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China's Censored Leap Forward: The Communist Party's Battle with Internet Censorship in the Digital Age

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CHINA'S CENSORED LEAP FORWARD:

THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S BATTLE WITH INTERNET CENSORSHIP

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Introduction

[I]   China before the Internet

Citizens around the world are using the Internet to connect with an international community, speak out against governmental injustices, and dissolve informational barriers. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), a regime known for its strict control and harsh repression, is faced with the challenge of balancing an appropriate amount of civilian freedom on the Internet while still maintaining its monopolistic power. How does a one-party system successfully maintain control over the flow of information and sustain its unchallenged control of citizens in an increasingly-liberalized world? The Party's answer to this question is a finely-tuned Internet censorship strategy, which this paper seeks to investigate.

Days after the Tiananmen protests of 1989, Deng Xiaoping admitted to the country that "the single biggest mistake the leadership had made in the eighties … [had not] been opening the economy, but a lack of ideological and political education to go with it."[1] Following this epiphany, the Party focused on reestablishing the power of political institutions and controls. Since this statement and the subsequent attempt to gradually liberalize the country, balancing regime control while allowing citizens certain freedoms has been a continued struggle for the CCP. The implementation of the Internet has allowed for greater personal freedoms among citizens, as expected, but the Chinese government has carefully ensured that these freedoms remain restricted.

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[1] Richard McGregor, *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers* (New York, NY: Harper, 2010), 41.

[II]   Rise of the Internet

In 1994, the Internet was introduced in China and was strategically, but hesitatingly, supported by the Party in order to enhance its public image as an open and progressive country.[2] When it first appeared, the Internet was seen by others as a potentially democratizing force in China. This expectation has proven unrealistic, however, as the Party has carefully crafted a censorship strategy to contain the Internet's liberalizing effects. Initially, the Internet presented a direct threat to the CCP: it did not simply serve as a means for communication and research; it offered the masses the opportunity to air their opinions and discontent with little censorship. It allowed for the dreaded possibility of political reform through the voice of the people. The Party had the right to be intimidated: within ten years of the Internet's introduction, China had the greatest number of online users in the world. The number of Chinese citizens online in just two years, from 2006 to 2008, jumped from approximately 125 million to over 300 million.[3] Today, there are over 500 million Internet users in China, with hundreds of millions maintaining public blogs.[4] Now that the Internet is so intricately interwoven through China's modern-day culture, the CCP has buckled down on its approach to controlling the spread of information.

While the few neighboring international powers with censorship strategies have gradually liberalized their censorship policies, China has shown no tendency to follow suit. The Party has actually tightened its grip on the Internet population, as we will see in this essay. Chinese citizens, additionally, are aware of the CCP's increased control: whereas 52 percent of Chinese users trusted the reliability of online content in 2003, that number had fallen by one-half, to 26

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[2] Ibid, 33.
[3] Patricia Moloney Figliola, *U.S. Initiatives to Promote Global Internet Freedom: Issues, Policy, and Technology.* (U.S.: Congressional Research Service, 2010), 1.
[4] Ibid, 4.

percent, in 2008.[5] The Party has become increasingly adept at fudging, deleting, and prohibiting information online, and users have simultaneously become increasingly aware of the big brother looking over their shoulders. General confidence in the government, on behalf of Chinese citizens, has suffered as a result.

[III]   Internet in authoritarian regimes

For authoritarian regimes, the Internet is a tricky and sensitive component of civilization. Similarities have been highlighted between the Chinese government's approach to Internet censorship and other authoritarian or totalitarian regimes' approaches. China continues to secure the second most censored web in the world, only after Cuba.[6] Iran is another example of applied censorship, but its government's approach has proven to be much "less sophisticated and slower" than the Chinese system.[7] Though many scholars focus on the intensity of Chinese Internet policies and the "Great Firewall of China," we must remember that China is not alone in this attempt to forcibly quell and form opinions on the web.[8] Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and India are some neighboring countries included in this movement. China is of specific international interest, however, because of its status as an economic world leader. We must consider China's economic liberalization in contrast to its lack of Internet freedom and wonder if this will inhibit, or promote, its steady rise in the global setting. In order to compete internationally, the Party has been forced to carefully create a censorship approach which will both allow for a comfortable level of citizen freedoms while maintaining an unquestioned monopoly.

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[5] Deborah Fallows, *Few in China Complain about Internet Controls*, Pew Research Center Publications, 27 Mar. 2008, accessed 14 Apr. 2012 <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/776/china-internet>.
[6] Figliola, 2.
[7] Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *China in the 21st Century: What Everyone Needs to Know*. (New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2010), 101.
[8] Ibid, 101.

Because of China's strict censorship policies, the topic receives special international attention. Applications of censorship include formal regulations and filtering, active intervention, self-censorship, and quick response. It is estimated that, in 2009, between thirty and forty high-profile activists or dissidents were serving prison sentences for posting anti-communist or otherwise controversial material online.[9] Human rights lawyers, activists, and outspoken artists are included on the list of imprisoned or disappeared. The treatment of these detained dissidents is shrouded largely in secrecy, but stories of torture and physical abuse have surfaced from those who are brave enough to share. These fearless Internet dissidents and their accompanying publicity, as we will see, have presented a great challenge to the Party's reputation and stability.

In general, the Party strictly filters searches regarding political and security issues. Social and non-specific Internet searches are censored, but less severely.[10] The relationship between the Party and its citizens is fragile, and founded largely on deceit. The lack of transparency in this authoritarian regime has been of increasing concern for citizens, especially after instances of dishonesty that have resulted in a loss of human lives. Such events have included censorship of the SARS epidemic, the Sichuan earthquake of 2008, and the Wenzhou train crash of 2011. Citizens are becoming increasingly aware of and uneasy about the tainted information fed to them by the government.

[IV]   Challenges

Recently, in response to the CCP's corrupt behavior, bloggers have been utilizing the Internet as an outlet for their discontent. One notable post by a blogger encapsulates the frustrations of millions within China: "when a country is corrupt to the point that a single

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[9] Figliola, 4.

[10] Open Net Initiative, *"Internet Filtering in China,"* 15 June 2009. Accessed online 17 Apr. 2012, <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/china>.

lightning strike can cause a train crash, the passing of a truck can collapse a bridge, and drinking a few bags of milk powder can cause kidney stones, none of us are exempted. China today is a train traveling through a lightning storm. None of us are spectators: all of us are passengers."[11] Whereas the Chinese government's dissemination of propaganda has worked to brainwash and control information in the past, this system of secrets and lies is no longer quite as effective. The Internet has increased the opportunity for the online population to discover holes and inconsistencies in the CCP's stories, and citizens are subsequently expecting the Party to be held accountable for its lack of transparency.

On average, China experiences over ninety thousand social uprisings per year. Most are sparked by government corruption, officials' inappropriate use of power, domestic issues, or Internet restrictions.[12] To thwart potential online attacks, the CCP has upped its internal security: billions of dollars and millions in manpower have been poured into the censorship operation. The Party's sledgehammer response to blossoming online uprisings have, for the most part, effectively discouraged citizens from attempting to spark revolution. Though the government is able to silence murmurings of discontent online, its failure to address and solve the citizens' concerns could soon be very detrimental to its relationship with the people.

[V]   Overview

It seems that the Party's main goal of its censorship and restrictive policies are to prevent Chinese citizens from speaking out against the government and its monopolistic power. The CCP has gone to extremes to silence dissidents and has thus far been successful in maintaining the status quo, but it is not without consequence. China's international audience is acutely aware of

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[11] Michael Clendenin, *"Risky Business: Sina Weibo Intensifies Censorship of Tragic Train Crash"* (RedTech Advisors Ltd.: 2011), <http://slidesha.re/r1hZLd>.
[12] Ibid.

the country's dissidents and the Party's strict, unreasonable reactions to their behavior. International newspapers are headlined with stories of controversial Chinese actors, including artist Ai Weiwei and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo. Pictures of Ai's torture-induced head wound and tales of Liu's mysterious forced disappearance flood the Internet, generating international disapproval of the Party's behavior. Worldwide, non-governmental organizations and democratic regimes react loudly to China's treatment of dissidents. Through campaigns for the release of imprisoned citizens, public denouncements of the Party's actions, and reevaluations of China as a strategic international power, the CCP suffers from repercussions of its censorship strategy.

In this essay I will examine the strategy of the CCP regarding Internet censorship, the implications this censorship has on Chinese citizens, and the impact this has on the nation internationally. I will evaluate the Party's apparent goals and priorities when applying Internet censorship, and examine how these concerns shape its strategy. Then, I will investigate the motivations of the Chinese population when using the Internet and evaluate the effectiveness of the Party's censorship strategy on Internet users. We will look at how Chinese citizens being affected, and dissect examples of censorship, including the Jasmine Revolution, the Wenzhou train crash of 2011, and the story of Ai Weiwei. Finally, we will confront whether the Party has paid a price, domestically and internationally, for its strict censorship strategy.

Chapter 2:

The Party's Censorship Strategy

[I]   Introduction

> The [censorship] approach of the Chinese government is similar to that of Chinese medicine. The emphasis is on the Internet being an organic part of the body politic. Too much intervention is as bad as too little. Constant monitoring is necessary so that one knows when and how much to intervene. The word in Chinese is *tiao,* which means continuous tuning of a complex system.[1]

The effectiveness of the Chinese Communist Party's censorship strategy is a subject of dispute, but its *effort* to censor the Internet is indisputable. Flushed with abundant fiscal resources derived from its rapid economic growth, the CCP-controlled state of the People's Republic of China has invested huge resources in ensuring its control over the Internet and has subsequently gained the "dubious distinction of being a world leader in Internet censorship."[13]

Untangling China's elaborate system of Internet censorship is no easy task. We will need first to describe and understand the CCP's strategy and then analyze the specific steps it has taken to implement this strategy. In this section we will first examine the assumed goal of the CCP when it created barriers to the access of information online, and then the actual steps the government has taken to implement this strategy, which consists of complete cutoffs from the Internet, gentle encouragement to use the Internet wisely, and varieties of self-censorship. We will describe and analyze the technical, tangible restrictions, as well as the psychological

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[13] Anonymous. "China: World Leader of Internet Censorship | Human Rights Watch." *Human Rights Watch*. 3 June 2011. Accessed 29 Oct. 2011. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/06/03/china-world-leader-internet-censorship>.

pressures applied by the government in achieving its objectives. We will then assess some of the outcomes of the government's strategy and evaluate its costs and benefits.

Maintaining the CCP's monopoly without triggering domestic or international backlash is both complicated and challenging, and the Party has carefully refined its censorship strategy in order to exercise the appropriate amount of repression. The government's main priorities are to increase the marginal costs of access, focus its repressive efforts on political activists seen as dangerous to the Party, and encourage self-censorship for all Internet users. Established counter elites with considerable followings are viewed as the biggest threats to the government's power. These activists – commonly human rights lawyers, artists, political dissidents, and revolutionary youth – propagate their discontent with the CCP through blogs and online publications. Though they present a direct threat to the Communist Party's stability, they represent a miniscule portion of the Chinese population. The vast majority of Internet users are categorized as politically apathetic masses, and typically exhibit no interest in challenging the Party's authority. The CCP's main focus, then, is to prevent the counter elites from connecting with and rallying support from the apathetic masses online. By maintaining this disconnect, the Party's primary responsibility will be silencing a very limited group of revolutionaries, thereby allowing the remainder of users to surf the web relatively freely.

There are two main methods to censoring the public: the Party will either employ technical and regulatory restrictions, or it will promote self-censorship and apply more subtle pressures.[14] Under these umbrella categories of censorship fall more specific ways to curb Internet use. The Ministry of Information Industry, the State Counsel Information Office, and the

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[14] Jongpil Chung, "Comparing Online Activities in China and South Korea: The Internet and the Political Regime." *Asian Survey* 48.5 (2008): 727-51, 734.

Propaganda Department are the main controllers of the flow of Internet information.[15] First, when establishing an alias or website online, all users must be approved by the government. At the national level, large agencies and businesses using the Internet to establish an online presence are forced to receive government approval, and these sites are subject to filtering, blocking, and controls. At the next tier, private Internet service providers are also required to receive licenses through the Internet Interconnecting Networks, which will block any unacceptable material. The final general censored sector are average Internet users who are required to real-name register with Internet service providers in order to create blogs, post content, and participate in chat rooms. Again, these users are subject to content control and censorship.[16]

Next, the behavior of these registered users is consistently monitored. Within the country, Internet services are based on "interconnecting networks, which are the national backbone networks that connect domestic Internet service providers (ISPs) to international networks."[17] The state is then effectively in control of the web, as the ISPs are required to obtain permission from one of the interconnecting networks in order to access the global network. Since these interconnecting networks are completely controlled by the state, it is especially easy for the Party to restrict individually created web pages that, in their words and by their definition, "threaten social order and national security."[18] Aside from the censorship of specific information and politically sensitive events, the government also completely forbids certain websites. In addition, "all individuals and organizations must obtain approval from the State Council Information

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[15] Jessica Bauml, "It's a Mad, Mad Internet: Globalization and the Challenges Presented by Internet Censorship." *Federal Communications Law Journal* 63 (2011): 697-732, 701.
[16] Bin Liang and Hong Lu. "Internet Development, Censorship, and Cyber Crimes in China." *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 26.1 (2010): 103-20, 106.
[17] Chung, 735.
[18] Ibid, 735.

Office before they publish any kind of news."[19] After website registration, the primary forms of follow-up censorship include website blocking, content filtering, and keyword alerts.[20] The government also enlists Internet censors and police to enforce appropriate behavior online. Before detailing these specific branches of Internet censorship, we will first evaluate how the Party views the threat of the Internet.

[II] How the Party Views the Threat of the Internet

Rupert Murdoch has been quoted stating that advances in communications technology are without fail an "unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere."[21] The problem with the Internet in an insecure, power-hungry regime such as the Chinese Communist Party, however, is not simply restricted to the people's potential to challenge their government in cyber space. If the government fears the development of the Internet and decides to ban this technology, it will pay the price both politically and economically. Aside from losing international respect because of its reactionary policies toward the information revolution and draconian policies to ban the Internet, China's business and economic expansion will suffer greatly. In fact, China would become a technological pariah state. As a result, the Communist Party has opted for a middle course. While recognizing the potential dangers of the Internet, because "an unregulated network would shift power from the state to citizens by providing an extensive forum for discussion and collaboration," it also "hails the Internet's vast commercial potential."[22] By acknowledging the

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[19] Ibid, 737.
[20] HRW, "China: World Leader of Internet Censorship | Human Rights Watch." Accessed 29 Oct. 2011.
<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/06/03/china-world-leader-internet-censorship>.
[21] Eric X. Li, "Globalization 2.0: China's Parallel Internet." *Huff Post World.* Huffington Post, 20 Jan. 2012.
Accessed 5 Feb. 2012, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eric-x-li/china-internet_b_1217436.html>.
[22] Nina Hachigian, "China's Cyber Strategy." *Foreign Affairs* 8.2 (2011): 188-33, 118.

power and potential of the Internet and taking control over the web, "Beijing has taken care to prevent this commercial gold mine from becoming political quicksand."[23]

Among all authoritarian regimes, there is a constant struggle to control and monitor citizens' behavior without sparking rebellion. The development of the Internet has added a new dimension to this balance, and in China specifically, there has been a debate regarding the importance and purpose of the Internet. One opinion among officials is that the Internet is "crucial to economic modernization," while the other group "appraises it as a direct threat to the central government's control over the country."[24] The control of information within an authoritarian system requires an overwhelming amount of finesse, and the government has tactfully addressed the potential dangers. Ultimately, the Party has accepted the Internet as a critical pillar of their modernization as a world power, and has found that controlling information and behavior on the web is the correct approach.

As a powerful but insecure authoritarian regime, the CCP values its survival above anything else. Because the Internet threatens the Party's monopoly of power, few should be surprised that the CCP will apply censorship to maintain its control. Confronted with the possibility of the 500 million Chinese Internet users utilizing the web as an outlet to publicize opinion or discontent, the Party's Internet censorship and regulation has "evolved into a comprehensive, multidimensional system that governs Internet infrastructure, commercial and social use as well as legal domains."[25] The relationship between the Internet and democracy worldwide is clear, and it is commonly understood that the Internet poses a serious threat to communist regimes. There is often the expectation that the introduction of the Internet in authoritarian countries will lead to the regime's demise, but "Internet use and development in

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[23] Ibid, 118.
[24] Chung, 732.
[25] Liang and Lu, 105.

China has so far failed such an expectation, and some even argue that the Internet has become a new tool for government control."[26]

Many claim that the Internet does not currently pose a serious threat to the Communist Party's power. Because China has experienced sustained economic growth, the population is hesitant to bash a government that has provided them with so much. Nina Hachigian, for example, believes that in the short term, the Internet could potentially help bolster the Party's power: "The CCP's popularity now so depends on economic growth that its leaders are safer with the Internet than without it…the power shifts wrought by the Internet will surface clearly only during an economic or political crisis in a future China."[27] Hachigian goes on to explain that since the late 1970s, when Deng Xiaoping "replaced ideology with economic growth as the cornerstone of future party legitimacy," Western ideals and concepts began infiltrating China and its governmental understanding of success.[28] Because of this, there is more pressure on the Party to encourage Internet use than to restrain Internet use. In general, the Party has benefited greatly by promoting the Internet: the average citizen has no interest in challenging the government's authority, and the population as a whole is content with the amount they are able to access on the web. Though the Party is strictly inhibiting citizens' freedom of speech, the online masses remain apathetic. Additionally, with a relatively "free" Internet, China's international allies and enemies have less to condemn about the Communist Party.

The Chinese government acknowledges that it lagged behind other international powers during the industrial revolution and believes that this Internet revolution is one they cannot miss: "China is determined not to be left behind by neighbors India, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore," and it the CCP will continue working to carefully integrate the Internet into the

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[26] Ibid, 109.
[27] Hachiagian, 118.
[28] Hachigian, 120.

country.[29] The threat of the Internet, then, seems to be less of a concern than the maintenance of the government as a superpower internationally. Additionally, the Party has thus far maintained a monopoly over the Internet, and has experienced no serious threats to its power. Attempted Chinese online revolutions, such as copycats of the 2011 Middle Eastern Uprising, have failed miserably, and have only cemented the Communist Party's power. The Party has maintained constant success in streamlining user behavior online while simultaneously reaping the economic and political benefits of the Internet.

In 1994, China was officially the 71st country to register onto the global computer network.[30] Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, the number of Internet users in China quickly surpassed other well-developed countries, and eventually China became the globe's leading user of the Internet. For the most part, the Party has stayed one step ahead of its population, and never have the Chinese citizens been able to successfully use the development of the Internet to rise up against their government. The CCP has carefully evaluated the potential for danger, and maintains a tight grip over the challenging portion of its Internet base. Overall, China's "Internet control represents an 'imperfect control,' aiming at keeping the vast majority from sensitive materials and preventing the nonconforming small minority from mounting a real challenge."[31] The censorship strategy is ever evolving, and next we will take a detailed look at the components of strategy within the government.

[III] Components of the Strategy

The specific methods of censorship are founded on the formal regulations as laid out by the CCP and associated groups. The Party has implemented technological restrictions that create

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[29] Ibid, 122.
[30] Liang and Lu, 104.
[31] Liang and Lu, 107.

barriers for users, as well as filter content before it has been posted. The other censorship approaches include active intervention by CCP-related advocates for Internet control, and the encouragement of self-censorship. In this section we will discuss in detail the specific methods of controlling information on the web, split into the following categories:

(1)   Formal regulations

(2)   Technological Solutions

(3)   Collusion with Service and Content Providers

(4)   Active Intervention

(5)   Self-Censorship

(6)   Quick Response

(1) Formal Regulations. Though the Party has established formal regulations for what can and cannot be trafficked and discussed on the Internet, they maintain, and exercise, the power to prohibit essentially any behavior they deem questionable. If a flagged Internet user, for instance, is innocently perusing international news sites, the Party reserves the right to interfere on this potentially problematic user's Internet use. Additionally, in times of latent or impending crisis, the Party may choose to prohibit Internet use altogether. Formally prohibited discussions, searches and activity specifically include behavior or information that 1) contradicts the Chinese Constitution or fundamental laws; 2) challenges or disrespects the regime or socialism as an institution; 3) attempts to undermine state unity; 4) promotes public discrimination; and 5) encourages inappropriate behavior, such as endorsing pornography, gambling, the spread of rumors, etc.[32] Additionally, journalists and citizens are forbidden to condemn or discuss without restriction any of the "Four Cardinal Principles:" "socialism, the dictatorship of the proletariat,

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[32] Liang and Lu, 106.

the leadership of the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought."[33] This wide range of prohibited topics results in a very restricted sense of Internet "freedom."

(2) Technological Solutions. Aside from the censorship of specific information and politically sensitive events, the government also completely blocks access to certain websites. In addition, "all individuals and organizations must obtain approval from the State Council Information Office before they publish any kind of news."[34] After website registration, the primary forms of follow-up censorship include website blocking, content filtering and keyword alerts.[35]

The Golden Shield Project, known alternatively as the Great Firewall of China (GFC), is the country's foundation for censorship. It is one of the first-layer barriers users encounter when attempting to search, distribute, or discuss information online. This aspect of the censorship strategy is straightforward: if a website is controversial or deemed "not safe" by the Party, it is blocked by the firewall. When using popular search engines – such as Baidu, Google, Yahoo!, and Bing! – to research sensitive words, the Firewall responds with a TCP reset, which is represented by error messages reading "connection timed out" or "this page cannot be found."[36] Then, the GFC blocks all communication from this IP address for about 90 seconds.[37] This serves to remind the user that their behavior is being watched.

The GFC is somewhat easily circumvented by Virtual Proxy Networks (VPNs), which reroute domestic users through international ports, such as Hong Kong, in order to access a less-

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[33] Chung, 732-733.
[34] Ibid, 737.
[35] HRW, "China: World Leader of Internet Censorship | Human Rights Watch." Accessed 29 Oct. 2011.
<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/06/03/china-world-leader-internet-censorship>.
[36] Tao Zhu, "An Analysis of Chinese Search Engine Filtering." *CoRR* (2011), 4.
[37] Ibid, 4.

censored Internet. Though the firewall is the least complex aspect of Chinese Internet censorship, it still is a maze of censorship strategies.

(3) Keyword Filtering. Keyword filtering is a more advanced form of censorship which often either requires much more finesse to circumvent, or is completely impossible to avoid. In most circumstances, if one inputs a sensitive keyword into a search engine, the results will be blocked by the GFC. Another method of filtering keywords, however, is subtler. We will look at one example of keyword filtering on Google.cn in 2010. A group of researchers searched "Falun Gong" and Google.cn responded with 16,900 hits, whereas Google.com, the U.S.-based version of the search engine, responded with over 880,000 hits.[38] China's version of Google, in other words, had hid 98% of this politically sensitive topic's online information. Additionally, the top twenty results for "Falun Gong" on Google.cn spoke negatively of the movement, brainwashing Chinese Internet users into believing what the Party wants them to believe.

Certain sensitive websites are "black listed" by the government, and others remain on the "white list."[39] Black listed sites, such as those specifically pertaining to movements like the Tiananmen Massacre or Falun Gong, will consistently be represented by error messages. White listed sites and terms are more fickle, and "when a search engine is given a sensitive ('white listed') query, it may only be permitted to return officially sanctioned results."[40] Additionally, there appears to be a "second-class white list" of sites, "which have lower priority than those in 'white list' but higher priority than other general web sites."[41] For example, when pornographic terms are searched on Google.cn, "the resulting web sites are not limited to the 'white list sites'

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[38] Ibid, 8.
[39] Ibid, 8.
[40] Zhu, 8.
[41] Ibid, 8.

[seen] elsewhere, but are still limited to a variety of government controlled web sites."[42] In addition to these technological restrictions implemented, the government also employs forces to curb and influence public Internet use.

(4) Active Intervention. China not only has the largest Internet-user base in the world, but also employs the largest amount of cyber police to monitor behavior online. The Internet police force started in Anhui in 2000, and soon thereafter twenty other regions followed suit. It is reported that by the end of 2000, over 300,000 personnel had been hired to control Internet behavior.[43] These "cyber police" work to intercept activists on the web and maintain the disconnect between activists and the apathetic masses. These police act as "big brothers" on the web, and will interrupt searches and discussions with the potential to lead to dangerous behavior. Another aspect of active intervention is a government-recruited youth group, known as the "Fifty Cent Party." Similar to Mao Zedong's strategy during the Cultural Revolution, the post-Mao regime encouraged school officials to recruit "a team of zealous students to work part time as 'Web commentators'" in 2005.[44] President Hu Jintao expressed that controlling and restricting Internet activity was not enough; the Party also needed to take advantage of the Internet. According to one Party official, the government must "thoroughly make use of online commentary to actively guide public opinion in society."[45]

The aforementioned student web commentators are estimated to total to a force of over 280,000.[46] These students, recruited by the government as ideal citizens, "set out to neutralize undesirable public opinion by pushing pro-Party views through chat rooms and Web forums,

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[42] Ibid, 8.
[43] Liang and Lu, 106.
[44] David Bandurski, "China's Guerrilla War for the Web." *Far Eastern Economic Review* (2008), 41.
[45] Bandurski, 43.
[46] Ibid, 41.

reporting dangerous content to authorities."[47] They are cheap, influential, and easily employed government workers who help reinforce the Party's power. This form of censorship not only helps to restrict citizens from discussing inappropriate matters online, but encourages them to speak fondly of the government. According to one Party scholar, "in an information society, the Internet is an important position in the ideological domain. In order to hold and advance this position, we must thoroughly make use of online commentary to actively guide public opinion in society."[48] This can be interpreted as the Party's continued propaganda campaigns, attempting to brainwash citizens against public disapproval of the regime.

Because Western interpretations have morphed the Chinese translation of "propaganda," which "denotes the broadcast and spread of information," into information tainted by "untruthfulness, bias, or manipulation," the CCP has refrained from using the term.[49] Instead, the CCP focuses on "publicizing" or "communicating" on the web to inform and sway its citizens into believing what it wants them to believe. The strategies used to control the flow of information on the Internet consist of "informing," "guiding," "harmonizing," "safeguarding," and "constraining."[50] This use of propaganda, though not as blatant as it was during the Cultural Revolution, is still successful in promoting specific ideologies and finely-tuned opinions of the Party. The CCP has adeptly adjusted its strategy to guide online opinion and discourse by first gauging common complaints and perfecting responses from Fifty Cent Party members to help reshape these opinions. In the words of Jiang Zemin, the goals of active intervention are to

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[47] Ibid, 41.
[48] Ibid, 43.
[49] Chin-Fu Hung, "China's Propaganda in the Information Age: Internet Commentators and the Weng'an Incident." *Issues & Studies* 46.4 (2010): 149-80, 151.
[50] Ibid, 153.

"develop actively, increase control, accentuate the good and avoid the bad, and use it to our advantage."[51]

The government's objective when employing students and Internet police to influence cyber activity is to "crank up the 'noise' and drown out progressive and diverse voices on China's Internet."[52] The CCP carefully applies an appropriate amount of repression so as not to incite anger among the apathetic majority: the strategy is selective and restrained, and is focused on the small minority who actually use the Internet for controversial purposes. The everyday user is not inconveniently inhibited, as "selective press censorship ensures control of political information without suffocating coverage of pop culture and business."[53] This is especially important for the free use of blogs, for which interest has grown overwhelmingly in the past decade.

(5) Self-censorship. The Party also relies on personal applications of self-censorship, and many users self-censor themselves because of their "limited choices, high governmental pressure, and potential stiff penalties."[54] Those employed to manage the web have one goal only: "to safeguard the interests of the Communist Party by infiltrating and policing a rapidly growing Chinese Internet."[55] Chinese Internet censorship domestically is about "social control, human surveillance, peer pressure, and self-censorship."[56] Internet cafes, major hubs for bloggers and apathetic Internet users, have begun cracking down on activity for fear of being held responsible for customers' behavior. All "website hosting services are installing keyword-filtering software

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[51] Hung, 159.
[52] Bandurski, 43.
[53] Minxin Pei, "How China is Ruled." *The American Interest* April 2008, 50.
[54] Liang and Lu, 107.
[55] Bandurski, 41.
[56] Xueyang Xu, Z. Morley Mao, and J. Alex Halderman. "Internet Censorship in China: Where Does the Filtering Occur?" *Department of Computer Science and Engineering, University of Michigan* (2011): 133-42, 135.

and have hired people to watch online information on their websites."[57] The aforementioned variations of censorship, such as the Internet police force and "Fifty Cent Party," additionally, serve as constant encouragement to censor oneself when online.

John Horton speaks of the phenomenon of self-censorship, and argues that "at the heart of this concept is a tension between the thoughts of the self-censor as, on the one hand, the author, and on the other, the instrument, of the censorship."[58] Self-censorship is a psychological game played between the Party and Chinese citizens. Censorship guidelines, as clarified by the government, are broad and mostly all-encompassing: they offer little precise direction as to what can and cannot be discussed, posted, and shared online. Citizens, then, are given the choice to either play safe in order to avoid any potentially troublesome behavior, or push the boundaries to test their freedoms. Generally, citizens tend to adjust behavior so as to avoid attracting the Party's attention. In this respect, self-censorship is a largely effective method of censorship.

At the start of the new millennium, the government released extensive regulations prohibiting all content that "subverts state power, 'disturbs social order,' undermines reunification efforts with Taiwan, spreads rumors, 'preaches the teachings of evil cults,' distributes 'salacious materials,' dispenses pornography, slanders others, or harms the 'honor' of China."[59] Along with these general guidelines, which discourage almost all potentially controversial behavior, the Party's exceptionally secretive handling of those who stray from these guidelines also serves as a promoter of self-censorship. The government purposely hides details of punishments applied to those countering their censorship guidelines. By maintaining this air of mystery, the temptation to push the Party's limits is muddled by the fear of the unknown consequences.

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[57] Chung, 737.
[58] John Horton, "Self-Censorship." *Res Publica* 17.1 (2011): 91-106, 91.
[59] Hachigian, 124.

(6) Quick Response. In 2011, in response to the powerful and contagious technologically fueled revolutions of the Middle East and North Africa, mini-revolutions sprouted up throughout China. One notable revolution, titled the "Jasmine Revolution" after Tunisia's uprising in 2011, was crumpled before fully blossoming. The revolution began in February of 2011, first by shouting protests, which ended in police brutality and violence. To prevent rapid expansion of the revolutionary ideology, the government responded quickly to the discussion of all things "Jasmine" online. First, the Party pre-emptively detained democracy advocates, bloggers, and "would-be troublemakers."[60] State police were seen patrolling the streets of Beijing and Shanghai, and any hint at revolutionary behavior was immediately addressed. Whereas protests sparked online in the Middle East led to the mass mobilization of citizens, "the biggest response [to talk of the Jasmine Revolution] in China was from the state."[61]

Because of an extremely responsive and effective Internet censorship strategy, most citizens were "largely left in the dark" about the Jasmine Revolution. Unless discussed through word of mouth or witnessed in person, most Chinese "have never heard of the protest calls in China," nor were they ever aware of the ensuing crackdown.[62] This is a testament to the Party's quick response to the use of the Internet as medium for rebellion. As highlighted in US articles reporting on citizens' use of the web, attempted rebellions in China almost always remain just that – attempted. Protests that "directly challenge the authority of China's ruling Communist Party usually face a swift and stern response. 'This shows just how nervous and how insecure the Chinese government is.'"[63] Though the government is extremely skilled in quick responses to

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[60] Andrew Jacobs, "Catching Scent of Revolution, China Moves to Snip Jasmine." *New York Times* 10 May 2011, viewed 5 Feb 2012.
[61] Austin Ramzy, "State Stamps Out Small 'Jasmine' Protests in China." *Time World* [Beijing] 20 Feb. 2011, viewed 5 Feb. 2012.
[62] Jacobs, viewed 5 Feb. 2012.
[63] Ramzy, viewed 5 Feb. 2012.

online threats of any sort, the (attempted) Jasmine Revolution has been noted by some as an important movement for Chinese citizens. As China researcher from Human Rights Watch noted, "the government won this [attempted protest] and looks capable of blocking any immediate threats to its hold on power. But the ease with which dissent spreads online means that while China isn't likely to see its own jasmine revolution, the authorities won't be resting easily either."[64] This leads us to the next aspect of the CCP's censorship strategy: its effectiveness.

[IV] Overall Effectiveness of the Strategy

With increased research about the Party's impact on censorship and Internet use, one important fact to keep in mind is the main purpose of the Internet for many citizens; the majority of Chinese citizens use the Internet for "gaming, entertainment, sports news, celebrities, and study and career opportunities."[65] The need to invest billions of dollars in technological advances, propaganda, and police forces to curb Internet use, then, may be unnecessary. It is hard to say how crucial Internet censorship is to the Party's survival; if the Party invested half as much as it does now into censorship, for example, would its power crumble or would it remain an untouched monopoly? We can only judge based on the Party's success, which is measured by its maintained power.

Though for the most part, China's Internet censorship remains relatively peaceful and mundane, the government occasionally turns to more severe tactics to send a message to its citizens. Especially since the recent Arab Spring of 2011, Internet and media censorship within China has been steadily increasing: the government now more than ever "resorts to cutting off the Internet entirely in areas hit by episodes of social unrest, such as Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner

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[64] Ramzy, viewed 5 Feb. 2012.
[65] Liang and Lu, 109.

Mongolia."[66] In instances where the government assumes there is a citizen upheaval brewing, it will not merely censor information, but instead prevent any Internet use. In response to the aforementioned Middle Eastern uprisings, Chinese officials issued a security crackdown to prevent a similar revolution in China. The "instantaneous deployment of the police to prevent even notional gatherings in big cities…is just one example of what Chinese officials call 'stability maintenance.'"[67]

For those dissidents who ignore, circumvent, and protest against censorship, their fate is one largely unknown. Within the past five years, persecution and harassment of well-known dissidents have escalated, and there are currently over 3,500 unexplained detentions for human rights workers and defenders. These dissidents are held in penitentiaries, "black jails," and psychiatric hospitals.[68] The government often seizes these outspoken rebels under pretenses other than inappropriate Internet behavior, and do not publicly discuss what punishments they will endure.

One example of this is the popular case of internationally-known artist, Ai Weiwei. Ai was arrested in April of 2011, in the midst of "China's worst spike in official repression in more than a decade."[69] Though Ai's critiques of the CCP and his self-described activism "as an explicit challenge to the 'ethics' of an authoritarian regime" are largely controversial and could be seen as direct threats to the Party's monopoly, his government-induced silence was reportedly for unrelated reasons.[70] According to the CCP, the government detained Ai for "unspecified

[66] HRW, "China: World Leader of Internet Censorship | Human Rights Watch." Accessed 29 Oct. 2011. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/06/03/china-world-leader-internet-censorship>.
[67] Andrew Jacobs. "In China, Security Muffles Calls for Change." *New York Times* 28 Feb. 2011. Accessed 25 Oct 2011.
[68] Unknown. "Freedom and Human Rights in China." *New York Times* 1 Mar. 2010, accessed 25 Oct 2011.
[69] Phelim Kine. "Ai Weiwei and China's Assault on Truth | Human Rights Watch." *Human Rights Watch*. 12 May 2011. Web. Feb.-Mar. 2012. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/12/ai-weiwei-and-china-s-assault-truth>.
[70] Ibid, 2/29/12.

economic crimes," such as evasion of taxes.[71] Though accounts of what happened to Ai while in detention vary, stories of "police brutality" and "corporal punishment and torture" are common threads through his, as well as hundreds of other dissidents', stories.[72]

How to silence dissidents who consistently defy persecution and harassment is arguably the weakest part of China's Internet censorship strategy. Out of desperation and disregard for human rights, Chinese officials reportedly resort to physical violence and psychological terrorism as methods to scare dissidents out of future inappropriate online behavior. This treatment then receives domestic and international attention from everyday citizens, human rights advocacy groups, and governments around the world. In this respect, it seems that the CCP's censorship strategy is largely ineffective: one of the primary reasons for censorship is to trick citizens locally and abroad into believing in the Communist Party and its decency, and they fail this mission when poor treatment of dissidents goes public. The backlash from Ai Weiwei's disappearance, for example, which attracted an overwhelming amount of international attention and "Free Ai Weiwei" movements around the world and throughout the web, only magnified the Party's issues, insecurities, and indecency.

 [V] Summary

In general, with constant and growing investments of perhaps tens of billions of dollars in financial resources and hundreds of thousands in manpower, China has maintained a high degree of control of the Internet inside its borders. Confronted with the possibility of threats to the survival of one-party rule that may sprout from widespread Internet use, the Chinese Communist Party has addressed this potential issue head on. For the moment, the CCP has managed to

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[71] Ibid, 2/29/12.
[72] Ibid, 2/29/12.

contain threats of the information revolution without suffocating the development of the Internet as a dynamic new industry. The Party has effectively isolated dissidents from the apathetic masses, and this disconnect has, so far, eliminated the possibility for active revolution. During moments of crisis, the Party's single-minded focus on snuffing out threats of political stability seems to have delivered desired results, as in the case of the Arab Spring of 2011, when the CCP was apparently terrified of a similar uprising in China and subsequently silenced potential revolutionaries.

It will be interesting to see, as time goes on, whether a reduction of censorship in China will occur. Thus far, their strategy has proven largely successful, and the careful balance of freedoms and restrictions has been sustained. We must wonder, however, how long the CCP can stay one step ahead of its population. In the following chapter, we will look into the implications and results of censorship in China: is there backlash, and how does the Party address it?

<center>**Chapter 3:**</center>

<center>**Effects of Internet Censorship**</center>

[I]   Introduction

With the advent of the Internet in authoritarian regimes, the international community has witnessed a range of different governmental responses. In some countries, authoritarian elites have been forced by the Internet to increase transparency and trust between the government and its people. But in other countries, the response has been very different. The introduction of the Internet in China, for example, has opted for more governmental control, not liberalization. The arrival of the Internet almost immediately motivated the Party to institute tighter control and insulate the government from its citizens, as it simultaneously attempts to use this new technology to improve the image of the government among the public. Whereas regimes in Malaysia and Singapore are using the Internet for "e-government initiatives that reshape bureaucracy, dispense education and health information, and increase direct communication between officials and the public [in order to] actually improve the quality of life for citizens and boost transparency," the Chinese Communist Party has invested an unprecedented amount of manpower and money to ensure the Internet is controlled appropriately in order to, above all, protect the regime's unchallenged monopoly.[73]

According to some experts, China operates the "most extensive, technologically sophisticated, and broad-reaching system of Internet filtering in the world," and has proved largely successful in repressing Chinese voices. Despite external pressures to democratize, the CCP maintains its strength and security as the ruling party. How exactly does censorship influence China's general online masses, its small community of outspoken dissidents, and the

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[73] Shanthi Kalathil. "Dot Com for Dictators." *Foreign Policy Magazine* Mar. 2003, 43.

international perception of the Party? In this chapter, we will gauge the impact of the Party's Internet restrictions. We will first examine the effects of such censorship on the general apathetic masses. We will look at specific censored events, such as 2011's Jasmine Revolution and Wenzhou train crash, and weigh the impacts censorship had on such situations. Then, we will evaluate how the "dangerous" dissidents and activists, both those making their way onto the government's radar and those already firmly established internationally, are affected. Finally, we will dissect the effects China's Internet censorship has on its international reputation.

[II]   The Impact of Censorship on the General Online Masses

(1) Breakdown of Internet users and uses. After overwhelmingly rapid economic growth, China's Internet users are mostly well-educated, upper-middle class urbanites. The vast majority of citizens use the web for Internet games and entertainment. In 2009, the most popular use for the Internet in China was listening to streamed music; over 80 percent of active Chinese web surfers regularly listened to online tunes.[74] Instant messaging, as opposed to email, is also a very popular Internet use: 87 percent of users in 2010 used instant messaging applications consistently, whereas 53 percent used email.[75] The largest sector of Internet users are aged 10-19, and are mostly utilizing the Internet for access to online games.[76] Young adults, university students, and young professionals, as well, account for the other major segments of Internet

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[74] Kamelia Angelova. "CHART OF THE DAY: China Goofs Off Online, We Buy Stuff." *Business Insider.* 22 May 2009. Web. 16 Mar. 2012. <http://www.businessinsider.com/chart-of-the-day-the-chinese-get-more-entertainment-online-the-americans-shop-2009-5>.

[75] Facts about China: TECHNOLOGY, INTERNET & MEDIA." *CHINA TECHNOLOGY, INTERNET & MEDIA.* 13 Jan. 2010. Web. 1 Apr. 2012. <http://www.china-mike.com/facts-about-china/facts-technology-internet-media/>.

[76] Rocky Fu, "China Internet Statistics Whitepaper," Aug. 2011, accessed 16 Mar 2012, <http://www.chinainternetwatch.com/whitepaper/china-internet-statistics/>.

users. The average Internet user spends about 2.6 hours per day online, with young professionals and university students spending upwards of 4 hours per day on the Internet.[77]

The government has witnessed the outstanding majority, a reported 87.5 percent, of college students and faculty frequenting the Internet.[78] The online activity of the university-trained upper class is especially of concern for the government because of their awareness of a world outside China. These elites are more likely to have a better understanding of international politics due to increased access to resources and the ability to travel internationally. Additionally, they are more likely to use the Internet to research history, current events, and controversial or politically-charged topics.

The apathetic masses, which account for the overwhelming majority of Chinese Internet users, are a secondary concern of the Party. It is important to keep in mind that the average Internet user is not interested in utilizing the web as an outlet to attack the government: "the logic goes, the Chinese government has engineered a monumental and societal transformation that has tremendously benefited its people. Hundreds of millions have ascended from profound poverty. Why would the Chinese people overthrow – or even question – the regime under such circumstances?"[79] To maintain domestic approval, the government has provided substantial and sustained economic growth. This has proven to be the leading factor in public support, which therefore allows the Party some leniency when applying censorship restrictions. Economic growth seems to trump political freedom in this case, by "[providing] satisfaction and distraction to the population, and, therefore [garnering] domestic support for the Party (or at least reducing

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[77] Fu, 3/16/12.

[78] Liang, Guo. "Surveying Internet Usage and Impact in Five Chinese Cities." *Markle Foundation* [Beijing] 2006, accessed 9 Dec. 2011.

[79] Dale Swartz, "Jasmine in the Middle Kingdom: Autopsy of China's (Failed) Revolution," American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research 2011: 2.

active opposition to the Party)."[80] Though some express frustration with the Party's control, in reality very few are actually challenging the system or demanding changes. Later in this section, we will discuss the potential power of certain groups, such as online bloggers, to challenge the system.

(2) How the average user views Internet censorship. Many users agree that the government should censor the Internet for the safety of their children, but their ideas of censorship contradict the government's application of restrictions. For instance, 84.7 percent of users believe pornography should be controlled, 72.6 percent think online violence should be stopped, and even 15.6 percent want the government to monitor game usage. Only 7.6 percent believe, however, that politics should be at all censored or hidden from the public.[81] Though users claim they want unrestricted access to politics and government-related websites, surveys show only 3.5 percent of Internet users often or always visit government websites.[82] This reinforces the government's perception of the apathetic masses, and allows them to focus efforts mainly on a portion of that curious 3.5 percent.[83]

By refining its Internet censorship strategy and allowing the general masses enough freedom to access entertainment websites, create and use blogs, and even write minimally controversially in forums and chat rooms, the government is allowing its public enough wiggle room without allowing complete freedom. This wiggle room has proved satisfactory for the general public, who, for the most part, continue to show little interest in raising their voices loud enough for the government to hear. Another aspect of the Party's strategy has been to utilize the

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[80] Aaron Friedberg, "Hegemony with Chinese characteristics," The National Interest 1 July 2011: 7.
[81] Liang, 6.
[82] Ibid, 6.
[83] Ibid, 6.

Internet to curb negative discussion of the Communist Party but allowing, and even encouraging, online conversations defaming the United States and Japan.

The results of the Party's efforts have proven successful: "China's system of Internet censorship, control, and propaganda, while in no means impenetrable, is effective enough that the picture of the world seen by the average Chinese Internet user is skewed in the regime's favor."[84] Whereas 79 percent of Internet users trust domestic online news services, only 29.6 percent trust foreign online news.[85] This statistic tells us that the Party's subtle brainwashing is incurring results. The average citizen is neither suffocated by the censorship nor dubious of the government's intentions when applying such restrictions. As long as the government can effectively maintain the disconnect between the few influential online dissidents and the masses, then, their Internet censorship strategy is largely successful.

One of the changes affecting all of China's 500 million Internet users is the enforced lack of anonymity. Increased restrictions have resulted in required sign-ins of true and confirmed identities, which encourages self-censorship and discretion when tempted to write politically controversial blog posts, comments, or websites. Internet service providers have been instructed by the State Council to "use only domestic media-news postings, to record information useful for tracking users and their viewing habits, to install software capable of copying e-mails, and to end immediately transmission of 'subversive material.'"[86] There is a possibility that the online masses, which would otherwise have no interest in challenging the government, would choose to mobilize if given the opportunity to hide their identities. By requiring real name logins, however,

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84 MacKinnon, Rebecca. "Networked Authoritarianism in China and Beyond: Implications for Global Internet Freedom." (2010), 33.
85 Liang, 6.
86 US Department of State, "2009 Human Rights Report: China" U.S. Department of State 11 Apr. 2010. Web. 9 Dec. 2011. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/>, 20.

those masses are remaining silent, for the risk of punishment outweighs the rewards of joining an online movement. Data shows that the Party's specific approaches to censorship are "effective in keeping casual users away from sensitive content, [but] are defeated easily through the use of various technologies."[87] Those who are determined to view restricted content, in other words, are largely able to do so.

Statistics show that while the number of avid Internet users is increasing, the number of users that try to circumvent censorship by purchasing proxies has not grown.[88] Additionally, those who use proxies are doing so not to access inappropriate material or gather support for an offline revolution, but rather simply to "participate in a global online community."[89] This means proxies are primarily being used for access to foreign, mostly benign sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google Reader; Chinese citizens "engaged in such practices" are aware that the government "rarely cracks down on them individually, preferring instead to go after prominent dissidents who publish information about forbidden topics online."[90] Most Internet users, therefore, feel relatively safe and unrestricted while online, which gives them less of a reason to challenge the Party for more freedom. However, one segment of the apathetic masses, online bloggers, has gradually begun to pose a potential threat to the Party.

(3) Bloggers and their relationship with Internet censorship. Bloggers have become powerful agents in China, and some scholars believe the freedom given to write blogs is enough to "dig…the Communist Party's grave."[91] This concern has so far proven unfounded, however, for at the mention of gathering support for organized political action, users will be quickly and

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[87] US Department of State, 22.
[88] Markle Foundation, 33.
[89] Brad Stone, "Scaling the Digital Wall in China." *New York Times* 15 Jan. 2010.
[90] Ibid, 2.
[91] MacKinnon, 42.

effectively censored, and potentially punished or removed from the web. In terms of the censorship they face, "Chinese bloggers and blog-hosting companies themselves have generally viewed censorship as part of the necessary tradeoff required for online speech."[92] Many of these bloggers show no interest in challenging the freedoms they have already been given just to spark the Party's further restrictions. They would need to experience "a much more profound and acute offline crisis" in order to find it worth jeopardizing the "online and offline freedoms they have gained in exchange for the very uncertain gamble that they might be able to gain even more."[93] Still, the blogging community is unique, for there exists a dangerous tipping point. Though strictly censored, the Party must be careful to not restrict users too much, or a single online voice could cause a domino effect.

Chinese bloggers, who have grown in number and significance over the past five years, have developed a "subversive lexicon" to "ridicule the government."[94] Of the approximately 500 million Internet users, 300 million are said to blog regularly on sites such as Sina Weibo.[95] Sina Weibo's popularity is seen as a threat: the site could easily be used as a vehicle for mass mobilization, so the Party has responded to this potential threat by establishing new rules for both website administrators and users. As of March 16, 2012, users are required to register with their real names, which forces bloggers to self-censor for fear of government backlash.[96] Additionally, all users with over 100,000 followers are considered potential mobilizers, and the government has mandated Sina Weibo to monitor their posts for controversial material.[97]

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[92] Ibid, 42.
[93] Ibid, 43.
[94] Mark McDonald, "Watch Your Language! (In China, They Really Do). *IHT Rendezvous* 13 Mar. 2012, accessed 21 Mar. 2012. < http://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/13/watch-your-language-and-in-china-they-do/?scp=2>.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.

Because of these newly instituted rules, and consistent government surveillance which results in the removal of approximately 16 percent of all material, users have experienced increased difficulty discussing any politically sensitive terms. Bloggers, therefore, have developed careful plays on words, innuendos, and encrypted terms as a new form of resistance discourse.

[III]   Specifically Censored Events

Generally, Internet censorship as applied by the government forbids users from viewing or creating websites related to "Taiwan and Tibetan independence, underground religious and spiritual organizations, democracy activists, and the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, [as well as] selected sites operated by major foreign governments, news outlets, health organizations, and educational institutions."[98] Additionally, all user-based websites are monitored and restricted so as to prevent rapid communication and possible mass mobilization. The public has especially restricted Internet access during certain politically-sensitive events, such as the revealing of Liu Xiaobo's Nobel Peace Prize, the July 2009 Xinjiang riots, and the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Incident.[99]

Chinese citizens are also subject to the possibility of complete cut-offs from technology, as witnessed during the 2009 riots in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). As a response to the uprising, the government promptly shut down Internet service providers, completely prohibiting citizens and potential activists from viewing or posting information online, thereby cutting off the problem at its root. The citizens of Xinjiang were then without

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[98] US Department of State, 21.
[99] US Department of State, 21.

normal Internet access for a full 10 months after the riots.[100] The Chinese were reminded then that the Internet and the limited freedom they are provided by the Party is a privilege, not a right.

    (1) Jasmine Revolution of 2011. According to the State Security Bureau, China has experienced a steady increase in organized protest. The "probably underreported" number of protests grew from 58,000 to over 150,000 from just 2003 to 2005.[101] When we peel back the layers of why, exactly, citizens are choosing to engage in protest or not engage in protest, we must look beyond Internet censorship as a reason: we must look at *what* the government is censoring. In other words, the Chinese citizens' motivations for speaking out against the government run deeper than simply the restrictions they encounter. The people are discontented by the government's treatment of minorities, disregard of human rights, and lack of personal freedoms. This is confounded, then, by forced censorship. Whereas some believe the millions participating in small-scale, makeshift protests are "relatively trivial when considered to China's overall population," this growing number in protests still tells us something.[102] The Party, however, has refocused efforts, money, and manpower to stop offline protests before they happen.

    As Mao Zedong once said, "a single spark could set the prairie alight."[103] The Jasmine Revolution of 2011 has been compared to the Middle East's Arab Spring, but Beijing's reaction was "swift and overwhelming – harassing reporters, jailing dissidents, and ramping up its already-aggressive censorship of the Internet."[104] In this instance, though some are skeptical of how seriously citizens were engaging in the Jasmine protest, the Party's Internet censorship

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[100] US Department of State, 22.
[101] Andrew Mertha, "Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0": Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process," The China Quarterly 2009: 1000.
[102] Mertha, 1000.
[103] Nicholas Bequelin, "Wake Up and Smell the Jasmine." *Human Rights Watch* 2 Mar. 2011, accessed 21 Mar. 2012 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/03/02/wake-and-smell-jasmine>.
[104] Swartz, 2.

proved successful. The Jasmine revolution was compared to a coma patient "waking and twitching his fingers," for "the event was small, but its significance large."[105]

Citizens were restricted from searching keywords "jasmine" and "Egypt," among many others, and the government was able to tag and survey any user who used those words in emails or online communication. Those encouraging discussion of the planned revolution on microblogs were swiftly arrested for "inciting subversion," and over 100 influential and potential leaders were placed under house arrest nationwide.[106] Because the world had recently witnessed the floundering of Middle Eastern governments due to similar revolutions, the Party overreacted to this potential threat. The government deployed "thousands of uniformed and plainclothes police at the sites of the gatherings and strengthened its censorship of Twitter-like services and virtual social networks."[107] The Party attacked foreign media sites, and cracked down substantially on Internet censorship in order to prevent any discussion of the revolution online.

Beijing's "sledgehammer response," however, sparked conversation domestically and internationally about just how "paranoid and insecure the leadership is about the risks of instability in the country."[108] The (attempted) revolution, however, served as an affirmation of the Party's monopoly: their swift and effective crackdown on mounting dissidents online has reminded the Internet community of their unbridled power. Whereas during the Tiananmen protest of 1989 the government employed tanks to physically crush dissent, the Party has begun crushing dissent virtually through strict Internet blockages and removal of controversial material. The CCP has updated its preventative and reactionary behavior to stop dissent before it happens offline.

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[105] Didi Kirsten Tatlow, "Arab Revolts as Viewed from Beijing" NYTimes.com 23 Feb. 2011. Web. 9 Dec. 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/24/worl/asia/24iht-letter24.html?pagewanted=all>.
[106] Bequelin.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.

(2) Wenzhou train crash of 2011. The aforementioned Wenzhou train crash is another example of the Party's use of censorship. In early 2011, the high-speed rail crash killed at least 39 people and injured over 200, and the government immediately rushed to hush the media and offered minimal information to victims' families and shocked citizens.[109] Hours after the crash, "propaganda directives leaked online showed reporters were warned not to run investigative reports or commentary, or to link the incident to the country's high-speed rail development."[110] Since the crash was so shortly after the high-speed track's opening, the incident was a source of profound embarrassment for the Party. Microbloggers were outraged, however, that the administration was choosing to withhold the truth from them.[111] One blogger, reflecting on the accident, stated that the Chinese have become "second-class citizens in the Internet Age. A whole generation is suffering from the lack of freedom of information."[112] Similar stories have been heard before, in response to censorship of tainted milk powder, the spread of SARS, and domestic human rights injustices. In all these circumstances, the government has chosen to save face by restricting Internet and media access, rather than confront issues head-on with candor and solutions.

In response to the difficulty in uncovering information about the crash, many were questioning the government's incentive: is money more important than lives? Are citizens and their basic rights getting lost in the fight for a continued economic miracle? Censorship, then, becomes more than just a power struggle; it becomes a safety concern. Because of the incident's censorship and the lies fed to the public, bloggers and news anchors questioned whether or not

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[109] Zoe Murphy, "BBC News – China struggles to censor train crash coverage," BBC News 28 July 2011. Web. 9 Dec. 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-14321787>.

[110] Murphy, 1.

[111] Murphy, 2.

[112] Peter Foster, "Man behind 'Great Firewall of China' pelted with eggs." The Telegraph. 19 May 2011. Web. 10 October 2011, 5.

this economic development was worth the risk. One CCTV broadcaster spoke for millions when he commented publically and emotionally on the event: "China, please slow down. If you're too fast, you may leave the souls of your people behind."[113]

Days after the train crash, protesters gathered around a morgue in Wenzhou to identify the dead, determine the number killed, and demand answers from the government. "People don't trust anything the government says anymore," a former journalist in attendance at the morgue stated, "[the public] thinks whatever [the Party] says is a lie."[114] It is statements like these that explain to us how, exactly, Chinese citizens are impacted by censorship. Yes, their searches and posts online are restricted, but more than that, their faith in the government is tested. When citizens are forced to beg for the truth, rally for a statement, and protest for apologies, their relationship with the government is radically strained.

The Jasmine Revolution and the Wenzhou train crash are just two examples of what happens during the censorship process. These instances illuminate the impact of censorship on Chinese citizens: their reactions are founded on more than just frustration. There is concern and desperation in their attempts to foster an honest relationship with the government. Next, we will look at the dynamic between the government and influential online dissidents.

[IV]   The Impact of Censorship on the Dissident Community

China's official report on human rights states that its citizens' "freedom of speech has been fully guaranteed," and the report cites the Internet as a "channel for citizens to exercise

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[113] Foster, 5.

[114] Ben Blanchard and Sui-Lee Wee. "China's effort to muzzle news of train crash sparks outcry" Reuters.com, 25 July 2011. Web. 9 Dec. 2011. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/07/25/us-china-train-censorship>.

their right to be heard."[115] When compared to the statistics of citizens punished for expressing themselves on-line, however, this statement is nothing less than a mockery. The Chinese government "detains a staggering number of people for daring to peacefully express their views," and in 2010 alone, there were over 3,500 unexplained detentions of human rights workers and defenders.[116] These dissidents are held in penitentiaries, "black jails" and psychiatric hospitals.[117] The government's description of ever-increasing Internet freedom focuses on its unprecedentedly large amount of websites, bulletin board systems (BBS), and Internet penetration. It is true that users do indeed continue growing in number and the amount of content on the web is ever increasing.[118] The important thing to keep in mind, however, is that the government strictly screens this content. Just because content is provided does not mean that freedom is provided.

(1) The Party's response to dissidents. Because of their potential to dramatically influence public opinion, powerful netizens receive harsh treatment from the government. During the Xinjiang riots of 2009, a few Uighur webmasters were arrested for "endangering state security" by using politically sensitive language on public forums.[119] As punishment for such behavior, these dissidents were subject to anywhere from three to 10 years in prison. Other behavior which warrants state intervention includes "insulting and slandering others," "spreading terrorizing information and creating a terrorizing atmosphere," as well as "subverting state power."[120] Active netizens can also receive serious punishments for leaking "state secrets," or discussing politically sensitive topics, such as poisoned milk powder, the Wenzhou train crash of

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[115] ChinaDaily, "Report on Human Rights Action Plan." Chinadaily US Edition 15 July 2011: 20.
[116] Human Rights Watch, "China: World Leader of Internet Censorship" 3 June 2011. Web. 9 Dec. 2011.
<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/06/03/china-world-leader-internet-censorship>.
[117] "Freedom and Human Rights in China," Times Topics - The New York Times.
[118] ChinaDaily, 20.
[119] US Department of State, 23.
[120] Ibid, 22-23.

2011, and the Sichuan earthquake. These events are considered "secrets" while the government is still formulating a plan for publicly handling these embarrassments.

A recent report states that China is experiencing the "worst crackdown since 1989 with a rising number of enforced disappearances of activists," and the government and other affiliated groups, such as the mafia, are forcibly removing influential dissidents.[121] In response to the Arab Spring of early 2011, 26 soft or potential dissidents were subject to "enforced disappearances."[122] Over the past two years, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW), "the problem in China has worsened considerably…we know that if they are targeting high profile individuals there may be many more who are not well known."[123] Though the Party withholds or alters almost all information regarding the treatment of dissidents, we have seen a trend of government-funded groups completely plucking potentially influential netizens, artists, and academics from their respective homes and cutting them off wholly from outside communication. Information which has managed to slip through the cracks, however, has repeatedly pointed to physical abuse and torture tactics used as methods of forcing confessions from dissidents.

Though Chinese officials have been quoted stating that there are no black jails in the country, international human rights defenders and journalists have discovered multiple "secret, unlawful detention centers" used to "detain petitioners" and potential threats.[124] Human Rights Watch researcher Phelim Kine explains one jail in Beijing as "an empty government building…staffed by thuggish men in civilian clothes with sharp brush cuts and the swagger of

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[121] Emily-Anne Owen, "CHINA: Enforced Disappearances on the Rise" <u>IPS Inter Press Service</u> 5 Dec. 2011. Web. 6 Dec. 2011. <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=106092>.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Phelim Kine, "Beijing's Black Jails." *Foreign Policy.* 17 Mar. 2012, accessed 17 Mar. 2012 <http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/15/beijings_black_jails>.

off-duty policemen."[125] These jails have existed in this state since at least 2003, according to HRW, and dissidents vary in age, apparent crime, and severity of punishment. These prisoners can be held captive and incommunicado for up to several months. The existence of black jails "makes a mockery of the Chinese government's rhetoric on improving human rights and respecting the rule of law," according to HRW researchers, and the Party is urged to reconsider its treatment of dissidents if it expects to garner respect for the regime internationally.[126]

The CCP, however, has not shown any tendency to reevaluate its handling of dissidents. The Party has recently revised its Criminal Procedure Law to allow for even more governmental power. Article 73 of the law would effectively "legalize secret detentions and 'disappearances' of people viewed as political risks by the government."[127] This increased Party control is allowing officials to essentially eliminate the possibility of mass mobilization led by dissidents. The CCP has the power now to "take dissidents and critics 'off the grid,' both to silence them and to make an example of them to others."[128] Though technically illegal to treat these dissidents inhumanely, victims are often "violently abducted, denied their right to due legal process and contact with loved ones or lawyers, and are at high risk of torture while in custody."[129] This strategy, though potentially effective in silencing the dissidents held in detention, has backfired in specific cases. In response to the detentions of activist Ai Weiwei, for example, netizens domestically and internationally have rallied to create presumably more opposition towards the government than these individuals would have, if not detained.

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[125] Ibid.
[126] Sophie Richardson, "China: Secret 'Black Jails' Hide Severe Rights Abuses," 12 Nov. 2009, accessed 17 Mar 2012 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2009/11/02/china-secret-black-jails-hide-severe-rights-abuses>.
[127] Nicholas Bequelin, "Legalizing the Tools of Repression," *The New York Times*. 29 Feb. 2012, accessed 17 Mar. 2012 <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/01/opinion/legalizing-the-tools-of-repression.html?_r=1&ref=freedomandhumanrights>.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.

(2) Ai Weiwei. In the case of Ai Weiwei, the government strategically convicted him for tax evasion, so as to generate less attention from the public. Ai, for his entire adult life, has taken art and politics further than almost any other Chinese artist. He defines himself as a "brand for liberal thinking and individualism" in a country so starved for contrarians.[130] After he created the iconic Bird's Nest for Beijing's 2008 Olympics, Ai "grew disillusioned, calling the Olympics a 'fake smile' that China was putting on for the rest of the world."[131] His anti-Party attitude, however, did not go unnoticed.

Ai was detained in 2011 not for his controversial activism and art, according to officials, but for the reported $2.4 million in taxes he owed.[132] In response to his arrest, more than 30,000 people donated over $1.3 million "via bank transfers and [by] folding cash into paper airplanes and tossing it over a wall and into the artist's compound in Beijing."[133] To Chinese netizens, Ai was a hero, and they protected him like family. In this instance, the government's attempt to delete a dissident from the Internet's history backfired: the response to his detention created more controversy than he would have, if left to freely express himself. Ai Weiwei remains one of the biggest celebrities in China, and bloggers around the world pay their respects to him daily.

 [V]   The Effect of China's Censorship Internationally

We will now look at China's censorship strategy through an international lens. Globally, how is this form of repression perceived? We will look at responses from Western governments

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[130] PBS, "Who's Afraid of Ai Wewei? *PBS*. PBS. Web. 21 Mar. 2012.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/ai-wei-wei/etc/site-map.html>.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Freedom House, "freedomhouse.org: The China Media Bulletin," FreedomHouse.org. Web. 10 Dec. 2011.
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=691&cmb=42>, 2.
[133] China Media Bulletin, 2.

and non-governmental organizations. Finally, we will look at whether China has paid a price for its application of Internet censorship.

(1) Western governmental criticisms of censorship. The United States, specifically, has voiced its concern about China's oppressive policies and responses regarding Internet censorship. During her time as Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice established the Global Internet Freedom Task Force (GIFT) to provide an outlet for U.S. foreign policy responses to violations of human rights and Internet freedoms committed by repressive governments around the world, specifically including China.[134] GIFT promotes Internet freedom by measuring and documenting Internet censorship policies and publicizing them in its annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*.[135] By publishing China's improvements or digressions on restrictions, the international community is holding the Party responsible for its actions. In November of 2009, President Obama publicly urged China to allow unrestricted Internet access. In January of 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton encouraged U.S. companies to "oppose censorship in their overseas operations."[136] In her speech, Clinton claimed "it's about whether we live on a planet with one Internet, one global community, and a common body of knowledge that benefits and unites us all, or a fragmented planet in which access to information and opportunity is dependent on where you live and the whims of censors."[137] Though the U.S. government actors continue to speak out against the Party's censorship strategy, we have seen no substantial efforts on behalf of the CCP to increase Internet freedoms. If the government's poor treatment of dissidents continues, Western governments will be forced to intervene. Internet censorship, in

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[134] Figliola, 13.
[135] Ibid, 13.
[136] Ibid, 9.
[137] Ibid, 12.

this sense, is inhibiting global relationships and retarding China's emergence in the international scene.

(2) Western NGO criticisms of censorship. International organizations have been pressuring China to adjust its Internet censorship policies since the early 2000s. In 2005, HRW requested that democratic nations encourage the Chinese Communist Party to rethink censorship policies.[138] The pressure applied from international organizations such as HRW has led certain global companies to withdraw business from China. Google, for example, announced in January of 2010 that it would no longer "accept censorship of its search engine in China," and its withdrawal was viewed "as an important step to protect human rights online."[139] This is an example of China's censorship closing their once open doors to the international world. Google's "resolve to avoid complicity with such violations of freedom of expression and association," according to HRW, "deserves praise."[140] We have to wonder if this will be a growing trend in the coming years, as the Internet in democratic regimes becomes more transparent while China's censorship remains oppressive.

(3) Has China paid a price? In regards to illegal detentions of dissidents and activists, the Chinese government "routinely asserts that it only imposes restrictions on expression in line with Chinese law, neglecting to mention that such laws are incompatible with international standards."[141] As China continues to float away from international expectations of freedom of expression, eyebrows are raising around the world. Again, these strict censorship laws are much more than an inconvenient disconnect between Chinese citizens and the rest of the world. They

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[138] "China: End Internet Censorship." *Human Rights Watch*. 27 Sept. 2006. Web. 21 Mar. 2012.
<http://www.hrw.org/news/2006/09/27/china-end-censorship-internet>.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.

are a blatant disregard for international norms, and could serve to prove China's immaturity to the global community.

[VI]   Summary

The Communist Party's relationship with the Internet has fluctuated significantly in the past ten years. The methods of censorship have adjusted to meet the varied challenges to the authoritarian regime, whether it is a budding revolution or an embarrassing misstep on behalf of the Party. In general, the main apathetic masses, which account for the overwhelming majority of Internet users, have remained relatively unaffected by censorship restrictions. The Party has focused efforts on the small segment of potentially dangerous dissidents, and this approach has proven successful. The harsh treatment of influential rebels, however, has attracted attention from both governments and watchdog organizations internationally.

Though the Party has been able to squash attempts at uprisings and block sensitive material online, its treatment of dissidents and its continued oppression are topics of concern among its increasingly liberalized world powers. A regime so insecure about its monopoly is considered volatile and immature: two undesirable characteristics of a potential international partner. Are the sacrifices – money, manpower, and a respectable international reputation – worth the benefits of an unchallenged monopoly? This question will be debated as long as China's Internet censorship policies exist, but for now, the Party will continue to do whatever it takes to maintain its unrestricted powers.

Chapter 4:

Conclusion

The Party's relationship with the Internet, as we have seen, is extremely complicated. Since the Internet's introduction in 1994, the CCP has been constantly adjusting and readjusting its approach to censorship. By evaluating its policies and relationship with citizens and their Internet use, we can assume that the Party's top priority is maintaining its unquestioned monopoly. To control the potential for threats posed by the Internet, the CCP has carefully crafted an intricate censorship strategy. Resources dedicated to this mission include billions of dollars, hundreds of thousands of employed citizens, and immeasurable hours of brainpower.

The Party's layered approach to censorship is outlined by its formal regulations, which officially prohibit potentially controversial materials. Citizens who choose to challenge these regulations by attempting to discuss disapproved subjects will be blocked by the "Great Firewall" of Internet censorship. The Firewall is the CCP's foundation for technological solutions to censoring material: citizens searching controversial material are met with error messages and occasionally flagged for inappropriate behavior. These flagged users, then, are confronted with even stricter website blocking, content filtering, and keyword alerts. Additionally, the activity of these potentially dangerous users is actively intervened by government-enlisted Internet police. Aside from forced censorship online, the Party also encourages self-censorship of users.

Self-censoring is promoted by peer pressure, fear of unknown consequences for controversial behavior, and the Party's harsh treatment of dissidents. The CCP has gone to extremes to silence controversial and popular activists online. Though the Party's secretive and

violent reactions to those who challenge its power have discouraged others from following suit, they have attracted international attention and condemnations. The Communist Party's blatant disregard for international norms has been carefully monitored by governments and watchdog groups worldwide. This is one of the several repercussions the CCP faces for propagating such strict Internet policies.

Aside from the international backlash resulting from China's censorship strategy, the Party has also witnessed decreased support from Chinese citizens. In an increasingly globalized world, some governments are utilizing the Internet to create closer bonds with their citizens, while the CCP is doing quite the opposite. The Party's lack of transparency has become a profound source of concern for the population, especially regarding public health or safety issues. Internet censorship, then, is not only straining the Party's governmental relationships internationally, but also its relationship with citizens. Additionally, when certain Party behavior, such as fudged reports and poor treatment of dissidents, is revealed, the government seems to suffer more than it would have had the issues been initially confronted with honesty.

Let us revisit the case of Ai Weiwei, for example. When Ai spoke out against the Party's careful web of lies regarding the Sichuan earthquake of 2008, he was swiftly removed from the public's eye. He was detained by the Party, and reportedly physically abused. Fearless, Ai posted photos of his abuse online, and continued to garner support from Chinese and foreign netizens alike. A number of international non-governmental organizations spoke out against the Party's decision to withhold and torture Ai, in 2011, for his controversial statements. His voice, then, grew louder than it would have had the Party allowed him to speak freely initially. What does this tell us about the nature of the Party's system? Is the Internet censorship strategy self-

defeating? This will continue to be a debate, online and offline, both within China and among its international partners.

In 2000, Bill Clinton was quoted stating that China's attempt to crack down on Internet usage is like "trying to nail Jello to the wall."[142] The Party's efforts are commonly considered not only futile, but harmful to Chinese growth. We have witnessed major corporations, such as Google, pull out of China due to its censorship strategies and subsequent human rights abuses. In this case, the Party refused to negotiate terms with Google, and more than twenty other U.S. companies, demanding that Google strictly censor sensitive information online. The CCP even went so far as to attack Google email accounts of Chinese human rights activists, as well as "dozens of U.S.-, China- and Europe-based [Google email] users who are advocates of human rights in China."[143] By breaking any semblance of trust between the government and Google, the Party effectively forced the corporation to pull out of the country.

Despite these severe consequences, however, the Party shows no signs of loosening its leash on the Internet population. Its grip only tightened after the Internet-fueled Middle Eastern uprisings of 2011, in which authoritarian states were overthrown by their proactive citizens. The Party continues to pour money and manpower into its censorship strategy, and is apparently unfazed by the subsequent backlash. Until there is intervention, on behalf of suffocated citizens or the international community, the CCP will continue with its repression of online speech. China has witnessed outstanding economic growth in the past decade, and is currently a leading world power. The Party's Internet censorship policy, however, ideologically conflicts with its growth as a modern superpower. We must wonder, then, how long can the Party continue to

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[142] Peter Mullen. ""Nailing Jello to the Wall": A Discussion on the Implications of State Control on Virtual Identity in Communities and Networks." *Online Conference on Networks and Communities*. 24 Apr. 2010. Web. 20 Apr. 2012.

[143] David Drummond. "Official Google Blog: A New Approach to China." *Official Google Blog*. 12 Jan. 2010. Web. 21 Apr. 2012. <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/01/new-approach-to-china.html>.

silence the voice of its people before its international standing is challenged? For this, we will have to wait and observe the apathy of Chinese citizens, the finesse of the Party, and the involvement of the international community.

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