The Internet in China's state–society relations: Will Goliath prevail in the chiaroscuro?

Eric Sautedé
University of Saint Joseph, Macao, China

Abstract
This article explores how state and society relations have been affected by the development of information technology in China over the past 20 years. It argues that despite all the transformative changes that such technology has helped bring about, 'benefits' have to be weighed in terms of both empowerment of society and strengthening of state capacity. Ultimately, the digital challenge has not translated into a weakening of the authoritarian state, and this can be explained by the very nature of the party-state in China and how it has managed to make use of communication tools that prove to be both constructive and divisive.

After the commercial coming of age of the Internet in the mid-1990s, analyses regarding the development of information technologies in China have more often than not fluctuated between two extreme perspectives: either unbridled enthusiasm or outright skepticism. Moreover, very few observers have been able to break free from the normative and positivist bias that envisions these new media as tools (or 'weapons' for some) that support greater individual freedoms. Rather unexpectedly, the capacity of a party-state geared at preserving both social harmony and communist rule seemed rather lightweight when juxtaposed against a 'global' and 'interconnected' world. In this re-enactment of David vs. Goliath, the millions of Chinese Internet users (currently more than 564 million) appeared bound to overwhelm the administrative colossus in their unquenchable thirst for liberty.

Nobody would dispute that new information technologies today offer both alternative channels of information and remarkable platforms for Chinese citizens to voice their concerns and grievances, allowing them to present and restore some form of truth about

Corresponding author:
Eric Sautedé, School of Business, Government and Social Work, University of Saint Joseph, Rua de Londres 16, Macao, China.
Email: esautede@usj.edu.mo

their circumstances, and revealing the distance between their and the 'official' truth – to potentially millions of netizens.[1] Here lies the real novelty of these technologies, and the authorities have indeed paid very careful and receptive attention to this revealing online vox populi, sometimes even at the highest level as when President Hu Jintao engaged live in an online chat on the Strong Country Forum (强国论坛) back in June 2008.[2] It is however very difficult to sustain the view that the Internet in particular and new information technologies in general are the untainted agents of a strengthening civil society, if by civil society we mean structured and autonomous social movements and actors. The propensity for panoptical control[3] imposes very strict constraints and these always deserve a strong emphasis, but it is truly the nature of the medium in connection with a particular political context which requires further exploration: the communist heritage is as much a matter of interdiction as it is of social mobilization. To sum up the main argument, analyses have far too often fallen victim to a triple illusion – the illusion of huge numbers, the quasi-supernatural powers attributed to communication technologies, and the self-fulfilling prophecy that radical political change was bound to happen with any disturbance of the status quo ante – thus granting the Internet a priori benefits that would over time be translated into the political sphere. Visions range from profound regime transformation and thus democratization to less ambitious forms of political diversification and pluralization, in which greater transparency should play a key role. From our perspective, the Internet has indeed helped renew and reinvigorate the social contract between the state and society, and in various instances it has been less an agent of 'radical' change as far as citizen empowerment is concerned than one of continuity that has allowed for an 'evolutionary' reinforcement of state capacity.[4] What is at play then is the colossal struggle between citizens empowered by the Internet, ranging from mere routine dissemination of official and less official information to far more challenging mobilizations via online social media platforms, and a state that far from being 'overwhelmed' by the new medium has become accustomed to the intricacies of 'public opinion channelling' (舆论引导),[5] in which effective suppression is only one of the many paths chosen by the authorities to respond to what is deemed contentious Internet chatter. Ultimately, what was to be a challenge has been made 'non-antagonistic', to use Mao's own wording, and possibly transfigured into a scheme of (re-)building legitimacy.

A triple illusion with a Chinese flavour

Most of the arguments tempering the fervour of those dubbed 'cyber enthusiasts' or 'cyber utopians',[6] to use Evgeny Morozov's terminology, are fairly clearly established, and they share a particular resonance in the Chinese context which we now turn to.

Numbers, huge ones

The first illusion has to do with the encounter between two immense entities: on the one hand, one of the most populous countries on the planet with a remarkable track record of double-digit economic growth over more than 30 years and, on the other hand, unlimited global electronic communication. Here again, what has been dubbed the tyranny of numbers plays to the full: with 564 million Internet users as of December 2012 (an estimated

422 million can access the Internet on their mobile phones), China is home to the biggest Internet population in the world, a population that continues to grow at a record pace of more than four million per month. As far as blogs are concerned, more than 65 per cent or 372 million users have blogs, 309 million use micro-blogging services (Weibo and the like), and 202 million access micro-blogging services via their mobile phones. Social networking services, such as QQ and Kaixin, have already managed to seduce 275 million users, close to half of the Internet users in China, and constitute the fastest-growing segment of the industry.[7] Huge numbers multiplied by an infinity of possibilities evoke an image of an irrepressible spreading movement, as if the structure of the Net has no tangible nodal points – servers, portals, search engines, blog providers, and so on – and cannot therefore be truncated.

Teleological 'liberation technologies'

The second illusion has to do with the intimate and teleological relationship that these new technologies seem to maintain with 'human progress' – what this author has dubbed the 'liberation technologies syndrome',[8] as if issues regarding the context – do technologies really exist without a social and political context? – as well as the ends are somehow less legitimate. A perspective that any good understanding of the Weberian formulation of the 'disenchantment of the world' or the classic questioning about 'technology as master or servant?' from Francis Bacon to Eugene Staley[9] should easily help dispel, but which seems to permeate – beyond reason – many writings about new information technologies that often border on self-fulfilling angelism. Again, 'numbers' play an important role, as usage is often reduced to 'access': improvements in the penetration rate of the Internet – today about 40 per cent – are therefore praised by all, and one can only worry about the digital gap that continues to exist between rural and urban areas.[10] Far too often, the 'modalities' of communication and the content of what circulates become secondary in this vision of modernity where only 'size' matters.

A necessary weakening of the state?

Finally, behind the analogy of the battle between David and Goliath lies the belief that the party-state will be irremediably fragmented and ultimately decline under the multiple assaults of newly empowered citizens. Perspectives on the Chinese state since 1979 have fluctuated, and cycles of analysis emphasizing 'structuring' forces have been followed by contradictory ones highlighting more debilitating developments. The initial economic analytical framework on the demise of the planned economy and the slow establishment of a market economy[11] was accompanied by speculations on the slow death of totalitarianism – and the hope of a possible separation between the state and the Party, which were abruptly reversed by the repression on Tian'anmen Square on 4 June 1989. A decade later, marked by huge social challenges and the need for new public policies at a time when state capacity seemed to be in peril, the Chinese state re-emerged as the sole purveyor of stability and corrective measures, which resulted in a retightening of its grip over society in the following decade – what the American political scientist Andrew Nathan has characterized as 'authoritarian resilience'.[12] If the studies on the workings of

control and censorship over the Internet in China clearly confirm Nathan's interpretation, it is somehow bewildering to note that a significant number of press articles reporting on defiant virtual activities perpetrated by Internet users towards the state often parallel the upsurge in 'mass demonstrations' in recent years as reported by the official statistics,[13] again implying that the erosion of the state's capacity was inexorable. And when the dissident use of the Internet appeared to have been finally curtailed, these very same articles never fail to suggest that 'time' was not on the side of public authorities, and that because of subversion in huge numbers, the clock signalling the end of the rigid bureaucratic state has started ticking.[14] Are the many lights blinking on the dashboard of state capacity the prelude for a vast overhaul of the party-state? Aren't these yellow and red lights overemphasized? And is the conviction that 'the revolution will be blogged' [15] a self-fulfilling prophecy, an act of faith or simply a bet? Are these blogs the real agents or the buoyant echo platforms of vast transformations? And what does it take for these blogs, tweets and posts to become the instruments or at least the facilitators of change?

Keeping the top in check

The empowering effect of the Internet has been far-reaching in China – as a form of mobilization (information technologies being mere tools) and one of the most innovative means that brings together two spheres that used to be distinct, namely, the production of information and its reception in everyday exchanges, what the French sociologist Dominique Cardon has characterized as 'the web in chiaroscuro'.[16] Undoubtedly, this 'revolution' of sorts has already changed and will continue to change the way people interact, in particular how they interact with the authorities, thus redefining the grammar of state–society relations as well as the processes and channels of governance. The nascent civil society in China has begun using the resources of the new information technologies to effectively exercise pressure on the authorities with regard to social and economic issues, very often at the local and regional levels but sometimes at the national level as well. Several well-publicized cases support the notion that the Internet and the role played by netizens have indeed helped strengthen civil society.

The Sun Zhigang case

Arguably the most important of these cases took place in 2003. On 20 March of that year, a 27-year-old man named Sun Zhigang[17] was violently beaten by other inmates in the infirmary of a custody and repatriation centre in Guangzhou. Sun ultimately succumbed to his wounds. Born in Hubei and an arts graduate of the University of Wuhan, Sun was a graphic designer employed by a private company in Guangzhou and was arrested three days earlier after failing to show proper identification papers and a resident permit during a routine check in the street. Sun's death and the interest aroused by his case ultimately led to the closure of custody and repatriation centres, institutions that were put in place in the early 1980s in order to control migratory flows that had become vulnerable to corruption and abuse of power. The regulations for custody and repatriation were abolished on 20 June of that year, and the announcement was made by Prime Minister Wen Jiabao in person. Even though the whole affair was triggered by a newspaper article published

on 25 April in the *Southern Metropolis Daily* (南方都市报), the Internet did play a crucial role in bringing together politics and emotion, and in spreading the whole story to a wider community. The story of 'injustice' was rapidly reproduced by local and national news portals, as well as on electronic forums where many stories of unfair treatment in these centres started to circulate widely and calls for the abolition of the whole system, backed by prominent intellectual figures, appeared the day after the article was published.

Turning point or culmination?

In this case, the debate on the Internet crystallized around three main issues: the procedures of criminal investigation in such cases (local authorities initially refused to provide an explanation as to why Sun was beaten to death by co-detainees); violence exercised by the police; and the compatibility of the constitution with custody and repatriation centres that were encroaching on the most basic rights of Chinese citizens. Public appeals to the authorities forced the national government to finally intervene as the local administration was unable to deal with the situation. The abolition of the detention centres was made effective in August, and 12 persons responsible for Sun's death were handed very heavy sentences (ranging from three years to life in prison and even several death penalties), and six civil servants were condemned to sentences of two to three years in prison for their misdemeanour and they were held indirectly responsible for the death of the young man. Among the many 'scandals' of that year (the deadly BMW of Harbin, the Japanese orgies in Zhuhai, the SARS crisis, and so on), the Sun Zhigang case was arguably the one affair that made 2003 'the year of online public opinion',[18] allowing the Internet to play the role of 'amplifier' to the fullest and for political change to take place with the abolition of unfair nationwide practices. The Sun Zhigang case is also often considered the starting point of what has since been dubbed the Rights Defence Movement (维权运动),[19] a movement that also uses the Internet as a resource platform for providing information and raising public awareness. In 2008, among the 20 most influential Chinese bloggers identified by the *Southern Metropolis Weekly* (南都周刊), two were lawyers. As we will argue later, specific conditions allowed the Internet to play its crystallizing and amplifying role in the Sun Zhigang case.

Online public opinion and journalism 2.0

The birth of online public opinion encouraged the *Southern Metropolis Daily* to start a section in October 2006 called 'Net Eyes', and in 2007, only a fraction of the high-impact stories that had sent the Web buzzing were not covered in that section of the newspaper.[20] One story became a symbol for all ordinary Chinese people who rose up to the predatory craving of the powerful, and especially real estate developers: the scandal of the 'toughest nail house' (最牛钉子户)[21] in Chongqing. By refusing to move out from their family house that was to be demolished and replaced by a luxury apartment complex, Yang Wu, a local martial arts celebrity, and his wife Wu Ping (who helped with public relations) became for a few weeks in March 2007 the spokespersons for all those who had seen their property rights snubbed – the initial compensation offered by

the developer was considered to be under the market price, despite the approval of the local authorities. Even though the case was ultimately settled quietly and the amount of compensation raised, the couple's battle was widely perceived as a form of 'rightful resistance', and the images of this solitary house perched on a piece of land surrounded by deep excavation works (hence the image of the nail) and mounted by a PRC national flag kept netizens abreast nationwide. Forums and blogs hosted by the biggest service providers such as Tianya, MOP, and KDnet were offering live coverage of the incident and numerous related developments. Zola, one of the most famous bloggers in China today, was the first to report developments live on his personal weblog.[22] For some, this affair, that was followed by many other 'nail house' stories across China in the subsequent weeks and months, kick-started what is now called 'citizen journalism'.[23] However, without the interaction with traditional media, and especially newspapers, the echo of the affair would have been more muted. A very similar case had also been reported on several Internet forums in August 2006 in Shanghai, but it only gained momentum and real exposure after the Chongqing story, albeit too late as the house had already been demolished.

Ordinary people and victims, fight back!

Many stories or scandals that appear on the Net have to do with the abuse of power and the injustices that common people have to endure at the hands of local officials, Party cadres, unscrupulous business owners and rapacious real estate developers. The development of what is known in China as 'human flesh searches' (人肉搜索), meaning the virtual tracking of the identity and whereabouts of people suspected of being involved in dubious or scandalous affairs, has put every cadre in a hot seat and nobody – at least at the local level – is spared from potentially damaging online enquiry by astute Internet users: several highly publicized cases have ended up with cadres being ousted (as in the case of the Shenzhen Marine Affairs Bureau Disciplinary Committee Party secretary Lin Jiaxiang who was accused of molesting a teenage girl in a restaurant) or at least having to face severe disciplinary sanctions, both of which have taken place in several cities of China.[24] However, some of these human flesh searches have got out of hand, as in the recent 'Li Gang incident', in spite of concerted attempts by portals, bloggers and cyberjournalists to 'auto-regulate' excessive and unjustifiable smear attacks.[25]

Cyberjournalism and cybervigilance akin to a form of 'sousveillance' (surveillance coming from below)[26] can take many guises, and here again electronic means have proven potent. Findings from an initial investigation by Fu Jianfeng that exposed the culpability of China's largest manufacturer of dairy products, Sanlu, in the melamine contaminated milk scandal that ultimately claimed some 300,000 victims was stifled for several weeks because of the Beijing Olympic Games, and the report finally made its way to the public after Fu resorted to posting it on his personal blog hosted by Tianya on 11 September 2008.[27] Virtual vigilance by citizens can even produce innovative effects in the revamping of state–society relations, as when a suspicious accidental death in a prison in Yunnan – following a highly improbable game of hide and seek! – led local authorities to set up a committee of inquiry in which several Internet users who had initially revealed the story were invited to participate in the inquiry.[28] What is true

for blogs and bulletin board systems (BBS) is being duplicated today on social network-ing platforms and tweets. The case of immolation in Yihuang in September 2010 is exemplary in this respect. After the local authorities had concealed the actual circum-stances in which three people had set themselves on fire to protest against the forced demolition of their home, the daughter of one of the victims began a crusade via Weibo, a Twitter-like service in China, which attracted some 60,000 followers of her 250 tweets, all of them passed around by the thousands, eventually drawing the attention of higher authorities and leading to the sacking of local cadres.[29] Whistle-blowing is but one aspect of cyberactivism on micro-blogging platforms, complemented by widely acknowledged logistical and organizational resources. During the massive strikes that took place in Guangdong in May 2010, two leaders of the movement at Honda, both originally from Hunan and in their 20s, made no secret that they had extensively used their QQ groups to get organized and facilitate the negotiation process.[30] In the end, the Honda strikes were emulated in many other companies across several provinces, result-ing in a significant increase in workers' wages (up to 70 per cent in some cases).

Not in my backyard!

Beyond the common people that fall victim to injustice, the so-called middle classes – representing as much as 20 per cent of China's population – are getting organized, and collective mobilization of residents which follows well-established practices in Western societies makes the best out of information technologies. In Xiamen, the circulation of text messages was soon joined by very lively discussions on several local forums, and it facilitated a mass mobilization of residents in May 2007 that ultimately caused the ces-sation of the construction of a paraxylene plant, forcing local authorities to reluctantly come to the fore and justify the feasibility and consequences of such a project. The initial text message, reproduced in part by the Xinhua news agency, likened the effects gener-ated by the operating plant with the consequences of the explosion of an atomic bomb![31] In January 2008 a project to extend the Maglev magnetic train in Shanghai prompted weekend demonstrations of several thousand residents in the city centre protesting about the impact of the project on the value of their homes and on their health: here again, online discussion forums provided rallying platforms after having alighted the virtual controversy.[32] These NIMBY (not in my backyard) movements make sophisticated use of information technologies and testify to the rising public voices that have increased in pitch, which directly challenge public authorities: to what extent will the growing 'peo-ple's power' be allowed to push the limits of what is forbidden?

An adaptive panoptical control

The constraints that weigh on civil society in its use of information technologies cannot be understood without a careful review of the control apparatus that alters these tech-nologies. The drastic control over the domestic (and domesticated) virtual world in China is widely documented by numerous reports and studies,[33] and the gradual and often bru-tal introduction of restrictive measures was made very early on – as early as the mid-1990s. Today, the wealth of regulatory provisions (already 20 of them between 1994 and

2005!) and the multiplicity of supervisory bodies,[34] including a dedicated State Internet Information Office since May 2011,[35] are an indicator of the seriousness with which the authorities deal with these new means of communication, which deserve a more refined management than the ruthless 'closing the tap' treatment to dry out subversive content, a strategy once advocated by a Chinese Minister of Telecommunications.

A panoptical ambition

The ambition to control electronic means of information can be described as panoptical as it encompasses all means of communication, upstream and downstream, and all actors, from users to Internet cafe owners and service providers. The methods are *preventive* (binding rules of information disclosure, code of good conduct imposed on portals and search engines in March 2002, and so on), *selective* (blocking of foreign sites such as Wikipedia, *The New York Times*, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and so forth; partial reproduction on Chinese websites of foreign articles purified of their subversive content; restrictive boundaries imposed on search engines; and filtering of emails), and *punitive* (criminalizing the use of the Internet for any activity involving dissent). The methods most commonly employed – filtering by keywords, IP blocking, bypassing DNS and cleansing of sites, emails as well as blogs – are all the more established since the technologies allowing for such restrictive measures were widely provided by large foreign companies that chose to ignore the possible ends that could be served by the hardware they were selling to state-owned Chinese corporations.[36] When the Chinese authorities tried to force computer manufacturers to pre-install a monitoring software on all their new machines, as was the case in June 2009, the latter were forced to backtrack; the irony being that it was not clear whether it was the public disgruntlement of users or the professed inefficiency of the so-called 'green dam' that had the upper hand in this very clumsy plan.[37]

Forbidden contents

Right from the start, the circulation and reproduction of several categories of information were outlawed. These concerned violating the basic principles as confirmed in the Constitution; jeopardizing the security of the nation, divulging state secrets, subverting the national regime or jeopardizing the integrity of the nation's unity; harming the honour or the interests of the nation; inciting hatred against other people, racism, or disrupting solidarity; opposing national policies on religion, propagating evil cults and feudal superstitions; spreading rumours, disturbing social order, or disrupting social stability; spreading obscenity, pornography, gambling, violence, terror, or abetting the commission of a crime; and insulting or defaming third parties, and infringing on the legal rights and interests of third parties. After 2005, two other prohibited categories of information made their appearance: those inciting illegal assemblies, associations, marches, demonstrations, or gatherings that disturb social order on the one hand, and conducting activities in the name of an illegal civil organization on the other hand.[38] The cooperation between Internet and telecommunication service providers in China and public security agencies is not only a practice but also a requirement as stipulated in the amendment to the State Secrets Law of

April 2010.[39] All these provisions confer a legal framework that is sufficiently broad to allow the regime to set 'examples' and to routinize its power of intimidation: more than 100 Chinese Internet users are reported to be 'officially' behind bars for violating these provisions, and many others have been threatened or harassed by authorities because they were followers of Falun Gong, proponents of a political reform debate, too-curious a lawyer or because they demanded a reappraisal of the 4 June repression.[40] The use of Twitter and Facebook for the purpose of mobilization and information during the 'riots' of Urumqi in July 2009 led to the outright prohibition of these two foreign services. The exchange of short messages on the Chinese Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo in December 2010 quickly translated into arrests as soon as account holders expressed their wish to gather and some were simply put under house arrest in order to contain any spillover.[41] A simple 140-character satirical tweet can land a person a one-year sentence in a 're-education through labour' camp because of its 'unpatriotic' content or for having mocked the then Party secretary of Chongqing Bo Xilai and thus 'fabricated fact and disrupted social order'.[42] Anything crucial or adverse to the legitimacy of the regime – ethnic tensions, national integrity, political reform, national leaders and nationalism – is absolutely averse to any form of tolerance. On an anecdotal note, yet revealing of the degree of watchfulness deployed by the state, producers of social network games simulating participation in mafia organizations felt the wrath of the Ministry of Culture during the summer of 2009, when games such as Godfather, Gangster and Mafioso Hitman were removed from circulation because they were considered 'socially disruptive'.[43]

Mobilizing the minds

According to the OpenNet Initiative, 'China has devoted extensive resources to building one of the largest and most sophisticated filtering systems in the world',[44] and extensive as well as successive Internet 'purges' such as in October 2007 at the time of the 17th Congress of the Communist Party, in Autumn 2008 after the Olympic Games in Beijing or in June 2009 around the 20th anniversary of the Tian'anmen massacre were accompanied by ever more important and parallel campaigns of targeted astroturfing with Chinese characteristics, in which pro-government activists mockingly nicknamed the 'Fifty-Cent Party' (五毛党) by the netosphere[45] attempted to post messages on blogs, online discussion forums or portal comments sections that shed a more positive light on official policies and actions. This new exercise in propaganda appears to be a necessary complement of a purely repressive apparatus: in a report to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in April 2010 that was obtained in its entirety by the NGO Human Rights in China, Wang Chen, the deputy director of the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of China, described at length all the recent campaigns that have made use of 'the Internet to vigorously organize and launch positive propaganda, and actively strengthen [the] abilities to guide public opinion', especially with regard to 'major emergency incidents, hot topics related to people's welfare, and key ideological issues'.[46] The government authorities actually issue daily instructions to the media and Internet service providers (portals, search engines and the like) regarding sensitive issues that ought to be ignored or covered from a particular angle, a widespread practice lampooned as 'directives from the Ministry of Truth'.[47]

National champions

Finally, the Chinese state has been particularly active in developing many resources that are preventively 'harmonized', the quantity of which being more important than the quality. Internet users in China have access to extremely varied resources and platforms set up specifically for the domestic market, which are in strict compliance with existing regulations. These vast 'local' resources far outstrip international platforms – that is, those that are accessible – be they search engines (prior to the termination of Google's services in 2010, Baidu already commanded 63 per cent of the market, against only 28 per cent for the American giant), major portals (the four biggest ones, Sohu, Sina, Tencent and Netease, earn about 73 per cent of the revenue in this segment), electronic BBSs or discussion forums, online video sites (Youku.com being more popular than YouTube!), blog service providers or platforms for social networking (Tencent's QZone hosts more than 400 million accounts, and is immediately followed by Renren that boasts the greatest number of active users, Kaixin001 claims to have the largest number of 'highly active' users, and 51.com is supposed to have the biggest number of users in rural areas). Weibo, established in August 2009 right after Twitter was blocked in China, is backed by the third largest operator of websites, Sina.com, and has rapidly become the leader for tweeting in China: in October 2010, after only 14 months of existence, it claimed 50 million users and over 2 billion posted tweets. Behind the emergence of these 'national champions' and their strict compliance with rigid domestic regulations lies of course the whole issue of the degree of China's openness to the outside world.

A biting bitter reality

The power of self-censorship

It is worth noting that the highly restrictive rules regarding online publications and the criminalization of what is deemed as the subversive use of the Internet in China have nurtured the phenomenon of self-censorship, even though it is by definition extremely difficult to quantify.[48] In defence of service providers, no business portal can really afford to be suspended from operation for several weeks. And from the perspective of the 'regular' user, the main motivations for blogging and twitting are recognition and distinction, and less often the pursuit of the truth, especially if one's messages are systematically deleted within the hour and can result in a prison sentence for subversion of the state or trafficking in state secrets. Just as the democratic movement in China suffers from the inability to develop an intergenerational memory,[49] harmonization and cleansing of the Internet exact a toll by making it difficult for users to pool and record experiences. By cleansing the networks of any content deemed unacceptable and by actively blocking the creation of archives, the authorities prevent the development of shared diachronic references, an essential pillar in the establishment of a critical apparatus. The wealth of material that circulates on China's networks is paralleled by incredibly poor accumulation – something that is detrimental to communication – and one wonders whether this perpetual re-invention of dissent (and its modes of operation) is ultimately counter-productive, both for frustrated social actors and short-sighted government agencies that do not allow for peaceful and diverse settlement mechanisms to blossom.

Imperfect debate and small change

The 'nature' of as well as criticisms about information and communication technologies in democratic environments also have to be taken into consideration, irrespective of political regime. The American lawyer Cass Sunstein has questioned whether the way the Internet operates somehow conflicts with some of the basic principles of democracy in America, especially those related to 'deliberation' – Internet connections and surfing constitute elective demand – and therefore the necessary exchange of ideas. The 'daily me' expressed in a blog seldom translates into a 'daily we', and instead favours the creation of 'deliberative clusters' where people only link up with like-minded others and reinforce one another, thus radicalizing their own ideas and going further to the extreme, a phenomenon that Sunstein interprets as an obstacle to the formation of movements and organizations that fuel the development of civil society.[50] By removing gate-keepers and allowing for peer-to-peer communication, the Internet has nevertheless 'pushed aside the walls and removed the floor'[51] as far as communication is concerned; its potential therefore exceeds presumably adverse effects. But the anticipated long-term benefits of new forms of self-organization and participative, collaborative and cooperative democracy have yet to materialize – as demonstrated by the recent Indignant protest movement in Spain. Malcolm Gladwell does indeed provide some food for thought – that online weak links are more conducive to low-risk activism.[52] Put in the context of a 'corseted' China, one can easily imagine the advantages that segmentation and loose links can yield for a regime that views targeted social engineering as a means of preserving social harmony.

Varying degrees of strengthening civil society

Several recent studies proffer the view that information and communication technologies are conducive to the strengthening of civil society in China, albeit in varying degrees. Some see the seeds of a possible 'revolution', the information revolution.[53] Others regard these technologies as a necessity for the existence and even the survival of a genuine civil society, despite strong political constraints.[54] Others, more circumspect, have expressed strong reservations about the revolutionary potential of these technologies, and want to see a promise of political 'liberalization' by default, where the Chinese state and society mutually transform one another provided that the challenges posed by the new technologies do not directly confront the legitimacy of the Communist Party – only 'escapist' movements, those challenging or simply ignoring the state, would therefore be repressed.[55] Finally, those who are more conservative want to see a growing influence of society on the agenda-setting aspect of public policy design.[56] Harmony would thus be preserved, as the professionalization of the state would be accompanied by a similar professionalization of social activists and journalists.[57]

Towards a new social contract

From our perspective, the growing role played by information and communication technologies is a fantastic resource for ad hoc re-legitimization of the regime. It is obvious that most reform-minded officials seem convinced that the government should tolerate

and even selectively encourage virtual and occasional expressions of discontent, not only because these provide a better measure of the true state of 'public opinion' and allow access to information that is far too often distorted by the bureaucratic apparatus, but also the opportunity to adjust necessary reforms based on the most visible concerns expressed by citizens and consumers, while allowing for a 'cathartic' function to partially address public dissatisfactions and frustrations as well as allowing for public opinion channelling, to use the expression coined by Hu Jintao himself.[58] One of the greatest challenges for a non-democratic regime is of course to develop auto-corrective capacities – the learning capabilities of the state. In the first-ever White Paper on the Internet in China issued by the government in June 2010,[59] the reference to the supervisory role played by the Internet appears in Section III, devoted to 'Guaranteeing Citizens' Freedom of Speech on the Internet', right after a paragraph that praises the rapid development of micro-blogging, video sharing and social networking services. What is meant by supervision is that 'governments at all levels are required to investigate and resolve in a timely manner all problems reported to the government by the public via the Internet, and to inform the public of the results'.

While this new mode of political regulation takes citizens' concerns into account in a timely and responsive manner, the question is whether the rise of people's power is attributable to information technologies. In the case of Sun Zhigang, the actual trigger factor where the media is concerned was the publication of a very factual and comprehensive article on 26 April 2003 in the *Renmin ribao* (人民日报), an unusual move that can only be explained by the prevalence of 'central forces' pushing for change. For years, prominent researchers and public figures have been strongly advocating the abolition of custody and repatriation centres; future memoirs of leaders might reveal factional politics at work. In the case of the Xiamen chemical plant project, it was moved further away from the city, albeit still in Fujian. The same goes for the Maglev: the extension was delayed, but ultimately built.

The many cases that arose after 2003 acted as a warning to the authorities and revealed the many dangers of 'contamination' or viral phenomena. The gradual suppression and cleansing of the Chinese information networks reflect without doubt the permanence of tight control on the political reform agenda. The riots in Tibet in March 2008 and in Xinjiang in the summer of 2009 resulted in a complete blackout, including the blocking of YouTube. The Charter 08 movement that was initially signed by 303 Chinese intellectuals calling for the democratization of the regime suffered the same fate, triggering many arrests. Even the relative tolerance towards spontaneous citizens' coverage of the Sichuan earthquake of May 2008 quickly vanished when the public's investigative efforts started to look into the reasons for the collapse of public buildings and schools in particular. Citizen-bloggers do not receive equal treatment; even Ai Weiwei, who designed the Bird's Nest stadium for the Beijing Olympic Games, was intimidated because of his persistent requests for the exact number of children missing in the Sichuan earthquake to be made public, and he was arrested for a while in early April 2011 on charges of 'economic crimes'.[60] The blackout – or at least the inclination to impose one – on demonstrations unravelling in Mongolia (May), Hubei (June), or Guangdong (September to December) in 2011 was dictated by the same concerns about exercising strict control, and the display of social irritability that feeds on a combination of actual

discontent and polarizing rumours is an indication that the supervisory role played by information technologies remains more of an objective than a reality.

Weak weapons, weapons of the weak?

Chinese Internet memes (恶搞)[61] have a point when they emphasize that 'grass mud horses' (草泥马, which is a homophone of 'f… your mother' and thus considered a slogan for resistance to censorship on the Net) are constantly threatened by 'river crabs' (河蟹 is homophonic with 和谐, harmony, the main tenet of the Hu-Wen leadership): the weapons of the weak indeed remain weak weapons.[62] The only certainty is that new communication technologies have accelerated the pace of and opened up the possibilities for a renewed relationship between the state and society, a renewal of extensive scope and depth. The empowerment of society has been accompanied if not preceded in most instances by an equally reinvigorated state that has managed to harness and use effective and soft propaganda-like channels to its own advantage, whether in the form of Web pages, BBS discussion groups, online forums or social media platforms. Indeed, harmony seems to adapt to and is even enriched by these innovative forums of public opinion, and thus it is almost impossible to determine the direction in which the balance of political renovation will tilt. Will it eventually translate into a durable renewed social contract if the regime insists on preserving its absolute monopoly on political decision-making? Can a form of 'enlightened authoritarianism'[63] transmute into effective liberalization? And is the ever-rejuvenating state capacity an indication of the end of the 'myth' of democratic transition in China?[64] The past 30 years of reform and opening up have shown that the party-state is able to adapt and be responsive to reality, in effect elevating 'pragmatism' to the status of state ideology. If handled incorrectly, new challenges to the legitimacy of the party-state in delivering stability, wealth, prestige and culture might indicate that the capacity of the Chinese state has encountered a glass ceiling – all the more so if communication channels do not stay open in both directions. If we were to make a distinction between the dubious, the probable and the certain, it would appear that immense online discontent has yet to translate into massive real-life protests, that both opinion shapers and the general public have so far been able to find alternative ways of expressing their grievances, and that the state has up to now never failed to remain on top of the digital challenge.

Notes

1. On this point, see Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang, Political expression in the Chinese blogosphere: Below the radar, *Asian Survey* 48(5), 2008: 752–72.
2. Even though questions seemed to have been selected, the event is interesting because of its highly promoted exemplarity. For a summary and video of the event, see http://www.danwei.org/internet/president_hu_jintao_talks_to_n.php, accessed 31 May 2013. For the official version, see http://bbs1.people.com.cn/postDetail.do?boardId=2&treeView=1&view=2&id=86766853, accessed 31 May 2013.

3. See Gudrun Wacker's chapter regarding the reference to 'panoptical surveillance' as found in Michel Foucault revisiting Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon and applied here to the Internet in China. Gudrun Wacker, The Internet and censorship in China, in Christopher R. Hughes and Gudrun Wacker (eds), *China and the Internet: Politics of the Digital Leap Forward*, London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003, 58–82.

4. The ever-expanding literature on state capacity has grown even wider in scope since the years of Gabriel Almond and Seymour M. Lipset because of all the debates related to globalization. We are interested in the constitutive elements of state capacity, that is to say, in the simple words of Thomas Heberer: '*Legitimacy* in the sense of the legitimation of the political system accepted by its citizens; *regulating and controlling capacity* in the sense of social control und regulation; *resources for enforcement* (financial and coercive means as well as personnel resources); *bargaining capacity*, i.e. the ability to incorporate new social groups, associations and organizations into bargaining processes and to find a balance between various particularistic interests; *learning capacity*, i.e. the ability to learn from mistakes and failures.' See Thomas Heberer, Strategic groups and state capacity: The case of the private entrepreneurs, *China Perspectives*, no. 46, 2003: 4–14.

5. On the exploration of the initial formulation of the idea of 'public opinion channelling' as expressed by the leadership, see David Bandurski, Is the opinion the problem, or the solution?, China Media Project, September 2009, http://cmp.hku.hk/2009/09/07/1735/, accessed 31 May 2013.

6. Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, New York: PublicAffairs, 2011.

7. See Zhongguo hulian wangluo xinxi zhongxin (China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC)), *Di 31 ci Zhongguo hulian wangluo fazhan zhuangkuang tongji baogao* (Statistical report on Internet development in China no. 31), 15 January 2013, http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201301/t20130115_38508.htm, accessed 31 May 2013, as well as CNNIC, *2011 nian Zhongguo wangmin shejiao wangzhan yingyong yanjiu baogao* (2011 research report on the usage of social networks by Chinese netizens), 3 September 2012, http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/sqbg/201209/t20120903_36006.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

8. See Eric Sautedé, Pour en finir avec les 'technologies de la libération': Internet, société civile et politique en Chine (Parting with 'liberation technologies': Internet, civil society and politics in China), *Hermès*, no. 55, 2009: 133–40.

9. Eugene Staley, Technology: Master or servant?, *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 14(10), 1958: 417–20.

10. CNNIC, *Di 31 ci Zhongguo hulian wangluo fazhan zhuangkuang tongji baogao*.

11. Barry Naughton, *Growing out of the Plan: Chinese Economic Reform, 1978–1993*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

12. Andrew J. Nathan, Authoritarian resilience, *Journal of Democracy* 14(1), 2003: 6–17.

13. Interview with Roland Soong, author of the blog EastSouthWestNorth, in spring 2009, and published in Eric Sautedé, L'Internet chinois dans le texte, avec traduction et notes critiques (The Chinese Internet in its original language, with translation and critical review), *Hermès*, no. 55, 2009: 71–9.

14. See, for example, Krassimira Twigg, Twitterers defy China's firewall, 10 June 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8091411.stm, accessed 31 May 2013.

15. Motto with which Xiao Qiang, the creator of the very rich and assertive *China Digital Times* (www.chinadigitaltimes.com) based in California, ends all his email exchanges. See also Xiao Qiang, The 'blog' revolution sweeps across China, *New Scientist*, 24 November 2004, http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn6707, accessed 31 May 2013.

16. Dominique Cardon, *La démocratie Internet – Promesses et limites* (Internet democracy: promises and limits), Paris: Seuil, 2010, 53.

17. For a detailed account of the Sun Zhigang case, see Zheng Yongnian, *Technological Empowerment: The Internet, State, and Society in China*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008, 147–51. And for French readers, see the very detailed account in Isabelle Thireau and Hua Linshan, De l'épreuve publique à la reconnaissance d'un public: le scandale Sun Zhigang (From public challenge to finding an audience: The Sun Zhigang scandal), *Politix*, no. 71, 2005: 137–64.

18. According to Zhang Yuhong as quoted by Wang Shaoguang.

19. Sophie Beach, Rise of rights?, *China Digital Times*, 27 May 2005, http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2005/05/rise-of-rights/, accessed 31 May 2013.

20. Wang Xing, The secrets of the exclusive 'Net Eyes', trans. Roland Soong, 27 December 2007, http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20080101_1.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

21. See Matthew Erie, Property rights, legal consciousness and the new media in China: The hard case of the 'toughest nail-house in history', *China Information* 26(1), 2012: 35–59.

22. For pictures, see Zola, Chongqing dingzi hu zhi Zola tupian badao (Zola's photo report of Chongqing nail house), 29 March 2007, http://www.shuiziliu.com/blog/collecting/fight-for-spirit-with-photos.html, accessed 31 May 2013.

23. Chen Wanying, 'The most awesome nailhouse' gives birth to 'citizen journalism', trans. Roland Soong, 29 March 2007, http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20070331_1.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

24. Ping Ke, Two steps forward, one step back? A review of the Chinese Internet in 2008, *Nanfang zhoumo* (Southern weekend), 21 January 2009, http://www.infzm.com/content/23064, accessed 31 May 2013.

25. Ma Jing and Cao Tianjian, How 'my dad is Li Gang' was hyped up, trans. Roland Soong, 29 March 2011, http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20110403_1.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

26. Expression coined by Steve Mann of the University of Toronto.

27. Fu Jianfeng, Why did I name Sanlu for having bad milk powder?, trans. Roland Soong, EastSouthWestNorth, 14 September 2008, http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20080918_1.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

28. For a detailed account, see the numerous translations by Roland Soong, Eluding the cat, http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20090221_1.htm (original in Chinese at http://epaper.oeeee.com/A/html/2009-02/16/content_704454.htm), both accessed 31 May 2013, and also Rebecca MacKinnon, 'Eluding the cat' – Bloggers investigate Yunnan prison death, 24 February 2009, http://rconversation.blogs.com/rconversation/2009/02/eluding-the-cat---bloggers-investi-gate-yunnan-prison-death.html, accessed 31 May 2013.

29. Ying Chan, Microblogs reshape news in China, China Media Project, 12 October 2010, http://cmp.hku.hk/2010/10/12/8021/, accessed 31 May 2013.

30. Zhongguo gongyun yaoqiu chengli duli gonghui gaibian guoyun guiji (The Chinese workers' movement demands the creation of independent unions and changes in the way the state acts), *Yazhou zhoukan* (Asia weekly), no. 23, 13 June 2010.

31. Philip Jägenstedt, Paraxylene and grassroots in Xiamen, 4 June 2007, http://blog.foolip.org/2007/06/04/paraxylene-and-grassroots-in-xiamen/, accessed 31 May 2013.

32. Sophia Beach, China's middle class derails new link, *China Digital Times*, 23 June 2009, http://chinadigitaltimes.net/china/maglev-protests/, accessed 31 May 2013. Note that local authorities were initially unable to censor blog posts because the service provider was based in another province.

33. For a short comprehensive report, see Reporters without Borders, *China: Journey to the Heart of Internet Censorship*, October 2007, http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/Voyage_au_coeur_de_la_censure_GB.pdf, accessed 31 May 2013; and the annual report of the OpenNet

Initiative, *China*, 9 August 2012, http://opennet.net/research/profiles/china, accessed 31 May 2013.

34. Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of State Security, Office of the State Council Leading Group for Information, National Administration for the Protection of State Secrets, State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, State Information Office and all their respective offices at the provincial and local levels. Ultimately, only the all-powerful Propaganda (or Publicity according to the official English translation) Department of the Communist Party of China seems to provide some consistency to the multiple prerogatives of these institutions.

35. Joseph I. Rosenbaum et al., China announces State Internet Information Office, 20 May 2011, http://www.legalbytes.com/2011/05/articles/technology-1/china-announces-state-internet-information-office/, accessed 31 May 2013.

36. Ethan Gutmann, Who lost China's Internet?, *The Weekly Standard*, 14 February 2002, http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/000/922dgmtd.asp, accessed 31 May 2013.

37. Rebecca MacKinnon, Green dam is breached … Now what?, I July 2009, http://rconversation.blogs.com/rconversation/2009/07/green-dam-is-breachednow-what.html, accessed 31 May 2013.

38. Information Office of the State Council, Provisions on the Administration of Internet News Information Services, trans. Congressional-Executive Commission on China, http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd?showsingle=24396, accessed 31 May 2013.

39. See Reporters without Borders, Amendment enlists ICT companies in protection of state secrets, 29 April 2010, http://en.rsf.org/china-amendment-enlists-ict-companies-in-29-04-2010,37238.html, accessed 31 May 2013.

40. Reporters without Borders, *China: Journey to the Heart of Internet Censorship*.

41. Bei Feng, Viewing the Liu Xiaobo response through Twitter, China Media Project, 11 October 2010, http://cmp.hku.hk/2010/10/11/7990/, accessed 31 May 2013.

42. Netizen jailed after mocking Chongqing official Bo Xilai, *China Media Bulletin*, no. 24, 9 June 2011, http://www.freedomhouse.org/article/china-media-bulletin-issue-no-24#netizen, accessed on 31 May 2013.

43. *The New York Times*, 29 July 2009. The developer of Happy Farm was luckier as he was simply warned and required to change some of the terms used in the game, for example, Chinese Internet users do not 'steal' the crops of their friends but 'harvest' them for their benefit!

44. China, OpenNet Initiative, August 2012, https://opennet.net/research/profiles/china, accessed 16 July 2013.

45. David Bandurski, China's guerrilla war for the Web, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 2008, http://www.upf.edu/materials/fhuma/xiin/mat/guerrilla_war1.pdf, accessed 31 May 2013.

46. Wang Chen, Concerning the development and administration of our country's Internet, delivered on 29 April 2010, trans. Human Rights in China, http://www.hrichina.org/crf/article/3241, accessed 31 May 2013.

47. Directives from the Ministry of Truth: May 1–31, *China Digital Times*, 4 June 2011, http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2011/06/directives-from-the-ministry-of-truth-may-1-31-2011/, accessed 31 May 2013.

48. Eric Sautedé, Les œillères de l'illusion technologique (The blinding effects of technological illusion), *Hommes et Libertés*, no. 142, 2008: 33–5.

49. Jean-Philippe Béja, *A la recherche d'une ombre chinoise: Le mouvement pour la démocratie en Chine, 1919–2004* (In search of a Chinese shadow: The Chinese pro-democracy movement, 1919–2004), Paris: Le Seuil, 2004.

50. Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001; and the gist of the book by the author himself in The daily we: Is the Internet really a blessing for democracy?, *Boston Review*, 1 June 2001, http://bostonreview.net/cass-sunstein-internet-democracy-daily-we, accessed 31 May 2013.

51. Cardon, *La démocratie Internet*, 10.

52. Malcolm Gladwell, Small change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted, *The New Yorker*, 4 October 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell, accessed 31 May 2013.

53. Xiao, The 'blog' revolution sweeps across China, and Esarey and Xiao, Political expression in the Chinese blogosphere.

54. Yang Guobin, *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

55. Zheng, *Technological Empowerment*.

56. Wang Shaoguang, Changing models of China's policy agenda setting, *Modern China* 34(1), 2008: 56–87.

57. Susan L. Shirk, *Changing Media, Changing China*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

58. See David Bandurski, More official thoughts on re-branding propaganda, China Media Project, November 2009, http://cmp.hku.hk/2009/11/04/2634/, accessed 31 May 2013.

59. For a full and official English version, Information Office of the State Council, *White Paper on the Internet in China*, 8 June 2010, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-06/08/c_13339232.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

60. For a summary of Ai Weiwei's arrest, see Sophie Beach, One artist detained; another released (updated), *China Digital Times*, 4 April 2011, http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2011/04/one-artist-detained-another-released/, accessed 31 May 2013.

61. Bingchun Meng, From steamed bun to grass mud horse: E Gao as alternative political discourse on the Chinese Internet, *Global Media and Communication* 7(1), 2011: 33–51.

62. We borrow this expression from the French sinologist Lucien Bianco who applied it to contemporary rural uprisings in China.

63. See Jean-Pierre Cabestan, Is China moving towards 'enlightened' but plutocratic authoritarianism?, *China Perspectives*, no. 55, 2004: 21–8.

64. Matthieu Timmerman, Le mythe de la transition démocratique en Chine, 1989–2008 (The myth of democratic transition in China), *La vie des idées*, 20 May 2008, http://www.laviedesidees.fr/Le-mythe-de-la-transition.html, accessed 31 May 2013.

References

Bandurski, David (2008) China's guerrilla war for the Web. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July. http://www.upf.edu/materials/fhuma/xiin/mat/guerrilla_war1.pdf, accessed 31 May 2013.

Bandurski, David (2009) Is the opinion the problem, or the solution? China Media Project, September. http://cmp.hku.hk/2009/09/07/1735/, accessed 31 May 2013.

Bandurski, David (2009) More official thoughts on re-branding propaganda. China Media Project, November. http://cmp.hku.hk/2009/11/04/2634/, accessed 31 May 2013.

Beach, Sophie (2005) Rise of rights? *China Digital Times*, 27 May. http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2005/05/rise-of-rights/, accessed 31 May 2013.

Beach, Sophie (2009) China's middle class derails new link. *China Digital Times*, 23 June. http://chinadigitaltimes.net/china/maglev-protests/, accessed 31 May 2013.

Beach, Sophie (2011) One artist detained; another released (updated). *China Digital Times*, 4 April. http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2011/04/one-artist-detained-another-released/, accessed 31 May 2013.

Bei, Feng (2010) Viewing the Liu Xiaobo response through Twitter. China Media Project. 11 October. http://cmp.hku.hk/2010/10/11/7990/, accessed 31 May 2013.

Béja, Jean-Philippe (2004) *A la recherche d'une ombre chinoise: Le mouvement pour la démocratie en Chine, 1919–2004* (In search of a Chinese shadow: The Chinese pro-democracy movement, 1919–2004). Paris: Le Seuil.

Cabestan, Jean-Pierre (2004) Is China moving towards 'enlightened' but plutocratic authoritarianism? *China Perspectives*, no. 55: 21–8.

Cardon, Dominique (2010) *La démocratie Internet: Promesses et limites* (Internet democracy: Promises and limits). Paris: Seuil.

Chen, Wanying (2007) 'The most awesome nailhouse' gives birth to 'citizen journalism'. Trans. Roland Soong. 29 March. http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20070331_1.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

Directives from the Ministry of Truth: May 1–31, 2011 (2011) *China Digital Times*, 4 June. http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2011/06/directives-from-the-ministry-of-truth-may-1–31–2011/, accessed 31 May 2013.

Erie, Matthew (2012) Property rights, legal consciousness and the new media in China: The hard case of the 'toughest nail-house in history'. *China Information* 26(1), 2012: 35–59.

Esarey, Ashley and Xiao, Qiang (2008) Political expression in the Chinese blogosphere: Below the radar. *Asian Survey* 48(5): 752–72.

Fu, Jianfeng (2008) Why did I name Sanlu for having bad milk powder? Trans. Roland Soong. EastSouthWestNorth, 14 September. http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20080918_1.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

Gladwell, Malcolm (2010) Small change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted. *The New Yorker*, 4 October. http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell, accessed 31 May 2013.

Gutmann, Ethan (2002) Who lost China's Internet? *The Weekly Standard*. http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/000/922dgmtd.asp, accessed 31 May 2013.

Heberer, Thomas (2003) Strategic groups and state capacity: The case of the private entrepreneurs. *China Perspectives*, no. 46: 4–14.

Information Office of the State Council (2005) Provisions on the Administration of Internet News Information Services. Trans. Congressional-Executive Commission on China. http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd?showsingle=24396, accessed 31 May 2013.

Information Office of the State Council (2010) *A White Paper on the Internet in China*. 8 June. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010–06/08/c_13339232.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

Jägenstedt, Philip (2007) Paraxylene and grassroots in Xiamen. 4 June. http://blog.foolip.org/2007/06/04/paraxylene-and-grassroots-in-xiamen/, accessed 31 May 2013.

Joseph I. Rosenbaum et al. (2011) China announces State Internet Information Office. 20 May. http://www.legalbytes.com/2011/05/articles/technology-1/china-announces-state-internet-information-office/, accessed 31 May 2013.

Ma, Jing and Cao, Tianjian (2011) How 'my dad is Li Gang' was hyped up. Trans. Roland Soong. 29 March. http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20110403_1.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

MacKinnon, Rebecca (2009) 'Eluding the cat' – bloggers investigate Yunnan prison death. 24 February. http://rconversation.blogs.com/rconversation/2009/02/eluding-the-cat---bloggers-investigate-yunnan-prison-death.html, accessed 31 May 2013.

MacKinnon, Rebecca (2009) Green dam is breached … Now what? 1 July. http://rconversation.blogs.com/rconversation/2009/07/green-dam-is-breachednow-what.html, accessed 31 May 2013.

Meng, Bingchun (2011) From steamed bun to grass mud horse: E Gao as alternative political discourse on the Chinese Internet. *Global Media and Communication* 7(1): 33–51.

Morozov, Evgeny (2011) *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. New York: PublicAffairs.

Nathan, Andrew J. (2003) Authoritarian resilience. *Journal of Democracy* 14(1): 6–17.

Naughton, Barry (1995) *Growing out of the Plan: Chinese Economic Reform, 1978–1993*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Netizen jailed after mocking Chongqing official Bo Xilai (2011) *China Media Bulletin*, no. 24, 9 June. http://www.freedomhouse.org/article/china-media-bulletin-issue-no-24#netizen, accessed 31 May 2013.

OpenNet Initiative (2012) *China*. 9 August. http://opennet.net/research/profiles/china, accessed 31 May 2013.

Ping, Ke (2009) Jin liangbu, tui yibu? 2008 nian Zhongguo hulianwang huigu (Two steps forward, one step back? A review of the Chinese Internet in 2008). *Nanfang zhoumo* (Southern weekend), 21 January. http://www.infzm.com/content/23064, accessed 31 May 2013.

Reporters without Borders (2007) *China: Journey to the Heart of Internet Censorship*. October. http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/Voyage_au_coeur_de_la_censure_GB.pdf, accessed 31 May 2013.

Reporters without Borders (2010) Amendment enlists ICT companies in protection of state secrets. 29 April. http://en.rsf.org/china-amendment-enlists-ict-companies-in-29–04–2010,37238. html, accessed 31 May 2013.

Rosenbaum, Joseph I. et al. (2011) China announces State Internet Information Office. 20 May. http://www.legalbytes.com/2011/05/articles/technology-1/china-announces-state-internet-information-office/, accessed 31 May 2013.

Sautedé, Eric (2008) Les œillères de l'illusion technologique (The blinding effects of technological illusion). *Hommes et Libertés*, no. 142: 33–5.

Sautedé, Eric (2009) L'Internet chinois dans le texte, avec traduction et notes critiques (The Chinese Internet in its original language, with translation and critical review). *Hermès*, no. 55: 71–9.

Sautedé, Eric (2009) Pour en finir avec les 'technologies de la libération': Internet, société civile et politique en Chine (Parting with 'liberation technologies': Internet, civil society and politics in China). *Hermès*, no. 55: 133–40.

Shirk, Susan L. (2010) *Changing Media, Changing China*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Soong, Roland (2009) Eluding the Cat. 16 February. http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20090221_1. htm (original in Chinese http://epaper.oeeee.com/A/html/2009–02/16/content_704454.htm), both accessed 31 May 2013.

Staley, Eugene (1958) Technology: Master or servant? *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 14(10): 417–20.

Sunstein, Cass (2001) *Republic.com*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Sunstein, Cass (2001) The daily we: Is the Internet really a blessing for democracy? *Boston Review*, 1 June. http://bostonreview.net/cass-sunstein-internet-democracy-daily-we, accessed 31 May 2013.

Thireau, Isabelle, and Hua, Linshan (2005) De l'épreuve publique à la reconnaissance d'un public: le scandale Sun Zhigang (From public challenge to finding an audience: The Sun Zhigang scandal). *Politix*, no. 71: 137–64.

Timmerman, Matthieu (2008) Le mythe de la transition démocratique en Chine, 1989–2008 (The myth of democratic transition in China). *La vie des idées*, May. http://www.laviedesidees.fr/Le-mythe-de-la-transition.html, accessed 31 May 2013.

Twigg, Krassimira (2009) Twitterers defy China's firewall. 10 June. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8091411.stm, accessed 31 May 2013.

Wacker, Gudrun (2003) The Internet and censorship in China. In: Hughes, Christopher R. and Wacker, Gudrun (eds) *China and the Internet: Politics of the Digital Leap Forward*. London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 58–82.

Wang, Chen (2010) Concerning the development and administration of our country's Internet. Trans. Human Rights in China. http://www.hrichina.org/crf/article/3241, accessed 31 May 2013.

Wang, Shaoguang (2008) Changing models of China's policy agenda setting. *Modern China* 34(1): 56–87.

Wang, Xing (2007) The secrets of the exclusive 'Net Eyes'. Trans. Roland Soong. 27 December. http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20080101_1.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

Xiao, Qiang (2004) The 'blog' revolution sweeps across China. *New Scientist*, 24 November. http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn6707, accessed 31 May 2013.

Yang, Guobin (2009) *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ying, Chan (2010) Microblogs reshape news in China. China Media Project. 12 October. http://cmp.hku.hk/2010/10/12/8021/, accessed 31 May 2013.

Zheng, Yongnian (2008) *Technological Empowerment: The Internet, State, and Society in China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Zhongguo gongyun yaoqiu chengli duli gonghui gaibian guoyun guiji (The Chinese workers' movement demands the creation of independent unions and changes in the way the state acts) (2010) *Yazhou zhoukan* (Asia weekly), no. 23, 13 June.

Zhongguo hulian wangluo xinxi zhongxin (China Internet Network Information Center) (2012) *2011 nian Zhongguo wangmin shejiao wangzhan yingyong yanjiu baogao* (2011 research report on the usage of social networks by Chinese netizens). 3 September. http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/sqbg/201209/t20120903_36006.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

Zhongguo hulian wangluo xinxi zhongxin (China Internet Network Information Center) (2013) *Di 31 ci Zhongguo hulian wangluo fazhan zhuangkuang tongji baogao* (Statistical report on Internet development in China, no. 31). 15 January. http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201301/t20130115_38508.htm, accessed 31 May 2013.

Zola (2007) Chongqing dingzi hu zhi Zola tupian badao (Zola's photo report of Chongqing nailhouse). 29 March. http://www.shuiziliu.com/blog/collecting/fight-for-spirit-with-photos.html, accessed 31 May 2013.