

THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP AND THE INTERNET

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Executive Summary

1. The Internet has provided unprecedented opportunities for Chinese leaders to better engage members of society. Both General Secretary Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao have chatted with netizens online, indicating the importance they attach to the Internet as a tool to improve governance.
2. The number of Internet users in China has expanded almost 150 times from 2.1 million users in 1998 to 298 million users by end 2008 to become the largest community of internet users in the world. In the first six months of 2009, the number of Internet users jumped to 338 million, a 13.4% increase since the end of 2008.
3. Chinese leaders see the Internet as a means to improve communication with and obtain feedback from the public on the work of the Party and the government. It is also a relatively more effective and direct way to reach out to the people, particularly the tech-savvy generation, than traditional media channels such as the print media and broadcasting stations.
4. Chinese leaders have further emphasized the role of mass supervision via the Internet. Netizens have now been ascribed a role, albeit within limits, to help the Party and government identify and report on official malpractices and abuse of power to improve governance and strengthen the Party and government's legitimacy.
5. While giving leeway to netizens to express themselves, the Chinese leadership is determined to maintain control over the development of the Internet. In fact, it has played a proactive role in maintaining the "healthy" growth of the Internet to curb the spread of decadent values and prevent unruly elements from using it as a platform to subvert the Party and government.
6. Chinese leaders appear to be keeping a tighter leash on unhealthy online content. Campaigns have been launched to clamp down on pornographic

websites that weaken the morals of society. There was also the abortive introduction of the controversial Green Dam software to block violence and pornographic contents on the Internet. These measures are attempts to set the right atmosphere in the run-up to a number of key anniversaries in China this year.

7. Looking ahead, the Internet will continue to be used as a tool by the Chinese leadership as a means to reinforce the image of a caring Party and government. By shoring up its legitimacy, the Party wants to retain its dominant hold on power.
8. In the long-run, the Internet may hasten the process of democratizing in China by exposing users to alternative ideas and views. Yet, the democratizing effect of the Internet should not be exaggerated given the dominant role that the Party plays in Chinese politics, its determination to remain in control and the fact that there are still many in China who have no access to the Internet.

THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP AND THE INTERNET

LYE Liang Fook and YANG Yi*

The Internet's Potential and Pitfalls

- 1.1 The Internet age has opened up new avenues and created unprecedented opportunities for China's leaders to engage members of society. In February 2009, Premier Wen Jiabao participated in his first online chat jointly hosted by the websites of the Chinese government and the official *Xinhua News Agency*. A few months earlier, in June 2008, General Secretary Hu Jintao also fielded questions from Chinese netizens through the *Strong China Forum* (强国论坛), an online bulletin board of the *People's Daily*. Both the Party and government have given their imprimatur to capitalize on the Internet's potential.
- 1.2 It is no coincidence that Chinese leaders are looking to the Internet as a tool to extend their reach. The number of Internet users in China has been growing at an exponential rate. Within a decade, the number of users has expanded almost 150 times from a mere 2.1 million in 1998 to 298 million by end 2008.¹ Even more important from the leadership's perspective is that the majority of Internet users are below 30, a young and malleable age. Many of them use the Internet to express their opinions, exchange ideas and share information.
- 1.3 There are many motivations behind the leadership's effort to grasp the opportunities provided by the Internet. First, the leadership realizes the importance of staying relevant with the times. With the strong growth of Internet users, and many of them in their formative years, the leadership wants to portray a forward-looking and dynamic image to identify with them. For

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¹ China overtook the US as the country with the largest number of Internet users in the first half of 2008. See "China surpasses the US in number of Internet users", *New York Times*, 26 July 2008.

this group of people, they may not find the traditional media channels such as the print media, broadcasting stations and books as appealing. Through the Internet, the leadership can portray itself as making an effort to better understand the concerns and preoccupations of the younger generation.

- 1.4 The Internet also provides the leadership with a channel to improve its communication with and obtain feedback from the public on the work of the Party and the government. There are currently few effective channels for the public to provide policy feedback to the leadership. The Internet offers a channel for the leaders to have relatively direct access to the public, with less chance of their views being sifted beforehand by various bureaucratic interests. Having more direct access to the public is in line with the pro-people orientation of the Hu-Wen leadership. In fact, both have consistently stressed that the power of the leadership originates from the people and therefore the leadership should be responsive to their needs.
- 1.5 By being closer to the people, the Party and government can better gauge public reactions to policies made and their implementation. Further improvements or adjustments can then be made to address existing gaps. Such a feedback mechanism further gives the people some assurance that their views can be heard thereby reducing the possibility of pent-up frustrations. The mechanism is also intended to improve the governance of the Party and government. Equally important, it will enable the authorities to nip any grievances in the bud before they snowball into a bigger problem.
- 1.6 The leadership has further ascribed to the public a limited role in using the Internet to supervise the conduct of Party and government officials. Lately, a number of cases involving ostentatious spending, abuse of public funds and corruption by Party and government officials have appeared online by anonymous individuals. Reacting to such tip-offs, the relevant officials have been punished. By taking action, China's leaders have given tacit approval to the public's use of the Internet to restrain the behavior of errant local officials.

- 1.7 While tapping its potential, the Chinese leadership is determined to maintain effective control over the development of the Internet. In fact, it has played a proactive role in managing the growth of the Internet. Two years ago, General Secretary Hu Jintao set the tone when he called on government officials to "actively and creatively nurture a healthy online culture" that meets public demand. In other words, he expects officials at all levels to facilitate the development of the Internet while improving the administration of web technologies, content and network security.²
- 1.8 This year, China's leaders appear to be keeping a tighter leash on unhealthy contents carried online. Minister Liu Yunshan, China's top official in charge of media and publicity, stated that Internet pornography is "eroding people's mind and destroying the moral standard of society".³ A one-month long campaign was launched in January 2009 to clamp down on websites that "spread pornography and threaten the morals of young people".⁴ This campaign has since been extended to cover contents carried by cell phone websites, chat rooms and instant messenger groups. An equally important reason for the tightening of Internet control has to do with the need to set the right atmosphere in the run-up to a number of key anniversaries occurring in China this year.⁵
- 1.9 Going forward, the Chinese leadership will want to continue to use the Internet to reinforce the image of a Party and government that is doing their utmost for the people. And by keeping its ears close to the ground through the Internet, China's leaders can initiate better policies and measures, and in a timely manner. By responding or being seen as responding to the aspirations

² "President Hu Jintao asks officials to better cope with Internet", *Xinhua*, 24 January 2007 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-01/24/content_5648674.htm.

³ "China vows to intensify online porn crackdown after shutting down thousands of sites", *Xinhua*, 6 February 2009 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-02/06/content_10776684.htm.

⁴ "Campaign looks to free web from porn", *China Daily*, 6 January 2009.

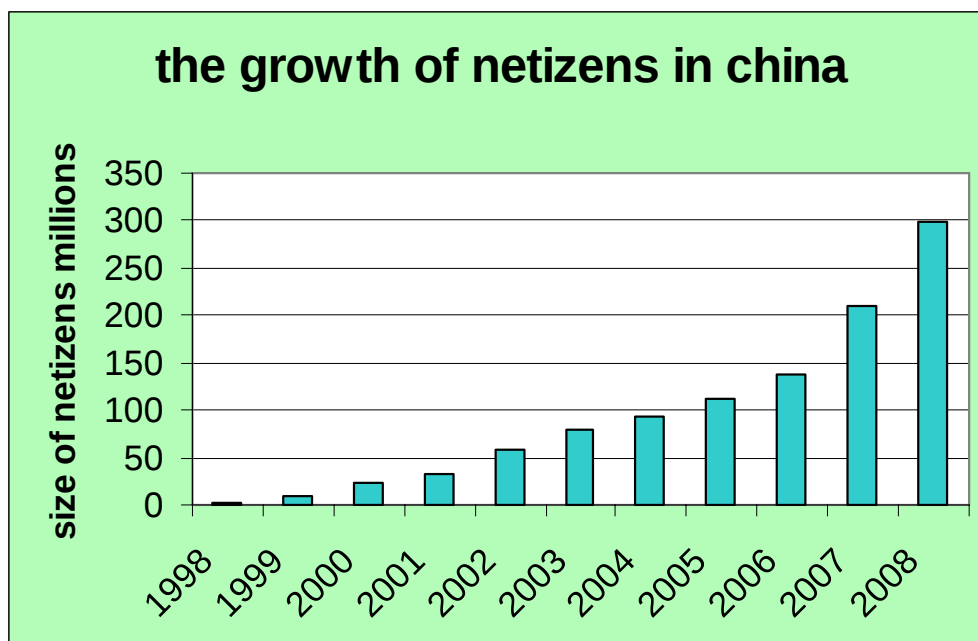
⁵ Some of the key anniversaries in 2009 include the 50th Anniversary of the uprising in Tibet against Chinese rule (in March), the 20th Anniversary of the Tiananmen incident (in June), the 60th Anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (in October).

and concerns of the people, the Party seeks to enhance its legitimacy in their eyes. This is ultimately intended to ensure its dominant hold on power.

- 1.10 Yet, the mounting size of netizens will require far more transparency and accountability on the part of the Party and government, and may even hasten the process of political reform in China. How to simultaneously meet this growing aspiration and maintain the orderly development of the Internet is a challenge which the Party and the government have to grapple with.

China's Internet Revolution

- 2.1 Since China reportedly plugged into the Internet in 1994, the number of users has grown tremendously. Within a decade, the number of users has expanded almost 150 times from a mere 2.1 million in 1998 to 298 million by end 2008. Within the first half of 2009, the number of Internet users reached 338 million, a 13.4% increase since the end of 2008.⁶ By June 2008, China has already surpassed the US as the country with the biggest number of Internet users.



Source: China Internet Network Information Centre (various reports)

⁶ “China has 338 million netizens now”, *China Daily*, 16 July 2009.

- 2.2 According to the China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC), the majority of Internet users are below 30, well-educated and of a malleable age. The number of Internet users in the cities is about 190 million, much higher than the 5.26 million Internet users in the countryside in 2007. Nevertheless, the Internet penetration in rural areas increased dramatically at an annual growth rate of 127% from 2000 to 2007, much higher than the annual growth rate of 38.2% over the same period in the urban areas.⁷
- 2.3 The top ten applications of Internet users at present are online music, online news, instant message, online video, search engine, email, online game, blog/personal space, forum/BBS and online shopping.⁸ From various Internet surveys, the bulk of Internet users go online for entertainment purposes.
- 2.4 The number of Internet bloggers in China also expanded from 26.9 million in 2005 to 78.3 million in 2008, growing at an annual rate of 42.8%. Presently, the ratio of bloggers to non-bloggers is 1: 2.8.⁹ This means that for roughly every three individuals who use the Internet, one of them is a blogger and blogging is becoming an increasingly important means of online expression for a growing number of netizens.
- 2.5 The growing popularity of blog/personal space demonstrates an emerging trend in Internet applications, that is, the rise of social internet applications in China. Numerous netizens, the young in particular, prefer to express opinions, exchange ideas and share information with their peers via the Internet. In addition, a series of big events in the past year such as natural disasters and the 2008 Olympics have enhanced the popularity of online news. Netizens log on to such platforms for relatively fast access and convenience.

⁷ CNNIC's report on Internet Development in Rural Areas dated March 2008 at <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/uploadfiles/pdf/2008/3/28/165206.pdf>.

⁸ CNNIC *Statistical Survey Report on the Internet Development in China* dated January 2009 at <http://www.cnnic.cn/html/Dir/2009/01/12/5447.htm>.

⁹ CNNIC *2007 Market Research Report on China's Blog Development* dated January 2009 at <http://www.cnnic.cn/uploadfiles/doc/2007/12/26/113707.doc>.

Tapping the Internet's Potential

- 3.1 Given the explosive growth of the Internet, the Chinese government has been quick to tap the potential of the Internet to improve its governance and enhance its legitimacy.
- 3.2 Sometime around 2005, Party leaders started getting more creative about how to influence public opinion on the Internet.¹⁰ Before that, a number of public relations blunders taught the government and Party the painful but important lesson of putting out timely and accurate information. For instance, in 2003, China's public image, both domestically and externally, was battered by its initial lackluster reaction to the outbreak of SARS in the country.¹¹
- 3.3 Other subsequent major events such as bird flu, the Olympic torch relay and the Wenchuan earthquake further underscored the value of seizing the "the right to speak" (话语权) first through various platforms including the Internet. By releasing information first, even when it is incomplete, the leadership can take the wind out of the sails of its critics that it is mounting a cover-up. More significantly, this is in line with the Hu-Wen leadership's call to be more accountable to the people. This marks an important departure from the past practice of covering up negative news.¹²
- 3.4 The Internet has also offered the Chinese government a channel to promote a pro-people image. The *People's Daily*, the mouthpiece of the Party, has since September 2008, sanctioned an official fan club webpage for top leaders in the central government. This webpage is partly a response to a series of informal fan clubs of key Chinese leaders that have spontaneously emerged online in

¹⁰ "China's Guerrilla War for the Web", *Far East Economic Review*, July 2008.

¹¹ China initially left it to the local levels to deal with the outbreak. It was only when SARS spread to the other countries and these countries pressured China did Chinese leaders mount a national response to deal with the crisis.

¹² For instance, in the Tangshan earthquake of 1976, no official information about what actually happened or the number of casualties was made available. This was done in the interest of protecting state secret.

recent years.¹³ Partly, this is due to the Chinese leaders' desire to use the Internet as a platform to get close to the people.

- 3.5 Most notably, in June 2008, China's President Hu Jintao visited the headquarters of the *People's Daily* and chatted online with netizens via the *Strong China Forum*. During the dialogue, Hu Jintao expressed his concern about the well-being of netizens at various social levels. As one of the netizens, he disclosed that he always read domestic and foreign news online.
- 3.6 This is apparently the first time a top leader of China has openly conveyed his well-wishes to netizens. Just before his online debut, Hu said in a speech delivered at the *People's Daily* headquarters that the Internet has become the catalyst for promoting the Party's ideology and culture and an amplifier of public opinion, from which the voice of the mass can be accumulated and augmented easily. Thus, the social influence of new media should be fully recognized, and government leaders and party cadres should attach great importance to the construction, implementation and management of the Internet he added.¹⁴
- 3.7 Nine months later, in March 2009, Premier Wen Jiabao made his online chat debut a week prior to the opening of the annual National People's Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) sessions.¹⁵ Going beyond Hu's earlier 20 minutes showcase chat, Wen's dialogue with netizens lasted almost 2 hours. He was deluged with about 90,000 questions on various subjects ranging from the shoe-throwing incident,¹⁶ his income level, the economic crisis, healthcare reform to

¹³ Fan club of Hu-Wen, which was sanctioned by netizens, can be accessed via <http://shijinbabaofan.g.ifiensi.com/main/show> and so far there are 40,000 members.

¹⁴ "Zai renmin ribaoshe kaocha gongzuo shi de jianghua" (Speech delivered while on a visit to the *People's Daily*), *People's Daily*, dated June 2009 at <http://media.people.com.cn/GB/40606/7409348.html>.

¹⁵ "Wen makes online chat debut", *Straits Times*, 1 March 2009.

¹⁶ A protester threw a shoe at the Chinese Premier as he was delivering a speech at Cambridge University, 2 February 2009 at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article5643558.ece>

corruption among officials.¹⁷ This dialogue is a reflection of the Chinese leaders' more open and confident style of governance in the information age. It is also a further attempt on their part to be even closer to the people at a time of economic hardship in order to prevent social grievances from getting out of hand.

3.8 As a new generation of Chinese leaders, they know it is not enough to govern effectively by merely reading impersonal documents and reports. As early as 2007 President Hu Jintao urged senior officials to improve their internet literacy and use the Internet well so as to improve the art of leadership.¹⁸ From then on, Chinese leaders and officials placed increasing attention to citizens' online views as a way to better understand their preoccupations and concerns. Most significantly, Wen even stated in his online chat that the public was entitled to know the government's thinking and actions, and to criticize government policies.

3.9 The central leaders have set a good example for other leaders at the lower levels. For instance, the governor of Guangdong Province issued New Year greetings by using Internet jargon to convey his well wishes to the people. Such greetings were apparently well received by the people. The governor of Qinghai province also thanked netizens for making useful suggestions that helped improve local governance.¹⁹

3.10 Many other officials also set up personal blogs to further engage netizens.²⁰ So far, 17 provincial governors and general secretaries have established the

¹⁷ "Premier Wen talks online with public", *China Daily*, 20 February 2009.

¹⁸ Hu said this at the 38th regular study session of the Politburo. See "Chinese premier to talk online with public", *Xinhua*, 28 February 2009 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-02/28/content_10916529.htm

¹⁹ "Qinghai Shengzhang Song Xiuyan zhixin dafu wangyou renmenwang wangyou liuyan" (Governor of Qinghai Song Xiuyan answered messages delivered by netizens), *People's Daily*, 11 February 2009

²⁰ These include Zhu Yongxin (Vice Mayor of Suzhou); Li Chao (Director of Shenyang Bureau of Environmental Protection) and Chen Junan (Director of Zhengzhou Pricing Bureau)

practice of personally responding to letters from netizens.²¹ This approach has been highly commended by netizens who view it as a practice in line with the Party's good tradition and as hallmarks of good leaders genuinely concerned about the people.

- 3.11 Almost every province in China has launched its own specific website to promote two-way communication between the government and people on issues ranging from foreign policy to people's livelihood. (See more details on such websites in **Appendix I**)
- 3.12 Not too long ago, there was an intense online debate on the appropriate use of China's huge foreign exchange reserves. Some netizens have proposed spending the money at home; others advocate a more diversified portfolio of investments. In view of the exchanges on this topic, a European banker commented that this was a completely unique situation faced by Chinese bureaucrats - having their every decision debated, analyzed and often attacked in the new media and on the internet in particular, all of which illustrate the increasing influence of netizens in the process of decision making.²² This will help to promote the transparency and fairness of policy formulation.

New Channel of Social Supervision

- 4.1 Chinese leaders have increasingly emphasized the role of mass supervision via the Internet. Netizens have now been ascribed a role, albeit within limits, to help the Party and government identify and report on official malpractices and abuse of power. This is again intended to improve governance and strengthen the Party and government's legitimacy.

²¹ "Wang Yang, Huang Huahua zaigei wangyou bainian" (Wang Yang, Huang Huahua again send their wishes to netizens), *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, 20 January 2009.

²² "China's dollar dilemma", *Financial Times*, 22 February 2009.

- 4.2 Year 2008 was known as the “Year of Internet Supervision in China”.²³ In that year, China witnessed the power of netizens who helped to disclose a number of high-profile incidents ranging from a corrupt city official in Jiangsu Province²⁴ to ostentatious spending and abuse of public power.²⁵ Such disclosures have not been met with the usual news black-out. Instead, the relevant authorities have taken quick and decisive actions to punish officials identified by the anonymous online postings. (A compilation of incidents that first gained prominence on the Internet is available in **Appendix II**).
- 4.3 Furthermore, during the NPC and CPPCC session in March 2009, netizens launched an “officials to declare their assets” (官员财产公开制度) campaign against corrupt officials at various levels. Led by a netizen under the moniker, *Tian yi*, dozens are taking part in the latest Internet campaign against China's corrupt officials by voluntarily declaring details of their personal assets online in an attempt to pressure officials to do the same.
- 4.4 The debate over whether Beijing should establish a system requiring officials to publicly disclose their assets to rein in official corruption has raged in China for years. During his debut online chat with netizens, Premier Wen said that the government was making "active preparations" for officials to declare their assets amid efforts to combat corruption. He added that there was a need to promote transparency of government affairs and to make public officials' assets.²⁶ Wen's comments, while positive, indicate that instituting such a disclosure system would be highly controversial and be met with strong resistance from those whose interest would be affected.

²³ “Wangluo jiandu wei fanfubai, goujian hexie tigong xin de dongli jizhi” (Online supervision offers fresh dynamic mechanism for the fight against corruption and the construction of social harmony), *People's Daily*, 3 February 2009

²⁴ “Official sacked for costly lifestyle”, *China Daily*, 21 January 2009. (A picture of the official, Zhou Jiugeng, was posted on the web showing him with a pack of Nanjing 95 Imperial cigarettes, which cost about 150 *Yuan* and wearing a Swiss-made Vacheron Constantin watch, retailing at about 100,000 *Yuan* in China).

²⁵ “Online video exposes corrupt officials”, *Straits Times*, 24 February 2009 and “For China, a costly lesson in engaging its netizens” *Straits Times*, 2 March 2009.

²⁶ “Chinese Premier says government preparing for officials to declare assets”, *Xinhua*, 28 February 2009 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-02/28/content_10917920.htm.

- 4.5 In 2009, an incident in Lingbao, Henan province showed that individuals were prepared to voice their displeasure through the Internet even though this may incur the ire of local governments.²⁷ Following this episode, a commentary in *Beijing News* (a publication partially owned by the *Guangming Daily* which belongs to the Propaganda Department) stated that “local officials should re-orientate their attitude toward the freedom of speech in cyberspace and stop tarnishing the image of local governments by disrespecting citizen's legal rights”.
- 4.6 In yet another incident of how the Internet has tilted the balance in favor of individuals was the case of Deng Yujiao who stabbed a local Party official to death in Hubei province in May 2009.²⁸ There was intense debate about her case on the Internet and other media channels. Speculation was rife that she was unlikely to get a fair trial. Eventually, the Badong County People's Court, while finding Deng guilty of causing injury with intent, spared her from punishment and released her. This seemed to be an outcome that is intended to appease public anger against official abuse of power.
- 4.7 These voices from below show that the internet has become an increasingly important medium to monitor not only the words but also actions of officials. In a way, China's internet users have become a de facto anti-corruption force in recent years, in the absence of independent checks and balances on official abuses.

Orderly Development of the Internet

- 5.1 While giving leeway to netizens to express themselves, the Chinese leadership is simultaneously determined to maintain control over the development of the

²⁷ Police from Lingbao, Henan province, had traveled thousands of miles to Shanghai to nab and jail Wang Shuai for eight days because he posted an online article criticizing the local government for its illegal land requisition practice.

²⁸ Deng Yujiao fatally stabbed Deng Guida, a local Communist Party official (and not related to her), after the latter demanded that she had sex with her. See “Court frees woman who stabbed Chinese official”, *Associated Press*, 16 June 2009.

Internet. It has done so through a couple of ways. The Internet police, for one, is still a key pillar in the entire censorship system. Having a reported strength of 30,000, this force is responsible for policing the web and deleting words and shutting down websites which they regard as “sensitive”.²⁹

- 5.2 Another method to ensure orderly development of the Internet is to launch regular campaigns. A one-month long campaign was launched in January 2009 to clamp down on websites that spread pornography and threaten the morals of young people. This campaign was extended to cover contents carried by cell phone websites, chat rooms and instant messenger groups. An equally important reason for the tightening of Internet control this year has to do with the need to set the right atmosphere in the run-up to a number of key anniversaries that has taken or will take place in China this year.
- 5.3 Most recently, China’s Ministry of Industry and Information Technology announced that all computers produced or sold in China will have to be installed with a filtering software (known as Green Dam) from 1 July 2009. The software is ostensibly designed to block violence and pornographic contents on the Internet. Critics, however, have slammed the move as a means for the government to keep tabs on Internet users who visit politically sensitive websites. This would make it easier for the authorities to clamp down on its critics. In the face of intense public opposition, much of it on-line, the authorities have postponed the installation of such a controversial software.³⁰
- 5.4 Yet another way to manage the orderly development of the Internet is to institute proper legislation to guide its development. This is a challenge as on the one hand, too much legislation may stifle the creativity and virtual freedom of the Internet. On the other hand, too much free play may result in excesses that may harm the interests of individuals who are least able to defend themselves. Such excesses may best be manifested in the controversy

²⁹ “30,000 Internet police in China myth, please not again”, 23 March 2009 at <http://www.nartv.org/2007/03/22/30000-internet-police-in-china-myth-please-not-again/>.

³⁰ “China postpones mandatory installation of controversial filtering software”, *Xinhua* wang, 30 June 2009 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-06/30/content_11628335.htm.

over the invasion of individual privacy arising from Internet-led witch-hunts, known as the “human flesh search engine”.

5.5 One of the most high profile cases of such witch-hunts involved Wang Fei whose wife apparently committed suicide after she found out that her husband had an affair. Personal details of Wang soon appeared online including where he worked and lived, and even the whereabouts of his parents and other siblings. Besides being vilified online, Wang soon found himself being harassed and threatened in real life by people who are not directly related to the case. In a landmark ruling in September 2008, the People’s Court in Beijing ruled in Wang’s favor. It found the defendants guilty of violating Wang’s privacy and tarnishing his reputation, and ordered punishment to be meted out to them.³¹

5.6 Some other localities have also taken matters into their own hands. In Jiangsu for instance, the standing committee of the provincial government passed an ordinance banning the act of posting other people’s private information online. More of such local rulings can be expected. This is however unlikely to quell the debate over the merits of legislation to curb the excesses of the “human flesh search engine”.

Internet and Prospects for Political Change

6.1 At the governance level, it is important to grasp the role of the Internet as envisaged by the Party and government. Rather than regard the Internet as a democratizing tool, China’s leaders will continue to use the Internet to strengthen its communication with the people to improve their governance. The ultimate goal is to strengthen the Party’s legitimacy and maintain its dominant hold on power.

³¹ The defendants, a Chinese website (by the name of Daqi.com) and a netizen (by the name of Zhang Leyi) were ordered by the People’s Court in Beijing to compensate Wang Fei in China’s first case of “virtual lynching”. See “Website ordered to pay damages to China’s first ‘virtual lynching’ victim”, *Xinhua*, 18 December 2009 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-12/18/content_10525436.htm.

- 6.2 The Party and government will further want to ensure the “orderly” development of the Internet by finding ways to keep up with rapid technological advances. Various controls will remain in place to prevent the Internet from becoming a platform used by subversive elements to challenge the authority of the Party and government. As mentioned earlier, measures will also be taken from time to time to counter the spread of decadent values on the Internet that erode moral standards of individuals that fill the ranks of the Party and government.
- 6.3 Technology alone is unlikely to bring about political change in China. While the Internet might facilitate some change, it cannot determine political reform in China. A more important determinant is whether the Chinese leaders see the need to introduce political reforms in the country. Presently, some initiatives in this direction have been introduced including intra-Party democracy, local elections, legal and constitutional protection of citizens’ rights, appointment of officials based on merit and greater accountability of officials. Yet, such initiatives are geared less at democratization as an end goal but as a means to maintain the dominance of the Party in Chinese politics.
- 6.4 At the level of the individual user, the fact remains that a large majority of the Chinese population still do not have access to the Internet. Being less exposed to alternative ideas and views, they are less likely to become agents of change. More importantly, for those who have access, many of them use the Internet for entertainment purposes such as gaming, music, e-mails, instant messaging and blogging. They are less interested in more serious topics like politics or regime change. To a large extent, this is due to the conscious decision by individual users to steer clear of what they regard as sensitive or contentious topics that if broached, may invite official reprisals.
- 6.5 It is important not to overstate the impact of the Internet on political change in China. To some extent, the cyberspace has indeed opened up a private realm for individuals to exchange information and interact with each other. Yet, this has to be set against the political realities in China such as the determination of the Party and government to tap the Internet for their own governing purposes

and the present limitations of the Internet. In this regard, the Internet's much touted "liberating" effects may not be as far-reaching as it is made out to be.

- 6.6 Yet, the exponential development of the Internet puts the Party in a dilemma with regard to information transparency and control. People with internet access may develop a thirst for information that could only be satisfied by the Party, thus requiring it to open up more to meet this rising expectation. At the same time, the same group of people may also demand greater accountability of Party and government officials, thereby pressuring the authorities to speed up political reform and changes, a process which could be a little tedious and gradual. Thus, while the Party and government appear to have the upper hand over control of the Internet for now, there are simultaneously forces at play which may work to their disadvantage over the longer term if they are not managed well.

Appendices

APPENDIX I ONLINE CHANNELS TO FACILITATE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE PEOPLE AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Province/Municipality/Autonomous Region	Channel for Online Communication
Beijing Municipality	http://szxx.beijing.gov.cn/webmayorbox
Tianjin Municipality	http://szmail.tj.gov.cn/szf/newmail.nsf/first?openform
Hebei Province	http://www.hebei.gov.cn/interaction/mail http://hudong.sjzchina.com/mailbox
Shanxi Province	http://www.shanxigov.cn/structure/hdjl/hdjl.htm
Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region	http://www.nmg.gov.cn/zx
Liaoning Province	http://www.ln.gov.cn/html/ldxx.html
Jilin Province	http://www.jl.gov.cn/zt/jlsszrx
Heilongjiang Province	http://www.hljxf.gov.cn
Shanghai Municipality	http://wsxf.sh.gov.cn/wsxf/zgsh/login.asp?Addressee=E997636B http://www.shanghai.gov.cn/shanghai/node2314/node19802/index.html
Jiangsu Province	http://www.jiangsu.gov.cn/tmzf/zfld/lzjdsz/
Zhejiang Province	http://www.zj.gov.cn/gb/zjnew/node3/node22/node165/node1749/index.html
Anhui Province	http://www.ah.gov.cn/szxc/szxx.asp
Fujian Province	http://www.fz12345.gov.cn
Jiangxi Province	http://www.jiangxi.gov.cn/gtzt/szxx
Shandong Province	http://www.shandong.gov.cn/col/col142/index.html
Henan Province	http://www.hnxf.gov.cn
Hubei Province	http://www.hubei.gov.cn/hdjl/index.shtml
Hunan Province	http://www.hunan.gov.cn/hdjl/szxx
Guangdong Province	http://www.gd.gov.cn/gzhd/szxx/
Guangxi Province	http://xinfang.nanning.gov.cn
Hainan Province	http://www.hainan.gov.cn/code/V3/leader.php governors@hainan.gov.cn
Chongqing Municipality	http://www.cq.gov.cn/publicmail/citizen/writemail.aspx
Sichuan Province	http://www.sc.gov.cn/hdjl/gmxf/szxx/index.shtml
Guizhou Province	http://www.gzgov.gov.cn/pages/zfjg/pages/szf_ly.asp
Yunnan Province	http://xfservice.yn.gov.cn/xinfang/xfjcx.jsp
Xizang Autonomous Region	http://www.xizang.gov.cn/mailBoxForm.do
Shaanxi Province	http://www.shaanxi.gov.cn/IssuedContentAction.do?dispatch=vContForXFMain&colid=643
Gansu Province	http://www.gansu.gov.cn/Szxx.asp
Qinghai Province	http://www.qh.gov.cn/qzlx
Ningxia Autonomous Region	http://www.nx.gov.cn/structure/myhd/wyxx.htm
Xinjiang Autonomous Region	Unable to access website at time of entry in July 2009 (due to riots by Uyghurs against Han Chinese on 5 July 2009)

Source: Based on findings by *People's Daily* dated 5 January 2009 and authors' own compilation

**APPENDIX II A COMPILATION OF MAJOR INCIDENTS THAT
FIRST GAINED PROMINENCE ON THE INTERNET IN 2008**

Location	Incident	Outcome
Chongqing	Homeowners refused to move apparently due to insufficient compensation	1. Greater awareness of the rights of individual home owners under the Property Law passed in 2007. 2. The local officials, construction companies and the nail families eventually worked out a compromise deal.
Shanxi	Child labor in coal mines	1. Shanxi government took tough actions against child labor 2. Governor made a public apology.
Sha'anxi	False sighting of rare South China tigers	1. Zhou Zhenglong who fabricated the sightings was arrested and sentenced to two and half year imprisonment, but given a three years reprieve. 2. Launching an educational campaign against fabricating false information for three months. 3. The deputy director of the Shaanxi Provincial Forestry Department and 12 other relevant local officials were suspended.
Wenzhou	Local officials' extravagant overseas travel at public expense	Officials concerned were sacked or required to report his or her movements to the proper authorities within a prescribed time and at a prescribed place (双规).
Jiangsu	An official with a luxurious lifestyle	1. The official, Zhou Jiugeng was sacked when his extravagant lifestyle was made public. 2. The provincial civil service launched a public education campaign against such practices.

Source: Compilation by authors