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Abstract² Chinese Internet users in the PRC are confined in content with censorship, with websites, contents blocked, blog entries and forum messages censored and deleted, and social media platforms banned or strictly monitored. Since Xi Jinping assumed the presidency, the CCP has become even more undemocratic, and the intellectual communities in the country have largely chosen to keep quiet on one hand while speaking silence in subtle, alternative manners on the other hand. Without any more resistance against suppressing dissent, how far can this second most populous country in the world go with such limited freedom of information and expression? Are the intellectual communities particularly examines individual experiences in Chinese media censorship and explores the mixed public attitudes and mentality behind the silence of the Chinese intellectual communities

Keywords² China, internet censorship, democracy

I. INTRODUCTION

Xi Jinping's administration in the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been known for strict information control and censorship practices. Under his leadership, the government has significantly tightened its control over the media, Internet, and public discourse. The government employs a comprehensive system of censorship and surveillance known as the Great Firewall, which restricts access to foreign websites and social media platforms, also heavily monitor and censor domestic media outlets, social media platforms, and online discussion forums to regulate the flow of information and prevent the spread of dissenting views. In his speech at Georgetown University, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg registered his stance on services in China because I believe in connecting the whole world « But we could never come to an agreement on what it would take for us to operate there. Keyword security measure as the Great Firewall blocks at least 18,000 websites according to a Harvard study [2]. Internet access, using self-censorship mechanisms, making

II. FIRST-PERSON EXPERIENCE THE PROCESS OF SILENCING

Information censorship as well as tips on getting around the Great Firewall of China, but narratives on first-hand experience widely found. As a former web content editor in Beijing, a former transnational independent filmmaker, and a former

Sina blogger from 2006 to 2012, I certainly have first-person

experience. In 2011, together with local film production company and an investment company collaborator, I submitted our film script, 《 禁城 (English working title: City of Forbidden Ghosts) to Beijing Municipal Bureau of Broadcasting, Film, and Television, a local censorship body serving as a subsidiary of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SARFT). In the feedback we received they provided suggestions for the script. Firstly, the boxer Revolution fighters in the late Qing

Secondly, the female protagonist, Claudia, a Chinese American woman, is portrayed in the story as an orphan abandoned by her Chinese biological parents but later adopted by an American couple. The script members giving strained interpretations and drawing distorted conclusions. Lastly, Mark, an American character in the script, says "I heard audience members having problems accepting the comparison it is recommended that it be changed."

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Not only film productions receive strict censorship, the government also heavily monitors and regulates social media platforms. Censorship measures include keyword filtering, content removal, account suspension, and even the detention of individuals for posting sensitive or critical information. The government uses advanced algorithms and human moderators to identify and remove content that is deemed politically sensitive, including discussions about human rights, democracy, Xinjiang, Taiwan, and other sensitive topics.

I was one of the first Sina blog users. My first blog entry posted in 2006 and with a total of 4,751 entries, I had received 2,752,885 views with 1,258 subscribers. It was deactivated by the Sina Administration and never been. I never wanted to be a political dissident and had been by no means a fanatic commentator of Chinese politics. My blog was mostly a vehicle to document my daily life, covering from grocery shopping, outdoor activities, to traveling and sightseeing, usually concluded with a meagre reflection.

After the launch of my personal discursive platform, I experienced a few years of relative tolerance from the Sina administration. Removal of blog entries almost never happened at that time.

When Xi Jinping assumed the position as the leader of the CCP and the state government in November 2012, I was hoping that, with the new generation of the Politburo, there would be a positive change in China's freedom of expression, of accessing information and connecting on social media. For years thereafter, however, people had no clear clues of where Xi would be leading the nation. Little was known about his political ideology, his personal likes and dislikes in the past, or whether he would become more liberal than the previous administration, given the fact that his father, Xi Zhongxun (1913-2002), a founding member of the CCP, was persecuted (1966-1976).

A large-scale anti-corruption campaign immediately after he took office was widely praised in the country though some overseas critics regarded it as a political genocide lacking transparency and had potential political motivations. To political observers, it was not until his second term that the country's lack of transparency and potential political motivations became more apparent. As early as in 2009, when he was still a low-profile vice president of the PRC, I could foresee his future style based on a brief speech he made to members of ethnic Chinese people in Mexico:

>7 @KHUH DUH D IHZ IRUHLJQH nothing better to do than try to be backseat drivers of (my trans.). FRXQWU\TV RZQ DIIDLUV« &KLQD GDRUHQH SIRDW out that ever 600 LoRy KXQJHU SRYHUW\ QRU GRHV &KLQD past blog entries were published by having been moved to Just what else do you want [4].

These surprising and yet perplexing remarks of Xi almost immediately provoked widespread criticism and speculation overseas of his future policy. A quick textual analysis led me to such beliefs: First, Xi had ambitions and had his own policy, a strategy of keeping a low profile internationally and concentrating on self-improvement domestically. Deng was the actual leader of the CCP, whose agenda would eventually play a role in China's development. Second, he seemed unwilling to take criticism by media, and he would not listen to opposing voices. Apparently, this has resulted in unprecedented censorship measures in the country a few years later. Third, he would not appreciate Western-style democracy, and ultimately would want to further consolidate, and strengthen totalitarianism. The method would be to use the state apparatus to maintain stability in various aspects. Being no expert in international relations or economics and seemingly only accepting opinions that cater to his liking and beliefs, he would potentially only draw sycophants to his inner circles as his advisers.

The government tightened restrictions over ideological discourse and intensified media censorship [5]. My Sina blog, almost simultaneously, went through rigorous screening, which led to the deletion of newly posted

entries, removal of posts from past years in private or public space, and a few years of relative tolerance from the Sina administration. Removal of blog entries almost never happened at that time.

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identical. The reason is very simple: They have the same boss² the Party. They are all affiliated with the Party. A senior photojournalist with the Beijing Youth Daily once told me that media workers mostly had professional consciences and were committed to truth coverage. But sometimes when the duty editor has just greenlighted the news dispatch, the editor-in-chief calls in to cancel it. Sometimes it is a call from a more important leader ordering them to cancel it. This is a common practice in China, where the news industry runs a strict screening process regarding what the government wants.

Sometimes a blog post is deleted even though the content is not relevant to China, such as another one of mine discussing why the USA had allies worldwide while playing the role of a world policeman. I would analyze that because it might potentially lead to hypersensitive individuals to put the PRC into comparison with those of the USA, which is a rival to China, it was deleted by the Sina administrator to avoid unnecessary disputes.

In some other cases, the system may prevent the user from uploading the post on the condition of replacing certain words. For example, when I tried to upload a post, an alert pops up claiming that the post contains sensitive words. The system never specifies the exact words that are blocked. Therefore, the author has no clue as to which words are sensitive. As a result, the only option is to withdraw that post.

In most other cases, a post is not immediately visible to the public after being uploaded, only visible to the author. A popped-up message indicates that the post is pending for approval.

Such restrictions inhibit free expression, and, as a result, will increase the censorship of choice of topics and vocabulary.

In addition to these measures, the government also requires social media platforms to verify the identities of their users and collect personal information, making it easier for authorities to monitor and control online activities. They also enforce strict rules and regulations on social media companies, making them responsible for the content posted on their platforms. Weibo, a microblogging and social networking platform that allows registered users to post and repost messages against a word limit, is a prominent example. This word limit was increased to 2,000 in 2016, while only the first 140 are publicly visible by default for browsing. Weibo may share the same user account as Sina blog, which means that a registered user can run the blog and Weibo at the same time using the same username and password. Registered users may choose to have their Sina blog entries synchronized into Weibo, revealing the title and the first few lines of the blog entry. Generally considered to allow greater freedom of speech than other media platforms in the PRC, in recent years Sina Weibo has also gradually tightened its restrictions, from only forbidding Beijing-based users to register with pseudonyms starting on March 16, 2019, to blocking certain terms with a sensitive nature, and to implementing the

approved by the moderator first before being published. As of September 2019, I found out that I could no longer log into my Sino Weibo. The failure to log-in message was to enter my cell phone number. Although there is an option for American cell phone numbers, the system keeps showing American numbers. I presume that the system is preventing overseas Sino Weibo users to keep their old accounts.

For fact, it has been reported that tightening the overseas use of Sina Weibo was a decision and order made by the CCP. During the same month, I found out that my WeChat account had been deactivated. WeChat, probably the most popular social media platform in the PRC and among overseas Chinese, is more like Chinese Facebook. Developed by Tencent, a Chinese company founded in 1998 providing Internet-related services and products, WeChat, an artificial intelligence and technology both in China and globally, it is an all-in-one messaging application that also provides games, online shopping, and financial services.

The inability to use this super app might cause extreme inconveniences. Each attempt to log in leads to the same message: 'Your WeChat account has violated the user agreement and is blocked from login. But you can only use Wallet, Contacts, and Favorites with temporary login. You can tap here to view details or unblock account.'

Type: Login blocked.
Self-service unblock allowed.

Reason: Reported for multiple instances of -non-compliance.

This indicates that although my WeChat login is disabled, I can still unblock it by requesting another WeChat user to verify my identity, and I can still use the wallet feature as well as receive messages and browse posts. Several friends on WeChat, but none of them has received any messages from WeChat. This penalty seems more like a permanent removal. To reopen a WeChat account, I would need a new sim card.

While I am not sure if this removal could have been linked to my sharing and reposting a number of articles from Sino-86, WUDGH ZDU RU WKH 7UXPS DGF, the Hong Kong demonstrations, I have been informed by several other WeChat users whose accounts have also been deactivated that to be punished by WeChat it would need multiple anonymous tips from fellow users. The penalty of varying levels from temporary blockage of three days to 15 days to permanent removal is a common practice in the PRC. In recent years Sina Weibo has also gradually tightened its restrictions, from only forbidding Beijing-based users to register with pseudonyms starting on March 16, 2019, to blocking certain terms with a sensitive nature, and to implementing the

Frustrations have literally silenced me... from Chinese social media... bloggers, the focus of their writings has shifted to a political... from politics.

III. THE FIFTY-CENT PARTY AND THE RISE OF NEO-NATIONALISM

6 RPH SHRSOH VXJJHVW WKD... 3 DU... called '5 HP... DSSH DUHG LQ ;L -LQSLQJ JV UHSR... of the Communist Party of China... is a Chinese cyber slang term for Internet commentators... Since in the cyber space it is not as easy to control... traditional news outlets... government departments to manipulate public opinion to the benefit of the CCP. These people are allegedly paid 50 Chinese cents for each post they upload... FRPPHQWV DQG DV VXFK -W KH QW... [12]. 7KH PHPEHUV DUH... Harvard study estimates that the PRC government has hired about two million people to fabricate social media posts under... WKH & KLQHVH UHJLPH JV VWUDWH... of the party and the government, and to not even discuss... FRQWURYHUVLDO LVVXH V'

) ROORZLQJ WKH FUHDW... THE INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITIES 2

3 ILI... fifty-FHQW... voluntarily fulfill regular fifty-FHQW... compensation... The emergence of volunteer fifty-centers may... be perceived as one prominent sign of the rise of nationalism... on the Chinese Internet, as opposed to the period of national... introspection soon after the Cultural Revolution ended... Interestingly, while these volunteer fifty-centers were... warmly praised by the government-run Guangming Daily... 3 ILUP SUDFWLWLRQHUV... YRLFH IURP RYHUVHDV SLWLHV... V XEMHFW HGXF... his Governance and Education: From Denizen to Citizen... in California, examines citizen education in the American Chinese citizens. The government also emphasizes the... Nazi Germany and argues that the purpose of education is to... empower people with greater capability for self-governance, could potentially lead to political instability and divisions... rather than assist the rulers to control people however they... wish to [16].

While Xu does not directly criticize Chinese politics in the... book, his attitude towards the current political system in the... PRC is very clear, which is evidenced by the consistency in... his interview and personal blog. One of the great repeatedly promoted by the state media is that Western... accomplishments of the CCP since 1949 is the people under... its rule has been successfully convinced that nation is... synonym of state a concentration of power under the one... PDUW\ UXOH UHJDUGOHVV RI WKH... VWDWH IRU DURXQG \ HDUV... pride is equated with loyalty and obedience to the Party... its government and its system. In other words, it takes the... measure of silencing all the voices and vanishing unwanted... votes if believed to be disapproving of the ruling... ideology and propaganda; it also means erasing traces of

demonstrations with a violent crackdown, resulting in the loss of many lives and widespread international condemnation. Following the Tiananmen Square massacre, the government implemented strict measures to suppress dissent and maintain social stability especially strict control over media and have been rethinking information. These actions, along with economic reforms that have brought increased prosperity to many Chinese citizens, have contributed to a more compliant and controlled society. While there may be occasional small-scale protests or acts of resistance in the country they are often quickly suppressed and the government's control over information and the media prevents widespread awareness or coverage of such events.

Are the Chinese and sensitive topics especially those educated alternative sources and perspectives. It is important to note that information flow between overseas Chinese and Chinese in China on social media such as WeChat is taking place every second. Measures have been created and widely adopted to get away from censorship, such as using homophonic characters. Besides, people are increasingly conscious of the likelihood of the government manipulating news through social media. Although the world within the Great Firewall is not completely enclosed, it does not reverse the impact of term information control and censorship at all. After all, having lived in this authoritarian and monolithic system year after year, people tend to tire of climbing out of the wall. Nowhere and have begun to focus more on their own well-being. Of the many university faculty members in the PRC with whom I have communicated frequently about current Chinese social issues, what impresses me the most about their thoughts is not how they conform to the government, but a self-indulgence mingled with denial and mild satire as the outcome of having been silenced in public as well as private. Only a very few dissidents, including retired and fired university professors, have been able to move to the USA to start a new life including Zhou Xiaozheng, Xia Yeliang, and Cai Xia. Most of the intellectuals must choose silence for self-protection and self-sustaining.

Before the pandemic, I had met visitors from Shanghai and Guangzhou who were vacationing in North America. They would stay at Airbnbs or hotels, traveling from coast to coast. When younger, they were among the enthusiastic supporters of democracy and deplored the rule of law and individual freedoms. While most powerful leaders in the world, even now I can afford to travel abroad every summer. My own condominium with mortgage paid off, besides the pension is not bad. So far so good, I have no complaints.

J, a professor emerita in her 70s from Nanjing, the capital city of the affluent eastern Chinese province, Jiangsu, travelled abroad with four groups for vacation several times a year until the pandemic lockdown. She says, "Now after several [pension] increases, I can make more than enough to spend on vacationing when my health still allows me to do so." She is an active advocator of freedoms of longer work effectively to the public eye and for how it

will be sustained. Perhaps the last straw will come yet.

V. CONCLUSION

How far can the CCP go? Its future trajectory is certainly uncertain, and any prediction of decline or stability should be taken with caution. Over the years, the CCP has maintained its grip on political, economic, and social institutions. Its control over the military, media, and judiciary, along with its ability to suppress dissent, has allowed it to maintain its authority.

How far can Xi go? Xi Jinping's leadership style has been often described as more autocratic and less tolerant of dissent than his predecessors. Xi has also introduced constitutional changes that removed term limits for the presidency, allowing him to potentially stay in power indefinitely. This move has raised concerns about the concentration of power, yet Xi does not seem to have run into obstruction in his pursuits.

Censorship and suppression of free expression do not seem to have met with a public backlash, especially from the intellectual communities across the country, as compared to the West. The public attitudes behind the silence should not be oversimplified. They comprise of a complex mix of factors, including economic growth at the price of trading in individual freedoms. There are more silent observers than loud dissidents and protesters. Certain factors that could potentially impact the CCP long-term stability including but not limited to persistent social issues such as corruption and information censorship while technology continues to evolve. Instead of addressing challenges and adapting to changing circumstances, the CCP seems to have a fixed mindset. For many of the silent, however, the full moon wanes, and water overflows. In a highly centralized power only draws no dissents lasts for indefinite terms, silences dissents, and prohibits free transparent information, then there is no other way out for the people and especially the intellectual communities but see

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest

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