
POLITICAL USE OF THE INTERNET IN CHINA

INTRODUCTION

This report addresses the use of the Internet by Chinese dissidents, members of Falungong,¹ Tibetan activists, and other groups and individuals in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and abroad who are regarded as subversive by the Chinese authorities. It also examines the counterstrategies that those authorities have employed in their efforts to prevent or minimize the impact of dissident use of the Internet. Finally it attempts to assess future trends in these areas.

The report is based on interviews with numerous government officials in Washington, D.C., and Beijing, as well as discussions with dissidents, Falungong members, human-rights advocates, and academics based in China and North America. The conclusions are also informed by a comprehensive review of the growing literature on the political impact of the Internet in China and other authoritarian countries,² as well as relevant Western and Chinese media reports. In

¹Banned in China, Falungong combines meditation with certain quasi-spiritual beliefs. For an introduction to Falungong, see the group's web sites, listed in the Appendix.

²Recent publications that deal specifically or in passing with the political impact of the Internet in China include Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, "The Internet and State Control in Authoritarian Regimes: China, Cuba, and the Counterrevolution," Carnegie Endowment Working Papers, No. 21, July 2001; Eric Harwit and Duncan Clark, "Shaping the Internet in China: Evolution of Political Control over Network Infrastructure and Content," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 41, No. 3, May/June 2001; Nina Hachigian, "China's Cyber-Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 2, March/April 2001, pp. 118–133; William Foster and Seymour E. Goodman, *The Diffusion of the Internet in China*, Center for Security and Cooperation, Stanford University, November 2000; and

addition, the research for this project included fieldwork in several cities in China and extensive data-gathering on the Internet, including the examination of hundreds of Chinese-language web sites, chat rooms, and bulletin board sites (BBS).

This report presents a case study that focuses on China, but it deals with a number of themes that are relevant to the analysis of the political impact of the Internet in authoritarian states and other non-democratic regimes. As such, its conclusions make a contribution to

Guobin Yang, "The Impact of the Internet on Civil Society in China: A Preliminary Assessment" (forthcoming). For a journalistic account of China's dissident diaspora that touches upon the use of the Internet by activists in exile, see Ian Buruma, *Bad Elements: Chinese Rebels from Los Angeles to Beijing*, Random House, 2001. A revealing, though by the author's own admission not particularly objective, look at China's Internet entrepreneurs that also contains some interesting observations on the social and political side effects of the information-technology revolution is provided by David Sheff, *China Dawn: The Story of a Technology and Business Revolution*, New York: Harper Business, 2002.

The Internet's political consequences are also addressed in the U.S. Department of State's annual reports on human rights in China, the most recent of which, *China Country Report on Human Rights Practices, 2001*, was issued in March 2002. Also available to the public are several reports prepared by the U.S. embassy in Beijing, including "PRC Web Forums on Mid Air Collision," April 2001; "Web Discussion Sample: True Democracy, Fake Democracy, or No Democracy?" undated; "China: Information Security," June 1999; "China's Internet Information Skirmish," January 2000; "Kids, Cadres, and 'Cultists' All Love It: Growing Influence of the Internet in China," March 2001; and "PRC Net Dreams: Is Control Possible?" September 1997.

Chinese researchers are also conducting work in related areas. For example, see Guo Liang and Bu Wei, *Hulianwang shiyong zhuangkuang ji yingxiang de diaocha baogao [Investigative Report on Internet Use and Its Impact]*, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Center for Social Development, research supported by State Informatization Office, April 2001; this paper is also available in an abridged English version, "The Questionnaire and Responses to a Survey on Internet Usage and Impact in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, and Changsha," Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Center for Social Development.

A number of studies of the political influence of the Internet in other countries have also been published recently. On Burmese dissident use of the Internet and the regime's response, see Tiffany Danitz and Warren P. Strobel, "Networking Dissent: Cyber Activists Use the Internet to Promote Democracy in Burma," in John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (eds.), *Networks and Netwars*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001, pp. 129–170. On the information revolution, network forms of organization, and "social netwar" in Mexico, see David Ronfeldt, John Arquilla, Graham E. Fuller, and Melissa Fuller, *The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1998. For a more general overview of the economic and political impact of the Internet and e-commerce at the local level in several developing nations, see Booz Allen & Hamilton, *E-Commerce at the Grass Roots: Implications of a "Wired" Citizenry in Developing Nations*, prepared for the National Intelligence Council, June 30, 2000.

the development of what is gradually becoming a substantial body of comparative literature on the topic of dissent and political activism in the digital age. The debate on this topic tends to center on the following questions: Does the Internet provide dissidents with potent new tools that they can use to promote their causes, break through the barriers of censorship, and perhaps ultimately undermine the power and authority of nondemocratic regimes? Or, on the contrary, is it more likely that those authoritarian governments will use the Internet as another instrument to repress dissent, silence their critics, and strengthen their own power?

These questions, though often presented in somewhat oversimplified form, are relevant in dozens of countries around the world. From Saudi Arabia, to Cuba, to Myanmar, to China, dissidents are using the Internet to organize and communicate with each other, to access banned information, and to draw support from a global network of activists and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). At the same time, the governments of these countries are struggling to prevent activists from using the Internet to erode government controls over the flow of information and to promote political or social agendas that the regimes find threatening. These authoritarian regimes employ a variety of countermeasures, some of which rely on the latest advances in communications technology and some of which are much more traditional.

In most cases, these cat-and-mouse games between governments and dissidents have produced no clear winners, and as yet, there are no definitive answers to the fundamental questions raised above. The principal finding of this report, however, is that the arrival of the Internet in China has altered the dynamic between the Beijing regime and the dissident community. It has enabled local dissident efforts to become issues of national and even global discussion. It has allowed dissidents on the mainland to communicate with each other and with their counterparts in the exile dissident community, as well as with other overseas supporters, with greater ease and rapidity than ever before. In response, the Chinese government has employed a mixture of low-tech and high-tech countermeasures, with a degree of success thus far that has confounded many observers.

THE STATE OF THE INTERNET IN CHINA

The Internet has been at the forefront of the information revolution in China. While penetration of the Internet is still fairly insignificant when measured in either relative or absolute terms, growth in the number of users since 1995 has been virtually exponential and is expected to increase at geometric rates for the indefinite future. The number of Internet users in China had reached 33.7 million by January 2002, up from only 2.1 million in January 1999, according to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) (see Table 1).³

China's international connectivity and the number of computers in the PRC with Internet access are also increasing at rapid rates. International data bandwidth has grown dramatically in recent years, increasing almost tenfold between January 2000 and July 2001, and more than doubling between July 2001 and January 2002 (see Table 2), while the number of computers connected to the Internet, only around 750,000 in January 1999, had surpassed 12,500,000 by January 2002 (see Table 3).⁴

³China Internet Network Information Center, "*Zhongguo hulian wangluo fazhan zhuangkuang tongji baogao*" [Survey Statistical Report on the Development of the Chinese Internet], January 2002, p. 5. See also "Semiannual Survey Report on the Development of China's Internet," July 2001, and other previous CNNIC reports (listed in the References). The CNNIC, located in Beijing's Haidian district, was established in June 1997 and operates under the leadership of the Ministry of Information Industry and the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Its responsibilities include registering domain names, distributing IP (Internet protocol) addresses, and conducting statistical surveys on the development of the Internet in China. The CNNIC has released nine of these survey reports. The first two were issued in October 1997 and July 1998. Since then, the CNNIC has issued reports twice annually, every January and July. The reports are available online (all but the first two reports are available in English translation) at CNNIC's website: www.cnnic.gov.cn/e-index.shtml. CNNIC reports also provide information on total bandwidth, Internet user demographics, number and geographic distribution of domain names and web sites, access locations and expenditures, and user views regarding online advertising and e-commerce. It should be noted that industry experts have questioned the methodology employed by the CNNIC to count Internet users and to tabulate some of the other statistics in its reports. It is also worth noting that account-sharing is another factor that complicates attempts to estimate accurately the number of people in China who are "wired."

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 5–7. More than half of all Chinese Internet users access the Internet at their homes or offices, according to the July 2001 report, while around 18 percent access the Internet at school, and 15 percent access it at Internet cafes. January 2000 statistics are from CNNIC, "Semi-Annual Survey Report on Internet Development in China," January 2000.

Table 1
Growth of Internet Use in China

Date	Number of Users
October 1997	620,000
July 1998	1,175,000
January 1999	2,100,000
July 1999	4,000,000
January 2000	8,900,000
July 2000	16,900,000
January 2001	22,500,000
July 2001	26,500,000
January 2002	33,700,000

Source: China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC).

Table 2
Total Bandwidth of China's International Connections

Date	Total Bandwidth (megabits/second)
October 1997	25
July 1998	85
January 1999	134
July 1999	241
January 2000	351
July 2000	1,234
January 2001	2,799
July 2001	3,257
January 2002	7,598

Source: China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC).

At the same time, however, there are a number of important distortions in the Internet modernization process that impede the effectiveness of the Internet as a tool for political expression. First, as revealed by the latest official statistics, a pronounced “digital divide” exists in China. Internet usage continues to be dominated by an extremely narrow sliver of the national demographic, primarily young, highly educated, urban men. According to the most recently released official statistics:

Table 3
**Number of Computers Connected to the Internet
 in China**

Date	Number of Computers
October 1997	299,000
July 1998	542,000
January 1999	747,000
July 1999	1,460,000
January 2000	3,500,000
July 2000	6,500,000
January 2001	8,920,000
July 2001	10,020,000
January 2002	12,500,000

Source: China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC).

- More than two-thirds of all Internet users in China are 30 years of age or younger, and nearly 80 percent are under 35.
- Approximately 90 percent of the Internet users have attained at least a high school diploma, and more than 60 percent have attended college.
- Users are heavily concentrated in prosperous provinces and municipalities in China's economically dynamic coastal areas, primarily Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Guangdong.
- Of the estimated 33.7 million Internet users in China, only 1.9 percent are peasants or farmers.
- Roughly 60 percent of the Chinese Internet users are male, although the proportion of Chinese women using the Internet has grown steadily over the past several years.⁵

While the current Internet-using cohort is likely to be most amenable to pro-reform political messages from abroad, the failure of a similarly structured protest movement in 1989 highlights the importance of a grass-roots, inclusive base for political change. Also, recent

⁵Ibid., pp. 5–10. The latest CNNIC report also shows that northeastern rustbelt provinces and inland areas host only a tiny percentage of Chinese web sites.

trends in China indicate that this cohort is becoming highly nationalistic in outlook, and anecdotal evidence suggests that its members have ambivalent attitudes toward the United States. Moreover, only slightly more than 20 percent of the information viewed by Chinese Internet users is in languages other than Chinese, and many users identify high prices⁶ and slow access speed as serious, continuing problems.⁷ The second developmental distortion centers on the shifting government regulatory environment regarding the Internet in China, which appears to be creating a situation in which cooperation or even partnership with government organs is the only effective strategy for profitable investment. The close ties between government and the commercial Internet sector, as well as a set of harsh edicts about improper Internet use, have led Internet service providers (ISPs) to implement policies of self-censorship and have deterred Internet users from fully exploiting the political potential of the medium.

THE STATE OF UNSANCTIONED NGOs INSIDE CHINA

The existence of the Internet, of course, is not inherently threatening to the political position of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). But when the Internet is used by unsanctioned organizations inside China for “subversive” purposes, the regime takes notice. This section assesses the state of unsanctioned NGOs in China and provides a brief introduction to the major groups that Beijing considers subversive users of the Internet and related communications technologies.

The CCP has never tolerated the formation of organizations that attempt to exist outside of its control, and over the past several years, Beijing has effectively carried out Jiang Zemin’s December 1998 pledge to “resolutely nip in the bud” all attempts to form unsanctioned political organizations in China.⁸ Although Chinese authori-

⁶For an extensive discussion of the cost issue, see Eric Harwit and Duncan Clark, “Shaping the Internet in China: Evolution of Political Control over Network Infrastructure and Content,” pp. 390–391.

⁷CNNIC Report, January 2002, pp. 8–9.

⁸Jiang made this comment in a December 18, 1998, speech marking the 20th anniversary of the Third Plenum of the 11th CCP Central Committee. See “Jiang

ties have been unable to prevent sporadic demonstrations by Falungong adherents or to completely silence the surprisingly resilient China Democracy Party (CDP), there is at present no political, social, or religious organization in China with the capability to challenge the CCP's monopoly of political power.

Over the past several years, the Falungong meditation sect and the CDP were the two unsanctioned groups that Beijing perceived as posing the most serious challenges to its authority. But even as it focused its efforts on suppressing these two groups, especially Falungong, the regime was bedeviled by a host of other organizations, including many based outside of China. The most prominent among these groups are the Tibetan exile community and its global network of supporters, and the dissident diaspora in North America and Europe. Even individual activists, such as Frank Siqing Lu, the director of the Hong Kong Information Center, which gathers information on dissident arrests and worker demonstrations and faxes handwritten press releases to international media organizations, caused Beijing great concern during this period of time and continue to do so today.

Before discussing dissident use of the Internet, we present brief sketches of three of the principal unsanctioned organizations that are discussed throughout this report: Falungong, the CDP, and the Tibetan exile movement.⁹

Falungong

Falungong was founded by Li Hongzhi, a government clerk, in 1992. At first glance, the organization appears similar to hundreds of groups in China that practice *qigong*, a traditional system of exercise

Stresses Stability, Unity," *Xinhua*, December 18, 1998, in FBIS, December 18, 1998. At a national law-enforcement conference three days later, Jiang declared, "Stability is the prerequisite for reform and development." He warned, "Without stability, we would achieve nothing and forfeit what we have achieved." Jiang told the assembled members of the police and law-enforcement apparatus that maintaining stability was thus of the "utmost importance." See "Jiang, Zhu Speak at Politics and Law Conference," *Xinhua*, December 23, 1998, in FBIS, December 24, 1998.

⁹We also mention the use of the Internet by other dissident groups and individual activists, and several are discussed in greater detail in other sections of the report. Because they are not the most prominent actors, however, these groups and individuals are not examined at length here.

and healing. What distinguishes Falungong from the other groups, however, is its founder, who claimed to have received knowledge of a spiritual system from “20 masters” who sought him out as a child to educate him in its ways. To traditional *qigong*, which holds that certain physical exercises can channel human energies in healing ways, Li added his own supernaturally received wisdom. The tenets included teaching far more potent healing exercises than are typically associated with *qigong*, including the healing of terminally ill persons; various cosmological and moral precepts; and the teaching that very accomplished practitioners of Falungong can attain “super-normal” powers such as teleportation and the ability to fly. By the mid-1990s, Li had gathered notes on his teachings into pamphlets and books that he sold at his classes and lectures. After clashes with the authorities, Li left China with his wife and daughter to live in the United States. Various estimates of the number of Falungong practitioners range from the understated Chinese government estimate of 10 million members to the group’s own July 1999 estimate of 100 million members in more than 30 countries.¹⁰ One independent observer placed the number at around 40 million in 1999.¹¹

Falungong came to national and global attention on April 25, 1999, when between 10,000 and 15,000 Falungong practitioners gathered outside the Zhongnanhai central leadership compound in Beijing. The protest was reportedly prompted by reports of violence inflicted on Falungong practitioners by Chinese police in Tianjin two days earlier, as well as an official ban on the publishing of Falungong materials. The protesters arrived to petition the National People’s Congress and the party leadership, with the goal of obtaining official registration with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Religious Affairs Bureau, or the China Buddhist Association. The protesters did not give the police any excuse for high-handed suppression. No banners were displayed, no slogans were chanted, and the crowd of largely elderly and female practitioners shunned contact with the foreign media. According to one account, the protesters sat in complete silence, ar-

¹⁰For the Falungong estimate, see “A Report on Extensive and Severe Human Rights Violations in the Suppression of Falungong in the People’s Republic of China, 1999–2000,” compiled by the group.

¹¹“Falungong and the Internet: A Marriage Made in Web Heaven,” VirtualChina.com, July 30, 1999.

ranged in neat rows, for 18 hours. They cooperated with police, dispersed peacefully at nightfall, and even collected their own garbage.

By all accounts, the Chinese government had no foreknowledge of the demonstration, which was coordinated through the use of the Internet and wireless telephones.¹² In public, the government initially responded by adopting a moderate position, announcing that the protest would not result in punishment of those involved.¹³ Behind the scenes, however, the CCP was preparing its counterattack. First, the leadership of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) was allegedly criticized for not providing any warning of the protest to the leadership or preempting the march itself, and some of the ministry's leaders were purged. After two months of investigation, which revealed a surprising number of practitioners among the ranks of military officers and ministry officials, a nationwide crackdown on Falungong was initiated.¹⁴ The crackdown combined a counter-propaganda campaign with an aggressive series of arrests and detentions.¹⁵ On July 20, 1999, hundreds of key members of Falungong were reportedly arrested in the middle of the night. On July 21, the group was banned in China for allegedly spreading "superstitious, evil thinking." President Jiang Zemin allegedly ordered the ban on the sect at an emergency Politburo meeting, asserting that Falungong was a destabilizing force. The Public Security Bureau issued a notice forbidding engaging in protests, spreading rumors, putting up notices or banners, or disseminating publications relating to Falun-

¹²See Kevin Platt, "China's 'Cybercops' Clamp Down; Beijing Sees Growing Web Use as Threat, But It Had a Victory Nov. 9 in Connection with Four Convictions," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 17, 1999, p. 6; and Willy Wo-Lap Lam, "Falungong Protest Shocks Party Leadership," *South China Morning Post*, April 28, 1999, p. 17.

¹³"Talks Given by Officials of the State Council and the Chinese Communist Party Central Letters and Visit Bureaus," *Xinhua*, June 14, 1999, in FBIS, June 14, 1999.

¹⁴John Pomfret, "China Sect Penetrated Military and Police: Security Infiltration Spurred Crackdown," *Washington Post*, August 7, 1999.

¹⁵The length of time between the demonstration and the crackdown can be explained by the general lack of knowledge about Falungong and its activities among members of the leadership and the security apparatus. Jiang Zemin himself has reportedly told foreign visitors that he had never heard of the group before the gathering. Various government organs needed to carry out detailed investigations of the movement after the demonstration, to provide data for the deliberations at higher levels.

gong. Other circulars prohibited party members from joining the sect. A week later, an arrest warrant was issued for Li Hongzhi, who by then was already a permanent resident of the United States.

The Chinese security apparatus' tried-and-true strategy of leadership decapitation and intimidation of the rank-and-file, which has been highly successful in past crackdowns, has not worked completely with Falungong. At the time of the official ban, the regime's attitude was summarized by a high-ranking official: "We will cope with any kind of reaction. The majority will have left the organization now that it's illegal." In fact, however, the government appears stymied by the cellular organizational structure of the group. To the alleged consternation of the leadership, practitioners continued to protest and file petitions throughout 1999 and 2000. In October 1999, for instance, Falungong held a clandestine press conference in Beijing, attended by foreign journalists. Shortly thereafter, the PRC government raised the ante by declaring Falungong to be an "evil cult," permitting the levying of harsher legal penalties against the group. Official state media outlets have churned out countless print, radio, and television stories detailing Falungong's "crimes," including the leaking of state secrets,¹⁶ the masterminding of 307 demonstrations, and the deaths of 743 people.¹⁷ In addition, millions of Falungong books, audiotapes, and videotapes have been publicly destroyed.¹⁸ The campaign also has an international dimension: Chinese embassies abroad have been ordered to disseminate anti-Falungong material in multiple languages.

Recently, the frequency of demonstrations has declined, as large numbers of practitioners have been imprisoned, sent to labor camps, or driven underground. In addition, by some accounts, the fiery suicide of several Falungong members in Tiananmen Square on January 23, 2001, and the ensuing campaign to vilify the group in the official media, which featured graphic images of a young girl who died from burns suffered during the incident, has turned popular opinion

¹⁶"Police Claim Falungong Followers Leaked State Secrets," *Xinhua*, October 25, 1999, in FBIS, October 25, 1999.

¹⁷See Pomfret, "China Sect Penetrated Military and Police."

¹⁸"Circular Issued on Destroying Falungong Publications," *Xinhua*, July 28, 1999, in FBIS, July 28, 1999.

decidedly against Falungong on the mainland and perhaps even in some overseas Chinese communities.

The China Democracy Party

On June 24, 1998, emboldened by the relatively relaxed political climate of the 1997–1998 “Beijing Spring,” three dissidents in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, announced the establishment of the CDP.¹⁹ The dissidents timed their application for official recognition to coincide with President Clinton’s visit to China in June 1998, apparently confident that Beijing would not order local authorities to act against them during the Sino-U.S. summit.²⁰ Within a few months, dissidents in locations throughout China had established regional branches of the nascent opposition party. In November, members of the CDP announced plans to convene a national party congress and applied to the State Council for permission to form a “national preparatory committee.”

Increasingly concerned about social and political stability at home, and with the perceived utility of tolerating dissident activity declining as the overall state of U.S.-China relations deteriorated, Beijing decided to launch a crackdown against the CDP. In late December 1998, the CDP’s three most prominent members, Wang Youcai, Xu Wenli, and Qin Yongmin, were sentenced to long prison terms on charges of “endangering state security.” At least two dozen more CDP members have since been imprisoned, and many others are being held in detention.

Although the CDP called for wide-ranging reforms, it adopted a relatively moderate approach by organizing openly and applying to the authorities for permission to register legally. The CDP even declared that, while it opposed China’s authoritarian political system, it did not oppose the CCP itself and would be willing to work with the CCP

¹⁹The group was led by Wang Youcai, a student leader of the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations who was named on Beijing’s “most wanted” list following the June 4 crackdown.

²⁰See “Open Declaration on the Establishment of the China Democracy Party Zhejiang Preparatory Committee” (*Zhongguo minzhudang Zhejiang choubei weiyuanhui chengli gongkai xuanyan*), available on the CDP web site or by request from the authors.

to achieve political reform.²¹ Nevertheless, Beijing regarded the dissidents' attempt to organize a nationwide opposition party as an intolerable assault on the "Four Cardinal Principles."²² Despite Beijing's crackdown, a number of CDP members remain active on the mainland. The CDP has also developed an organization-in-exile in the United States.²³

The Tibetan Exile Community

Between late 1949 and September 1951, Chinese troops invaded Tibet, eventually conquering the entire country, which Beijing claimed had always been part of the pre-modern Chinese empire. For a time, the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan authorities attempted to co-exist with their new rulers. By March 1959, however, resistance to Chinese rule had grown into a national uprising. The rebellion was quickly and ruthlessly crushed by Chinese forces, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Tibetans. The Dalai Lama and some 80,000 Tibetan refugees fled the capital city of Lhasa, taking asylum in the Indian city of Dharamsala, which is now the home of the Tibetan government-in-exile. According to statistics provided by Tibetan authorities, there are currently more than 130,000 Tibetan refugees around the world.

²¹See, for example, "*Zhongguo minzhudang zhengzhi gangling*" [Political Program of the China Democracy Party], available on the CDP web site or by request from the authors. In its political program, the CDP states that it "does not oppose the Communist Party, it only opposes the authoritarian system, and it seeks with the CCP a goal where both sides win" (*bu fandui gongchandang, zhi fandui zhuanzhi zhidu, zhuiqiu yu zhonggong shuangying de mubiao*). See also "Pro-Democracy Activist Interviewed on Party Formation," *Mainichi Shimbun*, September 13, 1998, in FBIS, September 13, 1998. Xie Wanjun, then a CDP member in Shandong Province, stated that the CCP would continue to be the ruling party during the process of political reform and pledged, "If our request to form a party is approved, we will act within the scope of the current constitution." Xie added, "We can form the party peacefully after holding discussions with the CCP without confrontation."

²²The Four Cardinal Principles, sometimes referred to as the Four Basic Rules or the Four Upholds, state that China must uphold (1) the leadership of the CCP, (2) Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought, (3) the people's democratic dictatorship, and (4) the path of socialism.

²³Several interviewees, including exiled dissidents and Western NGO researchers, noted that the actual size of the U.S.-based component of the CDP is unclear.

From their base in India, the Dalai Lama and his people have continued to press for greater autonomy for Tibet. Rather than negotiating with the government-in-exile, Beijing has implemented policies of ethnic Chinese resettlement and cultural and religious repression of Tibetans. Activists assert that as a result of these measures, an unknown number of Tibetans have been killed since the original annexation, and more than 6,000 monasteries have been destroyed. Han Chinese now outnumber Tibetans in Tibet by almost 1.5 million, and parts of historic Tibet have been incorporated into five neighboring Chinese provinces. Recent attempts to foster communication between the Tibetan government-in-exile and Beijing have foundered over disagreements about the choice of the current reincarnation of the Panchen Lama, one of the most important religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism; disputes over the size of Tibet; and Beijing's mistrust of and vituperative verbal attacks against the Dalai Lama.

Activities committed to winning increased autonomy for Tibet are supported principally by the Tibetan government-in-exile, composed of a variety of elected and civil service institutions. In addition, there are six central Tibetan NGOs: the Tibetan Youth Congress, the Tibetan Women's Association, Cholkha-sum, the Ngari Association, Ghu-chu-sum (a support organization for former Tibetan political prisoners), and the United Association. These NGOs are joined by an extensive international network of Tibetan advocacy organizations, including Students for Free Tibet, the International Campaign for Tibet, the International Tibet Independence Movement, the Tibet Support Group, the Tibet Fund, the Milarepa Fund (sponsors of the annual Tibetan Freedom Concerts), the Committee of 100 for Tibet, Tibet Environmental Watch, the Tibetan Plateau Project, the International Committee of Lawyers for Tibet, Tibet House, and the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy.

USE OF THE INTERNET

We next examine the use of the Internet by mainland and exile dissidents, Falungong practitioners, members of the Tibetan diaspora, and other activists for both two-way and one-way communication.

Two-Way Communication

For dissidents, students, and members of groups such as Falungong, the Internet permits the global dissemination of information, especially through two-way communication such as e-mail and BBS, for communication, coordination, and organization with greater ease and rapidity than ever before. Importantly, it allows the activists to pursue their activities in some instances without attracting the attention of the authorities, as exemplified by the unexpected Falungong demonstration outside the central leadership compound in April 1999. Dissidents, Falungong adherents, Tibetan exiles, and Chinese university students use a variety of means of two-way Internet communication, including e-mail, web-based petitions, BBS, and chat rooms to coordinate, organize, motivate, and transmit information regarded by Beijing as politically sensitive or “subversive.”

Two-Way E-mail Communication and Coordination. E-mail is an especially important tool for two-way communication and coordination among dissidents, Falungong practitioners, and Tibetan exiles. A variety of evidence indicates that mainland dissidents regularly use e-mail, as well as Internet chat rooms and bulletin boards, to communicate and coordinate with each other and with members of the exile dissident community.²⁴ Soon after Internet service became available to the public in China, several prominent dissidents began to use e-mail to organize political discussion salons and seminars.²⁵ More recently, two-way communication via e-mail played an important role in the organization and development of the CDP. Several CDP members assert that use of e-mail and the Internet was critical to the formation of the party and allowed its membership to expand from about 12 activists in one region to more than 200 in provinces and municipalities throughout China in only four months.²⁶ The Zhejiang branch of the CDP reportedly became a

²⁴See for example, “Internet Allows Chinese Dissidents to Network,” www.nando.net, June 2, 1998. Ren Wanding says that he uses e-mail on an almost daily basis to get information that is not available in the official media, to keep track of news regarding other mainland dissidents, and to contact members of the overseas democracy movement.

²⁵Interview, U.S. government executive branch official, May 2000.

²⁶Maggie Farley, “Hactivists Besiege China,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1999. See also Jasper Becker, “Review of Dissidents, Human Rights Issues,” *South China*

particularly important and influential component of the party, in part because many dissidents in the region owned computers and had e-mail access.²⁷ Over the past several years, mainland dissidents have also almost certainly used e-mail to coordinate open letters and petitions, many of which were signed by 100 or more dissidents.²⁸ In addition, in early 1999, mainland and overseas activists used e-mail to coordinate and publicize an abortive attempt to form the China Labor Party.²⁹

The use of e-mail is equally important to exile dissident groups such as the Chinese Democracy and Justice Party (CDJP). According to Shi Lei, director of the CDJP's Internet division, "The use of the Internet and e-mail to transmit information about the democracy movement has been the most effective method of communication for the CDJP since its founding."³⁰ Shi says that overcoming the countermeasures employed by the Chinese authorities is a constant struggle. "The CCP continuously tries to blockade us," he says, "and we never stop looking for new ways to break the blockade."³¹

Morning Post, January 12, 1999. Beijing CDP member and longtime dissident Gao Hongming told Becker, "It is the first time we attracted so many people from all over the country; it shows what can be done."

²⁷"Police Arrest Dissidents to Prevent Seminar Opening," Hong Kong Information Center of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China, March 14, 1999, in FBIS, March 14, 1999.

²⁸In late December 1998, for example, 274 dissidents from 20 provinces signed an open letter demanding that authorities release Hunan dissident Zhang Shanguang, who was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for discussing rural unrest on Radio Free Asia. It seems very likely that the signatories relied to a great extent on e-mail to distribute and coordinate the appeal.

²⁹"New Party for Workers to Seek Registry," Hong Kong *Agence France Presse*, January 2, 1999, in FBIS, January 2, 1999. A Beijing dissident using the alias "Li Yongming" and a U.S.-based exile announced the attempted formation of the party to the Hong Kong media organization via e-mail. They announced that the party's goals included combating official corruption and said it would draw its supporters in part from the ranks of laid-off workers, a prospect Beijing must have found particularly worrisome given widespread discontent among the growing numbers of unemployed workers and the increasing frequency of demonstrations.

³⁰Shi Lei, "*Xinxi bailingqiang: tupo zhonggong wangluo dianzi youjian fengsuo (zhiyi)*" [The Information Berlin Wall: Breaking the Chinese Communist Party's Net and E-mail Blockade (part one)], available in Chinese only on the website of the Home for Global Internet Freedom at <http://internetfreedom.org/gb/articles/994.html>.

³¹*Ibid.*

For Falungong, e-mail is perhaps even more vital. When Li Hongzhi moved to the United States, Falungong set up e-mail lists to facilitate communication between followers in the United States, and between followers in the United States and China. The movement reportedly used e-mail to coordinate the April 1999 gathering outside the Zhongnanhai central leadership compound in Beijing.³² Falungong also reportedly used e-mail to set up a secret press conference in Beijing to tell the world about police beatings of detained members.³³ Following Master Li's retreat from public life, all of his new articles have been disseminated via the group's primary e-mail list, Minghui Net. The importance of this list to the organization has become even greater in the aftermath of serious attacks against its bulletin boards and chat rooms, and repeated efforts to flood the Minghui Net mailbox have forced its administrators to adopt new methods. A July 27, 2000, message entitled "Notice to Overseas Practitioners from the Minghui Editors" announced that the old editorial mailbox (eng_editor@minghui.ca) was to be replaced by a new address (eng_article@minghui.org).³⁴ In the event that both mailboxes were unavailable, practitioners were instructed to send their articles "to the various local dafa associations and ask those in charge to submit them . . . to the Minghui editors." Practitioners were also encouraged to "periodically compress Minghui essays and documents into ZIP files and send them to the many readers in China and other regions where it is not convenient for them to access the Minghui site." It must be noted, however, that every submission to Minghui Net is retransmitted to the group at large. According to a July 14, 2000, posting entitled "On Important Matters, Practitioners Must Watch the Position of Minghui Net," users were told that their messages would be vetted by "a group of practitioners responsible for careful and detailed proofreading, editing, and approval."³⁵

³²Kevin Platt, "China's 'Cybercops' Clamp Down; Beijing Sees Growing Web Use as Threat, But It Had a Victory Nov. 9 in Connection with Four Convictions," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 17, 1999, p. 6.

³³Ibid., p. 6; see also Erik Eckholm, "China Sect Members Covertly Meet Press and Ask World's Help," *New York Times*, October 29, 1999.

³⁴See <http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2000/July/27/EDITOR072700.html>.

³⁵See http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/2000/July/16/AW071600_1.html.

Dissidents and human-rights activists also use the Internet and e-mail to transmit to the international media information about arrests, human-rights violations, and worker demonstrations on the mainland. Frank Siqing Lu's Hong Kong Information Center relies primarily on a beeper and callback system to gather information from informants in China³⁶ but has reportedly also made extensive use of e-mail for this purpose.³⁷ Indeed, Lu's e-mail address is listed on his web site, and he encourages visitors to the site to contact him with news of demonstrations by laid-off workers, retired workers, or farmers; the arrest or sentencing of individuals for engaging in political or labor-movement activities; infringements on religious freedom; banning of books or closure of magazines; and repression of Tibetans, Uyghurs, members of Zhonggong, or Falungong practitioners. Lu has even stated his hope that he might eventually be able to provide "spy-rate digital cameras" to mainland informants so that they can transmit pictures of worker demonstrations to him via e-mail.

Two-way e-mail communication is also an important channel for dissidents, Falungong members, Tibetan exiles, and various NGOs and human-rights advocacy groups to advance their interests with members of the U.S. Congress, congressional staff, and executive branch officials. Several interviewees in this study stated that e-mail has become the primary vehicle for such efforts to communicate with and energize U.S. government officials.³⁸ Although e-mail seemingly facilitates access to these officials, it may not always be an effective means of communication. Indeed, one interviewee opined that some congressional staff are now deluged with so many e-mail

³⁶For a detailed description (available only in Chinese) of this beeper and callback method of communication, see Lu's web site, which contains several pages of instructions explaining how to contact him from cities throughout China. Lu provides his beeper number, which ends with the digits 0604 to commemorate the June 4, 1989, Tiananmen crackdown, and states that no matter where a prospective informant is located, it is easy to reach him. Callers should simply dial his beeper number from a public telephone and he will call them back. The information on the beeper system is located at www.89-64.com/ct/191.html.

³⁷Interviews, Western NGO employees, May 2000.

³⁸Interviews, U.S. government executive and legislative branch officials, May–June 2000.

messages from activist groups on a daily basis that the messages have largely lost their effect.³⁹

Interestingly, although many dissidents express concerns about the privacy and security of electronic communications, we found no indications that they make use of widely available encryption software, such as PGP (Pretty Good Privacy), to protect their e-mail communications from the Public Security Bureau and the Ministry of State Security (MSS). At present, like many other Chinese Internet users, most dissidents apparently fear that using encrypted e-mail would draw the attention of the security services. Recent postings on Chinese-language websites concerning the use of encryption suggest, however, that in the future, larger numbers of activists may turn to free, widely available encryption software products to enhance the security of their e-mail communications.⁴⁰

Two-Way Communication Via Web-Based Petitions. Several groups of activists based in the United States and China have launched petition drives via the World Wide Web or supplemented traditional signature-gathering campaigns with an Internet component. To mark the 11th anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown, Ding Zilin's Tiananmen Mothers Campaign and Human Rights in China (HRIC) established a web site that features a form-based electronic petition to Jiang Zemin and Li Peng.⁴¹ The site, which is maintained in New York by HRIC, also urges visitors to become "virtual human-rights activists" by forwarding information to friends, listserves, and newsgroups, or by posting a link to the Tiananmen Mothers Campaign on

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Examples include "Yong jiami fangshi anquan shiyong dianzi youjian" [Using Encryption for E-Mail Security], available at www.internetfreedom.org/gb/articles/987.html; "Shenme shi PGP?" [What is PGP?], November 12, 2001, available at <http://www.internetfreedom.org/gb/articles/1034.html>; and "Youguan jiamifa, yinshenshu, ji yinxieshu ziyuan" [Resources on Cryptography, Anonymity, and Steganography], November 12, 2002, available at <http://www.internetfreedom.org/gb/articles/1035.html>.

⁴¹The Tiananmen Mothers Campaign e-petition demands (1) the right to mourn in public for victims of the crackdown, (2) the right to receive aid from organizations outside of China, (3) cessation of the persecution of victims of the crackdown and their family members, (4) the release of all individuals still imprisoned on June 4-related charges, and (5) a public accounting for the killings. The site is located at www.fillthesquare.org.

their own web sites.⁴² The site allows visitors to place a “virtual bouquet” of six white and four red roses in a cyberspace version of Tiananmen Square to mourn the victims of the June 4, 1989, crackdown. Organizers hope that the bouquet graphic will become a widely recognized political symbol that other activists can place on their web sites.⁴³

In 1999, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, a group led by Wang Dan initiated a petition drive calling for the reversal of the official verdict on the student demonstrations. Approximately 20,000 visitors to Wang’s web site, www.June4.org, signed the petition electronically, according to a press release from Wang’s group. Although authorities in China attempted to block access to the site, more than 2,000 signatures came from Internet users who identified themselves as PRC residents.⁴⁴ Campaign organizers described the web site and e-petition as important supplements to traditional methods and a useful vehicle for advertising the campaign.⁴⁵ Chinese residents have even begun using the Web for domestic petition drives. An Jun, founder of an anti-corruption newsletter in Henan Province, used the Internet as part of an effort to collect signatures on an anticorruption petition in mid-1999.⁴⁶

Two-Way Communication via BBS and Chat Rooms. Chinese-language BBS such as the popular North America Free Talk Forum and the *People’s Daily’s* Strong Country Forum (*Qiangguo luntan*) feature commentary on a variety of sensitive political, social, and economic topics from Internet users in the United States, Taiwan,

⁴²Press release from HRIC, “Tiananmen Mothers Seed Global Support for Campaign to End Impunity: On-Line Petition Launched,” June 2, 2000.

⁴³Interviews, U.S.-based Chinese activists, June 2000.

⁴⁴“Wang Dan Demands Change in China,” press release of the Global Petition Campaign/June4.org. The electronic petition was also made available on other web sites, including those of Amnesty International and HRIC. Wang’s group collected more than 150,000 signatures in all. Mainland Internet users also reportedly marked the 10th anniversary of the June 4, 1989, crackdown by posting the message “6+4=10” in chat rooms.

⁴⁵Interviews, Chinese pro-democracy activists based in the United States and Canada, June 2000.

⁴⁶“Dissidents to Start Signature Campaign,” Hong Kong Information Center, May 20, 1999, in FBIS, May 20, 1999.

China, and elsewhere.⁴⁷ The number of postings to the forums has tended to peak around the time of important events. For example, our observations indicate that traffic on these sites increased around the time of the diplomatic standoff that ensued after the April 2001 collision of a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft and a Chinese fighter aircraft. In addition, in 2000, the number of postings on such sites surged around the times of the Taiwan presidential election, Chen Shui-bian's inauguration, the permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) vote in the U.S. Congress, and the anniversary of the June 4, 1989, Tiananmen Square crackdown.⁴⁸

The sites that are hosted within the PRC are monitored, and censors often delete politically sensitive postings. According to a Chinese researcher, at least 1.5 percent of all postings to the popular Strong Country Forum web site, which was established by the CCP's main official newspaper soon after the May 1999 accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, were censored in 2000.⁴⁹ The site's managers employ a three-part system to restrict content: First, rules listed on the web site forbid the posting of comments that call into question the validity of the Four Cardinal Principles or the party's policies, encouraging users to censor themselves. Second, the site reportedly uses software that screens postings for key words, such as the names of party leaders, and sends postings that contain those words to a webmaster for review. The third layer of censorship is the webmaster, who periodically deletes "problematic" postings that are not caught by the filtering software and thus appear, even if only temporarily, on the web site. The Chinese researcher also notes that the webmasters sometimes ban individual posters from contributing comments to the forum by blocking messages from their IP ad-

⁴⁷In addition to messages having content of a political nature, there are also numerous messages advertising free e-mail services and "get paid while you surf" opportunities, as well as postings on other topics that lie beyond the scope of this report. Messages that use a variety of epithets to insult other users, known as "flames," are also frequently posted on some popular sites.

⁴⁸Conclusions based on data gathered during April 2001 and between April 2000 and July 2000.

⁴⁹Chinese researcher, January 2001. It should be noted that the methodology the researcher employed to generate this estimate yielded results that cannot be independently verified.

dresses.⁵⁰ In some cases, postings have even led to arrests. Fu Lijun, 37, an assistant professor at Xinxiang Medical College in Henan, was arrested in October 1999 for posting an article in a chat room detailing how Falungong could cure illness.⁵¹ In December 2001, Wang Jinbo, a member of the CDP, was sentenced to four years in prison for posting on the Internet a message urging Beijing to reevaluate the 1989 Tiananmen movement.⁵²

Still, not all comments on sensitive political topics are quickly expunged, and such missives have even appeared on some of the BBS managed by official Chinese media organs. After Chen Shui-bian's inauguration on May 21, 2000, for example, some Internet users suggested on the Strong Country Forum site that China should adopt a democratic system to promote reunification, while several others criticized CCP leaders for failing to deal more firmly with Taiwan.⁵³ Apparently overwhelmed by the deluge of postings, *People's Daily* censors were unable to immediately expunge all such messages.

Several dissident groups maintain their own BBS. The CDP, for example, established more than a dozen Chinese-language BBS in May 2000.⁵⁴ These include an organizational-development forum (*zuzhi fazhan luntan*), a 6-4 Tiananmen forum (*liu-si Tiananmen luntan*), a mainland democracy-movement forum (*dalu minyun luntan*), an overseas democracy-movement forum (*haiwai minyun luntan*), an oppose-corruption forum (*fanfubai luntan*), a CDP forum (*Zhongguo minzhudang luntan*), and an Internet "guerilla warfare team" forum (*wangluo youjidui luntan*). The Tibetan exile community also makes extensive use of BBS and chat rooms. Visitors can discuss issues

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹"Doctor Jailed for Promoting Falungong on Internet," <http://www.june4.org/news/database/jan2000/doctorjailed.html>

⁵²Bobson Wong, "Chinese Democracy Activist Sentenced," Digital Freedom Network electronic newsletter, December 18, 2001.

⁵³Michael Dorgan, "Critics of Taiwan Policy Outwit the Censor," *South China Morning Post*, May 25, 2000. One poster critical of PRC policy toward Taiwan wrote, "From the day Chen Shui-bian was elected, the mainland government's first reaction was 'wait and see.' Today, the period of waiting and seeing is over. Mainland leaders should understand that Chen Shui-bian refuses to be Chinese. The mainland leaders' behavior on the Taiwan issue has further made people understand who is the paper tiger."

⁵⁴An index of the sites is available at <http://dinfo.org/bbsindex.html>.

of mutual concern on Tibet Online (www.tibet.org), TibetCentral (home.earthlink.net/~suevt/tibet.htm), TibetChat, TibetLink (www.tibetlink.com), and Worldbridges Tibet (www.Worldbridges.com/Tibet/). Because of consistent flooding attacks, Falungong no longer uses BBS or chat rooms, but instead uses e-mail lists.

BBS and chat rooms are particularly important media for communication of sensitive political views and coordination of protest activities among university students. Indeed, Chinese students have made extensive use of the Internet for these purposes several times in the past five years: during the 1996 Diaoyu Islands dispute; in the aftermath of the accidental U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999; following the murder in late May 2000 of Qiu Qingfeng, a Beijing University student; after the April 2001 collision of a U.S. EP-3 surveillance plane and a Chinese F-8 fighter; and following the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States.⁵⁵

The 1996 Diaoyu Islands Protests. During the summer of 1996, renewed friction related to the long-standing dispute between China and Japan over the Diaoyu Islands prompted an outpouring of nationalistic sentiment and unauthorized public protests in China. The official Chinese media shied away from discussion of these events, but students at several universities in Beijing used Internet bulletin board sites, chat rooms, and e-mail to disseminate information that was not carried in official media, to communicate their views about the issue, and to organize demonstrations. Senior Chinese leaders

⁵⁵As illustrated by the 1996 Diaoyu Islands protests and the demonstrations that followed the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, nationalism is a double-edged sword for Chinese leaders. When Beijing has perceived promoting nationalist sentiment to be politically advantageous, the regime has taken the lead in attempting to stir up patriotic, and sometimes even xenophobic, feelings among the populace; but popular nationalism has in many cases placed the regime on the defensive. As one Chinese interlocutor told the authors, in its efforts to manipulate popular nationalism to its own advantage without losing control of the scope and direction of such potentially powerful forces, the Chinese government is "riding the tiger." Nationalism can be used to exert diplomatic leverage, to promote political and social cohesion, and to boost domestic support for the regime. At the same time, however, Chinese leaders recognize the difficulty of controlling, containing, and directing potent nationalistic feelings once they have been unleashed. Indeed, Beijing appears to be acutely aware of the risk that an upsurge of nationalist sentiment could turn against the regime, particularly if aroused citizens perceive Chinese leaders as irresolute in defending Chinese interests or insufficiently firm in responding to outside pressure.

reportedly became extremely alarmed after learning that a student at Beijing Aeronautics University had announced over the Internet a plan to use a remotely controlled airplane loaded with explosives to destroy the Japanese embassy in Beijing. Although official propaganda pronouncements in previous months had stoked anti-Japanese sentiment, Chinese leaders—worried that nationalistic outbursts could harm Sino-Japanese relations or even be directed against the regime for failing to more assertively press Chinese territorial claims—moved swiftly to discourage any further protests on the mainland.⁵⁶ Authorities temporarily shut down Internet bulletin board sites at several universities in Beijing and “advised” the organizer of the protest campaign to leave the capital for a brief “vacation” in remote Gansu Province.⁵⁷ In response to the incident, Vice Premier Li Lanqing, whose portfolio includes education issues, reportedly ordered universities to increase their control over student use of the Internet.⁵⁸

The May 1999 Embassy Bombing Demonstrations. Many Chinese people, including nationalistic university students, were genuinely outraged in the aftermath of the May 1999 mistaken U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, which the official Chinese media portrayed as a deliberate act of aggression on the part of the United States. The Chinese leadership initially sought to encourage and facilitate student demonstrations both to send a political message to the United States and to stave off possible popular and intralite criticism. With official support, large crowds protested outside the U.S. embassy in Beijing and at several U.S. consulates in China. After a few days, however, the demonstrations appeared to be on the verge of getting out of control, and with the tenth anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown approaching, the authorities became increasingly concerned that protesters might shift the focus of their anger

⁵⁶For an excellent study of nationalism and the Diaoyu Islands dispute, see Erica Strecker Downs and Phillip C. Saunders, “Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism: China and the Diaoyu Islands,” *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 3, Winter 1998/99, pp. 114–146.

⁵⁷Chen Chiu, “University Students Transmit Messages on Defending the Diaoyu Islands Through the Internet, and the Authorities Are Shocked at This and Order the Strengthening of Control,” *Sing Tao Jih Pao*, September 17, 1996, in FBIS, September 18, 1996.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

toward the Chinese government. Indeed, comments posted on some Internet sites—which assistants and advisors to Chinese leaders, or perhaps even some leaders themselves, may well have read—showed that while a great number of students were outraged at the United States,⁵⁹ quite a few were also angry with their own leaders.

Many of the Internet postings harshly criticized the United States, expressing “outrage” or “indignation.”⁶⁰ On the web site of the official *Guangming Daily*, students from Wuhan University defiantly declared, “The Chinese people cannot be bullied, and the Chinese people cannot be insulted!!!!”⁶¹ Some postings on other sites, however, excoriated Jiang Zemin and other senior leaders for failing to respond more forcefully to perceived U.S. bullying. Once again, after having fanned the flames of antiforeign sentiment through the propaganda apparatus, Beijing recognized that “riding the tiger” of nationalism carried serious foreign-policy and domestic political risks. In this case, the risks were probably far greater than those in the 1996 Diaoyu protests, largely because of the volatility of the issue, but in part also owing to the wider availability of the Internet. The authorities thus moved swiftly to halt the demonstrations and restore order on university campuses.

Protests over the May 2000 Murder of a Beijing University Student. In May 2000, Beijing University and Qinghua University students, among others, used the Internet to disseminate news about the murder of a female Beida (Beijing University) student, Qiu Qingfeng, who was killed on May 20 while returning to one of Beida’s satellite campuses, and to organize mourning activities and demonstrations in response to the incident. Beijing University officials at first attempted to prevent information on the murder from becoming public, but on May 23, the news was posted on Beida’s popular Triangle BBS. On

⁵⁹For more on Chinese reactions to the embassy bombing, see Peter Hays Gries, “Tears of Rage: Chinese Nationalist Reactions to the Belgrade Embassy Bombing,” *The China Journal*, No. 46, July 2001, pp. 25-43. The article draws upon hundreds of e-mails, letters, and faxes from students and other Chinese citizens that were posted on the web page of the official *Guangming Daily* during the embassy-bombing protests. Many of the writers charged that the bombing was intentional and that it was intended to bully or humiliate China.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 34.

that day, the number of users viewing the site skyrocketed from less than 700 the day before to nearly 12,000.⁶² Within hours, news of the incident spread to BBS at other universities and to forums hosted by popular web sites such as Sohu.com. As Guobin Yang observes, students used bulletin board sites during the next several days to rapidly disseminate information on the murder, to formulate the demands they would present to school officials, to motivate fellow students and organize protest activities on several campuses, and to keep students and other Internet users across the country informed of events on their campuses in near-real time.⁶³ On May 29, a posting on the BBS where news of the murder first broke analyzed the impact of the Internet on the case, arguing that the Internet enabled students to “break through the deliberate control of information and suppression of memorial activities by the authorities. . . . [I]f it had not been for the Internet . . . this case would also have been covered up.”⁶⁴ A memorial web site established in honor of the slain student had reportedly received over 24,000 hits by late May 2000.⁶⁵

The April 2001 Airplane-Collision Incident. In April 2001, Chinese Internet users flocked to chat rooms and BBS to express their views on the collision of a U.S. surveillance plane and a Chinese fighter plane, which resulted in the death of the Chinese pilot and a diplomatic standoff between Beijing and Washington. In online postings, Internet users, including many who identified themselves as students, alternately vented their anger at the United States for causing the death of the Chinese pilot, Wang Wei,⁶⁶ and criticized their own leaders for what they perceived as a timid response in the face of an affront to China’s national honor. As they had in the aftermath of the

⁶²For an in-depth case study of student use of the Internet following the murder of Qiu Qingfeng, see Guobin Yang, “The Impact of the Internet on Civil Society in China: A Preliminary Assessment,” pp. 35-42. Yang draws on interesting primary sources, including postings to BBS at several Chinese universities.

⁶³*Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 41. Yang notes that this posting from the Beijing University Triangle forum found its way onto Netease.com two days later, thus reaching many more Internet users throughout China.

⁶⁵See <http://cn.netor.com/index.asp>

⁶⁶Dozens of web sites memorializing Wang Wei quickly sprang up on the Internet. One of the most popular of these memorial sites, <http://cn.netor.com/m/memorial.asp?BID=5661>, has received more than 140,000 visitors.

bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade two years earlier, Chinese leaders once again faced a difficult balancing act in handling the April 2001 crisis. Through the official media, they encouraged a nationalistic response to perceived aggressive behavior on the part of the United States, while at the same time attempting to ensure that the regime itself would not become a target of the surging wave of indignation.

The September 11 Terrorist Attacks. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, Chinese Internet users, including university students from schools throughout China, once again flooded bulletin board sites and chat rooms with postings. Some of those posting messages expressed sympathy for the victims, but as was widely reported in Hong Kong and U.S. media, others gloated over an incident that in their view was the result of U.S. "hegemonism." This posed an unusual problem for Chinese decisionmakers. Accustomed to demands from U.S. NGOs and other free-speech advocates to relax its restrictions on the Internet, Beijing quickly realized that censoring anti-U.S. postings on the Internet would likely reduce negative publicity and improve its image in the United States. Given the volume of traffic on popular sites, it was undoubtedly no easy task to screen all of the postings and delete messages that contained offensive themes. The staff of *People's Daily Online* reported that in the week following the September 11 attacks on the United States, the Strong Country Forum was hosting as many as 25,000 visitors simultaneously during peak hours. Yet the site's webmasters managed to delete many postings that praised the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, as well as a few that called on Beijing to attack the United States. They also blocked messages that were inconsistent with Chinese policy, including some that urged Chinese leaders to assist the United States in retaliating against Osama bin Laden and the Taliban.⁶⁷

BBS and Chat Rooms as Barometers and Safety Valves. For officials in Beijing, bulletin board sites and chat rooms offer potential political advantages of two types. First, there is some evidence to indicate that government officials use popular sites such as the Strong Coun-

⁶⁷"Chinese Organ Screens Web Site," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 21, 2001.

try Forum to gauge public opinion on a broad range of domestic and foreign-policy issues. When discussing the site with journalists last year, for example, the deputy director of *People's Daily Online* noted, "The government is interested in seeing people's views on events." Another example is provided by Harwit and Clark (2001), who relate a central government official's assertion that Premier Zhu Rongji adjusted his approach toward Japan in response to Internet postings that criticized him for being too accommodating during an October 2000 trip to Tokyo.⁶⁸ Second, at least some elements of the regime may also view bulletin board sites as an outlet for people wishing to express themselves. This is particularly significant in a country like China, where there are few institutionalized channels through which individuals can air their grievances. "People have opinions," said the deputy director of the *People's Daily* Internet edition. "People have a need to discuss ideas."⁶⁹ While the ultimate effects of two-way Internet communication in China remain to be seen, there have already been significant developments. Indeed, in a forthcoming study of the Internet and the development of civil society in China, Guobin Yang argues that through the use of means such as chat rooms and bulletin board sites, Chinese Internet users "are engaged in the discursive construction of an online public sphere." This may ultimately enable Chinese citizens to engage online and off in "a new type of political action, critical public debate."⁷⁰ Of course, it is not only two-way, interactive communication via the Internet that is important in this regard; one-way electronic communication is sometimes equally potent.

One-Way Communication

In addition to using two-way communication, dissidents, Falungong adherents, and Tibetan exiles also use several means of one-way Internet communication, including e-mail, web sites, and web-based magazines. Most of these are designed to provide information pas-

⁶⁸Eric Harwit and Duncan Clark, "Shaping the Internet in China: Evolution of Political Control over Network Infrastructure and Content," p. 405.

⁶⁹"China Tightens Grip on Booming Net Cafes," *South China Morning Post*, July 30, 2001.

⁷⁰Guobin Yang, "The Impact of the Internet on Civil Society in China: A Preliminary Assessment," p. 24.

sively to those who actively seek it out. However, some new one-way strategies, such as e-mail spamming, enable groups to transmit uncensored information to an unprecedented number of people within China, and to provide recipients with “plausible deniability.” In part because of dissident countermeasures (such as the use of different originating e-mail addresses for each message), the PRC is unable to stop these attempts to “break the information blockade.”

One-Way Communication Via E-Mail. The first incident in which dissidents used mass e-mailing to send information to PRC Internet users occurred not long after the Internet became publicly available in China. On June 4, 1995, the sixth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, an article by Chen Ziming was e-mailed to thousands of Chinese Internet users.⁷¹ Then in late 1999, Wei Jingsheng sent an e-mail from Paris to five official e-mail addresses of the Beijing government to explain the meaning of freedom of expression protected by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He said in the e-mail that the Internet had become a useful tool for human-rights protectors.⁷²

As the number of Internet users in China has grown and technology for mass e-mailing has progressed, spamming has become an increasingly potent weapon for overseas dissidents and free-speech advocates. The publishers of two Chinese-language electronic magazines, *Tunnel (Suidao)* and *VIP Reference (Da Cankao)*, have mounted the best-publicized and most-sophisticated efforts. *Tunnel*, the first Chinese e-magazine aimed at a mainland audience, was launched on June 3, 1997. It is published weekly and is reportedly compiled and edited largely within China, then sent to Silicon Valley, and finally mass e-mailed back to the PRC from anonymous, U.S.-based e-mail accounts, such as nobody@usa.net. Sender names have included “Cyberspace Warrior” and “Digital Fighter.”⁷³ According to the preface to the inaugural issue of *Tunnel*, the magazine’s goal is to “break the current information blockade and suppression of speech

⁷¹Steve Usdin, “China Online,” *Yahoo Internet Life*, January 1997.

⁷²“Internet Used to Promote Freedom of Expression in China,” Taiwan Central News Agency, October 2, 1999.

⁷³William J. Dobson, “Dissidence in Cyberspace Worries Beijing,” *San Jose Mercury News*, June 28, 1998; see also “China: Activists Launch Online Magazine,” Reuters, June 18, 1997.

on the mainland.” The editors opine that computers and the Internet have “enabled the technology for information dissemination to extend to everyone’s desktop” and can thus be used to “disintegrate the two pillars of an autocratic society: monopoly and suppression.”⁷⁴ The magazine contains articles on a wide variety of topics, from politics to economics to social issues, as well as occasional Chinese translations of Western press reports. Recent issues, for example, have carried articles on interest-group politics, tax revolts in rural China, corruption among Chinese government officials, and the business exploits of Jiang Mianheng, the son of Chinese President and Communist Party leader Jiang Zemin.⁷⁵

The e-magazine *VIP Reference*, founded in November 1997, is edited and distributed by approximately one dozen overseas Chinese information-technology (IT) professionals, students, and academics based in Washington, D.C., and New York. It is published in a weekly edition, *Da Cankao*, and a daily edition, *Xiao Cankao*.⁷⁶ The editors describe themselves as Internet experts who support freedom of speech and declare that they are “destined to destroy the Chinese system of censorship over the Internet.” *VIP Reference* contains articles from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Western news sources that are not available to the public in China.⁷⁷ The magazine declines to reveal how many mainland subscribers it has, but it is reportedly sent to between 250,000 and 300,000 Chinese e-mail addresses. The number of recipients is likely to grow, as *VIP Reference* editor Richard Long

⁷⁴*Suidao [Tunnel]*, June 3, 1997, sd9706a. The first issue also contains an article on the Tiananmen crackdown by an author identified as “Temporarily Anonymous” (*Zan Wuming*).

⁷⁵See, for example, *Suidao [Tunnel]*, February 27, 2002, 0202a; *Suidao [Tunnel]*, January 27, 2002, sd0201b; and *Suidao [Tunnel]*, January 14, 2002, sd0201a.

⁷⁶The name *VIP Reference* is apparently a play on the names of several classified compilations of translated Western news reports available only to senior party and government officials. These compilations include *Reference News (Cankao Xiaoxi)*, and *Reference Materials (Cankao Ziliao)*.

⁷⁷“Frequently Asked Questions,” version 2.0, March 14, 1998, available on the *Da Cankao* web site. The editors encourage recipients to redistribute *Da Cankao* but warn that they may be arrested for doing so, whereas they will not be arrested simply for receiving the magazine. The editors also note that they intend to begin publishing articles from underground writers in China.

(an alias, according to some reports) claims that he can now send 1,000,000 e-mail messages to China within a period of 10 hours.⁷⁸

The editors of both *VIP Reference* and *Tunnel* employ a variety of countermeasures to protect readers and thwart any PRC efforts to prevent mainland users from accessing their publications. Both e-magazines attempt to provide a degree of “plausible deniability” to their subscribers by spamming tens of thousands of copies to recipients who have not requested them, including numerous CCP and Public Security Bureau officials. Even the head of the Shanghai Public Security Bureau’s Internet security division reportedly receives a copy. The editors of *VIP Reference* also frequently change web site addresses and use different e-mail addresses every day to prevent Chinese security services from blocking distribution of their electronic publications. “This is like a war, [and] the Internet is the front line,” says Lian Shengde, an information-systems specialist who works on the publication and distribution of *VIP Reference* at night.⁷⁹

Following in the footsteps of *Tunnel* and *VIP Reference*, several other dissident organizations have attempted to mass e-mail information to mainland Internet users. New York-based members of the CDP, for example, have launched a campaign to send 100,000 copies of the banned party’s political platform and other documents to mainland e-mail users.⁸⁰ CDP members in Britain, France, Germany, and Australia have also participated in the effort, which Xie Wanjun, director of the CDP’s Internet department, describes as a form of “Internet guerilla warfare.”⁸¹

⁷⁸Kevin Platt, “China’s ‘Cybercops’ Clamp Down.” “The Internet is a revolutionary tool for people’s freedom,” Long proclaims. “China alone can’t stop this global trend.”

⁷⁹Melinda Liu, “The Great Firewall of China,” *Newsweek International*, October 11, 1999.

⁸⁰The CDP Political Program (*Zhongguo minzhudang zhengzhi gangling*) calls for a variety of reforms, including land privatization (*tudi siyohua*), freedom of the press and speech (*xinwen ziyou, yanlun ziyou*), constitutional democracy with separation of powers (*fenquan zhi de xianzheng minzhu tizhi*), judicial independence (*sifa duli*), placing the army under state rather than party control (*jundui guojiahua*), and allowing farmers and workers the right to organize independent associations to protect their rights and interests (*nongmin, gongren you quan zuzhi duli nonghui he duli gonghui baozhang qi quanyi*).

⁸¹“PRC Internet Police Said in On-Line Conflict with China Democracy Party,” *Tai Yang Pao*, April 23, 2000, in FBIS, April 24, 2000. Chinese security services reportedly

Another type of one-way e-mail is employed by the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT): Visitors to the ICT web site can request to be added to the "Save Tibet E-mail Alert Network" and will thereupon receive a steady stream of e-mails from ICT containing recent statements or movements of the Dalai Lama, notices about the imprisonment and release of Tibetan political prisoners, and new Chinese efforts to repress Tibet. More important, the e-mails notify subscribers about current and future advocacy campaigns and provide information about how individuals can volunteer their time or financial contributions to the effort. Subscribers can even exercise a variant of the one-way e-mail effort by forwarding the e-mail alerts to their congressmen or other government officials.

One-Way Communication Via Web Sites. Dissidents, Falungong adherents, and Tibetan exiles also utilize web sites for communication and motivation. The overseas branch of the CDP, Frank Lu, Falungong, and the Tibetan exile community maintain particularly interesting and informative web sites (see the Appendix).

China Democracy Party. The CDP web page includes links to organizational information, important CDP documents, a publicity department, an invitation to join the CDP, and a variety of BBS forums (discussed above). The mainland and overseas organizational-structure (*guonei-wai zuzhi jigou*) area of the site lists information on more than 20 overseas departments, including an Internet department (*Zhongguo minzhudang haiwai wangluobu*) headed by Xie Wanjun, and the membership of the CDP Overseas Work Committee (*haiwai gonzuo weiyuanhui*). It also contains a list of 194 "open leading members" (*gongkai de lingdao chengyuan*) of CDP party branches in 29 provinces, municipalities, and special administrative regions, and one university on the mainland, as well as a listing of 64 CDP "secondary independent branches" in China. In addition, it includes a list of members of the CDP's national committee, with links to biographies of prominent members such as jailed CDP leaders Wang Youcai, Xu Wenli, and Qin Yongmin, as well as overseas committee members, including Xie Wanjun.

launched a technical counterattack against the CDP's mass e-mail campaign (discussed in more detail later in this chapter).

The core-documents section contains the complete Chinese text of the CDP's political program (*zhengzhi gangling*); the declaration of the party's founding in Zhejiang Province on June 25, 1998; an open letter to Jiang Zemin; a declaration of support for the U.S. granting of PNTR to China; and a statement on the eleventh anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown written by a Shanghai CDP member.⁸² The publicity department and "join the CDP" pages were both still under construction (*jianshe zhong*) when the authors last viewed the web site. The CDP home page provides a link to a password-protected "internal circular/secret code required" (*neibu tongbao-xu mimima*) area.

Frank Siqing Lu, director and lone employee of the Hong Kong Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy, maintains a web page that features daily press releases on arrests of dissidents and practitioners of Falungong and Zhonggong, information on worker demonstrations, and links to news updates from a variety of international sources, such as the BBC and Radio Free Asia.⁸³ The site also contains Chinese- and English-language versions of an introduction to the center and its mission, along with a fundraising appeal, and invites readers to subscribe to *China Watch*, Lu's e-mail magazine.⁸⁴ In addition, there are links to longer reports on the Internet in China and on the suppression of religious and *qigong* organizations, as well as a special section on the crackdown against the Zhonggong *qigong* group. This special section contains a description of the group, a biography of its leader, and a database of news updates, which includes several documents that are identified as classified Public Security Bureau memos related to the crackdown on Zhonggong. (Lu's website, www.89-64.com, was hacked early this year. The site was replaced with a message that says, "This site saled to www.islam.org." In addition, a back-door trojan-horse virus is

⁸²The CDP's "New Century Declaration," which was issued by the party's Beijing branch on December 31, 1999, is available elsewhere on the Internet in both Chinese and English.

⁸³For a profile of Lu, see Maureen Pao, "Information Warrior," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 4, 1999, pp. 26-27.

⁸⁴See www.89-64.com. Lu also brags on his web site that he is able to confirm and release news much more quickly than other activists or human-rights NGOs, and he claims that he is quoted by major media 10 times more frequently than the New York-based advocacy group HRIC.

automatically transmitted to the computers of Internet users who attempt to view Lu's website. The perpetrators have not been identified, but Lu is said to believe that the Public Security Bureau is responsible for the attack.)

Several other exile dissident organizations, including the CDJP and the Free China Movement, also maintain web sites.⁸⁵ Last year, mainland and exile dissidents jointly established a web site containing a database of information on corrupt Chinese officials, but the site has either moved or is no longer available.⁸⁶

Falungong. Falungong has an extensive and highly organized network of global web sites. After Li Hongzhi arrived in the United States, he met with overseas Chinese who were followers of Falungong and knowledgeable about web-site design. After the first web site was posted, Falungong's online presence grew quite rapidly. The site (www.falundafa.org), which is bilingual, frequently updated, and well organized, contains messages from Li Hongzhi, a primer on the group's beliefs, links to 26 local Falungong web sites around the world, calendars of conferences and events, news items, and audio downloads that enable practitioners to listen to Master Li's lectures from anyplace in the world.⁸⁷ Li, who lives in Queens, reportedly makes his living mainly from Web-based sales of his book, *Zhuan Falun*.

Tibet. The Tibetan government-in-exile and its supporting NGOs maintain a sophisticated and informative set of web sites around the world (see the Appendix). The main advocacy sites can be divided into three general categories: official, supporters, and radicals. The main official site for the Dalai Lama's government (www.tibet.com) is maintained by the Office of Tibet in London. A companion site, www.tibetnews.com, is run by the Tibetan Government Department of Information and International Relations and serves as the government's official information site. Tibetnews publishes *Tibetan Bulletin*, the government's official online journal. The Tibetan

⁸⁵See the Appendix for a comprehensive list of Chinese dissident web sites.

⁸⁶"Non-Governmental Report Center Web Page Set Up," Hong Kong Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy, April 3, 1999.

⁸⁷"Falungong and the Internet: A Marriage Made in Web Heaven," VirtualChina.com, July 30, 1999.

government-in-exile has received assistance in developing its Internet presence and technological infrastructure from San Francisco Bay area computer technicians.⁸⁸ As part of the Tibet Net Project, the computer experts traveled to India in 1997, donating equipment and providing free services to the Tibetan exiles.

Among the hundreds of sites maintained by supporters of Tibetan independence, three illustrate the various uses of the web by the international NGO community.⁸⁹ The first is informational. Tibet Online (www.tibet.org), maintained collectively by the major Tibetan NGOs, is a comprehensive resource of information, Tibet support activities, and links. The site aims to “level the playing field by leveraging the Internet’s ability to harness international grassroots support for Tibet’s survival, while at the same time helping Tibetans involved in these efforts pick up highly valuable skills.” The site offers English information on the global Tibetan support network, as well as links to 56 non-English sites in 18 languages. Other notable information sites include World Tibet News (www.tibet.ca), TibetLink (www.tibetlink.com), Current Tibet News from the International Campaign for Tibet, and the Tibet Information Network (www.tibetinfo.net).

A second supporter site seeks to motivate and coordinate Tibetan independence support activity. The International Campaign for Tibet (www.savetibet.org), located in Washington, D.C., is a primary focal point for coordination of various global campaigns. In June 2000, the ICT was running five major campaigns (“Stop PetroChina,” “Free the Panchen Lama,” “NO to Permanent NTR for China,” “Election 2000,” and a campaign directed at the World Bank), as well as championing the cause of 10 imprisoned activists and maintaining a constant congressional lobbying effort. Another notable motivational site (www.tibet.org/sft) is run by the Students for a Free Tibet, which has chapters in eight universities in the United States and Canada.

A third supporter site aims to raise money for the financing of pro-Tibetan activities. The self-described mission of the Tibet Fund (www.tibetfund.org) is “the preservation of the distinct cultural, re-

⁸⁸Carolyn Jung, “Wiring an Ancient Culture,” *San Jose Mercury News*, June 7, 1997.

⁸⁹For a list of 375 functioning links to Tibet-related web sites, see <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/9594/links.html>.

ligious, and national identity of the Tibetan people." Specifically, the Tibet Fund seeks to raise money, in the hopes of

supporting economic and community development projects in the refugee communities in India and Nepal, providing support to monasteries and nunneries outside of Tibet, supporting projects to preserve Tibet's unique culture and arts, improving health conditions in the refugee community, extending assistance for health, education, and small economic development projects inside Tibet, and offering scholarships and cultural exchange programs.

Tibet Fund's web site not only provides information for potential donors about the details of these efforts, but is equipped to permit online contributions.

In addition to official and supporter sites, the Tibetan community of web sites also includes more radical elements, in particular, groups that seek more democracy within the Tibetan government or that reject the Dalai Lama's calls for peaceful, nonviolent methods of resistance. Among the former, the Dharmasala-based Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy web site (www.tchrd.org) contains newsletters, press releases, and documents. Specifically, the center publishes a regular biweekly English-language newsletter, entitled "Human Rights Update," which reports the latest human-rights violations in Tibet. It also produces documents and reports designed both to lobby international institutions, such as the United Nations, and to educate the Tibetan community-in-exile about the principles of human rights and democracy.

More-violent methods have been espoused by some leaders of the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), including armed attacks against Chinese military facilities in Tibet. These views are expressed by some subscribers to the TYC web site (www.tibetanyouthcongress.org), particularly in *Rangzen Magazine*, which is available online in both English and Tibetan. The reasons for these new attitudes are concisely explained by the president of the New Delhi TYC branch, Tenzin Phulchung: "Our struggle has been too passive. Many of our young people are losing patience."⁹⁰ According to one report,

⁹⁰Rama Lakshmi, "Young Lama Inspires Tibetan Exile Youth," *Washington Post*, May 29, 2000.

Phulchung reportedly views the Karmapa Lama, who now lives and grants audiences in a Dharmasala monastery, as “the wrathful manifestation of the Buddha,” who could propel young Tibetans to take more direct action against China. Interviews with international Tibet activists in June 2000, however, discount the strength of this radical faction of the TYC and suggest that its proposed methods have been suppressed by a moderate majority.

One-Way Communication Via Web-Based Magazines. Exile dissident groups produce a variety of online Chinese-language magazines including *Beijing Spring* (*Beijing Zhichun*), *Democratic China* (*Minzhu Zhongguo*), and *New Century Net* (*Xin Shiji*) (see the Appendix for a more complete list). The monthly *New Century Net*, founded in June 1996 by former *Shanghai World Economic Herald* reporter Zhang Weiguo, is aimed explicitly at the Chinese mainland audience, and authors on the mainland have contributed articles via e-mail.⁹¹ In addition, the China Development Union, a Beijing-based pro-reform intellectual group banned in October 1998, apparently published an online magazine about environmental issues, entitled *Consultations*. Finally, the Tibetan movement publishes quite a few online journals, including the *Tibetan Review* (English), *Tibetan Bulletin* (English, French, Hindi, and Chinese), *Rangzen Magazine* (English, Tibetan), and *Tibet Journal* (English).

MEASURING SUCCESS

Postings on Chinese-language BBS extol the potential of the Internet to disseminate dissenting political views, calling it “the modern big character poster” (*xiandai dazibao*) and proclaiming that “the most powerful weapon of the democratic revolution is information” (*minzhu geming zui youli de wuqi shi xinxi*). Indeed, many observers, and even some activists, have extremely high expectations about the potential of the Internet to degrade the CCP’s control of information and ultimately to undermine its monopolization of political power. However, many dissidents and human-rights activists take a more conservative view, recognizing that while the Internet is

⁹¹Zhang Weiguo, “Evading State Censorship,” *China Rights Forum*, Human Rights in China, fall 1998. Zhang laments that he lacks the personnel and financial resources to e-mail *New Century Net* to subscribers in China.

a potential vehicle for communicating to millions of Chinese, it has not yet reached its full potential.⁹² The present study concludes that political use of the Internet has further degraded the CCP's ability to control the flow of information into and within China but rejects hyperbolic claims that the arrival of the Internet in China will inexorably lead to the downfall of the CCP. It is not our intention to suggest that sudden, revolutionary change in China is the goal of the majority of Chinese dissidents or pro-democracy liberal intellectuals. Indeed, the most thoughtful activists argue that gradual pluralization is the preferred outcome.

It is still early in the game, and the prospects for using the Internet to encourage political pluralization and reform in China depend in part on the ability of dissidents to make effective and innovative use of the technology. The dissidents themselves recognize this challenge. One U.S.-based human-rights activist recently stated that making effective use of the Internet is the most important challenge facing the dissident movement.⁹³ In all, Internet communication is a tool that presents dissidents with a variety of new opportunities for disseminating information to a larger and more geographically dispersed audience than ever before, and potentially for organizing their activities in unprecedented ways. The latter possibility is perhaps the most important, but dissidents have yet to exploit its potential to the fullest. As one interviewee put it, the key to making effective political use of the Internet is finding ways to "turn information into action." Human-rights advocates cite the use of information technology by anti-Suharto demonstrators in Indonesia as an illustration of the Internet's potential in this regard.⁹⁴

At the same time, enhanced communication does not always further the dissident cause; rather, in some cases, it serves as a potent new forum for discord and rivalry between various dissident factions. The Chinese dissident community, both on the mainland and in exile, has been plagued by disagreements over goals and tactics, disputes over the leadership of the movement, and myriad personal rival-

⁹²Interviews, U.S.-based Chinese activists, June 2000.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

ries.⁹⁵ In early 1999, a *Far Eastern Economic Review* article identified 18 separate Chinese democracy organizations in exile, and stories are rife about the fissures and cleavages among these groups.⁹⁶ Some of this internecine warfare is no doubt motivated by competition for what is ultimately a limited amount of media attention, public notoriety, and financial support. Information technology may have increased the ease and rapidity of communication within the dissident community, but it has clearly not contributed to the resolution of these intracommunity disputes. On the contrary, the Internet has provided a new forum for dissidents to air grievances, level accusations, and launch *ad hominem* attacks against their rivals. Chinese-language BBS sites are filled with messages denouncing various dissidents, lamenting the ineffectuality—and sometimes questioning the patriotism—of the overseas democracy movement,⁹⁷ and making a variety of other charges and countercharges.⁹⁸ It is not possible to verify the identity of message posters on such sites, a problem that occasionally generates online debates about the true identity and motivation of posters. Some exile dissidents allege that Chinese intelligence agents posing as dissidents have posted messages on various sites to sow dissension within the ranks of the exile democracy movement. (For more on PRC efforts to use the Internet to exploit the dissident community's weaknesses, see the discussion of government counterstrategies below.)

⁹⁵See for example Matt Forney, "Dissonant Dissent," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 5, 1997, pp. 28–32; and Erling Hoh, "Freedom's Factions," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 4, 1999, pp. 26–27.

⁹⁶Hoh, "Freedom's Factions," p. 27.

⁹⁷A recent message entitled "To Every Overseas Democratic Personage" illustrates the persistent divisions between the mainland and overseas dissident movements. The poster decries members of the exile dissident community as "Yankee's lackeys" and suggests that they engage in several alternative pastimes (none of which is suitable to mention here) rather than "interfering with Chinese affairs."

⁹⁸The North America Free Talk Forum (*Beimei ziyou luntan*) is a frequent site of online dissident exile-community disputes. In late May 2001, for example, a message ostensibly posted by New York CDP member Xie Wanjun criticized veteran dissident Wang Xizhe for improperly carrying out activities in the name of the CDP without the approval of party authorities. The message accused Wang of "serving as a Taiwan dog" (*chongdang Taigou*) and "conspiring to damage and split the CDP" (*yinmou pohuai, fenlie Zhongguo minzhudang*). It must be noted, of course, that it is usually impossible to verify the identity of the individuals posting such messages.

FUTURE TRENDS

This study identifies five key future trends in dissident use of the Internet: First, in the short term, the Internet will require some human-rights NGOs and advocacy groups to change their traditional focus on reporting arrests. Second, it will permit small groups and individuals with limited resources to exert much greater influence than would otherwise be possible. Third, it appears likely that overseas dissidents, and perhaps even mainland dissidents, will engage in more e-mail spamming campaigns in the near future. Fourth, dissidents may increasingly turn to emerging “peer-to-peer” technology to exchange information. Finally, dissidents and other unauthorized organizations will try to find new ways to exploit the Internet’s motivational and organizational potential.

Because news about the arrests of dissidents can be spread so quickly on the Internet, U.S.-based human-rights advocacy groups, such as HRIC and Human Rights Watch Asia, are no longer primary sources for this type of information. Such groups are now essentially secondary sources. They can provide verification of information disseminated on the Internet or released by Frank Lu, and they can also produce in-depth reports and organize advocacy campaigns. As a result of this change, these groups are focusing more on providing quality content that will stand out amid the ever-growing welter of information available online and will thus have an impact in both the United States and China.⁹⁹

Small groups of activists, and even individuals, can use the Internet as a “force multiplier” to exercise influence disproportionate to their limited manpower and financial resources. This is part of a broader trend, as exemplified by Nobel laureate Jody Williams, who successfully used the Internet to gain support for a treaty to ban landmines.¹⁰⁰ As one interviewee pointed out, however, the costs of designing, maintaining, and publicizing a web site represent a significant “barrier to entry” for many small groups and individual human-

⁹⁹Interviews, U.S.-based Chinese dissidents and Western NGO activists, May–June 2000.

¹⁰⁰Maxwell A. Cameron, Robert J. Lawson, and Brian W. Tomlin (eds.), *To Walk Without Fear: The Global Movement to Ban Landmines*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

rights advocates interested in establishing a major on-line presence.¹⁰¹

The PRC will continue to be essentially powerless to prevent overseas activists from spamming uncensored news and political information to mainland e-mail users. For this reason, it is likely that a growing number of overseas activists will launch mass e-mail campaigns over the next several years. As one interviewee predicts, there may soon be “hundreds of *Da Cankaos*.”¹⁰² Indeed, it appears that there is already an emerging trend toward more groups and individuals becoming involved in this type of “Internet guerilla warfare.” Frank Lu Siqing, director of the Hong Kong Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy,¹⁰³ is seeking funding for a plan to send human-rights information and daily news updates to 1,000,000 mainland e-mail users. According to one of our interviewees, an activist based in North America is also planning to send mass mailings to 1,000,000 PRC e-mail addresses.¹⁰⁴ In the future, spamming activities of this sort may not be limited to the exile dissident community. Activists on the mainland are reportedly compiling their own lists of e-mail addresses to use for future mass-mailing campaigns.¹⁰⁵

Dissidents, Falungong practitioners, and other activists in the PRC and abroad may increasingly turn to emerging peer-to-peer technology to exchange information. (This topic is the subject of a separate, ongoing RAND study.) For example, information-sharing technologies like Gnutella and Freenet allow users to exchange files without using a central repository that could become a tempting target for the

¹⁰¹Interview, exile dissident, June 2000.

¹⁰²Interview, exile dissident, June 2000.

¹⁰³Lu's center was formerly known as the Hong Kong Center of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China.

¹⁰⁴Interview, Chinese human-rights activist based in North America, June 2000. Like the editors of *Tunnel* and *VIP Reference*, this activist intends to change ISPs and e-mail addresses frequently in order to prevent Chinese security services from interfering with his campaign.

¹⁰⁵Jim Hu, “Ten Years Later: Chinese Dissidents Using Net,” CNET News.com, June 8, 1999. It should be noted, of course, that there is no reason to believe that all of these plans will ultimately prove successful. The dissidents face determined opposition from the Chinese authorities. (The countermeasures Beijing employs are discussed in Chapter Two.)

authorities to shut down.¹⁰⁶ Some of these technologies also have the potential to provide dissidents with a relatively high degree of anonymity. Discussions with pro-democracy activists and other proponents of freedom of speech on the Internet suggest that while some Chinese Internet users have downloaded documents such as the *Tiananmen Papers* by using peer-to-peer applications,¹⁰⁷ the use of the technology for the transmission of politically sensitive materials is not yet widespread.¹⁰⁸

Finally, dissidents and civil-society groups will try to find new ways to exploit the organizational and motivational potential of the Internet. This is the critical challenge for those who seek to use the Internet to enhance their efforts to articulate controversial views on sensitive political, economic, and social subjects and to promote change. The Internet, according to Guobin Yang, has already “diversified and strengthened existing forms of social organization,” enabled Chinese citizens to create “virtual communities,” and “in ways previously unimaginable” linked Chinese civil-society associations, particularly environmental groups, with their global civil-society counterparts.¹⁰⁹ “Online protest,” writes Yang, “represents the ex-

¹⁰⁶We are indebted to Bob Anderson for bringing this issue to our attention. For more information on Gnutella, see <http://www.gnutella.com/> and http://www.gnutellanews.com/information/what_is_gnutella.shtml. For more information on Freenet, see www.freenetproject.org. The technical capabilities of Freenet are explained in Ian Clarke, Scott G. Miller, Theodore W. Wong, Oskar Sanderg, and Brandon Wiley, “Protecting Free Expression Online with Freenet,” *IEEE Internet Computing*, January–February 2002, pp. 40–49. A Chinese version of Freenet has a Chinese-only web site at <http://www.freenet-china.org>.

¹⁰⁷It is difficult to determine how great a role peer-to-peer technology has played in the dissemination of the *Tiananmen Papers* over the Internet, but the complete text of the Chinese version of the book is available on Freenet. Moreover, in May 2001, *VIP Reference* published an article containing instructions on using Freenet to download copies of the *Tiananmen Papers* in Chinese. See *Da Cankao* [*VIP Reference*], No. 1196, May 5, 2001.

¹⁰⁸It is important to note that the most popular uses of peer-to-peer technologies in China to date have not been political in nature. To the contrary, although some peer-to-peer applications, such as the Chinese version of Freenet, are designed specifically to combat censorship on the Internet and address privacy concerns, most Chinese Internet users are undoubtedly more interested in using peer-to-peer applications for entertainment purposes such as downloading MP3 music files. Nevertheless, some exiled dissidents, including the editors of *VIP Reference*, are looking to peer-to-peer technology as a potential tool for reaching Internet users in China.

¹⁰⁹Guobin Yang, “The Impact of the Internet on Civil Society in China,” p. 43.

pansion of a contentious civil society in China.”¹¹⁰ But to realize the full potential of the Internet in this regard, dissidents and other social activists will have to devise inventive new ways to employ information technology and perhaps create organizational forms that are better suited to exploiting the opportunities presented by the Internet. One of the crucial mistakes of the CDP, for example, was the building of a hierarchical organization that did not permit its members to take full advantage of information technology and rendered the group vulnerable to Beijing’s traditional strategy of counter-leadership targeting.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 44.