Abstract

Title of dissertation: HUNTED BY THE CROWD: A QUALITATIVE

ANALYSIS OF COLLABORATIVE

INFORMATION SEARCHING IN CHINA

Xiaoyan Pan, Doctor of Philosophy, 2012

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This study explores a particular form of cyber surveillance in China known as "*human flesh search,*" in which unrelated Internet users collaboratively conduct surveillance on fellow citizens. Its theoretical framework draws up the notion of panoptic model, first articulated in the early 1800s by Jeremy Bentham and then developed by the French social theorist and philosopher Michel Foucault. Unlike some previous studies on human flesh searching, which focus on highly publicized search incidents, this study examines cyber surveillance in its daily practice, and probes how and why collaborative searches occur in China. It also explores structural constraints and empowerment experienced by search participants through the lens of power, in order to understand such a controversial activity.

The study involved content analysis of a Chinese leading search forum—the Mop Human Flesh Search Forum; an online survey with 158 search participants; and in-depth interviews with 9 search participants. The study found that Chinese human flesh search often took the forms of coveillance (peer-to-peer surveillance) and sousveillance (bottom-up surveillance). Fun-seeking

was the primary motive for participants, who are mainly male youths; being helpful is the next. Privacy invasions and power abuses have complicated or even undermined search practices, limiting the potential of this activity to contribute to civil governance.

In terms of empowerment, participating in the human flesh search seemed to give individual searchers a sense of empowerment, but such effects vary greatly depending on individuals' knowledge, social resources and search experiences. Privacy invasions and power abuses were consistently evident in searching practices, limiting the potential of this crowd-based searching, even when this is said to promote justice, to contribute to civil governance. The study also found that the panoptic model is still highly relevant and useful in understanding collaborative online surveillance, especially the function and effects of "gaze." Once conducted in a collective manner, the gaze of fellow citizens can be greatly extended in its reach and intensified by massive participation.

The human flesh search mechanism studied here has great potential to profoundly change China's media landscape, but such potential is limited by current media censorship and the lack of accountability of search participants. Although the study examines searching phenomenon only in Chinese cyber space, the findings may shed light on similar surveillance practices which have emerged elsewhere in recent years. The whole question of citizen participation might benefit from the explication of the role of participation in this form of surveillance.

HUNTED BY THE CROWD: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF COLLABORATIVE

INFORMATION SEARCHING IN CHINA

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2012

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Dedication

To my beloved husband Wei and my two little angels

Abigail and Samuel

Writing a dissertation can be a lonely job. I do not think I could do this without the support I received from the people around me. Last but not least, I want to thank my two children Abigail and Samuel for being my comfort and source of joy in this long journey.

The dissertation would be impossible without all the loving support from the people I have mentioned. Their love and kindness is the gem of my life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In March 2008, Jesse McPherson, a 26-year-old U.S. engineer, returned to his home in Philadelphia to find out he had been a victim of home robbery. His Xbox game console and other valuable goods had been taken. McPherson did his best to collect the clues, including a series of still photographs obtained from surveillance footage in the nearby pawn shop where the thief attempted to sell the stolen goods. He also retrieved voice messages left on his Xbox Live account by a person, who did not identify himself but was later revealed to be Joseph Grove, who had obtained the stolen Xbox and demanded $200 from McPherson in exchange for its return. Upon receiving the message, McPherson was able to see Grove's Xbox Live profile.

After receiving little help from the police, McPherson decided to take the matter into his own hands. He posted all the evidence he could find on his blog, including images of the suspected thief at the pawnshop and Grove's voice messages and his Xbox Live profile. McPherson then posted the blog link on Digg.com, a community-based news aggregation website that ranks stories based on votes from users.

McPherson's blog soon made the front page of the Digg site. The Digg community took over, with the aid of online chat rooms and a specially-created Wiki site (http://xboxmoron.wikidot.com/), and banded together to solve the case. Using clues from Grove's Xbox Live profile, they were able to track down his accounts on other sites such as YouTube and MySpace, which revealed his real name. Abusive messages flooded into Grove's account from people he did not know, pressing him to return the console to its original owner. He finally complied. At the same time, the thief became scared by the knowledge that his image was all over the Internet. He then quietly returned other stolen goods even before the police could

identify him**.** Within just a few weeks, McPherson got his belongings back. With the evidence

collected by the Internet community, police were able to arrest the thief.

In a phone interview with Austrian newspaper the *Age*, McPherson said he was "blown

away" by what could be accomplished by a band of disparate internet users with a common goal.

He said, "The Internet can be a scary place [for thieves] because if you are not smart then it only

takes one profile to be able to find the rest of you "(Moses, 2008).

The Rise of Collaborative Surveillance

McPherson is not alone in experiencing the power of collaborative surveillance of this

sort. In March of 1950, the FBI began to widely publicize the *FBI Ten Most Wanted Fugitive*

List through news media. The list was also posted in public places such as post offices to

encourage citizens to call in tips that might help the FBI or other law enforcement agencies

capture dangerous fugitives. As of April 10, 2012, 495 fugitives have been included on the "Ten

Most Wanted Fugitives" list. Of these, 465 fugitives have been apprehended, 153 of them as a

direct result of citizen cooperation. In some cases, fugitives have turned themselves in once they

become aware of their inclusion on the list. Currently, the FBI is also using television and radio

to attract public attention to the "Top Ten" list. The FBI also maintains lists of top fugitives,

terrorists, and of kidnapped and missing persons for the same purpose at the "Wanted" section on

the FBI web site. In the past decade, with the increased use of electronic and digital technology,

the FBI has turned to some nontraditional mechanisms to publicize the list, including setting up a

Facebook page and a Twitter account where followers can instantly receive the latest information

about the fugitives on the list. As of April 15, 2012, the FBI has 337,219 Twitter followers, and

is "liked" by 228,577 users on Facebook. The FBI podcast, FBI widgets, and a cell phone

application all allow the public to download the latest fugitive information at the touch of a button (FBI, 2010). Meanwhile, networks are airing television programs on FBI fugitives, such as the TV show A*merica's Most Wanted (AMW),* which has been running since February 1988. As of March 27, 2012, 1,178 people have been captured because of *AMW*, and 348,291 people "like" the program on Facebook (Bieniek, 2012).

With the prevalent use of the Internet and hand-held devices with built-in cameras, as well as the proliferation of blogging and social media, individuals have begun to initiate and conduct surveillance on fellow citizens through collaborative online efforts and direct intervention in real life. In South Korea in 2005, a young woman who was caught on camera refusing to clean up her dog's waste on the subway was tracked down, threatened, and humiliated in cyber space (Krim, 2005). In the United States in 2006, a collaborative online search singled out a woman who found a cell phone in a New York City taxi but refused to return it to its original owner (Confessore, 2006). In Vancouver, Canada in 2011, after a riot over the Stanley Cup, photos and videos taken at the scene were uploaded and used by local people to identify and publically shame the rioters, and resulted in numerous arrests of riot participants (Uechi, 2011).

In recent years, numerous web sites have been established in the United States to expose social missteps. The site "Caughtya" (http://caughtya.org) is self-described as "a Hall of Shame" to expose cars parked illegally in parking spaces reserved for people who are disabled. This site encourages people to take photos of illegally parked vehicles and upload photos on the site with identifying details (including license plate number, the make, model, and color of the car, and the date, time, and location). They display details of offending vehicles worldwide. During its six-

year operation, the site had documented over 500 individual disabled parking space infractions in over 15 countries, and generated press in major national newspapers and some foreign media. Although the site has stopped accepting submissions due to financial restrictions, its owner claimed to have "anecdotal" evidence that behaviors were changing as a result of the site – some people reported to the site that having their cars appear on Caughtya.org made them rethink their illegal use of parking spaces for people with disabilities and stopped using the spaces. Some drivers reported hearing others saying, "Don't park illegally, or your photos will be on the Internet."

Citizen-empowered surveillance also found its use in dealing with significant social issues. Hollaback! (http://www.ihollaback.org/) is a movement intended to raise public awareness about street harassment and expose offenders through grassroots participation. Its first photo blog was established in New York City in 2005 and two more blog branches opened in Washington, D.C. and Chicago. By May 2012, Hollaback! has engaged activists from 16 countries and opened numerous blog branches outside the United States. In areas where street harassment occurs in high frequencies, the organization collects, and maps and presents data to local officials for policy making. Meanwhile, it also provides training to individuals to help them deal with harassment strategically and effectively (Hollaback, 2012).

Some web sites for citizen surveillance set their eyes on the issue of police brutality. Cop Watch Los Angeles (www.copwatchla.org), a community organization, encourages users to send in stories and pictures of police brutality for posting. As their slogan goes, "Tired of being harassed by the police? Then patrol the police!" Cop watchers can report and receive text

message of police activity nearby with their cell phones. As of April 17, 2012, Copwatch LA had 1,457 Facebook followers.

Another surveillance example is Texas-located site Blueservo (http://www.blueservo.net/). Its Virtual Border Watch program has been operating since November, 2008. It streams live surveillance video footage of Texas-Mexico border and invites web users to watch and report illegal crossings (Blueservo, 2012). The site has attracted tens of thousands people around the world, even pub goers in Austria (Luscombe, 2009). Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition (TBSC), a leading force to protect the Texas border, reported the program had effectively curbed illegal immigration and drug smuggling. TBSC executive director Don Reay told the BBC news: "Having those extra pairs of eyes makes a big difference." Some volunteers said virtual patrolling gave them a feeling of doing their civic duty, while others said they actually get "a kick out of doing it" and "It's more interesting than television" (Prentice, 2009).

In addition to such dedicated surveillance sites, social media sites like Facebook and YouTube have served as platforms in citizen surveillance episodes (Albrechtslund, 2008). On January 1, 2009, Oscar Grant, an unarmed subway passenger, was shot dead by Joannes Mehserle, a transit police officer, at a subway station in Oakland, California. Witnesses at the scene caught the shooting with video-enabled cameras and cell phones from different angles, and put these videos on YouTube for millions to watch. The YouTube shooting clip triggered social unrest in Oakland. Zennie Abraham, a citizen who had lived Oakland since 1974, likened what happened to Grant to Rodney King back in the early 1990s. He added, "Except, with the rise of YouTube and with so many people carrying cameras around wherever they go, we're all each other's witnesses now" (Vargas, 2009).

Collaborative Surveillance in China

Despite the variety of agendas and outcomes, the surveillance sites or incidents above share several attributes. First, ordinary citizens acted as primary surveillance agents—a role traditionally taken by the government or other powerful groups. Second, surveillance was made possible through technology, especially mobile technology and the Internet. Third, exposure of offensive behaviors and public shaming of the offenders are often used to deter social mischief or the undesirable behaviors of others. Fourth, citizen surveillance often involves a certain level of interaction and collaboration among surveillance participants.

This sort of citizen surveillance is still considered an emerging cyber phenomenon in Western countries. In Mainland China, such Internet behavior has been prevalent for years. Since 2002, collaborative cyber surveillance has become a distinct part of Internet culture in China, and its prevalence, frequency, and impacts has achieved nearly universal recognition among Chinese Internet users (Fletcher, 2008). This mode of surveillance even has its own name— *human flesh search* (renrou sousuo in Pinyin).

Human flesh search explained. The term *human flesh search* originated in 2001 from Human Flesh Search Forum (HFSF), which belongs to a popular entertainment web site in China known as the Mop (www.Mop.com).

According to the Mop site, the term *human flesh* was coined to describe "a searching practice that is human-powered rather than computer-driven" (Mop, 2008). Initially, it was an act of searching for information about individuals or any other subject through the online collaboration of multiple users, facilitated by searchers' knowledge, social network, personal experience and expertise. Different from the Google and other search engines alike which

operate on search technology, such a search involves the process of information gathering conducted by multiple Internet users as they respond to an open inquiry. Users' participation and collaboration plays a vital role in such a search (Mengchi, 2008; Downey, 2010).

In early years, human flesh search practice remained as a crowd-sourcing activity. In the late 2000s, as Chinese web users began seeking out individuals for public humiliation or scrutiny in collaborative manner, the term *human flesh search* has gained a more sinister connotation, not only just a search *by* humans, but also a search *of* humans (Sterling, 2010;Chen & Sharma, 2011).

Of course, the phrase *human flesh* does not literally mean flesh of human beings, but refers to the human resources on which the search mechanism is based. The term "human flesh" was coined by Moppers (Mop members) to highlight a vital importance of human participation, made only possible by blood and flesh individuals, as a contrast to cold, mechanical computer program. Ice Cream, a moderator for Mop search forum, said that he personally considered "human-powered search" is a more appropriate term; he attributed the use and popularity of "human flesh search" to MOP's unique youth culture, which he characterized in terms of the non-liner thinking and creative, humorous use of language at the forum.

Over the years when such a mode of search has gained popularity and become prevalent in Chinese cyber space, a variety of sources have made attempts to define the term *human flesh search*. Some media sources emphasize its crowd-sourcing and collaborative approach. For instance, Baidu Baike (www.baike.baidu.com*),* China's biggest online encyclopedia, defines human flesh search as "information search performed through interaction and collaboration with others" (Baidu, 2012). ChinaSupertrends.com, an English language site based in China, defines human flesh searching as "online crowds gathering via China's bulletin board systems, chat

rooms, and instant messaging to collaborate on a common task" (Inch, 2008). Other sources lean towards search practices specifically for punitive purposes, which often involve privacy violations and cyber violence. Tom Downey (2010), a *New York Times* feature writer, described human flesh search practice in China as "a form of online vigilante justice in which Internet users hunt down and punish people who have attracted their wrath". In addition to the term *human flesh search*, *cyber manhunt* and *cyber violence* are often used to describe surveillance practice in its extreme form.

Although *human flesh search* is most frequently used to describe Chinese cyber phenomenon, such a practice should be viewed as a part of emerging trend of citizen surveillance around the globe, as the sectionbelow will highlight. The subject of my study is the collaborative surveillance phenomenon which has been prevalent in China, known as "human flesh search" in China context. I believe a deeper understanding of the phenomenon may benefit from scholarship developed under surveillance tradition and the role of citizen participation.

Given that understanding the Chinese collaborative cyber surveillance known as *human flesh search* is the primary purpose of the study, from now on, the search practices following refer specifically to the situation in China, unless indicated otherwise.

By 2012, Chinese collaborative cyber surveillance entered into its eleventh year since the first incident of this kind caught the public's attention. In that case in 2001, an anonymous user posted several photos of a pretty woman at Mop (www.Mop.com), a popular entertainment forum. The person who posted the photos claimed the woman was his girlfriend. Some Mop users thought the poster was bluffing; others suspected the woman was a porn star. Curious about the woman's real identity, the Mop users started a collaborative search to dig out the information

about the woman, using her photos as initial clues. Within a few days, they obtained detailed information of the search target, who was later identified as Chen Ziyao, a model employed by Microsoft China. All her private information was made public, including her name, work place, residence address, cell phone number, even her Resident Identification Card number. It was the first time that this kind of search caught public attention, and the public began to know and recognize the term of "Human flesh search" and its practice. Although the publicity Chen received was not considered to be entirely negative, it is apparent her privacy was violated as the result of the search (Ford, 2008; Wu, 2008). From then on, dozens of collaborative surveillance cases have emerged from Chinese online forums and attracted media attention domestically and internationally due to their dramatic developments and outcomes (e.g., Wang, et al, 2009; Downey, 2010). For some avid Internet users, searching and adding information about others has become an important part of their Internet usage (Ford, 2008; Wu, 2008; Chen & Sharma, 2011). So far, more than a dozen online forums dedicated to cyber collaborative surveillance have been established in China (Benzhan, 2011）.

A search of this kind often starts with an open query for information about any topics. A query can be initiated out of any motive, such as pure curiosity about a celebrity's academic record in high school or desire to track down a potential love interest. Although the subjects of the search vary greatly, a number of notable search cases have effectively publicized its most vicious type: Internet vigilantism. Often times, subjects of searches were wrongdoers who attracted public wrath, including cheating spouses, animal abusers, corrupt government officials, amateur pornographers, Chinese citizens who are perceived as unpatriotic, and rich people who committed a hit and run. The searches brought unwanted publicity to the search targets and their

private information was exposed, sometimes leading to public humiliation both online and in person. In some dramatic cases, search targets lost their jobs, had to quit school, or even were driven out of town as a result of being exposed.

Despite some drawbacks such as privacy violations and cyber violence, human flesh search has proved to be a very effective tool in revealing truth, soliciting public assistance, and fighting illegal behaviors (Chen & Sharma, 2011). For example, after the Sichuan earthquake in May 2008, human flesh search helped hundreds of victims find their missing family members (Deng, 2009).

Ambiguity towards human flesh search practices. With distinct benefits and drawbacks, human flesh search practice has generated mixed responses from the public (Ford, 2008; Wu, 2008; Chen & Sharma, 2011). On one hand, there have been some serious negative results caused by human flesh searches and subsequent cyber violence. Privacy violations, online abuse, threats, and mental stress are often the negative effects of human flesh searching. Therefore, search victims, concerned intellectuals, and sympathetic citizens have accused the practice and its practitioners of privacy violations and defamation. On the other hand, the practice has also been supported and applauded by others as a form of social justice, citizen empowerment, and civil participation, especially when the subjects of such searches were high-ranking officials whose power and behavior had never been checked by regular citizens before.

Local governments have attempted to regulate human flesh search in a variety of ways, often on the grounds of maintaining social stability and protecting individuals' privacy. In April 2008, Guangzhou Province outlawed the release of email addresses and other private data of others. This governmental act has been viewed as one of earliest local sanctions discouraging

human flesh search. In May 2009, Zhejing Province announced that it is illegal for any organization or individual to post, spread, delete, or change the private information of its owner without authorization. This regulation was interpreted as another local effort to curtail human flesh search (Cheung, 2009a). In the same year, both Xuzhou, a city in the Jiangsu province, and Ningxia Province established more rigid rules regulating citizens' Internet behaviors, banning individuals from releasing information concerning others without authorization, even if the information may not considered private (163 News Net, 2009). Though the regulations did not use the term "human flesh search," many forms of human flesh search practices were banned as a result.

Those local regulations were frowned upon by many scholars and legal experts, who viewed the bans as "throwing out the baby with the bath water" (e.g., Wang Pan, 2009; He, 2010). Some of them were concerned the laws would discourage citizens from reporting and exposing wrongdoings of government officials and other privileged members of society. Yin Yungong, a well-known communication scholar in Beijing, said in an interview with *LiaoWang Weekly*: "Human flesh search is one of already very limited options which enable ordinary citizens to watch over government and these officials. Given that corruption is so pervasive in China today, banning human flesh search only makes corruptive situations worse. It is not helping"[1] (Liaowang, 2010).

Compared with local governments, China's central government took a more conservative approach (Chen & Sharma, 2011). On February 28, 2009, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), the national legislature for China, amended the Criminal

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[1] The quote was originally published in Chinese, and the author provided the translation.

Law in an effort to curtail human flesh searchers from invading the privacy of individuals. According to the amendments, it is now illegal for employees of government agencies, financial institutions, transportation departments, educational institutions, and medical providers to sell or release individual private data. It is also now illegal for anyone to steal or obtain such private data without authorization of individuals involved. On December 26, 2009, the NPC passed the Tort Liability Act of the People's Republic of China. This tort act outlaws individuals or originations who infringe upon the lawful rights of others. The act holds a web service provider liable if it does not stop privacy invasions when such activity comes to its attention. The act also punishes a web service provider if it does not remove private content upon request from the information's owner. Since web portals play an important role in organizing the search, engaging participants, and disseminating research results, the tort act may discourage the participation and involvement in human flesh searching.

So far, none of these laws label human flesh searching an illegal activity. The Tort Liability Act of the PRC, for instance, does not punish individuals and organizations for short-term engagement with human flesh searching, as long as they delete the private content later (Chen & Sharma, 2011).

In their review of legal developments regarding human flesh search practices in China, Chen and Sharma (2011) observed:

> Chinese legislation on human flesh search is still evolving. There exists no systematic or comprehensive law to regulate human flesh search. The applicability of the existing legal clauses may also be insufficient. …The slow progress in Chinese legislation suggests that the government is taking a conservative approach in legalizing human flesh search before rushing into any quick decisions. As a result, human flesh search is still a grey area in China." (p. 62)

Panopticon and Power

Given the intricate nature and complex impacts of its practice, it is not surprising that human flesh search has been an emerging subject of research in China. The problem with human flesh search has always been, as it is now, the tricky power dynamic that engulfs the practice. The debate over the potential of the Internet as a power equalizer has been ongoing. Some scholars have expressed enthusiasm for the participatory potential of the Internet in harnessing collective intelligence (e.g., Rheingold, 2003; Jenkins, 2006; Howe, 2006). Others argue that the democratic potential of cyber space has been overestimated due to a failure to consider fully its economic, political, and cultural limitations (e.g., Cammaerts, 2008; Goldberg, 2010). In the case of human flesh searching in China, the negative and positive sides of online collaboration seem to have been amplified and complicated by the number of participants and the real life action spilled from cyber space. To examine this question in more depth, the study includes a more comprehensive literature review on this aspect, and discusses it in light of empirical evidence collected for the study.

To examine surveillance practices and the power dynamics they generate in cyber space, Michel Foucault's thesis (1977) regarding the Panopticon mechanism and power is highly relevant. *Panopticon* was coined by British philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1838/1995) to describe a prison design with which guards can oversee all the prisoners without being seen. Foucault uses the notion of Panopticon as a metaphor to explain power generation through observation systems. Foucault posits that modern societies have implemented a variety of Panopticon mechanisms for the purpose of social control, including schools, hospitals, and other disciplinary institutions. For Foucault, Panoptical system is a power generation machine which

empowers its users regardless of their capabilities and motives. Panoptic power can be "effective" and "productive" if used properly, but its unrestricted use may lead to the tyranny of power (Foucault, 1977). This notion is described further below, and the dissertation will offer an extended discussion of how Foucault and others have used and critiqued the notion of the Panopticon and other similar mechanisms of surveillance.

 With the prevalent use of the Internet and hand-held devices, the futurist Jamais Cascio (2005) raised the notion of *Participatory Panopticon*, describing the situations in which Internet and mobile phone users carry out collaborative surveillance by placing the search objects in a vast Panoptical system with no physical boundaries.

Research Questions

The overall research goal for this study is to examine Chinese cyber surveillance phenomenon, known as "human flesh search", through the lens of panoptic power. Unlike some previous studies on human flesh searching focus only on highly publicized search incidents, the study examines cyber surveillance in its daily practice, and probes how and why collaborative searches occur in China. It presents the experiences and thoughts of search participants with their own voices, and examines structural constraints and empowerment the searchers experienced, in order to understand such a controversial activity. Furthermore, it explores the implications of such a mode of surveillance toward media landscape, especially in Journalism.

Derived from the overall research goal, the study raised four major research questions. I will introduce each research question by addressing a particular research deficiency these questions tackle.

RQ1: How and why searches occur, and what are the attributes of its general practice?

Human flesh search phenomenon in China has not been sufficiently described to reveal its defining qualities. Some collaborative surveillance and punitive measures taken by Internet users have been defined as "Internet vigilante " and "cyber violence" by concerned intellectuals, and those participants are identified as a "cyber mob" (e.g., Ford, 2008;Wu, 2008; Downey, 2010). Several human flesh search forums in China responded to such strong criticism. For instance, Du Peiyuan, an executive manager in charge of Mop's *human flesh search forum,* the oldest and most notable search forum of this kind, said in an interview with the China Central Television (CCTV*)* in June, 2008:

> The major function of our human flesh search mechanism is to help users with knowledge inquiries, in which users ask questions and get answers from fellow users. Tracking down individuals by clues only makes up a very small portion of the inquiries, and is considered to be uncommon minority cases. However, some searching cases have been widely publicized to the extent which leads to a twisted view of human flesh search practice. As a matter of fact, the majority of human flesh search practice is not as intrusive and demonic as what people think…. ("Cyber Sword", 2008)

Du Peiyuan raised the question regarding the representativeness of those high-profiled search incidents covered by media. Is it possible that those dramatic, sensational cases only reflected a small portion of human flesh search practices, therefore leading to a "twisted view of human flesh search practice," as Du stated? There is no direct evidence regarding this question, partly because searching activities that did not result in dramatic results were often overlooked, and received little media coverage or document.

In order to make a well-reasoned and thoughtful judgment regarding the effects and probable implications of collaborative cyber surveillance in China, the study started by observing, listening, recording, and describing the phenomenon, in order to expand the understanding of this phenomenon. The study examined topics that emerged from human flesh search practices but

might be overlooked in the news selection process. Choosing leading site Mop's human flesh search forum as the primary sampling site, the study analyzed the content the forum provides, and provides a detailed description of the human flesh search forum, including the structures of sites, the nature of the queries, the subjects of the sought, response pattern, and the factors influencing the response rate. The paper used "thick description" to capture what was really happening in those forums. Chapter Three on methodology explains how multiple approaches were employed to achieve this goal.

RQ2: Who are the surveillance agents? How did they get involved in cyber surveillance? How do they view their roles in searches?

Besides raising the question regarding representative of highly publicized search incidents, Du's defense for human flesh search practices also served as a reminder of the need to attend to the voices of search participants. How do they see their roles in this phenomenon? How do they view privacy violations and cyber violence such modes of search can cause? The second goal of the study is to investigate searchers' experiences and perceptions so we can know why they were attracted to human flesh search practices.

In traditional surveillance, surveillance agents are typically governments and powerful organizations. In citizen surveillance, the forms of surveillance are more diverse, and the demographic make-up of surveillance agents is more complicated. The study examines the characteristics of the typical search participants, and what motivates them to conduct cyber surveillance. The answers to these questions were presented through the analysis of forum content, as well as a survey and in-depth interviews with the searchers themselves.

RQ3A: How is empowerment (or control) is experienced in surveillance process?

RQ3B: Does the notion of panoptic power helps understand citizen surveillance. If so, how?

The key argument around human flesh search boils down to the distribution and execution of power: who are the empowered, and who are subjected to this power, and how the power is used. This is a vital parameter for evaluating the legitimacy of the searches.

Given the high relevance of Foucault's thesis on the Panopticon mechanism and power in studying surveillance phenomenon, the study strives to understand surveillance agents—the experiences and perceptions of searchers— through the lens of power. By drawing upon existing research in surveillance, power, and collaboration on the Internet, the study strives to offer a robust and nuanced understanding of power relations in citizen surveillance conducted in a collective manner.

The study adopts the notion of the Panopticon to examine qualities of Chinese collaborative surveillance. The analysis of power was conducted through examining the enablement and constraints on the searchers through their experiences, as well as the user generated context at China leading search forum—Mop human flesh search forum.

The examination of power relations may contribute to the theoretical development of surveillance studies. It examines the fitness of the Panopticon concept based on empirical data of cyber surveillance, in order to decide what modifications should be made for this new form of surveillance, and whether Panopticon is still a useful way to understand surveillance phenomenon in China.

RQ4: How does human flesh searching affect the Chinese media landscape, especially investigative journalism?

The study is relevant to a profound transformation in the news media landscape in China, precipitated by the rise of citizen journalism, which refers to the trend in which members of a society play active roles in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information (Bowman & Willis, 2003). For years, legacy media such as television, newspaper, and radio have been the dominant news sources in China. Now, human flesh search practices have started to elevate the status of online forums in distributing the news (Chen & Sharma, 2011). With the Internet turning passive audiences into active content producers, citizens may use human flesh searching to identify their own Most Wanted persons or to rewrite the rules of tracking, sourcing, and reporting in order to influence, discipline, or punish the "bad guys" or to correct socially unacceptable behaviors. Such an emerging trend may have its disturbing sides, as indicated from some notable human flesh search incidents in China, but it can also be a welcome addition to the media landscape, especially in China where journalists were greatly limited on what and how much they could cover regarding "negative" news (Tong & Sparks, 2009).

Chang Ping (2009), a prestigious Chinese journalist known for his political commentaries regarding China, considers human flesh searching a form of media investigation and a much-needed anti-corruption tool. Commenting on the human flesh search that triggered Zhou Jiugeng's investigation, he says:

> In my view, human flesh searching is not just a simple act of data gathering – it is also about a dissemination of information to the public, and further research and then further dissemination. In short, it is an act of media investigation… (In China,) why can't officials publicly declare their wealth and assets? Those in authority would only use the excuse that it does not fit well with China's situation. If this is the case, then I would say that using human flesh search to fight

corruption fits well with China's situation and should be promoted at all costs (Chang, 2009; Poon, 2009[2]).

As Chang Ping said, human flesh searching has special value in keeping government officials' behavior and actions checked. Such a role is especially valuable, given that investigative journalism in China is in a precarious stage, and news organizations are discouraged from pursuing sensitive topics due to political and financial risks (Tong &Sparks, 2009).

A combination of factors contributes to the pessimism regarding investigative journalism. Political pressure from the central government is the most obvious factor. China has been undergoing rapid economic growth in the past two decades, but the increased wealth has only benefited a small portion of privileged people with financial, social or political resources. Rapid development and reform has brought unemployment for many, leading to sharp conflicts and social crisis. Social discontent and tension has been increased along with the growing gap between the rich and the poor (Wu, 2004; Tong & Sparks, 2009).

Since February 2005, the Chinese government, under President Hu Jingtao's leadership, has been promoting the idea of a "harmonious society." The aim is to mitigate social conflicts and re-establish the legitimacy of the party's governance. Authorities at central and local levels have increasingly restricted media coverage of social problems for the sake of "maintaining social stability." Ideological controls have become stricter (Sausmikat, 2006). With the emphasis on maintaining social stability, many fundamental exposures of wrongdoing of government officials or larger organizations have been judged to be a threat to social harmony and therefore

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[2] Chang's commentary was originally written in Chinese, and the English translation was provided by Alice Poon and retrieved from website: http://www.asiasentinel.com.

are discouraged. In isolated cases, journalists and editorial staff members were removed from their posts or imprisoned for releasing "negative" news (Esarey & Xiao, 2011).

In July 2011, China authorities shut down a leading investigative team, the investigative reporting unit of the *China Economic Times*; the entire editorial staff of the newspaper was reassigned to other jobs. The newspaper was criticized by its supervisor, the State Council, a government agency, for doing too much negative reporting without following guidance (Yiu & Schone, 2011). In addition to the potential political risk it may cause, investigative journalism is expensive and can easily put strain on important relations between media and other powerful social forces, leading to the loss of advertising revenue or difficulty in operation (Tong & Sparks, 2009). In such a climate, some Chinese news organizations have either abandoned investigative journalism entirely, or have adopted a very cautious strategy in exposing anything that may be perceived as negative, sensitive or upsetting by government authorities.

Given the limited room for investigative reporting at Chinese news organizations, citizen-initiated investigation in the form of human flesh searching can be a welcome addition to journalism in China today. However, considering the financial cost, potential risk, and complexity of investigative reporting, are amateur web users capable of doing the job?

The role of researcher. In the course of seeking answers to these questions, the study employed mixed methods: content analysis of a Chinese leading search forum—MOP Human Flesh Search Forum (HFSF), an online survey with 158 search participants, and in-depth interviews with nine search participants.

In any qualitative study, a researcher as the instrument is influenced by his or her moral standards, values, judgment, and personal experiences, as well as what he or she has learned as the research progresses. I am no exception to that set of facts.

At the initial stage, I was greatly influenced by the coverage in both Chinese and Western media of aggressive surveillance cases, in which such collaborative searches by massive participants often led to public humiliation even cyber violence towards their perceived wrongdoers. Therefore I assumed that search targets are victims while searchers hold greater power. However, after reading and analyzing hundreds of threads on the search forum, I gradually grew sympathetic towards some search initiators, who themselves are the victims of social injustice, frauds, or immoral behaviors. Financially deprived and socially disadvantaged, they resorted to human flesh searching to seek justice. Taking the existing power imbalance into account, the act of initiating human flesh searches may be considered as a form of self-empowerment. Such an understanding suggestions the importance of looking at each search case individually without making sweeping judgments about search practices in general. At the same time that I became more sympathetic towards some search participants, I did my best to listen to the participants carefully and without making judgments, and to present their thoughts and experiences in their own words.

The study recognizes the ever-evolving nature of cyber surveillance phenomenon. The intention is not to generalize the findings, but to deepen and expand understanding of social actions in cyber surveillance taking place in China. China is a big country with increasing global importance. Therefore, a more clear and detailed understanding of Internet developments in

China may be beneficial to everyone, especially given that the Internet is a global phenomenon

and inherently porous and since Internet activities can easily cross national boundaries.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical framework this study draws upon—the concept of

the Panopticon, beginning with Jeremy Bentham's development of this, and the attributes of

panoptic power. The first section will introduce the concept of surveillance, particularly

focusing on the proliferation of citizen surveillance in recent years. As the theoretical

background of the study, Michel Foucault's analysis of Panopticon and power are reviewed and

its limitations are discussed. The chapter also makes a distinction between collaborative cyber

surveillance and crowd-sourcing, and recognizes collaborative cyber surveillance as a special

form of crowd-sourcing.

Chapter 3 provides an introduction of human flesh search phenomenon in China and

reviews the scholarly literature about human flesh searching. The first section includes the

evolvement of human flesh search practice in China, as well as the introduction of social,

cultural contexts in China which may contribute to the popularity of such a practice. The second

section reviews the existing literature regarding human flesh search phenomenon in China, as

well as similar practices in other part of the worlds, and discusses what special value this study

may add to the current scholarship.

Chapter 4 describes my methodology and explains the content analysis of the forum.

The study derives from interpretative paradigms and the majority of the data is qualitative. To

justify the use of a qualitative approach, the chapter briefly introduces the interpretative

paradigm and qualitative research methods within the paradigm and explains in detail how each

method wsd implemented and how the data was analyzed.   The second part presents qualitative content analysis of the search forum, with key findings listed at the end.

Chapter 5 introduces the online survey method, and then explains the survey procedure and results. The results indicate that the majority of human flesh search participants are males under the age of 30 who have mixed motives for their search participation, including the desire to be helpful and serve justice. However, fun-seeking is the primary reason for search involvement. The analysis also suggests that searchers experience a strong sense of empowerment by hunting for information about others with few restrictions.

Chapter 6 introduces the in-depth interview method and then presents data about the searchers' experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes in their own words. The chapter concludes that searchers' empowerment levels vary greatly depending on their knowledge, expertise, and social status.

Chapter 7 summarizes the key findings of the study, and examines their theoretical and practical implications. The study found that human flesh searching takes the forms of peer-to-peer surveillance (coveillance) or sousveillance, covering more diverse topics than what scholars perceived; fun-seeking and being helpful are primary motives behind searching activities. However, privacy invasions and power abuses have complicated or even undermined search practices, limiting the potential of this activity to contribute to civil governance. At the end, the chapter concludes panoptic model is highly relevant and useful in understanding collaborative online surveillance, and suggests dividing searching practices by the forms and directions of each surveillance act, and then addressing the issue of power respectively.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

As a study focusing on cyber surveillance, this dissertation must first elaborates the issue of power in surveillance through Foucault's thesis on the Panopticon mechanism. This chapter will then briefly introduce crowd-sourcing, a concept referring to collaborative problem-solving and information gathering. The distinction is then made between crowd-sourcing and collaborative surveillance, in which collaborative cyber surveillance is recognized as a special form of crowd-sourcing in which the targets of searches are fellow citizens. The third section starts by elaborating the current situation in China, including Chinese media and its social environment, to contextualize the human flesh search phenomenon in China. This explanation will include several high-profile search cases occurring between 2002 and 2010. The point is that these are only one form of collaborative cyber surveillance. The study then proposes the research questions derived from Panoptic power perspective, in order to examine the extent to which Foucault's theory helps make sense of the phenomenon, and what modifications should be made to better explain contemporary cyber surveillance. The last section focuses on a review of previous human flesh search studies as a backdrop for the study. The research questions are raised and the method of inquiry is briefly introduced.

Theorizing Surveillance: Panopticon and Power

The term *surveillance* originated in France and refers to close watch kept over someone or something, such as by a detective ("Surveillance," 2009). Surveillance is defined as "the monitoring of the behavior, activities, or other changing information, usually of people for the purpose of influencing, managing, directing, or protecting" (Lyon, 2007.p.7).

French philosopher Michel Foucault's canonical analysis of Panopticon and power deeply influenced the theoretical treatment of surveillance studies for the past few decades. The notion of the panopticon was first proposed by Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century. Nevertheless, Foucault's view has had such a profound influence on later surveillance studies that David Wood, the editor of the journal *Surveillance & Society,* says every issue of *Surveillance & Society* is "a Foucault's issue" (Wood, 2002, p. 234). Socialist Kevin Haggerty says, "The Panopticon now stands for surveillance itself" (2006: 26).

Panopticon as architectural concept. The term *Panopticon* means "observing (*optic*) all (*pan*) in English. It was coined by English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in 1787 as a concept of architectural design. According to Bentham (1787/1995), the basic architectural figure of the Panopticon prison consists of a tower at the center for a guard and a periphery building which is divided into many cells, each of which is occupied by a prisoner. With the deliberate arrangement of positions and light, this design allows guards to watch all prisoners without the prisoners being able to tell whether they are being watched. As the guards cannot be seen, it is not necessary to have a constant guard presence, effectively reducing the cost of labor. Therefore, the Panoptic model was intended to be cheaper than the prisons of the time (see Graph 1. Plan of the Panopticon).

Bentham developed his idea with prison buildings in mind, although he considered the basic Panoptic model as equally applicable to hospitals, schools, daycares, and other facilities where surveillance is important. The essence of the design is to allow those in charge to watch the observed without them being able to tell whether or not they are being watched. Bentham himself described the Panopticon as "a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a

quantity hitherto without example"(Bentham, 1787/1995). He provided a list of benefits obtained

by the Panopticon design:

> The Morals reformed— health preserved — industry invigorated — instruction diffused
> — public burthens [burdens] lightened — Economy seated, as it were, upon a rock — the
> gordian knot of the poor-law not cut, but untied — all by a simple idea in Architecture!
> (Bentham, 1787/1995, p. 39)

Bentham spent his lifetime promoting the idea of the Panopticon prison, but failed to fully

actualize his plan due to the constraints of the available technology and the lack of sustained

interest from British government. But the concept of Panopticon was an important development,

and become even more influential when invoked by French philosopher Michel Foucault in a

metaphorical sense as a power mechanism for social control.

Panopticon plan by Bentham in *The works of Jeremy Bentham* (1838/1995)

Panopticon as a metaphor. French philosopher Michael Foucault (1977) invoked the

notion of Panopticon as a metaphor for modern "disciplinary" societies. He argues that modern

societies establish a system of hierarchical observation with which the power of control can be achieved by merely observing people. By placing the subjects in constant observation, the actions of the observed are changed from what they might otherwise have been. In this sense, discipline operates through a calculated "gaze," not by force. Foucault recognizes that with the Panopticon system an important mechanism of social control is available, not only in prisons but also adopted in other institutions with surveillance elements, including hospitals, schools, and factories.

Foucault presented a power analysis which has become well known today. He started with elaborating how Panoptic power is at work:

> Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and the permanent visibility that assures the automatic functions of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action…. (1977:202)

Foucault sees the Panopticon mechanism as a technology which produces power through observation. He describes the process as follows:

> It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted contribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up. (1977: 202)

Foucault states that the principle of the Panoptic model is that "power should be visible and unverifiable." He further explains:

> Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so. …The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the periphery ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen. (1977: 203)

Foucault points out two defining qualities embedded in the Panopticon: Its power is both asymmetrical and homogenous. Power relations between observers and observed are *asymmetrical*. The mechanism of the Panopticon "automatizes" power through deliberate distribution of "gazes" (Foucault, 1977, p. 202). The prisoners are subject to a constant "gaze" and must obey the rules all the time. Therefore, guards have the power to control through operating the mechanism of the Panopticon. Depending on the position individuals take within a mechanism, some people automatically gain power and others are subject to it. Foucault recognizes that observation generates power imbalance: "There is machinery that assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, difference." In short, a Panopticon system gives its users power, while the subjects of surveillance are made to subject themselves to the power. The asymmetrical nature of panoptic power means power imbalance always exists between the observers and the observed.

Foucault (1977) also notes that the Panoptic model produces *homogenous* effects of power. It does not matter who is doing the watching. He posits, "Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up." (p. 202) Because the Panopticon system makes observation "unverifiable," it does not matter who operates the Panopticon machine or what the motives are behind the operation, what the observed experience is the same- awareness that they are being watched. Also, the power obtained from operating a Panopticon machine works in the same way regardless of individual operators, that is, power is generated through observation. The Panopticon mechanism "disindividualizes" power (p. 202). Foucault concludes, "Any individual, taken almost at

random, can operate the machine: in the absence of the director, his family, his friends, his visitors, even his servants." In his "eye of Power" interview, Foucault (1980) repeated his thesis that it might not matter who is doing the watching.

Foucault's analysis of panoptic power. Foucault's thesis of the Panopticon mechanism is deeply rooted in his understanding of power and the generation of power. For Foucault, power is different from force, which is used in punitive societies. Power is embedded in social structure: "mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (p.202). Foucault sees power as a relationship between two entities in which one affects another's actions. Power can make free persons do things they would not do otherwise, therefore power involves constraining or altering someone's will. In other words, sometimes power coerces, albeit without overt threat and without physical force or violence. However, Foucault strongly opposes describing power in negative tones without careful examination of its effects. He believes power may be "productive" if it is executed in alignment with the demands of social, economic, and political developments.

Foucault recognized the potential danger of intensified power over social progress and production, and he ascribed two conditions which may assure that the increase of power remains "productive." One is that the Panopticon must be operated continuously and extensively in the whole social body, especially in the lower rungs of social ladders. The other is that the Panopticon functions in a stable, smooth, and constant form. This is in contrast with the sudden, violent, discontinuous forms that are bound up with the exercise of sovereignty. In laying out the extra conditions for power to be productive, Foucault implied that the Panopticon mechanism does not necessarily generate positive power for society in general, even though the power can be economic and efficient for purposes of governance.

Panopticon Revisited

Foucault's thesis of the Panopticon and power has been one of the most popular concepts in contemporary social thought, and has deeply influenced the theoretical treatment of surveillance studies over the past decades (Yar, 2003; Lyon, 2003; Haggerty; 2006). Haggerty (2006) contends that the popularity of the concept of Panopticon has to do with the claimed generalization of the concept by Foucault. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault proposed that the principles inherent in the Panopticon themselves served as a model of understanding the operation of power in contemporary society, stating that the Panoptic schema "was destined to spread through the social body; its vocation was to become a generalized function' (Foucault 1977: 207).

In the past, certain elements of what we might recognize as the Panopticon have been implemented by various governmental, military, police, and corporate entities for the purpose of social control. In the metaphoric sense, these institutions are considered to be "guards." These monitor the citizens while the observed are subjected to the observation as "prisoners" (Lyon, 2006; Mann, et al, 2003). This type of surveillance has been recognized as "one-way" surveillance where the authorities, other powerful people, and dominant institutions watch others for the purpose of control (Haggerty, 2006; Regan & Steeves, 2010). In those scenarios, surveillance often means execution of power, carried out by governments and privileged groups towards the general public or socially disadvantaged groups. George Orwell's novel *1984* depicts a fictional society of a totalitarian state, in which everyone is under complete surveillance by big screens, and is constantly reminded of this by the phrase "Big Brother is watching you" (Orwell, 1949). Since the publication of *1984*, the term "Big Brother" has become a synonym for abusive

government power, particularly exposing tight surveillance on citizens. As sociologist John Gilliom put it, the word surveillance insinuates domination: "Surveillance is never really just watching. It's not just vision, but supervision. It's not just sight, but oversight" (Gilliom 2001: 205).

The Panoption model has dominated surveillance studies for nearly half century, and has become a paradigm itself (Lynn, 2004; Haggerty, 2006). Under Foucault's influence, surveillance has been mostly treated as a unidirectional, upside-down, asymmetrical process; studies of surveillance have concentrated on institutional actors infringing on the rights and activities of others (Wood, 2005). Following this model, some have extended Foucault's thinking of Panoptic power to contemporary surveillance domains, detecting Panoptic attributes in new surveillance arrangements, such as low-income families' subjection to intrusive welfare surveillance systems (Gilliom, 2001), and CCTV operators' prejudice toward certain ethnic groups (Norrs & Armstrong, 1999) .

In recent years, there has been a distinct shift towards a cautiously critical tone in literature looking at the Panoptic model as it is applied to surveillance domains. More authors have called attention to the limitations of the Panoptic model for understanding the dynamic of contemporary surveillance (Bauman, 1992; Lyon, 1994; Yar, 2003; Haggerty, 2006). The need to revaluate the Panopticon scheme arose along with the significant changes that have taken place in the past few decades, which have radically changed the landscape of contemporary surveillance in its forms, purpose, and surveillance directions. These changes will be elaborated in the following section.

Forms of new surveillance. Since the 1950s, the number of new technologies for discovering personal information has increased significantly (Marx, 1989, 2002; Lynn, 2003). Sociologist Gary Marx (2002) states that traditional surveillance under the Panopticon system has emphasized visual surveillance, while new surveillance types have made multiple forms of data available and accessible. Marx listed new forms of surveillance as follows:

> The last half of the 20th century has seen a significant increase in the use of technology for the discovery of personal information. Examples include video and audio surveillance, heat, light, motion, sound and olfactory sensors, night vision goggles, electronic tagging, biometric access devices, drug testing, DNA analysis, computer monitoring including email and web usage and the use of computer techniques such as expert systems, matching and profiling, data mining, mapping, network analysis and simulation. Control technologies have become available that previously existed only in the dystopic imaginations of science fiction writers. We are a surveillance society. (P.9)

Marx considered that new surveillance takes enormously varied forms, and probes "more deeply, widely, and softly" (2002: 9) than the traditional methods. Marx identified computerized surveillance as an important form of new surveillance, distinguishing itself from traditional surveillance. "Computers qualitatively alter the nature of surveillance—routinely, broadening, and deepening it" (Marx, 1998: 208). He argued that in traditional surveillance, "what the surveillant (a person who is watching) knows, the subject probably knows as well," whereas in the new context, the "surveillant knows things the subject doesn't" (2002: 29).

Believing that the significant changes in surveillance merit the effort of redefining the term *surveillance* itself, Marx (2002) tried to construct a definition to reflect emerging, diverse forms of contemporary surveillance, realized by the development and prevalence of surveillance technology. He proposed what he called a better definition of the new surveillance: "The use of technical means to extract or create personal data. This may be taken from individuals or

context" (p. 12). By "the use of technical means," Marx implies information could go beyond what is offered to the unaided eyes or is voluntarily reported. The use of "context" along with " individuals" as sources of information recognizes that meaning may reside in connections made between discrete sources of data or information that are themselves not revealing.

Marx's (2002) definition of surveillance is especially suitable for describing cyber surveillance conducted by fellow Internet users. First, in a typical collaborative online search, surveillance involves all the behaviors identified by Marx: searching, retrieving, and releasing personal data. Second, without specifying the form of the data, Marx's definition of surveillance can include visual, auditory, text, and/or other forms of surveillance data.

Purposes of surveillance. The proliferation of new purposes for surveillance has transcended the functions initially envisioned for the Panoptic model: efficient and economic power mechanism for social control (Haggerty, 2006). Checking spouses' cell phone records for the signs of infidelity or watching the nanny's interaction with children at home through a hidden camera are often driven by the lack of trust (Lynn, 2004). Haggerty (2006) argued surveillance can be experienced from both sides of the observation as fun or liberating. This can be seen through the proliferation of reality TV shows as well as self-exposure in personal blogs. Surveillance may also be conducted out of curiosity about others with the help of search engines (Andrejevic, 2006). In recent years, a growing problem is when hackers hijack the webcams and closed circuited television systems (CCTV) installed in private settings for purposes of voyeurism (Di Justo, 2005). Nowadays, surveillance has also found its use in product marketing, health promotion, child-rearing, scientific research, and other fields. As Haggerty (2006) summarized, "Nowadays, it is

increasingly difficult to suggest that surveillance serves a single coherent purpose, or even a limited set of purposes at a societal level" (p.27).

    Directions of surveillance. Surveillance in the Panoptic model is typically unidirectional, with the powerful monitoring the less powerful in the social hierarchy. Under the unidirectional gaze, the watchers can observe the watched while remaining unseen by their subjects. Surveillance is executed in a top-down direction. While such surveillance is present and ongoing, an exclusive focus on that dynamic overlooks vital developments in contemporary surveillance (Haggerty, 2006). Omnipresent surveillance has included people from all segments of the social hierarchy under scrutiny according to their lifestyle habits, consumption patterns, occupations, and the institutions with which they are aligned (Nock, 1993).

    One of the most distinct changes in contemporary surveillance is the democratization of surveillance facilities, which enables regular citizens to act as surveillance agents by watching their peers or overseeing the government or powerful groups who used to be surveillance agents (Mann, 2003; Staples, 2005; Andrejevic, 2005, 2007). Some examples of citizen surveillance were listed in the first chapter, for instance, the web sites established by citizens to fight street harassment or illegal parking. This type of surveillance is different from traditional surveillance in its directions of surveillance, the functions it serves, and the motives behind it. Differing from top-down surveillance which used to dominate the surveillance field, citizens may watch their fellow citizen in a lateral form, or watch their governments or powerful groups in the bottom-up direction. Therefore, the motives behind surveillance have become much more complex and diverse.

Individuals watch or search others' information out of curiosity, lust, or a desire to escape, which makes surveillance a pastime or a way of self-entertaining.

In this way, sociologist William Staples (2005) recognizes contemporary surveillance operates in a different way from top -down surveillance aimed for social control and monitoring. He says:

> There is no Big Brother….We are him. Rather than appear simply "from the top down" or originate from a small group of identifiable individuals or even a particular organization, the new surveillance and social control practices, I argue , are advanced, directly or indirectly, by all of us. They are not orchestrated by only a few or as part of some master plan that is simply imposed on us; rather, disciplinary power expands "bi-directionally," flowing from top to bottom and vice versa. (p. 105).

Staples' statement pointed out the directional changes in surveillance, which is confirmed by others. Andrejevic (2005) argued, with the handiest surveillance tool at our finger tips—a computer with Internet connections--everyone can easily undertake surveillance by simply typing a few words.   He identified the most common citizen surveillance in the United States as using the Google search engine to search for someone else's information. The person or persons sought may be the searchers' romantic interests, friends, or acquaintances. He called such surveillance "lateral surveillance," or peer-to-peer surveillance. He posits that lateral surveillance indicates democratization of access to technologies and strategies for cultivating investigatory expertise, that is, everyone can be an Internet detective.

Even though searching like a detective is not an intuitive skill possessed by everyone, citizen surveillance can be performed at differing levels. At the individual level, it does not take an expert to find out that his love interest just changed her Facebook status to "in relationship," or for a parent to install a surveillance camera to watch the nanny's interaction with her child

when she is away. With a cell phone complete with built-in camera, people can report illegal parking, street harassment, or other suspicious activities with a picture on the scene. With the Internet and crowd-sourcing sites, individuals are no longer limited by their own expertise. They may solicit help from both friends and strangers from social networking or crowd-sourcing sites, or post an open call on a discussion forum (Chi, 2009). In the book market, a growing number of technical manuals have become available to anyone who is interested in conducting surveillance, covering everything from legal issues, through how to "tail" someone, to the increasingly sophisticated surveillance technologies available for purchase (Jenkins,2003;Wood, 2005).

Numerous scholars have come up with new terms to capture the emerging quality of new surveillance, especially directional changes brought about by citizen surveillance. To differentiate the directions of surveillance, engineering professor Steve Mann and others coined two words: sousveillance and coveillance.

Sousveillance is coined from the French words for "sous" (below) and "veiller" (to watch), referring to surveillance conducted by individuals to observe more powerful institutions like governments and organizations. According to Mann (2002), such bottom-up surveillance is *inverse surveillance,* which serves as a counter balance to the organizational top-down hierarchical surveillance that is so commonly imposed upon citizens. Mann et al (2003) question the asymmetrical nature of existing hierarchical surveillance, and conclude the necessity of employing sousveillance and coveillance to restore power balances (p. 348).

Coveillance is coined from the French word "co" (next) and"veiller" (to watch). Coveillance is used to describe peer-to-peer surveillance, in which citizens watch each other, and both the watchers and the watched are in the "vertical system of the power" (Reine & Wellman:

240). Mann (2002) describes coveillance as what happens in a small town: the next-door neighbors watch what you're up to. Neighborhood watches are an example of coveillance (Reine & Wellman, 2012).

Mann (2002) initially coined the two concepts for his experiments with a wearable surveillance camera. But others have found the two forms of surveillance practices are more prevalent on the Internet. Search engines and social networking sites are considered the primary sources people use to find out more about both known and unknown individuals (Andrejevic, 2005; Reine & Wellman, 2012). The concepts of sousveillance and coveillance help to specify the growing trend of citizen surveillance in terms of direction of the surveillance process. As mentioned in Foucault's thesis and other analyses on Panopticon power, top-down surveillance creates asymmetrical power relations by making the upper class the operator of surveillance, while bottom-up surveillance (also called *sousveillance*) helps to lessen such power imbalance by giving fellow citizens the opportunity to monitor those in charge. In a *coveillance* situation, ordinary citizens are equipped with surveillance technology so they can watch other citizens. In coveillance situations, both the observed and the observing belong to a flat power relation, at least initially.

Mann's stance on sousveillance and coveillance is oversimplified. He assumed that sousveillance and coveillance would always be preferred; his reasoning is that surveillance typically is asymmetrical. Therefore, any new form which counters power imbalance will be preferred. However, surveillance operated from an opposite direction does not guarantee counter balance. It is likely that sousveillance can be abusive, leading to ineffective governance. Mann overlooked that the

form or direction of surveillance does not say very much about the functions and effects surveillance

serves. Sousveillance and coveillance can be abusive, creating new asymmetry in power relations.

Surveillance scholars have attempted to revise and invent new concepts to capture the

new features of contemporary surveillance. In traditional surveillance, government and powerful

organization are the ones do the watching and monitoring. As the surveillance agents, they often

act as a singular entity and conduct surveillance independently. In cyber surveillance, citizens are

not only involved in surveillance individually, but also participate in it in collaborative manner.

But many scholars have only focused on citizen surveillance conducted individually, and did not

mention the collaborative aspect of cyber surveillance. However, if the interest in someone's

private information is shared by the public or a group of Internet users, cyber surveillance may

no longer be an individual, private, and "lateral" behavior, as Andrejevic (2005) claimed. A

growing number of collaborative cyber surveillance cases have manifested the frequency of its

occurrence and the power it contains.

Michael Zimmer (2008) summarized his doubts about the fitness of the Panopticon model for

the phenomenon of contemporary citizen surveillance:

> Can we expect the term surveillance, coined at the dawn of the nineteenth-century
> and meaning "to watch over," to adequately describe emerging scenarios where peers
> are watching each other in a much more symmetric fashion, as in the rise of social
> networks sites? Or, is the notion of the Panopticon, characterized by subjects who
> persistently and consciously feel themselves under the watchful gaze of a centralized
> authority, useful when surveillance increasingly is hidden and dispersed among
> various private interests, such as in the tracking of commercial or Web-based
> activities. (p.203)

Haggerty says:

> The Panopticon is oppressive in a sense that it is a leading scholarly model for
> analyzing surveillance. In doing so, analysts have excluded or neglected a host of
> other key qualities and processes of surveillance that fall outside the Panoptic
> framework. The result has been that the Panoptic model has been overextended to

domains where it seems ill-suited, and important attributes of surveillance that cannot be neatly subsumed under the "panoptic" rubric have been neglected. (2006, p.23)

The stance of the study. Despite the appearance of a number of critiques in the literature, the research reported in this dissertation still found that the Panoptic model is useful as the theoretical reference for analysis. The reasons are manifold.

First, as David Lynn (2006) said, the Panopticon is a rich concept capable of interpretation in a number of ways, especially in explorations of the issue of power. Since the study focuses on power in surveillance, the Panopticon cannot be avoided either as a historical reference or as an analytical frame, especially given the fact that competing theories are not available. Second, as suggested by numerous scholars, the Internet itself, the very environment of cyber surveillance, bears some resemblances to Panopticon systems.

I agree that the panoptic model should be applied with caution, on a case to case basis. But in this study, given the surveillance phenomenon under examination, the Panoptic model is still highly relevant, and can be a useful analytical scheme for investigation. Meanwhile, human flesh search, a distinct form of collaborative cyber surveillance, possesses qualities that are not captured in the Panopticon scheme. For example, the panoptic scheme does not see surveillance agents as plural, but a singular entity with a cohesive purpose. In collaborative surveillance such as human flesh search, there are multiple surveillance agents, acting either independently or collaboratively. They interact with each other through online chat, emails, or even offline contact. The interactions among multiple surveillance agents are certainly beyond the scope of the original panoptic model.

Therefore, instead of embracing the Panoptic model unconditionally and treating empirical data obtained through the study to validate the existing paradigm, the study treated the Panoptic model as a reference model and analytical frame. The results of the study were used to evaluate the fitness of the Panopticon theory to human flesh search practice and pointed to the differences and made suggestions for modification or revision, including new theories.

Citizen Cyber Surveillance and Empowerment

With the rise of citizen surveillance, the possibility for empowerment in surveillance settings has been explored (e.g., Andrejevic, 2005, 2007; Regan et al, 2010; Monahan et al, 2010). Regan and Steeves (2010) called cyber surveillance on Facebook and other social networking sites "two-way" reciprocal surveillance, and highlighted that such surveillance can be empowering in its effect, "in terms of aligning themselves with like-minded others for political or social purposes, and in terms of controlling, or at least contributing to, their identities and reputation"(p.153). Monahan et al (2010) posits that technologies and techniques of surveillance can help citizens with "leveling, equalizing, and actualizing social justice," which is an ongoing process of empowerment (p.105). He suggests that to evaluate empowering outcomes of surveillance, researchers may start with observing improvements in the economic, juridical, social, or symbolic status of an individual or group that has traditionally been marginalized or oppressed. The study adopts this view and examines the outcomes of surveillance by examining empowerment or disempowerment experienced by human flesh search participants.

Empowerment through self-efficacy mechanisms. Empowerment is achieved by equipping people with the requisite knowledge, skills, and resilient beliefs of self-efficacy to

alter aspects of their lives over which they can exercise some control. Studies of various aspects of personal change indicate that methods of empowerment operate through the self-efficacy mechanism (Bandura, 1986).

Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with people's belief in their capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control over given events (Bandura, 1989; Ozer & Bandura, 1994). Self-beliefs of efficacy can have diverse effects on psychosocial functioning. Judgments of personal efficacy affect choice of activities and selection of environments. People tend to avoid activities and situations they believe exceed their coping capacities, but they readily undertake activities and select social environments they judge themselves capable of handling. The social influences operating in the selected environments can contribute to personal development by the interests and competencies they cultivate and the social networks they provide.

According to Amichai-Hamburger, McKenna, and Tal (2008), increases in self-efficacy have long been shown to lead to increases in both perceived and actual empowerment for the individual. They identify four levels at which empowerment can be seen and how the Internet may contribute to empowerment. The first level of empowerment is that of personal. Personal empowerment is often associated with enhanced competence and skills, as well as an increased feeling of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1990). The second level is the interpersonal. This type of empowerment involves the ability of the individual to effectively establish and maintain relationships with others. The group level is the third level on which empowerment occurs. By being a member of a group, individuals find similar others, reinforce their group identity, and

participate in group decision-making. These activities further enhance their sense of self-efficacy and entail a sense of empowerment.

Positive or negative outcome of empowerment. Amichai-Hamburger et al. (2008) have explored the various contexts in which the outcome of empowerment may not always positive. They argue:

> It is important to remember that the consequences of empowerment, the confidence, self efficacy, and the emboldened pursuit of previously stifled, deep-seated desires, are not always a positive occurrence. The same processes that empower individuals in realms that are considered positive by any particular society will also occur in non-sanctioned arenas. Active group involvement with similar others will, equally strengthen the social identity and self-acceptance of individuals who suffers from epilepsy as it will the pedophiles. Grassroots groups with a pro-social agenda will be empowered, but so, too, will those who promote hate and violence. This said, it is vital that the positive potential of the Internet for empowerment must not be lost, rather ways must be found to limit the access and actions of those who wish to take this unique tool for good and utilize it for negative purposes. (p. 1786)

It should also be noted that the subject of empowerment and its social context are important in evaluating the effects of empowerment (Amichai-Hamburger et al, 2008; Monahan et al, 2008; Skoric et al, 2010). Sometimes, what is considered to be empowering among one group may be perceived as disempowering to another group. Positive outcomes along one axis, or in light of one model, may be considered negative on another measurement scale. In addition, an empowerment effect may change over time given fluid social contexts; so something that might seem empowering today for some people might yield different outcomes tomorrow. Therefore, to evaluate the empowering outcomes of surveillance, Monahan et al (2008) suggested that researchers may "start with observing improvement in the economic, juridical, social or symbolic status of an individual or group that has traditionally been marginalized or oppressed" (p. 109). The study adopts Monahan et al (2008)'s view and therefore examines the outcome of citizen

surveillance by considering what power relations used to be, i.e., when citizens had not had accesses to the available surveillance tools. It explores various forms of empowerment or disempowerment experienced by human flesh search participants in China.

The Internet as a surveillance environment. Tom Brignall (2002) argues that elements of the panoptic model are inherent in the structure of any society where a dominant feature is Internet surveillance. Brignall (2002) posits that few people can be exempt from cyber surveillance, because the Internet has become a part of daily life. Even if they themselves have never been online, their acquaintances may mention them and makes their presence and activities known online. Andrejevic (2005) used the term "digital enclosure" to describe the situation in which every online activity leaves its digital trace behind, which can be retrieved and used with the appropriate surveillance technology (p.9).

Foucault's Panopticon mechanism allows for physical access to a vantage point, the "tower," from which observations can be made. What is unique about the structure of the Internet is that it has no physical constraints (which a physical Panopticon structure has); therefore, the observations can be made from anywhere in an ongoing way. In such a situation, no one knows who the observers are and who the observed are. Not only can governments, police, and corporate entities be guards, any citizen with the Internet access and knowledge of how to use search engines can be a surveillance agent, initiating and conducting surveillance (Brignall, 2002).

Citing the high-profile case of Abu Ghraib's photos, which depicted prisoner abuses by American troops in Iraq, futurist Jamais Cascio (2005) pointed out that the real power of citizen surveillance not only lies in its bottom-up form, but also the network connections shared by

citizens to spread and develop news. Cascio proposed the notion of *Participatory Panopticon* to describe such a voluntary surveillance conducted by citizens in cyber space. He states that in a modern society with the characteristics of a participatory Panopticon: "Anyone, anywhere, with a digital camera and a network connection has enormous power, perhaps enough to alter the course of a war or to shake the policies of the most powerful nation on Earth" (Cascio, 2005).

Facebook as surveillance site. Marx's new definition of surveillance specifically excluded information voluntarily reported from the surveillance realm. But such exclusion is at odds with other scholars' views about modern surveillance in cyber space (e.g. Andrejevic, 2005; Albrechtslund, 2008). Anders Albrechtslund (2008) proposed to treat social networking sites like Facebook as places of participatory surveillance. In his opinion, social networking sites provide individuals a platform where they voluntarily reveal detailed information about themselves and their activities to friends and friends' friends for watching, while at the same time, they can watch what others are up to through others' self-revelations. What is unique about surveillance on social networking sites, Albrechtslund posits, is that such watching is often voluntary and reciprocal for participants. Both ends of surveillance are aware of the possibility of being watched, and have some control over what they want others to know about. Moreover, they can be the watchers and the watched at the same time. Although such surveillance still has some unintentional results, for instance, corporate-owned social networking sites may collect and use their information for commercial purposes, surveillance participants still have greater control over the content they are willing to give away. He considers surveillance of this form to be two-way, participatory surveillance. He argued that the participatory nature of such surveillance calls

for attention to its "flat" relations among the watchers and the watched, as well as social and playful perspectives of participatory surveillance.

From crowd-sourcing to cyber collaborative surveillance. Collaborative cyber surveillance and crowd-sourcing are two related concepts. This section will introduce the two concepts, and identify their similarities and differences for future analysis.

Crowd-sourcing is a form of problem-solving collaboration. The practice has been around for centuries but it has become more prevalent with the rapid development of the Internet. Jeff Howe, a contributing editor at *Wired* Magazine, has been covering the crowd-sourcing phenomenon through a variety of venues since 2006 (Howe, 2006, 2008). Howe defines crowd-sourcing as "the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call" (Howe, 2006). Howe emphasizes that the essential requisites of crowd-sourcing are the use of "open call" and the pool of potential massive laborers at which the call is targeted.

Based on Howe's definitions, Brabham (2008) examined several applications of crowd-sourcing and generalized crowd-sourcing as a strategic problem-solving model to attract an interested, motivated crowd of individuals. Both Howe and Brabham see corporations or institutions as primary initiators of crowd sourcing. They are the ones who make open calls and have tangible financial or intelligent gains from initiating and moderating crowd-sourcing projects.

In addition to Howe and Brabham's definitions of crowd-sourcing, the term has also been loosely applied to other situations. Some web sites based on users' collaboration and contributions have crowd-sourcing attributes, such as Yahoo! Answers. Yahoo! Answers' web

site is designed primarily for users to contribute content by either posting their questions or answering questions raised by fellow users (Yahoo, 2008). The questions raised at Yahoo! Answers are wide ranging, including queries such as "what's the best restaurant in the town," "what is the average height for males', and so forth. In this sense, any individual can initiate a query by making an open call to undefined users. To say that recipients are undefined is because the initiators do not specify recipients individually. For instance, a company may post a query on a news aggregation site, asking viewers to design a logo for their upcoming special event. The initiators may have a rough idea about the demographics of recipients, but they do not know individual recipients and have no idea who might respond to the request.

In the past three decades, computer-enabled or cyber surveillance has enabled citizens to undertake surveillance on fellow citizens. The prevalent use of the Internet means that every user leaves digital traces. With the help of search engines, it is simple to locate and retrieve information. Since the 1980s, technology developments have also significantly reduced the price of surveillance equipment and made this kind of gear accessible to and affordable for regular citizens. The act of surveillance no longer sounds abstract or far-fetched to regular citizens (Lyon, 2001; Mann, 2003; Andrejevic, 2005).

This study treats crowd-sourcing and collaborative surveillance as interrelated and overlapping. Crowd-sourcing is defined as a strategic problem-solving model, in which a task is designated to undefined, massive pool of potential laborers in the form of an open call. Based on this definition, China's cyber collaborative surveillance constitutes one type of crowd-sourcing, because it possesses two defining characteristics of crowd-sourcing: the search task is initiated in the form of open call, and the potential task performers are undefined, masses of Internet users.

However, the notion of crowd-sourcing does not sufficiently capture the special features of human flesh search practice in Chinese cyber space. As the *New York Times* reporter (Downey, 2010) described, in numerous notable human flesh search cases, the Chinese searchers were less interested in finding out the location of the best restaurant than in tracking down the personal information of the perceived wrongdoers, including individuals who cheated their spouses, abused animals, made offensive comments about earthquake victims, etc. In other words, crowd-sourcing seeks information, and human flesh search practice often targets specific persons of interest. Moreover, such searches are often conducted with punitive purpose.

Such collaborative cyber surveillance is different from peer-to-peer surveillance on social networking sites, where people voluntarily post information about themselves and their activities, while simultaneously gaining access to information about their friends and friends' friends. First, such surveillance is often conducted individually, while human flesh searching is operated in a collective manner. Second, with each surveillance act, watchers are plural, while the watched is often singular.

There are significant differences between surveillance conducted individually in private and searches operated collectively in public. Collective searches often render more information about the targets. When numerous people dig out an individual's information in a collective, collaborative manner, they can accumulate much more information or clues about the subject than each of them do alone. Information which has no meaning in isolation may take new meaning when connected to other information. The pattern which may be ignored by one person can be picked up by another person. The presence of others in surveillance also means there are group dynamics involved. Searchers can interact with one another and have a sense of belonging

through participation. They may be encouraged or discouraged by comments of their peers and respond differently due to the presence of "others" online. The dimension of the group adds complexity to surveillance phenomenon and also makes it more interesting to explore as a research subject (McKenna & Green,2002).

Chapter 3: Human Flesh Search in China

Chapter 3 includes the introduction of human flesh search phenomenon in China and the review of the scholarly literature about human flesh searching. It starts with a brief introduction of Chinese social environment and media censorship. Then it is followed by the introduction of several high-profile search cases and important developments in human flesh searching practices. It ends with the literature review regarding existing scholarly work regarding human flesh search phenomenon in China, and pointed out the unique contributions the study makes to surveillance scholarship and media studies.

Social, cultural, and economic climates in China

This section summarizes social, cultural, and economic climates in China that may account for the popularity of human flesh search practice, with a special focus on the period from 2002 to 2012, a period called Hu's era, for it is the time when China was under President Hu Jingtao's leadership. This period is important in the history of human flesh searching for it is the time when human flesh searching emerged, evolved, gained popularity, and developed into what it is today. It is also the time when China faced some enormous economic and social challenges. Wu Guoguang, a Chinese renowned scholar, summarizes these challenges as a "fundamental paradox," that is, "China's national and international success in material construction were the very source of misery for numerous citizens, development was still in opposition to social harmony" (Wu, 2011, p. 20).

Rapid rising economic and social discontent. The People's Republic China was founded in 1949. After many years of civil wars and numerous events of social disruption and chaos, China government initiated a series of economic reforms in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping's

leadership. Since then, China has maintained a high rate of economic growth and become the

world's fastest-growing major economy (Altucher, 2010). **despite the fact its exports were**

greatly affected by the 2008 global recession

   http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/jan2009/gb20090122_354571.htm

However, only China's government and government-affiliated groups obtained the major

share of China's growing wealth. Huge imbalance existed between the wealth owned by the state

and the wealth owned by citizens, and there is a widely accept public belief among ordinary

citizens that wealthy people in China became rich not through talents and hard work but by their

illegitimate use of public power (Wu, 2011).

In 2008, in order to **quickly exit from** global recession and continue its rapid economic

growth, China greatly increased government investment to create jobs and stimulate

consumption. Such a remedy negatively affected China society in multiple ways. On the one

hand, government investment provided tremendous advantage and resources to government-

affiliated personnel to become corrupt, also further transferred state assets to the hands of few

people with political power and good connections. On the other hand, as a result of these

stimulation measures, inflation of consumer goods greatly affected the lives of ordinary people

(Wu, 2011).

As the gap between the rich and the poor continuously widened, corruptions among

government officials became widespread and more severe, China began to see increasing

occurrences of social conflicts (Wu, 2011; Sommer, 2012). Strikes and other forms of labor

confrontations rose, and land disputes between citizens and local governments escalated.

According to statistics from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), in 2007 the

number of mass protests rose to over 80,000, a 33 percent jump compared with 60,000 in 2006. The government subsequently stopped publishing this statistic. In 2011, China averaged 500 **large-scale protests** per day, according to economist Niu Wenyuan, an adviser to China's State Council (Sommer, 2012; Ramzy, 2012). In some extreme cases, the expression of social grievance became destructive. In late spring of 2010, several unrelated school slaughters took place across China, in which over 100 elementary school children were killed or seriously injured. It was reported that the killers, in most cases impoverished, had unresolved grievances with local governments and turned their rage on the weakest and most innocent (Wu, 2011).

       China urban youth. China's population was over 1.3 billion by November 2010. Chinese youth, defined as those aged 30 and under, comprise roughly 40% of total population (Wallis, 2011). They are known as the "post-eighties generation" (born during the 1980s) and "post-nineties generation" (born during the 1990s). The youth also consist about 61% of China Internet users, leading to the domination of Chinese cyber space by the younger generation (CNNIC, 2012).

       Among ordinary Chinese citizens who were discouraged by social and economic inequality, Chinese youth as especially faced some special challenges as they struggled in the job market and tried to cope with a seemingly bleak future.

       Due to China's one-child policy, instituted in 1979 and enforced ever since, **especially** in urban areas, nearly all of China's urban youth have grown up without siblings. As only child in their family, they often received undivided attention from both parents, as well as their grandparents, and enjoyed a life which was easier and more comfortable than previous generations. Therefore, they were often called "little emperors" who were spoiled and did not

know how to face adversaries. Meanwhile, they also face huge expectations from family in terms of their academic performance and future career. Most urban youth finished high school, and many of them received higher education (Rosen, 2009; Wallis, 2011).

The situation was quite different for China youth growing up in rural areas. One-child policy was not effectively enforced. Many rural families were larger and rural youth are often disadvantaged compared to their urban peers, particularly in terms of standard of living and access to quality education. After finishing middle school or part of high school, they often went to urban areas for job opportunities, because there was not enough land for farming. However, due to China's household registration system (called *Hukou*), rural citizens **were limited on the jobs they could get in urban areas, and they often work in construction sites or factories where heavy labor is needed but salary is minimal.** In cities, they often face discrimination and exploitation as migrant workers (Wallis, 2011). Compared with previous generations, they are better educated and had higher expectation about their life. Some young migrant workers felt disillusioned and released negative emotions in destructive manner. From January to November 2010, at Foxconn, a factory in Guangdong Province, there were 18 suicide attempts by young employees; these resulted in 14 deaths (Lau, 2010; Tam, 2010). The later investigations revealed that the robot-like overtime work on the assembly line often sent these young migrant workers into depression. While many younger workers quit the job, a few vulnerable and disillusioned ones chose to end their lives when all they could foresee was a bleak future.

Although urban youth have relatively better chances of living a good life compared to their rural counterparts, the lack of job opportunities was a problem for both groups. In recent years, even college-educated urban youth have had a hard time in the job market, particularly

those who moved to larger cities like Beijing to find work. In 2009, an estimated 6 million

university graduates joined millions who were already unemployed (Rosen, 2009). Both youth

groups have become cause for concern for China government.

In general, youth in China have enjoyed a relatively higher standard of living than

previous generations. They have never experienced the radical social changes or political

mobilization that experienced by the youth in earlier decades of the People's Republic of China.

They have received patriotic education since elementary school, and often have a strong mistrust

of Western media, though many of them enjoy Western entertainment and fashion (Rosen, 2009;

Wallis, 2011). They also manifested a greater need for expression than the past generations,

which was often realized by the development of Internet and mobile technology (Wallis, 2011;

Liu, 2011). As China social discontent was intensified, China youth was viewed as a major group

that often vents its dissatisfaction and frustration online.

Xujun Eberlein, the Chinese-American writer and observer, addressed the association

between human flesh searches and **intellectually underemployed** China youth: "China's

population makes it easy to mobilize a large number of netizens to participate in such a search,

especially considering that there are many smart and reasonably well-educated people in China

who are intellectually underemployed" (O'Brien, 2008).

Internet development and censorship in China

China secured its first link to the Internet in 1993, and opened the Internet to citizens in

1995 (CNNIC, 1997). Since 1997, China has undergone rapid Internet growth. As of December

2011, the total number of Internet users in China has reached 5.3 billion, but its Internet

penetration rate still lag behind those of developed countries. As of April 2011, China Internet

users makes up 38% of national population, while in the United States, Internet users are 78.3%

of national population (IWS, 2012). About 61%, of China's Internet users are 30 years old or

younger, leading to the domination of Chinese cyber space by the younger generation (CNNIC,

2012). In the United States, Internet users who are 30 years old and younger make up for 35% of

Internet population.

Since 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded, China has established

and maintained its one-party political system governed by the Communist Party of China. The

central government imposes tight media censorship on traditional media (newspaper, radio, and

television), restricting foreign news sources, and suppressing discussions of politics and other

sensitive subjects.

The development of high Internet usage has imposed new challenges to information

control because the Internet is an open system which is not easy to regulate. Direct and indirect

means are used to achieve information control (Collins, 2002; Wacker, 2003). Internet

censorship in China is primarily manifested in three ways: blocking sensitive website content,

holding Internet service providers account for users-generated content, and monitoring the

Internet access of individuals (Jin, 2008).

Blocking and filtering web content. In 2000, China launched its massive Internet

surveillance and content control system, known as *The Great Firewall of China*. For sites located

outside China, the government assumes an active censoring role in blocking "problematic" sites.

Sites known for carrying content deemed "sensitive" are blocked from Chinese Internet. For

instance, sites that contain politically sensitive content, such as topics like the Tian'an Men

Square protest, Falun Gong, and the Tibet Independence movement, are all blocked. Secondly,

the search results containing certain taboo terms on the search engines have been filtered.

Keywords such as "Minzhu" (democracy), "Renquan" (human rights) and "Zangdu" (Tibet

Independence) are often filtered from search results. Anyone who searches for information using

these key terms, not only in Chinese but in other languages, will find only a few already filtered

search results (Jin, 2008; Pierson, 2010). In October 2012, the Chinese government blocked

access to the English-language and Chinese-language Web sites of *The New York Times* from

computers in mainland China, apparently in response to an article in both languages describing

wealth accumulated by the family of the prime minister. Chinese authorities also blocked

attempts to mention newspapers or the prime minister in posts on Sina Weibo, a mini-blogging

service in China that resembles Twitter. Blocking of websites and filtering search results has

effectively limited information access for the majority of Internet users who are not technically

savvy. But determined individuals can circumvent firewalls to browse blocked sites. Some argue

that it is more effective at providing a chilling effect rather than actually blocking content (e.g.,

Tai, 2006; Esarey & Xiao, 2011).

Holding Internet service providers accountable. Since user-generated content is too

fragmented to regulate tightly, the government holds Internet service providers legally liable for

the content that appears on the web. Internet service providers and portal managers have to sign

"pledges of self-discipline" to ensure that they receive licenses needed for operation. In signing

the agreement, web sites pledge to identify and prevent the transmission of information that

Chinese authorities deem objectionable, including information that "breaks laws or spreads

superstition or obscenity," or that "may jeopardize state security and disrupt social stability

(Karatzogianni, 2006). Controversial content on the web is routinely removed by portal

managers and forum moderators as a form of self-censorship out of fear of government sanctions. The imposed sanctions include issuing fine, revoking license, and shutting down the business (MacKinnon, 2008b; Qiu, 2004).

Regulating individuals' behaviors. To regulate individuals' behaviors on the Internet, the government also decreed that forum participants and bloggers on non-commercial sites should register with their real names. However, real name registration has not been strictly enforced nationally. The sites which enforced the policy often experience large shrinkage of user population (Jin, 2008). In May 2012, the government expanded the real name registration requirement to China's twitter-like micro-blog users.

Despite tight censorship on political comments and discussion, China has more or less loosened control over financial and social news as long as such information flow does not threaten or interfere with the party's governance. Chinese Internet users have formed a variety of online communities based on common interests via bulletin boards, online forums, and web blogs (Tan, 1999; Tisu, 2003; Yang, 2007). Chinese media scholar Guo Liang (2007) argues that Chinese cyberspace is mainly perceived as a place for socializing and entertainment, so the online news consumed is mostly "infotainment," that is, information which is appealing mainly because of its entertaining value. According to Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS), a leading market research agency, China's Internet users spend a lot of time online—44% of their free time, compared to 30% for Internet users in the United States. They are also more likely to describe their Web-based activities as "fun" (TNS, 2008). In general, Chinese cyberspace provides an arena where people are able not only to enjoy themselves, but also to express opinions

(particularly those that might not be sanctioned offline), build community, engage in fantasy, and mobilize for collective action (Wallis, 2011).

The Evolution of Human Flesh Searching

Among the diverse forms of online collaboration enabled by the Internet, human flesh search has introduced huge controversy and invited heated debate in China (Wu, 2008; Chen & Sharma, 2011). This mode of search originated in 2001 from an online forum called Human Flesh Search Forum, which belongs to the leading Chinese entertainment site Mop (www.Mop.com). This section describes the evolution of human flesh searching based on documented records on a variety of web and print sources, and supplemented by accounts of early search participant and former Mop search forum moderator Yule.

The Mop site was founded in October 1997, and has rapidly grown into one of the most popular web sites in China. Mop is a multifunctional portal, hosting online news, discussion boards, online gaming, and social networking sites. It is best known for its entertainment news and social networking forums. According to the Chinese new media consulting firm iResearch, Mop was ranked the #2 Chinese social networking web site, after another forum Tian'ya Club (iResearch, 2009). By June 2008, the number of registered Mop users had reached 43 million and the average daily page views have reached 45 million (″Oakpacific,″2009). Such a massive user base helped to fuel and promote human flesh searching activities.

In 2001, the Mop site established a forum called *human flesh search* (人肉搜索 RenRouSouSuo) for users to submit or respond to information queries. Mop describes the feature as a way "to solve problems through collective knowledge instead of technology" (Mop, 2009). The forum initially functioned as a crowd-sourcing site, with people seeking answers or

solutions to their questions, most of which were about gaming tips and tricks. The Mop site has its own virtual currency called MP, and Mop users often use them as incentives to solicit answers. Gradually, the question and answer function has attracted more people who like to solicit public assistance in seeking information and problem solving. The query initiators often promise a certain amount of MPs as reward for helpful answers. Mop search forum also set up the *Bounty Hunter Club* to encourage user participation. Users can join the club to earn more MPs by responding to the posts of fellow users. Once joining in as a hunter, a user is automatically ranked according to the amount of Mop points under his account.

Yule was one of earliest moderators for MOP human flesh search forum. He had participated in numerous high profile search incidents over the years. During the interview, Yule recalled how the function of the forum evolved from knowledge sharing to collaborative search of individuals' information.

According to Yule, the early forum members were a small niche originated from the Wangyi chat room. They were into playing online games and often shared gaming tips and tricks on the forum. They established an early sharing mechanism by exchanging tips and tricks of online games. Most them were young males in college or had just joined the work force. Compared to the general population, they were young, energetic, and technology savvy. Later on, many of them joined the major China portals such as Wangyi, Douban, Sina, etc.

Yule recalled how he was involved in human flesh searching:

> I was in college when I played in Mop, I earned MPs (virtual currency of the Mop site) by finding music pieces for others. Almost all my friends play Mop online games, or were earning MPs in other ways. It was exciting to see my MPs increasing gradually. MPs can be used to buy Q money, then to buy equipment for online gaming. It was a very good financial system then…. A bunch of early internet users hung out in the Wangyi

chat room with the name Moppers. They have a taste for Japanese culture and online gaming. They play online games and share the tips. Many of them have become the backbone of Sina site and other portal sites.

For Yule, the friendship formed online was strong and transferable to offline bond and trust:

> The early Mop users were considered the first generation of Internet users in China. They did not know each other offline. But they had no conflicts of interest and had mutual trust to one another. You can leave home and travel around the nation without ever staying in any hotel, for Mop fans would receive you along the way."

Posting and commenting on pretty women's pictures had been a regular activity among these early searchers, who were dominantly made up of young males. Sometimes, such an interest was intensified when they could not verify the women's identities. Yule said, "At that time, Yahoo! search engine could only render limited search results. Mop had a moderator, and everyone called him Mr. Jinba. He had tons of photos and files of Japanese adult movie stars. Once in a while, someone posted photos of these AV [Adult Video] stars but got their names wrong. Mr. Jinba would say, this is not XX, and it's XX. He had more pictures to prove himself. "

The first well-known search case at Mop was about Chen Ziyao. In 2001, some Mop search forum users worked together to dig out the information of a young woman, Chen Ziyao, using her pictures as clues. This incident caught public attention for two reasons. In this incident, unrelated Internet users collaboratively dug up information about an individual, and the question-answer form of crowd-sourcing practice began to transform into peer-to-peer surveillance. Second, by making all the private information of an individual public, human flesh search practice began to display its intrusive attribute (Ford, 2008; Wu, 2008).

From the Chen Ziyao incident in 2001 until 2006, no significant search case caught public attention. In February 2006, a kitten-killer search case emerged on the Mop site. It was recognized as "a milestone event of human flesh search evolution," as called by then- forum-moderator Sun Peiyuan. First, video footage was posted on video-sharing web site *Crushworld* (*www.crushworld.net)* that showed a woman smashing a kitten's head with her high-heeled shoes. The video soon circulated on the web and outraged many viewers. The Mop users immediately launched a manhunt looking for the cat abuser and the other people who were involved in video recording. Within six hours, the woman in the footage and two other people who had facilitated the shooting the scene were all identified. It turned out that the head of the Crushworld site engineered the shooting and posting of the footage, expecting (correctly) that this cruel scene would generate high traffic to the site. As a result and in response to public wrath, the Crushworld site was soon closed, and the woman and the two men who shot the video all lost their jobs. The kitten-killer incident did not just provide revenge; it helped turn the human flesh search into a national phenomenon (Downey, 2010). With a dedicated human search forum and its "bounty hunter club," Mop has been a leading platform for people to engage in human flesh searching.

Human flesh searching takes place in Chinese Internet forums like Mop and Tian'ya, as well as other sites. Besides Mop, Tian'ya's bulletin board system (BBS) has played a very active role in initiating and promoting human flesh search cases. Founded in 1999, Tian'ya Club (Tian'ya.com) provided BBS, blog, micro-blog and photo album services, and made a name for itself with the initiation and promotion of human flesh searching, as well as a variety of heated

discussions among and on its online communities. Numerous high-profile human flesh searches

first caught public attention through heated discussion at this Tian'ya forum.

Aside from the two leading platforms Mop and Tian'ya, almost all the other major portals

in China have participated in human flesh searches to some extent. They often help by spreading

the news and make the cases quickly become viral (Wu, 2008; Vincent, 2010, Chao, 2011; Chen

& Sharma, 2011).

High profile human flesh search incidents. Since the 2006 kitten-killer incident from

the Mop site, the use of human flesh search has rapidly become a prevalent online phenomenon

in China. While it has been used for soliciting help and for uncovering the truth of miseries like

the kitten-killer, human flesh search is best known for exposing individual privacy and launching

name-and-shame campaigns to punish those who conduct unacceptable behavior (Chen &

Sharma, 2010). In this section, I will first discuss the high profile search cases known for their

dramatic development, then introduce the first lawsuit concerning human flesh searching and

discuss the legal implications of its ruling.

South China Tiger Fraud. In another widely publicized case, the online collaboration

successfully exposed a fraud. Zhenglong Zhou was a peasant in Sichuan Province. In 2006, he

claimed to news media that he spotted a South China Tiger, the most critically endangered of the

living tiger subspecies. Zhou's evidences were digital photos of a South China Tiger he claimed

to have taken at the scene. Eager to use South China Tigers as an attraction to tourists, senior

officials in Sichuan province validated the authenticity of these pictures. However, many Internet

users remained suspicious of Zhou's claim. Hundreds of Tian'ya members set up a "tiger hunting

squad," which was dedicated to finding the truth regarding the authenticity of those pictures. The

heated discussion and debate over the authenticity of the tiger photos lasted nearly eight months, until one Tian'ya member found a Chinese New Year poster of a South China Tiger that was identical to what appeared in Zhou's photos. It turned out that Zhou cut out the photo from a South China Tiger poster. As a result, Zhou was sentenced to 2.5 years in prison for the fraud (Bai & Jin, 2008; Wang, L.H. 2009).

Lin Jiaxiang Incident. The objects of Chinese collaborative cyber surveillance are not limited to regular citizens. A number of high-ranking government officials have also been tracked down and then paid the price for their misdemeanors. In October 2008, a middle-aged government official attempted to molest an eleven-year-girl when drunk in a restaurant, and was confronted by angry parents a moment later. His rude attitude towards the parents was caught by a surveillance camera. The video was soon posted and circulated online, along with the subtitles which were claimed to be the man's words: "I did it, so what? Name a price, I'll give you." "Do you know who am I? My rank is as high as your mayor." "How dare you to mess with me, see how I'll deal with you!" Enraged Internet users quickly mobilized a large-scale cyber surveillance to track down this man, and his identity was brought to the surface within a few hours. He was Lin Jiaxiang, a high ranking government official. As a result, Lin was soon suspended from his position and investigated by his employer, the Maritime Safety Administration of People's Republic of China (Chen, 2008; Branigan, 2008).

Zhou Jiugeng Case. In 2008, Zhou Jiugeng, a director of the Real Estate Management Bureau in Jiangning District of Nanjing, the provincial capital of Jiangsu, made comments in an interview that the bureau would punish property developers for selling houses below market prices. At that time, housing prices had been well beyond the reach of most middle-class families

due to property speculation. Zhou Jiugeng's remarks showed he had no sympathy towards the

public burdened with sky-rocketing housing price, but was speaking for speculative property

developers who did not want housing market to cool down. Many netizens, who had been

complaining about the soaring house prices, posted comments criticizing his comment. Photos of

Zhou Jiugeng taken at conferences were also posted, showing Zhou was wearing a Vacheron

Constantin watch, which worth over Chinese yuan 102,000 ($14,000), and was smoking

cigarettes which cost 150 Chinese yuan ($22) per pack. Netizens also reported he drove a

Cadillac car to work, despite his moderate wage as a government official. These exposed details

triggered a flood of comments and questions about the source of Zhou's finances. The

government responded to the public inquiry with a legal investigation. Zhou was convicted of

accepting large amount of bribes from contractors, subordinate businesses and officials and was

sentenced to 11 years in prison (Sina, 2008; Macartney, 2009).

First human flesh search lawsuit. With so many search incidents taking place on the

web with profound impacts on individuals' lives, some doggerel widely spread that summarizes

the human flesh search phenomenon. A popular saying goes, "*If you love him, ask human flesh

search and you will learn his details. If you hate him, throw him to the search for it is a hell.*"

Wang Fei, a former Beijing advertising agent, was one of search targets who had hellish

experience with human flesh searching. He is also the first person who brought lawsuits against

searchers and web sites that engaged in such a practice. In 2007, Wang Fei's wife, Jiangyan,

once an active blogger, committed suicide, when Wang Fei pressed her for divorce so that he

would be free to marry his mistress. After Jiangyan's death, a friend of hers opened a website

publishing Jiangyan's "death diary" and other accounts regarding Wang Fei's indifference over

the death of his wife. Those postings triggered an immediate manhunt, and soon escalated to

cyber violence. Within a few days, all personal information about Wang's life was brought to the

surface. His photographs appeared on numerous online forums alongside his phone number,

address, and ID number. Wang Fei's parents, who had supported his affair and his plans for

divorce, also became the subjects of public rage. The vilifying and humiliating posts were all

over the web, and the action of revenge soon spilled over into real life. Wang Fei was constantly

haunted by threatening letters and calls. Someone painted a note on his residence door: "Blood

for blood." The home of his parents was surrounded by angry mobs carrying placards for weeks.

Soon after, Wang Fei's employer fired him and his alleged mistress to avoid the increasing

harassment and unwanted publicity to their company. The harassing calls then followed to

Wang Fei's new employer, leading to his second job loss (Bai & Jin, 2008; McDonald, 2008).

In March 2007, the highly distressed Wang Fei filed a lawsuit in the Beijing Chaoyang

District People's Court, accusing the web administers of the two websites which engaged in

searching of defamation and invasion of privacy and claimed damages for mental suffering. In

April 2008, Wang filed a lawsuit in local court against the two Chinese websites that took a

leading role in carrying out defamation and cyber violence against him. At the first hearing, the

Beijing city Chaoyang district court found that the case was very complicated and involved many

issues. Therefore, the court switched from the simple trial by a single judge to a regular panel of

judges. On June 26, the court convened a special meeting with legal scholars and Internet

experts to deliberate the case. On July 9, the court held a meeting with 54 judges to further

discuss the case, which was another unusual move. All those unusual moves indicated that China

legal system responded to the case with great caution and deliberation. Finally, The People's

Court in Beijing ruled upon the case using the legal ground of existing Internet laws, which outlaw defamatory messages and infringement upon the lawful rights of the others. According to the court ruling, one website was fined; the other was not found guilty, because the latter website deleted Wang's information upon his request. The court also found the man who engineered death diary blog guilty and fined him (Bai & Jin, 2008; Chen & Sharma).

Implications of human flesh search. The debate over the legitimacy of human flesh search is ongoing. On one hand, the practice has been accused of privacy violations and defamation by victims, concerned intellectuals, and sympathetic citizens. On the other hand, it has also been supported and applauded by others as a form of citizen empowerment and civil participation, especially when the subjects of such searches were high-ranking officials whose power and behavior had never been checked by regular citizens before (Canaves & Ye,2008; Ford, 2008; Wu, 2008).

Among the growing number of publicized human flesh search cases, the majority of search targets were accused of being involved in immoral, outrageous, or offensive behaviors, and even criminal offenses. Once their wrongdoings were exposed online, often with pictures and other detailed personal information, the news soon attracted a flood of comments, and was reposted in a variety of online venues. Massive numbers of users quickly mobilized to track down offenders. As a result, they were made the subjects of public humiliation and had to face disastrous consequences in real life, such as being fired from their jobs, shamed in front of neighbors, threatened with physical harm, or driven out of town. The accumulation of those cases has made some observers equate human flesh search with online vigilante justice (e.g. Downey, 2010) or cyber violence (e.g., Bai & Jin, 2008). For instance, when describing human

flesh search in China, Anne Cheung, a law professor at the University of Hong Kong, said that the goal of human flesh is to "achieve social shaming, monitoring and ostracism, or for private revenge by private citizens" (Canaves & Ye, 2008).

Despite these disturbing cyber vigilante cases, the use of human flesh search also has some distinctive benefits. It has proven effective in revealing the truth, soliciting public assistance, fighting illegal behavior, and deterring unethical behavior (Chen & Sharma, 2011).

The controversy over Chinese human flesh search may boil down to the issue of power. The argument is whether human flesh search is an empowerment of the powerless, or it is simply a power generator which subjects a few individuals to the tyranny of the masses. Since the procedures and consequences of human flesh search incidents differ case by case, there is no easy answer to the question. Marx (2002) has pointed out that the complexity of such an issue may be reduced to "a central question," which is, "who is being empowered or controlled, and for what ends?" He expects answers to this question to differ because "all of us play a variety of roles, the technology both empowers and lessens power, although hardly to the same degree across roles, institutions and broad contexts" (p. 22). Such speculation fits well with human flesh search phenomenon.

Existing Literature on Human Flesh Search Phenomenon in China

Human flesh search represents a novel cyber phenomenon in China. Given the lack of empirical data regarding cyber surveillance conducted in a collective manner, the emergence of Chinese human flesh search sites offers an example for understanding the nature and implications of such a mode of searching. It introduces new research opportunities and invites researchers to explore its multifaceted social-technical implications (Chen & Sharma, 2011).

Chen and Sharma (2011) provided a solid overview regarding the facts and issues around China's human flesh search phenomenon. Based on reviewing existing literature on China human flesh search practices, published in China and in English-speaking countries, Chen and Sharma pointed out the following three streams of research.

One stream of literature looked at human flesh search from the technological perspective and focused on social networks and their development as manifested through human flesh search. By analyzing human flesh search events at Mop search forum, Wang Shiyong (S. Wang, 2009) found that the Mop search forum shares many common characteristics with emerging social search engines, but with much more online and offline interactions. In another study, Wang, Hou, Yao, and Yang (2010) developed a modeling approach to understand human flesh search's evolving process, and characterized it as incorporating network expansion and gossip propagation with feedback (Wang, et al., 2010).

Another stream of research has explored the implications of human flesh search on individual's right to privacy. Through case studies of three high-profile search incidents in China, Bu Songtao (2008) found these human flesh search cases are the product of collaboration between online communities and legacy media. He argues that the self-discipline of netizens and media may reduce abusive usage of human flesh search (Bu, 2008). Luo and Wen (2009) pointed out that lack of legal protection of individual privacy in China contributes to the prevalence of human flesh searching in China cyber space. They suggested that regulations are needed to protect average citizens' privacy, while allowing reasonable exposure of the public figure to make public scrutiny possible. Yang and Zhang (2010) presented the definition of privacy, reviewed the status and development of the right to privacy in China, and discussed the

difficulties in protecting privacy from human flesh searching. Wang (Wang L.H., 2009) recognized that human flesh search posed a threat to privacy, but he reasoned that human flesh searching can be a valuable tool for fighting corruption in China and promoting effective citizen governance. Therefore, he called for tolerance towards human flesh search practices for the sake of its potential in soliciting public resources for social good.

The third stream of studies has examined the legal implications of human flesh search practices. Through surveys and interviews, Liu collected a sample of the public opinion towards regulating human flesh searching (Liu, 2008). Zhu suggested that human flesh search practice should be viewed as spontaneous reaction from a section of the public towards incidents violating social norms, and therefore should be regulated by civil codes rather than criminal laws (Zhu, 2009). Based on an analysis of four search incidents over the past five years, Meng and Li (2009) contended that human flesh searching might promote rather than violate the principle of rule by law. Their reasoning is that the existence of human flesh searching shed light on the areas where new regulations and laws are needed to address animal abuse, corruption, as well as appropriate online behaviors.

Despite its overwhelming prevalence in China, as well as the growing occurrence of similar practice in other countries, human flesh search phenomenon has not yet been thoroughly examined by scholars (Chen & Sharma, 2011). While the prior studies contributed to the accumulation of knowledge in human flesh search, they are limited in a number of ways.

Among the studies cited here, most of the researchers used descriptive and qualitative studies, written in Chinese. Only a few have been shared with the international community (e.g., Cheung, 2009; Tao & Chao, 2011). The Chinese literature has focused on descriptive and

qualitative analysis of the search phenomenon based on media publicized cases, and many of them are not theory-based (Tao & Chao, 2011). Only a few studies involve theories or models (e.g., Wang, B. et al, 2009). Most researchers only sampled data from high profile search incidents(e.g., Wang et al, 2009; Wang et al., 2010; Yang & Zhang, 2010).

With the prevalence of cyber surveillance, expanding our vision on cyber surveillance behaviors beyond social control assumptions is increasing important. In particular, the meaning and implications of collaborative cyber surveillance have not been sufficiently explored, and lots of questions should be asked and explored.

Contribution of the Study

The study contributes to the existing scholarship in several ways.

First, different from prior studies which only focus on high profile search incidents; this study examines human flesh searching in its regular, more mundane presence on the search forum.

Choosing leading site Mop's human flesh search forum as the primary sampling site, the study analyzed the content the forum provides, and provides a detailed description of the human flesh search forum, including the structures of sites, the nature of the queries, the subjects of the sought, response pattern, and the factors influencing the response rate. The paper used "thick description" to capture what was really happening in those forums. Chapter Three on methodology explains how multiple approaches were employed to achieve this goal.

Second, the study examines the issue of empowerment by understanding search participants' thoughts and experiences.

Empowerment is considered to be a process in which power is balanced by giving power to powerless. The identities of the searchers are important in evaluating the empowerment effect of citizen surveillance. If access to a surveillance mechanism means the possibility of power execution, the characteristics of surveillance agents give us some clues about their power status. It also tells us whether surveillance power is readily accessible to citizens in general, or if it is still reserved for certain groups of people.

David Wood, a leading scholar in surveillance studies, pointed out an over-emphasis on technologies and institutions in addressing surveillance phenomenon; he complains that not enough emphasis has been placed on the human dimensions of surveillance (Wood, 2005). For instance, how do surveillance agents conduct surveillance and how do they view their surveillance behaviors? Citizen surveillance often involves mass participation in a collective manner. As for the human flesh search phenomenon in China, the meaning that is shared by surveillance participants has not been sufficiently investigated. The presence of the crowd further complicated the situation. In a virtual group setting, individuals are motivated to behave in ways they would not act individually. To understand the cyber surveillance phenomenon in a deeper sense, the study focuses on the experiences of these search participants and their meanings-making process.

Finally, the study contributes to the theoretical development of surveillance studies in multiple ways. By examining citizen surveillance, the study further engages the theoretical literature by exploring surveillance beyond the standard top-down panoptic paradigm to a more fully developed concept of surveillance. It investigates the meaning of empowerment in the context of citizen surveillance. The empowering potential of the Internet has been a subject of

research for some time, but this study contributes to empowerment analysis in venues where citizen surveillance is active. The analysis is concentrated on collaborative surveillance—how people experience surveillance in a collective manner, what purposes surveillance serves, and with what effects. In this way it enriches the developing research on citizen surveillance.

Chapter 4: Understanding the Search Forum

The three methods used in this dissertation were textual analysis of the human flesh search forum, an online survey with the forum visitors, and in-depth interviews with selected searchers. The use of mixed research methods ensures each research question is sufficiently addressed and investigated through an appropriate approach. Qualitative textual analysis of the forum helps describe and examine cyber surveillance in a more comprehensive fashion, with the hope of revealing its defining qualities. An online survey with the forum visitors serves as a valuable exploratory method to capture demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal attributes of the searchers (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In-depth interviews with the searchers yielded rich data regarding their own experiences, perceptions, and meanings-making process. Taken together, the mixed methods render rich data and enhance the validity of the study.

The study derives from interpretative paradigms and the majority of the data are qualitative. To justify the use of a qualitative approach, the first section briefly introduces the interpretative paradigm and qualitative research methods within the paradigm, highlighting the worldview and research tradition the researcher adopts. The next three sections explain in detail how each method was implemented, and how the data was analyzed.

Justification for Use of Qualitative Approach

As an ontological and epistemological foundation for qualitative methods, the interpretive paradigm overlaps with related accounts such as the *naturalistic paradigm* (Anderson, 1987; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin &Lincoln, 2000) and *hermeneutic empiricism* (Anderson 1996a, 1996b). Contrary to positivists' view that social reality is "out there" and independent of human perception, interpretative researchers hold that no social world exists

independently from social meanings created by its members. Realities are socially constructed by and between human beings in their expressions, experiences, and interpretation. Knowledge of reality is thus emergent, collaborative, and symbolic in nature.

Interpretative researchers assert that social reality is constructed and reconstructed by routine practices over and over, and that social life is a text whose various meanings can be teased out depending on who is reading it and how it is read. Therefore, the core task for researchers is not to find laws (or relationships) as positivists strive to do, but to explore and interpret how people make sense of their worlds and how they express their experiences (Cheney, 2000; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Interpretative research allies itself with the humanities and places a particular emphasis on ethnography, in which researchers are immersed within particular social settings and knowledge regarding social action is co-produced through interaction with the scene and interviews with subjects. Evidence is recorded and expressed using verbal and narrative means. Besides transcripts obtained through in-depth interviews, photographs, video-recordings, and other everyday text are also collected for textual analysis with the hope of "decoding" the meaning-making process of social members (Gube, 1990; Atkinson, Heath, & Chenail, 1991; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I was not able to do ethnographic investigation, but I incorporated field methods in data collection. For instance, in addition to interviewing search participants, I also collected their posts on search forum, their blogs, and other digital documents they had published online to better understand their life and thoughts.

Corresponding to such an interpretative purpose, the study strives to examine the searchers' perceptions expressed in the process of human flesh searches, including their online

expressions, self-perceptions, and meaning-making process. In addition, the study pays special attention to the issue of power in cyber surveillance phenomenon, a topic which is better addressed by using qualitative approaches under the interpretative paradigm (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 17).

The study consists of two stages. The first stage involves qualitative textual analysis of the human flesh search forum in order to obtain a concrete picture of what is happening on cyber surveillance sites. The second stage is built upon the results from the content analysis. Based on the information collected from the first stage, the researcher proposes key questions pertaining to the study, and directly goes to the surveillance participants (searchers), asking about their experiences, perceptions, and how they make meaning of their behavior. The two-stage study provides rich data to enhance the validity of the study.

Content Analysis Method

As mentioned in the introduction, collaborative cyber surveillance has not been sufficiently described to reveal its defining qualities. Therefore, the primary purpose of the first-stage of the study is to provide an informative, comprehensive, and objective description of this communication phenomenon.

Choice of the site. As Holliday (2007) posits, to understand a phenomenon, the researcher must first "go deep into a definable setting in which phenomena can be placed meaningfully within a specific social environment", which provides a variety of relevant, interconnected data (p. 33). The site selected for this study is the human flesh search forum at Chinese entertainment portal Mop (www.Mop.com).

Mop was founded in 1997 as an online forum for game fans to exchange gaming tips and experiences. It soon expanded to a platform with multiple forums and best known for its entertainment news and active online communities. In 2004, Oak Pacific Interactive acquired the Mop site. Oak Pacific Interactive is a Chinese company that is led by Chen Yizhou, a Stanford MBA graduate. The company also owns social networking sites Renren (www.renren.com) andUUme.com. Over time, Oak Pacific Interactive has added more social networking services to the Mop site, and built its other products into the site, including online gaming and blogging functions. Despite the efforts of diversifying the services, advertising has remained the main revenue for the Mop site (Keek, 2007; Li, 2012).

According to Chinese new media consulting firm iResearch, by April 2007, Mop was ranked second among Chinese social networking web sites, next to Tian'ya site (iResearch, 2007).

Mop has its own virtual currency, Mop Power. According to Mop, MP currency was introduced to help the site to maintain necessary online order and regulate users' behaviors; meanwhile, it also adds some game-like elements into users' experiences. MP is rewarded to the users to encourage behaviors beneficial to the forum development. The users can receive one MP by registering an account at Mop, and then earn five MPs per day by logging into the account. The MPs can also be earned through posting threads or commenting to others' posting in the forums. If their threads receive lots of viewing and comments, they are labeled by forum moderator as "popular" or "original" and the posters receive more MP as rewards. Likewise, Mop users lose MPs for posting inappropriate comments or committing other violations. MPs are transferrable among users. The fastest way to accumulate MPs is to respond to inquiries from

fellow users which promise high MP rewards for helpful answers. The earned MPs can be used on the Mop site for purchasing virtual goods for gaming, such as swords, coins, potions, or avatars, or used as incentive when users want to solicit help from other users. Many people who post queries use MPs to reward the best answers they receive ("Users Must Read," 2009).

In 2001, Mop established a forum for users to submit information queries and to respond to questions, and coined the term "human flesh search" to describe this feature: "Using collective knowledge instead of technology to solve problems" ("Human flesh search," 2009) . Since 2001, dozens of high-profile search cases have originated from this forum. *Human flesh search* has since become a generic term to describe this mode of searching. Several similar surveillance forums have been established on other web sites, mimicking Mop's HFS Forum's structure and practice. Among these are Baidu, Sina, Tian'ya, etc (see Appendix 3), but Mop's HFS Forum remains the most active and influential. One reason for this is the "Bounty Hunter's Club" with 48,940 registered members as of October 2012. As a gathering place for searchers, MOP's human flesh search forum contains a large amount of digital content that essentially records the natural occurrence of surveillance acts, which makes a good observation point for examining collaborative cyber surveillance.

Qualitative content analysis. After choosing the Mop human flesh search forum as the primary research site, the study employed qualitative textual analysis to describe and examine the content of the forum, with the focus on the characteristics of collaborative cyber surveillance and power dynamics between the searchers and the sought.

The content analysis is a research technique for "making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying the specified characteristics of messages" (Hosti, 1996:.14).

Qualitative analysis helps researchers get beneath the surface of messages and identify the key themes relevant to the research questions raised, and is a wholly unobtrusive method (Creswell, 1998;2002). Qualitative textual analysis primarily involves presenting, interpreting, and making references to the meanings of texts without quantification. The data analysis is primarily inductive, grounding the examination on the topics and themes, as well as the inferences drawn from them (Hosti, 1996; Creswell, 1998, 2002).

The HFS Forum contains a large amount of data that may inform the research questions and was therefore used as the sampling pool. For the sake of analysis, data are roughly categorized into two types: user-generated content and editor-generated content. The data takes a variety of forms, including textual, visual, and video links.

Editor-generated content refers to the posts by forum editors and administers, including the guidelines for searching participation, editors' letters to users, forum announcements, and editor-complied media coverage which involves the forum. These online documents are important "digital traces" because they indicate how the forum has evolved**:** how it defines human flesh search, how it facilitates, categorizes, and regulates surveillance behaviors, how it explains past events and evaluates the forum's roles in these events. These posts reflect the mechanism of cyber surveillance and directly present an environment in which the surveillance behaviors are initiated, encouraged, facilitated, and regulated.

User-generated content includes the query threads asking for specific information on certain subjects or a particular person, and the posts responding to the questions asked. These data help further understand the participants' motives behind cyber surveillance behavior. The posts are purposely chosen based on the query threads and are roughly grouped into two

categories based on the nature of queries: people search (surveillance) or knowledge inquiry (crowd-sourcing).

Purposive sampling. As in most qualitative studies, the study is guided by purposeful sampling. Because the study uses thematic analysis for coding and interpreting qualitative information, the content will be sampled in the unit of theme. As Minichiello (1990) notes, when researchers look for a theme, they are looking for the expression of an idea. Therefore, a text chunk of any size, or a visual image, may be coded to a specific theme as long as it represents a single theme which informs the research questions. Under the purposeful sampling approach, the primary sampling criteria are that the content selected should inform one aspect of cyber surveillance. In this study, the content should inform at least one of the themes proposed. The unit of coding is the individual theme.

Usually, in a qualitative analysis, the themes can be generated inductively from the raw information or deductively from the existing theory (Boyatzis, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). For understanding the qualities of collaborative cyber surveillance, four themes were generated inductively from the data, including the nature of the queries, the mechanism of cyber surveillance, the motives of the searchers, and the justification for privacy violation. The fifth theme: empowerment and restrictions experienced by the searchers, was deductively generated from Foucault's notions of the Panopticon and power.

The first data collection took place from April to May 2006, during the pilot study on this subject. I collected 312 inquiry entries to sort out the five major themes; the second data collection period was from May to June 2010, and 450 entries were collected during this one month period. More themes were then added to the analysis. All of the sampled content was

processed and coded according to the themes, and then the content which would be included in the dissertation was translated into English. In collecting the data for a particular theme, the data collection stopped when saturation was reached, that is, when no new information or insights were provided by adding new data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Result and Analysis

As previously stated, the pilot study of the forum showed that manhunts are an extreme and rare form of human flesh search. To get a snapshot of cyber surveillance in normal, uneventful situations, I collected the newly posted 153 surveillance queries starting from May 15, 2010 to May 29, 2010, and then sorted them into two different categories: person search (cyber surveillance) and knowledge inquiry (crowd-sourcing). According to Ice Cream, a moderator of the search forum and another person I interviewed (see below), such a number is considered normal for two-week period. He said that daily entries of the search forum ranges 200-300 on average, with a peak of around 500 occasionally. But only small portion of them are related to people search. Among 153 inquiries, the ratio of surveillance to crowd-sourcing was about 1 to 4, which is presented in order to provide a more realistic portrayal of human flesh search activities.

The types of the search queries. Knowledge inquiry posts are identified by the subject of the query. If the subject of the query is objective information which has little to do with personal data, it is a knowledge inquiry. A few examples of the query threads in this category are:

— "Can someone come up with a good Japanese name? I am considering a Japanese name for my daughter. 20.000 MPs reward. "

— "I heard a song in a TV commercial yesterday, and stayed up all night searching for it. Unfortunately, I cannot find a place to download. Any hunter can help? I'll give 888 MPs for return. 253! (Mop user account number)"

People search (surveillance) is identified as when the target of the query involves people, and the purpose of inquiry is to acquire personal information or track down the search targets. Compared with knowledge query, the queries of people searches (cyber surveillance) may appear to be more intrusive. Here are two queries of this kind:

— "#QQ: 366701644. Help me track its IP address. Thanks in advance!" (QQ is the most popular instant messaging software in China, and a QQ number is similar to a MSN messenger account)

—Who knows this beauty? I am begging for your answer. Reward 5 million MPs for her identity and whereabouts. (In this post, photos of a young woman were posted along the text.)

Approximately, three out of four queries were knowledge inquiries-- either asking for information or seeking advice, which constitutes a typical form of crowd-sourcing. Meanwhile, about one-fourth of queries involved a people search. As one form of cyber surveillance, people searches usually involved privacy violations to a certain extent. People-related search inquiries can be roughly classified into six search types:

1. Nostalgia posts: these posts seek people out of nostalgic desire, a longing for the past. In these types of posts, people intend to find and reconnect with people from their past. The objects of search could be their first loves, long-lost childhood friends, former teachers from elementary school, or a comrade- in- arms who had served with the searcher in the same army unit. The purpose appears to be to find the person they had shared memories with and to renew

friendship and refresh memory of the past. E.g., one post says, "In these last days of my life, I want to see my first love for the very last time." The poster said he was terminally ill and seeing his first love is his only remaining wish.

2.   Exposing offender posts initiated by victims: This type of post makes allegations against individuals for their misconduct, social violations, and illegal activities, with the intention to summon viewers to shame, condemn, and hunt down the alleged offenders. They often leave their contact information and try to seek redress by finding the person who wronged them. In one of those posts, a user claimed that a middle-aged woman had a pattern of dumping men after squandering all their money, and he himself was one of the victims of the woman's scheme. He posted the name and pictures of the woman, and said he would like the others to be warned about this. Numerous posters state that they were conned out of their money and want to know the whereabouts of the swindlers to claim justice.

3.   Whistle-blowers: Exposing posts where the search initiator is not personally related to the misconduct. Those posts are similar to the type 2 posts. The difference is that search initiators are not personally affected by the misconduct of the sought. He or she initiated the search in the name of s social justice. Often times, they do not leave their contact information for the viewers to provide tips. Instead, they are more interested in publicizing the news and shaming the offenders in public.

4.   Missing person posts: Those posts are intended to find people who have gone missing for various reasons, most of times the person being sought is a family member of the search initiators. Those posts read like the missing person posts seen in Wal-Mart or other public spaces, often including a photo of the missing person and a description of what they were

wearing at the time they went missing and how they came to be missing. There is not much difference between those posts and those you may read in local a newspaper's Missing Person section. Sometimes, those posts were for spouses or family members who ran away due to family conflicts, or were mentally disordered, etc.

5.   Romantic interests: Photos of romantic interests are often posted on the forum by people who want to meet them, and the majority of search targets are young females. It appears to be a regular diet for such a male-dominated community. Some photos were claimed to have been taken in a casual encounter, and some photos were obtained from other sources or web sites. Sometimes, the post initiators have clear intentions to identify the persons with the hope for romantic relations. For instance, one post provided a video link of a young girl singing Beijing opera, a video the poster obtained from the web. He claimed he fell madly in love with the girl in the video and wanted to find her. Later, he posted his newly found clue, a class photo from the middle school which the young woman was in. He was obviously excited about the progress and asked for further help from the viewers in tracking down and identifying the girl.

6.   Male gaze, voyeurism. Photos of young females are a regular staple in this male-dominated community. More often than not, photos of good looking young women are posted not for searching, but for viewers' attention and comments. The comments often surround women's appearance and her best feature, etc. Occasionally, viewers described themselves as attracted by the stunning beauty of some women displayed in the photos and would initiate search to track down these women's identities and whereabouts.

7.   Specific solicitation. The last type of posts starts by recruiting searchers residing in a particular region, with a specific search quest to share only among the respondents later on.

Such requests tend to be more discrete in nature and may involve legwork and other offline search activities. A search quest in this type reads; "Friends who live in Suzhou city, please contact me. A search task is waiting. **"**

     MP Rewards System and Bounty Hunter Club. Cyber collaborative surveillance is a process which can only be generated through an appropriate communication system. The study attempts to understand how Mop human flesh search forum establishes and maintains its unique function of cyber surveillance. As a platform for cyber surveillance, how the forum is designed and structured is important to support this unique function.

     Before examining the mechanism of cyber surveillance and the motives of surveillance participants, two important features of the HFS Forum will be addressed: the reward system and the existence of the "Bounty Hunter Club".

     In 2001, the Mop site created its virtual currency called MP, which has no substantial monetary value in the real world but can be used or exchanged within the Mop site. One MP is equivalent to one China penny in value, and is transferable among users with Mop accounts. Users earn MPs thorough actively participating in a variety of activities at the Mop site, such as playing games, posting comments, or adding news links, etc. But the fastest way to get "rich" is to respond to question threads at HFS Forum ("MP", 2009).

     The reward system turned out to be an effective incentive for potential searchers, which is manifested by the establishment of the "Bounty Hunter Club." Users can voluntarily register a club membership without a fee. They earn MPs through searching for information and responding to the queries, as well as aggregating new threads from other sites. Often times, to encourage fellow users to respond to their question, people who make requests promise a certain

amount of MPs to reward information providers. Under such a reward system, "hunters" can

move up to a higher rank when they gain enough points. The "hunters" with the highest earnings

are listed at the salient space at the forum homepage.

*The Hunters club'*s mission statement also points out that the MP reward is an appealing

incentive. It goes as:

> Moppers (referring to Mop users) enjoy helping one another, *as well as being paid for their search. …* Everyone can ask Human flesh search for help. You can ask any question, solicit any form of help. We cannot guarantee that you get an answer or help you want, but we ensure our answers are different from what you get from anyplace else, and we can ensure you get most pleasant help ever. …*We advise you to promise a reward for your search query, so others would be more motivated to help.***"
>
> —Taken from "Bounty Hunter Club" mission statement (Italics added)

The promise of providing "different" answers from other sources was based on very personalized

and interactive searches conducted by these searchers. Often times, the number of people who

are willing to respond to a query is largely determined by the amount of the reward set by the

query initiators. It is not rare to see a statement in the query threads such as "Get 50000 MPs if

you have the right answer; get 100 MPs just by clicking "reply" button." The number of replies

positively associates with how far up the list on the form it is posted.   The following graph was

taken from Mop, which was used as a recruiting ad for the bounty hunter club. In this recruiting

ad, searching activities were described as detective work, filled with mystery solving, excitement,

and fun. I translated the text in the graph to English and placed the translation and the graph side

by side as below.

(Translation of the recruiting ad) WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE

Bounty Hunter Think-tank is now recruiting

A secret organization active in human flesh searching
A secret organization seeking clues with diligence
A secret organization helping others with sincerity and zeal
For limited time,
You can become one of us in no time
You will be gaining MPs for your participation
*   QQ: 93921900*
*   Produced by Living carefree*

*   Love Life, Love MOP*

Simply by typing the key words "MP" in Chinese search engines, dozens of postings from various sites showed up and most posts asked how to get more MPs to start or continue their search. Some query initiators promise they would pay real money for useful clues. The promised momentary reward ranges from 500 Chinese yuanto over 10,000 Chinese Yuan.

The following postings of MP users were retrieved at Bai.com, a web site with crowd-sourcing function.

—"I need to track down a person. (I) Just registered and only received 1 MP for it. Can someone tell me how many MPs are needed to make these searchers work harder?"

The post was responded to with several comments. The best answer chosen by the inquirer goes, "It depends. I guess you need at least 10,000 MPs to start with. But if your post is interesting, some searchers would do it without MPs." Another reply says, "The more, the better."

— "I am a new user (which often means fewer MPs). To continue my search, I need to set a higher reward. Can you tell me where to buy more MPs? " Among the answers provided by other users, the most helpful one described different ways of making MPs, "log in your MOP account for 5 mps each day (considerably slow); reply to others' search posts to get the MPs they promised (still slow), or buy it on Taobao.com (lighting fast)". Taobao Marketplace (Taobao.com) is a Chinese web site for online shopping, similar to eBay and Amazon. Users can buy 3.6 million MPs with 40 Chinese dollars at Taobao. MP is worth little in real life, but is regarded as good leverage for a variety of activities on Mop.

Response pattern towards search queries. Through evaluating a number of posts to each question thread, it has become apparent that the searchers are more likely to respond to the queries associate with high MP reward. A thread asking for a good Japanese name for a newborn girl received 136 responses within a day despite the generic nature of its query; a high reward of 20, 000 MPs proved to be a big incentive for people to participate. If someone promises a big reward and then many people participate, the initiator only needs to pay to the one participant who provides the best answer or most useful clues. Though MPs have little monetary value in the "real" world, it is still appealing for the searchers who want to be identified as a good hunter who are capable of solving problems for others.

To make searching more efficient and professional, the HFS Forum moderator "Ice Cream" proposed to categorize their best searchers based on their interests and specialties, such as Literature and Arts, Entertainment, Geography and History, People Search, etc. According to his posts, the moderator himself is an avid searcher specialized in History and Science subjects. Ice Cream's proposal received warm support from other "bounty hunters," and only one searcher

objected because he thought such a specification makes searching "less fun." But such a categorization is not officially adopted by the forum. Instead, later on, the Mop set up various sub-forums for queries of each respective nature, but its attempt was aborted due to limited participants in each category.

The textual analysis shows that the number of responses varies greatly. Some threads had fewer than 10 responses, and some threads received thousands of posts. It appears that the response rates are related to the rewards promised in the search quest, as well as how outrageous the claimed transgression is in the search quest.

Like other news aggregation sites, most-viewed and commented upon posts were moved up and the least-commented on were buried in the sea of content. When reading through the comments, the majority of the content did not provide any substantial information for further search.

So far, the analysis of the HFS forum has indicated that the Mop web site has set up an effective reward mechanism to encourage users to engage in crowd-sourcing, and users experienced a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction from being needed and helpful. The need for detailed information to conduct searches serves as the main excuse for justifying violating the privacy of the target, especially when those being sought were perceived as wrongdoers and therefore deserving of shame and condemnations.

Retributive behaviors and violence. The majority of search queries found on Mop are more about tracking information and whereabouts of people, while some of threads are aimed at mobilizing users to engage in verbal violence and harassment to the sought. A thread posted on 9:54 pm on May 19, 2002, starts with the following statement:

Please help find detailed information of this slut. At this point, I have her name, city origin, ID number. Her name is XXX, born in 1980, living in Suzhou city of An'hui province. Her social ID is xxxxxxx.

Please help me find her current home address, work place, family situation, any valid information worth 20,000 mps. I just bought 5.5 million mp, and I'll buy more if that's not enough. I am waiting for your input online. Thanks!! The More details, the better!!!

If there is something you cannot post here, send it to this email address. Remember to tell me your handler on Mops, so I can send you MPs. (Key information is filtered by the author for privacy protection)

Later on, the post was updated with new content as follows:

Just got the slut's phone number: XXXXXXXXX
Here I lay out the conditions for rewards. Just move your fingers, those MPs are yours.
30, 000 MPs for making harassment call but is not answered.
50, 000 MPs for texting harassing message or call to taunt that slut successfully.
80,000 MPs for calling or text with pornographic, exotic content.
You get your awards by sending me the screenshot of your text message or calling record!!
If you do it before 11pm today, 10,000 MPs more will be yours!!!!

The post was put up around 10 pm May 19, 2012. Five days after the initial posting, the thread had received 14,720 clicks and 1,128 replies. Quite a few clues about the woman who was being sought emerged, such as her address, whereabouts, resume she used for a job application, her photo, and her sister's name. One user claimed he could track down the woman's hometown address. Another said he knew of software that can send vilifying comments automatically. The majority of users replied with a simple word "support," which helped the thread stayed on the front page, also earned them MPs from the search initiator. Only a few comments asked why the thread owner had initiated the search against this woman. The search initiator never explained in details, but just responded with a short reply, "She stole someone's' husband." Another comment responded: "Didn't you see she (the woman) was called 'slut' in the post? So she was targeted

for being a slut!"

Just like this thread, often times, users commented on the search post itself as well as the comments made by others following the thread post. People seldom argue about whether a search seems fair or worthwhile, and the discussion is more about how and where they can get more clues.

Commercialization of the information. Although the high-profile search cases have made online vigilantes most noticeable, in the daily flow of the Mop human search forum, it is the commercialization of others' privacy that is more striking. Curiosity does not have to be justified if a monetary award is promised, according to the discourse of the participants.

In previous post searching for the young woman, the thread owner did not disclose what the woman sought did to justify such public humiliation. The comments following the thread showed that others did not really care what she had done either. Some users reported they called the woman without success, but received MPs from search initiators just for their efforts. Most comments were made about what a nice person the search initiator was since they received the MPs promised. Lots of posts called the search initiator a good person, for they received MPs from search initiator, either for adding the comments or making harassment calls. The most posts expressed excitement of receiving Mps. One comment went, "wow, I've received 13,000 mps for this. I 'supported' lots of posts before. This time the thread owner is for real. [I am] so excited!"

When browsing these search inquiries, I felt like I was in an information market where individuals' information is traded. The pursued information was label with price tags, either in real money or MP form. Others' private information is pursued and sold as commodity. In addition to MP or money incentive, enormous amounts of praise and flattering words were

offered upfront. For instance, search initiators often call the potential searchers "Renrou Di (Lord of human flesh search)." The elevated status associate with such name is certainly a boost of ego, making searchers more than willing to prove their capacity by bringing in the information asked, regardless of privacy invasion involved.

Justification for privacy invasion. Many of the people search queries reveal a lot of private information about the targets, and sometimes also include personal information of the query initiators themselves. The intrusive nature of cyber surveillance has to do with how human flesh searching works. When search initiators want to solicits help from viewers they do not personally know, they have to put information they already have online for all potential searchers. The searchers always need some information about the targets to start with. Sometimes, the person asking for help provides too little information for the searchers, which can frustrate passionate searchers. Below is an example, a searchers' signature picture, which goes, "Too little information. You should have known we are no Gods!"(See Signature Picture 1)

(Signature picture 1)

In some search cases, the query initiators perceived themselves to be the victims of wrongdoings made by the party being sought. They tended to purposely, even maliciously, expose private information of the sought, for the sake of facilitating the search and seeking revenge. In one case, not only was the man who was accused of fraud exposed, but his wife's

photograph also was posted. Users typically did not question the authenticity of the claims. On the contrary, they usually would add their new findings without verification to further facilitate the search.

A query of this type is very typical for people search in the search forum. The query initiators see themselves as the victims of the wrongdoers, and HFS Forum is a place to release their grief and seek revenge and justice. Once their inquiry has caught attention in cyber space, people who personally know the sought or have access to private data may retrieve and release that information online. It is suspected that employees working at places with access to private data , such as post offices, hospitals, or telephone companies, may have been involved in retrieving and releasing individuals' private information online (Wu, 2008).

The amount of MPs reward is only one form of incentive for the searchers. Many times, the searchers apparently saw a higher purpose in their search: serving justice.

In the first week of May, 2009, the post with the most responses was a query made by a new mother, who was asking the searchers to find her husband's whereabouts. The title of the thread said: "Help me please! My husband walked out on me and our baby. He is in Ningbo city with his mistress. Please help me find him, please!" The woman went on to tell a lengthy story about how her husband hooked up with a younger woman during her late pregnancy, and how he walked out on her only a few days before her due date, as well as how he made a brief home visit after her childbirth, only to divorce her.

This query revealed lots of information which would be considered private in normal situations, including her husband's name, the QQ numbers (similar to an MSN Live messenger account in the United States) of him and his mistress, his mistress's home address and cell phone

number, etc. She also posted their family photo with the baby in it. All this information would be considered private and presumably should be carefully protected, but in the HFS Forum, it is common, even normal, to reveal it.

This posting promised 2,000 MPs as a reward, which is quite low by the typical standards of the site. But that did not stop it from receiving a flood of responses within two days and was rated as the top thread on the next day. Some posts expressed sympathy toward her and fury towards her disloyal husband. Some suggested what she should do to protect her rights, and more blank postings were posted to increase the thread's salience. These prompt responses did not add any tangible information about her husband's whereabouts, but participants already started to talk about how to track down this husband and bring justice:

　—"I am a Ningbo resident. I took note and will attend to it."

　—"Post your message at Tian'ya site. It has a forum specifically against adulteresses."[3]

　--"I didn't know how to find him, but I can add 20,000 MPs for reward."

　--"If you can find this guy, my 50,000 MPs are yours."

From the responses above, it is not hard to tell this post motivated some searchers to try to track down the estranged husband. However, the post was no longer retrievable two days later.

Theme 7: Empowerment and restriction experienced by searchers. Centering on the issue of power, this theme is generated deductively from Foucault's thesis on the mechanism and power of the Panopticon. This theme incorporates the textual and visual expressions regarding empowerment and restrictions the searchers experienced in the process of cyber surveillance. In

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[3] Tian'ya Club site has many subforums, and one of the forum focus on marriage and relationship. The forum itself does not claim the stand against marital affairs, but several high-profie search cases originated there gained the forum such reputation.

other words, the study looks at what the searchers may or may not do in cyber surveillance forums, as well as the sources for the empowerment or restrictions.

Feeing needed and resourceful might be a reason why searchers feel good about human flesh search. Many search initiators use flattery as a way to solicit helpers. More people promise MPs as rewards. From the interactions between the search initiators and the participants, there are also interaction of solicitation and being solicited. The following is a subject title of a search inquiry, posted on May 2011. It was selected into the sample for its tone, which goes as, "I am begging our Emperor of Search to help find my dream girl. Kneeling here, waiting. "

Among these postings, two signature photos were very telling in how these searchers view the power displayed in their collective activities.

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(Signature Picture 2)

This image above was posted as a searcher's signature picture, which is a vivid portrayal of destructive consequences the searchers may bring to the wrongdoers whom they sought. In this image, a skeleton labeled "MOP human flesh search" is in the center. Below it is a mouse, symbolizing computers, and the shadow of a crowd is on lower part.

(Signature Picture 3)

In another signature picture (See Picture 3), two young girls are waving knives with blood on them, and a slogan at the right bottom of the photo says "We are a choppers gang."

Conclusion

In his discussion of interactive media, Mark Andrejevic (2007) argues that while people eagerly involve themselves with surveillance systems that meet some of their needs and desires, these systems are ultimately disempowering because they enable only "ersatz" freedom to make consumer choices, instead of actualizing political or social empowerment. Content analysis of the forum supported Andrejevic's point of view with empirical data. The daily information flow at the HFSF was filled with a huge amount of low quality information. Political agenda was not addressed, and civil discussion seldom took place. What stood out are the scale of participation and the extent of privacy violation involved in searching activities.

The analysis showed that the forum can be enabling and empowering to individuals by increasing their self-efficacy. Before China human flesh search engine came into being, some individuals already had needs or desire to engage in surveillance. People want to find their runaway spouses; betrayed wives want to find the women who stole their husbands. People who

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have been conned are eager to track down the persons who walked away with their money. Those needs may have been expressed and broadcast among a small social circle of family and acquaintances, but the Internet functions as a platform for spreading the news to a large unknown audience. Especially with the dedicated search forum like Mop HFS forum and its vast user base (over 48, 000 registered bounty hunters), surveillance initiators can broadcast their problems, and summon potential amateur detectives to work for them. In real life, paying handsome amount of money to hire professional detectives is not an affordable option for most people. But with virtual currency like MPs, they could afford to hire surveillance agents. In addition, some enthusiastic searchers are willing to work for free on the search quests they perceived worthy. Such an experience can be a relief for people who felt themselves wronged or unfairly treated.

With human flesh search forum and its volunteer human flesh search hunters, the impacts of the search posts may be multiplied to the point that it catches the attention of people with crucial clues, which leads to a higher likelihood of problem solving. In this study, I was told a variety of endings regarding individuals' surveillance efforts. There are no statistics to show how often these problems are solved. In addition, search initiators can sort through the information contributed and lead the search by adding new clues. Taken from this angle, the human flesh search is certainly enabling, empowering, and liberating for surveillance participants.

In summary, the analysis of the Mop HFS Forum presents alarming evidence that the empowerment of regular citizens does not necessarily lead to equal distribution of power. Chinese human flesh search is one form of peer-to-peer surveillance which is conducted by masses of Internet users, and the results of these searches appear more intrusive and detrimental to the search targets. Such a search and its inevitable privacy invasion are legitimized by the

presence of a "public," even if the action itself may be irrational, judgmental, or violating social

norms.

Chapter 5: Understanding the Searchers I

The key concept for this study is power relations among the searchers and those being sought in cyber surveillance conducted by massive numbers of Internet users. The second stage of the study involved both surveys and in-depth interviews with the searchers. The questions are formulated into three aspects: (1) Who these searchers are, who are being sought, and how the power relations between the two parties are played out; (2) What kinds of empowerment and constraints are experienced by the searchers; (3) What are the structural limitations or empowerments of cyber surveillance mechanisms in China. The issue of power is at the center of the inquiries.

As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) note, the quantitative method can add precision to qualitative research, and surveys in particular can be a valuable exploratory method. In this study, an online survey with the human flesh search forum visitors returned 158 responses within four days. The survey result helped me understand the demographic makeup of the searchers community, their motives and perceptions regarding human flesh search practice. It also helped me raise cogent questions at the time of conducting in-depth interviews with selected searchers.

Survey Method

This online survey used non-probability sample. The sample consists of the forum users who have participated in some form(s) of collaborative cyber surveillance in the forum. Since I was interested in the Internet users who have been active in cyber surveillance activities, the most appropriate site to locate them is their major gathering place—Mop Human flesh search forum. The invitation to the online survey was posted in the forum as a new thread with an imbedded link to the survey page.

Since the survey was aimed towards Chinese participants, the survey instruments were written in Chinese. The online questionnaire was generated with a Chinese software package called Survey Pie (www.diaochapai.com/). The Survey Pie system is similar to Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) in the United States, which allows users to generate online survey questionnaires with a link to give to participants. The prospective respondents may click the questionnaire link sent by the survey administer, complete the survey, and submit the responses online. The survey data would be stored on the Survey Pie site for survey generators to retrieve.

Before activating the survey link, the survey instrument was pretested with a handful of Chinese college graduates and some searchers. They were asked to complete the online survey questionnaire and give me feedback. They reported the time they used to complete the questions, and pointed out either ambiguous or self-conflicting questions. After the questionnaire was modified according to the feedback, the survey questionnaire was uploaded to the Survey Pie system for use (see Appendix 6).

Given the great distance between the location of my research subjects and my residence, an online survey offered many advantages. It allows the researcher to reach a large number of respondents across space and time zones, and also enables rapid data collection. It is cost efficient and logistically easy to arrange. However, online surveys also have a few drawbacks. The most apparent one is the low response rate. Online surveys are known to produce low response rates. It is mainly because the survey administer cannot remotely use effective persuasion, or potential participants do not have time to participate in the survey at the time of receiving invitation (Couper, 2000; Wright, 2005).

To encourage participation and increase the response rate, incentives were offered in a variety of forms in this study. First, survey participants were informed that they would receive 1,000 MPs upon the completion of the questionnaire; second, the respondents would be given the opportunity to receive the report with the major findings; third, they were offered the opportunity to enter a drawing for the prize, an iPad, which is worth 2,500 Chinese yuan. All these incentives were clearly stated on the survey introduction page. If the prospective participants were interested in the survey, they could click the survey link to start filling out the questionnaires. Given that it only took 5-7 minutes to complete the 12-item survey, the incentive should be considered appropriate.

In this qualitative study, the primary ethical concern is the issue of confidentiality. The survey consent page stated that survey responses would be kept anonymous and the data would be only analyzed in the aggregate. All participants were told that information would be kept confidential and only used for academic purpose. For participants who offered their email addresses for prize drawing purpose, their address data were kept separate from survey responses. The data was stored by the student investigator on a password-protected computer, and only the faculty advisor and student investigator have access to the data. The data will be stored in the researcher's office for up to 10 years before being erased.

The survey was designed to be administered only after informed consent was obtained. At the survey site, the subjects were first presented with a consent page, which included a brief introduction of the research project, the procedure of participation, and their rights as the participants. The ending of the page said, "If you have read and understood the above statements, please click on the 'Continue' button below to indicate your consent to participate in this study."

The participant could give their consent by clicking the survey link at the bottom of the consent page.

In the online survey, the first three questions were demographic: age, gender, and geographical location of the respondent. Then respondents were asked their surveillance experience and perception towards such mode of searching. The list of the questions is included in Appendix 1. The survey was also used to recruit the searchers for the later in-depth interviews. On the same questionnaire, the respondents were asked whether they were willing to be contacted for the interviews. If so, they were able to leave their contact information in the blank space.

The survey invitation with the survey link was posted as a thread on MOP Human Flesh Search Forum on Friday, March 18, 2011. The online survey went live on the same day and remained open for the whole weekend and closed on Monday, March 21, 2011. The four-day survey duration was decided by the combination of factors. First, as suggested by the forum moderators, Fridays and weekends are the time when the forum has high volume of viewings. Therefore, setting survey on these days would maximize the number of survey participants. Second, just as other threads in the forum, the thread of survey link could remain on the front page of the forum only if it was reviewed and commented frequently, or it would sooner be buried by other newly posted threads.

Survey Results

The results exceeded expectations, in terms of the number of participants and the concrete answers given to the open-ended questions. A total of 158 participants completed the survey. Within two weeks of the end of the survey, a brief report of the survey findings was sent

to the email addresses of participants who requested the report at the time of completing survey. By the end of March, 2011, a prize drawing was held among the participant pool, and a winner was randomly selected to receive an iPod as a prize.

Demographics of the samples. The most note-worthy finding about who made up the survey sample is that the ratio of male to female is more than 7:1 (86.1% male, 12.7% female). (The others did not indicate this.) The predominance of males in the sample resembles the population of the Mop users (Mop, 2012). In regard to age, 75.3 % of respondents were 25 years of age or younger. Only 5% were 35 years of age or older. Those between 26-35 years old made up 18.35% of the sample.

With regard to marital status, 48.7% were unmarried but in a relationship and 31.6% were unmarried and not in relationship, so 80.4% of the survey participants were unmarried, which explains the overwhelming interest in searching for women as romantic interests, a practice prevalent in the search forum. More than half of the participants had either a bachelor's (47.5%) or master's degree (5%). About 28.5% had some college, while 17.7% of participants had only a high school degree or less.

Searchers' experience and motives. When asked to what extent the participants were drawn to the forum for human flesh search purpose, 8.23% admitted they came to Mop solely for human flesh searching, 16.5% said they came to Mop mainly for human flesh search, 41.8% said human flesh search and other content in the forum is equally important, while 32.3% of survey participants said they are not interested in human flesh search in particular, but other content and activities in the forum instead. Altogether, 70% of survey participants on the forum said they were driven by their interest in human flesh search, which confirmed that the human flesh search forum has made a name

for itself in search activities and drawn considerable crowds for search purpose. This validated the choice of the forum as the sampling site.

Despite the fact that the majority of the forum visitors came to the forum for human flesh search experience, nearly one third of the forum visitors stated they were not interested in human flesh search in particular. Although this might seem surprising it can be explained by the content of the forum. As a community- based forum, the human flesh search forum carries lots of information well beyond the search realm, and its content was much more diverse than what its tag name carries. A new searcher said: "(It is) Very informative. Lots of information is out there."

Time spent on search. The survey also shows that searching only made up a small portion of participants' screen time. When the participants were asked to report the time they spent on search-related activities in an average week, including reading, commenting, searching, and publicizing content relevant to human flesh searching, 48.73% reported that they spent less than 1 hour, 24.7% spent 1-2 hrs, 9.5% spent 2-3 hrs, and 17% spent more than 3 hrs on search related activities. The reported number of hours spent on human flesh search per week is likely to be less than actual amount of time spent on search related activities. As later interviews with some searchers showed, searchers often consider time they used to search substantial information as search time, and do not count the time they used to browse and comment to search threads, even if such kinds of participation are integral part of human flesh search practice. There may be some correlation between amount of time spent on searching and the interest in searching.

Search experience. In this sample of the HFS forum visitors, only a small portion of participants have extensive search experience. Out of 158 forum visitors who claim to have participated in human flesh search, only four of them reported that they had lots of search experience and considered themselves very skillful in human flesh search. When asked their level of

participation in human flesh search, 35.4% said they seldom participated, 46.8% said they participated a little bit as a beginner, 14.6% said they did some search and had a little experience in the area, and only 2.53% said they had lots of participation and very experienced. Among the four experienced searchers, three of them stated that they were willing to be interviewed and left their contact information. Later these three persons were interviewed and their verbal accounts were included in the in-depth interview chapter.

When asked about their motives for participating in human flesh search, participants chose the following reasons: helping others (67.72%), having some fun (43%), serving justice (37.3%), earning MPs (34.2%), making friends (22.8%), and other motives (2.5%).

Searchers' Perceptions of Human Flesh Searching. In order to survey searchers' views regarding human flesh searching practices, I collected images depicting human flesh searching practices from HFS forum and online media. Some images were created by web users as their online signatures; some images were created by cartoonists for print or online media. I chose four images, and each picture depicts one or two aspects of human flesh searching. The selection is subjective. The pictures were inserted in the questionnaires as the choices for a question, which goes as: "In the following pictures, which image you most identify with?"

When asked to choose the pictures which the participants most identified with, participants have different preferences in which pictures reflect the nature of human flesh search in their mind. Some of the participants reported they made the selections intuitively and therefore did not provide concrete reasons supporting their choice, just because "I feel like it," "It is similar to what I have in mind" or "It is my first impression."

 Survey figure

(The words in this picture: human flesh search (人肉搜索) You are violating my privacy! 你们这是侵犯我的隐私权!)

Sixteen percent of participants found the first picture most close to the meaning of human flesh search in their mind. Some of them explained that involuntary exposure of privacy is the characteristic of human flesh search. "In most cases, the privacy of the target is exposed just like showed in the picture", "Human flesh search is all about exposure", "Human flesh search makes private information transparent to others", etc. Some participants chose the picture for the painful facial expression of the center character, who was bound and standing in an X-ray machine, and apparently in a stage of suffering, "There are lots of wrongly accused cases".

 Survey figure 2

Nineteen percent of participants chose the second picture. Some of them said the picture reflects the pursuit of justice in collective manner:

-- "It has a stronger sense of justice seeking, compared with other choices."

-- "Human flesh search is to seek justice, as reflected in the image."

--"It shows the power of collective wisdom."

--"The purpose is human flesh search is to let bad guys cannot hide themselves."

Survey figure 3

Nearly 9 percent (8.9%) chose picture 3. The reasons listed mainly suggested that the searchers are driven by curiosity and too much free time at hand. Their explanations are like the followings:

--"That's what searchers are like, curious and explorative."

-- "They are searching information for pleasure."

-- "It is a simple participation."

Survey picture 4

27.9% of participants considered Picture 4 as the best choice. Some of them appreciate the fact the image depicts the special connection between human flesh search activity and the Mop site, "Human flesh search is certainly related to Mop," "The power of Mop is omnipresent," The others said that they like the fact that the picture effectively highlights the massive participation and justice-seeking netizens, which are the characteristics of human flesh search.

-- "With unrecognizable crowd in the background, the picture is terrifying and entertaining at the same time, just like human flesh search itself."

---"It shows the power of crowd."

_ "Massive participation creates power."

The presence of mass is what distinguishes human flesh search with lateral surveillance; it is also the reason why such a search is more intrusive and unexpected. When a search request is sent out, it begins an uncontrollable run, in which potential participants are unknown and their responses are unexpected. The search may take dramatic turn at anytime.

27.2% of participants said none of the pictures they would identify with as far as human flesh search is concerned.

Sense of empowerment. With regard to the sense of empowerment experienced through human flesh search, the survey participants were asked to choose one of the statements which best describes their situation. The majority of the sample acknowledged that they had experienced a sense of empowerment. Nearly 8.9% of participants said they feel powerful through human flesh searching, 23.4% said they feel themselves to have some influence, but do not feel personally powerful. The majority of the participants agree with the statement that "individual's power is very

limited, but the collaborative effort is powerful." The rest of participants (14.6%) chose the statement, " I do not experience any change in the sense of empowerment."

__Fear of privacy invasion.__ The survey asked the participants to rate the extent to which a statement applies to their situation. The statement was, "I am very cautious with my online information, to avoid becoming others' search target." 20.9% agree that the statement absolutely applies to them, 59.5% agree the statement mostly apply to them, 16.5% said the statement does not quite fit their situation.

Conclusion

The survey showed that Mop search forum was dominated by male 25 years or younger. With over 80% of survey respondent is unmarried. The combination of single status and young age may attribute to their searching since they have more free time for online activities.

Regarding searchers' experience, survey showed that the most respondents (83%) only used a small portion of their screen time for searching, despite the fact they were visiting a forum dedicated to searching activities. The statistics indicated that although many subjects got involved in searching to some extent, searching is not a primary online activity for them.

The findings showed survey subjects identify a close association between surveillance activities and power. The majority of survey subjects acknowledged they had experienced a sense of empowerment from searching. They also related searching with displaying and exercising the power of the crowd, along with other attributes including justice seeking, privacy violation, and detrimental influence on search targets.

The study also found the fear of human flesh search practice affects survey subjects' online behavior. Over 80% of respondents expressed they were fearful or cautious about putting personal information online due to the fear of becoming search subjects.

In summary, the survey results show the association between surveillance activities and empowerment, both from respondents' experience and their overall perception towards human flesh searching. The findings resonates Foucault's (1977) analysis that surveillance produces power.

Chapter 6: Understanding the Searchers II

In the study, the key concept is power relations among the searchers and the sought in cyber surveillance conducted by massive numbers of Internet users. The second stage of study involves both surveys and in-depth interviews with the searchers.

In-depth interviews with the searchers may yield rich data regarding the searchers' own experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making process. More importantly, it helps the researcher to contextualize online behavior with real life situations. I conducted in-depth interviews with search participants either over the phone, or through instant messages and follow-up emails.

Method of In-depth Interviews

Sampling. Participants for the in-depth interviews were selected through purposive sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The primary sampling pool involved the searchers who have been involved in drafting and finalizing the first *Human Flesh Search Conducts Pact (*See Appendix 3*)*, which has been posted and widely circulated online since September 2009.

Then Mop search form moderator Yule initiated and drafted the pact, and he asked other netizens from the major portals to contribute and sign the pact. According to the pact, its purpose is to regulate citizens' online behaviors and maintain a harmonious online environment. The convention has become well known along with the prevalence of searching practice. It was also publicized by legacy media as a sign of self-disciplining of netizens. The convention itself is more about the expression of encouraged online behaviors, but its endorsement is not enforced. There is no penalty for violating the pact.

These searchers were considered to be good candidates for the in-depth interviews because their act of drafting and publishing the convention shows that these people have not only

been actively involved in human flesh search activities, but also feel strongly about the role they take and would like to suggest the future direction for such practices. The fact that they all agreed to have their screen names appear on the convention shows their openness and willingness to be identified as searchers, therefore they are likely to collaborate in the interviewing. I was able to interview three searchers on the list, Yule, Ice Cream, and Yan Zhi.

Meanwhile, I also tried my best to diversify the subjects in terms of gender, age, employment, as well as their level of participation in human flesh searching. For instance, I included two female searchers: one was a moderator for the search forum, who is the only female moderator in five moderators interviewed, and the other one categorized herself as "experienced" in the online survey for the forum visitors. The two female searchers were able to comment on their feeling in a male dominated community. I also purposively chose two newly joined searchers so that searchers with less experience were included.

Interviewing procedures. When it was time to approach potential subjects, the most visible searcher of all was contacted first: the moderator of the human flesh forum, Ice Cream. Ice Cream had been working for MOP for four years as a full-time employee. His status is quite different from most forum moderators, who volunteered at the forum. I contacted Ice Cream via emails, and he was supportive to my research agenda, but he was not much of a talker. After some small talks with him online, several short online interviews were conducted, he later agreed to be interviewed over the phone for half hour.

At the conclusion of the interviews, Ice Cream was asked to refer other searchers. He was able to provide contact information of some other searchers. I then started to contact other potential subjects via emails, introducing myself and explaining my research project. I included

in the letter the link to my bio on the University's website so that they could verify my information. I also mentioned the IRB approval issued by the graduate school and showed them the Chinese translation of the document. This strategy only worked on some searchers. Yan Zhi, a female searcher and forum moderator I had intended to include, did not respond to my inquiry at all. She agreed to be interviewed only after her supervisor, Ice Cream, introduced me as his friend. The other reason that such a strategy works is that the searchers on the list were only loosely connected, and no one has everyone's contact information. After trust was established, I readdressed the project and the procedure while assuring the protection of the subjects. In regard to voluntary participation, I emphasized it was strictly voluntary to participate in the study and they could withdraw any time as they wish. This gesture gave them the sense of control over the interview, and made them more relaxed and willing to participate.

Finding searching participants who fit the criteria for this study was not hard, and persuading them to participate in the interview was also easier than I thought. Most of them were willing to contribute to the project after I explained my research project. Some were cautious at first, but became more cooperative after their supervisor persuaded them. They were not cautious about the intentions of the study just because it is being conducted in the United States.

Some of searchers did express nationalism during the interview, given that in China media propaganda the United States is often portrayed as "unfriendly" competitor of China. Some interviewees hesitated to volunteer sensitive or unfavorable information which may make China "look bad" to Westerners because they are aware of privacy invasion accusations associated with their surveillance practices. Most subjects were not concerned about the issue of confidentiality. As forum moderators, they were highly visible and already well-known to Mop

search community. But they were more alert than others about revealing personal information, probably because they know very well that what they say or do may turn the evidence against themselves —a lesson learned from their cyber surveillance experience.

Given that I am in the United States most of time, face-to-face interviews with Chinese searchers were impractical. For practical reasons, I had to be very flexible with my interview approach and cater to the interviewees' schedules and preferences. Originally, I intended to conduct all in-depths interviews over the phone. To facilitate the correspondence with the potential subjects, I ordered the I-talk BB telephone service, which allowed me make unlimited calls between the U.S. and China.

However, the mode of investigation was slightly modified later to cater to the Chinese interviewees' needs. Instead of conducting all interviews over the phone, some interviews were done online over instant messaging. This happened for a variety of reasons. Some interviewees said that an international call from the U.S. would make them nervous, or they did not think themselves good at talking over the phone. Some chose online chatting for it is less interruptive to their daily routines. Among the nine interviews conducted, six of them were done through instant messaging. The interview questions remained the same as presented in the approved protocol. Both modes of data collection were supplemented with emails for corresponding with interviews. Such a change was made to respect the participants' rights to choose their most comfortable way of being interviewed without compromising the integrity of the study. Prior to the phone interviews, I asked for their permission to tape the interviews. During the phone interviews, notes were taken to record nonverbal cues, which can help contextualize the

conversations. During online interviews conducted via instant messaging, the participants knew and agreed that the chat record could be used as the data for the research.

To interview China search participants over the phone or via instant messaging, I had to overcome logistical inconvenience caused by the vast time difference (9 hours) between the region of my residence (the United States) and that of interviewees' (Mainland China). Most of the interviewees preferred to be contacted between 8-11 pm China Standard Time, which meant I had to be up between 3-6 am to conduct interviews. Although such a unique situation contributed to my insomnia, it also served as a good conversation starter at the time of interviewing.

In this study, I mainly used phone interviews and online interviews via IM, and only occasionally use emails to follow up with interviewees or clarify information obtained from interviews. From a methodological perspective, each mode of data collection methods has its advantages and drawbacks. Here I will first examine the advantages and disadvantages of phone interviews and online interviews over instant messaging respectively. Then I will make comparison between phone interviews and instant messaging.

Pros and cons of interviewing over instant messaging (IM). Mann and Stewart (2000) listed several advantages of using the Internet as a medium for interviewing. These advantages include the reduced time for travel and the saving of meeting venues; the convenience of automatically generated transcription in the forms of archived logs of instant online messages; and the capacity for online interviews to provide participants with an informal environment to discuss issues without being judged. The convenience, efficiency and expansion of research realms realized by the Internet technology can be quite compelling to qualitative researchers. In

addition to these benefits, the Internet also allow researchers to preserve the richness of the data through hypermedia, a multimedia format with hyperlinks to combine sound, video, images, graphics, documents, and other forms of data (Dick, 2007). In this study, interviewing over instant messaging as my primary mode of data collection did provide the benefits stated above.

Compared to face-to-face interviews, one of main drawbacks concerning interviewing via instant messaging (IM) is the relative lack of context and visual cues such as facial expression and body language (Voida, et al, 2004; Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). I tried to compensate for limited visual cues by asking interviewees about their surrounding and what they were doing at the time of interviewing. Sometimes, interviewees sent me the emoticons to express their feelings, which compensated for the lack of visual clues.

Comparison of phone interviews and interviews over IM. As one of traditional data collection methods, phone interviews are often compared with face-to-face interviews. Although phone interviews provide less visual clues and context than face-to-face interviews, it can be used as an alternative when meeting with subjects is infeasible or cost prohibitive (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010; Dimond et al, 2012). Compared with interviewing over IM, phone interviewing does not provide the convenience of automatically generated transcription during interviewing, but it generates more conversational flow and more data than if conducted with instant messaging (Kazmer & Xie, 2008; Dimond et al, 2012). However, longer transcripts from phone interviews do not necessarily mean better quality of data. Dimond et al (2012) have found no significant difference in the number of unique qualitative codes expressed when comparing phone interviews and interviews via IM.

Interview protocol and mechanics. Appendix B contains the list of questions for the in-depth interview. The list contains the questions which were used to elicit the data from the subjects. The questions were subject to change corresponding to the interviewee's responses. In addition, these questions are semi-constructed. While offering some focus and directions, there was considerable latitude for participants to express their thoughts. More than once, at the time of interviewing, searchers were either in the middle of an ongoing search cases, or had just wrapped up a search cases; therefore, they would talk about the current search event with greater details.

Reliability and validity. The way to achieve reliability and validity is different for qualitative research than quantitative. The use of mixed methods is one way to achieve validity through triangulation. The data collected through multiple approaches supplements one another (Patton, 2002). While qualitative research results are not meant to be generalized, the insights gained from the study can be transferable to the sample population in a similar situation. Using "thick description" is a way to ensure transferability of the data. The study used many direct quotations from the interviewees. Using extensive quotations also allow the readers to evaluate the validity of my interpretation.

In analyzing the interview data, I closely followed the instructions provided by Marshall and Rossman (1999) and Rubin and Rubin (2005) on qualitative interviewing. I revisited the themes I identified in the content analysis, using them as the basis for primary analysis. First, the tapes are transcribed and online chat records were archived, resulting in nine interview transcripts. I closely read and re-read the transcripts and then coded the data according to the guiding research questions. As the coding process unfolded, more categories were added as they

emerged from the data. I then combined all the data for each category and presented them under

the theme and subtheme. When presenting the data, I tried my best to present direct quotes from

the respondents.

Interview Overview

The study strives to understand surveillance agents', or searchers, experiences and

perceptions through the lenses of power. The interview chapter summarizes and synthesizes the

experiences and perceptions of nine searchers regarding their search practices. As discussed in

the methodology chapter, this purposive sample consists of the Mop forum members with

differing levels of participation in the human flesh search activities.

In addition to the written accounts of the respondents, the study also paid attention to

their online presence and self-expression in the form of self-profiles, posts, blogs, etc. These

online presentations speak to who they think they are and how they connect with others. With

huge information available in this category, only the data highly relevant to their human flesh

search experience and self-perception is included for analysis. The online narrative is constructed

and presented to contextualize their words, to give a clear picture of their life and thoughts.

Since many interviews were conducted through online chat, the participants sometimes sent web

links, pictures, or files to explain the situation they were talking about. That information was

selectively employed to contextualize their narratives.

Casting the sample. Finding the Internet users who fit the criteria for this study was

more complicated than I thought. Even the bounty hunter with highest rank, the person who had

gained the most MPs is not the one who had the most extensive search experiences. The search

forum has so much going on that the avid members of the forum are not necessarily drawn to

human flesh search activities specifically, but to other things, such as socializing with others, browsing entertainment news, . For instance, Wang Wu, the ranked # 1 bounty hunter, gained his MPs mainly through posting threads on the forum, not through human flesh searching.

The sampling started with contacting the forum moderators, first Ice Cream, then Yule, Yan Zhi , and Guo Jing. They are the key informers. After interviewing them, they gave me the contact information of other searchers, and told me I could contact them by presenting myself as their friends. Once the qualified candidates were approached, most of them were collaborative and much more open than I expected.

To create differences in the sample, six searchers were chosen for their extensive search experience. These six searchers either engineered or participated in the human flesh search frequently, and had been involved in several high-profile search cases. Four of them used to be or still are the moderators for the Mop human flesh search forum. Two experienced searchers were search participants with no editorial access to any online forum. To get a more diverse sample, a female searcher was chosen from the survey participants to get more female subjects, and a newly joined male searcher was interviewed in order to reflect a more complete picture of the searcher community. The sample also includes a search initiator who posted a search request, asking others to help track down a man who conned him for money. His unique experience helps understand what kinds of technical, financial, and structural barriers may exist for a person to utilize the human flesh search tool.

The interview analysis was guided by three research questions. To best address these, I used the appropriate categories to analyze the interviews. I also discussed the dominant themes

and subthemes that were present in the data. Those themes encapsulated and leant insight on what many interviewees said about a particular topic.

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the sample consists of searchers who have participated in some form of human flesh search. The sample included searcher participants with differing levels of experience. "Hard-core" searchers were these participants with at least two years of experience in human flesh search and had at least participated one high-profile search case. High-profile search case refers to a search event which was widely publicized by the mainstream media and is well known to the searcher community. The sample also includes participants who had limited search experience but their experience can add to new perspective in viewing human flesh search.

The following are the human flesh searchers in the sample:

1. Yule, male, 28 years old, the first moderator for MOP human flesh search forum. He has extensive searching experience and initiated the convention for human flesh searching behavior. He is currently living in Hangzhou, Zhejiang and working in social media marketing.

2. Web Shell, male, 21 years old, was a former hacker and recognized by peers as one of the top searchers in searchers community. He was studying at a vocational school in Computer Engineering at the time of interview.

3. Ice Cream, male, 28 years old, was a moderator and administer of MOP HFS forum. He had participated in searches for over 4 years. He has been in charge of Mop search forum since 2008. Ice Cream is currently in charge of the search forum and has compiled and edited the web sources on Mop regarding human flesh search.

4. Xian'yang, male, 21 years old, was a new forum member with 6 months of search experience. He was studying for associate degree. He is living in Xi'an city, Shanxi province.

5. Guo Jing, a male college sophomore in Communication Engineering, was moderating the human flesh forum as his pastime activity. He considers his search participation as a way "to help people achieve the most basic rights of life within my means".

6. Shi Yi, 30 years old, was married with a six-year old son. He was out of work and had been deceived by a stranger, who got him to work for online marketing but then never paid Shi Yi. Shi Yi initiated the search looking for the person who tricked him but was unsuccessful.

7. Wang Wu, 24 years old, used to be the # 1 bounty hunter in the search forum with highest MPs. He held a job of financial assistant at the time of interviewing. He was an active searcher and participated in numerous search incidents. He also volunteered to assist newcomers to the search forum.

8. Yan Zhi , 28 years old, was a female forum moderator and a searcher herself. Yan Zhi used to be a Mop fan, working for Pingmian Sheji and later was recruited to manage the human flesh search forum. She was one of few female staff moderators for the forum.

9. Huangxi, a female forum regular. She was a college student from the online survey participants. She was living in Xi'an, Shanxi province.

Overall, interviews with human flesh search participants went surprisingly smoothly. I was concerned that the subjects may be unwilling to cooperate since the search practice was controversial. It turned out they were open and forthcoming in answering my questions. I think to some extent, the reason lies in the fact that there were certain degrees of detachment between their online activities and real life. The interviewees were forthcoming in revealing lots of

things they did online, but they were vague about their real names and what they did for living. For instance, Yule and Yan Zhi did not tell me their real names. Yule said, "Everyone calls me Yule, except my parents." Some interviewees gave me their names with a bit of hesitation. They likely did not think it risky to reveal only one aspect of their online activities for their online presence is much more complicated and diverse than just the HFS forum. Yule said "I have numerous online handles and accounts, some are male, and some are female." Web shell said, "Siglad is the ID I use for human flesh search purpose," which implied that he may have other screen names for other purposes. Later he confirmed my speculation. Comparatively speaking, experienced searchers are more cautious and alert than ordinary forum members in revealing personal information, probably they know very well that what they say or do may turn out to be evidence against themselves—a lesson learned from their cyber surveillance experience.

Searchers' genuine interest in the U.S. As a Chinese graduate studying in an American university, I could sense a bit curiosity about my background and mixed feelings about the United States from the interview participants. When asked, quite a few interviewees wanted to help me. They see me as a person who did not forget my country of origin, and my interest in human flesh search was certainly flattering. Given that my research was going to be judged by some American professors, they wanted to help as a way of helping a fellow Cchinese person. One interviewee specifically said he was willing to help as much as possible because I am his "compatriot."

Both searchers and Mop forum moderators showed strong interests in the Western media's portrayal of them. When told that human flesh search phenomenon was covered by many major media outlets in Western countries, one interviewee got quite excited and asked,

"What they did they say about us, good or bad?" Not want to influence him one way or another, I told them that Western media were surprised at the prevalence of its practice in China. He agreed, "Yeah, human flesh searching is everywhere on the web."

I also sensed a bit of hesitation when the interviewees had something unflattering to say about human flesh search practices, which may have to do their Chinese patriotism As Chinese citizens. One interviewee was hesitant to say anything negative about China. Whenever he mentioned something which may make China look bad, he would add: "Everywhere is the same. I believe the United States is no better."

Quite a few interviewees also expressed their interests in US products and culture. More than once, I was asked about iPhone prices in the US. One of the interviewees asked whether the M65 military uniform was a mainstream outfit in the United States. He said he saw it in the Hollywood movies, and managed to get a M65 jacket for himself, but it was not as authentic as he had expected. Another interviewee expressed his admiration for the fact that I am studying in an American institute, a country with much more freedom. He told me he and his girlfriend are planning to immigrate to either Canada or the United States.

In the process of interviewing, more than once I experienced uneasiness and a personal fear of being sought. When approaching Web Shell-- the former hacker-- online with a brief self-introduction, he quickly sent me a web link with a short message, "Is this you?" What he had found were some of my former publications and an article in which I was interviewed as a source. It was not something that usually worried me. As a former journalist, I have been always aware of the digital presence of my work. But given the context, a sense of insecurity and uneasiness

seized me at the time. After talking to him, I took a hard look at several of my online accounts, and changed quite a few privacy settings to further search-proof myself.

Interviewing these searchers on this subject also reminded me of the vulnerability of digital presence. After talking to Yule about how human flesh searching was executed, I realized how vulnerable I was digitally. The password I used for different accounts does reflect the patterns Yule described, that is, I attached to certain names and used them quite often in my multiple accounts. If someone got one password right, they were not far away from cracking all my online accounts. Right after conversing with him, I took a hard look at every email account and social network account I have, and made changes to all the passwords.

Interview Findings

The participants each had their own stories about how they got acquainted with human flesh search. The different stories can be summarized into three following categories.

The first group is composed of the searchers who participated in many searches and had a lot of experience. They invested lots of time in searching with great interest and established relationships with fellow searchers. This group often experience strong sense of empowerment. The second group had participated in human flesh searching with moderation, but did not invest considerable time in searching, nor in establishing relationships with any other search participants. They often have no strong sense of empowerment associated with human flesh searching. The third group, who had tried the human flesh search in very limited situations, often found themselves lost in the scene and sensed a sort of disappointment in the power of human flesh searching .

The interviews also illustrated a gender difference in the sample. Two female searchers were both more sympathetic towards the sought and are more likely to feel they were unfairly treated, while male participants tend to be more comfortable with harsh treatment towards the sought. Female participants were less optimistic toward human flesh search practice than their male counterparts.

Searchers' involvement. Each searcher had their own stories about how they got involved with human flesh search. Quite a few of them came to human flesh search out of their interest in Mop in general. One common statement is that most of them were drawn to Mop long before they grew an interest in human flesh searching. They encountered human flesh searching as one of the online activities the Mop site provided. Often they were drawn to the Mop site for its big name and became interested in earning MPs. Now that lots of content on the forum was related to human flesh searching, these users participated in searching more or less.

As one of early search participants, Yule is also an early adopter of new media. He has one of earliest QQ numbers with only six digits (newly- issued QQ numbers have ten digits). As the first-generation moderator for MOP Human Flesh Search forum, he is a legend among the Moppers. Not only did he work as the first moderator for the Forum, but also he worked there when several dramatic human flesh search incidents took place. He was the one who initiated and drafted of the human flesh search pact. His career in the digital industry took off from Mop. He is now working in social media marketing and was considered a successful example of career development by current forum moderators. Already switching his focus to social media marketing, he is no longer actively involved in human flesh searching. But he keeps himself on top of the things happening in the field.

Yule's QQ account is connected to the text message service on his cell phone; he always keeps the status as "online." I obtained his QQ from a friend of his and sent him a friend request. He instantly added me into his friend list without even asking who I am. When asked why he did not even ask about my identity, he responded, "The spirit of the Internet is openness and sharing."

With a full-time job in social marketing, Yule withdrew from human flesh search gradually, but he stayed on top of the things. "I used to wish I could spend 25 hours per day on the Internet. Even now I spend lots of hours online. I've spent lots of time and enjoyed lots of activities in cyber space in general, and human flesh search in particular."

Other searchers' involvement. Huanxi participated in the online survey and left her email address, indicating that she was willing to be interviewed regarding the subject. She was a 25- year- old sophomore from Taiyuan city, Shanxi Province. She said she was on the human flesh forum mainly for the purpose of human flesh searching. She reported an average of 2-3 hours a week spent on human flesh search, and considered herself to have a lot of search experience. During the interview, she said she initially was attracted to the Mop site for other reasons: "At the beginning when I came to the Mop site, it was the simple and innocent content that draw my attention. I made friends online here. We got acquainted because we enjoy each other's posts. " She gradually got involved in human flesh search, with the hope to find solutions for others, especially those involving knowledge searches, such as the topics related to social science. Huanyi had never initiated any search for her own sake. She participates mainly through responding to others' search posts.

Huanyi was not alone in this. Xian'yang said, "I joined Mop for its big name. For instance, if one internet celebrity rose, most likely the source is from Tian'ya or Mop. Plus my friends often talked about Mop. … I feel it has lots of content, is very diverse and carries huge information." Xia'yang considered himself to be a searcher with quite a bit of search experience and very skillful in human flesh search, and said he spent about 10 hours per week on search-related activities.

Just like Huanxi, Xian'yang's participation is mainly through following the search requests. He said, "I did not encounter any human flesh search needs in my own life. I just followed (replied to) the posts here. If there is a search request I am interested in, I would comment on it, if I have some sort of speculation about the case. If not, I just send an empty reply to give my moral support." Though Xian'yang likes to add information to an existing search thread, he admitted sometimes he only repeated online rumors: "I googled information for others, and passed it along. Once I saw a post asking about Xuriyanggang[4] Duo's hometowns, and I found a piece of information online saying he used to serve in the army, so I passed that information along. It turned out to be false. " But sometimes, Xian'yang enjoys good luck. "Once people talked about the duo Xuriyanggang duo, I said the two came to Beijing for their big dream, one from He'Nan (province), and another from Dongbei…. I was right. I knew it from their accents."

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[4] Xuriyanggang is a grassroots duo made of Wang Xu, and Liu Gang, two migrant workers living in Beijing . They became a national sensation after the video showing them singing at their shabby apartment was put online by a friend. Their hoarse voice and powerful rendition was considered a true portrait of China poor migrant workers . Internet users had heated discussion regard their hometown origins before their background were made public. (Shengzhen daily, 2011) http://www.szdaily.com/content/2011-02/18/content_5352651.htm.

Wang Wu, a forum member ranked #1 on the Mop bounty hunters' list, found Mop to be a good place for leisure time. Landing his first job after college, the 24-old man said: "My work is not too busy. I have no girlfriend. I have nothing else to do so I play Mop. ...The first month I spent on Mop, it was an important part of my life. " Wang Wu gained MPs by posting threads. His record was 354 posts in a day--which was how he earned so many MPs. "At that time, I also began to volunteer for a human flesh chat group, responsible for receiving newcomers. Most netizens who came to Mop with search quests know little about the site, and it was quite a bit of work for me to teach them how to post search quests and get viewers' attention. Some of them did find the person they were looking for." Through the chat group, Wang Wu made quite a few online friends.

The human flesh search chat group was established to organize collective efforts for people search. Once web users register to the group, they automatically receive updated search quests. MOP users considered it a faster way to earn MPs because search quests are often presented with high MPs rewards, and sometimes even real monetary prizes. To experience the chat room, I registered to join in the search group. Soon, I received search requests. There were not many of them, and most of them were missing person posts.

Web Shell, a former hacker in his 20s, was recognized by the searcher community as a key player in human flesh search realm. He had multiple screen names, and one of them was set up solely for human flesh search purposes. He could not recall when and how he got involved in human flesh search, but still remembers his excitement when the search case he participated in was covered in mainstream media and his screen name was mentioned in the news story.

Search initiators. Some people got involved in human flesh search for help with specific search agendas in mind and expected that initiating a search would solve their problems. Shi Yi , a 30-year-old man who was out of a job at the time of interview, is one of them. As a former salesman and the father of a six-year-old, he experienced significant financial stress due to his unemployment. He desperately needed paid work. He was talked into online marketing by a stranger and worked a month for no money. Frustrated by the fact that he could not find the man who tricked him, he turned to the Mop human flesh search. For him, it was natural to think of human flesh search in times like this: "It (human flesh search) is very common in China. People are conned, or want to find someone, they will come to the Internet, come to Mop." Shi Yi said, "I did not use Mop prior to this. After I was conned, I used a Mop account my online friend gave me (to post)." At the time of the interview, three months had passed after his search post, and he had not found the person who conned him. But he decided to stick around the forum since he did receive moral support from others, and felt some sort of relief from his frustration and loss. He participated in others' searches sometimes, but did not contribute any key information.

Quite a few search initiators are the victims of petty crime or immoral behaviors. Often times, the damage is not major and cannot be taken to court, but it is enough to cause anger, grief, or emotional stress. Human flesh search forum serves as an informal court for them to present their cases. Wang Wu, who used to receive the newcomers for the human flesh search group, talked about the search initiators he personally encountered, "They search for the wives who walked out on them, or search for the mistresses who had affairs with their cheating husbands." Some searchers who came to the forum were desperate for clues and became easy prey for swindlers. Wang Wu recalled a man who was looking for his runaway spouse and asked HFS

forum for help. The man posted search quest at HFS forum, was helped by several nice people online, but was also conned by a swindler. The swindler contacted him online, claiming to have crucial information of his wife. As the swindler suggested, the husband electronically sent money to a bank account but never heard back from the person again. Fortunately, he eventually found his wife and resumed their life together.

It is not rare for a desperate searcher initiator to fall into the prey of swindlers. Just like the man who was eager to find his wife, some search initiators were desperate and willing to pay high prices to solicit help. They often promised handsome amounts of real money for useful tips. Swindlers may take advantage of their vulnerability by tricking them to send money for the claimed tips. In another case, Wang Wu responded to a post in which a wife was searching the mistress of her husband, and she was given the address of the woman by searchers, but they did not know what happened next.

Yan Zhi, a forum moderator, talked about search initiators with a sigh, "What should I say? I have to say most of them are not doing well, in terms of education or finance. If they are well educated, they are less likely to be conned and cheated. Even if it happens, usually they would find a better way to handle it. "

Mechanism of human flesh search. Ice Cream, the moderator of the human flesh search forum, says that netizens initiated human flesh searching. The forum only combines the resources of the users.

Ice Cream came to work for Mop in 2008. Prior to that, he was working for a dot com industry. "Since I have worked here, I have witnessed numerous search cases. More often than not, I participated in search cases just like other regular Moppers." Ice Cream saw himself as an

ordinary search participant. In his eyes, when a search case emerged, he knew as much as another guy who was browsing the forum. He said that he had participated in most of those high-profile searches with his online friends. In the search process, they always call each other by the other's online handles, even in offline settings. They interacted online for search cases, but those groups often evaporated after the search finished. But as a forum moderator, he knew some experienced searchers because of their active roles in multiple searches. Confirming that the Mop site was best known for human flesh searching, Shi Yi man says, "It (human flesh searching) is very common in Mainland China. People are conned, or want to find someone, they will come to the Internet, come to Mop."

> Yule described how human flesh searching works:

> The Internet is a social media, all the information are roads, through the connections, the weak links turn into strong links, then you can find the person sought. Unless he or she leaves very little information online, phone number, photos, etc., everything can be clues. One particular website allows users to upload pictures, and it will automatically find similar pictures online. Eighty percent of human flesh searches were done through search engines, twenty percent is done through social networks. The bigger the Internet users base is, the more people see the search post, the better chance to get more clues.

> Ice Cream's account on searchers' interaction resonated with F.Y. Wang and his

colleagues' finding (2009) about the network of human flesh search communities. They found HFS communities usually grow quickly at the beginning of an episode, but the density of search communities is generally sparse, with a network density of less than 0.001; this means that an individual in this particular network may be connected with one person in a population of 1, 000. And the search community usually dissipated once the search was finished. This stems from the large number of participants who post only simple, uninformative replies to existing threads.

Such users typically don't contribute constructive findings or substantive information and don't attract follow-up on discussions or posts. They were referred to as "casuals."

The moderators agreed that the key of human flesh searching is mass participation. The search information has to be spread to the people who know or see the search subject. The participation can take a widely variety of forms. Many participants do not have knowledge, skills, social network, or access to the information inquired; therefore they cannot directly provide relevant information. But they can play a role in publicizing the thread in the forum, either post comments in the thread, or simply write a few words to be counted as a post, in order to increase its salience in the forum. The word of *bump* here refers to posting in a thread for no reason other than having the thread up to the top. When a member posts in a thread for no reason but to have it go to the top, it is referred to as a bump or bumping in English or "*Ding*" in Chinese. With commenting, bumping, cutting and pasting the thread to other sites, forum users can publicize the thread at lightning speed. In the high profile search cases, mass participation is well beyond Mop or one or two online venues. Once the search post becomes viral, almost all the major portals are carrying the search information, and the number of participants will skyrocket.

Yan Zhi emphasized even if no substantial information is provided by casuals, their attention to the case is indispensable, **"**There is one among ten thousands who is capable of providing the key information and finding the sought. But if a posting is circulated and viewed by ten thousand people, it increases its likelihood of being viewed by that key person. As a matter of fact, it is the attention drawn by massive participation that gives human flesh search the

strength and influence. Many times, the trick is that mass participation generates lots of attention and the atmosphere of seeking truth, which leads to the solving of the problem. **"**

Wang Wu explained how searchers successfully tracked down the targets through massive participation of unrelated people, "Some searchers started a search with the targets' QQ number, phone numbers, and other information provided by the search initiator. Sometimes, they happened to see the sought. It sounds like an impossible coincidence, but did happen a couple of times."

Tangling issue of privacy invasion and vigilantism. Human flesh searching practice frequently involves violation of individuals' privacy, especially when search targets were accused of wrongdoings. When asked about the attitudes towards invasions of individuals' right to privacy, the participants' responses fell into two camps. The first group thinks privacy invasion can never be considered right, no matter how wrong the target is. The second groups consider privacy invasion to be justified if the wrongdoers should be condemned or social justice should be served.

"It's just too much". Huan Xi disapproves of privacy invasion on the basis of a diminished sense of security for everyone online:

> No matter if it is good or bad news, as long as it breaks out in public, detailed to the extent of address, phone number, even childhood experience, and everything about a person, I feel it is terrifying. It's just too much. I feel terrified for the person sought. At the same time, I have no sense of security myself…There are too many wrongly accused cases. I know everyone is afraid of being sought, no matter if it is negative or positive publicity. Life is complicated, and people hold different views on things, and are able to find faults on anyone, even a nice person… I view the human flesh search cases as news, as an online spectacle. But I do not search. It is not a welcome experience to be exposed in plain sight, no matter in real life or the virtual world.

When asked whether bad deeds deserve punishments, Huan'xi said, "Public condemnation is enough. I see no point to meddle in other people's lives (through offline activities), unless he or she is a danger to the country, community, or others. "

Yan Zhi, a moderator of the human flesh search forum, said that some searchers lost their moral ground by taking the law into their own hands. In her blog, Yanzhi recounted the severe damages caused by vigilantes.

> There are too many cases presented before us, reminding us we should not have been so proactive, so enthusiastic…Some people were found and killed by their enemies, someone's future was ruined due to negative exposure through human flesh search. Some people want to make themselves known via human flesh search, or do something illegal through search.…Morality can only constrain people with conscience, and really wicked men do not subject themselves to it.

Yan Zhi said that many human flesh search practices had gone overboard:

> I agree that the inaction of the parties involved is partly responsible for the injustice we have witnessed. However, we are not living in Robin Hood's age any more. We can only give moral support in many cases, and that is the best we can do. If you make an Internet user take revenge for you by breaking law, and he is locked up for it, can you at peace with it?...I do not recommend this sort of search, which is more for retaliation. It does not do good to social harmony….To be honest, human search is about exposing someone's wrong. Even though we do not encourage revenge, insulting, or personal attack, there are always people who want to seek revenge.

The ends justify the means. There is a certain level of consent that privacy invasion is justified if the human flesh search is about making people accountable for their wrongdoings, even if such exposure may go overboard. The other groups say that privacy invasion can be justified if the wrongdoers should be condemned or social justice should be served. Yule's opinion was best demonstrated by the Human Flesh Pact he drafted, and had co-signed by other active web users at the time. In the pact, the searchers state "Stick to the yardstick of Internet

morality, try not to participate in searching for others' private information. (Convention 3)."

Convention 4 reads, "Protect others' privacy, and do not spread private information in the

public." However, Convention 5 makes it clear that the privacy protection does not apply to

people who are corrupt or immoral, or apply to cases that punish evil and promote good. In other

words, Yule and his friends share the view that the end justifies the means.

Wang Wu used to help new users post their search quests, but he wanted to see some

form of justification for posting others' private information out there. He said, "Unless they

(search initiators) are looking for their family and relatives with good intention, I won't

encourage or help them with their search."

Web Shell, a former hacker, had less concern about privacy invasions or justification for

a search. His search interest is mainly tracking down swindlers and other wrongdoers. He saw

nothing wrong with exposing their private details if he found them, seeing as his actions can

warn others of the swindlers' schemes. Shi Yi also felt justified in his desire for revenge by what

the search subject did to him: "I worked for him ten hours a day for a whole month, the 50 Yuan

he gave could not cover the electricity bill." At the end of the post, he provided that person's

name (which might not be a real name), cell phone and QQ number, saying: "I want to search his

detailed information. I hope to track him down, and take a good look at this man."

Even without a legitimate reason for searching for a stranger who committed no wrong,

Web Shell did not think he need some form of justification to do searching. He explained why he

gradually lost interest in searching:"Lots of search requests are not valid, such as some male

users' requests to identify a pretty girl they met on bus." By "valid" Web Shell meant the

information provided should be concrete enough for him to start searching. He said if they can

supply "valid" information for him to start searching, he had no problem helping them track down their love interests.

Web Shell's lack of consideration about others' privacy may have to do with his former hacking experience. He once hacked over 600 web sites only to prove that he was one of the best hackers in his particular niche.

Ice Cream, one of the forum moderators, argued that human flesh search is not necessarily associated with the issue of privacy. He explained human flesh search is a term describing a wide range of collective search behavior, and privacy invasion is few and rare in its actual practice. He says: "There are more information inquiries than people searches. Human flesh search is more about helping each other. " Later, he said, "Where can you find much private information even if the users want to?"

Privacy protection and trust issues in their own life. Most searchers recognized their vulnerability to the search and it appears that the experienced searchers often have better sense in their own privacy protection. Yan Zhi thinks some people have a tendency to share too much about themselves, to the point of overexposure. "They failed to protect their privacy. They have so much online exposure that it is easy to track them down, and find anything about them. " Yule said he had set up multiple online accounts, and had posed as female in some online presences. Yan Zhi, a female moderator of the forum, has a photo of a young lady as her profile picture. She said the woman in the picture isn't her. "I certainly won't put my own picture out there. I do not want to be a target of reprisal."

With the skills and mentality of searching for other persons' secrets, searchers may have different attitudes towards searching people they know personally. Aware of how trust can be

eroded by the act of searching, Yule made a point to avoid searching people he knew personally. "I do not search people around me," he said. Web Shell, a former hacker, once oversaw his former girl friend's online chat messages, and then confronted her about her intimate conversation with another male. They soon broke up over this.

According to several moderators, Mops moderators are mostly volunteers, with only small portion who become employees later on. Yule and Yan Zhi were both Mop fans before they were recruited to volunteer as moderators for the forum. Once recruited as moderators, they were given editorial access to the users' posts. They would like to see themselves as regular searchers for they do this out of interest, not a job obligation. They had lots of sympathy to people with desperate search quests and they are inclined to help if possible.

Yan Zhi said she was often contacted by people who wanted to delete search posts. She gave a couple examples, "For instance, a woman named Xiaoying exposed her husband's extramarital affair and the identity of the mistress. The cheating husband demanded for us to delete the post. Xiaoying finally divorced him. Sometimes, it is the search initiators who want the posts off. There are women who have posted similar quests. They later reconciled with their spouses and asked us to delete the posts. In one occasion, a teenage boy posted information that the local government locked up his father with no legitimate reason. But he soon asked me to delete the thread for he was threatened because of it. "

Nature of power. Here the nature of power through human flesh searching was examined by surveying empowerment and constraints experienced by the searchers. Seeing the Internet as a potential surveillance system, the study questions what the nature of power enabled by human flesh search is, and what kind of constraints are associated with its executions. The

analysis of power is divided into two parts, one is about the enablement of power, and the other is the constraints of power.

   Power Enablement. There is no doubt a certain extent of empowerment has been experienced by searchers, including people who simply have access to the Internet. The sense of empowerment experienced by the search participants varies from person to person. Empowerment has been experienced more in an aggregate sense than individually. But the sense of power generated by mass participation may not be readily transferred to individual power.

   Surveillance power across the Internet is unevenly distributed. The moderators and skilled searchers have more resources to turn to when dealing with human flesh search, so they often experienced a greater sense of empowerment, and such power is even transferrable to their own life. That is to say, not only can they feel powerful as a member in an aggregate, they also feel powerful as individuals. The former moderator Yule is very positive about the power of human flesh searching,   "Human flesh search engine empowers the grassroots. In the past, this kind of power was exclusively in the hands of the ruling class, now the grassroots have more channels to power. The Internet is subversive, making the world flatter."

   Web Shell: A case of empowerment. Web Shell is a well-known human flesh searcher in Chinese cyber space, with a distinct experience as a former hacker. At the age of 16, he was on trial for cracking 666 sites, including some government branch sites. He did so to prove that he was one of the best hackers in his niche and without malicious intent. Web Shell was eventually let go because he was underage and no substantial harm was done to the sites cracked. The trial was covered by local newspapers. He later turned his interests to human flesh search and soon became a fearful searcher. Though it seems natural to connect his human flesh search activities

with his hacking skills, he himself denied such a connection, "I don't have to hack someone's computer to get what I want. I can perform searching with plain searching techniques…."

According to Web Shell, his searching often started with basic key word search using search engines, then he collected all the information he could get about search targets get through online and offline means. The clues he can use included user name, contact information, cell phone number, birth date, etc. Then he searches again with these pieces of information. Web Shell said, "Usually there are lots of search results. But after sorting them out and verifying the information found, I can find information I am looking for. "

At the time of interview, Web Shell was 18 years old, studying in a community college for an associate's degree in Computer Programming. He said his parents were divorced and he was raised mainly by his mother. Before the formal interviews, we had several short exchanges online. Each time it revealed something about his life. One time, I was calling him to set up interview time; he said he was home washing dishes for his mother. Another time, he posted on his blog:"I miss my mother." Web Shell explained he had not seen his mother for a few weeks so he started to miss her. When he went home from school over weekends, his mother was often away occupied with job obligations. On one occasion, he told me he was learning to drive at a driving school. A few months later, when I followed-up with him, he told me he failed the drive test. The result is understandable given that he did not have a car to practice driving on the road. The overall impression he gave me is a teenager who still has lots of growing up to do, and had not much financial or social resources to actualize his desires. Judging from his family background and socio-economic status, Web Shell is certainly not in a position of privilege and power. However, with his search skills, he was a star, even a fearful figure in cyber space. He

made his name known and contributed to numerous significant search cases. In the realm of human flesh search, he was considered an expert, a person who can effectively employ the power generator—the Internet.

The same situation may apply to numerous searchers in the sample. With regard to social status, none of them are considered privileged or associated with powerful individuals. But in cyber space, collectively, they have proved to be capable in subverting the world we were used to, and finding sources and promoting social justice.

Yule recalled, a college student once sadly moaned about an incident in which a young man from a rich family hit and killed a pedestrian by speeding, "Now the poor and the rich only meet on the street." Yule disagreed: "The poor and the rich also meet online, but they are equal in cyber space." But Yule admitted the advantage in real life has accumulative effect in cyber space, and one of the examples is in online game playing. He said, "Even on the Internet, the power of grassroots has been weakened. Because of the Matthew effect [5] and real name registration system, the offline social reality has gradually spread to the Internet. The social advantage in real life has been transferred to cyber space. For example, (in game playing), there are two types of game players. One is playing to the next level all by himself, the other one is playing with money. He can spend money to buy top-level gaming gear. The privilege in real life has moved online. "

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[5] In sociology, the Matthew effect (or accumulated advantage) is the phenomenon where "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer".[1][2] In both its original and typical usage it is meant metaphorically to refer to issues of fame or status but it may also be used literally to refer to cumulative advantage of economic capital. The term was first coined by sociologist Robert K. Merton in 1968 and takes its name from a line in the biblical Gospel of Matthew: For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath.—Matthew 25:29, King James Version. (from wikipeida)

Yule, a case of self-disciplining. With an increasing number of human flesh search cases lining up, and negative consequences of collective search accumulated, people may argue that the search has been over-powerful and should have been constrained. Similar thoughts are shared by the human flesh search agents. After all, they see that only if the practice is regulated to certain degree, it can maintain its legitimacy and not lose its social support and moral ground.

In January 2008, Yule lead the drafting and finalizing of the first *Human flesh searcher's Pact.* Its first convention goes as, "Love the motherland, love the people, and love China Communist Party." The wording imitated the pledge of the Young Pioneers of China, a mass youth organization for children aged 6-14 in China. Most of the schools requires student to join the organization at the right age, therefore Young Pioneers is a shared experience for China children and youth alike. As Young Pioneers, student learn about the Communist Party's glorious creation of a strong China, the importance of obeying authority and the merits of doing good deeds (Wikipedia, 2012).Erik Eckholm, a *New York Times* staff writer, made the observation about the profound influence of Young Pioneers experience on individuals' ideology : "Most Chinese today are cynical about Communist ideology and many younger people are simply indifferent, suggesting that the fervent message propounded by the Young Pioneers does not entirely stick. But in more subtle ways, many Chinese say, those years of hearing about the party's all-embracing and benign role may have lasting effects" (Eckholm, 2009).

When asked why he included "Love the Chinese Communist party" in the pact, Yule said he was sincere in putting such ideology statement in the pact:

> I think social reality in China is very complicated. It is not easy for the
> Communist Party to maintain social stability. I am advocating harmony. I grew
> up listening to the Voice of America. It is the Voice of America that made me
> realize the political conflicts between nations, and made me love China even more.

This particular convention has indirectly increased the acceptance of human flesh search in the mainstream media. I am a law-abiding citizen, and prefer a more moderate and realistic approach to improve society. For example, I participate in the Foundation for Poverty Alleviation to make a difference to society in a tangible way. If I amended the pact by removing the first convention, it may be interpreted as advocating democracy and freedom. When it comes to getting things done, I am rational, not impulsive.

Yule recalled one instance in which searchers voluntarily suspended human flesh search to avoid disturbing consequences for Gaokao test takers. The Gaokao, China's national college entrance exam, is generally considered the single most important test any Chinese citizen can take. Unlike universities in other part of the world where a test score is considered merely a portion of admission decisions, the score of Gaokao is nearly the sole factor in Chinese college admission and the result is believed to set the course for one's life. Students prepare for it their entire high school years, in some cases, half their lives. Therefore, Gaokao is also the most stressful experience for test takers. It is not rare that students faint at test sites, and even commit suicide before or after tests (Wu, 2010; Da, 2012). During test days, special measures are taken to make sure test takers are not disturbed. Flight routes are rearranged to mitigate overhead noise above test sites, and roads to the test facilities are cordoned off by law enforcement (Kristof, 2012). In extreme cases, families withhold disturbing news from students, even about the deaths of students' parents, only to ensure that students can perform well on the tests (Mao & Meng, 2012; Zhong'an, 2012).

In 2001, when Gaokao, the national entry examinations, started on July 7, the first test subject was Chinese. The assigned theme for essay writing is "The Morning." Since the test was supposed to remain extremely confidential until it started, some web users found it weird that someone posted a question on July 4, three days before the actual test day, asking how to write

an essay on the theme of "The Morning". Some netizens suspected that the test content leaked

before it was actually conducted. Considering it utterly unfair to all the students who took the

test, a search for the person who posted the essay topic was initiated right after the news broke.

Netizens soon tracked down the poster's cell phone, school and class, student ID, etc.

> Yule, recalling what happened on that day, said,

> The day the test subject came out, I received lots of information (from my online friends). The users already tracked down the poster's class, name, school, cell phone number, and so forth. This search was motivated by the speculation that the poster had a prestigious background and an inside track so he could know the test's content in advance, which is utterly unfair to other exam takers. However, if we release the news right away, and make the student's identity public, it would impose tremendous pressure on him, and also disturb other students who have more tests coming in next few days. Therefore, I, along with other search participants and forum moderators, agreed to put the information on hold until the examination finished. Tian'ya, Mop, and other major sites deleted the information as well.

Yule explained, he and other searchers did not want to impose pressure on test takers. Many of

them knew how stressful Gaokao could be. The news of a possible test leak may make students

wondering whether their test score would be invalid, whether they would have to go through

another Chinese test. They did not want to add worry to already stressed-out test takers.

> It was not the first time Yule controlled his impulse for blowing whistles. Yule recalled a

female college student who wanted to find a man who took her virginity and money. With the

information she provided, Yule found the man's real name and whereabouts. But he did not tell

the woman. "I did not want it to escalate," Yule said.

> Yule later explained his reasoning:

> The woman told us that the man [she was searching] is a wealthy businessman in Zhejiang. We found out that he was actually an ordinary school teacher in Hubei, married with a child. Apparently he lied to the woman about his identity. If I tell her this man's whereabouts, she might take revenge by humiliating or hurting him

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or his family. Such kind of things happens. If he (the man) turns out to be a wealthy man or corrupt official with the habit of womanizing, it might be a different story. But in this case, he is just a regular Joe. I make a point not to expose ordinary individual's privacy, as I stated in the Human Flesh Searchers' Pact, and I stick to it. I only told her the man was not what he said he was. He was neither rich nor prestigious.

Such a cautious approach to individual privacy is not shared in human flesh search practice. When asked Wang Wu, another searcher interviewed, what he would do with a case like this, he responded, "Of course we will expose him, that's what human flesh searching is for."

Yule admitted that his participation in human flesh search has an element of leadership. "In some cases I do guide." For instance, a so-called Martial Arts School in Henan province was operating a web site for paid membership to oversea customers, which provided pornographic videos in the name of promoting Chinese martial arts. In August 2006, some videos were caught online showing a group of Chinese young women in Bikini making marital- art- like moves with sexual insinuation. The photos taken from the video were post all over the web and netizens were searching this school (Jing Yang, 2006). Yule recalled his role in the search. "I pointed out which photo had key clues, what the direction for next step is. I am not a very logical person, but I have a good sense of direction and instinct," he said. Following the clues suggested by Yule and other users, searchers found and reported this so-called martial art school to local authorities. The site was closed under pressure (Jing Yang, 2006).

Power constraints: "The limits are certainly there". There are quite a few unwritten rules and unseen lines Chinese netizens are not supposed to cross. For instance, topics related to Chinese politics are often taboo in China's cyber space. In media scholars' view, the central government is often tolerant of criticism against regular citizens or lower rank government officials, but it is a different story to question the authority and legality of the political system

itself, especially the leadership of the Communist Party (Esarey & Qiang,2011) . Any posts that

involve political discussion or put the governing party in an unfavorable light are forbidden for

their potential to disturb the stability of the society. Guo Jing said, "As a matter of fact, most

netizens are grassroots. Influential personalities do not get online. The netizens' power only lies

in the scale of mass participation. The central government is very alert to the growth of such

power; therefore, (some) local authorities ban human flesh searches. "

Yan Zhi, a forum moderator, talked about the constraints the forum moderators had

experienced, "The limits are certainly there. A month ago, Chatoyant District (in Beijing) police

station asked us to help track down a fugitive. Many Moppers participated in the search and we

had more than 10,000 comments over that particular search thread. We thought it a good thing to

do, but we were *harmonized* (called to stop). Policemen and we considered it (using human flesh

searching to search the fugitive) a right thing to do, but the Internet Supervision Office did not

think so.[6] This search received so much attention, so many people participated. But we had to let

it go for we had to submit to the Internet Supervision Office. "

The Internet Supervision Office Yan Zhi mentioned is a relatively newly established

government institute for overseeing citizen's Internet activities. It has local branches all over

China, and is facilitated by the police force. Since President Hu Yingtao announced

"Harmonious society"as a slogan for China's future goal, netizens have started to jokingly call

government control and intervention acts of "harmonizing." "Being harmonized" means being

controlled, regulated, stopped, or silenced.

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[6] Internet Supervision Office is a government agency in charge of monitoring and regulating online activities of
individuals, organizations and web sites. The office was established at national and local levels, and is backed by the
police force.

Wang Wu, who had been a Mop member for two years and is listed[7] as one of "most influential Moppers" at the search forum, talked about the forum's cautious stand towards political matters:

> The forum is very careful with political stances….The threads involving politics cannot be approved. If a comment to a thread involves politics, it will be deleted as well….You post your thread; there will then be two moderators reviewing it. If it involves any politics, pornography, or violence, it will be deleted directly. My posts were deleted more than once. Sometimes, I posted the search requests for others, and the posts were deleted. Some threads exposing the dark sides of society, they were deleted even if there were thousands of comments with it. Sometimes, you do feel a little bit discouraged.

These moderators were visibly uncomfortable with talking about government censorship in any specific way or degree, but some of them admitted they received newsletters issued by Beijing Internet Supervision Office on a **daily** basis and complied with the instructions. **These newsletters were classified documents and were meant for internal use only.**

However, I was able to find some newsletters at China Digital Times (CDT, www.chinadigitaltimes.net), an independent, bilingual blog that contains uncensored news and information from China. The documents cited had been leaked by government insiders and were reposted on the CDT blog. Here are some examples of the instructions issued in August 2007:

> 2 August 2007, 07:34:11
> First Level (Instruction): Concerning the great rain in Beijing on 1 August, which caused flooding in a number of roads and blocked traffic, please do not repost any related content; do not disseminate any text or picture on the subject at interactive platforms. Please give timely feedback about any noticeable activities online.
>
> 2 August 2007, 21:14:56

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[7] The list is on the front page of MOP search forum. The forum moderators organize and maintain the list. The users are selected into list based on their level of activity on the forum, which is mainly measured by the post count.

Second Level: All websites may not repost the report "'Car Kidnappings Occur Repeatedly in Shantou Village." If the report has been posted, it must be deleted as soon as possible. Forums, blogs, and other interactive columns may not discuss or post this.

6 August 2007, 18:20:23
Second Level: Do not report on the event in which a number of foreigners causing trouble in front of the offices of the Olympic Organization Committee today in the afternoon. Do not discuss this on interactive platforms.

7 August 2007, 09:29:44
Second Level: All websites are requested to immediately search for and delete all harmful information concerning the "Union of Chinese Nationalists."[8]

To stay on the good side of government, the forum moderators were expected to comply with instructions like these. As manifested in these newsletters, the censorship instructions are specific and precise, and come at high **frequency**, leaving little room for confusion or delinquency on the receivers' part.

Editorial censorship. In addition to following these instructions, moderators also need to screen posts to delete any content perceived disturbing or inappropriate. However, when it comes to the content involving privacy violation or pornography, the search forum did not appear to be very diligent.

To post a thread for the viewers to see, users must follow certain editorial procedures. Wang Wu often helps newcomers post their search quests, because he has more experience with those procedures. "You post your thread, there will be two moderators reviewing the thread, just to ensure that it adheres to the Mop rules and regulations. If there are some elements of politics,

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[8] The original instructions were posted on Canyu site (www.canyu.org), a Chinese-language website located oversea. The bilingual versions of the cited text can be found at https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2013/01/censorship-vault-public-emotion-meeting-flying-car-kidnappings. Due to practical concerns, several moderators declined my request to verify whether the instructions they received are the same to what was listed here.

sexual content, or violence, etc, moderators will delete the thread without giving notices ….

More than once, my posts were deleted. Sometimes, I posted searching quests on behalf of others, they were deleted too. Even some threads had attracted thousands of comments, but still, they were deleted. "

Though the Mop forum has clearly stated rules that posts should avoid exposing individuals' private information if it is possible, it is hard to stick to this rule when the forum itself is about human flesh search. Once search initiators can present a believable story for posting the information, privacy restrictions do not apply.

Shi Yi, who posted the quest to search for the man who conned him, recalled his experience with the forum. "I posted the search quest, with the QQ and phone numbers of the person I was looking for. It seemed to conflict with Mop's (posting) rules. I got anxious when I did not see my post up after two days of posting. I contacted the moderator and explained to her why I did what I did (posting private information of others). Probably she can tell I am telling the truth. Within a day, the posting was up for view." Although he did not find the person he was looking for, he said, "I feel better now. At least I had a channel to release my grief. I was furious about being conned. But I feel better when people I don't know condemn the deceiver for me. At least I got this off my chest and gained some moral support. " When asked his impression about human flesh search, he says, "It is ok, not as powerful as I thought".

Capacities in utilizing the search. The study found vast differences in individuals' capacity for utilizing the search forum. Generally speaking, to initiate a human flesh search, a searcher has to understand how the forum functions, and how to attract attention from viewers. Posting a search quest can be a daunting task to newcomers, who come to Mop with an urgent

search agenda in mind. They often felt compelled to start a search, but with limited knowledge and understanding about the forum, they often found themselves inadequate in tangling with this seemingly easy task. The lack of capacity to conduct an effective search may also have to do with some search initiators' lack of social resources and relatively low socio-economic status.

Wang Wu, who used to receive newcomers for search groups, confirmed it is common for search initiators to seek help: "Posting is not hard at all, but for the newcomers, especially the ones who came here with specific search quest for the first time, it is not easy to figure out…Some of the visitors did not know how to post on the forum…so they asked others to post here." From time to time, Wang Wu posted search requests on behalf of others.

Shi Yi said, "I did not use Mop prior to this. After I was conned, I wanted to post a message looking for this person. A newly registered account cannot be used to post search requests, so I had to borrow a Mop account from an online friend…. I promised 500 MPs reward on the post, for I only had that much at the time. To earn MPs at Mop, you have to do lots of tasks. It is too slow for me." At the time of interviews, three months had passed but he had not received any useful tips. When asked what he thought might be the reasons that his post failed to get much attention, he offered these speculations, "Maybe compared with other incidents, my loss is not tremendous enough to motivate them." He also attributed to the lack of any sensational elements in the post. "In cyber space, it is the low taste and weird stuff that draws attention." "If my original post promised 1,000,000 MPs, certainly there would be more attention." Even as a new comer, Shi Yi knew MPs can increase the likelihood of getting help from searchers, "I just bought the MPs from Taobao (an online business site in China). The very next day, I added 350,000 MPs to my account."

Power dynamics. Foucault says that a surveillance system is a power generator which can be employed by everyone despite individual differences. But numerous search instances show that the power of surveillance may be limited by individuals' ability to engineer the search as well as the nature of search cases. To come up with an eye-catching search post, a person has to overcome several barriers. First is the lack of the MPs. Then it is the lack of understanding of the Mop system, which may affect the response received. The third is the scale of the loss he or she claimed. In addition, a delicate real life situation interacts with online world force, making it harder to analyze the dynamic of power.

The power invested in the human flesh search mechanism is not operating in a vacuum. More than once, cases with the full potential to become a front page story at a media outlet come to a sudden stop due to outside pressure. Some people successfully summoned thousands of supporters online, and set human flesh search in motion, but they had to withdraw the cases out of concern for their personal safety once they were threatened by outside forces.

A search case that came to a sudden stop. During the interviews with Guo Jing, a search case broke up and became the center of his talk concerning power dynamics between cyber space and the offline world. In March 2010, a post was up on MOP search forum, asking searchers to help find a runaway bus driver who hit and killed his mother. According to the search initiator's account, after the bus accidently hit his mother, the driver deliberately ran the bus over her several times and then escaped the scene. The bus company refused to attend to the incident and the runaway driver was at large. The post also accused that the local police station took bribes from the bus company and even refused to register the case. Along with these allegations, the graphic pictures

of a woman's dead body were also posted. The post instantly triggered a surge of comments, with over 10,000 replies within a day and new information about involved persons were added.

Guo Jing, a male college student who volunteered as moderator for the search forum, sent me the thread link of the hit- and- run incident when the event was still unfolding. He speculated that this event had a good chance of being treated with justice. His analysis was, "Speaking from the government perspective, this isn't politically driven. Therefore, it may not be restricted. Then, the outcome depends on the bus company's capacity to handle the crisis. However, if the company owner has an inside track, there is nothing we can do; if the owner does not have any special connection, then eventually the results would be good. "

When asked what the forum would do about this incident, Guo Jing said, "We can publicize the incident. If it had happened before the Internet was prevalent, no one would have known about it, except local residents. Now the major forums and portals are publicizing the incident to make more people know. In my opinion, it is just like what an old saying describes, 'Paper cannot wrap fire.'"

Two days later, seeing no new updates in the thread, I contacted Guo Jing to follow up the event. He was discouraged: "The person who initiated the search is no longer there. He no longer updated or commented. I guess he was warned (by people he exposed) not to say anything. "

Guo Jing's speculation was not unfounded. The incidents with such a sensitive nature were often ended under outside pressure. Search initiators sometimes were threatened by the people they exposed. In one occasion, the exposed wrongdoer locked up the father of the search initiator, and he had to take off the post due to fear of his father's safety.

Guo Jing sighed at the result, "It is easy to expose something bad by mass online participation, but it is unrealistic to find out the truth behind it. It's the reality of our society. Things like this happen a lot. There are many things we know but we cannot say out loud. You know how domestic media is. As long as you have slight influence, you are subject to control and close watch."

The role of mainstream media. Though many search cases against privileged individuals or authoritative entities have been silenced after initially breaking out, there were quite a few search cases in which the truth was persistently pursued. When asked if the hit-and-run case had not been stopped, but continued to develop, what would have happened, Guo Jing summarized a formula for mass-participation-based search cases.

> It would first be widely publicized at our search forum, then be picked up and made news by major portals, and appear on newspaper and TV. Local government will interfere, usually in the grassroots' favor. Basically, this is the process….The difference between success and failure of search cases lies in the attitude of news media, whether they have the guts to expose the truth.

> For instance, our forum has done an excellent job in publicizing the (hit-and-run) event, but it went nowhere, because portals and newspapers are afraid of covering the story like this. Tian'Ya (a well known BBS site) is afraid, let alone the portals. Unknown forums are subjected to fewer regulations and surveillance, they could do it, but they have limited influence.

It is hard to tell whether fear is the reason why other forums and portals did not pick up this story. On the surface, the target of the hit-and-run incident is a bus driver, a regular citizen. He is not a significant or prestigious person with special power or resource. But this search post was also criticizing the indifferent bus company and the police officers who refused to register the case. The scope of blame the post placed may add to the complexity of the investigation.

Moderators as human flesh searchers: "participant, listener, initiator."

In this study, the forum moderators were included as subjects of investigation due to their extensive search experiences and social connection with other searchers.

Mop has the tradition of recruiting moppers (a term referring to MOP users) for moderator position. According to a recruitment advertisement on the site, a qualified candidate for search forum moderator position should be an avid Mop user with a strong interest in human flesh searching, who has lots of time at hand and can commit to work a few hours each day. The priority was given to Moppers who were already very active on the forum. Once chosen, these moderators were granted access to the posts and threads of Mop members. These moderators were expected to screen the threads, as well as interact with forum members to energize the discussions on the forum. Yan Zhi recalled that when she was chosen to be a moderator for the search forum, she was told that her main task was to "ensure the users have fun". Search forum administers, who were full-time employees of Oak Pacific Interactive, supervise the moderators to ensure they coordinate with one another.

Most moderators were not paid monetarily and only received virtual currency MPs as a reward for their labor. The incentives were considered sufficient to attract motivated people. After all, given that most volunteer moderators were Mop fans themselves, moderating such a popular forum itself is both rewarding and exciting. Occasionally, some moderators were offered full-time job at Mop site after a period of volunteer work, and took the roles of administers to work for one of the profit-making projects and coordinate moderators. Both Yule and Yan Zhi became Mop employees after two years of volunteer work.

Since most search forum moderators are experienced search participants and organizers themselves, they are considered key informers and good candidates for interviews. Before being

recruited as moderators, they were avid forum members and had spent considerate time on the site. Many of them have been actively engaged in human flesh search since long before they became moderators. They often have sympathetic ears to others' stories. When asked which roles she thinks she plays as a moderator, Yan Zhi summarizes them as "participant, listener, and initiator".

Searchers' social resources may give them some advantages when it comes to engineering a search. What sets Yule apart from other searchers are the social resources and networks he has cultivated over the years and online connections he has made with moderators from other portals, such as Douban, Tian'ya, etc .With such broad connections, Yule was able to, initiate the publication of the *Human flesh search Convention version 1.0.* Ice Cream, the current moderator, compiled significant search events on the forum, and lead online discussions regarding the nature and functions of human flesh searching.

Yan Zhi said, "There are times when we really want to draw viewers' attentions to some posts. If a case is really outrageous and the search target is clearly morally wrong, we (moderators) often help with posting and promoting the quests." Yan Zhi even attended a night raid initiated by the forum members to hunt down a cat abuser. Guo Jing said he used to read through over ten thousand comments on a popular search thread in order to sort out all the useful tips for a search task.

Although the forum moderators were very informative and had lots of search cases to elaborate on, their special position made them differ from ordinary searchers. To some extent, they hold institutional power; therefore, their view may not just personal view, but the view of its owner, the Pacific Oak Interactive. But moderator's participation is often controlled and

reserved, with the interest of the site in mind. For instance, Yan Zhi attended the night raid

mainly out of concerns about the reputation of the forum. She said, "When they (Mop users)

were discussing the possibility of making a raid to catch the cat abuser, I felt obligated to

participate. These people got together online but they were strangers offline, there were two

women among them, and it was going to be in a dark park. If anything bad happens to these girls,

or these people catch the bad guy and beat him badly, our forum has to take part of the blame, for

they used this forum to get together. "

  Ambivalent attitudes among moderators. The moderators often have ambivalent

feelings about the power of the human flesh search practices. On the one hand, they can organize,

guide, even engineer human flesh searching, and in some highly publicized cases, the power of

surveillance is groundbreaking. Being a part of historical events certainly gave the participants a

sense of control and power. However, the moderator's positions also mean they also saw lots of

search cases ended without success, and the grief, loss, and sense of injustice has been hoarded

in the heart of the searchers. As a result, the sense of powerlessness is even greater for some

moderators.

  Guo Jing said he came to volunteer at the forum because he wanted to make a difference

in other people's lives. But he became disillusioned over time, "In fact, I feel powerless and

hopeless too. I read a lot of posts, and know a lot of things, but I could do nothing. I am

depressed sometimes. In the past with less regulation, we could blow the whistle from time to

time. Now the regulations get much tighter, and we cannot do what we used to."

  Guo Jing shared the following joke to illustrate his situation.

  Lee is going to leave his job to immigrate to the United States. His supervisor asks him,

"You are not satisfied with your salary?"
        "No. I am satisfied."
        "Is it about your housing?"
        "No."
        "Is it about the Internet environment?"
"No."
        "Is that about medical insurance, kids' education?"
        "No. I am satisfied with those too."
        "So you are satisfied with everything, why bother to immigrate?"
        "I want a place where being unsatisfied is allowed."

 Guo Jing said, "Though it is a bit extreme, there are some truths to it. I have no ambition to

change the world; I just want to follow my heart. I envy people like you who can study in a place

with more freedom."

        The future of the search forum. Despite clearly stated rules about pornography and

violent content, the forum standards appear to be quite loose. Vulgar language and soft-core

pornographic images are all over the forum, despite the fact that editorial censorship is already in

place. Quite a few posts are first person accounts of romantic relations with attractive women,

often with sexual context in it, although it is obvious this content is more of a fantasy than reality.

The moderators showed no intention to tighten their control in this aspect. Yan Zhi put it this

way, "Mop is an entertainment site. We cannot demand users to be serious. If we required real

name registration, they (the users) may be more careful therefore watch their language.

Sometimes, what they do is just fantasizing, just fantasizing to feel good about themselves." As

one of the few female moderators in the forum, Yan Zhi herself was sometimes the subject of

those fantasies. For instance, a user posted an announcement that he was going to marry Yan Zhi

the very next day. As a matter of fact, Yan Zhi had been married for three years at that time. Yan

Zhi simply shrugged off those posts, saying, "It's all right, as long as all is well." Guo Jing,

another young male moderator who was still in college, responded with an icon of flushing face

when I sent him some inappropriate content found on the site. He said: "This is my understanding, Internet users, especially many Moppers, come to the forum to relax and be entertained. We cannot demand them to put on a poker face. As long as they do not focus on body parts or get too vulgar, it is fine. Charlie Chaplin said, 'politics, sex, and violence are three key elements of entertainment.' I see nothing wrong with it."

Mop made its name in entertainment. As an entertainment website, they are eager to let users have fun for the competition is intense. They loosened the editorial control and left many vulgar comments untouched, which even lead to government sanctions in 2009 (Net China, 2009). When I asked several moderators about the pornographic content, they were all aware of the issue but dismissed it as a characteristic of an entertainment site. They do not have serious news content like other portal websites have, they want to nurture online communities in which people can daydream, share trivial information, and be entertained. Unfortunately, low-end entertainments are their resort. It is plain to see that in this human flesh forum, privacy invasion is unavoidable, pornographic content is not forbidden, and the only effective censorship is on politics.

As a female forum visitor, Huan Xi felt that the forum was getting less appealing to her. "I am a lucky one. At the beginning when I came to the Mop site, it was the simple and innocent content that drew my attention. Over time, there are darker, more negative comments. But now, I had made quite a few friends before I sensed the web site was going down." She said she had limited her search to knowledge inquires.

Yule admitted the declining quality of the forum and shared his opinions. "Early on, the Mop was for a particular niche. In its later business expansion, the company (Oak Pacific

Interactive) began to target the mass market. Without a distinguished branding strategy, it lost its original essence. Now there are not many top players there. …More people have joined the Mop site and changed its culture. Now, Mop has many more users, but the forum is no longer the same."

Web Shell, considered one of the top players in human flesh search realm, said he no longer invested much time in search activities as he used to. "I am busy now. I need to study more." As part of his growing up agenda, he started to seriously consider his future and pay more attention to his school work. He also expressed that the trends in the forum was a turn-off to him, "The forum has becomes more commercialized with so many search quests associated with MP reward (MPs) or real money." In addition, he also found too many "invalid" search quests: "So many posts were asking users to search pretty girls they ran into on the bus, in railway, etc. They did not provide any REAL clues (for me) to start with."

Lack of energy for pursuing the truth. Yule, the former forum moderator, also recalled a failed attempt in digging out the truth behind a complicated incident, "At that time (in 2010), we set up a search group to collect information about the Shanxi Vaccine Incident. It was getting too delicate and sensitive to continue, so we stopped." Yule declined to further elaborate what is delicate or sensitive about this case or what they had encountered in the search.

The Shanxi Vaccine Incident is a sensitive, complex, and difficult case even for a Chinese professional journalist to take. It refers to a scandal in which an estimate of a hundred children died or got seriously ill after receiving poor quality vaccine. The news first came out in 2007 in the form of unconfirmed rumor, and Shanxi local authorities had been denying the allegations and covering up the facts. It was until March 2010, the China Economic Times (CET),

a Beijing-based financial newspaper under the authority of the country's State Council, first

published a series of 6 investigative reports on the incident. The reports were written by Wang

Keqing, an influential Chinese investigative reporter, based on his 7-month extensive

investigation. The reports alleged that 4 children died and another 78 children were disabled or

seriously ill after receiving vaccines provided by the Huawei Shaidai Company (HSC). The

reports also exposed that the HSC were granted a contract to administer the immunization

program from Shanxi Disease Prevention and Control Center (SDPCC) by bribing the then

SDPCC director. Wang Keqing also pointed out that to comply with the Shanxi health

department requirement that all the vaccines must be labeled, the vaccines were exposed in the

high temperatures of hot summer for labeling, then were deliberately left unrefrigerated to

prevent labels from peeling off. These problematic vaccines were given to the children and

caused serious consequences to young children (Tang & Pang, 2010).

Wang's report created an immediate stir across China but within hours the reports had

been downplayed on websites and other media outlets following orders from the Propaganda

Department of the Communist Party of China.[9] Shanxi officials claimed Wang's story was

incorrect but refused to point out any factual errors. The chief editor of the *China Economic

Times*, Bao Yueyang, was removed from the post after defending the report, and moved to a

minor sister company (Garnaut, 2010). Wang was later warned that his life may be in danger if

he returned to the Shanxi province. He also said there had been no serious effort from China's

central government to investigate his claims (Garnaut, 2010).

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[9] The CPC, (officially called the Publicity Department in English), is a party division in charge of ideology-related work, as well as its propaganda system. It enforces media censorship and control in China. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda_Department_of_the_Communist_Party_of_China

The case of Shanxi vaccine reporting illustrates the risk and cost associated with pursing truth against the web of power. Yule and other searchers were interested in pursuing the news after the news emerged on web briefly. But the case was just way too complicated and risky for them to take. Amateur detectives may work efficiently on search cases targeting one or two individual wrongdoers, but they are not equipped or trained to handle sophisticated investigative work against structural corruption and bureaucracy, especially under tight media control in China.

One of the forum moderators, Guo Jing, sighed at the sudden cessation of a search case, in which the search initiator no longer responded to the posts, even though his thread had over ten thousand comments and a large scale search was in motion. Guo Jing recognized it as a pattern, in which when search initiators back off due to outside pressure, other searchers often give up as well. He believes it has to do with lack of energy for regular citizens to rigorously pursue truth or interfere in targets' lives. "Many people get online just for fun. There are always bored people looking for exciting things to do. But senior searchers no longer have much energy for those things."

Guo Jing's speculations had some empirical support from the interview sample. Hard-core searcher Yule has gradually withdrawn from human flesh search and invested his energy on social marketing, though he was still closely following the development of human flesh search and remained an influential figure in the field. The former hacker and avid searcher Web Shell, realizing the importance of education for his future, put more energy into school work instead of searching. Wang Wu, who used to be enthusiastic in receiving newcomers in the human flesh search group, said that he became numb after hearing countless search quests.

Guo Jing said, "Please don't over-analyze what I said. Take me as an example. I am a netizen, an ordinary citizen with the sense of justice. To get online, I have time. To respond to a thread exposing social injustice and individuals' wrongdoings, I have time. I can even go the extra mile to help by publicizing those posts on other sites. However, if you want me to follow the clues, to dig for the truth beneath, and to influence the parties involved. Sorry. I do NOT have time. I have to work to support myself. Even with a job, I cannot afford a house, cannot afford to get married, there are many things I want to have but I simply cannot afford. I do not have the luxury of time to do those searches."

Yan Zhi has quite negative impression in the power of human flesh search. "In my opinion, we are way too optimistic in evaluating the power of human flesh. Yes, collective wisdom can be a powerful force. But, how many policemen are out there? Do we have as many Mop hunters as there are policemen among the citizens?"

The future of the search forum. As a forum which made its name for human flesh search, the forum is struggling with the legitimacy issue. Yan Zhi said,

> In the beginning, human flesh search was mostly information search. Gradually, people-powered search became an act of searching people. I do not recommend this sort of search, which is more for revenge…To be honest, human flesh search is about exposing someone's wrongs. Even though we do not encourage revenge, insulting, personal attacks, there are always people who want to seek revenge. Now the human flesh search forum is losing its essence. We are becoming a platform for people search. We are trying to change it. There are some people who just learn to use the Internet, some even do not know how to get online, and they came to ask: 'I heard that you can help us looking for this person.' We then helped them with posting the requests. However, it is not what we really wanted. We hope to make it a platform for problem solving and knowledge inquiries. However, now it is used for hunting down people who owns the money, exposing the dark side of society.

Yule admitted that early participants no longer hang out at the Mop site, but that does not mean human flesh search is fading out as an Internet phenomenon. "Top searchers are among the crowd. People see injustice displayed, they will record and spread the news on Tian'ya, Mop, and other sites. The more people know about it and participate in the search, the more clues will be gathered. It is the power of the mass."

Despite some senior players' gradually withdrawing from the human flesh search scene, there are always new searchers who crave the excitement and empowerment associated with human flesh search. In March 2012, the search forum started their new round of spring recruiting for searchers. Within 4 days, 234 users applied to the advertisement. Their qualifications for human flesh search can be summarized with three conditions: love Internet and Mop culture, plenty of time on their hands, and interested in group activities. One of the applicants explained his own new-found infatuation with human flesh search this way:

> I am blown away by the power of human flesh search when I read the "90s hit the senior man" incident. My first response is to join you when I read your recruiting ad. My reason for joining is simple—to seek justice. Limited by the barriers in my life and social reality, I can contribute very little as an individual. But with the power of the Internet and the freedom it provides, I can actualize my dream of seeking justice and amplify my power to the maximum. I can do what I cannot do in real life. (Mop, 2012)

Conclusion

Foucault's panoptic model helps understand and interpret the power generated through observation. With the massive scale of participation, human flesh search exhibits a scenario in which the Panopticon mechanism operates in a collective manner by surveillance agents. It was operated by a crowd constituted of indefinable individuals and triggered by a variety of incidents or topics; therefore its performance varies case by case, often with unpredictable results.

While Panopticon power in Foucault's concept is "homogenous" and "disindividualized" in human flesh search, power lying in the collaborative surveillance is unevenly distributed. Online surveillance takes skills, knowledge, experience, social networks, and other resources individuals can find. The possession of these resources varies greatly person by person. At the individual level, personal attributes greatly affect individuals' search experience and their sense of empowerment. Experienced searchers, search forum moderators, and individuals with hacking skills experienced a greater sense of empowerment from participating in searches, while unskilled, inexperienced searchers often had less sense of empowerment. At the group level, however, searchers often consider themselves to be powerful as a group.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Discussions

At the beginning of the dissertation, four research questions were raised. This chapter revisits these questions and summarizes the key findings responding to these questions. It also examines the theoretical and practical implications of those findings. At the end, it also addresses the limitation of the study and proposes areas and directions for future research.

In summary, the study found that human flesh searching has the following attributes: It often takes the forms of peer-to-peer surveillance (coveillance) or sousveillance, covering more diverse topics than what scholars perceived; fun-seeking and being helpful are primary motives behind searching activities. However, privacy invasions and power abuses have complicated or even undermined search practices, limiting the potential of this activity to contribute to civil governance.

In terms of empowerment, participating in the human flesh search seemed to give individual searchers a sense of empowerment, but such effects vary greatly depending on individuals' knowledge, social resources and search experiences. Privacy invasions and power abuses were consistently evident in searching practices, limiting the potential of this crowd-based searching, even when this is said to promote justice, to contribute to civil governance.

The study also found that the panoptic model is still highly relevant and useful in understanding collaborative online surveillance, especially the function and effects of "gaze". Once conducted in a collective manner, the gaze of fellow citizens can be greatly extended in its reach and intensified by massive participation.

Last but not least, human flesh search mechanism has great potential to profoundly change China media landscape, but such potential is limited by current media censorship and

lack of accountability of search participants. In the following sections, I will elaborate on each key finding.

Attributes of China Human Flesh Search

Regarding the question about how and why human flesh searching occurs, and what the attributes of its general practice are, I found that human flesh searching is a highly dynamic process of information seeking, in which numerous variables may affect the attributes and outcome of the searches. Therefore, it is advisable to examine the attributes and outcomes of human flesh search practices on a case to case basis.

Generally speaking, human flesh searching was initiated by individuals' needs for information, facilitated by fellow Internet users when they participate in information seeking, and its effects on the targets may be amplified by the volume of mass participation.

This study's analysis of daily information of a major search forum reveals some discrepancies between the public understanding of human flesh search and its actual occurrences, especially in terms of the topics and the functions it serves. First, the study found significant differences between the daily flow of human flesh search activities and widely publicized search events. A variety of media, including the Internet, have effectively promoted search cases that involved dramatic development and outcomes, therefore leading to a narrow, sometimes twisted understanding of human flesh search. The empirical data collected in this study showed that a huge range of topics has been brought to the search realm, even though only a small portion of them attracted media coverage.

According to Wang Fei-Yue Wang, non-Chinese sources have showed a strong tendency to equate human flesh search with an online witch hunt. Human flesh searching was defined as an act of "finding and punishing people" or "digital witch hunts" conducted by "Internet mob" (2010: 45). Even for empirical study, scholars have chosen only high profile cases. For instance,

F.Y. Wang et al (2010)'s empirical study used one of most famous search cases "South Tiger Fraud" as the case for examination. Those high profile cases exhibited characteristics which are not present in the daily flow of search activities, while ordinary daily search activities were overlooked. Existing literature on Chinese human flesh search has only used well-publicized search incidents as samples for study. No wonder that in their review of scholarly publication on human flesh searches, Chen and Sharma (2011) concluded human flesh search initiates to serve only selective topics that arouse the public attention, such as love affairs, domestic violence, animal cruelty, and scams.

The empirical data collected in this study showed that a huge range of topics has been brought to the search realm. Search topics in human flesh search are much broader than what the media and scholars have perceived. People sought other people's information and whereabouts for nostalgia reasons, romantic interests, genuine concerns for a missing person's situation, or voyeuristic purposes. Within the search forum itself, many search inquiries received considerable viewership among the search forum community. Search initiators often received tips and help from search participants despite the mundane nature of their queries. These search threads were viewed and commented on by many members, and solved or answered without gaining much attention beyond the forum.

Secondly, as appeared from the search forum and confirmed by the interview data, peer-to-peer surveillance is a primary form of surveillance, while sousveillance search cases were less frequent and often ended in abortion under outside pressure.

In term of peer-to-peer surveillance, the most common scenario found in the search forum is that one person searches information and (or) tracks down another person with the help

of others. Public shaming and cyber violence are two highly publicized features in this sort of searches. What is overlooked by previous studies but is highly salient in the search forum is the proliferation of search practices stemming from men's romantic interests or voyeurism. These gender-based searches often draw comments about the women's appearance, and have little to do with these women's behavior or action. What we should notice is that this form of surveillance power is not immune to abuse. One of the alarming signs is the proliferation of search posts with which search initiators want to track down people they do not know personally but take interest in. No matter whether these searches are driven by romantic motives or voyeurism thoughts, the search targets have no fault in the situation they are caught up. The desire for pleasure, sometimes guilty pleasure like the lust for attractive opposite sex, has been actualized. In my view, no legitimate grounds exist to post, search, or track down women they do not know, merely because they find them attractive. Prevalent male gaze in peer-to-peer surveillance indicates that the purpose of much human flesh searching is voyeurism. Although the role of gender is not the focus of the study, it is worth some consideration.

Admittedly, despite the intensified information control across all media form, netizens have made noticeable progress in exposing and tracking down corruptive officials. But such forms of sousveillance were conducted in a sudden, random, uncontrolled manner, and the allegations against the targets were often a mixture of facts and fabrications. In addition, netizens' scrutiny of government officials has only touched officials at lower rank. From this aspect, utilization of human flesh searching for anti-corruption purpose is feasible but its effect is limited.

Searchers' Involvement, Motives, and Perceptions

Regarding search participants' involvement and motives of participation, as well as their self-perception, the study shows that human flesh search participants are dominantly male youth, and the majority of them are unmarried. The combination of single status and young age may contribute to their participation of human flesh searching since this particular demographic group has considerable free time for online activities and stronger desire for self-expression (Rosen, 2006; Wallis, 2011).

The study showed that many search participants got involved in a search as a way to spend their leisure time. For them, it is more or less like participating in an online game, in which they can gain points (MPs) by playing well, or have a sense of belonging through interacting with other searchers. The only difference is that such an online "game" playing brings real life consequences to the sought. The pleasure arising from human flesh search is experienced as a form of self-realization and self-affirmation. The pleasure can be intensified through interaction with others in the process.

Regarding the motives behind search practice, the study found some differences between the results obtained from different methods. Context analysis shows that fun-seeking is a primary reason why people engaged in human flesh search, while survey and in-depth interviews with the selective searchers showed that most of the interviewees see being helpful as their primary motive. The study also shows that the majority of search participants considered themselves to be helpful to search initiators; while content analysis showed that many searchers had mixed and sometimes dark motives such as voyeurism.

It is understandable that such a discrepancy exists. Interview and survey data were obtained through self-reports of the participants. The participants may tend to explain their motives in positive terms, even if their actions say otherwise. The second possible explanation is

that the searchers in the sample only represent a fraction of search participants who sincerely believe in helping people. The seeming discrepancy regarding motives behind human flesh search may also be explained away by the complicated nature of motives and mixed motives. On the one hand, the motives for participating in a search can vary greatly case by case. An Internet user may seek out a missing person for the devastated family out of sympathy and warm heart, but also mischievously dig out a young woman's whereabouts for the purpose of voyeurism. On the other hand, pleasure seeking and altruistic motive are not mutually exclusive, and altruistic behaviors can bring pleasure and satisfaction to search participants. Therefore the respondents may have mixed motives in responding to a search quest, driven by both the desire of being helpful and having fun at the same time. For instance, many users replied to an initial request with the word "support," simply because the person promised a certain amount of MPs for anyone who replied to the quest. But they may later read the post in detail and comment in more constructive manner with suggestions or further clues, therefore displaying altruistic attributes in their participation.

Based on the narratives of the search participants, as well as data obtained through content analysis, I concluded that fun-seeking is the primary motives for searching, at least for the majority of searchers. Surveillance is part of online leisure activities, which may contribute to significant social changes occasionally, but its daily practice itself serves more as an entertainment for stress relief. Most searchers would be pleased if their surveillance can contribute to society or help someone in need, but they do not take it as a major goal for their participation.

Such findings resonate with Zhang Jun-pei's study (2009) with human flesh searcher participants. Through in-depth interviews, Zhang Jun-pei's study found that human flesh search brings people playing-like experiences. As a way of pleasure seeking, people use searches to peep at other's privacy, vent their frustration or grudge against others, or escape from the real life.

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Empowerment in Surveillance Process

Tackling the issue of empowerment in surveillance process, and how the notion of panoptic power helps understand citizen surveillance, the study found that human flesh search has a certain level of empowerment effects on individual searchers, but such effects vary greatly depending individuals' knowledge, social resources, and search experiences. The analysis showed that the forum can be enabling and empowering to individuals by increasing their self-efficacy. Before China human flesh search engine came into being, some individuals already had needs or desire to engage in surveillance. People want to find their runaway spouses; betrayed wives want to find the women who stole their husbands. People who have been conned are eager to track down the persons who walked away with their money. Those needs may have been expressed and broadcast among a small social circle of family and acquaintances, but the Internet functions as a platform for spreading the news to a large unknown audience. Especially with the dedicated search forum like Mop HFS forum and its vast user base (over 48, 000 registered bounty hunters), surveillance initiators can broadcast their problems, and summon potential amateur detectives to work for them. In real life, paying handsome amount of money to hire professional detectives is not an affordable option for most people. But with virtual currency like MPs, they could afford to hire surveillance agents. In addition, some enthusiastic searchers are willing to work for free on the search quests they perceived worthy. Such an experience can be a relief for people who felt themselves wronged or unfairly treated.

However, the sense of empowerment experienced by search participants may be greatly weakened by obstacles or failed search attempts, as indicated by a number of searchers interviewed in the study. Some forum moderators and experienced searchers clearly expressed a sense of powerlessness, even despair when asked about the power held in human flesh searching. Such a perception regarding the power of human flesh search has to do with the fact that they

either witnessed too many failed search attempts or they had to give up search more than once under outside pressure. The limitations imposed by political system, social hierarchy, individuals' ability of following through, weaken the sense of empowerment on some individual searchers.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of the study hinge on the questions of whether the notion of panoptic power helps understand citizen surveillance. If so, how? The study shows that as a special form of online collaborative surveillance, the mechanism of human flesh search can be understood through the lens of Panoptic power. This section will summarize the theoretical implications of the study from three aspects: (1) how the mechanism of human flesh search resembles Foucault's Panopticon system, (2) how collaboration among searchers should be understood in light of Panopticon theory, (3) how Panopticon should be modified or extended to help understand contemporary search activities.

Resemblance to Panopticon system. Before talking about the resemblance of human flesh search mechanism to Foucault's Panopticon system, it is worth noting that human flesh search mainly takes the form of coveillance, or sousveillance, not traditional upside-down surveillance. Despite directional differences, human flesh search works in a way similar to the Panopticon system.

Foucault viewed the Panopticon system as an arrangement of visual observation, which places some people under the gazes of others. In a physical sense, individuals today are not like inmates in a Panopticon prison who are confined and under close watch. But in a metaphorical sense, we are living in a cage woven by our social network and daily activities, and our

behaviors are under watch intentionally or unintentionally by others and our records are kept and updated in a variety of data sets. All the information and data about us may seem trivial and meaningless when we are nobody, and no one would bother to take a look at it. But once public interest in an individual arises, everything about the person can be brought under an intense gaze.

Traditional Panopticon systems place their subjects under a constant presence of gaze, while the gaze of human flesh search is often executed in a post-fact manner. People are usually unaware of or at least not alarmed by the amount of personal information exposed. With the help of the Internet, a search initiator can effectively makes the search target a public enemy by broadcasting the latter's transgression, therefore attracting intensive gazes to every detail of his life. As long as public interest is sustained, the subject will be under the public gaze.

Intensified gaze: understanding surveillance collaboration. In Foucault's Panoptic metaphor, the scenario is one guard overseeing many prisoners. In human flesh search, the scenario is often strikingly different, in which many watchers watch one search target. How does the multiplicity of search agents affect the attributes of gaze? The study found that gaze is often extended in its reach and intensified in its strength due to collaboration among multiple search participants. The gazes are extended through technology, social networks, and crowd-source form of collaboration.

Extended reach of gaze. From the technical perspective, video recorders, mobile phones with a built-in camera, and web cameras, all possess the capacity to seize the moment and re-play the gaze. In the human flesh search process, almost all of the search inquiries have to provide some form of visual evidence as search clues and as validation of its authenticity. A profile picture of the search target, photos at the scene of the event, video footage of outrageous

transgression, etc, all help to validate the claims. "No photo, no truth" is a slogan in the Mop

human flesh search forum. The crowd-sourcing approach in human flesh search enables gazes to

be shared and exchanged, therefore greatly extending the reach of gazes. On one hand, through

sharing visual images and other information online, one person's gaze becomes the gaze of many.

On the other hand, by collecting and exchanging gazes from multiple sources and vantage points,

the gaze of the public becomes omnipresent and overwhelming powerful.

Intensified gaze. With massive participants as surveillance agents, the gaze from the

public has been greatly intensified once the public interest is arisen. Think about celebrities who

gained instant fame overnight. They may not have much experience with the presence of gaze

when unknown to the public. But with their newly gained fame, they often found they were in

the spotlight the very next day and lost their privacy as a result. Their private life was scrutinized

and publicized as long as public interest in them was sustained. In human flesh search gazes are

often initiated in a similar manner. The difference is that celebrities can capitalize on their fame

for the cost of losing privacy, while search subjects undergo substantial consequences due to

negative publicity.

Diluted liability or empowerment. In human flesh search, "gaze" or the observation of

the target, can be obtained from indefinable, unlimited sources. The claimed truth may have been

twisted, manipulated, and even fabricated. But massive participation in such surveillance often

means dilution of responsibility and liability even if substantial damages are done. Lack of

privacy protection to individuals has been recognized as the primary root of the problem

associated with human flesh searching (e.g., Cheung, 2009; Chen & Sharma, 2011). In human

flesh search scenarios, gaze shared and exchanged among massive participants is often operated

with extended reach and intensified force, leading to amplified effects.

The sustained interests in women's images are typical of the masculine gaze of sexualized

objectification. There is nothing new about such a practice, but it is worth noting that the level of

the intrusiveness of such a gaze can be. Even in the case of most benign forms, it may be

upsetting and terrifying.

The study does not fully support Foucault's thesis of panoptic power. Foucault (1977)

says that anyone can use surveillance tools regardless their knowledge, experience, or social

status. The study found that digital knowledge matters a great deal in human flesh searching.

In his discussion of interactive media, Mark Andrejevic (2007) argues that while people

eagerly involve themselves with surveillance systems that meet some of their needs and desires,

these systems are ultimately disempowering because they enable only "ersatz" freedom to make

consumer choices, instead of actualizing political or social empowerment. Content analysis of

the forum supported Andrejevic's point of view with empirical data. The daily information flow

at the Mop search forum was filled with a huge amount of low quality information. Due to tight

media censorship, political agenda was not addressed, and civil discussion seldom took place.

What stood out are the scale of participation and the extent of privacy violation involved in

searching activities.

The Effects of Human Flesh Searching on Journalism

Finally, I asked how human flesh searching may affect journalism in China, especially

investigative journalism. My conclusion is that the human flesh search mechanism has great

potential in profoundly changing China media landscape, but such a potential is greatly limited

by current media censorship and lack of accountability of surveillance agents. Here I will first discuss why human flesh search mechanism can be a valuable tool to promote citizen journalism, especially investigative journalism. I then elaborate on the limits and problems of its current practice.

The potential of human flesh searching. As a special form of citizen surveillance, human flesh search practices in China may help regular citizens to participate in information gathering, news selection and dissemination in a collective manner, therefore elevate the status of public in setting news agenda. It may also work as an efficient information gathering tool for investigative journalists.

Chen and Sharma (2011) rightly pointed out that human flesh searching help promoting Internet as major news media. Such a status was especially hard to achieve for China online media. Journalists in China are required to be licensed to report, and only journalists working for legacy media with good standing are granted such licenses. If an online medium does not belong to any legacy media, its personnel cannot receive licenses to report. That's why most China major portals do not have independent news gathering and dissemination. They simply cannot function as news media, only as news aggregation sites, carrying news produced by legacy media.

Under such a media climate, human flesh search activities may be viewed as a collective news gathering and dissemination by multiple Internet users, just like Chang Ping (2009) described. The fact that user-generated content is hard for censors to predict and often have to be controlled in an after-the-fact manner, gives citizens a small time window to release news which cannot be shared otherwise. Numerous high- profile search events which successfully disclosed

corruptive officials such as Zhou Jiugeng, demonstrated that human flesh searching can be conducted in a highly efficient manner as media investigation.

In addition, the evolvement of a human flesh search case can be viewed as a process of news selection by Internet users, who can choose to act on the information presented before them. With thousands, even millions of individual decisions being made, the search events were developed and reshaped. In a sense, human flesh searching is a process in which Internet users sort through huge amount of information and identify and address public concerns in a collective manner.

Last but not least, human flesh searching can help journalists do a better job as professionals. Once used properly, human flesh search practices can help journalist to identify salient news agenda, gather information more efficiently, expose journalists to diverse views, and inspire them to find fresh angels to report.

The limitation of human flesh searching. However, as manifested in the study, in China today, human flesh searching is not conducted in its best form. A combination of factors greatly limits the potential of human flesh searching to contribute to journalism in China society. Here I just list a few.

First, media censorship greatly limits the influence of human flesh searching. As one of moderator described, mass participation on a single forum alone is not enough to elevate the salience of a search event. Major portals and mainstream media are crucial multipliers of human flesh search influences. However, with even tighter censorship in recent years than previously, major portals and mainstream media have been more cautious in sourcing information through human flesh searching. Moreover, as stated before, the Mop search forum and other interactive

online platforms receive detailed instructions on daily basis, and are expected to delete any subjects that are perceived to harmful to "social harmony." This served to significantly limit the range of topics open to human flesh search practices.

Secondly, although human flesh searching practices can be an efficient tool for media investigation, especially once the financial costs, potential risks, and complexity of investigative reporting are considered, regular Internet users are not equipped to accomplish the task. A group of amateur detectives may work efficiently on search cases targeting one or two individual wrongdoers, but they are not equipped or trained to handle sophisticated investigative work against structural corruption and bureaucracy, especially under tight media control in China. Shanxi vaccine incident is a good example of that.

Thirdly, human flesh search practices often dilute individual accountability, therefore greatly weakened the credibility of the information accumulated in this manner. Privacy violation is also a pervasive problem, indicating that searchers do not have much ethic consideration when it comes to information gathering. It is not rare that some search participants make up and spread rumors, false accusations, even schemes.

Although current human flesh search practice has its problems and limitations, collaborative surveillance is still a promising addition to current media landscape, especially to investigative Journalism.

A Note on Fluid Reality

This study helped me understand the essence of fluid reality. During three years of my research, Mop has undergone numerous makeovers, adding more social networking features and

opening up more forums. At the moment when I was about finishing this paper, Mop was still evolving.

In September 2012, Ocean Pacific Interactive moved Mop's headquarter from China's capital Beijing to Nan'ning, in Guangxi Province. In addition to the obvious reason that Nan'ning city offers **free land** and low taxes to attract investment, the IT industry insiders also speculated that the company wanted to operate its business in a more open and free media environment (Zhou, 2012). Geographically far from China central government, and economically developed and independent, South China is known for its relative loose media environment. It is the place where the most outspoken media outletsin China are located.

Over the past few months, there are some tangible changes on the Mop site. The most noticeable is the increase in news disclosing wretched living conditions of China's lower class, as well as about dishonest business operations and environment pollution. These are topics which would be soon censored if Mop were still located in Beijing.

Meanwhile, during my three years of research about Mop search site, I witnessed the site declining in quality and taste. I thought Mop would continue this trend. Surprisingly, just within a few months after moving to Nan'ning, the Mop site seems to be changing for the better.

Will human flesh search practices be changing for the better?

There is no easy answer to this question. Yule expressed his opportunism in human flesh searching. He said that some searchers started self-disciplining themselves, and therefore no longer dig up private information about regular citizens. He also mentioned that some searchers voluntarily form groups to look for kidnapped children through collective surveillance.

However, when I was nearly finished with the dissertation and verifying a piece of data with a searcher, he told me that some search forum moderators took bribery for deleting the posts. The targets being sought who did not like unfavorable publicity brought by human flesh searching could pay the moderators money under table. Then, allegedly, the moderators would delete these posts. When asked about the credibility of such accusation, Yule said he never took bribery for deleting posts when he worked at Mop as a moderator, but he could not speak for others. Ice Cream confirmed that moderators' bribery taking does exist at the Mop site. Aware of this problem, Mop management team now only allows moderators who are full-time employee to delete posts of the users, and volunteer moderators cannot delete user-generated content. According to Ice Cream, moderators' bribery taking is a common problem for whole Internet industry, but it is impossible to supervise every moderator all the time.

Put the information above together, it is even harder to predict how human flesh search practice is going to evolve. Human flesh searching is a highly dynamic process, and it is worthy of rigorous research for its social relevance and significance. What I have done is to present my study here, and let it serve as an empirical basis for future studies with clearer focus on some particular aspect of surveillance.

Suggestions for Future Studies

First, since human flesh search has exhibited complex attributes and usage, it is advisable to break down the search type for more detailed description and thorough investigation. The future studies should have a more specific theme or agenda to advance knowledge. A practical step would be to sort human flesh search into three subgroups: crowd-sourcing knowledge inquiry, sousveillance, and coveillance, and then treat each subcategory individually and

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respectively instead of putting them together under the singular umbrella of human flesh searching. Such a categorization will help scholars specify the distinct features of each search type and untangle the theoretical aspects more effectively.

Based on the results of the study, it seems appropriate to adopt the empowerment framework for sousveillance searches, while fun-seeking and voyeurism is an appropriate framework for coveillance activities, and online collaboration literature will help in understanding the mechanism of knowledge inquires. Certainly, some common features are shared by the three types of cyber surveillance, but sorting them into subgroups makes more sense because each group has distinct features in terms of subjects of the search, the power relations between the searchers and the sought, as well as response patterns and its pressing issues.

For sousveillance, the urgent question should be a more holistic view of successes and failures of sousveillance incidents in China cyber space. As the study showed, in Chinese cyber space, human flesh search with a sousveillance nature are often discouraged, silenced, interrupted or aborted, despite the avid interest and large-participation at its initial stage.

For search activities with a coveillance nature, the study found two overlooked features of human flesh search practices: one is the game-playing attitude among searchers, and the other is gender-based voyeurism in search forum. The two features are manifested extensively in the content of the Mop search forum, but haven't received much academic attention. Empirical data purposively collected in these two aspects can help us understand the role of sexism in surveillance, as well as add insights in motives of search communities.

According to Foucault's analysis of power, given asymmetrical power relations between the searchers and the targets, the empowerment can only be achieved by one section of the public, at the cost of deprivation of others' right to privacy. Therefore, in essence, these searches may demonstrate themselves as a form of social control performed by a segment of the public in the form of many-to-one surveillance. The findings challenge the notion that the participatory potential of the Internet brings a more balanced power distribution among regular citizens. On the contrary, as data showed, collaborative cyber surveillance often creates vast power imbalance between the searchers and the target, which may lead to more severe power imbalance than before.

Although the study examines searching phenomenon only in Chinese cyber space, the findings may be applicable to other countries where similar surveillance practices are performed, such as Singapore, South Korea, and United States. The whole question of citizen participation might benefit from the explication of the role of participation in this form of surveillance; and conversely, the strength and weakness of citizen surveillance should be viewed in the context of tension over democracy.

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaires

1. Are you
a. Male
b. Female

2. Are you between the ages of--
a. 0-18
b. 19-25
c. 26-35
d. 36-45
e. 46+

3. Where do you live?
--city of residence

4. What is the level of your education?
a. Middle school
b. High school
c. College associates
d. College
e. Post-graduate

5. How you consider your expertise as a "hunter" on Human Flesh Forum. Do you consider yourself
a. An expert
b. Knowledgeable
c. A beginner
d. Not interested in becoming a hunter ,or "hunter" is not something I am interested in becoming.

6. How did you get introduced to Human flesh search Forum?
a. Website of the projects
b. Friend or acquaintance online
c. Friend or acquaintance offline
d. Non-Internet based media
e. Online (newsgroup, cartoon, IRC, non-dc related message boards)

7. How many hours do you spend per week on surveillance –related activities?
a. Less than one hour
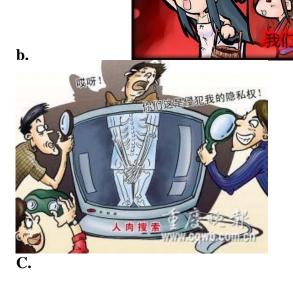b. 1-2 hours
c. 2-3 hours
d. 3 plus hours

8. What motivates you to respond to the surveillance queries (Choosing one of not important/quite important/very important)

    a.   Being helpful
    b.   Just having fun
    c.   Serving justice
    d.   Gaining Mops
    e.   Other reasons____

9. Of the following images, which one you most identify with? The reason you identify with this image is_____

a.

b.

C.

D.

E.

Appendix B: In-depth Interview Questions

1.   How did your involvement with Human flesh search begin?

2.   What do you remember as an orientation to Human flesh search techniques?

3.   Describe in kind of a grand tour, from start to finish, how did you conduct a human flesh search?

4.   Can you recall your most memorable searching experiences?

5.   Anything that was notable or interesting to you about Human Flesh experience.

6.   How important for you to gain Mops?

7.   What type of search you feel most interesting or rewarding?

8.   If you can use three words nouns or adjectives to describe yourself in this role, which words you may use?

9.   If you can use three words to describe Human flesh search you have experienced in general, which words you may use?

10.   How do you think of the media portrayal of human flesh search? Is it accurate? What you think should be clarified?

11.   Do you consider yourself more powerful through participating in human flesh search experience?

12.   Have you ever concerned with the authenticity of the claim made by surveillance initiators?

13.   Have you ever concerned with the authenticity of the information provided by other Internet users?

Appendix C: Human Flesh Searchers' Pact

为了加强网络公民的网络道德意识，加深人们对人肉搜索正确定义的理解，使人肉搜索向正确的方向发展，并不断服务大众，特制定本公约。

一、热爱祖国，热爱党，遵纪守法，互助友爱，维护网络和谐；

二、人肉搜索时做到以诚信、安全、公开、公平、公正、互助的原则，多进行利他性的知识性人肉搜索；

三、以网络道德为准绳，尽量不参与搜索他人隐私；

四、对他人暴露隐私尽力保护，保证不在公共场所公布他人隐私；

五、对于涉及"贪污、腐败"、"惩恶扬善" 可以不受第三、四条的约束；

六、人肉搜索要提供真实可信的内容，提供信息者对信息真实性负责；

七、文明用语，对于恶意人肉搜索行为做到不起哄，不传播；有条件的情况下告知当事人以及相关网站负责人；

八、通过不断努力提高人们对于人肉搜索的正确认识。

本公约于 2008 年末，经各网站网民讨论修订而成，凡在此网站活动的网民应该自己遵守。

人肉搜索非组织性联盟(25 个人)

二零零九年元月一日

感谢以下人员对人肉搜索公约提出的宝贵意见

猫扑

月明风轻，无双姑娘，Fleecy，蓝天饭店，flyws，21号女生，29男人，阿猎，curry，Web Shell，水婴，浪子老三，猛吃雪糕，ayawawa，大熊，洗劫地安门，幼小妖，Yule

天涯

一马青尘，赫连勃勃大王，青藤雪个

豆瓣

Calon，Yule

法律顾问

胡伟

Appendix D: Invitation Letter for Chinese Participants

Dear XXX (the names of the respondents),

My name is Xiaoyan Pan，a Ph.D. candidate studying in the College of Journalism at the University of Maryland in the United States.

I want to invite you to participate in my research project on Human flesh search phenomenon in China. Your collaboration will be highly appreciated. The project centers on the searchers' surveillance experiences and how you perceive this type of online activities. In this project, you will be interviewed individually for one hour , sharing your search experiences and your personal views on surveillance practice.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, any data I get from you will be confidential and your name and affiliates will not be used in any reporting of the findings, unless you suggest otherwise.

Thanks for reading the letter. I am looking forward to hearing from you soon so that we can discuss more details about the interview.

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact me. Thank you very much for your time and help!

Yours truly,

Xiaoyan Pan

Ph.D. Candidate
Philip Merrill College of Journalism
University of Maryland, College Park

Appendix E: Online Survey Web Pages

人肉搜索有奖调查，IPod第五代等着您

亲爱的网友：

　　您参与过网络人肉搜索吗？只要您在某项人肉搜索正在进行时参与过有关的读帖、灌水、搜索、信息发布或传播等活动，您就在我们的调查之列。本次调查是本人博士论文研究的一部分，目的是了解网友在人肉搜索方面的看法与感受。您只需花五分钟填写这份问卷，就有机会参与抽奖，奖品为价值2399元的IPod 第五代数码播放器。

　　您的参与建立在自愿基础上。您可跳过某些问题，或在中途选择退出。您提供的信息将以匿名形式保存，仅用于论文研究。如您感兴趣，可在调查结束后得到初步分析报告。如果您想了解更多有关此次问卷调查的情况，请随时与我联系。我的邮箱地址为 xpan0101@gmail.com;QQ号为 1256327807。

　　如果您已达到或超过18岁的法定年龄，并自愿选择参加这次问卷调查，请点击下面的图标开始问卷调查的填写。

　　衷心感谢您的参与！
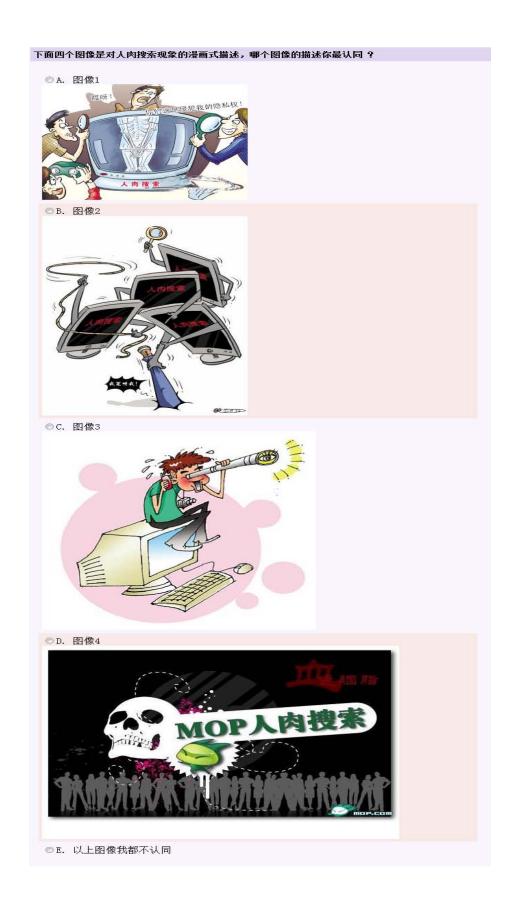
<div align="right">

马里兰大学新闻与传播学院

博士生　　潘小燕

</div>

下一页

您是如何了解到猫扑人肉搜索论坛的？

◉A. 从网上流传的人肉搜索贴了解到

◉B. 由朋友或熟人介绍

◉C. 通过其他媒体报道得知

◉D. 其他途径。具体是 _____

您访问猫扑人肉搜索论坛，在多大程度是因为此论坛有人肉搜索活动？

◉A. 专为论坛人肉搜索活动而来，不感兴趣其他内容

◉B. 很大程度是因为这里有人肉搜索活动，不太关心其他内容和活动

◉C. 人肉搜索活动和其他内容及活动对我同等重要

◉D. 不太感兴趣人肉搜索，主要关注其他内容和活动

◉E. 根本不在意人肉搜索

平均每周内，您大约花多少时间在与人肉搜索有关的活动上（如读帖、灌水、信息搜索与发布等）？

☐A. 少于1小时

☐B. 1-2 小时之间

☐C. 2-3小时之间

☐D. 3小时以上

您参与的人肉搜索内容多为 （可多选）

☐A. 寻人找人求助贴

☐B. 科普问答求助贴

☐C. 图片，影音，文档，软件等各种资源的求助

☐D. 揭露惩罚不道德人事的搜索贴

☐E. 悬赏值高的帖子（不分类别）

☐F. 热门贴（不分类别）

您愿意回复一些人肉搜索问题贴的动机是以下哪个或哪几个？

☐A. 帮助别人

☐B. 网上消遣

☐C. 伸张正义

☐D. 赚猫皮

☐E. 交些兴趣相投的朋友

☐F. 其他动机，包括 _____

请选出您参与人肉搜索贴的原因，并标出此原因对您的重要性

	A. 非常重要	B. 比较重要	C. 次要	D. 不在考虑之列
1. 帮助别人	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. 网上消遣	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. 伸张正义	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. 赚猫皮	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. 交些兴趣相投的朋友	☐	☐	☐	☐

您如何看待自己在人肉搜索方面的资历？比如说，您认为自己

◉ A. 很少真正参与搜索，只是灌水而已

◉ B. 少量参与搜索，菜鸟级别

◉ C. 做过一些搜索，稍有经验

◉ D. 参与很多，相当熟练

◉ E. 如果你觉得其他词语可更好地描述你对人肉搜索的参与程度， 应该是

[   ]

参与人肉搜索是否让您感觉自身的力量？请从以下叙述中选择最符合您情况的一种

◉ A. 参与搜索让我觉得自己很强大

◉ B. 强大说不上，但觉得自己对外界多少能施加些影响

◉ C. 自身参与微不足道，大家联合的力量很强大

◉ D. 我还是我，没觉得有什么区别

◉ E. 以上叙述都不符合我的情况，我认为

[   ]

下面四个图像是对人肉搜索现象的漫画式描述，哪个图像的描述你最认同 ？

◎ A. 图像1

◎ B. 图像2

◎ C. 图像3

◎ D. 图像4

◎ E. 以上图像我都不认同

请判断这句陈述多大程度上符合您的情况："我在网上对个人信息格外谨慎，以避免成为别人的搜索对象"。

- ◎A. 完全符合我的情况
- ◎B. 较大程度符合我的情况
- ◎C. 不很符合我的情况
- ◎D. 完全不符合我的情况

您的性别为

- ◎A. 男
- ◎B. 女

您的年龄界于

- ◎A. 18-25 之间
- ◎B. 26-35 之间
- ◎C. 36-45之间
- ◎D. 46岁以上

您的最高学历是

- ◎A. 初中毕业
- ◎B. 高中毕业
- ◎C. 大学专科
- ◎D. 大学本科
- ◎E. 硕士/博士

您的婚姻状况是

○A. 未婚，无恋爱对象

○B. 未婚，有恋爱对象

○C. 已婚

○D. 离婚

您所居住的城市或地区名为

谢谢您的参与，如果您愿意参加抽奖，赢取IPod第五代数码播放器，请在此输入您的电子邮箱以便通知领奖信息。

您愿意日后收到此调查的初步报告吗？

○A. 愿意，请发至我的邮箱

○B. 不愿意

您愿意以网聊或电话采访的形式谈谈您个人的经历或感受，或对人肉搜索现象的看法吗？

○A. 愿意，我的联系方式是（邮箱、QQ号码或其他）

○B. 不愿意

Appendix F: List of China's Websites with Human Flesh Search Functions

猫扑人肉搜索：http://dzh2.Mop.com/

天涯来吧：http://laiba.Tian'ya.cn/

雅虎知识堂：http://ks.cn.yahoo.com/

新浪爱问知识人：http://iask.sina.com.cn/

百度知道：http://zhidao.baidu.com/

谷歌人肉搜索引擎 http://www.google.cn/intl/zh-CN/renrou/index.html (not accessible)

豆瓣人肉搜索引擎小组 http://www.douban.com/group/72544/

中国人肉搜索网 http://www.China900.com

猫扑人肉搜索：http://dzh2.Mop.com/

阿里帮帮：http://club.china.alibaba.com/html/200809/bangtianxia.html

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