

Project title: China's Internet as Signifier: Contradicting Discourses, Paradigms, and Interpretations

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What are the underlying power-structures and existing societal paradigms which shape the differing perception of the role of the Internet in China in the “West” and in China?

My hypotheses and some preliminary conclusions could be described as follows: Fundamental differences can be found between the discourses of Western analysts and the discourses of Chinese analysts regarding the social and political impact of the Internet in China. Recent research on the Internet in China carried out by the West has too often focused on questions of censorship, the blocking of websites, the democratizing effects of the Internet in China and on the use of the Internet by dissident groups. Western discourses have focused on democratization and political change, paying little attention to broader social changes. During the 1990s, a prevalent view in Western publications was that the introduction of the Internet would result in Western models of democracy and democratic participation taking root in Chinese society, but in recent years, the Chinese state/Communist Party has increasingly been viewed as successful in controlling the Internet. This discourse is, however, technology-deterministic and is only an “inverse” version of the former discourse.

The recent case of Google and its involvement in China (“Don’t be evil, Google”) (<http://www.pcauthority.com.au/feature.aspx?ClaFID=1333>)¹ has – not for the first time – shown that the perception of the role of the Internet in China in the West and in China differs fundamentally. Political commentators, but also to some degree Western

¹ All websites mentioned were accessed on March 28, 2006 if not otherwise mentioned. I would like to thank the Singapore Internet Research Centre, School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University, for their support during my stay as a visiting fellow March/April 2006.

academics, have often focused merely on questions of censorship, the blocking of websites, and the possible democratizing effects of the Internet in China and on the use of the Internet by dissident groups. The Chinese discourse, however, regards the Internet as a signifier for modernization and for economic progress. In addition, a very active intellectual scene, including bloggers, has recently started to react to the Western discourse employing postcolonial and deconstructivist approaches; here the West is accused of an unfair bias against China

In this paper, I will analyze some of the underlying power-structures and struggles which have shaped the differing perceptions. In addition, I will also take a look on the historical background which has influenced the currently existing mutual distrust.

My paper is organized as follows

- Two examples: the launch of Google.cn vs. the alleged “closing down of” Message Milk (<http://lydon.yculblog.com/>) / Milk Pig (<http://milkpig.yculblog.com/>)”
- The question of censorship and its embeddedness in “US” / “universal values”
- The Chinese – intellectual – counter-discourse: Blogs and BBSs and how to evaluate its role
- The Chinese “official” discourse on the Internet and its role for modernization and “leap-frogging”
- Conclusion

Two examples: the launch of Google.cn vs. the alleged “closing down of” Message Milk / Milk Pig

I would like to start with a very recent example – that is the case of Google launching its service Google.cn (www.google.cn) and the discussion in Western media; the involvement of the American legislative bodies (U.S. House of Representatives), and the reaction of some famous Chinese bloggers such as Wang Xiaofeng 王曉峰 and Yuan Lei 袁蕾 who closed down their blogs “Massage Milk 按摩乳” and “Milk Pig 乳豬” with an ambiguous message on the empty page which led to reports on new censorship measures by Western media.

This debate on Google and its involvement in China started with Google’s decision to launch a specific service Google.cn, which would be registered according to the Chinese law, and thus include self-censorship on certain political sensitive issues (pornography should be also an issue, but was no part of the Western discussion). What Google did, was not really different from what other companies had done before (Yahoo/MSN). Not only in China, but also in other parts of the world: as a European, I would like to mention two examples; France and Germany have explicit laws against Nazi propaganda and the denial of the holocaust. International companies such as Ebay and Yahoo, therefore, had to ban the sale of Nazi memorabilia from its Internet auctions, and some websites are filtered.²

² See, Peng Hwa Ang, *Ordering Chaos: Regulating the Internet*, Singapore: Nanyang Technological University, p. 40.

Excursus: Google search for the German “revisionist” website vho.org (denial of Holocaust):



Zur URL vho.org wurden keine Informationen gefunden.

- Webseiten von [Website vho.org](http://Website.vho.org) finden.
- Webseiten suchen, die [den Begriff "vho.org" enthalten](#).

Aus Rechtsgründen hat Google 1 Ergebnis(se) von dieser Seite entfernt. Weitere [Informationen über diese Rechtsgründe](#) finden Sie unter ChillingEffects.org.

A search with for the address www.vho.org with www.google.de delivers no results (unlike a search with www.google.com), but it is explicitly explained that out of legal reasons some results have been removed: “Aus Rechtsgründen hat Google 1 Ergebnis(se) von dieser Seite entfernt. Weitere Informationen über diese Rechtsgründe finden Sie unter ChillingEffects.org.” [Out of legal reasons, Google has removed 1 result from that page]. Although this kind of censorship is sporadically discussed, Germany in general is not accused of carrying out censorship, and even some American legislators explicitly mention the right for Germany to deal specifically with the topic of the Holocaust (see <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/Censorship/Internet%20Censorship%20Report.htm>).

Unlike the German restrictions, which are widely accepted, Google has been harshly criticized for its decision to launch Google.cn: The news were full of reports with titles such as

- “Censorship: Google’s Newest Business Strategy” (<http://silverchips.mbhs.edu/inside.php?sid=6263>),
 - “How Google Censors its Chinese Portal” (<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2006/02/02/MNGRAH1IFA1.DTL>),
 - “Don’t be Evil, Google” (<http://www.pcauthority.com.au/feature.aspx?CIaFID=1333>),
 - “Live Talk: China’s Web Censors” (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11432971/site/newsweek/>),
 - “Google and the China Syndrome” (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11178913/site/newsweek/>)
- and last but not least CNN reported on
- “Tibetans Protest China’s Google” (http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/asiapcf/02/15/google.censored.ap/?section=cnn_latest).

All these articles stressed the importance of “freedom of speech.” “Freedom of speech is so fundamental in human rights” (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11432971/site/newsweek/>) and its denial by the Chinese government; Chinese explanations for filtering – may they be acceptable or not – were not mentioned, and

the absolute priority of the “freedom of speech”, an assumption firmly embedded in American thinking, was not questioned. Counter-arguments and examples such as the before-mentioned German legislation (or Singaporean and Malaysian legislation) were not only disregarded but usually not discussed at all.³

In addition, the launch of Google.cn had also political consequences: One of the CEO of Google, Elliot Schrage gave a Testimony of Google Inc. before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, and the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations, Committee on International Relations, United States House of Representatives. The fact itself that such a testimony was given shows the interest of the US in China’s Internet and political development, easily to be interpreted as interfering in China’s sovereign affairs by the Chinese side (<http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2006/02/testimony-internet-in-china.html>).⁴

Google, however, gave a quite realistic picture of the Chinese search habits and the interest of Chinese users in local news: “On the other hand, we believe that even within the local legal and regulatory constraints that exist in China, a speedy, reliable Google.cn service will increase overall access to information for Chinese Internet users. We noted, for example, that the vast majority of Internet searches in China are for local Chinese content, such as local news, local businesses, weather, games and entertainment, travel information, blogs, and so forth. Even for political discussions, Chinese users are much more interested in local Chinese Internet sites and sources than from abroad. Indeed, for Google web search, we estimate that fewer than 2% of all search queries in China would result in pages from which search results would be unavailable due to filtering” (ibid.)

Most of the articles and reports on Google condemned the decision; some more moderate voices could be found (“Censoring Google. Freeing China”, http://www.taemag.com/issues/articleid.18992/article_detail.asp) which showed a greater understanding of Google’s decision: nevertheless they also stressed possible democratic changes brought by Google’s involvement in China, and the basic assumption that the Internet in general would change China towards the desired direction was not questioned.

After the Western media had again criticized China for her censorship measures, it was widely expected that Chinese intellectuals, journalists, and of course also the very active blogger scene, would react and follow the Western critic. Chinese bloggers, however, became involved in a way most Western observers had not expected: Two famous blogs, *Massage Milk* and *Milk Pig*, posted on the March 8, 2006 that “due to unavoidable reasons which one is everyone is familiar, this blog is temporarily closed” (see, for example, http://www.virtualchina.org/2006/03/the_staged_demi.html); that rumor spread rapidly that the site was blocked by the Chinese authorities; but it was only a “hoax:” Wang Xiaofeng explained later that he and Yuan

³ Ibid, pp. 54-55; see also see also Randolph Kluver, “US and Chinese Policy Expectations of the Internet,” *china information*, Vol. XIX (2), pp. 299-324.

⁴ China’s foreign relations are officially guided by the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” from 1954. In particular, the issues “non-interference in each other’s internal affairs,” and “equality and mutual benefit” play an important role in the discussion of human rights and freedom of speech; see “Backgrounder: Five principles of peaceful coexistence (2004/06/14),” online: <http://www.chinaembassy.org/in/eng/ssygd/fiveprinciple/t132640.htm>, accessed 12 January 2005.

Lei intended to show that the Western press is “irresponsible” and that the hoax was designed “to give foreign media a lesson that Chinese affairs are not always the way you think” (http://online.wsj.com/public/article/SB114229717280997182.html?mod=hpp_free_to_day) and “They are not just supposed to report based on their own perceptions, without understanding the circumstances in China.” (ibid. see also for the history of that hoax <http://www.danwei.org/archives/002468.html>).

The Western media reported on that hoax, as well as some bloggers (http://www.jeffooi.com/2006/03/the_great_chinese_censorship_h.php); instead of analyzing the reasons for the bloggers’ decision and instead of discussing Western views and perspectives on China, a Wallstreet article concluded: “Reporters without Borders issued a correction to its statement on March 9, calling the incident a ‘joke.’ But Julien Pain, who runs the organization’s Internet Freedom Desk, says he doesn’t think Mr. Wang understands the consequences of the incident.1 ‘If some bloggers start crying wolf this way,’ Mr. Pain says, ‘nobody will listen to us when we try to support those who really need help. Censorship exists, as well as repression against Internet writers.’ (ibid.) Even Internet experts wrote in the Yahoo Chinese-internetresearch group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/chineseinternetresearch/> March 16, 2006) “It’s a shame that something like this actually happened. Freedom of speech is a basic right in the Constitution of the People’s Republic. It is not granted or assumed by any westerner. But here they are, these people crying ‘we want to be abused, and let me show you how I can abuse myself, and, my readers!’ What a pity, especially consider that these are among China’s most famous bloggers. I do agree though that international press needs to get beyond knee-jerk reactions. But we don’t need such hoaxes to make this point. This is only going to be self-aggrandizing for a very short time but, in the long run, hurting everybody except a few.”. In addition, the Chinese media also reported on that hoax, and referred to the fact that the “closing” took place on the International Women’s Day (see “Xifang meiti de ‘jiaobao yu pianjian’ 西方媒體的” 驕傲與偏見” (Arrogance and prejudices of the Western media, http://news.xinhuanet.com/newmedia/2006-03/13/content_4296678.htm).

The question of censorship and its embeddedness in “US” and “universal values”

The media discourse on Chinas Internet in general and on Goggle in particular, highlights the underlying assumption the Internet is still regarded as a tool for promoting Western values which are, however, perceived in the West as universal values.⁵ Thus, early statements of the 1990s on the relationship between the Internet and Western/American values have not changed; in 1995, Fernback and Thompson wrote “Ideologically, community within cyberspace appears to emphasize a shared belief in the principles of free speech, individualism, equality, and open access to the same symbolic interests that define the character of American democracy.”⁶ Thus, from the

⁵ See also: Huang Qing, “Secular limits of universal values,” http://english.people.com.cn/200512/22/eng20051222_230114.html, 22 Dec 2005, accessed 18 March 2006

⁶ Jan Fernback and Brad Thompson, “Virtual Communities: Abort, Retry, Failure?,” revised version of a paper presented at the annual convention of the International Communication Association, Albuquerque, New Mexico, May 1995, <http://www.rheingold.com/texts/techpolitix/VCCivil.html>,

very first beginning the Internet (also in the essential writings of Howard Rheingold) was linked to US American ideas; the problem, however, was the spread of the Internet in the following decade to many other places where it was regarded from different perspectives. Howard Rheingold commented: “Civil society, a web of informal relationships that exist independently of government institutions or business organizations, is the social adhesive necessary to hold divergent communities of interest together into democratic societies. The future of civil society in America and elsewhere is uncertain, even gloomy.”⁷ He then posed the question: “Can virtual communities help revitalize civil society or are online debates nothing more than distracting simulations of authentic discourse? Enthusiasts like myself point to examples of many-to-many communication that appear to leverage power in the real world of politics.”⁸

Thus, assuming Western values were superior, the Internet as a “technology of freedom” increased speculation about the degree of change which could be expected in Chinese society:⁹ media commentators, politicians and political scientists in the West, the so-called “China-watchers,” have since the introduction of the Internet in China, focused on the potentially great changes being wrought in China by the introduction of the Internet – great changes which would inevitably led to China become more open, more pluralistic, more free, that is to say, more like the US: “The biggest of big brothers is increasingly helpless against communications technology. Information is the oxygen of the modern age” as former US-President Ronald Reagan said.¹⁰ The first discourse on the Internet in China could be entitled the “liberation discourse,”

accessed June 2, 2004.

⁷ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community, Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, Reading: Mass.: Addison-Wesley 1993, online <http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book>, accessed June 1, 2004.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Bryce T. McIntyre, “China’s Use of the Internet: A Revolution on Hold, in: Paul SN Lee (ed.), *Telecommunications and Development in China*, Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press 1997, pp. 149-169; Jack L. Qiu, “Virtual Censorship in China: Keeping the Gate between the Cyberspaces,” *International Journal of Communications Law and Policy*, 4, 1999/2000, pp. 1-25, online: http://www.ijclp.org/4_2000/ijclp_webdoc_1_4_2000.html, accessed January 4, 2005; Michael S. Chase and James C. Mulvenon, *You’ve Got Dissent! Chinese Dissident Use of the Internet and Beijing’s Counter-Strategies*, Washington, D. C.: Rand Corporation, 2002; Randy and Jack. L. Qiu, “The Internet and Democracy in China,” in: Indrajit Banerjee (ed.), *The Internet and Democracy in Asia*, Singapore: Times Academic Press 2003; Philip Sohmen, “Taming the Dragon: China’s Efforts to Regulate the Internet,” *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* 1 (2001), pp. 17-26, online: <http://www.stanford.edu/group/sjeaa/journal1/china1.pdf>, accessed January 4, 2005.. Empirical data on the use of the Internet and the most recent figures can be found at <http://www.cnnic.com.cn>, the website of the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), which published the first statistical report to provide various data on the development of the Internet in China; since 1998, these reports, which include information on user demographics, access locations and average online behavior, have been published twice-yearly. For the problems of the data material, see Karsten Giese, “Internet Growth and the Digital Divide: Implications for Spatial Development,” in: Christopher R. Hughes and Gudrun Wacker (eds.), *China and the Internet: Politics of the Digital Leap Forward*, London and New York: Routledge 2003, pp. 30-57, especially pp. 31-35.

¹⁰ Roland Specker, “China und das Internet: Bringt die ‘Technology of freedom’ die Demokratie ins Reich der Mitte?”, online http://socio.ch/intcom/t_rspeck01.htm, accessed August 7, 2004.

where in addition to the involvement of Chinese users, the role of the West is emphasized: “How the U.S. Can Free China’s Internet”¹¹ is a typical heading in this kind of discourse. The “China watchers,” have often expressed great “enthusiasm” for the supposedly liberating effects of this technology. They not only see the Internet as an uncontrollable form of technology; they also refer to the wealth of information available on the Internet which eschews attempts at silencing voices. Former US President Bill Clinton pointed out that “attempting to control the Internet in China was like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall.”¹² The US Embassy in Beijing has remarked that “the Internet will almost certainly become a more important, positive force in facilitating the rights of Chinese users to be informed, and to be heard” and have concluded that “as the number of Internet users grows, ... the medium will become an increasingly important tool in fostering the development of civil society in China.”¹³

What has changed during the last years was not the discourse, but the technology, and every time a new technology emerged, it was described as being **the** essential tool for democratization: It started with the WorldWideWeb and the possibility that everybody could be his/her own publisher, later peer-to-peer technology was mentioned; unlike their Western counter-parts, Chinese were supposed to search for the Tiananmen-Papers;¹⁴ mass mails – usually named “spam” in the West – were considered to be valuable for the dissemination of information on Falun Gong instead of downloading music and software; BBSs were seen as critical political tools (even when discussions on famous BBS such as *Qiangguo luntan* 強國論壇, but also other BBSs after events such as the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade did not correspond to Western expectations);¹⁵ today BLOGS are regarded as one of the ultimate tools to spread freedom to China and finally to overthrow the Chinese government. In addition, international companies such as Google are also mentioned in bringing change to China.¹⁶

¹¹ Online <http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2002/5/2/192846.shtml>, accessed February 17, 2005.

¹² Quoted in Shanthi Kalathil, “Cyber Censors: A Thousand Web Sites Almost Bloom,” reprinted from the Asian Wall Street Journal, August 29, 2000, online http://www.ceip.org/files/Publications/thousand_websites.asp?p=5&from=pubdate, accessed May 24, 2004.

¹³ “Kids, Cadres and ‘Cultists’ – All Love It: Growing Influence of the Internet in China. A March 2001 Report from U.S. Embassy Beijing,” online <http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/sandt/netoverview.html> 2001, accessed June 5, 2004.

¹⁴ See, for example, Michael, James Mulvenon, and Nina Hachigian, “Comrade to Comrade. Network: The social and political implications of peer-to-peer networks Comrade to comrade networks: the social and political implications of peer-to-peer networks in China, in Jens Damm / Simona Thomas (eds), *Chinese Cyberspaces* London/New York: Routledge 2006, pp. 64-101; see also www.freenetproject.org/papers/freenet-ieee.pdf

¹⁵ Michael S. Chase, James C. Mulvenon, *You’ve Got Dissent! Chinese Dissident Use of the Internet and Beijing’s Counter-Strategies*, Santa Monica: RAND, 2002, online ; http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1543/MR1543.ch1.pdf, accessed March 28, 2006; Internet Activism in Asia, “Dissident E-Zine Threatens China,” online: http://journalism.uts.edu.au/subjects/oj1/oj1_a2002/internetactivisminasia/china_activists_vip.html, accessed February 12, 2005.

¹⁶ The same was true for the WTO when arguments were made which saw China’s admission as a “Trojan horse” for a system change; see, “Trading Despotism for Democracy,” UNPAN,

Interesting enough, these portrayals of the Internet as a liberating and democratizing force which can only be held back by strict governmental control is different to the kinds of narratives that are used to describe the effects of the Internet on Western society. “Picture, if you will an information infrastructure that encourages censorship, surveillance and suppression of the creative impulse. Where anonymity is outlawed and every penny spent is accounted for. Where the powers that be can smother subversive (or economically competitive) ideas in the cradle, and no one can publish even a laundry list without the imprimatur of Big Brother. Some prognosticators are saying that such a construct is nearly inevitable. And this infrastructure is none other than the former paradise of rebels and free-speechers: the Internet.”¹⁷

These discussions usually take place in the press, supported by Western bloggers, but also the academia focuses too often in research questions which are part of a certain US-/Western based paradigm: Michael S. Chase and James C. Mulvenon at the RAND Institute in Santa Monica, for example, formulate the key questions for their research as follows: “Does the Internet provide dissidents with potent new tools that they can use to promote their causes, break through the barriers of censorship, and perhaps ultimately undermine the power and authority of non-democratic regimes? Or, on the contrary, is it more likely that those authoritarian governments will use the Internet as another instrument to repress dissent, silence their critics, and strengthen their own power?”¹⁸

The issue is getting much more multi-layered when we have a look, for at example, at the works by Rebecca McKinnon (at the moment at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Harvard Law School). She analyzes China’s Internet and its role within broader societal changes, and delivers a great piece of work.¹⁹ Still, political change in China is not only analyzed in her work, but seen as a wishful aim without asking questions what would happen and what could be the consequences of political change? It seems that in a hierarchy of political stability, social order and freedom of speech, the latter is still regarded as the ultimate aim, and warnings of states such as China (but also Singapore and Malaysia) that freedom of speech, individualism, might be potentially as dangerous as an authoritarian regime are neglected²⁰

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan001881.pdf>.

¹⁷ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community, Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*.

¹⁸ James C. Mulvenon, *You’ve Got Dissent! Chinese Dissident Use of the Internet and Beijing’s Counter-Strategies*, Washington, D. C.: Rand Corporation, 2002

¹⁹ Rebecca McKinnon

http://rconversation.blogs.com/rconversation/files/mackinnon_chinese_blogs_chapter.pdf.

²⁰ For the debate on Asian values, see Tommy Koh, “The 10 Values Which Undergird East Asian Strength and Success,” *The International Herald Tribune*, 11-12 December 1993, p. 6. See also the comments of Lee Kuan Yew, “Society vs. the Individual,” *Time*, 14 June 1993; Fareed Zakaria, “Culture Is Destiny: A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew,” *Foreign Affairs*, 73, no. 2 (1994). For an overview, “Asian Values’ and Democracy in Asia, Proceedings of a Conference, Held on 28 March 1997 at Hamamatsu, Shizuoka, Japan, as Part of the First Shizuoka Asia-Pacific Forum, <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/asian-values.html>.

The Chinese – intellectual – counter-discourse: Blogs and BBSs and how to evaluate its role

Taking a look at the Chinese discourses on the Internet; I would like to start with the intellectual counter-discourse: which has developed more recently and which is aimed – primarily – at the Western media. Chinese intellectuals, often with an academic degree received in North-America, Australia or Europe, are observing the Western discourse in China and react – as in the mentioned case of the two bloggers – rather sophisticated on the Western attempts to change China.²¹

The “counter-discourse” seems to be often nationalistic, focusing on China’s superiority, and expresses dissatisfaction with Western media reporting on China. The basic aim, however, is to emphasize the importance of equal relations of China with the West. A patronizing and “colonial” attitude of the West towards China is strictly objected and Western criticisms of the Chinese system are analyzed and deconstructed:

In many ways, this discourse has no Internet-specific elements, but is only understandable taking into account China’s history and her encounters with the West and with Japan: the degradation of becoming a semi-colony after the Opium Wars in the middle of the 19th century, the forced opening of the treaty ports under unfavorable conditions, the loss of Taiwan to Japan under the treaty of Shimonoseki and the 1895 cession of Hong Kong to Great Britain. All these events led to long discussions within the Chinese intellectual world, how to become strong again: the one side sought the solution in wholesale Westernization (*quanpan xihua* 全盤西化) as the solution (May Fourth Movement 1919, Students Protests in 1989 as culmination), the other stressed the own ability of the Chinese to become strong again (victory of the Communists in 1949, but also the nationalist discourse after 1992).²²

Thus, the boom of China’s Internet has been interpreted by many Chinese intellectuals and users in term of China becoming a strong and technology advanced nation: As an example, I would like to quote Wang Jianshuo on an interview with the BBC: “The reason I was not comfortable with the interview is not talking about censorship. The problem is, I don’t want to be put into a condition that there is a pre-set conclusion and my role is just to act as a victim in the story and confirm it” and

²¹ See for example Wang Jianshuo who is perfectly able to forward his arguments in English; in addition, one of the best-known works critically (and partly polemical) dealing with the West was *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* 中國可以說不 (China can say no) –written by academics who spent some time in the US.: Song Qiang 宋強, Qiao Bian 喬邊, Zhang Xiaobo 張小波 alias Zhang Zangzang 張藏藏, *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu: lengzhanhou shidai de zhengzhi yu qinggan jueze* 中國可以說不 - 冷戰後時代的政治與情感抉擇 (China can say no - political and emotional choices in the post-Cold War era), Beijing: Zhonghua nongongshang lianhe chubanshe, 1996; Gu Qingsheng 古清生, Qiao Bian 喬邊, Song Qiang 宋強, Tang Zhengyu 湯正宇, Zhang Xiaobo 張小波 alias Zhang Zangzang 張藏藏 *Zhongguo haishi neng shuo bu Zhongguo keyi shuo bu xupian: guoji guanxi bianhu yu women de xianshi yingdui* 中國還是能說不 - 中國可以說不續篇: 國際關係變數與我們的現實應對 (China can still say no - the sequel of China can say no. The variable of international relations and our realist approach), Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 1996.

²² See also, Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, “Art, Culture, and Cultural Criticism in Post-New China,” *New Literary History* 28.1 (1997) 111-133, online: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/new_literary_history/v028/28.1lu.html, accessed March 17, 2006.

“create an exciting picture for the ‘civilized’ world” (http://home.wangjianshuo.com/archives/20051107_bbc_interview.htm)

That is, Chinese intellectuals/bloggers are not any longer willing to confirm to certain role expectation the West has put on them. Even newspapers report from the West are seen as critical as Chinese own newspapers reports, and Rebecca McKinnon explains: “these offers of help tend to be viewed as patronizing byproduct of foreigners’ pity towards the helpless Chinese victims of their own government” (Rebecca McKinnon http://reconversation.blogs.com/reconversation/files/mackinnon_chinese_blogs_chapter.pdf).

Taking this is background, we could also ask how Google’s testimony before the US House of Representatives is seen in China: for Chinese bloggers this is more ridiculous and – being maybe more cynic – they do not believe at all that the American parliament is acting for the Chinese but they see quite clearly that “in the end they all care about political survival” (ibid.).

The Chinese “Leap-Frogging Discourse”

In sharp contrast to Western discourses, Chinese – official – discourses have focused on the Internet’s role as a tool for China’s economic development. There is frequent reference to Western analysts and, in particular, to Toffler’s “Third Wave”²³. Technology-oriented modernization and the leap-frogging of industrial development has remained at the heart of Chinese research and the official news agency Xinhua saw the rosy future of China in its Internet development: “Technological leapfrogging

²³ Alvin Toffler’s (阿爾溫·托夫勒) work *The Third Wave* was translated into Chinese as “disanci langchao” (第三次浪潮) in the 1980s. All his works are said to have become bestsellers in China and many of his phrases have been widely used in China’s social, economic and cultural lives: “Internet to Contribute More to China’s Transformation,” online <http://www.edu.cn/20011128/3012100.shtml>, accessed June 1, 2004. The article “Futurist Toffler: China Has Seen ‘Astonishing Changes’” was published on the official website of the Chinese embassy in the United States, November 28, 2001, online <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/mgryzdzg/t36523.htm>, accessed June 1, 2004; Tuofule yuyan: “disici langchao” yi renlei jinru taikong juzhu wei tedian de shidai jijiang dao lai 托夫勒預言: “第四次浪潮”以人類進入太空居住為特點的時代即將到來 [Toffler’s Prediction: “the fourth wave” characterized by human beings residing in outer space], originally in *Beijing qingnianbao* 北京青年報, November 28, 2001, online <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/kejiao/42/155/20011128/614385.html>, accessed June 3, 2004; Meiguo zhuming weilaixuejia Tuofule fabiao fanghua guan’gan — Zhongguo de bianhua lingren jingya 美國著名未來學家托夫勒發表訪華觀感—中國的變化令人驚訝 [The famous American futurologist, Toffler, expresses his opinion after visiting China – the changes in China are astonishing], originally in *People’s Daily, Overseas Edition*, November 29, 2001, online <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper39/4833/524530.html>, accessed June 3, 2004; Hong Zhigang 洪治綱, “Wo xuni, suoyi wo cunzai” 我虛擬，所以我存在 [I virtualize, therefore I am], originally in *Renmin luntan* 人民論壇 (April 2002), online <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper85/6056/604017.html>, accessed June 3, 2004.

It is not clear whether “leapfrogging” is an indigenous development or whether it has derived from outside China: “Any belief in the revolutionary potential of ICTs among the Chinese leadership is thus as likely to have been influenced and derived from the up-beat assessments that have been produced outside China as by the heritage of the country’s own past,” Dai Xiudian, “ICTs in China’s Development Strategy,” in: Wacker and Hughes (eds), *China and the Internet*, p. 8.

supports the tomorrow of the Republic”²⁴ The term “technological leapfrogging” (*jishu kuayue* 技術跨越) is used in this context to refer to the idea of omitting a stage in economic development with the help of information and communication technologies, that is, of “leapfrogging” the industrial phase and achieving, through informatization (the third wave), the foundations of the second wave (industrialization).²⁵ Agents ranging from the government,²⁶ the mass media, companies and average internet users participate in a public discourse that is shaped by these ideas²⁷ Since the opening period starting in 1978 and the continuation of that in 1992 (Deng Xiaoping’s trip to the South), China is on her way to become one of the world’s most technologically advanced nation. Taking into account that many Chinese, at least the Chinese elite, also believed in the necessity of a strong leadership by one party and of the assumed opposition from the “losers” (workers, leftists, farmers); and the dangers which could derive from strikes and protests in a more open society, the Internet was from the very beginning built upon these lines. Later on, the Internet in China became more and more a tool for entertainment “rather than being an information highway, the Internet in China is more like an entertainment highway.”²⁸ That is congruent to my field research on local e-governance, where local e-entertainment played an important role.²⁹

Conclusion

Western reports on China’s Internet are strongly biased: topics are censorship and possible change by the Internet brought to China in terms of democratization and the transformation of China towards a more Western democracy including the overthrow of CCP’s rule. Every new invention in the Internet (BLOGs, BBSs, P2P) is also interpreted only in terms of these desired changes. The Chinese blogging scene, however, being global in many aspects, has learned their lesson: often being educated in the West, well-aware of postmodern and deconstructivist theories, they employ these theoretical approaches to analyze the Western media reports on China.

In addition, there is a strong technology-orientation, both in the Chinese discourse on the Internet and in the Western discourse: as McKinnon said, echoing many other Internet researchers, “The Internet in and of itself will not be a *cause* of political change in China: the causes will be much broader social, economic and political.” We must accept that the Internet has different implications for different societies. It

²⁴ “Keji kuayue, zhicheng gongheguo de mingtian” 科技跨越，支撐共和國的明天 [The technological leapfrogging supports the tomorrow of the Republic], www.jszs.gov.cn (Tax office of the province Jiangsu) online: <http://www.jszs.gov.cn/Page/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=33624>, accessed May 12, 2005.

²⁵ For a critical evaluation of these approaches, see Christopher R. Hughes and Gudrun Wacker, “Introduction: China’s Digital Leap Forward”, in: id. (eds), *China and the Internet*, pp. 1-7.

²⁶ Karsten Giese, “Internet Growth and the Digital Divide: Implications for Spatial Development.”

²⁷ See also, Xie Kang, “Industrialization Supported by Informatization: the Economic Effects of the Internet in China,” in: Damm / Thomas, *Chinese Cyberspaces*, pp. 132-47.

²⁸ Cass/Markle Foundation 2005, quoted in:

http://rconversation.blogs.com/rconversation/files/mackinnon_chinese_blogs_chapter.pdf.

²⁹ Jens Damm, “China’s e-policy: examples of local e-government in Guangdong and Fujian,” in: Damm / Thomas, *Chinese Cyberspaces*, pp. 102-131

should be taken into consideration that the Internet in China arrived at a time when the non-profit and academic Net had already undergone commercialization world-wide, as reflected in the hype surrounding the “New Economy.”