

# Assignment 1

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**Title:**

*Conference Paper*

**YOUNGSTERS IN CHINA DO NOT KNOW THE INTERNET LIKE THE REST OF THE GLOBE  
AND THEY PREFER IT THAT WAY**

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**Date Submitted:** 05 May 2019  
**Word Count:** [ 2350 Words excluding references]  
**URL (if applicable):**

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## CONFERENCE PAPER

### YOUNGSTERS IN CHINA DON'T KNOW THE INTERNET LIKE THE REST OF THE GLOBE AND THEY PREFER IT THAT WAY

The internet has made a huge impact on the web 2.0 giving people the opportunity to communicate. The newest Digital report of 2018(Kemp, 2018) reveals that there are 4.021 billion of Internet Consumers and among them, 3.196 billion users actively use social networks. Social sites are promising tools in every field: from social to economic. The most well-known globally are notably Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter. On the other hand, Weibo and WeChat are famous social networks which contains millions of Chinese users(Wang & Tang, 2015). The dynamics of usage in China are different the Western part and the current Chinese internet generation is distinctively contrasting(Monggilo, 2016). Sadly, Chinese youngsters do not know the internet like the rest of the globe and they prefer it that way. China with the largest internet users in Asia and the world has been accredited as the country with the lowest Internet freedom(CNNIC, 2015). Google, Facebook and foreign websites are blocked. Technical censoring mechanisms include IP blocking, content censoring, and keyword filtering to restrict a user's capability to access information and freely communicating(Qiao & Shih, 2018). An abundance of cloned applications with similar functions were created however the contents are highly filtered. This paper explores Chinese youngsters evolving differently in the age of digitization from the rest of the world and the goal is to determine the reasons why they prefer their current situation.

Technology has given mankind an asset known as the Internet. The total of Chinese Internet users during the half of 2018 was noted to be 802 million(Kemp, 2018). The 42<sup>nd</sup> bi-annual statistic report from the China Internet Network Information Center(CNNIC) reveals that internet availability was raised to 57.7% with 26.3% of Internet consumers being from remote parts. According to a survey from the CNNIC, by July 2008, the number of Internet users in China has reached 253 million, surpassing the U.S. as the world's largest Internet market. Although the development of the Internet industry in China is outstanding, the young Chinese generation in this digital era are getting familiar with the Internet differently from the rest of the world. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram as well as famous websites include Bloomberg and Chinese Wikipedia supporting the freedom of speech are banned(Monggilo, 2016). Even Google which allows access to all democratic and controversial information happening worldwide is blocked(Schlaeger & Jiang, 2014). Many Asian countries implement censorship legislation and similarly, China followed the path starting from filtering, regulating internet content and applying multilevel control mechanisms. If any web page is found to be dangerous bypassing the rules and safety of

China, it gets blocked by the Government without proper explanation and this act has been labeled as the “Great Chinese Firewall”(Zhi-Jin & Huang, 2017). US based NGO which promotes freedom speech labeled China as ‘the worst abuser of internet freedom’ for the 3rd consecutive years in its Net Freedom report.

Censorship in China has been dominant way long in its history. One example often depicted in dramas is the burning of scholar books by the First Chinese emperor. The trend targeted the internet. Fallows stated that from 2000 to 2007, 80% of the Chinese population started having negative impressions of the internet(as cited in Monggilo, 2016) and they agreed upon giving the control of the Internet to the Government to regulate internet censorship practice(Yang, 2013). Most content available today are unknown to Chinese people. Evaluating from the Government’s perspective, internet censorship is a good thing as it filters out pornography and vulgarity which is a taboo for China(Tu, 2016). Banning sites which bring negative influences makes the internet with a healthier platform especially for young people who are easily manipulated and find it hard to different between good and bad. More on, for years, the Government parties have feared that infiltration of foreign pop culture and the western values on the internet will impact their youth and this might make them lose their grip on the ideological loyal towards their culture(Kou & Nardi, 2017). Hence, the Government doesn’t want the younger population to be corrupted by these Western ideologies.

Meeting Chinese friends during social events made me learn the existence of a Chinese social network called Sina Weibo which is one of China’s biggest social networks. It is a Chinese social networking application which has similar features as Twitter(Poell, Kloet & Zeng, 2014). Created an account on it led to some interesting facts. Weibo allows a person to be know who visited the latter’s profile and at what specific time. But the main unusual factor is the way individuals express themselves. The users are more active in posting personal information on themselves instead of freely discuss topics linked to political organizations like on Twitter. Some implemented difference codes for expressing themselves on sensitive matters(Qiao & Shin, 2018). This shows that the population must obey to the Chinese rules of not posting sensitive contents. The meme on referring the Government Xi with Winnie the Pooh was blocked. Furthermore, Weibo’s existence has created a lot of heated controversies due to the government control to erase information. One big scandal occurred in October 2010 when a drunk boy, Li Qiming, aged 22 was involved in a hit and run case while heading to Hebei University. He warned lightly; “Sue me if you dare, my father is Li Gang! (a deputy police chief in nearby district).” This case became a sensation as the government covered it(Poell, Kloet & Zeng, 2014). Any online or offline public opinions which can cause chaos against the political party are erased while negative comments are blue-penciled(Mou & Atkin, 2014).

Before Xi Jinping becoming the current President, the internet was turning into a common political platform for the population and people could possess transparency in some contents and the power of communication(Zhi-Jin & Huang, 2017). Today, China operates the most sophisticated online censorship system on the planet. Famous Chinese bloggers and social activists were voicing out their thoughts and the netizens in unity made virtual petitions and protest and make the officials aware of their wrong actions(Clark & Zhang, 2017). A survey in 2010 reveals that 300 Chinese authorities were worried on online leaking about their wrongdoings or private details(You & Huberman, 2011). Among the 6000 Chinese people who did the survey, 88% of them reacted positively on officials having this fear. But in 2012, for President Xi, the virtual world and reality should be treated equally in terms of ideologies and standards(Bao, 2013). Therefore, he started investing in technological models to reinforce the internet censorship with more new strict laws and punishments. The population was informed that the initiative behind this change is to protect them from cyber-attacks(Fourie & Bothma, 2014). SNSs were started to be monitored, political content banned, the press fully controlled, and rebels were imprisoned(Mou & Atkin, 2014). The Government officials believed that limiting people's knowledge will protect their image(Bao, 2013). In my opinion, this is compromising the netizens' rights to freedom of speech. Even if the censorship on politics are being mentioned to protect the public, no one is superior enough to decide the welfare of a society by implanting his personal views as they are not forcibly correct. Also, the public's creativity is hindered as they cannot access democratic or sensitive topics which are important for growing knowledge.

Unfortunately, most netizens agree with President Xi's views and they prefer it this way. The main reason is the fact that many Chinese citizens turn to their regulated internet to get deeper understanding about the events going on in China and focus more about communicating among themselves since their media is heavily censored(Wang & Mark, 2015). The internet is a main source of entertainment for them and youngsters like it because they get many social sites and services(Piskorski, 2014). Although they cannot access many western social and blogging sites, china has allowed the emergence of a plethora of similar Chinese networking sites although they are monitored(Schlaeger & Jiang, 2014). In US, the most popular SNS is Facebook however in China, there's a variety of options such as WeChat, Weibo, QQzone, Renren and so on(Yang, 2013). Some even provide social games to keep the users engage while others like yy.com allow singing with friends(Jinfang, 2015). When asked about Facebook, one of my friends named Joy (喜悦), a freshman student at Changsha University responded, "Is it like our WeChat?" referring to China's popular messaging app. WeChat is an indispensable tool in their daily lives. Besides having similar features like texting, voice messages and videocalls, WeChat provides further functions such as booking taxis or appointments, sending payments, food orders and many more which are not available on Facebook(Svesson, 2013). Accustomed to their country's services and applications, the youth shows zero

interest in understanding what's censored online allowing China to construct an alternative value system competing with the western liberal democracy(Mongillo, 2016). These apps make the youngsters appreciate their country's technologies as their entertainment and communication needs are satisfied(Piskorski, 2014). This factor makes them prefer the internet the way it is even with the internet censorship.

Another explanation is the case when the Chinese Government ordered the pre-installment of a censorship software called "Green Dam Youth

Escort(绿坝花季护航/ Lvba Huaji Huhang)" on every new PC being sold on the marketing including those that are being imported(Kou & Nardi, 2017). The aim of this initiative was to protect the youth from having their mind corrupted due to pornography and violence graphics. As many netizens supported this idea, the researchers Kou and Nardi from the article 'A Confucian Look at Internet Censorship in China' came up with a very interesting analysis on this issue. After closely gathering enough information, they found out that unlike most countries that have the will to protest the decisions of their governments and view censorship as infringement of one's rights, the Chinese society have the mindset of the Confucian state-society ideal regarded by the belief "custodian government(父母官 /fuwu guan)", which gives the netizens a misconception on interpreting censorship. This Confucian belief reflect a state society structure in which the government upholds the authority by setting an exemplary image misguiding the population into believing that he cares for them. In return, the netizens respect and obey the projects of the Political Party. Both benefit from the situation causing social ideology, harmony and peace to prevail in the country(Wang & Mark, 2015). Upon interviewing some undergraduate students from Nanjing University, they stated; "The censorship in China is effective because it fosters an environment in which citizens do not demand such information in the first place". However, the Chinese culture does not summon hierarchy, nor it confronts the government legacy if the regulations match the confusion beliefs(Kou & Nardi, 2017). Back to the "Green Dam", many netizens consented because they expect a society with better morals which regulates the youngsters with the correct norms. Thus, for China, censorship is not a violation of rights rather it perceives it as a beneficial regulation that makes it meet the expected moral ethics(Fourie & Bothma, 2014).

The last justification is that the Chinese President Xi has spent a lot of money to make the 'Great Firewall' and many youngsters affirm that the country's investment in the internet censorship project is fruitful(Bieliński, 2018). Recently, when social media giant Tencent surveyed more than 10,000 users who were born in 2000 or after, nearly eight in 10 said they thought China was either in its best time in history or was becoming a better country each day (Tencent & China Internet Watch, 2019). Kaifu Lee, an innovation young incubator and the owner of Innovation Works living in Beijing, mentioned that censorship acts as a

mechanism to protect the local IT businesses even though the main idea was not meant to target this point(Bao, 2013). Censorship can eradicate some competitive foreign firms in the market which give more job opportunities and profits to the local ones(Bieliński, 2018). “The most pressing concern for entrepreneurs is to survive; I feel grateful to the government for the censorship rules as it prevents international firms from getting in China’s market” he added. According to Statista 2019, Facebook gained approval to open a subsidiary in the eastern province of Zhejiang – only to see the approval quickly withdrawn. Even if the western apps and sites make it into China, they may face apathy from young people. Lee’s opinion is further discussed by his friend Bishop Bill, Company Sinocism’s editor. He argued by stating that in the future, people’s views might change as being deprived from the latest information and idea exchanges on a more worldwide platform represents a big loss for new entrepreneurs and those who wish to expand beyond China(Bieliński, 2018). The Chinese government recently banned GitHub, an open source site where global programmers would discuss projects and Bishop was part of it.

To conclude, this paper reflects how china’s youngsters are very opinionated about internet censorship in the country and most of them have no interest in being to expose to the internet like the rest of the world because they like it this way. I aimed to find out the reasons behind Chinese youngsters not knowing about censored contents on the internet and internet. Many factors such as regulating the internet to stop pornography, violence and political sensitive information that can disrupt the mind of the youngsters were explored. Then, I focused on why the youngsters prefer this situation and do not voice out to the government on the censored regulations. The Chinese apps copying the western ones offering better features, an analysis of the society’s Confucian belief prevailing and internet censorship providing better prospects in the job sector were inspected. Although social networks connect the world together diminishing barriers, whether terming internet censorship as normal or as a big danger towards freedom of exchanging information is arguable. As MacKinnon (2011) stated, “If people do not wake up and fight for the protection of rights on the Internet, we should not be surprised to find out one day that they have been legislated and sold away”(as cited in Monggilo, 2016).

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