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Internet Censorship in China

In an age of rapid growth of accessibility of information through the internet, the nation with the largest population of web users today enforces the world's most disciplinary and sophisticated forms of internet censorship upon its citizens. China, a country with the world's largest population of people contains over 485 million internet users that rapidly grow every day and beats every nation in the amount of net users with the United States coming in second with 245 million users. Throughout the past few years the Chinese government has taken aggressive control of the content available to their citizens over the internet. The government of China has enforced clear objectives to use the internet as a resource to promote their views and further their power over their people. Almost all nations have equal access to internet content except for China. U.S. secretary of state, Hillary Clinton has expressed disagreements with the Chinese government's banning of the free expression of ideas over the internet. This report will examine the history of China's control upon its citizens, why and how the Chinese government is censoring the internet from their citizens, what exactly they are censoring and how the people of China are responding to their government's control over their web use.

To understand why the Chinese government has such a huge rule over the information that its citizens can obtain, let's first examine the history of how Chinese

ensorship even came into existence. As the internet became quite prevalent in the mid-90's, the Chinese government took its initial steps to ensure that this medium was securely shut. The Chinese Ministry of Public Security (MPS) wrote specific regulations designed for blocking certain aspects of the internet. These policies soon turned into the Computer Information Network and Internet Security, Protection and Management Regulations which became law. Article 4 of these regulations states: "No unit or individual may use the Internet to harm national security, disclose state secrets, harm the interests of the State, of society or of a group, the legal rights of citizens, or to take part in criminal activities" (Regulations art. 4). The vagueness and generality of this article allows the Chinese government to gain more control over Chinese citizens. For example, the clause "to take part in criminal activities" is very open-ended and allows the government to justify criminal activities to whatever they feel is an act of evil. Other articles in the regulations follow a similar trend in which the rules are very loose and abstract so that the Chinese government can decide on what's right and wrong later.

Although these regulations were quite specific and strict, the Chinese government needed a solid enforcement to regulate all of these rules which provoked the Golden Shield Project. The Golden Shield Project, managed by the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), started in 1998, but began execution in November 2003. Jia Chunwang, minister of the MPS wrote in a paper which described how the internet should be managed and treated in the country. One key point that he discussed was, "The public security information on how to speed up the pace of work, and study, that needs to be discussed by the party." Chunwang essentially suggests that the Communist Party of China (CPC) must have total control of the flow of information. After 5 years, the project finally began

execution in 2003 which single-handedly gave China the nickname “The Great Firewall of China.” Simply stated, the project was a system which completely monitored and blocked any “harmful” information which is dictated by the Chinese government. Any information coming or leaving China through digital means is subjected to this system which highly restricts the capabilities of what Chinese citizens can and can’t do. For example, if one were to run a search on a banned term/phrase, an animated image of a policeman would come up instead, telling you that your search is restricted. Even more so, if you continue to search terms on the system’s “blacklist,” the proper authorities would be notified and you could face severe consequences from the authorities.

Today, China actively strides for press control and the government knows that the internet is a major threat to the grip they have on the press. Many articles and studies explain that the Chinese government censors the internet to control the Chinese press therefore guiding the Chinese people’s opinion about their nation. In a *New York Times* article, “China’s Censorship Machine Takes On the Internet” by Michael Wines president Hu Jintao of China was quoted as saying “Whether we can cope with the Internet is a matter that affects the development of socialist culture, the security of information, and the stability of the state” (Wines 1). The Chinese government believes in censoring objectionable content seen by them that is a threat to the monopoly of power they have over their people. Objectionable content can be websites about anything the Chinese government disapproves such as sites about the Dalai Lama, the 1989 crackdown on Tiananmen Square protesters, Falun Gong, and the banned spiritual movement. These topics provoke unwanted attention from the Chinese government and are banned because they can be seen as flaws within the Chinese political system. The

Chinese government believes that regulation is crucial and will help prevent the nation from going into chaos.

As more and more information has become readily available over the internet, the censoring of the web in China has vastly increased and become more sophisticated. China has built three large computer centers in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou which all outside internet traffic must pass through. These computer centers intercept and analyze incoming data comparing it with an ever changing list of forbidden keywords and phrases. If a match is found, the computer centers can entirely block and ban the incoming data or trim certain content off from it before letting the data pass through. Data such as a Google or Yahoo search must always pass through the computer centers. Users who type in an objectionable search in Google might receive no search results back at all or only a few even though there should have been many results. The computer centers have blocked so much content from the Chinese people that they have been nicknamed “The Great Firewall of China”.

The government of China has also hired numerous companies to monitor and filter out content from the internet. These companies employ people to pose as regular internet users to screen out bulletin boards, forums, bloggers, and chat rooms by paying their employees fifty cents each time they post or delete a message. These acts are an attempt to sway the Chinese public to favor the views of the Chinese government on those websites. Messages and comments that are critical of a speech from an official of China are almost always automatically deleted. Words that are viewed as negative regarding the government or regarded authorities of China are also deleted. It is also not uncommon to have emails fail to be sent to recipients due to the email message

containing controversial text. The government of China even goes as far as letting these employees screen out text messages from cell phones from reaching people if the message itself contains anything objectionable. Xiao Quiang, an analyst of China's censorship system at the University of California, Berkeley, states that from his studies "There is an Internet monitoring and surveillance unit in every city, wherever you have an Internet connection" in a recent New York Times article (Wines 1). Each monitoring unit contains dozens of employees from the companies the Chinese government hired to censor objectionable content.

There are strict rules upon internet service providers and internet content providers in China regarding content they allow their customers to see. ISPs and ICPs in China have to register and get licenses in order to operate legally and be held responsible for any controversial content that appear within their sites. ISPs have to make sure that their customers do not upload any objectionable material over the internet or else authorities can seize the company for disobeying the law.

Many software programs designed in China and distributed to its citizens are built to censor objectionable material from its users. In 2009 the Chinese government even pushed a bill that required every new computer built and sold to Chinese citizens have a program installed called "Green Dam-Youth Escort!'. The government claims that the software will allow parents to block many inappropriate sites targeted towards the youth such as pornography sites. Using this program will lead towards a cleaner environment for our youth overall. However, there are few citizens who believe that this is the actual intention of the software and that it adds many additional "side effects" which the government does not tell you about. One side effect is that the software will essentially

monitor the users every single move on the computer including any activity done off the internet. Another program which is the leading instant messaging software in China called “QQ” automatically installs software that monitors what their users are communicating and instantly blocks out censored text. Other forms of internet censoring software are installed on almost all computers in schools and cafes. Recently, the government of China announced that they are in the process of developing similar software for cell phones.

Furthermore, the Chinese government has banned all western news and social networking sites. Sites that many Americans use on a daily basis such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are all banned. The Chinese government replaces these western developed sites with versions of their own controlled sites. Sites like You-ku replaces Youtube, Renren replaces Facebook and Weibo replaces Twitter. Even certain popular worldwide video games are banned. For example, Games such as “Command & Conquer” are banned because they portray China as an antagonist country and “Hearts of Iron” because it represented Tibet as an independent country.

Google has been fighting with the censorship programs in China for years. Regarded to many as the best search engine, Google is known for returning the most vast and accurate search results; however the Chinese censorship programs hinder the efficiency of Google’s search engine and threatens Google’s reputation. In January 2010, Google announced that it would stop operations in China if the government keeps filtering out search results. In March 2010, in a response to the Chinese government failing to allow uncensored search results Google ended its internet search services in China and started to redirect Chinese “Googlers” to their uncensored search engine in

Hong Kong. Ending months of tension, by June 2010 the Beijing government had renewed its license to operate a Google search engine website in mainland China. However, the search results are still being filtered as Google is determined to have a threshold in China due to the nation having the largest number of internet users in the world.

Responses from the Chinese public have been both active and passive. Citizens in China with the knowledge of computer networks have found ways to bypass internet censorship. Chinese entrepreneurs, researchers and scholars use V.P.N (virtual private network) services to evade the computerized censors. Journalists from foreign countries who visit China are almost always surprised when they cannot access websites they consider non-controversial. Protests have been occurred numerous times regarding internet censorship. The announcement of the “Green Dam-Youth Escort” software which the Chinese government pushed to be installed on every new computer in China was met with thousands of protestors against this new software. As a result of the protests many Chinese citizens who wrote articles and organized events against the “Green Dam-Youth Escort” program were arrested.

Despite having the most stringent and sophisticated internet censorship in the world, many citizens of China do not realize how much content they have been blocked from and therefore feel that there are no problems with the government censoring their internet. Since many of the citizens in China have never traveled out of their motherland they have never witnessed the websites and information banned from them. The government provides their citizens with substitute websites based on the more popular websites the rest of the world has access to. The most active members against the

ensorship of internet in China are actually people from foreign countries.

Having covered all of the various aspects of Chinese censorship, it is up to us, as human beings, to realize whether or not this is okay or not. Should we deprive the Chinese citizens of the same information that the rest of the world is able to access? Perhaps the Chinese government is correct and other governments should keep information from the public as well. Ethically speaking, there are different sides to the argument which makes deciding who is right and who is wrong very difficult. Ultimately, if we were to allow freedom of information in China, we would have to essentially reform the entire structure of government ran in China which in itself would be a lengthy process.

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