新聞、政治、社運與數字媒體

對談人：蘭斯・班尼特 (W. Lance Bennett) 、邱林川、史安斌
統　稿：邱林川、史安斌
翻　譯：張曉

蘭斯・班尼特教授
(Prof. W. Lance Bennett)

「互聯網並不能解決人類所有的問題，甚至無法解決大部份人類傳播的問題。然而，有更多的民眾能夠在今天發聲，這樣的傳播是嘈雜的、不平等的、充斥謠言且並不總是明智的、充分知情的。但是，我們亦見證了科技的發明使得群體組織更為良好、更有智慧、更具決斷力，這些都是非凡卓越的發展。」

邱林川，香港中文大學新聞與傳播學院副教授。研究興趣：信息與通訊技術、社會階級、全球化、中國社會、傳播政策。電郵：jacklqiu@cuhk.edu.hk
史安斌，清華大學新聞與傳播學院副院長及教授。研究興趣：媒介文化研究、跨文化傳播、全球傳播、新聞與政治。電郵：shianbin@mail.tsinghua.edu.cn

Dialogue

News, Politics, Social Movements, and Digital Media

Discussants: W. Lance BENNETT, Jack L. QIU, Anbin SHI
Editor: Jack L. QIU, Anbin SHI
Translator: Xiao ZHANG

Abstract

Reflecting on his scholarly journey that has lasted more than three decades, Professor W. Lance Bennett discusses his approach to political communication research, especially with regard to news, social movements, and digital media. From a global and multidisciplinary perspective, Bennett shares deep insights on the paradoxes of journalism, the new logic of connective action, the future of democracy, and important issues for research on Chinese media systems such as Weibo and citizen journalism. This dialogue is rich with empirical observation, critical thinking, and most updated methodological lessons including how to build a team of Big Data researchers. It offers a rare chance for readers to learn directly from one of the most achieved political communication scholars in the world, a true pioneer in studying digital media,

Jack L. QIU (Associate Professor). School of Journalism and Communication, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Research Interests: Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs), social class, globalization, Chinese society, communication policy

Anbin SHI (Associate Dean & Professor). School of Journalism and Communication, Tsinghua University, China. Research Interests: media and cultural studies, intercultural communication, global communication, press and politics

politics, and society. It also serves a companion for the award-winning article, "The Logic of Connective Action", by Bennett and Segerberg, whose Chinese version is published immediately following this Dialogue.

Citation of this article: Qiu, J. L., & Shi, A. B. (Eds.). (2013). News, politics, social movements, and digital media. *Communication & Society*, *26*, 1–31.

蘭斯·班尼特教授簡介

蘭斯·班尼特(W. Lance Bennett)現為美國華盛頓大學 (University of Washington) 政治傳播學教授及傳播與公民參與中心負責人(www. engagedcitizen.org)。該中心致力於探究傳播過程與科技如何提升公民對於社會生活、政治及全球事務的參與度。

班尼特教授的著作與演講均廣泛關注公民生活中的媒介與信息系統。他的研究領域包括：公民及公眾生活理論、媒介與政府關係、全國及跨國倡導的傳播組織、網絡社會的興起、數字媒體對公共空間的改變。

他曾獲美國政治學會(American Political Science Association)授予以賽亞·德叟拉·普爾講座榮譽(Ithiel de Sola Pool Lectureship)及穆雷·艾德曼傑出事業成就獎(Murray Edelman Distinguished Career Award)；並曾獲烏普薩拉大學(Uppsala University)授予榮譽博士學位；也曾擔任瑞典奧洛夫·帕爾梅客座教授(Olof Palme Visiting Professorship)；曾獲美國國家傳播協會(National Communication Association)授予傑出學者獎(Distinguished Scholar Career Award)。

班尼特教授的近期著作為《連結性行動的邏輯：數字媒體和個人化的抗爭性政治》(亞歷山卓·塞格柏格合著)，由劍橋大學出版社於2013年出版。

LB: 蘭斯·班尼特
QS: 邱林川、史安斌

QS: 作為一名政治學家，您是如何涉入到傳播與媒介研究領域的？您為何認為這一知識領域具有吸引力，特別是——鑒於您的作品如《新聞：政治的幻象》(1983 年第五版，於 2005 年譯為中文) 在過去數年中深具影響力——政治與新聞之間的交叉地帶，以及您與塞格博格博士合著的獲獎新作中所顯現的社會運動與數字科技之間的交叉地帶？

LB: 我的早期研究興趣是語言、符號主義與意識形態。於我而言，政

治就是用有影響力的語言、符號和儀式去激勵民眾追隨領袖、做出犧牲、採取行動。作為一名青年學者的我對於一些社會學及人類學作品印象深刻，尤其是例如塗爾幹(Durkheim)、韋伯(Weber)、馬文·哈利斯(Marvin Harris)及維特·特納(Victor Turner)等學者的作品。民眾在社會中創造出超越個體與在地生活之外的意義。這一過程如何運作一直吸引着我。

然而，當時並沒有很多政治學學者對此類議題產生興趣。而我非常幸運能夠與經典著作《政治的符號使用》(*The Symbolic Uses of Politics*) 一書的作者穆雷·艾德曼 (Murray Edelman) 共事。並且，我的博士導師魯伯特·雷恩 (Robert Lane) 引導我去理解意識形態如何存在於普通人的日常生活中。我在學習期間深受哈羅德·拉斯韋爾 (Harold Lasswell) 等早期政治學家的影響，拉斯韋爾闡釋了個體人格與偉大政治符號之間的聯繫。

從研究院畢業，我希望能夠對這些傳統有所貢獻；但與此同時，政治學界被量化研究及具體問題所主導，對此類宏大議題的開放空間很有限。我留意到大多數提出我所關注問題的人都轉向傳播領域。我於是也轉向傳播，出版了有關政治儀式和敘事在政治過程中的重要性等早期作品，以及《新聞：政治的幻象》。

《新聞：政治的幻象》建立在美國新聞與政治間關係悖論的基礎之上。我留意到儘管宣稱自己為世界最自由的新聞媒介系統，美國的日常新聞大多充斥着政府官員提供給記者的訊息。當新聞媒體報導故事的另一面時，往往是來自其他政黨的言論。許多議題並未為新聞所報導，而新聞報導中的許多故事亦並未超越當權者希望傳達的訊息。在其他研究中，我發現新聞媒介系統大多根據政府官員指定的方向去報導新聞。就政府在何種程度上能夠代表公民利益、新聞媒介系統如何促進公共問責而言，國家與國家間存在重大差異。

近年來美國新聞系統充斥着不實的政治宣傳，以致許多公眾開始對其失去信心。與此同時，互聯網提供了多種信息渠道以及可供公民就有興趣的事物進行交流的方式。這些變化促使我們召集一些學者共同研究《媒介化政治》(*Mediated Politics*)，這本書亦

有中文譯著版。在這本書中我們試圖關注一系列趨勢：新聞如何變化、青年為何轉向如政治喜劇等其他信息形式以及互聯網如何為探討議題及創造公共輿論提供新方式。

鑒於世人已經開始了數字媒體的嘗試，我將我的研究聚焦於人們如何使用互聯網與社交媒體以分享信息、組織民眾運動。在我關注世界各地的民眾運動、並研究美國的佔領華爾街運動時，我發現傳播科技正使得一種新的公眾輿論與政治組織成為可能。這一想法成為了考量立足於傳播網絡的新政治邏輯的基礎。這是刊登於貴刊的我與亞歷山卓·塞格柏格 (Alexandra Segerberg) 合著的〈連結性行動的邏輯〉一文的中心思想。我們將《連結性行動的邏輯》寫成專書(劍橋大學出版社，2013)，書中將添加許多實證研究到我們的理論模型，並關注網絡中的權力與組織。我希望此書在將來亦能夠被譯成中文。

在見證數字媒體如何改變人們的交流方式以外，我對於探究傳播如何成為社會及政治組織的一部分亦相當有興趣。這正在改變核心傳播範式。對於傳播領域大部分的歷史而言，聚焦傳播意味着聚焦大眾媒介、新聞與信息系統、媒介效果、以及訊息的傳送與接收。現在，我們必須添加理論和研究方法以探究作為社會組織的傳播。當然，曼威·卡斯特等學者早已指出研究方向。我目前的興趣就是延此方向去探究網絡公眾如何形成，及他們如何採取行動。

QS: 從您的眾多作品中我們體會到您有進步的政治價值觀且秉持支持社會變遷的規範性立場。然而與此同時，這並未阻礙您嚴謹的實證研究與批判思考。您是如何做到的呢？

LB: 我認為規範性觀點應當用實證的方式檢驗，以顯示它們是否有根據抑或需要改變。舉例來說，我對於現今許多各國政府官員採用使環境與經濟對立的政策框架感到擔憂。這意味着當經濟狀況不理想時，用以幫助環境的政策總會受到責難。而當經濟再度增長時，商業壓力總會違背可能削減利潤、延緩經濟增長的環境政策。將經濟與環境視為利益衝突兩方的常見框架也是一種規範性立場。這是一種由有力支持者及大量宣傳所推動的規範。當我們

以學者身份研究此類傳播時，我們可以超越單純的描述，去探究它是否對大家有利。此類傳播是否有利社會？如果將經濟與環境視為利益衝突的兩方，由此導致更大的問題應如何處理？我們怎樣可以針對這些議題採用不同的傳播方式？

如果我們的工作中沒有一些規範性的指導方針，那麼將無法判定社會中不同機構與系統的狀況如何。政府是否良好表現？新聞媒介是否良好表現？我們將如何得知？

這一普遍方法適用於我所研究的大部分課題。例如，探索世界各地的抗議網絡需要價值判斷。這些抗議是否有效？如果抗議有效，我們如何確知？此類評估與基於意識形態好惡的判斷是不同的。我對於人們是否創造出有效的系統、以及他們是否可以利用傳播改善這些系統更為有興趣。

QS：現今許多人都在談論「大數據」。但很少聽到針對如何組建一支出色的「大數據」研究團隊（例如包括社會科學家與軟件工程師）的討論。您怎麼看如何組建跨學科團隊？

LB：這對於傳播研究而言是一個相當有趣的挑戰。如何組建適合分析「大數據」的跨學科團隊？我認識一位傳播領域的同事，他甚至尋找到來自物理學領域的研究夥伴。許多科學領域已經開始學習如何處理「大數據」。像他們一樣擁有足夠設備及程式技巧，這對傳播學而言相當重要。我早期對「大數據」的興趣源於發展連結性行動理論及研究大型公共網絡的需求。為此我在學校不同院系尋求幫助。我找到研究計算機專業人士、信息學、技術設計、甚至還有藝術專業裏擅長運用科技手段的同事。這些同事中許多人也想研究基於微博和社交媒體的「大數據」資料庫。

而問題在於計算機專業人士或信息學家所採用的方法通常與傳播學者存在差異。他們使用一種截然不同的科學語言並使用不同方法。這意味着當團隊一起工作時，他們必須學習如何在不同的科學語言及研究方法之間轉換。這可能相當有趣，也可能相當令人沮喪。如果傳播學者能夠主導研究項目並且使用他們的理論框架來引導程式人員及技術團隊，情況會容易許多。這一領導能力要求傳播學者學習如何獲得數據、如何組建數據庫、如何將理

論問題轉化為具體的實證操作。這通常意味着發展新理論與新方法，也是非常令人興奮的。

我目前的研究項目之一涉及探究美國佔領華爾街運動中的組織。我們在推特 (Twitter) 平台——一種在美國與歐洲非常流行的 (類似中國微博) 的微型博客平台——建立了一個數據組。我們獲取了六千萬條推特消息。我們將如何處理？我們需要建立一個有關這種社交媒體網絡如何與其他參與抗議的網絡相互聯繫、以及網絡內部如何相互聯繫的模型。許多研究聚焦於微博客消息的內容，但這些內容並不容易理解。我們決定不去分析消息內容，因為它對於群眾如何被組織並不重要。取而代之的是，我們關注人們如何使用在消息中所添加的用以指向不同人群的標籤 (#)。我們亦決定關注人們在信息中插入的指向其他網站的鏈接。這涉及到建立一種新的編碼方式以便將我們所發現的不同鏈接中的內容歸類。最後，我們創造了一種簡單的模型來闡釋指向性標籤 (#) 與網站鏈接如何在佔領華爾街運動的不同時間點發揮作用，組織群眾。

日後我們將見證更多傳播學者從事大數據研究。這將改變我們的研究理念、研究方法以及展示研究發現的方式。

QS: 像在大多數社會中一樣，中國的大眾話語認為互聯網正朝着有益的方向改變世界。您是否認同互聯網，尤其是社交媒體，會帶來一個政治的美好新世界？

LB: 互聯網並無好壞之分。對於互聯網，民眾、商界、政府有許多相互衝突的使用方式。多數政府利用互聯網蒐集有關公民的信息。近期美國捲入了國家安全局披露政府從世界各地的電郵和電話中蒐集信息，並迫使互聯網服務供應商洩露其客戶資料的醜聞。這些並非正面的發展。

從商界的角度出發，如今企業相當瞭解我們的身分及行為。這正在改變產品的市場營銷方式和我們作為消費者的行動方式。

公民則面臨着決定如何運用其傳播權力的挑戰。例如，在一個巨大的網絡中不易探知其他民眾的身分或所分享信息的可信度。謠言所引發的公眾反應也並不總是正面的。

　　　　另一方面，有許多跡象顯示人們能夠以積極的方式使用科技網絡：與他人分享實際問題、迅速應對危機、提出重要的公共問題、以及就多樣的議題組建團體。在世界的許多地方，手機是公民所擁有過的最強大的工具。新的軟件系統在許多日常問題上為公民提供幫助，涉及健康、交通、公共安全、從政府機構獲取基本信息與服務多個方面。這些工程許多由非政府組織(NGOs)開發，提供交互技術以幫助普通民眾分享有關健康問題、暴力、犯罪、氣候、食品短缺以及許多不同生活領域的各地政府並不瞭解的信息。這些技術網絡和群眾不同，他們正是我們在文中所探討的組織激活型網絡的範例。

　　　　當然，基於技術激活的連結性行動的廣大群眾在當今世界日益普遍。雖然抗議行動早就存在，但有所不同的是，現今人們可以更為清楚的交流訊息以及更為有效的組織行動，而並不需要正式的組織(正式組織在許多地方引起更大花費或者危險)。

QS: 政治極端主義的興起在Web 2.0時代是否無可避免？

LB: 政治極端主義長期存在，在網絡尚未誕生階段已然存在。然而，網絡的確提供了一個幫助其發展並影響更多民眾的平台。在美國，關於奧巴馬總統的種族主義圖像在網絡廣泛流傳，觸及相當多的民眾。對部份民眾而言這些圖像顯得幽默，但另外一些民眾卻因此受到相當嚴重的冒犯和傷害。這個問題關鍵在於社會如何決斷，去控制此類極端主義傳播。

　　　　網絡在種族或宗教紛爭升級中通常扮演着重要角色。其中一個更為著名的實例是，有關先知穆罕默德的卡通令許多回教徒深感冒犯。這些圖像因為網絡而散播到全世界，並引發巨大衝突；而事件如果發生在早些年，或許兩極分化不會發展得如此嚴重。

　　　　大眾媒介可以被控制，但控制互聯網則更為困難。例如在瑞典，一個反移民黨派(瑞典民主黨)已經進入了議會。他們的2010年度選舉廣告因太過極端及具冒犯性而被禁止在電視上播出。然而這些廣告卻很快被發佈到互聯網上，並可能因此獲得了(相較於在電視上播出而言)更多的觀眾及討論。

QS: 您是否見證了 1999 年反世貿組織的「西雅圖之役」？發生於世紀之交的數字化網絡行動 (digitally networked action, 簡稱 DNA) 與近期的數字化網絡行動 (例如西班牙「憤怒者」運動、「阿拉伯之春」和「佔領華爾街」運動) 相比較，有何不同或相似之處？

LB: 針對世貿組織的西雅圖之役發生時，我正在意大利參加學術會議。因此，我通過電視新聞觀察了數日的抗議行動。回家後，我聯絡了數位曾經參與其中的朋友，然後開始了一項巨大的工程——訪問不同類型的參與者。有關這個項目的訪問可在世貿組織歷史項目網站 (the WTO History Project website，網址為 http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/) 上查閱。隨着訪問取得進展，非常清晰的顯示出這是一個新型抗議組織的早期範例。兩個非常有趣的變化日漸清晰。

　　第一，許多不同的群組聚集並決定圍繞他們的不同點展開工作，以使得主要的抗議活動成為表達全球經濟變化進程中的多種議題。不同主題社會運動的日益融合態勢，使得人們在表達個人意見時無須加入群組立場。政治個人化已成為今天我們所見的數字化網絡行動的核心基礎。

　　西雅圖抗議活動的第二個有趣之處在於運動分子藉以分享直接報導、信息及其他內容，創出自己的數字媒體平台。其中最具影響力的是獨立媒體 (Indymedia)，它已發展為一個連接全世界超過 100 個分支機構的開源系統 (open source system)。

　　自反世貿抗議行動起，數字化網絡行動的發展與種類，在短時間內取得令人印象深刻的進展。許多人現在用的商業科技在 10 年前並不存在，包括視頻網站 (Youtube)、臉書 (Facebook)、推特 (Twitter) 這幾個對於發生在中東、歐洲及美國的許多起義行動至關重要的平台。今天，幾乎任何人都可以嘗試啟用社交網絡以吸引人們對某些議題的注意。這些努力大多不成功，但它們中的一部分創造了使得參與者能夠協調活動、並與世界各地受眾相連系的緻密組織網絡。

QS: 現在，公民與非政府組織可以直接互動，而無需通過大眾媒介或其他傳統機構。這對全球的社會運動到底有何啟示？

LB: 我們針對使用科技以激活社會網絡的歐洲非政府組織的研究有個

令人驚奇的發現：這種行為實際上增加了在大眾媒介中製造新聞的機率（這些發現在《連結性行動的邏輯》一書的第四章中有所介紹）。非政府組織在全球政治系統中的角色日益重要是顯而易見的。隨着非政府組織利用數字科技以製造公共議題，以及大量非政府組織互相鏈接以分享不同議題，我們發現全球公眾的出現改變了民眾參與政治的方式。例如，在2009年哥本哈根聯合國氣候大會（United Nations Climate Conference）外曾有超過十萬名抗議者，而全世界通過數字媒體參與抗議的民眾多達數百萬人。

當然，關鍵挑戰在於權力仍然集中在國家與企業層面，並且這些權力中心大多並不對幫助解決全球性問題（global problems）持開放態度。然而，許多公共網絡通過成功地向政府及企業施壓開始改變它們在部份領域的運作。這些情況無論成敗如何，都值得傳播學者去研究。

非政府組織組建新信息渠道，這對新聞教育也很重要。新聞在許多國家處於危機之中。但報導非政府組織、基金會、智囊團，報導它們針對公眾推出及包裝的有趣信息，這或許會成為記者和新聞行業的新機遇。

除了非政府組織，我們亦發現類似佔領華爾街的龐大網絡抗議可以對大眾媒介就不同議題的討論產生影響（相關發現將在書中第五章介紹）。例如，美國社會不平等問題大幅增加，這影響到政治權力、民主的運行，美國夢也變得遙不可及。然而，大眾媒介中關於這些問題的討論仍然缺乏。佔領華爾街運動創造了一個有力的互聯網米姆（meme），即「我們是百分之九十九」，這一米姆迅速成為了全體民眾日常討論的一部分。這種「前百分之一多麼富有」的理念很快進入了大眾媒介的報導和討論。甚至連總統奧巴馬也開始談論不平等問題。

QS: 我們知道您對於中國非常感興趣。然而，政治傳播研究大多根植於西方世界。如果我們始終堅守黑格爾學派的理念——「中國是一個例外中的例外」，那麼從一個全球比較的角度來看，甚麼是對於研究一個像中國這樣的國家來說最為引人注目的好題目？甚麼是對中國青年政治傳播學者而言最為切中要害的問題？

LB: 我不是中國通，儘管我在學習關於中國的許多有趣的事。中國很顯然是例外，西方媒介理論顯然有其局限性。中國的新聞媒介系統、經濟以及政府都與最被廣泛研究的西方系統有所不同。然而，或許仍有一些重要概念與理念能夠跨越不同環境並提供一些比較的基礎。例如，當我有關新聞的著作被翻譯成中文時，我開始收到來自中國學者的電郵，這些學者解釋稱他們對這本書感興趣的原因，其中之一在於書中顯示了一個更為自由與獨立的新聞媒介仍可與政府保持緊密聯繫。

　　另一事例是連結性行動的理念，這一理念或許對思考中國的數字媒體有所裨益。正如亞歷山卓·塞格博格與我在文中及書中所指出的，理解連結性行動的一個關鍵之處在於不同國家中個人身分與傳播媒介的個人化。其中的原因當然由於國家與文化的不同有所差異。在西方民主社會中，市場力量與全球化打破了舊有的公民社會與社會結構，使得個人（如卡斯特所言）做好了創建網絡社會的準備。在其他國家中，公民社會並不是從最初就獨立於政府的，因此個人就公共生活而言更加孤立。當你將社交媒體添加到此種情境中，便也獲得了大規模連結性行動的條件。

　　另一個關於中國和西方國家的有趣比較，是社交媒體影響人們如何接收信息。對許多年輕人而言，社交媒體變得像是新聞推送，並且如今他們本身也成為了這個信息擴散過程的一部分。民眾亦已擁有了從事件現場報導消息、創造內容並與他人分享的科技手段。

　　在許多國家中，新聞機構開始採用「公民新聞」供稿作為新聞來源。當然，就社交媒體如何影響新聞機構以及這些機構如何響應而言，中國的情況有所不同。

　　我猜想，挑戰在於決定哪些概念可以用於比較中國和其他國家，以及這些概念如何更好的被應用於中國的情境當中。中國學者運用「連結性行動」概念開展研究，我對此感到興奮！

QS: 您的一部分作品關注「後現代」民主或稱之為「後工業」民主，這是一個中國或許並不適用的類別。中國仍然身處現代化進程之中，其經濟仍處於工業化進程中，其景觀仍處於城市化進程中。「後現

代」社會科學與中國現實社會（包括中國媒介系統）似乎存在根本性錯位。中國學者對此可採用甚麼策略？

LB: 是的，這個差異非常重要，在發展理論研究、比較中國與其他國家時需要牢記。正如我前面所說，尋找到正確的分析層面以進行比較是非常重要的。在宏觀層面，晚期現代社會與正在現代化過程中的社會似乎是有巨大差異。然而，不同的力量有時可塑造出相似的結果。例如社會體驗的個體化 (individualization) 或者個人化 (personalization) 的原因可以是相當不同的，但其對傳播所產生的效果卻可能極為相似。同樣重要的是，我們需要理解這些相似的傳播模式如何因不同機構、政府或企業的塑造而走上不同的歷史發展道路。

QS: 公民新聞通過微博及其他類似社交媒體產生影響。您看它對中國政治與社會轉型會產生甚麼作用？

LB: 在美國，一項重大的新聞獎項被授予了一位匿名的伊朗公民，因為他發布了一個關於 2009 伊朗選舉後抗議活動的視頻。這是因為這位匿名公民記者是理解該重大事件的最佳信源。公民通過手機通常可以從最好的角度報導重要故事、並迅速將新聞傳播出去。如前所述，這正在改變新聞現今的形式以及日後的發展。

　　至於中國，許多觀察家都認為微博在民眾與政府之間開闢了一個全新、儘管是間接的傳播渠道。有時政府意識到民眾在發表重要信息，有時政府也會予以回應。

　　然而，這其中亦存在許多不易解決的風險和問題。微博如何更好的與新聞媒介系統相融合是一個很嚴峻的問題。社交媒體的媒介邏輯與大眾媒體截然不同。如今民眾期待能夠與信息互動、加入他們自己的觀點並以他們自己的方式分享。這與電視新聞和報紙的邏輯存在相當大的差異。

QS: 與美國相似，中國面臨的一項重要挑戰是日漸增長的社會不平等，這種不平等使得想像的共同體與公民參與都化為泡影。羅伯特·普特曼 (Robert Putnam) 在《紐約時報》近期發表題為《破碎的美國夢》的文章，闡述他重返俄亥俄州家鄉時觀察到社會兩極分化帶來的種種惡果，儘管他未提及互聯網。數字媒體是否可以幫

　　　　助減輕不平等問題以及促進社區建設,而非導致個人化、碎片化及數字鴻溝?

LB: 我從前說過,佔領華爾街運動在美國掀起了一場有關不平等問題的有趣的公共討論。然而,社交媒體不能直接改變經濟狀況,但他們可令公眾針對經濟不平等問題發出聲音。

　　　　至於社交媒體是否能夠促進社會資本的增長,這是一個有趣的問題。普特曼對於網絡傳播的角色存有相當長時間的疑問。公民社會的大多數理論家都相信社會資本只來源於穩定的、面對面的關係。然而,在條件合宜的情況下,民眾可以通過社交媒體發展經濟聯繫與信任。其中一個條件是虛擬社群的一部分需要與社會環境相連。在數字傳播的世界裏一定存在許多真實的人過着真實的生活。一些在年輕人中最為流行的科技相當有趣,可用以發送的照片和視頻均與日常生活相關:學校、朋友、假期、派對和家庭。分享這些真實生活的再現有助於建立新型「想像共同體」。民眾在遊戲中仍可使用化身或者幻想圖像,但他們似乎更喜歡在線社交關係中分享真實的生活圖像。

QS: **在最近一期的《高等教育界》當中,南加州大學安納堡分校的歐尼斯特·威爾遜院長 (Dean Ernest J. Wilson) 給傳播學領域評分為「僅夠及格的分數C-」,因為傳播學者在與公眾溝通、參與媒介產業運作、幫助建構優良公共政策層面都表現不佳。您是否認同這一評價?傳播學作為一個研究領域,如何在公眾參與層面做的更好?**

LB: 我並不認同他給予傳播學研究的評分。他在文章中將傳播學與法學、商學、醫學等在實踐上具有更為清晰邊界與標準的專業領域進行比較。傳播無處不在,亦被每個人實踐。我們並不需要執照才能進行交流。正如前面部分問題所提示的,人們在不同社會中的交流方式正在迅速的、朝着不同的方向發生改變。這些都解釋了傳播學領域為何不像其他領域那樣被清晰明確的界定,或者由單一的方法及理論主導。然而,我的確認同傳播學可以在政策與媒介設計方面做得更好。政府與商界並非時刻明確知曉自己正在做甚麼,他們在如何發展不同的技術或規範自身行為層面會產生

嚴重錯誤。傳播學可以在這些領域提供更令人信服的服務。

　　威爾遜院長給予傳播學較差的評分亦是因為傳播學從其他領域借鑒了太多觀點，卻並未有自己本身獨特的理論。這似乎再次忽視了傳播學觀點存在於其他所有社會科學中這一要點。為了發展出好的傳播理論，向社會學、政治學、經濟學、心理學、人類學、藝術學、文學及其他領域借鑒是相當必要的。我認為傳播學觀點的多樣性是可貴的。

　　不過，我也的確認為傳播學作品質量不均。有大量描述性的作品並未對理論發展產生貢獻。人們往往喜歡使用一種個別的研究方法去選擇問題和設計研究，導致大量機械性使用研究方法的情況。由於有很多以描述、方法為驅動的研究，我們並不能發展出好的理論或者清晰的研究議程。這些議題可以通過更加良好的研究所教育以及更加嚴謹的研究得以改善。

QS: 另一本在中國廣為流傳的作品是您與羅伯特·恩特曼 (Robert Entman) 共同主編的《媒介化政治》(2000 年出版，中文版於 2011 年出版)。在結尾部份，您提及在民主政治的未來，傳播問題將日益嚴峻：公共空間萎縮、犬儒主義興起、想像與現實交疊創造出民主的幻象。這些呼應了您 1983 年的著作《新聞：政治的幻象》。您是否仍然堅持這些觀點？

LB: 這是個非常有趣的問題。當我觀察大眾媒介，我仍然對於犬儒主義的興起及有限的公共空間內充斥着官方信息感到憂慮。在美國，在我寫作《媒介化政治》時情況甚至更糟。新聞媒介系統正處於危機之中，公關專員的隊伍超過記者，公眾已經對公共機構與新聞媒介失去了信心。

　　然而，我會較為樂觀的看待作為一個新興公共空間的互聯網。互聯網並不能解決人類所有的問題，甚至無法解決大部分人類傳播的問題。然而，有更多的民眾能夠在今天發聲。這樣的傳播是嘈雜的、不平等的、充斥謠言且並不總是明智的、充分知情的。但是，我們亦見證了科技的發明使得群體組織更為良好、更有智慧、更具決斷力，這些都是非凡卓越的發展。更為值得注意的是，這些科技大多免費並向外開放。他們由一些並不擁有它們

或藉此獲得經濟收益的民眾創造和分享。這意味着傳播被許多人認定為生活中一個相當重要的組成部份。人們將傳播科技視為解決問題與改善人類狀況的重要工具。在這些方面，我現在的想法比當年更樂觀。

QS: 非常感謝您這次充滿深刻洞見的對談。

蘭斯‧班尼特著作選

蘭斯‧班尼特（2005）。《新聞：政治的幻象》（楊曉紅譯）。北京：當代中國出版社。

蘭斯‧班尼特、羅伯特‧恩特曼（2011）。《媒介化政治：政治傳播新論》（董關鵬譯）。北京：清華大學出版社。

Bennett, W. L. (2005). Beyond pseudoevents election news as reality TV. *American Behavioral Scientist, 49*(3), 364–378.

Bennett, W. L. (2007). Relief in hard times: A defense of Jon Stewart's comedy in an age of cynicism. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 24*(3), 278–283.

Bennett, W. L. (Ed.). (2008). *Civic life online: Learning how digital media can engage youth.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Bennett, W. L. (2011). *News: The politics of illusion.* (9th ed.). Harlow: Longman.

Bennett, W. L., & Entman, R. M. (Eds.). (2001). *Mediated politics: Communication in the future of democracy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bennett, W. L., Lawrence, R. G., & Livingston, S. (2008). *When the press fails: Political power and the news media from Iraq to Katrina.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bennett, W. L., & Iyengar, S. (2010). The shifting foundations of political communication: Responding to a defense of the media effects paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 60*(1), 35–39.

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society, 15*(5), 739–768.

本文引用格式

Academic Dialogue with **W. LANCE BENNETT**

News, Politics, Social Movements, and Digital Media

LB: W. Lance BENNETT
QS: Jack L. QIU & Anbin SHI

QS: **Trained a political scientist, how did you travel to the study of communication and media? Why do you find this intellectual terrain interesting, especially—given your highly influential work over the past decades, starting from *News: The Politics of Illusion* (1983, 5th edition translated into Chinese in 2005)—the intersections between politics and journalism, and more recently between social movements and digital technologies, as shown in your award-winning article with Dr. Segerberg?**

LB: From my early days I was interested in language, symbolism and ideologies. It seemed to me that politics involves powerful language, symbolism and rituals that motivate people to follow leaders, make sacrifices and take other actions. As a young scholar I was impressed with works in sociology and anthropology, particularly scholars such as Durkheim, Weber, Marvin Harris and Victor Turner. People in societies create meaning beyond the individual and beyond local life. How this process works has always been fascinating to me.

However, there were not many scholars in political science who were interested in these topics. Fortunately I was able to work with Murray Edelman, whose book *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* was for me a classic. Also, my Ph.D. supervisor Robert Lane helped me understand how ideology worked in everyday life for ordinary people. And during my studies I was inspired by an earlier generation of political scientists, including Harold Lasswell, who explained the connections between individual personality and the great symbols of politics.

When I finished my graduate studies, I wanted to contribute to thesetraditions, but at the time, political science was not open to such big topics. The field was dominated by quantitative methods and small questions. I noticed that most of the people asking the kinds of

questions I wanted to explore were moving into the field of communication. I was able to publish early work on political ritual, the importance of storytelling in political processes, and the book on the news.

News: The Politics of Illusion was based on a paradox I saw in the relationship between American journalism and politics. I noticed that despite proclaiming itself the world's freest press system, the daily news in America was mostly filled with what government officials told journalists. I wondered why a free press so often reported what the government said. When the press did report another side of a story, it was usually what the other political party said. Many issues were left out of the news, and many stories in the news did not look beyond what those in power wanted to say. In other studies, I found that most press systems bend the news to how government officials spin it. Important national differences exist in terms of how well governments represent the interests of citizens, and how press systems promote public accountability.

In recent years the U.S. news system has become so full of political spin that many people began to lose confidence in it. At the same time, the Internet offered many channels of information and many ways for citizens to communicate about things that interest them. These changes prompted us to bring a team of scholars together to work on *Mediated Politics*, the other book that is translated into Chinese. In this book we tried to looks at a number of trends: how journalism was changing, why young people were turning to other information forms such as political comedy, and how the Internet offered new ways for people to discuss issues and create public opinion.

As people all over the world began to experiment with digital media I shifted my research to study how people use the Internet and social media to share information and organize popular movements. As I followed these movements around the world and studied the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States, I saw that communication technologies were making a new kind of public opinion and political organization possible. This idea became the basis for thinking about a new political logic based on communication networks. That is the main idea in the article with Alexandra Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action", that you are publishing

in this journal. Next we published a book length version of *The Logic of Connective Action* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), which adds many empirical studies to our theoretical model, and looks at power and organization in networks. I hope that the book can also be translated into Chinese one day.

In addition to seeing how digital media are changing how people communicate, I am interested in understanding how communication is becoming part of social and political organization. This is changing the core communication paradigm. For most of its history as a field, the focus of communication has been on mass media, news and information systems, media effects, and the sending and receiving of messages. Now, we must add theories and methods for understanding communication as social organization. There are of course other scholars such as Manuel Castells who have already pointed the way. My current interest is in how networked publics form and take action.

QS: **From your prolific writings we gather that you hold progressive political values and a normative stance for social change. Yet at the same time, these views do not get in your way as a rigorous empirical researcher and critical thinker. How have you managed to do this?**

LB: I think that normative perspectives should be tested empirically to see if they are valid or if they need to be changed. For example, I am concerned that many government officials in many countries today use policy frames that put the environment against the economy. This means that when the economy is not doing well, policies to help the environment always suffer. And, when the economy is growing again, business pressures often work against environment policies that might cut into profits or slow the economy down. This common framing of economic and environmental issues as competing interests is also a normative position. It is a norm with powerful backers and a lot of propaganda driving it. When we study this kind of communication as scholars, we can go beyond just describing it, and asking whether it is functional. Is the communication we are studying working well for society? What if thinking about the economy and the environment as competing problems causes even bigger problems? How can we communicate differently about these issues?

Without having some normative guidelines in our work, it is impossible to decide how well different institutions or systems in society are working. Is the government working well? Is the press working well? How would we know?

This general approach applies to most of the topics I study. For example, looking at protest networks around the world invites value judgments. Are these protests effective? How do we know if they are effective? This kind of evaluation is different from making ideological judgments about what is good or bad. I am more interested in whether people create systems that work, and if they can use communication to make them better.

QS: **Many people are talking about big data these days, but few have discussed how to build a suitable team of big data researchers, involving both social scientists and software engineers, for instance. Could you shed some light on this aspect of interdisciplinary team building?**

LB: This is a very interesting challenge for communication research. How to build the interdisciplinary teams needed to analyze big data? I know colleagues in communication who have found research partners from fields as far away as physics. Many scientific fields have already learned how to handle big data, and having the technical infrastructure and the programming skills are important for communication researchers. My early interest in big data came out of developing the connective action theory and wanting to study large public networks. I had to find colleagues around the university to help me do the work. I looked for computer scientists, information scientists, people in technology design, and even people in the arts working with technology. I learned that many of these people were also interested in working with large data sets based on micro-blogging or social media.

The problem is that the approaches of computer scientists or information scientists are often different from communication researchers. They speak a different scientific language and use different methods. This means that when teams come together, they have to learn how to translate between the different scientific languages and approaches. This can be very interesting, but it can also be very frustrating. It is easier if the communication researchers

are able to lead the projects and use their theoretical perspectives to guide the programmers and the technical team. This leadership requires that communication researchers learn how data can be captured, how databases are organized, and how to translate theoretical questions into specific empirical operations. This often means developing new theories and new methods, which is very exciting.

One of my current projects involves understanding the organization of the Occupy Wall Street protests in the United States. We have a data set from Twitter, a micro-blogging platform (like Weibo) that is very popular here and in Europe. We have 60 million tweets. What do we do? We needed to develop a model of how this social media network connected to the other networks involved in the protests and how it linked these other networks together. Unlike a lot of research that focuses on the content of the microblog posts, which is often very hard to understand, we decided that the content of the tweets was not so important for understanding how the crowd was organized. Instead, we focused on the uses of hashtags (#) that people attach to tweets to direct them to different parts of the crowd. We also decided to look at the links to other sites that people inserted in their messages. This involved creating a new coding method to categorize the content of the different kinds of links we found. In the end, we created a simple model of how these direction tags and link patterns were important for organizing the Occupy crowd at different times.

In the future, we will see more communication scholars doing big data work. This will change our ideas of research and methods and how to display our findings.

QS: **As in most societies, popular discourse in China holds that the Internet is changing the world for the better. Would you agree that the Internet, particularly social media, brings about a brave new world of politics?**

LB: The Internet is neither good nor bad. There are many conflicting ways that people, businesses and governments can use it. Most governments are using it to gather information on citizens. The recent scandal in the United States involving the National Security Agency revealed that the government is gathering information on emails and phone calls around the world and forcing Internet service providers

to give up information on their customers. These are not positive developments.

On the business side, companies now know a lot about who we are and what we do. This is changing the way products are marketed and how we act as consumers.

Citizens face other challenges in deciding how to use their communication power. For example, it is not always easy to know who the other people are in a big network, or how reliable the information they are sharing is. Rumors can trigger public reactions that are not always positive.

On the other hand, there are many signs that people can use technology networks in positive ways: to share real problems with others, to respond quickly to crises, to raise important public questions and organize communities of interest to address various issues. In many parts of the world, the mobile phone is the most powerful tool that citizens have ever had. New software systems are helping citizens with many everyday problems involving health care, transportation, public safety and getting basic information and services from government agencies. Many of these projects are developed by non-government organizations (NGOs) that provide interactive technologies to help ordinary people share information about health problems, violence, crime, weather conditions, food shortages and many areas of life that governments around the world are often not in touch with. These kinds of technology networks are different from crowds. These are examples of the organizationally-enabled networks that we discuss in our article.

And of course, large crowds based on technology-enabled connective action are becoming common around the world. There have always been public protests, but the difference now is that people can communicate their messages more clearly and coordinate their actions more effectively, without having to become formally organized, which is often costly or dangerous in many places.

QS: **Is the rise of political extremism inevitable in this era of Web 2.0?**
LB: There has always been political extremism, and it has existed without the Web. However, the Web gives it a platform that may help it grow and reach more people. In the United States, racist images of President Obama have circulated online and reached large numbers

of people. To some people these seem humorous, but to others they are deeply offensive and harmful. The problem is how societies decide to control this kind of extremist communication.

The Web has often played a role in escalating ethnic or religious conflicts. One of the more famous cases involved cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad that many Muslims found very offensive. Because of the Internet, these images circulated around the world, and created huge conflicts that might not have become so polarized in an earlier age.

The mass media can be controlled, but the Internet is more difficult. For example, in Sweden, an anti-immigrant party (Sweden Democrats) has entered their Parliament. Their 2010 election ads were so offensive and extreme that they were not allowed on television. However, the ads were soon posted online, and probably received more viewers and more discussion that they would have on television.

QS: **Were you there in the 1999 anti-WTO "Battle of Seattle"? How was digitally networked action (DNA) around the turn of the century different from, or similar to, more recent DNA movements like the Indignado, Arab Spring, and Occupy?**

LB: When the WTO Battle of Seattle happened, I was in Italy attending a conference. So, I watched days of protests on the television news. When I returned home, I contacted numerous friends who had participated and then began a large project interviewing different kinds of participants. The interviews from that project are still available online at the WTO History Project website (http://depts. washington.edu/wtohist/). As these interviews developed, it became clear that this was an early case of a new kind of protest organization. Two interesting changes became clear.

First, many different groups came together and decided to work around their differences so that the main protest events became an expression of the many different issues involved in the process of global economic change. This relaxing of the divisions between different issue movements also enabled people to express their personal views without having to join group positions. This personalization of politics has become a central foundation of the kinds of digitally networked action (DNA) that we see today.

The second interesting aspect of the Seattle protests was the creation of digital media platforms that activists could use to share direct reports, information and other kinds of content. The most famous of these inventions was Indymedia, which grew as an open source system to more than 100 outlets around the world. Some of these Indymedia channels are still active.

The growth and varieties of DNA have been impressive in the short time since the WTO protests. Many commercial technologies that people use today were not available 10 years ago: Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter, just to name a few of the platforms that have been important for many uprisings in the Middle East, Europe and the United States. Today, nearly anyone can try to activate social networks to draw attention to issues. Most of these efforts do not succeed, but some of them create dense organizational networks that enable participants to coordinate their activities and connect with audiences around the world.

QS: **What are the real implications of contemporary activism worldwide that is based on concerned citizens and NGOs engaging each other directly, often without going through mass media or other traditional institutions?**

LB: One surprising finding in our studies of European NGOs that use technologies to activate social networks is that it actually increases the chances of making news in the mass media. (These findings are reported in Chapter 4 of the book version of *The Logic of Connective Action*). It is clear that the role of NGOs is growing in the global political system. With NGOs using digital technologies to create issue publics, and large numbers of NGOs linking together to share different issues, we see the creation of global publics that change how people engage in politics. For example, there were over 100,000 protesters outside the 2009 United Nations Climate Conference in Copenhagen, and millions more around the world participated through digital media.

The challenge of course is that power is still concentrated within nations and within corporations, and many of these power centers are not open to helping solve global problems. However, many public networks have had success pressuring governments and corporations to begin changing how they operate in some areas. However these

situations develop, they are of interest to communication scholars.

The emergence of new information channels organized by NGOs is also of interest to journalism education. Journalism is in crisis in many countries. But there are likely to be new opportunities for journalists (or storytellers) working for NGOs, foundations, think tanks, and other places where interesting information is being produced and packaged for publics.

Beyond NGOs, we also find that large networked protests like Occupy Wall Street can make an impact on mass media debates about various issues (these findings are in Chapter 5 of the book). For example, the United States has experienced large increases in inequality, which affects political power, the working of democracy and the chances of realizing the American Dream. Yet, discussions of these problems were missing from mass media. The Occupy protests created a powerful Internet meme—"We are the 99%"—which quickly became part of everyday discussions among the general population. This idea of how rich the top 1% had become soon entered mass media reports and discussions. Even President Obama began to talk about the problem of inequality.

QS: **We know you are interested in China. However, political communication research is mostly embedded in the western world. If we still hold the Hegelian belief that "China is the exception to all exceptions," from a global comparative perspective, what are the most compelling premises from which to study a country like China? What are the most pertinent questions for young political communication scholars within China itself to address?**

LB: I am not an expert on China, although I am learning a lot of interesting things. It is clear that China is an exceptional country. The western media theories clearly have their limits. The Chinese press system, the economy, and the government are all different from the western systems that have been studied most heavily. However, there may be some key concepts and ideas that travel across different contexts and offer some basis for comparison. For example, when my book on the news was translated into Chinese, I began to receive emails from Chinese scholars who explained that one of the reasons for their interest in the book was that it showed how a more liberal or independent press system could still be

connected in strong ways to government.

Another example is the idea of connective action, which may be of some use in thinking about digital media in China. As Alexandra Segerberg and I point out in the article and in the book, one key to understanding connective action is the personalization of social identity and communication media in very different countries. The reasons, of course, differ because countries and cultures are different. In western democracies, market forces and globalization have broken down old civil society and social structures, leaving individuals ready to create network societies, as Castells calls them. In other countries, civil society is not as independent from government to begin with, so individuals become more isolated when it comes to public life. When you add social media to this kind of situation, you also get conditions for large-scale connective action.

Another interesting comparison between China and western countries is that social media are affecting how people receive their information. For many younger people, social media become like news feeds, and they are now part of the information distribution process. People also have the technology to report directly from the scene of events, and to create content and share it with others.

In many countries, news organizations have started using direct "citizen journalism" feeds as news sources. Of course, China is a different situation in terms of how social media affect news organizations and how those organizations respond.

I guess that the challenge is in deciding which ideas may be of use for comparing China and other countries, and how those ideas can be adapted better to the Chinese situation. I am excited to hear about how Chinese scholars will use the ideas of connective action!

QS: **The bulk of your work deals with what you call "late modern" or "post-industrial" democracies, a category to which China perhaps does not belong. China is still modernizing, its economy still industrializing, its landscape still urbanizing. There seems to be a fundamental mismatch between "late modern" social sciences and the Chinese reality, including Chinese media systems. What are the strategies Chinese scholars might use to address this mismatch productively rather than being consumed by the incongruity?**

LB: Yes, this is an important difference to keep in mind when theorizing and when comparing China to other countries. As I said above, it is important to find the right level of analysis for making comparisons. At a macro level, the differences between a late modern and a still modernizing society seem huge. However, different forces can sometimes produce similar outcomes. For example, the causes of individualization or personalization of social experience are very different, but the effects on communication may be very similar. It is also important to understand how these similar communication patterns may evolve along different historical paths because of how different institutions of government or business shape them.

QS: **How do you see the role of citizen journalism through Weibo and similar social media in the transformation of Chinese politics and society?**

LB: In the United States, a major journalism award was given to an anonymous Iranian citizen who posted a video of a protest following the 2009 Iranian elections. The decision was based on the idea that this unknown citizen journalist was the best source for understanding an important event. Citizens with mobile phones are often in the best position to cover important stories and get the news out fast. As I said above, this is changing how journalism looks today and it will continue to change in the future.

As far as China goes, many observers have said that Weibo has opened a new (although indirect) communication channel between people and the government. There seem to be times when the government understands that the people are sending important information, and also seems to respond.

However, there are also many risks and problems that are not easy to solve. How Weibo can be better integrated with the press system seems a difficult problem. The media logic of social media is different from mass media logic. People expect to interact with information now, and add their own ideas and share it in their own ways. This is very different than the logic of television news or newspapers.

QS: **A key challenge for China, as for the US, is increasing social inequality, which has made supposed community illusory and**

civic engagement impossible. Revisiting his hometown in Ohio, Robert Putnam illustrated this painful process in a recent article for the *New York Times* entitled "Crumbling American Dreams"— although he didn't mention the Internet at all. Can digital media be used in a way that helps decrease inequality and facilitate community building, rather than the usual complaints of personalization, atomization, and digital divide, leading to nowhere but anomie?

LB: As I said earlier, the Occupy Wall Street protests helped start an interesting public discussion of inequality in the U.S. However, social media cannot directly change economic conditions, but they can raise a public voice about them.

As for whether social media can build greater social capital, that is an interesting question. Putnam has long been skeptical about the role of online communication. Most theorists of civil society believe that social capital comes only from stable face-to-face relationships. However, it is also clear that people can develop emotional connections and trust through social media if the conditions are right. One condition is that parts of virtual communities must connect to the social world. There must be real people living real lives somewhere at the center of digital communication. It is interesting that some of the most popular technologies among young people involve sending photos and videos of their everyday life: school, friends, vacations, parties, and home. Sharing these representations of real life may help build new kinds of "imagined community." People can still use avatars or fantasy images of themselves in games, but they seem to prefer sharing real life images in their online social relations.

QS: **In a recent issue of *Inside Higher Ed,* Dean Ernest J. Wilson of the USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism gave the field of communication "a barely passing grade of C-" for the poor public service provided by communication scholarship in talking to the public, engaging the media industry and helping form better policy. Do you agree with this assessment? How can communication studies as a field do better in public engagement?**

LB: I disagree with his grade for communication studies. In his article he compared communication to professional fields like law, business, and medicine that have much clearer boundaries and standards for their practices. Communication is everywhere, and practiced by everyone. We don't need licenses to communicate. And as some of the questions above suggest, the ways in which people communicate are changing rapidly and have different directions in different societies. All of this explains why the field of communication is not as clearly defined or dominated by single methods and theories as some other fields. So to give the field a bad grade just because it covers a more complicated and diverse social reality seems to miss the point. I do agree, however, that communication can develop more credible perspectives on policy and design of communication systems. Government and business do not always know what they are doing, and make serious mistakes in how they develop different technologies or regulate them in society. Communication can do a better job of developing credibility in these areas.

Dean Wilson also gave communication a bad grade because it borrows so many ideas from other fields, and does not have its own unique theory. Again, this seems to miss the point that communication perspectives exist in all the other social sciences. In order to have good theories of communication, it is necessary to borrow from sociology, politics, economics, psychology, anthropology, art, literature and other fields. I think the diversity of perspectives in communication is a good thing.

This said, I do think that work in communication is uneven in quality. There is too much descriptive work that does not help develop theories. And there is too much mechanical use of methods, as people pick questions and design research because they like to use a particular method. As a result of descriptive, methods driven research, we do not develop good theory or a clear research agenda. These issues can be addressed by better graduate education and more careful research.

QS: **Your other most circulated book in China is *Mediated Politics* (2000, Chinese edition in 2011), co-edited by you and Robert Entman. In the concluding section, you address the dilemma of communication and the future of democracy: the shrinking**

public sphere, rising cynicism and the interpenetration of image and reality to create an illusion of democracy, all echoing your 1983 book, *News: The Illusion of Politics***. Do you still hold these views?**

LB: This is an interesting question. When I look at the mass media, I still worry about rising cynicism and a limited public sphere filled with official spin. In the U.S., things may be even worse now than when we wrote *Mediated Politics*. The press system is in crisis, the ranks of public relations professionals and spin-doctors outnumber journalists, and the public has lost confidence in public institutions and the press.

However, when I think about the Internet as an emerging public sphere, I am more optimistic. The internet cannot solve all human problems, or even most human communication problems. However, more people have a voice today than ever before in human history. More people have ways to get their voice into conversations with larger numbers of other people than ever before. This communication is noisy, uneven, full of rumors and not always very wise or informed. However, we have also seen the creation of technologies that help make crowds better organized, smarter and more able to make decisions. These are remarkable developments. Even more remarkable is the fact that many of these technologies are free and open sourced. They are created and shared by people who do not own them or receive much financial compensation for their work. This means that communication is recognized by many people as a very important part of life. People see communication technologies as important tools for solving problems and improving the human condition. In these ways, I am more optimistic than in my earlier work.

QS: **Thank you very much for an engaging dialogue with full of deep insights.**

Selected Works by W. Lance Bennett

Please refer to the end of the Chinese version of the dialogue for W. Lance Bennett's selected works.