Internet Censorship in China: technology, boundaries, and popular attitudes.

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Introduction

China is moving fast and quickly catching up with the West, having surpassed most of the developing countries and is evolving into a hegemonic power in its own region of the world. In 1994, there were 20,000 internet users in China. Fifteen years later, this number rose to 384 million, surpassing the entire population of the United States (Yang, The Internet and Civil Society in China, 454). Foreign ideas penetrate into China from every direction, leading the authoritarian government to fear that discontents among the citizens within the country will be seduced by more attractive ideologies, resulting in the people's attempt to overthrow the government. In a country as heavily populated as China, it is especially difficult to maintain control; therefore, the government heavily censors all media and channels of influence.

The internet provides a medium for people to exchange ideas and information effortlessly and at a very minimal cost. The speed, openness, and universal character of the internet make it extremely popular, especially among the younger generation. In the United States there is a popular assumption that services provided by the Internet, these include BBS forums, blogs, and other communicative mediums that encourage online discussions and exchange of ideas are "ultimately a force for democratization and freer society" (MacKinnon 2008). However, this perspective reflects only Western thoughts and values. Westerners are strong advocates for democracy and freedom of speech and see these as the best principles under which societies should be governed under.

Recently, the internet culture in China has been receiving a great amount of attention from Western media. There have been many news articles written from a western perspective about China's strict internet censorship. These articles generally criticize China's authoritarian internet censorship system which is, referred to as "The Great Firewall." It is a technology that blocks thousands of websites and censors certain words, controlling the information and ideas

that "netizens," internet users in China, can acquire and spread. The Chinese government has

created a censorship system that "operates the most extensive, technologically sophisticated, and

broad-reaching system of Internet filtering in the world" (OpenNet Initiative 2005). To the West,

this form of censorship is a violation of the basic human rights of the Chinese citizens.

Western media picks up news and stories about websites and blogs that are shut down

due to political dissent and they write reports on it, portraying to the world how horrible and

suppressive the Chinese government is. However, the number of netizens who actually engage in

political discourse on the internet and challenge the system is very small. They are a fraction of

the 384 million users, who only use the internet for entertainment and communicative purposes.

James Fallows, a National Correspondent for *The Atlantic,* says,

> Depending on how you look at it, the Chinese government's attempt to rein in the
> Internet is crude and slapdash or ingenious and well crafted. When American
> technologists write about the control system, they tend to emphasize its limits. When
> Chinese citizens discuss it- at least with me- they tend to emphasize its strength. All of
> them are right, which makes the government's approach to the Internet a nice proxy for
> its larger attempt to control people's daily lives (Fallows 2008).

I wanted to explore this topic more by interviewing citizens in China who are directly affected

and controlled by the Great Firewall. How does the majority of Chinese netizens actually view

this issue? What are their opinions on Internet Censorship in China? How does the system

actually work and what are the boundaries? Can blogs really serve as a tool for political change?

These were the questions that I sought to answer during my stay in China.

Methodology

Even though I have had a background in the Chinese language, it was not nearly enough to prepare me to be able to carry on a conversation or read in Chinese about topics beyond the surface of everyday life. I was, however, able to find some blogs that translated popular Chinese news and blogs into English. I viewed these blogs daily in addition to doing field work. I conducted three interviews and collected fifty questionnaires. The interviews were casual. Two of the interviews were with university students, and one was with a Chinese English teacher in his early thirties. All interviews were conducted in English.

The questionnaires were passed out randomly within the Beijing Language and Culture University campus but mostly in internet cafés. The internet cafés in Wudaokou were upscale, populated with young and trendy Chinese students as well as many young foreigners that were taking summer classes or doing internships. The internet café was a good place to pass out my questionnaires because most Chinese students there were likely to be aware of this issue. Most of the subjects ranged from 18 years of age to mid-twenties. The questionnaire was originally written in English and was then translated into Chinese with the help of two Chinese students and Professor Wei Yang at the University of the South. The answers to the questionnaires were translated from Chinese to English by two Chinese university students at the Beijing Langugage and Culture University who I met at an internet café. The questionnaire asked questions concerning:

- The activities for which the students primarily used the internet
- Their participation in blogs, BBS, and online forums, and—in the event of participation in such forums—the nature of the topics about which they read and contributed

- Security issues and self-censorship, including which topics are permissible/not permissible to discuss online

- The level of personal and collective freedom on the internet

- The effectiveness of the internet, specifically blogging and online forums, as a mechanism towards social change and reforms in the society

- The effectiveness of the internet censorship, who benefits from this censorship, its perceived advantages/disadvantages for society, and how the individual respondents feel about the current level of censorship

The Golden Shield Project

Internet Censorship in China consists of a very complex system, which works to eliminate free flow of information and exchange of ideas that can threaten the government's regime. This system is the most stringent of any country, limiting netizens' use of the internet to maintain what the government propagandizes as a "harmonious society." This control system, metaphorically referred to as "The Great Firewall," blocks thousands of websites, hacks into personal e-mails, and scans web pages for tabooed words using very sophisticated technology. The system attempts to monitor and control Chinese netizens' actions on the internet, building a barrier that is hard to penetrate from inside and outside. The argument in support of the crackdown of censorship is that it serves to shield internet users in China from being exposed to what the Chinese government would consider false and misleading information.

The Great Firewall is only a part of the whole system known as the "Golden Shield Project." The Golden Shield Project is made up of many layers. These layers serve as the foundation of the Chinese Internet Censorship system, which includes cutting-edge technology combined with manual labor to purge the internet of any allegedly adverse and subversive material. The Great Firewall uses the technology to block a wide range of websites on a macro

level that are devoted to certain movements, such as Falun Gong, Tibetan Independence, and democracy to inappropriate contents like pornography. On a micro level, thousands of individuals (only some of whom are paid) monitor "blogs, chat forums, and even e-mail to ensure nothing challenges the country's self-styled harmonious society," (James 2009). The Chinese government is able to maintain such strict surveillance on the traffic because all of the information that enters into China from other countries passes through a very small amount of fiber-optic cables that are routed at only three points, Beijing, Qingdao, and Tianjin. This allows the government to physically view all requested data entering and exiting the country through a set of "Golden Shield" computers that essentially scans the material to see which information should be halted.

There are four ways in which the GFW blocks sensitive contents. The first is the Domain Name System (DNS), block, in which the response to the Uniform Resource Locator (URL), is the message, "This site is temporarily down or has been permanently removed." The DNS translates host names to ip addresses and the URL is the address of a webpage, for example "http://en.wiktionary.org/." The second method is similar to the first and also yields the same message or the connection will continue to be reset. The third is called a "URL keyword block", in which the site might not be on the "blacklist" but the name of the URL contains the sensitive word that is banned. In this case, the site will constantly be stuck in the redirecting phase without ever successfully connecting. The last way involves scanning on each page for sensitive words. If the system picks up a sensitive word, then it will launch a temporary time-out between the user and the web page. If the user continues to try to establish a connection with the same web page, then the durability of each time-out in the sequence can last from a few minutes to an hour (Fallows 2005).

To test this, I picked four highly sensitive topics in China - the Falun Gong movement, the Tiananmen Square 1989 event, Tibetan Independence, and the Xinjiang Uyghurs' Riot - and typed them into a search engine. It took a few seconds for the information to process, during which the Great Firewall recognized these ban words and stopped the connection. I was redirected to a link that indicated the page was not accessible for a technical reason. The connection was completely interrupted, and I could not get to the results page. When typing in "Tiananmen Square" by itself, however, the search engine yielded results that showed websites about the architectural design of Tiananmen Square. There was one link that referred to the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, but when I clicked on the link it also redirected me to a page that said, "This website is temporarily down or has been permanently removed." After further searching these sensitive issues, the main page to the search engine was completely inaccessible; indicating that time-out was put into effect and the connection could not be established for about 15 minutes. This is to punish and discourage the individual from searching any other similar topics in the future.

The task of censorship is also delegated to private websites. Each social networking website that is registered under the Chinese network is completely responsible for all materials posted on its blogs and forums. Therefore, each website is equipped with a group of surveyors whose sole job is to monitor and filter the web for potential forbidden terms and inappropriate contents, in which case the posts must be immediately removed. The government sends out "lists of forbidden words [to be] maintained, updated and shared by service providers, who then plug these keywords into their monitoring and/or filtering software" (MacKinnon 2005). Some websites even require each post to be approved by the administrators first before it can be shown to the public. Web management teams must comply with the strict orders of the government or

else they will risk getting their websites shut down or completely blocked. There are even incentives for Chinese websites to practice vigorous censorship. For example, the Chinese government gives out "Internet Self-Discipline Awards" to web companies that most effectively impose censorship policies based on a broad and vague guideline given by the government. In addition, the CEOs and executives are given the opportunity to sing some "red songs" with the CCP, which indicates an act of "patriotic duty" (MacKinnon 2005).

What is most effective about the Chinese system of censorship is its unpredictability. The system is "constantly evolving and changing their emphasis as new surveillance techniques become practical and as words go on and off the sensitive list" according to the "political winds." A regular Chinese internet user must be especially cautious because they do not know "where the off-limits line will be drawn on any given day" (Fallows 2008). According to a blogger who works in the technical industry:

> Censorship in China is unpredictable in part because it employs an array of tools-combining cutting-edge filtering algorithms and software that detects taboo keywords with the blunt instruments of the government's old propaganda machine. It takes place at different levels, involving government agencies and the private sector (Huus 2010).

This kind of unpredictability creates a veil over private institutions and individuals. Thus, it is easy to see why internet users engage in acts of self-censorship. Most internet users have given up on discussing political issues on blogs and other forms of communicative medium on the internet because the web's own censorship system quickly reports editors through the software that picks up these sensitive terms, resulting in a removal of the blog or post. Some websites require that all messages have to go through the pre-approved stage before it can be posted. In some cases, the posts never get past the pre-approval stage. Authors thus get discouraged after they find out that their post never appeared on their blog. Zhao Jing, a Chinese blogger whose

blog got shut down by the government in 2005, has learned from her blogging experience that "you should self-censor, limit your mind and be cautious, because you have no idea where the line is" (Huus 2010).

Defining the Boundaries

The Great Firewall sweeps the internet and blocks thousands of websites deemed harmful to the people and threatening to the regime. Social networking sites are held accountable for all the contents posted on their websites; therefore, all of these networking sites have a censorship team in which executive members physically inspect every space for anything that might conflict with the government's orders.

On June 8th, 2010, the government had released the "White Paper," a government report on the Internet in China, where "the Chinese government has…endeavored to create a healthy and harmonious Internet environment, and build an Internet that is more reliable, useful and conducive to economic and social development" (The Information Office of the State Council 2010). The paper claims to "uphold" freedom of speech on the internet and encourages exchange of information and discussion. Free speech is allowed so long as it does not violate one of the principles under a long vague list stated under part five of the report titled Protecting Internet Security that:

> …no organization or individual may produce, duplicate, announce or disseminate information having the following contents, [such as] endangering state security, divulging state secrets, subverting state power and jeopardizing national unification; damaging state honor and interests; instigating ethnic hatred or discrimination and jeopardizing ethnic unity; jeopardizing state religious policy, propagating heretical or superstitious ideas; spreading rumors, disrupting social order and stability.

The government has managed to develop a multitude of arguments in favor of censorship, all stemming from one principle: individuals shall not disseminate information or ideas that can potentially be detrimental to the regime. However, what exactly is considered harmful and threatening to their regime is up to the government and to the individual to interpret. This means that the individual has to be extra cautious about his or her actions and what he or she can discuss on the internet because the exact issues or topics that the government will consider to be "endangering state security, divulging state secrets, subverting state power and jeopardizing national unification, [and] damaging state honor and interests" are quite subjective and can be interpreted differently by everyone.

Since this document does not clearly specify exactly which topics to avoid (i.e. spreading rumors), it leaves room for individuals to find out by themselves through a process of trial and error. The list continues on, however. It included individuals that attempt to "[disseminate] obscenity, pornography, gambling, violence, brutality and terror or abetting crime; humiliating or slandering others, trespassing on the lawful rights and interests of others; and other contents forbidden by laws and administrative regulations. All Chinese citizens, foreign citizens, legal persons and other organizations within the territory of China must obey these provisions" (The Information Office of the State Council, 2010). Even though this list is a little more concrete and specific than the instruction above, one still has to wonder what exactly how to avoid "trespassing on the lawful rights and interests of others." This statement is contradictory since China's law doesn't necessary protect its own citizens due to high corruption in the system. The government claims that they are promoting a freer internet environment in China and that people are allowed to do anything they wish as long as it doesn't conflict with the principles stated

above. This essentially seems to dismisses the claim the government made about having a more open internet environment.

To understand how the majority of Chinese netizens respond to the ambiguity of restricted topics, I asked, "What topics do you feel safe discussing online? What topics do you think you should avoid?" in the questionnaires that were passed out. One response was, "Anything that doesn't have to do with the Chinese Communist Party is safe, and anything that is related to the Chinese Communist Party should be avoided." Another responded, "Not those sensitive topics" and "those the government opposes". These types of responses leave one pondering over what the exact topics are. However, 80% of all responses gave the same general answer which was "topics on domestic politics should be avoided." One person specifically stated that they will never "say anything about politics," but if she could, she would discuss "government policies." Therefore, the general consensus is that all topics on "Chinese politics…anti-morality…privacy…anti-state…money…and sex" should be avoided.

There are, however, permanently banned topics on certain historical events and political issues. When asked, "Do you know of any specific topics that should not be discussed, or any topics that if written about, then the post will be immediately taken off the website?" the interviewee responded, "The absolute no is for opposing comments on current political affairs, like Tibet, Uyghurs, and political organizations." In a 2008 research conducted by Nan Wang, a Master student at Unitec New Zealand reported three groups of factors such as "Political/religious factors…cultural/moral factors [and] economic factors" that "influence the control of Internet search engines in China" (Wang, 2009).

Under "Political/religious factors", the Chinese government will block any news, [Blogs, and forums] which critic on Chinese political/religious process and human rights issues…keyword list: TVBS; BBC news; Voice of America…Opposition parties, such as Taiwan political parties…keyword list: democracy China…Anti-communist, such as Tiananmen June 4 movements…key word list: anti communist; dictatorship; June 4; treason; human rights; coup; overthrow…Independence movements…such as Tibet and Xinjiang independence movements…keyword list: independence China; massacre China; genocide China; Dalai Lama; oppression, [and] Illegal religious movements…such as Falun Gong group." The second group of "Cultural/moral factors" included "Sex and homosexuality…keyword list: playboy; sex China…Health…such as Aids (Acquired Immure Deficiency Syndrome), STDs (Sexually Transmitted Disease…keyword list: aids China, [and] Violence…keyword list: humanity." The last category under "Economic factors" had only one "keyword list: protect rights" (Wang, 2009). The keywords shown here are not all 100% blocked, but are heavily censored, meaning some retrieved 0 search result or yield very little results; providing bad links or further results that are blocked when clicking into the link.

What is interesting to note about the permanently blocked topics, such as 1989 Tiananmen Square, Falun Gong, Tibetan Protest, and Xinjiang Riot, is that they were all events that evolved into mass protests. The government's biggest concern is to keep a "harmonious society" and the stability of their regime. Protests bring chaos to the society, which breaks social harmony; therefore, demonstrations, even if peaceful, have been made illegal. The government believes that these social networking sites can quickly gain attention and recruit people to join an organization that goes against the government's ideology, a potent remedy for chaos. Facebook, a social networking site, was blocked after the Uyghurs' Riot took place, in which the stages of

planning for this demonstration can be traced to an event group that was created on Facebook. Twitter, a micro-blogging website, has also been blocked to stop the spread of information. In the case of a demonstration, protestors could send messages on their Twitter accounts to call for more support. After videos of the Tibetan Independence protests were uploaded onto YouTube, which showed scenes of Tibetan monks getting beaten by the police, the government immediately blocked this website. Not only is the government controlling speech and ideas on the internet, they are also limiting the ways in which people can connect and restricting the ability to form and strengthen relationships with each other.

The Phenomenon of Blogging

Blogging has developed into a social and cultural phenomenon in China. For most Chinese people, the introduction into the culture of blogging was a blog kept by Mu Zi Mei, who regularly posted about her sex life in 2003. Once the government found out, Mu Zi Mei's blog was shut down, but she and her sex blog became very popular and widely known. Because Mu Zi Mei's blog was able to go undetected from the eyes of the government for a long time, people saw the opportunity to start their own blog and let their imaginations and ideas run loose through this decentralized and open space, in which each blog was the author's personal sanctuary.

Blogs allow people to easily connect and exchange ideas on any issue, from entertainment to politics, thus "the rapidly transforming blogosphere could be a catalyst for social change and organized political discourse" (Donovan, 2010). Because of this, the government saw the potential that blogs provide as a political tool, gathering people who share the same bitter attitude towards the government and producing online activism that can lead off-line into the physical world. In response, the government has made it their first priority to

continue to strengthen the policies on censorship, giving the blog hosting websites a more detailed set of guidelines of what to physically monitor in addition to requiring that the website must be equipped with the most advanced censorship technology. In addition to this, all individuals are subject to abide by vague rules and regulations (such as stated in the White Paper) and are induced with the notion that their on-line activities and comments are constantly being watched, promoting "self-censorship".

To better control the contents that can be posted on blogs, the government requires that all noncommercial websites and blogs be registered and that all blog service providers must install their own censoring technology and also must manually oversee all bloggers' contents and "delete illegal and bad information in a timely manner or terminate service to these bloggers" (Wang and Hong, 2010). In addition, bloggers' personal information must also be kept on file in the case that the government wishes to view it.

Due to this strict censorship concentrated on blog hosting services and any kind of communicative medium on the internet, Chinese people have been conditioned to avoid any topics related to "politics, the Chinese Communist Party, sex, religion, illegal, immoral, money, and anti-society issues" (questionnaire). An interviewee who used to update her blog on a regular basis on political matters said that she no longer blogs about political matters because the "articles in her blog are often rejected." In an interview with Eino, a 19-year-old- university student, he revealed that, "College students don't really blog much or are not really involved in an internet community" because "when my friends and I write something sensitive on a blog, it will get taken down or it won't get published at all, so why even bother again."

It is no surprise then that the blogging activity in China strays away from anything too serious or radical in terms of state and regime matters. Instead, blogs have become personal diaries for most people, in which they share everyday encounters and thoughts with close friends and families. Blogging activities mostly consist of topics about daily life, fashion, entertainment, sports, and social phenomenon or "other [topics] which are not very serious" (questionnaire). In concurrence to this, blogs on entertainment and celebrity gossips have significantly higher traffic than do blogs posted by commoners and non-profit organizations (Wang and Hong, 2010).

The demography of blogging is also a very important to consider. Only 20% of internet users have a blog, and only 34% of blogs are frequently updated (CNNIC, 2008a). Blogging is considered an activity for the elite as there is a huge disparity between urban and rural uses of the internet. Thus, "the structure of inequality is likely to persist as the diffusion process continues. In this context, a blog is not necessarily a new democratizing vehicle; moreover, concentrated power and sustained inequality in the blogosphere do not overcome governmental regulations" (Wang and Hong, 2010). Governmental regulations are getting stricter and more binding, successfully steering the culture of blogging away from promoting democratic values and political tool as internet users are afraid of the consequences of jail time "is the cause of political apathy" (Wang and Hong, 2010).

Blogs may not be the cause of political change, but they can foster this growth depending on how the netizens use blogs to serve their purpose. Despite many obstacles, the majority of Chinese bloggers are hopeful and quite satisfied with what they are allowed to do on the internet. Even though there have been some "occasional crack-downs on cyber-dissidents or on pro-democratic activists' blogs," most Chinese people will agree that, "the conversations in China's

blogosphere are much more culturally and socially wide-ranging- and much freer- than they were 20 years ago".

According to Chinese bloggers and Chinese web managers that attended the Shanghai conference in 2005, they do not want to be seen as "victims" but rather be "recognized for their substantial achievements in creating new spaces for public discourse- despite the challenging political circumstances" (MacKinnon, 2008). Most people in China will agree that this is the most freedom they've ever had in years. When asked if users feel they have personally benefitted from participating in online blogging and forums, most agreed that they benefited from the information exchange by being able to "acknowledge different kinds of opinions and ideas, thus furthering their knowledge and reasoning on an issue with more reflections in depth" (questionnaire).

Popular Attitudes among the Younger Generation

The internet has spread among the Chinese population very quickly within the last decade and has become more commonly used especially among the younger generation. College students use the internet for educational purposes, to access information they need to further enhance their knowledge and for career plans, to assist with language learning and interpretations, to share ideas with other internet users, to shop, to look at the news, and to keep up with pop culture. Therefore, it is logical to focus on the younger generation and their activities as well as their viewpoints on the internet to make a prediction of what their impact on the internet censorship will be in the near future. How important is internet censorship to the youth generation? How much are they aware or care about the limitations the government has imposed on them through the Golden Shield project? How much of an urge do they have to fight for their

rights for a freer internet? To find out, I've compiled some surveys and conducted interviews with university students in Beijing.

Two separate interviews from Zoe, a 21-year-old Chinese girl who attended the Beijing Language and Culture University, and Eino, a 19-year-old Chinese boy who also attended the same school shared a similar viewpoint on the subject of Internet Censorship in China:

> Zoe: I don't like that the government censors our internet. It is not good for the Chinese citizens but there is nothing that I or my friends can do to change it. China is a very big country and social order and stability must be maintained. The government is afraid of chaos and social disruption. They want a harmonious society. China is still a developing country with many parts where people are very poor.

> Eino: I wish that I can have more freedom on the internet to write whatever I want and to get any information I need. I wish that the government would lessen the censorship, but I have no control over what the government can or can't do. However, Chinese people have been living under this condition their whole life so they are used to it and aren't really bothered by it. Stability is more important for China.

A response from the questionnaire revealed a similar viewpoint, "Internet censorship makes people feel safe and secured, and reduces conflicts. China has a large population, as well as many problems. If just let it be, then it may lead to disastrous result," therefore "government control is necessary," even though it has both "advantages and disadvantages" (questionnaire). The average Chinese citizens do not seem to care about this issue. According to the questionnaires that I've collected, most people use the internet for entertainment, social networking, education, online-shopping, and reading news (nothing serious since all controversial news are blocked) rather than for serious political, moral, and ethical discussions. When asked "What, if anything, does internet censorship do for the Chinese government?" The responses have varied between the positive and negative side of the censorship. Some people feel that the censorship helps "secure people's privacy" and "create a healthy environment and promote on-line morality for the netizens." Some others think that censorship allows the

government to "control how the public think about certain issues" and "helps generate power to the central government." While there were some negative comments, most people agree that the censorship "stabilizes and helps form a harmonious society."

All university students with when I have had casual conversations on this topic have replied in the same tone with which they expressed their annoyance at inconvenience of not being able to log onto Facebook and stay in touch with friends overseas or go on YouTube to look at videos shared around the world. They do not like the censorship, but they have no choice but to conform to it. Shuting, a law student at Beijing University has a critical attitude towards the central government. She said she tries to educate her friends as much as possible on this topic. However, at the end of the conversation she confessed that if the government were to ask her to join the party, she would accept because of the benefits she can obtain as an elite. This disclosure complies with Zoe's other point: the younger generations care more about material comfort rather than individual freedom.

> Zoe: Chinese people, especially university students, are too worried about material things right now, such as buying a house after graduating from college. They do not have time to think about the spiritual things, like Westerners, where standards of living are much better than an average Chinese person. Chinese people are too concerned about the economy and do not have time to worry about other things such as internet censorship. As long as social order is maintained, then it is ok to give up some personal freedom.

This is generally the view that university students have about internet censorship. With the effect of rapid globalization in China, Chinese people are more concerned with acquiring material happiness and living a luxurious life. A separate interview with Eino concurred with Zoe's objective, "University students and the younger generation are more concerned with material success and not with politics," asserted Eino.

Eino seems hopeful for a democratic internet environment in the future when he said "I think a free internet in China is achievable, maybe in 20 years, when Chinese people are able to think rationally. I hear that the government is trying to move towards a freer and less censored internet policy in China." The government might be trying to move towards a more open internet in terms of promoting business and economic growth, but censorship is in fact getting stricter in the social realm. Eino also said that the internet will be completely free "when Chinese people are able to think rationally." The Chinese government tells their citizens that "big brother" censorship is necessary because Chinese people are not yet able to rationalize for themselves. How can a society progress if its people believe that they cannot think for themselves or are not capable of making their own judgments and decisions? Eino notes that Chinese people have lived under this kind of censorship their whole life and so they have been conditioned to it. Zoe also implied this when she said that "Westerners tend to patronize Chinese people on this subject, when in fact it is not a big issue for Chinese people." In concordance to Western vs. Eastern opinion of the censorship, a Chinese journalist who is well known in the technical industry said:

> "When Americans see the Chinese Internet, they say, 'Look at this! Look at how many sites are blocked! Look at all the censorship and how the government is denying its people information.' And then the Chinese people look at the same Internet and say, 'This is amazing! We have never had so much information made available to us before. It's like a dream" (The Peking Duck, 2010).

When asked, "How do you feel about the Great Firewall? Do you think that it is good or bad for China and the Chinese people?" some people had never heard of this term being used; therefore, they did not know how to respond. However, for those that did, the responses were divided in two different directions. One person thinks, "the existence of the GFW benefits the teenagers and the normal Chinese people, but has negative effects on the elite Chinese class."

Here, we can see the disparity and discrimination among users of the internet. Another responder stated, "It's ridiculous. It doesn't do any good for the Chinese people." Some people simply said, "It has both advantages and disadvantages." Some people stated two sides of the extreme as one said, "It's necessary to have the GFW. I believe it is good for the Chinese people" while another said, "It's not necessary to have the GFW at all. It can only bring in bad impact." One interesting responder said, "I think that other Chinese people don't care about the world outside of us, so there the GFW has no positive or negative effect on the Chinese people." This is in fact very true for most Chinese people.

In concurrence to the divided response to the previous question, the next question asked "If you can change the Internet Censorship policy, how would you change it?" Once again, the responses were divided as some people wanted to "employ stricter censorship" or "only censor for teenagers," while the other half said to "get rid of the censorship completely" or suggested to "lessen censorship but some is necessary." My finding supported a Pew Research survey conducted in 2009 that "80% of Chinese think the Internet should be managed or controlled, and 85% think the government should be responsible for doing it" (Time, 2009). However, one third of the people that took my survey left the answer to this question blank or said they had "never thought about it" or that they had "no idea." This carelessness and lack of passion in the response reveals that this issue was never even a priority in their mind. This raises an interesting question that was perfectly worded by the writer of the blog The Peking Duck, "How excited should we (foreigners) get about China's Internet censorship when the Chinese people, the alleged victims, are nearly unanimously complacent about a problem that to them doesn't exist?" To this question he answered, "99.9 out of 100 people here will tell you this is not a problem to them, and even to those who see it as such, it does not rank high on their list of urgent needs. And, again, the

breast-beating of 'gaga foreigners' will not swing the pendulum over to the side of

enlightenment. That's something the Chinese people will need to make happen…if there's going

to be a change, it's going to have to come from within China" (The Peking Duck, 2009).

Conclusion/ Reflection

My prior knowledge about internet censorship in China was mainly based on Western

media's report and news. Western media talks about China's Internet Censorship as a violation

of the human rights. News articles often report on conflicts between Chinese netizens and the

government, revealing the unhappiness and dissent of Chinese netizens on this issue. However,

even though the number of internet users in China has surpassed that in America, 80% of internet

users do not have blogs, as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, the number of Chinese netizens that

actually blog or participate on BBS and forums are all of a higher socio-economic class. The

rural population lacks the resources and knowledge to be active participants on the internet. In

order for the internet to become a catalyst for political and social reforms, both the rural and

urban class will have to unite to fight for their right.

However, findings revealed that the popular attitudes of the Chinese people on this topic

agree that some degree of internet censorship is necessary, and those that oppose lack the

grassroots support to make a difference. Under this game of tug of war, the government has

effectively managed to keep a strong grip on the censorship. The government has successfully

steered people's online activities away from brooding democratic participation on blogs and

forums to that of "political apathy." Nevertheless, the internet and specifically blogs allow for "a

widespread, efficient, open, and direct communication space that did not exist anywhere else in

Chinese society before," (Wang and Hong, 2010) where people can still write about their

problems and frustrations, so long that they don't target the central government or have the intention of jeopardizing the regime, so that this in fact helps keeps citizens from acting out in the physical world. The ability of Chinese people to vent about local corruptions and social injustices amounts to the kind of freedom that they've never had and reiterates the notion that their voices are being recognized, is a compromise for the government because it keeps citizens from acting out in the real world. As long as citizens continue to conform and subject themselves to the censorship, with continued government's persistence on internet censorship, the internet will not turn into a place of democratic reality, as one blogger so bluntly puts it, "I do not see this in my life time" (questionnaire). Blogger Zhao Jing stated, "The only true way of solving the Internet blockage in China is this: every Chinese youth with conscience must practice and expand their freedom and oppose any blockage and suppression every day" (MacKinnon, 2008).

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