CHINA

Journey to the heart of Internet censorship

Investigative report
- October 2007 -

Introduction

Use of the Internet is continuing to spread in China. According to the China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC), the number of Internet users reached 162 million, or 12.3 per cent of the population, on 1 July. A total of 1.3 million Chinese websites have been listed. And 19 per cent of China's Internet users have their own blog.

To maintain its grip on power, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has always controlled all the traditional news media (print media, radio and TV), banning independent news and information and foreign participation. But the government has seen its control eroded by the Internet's emergence. The Internet is the first medium to offer the public a direct means of expressing itself. But that does not mean that China's many privately-owned news websites are free. They, too, must submit to censorship and must practice self-censorship to avoid being quickly banned.

The government monitors the Internet by means of a skilful mix of filtering technologies, cyber-police surveillance and propaganda, in all of which China invests massively. Draconian censorship hunts down anything to do with human rights, democracy and freedom of belief. It nips free expression in the bud.

The victims of this censorship, the Internet users and bloggers, have sometimes rebelled, going to so far as to file complaints against hosting service providers. This is what He Weifang, Pu Zhiqiang, Xiao Han and Xu Zhiyong did when their blogs were blocked by Sina. In theory, the Chinese constitution protects basic freedoms against the many regulations that impose severe restrictions on online media and the sites of non-governmental organisations.

This report by a Chinese technician working in the Internet sector is an unprecedented journey to the heart of a system of censorship that knows no parallel. China is the only country in the world to have tens of thousands of cyber-censors and cyber-police. They have had special sections in every local Public Security Bureau for the past few years. Although their activities are a well-kept state secret, this report reveals their impressive ability to purge the Internet of news and information that embarrass the government. The cyber-police have been involved in the arrest of several hundred Internet users and cyber-dissidents in the past 10 years.

With less than a year to go to the Beijing Olympic Games, this report lifts the veil on appalling practices in China that make it one of the World Wide Web's most repressive countries.

Who controls the Internet?

Supervisory bodies

In China, the supervisory bodies include:

1) The Internet Propaganda Administrative Bureau and the Centre for the Study of Public Opinion, which come under the Information Office of the State Council (the executive)
2) The Internet Bureau and Bureau of Information and Public Opinion, which come under the CPC's Publicity Department (the former Propaganda Department)
3) The Ministry of Information Industry (MII)
4) The Ministry of Public Security's Computer Monitoring and Supervision Bureau
5) The MII's Centre for the Registration of Illegal and Unsuitable Internet Content.
The last two bodies (4 and 5) deal with the problems of pornography, violence and fraud, while the MII is not directly involved in Internet control. The really effective bodies are those mentioned in 1 and 2.
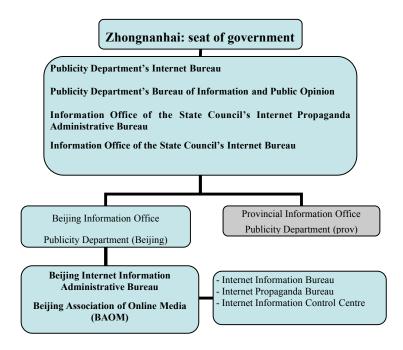

Table: Internet control bodies

- **The Internet Propaganda Administrative Bureau (of the Information Office of the State Council)**

This bureau consists of five sections whose job is to supervise and manage online information, produce reports on information circulating on the Internet and monitor public opinion.

In practice, the work of these sections consists of checking and approving requests for "Internet information service licences" and sending websites "information advisories," that is to say, bans on publishing articles or comments or covering events or issues.

The provincial and municipal bodies replicate the national-level structure. An Internet Bureau operates under the supervision of the provincial Information Office. So, for example the Internet Information Administrative Bureau that is attached to the Beijing Information Office has control over the Internet companies registered in the capital. If a privately-owned website has no licence, it can be closed at any time by the Information Office. This is what happened to the *Aiqinhai* and *Century China* websites last year.

Closure of Century China

A notification of *Century China*'s closure was sent by the Monitoring Bureau of the Beijing Communications Administration on 19 July 2006 to the Beijing Zhongqing Future Community Culture Development Research Institute, which founded *Century China* jointly with the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2000. The message said:

"The *Century China* website www.cc.org.cn and the Century Salon forum www.ccforum.org.cn (Internet Content Provider registration number Beijing 041040), for which your institute is responsible, are not complying with the Administration's provisions on Internet news reports and have illegally established news sections. This represents a serious violation of the Regulations of the Administration of Internet News Reports. Under article 19 of these Regulations, your institute must immediately close the *Century China* website and Century Salon forum."

The regulations issued on 25 September 2005 by the Information Office of the State Council and the Ministry of Information Industry (which Reporters Without Borders dubbed the "the Internet 11 Commandments") stipulate that a licence is required to provide a news service or reproduce reports already disseminated by the official media. However this licence does not allow a website to publish information gathered in an independent manner, including interviews.

- **The Bureau of Information and Public Opinion (of the party's Publicity Department) and the Centre for the Study of Public Opinion (of the Information Office of the State Council)**

These entities have the job of gathering information about important events and subjects in the news in order to draft reports about them for the Central Committee of the CPC.

The Centre for the Study of Public Opinion submits a daily report to the Central Committee and, if necessary, produces special reports on individual subjects. It also has an arrangement for obtaining despatches from all over the country in order to react rapidly to events.

The Publicity Department's Bureau of Information and Public Opinion organises a weekly meeting on the state of online public opinion. The report of the meeting used to be sent solely to Publicity Department chief Liu Yunshan and to Zhou Yongkang, who is Public Security Minister

and a member of the State Council. Since September 2006, it has also been sent to all of the members of the party's Political Bureau. Ten commercial websites (including Sohu, Sina, Netease, QQ, Bokee, Kongzhong, Daqi, Tianya and Cat898) were added last year to the list, already including 39 government websites, used for sounding out public opinion.

The Bureau of Information and Public Opinion also produces three kinds of periodical on the basis of its monitoring of online news:
Special News Report: daily, sent to Publicity Department chief Liu Yunshan and several other senior officials in the department.
State of Online Public Opinion: daily, sent to Li Changchun (a member of the party's Political Bureau and its Standing Committee) and to senior members of the Publicity Department. It always has five items.
Public Opinion on the Internet: issued for major events, sent to members of the Political Bureau's Standing Committee and to Public Security Minister Zhou Yongkang.

Take as an example the disturbances in high schools in Zhengzhou (in the central province of Henan) in 2006. The next day, the bureau sent a report to President Hu Jintao and other senior CPC leaders at 9 am. Half an hour later, directives for resolving the problem were sent to the Ministry of Education.

- **The Internet Bureau (of the party's Publicity Department)**

The CPC's Publicity Department (former Propaganda Department) created this bureau in 2006 partly in order to reinforce control over online media but also to preserve its own power within the state apparatus. The department had initially refused to get involved in administering the online media, leaving this task to the State Council (the executive). But the budget assigned by the party for controlling the Internet would have possibly grown, from local sources, to 200 billion RMBs (about 19 billion euros) as a result of the Internet's phenomenal growth. One of the ways adopted by the department as part of its drive to get a share of state control over the online media was to try to establish a system for registering bloggers under their real name. But when the biweekly *21st Century Business Herald* revealed this, it was opposed by Chinese intellectuals as it would have ended anonymous blogging and would therefore have discouraged blogging altogether.

Ideological control of employees

The Information Office of the State Council organises courses in order to exercise ideological control over its employees and to encourage better censorship and self-censorship practices. Twenty five-day courses for 50 people at a time have already been held in Beijing. A certificate is issued to participants at the end of each course.

The Beijing Information Office has also established a training service in cooperation with the faculty of journalism of the Beijing People's University. They run two-day courses for up to 200 participants at a time.

Training course certificate

The executives and editors of online companies are subjected to another kind of ideological control. An "online media trip to the place where communism was born" has been organised once a year since 2004. These are the companies that have been invited: Sohu, Sina, Netease, TOM, Zhonghua, Baidu, Beiqing, Zhongguo Sousuo, Xilu, Xici, Yahoo!, Hexun, Daqi, Qihu, Bokee, Soufang, Qianxiang Hudong and Kongzhong.

These media were asked to publish articles about the trip. The portal Netease, for example, was forced by the Beijing Information Office to post an article about this year's trip on its home page for 24 hours. The headline was: "Twenty Beijing-based electronic media go to Guangxi in search of the revolution's traces." The portal Sohu had to post a similar article.

Communication between supervisory bodies and commercial websites

Various forms of communication have been established between the leading commercial websites and the supervisory bodies – phone, email, SMS text messages, MSN, QQ and RTX (Real Time eXchange) instant messaging, web platforms and a weekly meeting. The Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau uses these different means of communication to instruct sites to not publish an article, to not cover an event or issue, or to put a stop to certain comments. The employees of these privately-owned sites are expected to liaise with the bureau and respond to its orders as quickly as possible.

The means of communication that are most used are SMS text messages and MSN instant messaging. Last year, for example, two journalists with *Diyi Caijing Ribao (China Business News)* wrote several articles criticising the way the Taiwanese group Foxconn, an iPod subcontractor, treated workers in its plants in China. Foxconn reacted by suing the journalists for 30 million RMB (2.9 million euros) in damages. In September 2006, privately-owned websites received SMS messages saying: "Do not disseminate reports about the Foxconn case so that it is not exploited by those who want independence to advance their cause."

As MSN's instant messaging service is run by a foreign company, the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau prefers not to use it out of concern that its orders could be revealed. So the bureau asked all the websites in August 2006 to begin using RTX (Real Time eXchange), an instant messaging service for companies that is operated by the Chinese company Tengxun.

Finally, the employees of the 19 leading Beijing-based websites attend a meeting at the Internet Information Administrative Bureau every Friday morning from 9 to 11, at which all the subjects that most interested Internet users that week are evaluated and bureau members criticise some sites. Then the bureau members announce the subjects to be covered in the coming week, the articles to be written under their supervision, and the articles to be eliminated.

In order to comply with the bureau's orders, all the online companies have set up a section dedicated solely to monitoring all of the letters, comments, articles and other messages on their websites. Content of a sensitive nature is immediately masked or erased, and the username or IP address of the person who posted it is also blocked.

Penalties for sites that go too far

Although website employees practice self-censorship and filter for keywords, it sometimes happens that sites broach taboo subjects inadvertently. In such cases, the authorities may apply penalties ranging from criticising the site, imposing a fine, ordering the dismissal of the site employee responsible or forcing either the site section or the entire site to close down.

Phoenix TV, a privately-owned station, broadcast a report on 9 May of this year about the death of Huang Ju, a deputy prime minister and member of the Political Bureau's Standing Committee. Shortly afterwards, the station said the information was wrong. In fact, websites had just received this message: "Ban on using any other source than *Xinhua* [the official news agency] on the death of Huang Ju." Despite the instruction, some sites such as Sohu and Bokee did post reports from other sources and were fined 20,000 RMB (1,900 euros) and 10,000 RMB (960 euros) respectively.

A South Korean website polled its visitors about their nationalism in August 2006, asking them: "If you were reborn, would you want to be Korean again?" The Culture and Debate sections of the website Netease copied the idea, asking visitors if they would want to be Chinese again. The poll ran from 4 September to 11 October. Of the 10,000 people who participated, 64 per cent said they would not want to be Chinese. The main reasons identified were: "Being Chinese is not honourable," "You cannot buy a house in China, happiness is too inaccessible," "No reason," "You cannot crack jokes in China" and "You cannot see good cartoons in China." Netease had to fire Culture section editor Tang Yan and Debate section editor Liu Xianghui. And the Debate section was closed down.

Expansion of the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau

Prior to 2005, the Beijing authorities had not really organised an Internet control system. After the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau was created on 21 November of that

year, many employees were recruited and real control of the major websites based in the capital began. The bureau subsequently went from passive monitoring and imposing bans on certain reports to active use of its power, forcing website to publish certain propagandistic reports.

Most of China's leading commercial websites are based in Beijing. There are 20 of them: Sohu, Qianlong, Sina, Netease, TOM, Zhonghua, Baidu, Beiqing, Zhongguo Sousuo, Xilu, Xisi, Yahoo, Hexun, Daqi, Qihu, Bokee, Soufang, Qianxiang Hudong, Fenghuang and Kongzhong.

The ones that are not registered in Beijing are not subject to as much pressure. Tengxun, for example, which has China's biggest portal and the instant messaging service QQ, is based in Shenzhen and, as a result, enjoys more freedom. Many reports that are blocked on Sina or Netease can be found on Tengxun, such as the story of the Chongqing family that refused to sell their home to property developers. As Tengxun was not being censored so strictly, the story was the subject of a great deal of comment on the site in March 2007.

Either on their own initiative or on orders from above, the bureau's members remind websites of the importance of political and social stability in China as soon as a story grabs the attention of the online media or public opinion. They ask the websites to remove the story, or move it to a less prominent position, put a stop to comments and to hide or suppress any new developments in the story, or to posts an article written by the bureau.

The score of privately-owned websites based in Beijing receive this kind of order up to five times a day.

The control is such that they cannot even change the headlines of the articles they reproduce. For example, on 25 July 2006, the Finance section of the portal Sina change the headline of a *Diyi Caijing Ribao (China Business News)* article from "The provinces of Guangdong, Shandong and Jiangsu have the biggest GNPs in China in the first half of 2006" to "Shandong boasts GNP of more than 1 billion yuan, entire country disclaims." For changing the headline, Sina was accused by Beijing Information Office director Cai Fuzhao of "inciting violence" and was banned from interviewing leading Chinese figures for a month.

Such orders and bans are often issued by the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau, rather than the State Council or Publicity Department, as you might think. In December 2006, for example, a Beijing security unit asked six major portals to post an article headlined "*The 21st Century Business Herald*, whose enemy are you?" denying a rumour about Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's son. But the bureau banned the article on the grounds that it could "alarm senior political leaders."

The bureau has stepped up the demands it makes on websites. In 2006, it simply asked them to comply with directives as soon as possible. In 2007, it divided orders into three categories – a first category order that must be implemented within five minutes, a second category order that must be executed within 10 minutes and a third category order that must be executed within 30 minutes.

The Beijing Information Office has introduced a new system of "licence points" for websites. As well as being fined, sites can have points withdrawn. If they loose all their points, they risk to get their licence withdrawn. But they have the possibility of recovering lost points and are encouraged to do so.

Relentless control

The Chinese authorities send orders of three kinds – bans issued before publication of a report, bans issued after publication of a report and propaganda instructions.

In May and June 2006, for example, a total of 74 directives (48 prior bans, 4 post-publication bans and 22 propaganda directives) were sent to commercial websites registered in the capital by the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau.

Examples of bans issued before publication of a report

• 8 May 2006, 08:35 From: Fan Tao, deputy director of the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau.

The newspaper *Minzhu yu Fazhi Shibao (Democracy and Legal Times)* is using sources of information that do not comply with regulations. You are therefore asked not to use articles from this newspaper. Sites that have posted any of its articles are asked to delete them immediately. Please reply to this message.

• 14 May 2006, 18:00 From: Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau.

The trial of the journalist Yang Xiaoqing of the newspaper *Zhongguo Chanjing Xinwenbao (China Business and Industrial News)* on a charge of blackmail is under way. As this case is rather sensitive and complex, sites are asked to use only reports from *Xinhua* and the site *Rednet*, to not post any information from other sources and to not post any information on this subject in discussion forums.

• 19 May 2006, 17:02 From: Fan Tao, deputy director of the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau

Please do not refer to the film "Summer Palace," a participant in the Cannes Film Festival official competition, without obtaining the censor's approval. You are also asked not to post articles or comments on this subject and not to interview actors who appeared in the film. You are asked not to report or reproduce any information about the Cannes Film Festival that mentions the film. Finally, do not post any article on this subject in discussion forums, blogs or comments.

• 22 May 2006, 14:47 From: Chen Hua, deputy director of the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau

1. A few agitators got residents in Dongzhou (in the southern district of Shanwei) to commit an act of vandalism on a windmill and attack the police on 6 December. The competent authorities are in the process of taking measures to resolve this problem, and the trial of those responsible for this unrest is taking place right now. The leading news media in Guangdong province and the

websites Nanfang Xinwen, Jinyang, Dayang and Shenzhen Xinwen are currently covering the case and will publish articles on this subject on 24 and 25 May. No news websites from other provinces should cover the case or post articles on the subject. Discussion forums, blogs and comments must not talk about the subject.

2. You are asked not to cover the matter of the real estate auction of public land at Dadun Beidingcun, in the Chaoyang district of Beijing.

- 3 June 2006, 22:00 From: Chen Hua, deputy director of the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau

Please continue to seek and remove any content referring to the 17th Congress of the CPC or to 4 June [the date of the Tiananmen massacre]. Tomorrow, each section, each blog platform and each page on the websites must step up monitoring and control in order to quickly resolve any problem.

- 28 June 2006, 18:40 From: Chen Hua, deputy director of the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau

Regarding the explosion at a mine belonging to the Fuxin mining group in Wulong (in the northeastern province of Liaoning), please only use articles from *Xinhua* and *Liaoning News*.

Regarding the draft law on the management of crisis situations [which, inter alia, steps up press censorship], please use the *Xinhua* and *People's Daily* articles and nothing else. Please reinforce monitoring of comments, discussion forums and blogs and immediately remove any violent or obscene message.

Regarding the issue of unequal income distribution, please use articles from the Central Committee's main information mouthpieces and nothing else. Please do not spread rumours about this matter or conduct online polls. Please reinforce monitoring of comments, discussion forums and blogs and immediately block any violent or obscene message.

Examples of bans issued after publication of a report

- 30 May 2006, 18:56 From: Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau.

Dear colleagues, regarding the death of a radio presenter while she was at the deputy mayor's home, do not disseminate any reports, do not send any new articles, withdraw those that have already been posted on the site, and ensure that forums, blogs and messages no longer refer to this case. Please reply.

- 17 June 2006, 18:35 From: Chen Hua, deputy director of the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau

Dear colleagues, the Internet has of late been full of articles and messages about the death of a Shenzhen engineer, Hu Xinyu, as a result of overwork. All sites must stop posting articles on this subject, those that have already been posted about it must be removed from the site and, finally, forums and blogs must withdraw all articles and messages about this case.

Examples of propaganda instructions

- 9 May 2006, 11:05 From: Fan Tao, deputy director of the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau

The *Xinhua* exclusive "Who is most hurt by the Web?" is available at the follow address: http://news.xinhuanet.com/focus/2006-05-08/content_4494204.htm. It contains many articles, so each site is asked to put a link on its home page so that Internet users can read them directly on the *Xinhua* site. This will reduce the amount of work for each site.

- 15 May 2006, 13:24 From: Fan Tao, deputy director of the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau

We ask you to kindly replace the lead article in the section "Encouraging online etiquette" by this one from the website Qianlong: "The Beijing Association of Online Media officially count 200 Internet monitors" (http://beijing.qianlong.com/3825/2006/05/15/178@3171683.htm).
And please put this Qianlong article in second place: "Silicon Valley launches website etiquette promotional activities" (http://beijing.qianlong.com/3825/2006/05/15/178@3171702.htm). We also ask you to put it in the news section summary. Please acknowledge receipt of this message.

- 19 May 2006, 16:00 From: Fan Tao, deputy director of the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau

The website Qianlong has already posted a news report about a change in the increase in Beijing taxi fares (http://beijing.qianlong.com/3825/2006/05/19/134@3182655.htm). All sites are asked to put it in their news section, but not in a prominent position, to not put it on their front page, and to stop comments on the subject.

- 27 May 2006, 18:45 From: Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau.

1. Please group together and highlight reports about the commemoration of the 85th anniversary of the Party's creation, the commemoration of pre-1949 Communist heroes and the campaign to encourage the creation of suitable websites. When there are important commemoration activities or speeches by Chinese leaders, articles about the World Cup must come second. Please do not post any critical content and try to create a positive online public opinion mood for these commemoration activities. Step up monitoring of forums, blogs and comments about the news. False rumours and offensive or distorted news reports should be suppressed as quickly as possible.
2. If reference is made on a forum to the news report, "774 ships of the Chinese fleet have sunk," suppress it immediately and step up monitoring.
3. Regarding the news report, "After a programming revision, the *CCTV* central television station has decided to stop broadcasting the national anthem," websites must not post it, refer to it or comment on it, and those that have already posted it should take it down. Step up monitoring of forums, blogs and comments on the news, and suppress offensive or insulting reports as quickly as possible. Comply strictly with these instructions!

See appendix for more examples of instructions issued by the authorities.

Key-word censorship

To avoid fines, websites of any importance practice self-censorship by blocking "key-words."

There are three kinds of key-work censorship:

- masked words: words replaced by an asterisk
- sensitive words: words that need to be checked by moderators before they can be posted
- taboo words: words that cannot be posted or isolated or appear in an article's content.

Comparison of censorship of comments on:

- The website forum of *Phoenix TV*, a Hong Kong-based television station that is regarded as a foreign new media. Chinese Internet users go to it to discuss "sensitive" news.

-The Chinese search engine Baidu, the second-biggest search engine in the world and the first in China.

-A blog on the portal Sina, one of the big three portals in China. Internet users check Sina's blogs more than they do its news reports.

A. "Communist Party of China's conservative wing"

After a note containing the word sequence "Communist Party of China's conservative wing" was posted on *Phoenix TV*'s discussion forum, the words were replaced by asterisks ***. But the same word sequence was accepted on the Sina blog and by the Baidu search engine.

B. "Crusade against the Publicity Department"

This expression was coined by Jiao Guobiao in an essay with this title published in 2004. When a message containing the expression is sent to the *Phoenix TV* forum, the following message appears: "We thank you for your message. The moderator will analyse its content and add it to the list of subjects for discussion. After verification, your comment will appear on the forum." The same word sequence produced no result from the Baidu search engine, but it appeared normally on the Sina blog.

C. "Wave of resignations by party members"

It was the outlawed spiritual movement Falun Gong that started talking about a wave of resignations by Communist Party members, which it encouraged. Ever since the authorities cracked down on Falun Gong in 1999, they have suppressed all words and names associated with it, such as "Li Hongzhi" (the movement's founder) and "Gao Zhisheng" (a lawyer who was jailed for defending Falun Gong members). Falun Gong synonyms and homonyms have also become "sensitive."

An attempt to post a short article about resignations by CPC members on the *Phoenix TV* forum elicited this message: "We thank you for your message. The moderator will analyse its content and add it to the list of subjects for discussion. After verification, your comment will appear on the forum."

The article initially appeared on the Sina blog, but it was erased after four and a half minutes and replaced by: "Sorry, the article 'Wave of resignations by party members' which you placed online has been suppressed by the moderator. We ask you to excuse us for any inconvenience caused. If you have any questions, contact us by email and we will reply within 24 hours."

A search on Baidu using this expression yielded 171,000 results, the first of which was entitled "Wave of resignations by party members." The page could be opened.

D.   "Tiananmen massacre"

A series of pro-democracy demonstrations by Chinese students on Tiananmen Square in 1989 was finally crushed by the authorities with a great loss of life on 4 June of that year. Since then, any words associated with the event, no matter how remotely, have been banned from the Internet. The list includes: "1989.6.4," "1989 student movement," "unrest," "rioting," "massacre" and "uprising".

When an article of harmless content was posted with the subversive title of "18th anniversary of Tiananmen massacre" on the *Phoenix TV* forum, it produced the following message: *"Your message could not be posted because of its undesirable content. You are kindly asked to correct it."*

The same article was not rejected when posted on the Sina blog. A search for "4 June" on Baidu yielded 17,500 results in 0.001 seconds.

E.   "Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party"

This is the title of a harsh critique of the CPC published by the Falun Gong in 2005. After learning of its existence, the authorities launched an all-out hunt for anything that could be related to it in order to avoid seeing the party's authority challenged.

When a note about the "Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party" was posted on the *Phoenix TV* forum, this message appeared: "We thank you for your message. The moderator will analyse its content and add it to the list of subjects for discussion. After verification, your comment will appear on the forum." Two minutes later, the Internet user was automatically redirected to the list of subjects, where this message was posted: "We remind users to employ appropriate language, respect other users, not insult them and not provoke them! Thank you!"

After same note was posted on the Sina blog, the blog became blocked and could no longer be visited. But by going into the server, you could see that the note still existed. A search for "Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party" on Baidu gave just four results.

"Sorry, the blog you wish to see no longer exists"

The implementation of key-word censorship varies according to the site. *Phoenix TV* is based in Hong Kong but its website is registered in Beijing, which makes it subject to Chinese legislation and to supervision by the Beijing Information Office. It applies a stricter censorship than Sina and Baidu'

Even if the key-words list is decided by the Information Office of the State Council, each site adds key-words to its own filters in order not to run the risk of being criticised, punished or, worse still, closed down.

Finally, news websites are not allowed to post articles taken from the boldest Chinese newspapers such as *Nanfang Dushi Bao (Southern Metropolis News)*, *Minzhu yu Fazhi Shibao (Democracy and Legal Times)*, *Diyi Caijing Ribao (China Business News)*, *Huaxia Shibao (China Times)* and *Caijing (Finance)*.

Can Internet users sidestep key-word censorship?

Internet users tried using signs such as " ", " / " and " \ " to get around censorship but websites installed new filters that detect and censor these codes. Users then tried employing different words, synonyms or homonyms but the sites have picked them up too. This has had the effect of making the list of banned key-words much longer. Today there are about 400-500.

Eluding censorship

All the same, the constant development of new Internet technologies gives Chinese Internet users the possibility of eluding censorship and surveillance by the authorities. By getting round the blocking of websites by their IP address or domain name, Internet users can gain access to freely reported news and information and can communicate and interact with other users.

Here are some suggestions for eluding censorship:

- Use proxy servers. A proxy server is a server located between the user and a website that can hide the user's IP address. There are various kinds of proxy servers (such as HTTP, POP3, FTP and SOCKS) offering different kinds of services. An HTTP proxy server is most used for this purpose.
  Proxy servers can also be used to access blocked foreign websites, but China's censorship is so well developed in this respect that it prevents this. You have to access sites such as dongtaiwang.com, wujie.net and huayuannetworks.com, which have been dubbed "The Three Musketeers." They provide many technical tools and services of excellent quality. Other services that can be used to get round censorship are ziyoumen, huofenghuang, shijietong, hanfeng, wujie liulan, SafeWeb and the software programme Tor, which protects a person's anonymity while browsing. Thanks to programmes such as Tor, it is no longer necessary to tweak one's browser settings.
- Exploit the different levels of censorship between provinces or between levels in the administration. One may be able to post a critical article in the online media in other provinces. The region where control is strictest is obviously Beijing. Also, as the smaller news websites are often less controlled by the local authorities, it may be possible to post sensitive information on them that would be censored on the more popular sites.
- Use new Internet technologies: blogs, discussion forums, Internet telephony, discussion groups, grouped calls, instant messaging, webmail, P2P (peer to peer) and VPN (Virtual Private Network).

Appendix

These are examples of the messages sent (in Chinese) in May and June 2006 by the Beijing Internet Information Administrative Bureau to the main portals and websites registered in the capital.

- Order to sites to withdraw an investigative report about the Forestry Department director's suicide (11 May 2006).
- Ban on posting any report about a bridge explosion in Nanjing, in the central province of Jiangsu (11 May 2006).
- Ban on posting any report about commuting sentences for senior officials (14 May 2006).
- Ban on posting any report, except by *Xinhua*, about changes in the salaries of government officials; order to suppress any note, message or comment about this matter (14 May 2006).
- Order to sites to withdraw all reports about the auction of a copy of a famous portrait of Mao Zedong (20 May 2006).
- Order to sites to withdraw any report about a teacher's strike in the central province of Chongqing and in Jintang, in the central province of Sichuan (26 May 2006).
- Ban on referring to a taxi driver's suicide after a fuel price increase (28 May 2006).
- Order to put an end to comments, articles, forums and blogs about China's gift of money to Indonesia after an earthquake, which had given rise to racist comments. Order to replace these comments with messages of support likely to favour relations between the two countries and China's international image (29 May 2006).
- Strict ban on posting any article, except by *Xinhua*, about the Beijing deputy mayor's dismissal for corruption (11 June 2006).
- Strict ban on posting any article, except by *Xinhua*, about a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit. Ban on posting any article referring to conflicts among SCO members (12 June 2006).
- Ban on posting, or commenting on, any report about claims by Chinese activists to the disputed Senkaku Islands, currently controlled by Japan (12 June 2006).
- Ban on posting any article, except by *Xinhua*, about the crash of a military transport plane (15 June 2006).
- Ban on posting, or commenting on, any report about a woman student who was beaten to death in the University of Agriculture in Guangzhou (22 June 2006).
- Order to suppress any report about rioting by students in the University of Zhengzhou, in the central province of Henan, in response to the downgrading of certain university degrees (22 June 2006).
- Ban on posting any article, except by *Xinhua* and *People's Daily*, about the draft law on the management of crisis situations (22 June 2006).
- Orders to post propaganda articles on the closure of illegal Internet cafés (7 June 2006), the creation of new Internet monitoring posts (25 May 2006) and the organisation of "educational" activities for websites (24 May and 28 June 2006).

Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD)
Non-political, non-government network of grassroots and international activists promoting human rights protection and empowering grassroots activism in China. CHRD's objective is to build NGO capacities, monitor rights development, and assist victims of abuse.   CHRD advocates non-violent and rule of law approaches. CHRD conducts investigation and research, provides information, organizes training, supports a program of small grants, and offers legal assistance.
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