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Cultural Revolution Revisited: Control and Censorship in Contemporary China

The Chinese government has followed the same government structure for six thousand years. There has been a constant cycle of progression and regression (also known as *Fang-Shou*), during the dynastic era up until the modern Peoples Republic of China (PRC) today. Through these times in history, the Chinese government has clearly developed a specific way they want its government to work with other factors such as Confucianism, which has only strengthened their authority and made no exceptions for change. Google, the 2008 Olympics, and National Freedom House rankings have revealed the Chinese censorship extremes to the rest of the world. Now it has become a national issue that the Chinese government themselves have kept out of its press completely, making its citizens blind to these political issues. Since Mao Zedong won the Chinese Civil war in the 1940's, the Chinese Communist Party has had majority control over the entire country's political system, with little competition in the running and inadequate adversaries such as smaller democratic based political parties. Charles Hauss, a scholar of comparative governments, explains "there is probably no better indicator of the limits to liberalization in China than the regime's continued leverage over the mass media, which is the primary way people learn about political events" (Hauss 291). The Chinese government has become excessive in terms of civil rights and political freedoms as seen in the way history shapes

its mindset, its unreasonable technology, its persistent strive to maintain authority, and its comparison with the rest of the world.

The Chinese government and its peoples' mindset has been shaped over history by three main foundations. These include Confucianism, The Middle Kingdom, and extraterritoriality. Confucianism has played a large role in the way the Chinese think about the rest of the world. Confucianism is not actually a real religion, most likely due to the fact that the government restricts any attempts at large organized religion. It is a major force against the government and could potentially be threatening to its jurisdiction. The main ideas of Confucianism have directly linked with why the Chinese people don't question any excessive laws on their personal freedoms. One author states "Confucius was mainly interested in how to bring about societal order and harmony. He believed that mankind would be in harmony with the universe if everyone understood their rank in society and were taught the proper behaviors of their rank" ("Confucius"). This idea of respect of authority is a crucial concept with the Chinese people themselves. It has taught them historically to approve and behave properly with interactions of authority, and therefore has lead them not to question any major legislation proposals that their harsh government creates. This in turn has proved that the Chinese are always "thinking in terms of hierarchy. They tend to respect hierarchy and differences in status much more than Westerners, who tend to be more egalitarian and open towards strangers," and therefore with this higher power in charge of all things, including western culture, their choice to keep it out of the country is unquestioned and there are no major forces against it ("Confucius").

An ancient Chinese idea, Zhongguo, which literally means "the foreign devil", refers to the Middle Kingdom and the Chinese disapproval of western culture. The Middle Kingdom is a

preeminent idea that the Chinese are the center of the world, metaphorically and literally. This emanated from the idea that the Chinese have been inventors of many modern ideas and technology, such as the compass. With this being said, it is acceptable to assume that the Chinese believe that the rest of the world should follow in their footsteps, and they will not follow the world in their creation of democracy. One author stated, “The main reason is that for all the complaints and dissatisfactions with today's Communist rule, there is no visible alternative -- in part, of course, because the government has worked so hard to keep such alternatives from emerging” (Fallows 7). This is very true because the government has kept any alternatives out of the Chinese peoples mindset, and through the idea of the Middle Kingdom they have thrived off of a proud sense of their culture and heritage.

Extraterritoriality is the idea that the Chinese show animosity to any forms of western culture because of their history of foreign domination. It explains reasoning for Chinese hatred and animosity for western ideas and culture. Because the Chinese were forced into inclusion with the rest of the world because of British imperialism, their hatred of the outside world has only intensified. They tend to disagree with many western ideas and try to block any forms of their influence through this idea of censorship, whether it is the internet, the media, or the press. All of these are restricted by the Chinese government. Confucianism, Zhongguo and the Middle Kingdom, and extraterritoriality all assist in magnifying the roots of the Chinese outlook and how it has led to these extreme measures of censorship.

Chinese technology has played a key role in successful censorship that can be thoroughly explained through an overview of the role of Cisco systems, an elucidation of various methods used, and an idea of possible punishments and consequences that are obtained by any Chinese

violators or activists. Internet censorship by the Chinese government is a “filtering system known officially as Golden Shield and unofficially as the Great Firewall made finding unauthorized material just difficult enough that the great majority of Chinese citizens wouldn't bother” (Fallows 4). The topic regarding the Chinese censorship is how they follow through with this idea of the Golden Shield in the first place. The Chinese have created an extremely sophisticated system for censorship, which has become much more advanced than any other authoritarian government attempt to do the same, for example Russia (Hauss 157). Cisco systems are big providers for their technology. Cisco is an United States company that “agreed to provide China with its 12000 Series routers, which are equipped with filtering capability typically used to prevent Internet attacks (i.e., worms and viruses). This technology can also be used by PRC authorities to block politically sensitive content” (“China”). Cisco systems have become extremely controversial because the United States typically condemn the idea of censorship and encourage freedom, but are secretly providing the Chinese with the technology that makes such harsh censorship possible and have “assisted China in developing censorship capabilities” (“China”). Also, there are many methods that the Chinese government utilizes in order to block any sources that they wish to keep out of their country. When the government detects an upload that it finds damaging to its authority, then anything else that is uploaded from that same computer will be blocked; this method is called IP blocking (“U.S. Internet Companies in China.”). Also, in terms of search engines, the government will filter any results and certain websites that is has detected as potentially threatening to its control. The government records all privates messages “[including] internet cafes, all chats, online games and emails...making it impossible to fly under the radar or send any truly private messages” (Wilkins 1). This only

proves the excessiveness and extreme measures that the Chinese government has taken in order to perpetuate its political sovereignty. In China “the Internet Police patrol 253 million web surfers”(Wilkins 1). Because the Chinese government got started on this concept of internet censorship much earlier than the rest of the world, it has been able to develop a much more intricate method and are capable of monitoring most of their web surfers in modern China.

The punishment that is enforced by the Chinese government for any internet violations is another strong indicator of its excessive attempt to maintain authority and communist rule. There have been many instances of journalists disappearing after posting criticisms about the government and “jailing of dissident journalists and blogger/activists” that all have made the Chinese government apprehensive of what could happen after the word gets out, and anything that potentially reveals state secrets (Bennett 1). Another source that has noted this idea described that “Journalists face harassment and prison terms for violating rules laid down by the government” and this once again reiterates the idea that the government, whether the method is legal or not, will do anything in order to sustain its control (Bennet 1). Through Cisco systems, methods, and punishment the main theme presented by the Chinese government is blatant; control.

As the world has come to notice, the Chinese government “has long tried to keep a tight rein on traditional and new media to prevent any challenges to its political authority” (Bennett 1). This has been obvious through their legislation and Tiananmen Square. China does have a constitution, therefore it would seem as if the Chinese people would have a guard between them and the government in terms of freedoms. Whether that constitution is followed is a completely different story in an entirety. The Peoples Republic of China have said

in the constitution that it “[affords their] citizens freedom of speech and press, but Chinese law includes media regulations with vague language that authorities use to claim [that] stories endanger the country by sharing state secrets” (Bennet 1). Therefore Chinese legislation has been proven harmful to the average citizens political rights and civil liberties. An author who researched this issue too, also pointed out that “[despite] predictions, China's emergence from isolation and its spectacular economic growth have not led to democratization. Instead, China has developed...a market authoritarian form of government, in which the free market is allowed to operate, but the government holds a very firm hand on political activity in the country.” (Flamini 1). China’s economy has flourished in terms of its economic policies, but has clearly suffered in any efforts to gain political rights for its’ citizens. Tiananmen Square was a tragic indicator of inordinate government censorship. One article stated that “[one] of the most restricted subjects in China is the 1989 pro-democracy demonstration in Tiananmen Square, Beijing. Chinese authorities responded with a severe military crackdown, shooting many protesters” (“U.S.” 3). After Tiananmen Square, a public outrage in China where many students gathered to protest more democratic reforms, there was little government change. The government decided to make many economic changes, which was enough for many Chinese, but made no changes in terms of their government style and political restraints. Tiananmen Square also foreshadowed extreme censorship on the Internet as well. The Chinese government would “periodically blackout certain pictures such as the Dalai Lama or Tiananmen Square protests, things that they consider negative or things that they don’t want local Chinese to see” proving that the government would do anything to make sure that their citizens are unaware of many political forces and other democratic ideas that threaten their authority (“NewsRevue” 1).

Legislation and Tiananmen Square have magnified Chinese excessive censorship on the internet and the media.

China's Freedom House rankings have made the Chinese issue with censorship apparent to the rest of the world. Also when China is studied researchers question the future of China's censorship because of the Freedom House, Chinese youth, and a constant and small push for political modernization in the Chinese government. The Freedom House is an organization that researches countries all over the world in terms of political freedoms and civil liberties and compares them to democratic nations such as the United States that have complete freedom in both areas for their citizens. One article discusses how a group "ranked China 171 out of 178 countries in its 2010 worldwide index of press freedom" (Bennet 1). This shows that in comparison to the rest of the world, it would seem like China would recognize their harsh control and put an effort towards reform. But in reality this is not true, and many Chinese people are unaware of the issue and do not question any means of authority. According to the Freedom House rankings of 2010 "China received a downward trend arrow due to increased Communist Party efforts to restrict public discussion of political, legal, and human rights issues, including through the systematic disappearance of dozens of leading social-media activists and lawyers and growing online censorship among domestic social-networking services" (Puddington 22). With this discussion of the direction of Chinese freedoms, it is questionable that anything will be done about this issue in the near future.

The Chinese youth are the most powerful movement for change in the future. Because many more Chinese are becoming educated, the likelihood of them joining the Chinese Communist party has decreased. Also, as the Chinese youth start to study abroad and go to

universities in areas such as the United States, they bring back with them democratic mindsets and a demand for information. When they return to China, they then realize that they are faced with no freedoms, which is much different than their studies abroad. Many Chinese think that their freedoms will come with time, and they conclude “that that violent political revolution, the essence of Leninism, only brings evil. What is desired is a peaceful transformation based on presumed real national essences, instead of hateful, splintering political struggles premised on violence. In this popular understanding, revolution can achieve no unifying national good, for it merely turns Chinese against Chinese” (Friedman 1). This explains another reason why the Chinese youth and other citizens are not a major force against the government, until there become aware of the outside world, which is extremely difficult with the measures of censorship that steers them away. The next question regarding Chinese censorship is the future for the Chinese and their freedoms. One author proposes that “authorities in Beijing are trying to balance the need for more information with their goal of controlling content and maintaining power” (Bennet 1). As this is stating the conditions of the government outlook on censorship now, “Human rights organizations, U.S. Government officials, U.S. Internet companies, and experts on the development of the Internet and censorship in China have made wide-ranging recommendations for expanding Internet freedom in China” (“China” 5). There is a worldwide push on the Chinese government to make policy changes in the area of censorship, but many Chinese are still unaware of the issue, obviously due to the effectiveness of the government censorship.

Overall, the Chinese censorship has obviously been effective. Through Confucianism and a stubborn Chinese mindset, sophisticated technology, a constant drive for control, and

comparisons to the world, the future of censorship in China looks questionable. One author of the book *Bringing Down the Great Wall* stated that “there’s no denying that China’s reforms are in big trouble. Modernization and democratization have come to a halt, unable to move forward even though the road back is cut off. All around us, societies of similar racial and cultural background are racing to join the ranks of the developed nations, while on the Chinese mainland time passes with little progress to report” (Lizhi 38). There have been few signs of democracy in China, including protests and some smaller elections, but none that indicate change for the future.

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