

## **Internet Censorship in China**

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The Internet first arrived in China in 1994 and has become a common communication platform as well as a vital tool for information sharing. The usage of the Internet in China increased from nearly 0 percent in 1994, when it was first introduced, to 28.8 percent by 2009 (Guo, Steve; Feng, Guangchao, 2012). In 1998, the "Golden Shield project" was created by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to prevent uncontrollable foreign data from being accessed in China (Koty, 2017). It took ten years to complete the two parts of the whole project and ended in 2008. This project was a database where the government could access the records of each citizen and connect China's security organizations. In addition, the government had the right to delete any comments online that were considered harmful. (Internet censorship in China, 2021) . The most important equipment for the implementation of the Internet censorship is the Great Firewall (GFW) (pingp, 2018). An academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and former president of Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, Fang binxing, also called the "Father of the Great Firewall of China", designed the key part of GFW. (Jia, 2007)

The Internet censorship in the People's Republic of China (PRC), also known as the GFW, has a political and ideological background which is considered to be one of Deng Xiaoping's favorite sayings in early 1980s: "If you open a window for fresh air, you have to expect some flies to blow in." Indeed, the GFW may influence both publishing and viewing online contents and decreases the freedom of online surfing; for instance, it's well-known that websites like Google are banned in China, just because they don't agree to restrict contents, such as searching results and speeches that can be both free and uncontrollable. Therefore, some people stand out for unfair treatment of web surfing within China and assert that the censorship must be abandoned, and the government should also remove the GFW, However,

as far as I'm concerned, the Internet censorship in China should be continued to maintain, preventing online users from harmful information and illegal materials including pornographic contents, contents that promote crime, violence and topics that are extremely controversial. In this paper, I will discuss why it is important to implement the GFW and how such censorship can prevent cities and a country from external threats among users' side and political aspects.

Firstly, online users can receive more positive information and facts under such Internet censorship. When the management of the internet is both comprehensive and multi-faceted, users will be less likely to obtain fake and "coloured" information that will cause chaos in social order and affect people's normal lives. Due to Professor Dai Yanjun, the deputy director of the Party Construction Department of the Central Party School in China, points out that "the Chinese government is fully aware of the huge impact of the Internet on society, and therefore will pay more attention to the management of the Internet" (ming, 2010). Therefore, what the Chinese government is trying to do is to filter out rumours and provide online audiences with information that are legal, reasonable, and necessary. In 2009, Chinese Internet has become the most intensive area of hot news: Green Dam software, cracking down on pornographic websites, and controlling mobile phone "yellow duo". Among these hot topics, the Chinese government's supervision has attracted much attention and the government will keep strengthening the management of the Internet in accordance with the law to maintain social stability (ming, 2010).

For instance, in 2020, the year when the coronavirus outbreak, the usage of this Internet censorship has found hundreds of rumours from all provinces in China. Most of these are spreading information that are false, such as fake article stating that Jiangxi, Sichuan, and

some other provinces have allowed citizens to not wearing masks in public areas, fake news that Russia is deporting Chinese citizens and even those who are Asians, false “facts” of China providing low quality Covid-19 test kit, and unproven Covid-19 information that have not been proven like agricultural products in a region could spread the virus, etc (Report, 2020). The spread of rumours and other false information related to the epidemic on the Internet interferes will, with no doubt, produce bad influences on the overall situation of epidemic prevention and control of Covid-19. Therefore, such censorship could reduce the risk of loss of control to the virus and can also ensure that all the audiences who prefer to obtain news from the Internet would not be affected by those fake news and articles, and thus make a better life and take more care of themselves under the social issue.

In addition, managing the Internet in accordance with the law is an international practice. An example of this is a bad practice of the Internet: Cyber violence. In China, netizens have complained about cyber manhunts, known as the “human flesh search engine”, which can be used to expose details of individuals who have violated social norms one way or another, achieving social shaming, monitoring and ostracism (Cheung, 2009). On the other side, individuals have little legal resources to protect their reputation, privacy and even themselves, forced to face these unwilling exposures in the Internet witch-hunt. As a solution, the Chinese government chooses to take down on internet service providers and post censorship on these social networks and platforms to avoid cyber violence, and the Golden Shield project has been reviewed as a classical protection to control these violations (Zhang Zhuo; Wang Handong, 2006). Although this seems like using violence to control violence, it indeed transforms the Internet “censorship” to the Internet governance. It is also reported that the government even hires “Internet critics” who act as normal individuals to direct the comments on social networks in the right direction. This, in fact, reduces a great amount of

cyber violence and provides a better online environment among the social platforms such as Weibo, a Chinese Twitter, WeChat, and QQ, etc. (Internet censorship in China, 2021). What's more, besides China, Italy also applies several related laws that are strictly forbidden websites to publish contents which are racially discriminatory, endangers public safety, conducts personal attacks, and violates personal privacy (ming, 2010). In Italy, even though some websites perform hardware filtering of such remarks, they will also send related stuff on duty to delete them at any time. Surprisingly, even in the United States, patriots clearly stipulates that the police have the right to inquire telephone calls, e-mail communications and other types of records for anti-terrorism need. Intelligence agencies can even utilize technical means to monitor, track, and even modify the Internet information which are not conducive to U.S. National Interests (ming, 2010). Also, platforms---- like Twitter, Google, YouTube and Facebook in the U.S.---- also applies censorship on its contents. These platforms will delete contents that may potentially influence the politic or that are complained by the government or a copyright party (Comparison of Chinese and American Internet Censorship). Most of the censorships and online materials' reviews in other countries are carried out by law, that is, accusing information providers of violating a certain law, then passing a court ruling and shutting down the contents after issuing an injunction.

On the other side, there are drawbacks of the GFW, and parts of the world have doubted as well. Some assert that such censorship will lead to leakage of personal information and will also isolate the country from the world. In October 2015, the US human rights organization "Freedom House" released a report showing that the global Internet freedom situation has deteriorated for the fifth consecutive year. Among the 65 countries and regions surveyed and evaluated, China is the least free country on the Internet. This is attributable to the fact that after Xi Jinping, the current general secretary of the Central

Committee of the Communist Party of China, made Internet sovereignty as one of the priorities of his governance, China has increased its network control efforts (Jiu Dao; Mo Yu, 2015).

The report is a true fact. However, the assertion that censorship can cause disclosure of personal information and make a society less open is entirely incorrect. In fact, the censorship in China only applies on the following 15 contents and behaviours by laws:

- 1. Delete, modify or increase to computer information network functions without permission.*
- 2. Oppose the basic principles established by the Constitution.*
- 3. Endanger national unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.*
- 4. Inciting resistance or undermining the implementation of the Constitution, laws and administrative regulations.*
- 5. Divulging state secrets, endangering national security or harming national honor and interests.*
- 6. Inciting ethnic hatred, ethnic discrimination, undermining ethnic unity, or infringing ethnic customs and habits.*
- 7. Undermining the state's religious policies, promoting cults and superstition.*
- 8. Spread rumors, disrupt social order, and undermine social stability.*
- 9. Propagating obscenity, gambling, violence, or abetting crime.*
- 10. Insult or slander others and infringe the lawful rights and interests of others.*
- 11. Endangering social morality or national excellent cultural traditions.*
- 12. Damage the credibility of state agencies.*

***13. Inciting illegal assemblies, associations, processions, demonstrations, gathering crowds to disrupt social order.***

***14. Activities in the name of illegal civil organizations.***

***15. Contains other content prohibited by laws and administrative regulations.***

*(Cited from Book, "Our firewall: Expression and Supervision in the Internet Age"*

*(Yonggang, 2009))*

What's more, the Internet censorship is not established on peeping individuals but mainly by setting an IP address blacklist and filtering on DNS, IP, URL and content (Yifeng, 2008). Domain Name Server (DNS) is to convert domain names into IP addresses, which is called address resolution. In China, the IP address of some websites cannot be resolved, and the prompt will display a "Site not found" or sometimes a "404 not found". The government used to provide a solution by using DNS filtering that if a wrong IP address is given, for example, when accessing Google, Baidu will be jumped and displayed. For IP address blacklists, when you get the correct IP address from the DNS server, the system will check whether the IP address is in the blacklist. If it is, a message of "The connection has been reset" will appear on users' web browsers. In view of the fact that some websites frequently change IP addresses, their URLs will be directly banned. When your URL contains these URLs, it will also display a "Connection reset". The implementation of content filtering to censor a specific content of each webpage. Once it contains prohibited materials, the link will be reset immediately. The specific manifestation is that the webpage only displays halfway, and then will be disconnected immediately, no matter how many times you try to refresh it. Once this happens, the system will automatically cut off the connection between your IP and the websites' IP for 10 minutes. It is worth noting that this step of filtering is bidirectional, and domestic web pages accessed from abroad will also be filtered by content. However, this

doesn't represent a leakage of audiences and user's information, but a periodical check on the public information, especially focusing on those large social networking websites such as Weibo. Finally, all banned IP addresses will be recorded, and those frequently banned addresses will eventually appear on the government list.

The proposal of the Internet censorship in China is to prevent Western media's throwing out major political reports on China that will lead and promote the direction of the attention of the whole Chinese society, and even set up political democracy for us. The GFW can be said to have hit this kind of attempt head-on and has almost wiped-out waves of efforts by the Western media (Hawaii). It requires strong information technology capabilities to restrict access to numbers of overseas websites and their harmful contents, maintain the overall connection between the Chinese Internet and the world, and maintain the global liquidity of information. China has achieved this, and it has formed a pattern to allow communication between China and foreign countries. It is definitely not easy for Western public opinion forces to penetrate ideologically into China.

Last but not least, a network firewall is not a real "wall", but a management system that accurately blocks some specific harmful and unsafe information sources on the Internet. It has brought a certain degree of inconvenience between China and foreign countries, but it should be said that Chinese and foreign societies have a strong adaptability to this inconvenience, and some of the losses it may bring have been correspondingly avoided. What needs to be clarified is that, since the emergence and development of the Internet have highly corresponded to the pace of Western socio-economic and political evolution, it almost brings a large number of elements of order and rules advocated by the West. The Internet in China not only maintains the existing competitive advantages of the West, but also strengthens the



dominant position of the West in the world and makes it more difficult for late-developing countries to maintain their political independence. The "Internet firewall" has reconsolidated the eroded part of China's sovereignty in the Internet era. It has contained and now stopped the West's unscrupulous penetration of China's ideology. It has created a relatively calm environment for China to learn the usage of the Internet and won us time to solve more deep-seated problems. China's Internet development principles is to maintain openness and defend autonomy with equal attention for a long time, because they are related to the core interests of Chinese society. So, the adjustment focus may be focused on a short period of time, but they are generally harmonious and unified undoubtedly.

In conclusion, with the above arguments on the implementation of the GFW, users' side and political aspects, the Internet censorship in China should be continued.

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