

# THE HIJACKED POTENTIAL OF CHINA'S INTERNET

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Following is a translated excerpt from an updated and expanded version of He Qinglian's groundbreaking study, *Media Control in China*. HRIC will publish a full English translation of the updated edition later this year.

In China, the government had a unique problem: how to keep a billion people from accessing politically sensitive Web sites, now and forever. . . . To force compliance with government objectives—to ensure that all pipes lead back to Rome—they needed the networking superpower, Cisco, to standardize the Chinese Internet and equip it with firewalls on a national scale. According to the Chinese engineer, Cisco came through, developing a router device, integrator, and firewall box specially designed for the government's telecom monopoly.

—Ethan Gutmann: "Who Lost China's Internet"<sup>1</sup>

When the Internet arrived in China in the 1990s, the international community and Chinese advocates of democracy and freedom were full of hope and confidence that it would break government news censorship and promote China's democratization. But cold reality has shattered this myth. The Chinese regime has hijacked the Internet and made a travesty of what ought to have been an engine for social progress.

China's Internet industry has indeed experienced extraordinarily rapid growth, but the Chinese government's technological capabilities to control the Internet have advanced even faster. Assisted by several European and American high-tech companies, the Chinese government initially built a firewall and then spent a huge amount of money on the Golden Shield Project, the world's biggest cyber police force and the largest and most advanced Internet control system. This sophisticated system enables it to defend its autocratic rule very effectively. Experts predict that by 2008, China will have become the world's largest and most intrusive police state.

## The development of the Internet in China

The PRC officially joined the Internet on March 20, 1994. In

June 1995, the Internet was opened to the public. The Internet has developed very rapidly in China over the past few years and is now having a significant and visible impact on the economy, culture, politics and education. According to a survey conducted by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in January 2006, China now has 110 million Internet users and 49.5 million computers with Internet access.<sup>2</sup> In December 2004, the number of domain names and Web sites registered under the domain name ".cn" was 430,000 and 669,000, respectively. China had an international bandwidth capacity measuring 74,429 megabits per second, and almost 59.9 million unique Internet protocol (IP) addresses had been assigned to computers in China.<sup>3</sup>

In purely quantitative terms, the Internet took off in China as rapidly as in most countries. The Chinese government and the Chinese people are proud of the fact that although China arrived at the atomic and electronic ages decades and perhaps even a century too late, it entered the Internet age at almost the same time as America and Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Analyses of China's Internet users reveal the following characteristics:

First, the absolute number of Chinese Internet users is high, but China's 110 million Internet users comprise less than 8.5 percent of the total population of 1.3 billion. In this respect, China lags far behind developed countries, and even behind Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. Hong Kong's 3.3 million Internet users represent 51 percent of the population, while Macau's 201,000 users represent 46 percent of the population. By the end of 2004, there were more than 13 million Internet users in Taiwan, representing 56.52 percent of the island's population.<sup>5</sup>

Second, the Internet has developed in an extremely unbalanced way throughout China. In economically developed cities, the number of Internet users is high, but in underdeveloped areas, it is much lower. This points to regional differences in China, not only in terms of economic development, but also in the spread and availability of information as well as in political development.

Third, because news is censored in China, news outlets are subject to all sorts of restraints and there is a uniform source of news. Apart from a small number of powerfully placed Internet content providers (ICPs) and Internet traditional content

providers (ITCPs), most Web sites and portals that publish news provide little content of their own. That is why the Internet news landscape is shot through with stereotyped, plagiarized and empty political commentary.

Fourth, Chinese Internet users are young, most of them under 35. This factor plays an important role in how online news has been censored. According to communication theorists, a communication medium must reach 20 percent of the population to be considered part of the mass media. For online news to reach 20 percent of the population, there would have to be 260 million Internet users in China.<sup>6</sup> Given China's level of economic development and the rural population's low level of education, this goal will not be attained anytime soon.

## People under 30 do not demand the same types of news as the previous generation; they are mainly interested in entertainment and sports.

The relative youth of Chinese Internet users also determines their political preferences. After the Tiananmen Incident, the Chinese government reverted to the Maoist era ideological strategy of defaming Western democratic values. As a result, the under-30 age group grew up after 1989 on a steady diet of official ideology, propaganda and indoctrination, and now has a seriously distorted view of Western concepts of democracy and freedom. People under 30 do not demand the same types of news as the previous generation; they are mainly interested in entertainment and sports. Some young people post online messages claiming that "As a scientific and technological superpower, America controls the main Web portals and uses them to promote its hegemony." This is by no means a minority view among the young.<sup>7</sup>

Following rapid initial growth, China's Internet industry is now going through a period of restructuring. Most middle-sized and small Web sites are struggling to stay in business, and one after another is closing down. Only a small number of major Web sites are able to survive. For Internet companies operating in a cutthroat business environment, the government's censorship of online news and speech is insult added to injury. To the Chinese government, controlling the Internet is a matter of life and death. Internet censorship may hold back economic growth, but that is a price the regime considers worth paying to protect itself. Economic growth means nothing to the Communist Party if it comes at the price of losing power.

### **Government control of the Internet**

The speed and convenience of the Internet posed a serious challenge to the government. In the first couple of years, it was caught off balance, but it quickly found ways to deal with the Internet. In recent years, the government has spent huge sums buying cutting-edge tools from foreign companies to set up a powerful and unprecedented system to control and monitor the Internet. China's state security agents, charged with managing the system, censor online speech and

have introduced political terror and political violence into cyberspace.

Because the government's propaganda departments lacked personnel with the requisite technical know-how, the state security agencies were given the job of controlling and filtering the Internet. To carry out this task, the Bureau of State Security and the provincial and municipal state security bureaus in 1998 began retiring older personnel and recruiting large numbers of university students and graduate students to man a new cyber police force. Most of the new cyber-police are computer science graduates with computing and Internet skills. The main task of the cyber police is to inspect and control the Internet. They continuously search Web sites and critical nodes within Web sites (particularly online discussion forums) and block or shut them down whenever they come across content the government disapproves of, including potential state secrets, "anti-Party and anti-socialist speech" and criticism of the country's leadership.

The cyber police employ different censoring methods depending on whether Web sites are located in China or abroad, or whether they are owned by a work unit or an individual. When forbidden content appears on a Chinese Web site, the cyber police can quickly ascertain where the site is located and who owns it and send a secret e-mail warning to the site managers instructing them to find out who posted the content. If the warning is not heeded, the police inform the Web site's local public security bureau to send police officers to threaten the culprit. They can also employ technical means to shut down the Web site's host server. When forbidden content appears on a Web site located abroad, Chinese cyber police have no way of blocking its host server, but they can block access to its directory or modify Chinese Web pages linking to it.

In addition to monitoring and controlling online news and speech, the government achieves further control by means of a Web site registration system. Since the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) issued the Provisional Regulations on the Administration of Electronic Publications<sup>8</sup> in 1996, the government has repeatedly revised laws and regulations to tame the "wild horse" that is the Internet.

The first approach was to control domain names. In May 1997, the State Council's Information Office issued a set of Guidelines on Disseminating News Overseas by Means of the Internet,<sup>9</sup> which stipulated, "All news organizations that publish news content on the Internet must go through the Central Committee's foreign news information platform and may not use other channels to access the Internet. Under no circumstances may they access the Internet from overseas."

But the Internet developed so fast that this rule had to be revised soon after it was laid down. In early summer of 2000, the CCP Central Committee convened a meeting to discuss ideological and political work involving the Internet. Soon afterward, *People's Daily* published a column criticizing "the negative influence of the Internet."<sup>10</sup> On November 27, 2000, the *Jiancha Ribao's* (Procuratorate Daily) "Justice" Web page, which is sponsored by the Supreme People's Procuratorate, published an article declaring, "The online media pose a serious challenge to the traditional media's administrative management system. Given the huge impact they have on the nation and on

society, we must not take a laissez-faire attitude to them. We must speed up efforts to formulate policies and draft laws to take control of the online media.”

## “The online media pose a serious challenge to the traditional media’s administrative management system.”

In 2001, the government began drafting the Provisional Regulations on the Administration of Internet Publications (hereafter Internet Publications Regulations), which were put into effect on August 8, 2002.<sup>11</sup> These regulations are mainly aimed at restricting Web sites with a political orientation. Their key provisions are:

- 1) Anyone who wishes to engage in Internet publishing activities must first obtain official approval. No unlicensed organization or individual may engage in Internet publishing activities;
- 2) In addition to complying with the provisions of the Internet Publications Regulations, anyone running an Internet publishing business is required to have a definite scope of publication; articles of association in compliance with laws and regulations; a professional editorial board and editorial staff; and sufficient funds, technical equipment and offices appropriate for a publishing business;
- 3) Pursuant to record-keeping regulations, Internet publishers shall report to the GAPP all selected topics involving national security or social stability;
- 4) Forbidden content for Internet publications includes anything that propagates evil cults (i.e. Falun Gong) or superstitions, contravenes the PRC Constitution, endangers national unity, or involves state secrets and national security;
- 5) Internet publications targeted at minors may not include content that induces them to imitate acts that violate social morals or illegal behavior, or terrifying or cruel content that impairs their physical and mental health;
- 6) Publications with other content are specifically forbidden by laws and regulations;
- 7) Internet publishers shall adopt an editorial responsibility system and appoint special editorial staff to examine and ensure that content to be published on the Internet conforms to the law.

The regulations stipulate a series of punishments for anyone found to have engaged in Internet publishing activities without official approval. Depending on the severity of the violation, the organization or individual may be punished with a warning, an order to halt operations and put themselves in order, an order to close down the Web site, the confiscation of the equipment used in illegal publishing activities and illegal proceeds, or a fine. In addition, the regulations stipulate that anyone engaged in Internet publishing activities has to submit to examination and approval procedures within 60 days of the implementation of the regulations.

The government has so far been largely successful in con-

trolling the Internet. As far as news content is concerned, China’s Internet is not a genuinely international network; it is a domestic network. Chinese people who engage in online discussions and communication are spied on and intimidated by the secret police. There is no freedom to speak of on the Chinese Internet. Internet users who think that employing online pseudonyms will allow them to safely speak their mind misunderstand how the Internet surveillance system works. The Chinese government’s Golden Shield is up and running and allows it to track any Internet poster’s IP address and true identity.

Even these restrictions were not enough to satisfy the government. After an article exposing local misgovernment was posted on the Internet in 2005,<sup>12</sup> the authorities introduced online “public opinion guides,” government officials posing as ordinary citizens while posting messages, monitoring, controlling and influencing discussions on online bulletin boards and forums.<sup>13</sup>

### The psychological Great Wall of China

The Chinese media borrowed the term “self-discipline” from the Hong Kong media after Hong Kong’s reversion to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. The term, which is a euphemism for self-censorship, has since been adopted by government officials and newsmen in mainland China. Because the Chinese media lived under similar political constraints during the Maoist era, the government has had to exert little effort on getting them to practice “self-discipline” once again.

Under severe pressure from the government, Chinese Web sites have erected a psychological Great Wall. They practice self-restraint in a variety of ways:

#### Routine Control

Most Chinese Internet home pages contain similarly phrased rules on “prohibited content subject to deletion” aimed at content deemed to constitute “incitement to subvert state power,” “endangering national security” or “leaking state secrets.” For example, Peking University’s popular Triangle Forum (*Beida Sanjiaodi*), hosted by a computer company owned by the university, lists the following “New Rules on Prohibited Content Subject to Deletion” on its home page:

“We have repeatedly posted our administrative regulations, but most people have not bothered to read them. Consequently, whenever a message is deleted or blocked, there are always public complaints about this Web site. We are now restating our Rules on Prohibited Content Subject to Deletion. From now on, these rules will be implemented without further explanation.

Article 2: Persons who post any of the content listed below shall be removed, have their account terminated or IP address blocked:

- i. Information on the evil Falun Gong cult
- ii. Attacks on our country’s leaders
- iii. Anti-Chinese reports published in the foreign news media
- iv. Defamatory rumors and agitprop

#### Article 3: A Few Points of Explanation

- i. Please read the Rules before registering with the Triangle BBS or posting to it. If you feel that you can only submit posts that fall under sections 1 and 2 or are disappointed with the Triangle bulletin board, you are welcome to go somewhere else.
- ii. This is not an official Peking University Web site. Articles and other postings found here do not represent Peking University. In fact, more than 95 percent of visitors to this site are not affiliated with Peking University. Any praise or criticism should therefore be directed at this Web site and not at Peking University.
- iii. In accordance with relevant PRC laws and regulations, this Web site has the right and the duty to cooperate with relevant government agencies in conducting investigations.
- iv. We reserve the right to close down the Peking University forum and the Triangle BBS without further notice.”<sup>14</sup>

Similar rules are found on the home pages of most Chinese Web sites, including those popular among educated Chinese, such as Century Salon, Tianya Zhisheng (Voice from the Far Corners of the World) and Guxiang (Hometown).

#### Censorship during sensitive periods

The Chinese government becomes jittery whenever there is a major political event, such as the 16th Communist Party Congress. During such periods, Web sites are put under extremely strict control.

A keen observer of the Chinese online media kept a record of public announcements posted on Chinese Internet portals and bulletin boards starting with the opening of the 16th Party Congress on November 8, 2002:

“Administrative announcement from Netease.com concerning the discussion forum during the period of the 16th Party Congress: To improve our administrative work during the period of the 16th Congress, message-posting services will be interrupted on weekdays from 10 P.M. to 9 A.M. and all day on weekends.”

“Wonderful 21st Century Forum (21 Shiji Jingcai Luntan) Announcement: As the 16th Party Congress approaches, everyone is kindly reminded not to post anything illegal! Postings with reactionary or sensitive content are strictly prohibited. Violators will have their ID blocked and, depending on circumstances, may be referred to the public security bureau for prosecution! Everyone is asked to cooperate!”

“Lycos Home Page Service Announcement: To cooperate with the authorities as they deal with harmful Internet content, Lycos plans to clear all harmful content from our free Web pages. While work is carried out from November 7–18, access to the free Web pages will be suspended.”

“Peking University Forum Announcement: temporary suspension of posts for system maintenance!”

“AOL Announcement: Internet closed for system maintenance”

“Intellectual Review/Sinoliberal.com (Sixiang Pinglun Luntan) and Yahoo Hong Kong: The page you wish to visit is currently unavailable. The Web site may be experiencing difficulties or you may need to readjust your browser.”

It is no coincidence that these announcements are almost identical; during periods the Chinese government considers sensitive, Chinese Web sites bend over backwards to cooperate with the government in stepping up its control and surveillance of online discussion forums.

#### Foreign Internet portals in service to the regime

Under pressure from the Chinese government, numerous foreign portals in China are also exercising “self-discipline.” As the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and other newspapers have reported, the American Internet company Yahoo is a classic example of cooperation with the Chinese government. Yahoo has drawn criticism from overseas NGOs such as Human Rights in China and Human Rights Watch for signing an agreement with the Chinese authorities to assist them in investigating Web pages. Yahoo has also agreed not to publish on its China Web pages any content that threatens China’s national security and social stability.<sup>15</sup>

Ethan Gutmann, a computer engineer who worked for a number of years for a Chinese Internet company, argues that the Internet has long since stopped being as free as most people would like to think it is. Gutmann explains:

All Chinese chat rooms or discussion groups have a “big mama,” a supervisor for a team of censors who wipe out politically incorrect comments in real time. Yahoo! handles things differently. If in the midst of a discussion you type, “We should have nationwide multiparty elections in China!!” no one else will react to your comment. How could they? It appears on your screen, but only you and Yahoo!’s big mama actually see your thought crime. After intercepting it and preventing its transmission, Mother Yahoo! then solicitously generates a friendly e-mail suggesting that you cool your rhetoric—censorship, but with a New Age nod to self-esteem.<sup>16</sup>

According to Reporters Without Borders, 45 countries place restrictions on their citizens’ ability to access information on the Internet. On the pretext of defending “national security,” these countries remove content from the Internet, block Web pages and close down Internet cafés. But Yahoo’s participation ensures that the control of the Internet is even more thorough and widespread in China than anywhere else.<sup>17</sup>

In September 2005, the Chinese journalist Shi Tao was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison for “divulging state secrets abroad” based on information provided to the Chinese authorities by Yahoo. The Shi Tao case is not the first time that major foreign Internet companies have collaborated closely with the Chinese authorities. On September 22, 2005,





Policeman inspects a Beijing Internet café closed after 24 people died in a fire at an Internet café in June 2002. Photo: Reuters

dissident writer Zheng Yichun of Liaoning Province was sentenced to seven years in prison on the charge of “incitement of subversion against the state.” A few dozen e-mail messages were cited as evidence against him. Clearly, this was another case in which Internet companies did the authorities a “small service.”

To break into the China market, in the second half of 2004 Google launched a “new Google News China edition” that complies with Chinese government requirements. Google openly acknowledges that its China edition does not provide links to news sources that are blocked by the Chinese government.<sup>18</sup>

#### Self-discipline pledges by ISPs

Chinese Web sites have grown increasingly “self-disciplined” as a result of government pressure. Chinese media report that more and more Internet service providers (ISPs) are signing “self-discipline pledges” (*zìlǚ gōngyuē*) to combat “cyber crime” and guard against “harmful information” and “unhealthy competition.” The official Xinhua News Agency reports that the government plans to prohibit ISPs from disseminating materials that harm “national security and social stability” and “violate the law.” According to an official at the Internet Society of China, on March 16, 2002, China’s ISPs began signing its Public Pledge on Self-Discipline for the Chinese Internet Industry (hereafter Self-Discipline Pledge). ISPs all across China have signed the pledge. In Tianjin City alone, 22 ISPs

have signed the pledge, as have the main ISPs in Guizhou, Fujian, Liaoning and Hubei provinces.

In June 2003, a fire broke out in a Beijing Internet café. The government responded by closing down thousands of Internet cafés, purportedly for safety reasons, and stepped up its monitoring and control of the Internet.<sup>19</sup> In 2003, the Chinese government announced that within three years it would select 10 major culture and telecommunications companies to form a nationwide chain of Internet cafés. Every province was ordered to choose one to three such companies as part of the chain. The nation’s more than 110,000 Internet cafés would thus be consolidated into fewer than 100 cafés under “standardized management,”<sup>20</sup> an official euphemism for controlling free expression on the Internet.

Many foreigners cannot understand why Chinese people would “exercise self-restraint” like obedient children. Nor do they understand the meaning of “self-discipline” as used by the Hong Kong media since 1997. The fact is that self-discipline is a conditioned reflex acquired over the course of countless ideological campaigns. For those who have not lived under the Chinese Communist dictatorship and done some serious soul-searching as a result of engagement with Western culture, it is very difficult to understand how people’s thinking can be domesticated. When an online discussion forum is punished or closed down for publishing comments on a topic the authorities have pronounced taboo, Web site managers and other users direct their criticism not at the government but at

the poster who had the temerity to express a personal opinion.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Chinese government's interference in the Internet**

The Chinese government engages in several forms of interference in the Internet, including firewalls, "rectification," filtering, and using online activity as a weapon against dissidents.

#### **Building the world's biggest firewall**

As Greg Walton has observed, from the first linking of China to the global Internet in 1994, central authorities have consistently sought to control China's Internet connections. Heavily restricting international connectivity was a key principle in China's nascent Internet security strategy. To this day, international connections for all five of China's major networks still pass through proxy servers at official international "gateways." Filtering and monitoring of network traffic is still focused at this level. The international community therefore derisively terms the Chinese government's monitoring and filtering system "The Great Firewall."<sup>22</sup>

The Chinese government has set up filters in Internet portals designed to filter out "sensitive" keywords it considers illegal. Blacklisted keywords include "democracy," "human rights," "freedom," "64" (for June 4, the Tiananmen Incident), and "dafa" and "disciple" (terms associated with the prohibited Falun Gong movement). Texts in which the proper names of Chinese Communist Party leaders appear in disrespectful contexts are also deleted.

Because government filtering is increasingly rigorous, many Chinese people find they have to substitute sensitive keywords with XX to ensure that their e-mail messages get through. For example, "XXfall" replaces "freefall," and the year 1964 is written 19XX. When Chinese Internet users began to complain that the government was blacklisting too many keywords, online discussion forum managers decided to put a stop to such discussions by including the string "illegal keywords" in their blacklist, with the result that even the expression "illegal keyword" is now filtered in online communications.

### **The Western trade journal *SecurityWorld* predicts a 20 percent annual increase over the next few years in the Chinese government's expenditure on control of the Internet.**

The Western trade journal *SecurityWorld* predicts a 20 percent annual increase over the next few years in China's expenditure on "security," a roundabout term for the Chinese government's control of the Internet. The goal of "security" is to intimidate and systematically monitor the Chinese people, restrict human rights and prevent dissemination of the concepts of freedom and democracy. China is expected to become the second largest security market after the United States within a decade. One of the biggest customers of international companies that sell

security products is the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee's Commission for the Comprehensive Management of Social Security, which coordinates control of uprisings among workers and farmers and spying against dissidents and independent intellectuals.<sup>23</sup>

Foreign journalists began taking note of China's control of the Internet in October 2001, when attendees of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Shanghai found that numerous international Web sites were being blocked at the forum's computer center. One reporter from Voice of America said he was unable to access his own site, and foreign journalists quoted by the BBC reported blocked access to the Web pages of several Taiwanese and foreign Western media outlets, including Voice of America, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.

When Zhang Qiyue, a Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman assigned to the APEC forum, announced that the Chinese government would hold a press conference on the Internet and regional economic development, a foreign journalist asked her why numerous Web sites were being blocked. After an initial "no comment," Zhang suggested, "Maybe there is some problem with online communications," eliciting derisive laughter from the assembled foreign journalists. She added that it is "natural for any government to take measures to keep a firewall on the Internet," and insisted that along with its many benefits, the Internet is also a vehicle for bad influences.<sup>24</sup>

#### **"Rectifying" domestic Web sites**

The Chinese government has closed down Web sites incessantly since China joined the Internet. After the July 1, 2001 celebrations to mark the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, the government declared that China needed a "good public opinion environment" and stepped up its efforts to "rectify" online news activity. A Xinhua News Agency report from December 2001 quoted Li Rongrong, Minister for the State Economic and Trade Commission, as saying that in the previous six months more than 45,000 Internet cafés had been inspected, 12,000 temporarily closed and more than 3,300 permanently closed.<sup>25</sup>

These are a few of the Web sites that have been shut down in China:

- *Sixiang de Jingjie* (Frontiers of Thought) was a Web site created by Li Yonggang, a young lecturer at Nanjing University's Department of Political Science and Administration. Dedicated to major issues of academic debate, it was very popular among intellectuals. Previous suspensions of the Web site had caused a stir among foreign readers and been reported by the foreign media. But foreign support only prompted the Nanjing state security bureau to shut down Li's Web site for good. To quell international criticism, the authorities forced Li to issue a statement that he had closed the Web site of his own free will.
- *Southern Weekend's Zhoumo Luntan* (Weekend Forum): After *Southern Weekend* was purged in May 2001, much criticism about the government's actions was voiced on Weekend Forum. The Web site was suddenly shut down on June 18.
- *Xici Hutong* (Western Temple Alley) was China's most popular

online bulletin board. In June 2001, it was announced that the bulletin board was “stopping operation for one week.” Then the *Minzhu he Renquan* (Democracy and Human Rights) forum, which was operated by the *Xici Hutong* BBS, was shut down. Both sites were closed shortly afterward and have not opened since.

- Soim.com’s *Remen Huati* (Hot Topics): This e-zine started publication on November 27, 1997 and grew very popular, with more than 230,000–250,000 e-mail subscribers. On June 18, 2001, after its 800th issue, the announcement came that *Hot Topics* was ceasing publication. In a farewell letter to his readers, the editor was unable to contain his indignation: “Much of what we said was like a fishbone in their throat; they were not content until they got rid of it. . . .”<sup>26</sup>

The government has shut down many other Web sites, including the *Bumei Luntan* (Sleepless Nights) and *Tianya Zongheng* (Across the World) forums. These Web sites issued statements when they were closed, but many others remained silent. A small number of farewell statements expressed indignation. Others declared that they were folding for “personal reasons” and only hinted at what had really happened. When traditional print media are purged for political reasons, only journalists find out about it, but by censoring the Internet and closing down Web sites, the Chinese Communist government has unwittingly publicized its loathsome efforts to muzzle the media.

China’s Internet censors and opponents are embroiled in a fierce struggle. Although the government continuously blocks Web sites, there are always more people prepared to open new ones to discuss the prospects for democracy in China. Some of these Web sites have been quite influential, including Qiu Feng’s *Sixiang Pinglun* (Commentary on Ideas), Yang Zhizhu’s *Xue er Si* (Study and Thought), *Chunlei Xingdong* (Operation Spring Buds) produced by Wen Kejian and others, and *Xiangzheng Lunheng* (Disquisitions on Constitutional Government Weighed in the Balance) produced by Wang Yi and others. Before October 2003, when the government closed these Web sites, their moderators and editors looked for every opportunity to start up again. Some Web sites, such as *Minzhu yu Ziyou* (Democracy and Freedom), were closed almost 30 times. But after October 2003, the authorities closed down almost all of these Web sites for good.

## Some Internet forum moderators have paid dearly for their struggle for freedom of speech.

Some moderators have paid dearly for their struggle for freedom of speech. For example, five well-known moderators for the Democracy and Freedom forum were arrested, among them the 22-year-old Beijing Normal University student Liu Di known by her Internet pseudonym “Stainless Steel Rat.” Another moderator was fired from his job, and another received a visit from public security agents who ransacked his home and confiscated his computer and other equipment and

materials. Two others were summoned for interrogation by the police.<sup>27</sup>

Before 2005, the Chinese government mainly censored Web sites dedicated to intellectual and cultural debate. University Web sites initially escaped closure because the government still wanted to hoodwink the outside world into believing that China’s universities were a cradle of democratic culture, but since 2004, even university Web sites have been subjected to increasing restrictions. The first sign of trouble was the closure of Peking University’s *Yita Hutu* (“A Big Fat Mess”) BBS on September 13, 2004. Some professors protested, but their appeals were like stones dropped into the sea.

In March 2005, the PRC’s Ministry of Information Industry issued a set of Measures on the Administration of Record-keeping on Non-commercial Internet Information Services,<sup>28</sup> which enabled the government to investigate Web sites of all sizes and required anyone who planned to provide “noncommercial Internet information services” to fill out and submit a “Registration Form for Record-keeping Purposes” to the authorities by April 15. The first result of this purge was that university bulletin boards were either closed or blocked to external access.

Some universities decided that students could only post to the BBS under their registered name and student number. Consequently, in March 2005, Tsinghua University’s *Shuimu Qinghua* BBS, Nanjing University’s *Xiaobaihe* BBS, Fudan University’s *Riyue Guanghua* BBS, Nankai University’s *Wo Ai Nankai* Web site and Wuhan University’s *Baiyun Huanghe* Web site became read-only sites. People with university e-mail accounts were no longer allowed to post messages and IPs outside the university were not allowed access. The managers of Tsinghua University’s *Shuimu Qinghua* BBS posted a notice stating, “We took the decision in accordance with a decision made by the Department of Education.” Wuhan and Nankai universities stated, “This BBS is a platform for communication within the university; it is not open to anyone outside the university.”<sup>29</sup>

At one stroke, the Chinese government flushed out the last relatively uncensored corner of the Internet in China. In the past two years, since the launch of the Golden Shield project, many Chinese Web sites dedicated to intellectual and cultural debate have been shut down.<sup>30</sup> Traces of debate about politically sensitive questions and popular culture are still found in a small number of university Web sites, discussion zones and bulletin boards. Although users know that whatever they write can be deleted as soon as they post it, they can at least deploy guerilla tactics to play a game of cat-and-mouse with the cyber police.

In recent years numerous human rights cases have been brought to light through the Internet. It was only after Internet reports on the cases of Sun Zhigang,<sup>31</sup> the Harbin BMW accident<sup>32</sup> and Li Siyi<sup>33</sup> ignited storms of popular protest that the government was forced to take action. The Internet era opened up a new arena for public debate in China, but the closure of University Web sites has substantially reduced it again.

### Filtering overseas Web sites

Jiang Mianheng, son of former PRC President Jiang Zemin and

vice president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, declared at a conference in Shanghai, "China needs to build a national Internet network that is separate from the World Wide Web." This dream has been realized.

The "Empirical Analysis of Internet Filtering in China," conducted in 2002 by Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet & Society, revealed that of the 204,012 distinct Web sites that were requested, more than 50,000 were inaccessible from at least one point in China on at least one occasion.<sup>34</sup> Adopting a more conservative standard for determining which inaccessible sites were intentionally blocked and which were unreachable solely due to temporary glitches, the Berkman Center researchers found that 18,931 sites were inaccessible from at least two distinct proxy servers within China on at least two distinct days. Ben Edelman, a researcher at the Berkman Center, told a Voice of America journalist that in all probability 10 percent of content was being filtered by the Chinese authorities, though the precise figure was impossible to determine. The Berkman Center study, which was more extensive than many similar previous studies, concluded "that China does indeed block a range of web content beyond that which is sexually explicit. For example, we found blocking of thousands of sites offering information about news, health, education, and entertainment, as well as some 3,284 sites from Taiwan."

The following types of Web sites are blocked or filtered in China:

- Human rights and dissident Web sites, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights in China, as well as dozens of Falun Gong sites.
- News sites: BBC News Online is always blocked; the CNN and Time Magazine Web sites are sometimes blocked; the American PBS (Public Broadcasting Service), the *Miami Herald* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* are also often blocked. Other sites blocked by the Chinese authorities include the US broadcasters ABC and CBS, the Alta Vista search engine and several American universities.
- Public health sites, including the AIDS Healthcare Foundation and the Internet Mental Health Web sites.
- Web sites related to Taiwan and Tibet.
- Religious Web sites, including the Atheist Network, the Catholic Civil Rights League, the Asian American Baptist Caucus and numerous Web sites dedicated to *feng shui*.

Of Google's list of the world's 100 most popular news sites, 42 are blocked by the Chinese government. Experts note that the Chinese authorities continuously update their blacklist. Even usually accessible Web sites are blocked whenever they publish sensitive content.

According to the authors of the Berkman Center study, the Chinese government now uses at least four distinct and independently operable methods of Internet filtering, with a documentable leap in filtering sophistication after September 2002. Jonathan Zittrain and Benjamin Edelman report, "There is some evidence that the government has attempted to prevent the spread of unwanted material by preventing the spread of the Internet itself, but a concomitant desire to capture the economic benefits of networked computing has led to a variety of

strategies to split the difference. For example, the government might encourage Internet access through cybercafes rather than in private spaces so that customers' surfing can be physically monitored by others in the cafe."<sup>35</sup>

Google has become a target of censorship because its powerful search capabilities give Chinese people access to foreign online news that the Chinese government considers reactionary and harmful.

The international community was shocked when the Chinese government blocked access to the widely-used Google search engine from late August to early September 2002. Google had become increasingly popular among Chinese Web surfers because its ability to search in a variety of languages and scripts, including the simplified Chinese characters used in the PRC. Search engines such as Google are not news media outlets and do not represent any particular political, cultural, moral or legal standpoint. Their business is merely to offer information search services, and ordinary Chinese people find that foreign search engines meet fundamental needs in their life and work. But Google has become a target of censorship precisely because its powerful search and navigation capabilities give Chinese people access to foreign online news that the Chinese government considers reactionary and harmful.

An article posted by an unidentified person on the NetEase.com ([www.163.com](http://www.163.com)) portal reveals that in order to pass official censorship, Chinese ISPs that offer information search services must filter their search results. The article can be summed up as follows: "Chinese Yahoo, which uses Google search services, has repeatedly published a liability disclaimer for Google search results. Clearly, Yahoo is aware that if it wants to continue providing such services in China it must comply with local laws. But considered from another angle, can Yahoo comply with local laws and relinquish its own responsibility? . . . Many other countries besides China practice strict surveillance and control."<sup>36</sup>

This article argues that search service providers ought to exercise "self-discipline," and that China's restrictions on Google are no different from those imposed by many other countries; in other words, that China is merely monitoring and controlling harmful information. But it is common knowledge that although the Chinese government claims to inspect and control political and sexually explicit content, its only real target is political information it considers "harmful to national security." The government blocks sexual content as an excuse to go after its real target. Lumping together sexually explicit material and political information also enables the authorities to give ordinary people a bad image of political news. That is why Google's powerful search and navigation services and Chinese-language pages are often blocked in China,<sup>37</sup> and why the keyword search, cache and spider functions on Google's Chinese-language pages are censored with sophisticated filtering technologies.<sup>38</sup>



### The Internet as a weapon against dissidents

To further tighten its control of Chinese Web surfers, the Chinese government has introduced a system of electronic access cards in Internet cafés. In Jiangxi, the first province to introduce the system, all Internet cafés now have computers equipped with card readers. The system requires users to swipe their card, which transmits personal information about them to a provincial public security bureau database. To go online, they must first secure access from a police Internet monitor by means of an IP tunnel. On September 1, 2001, the Jiangxi Province Public Security Bureau issued an order prohibiting Internet cafés from admitting customers without a personal access card. The system enables the Chinese government not only to censor speech on the Internet but also to determine the identity of anyone who posts something online.<sup>39</sup> By the first half of 2003, an ID card system was introduced in Internet cafés throughout China. Whenever Internet café customers go online, the cyber police can monitor what sites they visit and what they write. Anyone who commits an “unlawful act” (in most cases speech critical of the government) is severely punished.

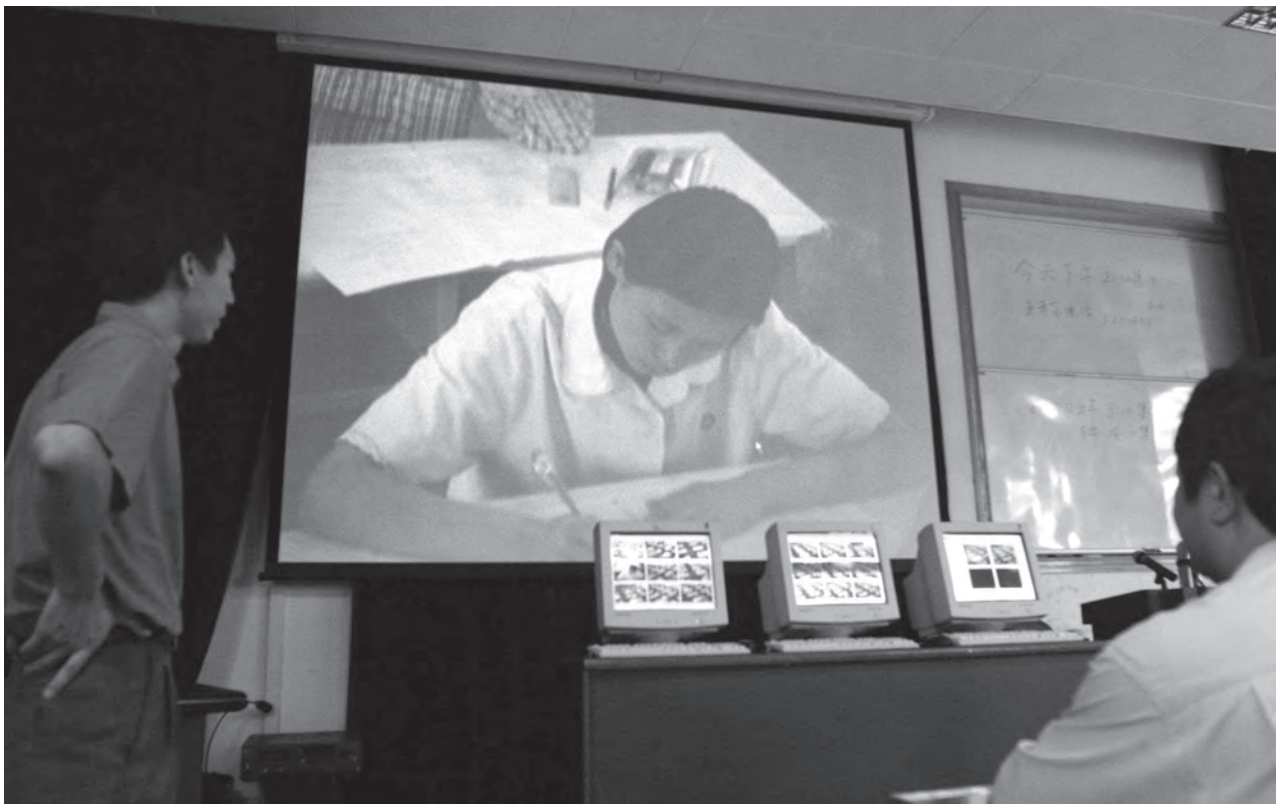
Such punishments were already being meted out before the online registration system was introduced. The Xinhua News Agency announced in January 2001 that using a computer network or other means to engage in “espionage,” including “stealing, revealing, buying or publicizing state secrets,” was punishable by death or a prison sentence ranging from 10 years to life.

Chinese people had high hopes that 16th Communist Party Congress in 2002 would produce a new generation of leaders

who would carry out political reform. But since then, the government has only tightened its control of the Internet and relied on its monitoring of the Internet to arrest even more “dissidents.” In fact, many of the people the Chinese government considers dissidents have neither advocated political positions nor been involved in political activities; many have merely expressed some criticism of the government online.

On November 7, 2002 (the day before the opening of the 16th Party Congress), the government arrested Liu Di, a senior psychology student at Beijing Normal University known by her Internet pseudonym “Stainless Steel Rat.”<sup>40</sup> Li Yibin, publisher of the online “Democracy and Freedom” magazine under the pseudonyms “Yangchun Baixue” (“Spring Snow”) and “Yangchun” (“Springtime”), was arrested at the same time as Liu Di.<sup>41</sup> Wu Yiran, a student at Shanghai’s Jiaotong University, was also arrested and indicted with them.

According to a friend of Liu Di’s who wishes to remain unnamed, Liu was probably arrested because she shared a meal with a labor activist from the northeast whom she met chatting online. Liu Di was an ordinary young woman who liked to study, express her thoughts in writing and share them with anyone who was interested. She never took part in political activities. Thirty days after the Beijing police arrested her, she was formally charged with “threatening state security.” On December 25, 2003, after more than a year of international calls for their release, the Second Branch of the Beijing Prosecutors Office informed Liu Di, Wu Yiran and Li Yibin that the charges against them had been dropped in accordance with Article 142, Paragraph 2 of the Criminal Procedure Law of the



Surveillance technologies can catch students cheating, but also more innocuous activities. Photo: Associated Press

PRC because their “crimes were minor.”<sup>42</sup> Wu Yiran refused to accept this judgment, maintaining that they were not guilty of any crime.

Another innocent arrestee was not so fortunate. After Li Zhi posted an article exposing corrupt local officials, the Dazhou Intermediate People’s Court in Sichuan Province sentenced him to eight years in prison for “incitement to subvert state power.”<sup>43</sup>

In China, even minors can be arrested for expressing their opinions online. In July 2003, a 15-year-old Sichuanese girl named Wang posted an online message listing 50 ways in which a “certain organization” and “certain people” were worse than prostitutes. Her post reflects how most ordinary Chinese feel people about corrupt Communist officials. The following is a brief excerpt:

Prostitutes trust their customers, unlike certain people who lie to hold on to power. Prostitutes’ price lists are reliable, but many laws are not worth the paper they are written on. Prostitutes don’t erect memorial arches to advertise themselves, unlike certain people who control the media to make themselves look good. Prostitutes have to please their customers to earn their living, unlike certain people who remain in power by bullying and oppressing ordinary folk. Prostitutes know that they won’t live forever, unlike certain organizations that think they will. Prostitutes allow others to disagree with them, but certain organizations arrest those who oppose them. Prostitutes sometimes put their past behind them and get married, but certain organizations never admit their mistakes or surrender power. Prostitutes don’t presume to represent other people’s interests, unlike certain organizations that profess to represent everybody’s interests. If you don’t like a prostitute you can simply avoid her, unlike certain organizations which you can’t avoid no matter how much you dislike them . . .

This text was removed by the cyber police as soon as it was posted. The girl who wrote it was arrested shortly thereafter.<sup>44</sup>

The list is growing. According to Human Rights in China, by October 2003 at least 69 journalists and dissidents had been detained or imprisoned for publishing or distributing essays on the Internet. Most were convicted of “incitement to subvert the state,” “endangering national security” or “leaking state secrets.” These arrests and heavy sentences were aimed at intimidating other cyber dissidents into silence.<sup>45</sup> The arrest of Zhao Yan, Liu Shui and more than eight other journalists in 2004 has earned China a reputation as the world’s biggest prison for authors and journalists.<sup>46</sup>

### China’s “Big Brother”: The Golden Shield

Chairman Mao knew the utility of briefly loosening controls to create a dragnet. In effect, the current Chinese leadership promoted a “hundred flowers” period of relative Internet freedom—again, not to capture terrorists, but to expose anyone who disagreed with the legitimacy of their rule and to attract massive Western investment. American technologies of surveillance, encryption, firewalls, and viruses have now been transferred to Chinese partners—and might even one day be turned against our own ludicrously open

Internet. We funded, built, and pushed into China what we thought was a Trojan Horse, but we forgot to build the hatch.

—Ethan Gutmann, “Who Lost China’s Internet?”<sup>47</sup>

George Orwell’s 1984, based on Soviet totalitarianism, is set in a country where citizens are constantly monitored by Big Brother. The most terrifying aspect of life in 1984 is how little it takes for citizens to be accused of “thought crimes” by the Thought Police lurking in every nook and corner.

The Chinese government is currently establishing Big Brother in the form of the Golden Shield Project. Technological innovation is not one of China’s strengths, and the Chinese government wants to gain all-encompassing control of society but lacks the technological capacity to do so. For that reason, it has turned for help to a number of prominent Western high-tech corporations, who for the right price have actively helped the Chinese regime set up an infamous system of surveillance and control.

On September 3, 2003, CCTV’s evening news reported that the Golden Shield project was already underway and that Huang Ju, member of the Central Committee’s Politburo, had been put in charge of the project and was its chief technical expert.<sup>48</sup>

The Chinese government has declared that the Golden Shield project is an information system designed for use by the public security system. The vast majority of Chinese people do not understand the first thing about this project or how it relates to their everyday lives. But as early as 2001, Greg Walton, a freelance researcher working with several foreign experts, published a detailed report on the project’s implications for freedom and human rights: *China’s Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People’s Republic of China*.<sup>49</sup>

Before continuing with a discussion of the Golden Shield project, it is worth citing an anecdote former First Lady Hillary Clinton recounts in her autobiography, *Living History*. Although a translation of *Living History* was published in China, this incident, which occurred in 1985 while Clinton was attending the United Nations’ Fourth World Women’s Conference in Beijing, was expurgated:

While the Chinese officials would try to control what their citizens heard, they kept themselves surprisingly well-informed, as I learned when we retreated to the hotel to relax for a few hours after the speech. I hadn’t seen a newspaper since leaving Hawaii and casually mentioned to my aides that it would be nice to get a copy of the *International Herald Tribune*. Within minutes, we heard a thump against the door to my room. The *Tribune* had arrived, as if on cue. But we had no idea who heard that I wanted it or who had delivered it.<sup>50</sup>

Hillary Clinton saw black humor in this anecdote, but behind it lies China’s harsh social reality. China claims to be reforming and opening up to the world, but it is still a police state under the tight grip of military and police agents. Important Western guests (including foreign journalists who have been critical of

the Chinese government), anyone considered a dissident and critical intellectuals are invariably spied on or harassed. The Chinese government is exceedingly corrupt, incompetent, inefficient and irresponsible, with the exception of its security agencies, which have always been highly efficient.

#### Technology's unholy alliance

The unholy business alliance between foreign corporations and the Chinese government was first exposed by foreign experts who participated in the establishment of the Internet in China. For this reason alone, their articles are very important documents. The first is Greg Walton's report *China's Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People's Republic of China*.<sup>51</sup> The second is Ethan Gutmann's article "Who Lost China's Internet?"<sup>52</sup>

To get a piece of the China market, many multinational corporations have broken their early promises to use their business ties with China to promote democratization. In fact, as Gutmann reports, Microsoft is the only foreign corporation to have refused one of the Chinese government's shameless requests: "When Chinese authorities ordered Microsoft to surrender its software's underlying source codes, the keys to encryption, as the price of doing business there, Microsoft chose to fight, spearheading an unprecedented Beijing-based coalition of American, Japanese, and European Chambers of Commerce. Faced with being left behind technologically, the Chinese authorities dropped their demands."<sup>53</sup> But soon afterward Microsoft became concerned that it would fall behind its competition, and it began to collaborate closely with the Chinese government.

Gutmann explains how it all began:

Theoretically, China's desire to be part of the Internet should have given the capitalists who wired it similar leverage. Instead, the leverage all seems to have remained with the government, as Western companies fell all over themselves bidding for its favor. AOL, Netscape Communications and Sun Microsystems all helped disseminate government propaganda by backing China Internet Corp., an arm of the state-run Xinhua news agency. Not to be outdone, Sparkice, a Canadian Internet colossus, splashily announced that it would serve up only state-sanctioned news on its Web site. Nortel provides wraparound software for voice and closed-circuit camera recognition, technology that the Public Security Bureau has already put to good use, according to the Chinese press. . . . China Telecom is considering purchasing software from iCognito, an Israeli company that invented a program called "artificial content recognition," which surfs along just ahead of you, learning as it censors in real time. It was built to filter "gambling, shopping, job search, pornography, stock quotes, or other non-business material," but the first question from the Chinese buyers is invariably: Can it stop Falun Gong?<sup>54</sup>

James Mulvenon of RAND Corporation reveals that "Network Associates (better known as the producers of McAfee

AntiVirus), Symantec (Norton AntiVirus) and Trend Micro of Tokyo gained entry to the Chinese market by helpfully donating 300 live computer viruses to the Public Security Bureau."<sup>55</sup> According to a RAND report, there is evidence that the Chinese government has not only used the Internet to spread political propaganda, but also to criticize dissidents, to flood and disable their e-mail inboxes by means of massive spam attacks and to cripple Web sites and personal Web pages with viruses.<sup>56</sup> The Chinese government has bought all these advanced technologies from prominent Western corporations. One statistic speaks volumes: China accounts for about 25 percent of the world's market for telecommunications equipment and is expanding exponentially. Much of this growth is achieved through the Chinese government's purchase of equipment to build its "security system."<sup>57</sup>

### The Ministry of Public Security has been involved in creating fake proxy servers to conduct surveillance of surfers who try to circumvent official firewalls.

In May 2005, the Ministry of Public Security required Chinese Internet service providers to install two "black boxes"—monitoring devices dedicated to tracking the content and activity of individual e-mail accounts. Chinese authorities are also working with technology experts at Shenzhen University to develop an e-mail filtration system that is able to detect and delete "unwanted" e-mails without the recipient's knowledge or consent. The Ministry of Public Security has also been involved in creating fake proxy servers to conduct surveillance of surfers who try to circumvent official firewalls.<sup>58</sup>

Numerous multinational telecommunications giants, including US-based Lucent, Motorola, Cisco Systems and Sun Microsystems, Germany-based Siemens, and Canada-based Bell Northern Research (BNR) and Nortel Networks, have cooperated with the Chinese government in introducing these technologies to China, with Cisco Systems providing a large proportion of the routers and firewalls in China's network.<sup>59</sup> These companies know full well that the technology they provide is not aimed at "improving the quality of people's work and lives,"<sup>60</sup> but rather at spying on, wiretapping and monitoring online communications, and that it violates the fundamental human rights of Chinese people. Playing deaf and dumb, some companies argue, "If we don't do business with China, companies from other countries will!"

The Chinese government's "Great Firewall" is not completely invulnerable. Gutmann describes technologies such as Triangle Boy, developed by Stephen Hsu of the University of Oregon, that exploit vulnerabilities in China's censorship through a constantly shifting fleet of proxy servers. But Gutmann adds, "As surely as Triangle Boy works to liberate the surfing Chinese masses, you can bet State Security is looking for a way to pounce on this latest proxy rebellion. The simplest one will be to enlist American companies, still eager to curry favor in Beijing, and get them to develop software allowing the

Public Security Bureau to sniff out and block proxies as quickly as they are created.”<sup>61</sup>

Without the enthusiastic cooperation of foreign companies, the Chinese government would lack the advanced technology it now recognized can help it maintain autocratic power more effectively.

### The Golden Shield

How far is China from modern democracy? Any freedom-loving person who reads the reports about the Golden Shield project cannot but be filled with apprehension.

At the South China Information Technology Exhibition in June 2002, Qu Yanwen, director of the Center for the State Information Security and Computer Examination, declared that the Ministry of Public Security was setting up a nationwide public information network security monitoring system. The system will monitor information on the Internet, locate foreign Web sites that require filtering, block content deemed to be harmful to China, and monitor, investigate and collect evidence on criminal behavior.<sup>62</sup> This is in fact the Golden Shield project the international community expects to be completed by 2008. But the Chinese government declared as early as September 2003 that the project was already partially underway. Judging by its function, the Golden Shield project is gradually shifting the focus from a “Great Firewall” strategy to a new high-tech surveillance and control system.<sup>63</sup>

Walton reports that at Security China 2000, a trade show held in Beijing, the biggest international names in Web technology peddled their wares to China’s secret police and security officials.<sup>64</sup> Although these companies proudly proclaim their attachment to the Internet’s reputation for anarchy, a large proportion of the \$20 billion worth of telecom equipment they sell to China every year is bought by the Chinese government to monitor and control the Chinese public.

What does the Golden Shield project consist of? The Golden Shield is part database and part surveillance network. Walton explains that basic work on the project was completed by 2001. China security’s agencies began to buy highly complex surveillance technology from Western corporations, with the ultimate aim of integrating a gigantic online database with an all-encompassing surveillance network—incorporating speech and face recognition, closed-circuit television, smart cards, credit records and Internet surveillance technologies. The Chinese government envisions the Golden Shield as a database-driven remote surveillance system, offering immediate access to national and local records on every citizen in China, while linking to vast networks of cameras designed to increase police efficiency.<sup>65</sup>

As Walton explains, “The success of the Golden Shield project depends on a wide range of advanced technologies. While Chinese research is advancing rapidly in these areas and other related fields, Chinese scientists have developed none of the components necessary to implement Golden Shield independently. In each case, they have relied on assistance from Western corporations, either by purchasing components as turnkey solutions, or through technology transfer—either through for-

mal business deals or in exchange for greater market access.”<sup>66</sup> Of course, they also work through illegal channels.

Technology allows the network to “hear”—to automatically monitor telephone conversations, searching for key words and phrases, for example—through speech signal processing. Similarly, video signal processing lies behind a surveillance camera’s ability to “see,” that is, to recognize individual faces in a crowd of people.<sup>67</sup> According to Walton, one of the goals of the Golden Shield project is to integrate CCTV surveillance networks into the urban environment.<sup>68</sup>

When they entered the China market, foreign corporations declared that “technological innovation works in favor of freedom and democracy.” The irony is that the Chinese government uses these sophisticated technologies for the opposite goal: to step up its repression of Chinese citizens in general and of freedom and democracy advocates in particular.

In Orwell’s 1984, the state deprives citizens of their dignity as individuals and controls every aspect of their lives, but it relies largely on relatively primitive technology to exercise control. Once the Golden Shield project is completed, Chinese people will live in the world’s biggest police state—founded on the latest technological tools. The myth that the Internet will promote the free exchange of information and democratization in China flies in the face of reality. Ethan Gutmann concludes:

As the father of the Chinese Internet Michael Robinson notes, “In the Chinese Internet’s infancy, the first three sites that the government blocked were two anti-government sites—and one Maoist site. What threatens them? . . . The heartland.” Ultimately, it won’t be the intellectuals who are key to bringing democracy to China. Irate overtaxed peasants with Internet-enabled cell phones ten years from now are the real target market. And those whose dream is democracy in China are operating with diminishing points of entry. The American business presence in China is deeply, perhaps fatally, compromised as an agent for liberalizing change.<sup>69</sup>

### A bogus Internet survey

In September 2003, the Research Center for Social Development of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences released a report entitled *Surveying Internet Usage and Impact in Twelve Chinese Cities*.<sup>70</sup> The report claims that a big increase in Internet usage and competition among Internet providers has already promoted economic growth in China. But the report reaches two contradictory conclusions: on the one hand it claims that most people agree that the Internet will provide them more opportunities to express their views and criticize government policies; on the other hand it claims that most people think that the government ought to strengthen its control and management of the Internet.

To understand to what degree this report and the survey on which it is based reflect the real thinking of Chinese Internet users, it is necessary to understand under what circumstances such surveys are conducted.

This study was conducted in collaboration with the World Internet Project initiated by UCLA and funded by the U.S.-





**Chinese authorities are investing big money in security. Photo: Associated Press**

based Markle Foundation. UCLA's Center for Communication Policy launched the World Internet Project in 1999 with the goal of assessing the social impact of the Internet based on questionnaire surveys. There were two reasons why the World Internet Project had to commission the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Research Center for Social Development to conduct this survey: First, the Detailed Rules and Regulations on the Implementation of the Statistics Law of the People's Republic of China<sup>71</sup> and the Interim Measures for Administration of Foreign-Related Social Survey Activities<sup>72</sup> stipulate that foreign groups or individuals may not conduct independent statistical research within China, but must entrust officially approved Chinese organizations with this task. Second, all collected data must be examined and approved by Chinese government agencies before they can be delivered to foreign organizations.

The Chinese investigators acknowledge that their survey was conducted "with the support of the China State Information Office and the solicitude of leaders from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences." Data for the survey were collected in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Changsha from late 2000 to early 2001; the results were released in May 2001. The goal of this several-year-long study was to understand the demographic distribution, usage, changes and special characteristics

of Chinese Internet users, and to ascertain the utility of the Internet for China's mass media as well as its impact on interpersonal communications and personal and social openness. The report also put forward a series of policy proposals to develop and manage the Internet in China.

**The report ignores the fact that the Chinese government censors Internet speech and has spent huge sums of money on controlling the Internet.**

It is rather pointless to discuss the reliability of surveys conducted under the strict control and supervision of the Chinese government. As we say in Chinese, a nightingale caught in a cat's claws cannot sing beautiful songs. Here I will merely point out some of the flaws in this particular report.

To begin with, the report ignores the fact that the Chinese government censors Internet speech and has spent huge sums of money on the Golden Shield project to control the Internet. The report also fails to note that 30,000 cyber police are monitoring Internet activity every day, and that they continuously filter and block "sensitive" Web sites. The report actually pro-

vides theoretical support for increased government censorship. When asked whether they thought the “Internet should be managed or controlled,” 50.9 percent of interviewees believed it was “very necessary” to do so, and 36.2 percent felt it was “somewhat necessary”—i.e., nearly 90 percent of the interviewees believed at least some control and management of the Internet was necessary. Compared with data gathered in the same localities in 2001, this survey found a dramatic increase in the number of people who wanted some control and management of the Internet.<sup>73</sup>

The authors make two points: first, Chinese citizens want the government to control the Internet; and second, there is not enough control. In view of the reality on the ground in China, this conclusion is utterly absurd. This investigation confirms once again that the job of scholars in the pay of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is to justify and legitimize government policies.

As for the people in charge of UCLA’s World Internet Project, they have simply fallen for the Chinese government’s long-standing scam of “using Western money to handle Chinese affairs.” If the people who commissioned this report trust its findings, their analysis of the political impact of the Internet on China will be very far removed from reality.

The government’s control of the Internet is an insult to the intelligence of ordinary Chinese citizens, many of whom have been protesting this control for years through one petition after another. The writer Yu Shicun has written an essay entitled “Hominid Children in the Morning Light,” satirizing the fact that the Chinese government treats Chinese citizens as if they were feeble-minded.<sup>74</sup>

Faced with strict filtering by the cyber police, Chinese people sitting in front of their computer monitors have no freedom to write or even to read what they want. They have been reduced to a sub-human state. . . . The invention and the use of writing is what separates human beings from animals. Yet in the 21st century, while the rest of the world has entered the Internet age, in China, which boasts 5,000 years of civilized history, people are still living like slaves in pre-civilized times.<sup>75</sup>

#### The official double standard

What fills Chinese people with indignation is that while the government bans all debate about freedom and democracy it concurrently permits all sorts of degeneracy.

I once set my anti-virus software to block access to “sex” sites, but I quickly realized that this was not practical, because it also blocked access to all sorts of other Web sites in China, including numerous provincial Party newspapers.

In November 2003, a magazine columnist named Mu Zimei started an online diary revealing details of her sexual exploits. Her diary became a hot Internet destination, and it was much commented on in overseas Chinese-language Web sites, including many in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan. Having read a number of reviews of Mu Zimei’s writings, I cannot help but feel that the Chinese government has flung open the doors to pornography and licentiousness.

This tolerance contrasts markedly with the long and growing list of Chinese citizens have been imprisoned for discussing democratic politics online. There is a clear method to the authorities’ inconsistent policies, which exposes the ideological strategy the regime has pursued since the 1990s: it wages a propaganda campaign to prevent Chinese citizens from learning about the concepts of freedom and democracy and censors the media and the Internet while at the same time allowing people to indulge in material excess and pornography.

On August 1, 2002, the Chinese government promulgated the Provisional Regulations on the Administration of Internet Publications,<sup>76</sup> which banned the following content from the Internet:

*Internet publications shall not publish the following contents: content that opposes the basic principles determined by the Constitution; content that threatens national unity and sovereignty and territorial integrity; content that divulges state secrets, threatens national security, or damages the reputation and interests of the state; content that incites ethnic hostilities and ethnic discrimination, jeopardizes unity among the ethnic groups, or infringes upon ethnic customs and habits; content that advocates perverse religious sects or superstitions.*<sup>77</sup>

It also prohibits “content that disseminates rumors, disturbs the social order, or damages social stability.” These provisions have been widely enforced against any content critical of the government, promoting Falun Gong or other forbidden religious practices, or disseminating information of public interest as during the SARS epidemic. But also prohibited is “content that disseminates obscenity, gambling, or violence, or incites crime; content that impairs social morality or the national culture and tradition” and “content inducing minors to imitate behavior in breach of social morality and illegal and criminal behavior, in addition to terror, cruelty, or other content harming the physical and psychological health of minors.” Mu Zimei’s online sex diary meets at least three of these banned criteria, but the authorities have turned a blind eye to the publication and dissemination of such material on the Internet.

Beyond meeting their basic subsistence needs, Chinese citizens also need to participate in social interaction. But since any discussion of politics, democracy, freedom and human rights is prohibited, people are drawn to areas forbidden by the government, where they seek to satisfy sexual desires. In fact, the Chinese public’s inability to distinguish right from wrong has been painstakingly manufactured by the Chinese government. The strategy of domination the government has pursued since the Tiananmen Incident of 1989 has evidently been a success.

As for the morality of Mu Zimei’s exploits, I don’t wish to waste much time discussing it. First of all, Mu Zimei came of age during a period when the Chinese government ran the country much like Saddam Hussein ran Iraq. The regime’s ideological strategy is clear: as long as you don’t oppose the Party and government (and don’t show lack of respect for the holders of power and government officials), you can do whatever you want. As a result of this government strategy, Chinese society has gone from belief to unbelief, from unbelief to deprav-



Mu Zimei came of age while the Chinese government ran the country much like Saddam Hussein ran Iraq.

ity, and from depravity to criminalization. "If you can sell your body, sell it; if you can sell your soul, sell it too" has become everybody's guiding principle, from government officials down to the common people. Mu Zimeis are a dime a dozen in this society.

Second, I am reminded of Victor Hugo's words in *Les Misérables*: "If the soul is left in darkness, sins will be committed. The guilty one is not he who commits the sin, but the one who causes the darkness."

Third, Chinese males have been writing pornography for years without being censured for it. On the contrary, they have been hailed as a literary vanguard, and many have made a fortune from it. It was only after pornography written by male authors became commonplace that a few brave women began to follow in their footsteps. Since male authors are acclaimed for writing pornography, it seems unfair to condemn the small number of female authors who are doing the same.

What's more, the subversion of the system of values did not begin with Mu Zimei. The Chinese government has long since subverted the universal values of human rights, freedom and democracy. Mu Zimei's lascivious reinterpretation of what constitutes acceptable behavior is a trifling misdemeanor in comparison.

According to an old Chinese saying, "Both leniency and

severity can be seen in the rules and regulations," meaning that the government adopts laws and measures to encourage people to act as it wishes them to act and to punish those who flout its laws. The Chinese Communist government's uncompromising interdiction of political debate and its permissiveness toward pornography and sexually explicit Internet content shows that it lacks any sense of responsibility for China's future.

With its policy of strict social control, the Chinese government has met its goal of keeping citizens ignorant: the Chinese people are like a sheet of loose sand, isolated from one another and woefully lacking in organizational capacity and the ability to engage in political activity. Consequently, they are utterly incapable of opposing government corruption, no matter how blatant.

Translated by Paul Frank

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  12. *SouthernWeekend*, May 22, 2005.
  13. See "Zhongguo wangmin zengguo zhongguo kongzhi jiaqiang" (The Chinese government's control is reinforced as the number of Chinese Internet users grows), *The EpochTimes* Chinese edition, December 27, 2005, <http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/5/12/27/n1168574.htm>.
  14. Peking University Triangle Bulletin Board, [bbs.beida-online.com](http://bbs.beida-online.com), accessed July 7, 2002.
  15. Translator's note: Human Rights Watch reported in August 2002 that Yahoo was a signatory to China's Public Pledge on Self-discipline for the Chinese Internet Industry, which requires signatories to agree to investigate all Web sites to which they provide links, block anything the Chinese government would consider "harmful information" and report those sites to Chinese authorities. See "Yahoo! Risks Abusing Rights in China," Human Rights Watch, August 9, 2002, <http://www.hrw.org/press/2002/08/yahoo080902.htm>.
  16. Gutmann, "Who Lost China's Internet?"
  17. "Dailifuwuqi jishu yu zhongguo zhengzhi zongjiao ziyou luntan" (Proxy server technology and Chinese forums advocating political and religious freedom), <http://fangyingkan.yeah.net>, source: Triangle Forum, Peking University, [bbs.beida-online.com](http://bbs.beida-online.com).
  18. "China, Google News and Source Inclusion," Google Blog, September 27, 2004, <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2004/09/china-google-news-and-source-inclusion.html>.
  19. "Baocheng zhongguo wanglu xiangying zilü" (China's Internet reportedly practices "self-discipline"), BBC Chinese online service, July 5, 2002.
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  22. Greg Walton, *China's Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People's Republic of China*, Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2001, <http://www.ichrdd.ca/english/commdoc/publications/globalization/goldenShieldEng.html>.
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  26. "Neidi fengsha wangshang luntan" (The closure of Internet forums in China), special report, *Xianggang Minzhu zhi Sheng* (Hong Kong Voice of Democracy), June 2001.
  27. Bei Ming, "Zhongguo dalu sixiang wangzhan de zuowei ji qi suo mianlin de kunjing" (The achievement of Mainland China's [Frontiers of] Thought Web site and its current predicament), *Yi Bao* (China EWeekly), November 25, 2003, <http://www.chinaeweekly.com>.
  28. Decree of the Ministry of Information Industry of the People's Republic of China No. 33, *Feijingyingxing hulianwang xinxi fuwu bei'an guanli banfa* (Measures on the Administration of Record-keeping on Non-commercial Internet Information Services), promulgated February 8, 2005, put into effect on March 20, 2005: [http://www.mii.gov.cn/art/2005/12/17/art\\_521\\_2665.html](http://www.mii.gov.cn/art/2005/12/17/art_521_2665.html).
  29. "Shuimu Qinghua BBS duiwai guanbi suo yinqi de huati" (The closure of Tsinghua University's Shuimu Qinghua BBS to people outside the university," March 26, 2005, [www.54tsinghua.cn/online.php](http://www.54tsinghua.cn/online.php); "BBS guanbi fengbo shimo" (The ins and outs of the controversy over the BBS closures), March 25, 2005, [www.donews.net/greyrainbow/archive/2005/03/18/305508.aspx](http://www.donews.net/greyrainbow/archive/2005/03/18/305508.aspx).
  30. Translator's note: Stanford University's Shireen Brathwaite et al. explain: "Using a massive surveillance system, the Golden Shield's aim is to integrate a gigantic online database with comprehensive surveillance network—incorporating speech and face recognition, closed-circuit television, smart cards, credit records, and Internet surveillance technologies. The Golden Shield offers immediate access to records on every citizen in China, while linking to vast networks of cameras designed to increase police efficiency." See Shireen Brathwaite et al., "China's Golden Shield Project," [http://www.stanford.edu/~mdelgado/cs201/golden\\_shield.htm](http://www.stanford.edu/~mdelgado/cs201/golden_shield.htm).
  31. Translator's note: In 2003, the university graduate and migrant worker Sun Zhigang died in police custody in Guangzhou after being picked up without an identity card and temporary residence permit. Public pressure generated by a *Southern Daily* article about the incident which circulated on the Internet eventually led the central government to turn migrant detention centers into voluntary service centers and to abolish the temporary residence permit requirement.
  32. Translator's note: On October 16, 2003, Su Xiuwen, the wife of an engineering tycoon, accused farmer Dai Yiquan of scratching the mirror or her BMW with his vegetable cart. Su then slapped Dai, got behind the wheel of her car and plowed into 13 onlookers, killing Dai's wife. A judge acquitted her of manslaughter but gave her a two-year suspended sentence for negligence.
  33. Translator's note: On the case of three-year-old Li Siyi, who died of starvation while her mother was in a detention center, see Ren Bumei, "After Li Siyi," *China Rights Forum* No. 4, 2003, [http://www.hrichina.org/fs/view/downloadables/pdf/downloadable-resources/a3\\_Lisiyi4.2003.pdf](http://www.hrichina.org/fs/view/downloadables/pdf/downloadable-resources/a3_Lisiyi4.2003.pdf).
  34. Jonathan Zittrain and Benjamin Edelman, "Empirical Analysis of Internet Filtering in China," Berkman Center for Internet & Society Harvard Law School, 2002, <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/china/>.
  35. Zittrain and Edelman, "Empirical Analysis of Internet Filtering in China"; see also Anh-Thu Phan, "Probe into blocked Net sites," *South China Morning Post*, September 4, 2002.
  36. "Wangyi kuaibao, Google bei Zhongguo lengchuli?" (Has China given Netease News/Google the cold shoulder?" September 1, 2002, Dwnews.



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37. "Google juran bei feng le" ("Google has been unexpectedly censored), Boxun, October 20, 2003.
  38. "Fengsha Google de hei neimu" (The inside story of the blocking of Google), Boxun, February 8, 2003.
  39. Shao Buding (a pseudonym), "Zhonggong de hulianwang IC ka" (The Chinese Communist government's Internet IC card), Dwnews.com, December 15, 2002.
  40. Voice of America Chinese news service, "Buxiugang laoshu—Beijing Shida xuesheng Liu Di wangshang yizheng beibu" (Stainless Steel Mouse: Beijing Normal University Student Liu Di arrested for discussing politics on the Internet), December 6, 2002. Liu's penname is also translated "Stainless Steel Mouse," but insiders say she is a fan of Harry Harrison's Stainless Steel Rat series of novels, and that the less pleasant-sounding "rat" is the correct translation.
  41. "Zhongguo xinxi liutong guanzhi geng qu yanmi" (Tighter news controls in China), *The Epoch Times* Chinese edition, December 21-27, 2001.
  42. Radio Free Asia, December 25, 2003.
  43. Zhongqing Zaixian (China Youth Online), November 21, 2003, <http://bbs.cyou.com/>.
  44. "Henan 15 sui shaonian wang shang fabu fandong yanlun yingshe zhengfu shi jinü shou dao chufa" (Fifteen-year-old girl who posted a reactionary message on the Internet insinuating that the government is a prostitute has been punished), Xinhua Net, July 7, 2003.
  45. Radio Free Asia, November 25, 2003.
  46. *Kaifang* (Hong Kong), November 2004.
  47. Ethan Gutmann, "Who Lost China's Internet?," *The Weekly Standard*, February 15, 2002, online at [http://www.weeklystandard.com/Utilities/printer\\_preview.asp?idArticle=922](http://www.weeklystandard.com/Utilities/printer_preview.asp?idArticle=922).
  48. Translator's note: Huang Ju graduated from the Department of Electrical Machinery Engineering of Tsinghua University with a major in electrical machinery manufacturing. He is the former mayor of Shanghai and secretary of the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee. See China Vitae at [http://www.chinavitae.com/biography\\_display.php?id=25](http://www.chinavitae.com/biography_display.php?id=25); Reporters Without Borders, China—Annual Report 2004, [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=10166](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=10166).
  49. Greg Walton, *China's Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People's Republic of China*, Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2001, <http://www.ichrdd.ca/english/commdoc/publications/globalization/goldenShieldEng.html>.]
  50. Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Living History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), p. 306.
  51. Greg Walton, *China's Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People's Republic of China*, Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2001, <http://www.ichrdd.ca/english/commdoc/publications/globalization/goldenShieldEng.html>.
  52. See note 1.
  53. See Ethan Guttman, "U.S. Capitalists Spread China's Communist Propaganda," NewsMax.com Wires, Wednesday, May 2, 2002, <http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2002/5/1/180312.shtml>. First published in *Weekly Standard*.
  54. Guttman, "U.S. Capitalists Spread China's Communist Propaganda."
  55. Gutmann, "U.S. Capitalists Spread China's Communist Propaganda."
  56. RAND Corporation, *You've Got Dissent! Chinese Dissident Use of the Internet and Beijing's Counter-Strategies*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2002.
  57. Walton, "China's Golden Shield."
  58. Walton, "China's Golden Shield."
  59. Walton, "China's Golden Shield."
  60. Philips' slogan at the Security China 2000 Fair. Walton, "China's Golden Shield."
  61. Gutmann, "Who Lost China's Internet?"
  62. *Epoch Times* Chinese edition, July 1-7, 2002.
  63. Translator's note: Greg Walton explains: "The pace and scale of the development of China's Internet have reduced the significance of the 'Great Firewall' strategy of gateways linking to a secure national 'intranet'.... One approach to the problem China's security apparatus faces with the decline in effectiveness of the 'Great Firewall' is to shift the focus of content-filtration firewalls from the national level to individual homes and offices – in effect, redistributing the 'Great Firewall' from five international gateways to millions of household PCs and cellular phones." See Walton, "China's Golden Shield."
  64. Walton, "China's Golden Shield."
  65. Walton, "China's Golden Shield."
  66. Walton, "China's Golden Shield."
  67. Walton, "China's Golden Shield."
  68. Walton, "China's Golden Shield."
  69. Gutmann, "Who Lost China's Internet?"
  70. Guo Liang et al., *Surveying Internet Usage and Impact in Twelve Chinese Cities*, Research Center for Social Development of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, October 2003. The Chinese version was published by www.china.com.cn on September 18, 2003. An English translation dated October 2003 is available at [http://www.markle.org/downloadable\\_assets/chinainternet\\_usage.pdf](http://www.markle.org/downloadable_assets/chinainternet_usage.pdf).
  71. *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo tongjifa shishi xize*.
  72. Shewai shehui diaocha huodong guanli zaxing banfa. Article 3 reads, "Organizations and individuals from outside the territory, subsidiaries of foreign enterprises and resident representative offices of foreign enterprises within the territory and resident institutions in China of other foreign organizations shall not, by their own, conduct social survey activities within the territory of China. Where there is a need to conduct such surveys, they shall be conducted by domestic institutions with the qualification of conducting foreign-related social survey. Institutions without such qualification shall not be commissioned for any survey." Translated by the National Bureau of Statistics of China. See [http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/lawsandregulations/statisticalregulations/t20020402\\_16461.htm](http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/lawsandregulations/statisticalregulations/t20020402_16461.htm).
  73. Guo Liang et al., *Surveying Internet Usage and Impact in Twelve Chinese Cities*.
  74. Yu Shicun, "Leiren haimen jin zhaozhui" (Hominid Children in the Morning Light), online at <http://beijingspring.com/big5bjs/bjs/bc/125/032.txt>. By calling Chinese people "hominid children," Yu implies that they are behind the rest of humanity in evolutionary terms.
  75. Beijing Zhichun (Beijing Spring), October 2003.
  76. Hulianwang chuban guanli zaxing guiding. An English translation is available online at <http://www.chinaitlaw.org/?p1=print&p2=050611165049>.
  77. For reasons of space, I ignore for the moment how inherently undemocratic these regulations are.