

**THE MAKING OF A GIANT CAGE:
MANAGING INTERNET PUBLIC OPINION
IN CHINA**

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Executive Summary

1. Since the internet was introduced to the country, the Chinese Communist Party has realized its potential threat and made efforts to regulate the cyber world.
2. After nearly 20 years of effort, the Chinese authorities have demonstrated great capability in putting online activities under strict surveillance. A comprehensive and complex system of internet management has been established, along with an even more complex monitoring and censorship system.
3. Since Xi assumed leadership in late 2012, he has shown considerable determination to win the “public opinion struggle” in the cyber world. His new policy aims to ensure that the Party, and not the Chinese grassroots, has the loudest voice in the country's new media space.
4. Xi’s new campaign soon bore fruits. In the recent months, the state media and government-sponsored accounts have become more influential than those of grassroots opinion leaders in social media sites, indicating the Party’s attempt to turn the internet into its propaganda machine.
5. The backbone of the internet surveillance system is the Great Firewall of China, which separates the Chinese web from the rest of the World Wide Web by keeping out “undesirable” foreign sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and by monitoring activities within China.
6. Online content control is largely enforced through web companies. Substantial investment in labor to monitor and delete politically sensitive content has been made.
7. Internet celebrities with high popularity have become the target of suppression. In the past few years many of them served as an aggregating point for dissident opinions or suppressed news. The authorities have combined tactics such as cooptation, discipline and crackdown to silent internet celebrities.

8. An army of online commentators has been established to steer online public opinion in favor of the government.
9. Contrary to popular belief that the internet facilitates civic mobilization and helps bring down authoritarian regimes, at least in the near future, internet in China may not be an agent of political upheaval, but one “of authoritarian adaptation”.
10. In the long term, however, values changes resulting from the internet may empower the new generations to push for political change.