

**Human Flesh Search:  
The Governmentality of Mass Surveillance in China**

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the relationship between the users of China's online social space, known as *netizens*, and the Communist Party of China, through an investigation of the online activity known as the "human flesh search." This study aims to contextualize government management of China's online social space, by understanding the historical, economic, and political roots of the form of governmentality found in contemporary Chinese society.

Case studies follow different instances of political human flesh searches, including online exposure of corrupt officials and nationalistic flesh searches targeting "unpatriotic" behavior, to reveal the capacity of the state to manage China's online social space.

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## Introduction

人肉搜索 *Renrou sousuo* can be translated as “flesh search,” “human flesh search,” “human flesh search engine” or “human search engine.” It refers to a search done by individuals working offline to gather information and then posting it online to help the group to further narrow down the search (Tapia, 2009). Flesh searching began in China by netizens sharing information on the forums of Chinese BBS sites (Bulletin Board Systems). Although the term “human search engine” refers to the searching done offline, it has evolved to refer to “human flesh” as the target of the search. These flesh searches target an individual or individuals who have somehow incited anger (*ibid.*). The conclusion of the flesh search is the exposure of the target by revealing their identity and other personal information to the online community. Targets have included those guilty of animal cruelty, student bullies, unfaithful spouses, as well as more political targets, such as those accused of corruption, abuse of power or treason. Flesh searches have led to public condemnation, humiliation and harassment of the individual, as well as to loss of employment and arrest (Downey, 2010).

Although not all flesh searches are political, political flesh searches have risen to prominence in recent years, forcing the state and the state media to respond. This thesis seeks to better understand the relationship between the state and the community involved in these flesh searches. A number of core questions define this research problem: What are the social-political conditions surrounding the practice of flesh searching, or in other words, how are the Party-State and online civil society

constituted in China? What factors have influenced the emergence and direction of political flesh searching? What is the relationship between the Chinese Party-State and civil society, and can this relationship explain the nature of politically motivated flesh searches?

### **Hypothesis**

Flesh Searching is a social action beginning from communication between netizens in an online community, leading to offline research and communication, and if successful, to an online conclusion which exposes the identity and offences of the individual to the public (French, 2006). The online community is in turn part of a larger civil society. Just as civil society is shaped in the west by the political-economic structure of society and the power flowing through those institutions of that political economy, so too is Chinese civil society shaped by its political economic environment, and by the methods and strategies of government used by the Party-State.

In the case of civil society in China, political constraints on group formation, public organization, and other social actions had stunted the capacities of civil society prior to the 1980s. In the period prior to the reforms, Chinese society had been organized into Party-directed communities based around work. Work units in the factories and communes in the countryside, were the basic political units of Chinese society. The state was able to implement policy, and exercise control over the state, industrial and bureaucratic structures of society through a form of mass-line politics. Mass-line politics worked to mobilize the people, work unit by work unit, and

commune by commune, behind the revolutionary political movements of the period, such as the Great Leap Forward. Mass-line politics also allowed the Party to exercise control over officials through mass surveillance. The politicization of the masses was used to encourage surveillance, and the reporting of any abuses by officials to the Party media. This bottom-up flow of information was a means of informing the Party leadership and maintaining Party discipline and control throughout society.

The Party communities began to disintegrate after the introduction of reforms in the late 1970s. These reforms saw the privatization of industry and the disbanding of the rural communes. Mass surveillance disintegrated along with mass-line politics. Officials were no longer under the same level of surveillance, and at the same time, were in a much better position to profit from corruption, as a result of the opening of the Chinese economy to foreign trade and investment, and the introduction of a capitalist market economy.

While the Party-directed communities of Maoist China crumbled, Chinese still found that the state was unwilling to legitimize an open civil society. Voluntary formations were still treated with suspicion and lacked security. However, the reforms also led to the adoption of Internet technology, infrastructure, and the development of an online community where individuals could enjoy a degree of freedom of expression beyond what they had enjoyed previously. Although the tools of surveillance exist for the state online as well as offline, it is much easier for netizens to remain anonymous online than offline, as well as to gather attention and support from huge numbers of netizens across the country. It is also more difficult to monitor

this online space in a way that can guarantee containment of all counter-governmental action without shutting down the entire system.

The Party-State has also had to accept the online social space as a consequence of the process of reform and adaptation, which has resulted from the transformation of the People's Republic of China into an industrialized part of the global capitalist economy. The economic transformation of the country has coincided with a shift from a closed totalitarian state to an authoritarian state with a globalized economy. The Chinese state has adopted some liberal methods of government, if not principles, from western liberal-capitalist states. Despite the continuing existence of state censorship and discipline online, the CCP has adopted a different strategy when dealing with the online social space than it has in the past with offline civil society groups and movements. It has demonstrated at times, in articles in the regime media as well as in its actions, a greater tolerance towards online discussion, and criticism of state actors, so long as it can be contained so as to not threaten the legitimacy of the Party's rule (Tai, 2006: 115).

Opinion management has entered this arena as a governmental process, which, though it has not entirely eclipsed the coercive and disciplinary methods of the Party, has nevertheless come to occupy a role in managing this growing social space (Trouillaud, 2011). This has reflected the transformation of a state which has acknowledged its inability to manage all aspects of society in a period of increasing complexity, choosing instead to focus on strategies of limited intervention, governing instead through less politically and economically costly methods. Its architects saw

this retreat from direct public control as a necessity for the Party's survival and as a necessary adaptation to a changing economy and society (Pei, 2006: 30).

A mixture of discipline, coercion and the exercise of more subtle governmental power make up the strategy of opinion management. Opinion management aims to neutralize threats to the Party-State and to "educate," both implicitly and explicitly, the online masses as to their role and the Party's role in society (Trouillaud, 2011). Aiming to redirect energy in a way deemed productive or at least less harmful, the process also aims to neutralize dangerous developments, whether explicitly threatening to the rule of the party, or potentially threatening.

The Party's response and contribution to political flesh searching reveals the adaptation of liberal governmental techniques of limited intervention and acknowledgement of the role of netizens with an online form of civil society, along with a revival of the governmentality of mass-line politics and mass surveillance from the Maoist period. The use of opinion management, through the proliferation of the Party narrative online, in the Party media, and through the control, limitation and censorship of counter-narratives, works to enforce this adaptation of the idea of mass surveillance to the post-reform authoritarianism of the CCP.

The Party responds to these cases of flesh searching by assuming leadership, judging the target of the flesh search according to the evidence provided by mass surveillance, the results of the flesh search, and deciding punishment publicly. The state media has come to respond to these cases by praising the Internet as a tool of surveillance, which can and should be used by the Party to fight corruption and to maintain the Party's mass-line politics.

## **Literature**

My theoretical framework builds on Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality to investigate the influence of the values and policies of the Party-State on the online social space in China, and in cases of flesh searching in particular. Foucault's theory of governmentality as a growing and all-encompassing web of power subverting the freedom of civil society is instructive when applied to the Chinese case (Lemke, n.d.: 4). The exercise of power in China is often seen as a coercive or restrictive force, however this is only part of the picture. Censors do monitor the Internet, and limits are placed on freedom of speech, however, political power also functions to shape, persuade and to interpret behaviour and action. Foucault's governmentality is at the heart of a theoretical understanding of this phenomenon.

Other researchers involved in the study of Chinese politics and state-social relations in China have been invaluable. In particular, Franz Schurmann's work *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (1968), provided a critical understanding of the role of ideology in mass-line politics in Maoist China, as well as the application of mass-line politics to surveillance. Michael Dutton's article "Passionately Governmental: Maoism and the Structured Intensities of Revolutionary Governmentality" (2009), positions the present governmentality of the Chinese state along a historical continuum that not only takes present reforms into consideration but also the legacy of an earlier governmentality.

Yuezhi Zhao, David Shambaugh and Pei Minxin have provided me with a firm

grasp of the transformations that have produced the contemporary Chinese state, media and economy over the last 60 years.

Yuezhi Zhao's investigation of the evolution of the Communist Party's media policies has given me a historical foundation to understand the evolving relationship between the Chinese media, the Communist Party and civil society. Her investigation of the Party's media practices since the Chinese Civil War, and its evolution through political upheaval and economic transformation provide the historical framework for understanding the role of media in promoting the Party's policies and narratives (Zhao, 1998: 47-51). The media is not the sole tool for transmitting the Party's views, however it is a very powerful one, and one that can be analyzed to better understand the character of Chinese government.

David Shambaugh's investigation of the Chinese Communist Party has proved valuable to understanding the changes in politics, society and economy that have affected the evolution of the Party, as well as its attempts to control these changes (Shambaugh, 2009). The evolving complexity of the Chinese economy and society has been met with a greater degree of government sophistication in dealing with political and economic difficulties and crises, and a greater ability to adapt, according to Shambaugh (*ibid.*: 128-160).

Pei Minxin, in contrast to Shambaugh, takes a much darker view of the transformation beginning in the late 1970s, concluding that the CCP is in a "trapped transition," unable to proceed with further economic reforms because of its unwillingness to implement needed political reforms (Pei, 2006: 8-9). The result of a state that is unwilling to implement rule of law and democratic reforms in a period of

economic reform and openness is, according to Pei, a fragmented authoritarianism, with the centre unable to police an increasingly predatory periphery of corrupt and criminal local party bosses (*ibid.*: 72). Pei believes that this "government deficit," the increasing inability to govern effectively from the centre due to a loss of control over local government, and a decreasing level of support from the people, will only increase over time (*ibid.*: 204). Pei's work is valuable in exposing the very serious challenges threatening the future of the state, and also helps to explain the reasoning behind some of the Party's strategies in dealing with these challenges.

Zixue Tai's *The Internet in China: Cyberspace and Civil Society* (2006), and Yongnian Zheng's *Technological Empowerment: The Internet, state, and society in China* (2008), have both been critical to understanding the development of the Chinese Internet, online social space, and the democratic potential of that space.

Clay Shirky's *Here Comes Everybody* (2008) has also been useful for understanding the potential of the Internet as a space encouraging group formation and interaction, as well as for understanding the differences between online groups and offline groups.

A number of journalists and researchers proved invaluable to understanding the complexity of the Communist Party's apparatus of censorship and opinion management. Pascale Trouillaud, David Bandurski, and Evgeny Morozov are among the writers whose work helped to expose the nature and background of the Party's online commentators, and their role within a larger system of propaganda (Trouillaud, 2011; Bandurski, 2008; Morozov, 2011). Rebecca MacKinnon's study and the work of Ronald Deibert, John Palfrey, Rafal Rohozinski and Jonathan Zittrain also

provided greater depth to the analysis of China's system of online censorship (MacKinnon, 2009; Deibert, et al., 2010).

### **Method**

Background research has been done on the transformation of Chinese society and government since the 1970s. The works of specialists in Chinese government, development, and the Chinese media and internet have been used as a foundation for understanding the political, economic and social dimensions of Chinese society over the last 30 to 40 years, as well as the ongoing changes in Chinese society and politics.

Research on flesh searching, the online social space and government policy, and reactions to both were gathered by monitoring a number of different news sources as well as websites specializing in the translation of Chinese news stories, forum threads, and Chinese government policy papers. *The China Digital Times*, *China Elections.org*, *Danwei*, and *Chinasmack* were some of the sources monitored for breaking news relevant to this area of study. Chinese state news sources, including: *Xinhua*, *China Daily*, and *People's Daily*, also proved valuable as a source of insight into the government view and discussion of netizens, flesh searching and other more specific stories researched as part of this thesis. Due to the limitations of my ability to read Chinese, I monitored these English-language sites, then, where possible, traced the stories back to their Chinese origins. Chinese pages that have been included, have been read using my knowledge of Chinese and using Chinese character-translation software. The Chinese pages were included where they had not been erased or

blocked by the state censors. The references for these pages can be found in the bibliography.

Several Case studies were included under the different categories discovered for political flesh searches. These categories included: 1) Flesh searches involving official corruption, and 2) flesh searches motivated by nationalism. Case studies were chosen for their completeness and relevance. Incomplete case studies include flesh searches that were censored before they were able to develop or which did not attract enough attention from netizens for them to develop. These case studies trace the development of specific flesh searches from their origins to their conclusions with a special interest in the motives and strategies of the participants and to the response of the state.

### **Implications**

My Thesis builds on the work done by Michel Foucault to define a decentralized network of power that exists in modern capitalist states, as well as others who have helped to shed light on the ever-evolving social interactions on the Internet. By investigating the Chinese situation with an eye towards what is similar and what is different, this paper will not only provide a deeper understanding of flesh searching, its relationship to government, and its significance to civil society in China, but also provide a deeper understanding of government in China, the object of its management, civil society, and the evolving relationship between the two.

## **Thesis Outline**

**Chapter 1- Theoretical Background:** The first chapter explains the theoretical foundation for interpreting and explaining the results of the research.

**Chapter 2- Chinese Communist Party Governmentality:** The second chapter maps out the changes that took place during the transition of the state from the Maoist regime of the 1970s to the reformist regime of Deng Xiaoping and finally to the ongoing adaptations of the Hu Jintao government. Using a Foucaultian understanding of government and power, this chapter pays close attention to improvisations and adaptations of new techniques of government, the resilience of older forms of state power, and the impact of these changes on state-society relations.

### **Chapter 3- China's Online Civil Society:**

This chapter investigates the significance of China's online space as a space for civil society in China. How has China's online social space evolved since its introduction and what relationship exists between netizens and the state?

**Chapter 4- Human Flesh Search Engine:** This chapter investigates the origin of the phenomenon and the evolution of flesh searching over the last decade, as well as the types of flesh searching that take place. How has flesh searching become a form of social action? What kinds of flesh searching exist and what motivates netizens to participate in these different types of flesh searches? The different categories of political flesh searches will be explained in this chapter.

**Chapter 5- Flesh Searching Corruption, Case Studies:** Several different case studies of flesh searches targeting allegedly corrupt state officials have been mapped out in this chapter. Case studies were chosen for their completeness and

relevance. Each case follows the flesh search from its origin to its conclusion.

Attention is paid to the actions of netizens as well as to the reaction by government, whether the search was blocked or censored, by which levels of government, and how quickly and effectively the search was blocked. Attention was also paid to the fallout from the search, and to the responses, if any, in the official media. The findings are compared and analysed at the end of the chapter.

**Chapter 6- Nationalist Flesh Searching, Case Studies:** Several different case studies of flesh searches motivated by nationalism and targeting alleged traitors of the nation have been traced in this chapter. Research and procedure follows the same outline as chapter 5.

**Conclusion:** This chapter explains the findings of the research in regard to the background research and hypothesis set out at the beginning of this thesis.

## **Chapter 1: Theoretical Background**

Foucault defines governmentality in the modern western state as coming from an "art of government," that concerns itself with "the reasoned way of governing best and, at the same time, reflection on the best way of governing" (Foucault, 2010: 2). This reflection on better ways of achieving government aims, especially through the adaptation of techniques to achieve principles of government, is characteristic of governmentality, and as Foucault explains, it has its roots in eighteenth century Europe. According to Foucault, governing best during the eighteenth century was governing according to "raison d'Etat", governing towards a stronger, wealthier and more stable state (*ibid.*: 4). This governmentality included a set of principles by which policy should follow the aim of strengthening the state's position. A key principle incorporated from early economists was the principle of an unregulated market. The liberal contention was that the state would be unable to interfere in the market without causing disruption and economic loss. The sovereign therefore accepted a more limited role in the economy, believing that a free market was a more prosperous one, and that a prosperous market meant a more powerful state (*ibid.*: 16). This modern art of government, according to Foucault, was a "government pegged to rationality." In other words, government was formed "according to calculation...the calculation of force, relations, wealth, and factors of strength" (*ibid.*: 311). Modern governmentality is the web of power extending from the policies and institutions formed under this understanding of government and society. The purpose of this form of power is not only to govern using efficient techniques of bringing society in line with the

perceived ideal, but also to act on individuals to form the ideal citizens for that society.

Foucault's theory of governmentality was formulated to explain the "how" of government in a liberal, and specifically, neoliberal state. This theory took into account the more subtle means used by government in shaping identities and in "conducting conduct," or in other words, governing how others govern themselves (Lemke, n.d.: 4). In the case of the liberal state, the reasoned conclusion that the limitation of government is necessary in order to ensure a prosperous state, and later the principle of the rights of man, gives way to the values upholding limited government as a necessity reflective of the idolization of the entrepreneur as a model citizen and of the market as a model for the state and society in neoliberalism (Foucault, 2010: 296-297). These conclusions not only led to the self-limiting of the state but also to strategies of government used to shape the ideal citizen for this society.

Governmentality is concerned, on the one hand, with modern forms of institutional power aiming at achieving political ends, and on the other, with the use of that power to produce the ideal citizen for that form of society (*ibid.*: 241). Civil society, and the citizen embodying the "right" understanding of rights and freedoms are, in Foucault's understanding, a product of liberal governmentality, as opposed to something natural predating the liberal state (*ibid.*: 296-297).

Although its origins and development are quite different from that of western liberal states, Chinese governmentality, nevertheless, borrows many of the techniques

of governmentality investigated by Foucault in liberal societies, and his theory of governmentality is central to understanding the strategies and methods of the CCP.

The Chinese government underwent a transformation of purpose as much as it did a transformation of method in the late 1970s. This transformation can be partly understood by the distinction Foucault makes between regimes of truth and regimes of rationality. According to Foucault, Feudal European government was not pegged to rationality, but to "truth" (*ibid.*: 311). Governing according to truth meant "governing in accordance with the order of things. It meant governing according to the knowledge of human and divine laws" (*ibid.*). Governing in this way required an understanding of what was considered just and unjust, right and wrong; whereas modern governmentality requires an understanding of what is beneficial and not beneficial, according to an understanding of what will work and what will not work towards attaining practical goals. The Chinese state, likewise, underwent a shift from governing according to the "truth" of ideology to governing according to the means of reaching rational and practical ends.

This is an aspect of Maoist China that Franz Schurmann explores in his work *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (1968), and which also provides more information about the strategies and methods of government prior to the reform period. Schurmann's investigation of the importance of ideology as a governmental tool as well as a truth of government has been invaluable in understanding how the Maoist state governed as much as why it governed the way it did. The mass-line politics of the Maoist state existed as a pre-civil society form in revolutionary China, and Schurmann's explanation of the theories and methods underlying this

governmental tool give a framework for understanding the significance of the economic and political transformation of the late 1970s and its subsequent impact on social organization. The disintegration of this social model and the adaptation of liberal governmental practices led to the emergence of a social space shaped by both an earlier governmental understanding of society as the masses led by a vanguard party, and the independent and voluntary social formations of a civil society emerging in the wake of governmental practices of privatization and limited government. Foucault's theory of civil society as a product of liberal governmentality is the framework for understanding both this transformation and the Party's attempts to manage it.

Foucault's theory of civil society points to its conception as being a product of reconciling the state with the conception of a free market beyond the manipulation or control of any governing body. Foucault's theory points to the evolution of the conception of civil society passing through two stages. With the evolution of a governmentality pegged to rationality in the seventeenth century, the state no longer pegs itself to "Truth", but to a self-interested rationality represented by the sovereign. This rationality centred decision-making within an absolutist monarchy intent on maximizing state power and the country's prosperity. Foucault saw the juridical "state-of-nature" arguments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a reaction to the problem of an absolutist state coupled with the complexity of a free market, the appearance of which is understood as the expression of free self-interested individuals. The liberal juridical stand argues for a limitation of state power and the legal protection of citizens' rights according to the argument that individuals form a contract when they enter into society in which they

voluntarily give up some rights, while getting state protection of other rights (Foucault, 2010: 291-313).

The reformulation of governmentality reflects the growing importance of the market in the rationality of government and the realization of the limitations of the state in regulating this sphere effectively. From the late eighteenth century, Foucault argued, the idea of civil society is again reconsidered, and a new formulation representing the primacy of civil society is created. Civil society is no longer something individuals enter into collectively when agreeing to a social contract, it is now understood as being a natural state of mankind, and something predating the state entirely (*ibid.*). In this formulation, civil society is composed of self-interested economic actors whose interests and exchanges manifest themselves in the market but whose social bonds go beyond mere economic self-interest. The rationality of the state shifts from the rationality of the sovereign, either absolutist or modified by a juridical sense of the rights of man, to the rationality of the governed, of civil society (*ibid.*). The modern liberal state is one, which appears as and acts in the name of the manifestation of the will of civil society.

Foucault describes this as the liberal solution of how to govern economic subjects according to the liberal juridical idea of right. Civil society, as it appears in liberal society, is not in fact natural, but a "transactional" reality according to Foucault. Foucault describes a transactional reality as being "born precisely from the interplay of relations of power and everything which constantly eludes them, at the interface, so to speak, of governors and governed" (*ibid.*: 297). It is the result of applying liberal technologies of government to the problem of human community and how to govern autonomous individuals motivated by self-interest and protected by rights within that community. It is

part of the self-limitation of liberal governmentality that favours the public withdrawal or fading into the background of the state and the apparent autonomy of the market and civil society.

At the same time, the understanding of individuals as *economic* individuals by the state is reflected in policy and government that acts on this "governmentalizable" aspect of individuals (*ibid.*: 252). Liberal government considers and acts on individuals only so far as they are conceived as "homo economicus," only as far as their behaviour is conceived of as being economic. Foucault describes the consequences of this form of governmentality in the policies of neo-liberalism which seek to re-define *homo economicus* not only as an autonomous self-interested economic actor involved in production and consumption, but as an entrepreneur, no matter what class he is from or occupation he performs (*ibid.*: 242). The understanding of individuals according to the grid of economic behaviour, and the governing of individuals according to this behaviour allows the production of a citizen capable of accepting the responsibility of "freedom" within the sphere of liberal civil society. His political behaviour is tamed by his production as *homo economicus*, an individual that can be shaped indirectly by policies that classify and hope to manipulate him as such (*ibid.*). With the universal acceptance of this basic governmental framework by all competing political parties, the system permits individuals to inhabit this "free" environment and to choose their government without risking the collapse of the system or changes to the techniques and strategies of government.

Prior to the late 1970s, the People's Republic of China lacked a civil society, and in fact, lacked any social space independent of the Party's construction and direction.

With the opening of China, and the economic and political reforms that have followed, the Chinese government underwent a great transformation that saw the adoption of some of the liberal techniques of government mentioned by Foucault. At the same time, the Party avoided complete adoption of liberal political reforms, choosing other techniques of government as well as reviving techniques used prior to the reforms.

The Party's adaptation of certain technologies of liberal government, such as the privatization of parts of the command economy and the promotion of liberal notions of individual autonomy in regards to employment and status, have not been matched with the liberal governmental strategy of releasing society from explicit political control in the name of a legitimate civil society (Pei, 2006: 55-57). The Party has increasingly governed individuals according to their economic role as *homo economicus*, as reflected in policies concerned with the economic performance of different sectors, the cooptation of emerging economic elites, the growth of GDP and the employment and development it generates (Pei, 2006; Xu, F., 2009). However, the liberal juridical component, the idea of governing individuals according to rights, has not been adopted.

Where civil society exists in China, it is a consequence of a partial adoption of liberal governmental technologies, rather than a deliberate design of Party policy. The strategies used by the Party in its relationship with an emerging Chinese civil society on the Internet demonstrate, what Foucault described as, an overlapping of governmentalities (Foucault, 2010: 313). The Party has overseen a massive expansion of IT infrastructure connecting Chinese to information that was not available or seen as fit for consumption in pre-reform China, yet they have also overseen an elaborate network of censorship, informers and opinion managers to manage that flow of information

(Bandurski, 2008). The Party has adopted liberal governmental strategies with the aim of transforming and developing China's capitalist economy, but have shied away from fully embracing the liberal governmental technique of legitimizing an autonomous civil society. Rather, the Party has re-adopted aspects of its pre-reform governmentality of mass-mobilization and the role of the Party as the vanguard of public interest in its dealings with the netizens of China's online civil society.

Whereas liberal government acknowledges the independence of civil society and its primacy over the state in public life, the Party retains the classic understanding of itself as the vanguard of the people. As such, the role of the Party is to know what is in the best interests of the people and the country, and to act to harmonize debate and to lead the people in the right direction. Despite its adoption of limited government in the economy and the promotion of individual economic autonomy and responsibility, the Party has not relinquished its directive role in public life. It has adopted a much less intrusive directive role, but it has not abandoned it.

The Party's policies regarding the online social space, in particular its response and interaction with netizens involved in flesh searching, demonstrate the overlapping of pre-reform and liberal governmentalities. The Party views the flesh searching of corrupt officials as being both useful and problematic. The cooperation between netizens in exposing these officials does not necessarily conflict with Party policy, which is also concerned with the rise of systemic local corruption (Juntao, 2011). In fact, the Party has publicly acknowledged and encouraged this form of mass-surveillance as a form of civic responsibility and a form of cooperation of the masses with the police and the Party (Li, 2009). This approval of flesh searching targeting corrupt local officials is a revival of

earlier policies of mass surveillance utilized during the Maoist period to exercise control over local officials.

At the same time, this online social space was not an intentional production of government policy, but rather an unintended consequence of the adoption of liberal economic policies. The Party has devised layers of control and manipulation aiming at taming potential threats to Party legitimacy. The state has also shown concern over an activity that demonstrates social efficacy and has the potential to expose systemic failings, which in turn could lead to an erosion of public confidence in the Party and direct criticism of the central government. The Party hopes to contain the social activism of netizens while also using it to shore up its surveillance and control of local government and to preserve its legitimacy as the governing party.

Foucault's theory of governmentality and the production of a liberal civil society is clearly central to an understanding of not only how a Chinese social space has evolved, but also how the Party has managed the emergence of this space and the emergence of online social activism exemplified by flesh searching.

Although Foucault's theory of governmentality occupies a vital position in explaining the phenomenon of flesh searching, a number of other theories have also been used to better understand the group interactions found in an online social space, and in the Chinese online social space in particular. Zixue Tai and Yongnian Zheng's individual works investigating the emergence of a Chinese internet and the relationship between online users and the state have both been used for the deeper understanding that their historical examinations and case studies provide (Tai 2006; Zheng 2008). Both writers point to the potential of the Internet to empower its users,

but also add that this potential is limited to an ongoing interaction with the Party, rather than the belief of a revolutionary-democratic potential that some western observers seem to hold.

Clay Shirky's (2008) detailed analysis of online group formation has also been referred to for its detailed analysis of Internet group formation around the world and his comparison of online group formation with previous offline forms. Clay Shirky's investigation of Internet group formation and interaction point to the advantages that online group formation offer over previous models of group formation, as well as the possibilities and limitations of these new social formations. All of these works have been used for historical background, and for models of interaction between netizens and the state. Their work has been used where it speaks to the content under investigation in this paper.

## **Chapter 2: Chinese Communist Party Governmentality**

Despite its young age for a state, only 62 years old this October 1st 2011, the history of the People's Republic of China is one of enormous social, political, and economic changes. The Communist Party oversaw the destruction of the last remnants of feudal China, the isolation of the country, the establishment of a Soviet-inspired command economy, several large social upheavals and near civil war, as well as the liberalization of the economy, re-opening of the country to the outside world and ascension of the once desperately impoverished country to the status of emerging superpower (Hsu, 2000). Despite these sweeping social and economic changes, the same regime remains in power. While many communist regimes fell from power during the 1980s and early 1990s while either pursuing liberal reforms or using state repression to avoid change, the Chinese government has been able to survive, while pursuing at different times and sometimes simultaneously, both reforms and repression.

The methods of government used by the Party reveal an ability to be flexible, to adapt and to reinterpret ideology while retaining the position of the Party as the sole source of legitimate government. The flexibility of ideology or at least the flexibility of practical ideology has served the purpose of pursuing and maintaining the political legitimacy of the Party.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the Party since the changes undertaken by Deng Xiaoping, has been the severance of the strongest connection between the masses and the Party. The ending of mass-line politics through the privatization of much of the economy and the ending of the Maoist organizational model has

coincided with a loss of control over both officials and the masses, and has spurred the Party to adapt and reinterpret practical ideology to regain greater control and to safeguard its legitimacy.

## **2.1 Maoist China**

Modern China differs from the liberal western experience; New China was not established under a government that was pegged to rationality, but to "Truth." This truth was grounded in the modern secular philosophy of Marxism as understood and elaborated by the Chinese Communist Party under the direction of Mao Zedong. The "order of things" was a world divided by economic classes, and the need for violent struggle against class enemies inside and outside of Chinese society. As Michael Dutton has elaborated, the defining question of Maoist China, "Who are our enemies, who are our friends?" was used to shape the governmentality of that revolutionary period lasting from 1949 to 1976 (Dutton, 2009: 24). The pervasive influence of a totalitarian governmentality pegged to truth on Chinese society was the politicization of every aspect of life according to that question. The framing of politics in this way had a profound impact on the development of Chinese society, leading to a mass-line politics of social mobilization that transformed the population into tools or weapons depending on the campaign (*ibid.*: 30), and which culminated in the man-made disasters of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.

The *danwei* was the base organizational unit for the urban economy and society. Prior to the reforms of the late 1970s up to 90% of urban China lived and worked in a *danwei* (*ibid.*: 31). More than just a work unit, *danwei* consisted of shops,

hospitals, schools, apartments and entertainment venues (*ibid.*). As Dutton points out, the distribution of goods and services in Maoist China was through homes registered by *danwei*. The system encouraged close relations within the *danwei*, as well as active participation on behalf of the community in the campaigns of the Party. Public security committees were created among the *danwei*, making up for weak state security structures (*ibid.*: 33). Members of the *danwei* were under constant surveillance by their neighbours just as they were also expected to be vigilant (*ibid.*: 35). The members of these organizations were mobilized for mass movements, which were often, Dutton shows, framed around the question of "Who are our enemies, who are our friends?"

The question "Who are our enemies, who are our friends?" was typical of the antagonistic duality found in Mao Zedong Thought, the practical component of Chinese Communist ideology used for mass mobilization. As Schurmann explains in his work *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, The CCP's ideology consisted of a universal core, referred to as "Marxist-Leninist Theory," as well as a flexible application of unchanging principles derived from that theory to specific conditions or contradictions found in China, known as "Mao Zedong Thought" (Schurmann, 1968: 50). Both parts of this ideology were used for mobilization, but in different ways. The core theory was used as a source of principles, of a worldview and to provide the goal for mobilization, the attainment of true communism. The methods used to strive for this goal and to apply these universal principles were dictated by Mao Zedong thought, which could evolve through experience from the application of theory to specific conditions found in China (*ibid.*: 17-57).

Schurmann credits the core theory for its ability to mobilize the cadres and masses to undertake very difficult work and to accept great sacrifices in order to attain the paradise offered by communism (*ibid.*: 72-73). The practical ideology was used to create and use organizations as tools to attain this end. The basic understanding derived at by Mao Zedong's interpretation of Marxist-Leninism applied to the conditions of China was that Chinese society was divided by contradictions found at every level, between traditional and modern culture, between leader and led, between workers and peasants, between intellectuals and "worker-peasant toilers," and between "red and expert" (*ibid.*: 58-104). The resolution of these contradictions was believed to be the unity of opposites through struggle. By bringing down the barriers between opposites, Mao Zedong believed that society could advance towards communism. This explains the disastrous thinking behind the "Great Leap Forward" which saw workers assume the role of technicians, peasants the role of workers and intellectuals the roles of peasants and workers (*ibid.*).

Another aspect of the Party's ideological view of society was its suspicion of intellectual and technical management. Despite the attempts to reconcile "red and expert," the Party came to accept the need of experts who were not truly red; those experts who achieved their status through formal education (*ibid.*: 162-167). The Party was often deeply antagonistic towards technicians and bureaucrats who they believed to be incapable of fully accepting the ideology of the Party as well as to be prone to individualism nurtured by a competitive and elitist education. The mistrust of bureaucracy also had a less ideological and more practical reason, the fear of bureaucratic inertia, of the stability and "routinization" of large bureaucratic bodies

which would slow and blunt policies that were aimed at revolutionizing and transforming society (*ibid.*). The Party was able to maintain control over these ideologically-suspect experts and managers, which they nevertheless needed, by enlisting the masses in surveillance.

The masses, represented by workers in factories, were encouraged to expose and to criticize the corruption and waste of their superiors. Workers were encouraged to report abuses to the Party or to the Party through the mass media. These denunciations were sometimes reported in local papers or posted on the "wall papers," which were papers posted on walls for the public to read. They named the managers and exposed them to the wider community for criticism (*ibid.*: 317). Although not all denunciations were published in the press, all denunciations were supposed to be reported to the Party. This was the "bottom-up" function of the mass media in China, and was a way for the Party to exercise control over officials using mass surveillance. As Schurmann put it, "All in all, one can say that the Chinese Communists have followed a line of making control operations public" (*ibid.*: 317-318). Of course, only denunciations of *specific* individuals and the actions of these individuals would be accepted or published. The privilege of voicing criticism of policies or direction was reserved for the leadership of the Party (*ibid.*: 66).

One of the early peaks of mass-mobilization used against official corruption was during the 1950s. The "Sanfan" or Three-Anti movement of 1951 was directed against officials guilty of "corruption, waste, bureaucratism." Officials who had been denounced underwent "struggle meetings," where they were criticized, attacked and removed from office by the masses (*ibid.*: 318). Schurmann describes the Sanfan

movement as the Party resorting to "terror to enforce controls," because other more sophisticated forms of control had not been fully developed (*ibid.*). However, the threat of mass struggle against officials was revived again during the Cultural Revolution and remained a tool of Party control. The end of mass-line politics was one of the greatest changes initiated by the reforms of Deng Xiaoping.

The legacy of the Maoist period can still be felt in Chinese society, despite the transformation of the Chinese state into one that pegs itself to a rationality closer to that of western liberal states, and which is concerned above all with stability. Although conscious of the dangers of returning to the Maoist period of struggle and upheaval, the Maoist understanding of the world according to that pivotal question "Who are our enemies, who are our friends?" remains a part of governmentality in China, as do the old forms of government discipline over society: the departments overseeing censorship, propaganda and security (Lam, W., 2008). The idea of mass surveillance has also been revived to a certain extent in the role of the mass media as a monitor of local conditions as well as government tolerance of mass denunciations of individual officials in the form of online flesh searches. However, just as tolerance of mass surveillance and criticism in Maoist China was limited to its use in exposing individual cases of abuse, The Party remains wary of cases that could be linked to general criticism of the state and the Party.

## **2.2 Transformation and the Crises of the 1970s and 1980s**

The death of Mao Zedong and the ascent of Deng Xiaoping to the head of the CCP was the beginning of a reorientation of the state away from the ideologically

driven policies of totalitarian Maoism and towards a pragmatic and technocratic authoritarianism. The new leadership was interested in learning from and adapting western capitalist models of development. This was a radical change in the sense that ideology no longer directed government policy. Ideology became something to apply to a decision after it had been made (Shambaugh, 2009: 105). It was a way of reconciling capitalist policies with a "socialist" party state.

The decision to change the way of governing was a conclusion arrived at by the party after the state of crisis at the end of the 1970s (Pei, 2006: 30). With the economic and social disasters of the 1960s and 1970s and the collapse of faith in the party following the Cultural Revolution, the Deng regime responded to the limitations and dangers of the totalitarian state and began a retreat from the politicization of the population, leaving room for the development of society outside the manipulation of neighbourhood councils and mass line politics. At the same time, the Deng regime focused more attention on economic development by following technical rather than political solutions to economic and social problems. Pragmatism rather than ideology came to dominate decision-making (Shambaugh, 2009: 105).

*Danwei* were broken up. Collectivization was reversed and peasants were given parcels of land to work on their own. Private enterprises were allowed and foreign investment was courted. The privatization of industry began, but would not include all sectors of the economy (Pei, 2006: 10). In almost every area, Party control loosened. The shifting of the population into the mixed capitalist economy coincided with the severing of the strongest links between the Party and the population; the neighbourhood work units and collective farms became obsolete organizational

models. This marked the end of mass line politics and the beginning of a flexible capitalist organization that stripped many workers of security. Many workers were thrust into the market, having to sell their labour in the emerging "socialist market economy." Less able to rely on the security and stability offered in the command economy, workers had a difficult time finding new forms of organization to protect themselves (Ford, 2009). The *danwei* was becoming a memory for many workers, but independent unions were deemed "counter-revolutionary" organizations by the state (*ibid.*). The old identity of the Chinese workers as the vanguard class was also dissolving along with the *danwei*.

The transition left a vacuum of values and identity for those within the Party as well as for its subjects. "Expert" was now elevated over "red", and the ideological discipline of the Party began to erode. At the same time, mass surveillance, which had kept officials in check, was ending. The state's movement away from ideology towards pragmatism, and the disintegration of the ideological organizations that formed workers' communities, spelled the end of the era of mass-line politics. Officials were now in a position to benefit from the growth of the new economy at the expense of the public good and the Party's legitimacy.

The media, long a mouthpiece for the Party, also began to show signs of change during the 1980s. In theory, the role of journalists after 1949 had been to provide a link between the people and the party. Journalists were to gather information from the peasants and workers regarding the impact of policy and relay their findings to the Party. The Party would then debate the meaning of this information, draw the "correct" conclusions and have the journalists relay their

policies to the people (Zhao, 1998: 24). This was the "bottom up" role discussed earlier and demonstrated by the act of workers denouncing officials in local papers and reporting abuses to journalists who were required to relay these reports to their superiors. This was meant to be a practical method of circumventing the "middlemen" of the state economy and connecting the Party leadership with the masses. In practice, the emphasis was more often on the top-down part of this theory rather than on the bottom-up. Mao Zedong clearly emphasized the role of the press in relaying the Party's plan, an important role in mass line politics, "your job is to educate the people, to let them know their own interests, their own tasks and the Party's general and specific policies" (*ibid.*: 26). With the loosening of political control over the press in the 1980s and the opening of the country to the outside, the media experienced internal debate regarding purpose and method. Western media theories and principles, such as objectivity, and the independence of the press, were discussed and many papers showed a greater objectivity and even provided critical analysis (*ibid.*: 35). The Party's control over much of the content and direction of coverage began to slip.

The dissolution of mass organizations imposed from above, such as neighbourhood councils, communes and *danwei*, as well as the loosening of political control and the opening of the country to new sources of information allowed the opening of space for civil society in the 1980s. Voluntary and independent forms of organization began to form. The destabilizing effects of the economic and political transformations of the 1980s gave rise to movements within this emerging civil society.

Student movements and workers' movements sprung up during the late 1980s with concerns over the changes taking place; the workers voicing discontent over the loss of job security following the neoliberal reforms and the students demanding a greater say for the people by implementing further political reforms (Ford, 2009). This period ended famously in 1989 with the crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square. The liberal political reforms were halted and the media were brought back under tighter political control. The transformation had entered a second phase. The economic transformation continued but the political transformation, which had lacked a clear direction, took a more solid, and a more conservative form during the 1990s.

The 1980s were a period of political uncertainty in China. Many sources discuss the internal power struggle between hardliners and liberals within the Party (Kahn, 2005). There were groups interested in further political reform, while others believed the reforms had already gone too far and posed a threat to the Party's survival. Although Deng Xiaoping saw political reforms as an economic necessity, he did not support democratization nor did he support any judicial or state reforms which he believed would hinder the ability of the Party to govern (Pei, 2006: 55-57). The Party adapted the idea of limited government from western liberal governmentality, the need for individuals to take responsibility for their own welfare, but at the same time refused to legitimize a "liberal" civil society, with respect to the rights to form independent associations, and to freedom of expression. Discussion of political reform ended with the 1989 crackdown and was also repressed under the leadership

of Jiang Zemin. Many liberals were purged from the Party following the Tiananmen Square Massacre (Kahn, 2005).

Civil society grew out of the implementation of liberal economic reforms and the dismantling of the totalitarian social apparatus, yet it was not acknowledged by the state as a fully legitimate space. Liberal economic reforms adopted from western liberal economies initiated the privatization of the state economy and the dismantling of state-based organizations and security, leaving many workers and peasants to take responsibility for their own position in the economy and society. No longer tied to the artificial organizations imposed by the Party, many began to form their own groups within an emerging civil society. However, a liberal understanding of the legitimacy of an independent civil society and the rights of citizens never materialized. Rather the state transitioned towards a pragmatic authoritarianism, which maintained elements of an earlier totalitarianism, adopted elements of liberal economics and government yet ended up being very different from either system.

### **2.3 Party Reforms, Cooptation and Values**

The 1980s and early 1990s also saw the end of the East Block communist regimes and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, both of which, David Shambaugh argues, had a profound impact on the CCP and how it organized itself and the state. The Party set out to learn from the mistakes of the Soviets and concluded that stagnation and disconnection were partly to blame for the fall of the communist regime. Stagnation and disconnection left the Soviets unable to see the seriousness of their position, resulting in the country falling behind and implementing needed

reforms too late (Shambaugh, 2009: 73-76). At the same time, when the reforms finally came, they were implemented too quickly, leaving the Soviets incapable of dealing with the consequences.

With these conclusions in mind and also aware of the challenges emerging as a result of their own reforms since the 1980s, the CCP has managed a number of policy initiatives within the Party and the state (*ibid.*: 75-81). The Party set out to reclaim lost legitimacy and control at the local level, improve competency, moral character and technical performance of cadres and to extend the influence of the Party inside emerging sectors of the economy and among emerging elites. Traditional Marxist study sessions were also accompanied by sessions dealing with the new policies of Deng and Jiang, as well as self-criticism and career training. The CCP also moved to include greater intra-party democracy and collaborative decision-making. These reforms were aimed at increasing the level of professionalism within the party and in enhancing the technical abilities of cadres (*ibid.*).

To remain connected to the changing society, the CCP moved to officially recognize and promote the cooptation of new elites, which had already been occurring since the rise of a capitalist economy. Jiang Zemin's "Three Represents" encouraged incorporating emerging elites and new social groups within the Party. According to Jiang, the Party needed to represent: "The advanced productive forces," "advanced modern culture," and the "interests of the vast majority of the people" (*ibid.*: 111). The Party would now actively seek out business and professional elites for Party membership, sharing with these elites the goal of economic development. However, as Pei illustrates, most of the "advanced productive forces" now included in the Party

were cadres who were able to enter into business following the opening of China's economy (Pei, 2006: 94). Rather than including new independent elites, the policy reflected the penetration of the capitalist economy by Party members.

As a Party no longer relying solely on its role of vanguard party of the truth, the CCP has come to embrace a more purely nationalist justification of its role in society. The Party has characterized its role as overseer of economic development, scientific progress and social stability. Hu Jintao's "Harmonious Society" has built on these earlier modifications, confirming the changes made by Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin while also stressing the need to decentralize development and protect the less powerful in society (Shambaugh, 2009: 115-116). The question of how to deal with contradictions in society remains with the Chinese leadership. However, whereas the regime once forced these contradictions to manifest themselves in the form of class struggle, the Party now acts to smooth out relations and to repress conflict in the name of "Harmony."

The Party is hoping to avoid the emergence of an independent social group that could be hostile to the state. While stretching its influence to new social classes and justifying policies according to national benefits, the Party has positioned itself as being indivisible from the nation itself. This has been an intentional consequence of the Party's extension throughout society as well as of the Party's role in building "New China" and its embodiment of the nation as depicted in schools and the media (Guo, Cheong, & Chen, 2007). The Party has been able to cloak itself in the flag as a defense against critics it often labels as traitors influenced by hostile foreign powers. The flesh searching of individuals branded as "traitors" because of their critical view of Party policy, such as

Grace Wang, indicates that the Party and the nation are indeed closely linked for many Chinese (Wang, G., 2008).

This is not a new strategy, but rather the simplification of the old question, "Who are our enemies, who are our friends?" away from its Maoist/Marxist-Leninist formulation and along more crudely nationalist lines. This strategy has had mixed results in achieving popular support, and the Party is also aware of the danger nationalism can pose if it gets out of control or is turned against the Party (Tai, 2006: 284-285). Nevertheless, it is often a kind of pragmatic nationalism that the Party now turns to, rather than Marxist-Leninist or Maoist ideology, for support.

#### **2.4 Consequences of the Reforms and Party Adaptation of Governance**

Improving technical competence is one part of these initiatives; the other has been an attempt to deal with the systemic corruption that has spread throughout the Party since the opening of the economy. In recognition of this problem, Shambaugh argues, the Party has taken steps beyond the cadre study campaigns. The Central Discipline Inspection Commission of the Central Committee (CDIC), the Party's chief body investigating allegations of misconduct and corruption, has undertaken a number of initiatives to ferret out corruption among the ranks of the CCP. As Shambaugh points out, this has netted the CDIC a number of very large fish, including a Beijing mayor and a Shanghai party secretary (Shambaugh, 2009: 134). However, as Pei has demonstrated, the number of those arrested for corruption remains a drop in the ocean, and the CDIC itself has been penetrated extensively by this systemic corruption (Pei, 2006).

The external causes of the growth of corruption can be traced to organizational as well as economic changes in China since the late 1970s. The partial retreat of the state from the economy allowed the growth of private industry and the commercialization of state owned enterprises. While the central authority over the economy has diminished, local government has become more involved in business. At the same time, the end of mass-line politics and Party-supported surveillance of officials has left the growth of corruption unchecked. Corruption at the local level is rampant and widely known in Chinese society (*ibid.*: 9-15). In extreme cases, local "black hand" or organized crime is connected to government. In some cases investigated by the central government, local government was discovered to be *the* organized crime in the region (*ibid.*: 159).

Pei points to another cause for the growth of corruption. The loss of faith in the ideological foundation of the Party following the reforms in China, and the fall of the Soviet Union and the East Block communist regimes in the 1980s and early 1990s, had a profound impact on cadre morale and behaviour (*ibid.*: 21). The formation of cadre identity as part of a vanguard party working for the people and leading society towards an egalitarian future was shattered by the transformation of the Party and the assessment made of the Party's vulnerability in a post Cold War world. Many cadres arrested on corruption charges following the period of reform have claimed that pessimism about their future and the future of the Party led to their actions to achieve financial security while they still had the chance (*ibid.*: 21).

The Party has been attempting to rebuild the cadre identity, in part through Party initiatives such as the study sessions, career training and the rooting out of

corruption (Shambaugh, 2009: 103-160). However, with the loss of a strong ideological foundation, the cadre is no longer seen by the people or by himself as a vanguard of the masses, but now is seen and sees himself as simply a state official. The perception of the cadre as an efficient and effective servant of the people has been replaced with the image of the official who has given into the temptations and pressures to take advantage of his position of power, in a time of economic opportunity, to benefit himself and his family (Ibid. 21).

The lack of an independent judicial body to investigate allegations of official abuse and corruption, Pei argues, is a symptom of China's trapped transition, and the reason for the lack of a solution to the problem of systemic corruption (*ibid.*: 15). Pei points out that the loss of Party control over the periphery has not been balanced with any judicial reforms, which would allow an independent body to monitor and check local government (*ibid.*: 72). Although Shambaugh also sees this as a major threat to the Party, he nevertheless concludes that the Party has the ability to adapt to this, and other challenges (Shambaugh, 2009: 161-181). By experimenting with new techniques of government and abandoning obsolete tools and methods to atrophy, Shambaugh believes the Party will likely survive well into the future without falling victim to a revolution or being forced to implement democratic reforms (*ibid.*). Pei takes the much darker view that corruption in the Party and government is a cancer spreading with little resistance from a system incapable of implementing the reforms needed to deal with it (Pei, 2006: 204-208).

Pei argues that the exclusionary political system coupled with the lack of rule of law, plus neoliberal market reforms have resulted in predatory behaviour by local

officials out to enrich themselves at the expense of the public, and over whom the central government has largely lost control (*ibid.*: 44). Pei presents a very systematic investigation in regards to the challenges facing the state. Due to local party control over the judiciary and the unclear, often incoherent laws resulting from overlapping authority, rule of law appears as a tool of the Party and not as a fair and objective check on power (*ibid.*: 12-14). The courts fail to convince both the cadres and the people of their role, failing to hold local officials accountable and failing to mask the exercise of law as anything other than the rule of the strong over the weak. Pei points to the collusion of the courts with corrupt local government (*ibid.*: 72). Pei also provides an extensive account of corruption at the local level in industry and development, and the often close connection between officials and organized crime (*ibid.*: 170, 159). Pei argues that corruption threatens the Party in two very important ways; 1) it can prevent the proper implementation of policy at the regional or local level, resulting in economic losses and failed initiatives, and a general loss of effective government; 2) it is eroding the Party's legitimacy among the public (*ibid.*: 204). His conclusion is that the trapped transition of the government has prevented the central authority from instituting the only reforms capable of arresting the growth of corruption and decline of governance that have resulted from the partial transition started by the economic reforms. Allowing an independent judiciary and the rule of law, as well as democratizing the political system would threaten the future of the Party. However, these measures are in Pei's view, the only steps the government can take to arrest the problem of the governance deficit characterized by a decline of control over the periphery, rising corruption and declining public support (*ibid.*: 208).

Whether Pei is correct in concluding that the Party is doomed in one way or another or whether Shambaugh is correct that the adaptive capacity of the Party is capable of carrying it well into the future remains to be seen. However they both shed light on the successes and the failures of the Party in dealing with these challenges, as well as the challenge of publicly exposing corruption while also protecting the legitimacy of the Party.

## **2.5 Surveillance**

Pei is correct that the problem of how to govern local cadres is tied up with the problem of how to govern the masses. Corruption remains a central area of concern inside the Party and also among the greater public. Access to more diverse sources of information for the public as well as the ability of the media to report on corruption in many cases has also increased public cynicism towards the government. This has further eroded the legitimacy of the Party, especially where local government is concerned. The monitoring of corruption and abuse by the media, and especially by netizens is viewed as a double-edged sword by the central government. On the one hand, it can be used to police local officials, bringing cases of abuse by local officials to the attention of the central government (Shambaugh, 2009: 81). On the other hand, cases of corruption can further erode the legitimacy of the central government and can threaten the survival of the Party (Pei, 2006: 204). Policies reflect this need for balance between the need to control information and the need for access to information. This understanding is reflected in the Party's concern with stability, and in the process of loosening and tightening of censorship and in other more

sophisticated forms of opinion management (Deibert, et al., 2010: 456). This ambivalence of the Party regarding exposure of corruption informs their view of flesh searching.

When evaluating the failings of the Soviet Union, the CCP also concluded that too little reform followed by too much reform too quickly led to the collapse of Party control in Russia. CCP analysts concluded that, whereas pre-reform Russian censorship and propaganda had been too heavy-handed, distorting reality in one way, Gorbachev had also given the Russian media too much freedom, allowing them to be infiltrated by "anti-party" and "pro-western" elements, who "distorted" the reality in another way. The Party has concluded that the CCP should allow media an "inspection function," while also maintaining ideological control (Shambaugh, 2009: 81). The inspection function is to provide the Party with a link to the issues and problems of society, preventing them from being cut off from reality. "Social problems" such as corruption, are reported in the state media as well as the commercial media. However, political issues remain to be framed by the Party. Political reform, and the legitimacy of the central government and of the Party remain off-limit topics for the media.

Similar to the "bottom up" function of the press in Maoist China, the media is often permitted to cover specific cases of corruption that lead to criticism of specific officials or policies, but they are not permitted to link these cases in a way leading to general criticism of the Party. In the same way, the Party has shown a tolerance, and even praise, for netizens who expose the corruption of individual officials. The flesh

searches targeting corruption are often praised as a form of mass surveillance in line with Party leadership.

The Party has shown a willingness to loosen control over censorship during times of greater stability while also tightening control during times of uncertainty or rising tensions (He, 2011; Deibert et al., 2010: 456). The Party's tolerance of the Media's surveillance function, and of the public's access to this information is conditional to the Party's security and the stability of society. Once threatened, the Party has shown a willingness to increase the control of information and use tools of discipline and coercion (*ibid.*). The familiarity with the cycle of relaxation and tightening of control has made the media and the public sensitive to what is acceptable for discussion and what is not (Crook, 2008). The media, at its most critical, remains within the boundaries of its role of monitor of local implementation of policy, and watchdog of local corruption.

The media has been the most vocal and critical when following its role of surveillance of corruption. However, the state has exercised restraint and censorship over the media when the issue proves too sensitive, in the view of the government, for public discussion. Examples of corruption which provoke too much public anger or which can be linked to other issues or to systemic problems are the most sensitive. This does not mean that the media will always follow the directions of the propaganda department. In the case of China's high-speed train disaster, the media reported detailed accounts of the mismanagement of the disaster, in some cases even after being warned by the propaganda department not to cover the event (Beach, 2011c; Beach, 2011d).

Central state control of the media is most effective over the state press, like *The People's Daily* and over state broadcasters like *CCTV*. The state often forbids these media companies from covering news covered by other private or local media. These organizations are also given detailed direction on how to cover different stories in a way that reflects the wishes of the central government. Ironically, the national media can also be the most open in its coverage of news that is sensitive at the local level (Tai, 2006: 11-115). Local governments maintain their own propaganda departments that can muzzle the local media, but their web of control ends where their jurisdiction ends. Stories of local corruption are often picked up by smaller media companies in neighbouring provinces and/or by the large national media companies. Smaller media companies are also more likely to run stories that the central government would like to control (*ibid.*). This fragmented network of control makes it difficult for the Party to maintain coherent control over the media, without bringing in stronger, more centralized controls over the flow of information. Direct government control over all sources of information has occurred in cases of extreme crisis in less developed regions of China (Branigan, 2010). The Xinjiang riots in 2009 resulted not only in government handling of the media, but also the complete shutdown of the Internet in the province until state confidence was re-established (Wade, 2011). This would be impossible to do in the connected and highly developed eastern provinces without crashing the internationalized economy of this region. The flow of information in the developed east can be monitored and controlled but it cannot be shutoff without severe consequences for the economy and society.

The surveillance function of the media has also become increasingly tied to the role of netizens as monitors, broadcasters and receivers. Many of the stories of local corruption are delivered by netizens with first or second-hand knowledge of corruption in their community who post the information online. The information is then received and transmitted by other netizens, in some cases reaching a national audience (Jin, 2008). This is the process that many flesh searches have taken. The mass media, in turn, may also pick up the story, extending transmission through television or the press (*ibid.*). Once published or broadcast by the media, the story again returns to the Internet forums where it may undergo further transmission and even elaboration. This cycle is typical of the relationship between the media and China's online civil society, and is a relationship of concern for the Party. Realizing the benefits and dangers of this relationship between an empowered media and civil society, the Party has permitted netizens and the media a surveillance function while also expanding tools of social control and manipulation, both traditional and new.

The tolerance shown by the Party towards netizens who have exposed local corruption is a reflection of the old role of the Party in mobilizing the masses to root out counter-revolutionary and corrupt officials. The empowerment of netizens to act on behalf of the Party to expose the disobedience of officials is again conditional to the target being an individual and not the Party. The fear that the exposure of individual corruption could grow into more general criticism and anti-party action has also tempered this tolerance.

Ironically, the growing complexity of a liberalizing capitalist society in China has resulted in a reciprocal growth and modernization of many tools of societal

control. Spending on domestic security in China has, for the first time, surpassed military spending. 624.4 billion yuan were spent on public security in 2011 (Huei, 2011). Part of this allotment was spent on the expansion and funding of the Stability Preservation Office or *Wei Wen Ban* which maintains offices throughout the country and a network of informers throughout society (*ibid.*).

Despite greater openness, state repression remains a central feature of CCP authoritarianism, especially when used against public disturbances, which occur more often in the less developed regions, and are fuelled by the anger and resentment of the vast peasant and peasant-worker underclass of the nation (Escobar, 2005). Rural "mass incidents" number in the 100,000s each year (Huei, 2011.), and are suppressed using state security forces. Public security forces remain one of the best examples of traditional tools of coercion wielded by the Party, although they have also undergone strategies of reform aimed at greater efficiency and "professionalization" through adoption of strategic repression. Public security forces have become more targeted in their repression and have adopted sophisticated methods of dealing with public disturbances with a minimal political, social and economic cost (Ma, 2011).

The government also maintains a similar network of online informers as well as a decentralized network of censors, spin-doctors, and opinion manipulators (Bandurski, 2008). In order to deal with a complex and decentralized network of broadcasters and receivers, the netizens of China's online civil society, the state has been nurturing a decentralized and complex network of power that has had to also make use of more subtle forms of opinion management to direct this emerging group towards goals inline with Party policy and security. Traditional forms of coercion are

more difficult to apply and much less effective when used on China's online civil society.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

These seemingly contradictory strategies of greater openness, media empowerment and opening social space coupled with the growth, modernization and decentralization of the state security apparatus reveal the complexity of the contradictions facing the state in attempting to reconcile the contradictions of a partially liberalized society with a one-party state and authoritarian state apparatus. The consequences which have resulted from these contradictions: fragmented state authority, rising and systemic corruption and the threat to political legitimacy, have spurred both liberal governmental strategies and the reinterpretation and revival of the strategy of the Party as a mobilizer of the masses to facilitate the "harmonization" of these contradictions in society.

Although the Party has distanced itself from the masses through the liberalization of the economy and the disintegration of organizations linking the masses with the party, it nevertheless retains the discourse of a vanguard party that sees itself as being in touch with the people and striving to work with the masses in achieving national progress. Whereas this discourse had focused on the Party's relationship with the proletariat, it now focuses more on its relations with the "advanced progressive forces" of society, including the new capitalist and professional classes, the emerging middle class, and the most politically-expressive group in China, the netizens of China's online civil society. The Party's strategy of interaction with the netizens of China involves a public appearance of

tolerance and acceptance of the empowerment of this group, while at the same time using strategies of manipulation, discipline and coercion to control the potential threat posed by this group. In a sense, the attitude of the Party towards netizens reflects a revival of the Party's identity as a mobilizer of the masses, permitting the empowerment of this group while also hoping to control and direct its actions.

### **Chapter 3: China's Online Civil Society**

The origins and development of the internet in China and of an online civil society is very much the story of the Party's drive to modernize and develop the Chinese economy and the unexpected consequences which have resulted, in part, from the pursuit of this goal.

The CCP believed that the key to China's development as an advanced and developed country lay in its ability to embrace new communications technology and to develop the high tech infrastructure that would lay the groundwork for the expansion of communications technology and the market economy. The development of this infrastructure and the increasing ease of access to connected computers and cell phones has in turn resulted in the rapid development of an online community connected not only with other users across China, but also to users from the rest of the world. Internet forums, which have come to resemble space for civil society, have proliferated in part due to the ease of access to the Internet.

The Party has applied similar techniques and strategies of governance in the aim of neutralizing or "harmonizing" the threat posed by activity originating from this social space, while also tolerating and even sanctioning the social actions of netizens that are in harmony with the governance of the Party.

#### **3.1 Development of Internet Technology Infrastructure**

Zixue Tai outlines four stages of Internet development in China in his book *The Internet in China* (Tai, 2006: 123-135); the first stage was prior to 1992, and saw the Internet used only in research labs in government and universities. The Party showed

little interest in the technology and little was done to further its development. The second stage lasting from 1992 to 1995 saw the expansion of Internet technology and infrastructure, such as networks, and government investment in developing the technology and infrastructure. The change in policy from one of neglect to one of engagement was partly the result of technological advancement, which made access to the internet cheaper and more practical, as well as the fear of being left behind by western powers, particularly the United States, which were actively building national networks and encouraging the development of internet technologies (IT). By the mid-1990s, the Chinese government had completed "major national network backbones" (*ibid.*: 129). The focus of the government during this period was on establishing a national network, even though the high cost of connecting to the Internet and scarcity of home computers meant that very few users were actually making use of this high-tech infrastructure.

The change in policy during the second period listed by Tai was very much a reflection of the economic aspirations of the Chinese government. The Chinese leadership began to see the development of IT infrastructure as a key economic goal for the development of the Chinese economy and society. Tai notes that many senior officials viewed the advent of the internet as holding the same promise for Chinese economic and social development as the industrial revolution did for those western powers fortunate enough to be early adopters of the new technology (*ibid.*: 94). The drive to develop this infrastructure was very much in line with the pragmatic and technocratic character of the post-Mao regime.

The government continued with its policy of expanding Internet networks from 1995 onwards. The third stage, as described by Tai, involves the gradual expansion of the

user base. All four backbone networks were fully operational and providing internet service for their clients. The Party also began to create and implement mechanisms of control over information entering the networks. The fourth and last stage listed by Tai is from 1998 to the present and involves the user base reaching, what he calls, a "critical mass," or a large enough user base that the development of the internet and increasing number of networks and integration takes on a momentum of its own (*ibid.*: 134).

Since the decision by the Party to make the development of telecommunications and Internet technology and infrastructure a central part of economic planning, the number of Internet users has skyrocketed and has resulted in the emergence of an online community populated by netizens, whom the Party has had to acknowledge and with whom the Party now engages.

### **3.2 Internet Group Formation and Development of an Online Social Space**

At present China has surpassed the United States as the country with the largest number of internet users, however, it remains a country with a lower rate of internet penetration per capita than many countries in the developed west, including the United States, as well as a country with uneven penetration (*Internet World Stats*, 2011). The percentage of the Chinese population with internet access in 2011 according to "Internet World Stats" was 36.3% compared with 78.2% of Americans, 78.4% of Japanese, 80.9 % of South Koreans and 82% of British (*ibid.*). However, this has increased from a 2007 estimate by the same organization of a penetration rate of only 16% (Jin, 2008: 16). Statistics for internet penetration in rural and urban areas for 2007 by the *China Internet Network Information Center* (CINIC) show a gap between the two regions with a

penetration rate of only 5.1% in rural areas versus 21.6% in urban centres, with penetration being highest in the larger urban centers such as Beijing and Shanghai with 46.4% and 45.8% of those populations (*ibid.* 17). The same source shows the percentage of Internet users being of a younger age, with 69% of users in 2007 being under the age of 30 (*ibid.*). According to statistics released by CINIC in 2010, the percentage of users under 30 was up to 71.2% of all users (*China Internet Network Information Center, 2010: 17*). These statistics indicate that netizens are mostly represented by the younger residents of China's more advanced regions. 2010 statistics released by the China Internet Network Center reveal that of the percentage of the entire population of Internet users, 42.1% of users had an income of 1000 yuan or less per month (*ibid.*). However, the overall percentage listed may be misleading since students who are unemployed but from wealthy families may also fit into this group. The availability of Internet cafes and the expansion of the number of users connected to the Internet through mobile phones has nevertheless increased access to the Internet among the wider population (*ibid.*: 16). Despite the diffusion of Internet technology and expansion of networks, China's users remain mostly young and urban.

Some of the older members of this youthful group joined towards the early period of the last stage of internet development in China, which saw the rapid expansion of the user base and the beginnings of group formations online in the forums of BBS sites, which remain the most popular form of website for Chinese users.

The BBS or Bulletin Board System, originally referred to a pre-internet hosting server accessible through a modem connected to the server via a phone line. The server hosted forums, news and file sharing (Jin, 2008: 40-60). The BBS model was used in the

United States prior to the introduction of the Internet, and remained popular among a few users who owned the necessary software and hardware. The main function of the BBS as a file sharing and forum host has been picked up by Internet forums and by discussion groups (like *Yahoo Groups*), in the west, as well as by social media sites of "web 2.0," such as *YouTube* and *Facebook* (*ibid.*). The applications available on the old BBS sites have migrated to a number of different kinds of websites, and have also diffused among sites dealing with different specializations. In contrast, the old form of the BBS as a site containing various forums hosting content ranging from general interest to more specific topics remains the primary platform in China. Only recently has the Chinese social media site, *Weibo* ("Microblog," a Chinese version of the blocked site *Twitter*) been able to claim a similar level of popularity and user activity as the BBS (Richburg, 2011).

One of the first BBS sites using a Chinese character interface, and the first BBS in Mainland China to be accessible to those outside of a lab, was *Shui Mu Tsinghua* (SMTH), the first of the college BBS sites, which have become so popular for students in China. The model was quickly adopted by other universities across the country. The construction of Internet infrastructure within universities in the 1990s and the availability of computers to students on campus facilitated the growth of the first online Chinese communities within the college BBS sites (Jin, 2008: 49). Students who could not afford their own PC, which were becoming more easily available and cheaper, could always use the computer rooms available on campus (*ibid.*). As IT infrastructure developed and computer ownership became more common, this BBS model migrated outside of colleges to be the dominant form of Chinese site on the Internet.

Once the infrastructure became available, group formation was facilitated by the efficient and practical nature inherent in online communication. Online group formation and interaction has been explored in depth by Clay Shirky in his book *Here Comes Everybody* (2008). Shirky explains the proliferation of diverse forms of groups online as the result of "the collapse" of the transactional cost of group formation and activity (*ibid.*: 47). Coordination of a large group prior to the Internet required a great deal in organizational and managerial costs as the group increased in size and complexity. Communication between individuals leading to large group coordination required hierarchical management, placing layers of management between the individual members and the leaders of any large organization (*ibid.*). With the advent of the internet, a platform or space has been provided that allows direct communication between one to one, one to many, many to many, and many to one without any of the old costs of organization. With the collapse of the cost of organization, groups can form, coordinate and disperse without the need of a costly hierarchy and allowing dynamism that top-to-bottom group formations are unable to match (*ibid.*). Shirky provides the example of photo sharing by amateur photographers on *Flickr* as an example of the ease of group formation. Individuals taking photos of the same event can use the platform to organize themselves into a group by simply tagging their photos, allowing them to be shared and discussed in a group (*ibid.*:31-34). This dynamism exists within the BBS platform as well, allowing netizens to share files and information, which other netizens with similar interests will be able to find by doing a simple search. Popular topics or interests gain more attention as well as more sharing from members of the group.

The ease of group formation and sharing has led to the proliferation of amateur interest groups and discussion. While the online social space provided by Internet technology has given rise to political activity, it is not a major motivation for most group formation. Discussion of common interests, entertainment, news, and life experiences remain major areas of interest for netizens who participate in the forums of BBS sites in China, just as they do for netizens in western countries (Jin, 2008). However, the ease of entering a BBS discussion and participating and discussing in areas of shared interest and concern can and does give rise to feelings of solidarity, shared experiences and expectations. When events outside of the group's usual area of discussion do unfold, they can be picked up, discussed and spread to other forums if they touch a feeling of shared concern. As Yongnian Zheng notes in his book *Technological Empowerment: the Internet State and Society in China* (2008), the social participation and social capital of shared connections and solidarity can allow netizens to overcome the "social atomization" characteristic of life under the CCP to form a new civil society (*ibid.*: 133). Social atomization refers to the Party's ability to separate individuals from pre-revolutionary civil society groups and formations, voluntary or otherwise, and to re-organize them within group formations imposed from above. The Party denied the legitimacy of any independent social formations, which by definition threatened the supremacy of the Party in public life. Even in post-reform China, civil society group formation remains a precarious activity, especially if the group is seen to have a potential to grow in size and mandate, as was the case with Falun Gong. Whereas social formations offline can be more easily monitored and broken up, those formations which remain online are much more difficult to contain or to eradicate.

Whereas group formation in China since 1949 was organized and controlled by the Party, the emergence of the Internet has allowed the independent forming, dispersing, and reforming of groups according to the will and interest of participants. Whereas independent civil society and independent group formation have never been legitimized by the Party, online civil society has been able to form and grow with a degree of independence unheard of in China since 1949 and especially prior to the reforms of the late 1970s. The potential of the online social space to connect groups from geographically distant areas, as well as to connect groups within China to those outside of China, surpasses the ability of previous platforms of social interaction (Tai, 2006: 255).

However, despite the potential of the online social space to allow the formation of enormous groups with members scattered across the country, and potentially across the world, most groups remain politically uninvolved or only partly involved (Jin, 2008). As Shirky has noted, the potential social activities of groups can be divided into three categories by order of difficulty from least to greatest: Sharing, cooperation, and collective action (Shirky, 2008: 49). The Party is generally more concerned with the most difficult and rarest form of group activity, collective action, reserving more traditional forms of coercion for when newer forms of social management and manipulation fail to prevent a group from ascending the "rungs" of activity from sharing and cooperation to collective action.

### **3.3 Development of Structures of Online Social Control**

The Chinese Internet is known for its censorship. The term "Great Firewall" is well known outside of China for its ability to block undesirable websites and to censor

search engine terms like "1989," "Tiananmen Massacre," "Falun Gong," and "Tibet Independence." However, the state's control over the Internet is not as firm as it may seem, and in part, this is a consequence of the form of economic organization it has embraced. Liberal economic reforms have fostered an open and connected China, two of the requirements for international trade and neo-liberal economics. As a result, any attempt to shutdown the Internet would cut the Chinese economy off from many investors, clients, and customers. Since the beginnings of internet development there have been competing concerns within the state between the need for the free flow of information to facilitate commerce and the need to maintain political control, if need be, through the restriction of the flow of information. (Zheng, 2008: 68-69). This partly explains the give-and-take character of Party censorship, to loosen control only to tighten it later. There has been an ongoing attempt to achieve the right balance of control.

The earliest attempts to exercise control over online communication originated in the late 1990s, as the user base was just beginning to grow. As Tai notes, the government issued a policy document in late 1997 spelling out the Party's legal stand on online communications. The "Implementation Measures for Enforcing the Temporary Decree on the Management of Computer Information Network International Connectivity in the People's Republic of China," listed types of communication that were forbidden for internet users, including the transmission of information that is "harmful," "subversive," "obscene," as well as information that is "damaging to the state or state organs" (Tai, 2006: 98). Tai discusses the characteristic vagueness of these terms, noting that the power to define these terms and to punish transgressors is held by the Party.

The issuing of state licenses to Internet providers and websites to operate in China soon followed, bringing the conduct of these companies under closer government control (*ibid.*). With the licensing of Internet companies, the government began to shift some of the responsibility of censorship to these actors. Laws were passed in the early 2000s requiring these companies to cooperate with the Public Security Bureau (PSB), accepting PSB "supervision," "inspection," and "guidance" (*ibid.*: 99). Internet companies have since voluntarily taken steps to secure the legality of their operations by signing an agreement known as the "Public Pledge on Self-discipline for China Internet Industry," which claims to prohibit signatories from producing, releasing or spreading information "harmful to national security and social stability," as well as encouraging internet users to "use the web in a civilized way" (*ibid.*: 101). This relationship between the state security apparatus and those co-opted businesses has evolved as the sophistication of state control has evolved; the Party making these companies partners with government-employed agents of security and "harmony."

As a result of this decentralization of filtering and censorship to Internet companies and website hosts, variations in censorship levels have developed between different websites just as they exist between different media in China. As Rebecca MacKinnon discusses in her article *Censorship 2.0: How companies censor bloggers*, different companies use different methods and guidelines to filter their content (2009). Whereas some use keyword lists to automatically block text with sensitive keywords, others may have editors or moderators review text before allowing it to be published. Whereas some websites are quite strict in filtering sensitive topics, others are relatively liberal. Topics tested for censorship in her study included sensitive current events, such

as disturbances in minority regions, corruption, and even Tibet Independence and the Tiananmen Massacre. While the most sensitive posts on these blog hosting websites, including those discussing Tibetan independence and the Tiananmen protests, were heavily censored, they were not universally blocked. MacKinnon argues that a number of factors affect how strictly a company censors posts. These factors include where the company is registered, how large it is, and how much attention it receives from netizens and the authorities (*ibid.*).

While variations in censorship exist between websites, there is an overlapping layer of censorship affecting all websites in China. This layer of overlapping censorship is known as the Great Firewall. The growth of the Great Firewall began soon after the first Internet regulations. The Great Firewall refers to the programs involved in filtering access to foreign and domestic websites as well as search term censorship. Deibert, et al. also refer to this strategy of censorship as “Chinese-style” filtering because China was one of the first to adopt this infrastructure of control (2010: 4). According to Deibert et al., the Great Firewall represents the “first generation of internet control techniques” (*ibid.*). The Great Firewall consists of software packages and routers situated at key Internet points, such as international gateways and major Internet service providers. These software packages and routers are programmed with lists of Internet protocol (IP) addresses, domains, and keywords. Any websites or pages contained in these lists are blocked; as are any pages with sensitive keywords. According to Deibert et al., this form of censorship is “static, fixed in time...determined Internet users can circumvent them with relative ease” (*ibid.*).

The Great Firewall is a web of control affecting every netizen, from the most dedicated subversive elements to the casual browser. It is the macro-level of state control (Tai, 2006: 103). As Deibert et al. have noted, many netizens are able to circumvent its control by using a number of different methods (2010: 4). Proxy servers allow netizens to open banned websites on their computer by first crossing a "bridge" offered by a computer overseas. This service can be purchased inexpensively or even used for free (Hernandez, 2011). The security apparatus continues to cut these bridges, forcing users to find new proxies. This cat and mouse game is also accompanied by inventive Internet jargon, and memes used by netizens as another means of saying what they want to say without resorting to sensitive keywords. Discussion of the "harmonious society" 和谐社会 *hexieshehui* in netizen jargon, for example, involves discussion of the "rivercrab 河蟹 society." Rivercrab and harmony having the same sound but using different characters (China Digital Times, n.d.3). Internet censorship is not as easy and is never as affective as Party censorship over the traditional media.

The censorship apparatus acts to block foreign websites with content deemed harmful as well as to censor sensitive keywords. The list of blocked websites and sensitive keywords changes over time. Keyword censorship is flexible and is used to block keywords used for specific, politically sensitive issues, such as "Tibetan Independence" as well as keywords of a wider use which may be blocked for a short period during which the government wishes to restrict discussion of an issue (Jin, 2008: 19). An example of limited keyword censorship is 未来 (*weilai*), meaning future, which was being used to refer to the dissident Chinese artist Ai Weiwei because of the similarity between the characters for future and his name 未未 (*Weiwei*) (Xiao, 2011; Beach,

2011b). Other banned keywords on Weibo at the time were: 胖子 *pangzi* (fatty), and 月半子 *yuebanzi* (moon half son), which were nicknames referring to Ai Weiwei (*ibid.*).

The censorship apparatus is set to block discussion of key political issues that the Party views as the most sensitive and the most threatening, as well as to control and censor emerging issues of concern for the government.

As Tai has noted, the state's requirement that all Internet traffic into and out of China flow through a handful of closely monitored "backbone networks" is part of the strategy of containing and "territorializing" the Chinese Internet (Tai, 2006:102). The Great Firewall is the gateway of a complex and evolving apparatus of control that is at work monitoring the actions of netizens and implementing new policy directives from above.

At the other extreme of Party control, the micro-level of control involves the identification of users through the registration of ISPs with the PSB as well as the requirement to show ID upon entering an Internet cafe. The use of proxies, as well as unlicensed internet cafes, have made it possible for users to continue to shield their identity. While arrests have been recorded for minor expressions of political disobedience, the state security bureaus are most concerned with explicitly revolutionary groups and banned political and religious organizations (Kristof, 2011). Users having links with the pro-democracy movement and other outlawed organizations such as Falun Gong has been the reason for many of the Internet arrests (Zheng, 2008: 70-78). Organizations using the Internet to raise support remains a fear of the Party. The potential of the internet to be used by "counter-revolutionary" groups to organize against the Party was first demonstrated by Falun Gong's use of cellphone messaging and email to

organize a flash mob outside of the Party's compound at Zhongnanhai in Beijing, in 1999 (Shirky, 2008: 174). This was quickly followed by the state-directed eradication of the group within Mainland China.

When most people think of the control of information in China, they are likely to identify censorship and the arrest of dissidents. On the Internet, these two forms represent the macro-level of control and the micro-level of control. The macro-level attempts to exercise uniform censorship over the entire user base, whereas the micro-level targets specific individuals. However, it is at the middle-range of control, the attempt to control group discussion, opinion and behaviour, that the Party has been developing a subtler and more sophisticated strategy of management. This is what Deibert et al. refer to as “second- and third-generation techniques” (2010: 6). Whereas second-generation techniques make use of legal frameworks and technical capabilities to deny access to information when needed, using anti-terrorism and national security laws to these ends, third-generation techniques take the most extensive approach, using a “highly sophisticated, multidimensional approach to enhancing state control over cyberspace, and building capabilities for competing in informational space with potential adversaries and competitors” (*ibid.*: 7). Third-generation techniques use “counterinformation campaigns that overwhelm, discredit, or demoralize opponents” (*ibid.*). These techniques are embodied in the strategy of opinion management utilized by the Party.

Opinion management is an evolving form of engagement with netizens. This engagement has taken the form of the ideological work of government agents who act to promote the Party's point of view, bring netizen discussion inline with the politically correct view, and to combat the destructive influence of subversive and “foreign”

influences on the legitimacy of the Party. These agents are pejoratively known by the term "*wu mao dang*五毛党" or 5 Mao Party. 5 mao is half of 1 yuan, and refers to the amount these agents of propaganda allegedly earn for every pro-party comment they type online (Trouillaud, 2011).

There is disagreement over the exact number of 5 Mao Party agents and their influence. Verifiable data, of course, is not available to the public. According to sources, their numbers may range from "tens of thousands" to as many as 280,000 (Trouillaud, 2011; Deibert et al.: 455.). Many are students who are recruited in university and are paid for this work, but reportedly their numbers have also included civil servants and retirees (Trouillaud, 2011). Although sanctioned and encouraged by a central government interested in more active guidance of public opinion, the employment of 5 Mao Party agents is not directly administered by Beijing. 5 Mao Party agents are employed by provinces, municipalities, universities and work units. Local party offices have been known to put up notices for recruiting "web commentators to guide public opinion" (*ibid.*).

Whereas 5 Mao Party agents were characterized by simple pro-Party slogans, they have become increasingly professionalized in the nature and quality of their output. Rather than merely rebutting forum posts that are critical of the government, the 5 Mao Party actively works to convince other netizens of the wisdom of government policy and the legitimacy of the Party through detailed and rational arguments. These arguments often hang on a definition of patriotism which views the Party as inseparable from the nation, and which aim to expose the hypocrisy of the west and the treachery of anti-Party elements in China. The 5 Mao Party engages netizens, group by group, either beginning a

discussion or entering a discussion already in progress on a forum. When they attack or defend the views of one netizen it is with the aim of convincing the rest of the group involved in the discussion. When combined with the censorship of sensitive topics and anti-party views, the posting of 5 Mao Party agents works to create, what has been called, a "false general opinion" (*ibid.*). The posting by 5 Mao Party agents and the censorship of others works to "drown out" all but the Party's narrative. The aim is to convince netizens that the opinions that remain on the forums are the online group's opinions, when in fact they may only be the "opinions" of Party agents (*ibid.*).

Evgeny Morozov's *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, describes these "50 centers" as being one of the main tools of the Party's "Spinternet," the name given to the online spin that pro-government commentators give to news and discussion (2011: 130). While the decentralized nature of discussion and group formation has presented challenges to Party control, it has also given the Party a new avenue for delivering its message; one which is less obvious than propaganda delivered through traditional media. Morozov maintains that this decentralized environment does not favour dissident voices over the state. Rather, the imbalance of power allows the state a position of advantage. "Decentralization..." Morozov argues, "creates more points of leverage over the public discourse, which, under certain conditions, can make it easier to and cheaper to implant desired ideas into the national conversation" (*ibid.*: 136). "Economies of scales" in opinion management matter, according to Morozov, who argues that the sheer number of pro-Party commentators may in fact support the growth of genuine government supporters. In this way, the government can use 5 Mao agents to nurture, support and provoke pro-Party segments of China's online social space (*ibid.*: 137).

Despite the pervasiveness of the 5 Mao Party and the increasing sophistication of their techniques and arguments, many netizens remain unconvinced, and in fact, have adopted a degree of scepticism and cynicism when reading any pro-Party views online. They know about the 5 Mao Party and come to assume that any pro-Party argument is the work of a paid agent, labelling even independent pro-Party voices as "*wu mao*" (Trouillaud, 2011).

However savvy netizens may or may not be at distinguishing a 5 Mao Party comment from that of an independent netizen, the 5 Mao Party agents still fulfill an important function as one more conduit of the Party narrative that is repeated in the schools and the media of the country. The consequences of this reinforcement of the Party view are difficult to measure, but it is worth noting that those "angry youth," known as *fenqing* 愤青 in Mandarin, who passionately defended their country from foreign criticism during the 2008 Olympic Games, adopted many of the same positions and arguments used by the Party and by their online agents (Zhang, K., 2008). Although netizens may reject the spin given to some news stories, some of the underlying assumptions promoted by the Party, such as the indivisibility of the Party from the nation, the dangers of following the western democratic model, and the hostility of foreign powers, have gained traction in online discussion, and in nationalist flesh searches in particular.

### **3.4 Netizen Social Action and the Harmonious Society**

The 5 Mao Party is just one form of opinion management. The state media, despite its commercialization and the increasing competition it has to deal with from the

private sector, remains another important tool of opinion management, and one that works with agents to reinforce the Party narrative.

Articles praising some netizen behaviour, while criticizing other forms of behaviour, reveal both the state's role in acknowledging the importance of netizens as actors, and therefore the implicit social power of netizens, as well as the state's directive role in prohibiting some forms of behaviour while sanctioning and even promoting other forms. This strategy aims to harmonize the contradictions that could arise from netizen activity, and an important part of this harmonization involves an understanding of how netizen activism can be reconciled with Party hegemony.

According to Foucault, the governmentality of the western liberal-democratic state produces a model of citizen who is able to handle being a free member of civil society. His behaviour, when interacting with the state and economy, is made predictable. The state is able to move out of the spotlight and allow the citizenry a greater degree of freedom without risking a systemic collapse.

The governmentality of the Chinese state also acts to bring a greater degree of stability to its own emerging civil society, however it has not relinquished its explicitly directive role in Chinese society. Rather, the Party acts to remove threats to its hegemony and to smooth out contradictions that have arisen since introducing reforms. The Party makes a distinction when dealing with netizens between those deemed a threat and those who can cooperate in the harmonization of contradictions. Those netizens who cooperate when provoked by outrage to expose failings, injustices and corruption are those involved in what Zheng refers to as "cooperative interaction" with the state (Zheng, 2008: 165). This involves cooperation between netizen activists who expose a problem or

contradiction, but who do so without directly criticizing or implicating the Party or the top leadership. For this cooperative interaction to occur, the Party leadership must agree with netizens that this problem requires solving rather than ignoring (*ibid.*). Zheng uses the example of the death of a student held in police custody under an unpopular migration law, and the strategy of the leadership in using popular outrage to remove an obsolete law while also appearing just and responsible (*ibid.*).

Cooperative interaction occurs more often with the state media, sometimes unintentionally, through the sharing of information- the media picks up a story that breaks online, investigates the story, uncovers new information, and this information in turn is passed on to netizens who further develop the story, and so on, such as the case of the fake tiger sighting in Shaanxi (Jin, 2008: 62).

The cooperation or interaction with netizens by the Party and the state media is an acknowledgement of the importance of netizens in the social realm, and this acknowledgement is mirrored by the sense of empowerment netizens seem to have compared to their lack of influence outside of the Internet. According to polls cited by Tai, almost half of netizens believe that "by using the Internet, people have more say in what the government does" (Tai, 2006: 201).

The state media has empowered netizens to the extent that it reports their activities and investigates the allegations they raise, but at the same time the state media interprets netizen activity according to a Party understanding of netizens as representatives of the masses led by the Party (Li, 2009). Netizen flesh searching, which results in the exposure of corruption, is reported as a form of mass cooperation with the Party. Netizens are seen as bringing information to the attention of the public security

bureaus and to the Party leaders. State media, such as the *People's Daily*, have reported favourably on the involvement of netizens in exposing officials involved in expense fraud or embezzlement of public funds. The *People's Daily* has warned that "officials abusing funds or playing games online have to be cautious" (Yan, 2009), as many netizens are working with police to expose corrupt officials. The paper also cites the existence of a Wenzhou website, created in part by the Wenzhou Environmental Protection Bureau, which was opened to allow "the public to voice complaints and expose dishonesty" (*ibid.*). Another article by the *People's Daily* cites the interaction of Prime Minister Wen Jiabao with netizens as evidence of the leadership's "will to promote 'internet democracy'" (*People's Daily*, 2009). The article quotes Yu Guoming, vice president of the Media College of Renmin University, as saying, "Chinese officials and scholars felt obliged to notice online views because it keeps them informed of the social situation" (*ibid.*). The article praises the use of the Internet as acting as a bridge between the leaders and the people, allowing the Party to hear the concerns and problems facing the public. Netizen activism is interpreted in this context as empowering the Party as much as the people. These articles reinforce the idea of mass surveillance of officials directed and utilized by a responsible Party leadership. The netizen activism is interpreted as "the bottom-up" flow of information which keeps higher officials and the Party leaders informed of social issues, allowing the Party leadership to act to correct these contradictions and to restore social harmony.

Party tolerance of netizen activism remains conditional upon a degree of control over this activism. Despite praise for the exposure of corruption by netizens, the state media has also voiced concern over a lack of legal restraint on netizen activity,

particularly on flesh searching. Flesh searching has been referred to as "an internet lynching" in the *People's Daily* (Bai & Ji, 2008). Another article by the state newspaper discussed the danger of flesh searching being used to expose private information at the expense of people's reputation. The need for a more developed legal framework for dealing with the phenomenon is mentioned (*People's Daily*, 2009).

Since the rise of political flesh searches, laws dealing with the release of private information online have been introduced at the municipal and national level. This is a form of the second-generation control noted by Deibert et al. (2010: 7, 457-463). Using laws protecting privacy and national security, the state has moved to further legalize and formalize content controls. The Xuzhou government passed the "Xuzhou City, Computer Information Security Protection Ordinance," in the summer of 2009, much to the anger of netizens who felt that the law was a thinly-veiled attempt to shield officials from the wrath of netizens engaging in flesh searches. The law "forbids unauthorized dissemination of other people's private matters," as well as defining private matters to include "personal or family property and composition, income, residence, wages" (*Netease*, 2009). Flesh searches targeting corrupt officials often seek to reveal the *real* income of these officials (Poon, 2009). The same law increased security at Internet cafes and the mandatory recording of users' identities (*Netease*, 2009). Netizens posting on *Netease*, a popular Chinese BBS, were quick to blame officials for passing the law as a means of protecting themselves from being exposed by flesh searches. "Whoever made this proposal is the corrupt official. An innocent person definitely would not come up with this kind of suggestion," wrote one user. "You only need to see a government official to know he is oppressing the common people," wrote another. "See which leaders

drew up this law, and human flesh search them," suggested another, adding a grinning emoticon to the end of his post. Many posts threatening the city's government followed, including this one: "They are afraid. But they are not afraid enough. We must make them more afraid. We must make them terror-stricken" (*ibid.*).

Such users, whether or not they intend to follow through on their threats, are indicative of the kinds of opinions with which the Party is concerned. A general mistrust, cynicism and anger directed at officials in general, and even towards the leadership and the Party, is what the Party is fearful of encouraging by exposing cases of corruption. Yet, the leadership has also publicly acknowledged the need to fight corruption or risk losing the support of the people (Juntao, 2011). The Party would like to claim direction for the mass surveillance of officials as a means of combating corruption but is afraid that too much surveillance and exposure could undermine Party legitimacy. The Party's attitude towards flesh searching reflects the difficulty of using mass surveillance to police officials while also shielding the Party hierarchy and leadership from negative exposure and loss of legitimacy. While the law in Xuzhou was passed by local government attempting to shield itself from this mass surveillance, the national courts have also passed a tort law dealing in part with privacy, indicating the Party's desire to bring other legal governmental techniques of control into the online space as an added layer of control. The law protects individuals from defamation and the leaking of private information to the public (Yang, 2009). Similar to earlier laws dealing with Internet security, it is very much up to the Party-controlled courts to determine what constitutes defamation and the leaking of private information versus the exposure of crime or

corruption. The distinction between the right to privacy and the public good has not been made clear.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Liberal economic reforms and the creation and expansion of IT infrastructure under the Party created the space for an online civil society. Policies favouring the development of a technologically advanced infrastructure were adopted with the aim of developing the Chinese economy, but had unforeseen consequences for the relationship between the Party and the public.

Despite censorship, surveillance and opinion management, the online social space has allowed netizens a greater degree of freedom in group formation and expression than was previously possible in China. The dynamism of these online social formations has challenged the Party's monopoly over the flow of information and the framing of the national narrative.

In response to this challenge, the Party has taken a multi-level approach to the challenge of this social space, including the use of older forms of coercion and discipline as well as policies of engagement and recognition. The Party's policies represent an overlapping of liberal strategies of limited government, privatization and self-responsibility, and earlier policies of mass surveillance and Party leadership of society. Rather than silencing netizens who expose incidents of corruption, the Party has instead chosen to engage with these stories. Although sensitive to the exposure of corruption, the Party has stepped in to claim leadership in these instances, investigating and often punishing these exposed officials. The resurrection of the governmental strategy of mass

surveillance plays a central role in this behaviour. At the same time, the Party is acting to exercise legal control over netizens, utilizing a liberal governmental strategy of governing from a distance. The use of privacy laws governing what can and cannot be disclosed online have the potential to be used to muzzle netizens engaged in flesh searching.

## **Chapter 4: Human Flesh Search Engine**

Flesh searching has a short history in China, dating back a decade at most. However, flesh searches have grown in number and involvement in the last 5 years to the point where the terms "flesh search" and "human flesh search engine" are well known among Chinese, online and offline (Downey, 2010). Flesh searches have targeted individuals who have provoked moral outrage, but have also expanded in recent years to include political targets.

Due to the nature of flesh search groups as temporary, spontaneous and limited in organization and purpose, the Party has taken a different approach to dealing with this phenomenon than it has with civil society formations with more permanent organizational structures. Rather than treating these groups as revolutionary threats, the Party has adopted a pattern of engagement which publicly treats political flesh searching as a form of Party-directed and utilized mass surveillance, while also working to shape and control the narrative to shield the Party from popular criticism. The tactics the Party uses vary depending on the targets of these flesh searches, but the governmental strategy remains the same.

### **4.1 Origins and Definition**

The term "human flesh search engine" has been traced as far back as the early 2000s, and was originally defined as any searching for information by individuals offline, which was then shared with other netizens (Tapia, 2009). In the mid-to-late 2000s, the term flesh search took on a more specific definition, to refer to the gathering and posting of information to reveal the identity and/or guilt of an individual with the goal of

having them publicly shamed and punished. These earlier cases of flesh searching were conducted against individuals who had allegedly behaved in an immoral way. Netizens involved in these flesh searches claim to be motivated by a sense of outrage, justice and the belief that they can exert a degree of control over a situation that has provoked moral outrage or anger.

One of the cases that first popularized the new definition of flesh searching among netizens and the greater public alike was the 2006 case of the "kitten killer" (Downey, 2010). A video of a woman stomping a kitten to death was posted on the BBS *MOP*. The video outraged netizens who voiced what should be done to punish this woman, and eventually who also began to ask if anyone could provide clues to uncover her identity (*ibid.*). Netizens were able to trace the origin of the video back to a Hangzhou server, but were informed by netizens from Hangzhou that they did not recognize the scenery in the video. A netizen from Heilongjiang recognized the woman, and the video was traced back to a small town in the province, where the woman and the cameraman were identified. Their identities, and personal information, including contact information, were posted online. Both lost their jobs and were forced to relocate (*ibid.*). This example would be repeated again in flesh searches targeting those guilty of immoral behaviour, including school bullying and adultery (*ibid.*). In all of these cases, the trigger seemed to be an incident touching off a shared outrage among netizens who were not otherwise linked, except by their shared use of a BBS. In some cases, even this does not link all of those involved, since flesh searches can and do involve sharing between different forums on different websites.

If Clay Skirky's categories of social coordination are applied, flesh searching, as it has been described above, involves sharing and a limited degree of cooperation, but does not ascend to the level of collective action. The group involved in a flesh search come together voluntarily to share information that they hope will lead to the identification of the target. They cooperate to the extent that they spread the information about the flesh search to other forums, request help from other netizens who respond by sharing information, and to the extent that they use the shared personal information to harass the individual, their friends and family. However, the goals of identification and shaming do not require a commitment on the part of the flesh searchers. Some participate only by sharing, others through cooperation with other netizens to locate and shame the individual. However, the demands of collective action, of a committed group which decides the strategy and behaviour of all of its members, has not materialized. The group comes together around an issue, different members decide their own level of involvement, and the group dissipates once the goals of identification and shaming have been accomplished. Flesh searchers, as such, do not form a permanent grouping in civil society, and their aim is limited to exposing and shaming their individual targets.

#### **4.2 Political Flesh Searches**

In the last few years, particularly since 2008, flesh searches have increasingly targeted individuals believed to be enemies of the people. These political flesh searches can be distinguished by the targets' relation to an explicitly political issue, rather than a private crime or an immoral act. The two forms of political flesh searches are those

targeting corrupt officials and those motivated by nationalism, targeting "anti-China" elements in their flesh searches.

Flesh searches targeting officials abusing power often begin with a netizen posting a first or second-hand account of an abuse of power, or indications of an abuse of power. The posting will usually carry information about the incident or about the official. Examples of stories that incite this kind of flesh search are numerous, such as a news report about an alleged crime involving an official or “*guanerdai*” 官二代 (second generation official, or offspring of an official), an official or member of their family flaunting wealth, and an official with perceived illicit connections (Hartono, 2010; *Sina*, 2008). The original post may or may not identify the official, but the flesh search will aim at uncovering as much personal information as netizens are able to find, as well as much detailed evidence of the abuses as possible. Public shaming and demands for justice often follow the exposure of these individuals.

Flesh searches targeting "anti-China" elements follow the same methods of searching and exposing but differ in their choice of target. Rather than targeting officials or those in a position of power, these flesh searches target individuals for perceived disloyalty or treason (in the case of Chinese targets), or for attacking or defaming the nation (in the case of foreign targets). Nationalist flesh searches are unique in that they have also targeted foreigners. The protests following the Olympic Torch Relay of 2008 by human rights demonstrators and Free-Tibet activists provoked a number of nationalist flesh searches (Wang, G., 2008). Nationalist flesh searches are often more focused on harassment, and netizens involved in these flesh searches have encouraged other users to use the contact information posted to seek out and punish the target (*ibid.*).

The Party has engaged with both forms of flesh search under the framework of utilizing mass surveillance to reveal contradictions and to restore social harmony. Differences in how these two forms of flesh searching are treated, however, reveal the concerns of the Party and their relationship with the masses.

### **4.3 Party Response**

The temporary and spontaneous nature of flesh search groups means that the Party does not see these groups as a direct threat or rival. They can be more safely tolerated than a group involved in collective action, since once those involved in flesh searching have achieved their goal, they dissipate on their own. They have no designs on seizing power, nor could they in their current form of organization. At the same time, the fluid and spontaneous nature of these groups makes it more difficult for the Party to exercise direct control over them. There is no leadership to decapitate, no way to isolate their members or arrest their growth, except through the use of censorship, which is rarely completely affective in controlling an increasingly dynamic online community.

The Party has instead chosen a path of engagement with netizens, reviving the idea of Party-directed mass surveillance. While nationalist flesh searches reinforce the Party's legitimacy, flesh searches targeting corrupt officials pose a threat to the Party's legitimacy and to the Party hierarchy.

The Party can safely ignore nationalist flesh searches and may even be supporting these kinds of flesh searches publicly as well as covertly (*ibid.*). "Anti-China" elements are often critics of the state, the Party, and the Party's human rights record. However, as critics of the Party's policies towards Tibet, other minorities, and even its overall record

of human rights abuses compared to other nations, they are seen as critics of the nation itself (*ibid.*). This fits the Party's own definition of itself as being inseparable from the nation. While responding aggressively to these critics, these netizens reinforce the legitimacy of the Party, allowing the Party to demonstrate its solidarity with the masses in rebuffing these critics. The Party has chosen to forego censorship in these cases. Nationalist flesh searches serve not only as a safety valve for social frustration, but one that does not pose any threat to Party legitimacy.

The flesh searching of corrupt officials is also a kind of safety valve for social frustration, but one that is more delicate. The Party has therefore taken a more cautious approach when dealing with the flesh searching of corrupt officials, cultivating an image of a responsible and just vanguard of progress, while at the same time working to minimize the consequences of these flesh searches. For those cases that are not censored, the Party is active in shaping the public perception of the case as an individual example of corruption or alleged corruption, which the party is intervening to deal with, restoring justice and social harmony.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

As a spontaneous, fluid and temporary group formation, flesh search groups lack the organization and long-term direction which would constitute a more powerful threat to the position of the Party, yet at the same time, their spontaneous and fluid character make them more challenging to isolate and arrest. As an activity that targets individuals involved in corruption, rather than the Party itself, it has been interpreted as an acceptable

form of mass surveillance on behalf of the Party and the nation. The Party has therefore adopted the strategy of engagement with netizens involved in flesh searching.

As the evidence of the case studies in the following chapters demonstrate, the Party has revised the idea of mass surveillance in managing public perception of political flesh searches as well as utilizing flesh searches to exercise a greater degree over the contradictions which have arisen since the adoption of liberal governmental strategies of limited government and privatization. The Party tolerates the activity of political flesh searching, while at the same time utilizing it to reinforce control over society and shaping its perception to minimize threats to the Party's legitimacy and to even reinforce the Party's position as the guardian and leader of the nation.

## **Chapter 5: Flesh Searching Corruption, Case Studies**

Several Case studies have been included under the two categories of political flesh searching: Flesh searches related to corruption, and flesh searches motivated by nationalism. These case studies trace the development of specific flesh searches from their origins to their conclusions with a special interest in the behaviour of the actors involved in the flesh search, as well as the response of the state. The two categories of flesh searches are incorporated into two separate chapters analysing the case studies under each category.

This chapter presents three case studies under the category of flesh searches related to corruption. Each case study is broken down into two parts: the development of the case, and the management of the case. The first part presents the case study as it unfolded, noting important events and the dates which they occurred, as well as the origins, development, conclusion and fallout of the case. The second part analyzes the state response to the flesh search, the strategies undertaken, and the result of these strategies.

The last part of this chapter uses the findings of these case studies to understand the broader government strategy towards flesh searches and the netizens participating in them, as well as the relationship between netizens and the Party-state.

### **5.1 Shenzhen Official Accused of molesting 11-year-old Girl**

#### **Development of the Case**

Lin Jiexiang, Party Secretary of the Shenzhen Maritime Bureau, in Guangdong Province, was accused of attempting to molest an 11-year-old girl in a restaurant on the

evening of October 29, 2008. The incident was caught on the closed circuit television of the Plum Garden Seafood Restaurant (Fauna, 2008). The video showed the girl leading a man across the floor of the restaurant and off the screen of the camera, only to come running back by herself a few moments later. The girl ran back to her parents, and the three of them went looking for the man whom she had led across the restaurant.

According to witnesses, the girl claimed that she was helping a man in a white shirt to find the washroom, but once there, the man grabbed her neck and tried to force her into the room. The girl escaped and ran back to find her parents and they came looking for the man in the white shirt. The man was in the toilette when the parents came looking for him, and burst out shouting, "I did it, so what? How much money do you want, give me a price. I will pay it!" After pushing and pointing at the girl's father, the man was also quoted as saying, "Do you people know who I am? I was sent here by the Ministry of Transportation, my level is the same as your mayor. You people are worth less than a fart to me! How dare you mess with me? Just watch how I am going to deal with you" (*China Digital Times*, n.d.2). After blocking the man and his companion from leaving, the father used his cellphone to call the police. The confrontation was also caught on the security video.

After the video was posted online, netizens began a flesh search to uncover the identity of the official. On October 31, the first results of the flesh search were posted on a forum of the BBS *Club K.D.net* (2008a, 2008b). Photos of the man identified as Lin Jiexiang, Party Secretary of Shenzhen Maritime Administration, were posted on the forum next to screenshots of the video from the closed circuit television. Numerous other

photos of Lin Jiexiang soon followed, including one of him receiving an award for "civilized work unit" from the Party in Shenzhen, on February of 2008 (Fauna, 2008).

Netizens cursed the official, calling for justice and revenge. "I am willing to give a month's salary/wages. Anyone else willing to give money? Hire an assassin, and murder him," wrote one netizen. "Chop him up and feed him to the dogs, this kind of human scum," wrote another. Some netizens also linked the incident to other cases of corruption; One writing, "Dirty devil + corruption is the essence of many officials." Lin Jiexiang's work telephone number was posted, along with the number of the Shenzhen Maritime Administration Disciplinary Inspection Office. The netizen who posted the telephone numbers encouraged others to phone and to demand an explanation. Warnings to the police and investigating officials also followed from netizens. "If he is not 'taken care of,' it will be difficult to calm public anger. Human scum...even picking on children!" wrote one. "Dammit! Shenzhen Nanshan District Police!!! The entire country's masses will be watching how you handle this!!! If you do not give a statement, the masses will give you guys a statement!!!" wrote another (*ibid.*).

A thread was also started on a forum of *Netease* asking for contributions of photo-shopped portraits of Lin Jiexiang. Contributions included a donkey's head on his body, distorting his face to look uglier and to resemble a pig, the joker, and a monkey (*Netease*, 2008).

A number of bloggers also commented on the story. Xiangyu, a blogger from Ningbo wrote, "only sufficient media monitoring can prevent abuses of power and mitigate the increasingly widespread corruption. [The Party's self-monitoring] has basically no effect, and conventional media are all strictly controlled. That's why we need

an open internet." Another blogger named Luo Ben, also commented that, "Once his evilness was caught [online], netizens who desire justice will beat this unlucky fellow to death. We could use an old saying to describe netizens' motives, "killing the chicken to scare the monkey" (Xiao, 2008). The expression refers to the practice of punishing an individual severely in order to scare others into compliance.

The video was uploaded to *YouTube*, but since *YouTube* was blocked soon after, a proxy was required to view the video on that site (Tang, 2008). However, the video had also been uploaded to other Chinese video hosting sites, which remain unblocked in China (*Ku6.com*, 2008). Screenshots of the video and descriptions of the incident have also been uploaded to forums on numerous BBS sites, including to *Club K.D.net* and *Tianya* (Fauna, 2008).

On November 3, Lin was fired from his position with the Ministry of Transport (Tang, 2008). Lin was investigated by Shenzhen police, but was found innocent of committing any "indecent act against the child," (Chen, H., 2008). On November 5, the police concluded that the incident was a result of "drunken misbehaviour," rather than "child molestation" (Yan, 2008). "The video captured by the restaurant's closed-circuit cameras shows no evidence of molestation, which is in line with both Lin's and Chen's statements," a spokesman of the Public Security Bureau of Shenzhen said. Tests reportedly showed Lin's blood alcohol to be well over the level classified as drunk under Chinese law (*ibid.*). *China Daily* and *Xinhua* both reported a detailed police investigation following the incident (Yan, 2008; Chen, H., 2008). The report from *Xinhua* concludes with a quote from the spokesman for the Shenzhen PSB, "The video...shows no evidence

of molestation...However, Lin's behaviour had an extremely negative impact on society, which merits punishment" (Yan, 2008).

A poll was posted afterwards on *Xinmin.net* asking netizens, "whether Lin should be pardoned" (Tang, 2008). By November 6, close to 2000 netizens had voted, with 95% of them "mad" about the conclusion of the police investigation and pardoning of Lin, advocating a further investigation to collect the necessary evidence to punish him. 2% voted to respect the result of the investigation by the Shenzhen Public Security Bureau (*ibid.*).

Lin Jiexiang's remark, "You people are worth less than a fart to me!" has become a Chinese Internet meme suggesting the contempt with which Party officials and leaders hold the masses. Netizens have since adopted the term "fart people" for the masses when discussing the relationship between officials and the common people (*China Digital Times*, n.d.2). The term has also surfaced among netizen discussion of official corruption since the Lin Jiexiang case, for instance in the discussion of Zhou Jiugeng, the Nanjing official who was also a target of flesh searching for corruption, and referenced again in the case study titled "Super Expensive Cigarette Director" in this chapter (*Tianya*, 2008b).

The Lin Jiexiang case has also been referenced by the *Shenzhen Daily* as an example of unacceptable arrogance demonstrated by officials. When discussing the arrogance of an official interviewed by *CCTV* reporters in 2011, the article referenced Lin Jiexiang. "In fact, Lu is not alone...Lin Jiexiang...shouted: 'Do you know who I am? I am ranked as high as your mayor! How dare you challenge me?'" The article went on to say, "Again, it's due to a lack of an effective mechanism to ensure strict selection of qualified

and humble officials and close oversight of the official's conduct...they have had little supervision and restriction. So the best way to clear away bureaucracy is put a bridle on the power, which, if unchecked, will lead to autocracy and corruption" (Wu, 2011).

No evidence was found of state censorship of this case. The only censored material was the video posted on *YouTube*, but then all of *YouTube* had fallen under censorship at that time, and there is no evidence that this case was singled out by censors. In fact, the video has been posted to other video hosting websites in China, and can still be found using *Baidu*, the Chinese search engine (*Ku6.com*, 2008; *Baidu.com*, 2011c). Discussion that occurred at the time that the story broke continued uninterrupted on forums, and those discussions can also still be located using *Baidu*, three years later (*Baidu.com*, 2011c).

### **Management of the Case**

Netizens stressed their role in the flesh search as one of surveillance, and demanded a state response to the evidence they had uncovered. Netizens demanded a public response from the PSB and severe punishment of Lin (Fauna, 2008). As they saw it, their role was to present the evidence, the role of the state was to take leadership of the case and to make sure that Lin was punished. Many of the comments by netizens express the need for greater surveillance and discipline of officials, who are seen to be out of control. Many of the comments discussing the case on blogs as well as on the forums indicate that this form of corruption is seen as typical of officials who behave as though they are untouchable (*ibid.*).

Rather than censoring discussion and coverage of the incident, the Party responded by dismissing Lin Jiaxiang from his position and allowing (or possibly directing) the police investigation of the official. The Party responded quickly to the flesh search. The handling of the case by the authorities was made public through the Party media, as were the results of the investigation. State representatives acknowledged the damage done by officials behaving this way in public. Lin had brought negative attention to the government, and had to be dealt with publicly to show the Party's sincerity in fighting corruption, and to serve as an example to other officials. Lin's dismissal by the Party served as punishment for the negative attention he brought to the Party, as well as a public demonstration of leadership in the mass-line against corruption. The Party's strategy was to demonstrate its sincerity in fighting corruption, and to manage the case as openly and quickly as possible.

## **5.2 "Super Expensive Cigarette Director."**

### **Development of the Case**

The incident that sparked the flesh search of Zhou Jiugeng, occurred on December 10, 2008. Zhou Jiugeng, a director of Nanjing's property bureau, held a press conference to announce that he had uncovered that a real estate developer in Nanjing was selling property below the market price, and that his department would run an investigation to uncover the facts (*Southern Metropolis Daily*, 2008). Zhou stated that the evidence revealed the developers were selling property below the actual cost price, and that this behaviour would undermine the property market. Zhou stated his office would issue a fine to any developer involved in this practice. "Developers are not charitarians; I

fined them not for their actions, but for the consequence of their action. I am doing this for people." The report sparked outrage among the public at a time when many middle class Chinese found the cost of housing to be too high, and priced out of their reach (Mu, 2008).

Zhou's comments incited a flesh search online, and by December 14, netizens were already posting the results of their flesh search on *Tianya*. The news had also spread to other BBS forums, such as *MOP* and *Club K.D.net* (*Tianya*, 2008; *MOP*, 2008; Chen, B., 2008). On December 14, Images of Zhou Jiugeng at the press conference appeared on *Tianya* with a circle drawn around a pack of cigarettes placed on the desk beside Zhou (*Tianya*, 2008). The cigarettes were identified as "Nanjing 9-5 Zhijun" an expensive brand of cigarettes usually costing 1500 yuan a pack. Netizens were quick to point out how such an expensive brand of cigarettes should be out of reach for a man with a typical civil servant's salary, and that the money must have come from bribes and kick-backs from developers (Chen, B., 2008). One netizen commented, "Our wonderful officials! You are sucking the blood of us people!" "This must be an official of corruption. If not, shoot me dead," wrote another. Another commented that the price of these cigarettes should make them out of reach for an official earning only 4000 yuan a month (*ibid.*).

Between December 14 to 18, another flesh search discovery was posted on the BBS *Club K.D.net* (*ibid.*). A netizen posted another photo of Zhou Jiugeng, but this time with a circle drawn around the wristwatch he was wearing. The netizen wrote that, "according to search results, the watch is Constantin, worth 10,000 yuan." Zhou was also discovered to be driving a Cadillac to work (*Xinhua*, 2009). Finally, the discovery was

made by netizens that Zhou Jiugeng had a brother who was a real estate developer (Mu, 2008).

The Jiangning District Party Committee, the district of Nanjing that Zhou Jiugeng represented, distanced themselves from the comments made by Zhou on December 19, stating publicly that no real estate developer has ever been penalized for lowering the price on property (*Southern Metropolis Daily*, 2008). The *Yangzi Evening News* also reported that Zhu Shanlu, Nanjing City Party Secretary and Jiangsu Province Party Standing Committee member, also issued a public statement to officials at the end of December (*Yangzi Evening News*, 2008). According to the paper, "Zhu Shanlu said that the rapid development of the media (and the internet especially) has made every word and move by party cadres come under monitoring by the media and the general public." The article went on to note that, "Zhu Shanlu demanded that the party cadres at the various levels remember that they are there to serve the people and therefore they must pay attention to the various ways in which public opinion can be expressed" (*ibid.*).

As the local and provincial governments issued statements to the press, the discussion of Zhou Jiugeng continued to spread online. A satirical defence of "good comrade Zhou Jiugeng" was posted on *Tianya*, and soon provoked many pages of discussion (*Tianya*, 2008b). The post pretended to defend Zhou, refuting the charges against him, while in fact listing his corrupt actions and linking him to other cases of official corruption and public concerns surrounding real estate development. "They [officials] are concerned about the development of cities, so they send armed police to communicate with residents, but they are misunderstood to be violently tearing down houses. They raise the price of housing to prevent the financial crisis from spreading, but

they are misunderstood to be colluding with real estate developers...Today, we just overreacted! Commissioner Zhou just picked up some cigarette butts, but some people have linked him with corruption. How can it be that China's officials don't even have the right to pick up cigarette butts?!" Other posters joked that the watch Zhou Jiugeng was wearing was a fake. "I can prove that the watch the commissioner is wearing costs 50 yuan, because it was me who sold it to him," joked one netizen. "You fart civilians can't afford such expensive cigarettes. Some officials don't even care about their health; they risk their lives to smoke to increase domestic demand. What spirit is this? I think it is the same as Dr. Norman Bethune's: Always benefit others, never benefit yourself," wrote another. The phrase "fart civilians," is of course a reference to what the official Lin Jiaxiang said when confronted by his accusers, "You people are worth less than a fart to me!" (*China Digital Times*, n.d.2).

On December 28, Zhou Jiugeng was dismissed from his post for, "expressing inappropriate opinions to the media without authorization, which caused negative social effects," as well as for, "purchasing high priced cigarettes using public funds" (*Xinhua*, 2009; Mu, 2008).

Zhou Jiugeng was then investigated by police and arrested. The results of the investigation and ensuing trial by the Nanjing Intermediate People's Court was the sentencing of Zhou Jiugeng to 11 years in prison for accepting bribes (*Xinhua*, 2009). The court found Zhou guilty of accepting as much as 1.07 million yuan and HK\$ 100,000 in bribes from subordinate officials, businesses, and from contractors (*China Daily*, 2009). The court confiscated personal property from Zhou worth 1.2 million yuan. News of Zhou's trial was carried by the state media; posted by *Xinhua* and *China Daily* among

others (2009; 2009). *China Daily* reported, "the court said the 49-year-old was given the lenient sentence for confessing to the prosecutors and handing over the accepted bribe money on his own" (2009).

The same article stated that, "Zhou's case showed the Internet was becoming an increasingly important medium to fight corruption, experts said." The article also quoted Hao Mingjin, Vice Minister of Supervision, and a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee, as saying, "We get tips through the internet and treat them seriously. Some investigations are actually based on information that has come online." Another Party member praising the surveillance function of the internet, Liu Binjie, head of the General Administration of Press and Publication, was quoted as saying, "Internet supervision is playing a very important role in promoting democracy and ensuring the people's right to know, which should be fully encouraged and supported" (*ibid.*).

While most of the article focused on the positive contribution made by netizen surveillance, the article also quoted Gao Xinmin, a professor with the Party School of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, as saying that, "the internet provides a new way for people to supervise officials, but what really matters is that the government listens to their voices and takes action." Gao also cautioned that, "while online manhunts can help fight corruption, they must be properly used or they can infringe on people's basic human rights."

No reports of censorship were found when investigating this case, and indeed, a search for "Zhou Jiugeng," and "flesh search" in Chinese turns up many pages from BBS forums, as well as news articles on the *Baidu* search engine used in China (*Baidu.com*,

2011f). The articles and discussions on Zhou Jiugeng date from December 2008 to present, indicating a consistent lack of censorship of the story, or at least a lack of affective censorship (as it is possible that censorship directives may have been issued but ignored).

### **Management of the Case**

After the exposure of Zhou Jiugeng by netizens who discovered his taste for expensive cigarettes and watches, the local Party officials took immediate steps to distance themselves from someone who had made himself a target of public anger and ridicule. His comments about investigating property sold at below cost had incited public anger and accusations of corruption, from which the government then attempted to shield themselves. Zhou was investigated by police and arrested soon after, but the Nanjing government had already passed judgement. Zhou was guilty of “negative social effects.” Zhou Jiugeng represented a contradiction, which mass surveillance had uncovered and presented before the Party for punishment.

Aside from the government response to the evidence of Zhou’s corruption, the Party was also actively promoting netizen surveillance through the Party media, while also using this case as a warning to other officials.

## **5.3 "My Father is Li Gang."**

### **Development of the Case**

The phrase, "My father is Li Gang," has become a common internet meme and phrase used by netizens, jokingly, as an excuse in any situation, and also as a reference to

the abuse of power and the privilege enjoyed by the children of officials, the "*guanerdai*" or "second generation official." The phrase "My father is Li Gang" has its origin in a drunk driving accident in the fall of 2010 that incited several flesh searches, censorship, and media coverage at the national and local levels.

The accident took place on October 16, 2010 within Hebei University campus. Li Qiming was reportedly driving his girlfriend back to her dormitory when his car struck two female students, Zhang Jingjing, whose leg was fractured, and Chen Xiaofeng, who died in hospital (*Xinhua*, 2011a). According to eyewitnesses who later posted the story online, Li Qiming attempted to drive away after hitting the two students, but was blocked from doing so by bystanders and school guards. When confronted, an intoxicated Li Qiming reportedly shouted, "Go ahead and sue me, my father is Li Gang!" (Lam, O., 2010).

News of the hit-and-run and Li Qiming's outrageous use of his father's name was quickly posted online, and the news spread to other forums outside of Hebei University. By October 19, the phrase, "My Dad is Li Gang!" had already been recognized as a new Internet expression (*Netease*, 2010). Netizens soon began a flesh search to uncover Li Qiming's background and that of his father Li Gang. The early results of the flesh search on Li Qiming uncovered where he had gone to school, what his major was, his home telephone number, Renren page, Baidu page, as well as information about his father (Key, 2010; *yzdsb.com.cn*, 2010). The flesh search also uncovered that his father, Li Gang, worked for the Baoding City Public Security Bureau as the deputy director of criminal investigations (*ibid.*). Netizens also presented another allegation, during the flesh search, which has not been proven, and which was later denied by Hebei authorities,

that Li Gang had substantial property holdings, five in total, of which three were registered under Li Qiming's name (Site Jia, 2010; Ma & Cao, 2011). Some netizens also posted that Li Gang's father-in-law was a provincial deputy governor, which has also been reported as a fabrication by the Hebei media (Ma & Cao, 2011).

The Hebei University news channel is said to have carried the story immediately after the event, but in the days that followed, there was no more mention of the accident in the school or local news (Wines, 2010). However, news of the story was quickly spreading on forums across China. Although the local media was not covering the story, outside media began to take notice. A Hebei University student interviewed by *Guangzhou Daily* remarked that, "the school does not allow us to tell the truth, so it will be difficult to find eyewitnesses. If the school catches any words from the media, the student's involved will be given infractions, and everyone is afraid of that" (Site Jia, 2010).

The phrase, "My father is Li Gang," was taken up by artists and netizens who incorporated it into installations, jokes, discussions and used it for social commentary. A netizen named "Piggy Feet Beta" posted a contest to include the phrase in poetry, with six thousand applicants replying (Wines, 2010). The phrase was also incorporated into numerous images, including a mock advertisement for a "government official father," that can be used to escape responsibility (*China Digital Times*, n.d.1). The phrase and story was also used in a satirical song, which has been posted on *Youku*, a popular video hosting site similar in use and popularity to *YouTube* (*Youku.com.cn*, n.d.).

Less than a week after the accident, despite Hebei and university officials' attempts to silence the story, "Li Gang Gate" was much-talked-about national news. On

October 22, *CCTV* aired an interview of Li Qiming, being held in custody, wherein he wept and apologized for what he had done (Wines, 2010). Li Gang, the now famous father of Li Qiming, was also interviewed. Li Gang was shown, head bowed, crying, and repeating how sorry he was (StoryfulProVideo, 2010). The media also reported Li Qiming's arrest on October 24.

*Xinhua*, the official press agency of the state, also covered the Li Gang story, reporting the details of the accident, and the angry response it incited from netizens on October 27 (Lu, 2010). The article reported that Li Qiming had been arrested and would stand trial in Baoding's Wangdu county, rather than Beishi District, to ensure a fair and impartial hearing. The article expressed concern over the rift that this case caused between the masses and the people. The article quoted Wu Zhongmin, a professor at the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, as saying "Like father, like son. If the children of officials think that they are the privileged class, will future generations follow suit? After deviating from the basic tenet of following the Party's mass line, which is serving the people heart and soul, the question is where will China go from here (*ibid.*)?"

On October 28, the Ministry of Propaganda issued directives to many media outlets in China restricting coverage of the Li Gang story (CDT Translator, 2010). The directive stated that, "All media outlets are to adopt effective measures, conscientiously strengthen internal management, strictly enforce propaganda regulations, and standardize news information sources, ensuring there to be no more hype regarding the disturbance over traffic at Hebei University...and other negative and sham news. Please earnestly comply and put into practice (*ibid.*)."

In early November, Ai Weiwei, Beijing artist and outspoken critic of the CCP, posted an interview of Chen Xiaofeng's family, including her brother and father, to his blog (Wines, 2010). Chen Lin, the brother of the victim, expressed his dissatisfaction with apologies of Li Qiming and Li Gang, "In society they say everyone is equal, but in every corner there is inequality" (Page, 2010). Chen Lin went on to say "It's relying on the power of his family; he said it subconsciously. Lots of people are like this now...Because we are ordinary people from the countryside, I hope to call on everyone in society...to come out and stand by our side" (*ibid.*). The interview was blocked by censors but was reposted by Ai Weiwei and other netizens from site to site, spreading the video as the censors moved to have it "harmonized" (*ibid.*). Another interview of Chen Lin, broadcast on *Fenghuang Satellite Television* was also blocked by censors on November 4.

By November 9, Internet discussion was reported to have "abruptly withered" as a result of web censorship (Wines, 2010). However, despite reports of censorship, many of the early discussions and even the results of the first flesh search remained online a year after the story had broken (*yzdsb.com.cn*, 2010; Netease, 2010; *Baidu.com*, 2011e). Although the Ministry of Propaganda had an interest in controlling the story, to avoid in their words, any "hype," they were unable or unwilling to wipe the forums clean of these discussions, or to put the necessary pressure on websites to censor discussion of the case.

Another reason for the withering of discussion may have been the lack of news since early November from the victim's family. On November 4, the Chen's lawyer, Zhang Kai lost contact with the family and was unable to reach them at home (Wang, K. 2010a). The media was also unable to reach any members of the Chen family for further

comment. News soon followed that the Chen family had reached an out-of-court settlement with Li Gang, and that a civil trial for damages would not follow, although the criminal trial of Li Qiming would still proceed (*ibid.*). The Chens remained unreachable to all but one reporter, Wang Keqin, who posted the investigation on his *Sohu* blog at the end of December (*ibid.*). Wang discovered that the family had been under incredible pressure from the local government to settle the dispute with Li Gang, and to cut off discussion with the media. Any visitation to the Chen family home was reported to the village head and party secretary. Both had paid the family a number of visits threatening consequences for the family if they insisted on taking a stand, which they said was no longer legal, but political. The officials insisted that if the Chen family gave any more interviews, they would be seen as "anti-Party, and anti-government" (*ibid.*). The family bowed to pressure, accepted 460,000 RMB in compensation and refused further interviews (*ibid.*).

Despite the withering of discussion surrounding the case in late 2010, the phrase "My father is Li Gang!" had stuck. The phrase continues to be used in reference to a privileged group of Chinese by both netizens and the media (Beach, 2011a). The story has even been referenced by the state media when publishing articles about similar abuses by officials and their children (*Xinhua*, 2011b).

The discussion surrounding the case revived in January after news of the trial was reported (AFP, 2011). Li Qiming was ultimately charged under "traffic offenses," which carries a sentence of three to five years (*ibid.*). However, many netizens voiced anger that he was not charged instead for "a dangerous offense against public safety," which carries much harsher sentences, including death (*ibid.*; *Xinhua*, 2011a). The state media reported

the decision to try Li Qiming for "traffic offenses" as the result of a debate between independent legal experts involved in the trial (*Xinhua*, 2011a).

### **Management of the Case**

One of the most striking aspects of the Li Gang case is the very different strategies taken by the local government in Hebei and the central government. Whereas the local government was quick to attempt to suppress the story by issuing a gag order to both university students and the local media, the central government had the state media cover the story and publicly respond to the demands of netizens for justice. The Party made it clear through the state media, that Li Qiming would be charged for his crime, and that his father's position would not help him. However, the story continued to draw attention online. The perception of Li Qiming being shielded from justice by his father's position in the government was relayed throughout forums, and the phrase "My father is Li Gang," embodied the cynicism netizens held towards officials.

When the central government did move to control coverage, it was in order to manage the fallout, rather than to silence all discussion. The department overseeing propaganda and censorship issued directives to prevent any further "hyping" of the Li Gang story. The story was also described by the department as "negative or sham news" (CDT Translator, 2010). The Li Gang incident became a very damaging symbol of official corruption that could easily be, and had been, applied to all officials and their families, and to the state in general. In this way, it was indeed "negative news," which the Party was largely unsuccessful at turning into a positive example of mass surveillance under Party leadership. The coverage by *CCTV* was unconvincing for many, and the

attempts to block the interview of Chen's family was not entirely successful, as it did make its way around the Internet.

By the time the department of propaganda issued directives limiting coverage, the story was already a national story and beyond any form of gag order. "Li Gang" had already entered netizen jargon, and would be difficult to erase. The central government's strategy was to limit coverage, and to proceed with the investigation and trial of Li Qiming, releasing the results through the Party media when they were available.

While the central government moved to control the coverage behind the scenes, the image they worked to put forward was one of openness, accountability and leadership. The Party media reported that Li Qiming would face justice and that the results would be made known to the public. The Party again acted as a leader responding to mass surveillance by disciplining the target of the flesh search, Li Qiming. The Party media also expressed the seriousness with which the Party viewed this abuse of privilege. Party representatives were quoted by the state media as saying that this behaviour represented a serious deviation from the Party's mass line, which threatened the future of the nation.

#### **5.4 Understanding the Flesh Searching of Officials**

In all three cases, the Party assumed the role of judge, intervening after a flesh search to analyze the evidence and decide punishment. The Party media, in turn, wrote in support of the Internet as a tool of mass surveillance, and the need for officials to make use of mass surveillance for the good of the country. Mass surveillance is presented by the Party media as both a tool for the Party to promote greater harmony, and also a warning to

officials that they can and would be punished for breaking Party discipline. There is much discussion in the Party media of the importance of mass surveillance as a form of mass-line politics led by the Party, as well as the guilt of these outed officials for “deviating from the basic tenet of following the Party's mass line” (Lu, 2010).

Netizens involved in “outing” corrupt officials through flesh searches have taken on the role of mass surveillance on behalf of the Party. Even though many of their comments betray a deep cynicism towards the state, they nevertheless fulfill the role of mass surveillance. They presented the evidence online and demanded a response from state officials. The act of flesh searching a corrupt official places the Party in the position of judge, while netizens use the response of the Party to pass judgement in turn.

In all three cases, the Party intervened to assume a leadership position in acknowledging the evidence and publicly disciplining the target of the flesh search. Both Lin Jiexiang and Zhou Jiugeng were dismissed as soon as they drew public attention as a result of their exposure. In the case of Zhou, he also paid for his exposure with the loss of his property and an 11-year prison sentence. Li Qiming's exposure resulted in the state media coverage of his arrest and trial, providing proof that he would not be protected by his father's position.

The Party assumed the public image of an open and accountable source of justice; managing the cases so as to provide an example to reign in corrupt officials and appease mass anger, while also trying to minimize the damage these cases threatened to the legitimacy of the Party. As the Li Gang case illustrates, this can be a very difficult balancing act. The exposure of individual corruption can also touch on systemic problems and larger unexpressed anger. The possible abuse of privilege by Li Gang's son touched

on the anger and resentment that many netizens and other Chinese feel towards officials and their families. Both the Li Gang case and the Lin Jiayang case epitomized the abuse of privilege, as well as the disregard, which officials are seen to exhibit towards the common people. Both of these targets drew anger for the belief that their position made them untouchable and unaccountable to the masses. In the case of Zhou Jiugeng, the perception that he was an official who had accepted bribes in exchange for enacting policies harmful to the people, also touched on sensitive issues, such as development and the rising cost of real estate.

The Party's response in all three cases was to isolate, investigate, and punish the target, and to do so in a way that demonstrated the openness and objectivity of the Party. In the case of Li Qiming, the loss of control of the story, and its connection to larger questions of abuse of privilege in the state hierarchy, encouraged the Party to take a more active role in managing the public perception of the case. While covering the story in the national media and presenting itself as a leader of mass surveillance, the Party also acted to issue directives limiting coverage, as well as to block the posting of Ai Weiwei's interview of the victim's family. The Party had hoped to limit, rather than to block all coverage, presenting the state narrative as the only accessible one. However, this proved unsuccessful.

## **Chapter 6: Nationalist Flesh Searching, Case Studies**

This Chapter presents three case studies under the category of flesh searches related to nationalism. Each case study is broken down in the same way as the case studies in the previous chapter, into two parts: the development of the case, and the management of the case. However, unlike the previous chapter, there are two case studies related to the same event, the Sichuan Earthquake of 2008. Since both case studies centre around the same event, and follow a similar process, they have been included together as Part A and Part B of flesh searches reacting to responses towards the Sichuan earthquake. They have also been included together to draw together the similarities and to point out the differences between the two cases.

The last part of this chapter uses the findings of these case studies to understand the broader government strategy towards flesh searches and the netizens participating in them, as well as the relationship between netizens and the Party-state.

### **6.1 Grace Wang**

#### **Development of the Case**

Wang Qianyuan, also known by her English name, Grace Wang, was a 21-year-old undergraduate student from China, who was studying abroad at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Wang achieved international attention, from Chinese netizens as well as from the American media, as a result of her actions on April 9, 2008 (Xin Liu, 2008). Wang was caught up in the Beijing Olympics demonstrations on campus. One side, consisting largely of American students, represented the “Free Tibet” movement,

the other side, consisting of a larger group of around 400 Chinese foreign students, represented the “pro-China” side (Kennedy, 2008).

Wang reportedly knew demonstrators on both sides of the argument, and spoke with people from both sides. Wang then attempted to mediate between the two sides, and to encourage demonstrators on both sides to talk with each other. “They saying that they were expressing their opinions, but most of the opinions were really stereotyped and both sides didn’t really know the whole story, so I wanted them to try to communicate with each other” (Kuhn, 2008). A photo was taken of Wang writing “Free Tibet” on the back of one of the American demonstrators, which would later be posted online (Wang, G. 2008). “A lot has been made of the fact that I wrote ‘Free Tibet’ on the back of the American organizer...I did this at his request, and only after making him promise that he would talk to the Chinese group...the leaders of the two groups did at one point try to communicate, but the attempt wasn’t very successful” (*ibid.*). Wang has also said that the “pro-China” side was especially aggressive, surrounding the much smaller, “Free Tibet” group of only “a dozen or so,” and pushing them up against the Duke Chapel doors, shouting “Liars, liars, liars!” (Wang, G., 2008).

Wang has written that she was cursed and threatened by a vocal minority within the “pro-China” demonstrators, whom she called “fenqing,” the “angry young men,” who are often the participants in aggressive nationalist demonstrations, including those against the Carrefour department store chain that year. Wang said that she was threatened by one demonstrator, who compared her to one of the leaders of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. “Remember Chai Ling? All Chinese want to burn her in oil, and you look like

her” (*ibid.*). Wang says that she gave up trying to mediate after fearing that she might be attacked by the “angry mob,” and left the demonstrations under police escort (*ibid.*).

Within hours, discussion of the demonstration had begun on the Duke Chinese Students and Scholars Association (DCSSA) website. Wang posted a letter in response to the discussion, stating that she does not support Tibetan independence, but that she instead supports “Tibetan freedom as well as Chinese freedom. All people should be free and have their basic rights protected, just as the Chinese constitution says” (*ibid.*).

Wang’s actions at the demonstration had touched off a flesh search which spread from the DCSSA website, to a Chinese discussion forum on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) website, and to mainland China through the forums of the BBS *Tianya*, and from there to other Chinese BBS sites (Kennedy, 2008).

The flesh search on *Tianya* began just one day after the demonstrations. On April 10, the first post describing the protests at Duke University and the actions of Wang appeared on *Tianya*. The post gave her full name and the name of her middle school: “Qingdao #2 Middle School graduate classmate Wang... completely abandoning the truth, and stood on the side of the Free Tibetters, trumpeting Tibetan human rights issues, baldly calling for a free Tibet, effectively embarrassing the Chinese people, with her evil sins witnessed personally by several hundred overseas Chinese at the scene. Wang Qianyuan...” (*ibid.*). Demands quickly followed for photos, more information about Wang and proof that she had participated on the “Free Tibetters” side. “Show us photos!” demanded one netizen. “Dig up some proof-I’ll start sharpening the knife,” wrote another. Many posts were violent in content, threatening harm to Wang and to her family. “Notify China Customs, that if they see her, get her right away, and if she still has family,

find them, and beat their shameless children to death, so they don't hurt the Chinese people," wrote one. "I'll set her nice and straight~" threatened another. Several other posters began labeling her a "race traitor" or "traitor of the Hans" (汉奸) (*ibid.*).

A photo of Wang was then posted, and then uploaded photos from the Duke University protests. A video of the protests was then uploaded by another netizen, and someone claiming that they were at the demonstration at Duke University gave a description of the event: "That girl, just to get attention, was even willing to betray her country" (*ibid.*). Netizens posted several different guesses for her American telephone number. On page six of the discussion on *Tianya*, Wang's national identity card number and her parent's address and telephone number in China were posted.

Wang soon began receiving violent and threatening emails and phone calls (Cha & Drew, 2008). One person emailed, "If you return to China, your dead corpse will be chopped into 10,000 pieces" (Dewan, 2008). Wang discovered the day after the protests, that her personal information and the personal information of her parents, including their ID numbers, had been posted online. "Then I saw something really alarming: Both my parents' citizen ID numbers had been posted. I was shocked, because this information could only have come from the Chinese police." Posted along with the information were directions to her parents' home in Qingdao and "calls for people to go there and teach 'this shameless dog' a lesson." Wang's parents soon became the targets of harassment, and threats, and their home the target of vandalism. Someone emptied a bucket of feces on the doorstep of their apartment, violent posters and graffiti had gone up around the entrance to her parent's apartment, and rocks were thrown at the windows (Wang, G., 2008; Kennedy, 2008). Her mother also emailed to tell her that someone had installed a

video camera outside of her apartment, and that they had been receiving death threats. Her parents went into hiding soon afterwards (Cha & Drew, 2008).

A friend of Wang's corroborated her description of the harassment her parents suffered, "Her parent's apartment in Qingdao was attacked with rocks, and they are in hiding (I have confirmed this in direct communication with her mother)...Because all the information about her and her parents' addresses and calls to do violence were posted on the Duke list, it is being considered criminal incitement to violence" (Kennedy, 2008). Wang's father was a member of the Communist Party, and he had asked her to publicly apologize. He told her that he and her mother loved her, but that she had to tell people that she had made a mistake by taking the stand that she had (Cha & Drew, 2008).

The DCSSA removed the posts revealing Wang and her parents' private information after a complaint had been made. The group denied responsibility, claiming that the site is open to the public, but that they considered the attack on Wang to be "troubling and heinous" (Dewan, 2008). The information revealed on *Tianya* and other forums remains online (*Baidu.com*, 2011b).

Since the flesh search began, the story of Grace Wang was reported in the *Washington Post*, and *The New York Times* (Cha & Drew, 2008; Dewan, 2008). *National Public Radio* has also interviewed Wang (Kuhn, 2008). Wang also penned a response to the attacks, which was printed in the *Washington Post* on April 20, 2008, in which she recalled the ordeal, and wrote, "I've responded by publicizing this shameful incident, both to protect my parents and to get people to reflect on their behaviour" (Wang, G., 2008). The Chinese state media, on the other hand, has said very little regarding the incident. A search on *Baidu* turns up page-after-page of discussion on various forums,

such as *Tianya* and *Club K.D.net*, but no pages from *Xinhua* or the *People's Daily* (*Baidu.com*, 2011d). When researching this story in English, no pages were found on the *China Daily*, *Xinhua* or *People's Daily* sites either. Only one reference in the Chinese media was discovered, the *CCTV* home page from April 16, 2008 featured the video of the Duke University protests and Wang's actions, along with the caption, "The most hideous Chinese student abroad" (Xin Liu, 2008; *CCTV*, 2008). The page is no longer available on the *CCTV* website, but the screenshot of the page has been saved on the website, *Creader* (*ibid.*).

The administration of Wang's high school reacted to the news of her actions by meeting to publicly condemn her and to revoke her diploma. The school also announced plans to reinforce "patriotic education" (Wang, G., 2008).

### **Management of the Case**

The Party did not publicly engage with this case in any extensive way. The only reaction by the state media found after searching online, was the uploaded video of the demonstrations on the *CCTV* homepage, along with the labeling of Grace Wang as the "most hideous" overseas Chinese student (Xin Liu, 2008; *CCTV*, 2008). There is evidence, however, that state officials may have been privately involved in the flesh search. The posting of Grace Wang's personal identification number, which she described as only being available to the police, as well as the installation of a video camera on the street corner looking into her parents home in Qingdao, indicate state involvement in the harassment of Wang and her family. Since the Qingdao police would have access to her ID number, it is unclear whether state involvement was merely at the

local level or whether it also involved officials in the central government (Wang, G., 2008).

The fact that the administration of her middle school reacted to the news of Wang's involvement with the "Free Tibetters" by revoking her diploma and pledging a renewed emphasis on patriotic education, also indicates state support of this nationalist flesh search (*ibid.*).

The netizens who pursued the flesh search against Wang, and who threatened and harassed Wang and her family were defending, in their view, the principle of a unified China against foreign aggression and internal treason, and at the same time, defending the Party's policies towards Tibet and Tibetans (Kennedy, 2008).

## **6.2 2008 Sichuan Earthquake Response Part A: Gao Qianhui**

### **Development of the Case**

A few days after the Sichuan Earthquake of May 12, 2008, a young girl from Liaoning Province, in Northeast China, first identified as Zhang Ya, and later as Gao Qianhui, recorded herself expressing her disinterest in the earthquake, the media coverage, the period of mourning, as well as her disgust and anger towards the Sichuanese. In the video, Gao can be heard saying, "I turn on the TV and see injured people, corpses, rotten bodies...I don't want to watch these things. I have no choice" (Fletcher, 2008). The video is around 5 minutes long. Gao can also be heard saying, "Don't you guys deserve it?...You're driving everyone crazy...What are you doing? Do you think you're all good-looking? Which part of your body is that precious? People giving you cash and giving you food. And you guys doing nothing?...the Earthquake

might as well kill you guys...all you have given us are catastrophes...All your children are jinxes” (*ibid.*).

She then uploaded the video to the internet, where it received an outraged response from netizens who set out to track her down. Netizens accused her of “insulting the victims,” and called her, “scum” (Lin, 2008). Within hours of posting the video, Gao had become yet another target of netizens involved in a flesh search. Gao was soon identified, her name, location, age, home and work addresses, as well as her family background, were posted online. “Now humiliate her,” Wrote one user, identified as Yang Zhiyan. A number of messages were also posted in response to the outrage, by netizens claiming to be her parents and her brother. “I’m sorry! Zhang Ya’s almost in emotional collapse...please, please don’t push her anymore...Please, please don’t harm her. Speaking as a father, this is my heart-felt apology and hope,” wrote someone claiming to be her father. Someone claiming to be her brother wrote “I am Zhang Ya’s brother...I’m also disgusted...but she really didn’t mean it in a malicious way, it was just an impulsive moment of frustration that led her to say what she said...but she knows she is wrong now, I hope everyone can lessen the anger in their heart” (Tan, 2008).

Several videos were soon uploaded to *YouTube* by Chinese netizens responding to Gao, in which they curse and insult her (Lin, 2008). The discussion surrounding Gao spread to a number of different forums and sites (*Baidu*, 2011b). Yang Zhiyan was reportedly one of the principle instigators of the flesh search against Gao. When asked if what he had done was right, Yang replied “She just had to be stopped...In the face of a catastrophe, we Chinese have to be of one heart” (Fletcher, 2008). Yang went on to elaborate on Gao’s “crime,” “Gao Qianhui publicly defamed the State Council’s

announcement of a national mourning period through the fastest and most effective avenue possible [the internet] and she should be dealt with according to the laws on public order.” Yang also claimed that it was netizens who told the police about the case and gave them the information that they needed to arrest Gao (*ibid.*).

Gao was arrested by local police within several days of posting her video and becoming the target of a flesh search. It was confirmed that she was a 21-year-old girl in Liaoning Province. Online discussion followed the arrest, regarding whether Gao could be charged for defamation or for endangering public stability (Tan, 2008). No information was found online about the outcome of this arrest, and it is unknown whether Gao was charged or released.

Gao Qianhui’s case was mentioned in a *Xinhua* article discussing the impact of the Sichuan Earthquake on the internet in China. Whereas “Zhang Ya’s” video and the following video responses by netizens involving curses and other obscenities is sited as the dark side of the fallout, the use of internet to aid rescue operations and to locate loved ones is also discussed. The author of the article discusses the “Zhang Ya” incident as an “embarrassment,” that one netizen is quoted as saying, “showed how far it is for the Chinese Internet community to grow mature and rational, and how arduous the job is to purify the country’s online environment” (Lin, 2008).

Gao Qianhui’s video has been uploaded to a number of different video hosting sites, and a search on *Baidu* yields many pages of discussion on many different forums (*Baidu*, 2011b). No evidence of censorship was discovered.

### **6.3 2008 Sichuan Earthquake Response Part B: Diebao**

#### **Development of the Case**

On May 15 and 16, 2008, a woman using the online name “Diebao,” commented on the government and media’s coverage of the Sichuan earthquake of May 12. Diebao was posting on the Southern Weekend group forum “Douban,” and had joined in the defense of a group who were critical of the government. Diebao expressed her concern that the earthquake was being used by the government to rally nationalism, and that this was exploiting the disaster (Downey, 2010). A group known as the “sock puppet gang” attacked Diebao and others for taking this view (*Pandemonium*, 2008; *Douban*, 2008). The sock puppet gang argued that China should speak as one voice after this disaster (Downey, 2010).

Diebao commented on a friend’s blog regarding her frustration with the “sock puppet gang” on the 16 of May, who then found out about the post and renewed their attack. “The sock puppet gang” continued to flood the thread with angry posts. On May 17, Diebao issued a letter to the “sock puppet gang” apologizing, and hoping that the discussion would die down. It did not. Diebao removed the threads from the forum that afternoon in order to stop the attacks (*Pandemonium*, 2008; *Douban*, 2008).

The “sock puppet gang” had begun a flesh search against Diebao, searching through her older posts, looking for anything incriminating. They found a reason to renew their attack after coming across a blog post by Diebao, which she had posted just after the May 12 earthquake. Diebao wrote “I felt really excited when the earthquake hit. I know this experience might happen once in a lifetime. When I watched the news at my

aunt's place, I found out that it caused five people to die. I feel so good, but that's not enough. I think more people should die" (Downey, 2010).

The "sock puppet gang" had already mobilized their members for a flesh search, but were having difficulty attracting the attention and involvement of other netizens. They posted the call for a flesh search on the "Wenchuan needs your help group," but there was no response. They also posted on *Tianya* and *MOP* but also received no response (*Pandemonium*, 2008; *Douban*, 2008). They reworked their post, and chose a title that would make their post stand out. They gave it the title "She Said the Quake Was Not Strong Enough," and wrote "We cannot bear that an adult in such hard times didn't feel ashamed for not being able to help but instead was saying such nonsense, with little respect for other people's lives. She should not be called a human. We think we have to give her a lesson. We hereby call for a human-flesh search on her!" (Downey, 2010). They also posted photos taken from her blog and information about her taken from her school user account (*Pandemonium*, 2008; *Douban*, 2008). This time, the post attracted a lot of attention from other netizens, and the story spread to other forums. The "sock puppet gang" continued to post attacks on Diebao, as well as on her school.

Diebao's teachers and the administration of her university began to receive angry telephone calls. Diebao's mother also reportedly received angry phone calls. On May 20, the university asked Diebao to accept their recommendation of going on leave. "You may encounter trouble...you are a girl...the school may expel you if the school gets in trouble," a school official reportedly told Diebao (*ibid.*). Diebao was said to have gone on leave from school (Bai & Ji, 2008).

There is little mention of the Diebao case in the Party media. Aside from a brief reference in a *People's Daily* article about the human flesh search phenomenon, there was no other mention of her case found in any of the major Party newspapers (Bai & Ji, 2008). A search for Diebao on *Baidu* turns up many pages of discussion on several forums (*Baidu.com*, 2011a). No evidence of censorship was uncovered.

### **Management of the Cases**

The netizens who worked to expose, shame and harass both Gao Qianhui, and Diebao, claimed to be reacting to a grave insult to the people of Sichuan as well as to the nation, but were also reacting against criticism of the Party.

In Gao Qianhui's case, she was not only insulting the victims and trivializing a natural disaster that claimed the lives of thousands, but she was also criticising the government's directives towards the media following the disaster, in particular the national period of mourning that disrupted her television viewing schedule. As one of Gao's attackers argued "Gao Qianhui publicly defamed the State Council's announcement of a national mourning period through the fastest and most effective avenue possible [the internet] and she should be dealt with according to the laws on public order" (Fletcher, 2008). Gao was exposed and then she was reported to the PSB, and was arrested (*ibid.*).

The Party itself did not publicly engage with this case, and the only known involvement of the state was by the local police department, who arrested Gao after the flesh search exposed her. Gao was only mentioned briefly in a report by the state media

looking at the positive and negative behaviour of Chinese following the earthquake, in which Gao was sited as a bad example (Lin, 2008).

The Diebao case followed a similar path, except that the flesh search unearthed Diebao's "crime" rather than the "crime" inciting the flesh search, as it did in Gao Qianhui's case. Diebao was targeted by a group of netizens for her belief that the state and state media had been using the Sichuan earthquake to rally Chinese behind an aggressive nationalism. The gang she was arguing with believed that Chinese should speak with one voice, united as a nation behind the Party. She was not the only netizen who was critical of the government's use of the disaster to stir up nationalism, but her continuing disagreement with other netizens led them to seek information they could use as a weapon against her. After unearthing her blog and her expressions of excitement over the earthquake, the gang used this information to rally popular outrage against her (Downey, 2010).

The Party did not become publicly involved in the Diebao case, and the only mention of the case that was found in the state media, was a brief mention in an article listing examples of flesh searches used to shame and harass targets (Bai & Ji, 2008).

In both cases, netizens claim to have acted out of a sense of patriotism and in reaction to criticism directed at the Party.

#### **6.4 Understanding Nationalist Flesh Searches**

The Party narrative linking the Party with the nation, and defence of the nation with defence of the Party, has seen the employment of flesh searching that targets critics of the Party as critics of the nation and vice versa. The attack on Gao Qianhui and her

exposure to the PSB was defended by netizens involved in the flesh search as the proper response to her attack on government policy, the official period of mourning and state media coverage, as much as it was defended as the proper response to her insults and disrespect directed towards the people. Diebao's criticism of the Party's framing of the natural disaster as an event to rally nationalism, was likewise met with a flesh search targeting her for disloyalty and lack of feeling towards the people and the nation.

The overlapping of defence of the nation and defence of the Party serves the interests of the Party in maintaining social harmony through the isolation of critics of the Party as traitors. As a vent for popular anger or frustration, nationalist flesh searching does not threaten the Party hierarchy or legitimacy, rather, it often reinforces it. As such, the Party need not engage with this form of flesh search to the extent that it is compelled to engage with flesh searches targeting corrupt officials.

Party involvement in the Grace Wang case is harder to judge, as there may have been cooperation by officials and police in exposing her and her family's personal information, particularly her ID number and family's address. The possibility of *wu mao dang* involvement in these forms of flesh searches is also highly probable. Sources have indicated that the *wu mao dang* were involved in provoking outrage against critics of the regime in China's online social space during the 2008 Olympics, which spread offline and was directed towards CNN's Jack Cafferty. His remark that Chinese leaders were "goons and thugs" was taken by the *wu mao dang* and posted out-of-context, to appear as though Cafferty was speaking about the Chinese people (Bandurski, 2008).

Whether or not the *wu mao dang* are actively engaged in these forms of flesh search, the Party has taken a much less publicly-active role when dealing with these flesh

searches, if indeed the party deals with them at all. Rather than engaging with these flesh searches in public or through the Party media, the Party sustains a national narrative, which unites the Party and the nation, and which supports and encourages these forms of flesh search as a patriotic act.

## **Conclusion**

The rise of China's online social space has presented a formidable challenge to the ruling Communist party, however it is a challenge that the Party has proved remarkably adept at managing.

Using older forms of discipline and coercion when needed, the Party has also adopted a sophisticated strategy of opinion management through layers of censorship, manipulation of online discussion and public recognition and engagement with netizens. These strategies and practices have served a form of governmentality used to manage netizens that embraces the mass-line politics of earlier Maoist China, while reinterpreting them in the context of the Internet, and in the context of a post-reform era China that has used some aspects of liberalism while maintaining an authoritarian state structure.

This governmentality has taken the form of online and spontaneous mass surveillance, represented by flesh searching. While online discussion does demonstrate that a deep cynicism exists among many netizens towards the Party and the state, the Party has been able to selectively use this criticism to strengthen control over local government, while also simultaneously safeguarding its legitimacy as the ruling party.

Rather than threaten the dominance of the Party, groups involved in political flesh searches have actually been used to reinforce it. The Party has adopted a paternal role in these cases, claiming leadership over the masses, and using this leadership to discipline corrupt officials and restore harmony. Flesh searches motivated by nationalism also reinforce the leadership role of the Party, as demonstrated by the adoption of the Party narrative in the rhetoric of the *fenqing* involved in these flesh searches.

While the advent of the Internet and the growth of an online social space in China have certainly empowered a great many Chinese users, providing them with a space for expression, which had not existed before, there is little indication that this development will herald the end of the Communist Party's rule of China. On the contrary, the advent of the Internet has also provided new avenues for governmentality, and new means of domination. While many challenges remain for the Party online, the Party has so far been able to keep threats at bay and to utilize these challenges to shore up its governing capacity and the legitimacy of its rule.

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