

# **Chinese bloggers revolution**

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### **A new revolution**

In the 90s when Internet was just created it displayed a simple page containing only text and sometimes an image. However having the ability to share content and receive it world wide without any sort of borders or restrictions was remarkable. Internet, thereafter, started to grow immensely over a short period of time becoming a very influential part of people's lives. Too many, the world had suddenly become very approachable and free. This changed when commercialization's, corporations and governments started to realize how important Internet was becoming and therefore deciding to take it into their own hands. Internet had suddenly become an entire world of its own which to some needed rules, regulations and borders to control the immense stream of information that was spreading worldwide. To what at first seemed, and to many still seems, to be a borderless, global, everybody connecting, democratic network has suddenly turned into a network controlled, censored, filtered and containing state borders. States such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Vietnam, Tunisia and especially China do strict political Internet censorship by blocking IP addresses and by dynamic content filters with the help of western countries. China, having a huge chunk of the worlds IP addresses, and being a communist country have been faced with a problem. They want self-expression to follow the party line. This has created the bases of a type of revolution that has started to rise in China with Chinese bloggers expressing their own thoughts and beliefs and posting that on the Internet for the entire world to see. Thereby completely going against Chinese laws, this has created a dangerous but also exciting terrain.

### **The start of a new civilization**

In 1996, the early years of Internet development, John Perry Barlow, wrote "A declaration of independence of cyberspace" in Davos Switzerland. It was a paper that concentrated on the fact that governments, laws and regulations where not welcome on the rapidly growing Internet. He wrote it as a response to the passing into law of the telecommunications Act of 1996 in the United States. When reading this paper it is very clear that it was written in the early years of Internet development, because it gives a clear sense of what Internet was suppose to be, and the fear he had to what it will become. It starts off by saying, "We have no elected government, nor are we likely to

have one, so I address you with no greater authority than that with which liberty itself speaks. I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. You have no moral right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement we have true reason to fear.” He continues by saying, “We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice according by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth”. This new world, according to John Barlow, has no borders, restrictions or is not connected to any type of government system. It is a new civilization based primarily on the mind where self-expression, and freedom is important. It is a place where information can be reproduced and distributed infinitely without any cost and without having to fear the consequences. He finished of by saying. “These increasingly hostile and colonial measures place us in the same position as those previous lovers of freedom and self-determination who had to reject the authorities of distant, uninformed powers. We must declare our virtual selves immune to your sovereignty, even as we continue to consent to your rule over our bodies. We will spread ourselves across the planet so that no one can arrest our thoughts”. After reading John Perry Barlows declaration of independence it is clear that the Internet at first was created with a completely different intension than that what it developed into. In fact his greatest fear has finally become reality. The Internet has simply become an identical reflection of the real world. It not only contains laws and regulation but also real world borders (countries, continents, states).<sup>2</sup>

### **Internet today**

It is clear that Internet has changed and grown. Paul Garrin a politically active video artist from the 1990s explains in his interview, Internet tyranny, what Internet eventually has turned into. In his interview he explains that as the Internet started to scale an inversion of the net came about. The Internet was created at first to be a decentralized peer-to-peer network but as it popularity increased it soon changed into a centralized one. He compares this new Internet with that of cable TV, where content on the edge of the world will not necessarily reach other people on the other edge of the world. At first commercialization was forbidden on the net, but this soon changed and started to become

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<sup>2</sup> John Perry Barlow

a threat to independent development, content and production distribution. It all became a money issue, and the only way in which one could assure the existence and the universal distribution of independent non-corporate, non-commercial art content and cultural content was to in fact buy bandwidth.<sup>1</sup>

According to Paul Garrin there are three common myths about the Internet, the first myth is that the Internet is public, the second is that it has no borders and the third myth is that it has no center. All of these are false. The Internet is not public because it is a privately owned infrastructure in an unregulated environment. The Internet is not borderless. It may seem borderless because it may appear as if we can spread and receive information from all over the world without any censorship or restrictions, but this is not the case. What allows the Internet to send traffic back and forth is a protocol called border gateway protocol (BGP). It is a protocol that collects a table of IP networks or ‘prefixes’ which assign network reachability among autonomous systems (AS). It is designed to make routing decisions based on path, network policies and or rule sets. Firewalls can than be seen as the custom police that decide which traffic information may enter and which may not. BGP was created to replace the Exterior Gateway Protocol (EGP), which allowed fully decentralized routing, and made the Internet a completely decentralized system containing no center. This however has changed, and the Internet does in fact have a center, which is called the root domain, the starting point of the top-level domain structure on the Internet. It is essential to routing or directing traffic based on the use of domain name systems. And it is structured in a hierarchical delegation of authority. The Internet in fact has simply become a military model based on hierarchal delegations of authorities and a centralized, demand and control. So in fact the Internet has turned into a “Big Brother” monitoring your every move, every message, every picture that you have ever done or put on Internet.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Great Firewall if China**

The Peoples Republic of China has become an expert in Internet censorship and has the biggest “Big Brother” in the world. With its Chinese communist party it is important for

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Garrin

everyone within China to follow the parties line and not openly insult or offend it. One may ask why, if China is so focused and obsessed about keeping the outside out and keeping self-expression under control, have they ever agreed to welcoming the internet into there country in the first place. This to is a money issue. China needs the Internet in order to be connected to the globe and in order to be an international trading power. Internet censorship in the PRC is conducted under a wide variety and administrative regulations. More than sixty Internet regulations have been made in accordance to those laws by the government. The main reason why the PRC suddenly started to implement Internet laws, and censorship was due to the escalation of protests on anti-Japanese, anti-pollution, and anti-corruption that where openly publicized using instant messenger services, chat rooms, and text messengers. The government saw how fast and efficiently information was being spread through the use of the Internet and decided to take matters into their own hands before it was to late. Today there are over 30,000 Internet police in the PRC, blocking within minutes all critical comments appearing on Internet forums, blogs and major portals.<sup>3</sup> The equipment used by the PRC for censorship is more widespread and advanced than in any other country in the world. It not only blocks websites that to them goes against the regime but also monitors the Internet access of individuals. In 1998 the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) created “The Golden Shield Project” it began its process in 2003 and in 2006 the first part of the project passed the national inspection. It is a project that has created a new communication network and computer information system that is designed to monitor Internet activity more closely and improve their capability and efficiency. Many refer to this project as “The Great Firewall of China”. The manner in which it works is that it prevents IP addresses from being routed through, and consists of firewalls and proxy servers at the Internet gateways. These huge surveillance measurements have made life very difficult for the Chinese people who already are caged in and detached from the rest of the world. Internet was supposed to create this opening for the Chinese people to reconnect and finally truly find out what is happening in the world around them, and express who they are and where their opinions lie. Just like John Perry Barlow said, it should have been a place where “Anyone anywhere could express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear

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<sup>3</sup> Wiki, internet censorship

of being coerced into silence or conformity”<sup>4</sup>.

### **Chinese bloggers revolution**

The Internet's biggest form of self-expression is most likely blogging. Even though China's network is being censored so severely and monitored constantly, it has become the world's second largest blogging country in the world after the United States, with 160 million users. The blogs have various characters, some are political, some are unusual but most of the Chinese blogs on the Internet are simply about expressing oneself: me, myself and my life. Some people wonder if this huge flow of personal expression can change the country. The blogs are so accessible and it has become so extremely easy to publish one's thoughts on the Internet that it is nearly revolutionary. It maybe revolutionary but the government has still not lost any grip on power.<sup>5</sup> As long as the blogger stays away from the forbidden words / terms such as Chinese political terms, Terms related to the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement, Specific overseas Web Sites, Publications and Dissident Groups etc.<sup>7</sup> then their blogs will be left alone. As soon as one of the forbidden terms are found on a blog an alert is called to an editor to examine the messages that contain them and possible actions can be made to remove or block the blog.

Bloggers that concentrate on politics have gotten to the point where they are openly being sarcastic about governmental movements, while at the same time are writing about things that the mainstream press won't write about, for example rural unrest. There is a very big downside however to blogging about these issues, because by posting this information onto the net the central government is a lot more informed about, for example, corruption in provincial cities, and because these blogs are helping in that sense the borders are slowly being pushed forward. One of the most famous political bloggers in the People's Republic of China is Michael Anti, a Chinese journalist. The main reason why he became very famous was that Microsoft (a western company) deleted his blog at the end of 2005. This became a very big issue around the world and contributed to ongoing debates about

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<sup>4</sup> Wiki, Golden Shield

<sup>5</sup> Lim Lioua

<sup>7</sup> Wiki, list

the role of Western Companies in China's censorship program. Other western companies that have complied to Chinese laws are yahoo.cn and google.cn, meaning that not everything you search for within google.cn is available. The argument that these companies are giving to the rest of the world is that if one wishes to do business in a particular country, than they must obey their rules. According to Michael Anti, with even Western companies bowing to China's senses the situation, referring to the Chinese bloggers, is deteriorating. However the Chinese people have no choice then to keep on going. This is the only way in which they can express themselves, The media is controlled and public forums are controlled, the only thing they have is blogs that in some small way they are able to use to express who they are.<sup>5</sup>

There are also Chinese bloggers that have no political intentions what so ever. In early 2004 several sexual oriented blogs began appearing on the web. The most popular bloggers, in this area of interest where, Muzi Mei and Zhyying Qingtong. They where known for sharing their personal sex stories online, and this eventually made them minor celebrities within China. Many people disapproved of this and these blogs where widely reported and criticized upon in mainland Chinese news media, which eventually resulted in blocking several of these blogs even till this day on. However due to these blogs a new movement had started to emerge in China. Artistic nude photography became a new trend and started to appear in a few magazines. Even a few Mainland Chinese newspapers started to show a couple of barely clothed photographs of women some of whom where even topless. This shows how blogs, even if they are censored and blocked can still have an impact on people.<sup>6</sup>

Types of blogs that are very popular in China are blogs that simply concentrate on the blogger themselves, their interests, their hobbies, what they have been doing, where they are going on vacation etc, just simple everyday things that keep them going. These types of blogs might not be as determined, as political oriented blogs, to strive for democracy and freedom in China, however, in a way they too are blogging for freedom, the freedom to be silly, to be selfish or just to control their own media. A new generation has been

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<sup>5</sup> Lim Liouisa

<sup>6</sup> Berry Petersen

created in China a generation that is determined to get their views and their opinions across no matter how difficult it might be.

### **Enforcements**

There is a lot of danger when it comes to blogging and expressing ones opinion about the government in China. In September 2006 there where 50 cyber dissidents in Chinese prisons and the sentences could vary from three to ten years. One of these dissidents is Shi Tao, a Chinese editor who worked for Dangdai Shang Bao (contemporary Trade News) a newspaper in the city of Chansha, in Hunan Province. He also wrote critical political essays about the Chinese government system and posted these on western news websites that where banned in China. He was sentenced in November 2004 for 10 years for leaking state secrets abroad. He had leaked information concerning the instructions that where set up by the Chinese Propaganda Department for the media on how to cover the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the military attack in Tiananmen Square. What was interesting about this case was that, Shi Tao had used a private yahoo! e-mail account to pass on this information to an overseas website called Asia Democracy Foundation. When the Chinese government found out about this it forced yahoo!'s Hong Kong office to reveal the senders personal information. Yahoo, having no idea what the information was going to be used for, turned over the information. This eventually resulted in the imprisonment of Shi Tao. The Chinese authorities had, without any proper permission, confiscated his computer. Shi's lawyer, Guo Guoting, had than stated that this invasion of Shi's privacy without authorized permission was illegal, which resulted in suspension of his license to practice law for one year by the Shanghai's department of Law.<sup>8</sup> This is an example of how much power the Chinese government has and how dangerous it can be to express your opinion and beliefs. Shi's imprisonment shows the Chinese governments intense effort to control the Internet which again is suppose to be the only break away from authorized media in China. The Internet Society in China (ISC), which falls under the Ministry of information Industry, has even taken it thus far that bloggers are now required to register and log in with the real names apposed to staying anonymous.

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<sup>8</sup> IPFA

## **Ways to get around the system and help from outside**

It is very clear that the dangers that come with blogging are severe however there are always ways, if you are determined enough, to get around “The Great Firewall” of China. Here is a list of services that can help internet users get a unfiltered access into China: Anonymous proxy (many free services provide web-based proxies), Witopia (a VPN service which provides relatively fast service), 12vpn (similar to Witopia with optimized configurations for selected regions), Freedur (plug-n-play proxy service with simple software for all platforms), Tor (Slow but very secure and reliable p2p onion routing network), Hotspot shield (Another VPN service but very slow), Freegate (proxy service created by Global Internet Freedom Consortium), UltraSurf (encrypted proxy service similar to freegate), SSH tunnel (requires sever and is for more technical people appropriate). It is clear that there are many ways to get around the system however this often does require some technical knowledge, so for the average Chinese citizen this is very difficult and hard to actually perform.<sup>9</sup>

Many projects have also started to develop that concentrate on Chinese censorship. One is for example, elgooG, which is a mirror image of the real Google website and works exactly the same, however everything within the website is mirrored. It was intended to be a parody site designed and hosted by the comedy website All Too Flat. However, even though the Government of China blocked Google in 2002, they did not block elgooG. Thereby giving the Chinese a back door method of accessing the search engine. When the government actually started to realize that elgooG, even though a parody site, still showed the actual search results of Google did they unblocked the actual Google site and instead decided to censor the search results on both sites.<sup>10</sup> Another project that was created to help the Chinese people get access was fuckflickr: narc free image gallery created by Free Art and Technology (F.A.T). It is an open-source image gallery software. It was created as an alternative to hosting your photos on a Yahoo! Flickr account allowing users to download a type of image bank to their computers where they too can add their own images. It was created in response to the imprisonment of Shi Tao who was

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<sup>9</sup> David

<sup>10</sup> elgooG

imprisoned after Yahoo! ratted him out<sup>11</sup>.

There have also been a lot of projects created, not to help the Chinese citizens get access, but to show the rest of the world how huge the boundaries are on internet in China compared to that abroad. One of these projects is the China Channel Firefox Add-on project. A website that allows people that do not live in the PRC to experience how it is to search on the web in China and see how huge the difference are and how extremely limited they are.<sup>12</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that the Internet has changed drastically from what it first intended to be, to what it has developed into. Freedom of self-expression and a borderless realm has become controlled, bordered and censored. It is clear that governments, especially the Chinese government, fear the Internet because it is so diverse, huge, growing so rapidly and is so hard to control. Communist China is feeling the power of the Internet, a free press whether they like it or not, and the Chinese people have finally found a way to express their thoughts to the world. Even though they still censor most information it still feels, to them, a point into the right direction. I fear however, as technology starts to develop further, censorship and the means to regulate the Internet will only grow, and governments will slowly but surely get full control over it. China might be the first country to censor the Internet to its extremes, however, its just matter of time until the rest of the world follows. In fact it is starting to show already in Western countries, which are already filtering the Internet for sites relating to piracy, terrorism, and child pornography. The Internet has changed, and it has affected the freedom to communicate severely. The Chinese bloggers revolution might have seemed to start a new more open era in China however this is not the case it has only started a new era of censorship and filtering. The revolution was doomed to fail from the start.

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<sup>11</sup> FuckFlickr

<sup>12</sup> China channel

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