached to bunches of flowers were many reverently handwritten poems, messages, and cards, including "HTTP 404 Page Not Found: in accordance with local laws and regulation, some wishes are not displayed." Later, these messages were widely circulated and lavishly acclaimed through the Chinese social media. The first Chinese "flower campaign" quickly spread to other cities, encouraging pilgrimages to Google's offices in Beijing and Shanghai. Several pilgrims sent out real-time updates through tweets or pictures disclosing what they had seen and heard. Correspondingly, the *Wall Street Journal*, which had tracked the Chinese netizens' commemoration for Google, reported in a January 14, 2010, article that employees at Google's Guangzhou branch "hadn't received any flowers from Chinese Web users" (Ye, 2010). Soon, some Twitter users (e.g., @baofan) posted the address of Google's office in Guangzhou in both Chinese and English, tweeting an appeal for flower tributes to Guangzhou (see @baofan, 2010).

Nevertheless, when online calls for flower tributes were responded to in the real world, Chinese state power reigned in. The flowers were swiftly removed by security guards, who admonished the visitors that they should apply for official permission; otherwise, it would be an "illegal flower tribute" (Osnos, 2010). The expression from one unknown guard caused an instant sensation and became another catchphrase online. On January 14, 2010, Radio France Internationale reported that "the Central Publicity Department had forbidden the print media to make in-depth reporting on the Google event while the State Council Information Office had urged websites to delete all the pictures or posts about flower bestowal" (Cao, 2010). Contrary to such an order, many sources from Google+, GTalk, and Twitter emerged inadvertently to justify the report's authenticity, proving in a sense that Baidu and Sina Blog or Weibo, where articles and comments containing keywords "Illegal Flower Tribute" or about Google China "suddenly became unavailable for viewing" (Brad, 2011), had been drastically filtered and censored. Against it, Twitter users fought tenaciously. The Twitter account @CDTimes, created by Prof. Xiao Qiang from the University of California, Berkeley, provided translations of the tweets, and the most quoted ones came from @jason5ng32, expressing sadness at "living [in] an era of truly distorted values" (Brad, 2011).

Three online surveys were carried out around January 13, 2010, hosted respectively by the *Global Times* (GT), *Nanfang Weekly* (NW), and iFeng. The different polling results, in addition to the differentiated political positions of the three media outlets, not only testify to "the multifaceted and contradictory nature of media commercialization and globalization" in China, but also reflect the coexistence of a multiplicity of "public spheres" which constitute a "complex of sometimes overlapping, sometimes antagonistic, discursive fields" (Zhao, 2008, pp. 327–328). The *Global Times*, always the target of Chinese liberals for its pro-government editorials and pacifying reviews in its Weibo account, launched its web-based survey at 4:00 p.m. with two items, one of which was "Do you think China should accept Google's requirement that the company's Chinese business functions without censorship?" Until 8:00 p.m., "not accepted" outvoted "accepted," with a margin of nearly 60%. But after that, with one anonymous user on a fixed IP address registering as many as 6,000 "accepted" votes, the earlier count favoring "not accepted" was turned upside down. Asserting that the poll was persistently under malicious attack from multiple and changing IP addresses, GT's technology department cleared out 3,000 fake votes. In stark contrast to the uncontaminated result of GT, the polls launched by NW and iFeng both demonstrated that Google's stay would be an overwhelming preference of a majority of Web users (iFeng, 83.6%, deleted now). Furthermore, these users were inclined to credit Google's leaving as unrelated to itself (NW, 44.79%), implicitly laying the blame on the Chinese government. Hundreds of unsolicited

sensational and provocative comments were posted below the NW questionnaire: "There is a kind of justice that is called withdrawal. Not Google retreats from China, but rather China retreats from the world"; "Google is not forced to leave, but China is abandoned"; or more frankly, "I prefer Bing to Baidu" (*Nanfang Weekly*, 2010).

In the early hours of March 23, 2010, the official announcement was updated by Google, claiming that they couldn't "continue censoring their results on Google.cn" (Google, 2010). Beginning then, Google redirected all search queries from Google.cn to Google.com.hk. Later, the popular terms "bone brother" (a homonym for Google's Chinese name), countering "Goodog" and (fire) "Wall Culture," invented by savvy netizens who parodied all the peculiarities of official rhetoric, amounted to extolling the glory and fortitude of Google. *Chongqing Evening News* produced a piece entitled "A Story of Goo-pigeon's Migration" on March 27, 2010 (*Chongqing Evening News*, 2010, see BBC, 2010), a hybrid of a Wikipedia-style entry with colorful argots signifying Google's relocation to Hong Kong. Out of the debates online was born Goojje, a bits-and-bites copycat site featuring a similar logo to Google with its Chinese names roughly translated in English as "elder sister of Google" (Brad, 2011). Goojje quickly gained fame not only in foreign media outlets such as the BBC, Reuters, and *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, but also in domestic media, which had long since been banned from reporting about the Google affair.

With cyber-protests finally, it appeared, about to end, no one would then have predicted that the same flower tribute campaign would happen again three years later. At the end of 2012, there appeared a post in the Weibo-sphere that the New Year's Editorial for *Nanfang Weekend* (NW), entitled "*Dreams of China, Dreams of Constitutionalism*," had been withdrawn by Tuo Zhen, Director of the Propaganda Department of Guangdong Party Committee without agreement by all the editors. Soon, the liberal reporters and public intellectuals forwarded and reviewed the message via their own Weibo account, arousing strong resentment among the vast majority of Web users. However, most Web users did not know the whole truth. Even so, they circulated the related posts to support NW. It not only stirred up an unprecedented online barrage toward Tuo, the Propaganda Department, and its censorship, it also initiated another offline flower-tribute action. As a result, since the end of last year, punctuating Weibo from start to finish are steadfast proclamations for "breathing the air of freedom," speeches of exhortation, and pictures of flower donation and confrontation with policemen on the scene. A quintessential example of these posts is the one linking the floral tribute for Google to the flower action for NW, "After Google flower action, (free speech on the) Web retrogressed greatly; After NW floral campaign, (freedom of) the Press stepped backwards" (@3dlinux, 2012).

As can be expected, mainstream transnational media provided extensive coverage of the NW episode as the latest manifestation of a black-and-white struggle for press freedom in China. However, it was widely understood inside the NW that the decision to withdraw the editorial was actually made in an act of self-censorship by NW editor-in-chief Huang Can, rather than being forced upon the newspaper by Tuo Zhen. This fact, however, was deliberately ignored by *outsiders* who construed an Orwellian scenario of party/state stretching its diabolic claws into the single most liberal newspaper in China. The word "Google" in those metaphors, slogans, or activities that came about in the wake of the Google's withdrawal from China three years earlier, now could be easily replaced by NW, as if freedom or democracy, like an enriched and all-round signifier, referred to different signified items or found its

incarnations in different contexts. If the Google withdrawal event held the transnational discursive bloc together in an embryonic form, then the *NW* incident marked, in a sense, the inside-out collaboration between foreign media and domestic liberal reporters and intellectuals, especially after their unparalleled discursive collaboration in the events leading to the downfall of Bo Xilai (Wang, 2012; Zhao, 2012) and in light of their attempt to influence the newly-installed CCP leadership under Xi Jinping. *NW*, *inside* China and now, while Google, *outside* China and then, have both served to produce a symbolic dichotomy: Google/*NW* is to democracy what China is to authoritarianism.

### **What a Dangerously Beautiful Jasmine Flower! The Unfinished Web-Based Flower Revolution or Random Flower Rallies?**

If Google's storm aroused Chinese netizens' passions for free communication and pushed them to boycott China's digital Panopticon, then the Twitter-initiated and (overseas) Web-dependent Jasmine Revolution was meant to engender the Chinese version of the Arab Spring. To be sure, the Chinese leadership was determined to keep China immune to the democratic contagion sweeping other parts of the world. The CCP Propaganda Department warned Chinese editors that they could "only use news dispatches by the official Xinhua News Agency" (Lam, 2011, p. 3) in their reporting of the uprisings in the Middle East. However, this did not prevent mobilizations for a Chinese Jasmine Revolution (CJR).

In fact, analogies were quickly made in the "Chinese Twitter Circle" (CTC) "between events in Cairo and the rise and fall of demonstrations in Tiananmen Square" in 1989. For instance, Teng Biao, the liberal activist lawyer, when seeing the video of a lone Egyptian protester standing before a truck, swiftly wrote on Twitter, "Must see! Egypt's Tiananmen movement, a warrior blocks a military vehicle!" (Osnos, 2011). Let me first explain the "Chinese Twitter Circle." Since Twitter was banned in September 2009, many domestic Chinese Twitter users simply found proxies to log onto it. They were composed of the IT elites, lawyers, public intellectuals, and rights activists (Wang, 2010) who were mainly male, middle-aged, well-educated, and living in relatively good conditions. It was through a series of rituals (e.g., crossing the "Great Firewall" [GFW] or criticizing the government) that the Chinese Twitter Circle gradually come into being. CTC was a more radical and larger-scale cyber-group, with its own political grandiosity and set of performative acts online. It first saw the potential of leveraging Twitter as *global* social media, and then seized the opportunity to build up a closely-tied, civilian cyber-community; share value orientations, common emotions, and ideological predispositions; and more profoundly, to turn online mobilization into offline social actions *within* China. Many members of the Chinese Twitter Circle had accumulated significant experience with organizing, mobilizing, and participating in varieties of safeguarding rights activities, and had grown into influential opinion leaders and public intellectuals. No wonder, then, that the Chinese Twitter Circle gained recognition and sponsorship from the Western states, media, corporations, and NGOs. Several Western government leaders had even officially met or invited some of them to attend the high-profile public events (Wang, 2010).

Consequently, it is undoubtedly logical that CTC, after the Arab Spring, would seize the moment and lead the Chinese Jasmine Revolution online. However, the revolution that erupted on February 17, 2011, was not initiated and organized by CTC members. That day, a Twitter user *@mimitree0* posted a tweet, "The date for the first assembly of the Chinese Jasmine Revolution has been set on the afternoon of

20 February 2011; the meeting places in major cities nationwide will be announced in advance on Boxun website" (He, 2011). After being forwarded thousands of times, the tweet was salvaged by Ding Xiao, a journalist with Free Asia Radio, and was made into a message. Then, tweets with the hashtag #cn220 began to spread like wildfire throughout Twitter and other websites overseas. A long article calling for the revolution was issued on the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy-supported Boxun website two days later. After that, Hua Ge, a Columbia University graduate in classics, together with an anonymous man, started the website Molihuaxingdong.blogspot.com, which was very soon redirected to molihua.org, paired with a new Twitter account @molihua\_org, and releasing the meeting places of CJR. Unlike CTC, the CJR group, which appealed for protest and called itself "The Initiators and Organizers of CJR," was a "network of 20 mostly highly educated, young Chinese with eight members inside China and 12 in more than half a dozen other countries" (Wong, 2011).

Despite information blockage by the GFW, on February 20, the McDonald's location in the central Wangfujing shopping district, one of the first 13 meeting places, actually attracted only a few tech-savvy protesters, but more than 100 foreign media outlets, including *TIME*, Reuters, and the AP were on the scene. It made the first rally appear overwhelming; nevertheless, most of the people gathering in the zone had simply been curious onlookers and spectators. To exaggerate the spectacularity of the scene, Taiwan's *Liberty Times* newspaper even deliberately chose an image of migrant workers holding "Jobs & Careers" placards and published it.

Furthermore, Chinese Web users, for their part, posted photos and a video of US Ambassador Jon Huntsman standing at the scene. Embassy spokesman Richard Buangan, sensitive to potential charges of intentional U.S. interference in Chinese domestic affairs, immediately stressed that Huntsman was merely "coincidentally" there with his family (AFP, 2011). However, it was well-known that prior to the first rally, Huntsman was thoroughly critical of Chinese censorship. He quoted Hillary Clinton's speech on Internet freedom in his official Weibo account, and after the second rally, he openly denounced the Chinese government for "roughing up" the people at the scene. Of course his presence, dressed in a jacket with a U.S. flag on it, was more an intentional foreign intervention, using diplomatic cachet, than a coincidence. In fact, on May 23, 2012, Huntsman was interviewed in New York by the Chair of the National Committee on United States-China Relations, Stephen A. Orlins, and he admitted that he had known there would be an assembly that day. According to him, he had planned to show up and to first understand the situation and then to write a report (Zi, 2012). More significantly, that CJR members would have disseminated the message of the U.S. ambassador's presence in a Chinese political protest or quoted the foreign media reports about it via their website or Twitter accounts as a manifestation of global solidarity for democracy is itself a telling manifestation of the transnationally coordinated nature of CJR.

Besides, lurking at the possible places of the first three rallies of CJR were the gleeful camera-wielding journalists, all from overseas media. The enthusiastic correspondents for ATV, the BBC, *The Telegraph*, ZDF, VOA, and DPA emerged at Wangfujing for the second rally, and several were seen being hauled off or unlawfully detained by Chinese security forces, but without real abuse (Zhang, 2011). The third-round action on March 5, code-named *Two Sessions* and drawing college students, was under heavy surveillance, stalked by enormous numbers of security personnel. In Shanghai, several Japanese reporters

and Janis Vougioukas from Stern were taken away by the police to a nearby basement and detained for nearly three hours (*Deutsche Welle*, 2011).

More severely, Chinese state power struck, as the whereabouts of several activists remained unknown. Most of them were human rights activists, lawyers, and pro-democracy dissidents, including Ran Yunfei, Hua Chunhui, Ding Mao, and Chen Wei, who had spread news about CJR via Twitter (Xia, 2011). They were imprisoned and charged with “subverting state power” or “deliberately spreading falsehood.” Ran Yunfei (@*ranyunfei*, with 73,102 followers by now), who once drafted *Declarations of Human Rights Online* in 2009 and was thus blacklisted as a thought-criminal, posted a blog entry nearly two weeks before CJR. In the article, Ran stated his unwillingness to be an otherwise leisurely and carefree citizen, thanks to living in a country where he could not “in good conscience merely live such a life”, and further declared that “criticizing the government and the system is to be a free person to fight for my own rights” (Ran, 2011). CDTimes translated the article into English, and based on it, Human Rights in China and *TIME* magazine profiled him as a moderate intellectual bare-handedly fighting against a heavy-handed “crackdown” by Chinese government (Ramzy, 2011).

On the one hand, against the story of righteous and temperate veteran activists swept out by the iron fists of Chinese government, and their voices rendered invisible or erased from the domestic media from February to at least June in 2011, advocacy groups Amnesty International and China Human Rights Defenders, diplomats, and Western governments expressed their serious concerns. These parties willingly acted as a sympathetic agents for those detainees, and further as “impartial” political brokers between them and Beijing. Correspondingly, Molihua.org opened up a new column *Detained Heroes* listing all the arrested, missing, or even imprisoned dissidents or activists during CJR period, whether related to CJR or not (CJR, 2011a). In particular, it paid extraordinary attention to Ai Weiwei, who had been taken into custody for tax evasion in April 2011. The “unimpeachable” lists of “victims” offered up incontrovertible evidence for human rights organizations and transnational media; and thus they purposely crammed the lists into a *continuum* running from the past into future, with the most democratic and libertarian societies on one end, and the most authoritarian but vulnerable societies on the other.

Meanwhile, the GFW and more tightened censorship made CJR quickly evaporate within cyberspace, as if it hadn’t existed at all in mainland China. Jasmine, an otherwise unhazardous word from the world-famous Chinese folk song, had then been a thorn in the Chinese government’s side. It was to be banished as much as possible: Don’t ask, don’t tell, and even don’t hold the flower in public. However, from outside the GFW were published and widely circulated the CJR manifesto, the Gandhiist tactics (e.g., taking a walk with smile once a week, no marching or chanting), places and codenames of the follow-up rallies, cell organizations and covert communications, via molihua.org and Twitter in an effort to forge an *outside-in* force to remonstrate against the increasingly deteriorated living conditions of the ordinary people in China, and merciless suppression of protestors. On its self-proclaimed official website, the revolutionary slogan was highlighted, “We Want to Eat, We Want to Live, We Want Justice, End One-party Dictatorship, Terminate Censorship,” a more-scrupulously but less-vociferously refined version of Charter08, the political manifesto that had called for liberal democracy in China. In their declarations during a virtual Q&A session on March 7–8, 2011, the CJR core members poignantly pointed out three social megatoxins persuasive in China: “[T]here is no stability, no harmony and China is always being on

the verge of destabilization.” Thus, what I call CJR Delusion was created: CJR (or smile campaign)—not Egyptian- or Libyan-style revolution—was determinedly identified to be the most efficacious and appropriate act of defiance; it was built over such long periods to critical mass, a flashpoint that a real revolution would then ignite unpredictably, like something viral, expanding uncontrollably and globally (CJR, 2011b). More paradoxically, CJR members sanctimoniously denied any connections with overseas organizations, institutions, or foreign governments, stating that most domestic participants had just voluntarily walked out and acted rationally for democracy. However, Örkesh Dölet, Wang Dan, the leader of the 1989 movements, and over 20 exiled China Democracy Party members opportunistically and blatantly joined in the then-not-yet expanding but evidently *inside-out* linked agora or protests in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and New York. It did render the CJR pronouncement untenable.

On the other hand, from March until the end of 2011, transnational media, together with independent blogs, commenced the anti-CCP chorus orchestrating China’s imminent collapse: Party/state had set up a “special high-level task force called the 6521Group” to extinguish possible flames of revolution sparked anywhere, a move attesting to the regime’s “hypersensitivity” (Dobson, 2011). At the same time, CCP conventionally viewed any protest “through the prism of the Tiananmen demonstrations and subsequent crackdown” (Swartz, 2011), which was its typical approach to internal stability. Furthermore, those foreign media questioned whether or not party/state, facing a menace to its domination from the core ethnic population who resented its government malfunction, power abuse, and misrepresentativeness, would “maintain its monopoly on power in a fully developed market economy” (Quiggin, 2011). In sum, China was much too “dynamic and volatile” for the party/state to hang on, and in the near future, whether in a small village or big city, an incident would expectedly “get out of control and spread fast” (Chang, 2011).

Reciprocally, a “Chinese Democratic Revolution Road Map” was profusely crystallized on the CJR official website at the very beginning of 2012, and delivered as a four-step approach: the greatness of an opposition, the second Tiananmen campaign, smashing and reshuffling the hierarchy, and then finally, the round-table session for constitutional democracy (Kong, 2012). Of more peculiar, albeit somewhat counterintuitive, importance are the CJR critiques on China’s middle class and elites for their inherent intellectual superiority and thus simplistic negation of democratic revolution. Instead, CJR concentrated on the deprived class and their “eating” and “living” rights. It is fair to say that CJR was more an “illusory young angry rebellion” with heartfelt subaltern sympathy, than a brilliant but ephemeral collective performance of middle class as I discussed elsewhere (2012, p. 61). However, it did not successfully mobilize the lower classes in China to participate in the scheduled revolutionary cause: Most of the ordinary people, much less China’s middle class, did not appear in the appointed rally places or preferred to be onlookers. Then, to a certain degree, people’s “doing nothing,” or their aloofness to CJR, made the CJR and its supportive allies’ chilling prediction all-too implausible that “any change in the political system” would solely throw China “into the abyss of internal disorder” (Jacobs, 2011). Nevertheless, CJR somehow subserviently pinned its hope on the Chinese elites (including CTC members) who would enlighten, instruct, mobilize, and *lead* both the middle class and the poor majority to someday complete the revolutionary cause (Kong, 2011). So, it made sense that Molihua.org nominated Ai Weiwei, already the darling of Western media, Li Chengpeng, Wang Lihong, and Boxun Web its CJR heroes for 2011. It added up to a simulacrum of *shared* democratization, with CJR members solely reveling in renovative bliss.

Ironically, the heroic activists the CJR members celebrated to be their vanguards either overtly distanced themselves from CJR or showed little to no interest in or regard for it. Li Chengpeng, a vigorous writer and commentator who, as an independent candidate, once ran for a member of a district legislature in Chengdu, May 2011, never mentioned CJR in his blog or Weibo. Wei Shi, founder of Boxun, in his interview with VOA on February 25, 2011, clarified that he knew nothing about CJR. Wang Lihong, in her Twitter account, acrimoniously doubted, "what's wrong with being caught or sacrificed for taking a walk" (@wlh8964, 2011). As for Ai Weiwei, what was truly odd was that there abruptly emerged, en masse, new accounts in Twitter right after the first CJR rally, heaping up malicious words against Twitter users who favored CJR and vowing that it was Ai Weiwei who pulled strings from behind the scenes. Soon, Ai posted a tweet disassociating himself from the event.

Since the first rally in February 2011, CJR had turned out to be a false alarm to the Chinese government, and a dying-out sparkle to the foreign media and Western countries. With only a handful or fewer people actually turning up and protesting, the imagined grand Chinese Jasmine Revolution was eventually divided into several separate random Chinese Jasmine Rallies. The American Enterprise Institute simply judged that China's version of the Arab Spring, its Jasmine Revolution, was "an abject failure" (Swartz, 2011). Even so, it could be concluded that many things—the domino effect the Arab Spring has generated, the hopeful expectations for Chinese "political reforms" or "democratization" in overseas media and NGOs, the increasingly intensified social and class conflicts in neoliberal marketized China, a small but determined cohort of young Chinese and their illocutionary or even perlocutionary acts for anti-governmental social mobilization via Twitter, and China's stability-maintaining policy and censorship system—all *intertwined* to manufacture the much-hyped CJR, to be exact. This is remarkable for a "movement" that would eventually devolve to a one-man show with, indeed, a kind of impracticality and rhetoric aggrandizement.

Tellingly, the U.S. and European governments, the foreign media, the remnants of the 1989 movement, and the range of human rights associations, all were solid allies to CJR. For them, CJR was just one of the many ways to outside-in instigate a popular aversion to CCP domination. It is within this context that we could understand why the first three allies have become such outspoken libertarian proponents (through overseas media) in support of the persecuted democratic martyrs in China. Also, the more vulnerable members of this alliance were inclined to dramatize the Pygmalion effect of Twitter: *Several* informally networked people were happily mistaking themselves for the ones highly expected by *many* domestic people to bring "democracy" and "freedom" to China. Living virtually in the same Twitter-land, they were running together toward a convergence with the liberal democratic discourse which is prevalent in the United States.

However, the "revolutionary" CTC members stayed calm toward, or were more critical about, CJR: "CJR is a ridiculous farce, a copycat and a prank" (@zuola, 2011), or "it is just a big flash mob" (@mozhixu, 2011, see Wang, 2010). Even their dispassionate manner did not shake the CJR members' enthusiasm at all. What essentially distinguishes CTC and CJR members, due to their dissimilar socioeconomic backgrounds and thus divergent assessments of where China is heading next, lies in their different ideas and tactics of struggling for democracy. CTC's focus is on directly confronting the government, participating in and organizing rights protection activities *within* China, while CJR is

consistently embarking on flash-like rallies or non-violent demonstrations from *outside*. For CTC, CJR was a more or less hot-headed and immature social activity, a minor but referential deviance to its rational and elitist road to democracy, and an unnecessary and annoying bit of spray before the true sea tide came.

All in all, CJR, the small blooming bud which the Twitterized liberal elites in China could not love, and even only looked on indifferently while they tended to the people's real cause, was still calculatedly irrigated by the transnational coalition, and under unalloyed and constant care from CJR young members. Finally, though, that would not be enough, and this revolutionary bud would be doomed to wither away before blossom, for its lack of endemic nutrients.

### **Chongqing Drama or Chongqing Model? Bo Xilai's Fall and the Performative Transnational Liberal Alliance's Show**

Despite the vehement disagreements between CJR and CTC members, those once-shining cyber-diasporas both allied with the transnational media to promote their democratization cause in China. In a way, the democracy they strongly believe in is the one bound up with the logic that capitalist markets would have liberated post-Maoist China from authoritarianism. Necessarily, they assume the "sacred" job of "enlightening" the majority of the ordinary Chinese people. In most events as mentioned above, they were discontented with, and even disdained the ordinary people for their disappointingly inactive behavior. However, they did often appeal to the lower classes by paying lip-service to the idea of resolving the basic livelihood problems; to their disillusionment, though, those mobilizations were always brought to naught. There is a clear disjuncture between the political aims of the Chinese libertarians and the popular demands.

Significantly, Bo Xilai, a once-rising political rock star in China who had been a member of the transnationally-linked elite class, intentionally responded to popular discontents generated by neoliberal marketization with his Chongqing Model, launched in 2007. Contrary to the Chinese liberals' appeals of "wanting to eat, wanting to live, wanting justice" (which did not truly reach the ordinary people and turned out to be a hollow claim, fraudulent political marketing, or worse, a bald-faced lie), Bo's Chongqing Model aimed at achieving greater social equality, and ensured the effective implementation of protecting the basic rights of the disenfranchised. Bo's policies in Chongqing included "the enlarged public sector" and improved social welfare (e.g., cheap public rental housing for immigrant workers, house prices under control) on the one hand, and focused on the left-leaning law-and-order campaign against "the intertwined forces of party-state officials, private businesses, and criminals" on the other (Zhao, 2012; see also Cui, 2011; and Huang, 2011). In large part, Bo and his Chongqing Model undermined the vested interests of his past allies, provoked panic among the public intellectuals and elites, and challenged the Western fetishism for capitalist liberal democracy. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the Chongqing Model encountered fierce oppositions from Chinese liberals—paired with their foreign media allies who, from the onset, have been hostile to any hopes for a socialist alternative in China.

The making of the *inside-out* coalition relied on the rising of the domestic Twitter clone, Sina Weibo. Because Twitter and Facebook were banned in 2009, most Chinese liberals who were and still are

CTC members, took to Weibo en masse as a means of anti-government-protests in China. Compared to Twitter, Weibo, notwithstanding its being a sharply-circumscribed space due to the capillaries of China's censorship system, is more convenient to directly log onto. As such, it has been adopted as a sharp dagger to stab immediately into the government. Furthermore, the same goal for democracy aligns these Weibo-using liberals globally with transnational media, wittingly or unwittingly, collaborating to Twitterize Weibo in an attempt to fashion China after the image of liberal democracy.

During the Bo Xilai scandal, the world has witnessed a famously twisty, plotted drama where a Communist leadership; right-wing scholars, lawyers, and correspondents; and anti-Communist transnational media and overseas observers intimately allied to launch an anti-Bo/Chongqing campaign. On February 6, 2012, a post emerged abruptly on Weibo, saying that Wang Lijun, former police chief in Chongqing, had fled to the U.S. consulate in Chengdu for asylum. Its ripple effect for Chinese politics as a whole proved to be unprecedentedly dramatic and voyeuristically subversive. Based on what I have tracked and collected online from February to July 2012, Weibo had almost become a carnivalesque-machine, staging and restaging dispersed and fragmented conspiracy theories, dramas, sagas, anti-Bo choruses, voices of neo-liberalism, intellectual fabrications, and media stories.

Until early March 2012, the Weibo-sphere was congested with a vast array of explosive and rampant updates, conjectures, rumors, lies, and gossip passed down through the grapevine. Miscellaneous reports from transnational media (mainly *The New York Times* and WSJ) and overseas Chinese websites, and their textual discontinuities with Wang and Bo's invisibility in party organs, prompted Weibo users, as thrilled bricoleurs, to adapt, insinuate, incorporate, blurrily mix, and gradually to piece together a panorama of a palace coup in contemporary China. To those users, the truth about Wang and Bo still remained hidden in plain sight. In most liberals' stories, Bo was described to be a domineering and sinful villain right out of central casting, while Wang was set up as a sort of John McLane in the Die Hard series, a lone hero who fled, driving overnight, desperately vowing vengeance against Bo. Remarkably, some anti-China foreign websites, including Boxun and Epochtimes, have been unblocked intermittently within China since February 2012, while several taboo words, such as Jiang Weiping, a journalist for Ta Kung Pao who had once been arrested for criticizing Bo, could be searched through Baidu, only to provide "a conduit for more rumors to flow into China" (Wang, 2012). It was nearly impossible to figure out, beneath the temporary "Speech Spring," how information flowed and the agenda was set among factions inside the broad alliance of the CCP; transnational media; and Chinese sites, social media, and domestic market-driven press. But those forces, inside or outside China, collectively worked out a postmodern Normandy landing-style tale.

At his press conference at the closing of the National People's Congress (NPC) meeting on March 14, 2012, then Premier Wen Jiabao allusively toned up his criticism of the Chongqing Model by pointing to the Cultural Revolution. Wen's remarks were tenuously and biasedly counterposed by Weibo users against Bo's previous Cultural Revolution-styled slogan, "Struggle with devils, do not compromise with power," made at a press conference on March 9 held by the Chongqing delegation at the NPC. Echoing Wen, right-wing intellectuals and lawyers found more justification to intensify and upgrade their critiques of the Chongqing Model. There was the unusually massive muckraking and crusading against the dark side of Chongqing's Strike Black campaign, and another common approach was to highlight Chongqing authorities

themselves found to be trampling on the law. A March 20 report on Chongqing Government debts of up to RMB500 billion by Xinhua Agency, then reprinted by Apple Daily, MASTV, and Epochtimes, was forwarded widely. It appeared that liberal elites leveraged the Hu-Wen leadership to create an overwhelming public opinion squashing both Bo and the Chongqing Model.

There was more yet to come. On March 24, 2012, Yang Haipeng from *Caijing* magazine and Chu Chaoxin, a reporter for *NW*, simultaneously dropped a bombshell report, noting on Weibo that Wang and Bo must have got involved in murdering a British businessman named Neil Heywood, who had befriended Bo's son Bo Guagua and wife Gu Kailai. In two days, Reuters, WSJ, FT, the BBC, and *The Guardian* all reported on the British Foreign Office having recently urged the Chinese government to re-scrutinize the Heywood case. Later on, numerous celebrity Weibo users referenced and highlighted the case, metaphorically exclaiming about the *foreign* straw that broke the *domestic* camel's back. Hence, a linear chain emerged that drew a line along the course of "Neil Heywood→Bo Guagua→Gu Kailai→Wang Lijun→Bo Xilai." The implication was that the link between each person was causal, not casual; this was not just in the more thematic, derivative fashion of a "speculation/foreign media framing/witching hunting online" complex to comprise its targets. It would be more accurately understood as interlocking or parallel chains meant to very directly bring down Bo Xilia himself.

What would come, would come in due time. It was strange and even a little hair-raising that the decision to ostracize Bo from the Central Committee and its Politburo was broadcast on the CCTV-News channel at midnight on April 10. Thus the official notification, the rumors around the Internet-sphere, and all the uncorroborated messages spread on Twitter, overseas Chinese sites, and transnational media reports ultimately and spectacularly met. For foreign media, focus had to be resolutely shifted from the power struggle inside the CCP to finer details or key issues around the murdered Heywood and the suspected Bo family members. Their coverage turned its attention to affairs, scandals of the purged Bo and his wife, the privileged and flashy lifestyle and influential social networks of his son Bo Guagua, and the widening wealth of the couple and their relatives. The WSJ (mostly through its reporter Jeremy Paige) and *The Telegraph*, which had previously stayed silent on the Bo event, were the two most indefatigable and prominent muckrakers. Liberal opinion leaders who could access and read the English reports, for the first time posted all those reports in translation onto Weibo, without encountering heavy censorship.

Since September 2012, the party organ system has gradually replaced the transnational media and Web-based rumor machine to become the only source of official verdicts on Wang and Bo (Zhao, 2012), in a vain attempt to create an apparent political cohesion and stability, and to add cheer to the then-upcoming party congress. Meanwhile, as Wang and Bo were subsumed under the charges of criminal offense and violation of party disciplines, domestic liberal media could more rightfully condemn Chongqing and the former Chongqing government officials when Bo was definitely down. After Wang was sentenced to 15 years in prison on September 24, 2012, *Nandu Weekly*, a sister paper of *NW*, made a splash by publishing the special issue *Raking up Wang* in December 2012, reverentially detailing Wang's temperament and bearing, his close ties to and then conflicts with Bo and his family, and to what degree he got involved in the Heywood case. However, it's worthwhile to note that ordinary people in Chongqing remain absent in those reports, while some trial particulars come from confidential sources, to whom reporters are not usually able to gain access. One wonders how *NW* got to access to these reports.

On the one hand, during the time when the Weibo-based collage of the Chongqing drama was evolving into a ceaseless transnational, even global, chorus of criticism against Bo and the Chongqing Model, the online enthusiasm to exterminate the Chongqing Model reached a fever pitch, as did the rhetoric used to contribute to that goal. The logic of this dominant liberal rhetoric sought to turn "Mao Zedong," "Cultural Revolution," "Red," or "Chongqing" into Schmittist descriptors for differentiating themselves from the enemy. By doing so, an otherwise serious discussion might devolve into an all-out brawl, a provocation tantamount to a formidable Web-based Cultural Revolution. However, the irony here is not only that it is exactly liberals themselves and their vast number of followers who created this anarchic frenzy online, but also that "their victory in quashing Bo relied on the Chinese state's massive clampdown on leftist media and communication" (Zhao, 2012).

On the other hand, senior officials inside the CCP leadership, who expectedly required anonymity, were the stories' primary sources. Along with the liberals' reviews, these anonymous reports made up the central parts of stories for transnational media. In turn, liberals re-narrated, tailored, reproduced, and disseminated via Weibo those original reports and insider information, inverting the actual backroom politics and betrayals into a common call for political transparency, democratization, and thus anti-socialism. The bidirectional flow "revolutionized" the climate of domestic public opinion, precipitated Bo's downfall to a certain extent, and signified the power of the transnational political and discursive alliance within Chinese politics. Nonetheless, the struggle for socialism, the word that was set to counter the uptaking of "democracy" by Chinese liberals, as Zhao commented, had been "actually absent from the great *mélange* of" the Weibo-driven transnational media circus, which exactly constituted "the most crucial part of the story" (Zhao, 2012).

The situation concerning Chongqing is similar to what Trotsky referred to as "the Soviet Thermidor" in the Stalinist 1930s, when "the bureaucracy enjoy[ed] its privileges under the form of an abuse of power," dependent "upon the basis of a workers' state torn by the antagonism between an organized and armed Soviet aristocracy and the unarmed toiling masses" (1972, pp. 277, 279). A background fact necessary to fully understand the Chongqing Model is that the party/state unapologetically embraces the project of market reform and integration into the global capitalist system, and hence regards "bourgeois, urban middle class, civil servants and employees in state-owned enterprises" (China Worker, 2011) as forming the new basis for the increasingly intense renewal in state ideology.

Only against this background can one judge the importance of the Chongqing Model and comprehend the making of the transnational discursive alliance and its fierce attacks on this model. On the personal plane, it highlights differences within party leadership around the development path for China, and hence the growing internal conflicts. For most of the foreign media, it is nothing but the leverage for Bo Xilai to re-enter into the Politburo Standing Committee. On the practical plane, the social equity advocated by the Chongqing authorities, along with related initiatives, or what Wang Shaoguang called "Chinese Socialism 3.0" in Chongqing's policies, all demonstrate an ambitious correction to market authoritarianism. The many facets of this pivot to market-dominated thinking are truly *fleurs du mal* for a nominally socialist China that has precisely nothing to do with its people. The Chongqing Model makes this visible, in a crushing blow to the state-backed crony capitalist groups. In sum, the Chongqing Model is not

one of contingent idiosyncrasy: It is a vessel neither exclusively shared nor easily broken by the transnational alliance that tossed the model's pro-people redistributive policies into the trash or belittled them as populist ways for Bo to realize his politically audacious careerism. Rather, this is the first time that a local government, unapproved by the Central government, has put itself into the political limelight. It has done so by resurrecting the communist revolutionary traditions and socialist legacies of how to reactivate and re-forge the class consciousness and subjects of worker-peasant alliance, "a phrase that has virtually been forgotten in the Chinese communication studies literature" (Zhao, 2010, p. 549). It's doing this constructs a political-economic heterotopia, a third way which is a desperate attempt at socialist modernization under capitalist siege. That is exactly the last thing the transnational alliance wants to see.

### **The Transnational Discursive Alliance Expanding: Dreams of China, but Whose Dreams?**

From the Jasmine Revolution to the anti-Bo campaign, from guerilla warfare for democracy on Twitter to overt defiance against the CCP and any attempts within the CCP to renew socialism, from showing support for Google to protesting with NW, intervention by foreign media organizations and Western governments always make internal Chinese political incidents into the transnational events, thereby seeking to bracket China into the global democratization wave. The transnational discursive bloc is comprised of both outside and inside forces. The outside forces include the U.S. government, transnational business corporations, foreign journalists, and human rights advocates. From within, this bloc include domestic liberal reporters, media professionals, public intellectuals, and neoliberal-oriented state officials, a group who, through BBSs, blogs, Twitter, and its copycat Weibo, conscientiously "recognize themselves as part of global, polyglot" bourgeois "collectivity", as Dan Schiller observed in his contribution to this special section (Schiller, 2013). In those four outlets (and more), they make up a mutually supportive political, ideological, and discursive network, both to exert a powerful impact on Chinese politics, and to promote their dreams of capitalist liberal democracy and constitutionalism in the struggle for the future of China.

Ironically, what the transnational ally of today refers to as freedom or democracy is the same thing as what they denounce and despise as totalitarianism: The principles of democracy, or the demands for free speech and autonomous civil society, have so far "become the englobing principle of modernity viewed as an historical and global totality" (Rancière, 2009, p. 12). In a further irony, in the Chinese liberals' eyes, the CCP's historically articulated idea of "people's democracy" is equivalent to Schumpeter and Tocqueville's "tyranny of the majority," and is what would drag China back into chaos or obscurantism.

Furthermore, the transnational alliance are inclined to reduce China's future to some arbitrary formula of public sphere or freedom of the press, suggesting that democratic reform should be in coincidence with economic reform, especially with the collapse of communism worldwide. Accordingly, the alliance ignores that neoliberalism is one of the real causes of "the deterioration of social conditions," disassociating it from the "fast growing inequality in the distribution of income and pauperization for the majorities" (Amin, 2012). When Fukuyamaist thirst for "middle class-society," or a "new world order" causes an emotional resonance in the transnational alliance, the worker-peasant alliance—the constitutional foundation for the "democratic dictatorship of the people" in Maoist China—is reduced to the

subaltern class. The dispossession of these people, once the very foundation of the People's Republic of China, are now seen as the necessary cost of capitalistic modernization, with people's democracy supplanted by civil rights, and rule by the people by rule of law.

If every effort to give the lower classes equal rights and social justice, or to pursue economic democracy, is absolutely close to the last thing the transnational alliance thinks of, while the omnipotent and monstrous power of the state that is a priori ascribed as "the villain of the piece" is their political inclination, then the transnational alliance, as radically as it tries to be the dissensus to the party/state, turns into a high-end club which ends up "being no more than a defense of particular group interests in always *singular* struggles" (Rancière, 2009, p. 48). The key question remains: Whom will they, and can they, represent?

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