Chapter 1
An Introduction to the Interaction Between the Chinese Government and Citizens
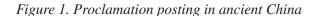
ABSTRACT

Chapter 1 examines the evolution and current state of government-public interaction in China, tracing its transition from traditional face-to-face and written communication methods to today's advanced digital platforms. The chapter outlines the three key platforms for digital interaction between the government and the public in China. It highlights how the internet and digital technologies have transformed these platforms, enhancing communication between the Chinese government and its citizens. This chapter also examines the scholarly consensus on the timeline and importance of China's digital governance initiatives, emphasizing how the internet has democratized information and fostered greater citizen engagement.

1.1 THE RESEARCH BACKGROUND OF GOVERNMENT-PUBLIC INTERACTION IN CHINA

In traditional Chinese society, interaction between the government and the populace was quite limited, primarily occurring through face-to-face communication. This type of interaction typically involved direct exchanges between the public and the lowest level of local officials, as both ordinary citizens and lower-ranking officials rarely had opportunities to meet the emperor. These officials conducted regular inspections and accepted petitions, which allowed them to collect and relay the public's demands and suggestions to higher authorities. Additionally, the gov-

ernment communicated policies or laws through public gatherings and by posting notices or proclamations (Figure 1). These methods offered a direct means for the public to grasp governmental intentions and information. Historically, such practices were indispensable in establishing a communication bridge between the government and the populace, serving as critical channels for disseminating official directives and ensuring public awareness.

Figure 1. Proclamation posting in ancient China

In September 1987, China officially established its first international internet email node and sent out its first email: "Across the great wall, we can reach every corner in the world." This marked the beginning of the internet era in China. Entering the late 1990s, the Chinese internet saw rapid development. By the year 2000, the number of computers with internet access in the country had exceeded 1 million, and the number of internet users had surpassed 3 million. With the continuous growth of the internet user base, the impact of the internet on citizens' lives and social development increased year by year. Major portal websites like People's

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