

# Freedom of speech, propaganda and censorship in the PRC: gradual progress or perverted nationalism, stagnated political reform and stunted civil society?

## Abstract

沈大伟在他写的《中国共产党：萎缩和适应》这本书的宣传系统的章节写道中国的宣传系统是中共控制整个社会萎缩的缩影。他认为，市场化，技术现代化，法制化和其他的趋势已经削弱了中共对信息的控制，同时中共已经适应这些新的挑战因此。据沈大伟说，安妮玛丽布莱迪的《营销专政》是自1999年以来唯一一本关于这方面的研究的著作。布莱迪认为，宣传系统的“制造同意”是维持一党专政的主要方式。这个想法值得进一步确认。中共的宣传和审查的效果如何？中国人相信宣传吗？他们被洗脑吗？在网络时代信息的漏洞多的时候，年轻人到底知道多少关于被封杀的人物和事件？该系统的萎缩并不意味着宣传的效果减小了。乔姆斯基认为，自我审查甚至在一个向美国自由言论受保护和尊重的国家的影响都很大。丁子霖已指出1989年民运被删除和整体失忆的成功，尤其是年轻一代的集体失忆。2003-2009在中国的学习生活中，笔者与年轻人聊天中也发现他们对这段历史的普遍无知。我建议调查这个题目的主要方式包括采访在香港留学的大陆大学生，和被封杀的作家和记者。

## Introduction

Freedom of Speech and Censorship have been important issues throughout the world, ever since Socrates chose to die rather than recant his views, and Qin Shi Huangdi buried 450 scholars alive after burning their books<sup>1</sup>. Although freedom of speech, especially in cyberspace, is much greater than before the reform period, questioning the legitimacy of the one-party system is off limits, and the government maintains a list of sensitive topics which are censored, such as Tibet and Uighur separatism, the June 4 massacre, higher-level cadre corruption and other topics whose discussion undermines the Party. In addition, the propaganda departments are constantly banning or restricting reporting of new topics, while producing official versions of other topics which have to be followed. A "Grand Paradox" can be observed, especially in cyberspace, with both general freedom and specific repression increasing.

### 引言

言论自由和审查在全球已是个很重大的争论。自过就有西方的苏格拉底宁死也不放弃他的观点，而在中国秦朝就有焚书坑儒的悲剧。尽管言论自由尤其是在网络空间，比改革时期已经有很大的改善了。但是对一党专政的质疑仍是被禁止的，而且政府保持对一系列敏感话题的封杀，如西藏维吾尔族分裂主义，六四大屠杀，上级干部的腐败和其他的破坏党的话题。此外，在建立必须遵循的其他主题的官方版本时，宣传部门不断的禁止限制新课题报告。从“大悖论”

可以看出，尤其是网络空间，不管是整体在还是特殊话题，言论自由有改善的同时对言论自由的打压也在加大。

## What I propose to study:

- 1) The Chinese Propaganda System in the news media, cyberspace, and education
- 2) The censorship of dissenting views or unharmonious information carried out by the Propaganda System
- 3) The effectiveness of censorship in the Education system and the media in removing certain events from the collective memory.
- 4) The extent of ignorance amongst university students of certain historical events which are inconvenient for CCP historiography, such as the 1989 democracy movement and its violent suppression, and China's history of military aggression against its neighbours.

我要研究的内容：

- 1) 中国宣传系统中的新闻媒体，网络空间以及教育
- 2) 被宣传系统所封杀的不同看法和不和谐信息
- 3) 审查从集体记忆删除某些事件对教育体系和媒体的影响
- 4) 大学生对某些给中国史学带来麻烦的某系历史事件的无知，如1989年的民运及其暴力镇压，及中国历史上对邻国的军事侵略。

## Why it should be studied:

There are many good reasons to study the Propaganda System

- 1) The Propaganda System is a microcosm of CCP control and it's "atrophy and adaption"<sup>2</sup>.

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1. This is immortalized in the Chinese idiom 焚书坑儒

2) China is investing 45 billion yuan in a massive expansion of its external propaganda<sup>3</sup>, while simultaneously tightening control of internal media<sup>45</sup>. This is happening at a time when government and commercial news agencies in western countries are under pressure and cutting back on news reporting.

3)

Since 1989, and the strengthening of "patriotic education", a generation of students have been indoctrinated in a rather one-sided, victim-victor version of history, in which China's imperialist and Communist past is conveniently censored<sup>6</sup>. Now that this generation is entering higher education, we have an opportunity to test the results of such propaganda on this generation.

4) It could be argued that the vitality of the propaganda system is inversely proportional to freedom of expression and freedom of information, which is itself a precondition for political progress. A fully functional legal system, democratic government and an independent media all depend on freedom of information and freedom of speech. Clarifying the strengths, weaknesses and overall effectiveness of the system helps us evaluate the possibility of political development and better China-West relations. Thus the vitality of the propaganda-censorship system is a yardstick for China's political stagnation, and its atrophy is a yardstick for progress.

5) The issue of censorship is already a source of friction in International Relations and likely to become more important over time<sup>8</sup>. Free access to information is becoming more important to economic growth and free flow of knowledge may become a trade issue. This issue has been highlighted by the controversial decision by Google to close down their Chinese search business, and subsequent comments by Hillary Clinton on the issue.

6) The system has not been studied much, except to dismiss its importance<sup>9</sup>.

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2. Iavid Shambaugh, China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation, 2008

3. Nicholas Bequelin, China's New Propaganda Machine, Wall Street Journal, Jan 2009  
According to the report, the investment will include a 24 hour English language TV news service, 86 more overseas Xinhua bureaus and new programming in French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123326012456829891.html>

4. According to a FEER report, the CCP has also created an online force of 280,000 commentators to promote the party line: [http://www.danwei.org/featured\\_video/david\\_bandurski\\_on\\_the\\_web\\_war.php](http://www.danwei.org/featured_video/david_bandurski_on_the_web_war.php)

5. The International Federation of Journalists report, **China clings to Control, Press Freedom in 2009**, paints a picture of increased control of media in China in 2009.

See <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/assets/docs/026/101/5bc771a-e97d065.pdf>

6. Yuan Weishi caused the controversy in 2005 with his criticism of bias in history textbooks, which was based on a comparison of history textbooks in the mainland and Hong Kong. The authorities used the publication of this essay in *bingdian* to order the closure of the magazine.

Alisa Jones has given a good overview of secondary school history textbooks in her PhD thesis.

W.J.F.J Jenner, in the Tyranny of History, describes the problems of state-centrism and ethnocentrism in Chinese historiography.

7. The "momentum factors" which include: A) Rising living standards B) Awareness of legal rights such as property rights and consumer and rising expectations of information rights.

C) Urbanisation

D) Spread of Computer access and falling price barriers to information

E) Faster Internet access speeds

F) The porous, decentralized nature of Internet.

8. Dong Xiang's editor said on RFA Google's departure is the biggest attack on the CCP in recent years

9. Brady, Marketing Dictatorship, 2008

Most studies have focused on the newest aspects, especially the internet, without looking at the whole system, which includes literature, primary, secondary and higher education, the arts, popular music, cinema, Confucius Institutes, etc.

7) The effectiveness of the system has not been evaluated.

8) The system is a large and expensive one with deleterious effects on society and China's foreign relations. The system is damaging to China's soft power, because it robs China's institutions of vitality and credibility, especially the media and education.

9) China's censorship activities have become a negative role model, described as the Beijing Consensus, the China model, etc. Other governments and jurisdictions are following China's example of censoring the Internet<sup>1011</sup>.

10) The system prevents China from realizing its potential, while its continued existence and strengthening provides support for Pei's "trapped transition" theory of China's development.

我要研究的理由

研究宣传系统的充分理由太多了

1) 宣传系统是中共统治及其“萎缩和适应”的缩影

2) 当西方国家的政府和新闻机构在经济的压力下消减新闻汇报时，中国在加紧对内媒控制的同时，正在投入45亿的资金加大外媒的宣传规模。

3) 自从1989年，“爱国教育”的加强，这一代的学生已被及片面的受害者—胜利者版本的历史洗脑了，在这个版本的历史书里中国封建帝国和过去的中共被便利的删除。既然这代人正在接受高等教育，我们有机会在这代人身上测试中共的宣传的成效

4) 宣传系统的力量和言论自由是成反比的。言论自由是政治进步的前提条件。

一个完全有效的法律制度，民主政府和媒体独立全取决于信息自由和言论自由。区分这个系统的优缺点和它导致无知的影响力有利于我们评估改善中国的政治发展和中国的中西关系可利用和改善的余地。因此，宣传审查系统的活力是衡量中国政治停滞的尺度，而它的萎缩是衡量中国政治进步的尺度。

5) 这个问题已经成为国际关系冲突的一个来源，而且随着时间的推移会越来越激烈。信息的自由获取对经济的增长越来越重要，而知识的自由交流可能会成为一个贸易问题。

6) 除了驳回它的重要性，对这个系统的研究已经差不多了

7) 宣传系统的影响力未被评估过

8) 宣传系统对中国的社会和外交关系是极其有害的。它破坏了中国的软实力，因为它使中国的各个机构丧失了活力和信誉，特别是媒体和教育

9) 中国的审查活动已成为被描述为北京共识，中国模式的一个负面榜样。其他国家和司法机构正在按照中国的榜样对互联网设限。

10) 宣传系统阻碍了中国实现它的前景，它的存在和加强为中国发展的裴氏“转型陷阱”理论提供了依据。

**How I would research this topic.**

Censorship is a sensitive topic which is itself subject to censorship<sup>12</sup>.

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10. US counter intelligence when suppressing leaks of sensitive material has used the justification that China is blocking wikileaks.org: <http://file.wikileaks.org/file/us-intel-wikileaks.pdf>

11. On Mar 23, 2010, a Brazilian court in the northern state of Rondonia slapped the search engine giant with a fine of 2,700 dollars for each day that the pages remained up on the social networking site.

The court also ordered Google to stop sleazy material from being posted on its social networking site, brushing aside the internet behemoth's argument that it did not have the technical means or workforce required to police or censor pages on Orkut.

The court also noted that Google already implemented such curbs on its pages in China. However, it did not address the Google-China dispute.

The lawsuit reportedly came up when two teenagers complained that the jokes on Orkut pages offended them.

Orkut has its biggest following in Brazil. <http://news.oneindia.in/2010/03/24/fresh-censorship-trouble-for-google-in-brazil.html>

First I would describe the subject giving an overview including important elements which are not currently fashionable as the internet these days, such as education. I would

1) Draw on the work of Shambaugh, Alisa Jones, Brady, He Qinglian and MacKinnon to describe the system.

2) I would update this work with information about recent developments such as press and NGO reports.

3) I would supplement this with interviews with NGOs, writers, journalists, dissidents, bloggers who have been censored, and if possible central, provincial and local officials of the propaganda systems, 50 cent commentators and ISP "net mamas"<sup>13</sup>.

Having described the system, I would examine its effectiveness in two ways, which could be described as inputs and outputs of the system.

1) By putting sensitive material into cyberspace in the way that MacKinnon has done<sup>14</sup>, and observing what gets censored in which virtual space. I would partially repeat MacKinnon's research to see how censorship has changed over time. This part of my research would take an up to date snapshot of the effectiveness of censorship in destroying information at the stage when it is introduced to society. However, MacKinnon's research, which was conducted by a team, seems to have taken about three months full time work<sup>15</sup>. As I would not have time to repeat the whole series of tests, I would repeat it with just the latest taboo topic.

2) To examine the long term effectiveness of censorship, I would also conduct a survey of a group of young mainland Chinese who have been brought up in the "re-born" propaganda state since 1989 to measure how effectively it has removed certain important information from society and how ignorant these people are of such important information, (eg events of 1989). To avoid the difficulties of research on the mainland, I propose to survey groups of mainland students in Hong Kong and compare their knowledge of key events, such as the 1989 democracy movement, and key people, such as Zhao Ziyang, etc, with local students. I propose to re-survey them at a three year interval, and to learn how their awareness of these issues changes during their stay. This survey could take the form of a questionnaire, with questions multiple choice questions. I am not sure how to do this without putting ideas into people's minds, but it could be in the form of a multiple choice questionnaire.

Example questions:

1: Who the Premier of China was in the 1980s? (The death of Zhao Ziyang went almost unreported in the mainland media, and in my experience most young people know almost nothing about this man although he was the Premier of China for most of the 80s and crucial in the success of the reform period.)

2: Who invaded Vietnam in 1979? (To test the myth, which many Chinese people have told me, and which according to my readings is taught in schools, that China has never invaded another country. )

In addition, I propose to survey British students studying Chinese in China and compare their knowledge of and attitudes to recent political events that have occurred during their stay in China with British students studying in the UK, to test the influence of the propaganda environment on expatriates.

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12. It can be dangerous for Chinese citizens to provide information to foreigners on the topic. The authorities have imprisoned such citizens on more than one occasion, often by applying the laws on State secrets. Several examples can be found in State Secrets: China's Legal Labyrinth, Human Rights in China report

13. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big\\_mama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_mama)

Tsui Lockman, "Big Mama is Watching You: Internet Control by the Chinese government <<http://lokman.nu/thesis/>>, unpublished MA thesis, University of Leiden

14. The research is summarised in: <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2378/2089>

15. the International Federation of journalists 2009 report suggests

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Anne-Marie Brady Marketing Dictatorship

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Meixin Pei, China's Trapped Transition

Jiao Guobiao China's Information Pigsty

Yuan Shiwei, Modernization and History Textbooks, [http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20060126\\_1.htm](http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20060126_1.htm)

Alisa Jones Changing the past to build the future : history education in post-Mao China. [PhD thesis](#), University of Leeds,

Rebecca MacKinnon [Congressional Hearing Testimony](#) 2010

### Web resources

<http://www.indexoncensorship.org/> index on censorship

<http://www.rfa.org/> Radio Free Asia, including [timeline](#):

<http://chinadigitaltimes.net/> Uncensored news and news on censorship

<http://chinasmack.com/> translations of netizen comment

<http://www.internationalpen.org.uk/> International Pen

<http://www.zonaeuropa.com/weblog.htm>

[www.hrichina.org/](http://www.hrichina.org/) Human Rights in China NGO

<http://bbs.ywms.net/space/batch.viewlink.php?itemid=23144> Michael Anti's Manual for new journalists