

**CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE**

**THE INTERNET IN CHINA**

**WELCOME AND MODERATOR:**

**MINXIN PEI,**

SENIOR ASSOCIATE, CHINA PROGRAM,  
CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT

**SPEAKER:**

**REBECCA MACKINNON,**

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR,  
JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES CENTRE,  
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2009**

*Transcript by  
Federal News Service  
Washington, D.C.*

*Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

MINXIN PEI: Good morning. I'm Minxin Pei, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment's china program. Welcome to this morning's seminar: "The Internet in China." Rebecca MacKinnon is one of the people I always wanted to invite to speak at Carnegie. Unfortunately she's been based in Hong Kong so we don't have an opportunity to do so. But very fortunately she's spending some time in Washington this month, so we now have her.

When she was a journalist for CNN she was really one of the best informed, most perceptive journalists covering China. And then she switched gears and became a scholar, a specialist on the Internet in China and, of course, whatever she touches she becomes very good at. She is now really one of, again, the most interesting, one of the most interesting commentators and analysts of the development of the Internet in China.

As a political scientist watching changes in Chinese society I have to confess that the Internet really brings hope to any prospect of political change in China. But this change is not a linear type of change; it's far more complicated, as Rebecca will tell us in her presentation. She will speak for about 40, 45 minutes then we'll open up for questions. Again, I am very, very pleased to have Rebecca here today and the floor is yours.

REBECCA MACKINNON: Thanks very much, Minxin. Your flattery is just too much. (In Chinese.) Well, I very much appreciate it. I'll just get into my talk and then we can have a bit of a conversation afterwards. I've been studying the Chinese Internet closely now, I guess, since about 2004 kind of in a professional way but I was based in China from 1992 until 2001 and really had the privilege of being in China when the Internet showed up in China and experiencing sort of the liberation that many people felt when the Internet arrived.

And I was able to find ways to send TV stories through the Internet so we could circumvent the requirement that we had to send TV stories by satellite feed and also experienced the blocking and censorship that happened when I was trying to access Web sites. And so my interest in the Chinese Internet really began due to my first-hand experience with it in that sense.

So China's Internet, you know, is a real challenge to what we might call the cyber utopians, and people who kind of hoped in the early days of the Internet that the Internet would just create this global seamless world and it would bring democracy ultimately very quickly to all societies; and it's proving a bit more challenging than that.

But the Internet certainly has brought about a loss of control by authorities over Chinese culture, particularly Chinese youth culture. And I want to start by showing a video which some of you might recognize. This video has been around for a while; it was uploaded by some students in the Guanzhou Arts Institute back in 2005. They were just playing around in front of their Webcam; they put this on the Internet and it became an instant hit. So let me see if I can get this going here. The Internet hasn't been –

(Begin video clip.)

(Music: "As Long as You Love Me.")

MS. MACKINNON: We could spend all day watching funny videos off the Chinese Internet, and that would probably be much more fun than actually listening to me speak. But the

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

point being that the Chinese Internet is actually a rather fun place. And I think sometimes Westerners, you know, from reading the media get this impression that, you know, that the Chinese people are kind of sitting there behind the firewall, you know, just waiting to be saved and, you know, feeling very oppressed.

Yet actually people are having and managing to have a great deal of fun. And that young Chinese people, you know it used to be, if you wanted to be famous in China, we're not talking about politically famous, but if you wanted to be culturally famous, you wanted to be a well-known singer, writer, poet, whatever you needed to pass through official gate-keepers of some kind.

In order to get on TV, in order to get on the radio, in order to get something published you had to get through an official gate-keeper affiliated with the propaganda department or, you know, an official media outlet that had to have approval.

And now people are just uploading this stuff on to the Internet and these guys, there's actually four different guys known as the Back Dorm Boys and they've become famous. They've got recording contracts, they appear in concerts and their careers are made just because they were playing around in a dorm room and they happened to be kind of outgoing and talented. And so Chinese culture is really – youth culture in particular – is really being transformed by the Internet.

And when you talk to people who study entertainment in China they'll tell you that young people now are consuming much more video online than they are from television and that the way that – and I was just actually looking at a study last night that was saying that actually one of the main ways that young people find out about interesting videos they want to watch online is not through any kind of state Web site or anything, but through instant messaging; links that people are sending around through their instant messaging and QQ being one of the top instant messaging services in China. So I'm going to have to pause this very fun video and get back to my more serious presentation I'm afraid.

(End video clip.)

But the point here is that while the government has lost control over culture, over youth culture, that young people can post silly videos online, or maybe not even so silly but just good material online and become famous and have careers. Nobody has managed to use the Internet to organize an opposition party; you have not seen a Chinese Lech Walesa emerging out of the Internet.

That has not been possible and that is because while Chinese Internet censorship is not perfect, it works well enough – combined, basically censorship combined with surveillance combined with other social controls. It works well enough that nobody has been able to organize a successful political movement through the Internet. So I'm going to talk a little bit about Chinese Internet censorship works because I think there's perhaps not enough understanding or perhaps a somewhat oversimplified understanding overseas about how it works. And this will help people understand kind of what's possible, what isn't possible in the Chinese Internet.

There's really two layers of Chinese Internet censorship and what most Westerners are aware of is something that's come to be known as the great firewall; and that's the system of blocking of Web sites. And the great firewall basically – and I'll explain in a little more detail – but the great

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

firewall mainly involves blocking of Web sites from overseas. Then there's the censorship that happens inside the great firewall, which is not just blocking of Web sites; it's the actual deletion, removal of content by commercial sites, by companies primarily not by Internet police. You also have the take down of Web sites and the shutting down of datacenters when necessary.

So that form of censorship, I think mostly what Westerners think about is, you know, you can't access Human Rights Watch or something but there's actual take down of sites. Now, to understand how this censorship works you need to be reminded of a basic aspect of the Internet is that Web sites don't float around in outer space. The data for any Web site actually is housed physically on a computer server somewhere and that computer server is in a legal jurisdiction somewhere, right. And so either computer servers are inside China or they're outside China for our purposes.

This is the latest map; this was issued in 2006, issued by the China Internet Network Information Center, a government organization. This is an Internet connection map of China and basically what it shows us – it's hard to see because it's big and everything's very small – but those diamonds up at the top are basically countries from which the Internet is going into China. And then it's coming through different exchange points, going through kind of central nexuses, being looped back through and then going all the way through several layers of the Chinese network, down to those things at the very bottom are the Internet service providers.

So that's like, you know, if you're signing up for your Web service with Comcast or, you know, whoever, you know, that's the Chinese equivalent down there. And if you spend time and kind of really look at all these lines going in you'll see that according to this chart anyway, the international Internet is actually entering China through seven points. And it's coming from different pipes that are coming into China, but it's coming in through seven points and then it's kind of being distributed around China through various network players to the Internet service providers to the consumer.

And so the reason why I'm explaining all of this is that – because this relates to the great firewall and the Internet filtering, which is that any Internet router has the ability to block – you basically, you can program into an Internet router and say, you know, I want to block certain things. And it may be you want to protect your network from viruses and worms and you want to block out pornography maybe or something and you can plug different things into the router.

You can also plug in political content, political Web address, IP addresses and key words into the router and so what happens is that the result is something like this in China. This is the great firewall in action where you try to access Human Rights Watch from an Internet service provider in China and you get this error message. And the way it works in China, there are some countries that filter the Internet that will actually give you a screen that says, we're sorry this Web page has been blocked according to blah blah blah regulation; they do that in Saudi Arabia they do that in some other countries.

But in China you just get this error message that makes you think that you're having a connection failure or something; you don't know why you're not able to access this Web site. And so this filtering could be happening at any number of points along the network, and it actually does happen at multiple points along the network. So that's blocking and that's the great firewall, and there's quite a bit written about that. And there was a lot of discussion about it during the Olympics

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

and about the fact that international journalists went to China and found that they couldn't access certain Web sites and then there was a great deal of outrage about it, and then the Chinese government loosened up a little bit on the filtering.

There's another level of Internet censorship which has to do with the removal of certain kinds of materials from search engines or removal of certain kinds of material from blog hosting services and so on. And so this, this is an example of search engine modification or search engine censorship, one might call it, at which is basically the Chinese government is requiring companies inside China to modify the way in which search results appear in order to make the results more acceptable.

This is an example of a search for "Tiananmen massacre" on Google.com, the international Google.com. And as you'll see there are some gory pictures there and some photographs from 1989, June 4<sup>th</sup>. When you do the same search on Google.cn, which is the filtered version, or the modified version for the Chinese domestic consumption of Google, you get results that show Tiananmen Square kind of generally and Nanking Massacre, which is a different massacre that it's bringing up but that's kind of what you end up getting.

So you don't get sort of the bloody gory picture there on the front page of results that you get from Google.com. However, in all fairness – and I did a couple of years ago a series of tests on the different search engines sort of inside and outside of China and how censored they are – Google.cn censors a great deal less than Baidu, which is China's largest search engine which has a greater market share than Google at this time in China.

When you search "Tiananmen massacre" on Baidu, you get nothing; and so that's kind of the level of censorship that is being – you know, they're kind of setting the bar of censorship at a fairly high level and Google does come under a certain amount of pressure in China, from what I understand, to censor more than it does and there's that tension that Western companies are feeling in China about how they can sort of operate and keep their permission to operate and continue to expand and deal with Chinese government demands.

And the point being here is that the Chinese government, when it comes to Web sites that are hosted on those computer servers that are physically inside China, as opposed to outside China; they're not blocking Web sites. What they're doing is they're expecting companies operating with their computer servers, with their Web sites inside China to police the content on those sites and take things down, remove things; either erase them or prevent their publication.

So a Chinese blog-hosting service or a Chinese company that runs a chat-room or a forum; they are held legally responsible by the Chinese government to make sure that objectionable material doesn't appear on their site or at least doesn't appear in the quantities that is going to cause tension or create some kind of critical mass around an issue.

And Chinese Web hosting companies, because you know in order to set up a Web site you have to host it somewhere and so most people, unless they are geeky enough to run their own servers, have to rent space from a Web-hosting company and set up a Web site. Those Web-hosting companies are all required to make sure that they're not hosting, you know, politically controversial sites. And so from time to time the Web-hosting companies are expected to take things down, and they get calls all the time. And during really sensitive periods like before the Olympics, there were

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

reports of police going into datacenters and actually physically removing servers for investigation, and so that sometimes happens; but back to the censorship.

I did a pretty extensive study last year trying to look at how Chinese Web companies censor user-generated content and, you know, any time people are posting blogs or YouTube videos or that kind of thing onto Chinese versions of these sites that's user-generated content and most – China now has about 30 to 50 million bloggers depending on who's counting, who you ask.

And most of those bloggers are blogging on blog-hosting services inside China, right. So they're Chinese companies; it's not Blogspot.com or Type Pad or Word Press, but it's Chinese versions of those kinds of services. And so it's those companies themselves, not the Internet police, that are expected to take the content down.

So this is Tianya, which is a main blog-hosting service in China, and this is an example of an attempt that I made to post a blog post about the Tiananmen mothers and sort of their efforts to create a Web site and the fact that it had been censored. I basically copied an article from somewhere else and put it in there; this is the back end and I hit, "Publish." And then I get this message that says, "Your post: Tiananmen mothers' organization publishes a Web site" has been successfully submitted. Because it contains sensitive words, please wait for the community editors to approve it; please don't repost, thank you. And it never gets published; it just kind of disappears.

And so this happens a lot when Chinese bloggers are trying to post politically sensitive things or have conversations about matters that involve sensitive words or terms is that they'll often encounter these kinds of error messages and they just can't get their post on the Internet at all. It's not a matter of blocking what they're saying it's a matter that it's just not getting up.

Here's another example on another blog-hosting service, Sina, which is one of China's most popular blog-hosting services. I posted an article about an explosion in Xinjiang over the summer in which some people were killed and I was initially able to post it but within 24 hours it's removed and I get this error message. And so I actually posted this same article across 15 different blog-hosting services and it was deleted by eight of them, or prevented from being published, one or the other; but the remaining ones stayed up, which is very interesting.

And what I have been finding in studying this is that the censorship is being done by the companies, that basically they're getting directives from the government and then the government is leaving it to them to implement the censorship. But there's a huge variation from company to company in terms of how much censorship is happening.

So I tested 15 different blog hosts and I – basically in this study I did last year I just posted the same piece of content across 15 different companies' platforms and then just tracked what happened to it. And I have not put the names of the companies here because I can't publish that information because if I publish the information of who censors the most and who censors the least the people who censor the most are going to go tell on the people who censored the least to the authorities and try to put the people who censor less out of business; or the authorities will use this against certain companies.

So I'm not publishing the names in aggregate of which companies are particularly censoring the least. But what I found was that, you know, of 108 valid tests, you know, there was one

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

company that censored more than half and then there was another very small company that probably won't stay in business very long that censored very little, almost – only censored one post and I think partially that's because it's so small that, you know, kind of nobody's noticing.

But there were a lot of – several of the blog-hosting services that are in the middle there are pretty major companies and they are censoring to very different degrees. And this I found very interesting. What this shows is that there is a certain amount of choice that companies do have in China in terms of how they're going to respond to regulations, how enthusiastically they're going to respond to regulations, whether they're going to try and be more minimalist or whether they're going to be more maximalist about how they deal with the authorities and the ability of their users to have wide-ranging conversations.

We're also noticing something kind of interesting going on in China. This is a photo that came from a chat room of the aftermath of a riot in the town of Weng'an in Guizhou province last summer. And basically the riot was sparked because a young girl turned up dead in a river and it turned out that nobody was quite sure whether it was a suicide or whether it was a murder – her relatives thought it might be a murder; the police ruled it as suicide – but there was a rumor – because apparently she was with a couple of young boys at the time and there was a rumor that they were sons of some people in the police and that they had really killed her and it was a cover up.

Turned out they weren't related to the police, turned out the circumstances of the whole thing were very inconclusive but the riot was sparked because there was – the feeling between the local population and the police was so bad that everybody was just – immediately believed the story that it was a cover up and believed the story that, you know, that the police had just gotten out of control and were now killing people, and went and trashed the local public security bureau.

And we know that this happened, of course, thanks to the Internet and thanks to the news that quickly spread on the Internet about what happened. But what one thing that we also saw very quickly happening in that case is that Xinhua News Agency reported on it. Now, in the past when I was journalist in the '90s – something like this happens in China, Xinhua News Agency did not report this stuff. And they're now starting to report on these kinds of incidents and to get the official version of the story out quickly.

And then what happens is that all the major Web portals and so on are instructed that they have to only run the official version and delete all unofficial versions. And so what I found over the summer was very interesting, that phenomenon I showed you with blog posts getting taken down or prevented from being posted, you know, in Tianya and so on you tried to post something that said, Weng'an, even if it was a Xinhua News Agency story, you couldn't post it.

Meanwhile, if you looked at all the news sites, including the Xinhua News Agency and People's Daily Web sites, they all had stories including feature stories about what happened in Weng'an. Now, one of the interesting little things about Weng'an, which is going to relate to the next slide I'm going to show you, is that the young men who were with this girl at the time who apparently allegedly committed suicide – apparently she was, you know, a bit despondent or something – and they were questioned by the police afterwards and their story was that –or the story of one of the young men was: Well, they were on the bridge, it was late at night and they were talking and she was talking about how depressed she was and then I got bored and I started doing pushups and then I turned around and she jumped off.

*Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

You know, this was the kid's story, right, and so there was a lot of discussion online on the Internet about, you know, well, that's kind of bizarre. But something very interesting happened because, you know, the discussion of Weng'an quickly became censored so people around the Internet started talking about pushups. And so you started to have this weird kind of Photoshop meme all around the Chinese blogs and chat rooms where people were – this is a, this is a series of Photoshop photographs of a naked man doing pushups at various famous locations around China. (Laughter.)

And these photographs were being passed around and people were sort of competing with each other – (laughter) – to do all kinds of – and actually on the original Web site that – a couple of those were actually animated flash files and so you could see – and there were Web sites who were like, come to my Web site and do pushups and every time you click it like makes, you know, and like which province does the most pushups.

And this was kind of a form of commentary of course about people expressing frustration that they're not able to talk about Weng'an directly but also an expression that they find this whole pushup story a bit weird and kind of wish they could talk about it more directly, but since they can't they're all going to, you know, post photos of naked men doing pushups on the Great Wall instead because at least then everybody can have a good laugh about it.

And so this is one kind of phenomenon we're seeing in China, increasingly is this kind of weird Photoshop and video humor in which people are expressing their, kind of acting out their frustration not being able to talk about what they want to talk about by creating all kinds of weird jokes. So a year or two ago there was – yeah, about two years ago now – there was this strange thing that happened on the Chinese Internet where you started seeing pictures of crabs with watches on them all over the Chinese Internet: Now, why?

Well, there is Hu Jintao has a, President Hu Jintao has a saying that he was saying a lot a couple of years ago talking about a harmonious society. This is kind of part of his policies, you know, talking about China needs to have a harmonious society. And so people on the blogs and chat rooms were talking about harmonious society, kind of in an ironic way quite often, sort of sarcastic, ironic, cynical.

And people also started using the word, “harmonious” or “harmonized” as a verb, so people – if somebody got censored they would say, I've been harmonized – (in Chinese). (Laughter.) So then what happened is that “harmonious” or “harmonized” became a blocked word or a banned word on a lot of Web sites and if you used the term – (in Chinese) – your post might get taken down or it would get flagged as sensitive. So people changed the characters they changed it to – (in Chinese) – which sounds the same kind of except with different tones and different characters which means river crab.

And so then you started seeing all this stuff on the Internet about river crab this and that, but you know everybody kind of knew what people really meant. They knew that – (in Chinese) – really means, you know – (in Chinese) – and everybody kind of knew what that meant. And so then people started playing around with this and they started – so for those of you who speak Chinese this is – (in Chinese) – and for those of you who know Chinese you know – (in Chinese) – is kind of a reversal of – (in Chinese) – which is “the three represents” which is Jiang Zemin's favorite saying.

*Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

So this is kind of – (in Chinese) – and – (in Chinese) – kind of combines Jiang Zemin’s favorite “three represents” with Hu Jintao’s, you know, harmonious society to kind of make fun of both of them in this kind of back-handed way. And so you’re seeing a lot of this kind of humor and sometimes the humor gets really very edgy and – (laughter) – this is – some Chinese speakers may have seen this already, but this is the song of the Alpaca sheep.

Now, why is this politically edgy? Well, if you know Chinese you might – hang on a minute – let me just play this.

MS. MACKINNON: Now, this is pretty ridiculous – (music in Chinese). Now, this is really obscene. What this is, is this is a protest against the anti-porn crackdown online that’s been happening since the beginning of the year. And how is the song of the Alpaca sheep a protest against censorship? Well – (in Chinese) – is the Chinese word for Alpaca sheep. If you change the tones and change the characters it means something very obscene about your mother – (laughter) – and so and when you sing it, you know, the tones go away and you’re just kind of singing about somebody’s mother the whole time.

And so people online kind of, you know, write “Alpaca sheep” when they mean to swear at somebody. This has become a convention for some time but people were just getting so frustrated about kind of, you know, because the anti-porn crackdown, while it was against porn, there were also a lot of Web sites containing political commentary that were being censored and people were getting very frustrated and so this video resulted.

And so, you know, people are finding ways to really mock the regime. Here’s another bit of mockery by a guy named Hu Guo (ph) who also mocks kind of famous movie stars, but this guy is very, very popular. And there’s been a bit of a trend in the past few months to make fun of Chinese Central Television as much as possible. And there was a petition that went around in late December/early January calling on people to boycott the Chinese New Year program on CCTV because it’s just such a bunch of brainwash propaganda.

And, you know, we’re frustrated; we want CCTV to start telling the truth and stop wasting people’s money and so on. And there was actually an alternative Chinese New Year program that was put online that was then censored. But, meanwhile, there’s this guy Hu Guo and others who make fun of Chinese central television broadcasts. Now, if China were like the U.S. these guys would have their own “Saturday Night Live” show, but they don’t. So instead you get things like this.

(Begin video clip.)

MR. : (In Chinese.)

MS MACKINNON: So for those of you who speak Chinese you’ll know that this is the report from the important meeting of economic policy from the group housing dormitory, you know, in XXX mall district. But it’s done in a way that totally mimics CCTV broadcast about the leaders by meetings with top leaderships.

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

And it goes on to a, you know, they make a decision about how to use toilets in the collective, you know, how to deal with controversies over the toilet in collective apartments – (laughter) – but it's just done in a language that just perfectly mimics CCTV.

And here's somebody who used the toilet wrong and then, you know – (laughter) – anyway, it's very, very funny.

(End video clip.)

And so people are finding ways to really mock the official media and, you know, despite the censorship you see a lot of this stuff going around the Chinese Internet; and sometimes it's really edgy. You know, CCTV, the tower, the Chinese Central Television recently built itself a new building: very expensive, you know, design by famous architects and there were sort of a complex next to it that caught fire last week. And basically that complex burned down; it wasn't occupied yet.

But it caused, it was caused by a fireworks explosion organized by the employees apparently and, you know, the flames are sort of going up alongside the main CCTV building and you saw a lot of really edgy stuff appearing on the Internet almost immediately after the fire. People not only posting their own photos of the fire itself – and a lot of the coverage was actually censored later on and you know the directive went out, don't report much about the fire and so on – but the pictures were all over the Internet and then were being taken down.

But people were posting things like this: So this is, you know, a poster of the movie “Independence Day,” the end of CCTV, and you know, a photo of the fire; that's pretty edgy. Or – (in Chinese, laughter). So the CCTV new building is known in Beijing as the underpants – (laughter) – because it kind of looks like a pair of pants and so this is a joke about, you know, anyways, just making light of the whole thing.

And this is really kind of, you know, ha, ha, ha, ha; and there were a number of bloggers wrote some lengthy commentaries about, you know, here go our tax dollars up in flames and, you know, the CCTV is kind of this wasteful brainwashing thing and, you know, it's just as well they got burned. And a lot of really edgy commentary taking place online, which then, you know, the blog services have to do their best to delete but which still continues to make its way around the Internet.

So coming back to how we think about the Chinese Internet; I think Westerners tend to think about the Chinese Internet kind of with this sort of Great Wall metaphor in mind, right, and this kind of Iron Curtain metaphor in mind in that you have the great firewall, the censorship and the blocking and if only the great firewall were lifted then China will be liberated just like former Eastern Europe and Soviet Union kind of were brought down; all we need to is bring down the great firewall and China too will change.

There's kind of this rhetoric that one often sees and sort of a form of analysis one often hears; and so that's kind of one way of looking at the Internet in China and what's going on with the controls. But, actually, a lot of bloggers, a South African blogger who lives in Beijing who runs a Web site called Danwei.org, a guy named Jeremy Goldcorn, you might have seen his blog.

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

He actually has coined a term, “net nanny” that he says, actually Iron Curtain isn’t really that good a way to describe what’s happening in China because that implies that, you know, all the good stuff is outside, there’s nothing good inside and you’re just trying to keep all the good stuff from outside. Actually there’s a lot of really great stuff happening inside that people are doing and this net nanny is trying to control it and – (inaudible) – you all the time. And so it’s more of a nanny metaphor, a paternalistic metaphor than an Iron Curtain might be a better way to describe this relationship that’s going on.

Then a Chinese journalist who works at a Web company at the Chinese Internet Research Company last year suggested another metaphor. He pointed out, you know, the Chinese government is run by people, many of whom are engineers and kind of have this kind of hydroelectric management background. And you can also kind of think of their approach to the Internet not as an effort to 100-percent control it all the time – because they can – as you can see, there’s all kinds of stuff happening on the Chinese Internet. The government is completely failing to control most of it.

But have they managed to control enough that despite all this mocking jokes, despite all this hilarity, still nobody can organize an opposition party? Still, you put out Charter ’08, you know, the organizer goes to jail and a lot of the signatories get questioned and quite a lot of people are pressured not to sign it and kind of, you know, it spreads around but people are not able to act. You know, you’re finding that what’s happening is, the government isn’t trying to control everything.

I would argue that’s not the goal in the first place, that the goal is to make sure that in aggregate, the kinds of conversations that actually lead to action are minimized and then the regime remains in power and people are able to blow off steam. And so the hydroelectric management – you know, you have a storm, maybe you kind of let some water out, you have a drought you put the dam out – you know, that you’re constantly sort of adjusting, depending on the political climate and so on, and that that might be another way of thinking about the Internet.

This is a picture drawn by a Chinese artist to depict the Chinese Internet which might look a little bit like the Cultural Revolution. But this – this depicts a battle between two factions of people on the Internet that took place last spring, soon after the unrest in Tibet, where a Chinese blogger who was of the liberal persuasion wrote a blog post sort of asking, you know, how can we really know the truth about what happened in Lhasa – you know, kind of raising some questions. And then a bunch of nationalistic bloggers attacked this person, and then sort of a battle ensued between different people with different points of view on the Chinese Internet.

And so this is a cartoon drawn by a Chinese cartoonist of this battle that raged on the Chinese Internet last spring, with – you know, up in that tower, it says – (in Chinese) – you know, that nationalism, you know, and people sending guns, and there are some people hanging from that tower, if you can see it closely. I can post the link, if they want to send it around later, but you know. And so if you kind of look at the slogans here, it really looks like a battle between two factions during the Cultural Revolution.

And there are some people who point out that some of the arguments that go on and sort of the cyber-mobs going after each other on the Internet in China sometimes resemble, in some ways, different ideological battles that have happened at different times in China. And so that depending

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

on kind of where you sit and who you are in China and what your concerns are, you might view the Internet very differently.

And there's a lot of people in China who view the Internet as a very chaotic place where, you know, there are situations where somebody is caught doing something inappropriate, whether it's an official or a whether it's a private citizen, it's posted on the Web, then people go after that person. Kind of, you know, some people will, you know, just sort of describe that as sort of the Chinese cyber-Red Guards, vigilante justice kind of thing. And so there are – actually, a lot of people in China, if you talk to them, they'll say, god, the Internet's such a chaotic place. Somebody has to control it better. I'm really afraid of – my kids just don't know what to make of it, and I'm worried. It sounds familiar. And so there are all kinds of ways to look at it.

So where is all of this heading? There are different possible directions, and given that this is China, China does not move in a linear way. Generally, China moves in several directions at once, so one direction might be cyber-tarianism. Now, Hu Jintao did something last summer which got a huge amount of attention in the Chinese Internet and some in the international media. He went to the People's Daily Internet division and spent some time with the netizens of – (in Chinese) – the Strong China Forum, which is a Web forum run by the People's Daily's Web site, where – which tends to be a place where nationalist people like to hang out.

And he spent some time answering questions from netizens. And the whole point – and he kind of made some remarks that were webcast and widely passed around where he said, you know, we pay great attention to what people are saying on the Internet, and it's – we find the Internet to be an important tool and an important channel from which to understand public concerns and to assemble the wisdom of the people.

And so what's very interesting about this is that there have – oops, I'm getting ahead of myself there – that there's a scholar who's now based in the University of Nottingham named Zheng Yongnian, or Yongnian Zheng is how his name is on his book, who wrote a very interesting book recently about the Internet in China, and he talked about a concept of authoritarian deliberation. And he talked about the fact that while China is not institutionally getting any more democratic – in fact, one can argue it's less democratic than it was 10 years ago when it comes to progress on things like village elections, local elections or any kind of progress on independence of courts or anything like that, that Chinese society is getting much more deliberative.

And that you're starting to see more and more give-and-take on quite a lot of local issues, or specific policy issues, where the public – there's a public outcry about a particular regulation that's being discussed and then it gets changed as a result of the online outcry. Or an official is behaving in a particular egregious way, and as a result of the outcry on the Internet, that official loses his job. And there have been a couple of cases where – of police abuse, where actually regulations got changed as a result of the outcry on the Internet. And so one could argue that – and – that China is potentially able to use the Internet – the Chinese government is potentially able to use the Internet as a way to enable citizens to engage more with the government, feel more engaged, feel like they have more recourse without having to resort to multi-party elections and democratic institutions.

And so one could almost make the argument – and it has been made – that the Internet could enable the Chinese communist party to remain in power longer than it might have done had the Internet not existed and when people would have felt the need to go into the streets at a much

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

earlier stage of their frustrations than they do now. Now, of course, this ability to let off steam, have fun, make fun of the government and also from time to time have an impact on policy is supplemented by a robust police force, both online and off. And there are the legendary Chinese Internet police, you know, some say 30,000, some say 50,000, who knows, it depends on how you count these things.

But it is certainly the case that the Chinese government places a great deal of importance on having a police force in every locale that is dealing with cyber-crime that is dealing with surveillance issues and so on. But one thing to remember, you know – I mean, to us as Americans, as Westerners, we look at this, this looks very ominous. But actually, there are a lot of people in China – again, as I mentioned before, a lot of parents very worried about their children being vulnerable to predators on the Web, there's a lot of problems with hacking, a lot of problems with identity theft, a lot – tremendous amount of technological crime happening in China, and so the government is presenting itself as, here we are to help you be safe in this cyber-world that all parents are deathly afraid of these days.

And so that's something to keep in mind as well, is that while certainly people who are having political conversations and trying to organize politically might see this as more of a panopticon thing, they're not sure if anybody's watching or not, but you better be careful and assume they are because you never quite know, you might end up like Shi Tao, in jail, who was a Chinese journalist who got handed over to the police by Yahoo!China. You just never know. But that's there as well.

But on the other hand, as I alluded to before, you have a great deal of nationalism. And again, this is where to say that people in China are just kind of all waiting to be saved or all pushing for change, it's a much more complicated picture, and really increasingly you're seeing society divided into liberals and conservatives – or different kinds of factions, and you have people who do – who are more sympathetic to liberal, democratic-type ideas.

But you also have a lot of people in China who are very proud of China becoming strong and who are very defensive about foreign criticism of China, and this is a Web site called Anti-CNN that was built about a year ago by some students, initially, who were very angry about what they felt were gross inaccuracies in Western coverage of China around the time of the unrest in Tibet, and there were some photos that were cropped on cnn.com, and then Jack Cafferty called the Chinese government “goons and thugs” and people got very upset, but there were also some other incidents that happened like there was some agency video from Nepal in which some Tibetan protestors were being beaten by Nepali police.

It was incorrectly captioned as Chinese police beating Tibetan protestors and broadcast around the world on Western television and in a lot of Western media as photographs, and that all of those things featured very prominently as Anti-CNN as evidence that, basically, the West is just a bunch of racists out to put China down and not wanting to see China succeed – and that human rights groups are really just a bunch of racists who want to keep China in its box.

And that – those feelings have a lot of currency, not only amongst people living inside China, but there are a lot of students and overseas Chinese people living around the world who feel that Westerners have grossly oversimplified impressions of what China's like, feel very frustrated, feel that the Western media only says bad things about China and isn't complimentary enough about

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

the very good things about China and so therefore have a great deal of support for the conversations taking place here.

And another example that just came up recently is, Vice President Xi Jinping was in Mexico a few days ago, and he gave a speech that has made the rounds in the Chinese Internet with a great deal of support, where – in which he said, you know, some foreigners have eaten their fill and have nothing better to do than point their fingers at our affairs. (In Chinese.) And this generally, on the Chinese blogs, got a lot of support, and this was one example of one blogger whose – you know, was saying, yeah, this is – we need more of this kind of language, this more kind of frank language from our leaders. Our leaders aren't frank enough in standing up to foreigners who criticize us, and this is – we're a powerful country and we need to start acting like it by not letting those foreigners push us around.

And this was a more colloquial kind of reaction. “Vice-President Xi Jinping is so cool, he trashed the unfriendly foreigners.” So there were some other voices, there are some other voices on the Chinese Internet that are saying, well, this is all a bunch of kind of – that are expressing more cynicism, but not that much criticism. I get the sense that even the liberal-minded bloggers are staying away from this one, not wanting to criticize the vice-president, kind of seeing that as if they go that direction, it's just going to go too far, it's not worth going there. So you are not seeing funny videos making fun of his speech, for instance, which is very, very interesting. It's interesting to see where people are choosing to draw the line.

On the other hand, cyberocracy. We are seeing a growing number of people in China who are kind of what we're getting to – what some are calling the Internet grassroots, who are meeting each other online, who are feeling empowered, who are feeling like their ideas are getting attention in ways that never could be possible before and are sometimes meeting in person. And so this is the fourth annual Chinese Blogger Conference that took place in Guangzhou in 2008, and it's a completely grassroots conference organized once a year for the past four years by a group of bloggers, basically, who want to help each other use social-networking tools to have conversations about things they care about in ways that haven't been possible before in traditional media spaces.

And some people have political concerns, others just are educators, they want to figure out how to use blogs better so that they can share information about how to teach geography. Or all kinds of different kinds of problem-solving situations where people unable to form NGOs to the extent they want to form them, unable to form unofficial, nongovernmental associations in the ways that they might be able to do if one could form associations easily in China, people are creating loose associations through the Internet using social-networking tools and then kind of meeting once a year to kind of share experiences and talk about how they're doing this.

And this is kind of, again, sort of one form of emergent network civil society, some people like to call it. And one of the bloggers who's been a key organizer of these conferences is named Isaac Mao. He's actually spending some time at Harvard right now at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society, but he likes to say, if we want free speech, first we need free thinking. And that there's not enough free thinking in China, there are too many cyber-mobs kind of going after each other and too little intolerance for opposite points of view, too much knee-jerk kind of reaction to things.

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

And we just need more practice, you know, debating issues in kind of rational ways and having platforms on which to do this and to exchange information in an uncensored manner or in as uncensored manner as possible so that people can really develop both kind of tolerance for plurality of ideas and learn how to debate each other rationally rather than just say, you know, if you don't agree with me, you deserve to die, kind of reactions.

And he's also been developing his own sort of ideas about what he calls "shareism", which is, he says, not socialism, he emphasizes, but it's a way that people kind of share their knowledge, share their ideas through communities that are formed online – because that's how you can form them most easily in China – and finding ways to facilitate collective learning, critical thinking, public discourse, and which he also hopes will help to facilitate social justice, in that people will be able to gain more information about what are their rights, what to do to defend their own rights, this kind of thing. And that eventually this might perhaps lead to some kind of emergent democracy. But he really focuses on the need for capacity-building first, that people need to kind of work this out, and they need a platform on which to discuss where they want to go as they move ahead.

So there have been some bloggers actually who have asked whether the Internet might perhaps be a special political zone, kind of like the special economic zones that China started its economic reforms with in the early '80s, that is the Internet a place where perhaps new forms of democratic discourse can be worked out and where the sort of more intellectual, kind of politically minded people can go to have debates and sort of prove that in a way, that they're not a negative, anti-China force. To find a way to prove that this is something that is compatible with China moving forward and not being invaded by foreigners, or something. And so this is an idea that a blogger, Yang Hengjun in particular, likes to talk about.

And you're seeing a lot of people, again, who are using the Internet to raise grassroots awareness on social issues. So this guy is named Lai Humyao (ph) – or his real name is Zheng Shihu (ph) and his penname is Lai Humyao, and he's been raising awareness about homeless people who are kind of crippled and beg around Tiananmen Square, and they're not getting any help, and so he just kind of organized random people online to donate food and clothing to help some of these people over the winter. And this is one man who his kind of grassroots group helped out find food and shelter – just again, not even forming an NGO but just kind of posting online, saying, here's some people who need help and we're going to get together on Saturday and take some clothes over and, you know, anybody who wants to come can come kind of thing. And that you're starting to see groups of people doing this kind of – these sorts of actions of ad hoc charity.

Artist Ai Weiwei has also been kind of involved with this kind of grassroots civil society capacity-building, as one might call it. He did an online auction recently with a bag of poisoned Sanlu milk powder with his signature on it, kind of a very edgy sort of thing to do, sort of protest again about what's been going on with the food system. But he did this auction online to raise money for homeless people. And he's arguing that the Chinese people have to take greater responsibility for the state of society, and if leaders aren't doing it, if companies aren't doing it then individual actions really matter and it's time for people to start taking individual action. And he organized – he argues that the Internet makes that more possible than before.

You're also seeing quite a lot of lawyers starting to use the Internet to get out more information about the cases they're working on or the cases that they think are important for civil rights in China. This is one blogger and civil rights lawyer, Liaozhao Yuan (ph), who has been

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

involved with a number of very controversial cases, and however, all these people are under increasing pressure as we're entering into this very sensitive year. And as of Tuesday, his law firm actually was there were some investigators came to his law firm, sort of asking questions about whether one employee had been hired in accordance with regulations or not, and they might have to – they might be penalized and forced to shut down for six months and this kind of thing. So people are really kind of hitting up against problems and constraints at every turn.

But the picture that we have is of a really diverse discourse that's starting to emerge on the Chinese Internet, despite the censorship that's taking place. People are finding ways to have these conversations. There's a real desire among many people to have more platforms on which to just have these conversations so that they can figure out where they want to go next, because there's a great feeling that even among, say, people who signed Charter '08, which was the call for political reform that was circulated at the end of last year, many people who signed it said, well, it sets a lot of great goals, but how do we get from here to there without civil war or without losing everything?

We need to start having – or do we go slightly somewhere else? We need to find some way to have this conversation, and we need to try and build capacity to have that conversation, whichever way we're moving. And just kind of to – a lot of people think about the Internet, and when thinking about the Internet and freedom and control are always referring to Western philosophy, so I just thought I'd end with a bit of Taoism, which is that if you try too hard to control your kingdom, you lose your grasp.

And so what does this say about the Internet and what does this say about if the Chinese government is smart, if the Communist party is smart, if they do want to use the Internet to stay in power longer or if they're going to evolve, if the Chinese polity is going to evolve? How will it evolve? It's going to be a very, very interesting thing to watch. So with that, I'd love to hear people's comments and so on.

(Applause.)

MR. PEI: Thank you so much for this really fascinating talk. We now have 30, 35 minutes for Q&A. Please tell us who you are and then I will let Rebecca to call on you by herself.

MS. MACKINNON: Okay, where to start.

Q: Hi, my name is Godov Misha (ph). I do research in social media and teach at Georgetown University. Great presentation, Rebecca. My question is that we – many of us tend to think of Internet and democracy being correlated. My sense is that, though, we're moving – we're increasingly seeing more and more cases, even in Western countries, where we are trying to shut down parts of – close down parts of the Internet. In the U.K. and Australia, there's censorship out on pornography. In America, there are concerns about child predators. Also, in many countries, including South Korea and America, there are discussions on linking online identities with government-issued offline identities. And some see a discussion set on that, on closing down anonymity. Do you see this trend internationally, beyond China?

MS. MACKINNON: Well, that's, yeah, a really key question. There's another talk I sometimes give where I have a slide that shows Western democracies – or kind of democratic countries here and authoritarian countries here, and so the assumption is that all the authoritarian

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

countries, thanks to the Internet, are going to move over here, but are we actually going to meet in the middle? This is a real question. It's up to us. We could meet in the middle.

I think this is a very possible scenario, and it's one that, as you mentioned, that there are a lot of current trends today that point in that direction, and yeah, it's true that we're at this point, I think globally, where in all societies – not just in places like China but certainly in the United States, UK, Australian, there are real questions about, you know, you have governments here, you have citizens, users here, whatever you want to call them. Then they have this layer in the middle of Internet and telecommunication services in which we are increasingly entrusting everything that's important to us.

You know, the Carnegie Endowment couldn't print out our programs today because the Internet was down. So increasingly, without that layer, our love lives go away, our work lives go away – kind of we can't, you know, everything breaks down. We depend on this layer for everything. And is that layer going to become an opaque arm of incumbent power or is that layer going to be a transparent layer in between government and citizens.

That's a real question, and it's not just a question for places like China but it's a question for current liberal democracies where there's a real debate going on about what to do about child pornography, what to do about the war on terror, what to do about cyber-crime, and this whole tension between free expression one hand – and this is the age-old – goes back to Jefferson and Hamilton debates here in the United States and goes back even further in other countries.

But just this whole tension between maintaining social order on one hand and preserving freedoms on the other, and where do you find that balance and how do you make sure that the desire to control and protect doesn't then kind of eliminate some basic freedoms and also giving sort of an opaque excuse for people to mission-creep on their – in their efforts to censor child pornography and censor hate speech, and how are these layers being set up.

And so there's a real question about, how do you do that? And there probably isn't enough debate going on in any society at this point, and there are not a lot of good answers. In the U.K., there have been people in Parliament calling for – that Internet service providers need to be held responsible for any crimes that are done.

There are kind of all sorts of – Australia's testing a filtering system for filtering pornography, but then the question is, when you look at studies that have done about Internet filtering and the way that these systems tend to be set up, you have to be incredibly transparent and accountable about the way you do it, or how do you know who's making the decision about what to censor and what not to censor, even in cases where it's censoring material that a democratic society has a consensus around needs to be censored? Or with surveillance, you know, how do you decide how surveillance is going to be done in a way that then doesn't get abused? You know, even in democratic societies, this is a huge, huge, emotionally contentious issue.

But then when you take that layer and take it to a society that isn't democratic and doesn't have transparency and doesn't have rule of law, then what happens? And again, we're creating this global layer that, you can't sort of have it set up according to certain standards and business practices in the United States and then, kind of, completely different standards and business practices in China. I mean, this is really kind of a global set of technical and other, sort of – in terms of the way

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

companies operate – ends up being a very global thing. And so how do we set it up in a way that civil liberties will be protected everywhere?

You know, it's never going to – it's going to require, just as, you know, for democracy to survive, you require people constantly pushing – I think for that layer to remain transparent and not to be an opaque arm of power, citizens are going to need to be constantly pushing in democratic societies. And you know, I think in places like China, you're seeing that there is a grassroots movement that's kind of pushing against the controls, as well. And how do we kind of support those people as well and help to empower them?

And it's less, I think, a matter of "saving them," or "freeing them," than it is a matter of empowering them to figure out what they want to do with their own country and to have their own discourse about it, and, you know, how to have a rational debate in-country about it. So anyway, that's a long answer to your question. You had your hand up?

Q: (Inaudible, off mike) – Nicole Kempton from the Laogai Research Foundation and Laogai Museum. You mentioned that, you know, there are 30 to 50 million bloggers in China and that the Internet is a very chaotic place. And it made me think about an interview that I saw this morning through the China Digital Times news digest with the blogger Ping Ke on MSNBC. And I don't know if you saw the interview or not, but I kind of had an "aha!" moment when I was watching it, because he said, well, you know, I don't trust any information that I get through CCTV, but I also don't really trust any information that I get through Southern Weekend or any of the more liberal news outlets.

And he said, so I guess as a blogger in China, I feel that the best thing for me to do is to come up with my own opinion. And it suddenly clicked that that's the reason why there are so many bloggers in China. And I wonder, you know, this idea of people kind of coming to their own conclusions and only being able to rely on themselves, you know, what implications does that have for the delivery of information in China through the media? And also, simultaneously, what kind of implications does that have for the development of civil society?

MS. MACKINNON: Yeah, good question – there's a lot of sort of complicated issues in there. But yeah, I mean, I think this is one reason why the blogosphere and kind of Web 2.0 and social media in China is – you know, when people do studies of what people watch and what people are influenced by, we're finding that the blogosphere has a huge impact on people. And it does have to do with this matter of trust – that people don't trust what's in the official media; they only trust what they hear from people who they know, and so therefore, they decide they can trust, you know.

But this is something that's going on globally as well. I mean, here in the United States, there's been a huge debate and, you know, one of the reasons why the blogosphere arose in the United States was that, you know, people on the right felt that the American media was a bunch of liberal, you know, good-for-nothings, and the people on the left felt that the American media was all in the hands or the palm of the Bush administration and couldn't be trusted. And so therefore, you know, the blogs could help come up with the truth because the mainstream media had completely failed from the perspective of people on all political sides.

So I think globally, we're at this moment anyway, where I think all individuals are having to really realize that yeah, you can't – I mean, it's never been the case that you could trust any media. I

*Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

mean, I worked for CNN for 12 years and would I tell you to believe everything you see on CNN? No. I can come up with any number of instances where, you know, CNN made mistakes in its reports and I'm really glad that there were a lot of alternative news sources that people could turn to and didn't 100-percent believe – but any news organization, it's the same thing, right?

You know, you shouldn't believe any one source. And I actually – I gave a talk in China to a bunch of young journalists not too long ago, actually. It was titled, "Why I Quit CNN," and it was very popular. (Laughter.) But, you know, my point ended up being that, you know, it was kind of exactly that – just don't believe anybody until you've verified it. And you shouldn't have blind faith in any one media outlet. And you know, there's been a lot of debate in China whether you can trust international news either. And a lot of people are saying, god, I can't trust anything, you know.

I was like, well, but it's always kind of been that way. The thing is now, is that there's more of a chance for people to triangulate, for people to debate, for people to fact-check independently against the professional media that they're seeing and then reach their own conclusions. You know, in the old days, you just kind of received whatever it was you received and then you might discuss it amongst your friends but you didn't have a chance to have a wider debate amongst society about, oh, did that reporter get his facts right or not, and sort of get, you know, kind of rely on the wisdom of the crowds to come up with whether that photo on Reuters was Photoshopped or not, you know.

And now, there's more of a possibility to do that, not just in China, but everywhere. But because of the nature of the controlled media in China, the advent of the Internet and the ability to triangulate and discuss and debate about information is just all that much more powerful than it has been even in the West, where it's kind of, you know, traumatized mainstream media as well.

Q: Hi. My name's Angelina Doh (sp) from a Vietnamese pro-democracy group called Viet Tan. Well, there has been a lot of ongoing Internet restrictions in Vietnam as well, and recently, it became more clear that Vietnam is going to adopt the Chinese model. They have, like, created this cyber-police entity like in China and announced that they will approach the international Internet service providers asking for their cooperation. So what would you say the West can do to prevent Vietnam from getting, you know, where China is right now? I mean, there is restriction in Vietnam, but I assume it's not as much as in China right now. But they're getting there. So what can the international community do and what can Vietnamese bloggers do?

MS. MACKINNON: Good question. Well, I mean, one piece of good news is that, since Vietnam is coming to this a little later, it's going to be harder for them to do for a number of reasons. One is that I think the international Internet business community has learned from what's happened in China and Google, Microsoft and Yahoo! have all signed on to something called the Global Network Initiative, which is basically a code of conduct for free expression and privacy, basically agreeing to some bottom-line standards when it comes to trying to minimize censorship and also trying to minimize, you know, the amount of user data that is collected and how companies deal with the government.

So you know, now, at least that these big three, you know, before doing anything in any market, are really going to think through a lot more than, say, Yahoo! did when it went into China originally and then found itself in the position of handing over user information to the Chinese police. And they hadn't thought through, as a company, how they were going to deal with those

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

kinds of situations. Now these companies are thinking through these issues in advance, and so it's going to be harder for the Vietnamese government, I think, to get these companies to play ball.

And also, in the situation with Vietnam – and I'm not a Vietnam expert by any means – but my understanding is that most Vietnamese bloggers are on Yahoo! 360. And you know, so one thing that is very interesting is that China started blocking the Internet early enough that you never got a critical mass of Chinese bloggers on an international blogging platform. So everybody was kind of driven onto domestic blog-hosting platforms, which are much easier to control. But Vietnam didn't encourage the development of domestic blog-hosting platforms.

In fact, I think VietNamNet tried to set one up at one point and it got shut down because they weren't controlling it well enough. If the Vietnamese government had been really smart, they would have let it actually – they would have encouraged its development and then policed it. But instead, they shut it down and then everybody went to Yahoo! 360, and now, kind of, everybody is on Yahoo! 360, and if they block Yahoo! 360, you know, it might kind of be at the point where they can't really afford to block it because everybody's there.

And Yahoo! has now kind of learned its lessons from China and, I think, is not about to go put a user data, hosted service inside Vietnamese borders, where it would be subject to Vietnamese police demands. So you know, Vietnam is in a bit of quandary on that. It will be very interesting to see, kind of, where that goes. But my understanding is that the main leverage that the government is using is just intimidation. It's like if somebody's blogging things that the government doesn't like, they just get arrested.

And that's just the old-fashioned way. And you know, I think one of the things that China has managed to do kind of successfully is to engineer a little bit more of a light touch, where they're kind of censoring people and so on so, actually, they can minimize the number of people they actually have to arrest because the problem is resolved before it gets to the arresting phase. And you know, the conversation has already kind of moved in a different direction.

But Vietnam, yeah, it may be harder to do that now because people have learned. And I think, you know, another – just to come back to your question about what can the international community do, there are a number of groups now that are working on what are known as circumvention technologies to help people get around Internet blocks. And certainly, as those technologies get more effective, more people will be able to use them.

We are finding in China that there seems to have been sort of some limits to the growth and use of those tools just because people are either afraid to use them or they find it too much of a bother and so on and so they end up staying within the censored Internet anyway. But you know, if there's a critical mass of material outside of the Vietnamese Internet that the Vietnamese people still want to access, then it's more likely they'll use those tools. And again, China has been successful because there's so much great stuff on the Chinese Internet anyway that, you know, even if you don't look at the foreign Internet, you can still be, you know, infinitely entertained.

And so if the balance with the Vietnamese-language Internet ends up being kind of outside of the Vietnamese-hosted Web sites, then that might also make a difference. But, yeah, it's going to be interesting to see how that evolves, certainly. And certainly, companies or countries – national governments – are saying to Internet companies, you know, well, you do this, that and the other in

*Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

China; why can't you do it in our country, too? So that's definitely a problem. Oh, so many hands – what to do? I think you had yours up.

Q: Hi. I'm Tom Lynn (ph) with the Congressional Research Service. If some members of Congress came up with some funding or appropriations to promote Internet freedom in China, how would you advise them? (Laughter.)

MS. MACKINNON: Whoa! That's a good question. Well, I know that –

MR. PEI: (Inaudible, off mike.)

MS. MACKINNON: No, don't give it to me. I think I'm better off without U.S. government money. No offense to the U.S. government, but you know, it just sort of makes me more independent that way, not to take government money.

MR. PEI: (Inaudible, off mike.)

MS. MACKINNON: But – yeah, I know you were joking – but the – I know that there's a grant that went out last year to fund circumvention tools and the development and promotion of these technologies to help get around Internet censorship. And certainly, more support for those tools is always good. There are a number of groups developing different kinds of tools. All of the tools work a little bit differently; they're run by different kinds of people. One of the biggest groups is something called the Global Internet Freedom Consortium, which is run by a consortium of companies and organizations consisting of Falun Gong followers.

And they've developed a suite of tools that many people in China use and which the U.S. government has supported in the past. And the U.S. government is also, I know, supporting some other tools, including something called Siphon, including something called Tor and some other, sort of, organizations and NGOs that are helping to promote the development and awareness of these tools, not only in China, but in various places. And certainly, I think, you know, supporting a range of these different organizations and supporting the development of different kinds of tools is always useful.

I don't think there's any one tool that's kind of the silver bullet that's going to solve all the problems, but there are different kinds of tools that, in different cases, are more appropriate for different people. And it's good to support that development, but circumvention, on its own, is not the full answer. And there's been a lot of focus on circumvention because, in part, of this idea that – you know, kind of the Iron Curtain 2.0 approach to the Chinese Internet, which is that all we need to do is tear down this wall and the Chinese people will be freed.

I think the circumstances – I think the relationship between the Chinese government and its people is very, very different than what we had in the Eastern Bloc and former Soviet Union. I think China is a new form of cyber – or kind of techno-authoritarianism; it's a much more participatory kind of regime, even though it's not democratic. That's not to downplay at all the human rights abuses and, you know, people I know who have been victims of outrageous things, but to say that it's a very different kind of relationship that actually obtains a great deal more buy-in from its population than the former Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc did, certainly, in the final days.

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

And so I think also what we see from – so you know, kind of the idea that you tear down the wall and suddenly, the Chinese people will be, you know, kind of dancing in the streets and free is perhaps a little bit oversimplistic. I think, at this point, that if the Great Firewall type of blocking censorship were lifted, I don't think that necessarily means that China would become a democracy. And I think, frankly, if you did a vote on – you know, of everybody who's on the Internet in China today for China's next president, you'd probably see the election of somebody who's more hostile to the United States than the current set of leaders.

So I don't think that one can assume that just because you break down the Great Firewall that everything will be resolved. I think what we're seeing in China is that, despite the censorship – and you know, we've got the Great Firewall and then we have the domestic censorship of things being taken down – I think people need more information about what's happening with that kind of censorship. I think the fact that there's so much variety from company to company and service to service within China is not very well-known.

I think if Chinese users were more aware of the variation in how different companies treat their users, there might be a bit more pressure on companies to, you know, not – to take the interests of their users more into account. Or, you know, these people are nasty censors and these people like us better and so, you know, use these people and don't use those people – put a bit more consumer pressure on companies that way.

But I think despite all the censorship that's going on, I think one thing that's very clear if one spends time hanging out in Chinese cyberspace is that there is a discourse going on – there's a debate going on – that there are people – that the nationalism that you see on the Chinese Internet is not – while there is something that is known as the “50 Cent Party” and people who are paid commentators to say things in favor of the government in forums and blogs and so on – the nationalism that you see on the Internet is not all just paid skills. There's very, very heartfelt feeling in there that is in support of a strong China, led by people who tell the foreigners where to get off, like Xi Jinping.

You know, the reaction to Xi Jinping was genuine; it was not only a 50 Cent Party construct. It wouldn't have worked, had it been only a 50 Cent Party construct. It's supplemented by the 50 Cent Party and strengthened by the 50 Cent Party and by censorship and so on, but the nationalism is real, and there's a real debate happening in China amongst different kinds of people about where the country should be going, and what does China want. You know, how do you get from A to B without the country falling apart?

I talk to a lot of people, some of whom signed the Charter 08. I was back in Beijing and Shanghai in January and some people had signed the Charter 08; some people agreed with most of it but didn't sign it because they were afraid of getting in trouble; some people disagreed with it. But one of the big criticisms was, you know, this is a great set of goals, but that's over there and we're here and how do we get from here to there without the country falling apart, without having civil war, without me losing my child's tuition, without a lot of – you know, without my son losing his ability to go abroad to study in graduate school – you know, all kinds of different – without me losing my apartment, or whatever.

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

And there are also people who think, well, you know, I don't want to go exactly there; I want to go to a somewhat variation of there. I agree with half of what was in there and I disagree with other parts. And then there are other people who say, you know, Western democracy is not what we want; we want to create something new. Most people you talk to – it's very, very hard to find anybody in China who actually thinks that the status quo is acceptable, actually, I mean, even amongst people who are quite nationalist, very few of them will, when you really get down to brass tacks over beers, very few of them will tell you that they think the status quo is just fine.

There's a lot of frustration with corruption and inequality and all kinds of things. But, you know, how to get to a model that, you know, better represents the will of the people and what that looks like and whether it's something like what we have where you're voting for leaders in a multiparty system, or you know, there are people who are advocating for, no, we don't need voting anymore because we can use the Internet to aggregate public opinion and then the government can adjust and then you won't need voting and so on. You know, there's a lot of debates going on.

And the point is that people need platforms to have these debates in ways that are rational. And I really would go back to what my friend Isaac Mao said, that before free speech, you need freethinking. And so how to kind of build the capacity for rational debate, for a sophisticated kind of civil discourse – public discourse – on China's future so that thought leaders can emerge who really have domestic legitimacy and whose thinking is really rooted in the local reality. And that takes time, but I think there could be ways to help facilitate discussion. I think that, you know, certainly when it comes to, say, you know, the U.S. government – amongst the things that the U.S. government funds – we have Radio Free Asia and Voice of America that have been broadcasting into China for a long time and are now on the Web.

One of the big criticisms I hear from people in China of these services is that they're just lecturing us. They're just telling us things we already know. Of course, you know, the system is bad; of course democracy is better. What do they think? Do they think we're idiots? You know, I've had people say this to me. We just want – they're saying that they want more of an ability to kind of engage about issues and to have a platform for discussing specifics. And this is what I often hear from people. So it's like, I don't need to be convinced that democracy's better than our current system – you know, this is from somebody I know who is in the liberal camp anyway, because you're probably going to have a more difficult time reaching people who are not in the liberal camp anyway – but even people in the liberal camp are like, look, don't waste your time convincing me democracy is better because I know that.

What I want is I want to be able to have specific discussions about how to hold people accountable so that my baby doesn't get poisoned, you know – how do build, kind of, immediate things. You know, you really want to engage people and also facilitate a discussion about solving concrete problems. It's to get really specific. How do you eliminate corruption in the food production system so that Chinese children won't be poisoned. You know, how do you create a system by which urban development is done in a way that better benefits all citizens of the city rather than just the developers and the local party bosses?

How do we move towards solving these specific problems and what has been done in other countries, and try and create platforms where people can discuss this and, perhaps, can experience this from different countries. The reaction that I often get is that if you kind of engage in discussion that way, that people will be less likely to turn off and that a lot of people, you know, the moment

*Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

they feel that they're getting lectured at, the moment they hear anything or read anything that smacks of propaganda, no matter who it's coming from, they run, you know, and they go watch these spoof videos instead and they're just not interested.

And so while they might be sympathetic to a lot of the ideas, the way in which those ideas are being discussed is really important. And is it coming to them in a way that they feel is not patronizing and that respects them as equals and as equal players and that respects their ability to affect their own future and not just be, kind of, acted upon? And I think people in China are very tired of being acted upon, whether it's by their own government or by other foreign actors of different kinds. And so people really want a chance to be treated with respect by, kind of, everybody.

MR. PEI: One more question.

MS. MACKINNON: Yeah. Oh, geez, who's had their – you choose, I can't choose.

Q: I have a very specific, short question.

MR. PEI: Oh, tell us who you are.

Q: Oh, my name is Susan Weld (sp). I'm from Georgetown Law Center. And I'm interested in those virtual NGOs you described. Has the government shown any interest in controlling them? Are they still pretty free? I think it sounds like a wonderful way to organize not suspiciously in civil society.

MS. MACKINNON: Well, this is the thing: I mean, they're so virtual that they can't be controlled because they don't exist. (Laughter.) You know what I'm saying? So I mean, there have been some people that have tried to use the Internet to organize NGOs that are concrete enough that they might have a bank account or, you know, a physical place, and that's where it gets into difficulty because the government regulations on setting up NGOs are so strict. And so a lot of these guys who – and you know, there was kind a lot of spontaneous efforts that emerged around the earthquake as well, where people just kind of organized each other and then went to help with the relief effort around the earthquake.

And this is the problem is that they can't scale because the moment they scale beyond, you know, a blogger posts a thing saying I'm going to go help these people in this neighborhood and I'm going to go have lunch at such-and-such a place and, you know, don't bring cash, just bring food and clothing and, you know, whatever – toys for the kids or whatever – and meet me on Sunday at such-and-such a place. You know, that's all very small-scale, and the problem is, you can't use the Internet to organize larger scale, because the moment you get larger scale, you start needing bank accounts, you start needing physical institutions of some kind that do get you shut down. And so that is one of the problems.

But at the same time, people are finding ways – you know, they're saying we can't do anything large-scale, so we're just going to keep doing lots of little, small-scale things and then kind of meet and talk about our experiences and share them and so on. But yeah, they're certainly in a situation where the government won't allow larger-scale organizations to form very easily. There's real limitations.

*Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

MR. PEI: Okay, I'm afraid we have got to end here. We can keep you here for another hour, still not having our questions answered. I want to say that Rebecca has her own blog, and I really urge you to go and visit her blog. And her book on China's Internet will be coming out at some point in the future; she's working on it. And I hope you will go and you will buy a copy so that Rebecca can really benefit from our interest in her intellectual work. And please join me in thanking her for giving us this fantastic talk.

(Applause.)

(END)