

CENSORSHIP IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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Summary: The article deals with the problems of the censorship in the People's Republic of China. Press, television, radio and other mass media are analyzed. The conclusion is made that censorship has been prevalent in China for centuries.

Key words: censorship, mass media, press, radio, television.

Анотація: У статті йдеться про проблеми цензури у Китайській Народній Республіці. Аналізуються преса, телебачення, радіо та інші ЗМІ. Висновок полягає у тому, що цензура домінувала в Китаї упродовж сторіч.

Ключові слова: ЗМІ, преса, радіо, телебачення, цензура

Аннотация: В статье речь идет о проблемах цензуры в Китайской Народной Республике. Анализируются пресса, телевидение, радио и другие СМИ. Выводы состоят в том, что цензура доминировала в Китае на протяжении столетий.

Ключевые слова: пресса, радио, СМИ, телевидение, цензура.

Censorship has been prevalent in China for centuries; however it has become more relaxed recently. Since 1949, China has been under communist rule, and they have controlled every aspect of life from popular culture to mass media. During the 1950's, the government had total control over what information was shown to the people. They used propaganda to glorify the communist party and to depict capitalism and western culture as evil. During that period the Chinese people were effectively cut off from the outside world, and the people only heard exactly what the government wanted them to hear. The decade of 1966 through 1976 was known as the Cultural Revolution in China [4]. The protests of Chinese students and workers against the bureaucrats of the Chinese Communist Party, forced the government to relax their stance on censorship and the economy. Over the past three decades, nearly half of the economy has been privatized, and with it has come more freedom of speech [1, p. 1]. Nevertheless the general situation with freedom of speech in China continues to perturb all civilized and democratic world.

According to Article 35 of the Chinese Constitution, Chinese citizens enjoy freedom of speech and freedom of the press; however, these laws can not be used as a basis for lawsuits in China. Today, the average Chinese citizen experiences more freedom of expression than ever before but strict censorship legislation is still in place to monitor and control the flows of information and opinions in China.

The following is an overview of prior restraints, which refer to any system in which the government may deny a person the use of a forum for expression in advance of the actual expression, and censorship legislation in China.

There are several different types of prior restraints used to silence critics of the Communist Party and maintain control over political information: Legislative Prior Restraints – Administrative barriers to control freedom of speech, for instance the requirement for Chinese citizens to receive permission to publish information (licensing schemes); Political Prior Restraints – Forbidden topics are

sent out to editors by the Communist Party regularly. Common forbidden topics include constitutional amendments, political reform and the Tiananmen Square events; Psychological Prior Restraints – The Chinese government uses vague and broad laws on censorship to control opinions and expressions and encourage self-censorship; Technological Prior Restraints – Authorities in China use technology to block, filter and monitor information and opinions in various media outlets, including the internet, satellite television and radio.

But in general, Chinese laws require anyone intending to disclose any sensitive information about the government to get prior authorization. Laws relating to national security include Articles 102 through 112 and specify behaviors that are considered threats to national security, including stealing state secrets and subversion [2].

Chinese news, media, and the internet are more open today than they were in the past. Journalists do have more space for investigative reporting on some issues, such as police abuse and official corruption. The Chinese government still has the ability to restrict certain speech or punish people for holding and sharing their opinions. China allows free expression only until officials decide that something has become threatening to the Government's power. If the government is worried about a specific issue, they crack down on editors, journalists, and web users.

The press, television, radio, and other news media are controlled through a combination of laws, local propaganda departments, self-censorship by editors, and internalized rules about what is and is not an acceptable topic for reporting. Laws and regulations ban writing and reporting that might “undermine social stability” or challenge one-party rule. Propaganda departments issue statements on permissible topics and direct editors on how they should cover certain stories. Informal rules internalized by journalists control which issues may never be covered.

There are four major aspects of media control/censorship in mainland China. The first, and most important, is the effort to isolate China from the outside world. In order to do this, China makes it difficult for overseas journalists to gain access to the country for interviews. Even when permission is granted from the Chinese government, their freedom is highly restricted. China also restricts access to international media in China. One example of this is how customs officials seize international newspapers and magazines during searches. They also interfere with and disturb the reception of international radio services. There are also restrictions on international satellite services; the general public is kept from receiving such services. The second aspect of media control deals with the control of personnel. The reason that China can maintain such strict tight control is because general directors of media in China are in fact government officials who have been appointed by the government. In the face of political incident they respond in accordance to the wishes of government officials instead of playing the role of a professional journalist [5].

The third aspect of control involves the processing of articles. Each article goes through three or four stages of supervision versus in the US where the final

decision on publication is based on the reporter. There is also a system of punishment for media agencies which gives the agencies incentive to eliminate sensitive issues from their publication.

Another way to control the media is to control web content. As a matter of fact, the government of the People's Republic of China has the dubious distinction of being a world leader in Internet censorship.

In addition to an elaborate architecture of technological censorship based on website blocking, content filtering and keyword alerts, it is estimated that the government employs over 40,000 Internet censors, whose role is primarily focused on blocking and removing content critical of the Communist Party and the Chinese government, and identifying the contents' authors. In addition, government agencies under the Ministry of Propaganda employ large numbers of contracted Internet users to flood discussion forums with pro-government propaganda. As noted by the Special Rapporteur, the government also blocks access to popular social media websites such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Flickr [7].

China is also the origin of cyber-attacks that systematically target domestic and international human rights organizations working on China. In January 2010, Google accused China of orchestrating an attack against its popular email system, Google Mail, and its password technology, prompting the company to revisit its operations in China. All search engines, including Google, Yahoo, Bing and Baidu remain heavily censored [3].

The government has also turned ad hoc internet news censorship into an integral element of its already-stringent of system media censorship, ordering media outlets, ISPs and web platforms to conduct surveillance of their users, to remove news items as instructed on a daily basis, and to micro-manage news hierarchy systems so as to artificially alter most-popular items. The government increasingly resorts to cutting off the Internet entirely in areas hit by episodes of social unrest, such as Tibet in 2008, Xinjiang in 2009, and most recently parts of Inner Mongolia.

It also filters systematically any individual case of dissidents or government critics arrested or facing trial from micro-blogging sites.

Censorship in China also spreads on popular culture. Popular culture in China is severely restricted by censorship. Everything from which bands are allowed to perform, to which movies and television shows are allowed to be broadcast is controlled by the Chinese government. Currently, the government is loosening up their restrictions by allowing some western bands play in China, as well as the addition of music mega stores.

The most recent attempt by the Chinese government to become more acceptable of western pop culture was concert in Shanghai by the world's most famous rock band. After decades of clashing with the Chinese government over censorship issues, the Rolling Stones finally had their first concert in China. However, due to their limited exposure in China, there were no screaming fans waiting for them at the airport and most people were not familiar with their music. They performed to an extremely small crowd, in Rolling Stones terms, of 8,000 people. Although China is the world's most populous country, the concert was tiny

in comparison to the Rolling Stones concert in Rio de Janeiro this February that drew an audience of over 1.2 million. With ticket prices of \$37 to \$370, the concert was considered to be much too expensive for most Chinese people; the prices were well above the monthly salary for most people. However, the concert will also be broadcast for free on television after it is reviewed by the censors for inappropriate content, another first for a western band. Although the concert was considered to be a breakthrough for censorship in China, the government still restricted the Rolling Stones by banning 5 of their songs that they deemed to be inappropriate [6].

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