The Chinese Authorities' Control of the Internet and the Challenge of Democratisation

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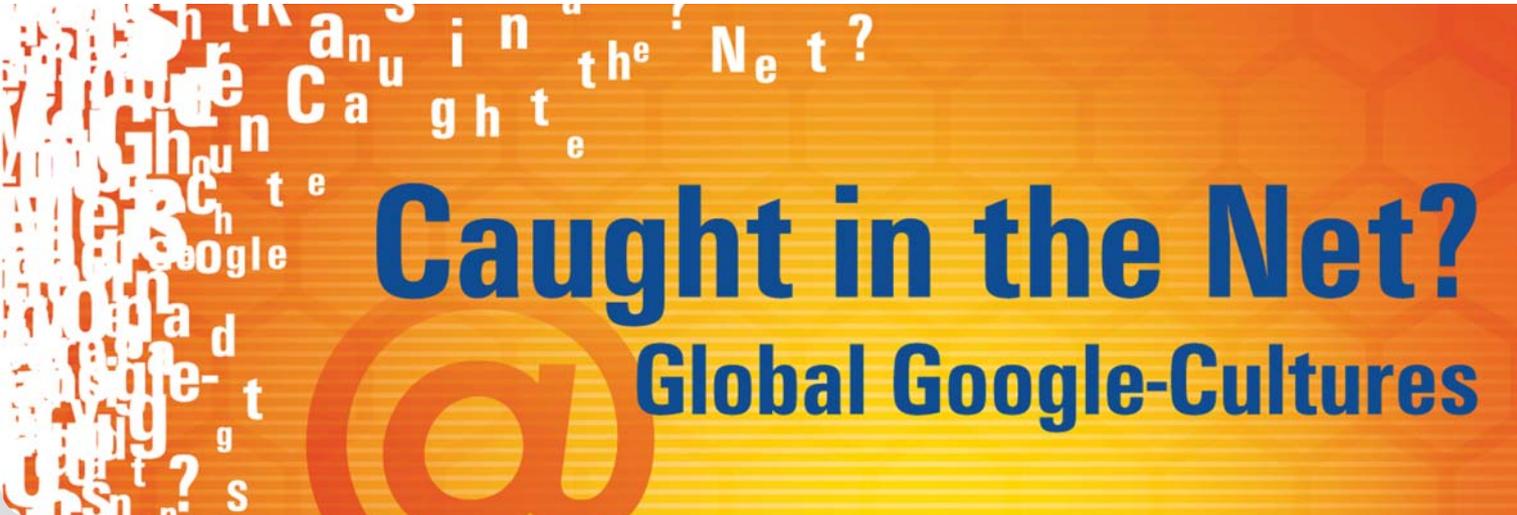
Caught in the Net?
Global Google-Cultures

I.   Introduction[1]

As the most significant invention in the twentieth century, the Internet has important influence on our life and the world we live in. To the Chinese authorities which exercise strict control over information flow and the public discourse, the Internet is a double-edged sword. How the Chinese leadership responds to the challenge of the Internet has become a serious concern on the part of the international community, especially human rights groups and academics.[2]

The OpenNet Initiative project (ONI), a partnership of researchers at the University of Toronto, Harvard Law School and Cambridge University, has a mission "to investigate and challenge state filtration and surveillance practices". Its country study on China, released in April 2005, concludes that "China's Internet filtering regime is the most sophisticated effort of its kind in the world," and that it "involves numerous state agencies and thousands of public and private personnel." This technical filtering regime is further enhanced by "an equally complex series of laws and regulations that control the access to and publication of material online".[3] Another report later published by Reporters Without Borders and Chinese Human Rights Defenders is more critical and straightforward. It observes that the Chinese Communist regime has always controlled all the traditional news media (print media, radio and television), banning independent news and information as well as foreign participation. The regime cannot allow the Internet to be an exception, and it "monitors the

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[2] See *OpenNet Initiative*: Internet Filtering in China in 2004-2005. A Country Study, 14.04.2005; http://www.opennetinitiative.net/studies/china/ONI_China_Country_Study.pdf [30.07.2012]; *He Qinglian*: Media Control in China", in: China Rights Forum, No. 4, 2004, pp. 11-28; http://www.hrichina.org/public/contents/8991 [30.07.2012]; *Jonathan Zittrain/Benjamin Edelman*: Empirical Analysis of Internet Filtering in China 2003; http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/china [30.07.2012].

[3] *OpenNet Initiative*: Internet Filtering in China.

Internet by means of a skilful mix of filtering technologies, cyber-police surveillance and propaganda, in all of which China invests massively. Draconian censorship hunts down anything to do with human rights, democracy and freedom of belief. It nips free expression in the bud."[4] In December 2003, the then German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, delivered a speech at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, and he appealed to the Chinese government to relax its control of the Internet so as to realise its objective of making China the largest Internet market in the world within four years.[5]

The Chinese government's official position regarding the Internet is: "active development, strengthening its management, extracting its benefits and avoiding its harmful effects, and exploitation in China's interest".[6] Hence, the Chinese authorities adopt a utilitarian attitude in exploiting the Internet while imposing restrictions. They attempt to use the Internet for economic, political and military purposes; and at the same time try their utmost to limit its political impact on the regime. But the control of the Internet poses a new challenge. To the people in Western democracies, the Internet is an efficient and convenient channel to secure information. In China, however, the Internet has tremendous political significance because the media there are tightly controlled by the authorities, and they cannot fulfil the functions of articulating public opinion, monitoring the Party and the government, facilitating public discussions, etc. The Internet has therefore served as a potential platform for unrestricted communication for the articulation of views normally suppressed by the traditional media. This platform has facilitated the monitoring of government activities, including those of judicial organs.

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[4] *Reporters Without Borders*: China: Journey to the Heart of Internet Censorship Investigative report, October 2007; http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/Voyage_au_coeur_de_la_censure_GB.pdf [30.07.2012].
[5] *South China Morning Post* (an English newspaper in Hong Kong), 04.12.2003.
[6] Chang Hong/Gao Xing: Wang Chen: Woguo hulianwang fazhan chengxian chu si ge fangmian xin bianhua, in: People's Daily Online, 29.04.2010; http://npc.people.com.cn/GB/11490270.html [30.07.2012].

As more and more Chinese people have access to the Internet, communication and public opinion on the Internet have become significant political forces. They have generated hope and new space for the dissidents and the potential political opposition in China. Dissidents inside and outside China have been using the Internet in various sophisticated ways to challenge the Chinese authorities, to break through their blockade of news and information, and to spread anti-Party and anti-state messages. They have been making good use of the Internet to establish and maintain contacts, promote the cause of democracy, organise protests and engage in mobilisation for various types of political activities. The Chinese authorities in turn have been relying on political, administrative, legal and technological means as well as self-discipline within the relevant trades to control Internet activities at the community level; they certainly want to establish a comprehensive control system.

As Kenneth C. C. Yang indicates, though the development model and mentality have dominated the rhetoric of Internet contents regulations in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, national cultural characteristics have a significant impact on the definition and implementation of their Internet regulatory models.[7] Many have argued that information technology like the Internet may contribute to the democratisation of China, but S. Venturelli argues that "there is no necessary relation between information technology and participatory democracy."[8]

This article intends to study the Chinese authorities' system of control regarding the Internet and their associated policy tools. It will initially consider the development of Internet activities and services in China, and examine the Chinese authorities' utilitarian attitude in

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[7] *Kenneth C. C. Yang*: A Comparative Study of Internet Regulatory Policies in the Greater China Region: Emerging Regulatory Models and Issues in China, Hong Kong SAR, and Taiwan, in: Telematics and Informatics, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2007, pp. 30-40.

[8] *Shalini Venturelli*: Inventing E-regulation in the US, EU and East Asia: Conflicting Social Visions of the Information Society", in: Telematics and Informatics, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2002, pp. 69-90.

the exploitation of the Internet. It will then analyze the political challenge posed by the Internet to the Chinese authorities, focussing on the issues of public opinion and democracy on the Internet. The following section of the article studies the Chinese authorities' means of controlling the Internet, especially the political measures and the self-discipline imposed on the related trades. The authors argue that the authoritarian nature of the Chinese regime determines its efforts to impose political control over the Internet, while its economic as well as scientific and technological capabilities enable it to do so. The control aims to prevent the Internet from challenging the Communist Party of China (CPC)'s monopoly of political power; and the spread of the Internet will mean that the control will be tightened. But the very nature of the Internet will almost ensure that the Chinese authorities' system of control cannot be totally effective.

II.   The Development of the Internet in China

20 April 1994 marked the entry of China into the Internet era. The State Planning Commission (now National Development and Reform Commission) used the National Computer and Networking Facility, a priority scientific research project funded by the World Bank, to achieve the complete linkage to the Internet. In the following month, the Chinese authorities completed naming all the Web sites in China under the '.cn'-domain. By January 1996, ChinaNet established the fundamental network in China and mutual linkage became feasible; Internet services became available to all computers in the public sector in China. According to China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC, Zhongguo Hulianwangluo Xinxi Zhongxin), Internet users in China increased very rapidly, and their number surpassed that in the United States.

The number of Internet users in China had reached 420 million by the end of June 2010, about 31.8% of China's entire population. It further expanded to 457 million at the end of the year. Among China's netizens, 450 million (98.3%) enjoyed access to broadband services,

about 303 million of China's netizens secured their access through mobile phones, accounting for 66.2% of all Internet users.[9] In terms of the social stratification of China's netizens, they are no longer concentrated among the elites strata in recent years. A high proportion of ordinary people have become netizens. For example, in 2010, netizens in the rural areas increased by 16.9% to reach 125 million, 27.3% of the total Internet users. Regarding the number of domain names, there was a sharp decline of 41%. This actually reflected a tightening of communications through the Internet after the Beijing Olympics. Many domain names have been closed because they did not meet the standards set by the authorities; and this goes against the trend of the rapid growth of Internet users in China.

The rapid development of the Internet in China has a significant impact on politics, the economy and social life as well as the public policy arena. A number of scholars have been engaging in research on the relationship between the spread of the Internet and political democratisation; their principal focus is whether the digital revolution has been promoting the democratisation of the current political system. A survey of the relevant literature seems to agree that through the spread of information, the creation of public space and the organisation of collective action, the Internet has been promoting political participation in China.[10]

There is a view that the most important feature of a modern democracy is the people's checks and balances vis-à-vis the government's decision-making processes and its policy agenda by the people. In the absence of such control, there can be no genuine democracy.[11] This means that the realisation of democracy will depend on citizens' participation in, and control of, the policy-making processes especially the policy agenda-building process. The question for China therefore is whether the development of the Internet in the country and

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[9] *China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC)*: Di 27 ci Zhongguo hulianwangluo fazhan zhuangkuang tongji baogao (The 27th Statistical Report on the Development Situation of the Internet Network in China), 19.01.2011; http://www.cnnic.net.cn/dtygg/dtgg/201101/P020110119328960192287.pdf [30.07.2012].

[10] *Wu Guoguang*: Zixun chuanbo, gonggong kongjian yu Jiti xingdon: shilun hulianwang dui Zhongguo minzhuhua de zhengzhi zuoyong(Information Communication, Public Space and Collective Action: On the Political Functions of the Internet on Democratization in China), in: *Zhang Maogui/Zheng Yongnian* (eds.): Liangan shehui yundong fenxi (An Analysis of Social Movements Across the Taiwan Straits), Taipei 2003, pp. 263-280.

[11] *Yu Keping*: *Zengliang minzhu yu shanzhi* (Quantitative Improvement in Democracy and Good Governance, Beijing 2005, pp. 138.

that of the cyber society formed on this basis will enhance the public's control of China's policy agenda-building process, and promote its participation in it. Put it another way, what impact will the rise of the cyber society in China have on the public policy agenda-building process? These questions are central to the study of the relationship between the Internet and China's democratisation as well as the impact of the Internet on China's politics and policy-making processes.

When Internet services first became available in China, Chinese leaders appreciated their significant socio-economic implications, and they perceived them as a new approach to promote economic development and secure economic benefits. They were eager to invest in the development of internet services and promote their use, while expecting to reap investment returns. Since the mid-1990s, the Chinese authorities have been allocating substantial resources for the building of the infrastructure for the information industry, for its technological innovation and general development. They have been strengthening the co-ordinated planning of the development of Internet services, as well as their market regulation and technical standardisation. They have been promoting the export of Internet services and the development of broadband Internet services, pushing for the considerable lowering of charges for Internet services and the development of e-commerce, e-government and other information services, as well as exploiting the Internet to promote industrialisation and improve the industrial structure. Under such circumstances, Internet services have been spreading rapidly, and China may be said to have entered the era of the Internet. The commercialisation of the Internet has transformed it into a significant new industry.

Since May 1995, China Telecom had begun establishing ChinaNet, which was the national backbone network serving all computers in China's public sector. It began operation in 1996, and has become the main frame for China's international linkage with the Internet. Internet services on the part of China's public sector computers thus became available nationwide. In anticipation of the large-scale commercialisation of Internet services, and to ensure its orderly development, on 23 January 1996, the State Council released the 'Temporary Regulations on the Management of the International Linkage of the Information Network of the People's Republic of China'. The regulations were implemented on the day of release, and they were China's first set of regulations on the Internet. The Chinese government soon established the Ministry of Information Industry. In April 1997, a document on the 'Ninth Five-Year Programme and the Long-term Objectives for 2000 Regarding the National Promotion of Information Networks (*xinxihua*) was endorsed by the Chinese authorities, indicating that the development of Internet services was included in the state's infrastructural development of the information industry; the document also proposed the establishment of a National Internet Information Centre and a National Internet Exchange Centre.

At the same time, the government began large-scale investment in developing the infrastructure for Internet services. In June 1997, the Telecommunications Bureau of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications launched 169 multimedia communication networks nationwide, and investment for the project amounted to 7 billion *yuan*. Since 1997, four major Internet service providers, i.e., NetEase, Stone RichSight Forum (the predecessor of Sina), Chinabyte and Sohu, gradually emerged, supported by the state's related infrastructural investment. On 12 July 1999, China.com Inc. was listed in NASDAQ in the United States, marking the first listing of an Internet service company from China in the

United States stock market. China.com Inc. was soon followed by Sina, Sohu and NetEase in April-July 2000. The subsequent sharp decline in the prices of dot.com shares also dealt a severe blow to the emerging Internet service industry in China. The blow, however, lasted for about two years only. In 2003, clients engaged in Internet games in China numbered 13.8 million, creating a market value of 1.32 billion *yuan*, surpassing the box office receipts of China's movie industry in the entire year. It was estimated that Internet games directly contributed 8.7 billion *yuan* to the telecommunications industry in 2003, 3.5 billion *yuan* to the information industry, and 2.6 billion *yuan* to the media and traditional publishing industries. The internet media and their advertisements already managed to reach a population just smaller than that reached by television and newspapers. Surfers accessing to news information from Sina and Sohu also exceeded the readership of any newspaper on a daily basis. E-commerce in China was longer an Internet platform for the display of product samples, it had become a sales channel for numerous enterprises, big and small. Internet tycoons also appeared in China, who became the stars of Forbes' list of the richest entrepreneurs in the country. In 2003, the Chinese government indicated that it would only take four years for China to become the world's largest market for Internet services.[12]

The Chinese authorities have certainly adopted a very pragmatic attitude towards using the Internet as a tool for information and communication, and they fully appreciate the significance of the technology in China's economic development and social life. Chinese leaders consider China as a major country involved in Internet services, but not an advanced one. Xu Guanhua, then minister of science and technology, indicated that the essence of the technology lay in its application, hence China would push for the broad application of the

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[12] *Cheng Tao/Lü Weigang*: 1994-2004: hulianwang jingji 10 nian liangre" (1994 – 2004: Ups and Downs of the Internet Economy in the Last Decade), in: Nanfang zhoumo (Southern Weekly, a weekly magazine published in Guangzhou, 22.04.2004, p. 23; http://www.southcn.com/weekend/economic/200404220028.htm [30.07.2012].

Internet by the population, while paying attention to the related research and development. The priority areas would be e-commerce, e-government, and the promotion of industrialisation by information technology.[13]

Some experts believe that despite the fact that Indian universities joined the Internet in 1988, six years before their Chinese counterparts, China now has a solid lead over India. China's market reforms and liberal trade policy apparently offered resources for and an openness to Internet diffusion. Since the late 1980s, China concentrated its industrial policy on infrastructure and advanced technology. This facilitated the rapid expansion of the telecommunications infrastructure, personal computer manufacturing, adoption/awareness of the Internet and information technology applications, and a reservoir of trained users as well as managers and technicians to serve them.

The two countries' political systems have obviously led them to different approaches to the Internet. The Chinese authorities try to maintain control over access and content, while India's Internet remains open. Privatisation has progressed more slowly in China, though a strategy of competition among state-owned enterprises has been implemented in the huge Internet service providers market.[14] Pressure from the World Trade Organisation and market forces have not been able to alter the Chinese authorities' policy. In fact the Chinese leadership has been tightening control in recent years, probably because of its concern for potential social instability.

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[13] Zhongguo luyou bao (China Tourism News, a Chinese newspaper in Beijing), 24.12.2003, p. 6.
[14] *Larry Press/William Foster/Peter Wolcott/William McHenry*: The Internet in India and China, in: Information Technologies and International Development, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2003, pp. 41-60.

The top priority accorded to China's modernisation, however, means that information technology cannot be neglected. China's expenditure on scientific and technological research and development will reach 2.2% of its GDP in the Twelfth Five-Year Plan period (2011-2015), compared with 1.5% in the previous plan period. Through the present plan, the Chinese authorities strongly urge improving the informatisation level among all provincial units, government agencies and major state-owned enterprises. Information technologies are expected to assume important roles in economic development, operations of urban governments and the delivery of social services. New breakthroughs are expected in such fields as ubiquitous perception, precise acquisition, high-speed transmission and intellectual processing. Next-generation IT is among the seven "strategic emerging industries" identified for priority development where Chinese corporations are expected to succeed on a global scale. The Chinese government is prepared to spend more than 4 trillion yuan on these industries in the present plan period, with the aim to increase their contribution from today's approximately 5% of GDP to 8% by 2015 and 15% by 2020.[15]

III.   Internet Public Opinion and Democracy: The Internet's Political Challenges in China

While working hard to develop the internet service industry, the Chinese leadership has been well aware of the Internet's political challenges. Internet public opinion has gradually emerged as a political and social force to reckon with, and the Chinese intelligentsia believes that the Internet will change politics in China.

In line with the spread of the Internet and progress in related technology, Internet media have been developing rapidly in China. Despite the authorities' strict control, China's

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[15] "China to spend 2.2% of GDP or R & D by 2015 ", in: New China News Agency dispatch, 05.03.2011; http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-03/05/c_13762... [This Site is not available anymore].

netizens continue to work hard to fight for freedom of speech. With over twenty million netizens in China in the beginning of this century and 457 million netizens at the end of 2010, Internet public opinion can no longer be ignored. Many Chinese intellectuals consider that since the traditional media are in the hands of the authorities and the political elite, the Internet is the only channel for ordinary people to articulate their views. They therefore increasingly use this channel to voice their dissatisfaction and criticisms, especially those related to corruption among cadres, injustice within the judiciary, and so on. News on important events which has been neglected by the official media because of their political sensitivity is now in wide circulation on the Internet, which has also been effectively exploited for interest articulation and the demand for the redress of grievances, too.

In 2003, netizens in China were increasingly active in the pursuit of freedom of speech on the Internet. A number of significant social events were broadly circulated and discussed on the Internet, making the official information blockade almost totally ineffective and achieving an important impact on the government and public policy. Most of these events involved abuse of power, corruption, organised crime and social injustice. Notable examples include the death of Sun Zhigang while in custody in Guangzhou as an illegal migrant labourer for lack of identification documents; the reduction of the death penalty to a lighter sentence for Liu Yong, a leader of organised crime in Shenyang; lottery fraud in Xian; a fatal traffic incident involving a reckless, prosperous driver of a BMW in Heilongjiang; massive prostitution involving hundreds of Japanese in Zhuhai, etc. Through the influence of Internet public opinion, these events attracted broad attention, and their discussions ultimately led to changes in the fortunes of the parties involved as well as adjustments in related legislation and the judicial processes.[16] 2003 subsequently was known as the "Internet Public Opinion

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[16] *Xu Yongkang*: Wangluo yulun: tuijin Zhongguo fazhi de zhongyao liliang (Internet Public Opinion: an Important Force in the Promotion of the Rule of Law"), in: Jingbao yuekan (The Mirror, a monthly magazine in Chinese published in Hong Kong), No. 328 (November 2004), p. 48.

Year."[17] The above development has thus made the Internet an important channel for information transmission, articulation of views, news commentary, and even release of emotions in China. Internet public opinion has been achieving an increasingly significant impact on China's public policy agenda; and the Internet has established itself as a major channel for shaping public opinion.[18]

In contrast to the traditional media, the most significant characteristics of the Internet are that every user is a potential source and transmitter of information spreading in a multi-directional manner, and that the information may reach all corners of the globe within a very short period of time. These characteristics mean that the control of information flow by the Chinese authorities becomes very difficult, that ordinary netizens in China have an unprecedented freedom to articulate their views, and that political authority can no longer be exercised in a black box.[19]

Top Chinese leaders are aware of this significance. During the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome epidemic in 2003, President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao personally attempted to have a better grasp of the state of public opinion through a survey of the Internet. Their concern in turn enhanced the impact of Internet public opinion. In the formal document released by the fourth plenum of the Sixteenth Central Committee of the CPC, it was stated that the Party would accord a high priority to the impact of the Internet and

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[17] *Zhang Yuhong*: Qianbujian guren de bolanzhuangkuo: 2003 nian Zhongguo wangluo shijian shuping (An Unprecedented, Impressive Scene: a Narrative and Commentary on the Internet Events in China in 2003), December 2003; http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=2960 [This Site is not available anymore].

[18] *Xiao Qiang*: The great Leap Online that is Stirring China", in: International Herald Tribune, 06.08.2004.

[19] According to the 'Global Internet Project's' survey data on various countries, a majority of respondents in most countries disagreed with the assertion that "through the use of the Internet, people have more rights in articulating their views on the government." But China was an exception, over 60% of the respondents agreed to the above statement. See *Guo Liang*: Zhongguo hulianwang de fazhan jiqi dui minyi de yingxiang (The Development of the Internet in China and its Impact on Public Opinion"), speech at the School of Law, Yale University, 26.04.2004; http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=3329 [This Site is not available anymore].

other new media on society's public opinion.[20] In 2006, in addition to the traditional Internal Reference Materials sent to the top Chinese leaders, the Information Section of the First Secretariat Bureau of the Office of the State Council was assigned the task of editing a '*Hulianwang Xinxi Zhaiyao*' ('Internet Information Digest') for the State Council's leadership. It is said that Premier Wen often issues instructions based on the publication, and he has been an active netizen collecting information. It was reported that several important social incidents, including the sub-standard milk powder in Fuyang, Anhui, the beating up of rural migrant labourers seeking wage arrears in Guangzhou, the illegal demolition in Jiayang, Hunan, etc., came to the notice of the State Council leadership through the *Hulianwang Xinxi Zhaiyao*.[21] Moreover, many ministries in the State Council have produced similar publications for the consumption of their respective leaders. Central Inspection Teams, a recent organisational tool for the combat of corruption, also highly evaluate Internet public opinion as a source of information; they consider that gossips at the grassroots level offer many hints which they cannot afford to ignore.

At the same time, the spread of Internet services has provided a new platform for China's dissidents and pro-democracy groups for criticising the Chinese authorities and in pursuit of freedom and democracy. A number of prominent liberals and political activists have been skilful in exploiting Internet services. They have set up personal Web sites and blogs to spread news and information censored by the Chinese authorities, articulate their views and issue declarations on public policy and major events, initiate signature campaigns on the Internet, attempt to shape public opinion, and promote the pro-democracy movement. They have established their reputation as Internet public intellectuals and commentators.

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[20] For the document, please see http://www.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/zht0919/index.htm [30.07.2012].

[21] *Chen Liang/Dong Xiaochang*: Hulianwang Zhongguo de xinminyi shidai: yijian yeshi 'caifu" (A New Era of Public Opinion in China on the Internet: Opinions are also a Form of 'Wealth'), in: Huliangwang zhoukan (China Internet Weekly, Beijing), 31.03.2005; http://media.163.com/05/0331/11/1G5T8FDT00141E7P.html [30.07.2012].

On 24 June 2002, the General Administration of Press and Publication and the then Ministry of Information Industry jointly released the 'Temporary Regulations on the Administration of Internet Publications'. This document made no distinction between commercial and non-commercial Internet service providers, and adopted a very broad definition of 'publications'. Hence the monitoring system and the issue of permits would cover academic research, exchange of views, public philanthropic projects, personal Web sites, group e-mail messages, various types of publicity Web pages, and so on. This set of regulations therefore imposed severe restrictions on the freedom of speech on the Internet. In response to this violation of freedom of speech, eighteen well-known public intellectuals and critics including Ren Bumei and Mao Yushi released an "Internet Civil Rights Declaration," and they quoted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to defend their right of publishing their views on the Internet. The authors of the Internet Civil Rights Declaration argued that freedom of speech is the most basic foundation of any society; and in this historical juncture of China in transition to become a modern society, any restrictive measure will be disadvantageous for the convergence of the Chinese society with the international society as well as the peaceful transition of the Chinese society. This declaration was soon endorsed by over six hundred Internet publishers, clients and netizens. This was in a way a demonstration on the Internet, which was the first of its kind in China.

IV.   Chinese Authorities' Restrictions on the Internet

a)   The General Situation

The Chinese authorities have been in a dilemma. On one hand, they have to develop Internet technology and promote the spread of Internet services as part of China's modernisation efforts; yet on the other hand, they have to impose restrictions to limit the Internet's political impact. On 11 July 2001, in a forum on the legal system organised by the Party Central Committee, the Chinese leadership clearly stipulated its utilitarian position:

> "On the issue of the development of information networks, our fundamental guideline is enthusiastic development, strengthening of administration, exploitation of their benefits and avoidance of their harmful effects so that they will serve us. We should strive to occupy a pro-active position in the development of global information networks… The development of information networks has posed new issues for our governmental administration and social administration, for example, the transmission of superstition, pornography, violence and other harmful information on the Internet… Special attention has to be paid to the use of legal means to do a good job in the administrative work related to information networks, so as to promote their rapid, healthy development… We have to strengthen and perfect the legislation, law enforcement and the judicial process concerning information networks. We have to strengthen the cultivation of talents for the administration of information networks."[22]

The Chinese government has been consistent in trying to control the use of the Internet; but obviously it did not have a set of comprehensive and effective control mechanisms at the

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[22] "Chongfen yunyong falu shouduan, jiaqiang xinxi wangluo guanli" (Fully Exploit Legal Means, Strengthen the Management of Information Networks), in: Renmin ribao (People's Daily, Beijing), 12.07.2001; http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/3763/458950.html [This Site is not available anymore].

beginning. In fact, such mechanisms have been strengthening in view of the spread of Internet services. Chinese leaders realise that the Internet is a new invention; they need time to study its nature, explore the possible control mechanisms and establish an effective monitoring and control system. In a way, they have been going through a policy learning process. In the initial development phase, the Chinese authorities did not have any effective means of control; and since access to Internet services was limited, the need for control was not yet keenly felt. As Internet public opinion emerged as a significant political force, Chinese leaders became determined in exercising control over the Internet.

Li Yonggang of Nanjing University divided the Chinese authorities' control of the Internet into three stages. The first stage of low-level control covered the period 1994-1998. The approach was rather passive and defensive as access to the Internet remained limited, and Internet public opinion had not become a potent force. The second stage of mid-level control lasted from 1999 to 2003. The approach adopted was a combination of combat and prevention, with monitoring and control parallel to self-discipline. Legislation on the Internet developed, and many statutes and regulations were promulgated in this period. Internet services rapidly spread in these years; and Internet public opinion emerged as a force to reckon with, generating many rights-protection and protest activities. Chinese leaders began to feel the pressure, hence from 2004, the third stage of high-level control has begun when control measures have been strengthening substantially.[23] The measures adopted have become sophisticated including administrative, technological and legal measures. In terms of the scope of control, the priorities are to stop harmful information from entering China and getting out of China; and control over Internet cafes and Internet service providers has been

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[23] *Li Yonggang*: Zhongguo zhengfu dui hulianwangde guanzhi: zhengce yu linian (Chinese Government's Administration and Control of the Internet: Policy and Philosophy), speech at the Universities Service Centre, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 23.08.2006.

strengthening, as demonstrated by the controversy over Google's departure from China in January 2010. Local government organs are made responsible for well-defined areas while inter-district co-operative mechanisms are developed. A national control system is now in place with overall command in the hands of the central government, and law enforcement measures to be implemented by the central ministries concerned and local governments. This system is supported by assistance from Internet service providers as well as netizens' self-discipline and mutual surveillance. Central ministries involved include the State Council's Information Office, and Ministries of Culture, Industry and Information Technology, Info and Public Security. There has been established an Internet Police Force of over 30,000 people, too.

The following sections attempt to analyse the Chinese authorities' targets of control and control mechanisms. The former mainly include China's netizens, Internet contents and Internet service providers. Ren Bumei, a famous dissident and Internet public intellectual mentioned above, summarised the control mechanisms in ten categories: legislation; the establishment of the Internet Police Force; persecution of netizens to generate a deference effect; control of domestic Web sites; blockade of access to overseas Web sites; restrictions on Internet cafes; key words filtering system; monitoring of electronic communications; setting up of reporting Web sites on illegal internet activities; and guidance by official Web sites encouraging self-discipline. These ten categories of control mechanisms include legal restrictions, administrative monitor and control, self-discipline within the trade, techno-logical control and political guidance. These five aspects will be further analysed below.

b)   Targets of Internet Control

Control is mainly directed at politically sensitive information and pornography. Regarding content control, the Chinese authorities have imposed a series of filtering mechanisms. Based on the 'Temporary Regulations on the Administration of Internet Publications' to be implemented from 1 August 2002, the then Ministry of Information Industry released the 'Administrative Methods Concerning Commercial Permits of Telecommunications Businesses'. This permit system forbids Internet contents endangering state security, exposing state secrets, destroying national unity, damaging national honour, destroying national solidarity, propagating evil religions, destroying social stability, etc. The above list covers movements and activities promoting independence of Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang; the pro-democracy movement; Falun Gong; and so on. In 2003, Reporters Without Borders engaged in a month-long investigation which revealed the use of a filtering system by the Chinese authorities targeting information concerning Falun Gong, Taiwan independence, 4 June Incident and human rights.[24]

According to the 'Temporary Regulations on the Administration of Internet Publications', the Chinese authorities may exercise the following control mechanisms: direct closure of Web sites; setting up of monitoring mechanisms regarding Internet forums and chat rooms; filtering system on sensitive words; demand for censorship before the transmission of information; and registration in genuine names regarding bulletin board systems (BBS). The famous Web sites of Peking University's *Yitahutu* and Tsinghua University's *Shuimuqinghua* are only open to domestic Internet protocols (IPs); people in Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas Chinese communities have no access to such Web sites.

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[24] South China Morning Post, 04.12.2003.

Further, control of Internet businesses involves entrepreneurs operating news Web sites, commercial Web sites, Internet service companies, Internet cafes, etc. According to the 'Administrative Methods Concerning Commercial Permits of Telecommunications Businesses', entrepreneurs operating Internet businesses including Internet service providers and Internet contents providers have to assume responsibility for Internet contents. The document stipulates that when such entrepreneurs, in supplying public information services, discover that the information in transmission in the telecommunications networks are obviously in the prohibited categories, they should stop the transmission immediately, keep a record of the materials, and report to the state organs concerned. These entrepreneurs, in providing news, publications and BBS services, have to keep records of the information contents, the times of information transmission, Web sites and domain names, the times of clients using Internet services, their account numbers and telephone numbers, etc. There are also special regulations governing the import of foreign software and Internet management systems. These regulations require the seeking of permission for foreign Internet service or contents providers to acquire remote access in operating tele-communications network management systems in China; and high-level network management systems should adopt domestic products or commission reliable domestic agencies to develop the products required. If foreign products are required, there should be security assessments and the adoption of necessary security measures.

Regarding Internet cafes, the State Council's regulations demand the setting up of monitoring systems within the premises by the operators, and they must stop and report the illegal activities of clients to cultural administrative agencies and public security organs. Operators have to check, register and maintain records of clients' identification documents as well as their use of Internet services. Local governments closely monitor the operation of

internet cafes, and rectification campaigns are frequent. In June 2004, 16,500 Internet cafes without licences and over 8,300 illegal operations were closed nationwide.[25] In recent years, the Chinese authorities have altered the strategy, and organisations under the Communist Youth League of China are given licences to operate Internet cafes to ensure that their management is in politically reliable hands.

To strengthen the monitoring of Internet cafes, since 2004, the Chinese government has demanded their installation of a new monitoring device. The Ministry of Culture is responsible for monitoring their standards and the use of the specified software. Shanghai played a leading role in this aspect. In April 2004, the Shanghai municipal government ordered all Internet cafes in the municipality to install an electronic identification card system which could record all Web sites visited by individual clients.[26] The reason given was to prevent adolescents from having access to pornography, but the purpose of political surveillance and the problem of violation of privacy were obvious. In June 2005, the then Ministry of Information Industry asked all Web sites and portals to register with the government before the end of the month, otherwise they would be closed. Commercial publishers and advertisement agencies which refused to register might be fined. Before politically sensitive anniversaries and important conferences, the Chinese authorities would summon all the major Internet service and contents providers, operators of major portals, and responsible persons of Internet cafe chains to warn them against the appearance of 'subversive contents' on the Internet, otherwise their accounts would be blocked.

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[25] Ming Pao (a Chinese newspaper in Hong Kong), 25.06.2004.
[26] South China Morning Post, 29.04.2004.

Re-registration and outright closing are the common means adopted in the general campaign to monitor all existing Internet public information service outlets. Forbidding the entry of non-adults has been a priority in the management of Internet cafes in recent years. In 2004, the Chibi City authorities in Hubei raised the slogan of "Destroy an Internet Cafe, and Save a Group of Children", and closed 57 Internet cafes in the city. In 2006, the Fangshan County authorities in Shanxi banned all Internet cafes in the county in one evening in the name of protecting non-adults, making the county a local administrative unit with Internet network connections but not Internet cafes.[27]

According to the survey data of the CNNIC, China's netizens are mainly male, unmarried and below thirty-five years of age. Students as a group are more numerous than those in other occupations; and their proportion among China's Internet users continues to rise. In exerting control over netizens, the Chinese authorities tend to focus on young people, especially university students. In November 2004, the then minister of education, Zhou Ji, strongly appealed to universities' management in a seminar to strengthen the construction and administration of on-campus information networks.[28] The Ministry of Education then released a document entitled 'Views on Further Strengthening the Administrative Work of Tertiary Institutions' On-campus Information Networks'. The document called for the registration of on-campus Web sites in genuine names, and made this a criterion in the

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[27] *Zhou Yu*: Shanxi Fangshan Xianwei Shuji tiewan guanbi xiancheng quanbu wangba yin zhengyi (Party Secretary of Fangshan County in Shanxi Closed all Internet Cafes in the County Town with an Iron Fist Creating a Controversy), in: Mingzhu yu fazhi shibao (*Democracy and Legal System Times*), 8.10.2006.

[28] Ming Pao, 20.03.2005.

ministry's assessment of the performance of tertiary institutions. In spring 2005, many universities followed the ministry's instruction and tightened the control of on-campus BBS, demanding participants in exchanging views to leave their real names and restricting the access of off-campus participants. Tsinghua University's *Shuimuqinghua* was asked to serve as a model.[29]

In June 2009, the Chinese authorities initiated the most blatant and largest-scale Internet censorship to date. While Web policing was tightened around the twentieth anniversary of the Tiananmen Incident on June 4, resulting in the temporary blocking of Twitter knockoffs and other Web sites, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology issued a directive demanding a new filtering software – Green Dan Youth Escort – to be introduced on new personal computers from 1 July onwards. The official purpose was to stop people viewing 'offensive' content such as pornographic or violent Web sites, but Internet users in China perceived this as an attempt to curb access to politically sensitive information and keep track of users. A protest campaign emerged, and the Chinese authorities soon retreated from their controversial plan.[30]

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[29] Hong Kong Economic Times (a Chinese newspaper in Hong Kong), 21.03.2005.

[30] *Michael Bristow*: China Defends Screening Software, in: BBC News, Beijing, 9.06.2009; http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi-/asia-pacific/8091044.stm [30.07.2012]; and *Matthew Taylor*: China Drops Green Dan Web Filtering System, in: The Guardian , 13.08.2009; http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2009/aug/13/china-drops-w... [This Site is not available anymore].

c)   Political Control on the Internet

In influencing Internet public opinion, the Chinese authorities attempted to form their own Internet propaganda teams to guide China's netizens. This is their traditional mode of thinking and operation. As internet public opinion has emerged as a significant ideological front, Internet work becomes as important as the work on newspapers, television and radio broadcasting. They therefore must seize the initiative in the propaganda and ideological work concerned, and launch a strong offensive in shaping Internet public opinion in support of the Party's policy programmes. On 10 January 2001, the then Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin stated in the national conference of propaganda chiefs:

> "[We] must tightly grasp the leadership and initiative in public opinion work… In a modern society, various types of media, especially information networks, develop rapidly; the function and influence of public opinion will increase, and will therefore need a strengthening of guidance… (We) need to accord a high priority to public opinion and propaganda on the Internet, positively develop them, fully use them, strengthen their administration, exploit their advantages and avoid harmful effects, continuously strengthen the influence and fighting spirit of internet propaganda, and make it a new battleground for ideological and political work, as a new channel for external propaganda."[31]

Similarly, a prominent *People's Daily* article on 8 December 2004 argued that "there are politics on the Internet, and there is competition on the Internet. We must not treat this lightly." The author indicated that the conquest of the Internet battleground and the shaping of positive, strong public opinion on the Internet are important ideological work, and should

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[31] People's Daily, 11.01.2001.

be placed at the level of raising the Party's level of governance and governance competence, as well as consolidating its status as the governing party.[32] The formal document of the Party's Sixteenth National Congress in 2002 also acknowledged that the Internet has to become an important front in the dissemination of advanced culture.[33]

In early April 2006, Standing Committee member of the Party Political Bureau, Li Changchun, indicated while engaging in field research in Beijing that the Internet had an increasingly important impact on people's spiritual and cultural life, and therefore was a significant front in the building of socialist spiritual civilisation. Li made the following appeal: "Actively promote civilized internet services in accordance with the demand to uphold the socialist perspective on honour and disgrace, promote civilised access to the Internet, purify the Internet environment, boycott uncivilized behaviour, and form a healthy, progressive, civilized new style on the Internet."[34]

Another significant measure of political control is to use the official news Web sites like *People's Daily Online* and *Xinhuanet* to serve as standard bearers and guides in the dissemination of news and information. The Chinese authorities consider that the major news Web sites are the key channels for news and information transmission, and important sources for other Web sites, hence their responsible persons must demonstrate a high level

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[32] *Yu Xiao*: Yingzhao wangshang yulun qiangshi (Building Strength in Internet Public Opinion), in: People's Daily, 8.12.2004, p. 4.
[33] For the document, please see http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/zhuanti/Zhuanti_251.shtml [30.07.2012].
[34] "Shenmi wangjing fuchu shuimian, jianpan shubiao jiushi wuqi" (Secret Internet Police Exposed, Keyboards and Mice are the Weapons"), in: Nanfang zhoumo (*Southern Weekly*), 18.5.2006; http://it.people.com.cn/GB/1068/42899/4383543.html [30.07.2012].

of political consciousness and seize the initiative in reinforcing the Chinese leadership's main themes. Since the official Web sites have been given such an important political task, it is only natural that they constitute about 10% of existing Web sites in China and that local governments at various levels have established their own news and information Web sites.

The Chinese authorities have quietly organised their Internet commentator corps, too. Chinese leaders consider that most commentaries on the Internet are emotional, irrational and biased, thus generating confusion and an adverse impact on the proper Party line. Hence, major official Web sites have recruited their own commentators, some of them full-time and some part-time. They disguise themselves as ordinary netizens expressing their own views on the Internet, with the objective that the proper political line endorsed by the Party will become the mainstream of Internet public opinion.

In line with the above, the propaganda departments of provincial and municipal Party committees have been instructed to build teams of Internet commentators, whose job is to guide discussion on public bulletin boards away from politically sensitive topics by posting opinions anonymously or under false names. Although advertisements for such recruitment are supposed to have been placed in-house, many details about the part-time Internet commentator corps have emerged in the domestic media. According to the *Southern Weekly* magazine, a team of about 20 commentators had been operating in the city of Suqian in Jiangsu province since April 2005.[35]

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[35] *Jonathan Watts*: China's Secret Internet Police Target Critics with Web of Propaganda, in: *The Guardian*, 14.06.2005; http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2005/jun/14/newmedia.china [30.07.2012].

At the same time, traditional media share the task of educating China's netizens. On 9 November 2004, China Central Television's *Jiaodian Fangtan*, probably the most authoritative and popular news commentary programme in China, offered a document-tary-cum-commentary entitled 'Be Alert Against False Information on the Internet'. The programme's anchor person emphasised that many forums and chat rooms on the Internet did not require the participants to reveal their real names; hence many commentaries appeared to be genuine articulation of views by ordinary people, but in fact they were fabricated. A Central Party School staff who held a doctorate revealed in the programme that one of his articles published on the Internet attracted a lot of criticisms, but his careful study of the IP addresses of the critics suggested that they all came from one person or a small group of people. The programme also pointed out that some social incidents appeared to have attracted a lot of interest and discussions, but they might have been the work of small groups of people who created a facade of such widespread intense interest. The programme finally interviewed a section head of the Internet Supervision Bureau of the Ministry of Public Security, who appealed to the netizens to be rational, objective and cool-headed in handling Internet information.[36]

The widespread use of the Internet and its comparative advantages in terms of its spontaneous, open, mutual-sharing and interactive characteristics make it an increasingly significant ideological front. At the end of 2004, the Party Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the State Council's Ministry of Supervision completed a training programme for 127 Internet commentators from all over the country, and established an 'Internet Propaganda Work Leading Group on the Combat of Corruption and the Promotion of Cleanliness'. They also set up a system of Internet Propaganda Work Joint Conference

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[36]   Ming Pao, 21.11.2004.

involving the Party Central Propaganda Department, the Party Central Office for External Propaganda, Xinhuanet, People's Daily Online, etc. to integrate the management and control of Internet news and commentaries, and to deploy the Internet commentators to monitor Internet discussions.

In April 2005, Suqian City in Jiangsu recruited 26 Internet commentators. They all came from government departments and official propaganda agencies, including newspaper editors and police officers. They were recommended by the city propaganda agencies; and were considered to have a good understanding of policies, a strong ideological background and politically reliable. They then received training from the city's Party Propaganda Department on the Marxist perspective on journalism, the Party policy on propaganda, Internet knowledge, domestic and international development trends concerning the Internet media, etc. Their major responsibilities were to publish articles in the major internet forums in China, and to guide internet discussions posing themselves as ordinary netizens. Nanjing, Wuxi, Suzhou and other cities in Jiangsu as well as provinces such as Jiangxi and Fujian also launched similar operations. Apparently the Chinese authorities considered that the "Internet commentators" campaign facilitated the guidance of Internet discussions; it was more humane than the administrative measures including the closing of Web sites and therefore more in line with the building of a harmonious society. There were liberal academics who defended freedom of speech on the Internet. They argued that Internet discussions should not be perceived as a challenge to a harmonious society, and suggested that the authorities should use statements by government spokesmen to articulate their positions and present the facts.[37]

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[37] *Jonathan Watts*, 2005; *Cao Junwu*: Suqian de 'wangluo xuanchuan duiwu' (Propaganda Teams in Suqian), in: Nanfang zhoumo (*Southern Weekly*), 9.05.2005.

d)   Administrative Control on the Internet

Administrative measures are the principal means of control, as can be expected of the CPC. These measures include the establishment and development of Internet supervisory teams, the registration of Web sites and domain names, the demand for participants' real names in BBS discussions, the launch of campaigns to combat illegal Internet activities, and the imposition of administrative sanctions.

China's Internet police force was estimated to be around 30,000 people in 2005.[38] Shenzhen, for example, is a city in China famous for its advanced development of the Internet; and its netizen population expanded from 10,000 in 1996 to four million in 2006. Though the Internet Security Monitoring Office of Shenzhen's Public Security Bureau rapidly increased its personnel from four in the beginning to about 100 in 2006, it acknowledged that management pressure remained substantial. The office concentrated on over 5,000 Web sites, including the interactive forums, chat rooms, etc. as well as about twenty large-scale comprehensive portal Web sites.

The Shenzhen authorities' management model apparently had attracted the Ministry of Public Security's attention, which demanded Chongqing, Hangzhou, Wuhan, Chengdu and four other cities to launch the same management model in June 2006, and planned to implement it nationally in 2007.[39] By 2007, the Shenzhen Internet Security Monitoring Office became the Internet Monitoring Sub-bureau of the central Ministry of Public Security, with over 100 personnel. In fact, the public security apparatus has now organised its Internet monitor corps throughout the country. A Public Information Internet Security Monitoring

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[38] *Jonathan Watts*, 2009.
[39] "Shenmi wangjing fuchu shuimian."

Bureau has been established within the Ministry of Public Security; at the provincial level, the public security bureaux all have their respective Public Information Internet Security Monitoring General Corps; at the city level, their public security bureaux have organised their respective Public Information Internet Security Monitoring Branch Corps; and at the district/county level, their public security bureaux have established their respective Public Information Internet Security Monitoring Brigades. It seems that the establishments at various local levels are not yet uniform. But in general, in places where the Internet has been better developed with more netizens, more manpower has been deployed.

On 4 May 2011, in response to the potential spread of the 'Jasmine Revolution', the Chinese authorities established a new State Internet Information Office (*Guojia Hulianwang Xinxi Bangongshi*) to unify the law enforcement and management work concerning the Internet. Public Security Bureau of the Beijing municipal government too raised the status of its Internet Monitoring Department (*Wang Jian Chu*) to the bureau-level Internet Security Bureau (*Wangluo Anbao Zongju*) to strengthen the monitoring and control of the Internet. This was rapidly initiated by various provincial governments.[40] These are indicators that the Chinese authorities have been tightening the control of the Internet while they are concerned with the maintenance of social stability.

Through a survey of some official Web sites, the responsibilities of China's Internet police may be summarised as follows:

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[40] *Shen Yuan*: Zhou Yongkang Qiangjian Quanmin Kongzhiway (Zhou Yongkang Forcefully Built a Nationwide Control Net), in: Open Magazine (a Hong Kong monthly), No. 294, June 2011, p. 14.

i)   co-ordinate, supervise, inspect and guide the security, protection and management work of public information networks of local Party and government organisations, financial agencies and other important agencies, and those of the Internet;

ii)   supervise the implementation situation concerning the establishment of security management systems for the computer information systems of user units and that of connecting units, access units and users of the international Internet; and inspect the implementation situation of the management and technical measures of Internet security;

iii) supervise, inspect and guide the work of the security organisations and security personnel of the user units of computer information systems;

iv)   supervise, inspect and guide the implementation of graded protection systems concerning the security of the computer information systems of significant agencies;

v)   in accordance with the state's standards and regulations concerning computer operation centres, exercise supervision and management of the construction of the operation centres and the construction work in the neighbourhood of the operation centres;

vi)   in accordance with the state's standards and regulations regarding the defence against thunder strikes and static electricity for the sites of computer information systems, implement a system of record and registration as well as that of security inspection and approval for the safety testing and monitoring work regarding such defence;

vii) exercise supervision and inspection regarding the sales permits of specific products for the security of computer information systems;

viii) exercise management of the prevention and research work concerning computer viruses and other data damaging public security in society;

ix) investigate into and sanction behaviour in violation of the management regulations on network access routes, the Internet, and connecting networks of the international information networks of computer information systems;

x) in accordance with the stipulations of relevant laws and regulations, implement a system of record and registration as well as that of security inspection and approval for Internet service business operations such as Internet bars, Internet cafes, hotel electronic business centres, etc.;

xi) secure a grasp of the record situation, establish record files, engage in record statistical work concerning the connection units, access units and users of the international information networks; and report to higher level authorities in accordance with relevant regulations of the state;

xii) investigate into and sanction units and individuals exploiting the international networks to produce, reprint, seek access to and propagate harmful information; and notify relevant units to close or delete the respective Web sites, catalogues and servers;

xiii) receive reports on cases concerning the computer information systems of relevant units and users; investigate into and sanction criminal cases in violation of the law including security incidents of public information networks, illegal invasion of the

state's important computer information systems, destruction of the functions of computer information systems, destruction of the data and application programmes

xiv)   of computer information systems, the spread of programmes damaging computers, etc.; investigate into and sanction criminal cases in violation of the law involving financial fraud, thefts, corruption, illegal use of public funds, thefts of state secrets, etc. through the use of computers;

xv)   grasp the development trends regarding crimes and violations of the law in the public information networks; study the characteristics and patterns of such crimes and violations of the law; and propose measures to prevent and combat such crimes and violations of the law;

xvi)   study the investigative technologies to secure evidence, break codes, access confidential information, etc. regarding criminal cases and violations of the law relating to computers; and assume responsibility for securing evidence and related technical authentification concerning the electronic data and evidence in criminal cases and violations of the law related to computers;

xvii)   engage in the inspection and safety assessment of computer information networks, and radiation, release of radiated materials, etc. from computer systems;

xviii)   monitor the implementation of the laws and regulations relating to the security of public information networks; and

xix)   organise and develop the publicity work, education and training relating to the security of computer information systems.[41]

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[41] See for example the Web site of the Internet Police of Taiyuan City, Shanxi, http://www.ty-police.com.cn/yewu.asp [This Site is not available anymore].

China's Internet police are mainly the police of the Ministry of Public Security's Internet Supervision Bureau and the Internet security personnel of the Ministry of State Security. The specialised police force of the Ministry of Public Security has highly sophisticated technology at its disposal to capture domain names, filter key words of political sensitivity, survey networks, block access to Web sites, collect electronic data as evidence, gather intelligence, etc. It assumes the responsibility to block information in the following categories: those which may cause damage to national solidarity and unity of the state, those which may lead to the subversion of the state and government, and danger to state security; pornography; and other information which may involve the generation of harmful effects. In short, it is responsible for the combat of crime related to the Internet and computers.

China's Internet police force engages in cat-and-mouse-like games with the netizens. It checks the information networks at fix intervals as well as at any time, closes Web sites considered politically sensitive, and supervises netizens who often access to politically sensitive Web sites. According to the United States State Department's country human rights reports, China's Internet police closed 50,000 IP addresses in the first half of 2002 alone.[42] It is said that the Chinese authorities have a list of politically sensitive words of several hundred pages, and domestic Web sites are ordered to filter through the list. Many overseas news Web sites have been blocked, and Chinese netizens are denied access to them.[43]

In addition to the Internet police force, the Chinese authorities have also set up a system of Internet 'surveyors' ('yuepingyuan'), which mainly consists of retired conservative intellectuals. Apparently recruitment started in May 2006 by the ministries concerned which provided scheduled guidance sessions to the "surveyors". They monitor the Internet in their

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[42] South China Morning Post, 10.09.2004.

[43] Hong Kong Economic Times, 02.02.2006.

spare time concerning "uncivilized behaviour, and illegal and harmful information",[44] and offer their reports and views to the government agencies through telephone, e-mails and irregular conferences. There are some network security companies which also recruit Internet security personnel. These companies do not have any authority. They monitor the Internet in the service of their clients; and their main tasks are to remove prohibited information, alert to the emergence of illegal activities, and report them to the public security agencies.

Registration in real names is another important administrative control measure. Connection to the Internet, Internet cafes, Web sites for the dissemination of information, e-mails and even online games all require registration in genuine names. Since 2003, Internet cafes have been required by their official administrative agencies to demand identification documents from their clients for registration purpose. They are often asked to open accounts and apply for smart cards. The official reason given was to prevent adolescents from visiting Internet cafes. On 13 May 2004, the Internet Society of China released the 'Internet Electronic Mail Service Standards (drafts for solicitation of opinions)'. It demanded registration in real names for the first time; and stressed the duty of e-mail service operators to deliver accurate information on their clients to define the ownership of the e-mail service.

In February 2005, the then Ministry of Information, in co-ordination with the government agencies concerned, asked all domestic Web site operators to register through their Internet data centres or Internet service providers; the alternative was to register directly with the ministry's Web site. Registration included the delivery of identification documents of the operators; and failure to register by 9 July 2005 would lead to closure.

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[44] „How Censorship Works in China: A Brief Overview"; http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/china0806/3.htm [30.07.2012].

On 20 July 2005, China's largest real-time communications company, Tencent Inc., notified its clients, QQ groups' initiators and administrators involved in its instant messaging service platform to complete the process of registration in real names in accordance with the Shenzhen Public Security Bureau's 'Notice on Implementing the Work of Clearance and Shake-up of Network Public Information Service Sites'. Tencent Inc.'s act was interpreted as the curtain-raiser of China's comprehensive campaign to implement the registration in genuine names of Internet users.[45] Two days later, it was reported that the Shenzhen police would engage in the clearance and shake-up of the city's network public information service sites till the end of the following September, including the registration of BBS and BBS owners in genuine names (their identification documents would be checked).

On 5 August 2005, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Information Industry jointly released the document "Certain Views on the Administration of the Development of Online Games." The document stated that in order to prevent adolescents from heavily indulging in online games involving violence, those who wanted to have access to the "Players Kill (PK)" category of online games would have to use their identification documents to secure access, so as to deny access to adolescents. In July 2005, the Public Security Bureau of the Chongqing municipality released the ‚Notice on Strengthening the Administration of International Internet Registration', asking those who had access to the Internet at home to register with the public security organs, otherwise they would be warned by the police and might have their access denied for half a year.[46] At the same time, local governments at various levels and some ministries began to publicise their telephone numbers and Web sites to encourage reporting of illegal Internet activities, e.g., the Ministry of Public Security's

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[45] China.com, 21.07.2005.

[46] "Chongqing chutai xinguiding: zaijiazhong shangwang xuxiang gongan jiguan beian" ("New Regulations Introduced in Chongqing: Access to the Internet at Home Requires Registration with the Public Security Organs"), in: Zhonghuawang keji (tech.china.com), 7.07.2006; http://tech.china.com/zh_cn/news/net/156/20060707/13454298.html [This Site is not available anymore].

reporting phone numbers are 010-65283344 and 010-65207655, and its reporting Web site is http://www.cyberpolice.cn; and the Web site of the China Internet Illegal Information Reporting Centre sponsored by the Internet Society of China is http://net.china.cn.

In addition to strengthening the surveillance of Internet news and information service units and closing insubordinate private Web sites, the Chinese authorities also arrest dissident internet authors to deter anti-government commentaries and activities. Since 1998, there were arrests every year associated with Internet activities. Probably China's first internet political prisoner was Lin Haiyin, a computer businessman in Shanghai; he was arrested in 1998 for supplying 30,000 e-mail addresses in Mainland China to a magazine *Dacankao*, and was subsequently sentenced for a two-year prison term. In 2002, a former psychology student of Beijing Normal University, Liu Di, was arrested for anti-government Internet commentaries and later imprisoned for one year. All she did was publishing articles criticising the Chinese authorities and demanding the release of dissidents in custody. On the basis of the data from Amnesty International, people arrested in China for disseminating illegal and harmful information and articulating anti-government views on the Internet had been increasing; they included students, dissidents, Falun Gong followers, writers, lawyers, teachers and ordinary workers.[47] According to Reporters Without Borders, people arrested in China because of illegal Internet activities rose from three in 2001 to 62 in 2005.

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[47] "China Wages a High-tech Battle Over Control of the Internet – Providers Ordered to Keep 'Subversive Content' off the Web", in: International Herald Tribune, 05.03.2005, p. 3.

e)   Technological Control on the Internet

In recent years, the Chinese authorities have been spending substantial resources on the research and development of Internet surveillance and control technology, building electronic firewalls to block pornography and politically sensitive information from the people. In a way, its development of the technology is proportional to the spread of Internet services in China. The technological measures now adopted by the Chinese authorities include: the IP blockade against information imports from foreign Web sites; the system of filtering a list of politically sensitive words through trunk channels; the capture of domain names; the development of surveillance software; and the monitoring of organised computer hacking. At the same time, the Chinese government is in the process of developing China's own network system independent of the global Internet.

Experts realise that the Chinese authorities have developed highly sophisticated Internet surveillance technology to impose strict limits on the information which can be accessed to domestically. The technology in their grasp has enabled them to search e-mail messages in real time, travel through the body of messages for sensitive materials, instantaneously block delivery and pinpoint the offenders. They also have the technology to re-direct Internet surfing from companies such as Google to the copycat sites under their control so as to ensure the serving up of sanitised search results.[48]

Technological control on the Internet comes under the infamous 'Golden Shield Project' of the Chinese authorities. The project aims to transform China's public security personnel into a digital public security corps, and is one of the twelve projects of the Chinese government in the promotion of e-governance. The project was first proposed by the Ministry of Public

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[48]   International Herald Tribune, 05.03.2005.

Security in 1998, approved by the State Council in 2001, and launched in 2003, with an investment of several billion *yuan*. According to the Ministry of Public Security, the project would gradually serve to provide information services to the entire national public security system. It aimed to achieve the establishment of a national information network for enquires and comprehensive information services related to public security available to the other organs and agencies in the Party/state's political and legal system (*zhengfa xitong*) at the end of 2005, and the basic digitalisation of public security work by 2007.[49] Zhao Dabin,[50] head of the Information and Communication Bureau of the Ministry of Public Security, was the commander of the 'Golden Shield Project' whose tactical objectives include the setting up of a monitoring and blockade system over China's information networks, so as to exercise strict digital control over them.[51]

It is speculated that upon the full implementation of the project, China's major public facilities would be monitored by closed-circuit television; and all phone calls, Internet communications, financial transactions, individual activities, arrivals at and departures from China, etc. would be recorded in the gigantic database. In sum, it would represent the realisation of the scenarios described by George Orwell's *1984*. Hong Kong media reported that the key planner of the project was Jiang Mianheng, son of Jiang Zemin; Jiang junior now holds the position of deputy president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and is an expert of information technology. It was said that he first initiated the idea of the project, and won the support of his father who then gave the green light for its implementation.[52]

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[49] *Zong Wen*: Shushiyiyuan Jindun Gongcheng zhengshi qidong (Formal Launch of the Multi-Billion yuan 'Golden Shield Project'), in: Zhongguo jisuanji yonghu (China Computer Users), No. 39, 20.10.2003, p. 10.

[50] Zhao Dabin was transferred from the People's Liberation Army to the Ministry of Public Security in 1982. He was deputy head of the Law and Order Bureau, deputy head of the office of the ministry, and head of the Planning and Finance Bureau before taking up the present position.

[51] Jisuanji shijie (China Computerworld, a newspaper in Chinese published in Beijing), 08.12.2003.

[52] Kaifang zazhi (Open Magazine, a monthly magazine in Chinese published in Hong Kong), No. 12, December 2003, pp. 13-14.

f)   Legal Control on the Internet

China's legislation on information networks has been parallel to the development of Internet services in the country. The initial purpose of the legislative work was to ensure the security of computer information systems; and it has been further strengthened since 2000 in view of the rapid expansion of Internet users. The Chinese authorities obviously have been alert to the development of network media and the increasing significance of Internet public opinion critical of the Chinese authorities.

The Chinese leadership hopes to have a legal framework to guide the development of information networks and to regulate them. Up till July 2006, the Chinese government had promulgated over fifty statutes and sets of regulations in this area. In terms of quantity, it is probably ahead of all its counterparts in the world. These laws and regulations aim at ensuring the security of Internet technology and combatting Internet crimes; but they also attempt to control people's access to Internet information, the dissemination of information on the Internet, and Internet publications. They cover news, information and publications; state secrets; internet service and contents providers; and Internet cafes.

It is significant that there are not too many statutes formally approved by the National People's Congress and its standing committee; most of the relevant legal documents are administrative regulations released by the central ministries responsible for the control of the Internet. There are no laws clearly stipulating the concrete measures of government control on the Internet, and there are no legal provisions for the protection of privacy either. The existing legal documents reflect that the regulatory framework has many sources, and that the administration is rather confusing.

g)   Self-Discipline in the Control on the Internet

The Chinese authorities consider self-discipline an important aspect of the control on the Internet. They believe that the Internet is not a virtual society, but a reflection of the social reality and has to serve the actual society. Internet activities therefore have to observe the Chinese constitution and Chinese law so as to fulfill the nature and demand of China's socialist system. Internet media have to practise self-discipline, follow the law and regulations, be responsible to the public, restrict the contents of its messages, and rule out harmful information and immoral behaviour. At the same time, the Chinese authorities would mobilise the official media to expose and criticise the negative aspects of Internet media and Internet information such as pornography, false information, etc. so as to exert political and social pressures on Internet service and contents providers to enhance the forces of self-discipline.

On 25 May 2001, the Internet Society of China was formally established with the approval from the then Ministry of Information Industry and formal registration with the Ministry of Civil Affairs. On 17 December in the same year, the standing committee of its executive council approved the 'Self-discipline Convention on Internet Trade in China'. The convention contains four chapters and thirty-one articles, and clearly stipulates self-disciplined behaviour in various areas for those in the industry including Internet services in operation, the use of Internet services, information services, development and production of Internet products, as well as scientific research, education and services related to the Internet.

The convention was then endorsed by the central ministries concerned for formal release. On 26 March 2002, a signing ceremony was held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing; more than ten major enterprises representing the industry signed the convention. This was the modern version of the Leninist model of the Party exercising control through mass organisations.

Since self-discipline concerning news and information services is perceived to be the priority by the Chinese authorities, the Internet Society of China established the China Internet Information Service Commission in December 2003. The Commission then prepared the "Self-discipline Convention on Internet News and Information Services", and asked the service units to sign the document to pledge the voluntary acceptance of government administration and public supervision, the observance of relevant laws and regulations and the restrictions of social morality, the strengthening of self-discipline, the establishment of a healthy Internet environment, and the rejection of transmission through the Internet harmful information including pornography, superstition, etc. Liu Zhengrong, deputy head of the Internet Affairs Bureau of the State Council's Information Office, served as chairman of the Commission. A ceremony was held in which the representatives from over thirty major Internet news and information service units including Sina, Sohu, People's Daily Online, Xinhuanet, China Internet Information Centre, etc. signed the convention. Cai Mingzhao, then deputy head of the Information Office, presided over the ceremony and made a speech. Cai appealed to all Internet news and information service units to fulfill their social responsibility; and he indicated that the commission, as the work organ of the Internet

Society of China, would be responsible for defining and implementing the self-discipline framework for all Internet news and information service units, as well as for promoting a self-discipline education campaign.[53] Since then, the Internet news and information service units at the local level had been mobilised to sign the convention.

In 2006, apparently the promotion of Internet self-discipline was taken up by the top leaders. On 14 March 2006, upon the conclusion of the annual sessions of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Premier Wen Jiabao, in answering questions from Chinese and foreign journalists, confirmed that "every citizen has the right and freedom of using the Internet"; but he also added that "every citizen also has to consciously observe law and order, and uphold the interests of the state, the society and the collective".[54] Wen then stressed that "Web sites have to transmit correct information; they must not mislead the masses, and must not create harmful effects on the social order. These regulations must be observed as professional ethics. China would administer the Internet according to the law, and at the same time we also promote self-discipline within the Internet industry so as to realize self-administration." In the following April, Li Changchun, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC in charge of ideological and propaganda work appealed to the promotion of operating and using the Internet in a civilised manner to sanitise the Internet environment, according to the standards of socialist honour and disgrace.

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[53] "Hulianwang xinwen xinxi fuwu zilu gongyue zuo qianshu" (Self-Discipline Convention on Internet News and Information Services Signed Yesterday), in: Zhongguo xinwen chuanboxue pinglun (China Journalism Review), 12.09.2003; http://cjr.zjol.com.cn/gb/node2/node26108/node27330/userobject15ai2091910.html [This Site is not available anymore].

[54] „Chinese Premier Addresses Media on Major Issues, 15.03.2006, in: People's Daily online; http://english.people.com.cn/200603/15/eng20060315_250735.html [30.07.2012].

It seems that the stick of heavy pressure from the Chinese authorities and the carrot of the appeal of the huge China market work, Internet enterprises, domestic and foreign, have opted for self-discipline. This situation, however, has attracted the attention of the international community, too. Since 2000, Google had introduced a Chinese version of its search engine based on its network system in the United States. But because of the Chinese authorities' control, users in China either could not make use of Google's search service, or had to encounter a serious reduction in the speed of the service. To overcome the inconvenience, Google in early 2006 opted for self-censorship to satisfy the Chinese authorities. This meant that users in China would not be able to use thousands of keywords for search purpose or to access to certain Web sites related to, for example, Taiwan independence and the Tiananmen Square Incident. Google stated that such denial of search service and access to Web sites would be indicated in its Web page as information for its clients. Regarding the self-censorship, Google's defence was that entry into the China market would be a better choice than its rejection. Google acknowledged that it was a difficult decision, but entry into the Chinese market even on the Chinese authorities' terms would make its service more influential.[55] Apparently Google's position did not win wide acceptance from the international community. There were many severe criticisms; Reporters Without Borders described Google's acceptance of self-censorship "a black day"[56] in freedom of speech. The United States Congress held hearings on the issue, and many congressmen and senators severely condemned Google, Microsoft, etc. in helping China exercise the monitoring and blockade of information on the Internet. Google ultimately chose to leave China in January 2010.

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[55] Hong Kong Economic Times, 02.02.2006.

[56] "Google Move ‚Black Day' for China", in: BBC News, 25.01.2006; http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4647398.stm [30.07.2012].

V.   Conclusion

On the basis of the observations of many experts, the Chinese authorities have been exercising very strict control over the Internet; and this control has been strengthening in line with the expansion of netizens in China. In terms of a regulatory system, it vertically links the central government to the basic-level local governments; and horizontally involves the agencies responsible for public security (mainly the Internet police force), state security, news and information management, communications, cultural administration, radio, movies and television broadcasting, publications, and secrecy protection. Measures of control cover the administrative, technological, political propaganda, law enforcement, and self-discipline aspects within the industry. Control is exercised not only over the virtual reality on the Internet, but the actual internet service and contents providers as well as the Internet users. The Chinese authorities attempt to monitor and control Internet news and Internet public opinion, as well as e-mails, chat rooms, online games and even blogs.

The Internet, however, has been free and highly autonomous right from the beginning, bearing its open, global, interactive and high-information-capacity characteristics. Hence governance in this virtual world becomes very difficult. In order to realise the Chinese leadership's objective of managing and controlling the Internet, the authorities concerned have adopted various administrative, technological, political and legal means. They may be useful in some ways, but not always totally effective. China's vast territories and the developing Internet space and its technologies mean rising costs and limitations of administrative control. Technical control tends to generate technical counter-measures.

Hence, self-discipline within the industry appears to be relatively more effective; and seems to better grasp the balance between management and development, as well as between regulation and freedom. It is therefore quite probable that the Chinese authorities will increasingly rely on industry-wide self-discipline in their control of the Internet in the future.

Despite these strict controls, the fact remains that the Internet and internet public opinion have become part of the life of Chinese people, which will continue to expand the scope of freedom of speech and promote social change. It is expected that the Internet will facilitate greater public participation, and pave the way for more active social and political life.

The Internet has been facilitating the organisation of collective action in China, so that interest and views can be accumulated and articulated in a more effective way. The Internet obviously has an instrumental value and function in the transformation of the policy agenda-building model in China. At the same time, the Internet's own development has been gradually changing the social structure to a more network mode; and the public space represented by Internet forums facilitates the progress of deliberative democracy. It may therefore be argued that the development of cyber society in China embodies the demand for democratisation of the policy-making processes; and more specifically, the demand for the democratisation of the public policy agenda-building process.

In recent years, there are numerous cases which demonstrate that the public policy agenda-building process in China has been gradually transformed from a mobilisation model to an outside initiation model in cases which are perceived as politically acceptable and not threatening to the Party regime. This transformation is closely related to the emergence of

cyber society. Chinese leaders certainly set strict limitations on the scope of the public agenda allowed, and they are always ready to crack down to generate a deterrence effect. The Party regime at this stage has no intention of allowing any erosion of its monopoly of political power, and democratisation is not yet on its agenda.

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