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Internet Ideotainment in the PRC: national responses to cultural globalization

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Political leaders and establishment intellectuals in China often claim that their country is experiencing challenges from the Internet that entail threats to traditional culture, Chinese youth, and existing value orientations and ideology. To meet the challenge, they argue, there is a need to re-think outdated strategies of propaganda. In this article, I coin the term ideotainment, which is helpful for understanding the underlying rationale and concrete outcome of their thinking. Ideotainment is the juxtaposition of images, symbolic representations, and sounds of popular Web and mobile phone culture together with both subtle and overt ideological constructs and nationalistic propaganda. It is argued that strategies of ideotainment are envisioned as an effective means to engage perceived enemies in China's cyberspace, win battles of public opinion, and not least to shore up legitimacy for the Chinese Communist Party in the information age.

With the globalization of media products and the new communication technologies through which they travel, apprehension often arises concerning the impact on indigenous cultures and on younger generations. In China, much like in other countries, people's responses are positioned along a broad continuum ranging from the positive and confident to the negative and dejected. As I will show in this article, however, many Chinese intellectuals, especially those pondering the threat that Internet communication poses to the established canon of Chinese political thought, express an openly pessimistic view of cultural globalization.

China's leaders claim that their country is experiencing challenges from the Internet that entail threats to traditional culture, Chinese youth, and existing value orientations and ideology. Leaving aside certain economic objectives and considerations of national security, when contemplating battling for ideological legitimacy and winning Chinese public opinion over to their policies, what do the ideologues in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) envisage China's 'soft power' responses to be? Moreover, although it may be intuitive to assume that wholesale and fundamentally new approaches are needed for a new time and a quite new medium, is it possible to trace deeper motives and find a historical rationale behind the responses?

The speedy developments regarding implementation of harsh Internet laws and regulations, the emergence of electronic government platforms, and the continued relevance of analyzing the sources of legitimacy for the Chinese regime make notions of a crumbling propaganda state outdated. The existing literature on the social and political impact of China's Internet development is growing by the day. Yet there are few works that tackle the intersection of the information revolution, ideas on cultural colonization, and the constructs lying beneath this Chinese current of thought.[1] The direction that Chinese public opinion and policymaking take will be increasingly important on a global scale. Hence, it is important to analyze current thinking about how foreign cultural impact mediated through the Internet is thought to influence Chinese politics, and how the opinions of the people are to be channeled into support for the CCP and the governance structure at national and local levels.

Against the backdrop of these questions and the intention to seek out the mind-set behind Chinese current and emerging responses to certain 'Internet perils', I borrow from Arjun Appadurai's concept of *ideoscape*. Appadurai has proposed a framework for understanding the new global cultural economy consisting of overlapping and disjunctive dimensions of ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes.[2] He argues that ideoscapes are concatenations of images dealing with ideologies of states, and sometimes counterideologies against them.[3] Particularly noteworthy from the perspective of the contemporary Chinese social fabric is Appadurai's argument on constantly evolving terminological kaleidoscopes due to the traveling of political key words, such as democracy, between cultures and across borders, especially 'as states seek to pacify populations whose own ethnoscapes are in motion, and whose mediascapes may create severe problems for the ideoscapes with which they are presented'.[4] Today, there are enormous social problems concerning a restive migrating population that often suffers discrimination as it roams between China's provinces in search of wage labor. When social protests erupt, the state-owned organizations of the Chinese media landscape are under hard pressure not to engage in investigative reporting on the events, although risky ventures of that

1. Other works primarily deal with issues of control, online identities, global networking, and online governance. See Christopher R. Hughes and Gudrun Wacker, eds, *China and the Internet: Politics of the Digital Leap Forward* (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2003); Junhua Zhang and Martin Woesler, eds, *China's Digital Dream: The Impact of the Internet on Chinese Society* (Bochum: Bochum University Press, 2002); Francoisie Mengin, *Cyber China: Reshaping National Identities in the Age of Information* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
2. Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and Difference in Global Cultural Economy', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 7, 1990, pp. 295–310.
3. *Ibid*, p. 300.
4. *Ibid*, p. 301.

sort are occasionally undertaken. The Chinese ideoscape is replete with reactive policies and punitive actions aimed at protecting the political status quo, but it also has a proactive 'soft power' element aimed at shoring up the legitimacy of the CCP in the information age.

I propose that this element be called *ideotainment.* Ideotainment entails the intermeshing of high-tech images, designs, and sounds of popular Web and mobile phone culture with subtle ideological constructs, symbols, and nationalistically inclined messages of persuasion. Ideotainment can be used in characterizing the changes in the forms and looks, and perhaps a new sense of mission, that the propaganda apparatus undergoes. Furthermore, with ideotainment, a worldwide tendency during the US-led 'War on Terror' to 'win the hearts and minds' of global and national audiences, is captured in the Chinese setting.[5] The main thrust of the term illuminates the efforts to ideologically mold public opinion in ways more consistent with symbols and images liked, used, and judged to be 'cool' by younger generations accustomed to the world of popular culture. The ideology to be seen and read in digital format is less 'in your face' than when it is conveyed via offline mouthpieces, although very conspicuous intimidation, or exhortation, in the form of animated Internet police instilling censorship practices among ordinary users definitely exist online.[6] This is the overt form of ideotainment; the covert form entails striving to build legitimacy in more subtle ways, such as through anonymous police postings aiming to shape political discourse in chat rooms or through government appeals to Internet users to report deviations from a *luse hulianwang,* or a 'green' Internet (meaning one that does not contain vulgar or other 'unhealthy' elements).[7] Furthermore, the form and language of online ideology depend on whether it is to be disseminated over cellular networks or computer networks and the age structure of certain online media services. That means that the Party cannot rely solely on older propaganda workers for spreading the word of the government or Party to the younger age cohorts. A by-product of this development is that new propaganda tactics are likely to be tested online first, since it is in this domain that a generational shift within the Chinese propaganda corps is most evident.[8] As for the content of the ideology in Chinese ideotainment, it matter-of-factly persuades by appealing to feelings of pride in China's ongoing economic miracle, deemed necessary to achieve even more greatness on the global stage and scale. While the ideology of the Communist Party of today is mild by comparison with the fervor of Maoist ideology,

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5. Ideotainment is not anything that is unique to China. Many states—democratic and authoritarian—use the principles inherent in ideotainment. See, for example, Marcus Alexander, 'The Internet in Putin's Russia: reinventing a technology of authoritarianism', presented at the *Annual Conference of the Political Studies Association,* University of Leicester, UK, (16 April 2003). Strategists involved with political competition and campaigning in democratic countries strive to make political communication more fun to the electorate. In election democracies such as semi-authoritarian Russia and still-authoritarian China, where political competition is minimal or outright forbidden, ideotainment is a rather new phenomenon that isn't really about winning elections—it is about keeping or increasing legitimacy for the powers in place.

6. The animated characters 'Jingjing' and 'Chacha', for example, with their youthful smiles look anything but hostile to the random surfer, but the message to stay in line should be lost to no one; see www.egov.org.cn/Article/news003/2006-01-02/15229.html, (accessed 20 February 2006).

7. One is admonished to report deviations to *weifa he buliang xinxi jubao songxin* [The Reporting Center for Illegal and Unhealthy Information]; see http://net.china.com.cn/chinese/index.htm (accessed 21 February 2006).

8. Interview with the director of the National e-government Service Center, Beijing, January 2002.

the seemingly dispassionate ideology of technocratism under Hu Jintao's leadership draws on symbols of both a glorious red past and a shiny space-age tomorrow.[9] In this endeavor, the leaders of the CCP reinforce ideas about what constitutes Chinese nationalism and modern 'Chineseness', something that Hu's predecessor Jiang Zemin also worked hard at. The raison d'être for this, the thinking goes, is that without the sound technocratic leadership of the Communist Party at the state rudder, there is no one to navigate China through the difficult shoals lying between now and a future prosperous China.

In this article, I will first show how novel proposals on how to strengthen propaganda work consistently with the demands of the information age should be conceptualized and understood as incipient ideotainment strategies. Second, the strategies of ideotainment are also contextualized by listening to the voices of contemporary intellectuals reflecting on new media, culture, and globalization, using the familiar vocabulary of classical socialist jargon. It is shown how strands of Chinese political culture and inherited Leninist thought concerning imperialism, colonialism, and hegemony still function as the metanarrative and the intellectual rationale for launching strategies of ideotainment applied in order to socially control an emerging pluralism of interests and thinking on China's electronic networks. The texts selected for analysis in this article are collected from a large body of materials.[10] Most of these echo the voices of Party and establishment intellectuals more or less loosely connected to the party-state apparatus.[11] The sentiments of other educated people, writing in journals and books on the topic of the Internet and its influence on society, are also represented, however.[12] Third, these strategies of ideotainment will be related to ongoing discussions within cultural theory and studies of China's propaganda state and its commercialized nature.

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9. In 2003, when the Sars crisis shifted from its cover-up phase to 'the Battle Against Sars' phase, the symbolic arsenal of both the CCP and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) included images of the stern countenance of the worker-peasant and the tending field nurse.

10. Database research was done at the National Library in Beijing. After doing a rundown using keywords such as 'the Internet', 'society', and 'politics', a large body of articles and books covering the time frame from 1997 to 2004 emerged. These were grouped into the major categories. From that list, I chose nine articles that were either representative for these categories, or published in influential academic or Party flagship journals such as *Xinwen yu Chuanbo* [*Journalism and Communication*], *Xueshu luntan* [*Academic Forum*], *Qiushi* [*Truth*], *Xin Changcheng* [*The New Long March*], or given earlier as presentations at the prestigious Beijing University. The findings in these texts were later cross-checked/corroborated in interviews with academics, media professionals, and civil servants within different sectors of the Chinese bureaucracy. The translated excerpts of these articles come from the issue 'Chinese intellectuals' thoughts on the Internet', *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 35(2), (2003–2004).

11. See C. L. Hamrin and T. Cheek, eds, *China's Establishment Intellectuals* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1986), p. 3. Most of the writers analyzed for this article are academics working at state universities. One writer is a freelance journalist, and another is a teacher affiliated with the Communist Party's Central Party School in Beijing. Arguably, the most important factor to take into account when considering their biographical backgrounds would be age. People brought up and educated before the economic reforms of 1978, and before and after the tragic events at Tiananmen Square in 1989, have widely different levels of professional skill, education, and ideological perspectives.

12. Sun Xiaoli and Chuan Guoduan, eds, *Xinxi kexue jishu yu dangdai shehui* [*Information Science and Technology and Contemporary Society*] (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe [Higher Education Publishing House], 2000); Yang Boshu, ed., *Yintewang yu shehui—Lun wangluo dui dangdai xifang shehui ji guoji chuanbo de yingxiang* [*Internet and Society: Discussing the Impact on Contemporary Western Society and International Communication*] (Wuhan: Huazhong keji daxue chubanshe [Central China Science University Publishing House], 2002); Yang Daigui, 'Lun hulianwang dui weilai zhengfu guanli de yingxiang' ['Discussing the impact of the Internet on future government administration'], *Dongnanya, zongheng* [*Comprehensive Southeast Asia*] no. 6, (2002).

National responses to the dangers of the Internet

Echoing the debate on Western influence in China in the 1980s, the young academics Huang Tianhan and Hui Shugang argue that its impact today leads to 'colonialism in the ideological arena', and to the 'subtle influencing of the public's soul'.[13] They are apprehensive about what they see as venomous influences of foreign-produced information. In broad terms, they identify international enemies' strategies to forcefully use *heping yanbian,* or peaceful evolution, assisted by various foreign media, against all socialist countries. They therefore believe that it is obvious that the borders against undesired information must be closely guarded and patrolled, as they proclaim: 'This information from abroad is leading to a strong attack against political thought work and ideology'.[14] This awareness leads them to argue that China's leaders need to come up with strategies to protect China's information space and national identity. But how to do it? According to these two writers, it can be done— and it must be done—by high-tech screening, filtering, and blocking of harmful information; by publicly enforcing harsh laws on disseminating incriminating news or rumors on the Net; and most important, by influencing people's thought patterns.

Another pair of writers who identify the same problem and highlight its importance are Li Zhuoying and Wang Jian. They also identify the need for new methods to win back people's minds and keep loyalty to the Communist Party intact. They are impatient with current affairs and acknowledge that the party-state's propaganda apparatus has lost considerable ground in the world's new information order. In their analysis, China has become relatively weak and 'unable to adapt to new circumstances' in defending socialist ideology on the Internet, especially in the face of what they see as the aggressiveness of hostile Western powers. As a consequence, the Communist Party's political thought work is fraught with problems:

> What this demonstrates is that, by virtue of its dominance of the network, Western culture is launching an intense assault on our intrinsic traditional culture, moral standards, values, and mainstream ideology; this also creates extreme difficulties for the political thought work of our Party.[15]

Without the slow loosening of the reigns of ideological control in the 1980s and 1990s, the proposed countermeasures against perceived negative influence on China's networks need not be made today. But the case is that although the Party's Central Propaganda Department, the Party's Central Leading Group on Propaganda and Education, the Xinhua News Agency and the State Press and Publications Administration are in control of print and broadcast media, the Party is no longer able to maintain total control over all information available to the public.[16] Surely, due to a growing financial resource gap between the regulators and the regulated, created by

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13. Hui Shuguang and Huang Tianhan, 'Hulianwang dui sixiang zhengzhi jiaoyu de xiaoji yingxiang ji duice yanjiu' ['Research on the negative impact of the Internet on ideological education and countermeasures to it'], *Beijing youdian daxue xuebao* [*Journal of Beijing Post and Telecommunications University*] no. 2, (2002), p. 52.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Li Zhuoying and Wang Jian, 'Hulianwang dui sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo de yingxiang ji duice' ['The Internet's impact on ideological and political thought work and ways of addressing it'], *Xin Changzheng* [*The New Long March*] no. 3, (2001), p. 32.

16. D. Shambaugh, 'The Chinese state in the post-Mao era', in D. Shambaugh, ed., *The Modern Chinese State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 178.

the limited media reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping, control resources have shifted to narrower monitoring of views opposing party rule.[17] As a result, ever since Deng started to liberalize ideological thought work in the late 1970s, it is likely that propaganda departments, in the Party and in the bureaucracy throughout the country, have been in a state of disarray, and thus slow to adapt to technological change.[18]

However, the Chinese party-state's traditional use and control of mass media are essential when analyzing its current strategies and policies aimed at controlling China's networks,[19] as many of the old practices pressuring editors to comply with CCP demands are transferred from the offline news environment to the online milieu.[20] As suggested by political scientists like David Held and Monroe Price, authoritarian states such as China observe the political implications of the global information revolution with alarm. Consequently, these states will deploy the lion's share of control resources to the media form that they envisage as constituting the main peril in terms of fomenting opposition to continued rule, which, in the case of China, would be the Internet for the foreseeable future.[21]

Zhao Yuezhi has observed that traditional media such as television and radio stations, with the new commercial logic in command and with a popular format and content that caters more to audience demand, has entered the Chinese mediascape. Zhao holds that this 'propagandist/commercial model' is supplementary rather than oppositional to the more conventional propaganda organs.[22] Although her model is conceptualized within the framework of traditional media, it stands out as an important point of reference when taking the analysis further into practices of delegated censorship and party policies directed at the Internet. In the propagandist/commercial model, there is a state strategy that resembles the global shift in today's world toward what Monroe Price has called a '"soft" or managerial

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17. R. Cullen and H. L. Fu, 'Seeking theory from experience: media regulation in China', in V. Randall, ed., *Democratization and the Media* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), p. 162.

18. A clear example of this was when the privately owned web-portals Sina and Sohu started to write their own news items in the late 1990s. The Central Propaganda Department was slow to recognize the threat to the agenda-setting function of Party-controlled media. Limitations to their online journalism became clear only with the promulgation of 'Provisional Regulations for the Administration of Internet Sites Engaging in the Business of News Publication', effective starting 6 November 2000. It was clearly spelled out therein that Internet companies that are wholly, or partly, privately owned are only permitted to publish news that has already been published by approved news organizations in China (see Baker and McKenzie *China and the Internet: Essential Legislation* (Hong Kong; Asia Information Associates), 2001, pp. 362–366).

19. On changing journalistic practices and bureaucratic control in the PRC, see Pan Zhongdang, 'Improvising reform activities: the changing reality of journalistic practice in China', in Chin Chuan-Lee, ed., *Power, Money and Media*: *Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control in Cultural China* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000); and Yuezhi Zhao, *Media, Market and Democracy in China—Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

20. See Johan Lagerkvist, 'In the crossfire of demands: Chinese news portals between propaganda and the public', in Jens Damm and Simona Thomas, eds, *Chinese Cyberspaces: Technological Changes and Political Effects* (London: Routledge, 2006).

21. For an estimation of the scope and weight of the resources that are planned to control the Internet, see Greg Walton's 2002 report, *China's Golden Shield: Corporations and the Development of Surveillance Technology in the People's Republic of China*, available at: www.ichrdd.ca/english/commdoc/publications/globalization/goldenShieldEng.html, (accessed 1 August 2006).

22. Zhao, *Media, Market and Democracy in China*, p. 158.

state'. Price implies that such a shift moves nation-states away from a previous focus on laws toward 'influencing, persuading, or managing the environment'.[23]

In the case of China, different levels of government and the state bureaucracy still try to manage a dynamic market economy and a restive population, even as the central government is more committed than ever to transforming a political system based on 'the rule of man' to one based on 'the rule of law'. The conceptualization of a managerial state that is bent on ruling society with both newly implemented laws, and when it sees fit, forms of 'cultural engineering', well captures the trend of ideotainment that, in China, strategically puts out more subtle propaganda to mold public opinion in line with the interests of the ruling elite. According to the anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, where cultural engineering is used, 'purposive manipulation of the social organization of meaning is involved'.[24] In an analysis of political and social change in Britain in the 1990s, the sociologist Nicos Mouzelis argues that tradition has operated as a 'protective device minimizing attempts at symbolic/cultural engineering from the top'.[25] In the case of today's China, after the death of communist ideology, cultural tradition is, to the contrary, the main reservoir and means for continued cultural engineering from the top of the political hierarchy.

We find ample mirroring of the logic of the two concepts of the managerial state and cultural engineering in Huang Tianhan and Hui Shugang's outline of the necessary countermeasures to be taken to save the party-state's current quasi-Marxist, nationalistic, stability-preserving ideology. They propose and review a three-pronged defense strategy to resist and 'exterminate' the incoming contaminating influence of the Internet on ideological work. First, Huang and Hui advocate strengthening lawful surveillance and increasing technological control in order to constrain the negative leverage of mass media, such as the spread of vulgar and pornographic information. Second, they argue for raising the overall awareness and moral character of people working within the Internet industry. It can be argued that the 'Public Pledge on Self-discipline for the Chinese Internet Industry', signed by Yahoo, as well as other domestic companies that later followed suit, was a clear manifestation of this thinking. The Internet Society of China publicized the first pledge on 26 March 2002. In this document, companies promised to remove web-links to sites that contained what was labeled as 'harmful information'.[26] This pledge was followed up on 11 October 2003, when a similar joint statement was issued. In this second pledge, called 'The Beijing Pledge on Chinese Internet Media's Social Responsibility', state-owned or municipally owned online news web-portals promised to work in tandem with the authorities on the issue of developing a healthy Internet. Third, reflecting Jiang Zemin's catchword of

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23. M. E. Price, *Media and Sovereignty: The Global Information Revolution and Its Challenge to State Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), p. 143.
24. U. Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 17.
25. N. Mouzelis, 'Reflexive modernization and the third way: the impasses of Giddens' social-democratic politics', *Sociological Review* 49(3), (August 2001).
26. The pledge is available at: http://www.isc.org.cn/20020417/ca102762.htm, (accessed 1 August 2006).

'going with the times', in order to avoid losing out against other forces in society, Huang and Hui argue:

> We must also realize that there is a huge gap between the traditional forms of propaganda and education and the ways of modern mass media. This forces us to implement creative changes in traditional forms of propaganda, and to use modern high technology to fine-tune, enrich, and perfect the content and forms of our culture—in order to make it easier for young people to accept and be influenced by education.[27]

As reflected in the above paragraph, I believe the term 'ideotainment' captures much of what is going on in and what permeates the *xuanjiao xitong*, or propaganda system, in China today.

Li Zhuoying and Wang Jian are two other young academics who show they believe there is an urgent need to adapt to modern demands on political thought work under new network conditions. They propound a sophisticated scheme regarding the appropriate countermeasures to be taken, given what they see as a foreign onslaught on the Chinese political system and ideology. They want to continuously innovate, develop, and explore new forms of propaganda in what is now the global network society. While admiring the party's 'long and excellent traditions of political thought work', they contend that more effective use of network media is a crucial element, specifically implying that there is a need to add fresh content to traditional political thought work. Moreover, in their view, this will lead to the construction of a much-required and strong 'spiritual line of defense' to prevent the destructive influence of Western civilization. These authors firmly maintain that China can 'absolutely not give up the Party's propaganda position on the Internet'. Reflecting methods of ideotainment, they devise ways to change propaganda work in this new era:

> Faced with new situations and new challenges, we must work extremely hard to set up an overall plan for news, propaganda, theory, culture, and healthy websites and web-pages, such as the specialist web-pages that tertiary institutions have posted on the Internet for studying Deng Xiaoping Theory … In developing online political thought work, we must aim for a look that 'netizens' will enjoy. By combining advanced technology and entertainment, we will be molding their temperament and raising awareness in a relaxed atmosphere and a pleasant environment.[28]

Although the mouthpiece and propaganda functions are still vital elements of the traditional mass media, the function of being 'the eyes and ears' of the state is becoming less important and is less possible to uphold with the increasing commercialization of the media industry. Instead, as Monroe Price has argued, it has become globally important to 'win the hearts and minds' of people,[29] and in China, this persuasive element of ideotainment is combined with lawful compliance and the delegation of censorship to key high-tech and media industries. Moreover, new powerful surveillance and monitoring technologies, coupled with ideotainment strategies superseding outdated propaganda techniques, may, in fact, convince ordinary Chinese Party cadres and state bureaucrats that the Leninist system for upholding social stability can withstand the challenges of social pluralization in

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27. Hui and Huang, 'Hulianwang dui sixiang zhengzhi jiaoyu de xiaoji yingxiang ji duice yanjiu', p. 53.
28. Li and Wang, 'Hulianwang dui sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo de yingxiang ji duice', p. 33.
29. Price, *Media and Sovereignty*, p. 225.

society. And it can be argued that this group of people is essential for maintaining belief in the current polity.[30] They may find Internet technology to be helpful in the dual problem for the authoritarian state, namely, to both control and understand the formation of public opinion and identify threats to its own rule. In line with Li and Wang's analysis above, Quan Zhemo argues:

> Our party ... must closely integrate with the Internet and other media developments today. And along with the changing of the channels through which people receive information, we must explore how to make use of high technology to extend the measures for propagating thought work.[31]

Hearing out the voices of Chinese establishment intellectuals suggests that a rethinking of the appropriate mechanisms of the former propaganda state is beginning to take place. How this mind-set is formulated by top leaders became apparent in a speech given by China's vice president, Zeng Qinghong, in 2004, when he stated that the Communist Party must

> take very seriously the influence that the Internet and other new types of media have on public opinion, strengthen the system for managing the Internet and the buildup of a corps of online propaganda personnel, and form strong momentum in straightforward propaganda.[32]

The Chinese political system and its bureaucracy are far from a monolithic bureaucratic whole, able to impose set values on an increasingly well-traveled and well-educated public all over the country, as it contains progressive as well as conservative views on the information revolution.[33] Nevertheless, we find echoes from the thoughts of Chinese intellectuals at top levels of the political hierarchy—for instance, in the speeches on the need for a healthy Internet by former minister of information industry Wu Jichuan and other highly placed Party and government leaders.[34] Moreover, there are signs that lower levels in the political and administrative hierarchy, prompted either by their own initiative or directly heeding the words from political and intellectual quarters, act according to the spirit of either overtly or secretly guiding public opinion. The case of the undercover agents of an Internet police task force who anonymously posted positive comments on government behavior in Suqian County of Jiangsu Province well illustrated the importance given to this particular policy area.[35]

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30. For an account of what happens when socialist cadres stop believing in the fairness and legitimacy of the political system within which they play key roles, see P. Hollander, *Political Will and Personal Belief: The Decline and Fall of Soviet Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

31. Quan Zhemo, 'Jianchi "san ge zhuoyan yu" nuli kaichuang xuanchuan sixiang gongzuo xin jumian' ['Upholding "three views" in trying hard to open up a new prospect for ideological education'], *Shehui kexue zhanxian* [*Social Science Battle Line*] no. 2, (1999), p. 8.

32. Zeng Qinghong, 'Jiaqiang dang de zhizheng nengli jianshe de ganglingxing wenjian (xuexi guanqie shiliu jie si zhong quan hui jingshen, jiaqiang dang de zhizheng nengli jianshe)' ['A programmatic document strengthening the construction of the Party's governing ability (study and implement the spirit of the Fourth Plenum of the 16th Central Party Committee, strengthening the construction of the Party's governing ability)'], *Renmin Ribao* [*The People's Daily*], (8 October 2004), p. 2, available at: www.people.com.cn/GB/paper464/13101/1175378.html, (accessed 1 August 2006).

33. N. Hachigan and L. Wu, *The Information Revolution in Asia* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2003), p. 80.

34. Wu Jichuan, quoted in Zhang Chunjiang and Ni Jianmin, eds, *Guojia Xinxi Anquan Baogao* [*Report on National Information Security*] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe [People's Publishing House], 2000).

35. See 'Yindao wangluo yulun shijian, Suqian de "wangluo xuanchuan duiwu"' ['The incident of Internet opinion guidance: Suqian County's "Internet propaganda team"'], *Nanfang Zhoumo* [*Southern Weekend*], (19 May 2005).

Perceptions of strong and weak cultures

To understand the intellectual rationale for Chinese ideotainment strategies inherent in current responses toward globalizing value orientations on the Internet, the historical foundations for this rationale need to be understood. When taking a deeper look at China's modern historians and their writings about victimization at the hands of foreign powers in the nineteenth century, one finds a conditioning and cultivation of the recurrent theme of *youhuan yishi*—the 'worrying mentality' in Chinese cultural life.[36] An illustration of how generations of Chinese, imbued with this mentality and concerned about belonging to what has long been perceived as a weak culture, is the following dialogue on hegemony and power in the information age, which took place in a Beijing University lecture hall between a college student and Internet pioneer and journalist Hu Yong.

> *Question (student):* Could you say something about the dangers of strong cultures encroaching on weak cultures?
> *Answer (Hu Yong):* Personally, I believe the greatest harm is that the weak cultures will lose their sense of identity.[37]

Today's sentiments about disruptive influences infiltrating China from overseas also echo China's recent past. From Mao Zedong's legendary two talks in Yanan in 1942 on the role Chinese literature and art should play in the new China, to Deng Xiaoping's rather undaunted words on the inevitability of receiving 'flies through the door' when China's program of reform and opening up to the world started in 1978. Among other things, it was 'flies' in the form of discothèques and makeup that provoked a heated intellectual and political debate in the mid-1980s about the need for cultural resistance against the trend of 'bourgeoisie liberalization'.[38] The historian Frank Dikötter has wondered where the impulse to national union in China would be without the ever-present threat of national extinction at the hands of evil-minded outsiders. He has argued that outsiders, foremost those of Western origin, have been essential for constructing national identity in China during the twentieth century.[39]

References to Marxist theories of cultural imperialism, and the use of insights on cultural and political hegemony from reading the texts of Antonio Gramsci or Edward Said, regularly occur in the published articles of the time period covered in this article. Samuel Huntington's 1993 article 'The clash of civilizations' in *Foreign Affairs*, which discussed what would constitute tensions in world politics after the Cold War, received much negative response among Chinese intellectuals. They argued that with this article, Huntington disclosed a tendency toward 'Western cultural centrism'.[40]

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36. P. Link, *Evening Chats in Beijing: Probing China's Predicament* (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 249.

37. Hu Yong, 'Diannao he wangluo zheng zaojiu yi zhong shenmeyang de wenhua' ['What sort of culture are computers and the network creating?'], in Wen Chi, ed., *Zai Beida ting jiangzuo—sixiang de guangmang* [*The Brilliant Rays of Thought—Listening to Lectures at Beijing University*] (Beijing: Xin shijie chubanshe [New World Publishing House], 2001), p. 222.

38. Lawrence R. Sullivan, 'Assault on the reforms: conservative criticism of political and economic liberalization in China, 1985–86', *China Quarterly* no. 114, (June 1988), pp. 198–222.

39. Frank Dikötter, 'Culture, "race" and nation: the formation of national identity in twentieth-century China', *Journal of International Affairs* 49(2), (Winter 1996), p. 617.

40. See Feng Pengzhi, 'Shuzihua de "paomo": wangluo shehui zhangli ji qi biaoxian xingshi' ['The tension in network society and its manifestations: the digital "bubble"'], *Tianjin shehui kexue* [*Tianjin Social Science*] no. 3, (2000), p. 29.

The response to Huntington was fuelled by a turn in cultural politics and ideology that in the mid-1990s helped make strong nationalist sentiment more 'mainstream' than before. Since then, concerns have been voiced in PRC society about a national culture under attack from aggressive nations of the West, intent on containing China's rise to world prominence.[41] As the following two paragraphs on cultural imperialism and cultural clashes show, however, there are some interesting intertextual borrowings going on between Chinese intellectuals and the products of various Western scholars such as Huntington.

First, the academic Xiao Lingnuo's writing in the Party journal *Qiushi* displays distress about the threat the Internet poses to indigenous Chinese culture, and concludes ominously:

> Information technology has increased the speed and expanded the scope of cultural dissemination to the extent that many different cultures inhabit the same space. A clash of cultures is thus unavoidable.[42]

Second, resounding these old fears, Fu Xiaoping and Zhang Lei also point to the inevitability of a clash of civilizations. While they identify some positive aspects of worldwide human exchange, they see it as unavoidable that the global electronic network also brings with it clashes of culture and moral values:

> When two foreign cultures come into contact, conflicts, collisions, and struggles are unavoidable. In the network environment, there is an increasingly evident conflict and antagonism between carrying forward national traditional cultures and 'cultural colonialism' and 'cultural hegemony' from outside.[43]

Elsewhere in the world, and also among cultural theorists at universities in China, it has become rather commonplace in debates on cultural theory to argue for a processual rather than static conceptualization of culture.[44] Cultures are seen to be 'traveling'—and thus constantly in flux. But the 'worrying mentality' continues to be a strong force among mainstream Chinese intellectuals, and especially among establishment and Party intellectuals, after having inculcated the intellectual foundations of countless Chinese scholars worried about the prospects of Chinese civilization in a world of cultural and political zero-sum games. Thus, characterizing Western culture as an imminent menace isn't anything new to Chinese intellectuals, but they do seem suddenly bewildered, and definitely overwhelmed by, foreign

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41. See W. Meissner, 'New intellectual currents in the People's Republic of China', in D. C. B. Teather and H. S. Yee, eds, *China in Transition: Issues and Policies* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 19; and J. Fewsmith, *China since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 145.

42. Xiao Lingnuo, 'Mianlin xinxihua de minzu wenhua' ['Informatization and the national culture'], *Qiushi xuekan* [*Seeking Truth*] no. 6, (2000), p. 24.

43. Fu Xiaoping and Zhang Lei, 'Hulianwang dui daxuesheng xinli, xingwei de fumian yingxiang ji duice tanjiu' ['The negative effect of the Internet on the behavior and psychology of tertiary students and a thorough look at ways of dealing with it'], *Sichuan shifan xueyuan bao* [*Journal of Sichuan Teachers College (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*] no. 1, (2002), p. 89.

44. For an example of this processual view, see J. Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 25ff.

'information pollution' drawing nearer in the Internet age.[45] Evidently, and ironically, as the articles reviewed here clearly show, the Huntingtonian position about conflicts being drawn between the civilizations of 'the rest' against the West seems to be taken for granted. This is ironic because the conceptualizations and ideas in foreign academic writing and 'thought work' are used to sharpen the arguments among these Chinese intellectuals most vehemently opposed to the importation of Western political thinking on the Internet.

Perceptions of cultural imperialism

How to deal with foreign cultural influence and the negative impact of foreign values has been debated in China since the mid-nineteenth century.[46] Analyses of cultural imperialism in the Marxist–Leninist tradition, especially before, but also after, the Communist revolution in 1949, added to these fears among Chinese people. Nevertheless, these writings also fired feelings that effective resistance was possible. The contemporary voices, like their forerunners, oftentimes have a vigilant and alarmist ring, concerned as they are with not just the death of the nation-state, but also the death of Chinese culture, identity, and traditions. Notwithstanding that Western scholarship and philosophy have found their way into the educational system of the People's Republic, and over time have enjoyed popularity, and even a devoted following, notions of the hybrid nature of national cultures aren't shared by a majority of these writers I have analyzed.

A number of Chinese writers today obviously still view the internationalization of communication as resulting in a dependency in which traditional cultures will ultimately be destroyed through the intrusion of a predominantly American 'electronic invasion' of Western values. This particular group of writers deeply mistrusts the increase of American cultural products on the Chinese cultural market. In a study on cultural information spread on Chinese websites, researcher Peng Lan, although nuanced in much of his reasoning, states at the outset that the key foreign country to be observed in relation to the perceived problem is the United States: 'US movies also act as a window on the American lifestyle. This leads to the promotion of American fashion'.[47] As proof of the fact that challenges from cultural imperialism on the Internet are 'slipping through' to China, Li Zhuoying and Wang Jian partly take their cue from Samuel Huntington. But in accordance with the language of the classical cultural imperialism thesis,[48] these two writers point out that 'at present, the Internet is the main ideological and political tool of Western countries—especially the United States—in their quest for world hegemony'.[49]

45. As Prasenjit Duara has argued, in Chinese national ideology, the *tiyong* dichotomy is prototypical for designing East–West relations, that is, striving for Western means and Eastern essence in guiding development is still relevant: see Prasenjit Duara, 'Response to Philip Huang's biculturality in modern China and in China studies', *Modern China* 26(1), (2000), pp. 32–37. Lokman Tsui also draws on the continued usefulness of this dichotomy for understanding how it shapes discussion and thought on the Internet in China: see Lokman Tsui, 'Introduction: The sociopolitical Internet in China', *China Information* 19(2), (2005), pp. 181–182.
46. J. K. Fairbank, *China: A New History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 217.
47. Peng Lan, 'Is the "wolf" coming? An empirical study on cultural information spread on Chinese websites', in Zhang and Woesler, eds, *China's Digital Dream*, p. 236.
48. See Herbert Schiller's classic thesis of cultural imperialism: *Mass Communications and American Empire* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969).
49. Li and Wang, 'Hulianwang dui sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo de yingxiang ji duice', p. 31.

One important common theme among the cited articles concerns the perceived threat of a cultural invasion from the West. The majority of the articles found in the database search fear a world culture dominated by American hegemonic interest, because it would ultimately mean the destruction of China's own 'splendid and ancient civilization'. Only a minority of the essays is prepared to entertain the view that, on the contrary, Chinese culture might be quite resilient in the face of foreign cultural onslaught. This minority, however, envisage the Internet as a vehicle for bettering China's international image in world affairs.

Although the nationalistic attitude toward foreign culture is the overriding theme in most articles analyzing responses to perceived dangers on the Internet, the display of intense social-Darwinist rhetoric about national survival isn't the only way to think about these matters in contemporary Chinese thought. Moderate attitudes toward what the Internet may mean for the survival and spread of Chinese culture also exist, although they are surprisingly few. Among these, communications scholar Min Dahong shares the view of mainstream thinkers that the dilemma about the endurance of cultural pluralism and the perseverance of national cultures is a most serious issue with which to grapple in the age of globalization. Still, he confidently reviews the recent development of a Chinese presence on the global Internet. Li Zhuoying and Wang Jian also write positively about the possibilities to buttress both national consciousness about Chinese culture and generate new interest for it in the world arena. In so doing, they are quite sure that the greater pride taken in indigenous cultural history and national culture will indeed 'yield a positive effect for the resistance against cultural imperialism'.

Before people figure out how to resist, however, there is a need to understand what happens when overseas cultural content meets indigenous consumption. A most pressing question that many Chinese intellectuals worry about is how the social impact of the localized appropriation of Western media products over the Internet should be understood and dealt with. Researcher Feng Pengzhi, who is affiliated with Beijing Central Party School, detects a clear master plan on the part of Western ethnocentrists, who he believes use their formidable technological strength in the network society to disseminate their ideological and cultural models on the Internet. He paints a bleak picture, saying that it will be difficult to imagine other cultures being able to resist being 'sucked into the multicolored digital bubble of West-centric cultural models'.[50]

These writers could perhaps take solace from arguments made by the media theorist John B. Thompson, who argues that the globalization of communication has created 'a new kind of symbolic axis of globalized diffusion and localized appropriation'.[51] Thompson means that through the localized process of appropriation, media products are embedded in sets of practices, which shape, and ultimately alter, their original significance. As a matter of fact, most contemporary cultural theorists hold views like this, which actually ought to serve as a 'tranquilizer' for even the most alarmist of intellectual thinkers.[52] China is changing as a result of Internet technology, but the

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50. Feng, 'Shuzihua de "paomo"', p. 29.
51. J. B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 174.
52. Like David Held *et al.*, one may question whether there have ever existed any indigenous, authentic traditions and cultural heritages untainted by values imposed from outside: see D. Held, A. McGrew, D. Goldblatt and J. Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (London: Polity Press, 1999), p. 371.

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politics of the state's Internet control and cultural specificities that are visible in the creativity of individual user-surfers also create 'China's own Internet'. Since all cultures evolve through input from and interaction with others, there hardly exist cultures that are without any sign of hybridity.

Other writers continue to nurture the fear of English being a Trojan horse for liberal ideology;[53] they do not share the general craze to learn English, which has been a theme in China during the last two decades. Some of the analyzed texts specifically address the problematic relationship between the young and the Internet. When an Internet café in Beijing was burnt down in June 2002, a nationwide clampdown on both unregistered and registered Internet café businesses followed.[54] The Lanjisu fire presented an opportunity for the party-state to react to a moral panic ignited by the media and supported by worried parents about the dangers of Internet cafés frequented by alleged teenager-hooligans.[55]

In line with the thinking of the time, Fu Xiaoping and Zhang Lei write about university students who are starting to waver and who have doubts about socialism with Chinese characteristics in the information age. The bewildering array of information can easily turn them against positive education and guidance. They may blindly absorb Western and foreign things, willfully criticizing existing Chinese institutions and systems and turning their noses up at traditional culture.[56] Huang Tianhan and Hui Shugang expand on the necessity to adopt various methods in order to protect these young souls. They observe that the strengthening of 'lawful surveillance and technological control' is urgent, because these methods have been quite effective in the past, and to some extent, have inhibited the 'unsanitary' influences of mass media that spread pornography. Surveillance is called for because it facilitates the 'development of the Internet's positive aspects and the protection of all young people's physical and mental health'.[57] The vocabulary of 'youth', 'health', 'hygiene', and 'pollution' is often used when concrete action is envisaged for China's networks. A clear example of this occurred in 2004 when the authorities established a web-portal, designed to encourage Chinese enterprises and individuals to report on 'unhealthy tendencies', primarily targeting online pornography on Chinese networks.[58]

How are we to understand this subconscious, or rather semiconscious, basis that underpins anxiety for cultural change? In the view of these authors, what is seemingly at stake is the rescue of Chinese youth born into a vulnerable and weak, albeit still splendid, culture. Surely, one can dismiss their views as overly strong words meant to safeguard the monopoly on power by the Chinese Communist Party. I do believe that

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53. See, for example, Hui and Huang, 'Hulianwang dui sixiang zhengzhi jiaoyu de xiaoji yingxiang ji duice yanjiu', p. 53; and Shi Lei, 'Hulian wangluo, yanlun ziyou, weilai zhengzhi' ['The Internet, freedom of expression, and future politics'], *Shandong xingzheng xueyuan Shandong sheng jinan guanli ganbu xueyuan xuebao* [*Journal of Shandong Administrative College and Shandong Economic Management Personnel College*] no. 1, (January 2004), p. 117.
54. Since then, Chinese authorities have regularly cracked down on Internet café operations. During March and April 2004, the *People's Daily* reported that 8,600 underground Internet cafés had been banned, citing Minister of Culture Sun Jiazheng, see 'Mainland crackdown on net cafés', AFP, (27 April 2004).
55. Interview with Internet café owners in Nanjing, November 2002, and in Shanghai, October 2003.
56. Fu and Zhang, 'Hulianwang dui daxuesheng xinli, xingwei de fumian yingxiang ji duice tanjiu', p. 89.
57. Hui and Huang, 'Hulianwang dui sixiang zhengzhi jiaoyu de xiaoji yingxiang ji duice yanjiu', p. 55.
58. Information available at: http://net.china.com.cn/chinese/index.htm, (accessed 1 August 2006).

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their mission is more to help assure the survival of the CCP than the survival of the age-old civilization that is China. On a deeper level, however, one could also claim that with the pace and permeability of Internet communications, it is only plausible that technologically induced cultural changes meet with fears and intellectual resistance in countries everywhere—not just in fast-developing countries. And given that spheres of contact between countries are on the increase, it is only to be expected that ongoing and far-reaching transformations of society and cultural practices produce worry among most peoples. Kevin Robins asserts that change implies the capacity to relinquish at least some aspects of a given identity. Still, it is likely to provoke feelings of anxiety and fear in the collectivity. This he holds to be 'a basic fear about the mortality of the collective institution'.[59] Thus, while by no means a phenomenon unique to China, I would argue that the fears (and exhilaration) of imminent changes in cultural practices, ways of life, and traditional customs are perhaps more acute there, the reason being that China today is in the midst of a fundamental upheaval of its social and economic system, which in all likelihood is unmatched in modern economic history.

Studying the effects of this social transformation on the intersection of ideological propaganda work and rapid commercialization of media industries, Daniel Lynch has made an important point in arguing that control over political thought work and communication processes is slipping away from Beijing into the hands of different sectors of society. According to Lynch, efforts by the state to reassert control of *sixiang gongzuo*, or thought work, are not without effect, but they generally fail to achieve their goals. However true this assertion may be in the long run, it seems quite unlikely that the Communist Party will sit passively waiting to be overthrown by whatever social and political forces may arise in the future.[60] But as I have put forward in this article, to this knowledge must be added new findings from the field showing that ideotainment strategies are emerging by the integration of subtle images, 'cool' animations, and entertaining catchphrases into new media applications and services on the Internet.[61]

Research findings on the propaganda discourse and its makeover show that more subtle efforts at propaganda, aimed at increasing the legitimacy of the party-state, have been underway for several years.[62] This was clearly evident during the Sars crisis in the spring of 2003. Aided by network-savvy young propaganda professionals, the CCP was able to transform rallying cries against the corona virus into a means of boosting legitimacy for post-Jiang leaders President Hu Jintao

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59. K. Robins, 'Interrupting identities: Turkey/Europe', in S. Hall and Paul du Gay, eds, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), p. 61.
60. Since Hu Jintao became the supreme leader over the Party and China's president in 2003, the trend toward increased control over both online and offline media has been steadfast: see Freedom House Report on China, Ashley Esarey, *Speak No Evil: Mass Media Control in Contemporary China*, available at: http://freedomhouse.org/uploads/special_report/33.pdf, (accessed 30 July 2006).
61. Other scholars have also noted the CCP's ability to recast and repackage its current ideology of nationalism and legitimacy to rule China indefinitely: see also Suisheng Zhao, 'A state-led nationalism: the patriotic education campaign in post-Tiananmen China', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31(3), (1998), pp. 287–302; Zhao Bin, 'Popular television and party ideology: the spring festival happy gathering', *Media, Culture and Society* 20, (1998), pp. 43–58; Anne-Marie Brady, 'Regimenting the public mind: the modernisation of propaganda in the PRC', *International Journal* 57(4), (2002), pp. 563–579.
62. See Zhao, 'A state-led nationalism', footnote 15, p. 298; and A. Chan, 'From propaganda to hegemony: Jiaodian Fangtan and China's media policy', *Journal of Contemporary China* 11(30), (2002), p. 43.

and Premier Wen Jiabao, when MMS (multimedia message service) pictures showing heroic figures hit individuals' cell phones.[63] Propaganda that was less subtle and more old-fashioned, but still quite effective, also bombarded Chinese media outlets as the battle against the spiritual movement Falungong raged.[64] And on the eve of the anti-Japanese demonstrations in April 2005, the authorities in Beijing sent SMS (short message service) text messages to subscribers over China Mobile's network, assuring people and pleading for their concurrence that the government was, indeed, dealing with foreign relations in a way most beneficial to the nation.[65] In 2005, it also became known that undercover police agents operated in chat rooms and bulletin board systems (BBS) to secretly steer discussions in a way favorable to the image of the ruling Communist Party and local government.[66]

In his work, Daniel Lynch also argued, 'telecommunications companies cannot be expected to judge the healthiness or political correctness of every message they transmit'.[67] However, that is *de facto* the direction that developments have taken since the writing of his book. Domestic high-tech companies notwithstanding, US media giants Microsoft, Google, Cisco Systems, and Yahoo have also been found to acquiesce to censorship demands from the Chinese government, which has caused them to come under repeated attacks from human rights organizations and from representatives in the American Congress.[68] Propaganda departments at various levels now operate a system of delegated censorship practices, obliging Chinese Internet companies to screen Chinese Internet users against blacklists of politically sensitive key words. Thus, there are, in fact, several signs of slowing down the overall trend that Lynch outlined as leading to a stage 'after the propaganda state' in the late 1990s.

Media scholars have made the argument that the diffusion of Western ideas and ideals do get through to people in China, and, through imported cultural products, result in the potential for critical comparison between one's own political situation and that of others. John B. Thompson refers to the fact that symbolic mediation, or rather symbolic distancing, by television, as described by James Lull in his study of the impact of television in China, has been going on at least since the 1980s. Lull contended that glimpses of the world transmitted in Chinese television during that decade helped to create a cultural reservoir of alternative visions, encouraging people to question official interpretations and helping them to imagine other ways of life. Thompson wisely tries to qualify this argument by saying that the localized appropriation of globalized media products is also a source of tension, partly because

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63. The colorful and expressive SMS and MMS propaganda messages, borrowing from a vast symbolic and visual reservoir of images of revolutionary heroes, poses, and sacrifice, was sent out to reassure the Chinese population that the government was efficiently fighting the spread of Sars during the spring and summer of 2003.

64. James W. Tong, 'Publish to perish: regime choices and propaganda impact in the anti-Falungong publications campaign, July 1999–April 2000', *Journal of Contemporary China* 14(44), (2005), p. 522.

65. Jane Macartney, 'Message to the mob: China texts protest ban', *Timesonline*, (2 May 2005), available at: www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-1594030,00.html, (accessed 1 August 2005).

66. Jonathan Watts, 'China's secret Internet police target critics with web of propaganda', *The Guardian*, (14 June 2005), available at: www.guardian.co.uk/china/story/0,7369,1506016,00.html, (accessed 1 August 2006).

67. D. Lynch, *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, and 'Thought Work' in Reformed China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 209.

68. See *Net Firms Criticised over China*, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4699242.stm, (accessed 1 August 2006).

media products convey images and messages that clash with, or do not entirely support, the values associated with a traditional way of life.[69]

I would argue that this phenomenon is especially true in today's Chinese setting, given the existence of a ruling party bent on steering the passions and interest of an affluent urban middle class and a restive underclass of worker-peasants into support, or at least tacit acceptance, of its rule. To this end, spurring international trade and harnessing a strong nationalistic mood will be used to rally opinion in favor of the political status quo. A case in point is the American bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, after which the Communist Party mouthpiece, the *People's Daily*, set up a 'Strong Country Forum' (SCF) website.[70] This interactive nationalistic forum became instantly popular among ordinary people. Therefore, it was quite logical that a year after the successful launching of and reaction to SCF, the central government invested one billion RMB earmarked for the establishment of five new information and news agencies, each carrying moderated agenda-set news on their own giant websites.[71]

Electronic government projects, state-owned and municipal news portals, and a plethora of information campaigns all indicate the possibilities and the potential in mixing useful information with skillfully presented propaganda for government policies. The long-term effectiveness of these efforts at regime promotion on the Internet can be doubted, but since many Chinese still use government-controlled news media on the Internet and watch the packaged news on Chinese state television, the new and more subtle ways of propaganda may, in fact, contribute to what Andrew Nathan has called 'authoritarian resilience'.[72]

Concluding remarks

As in many other countries, in the People's Republic of China, views on the repercussions and meaning of cultural globalization range from the optimistic, focusing on the emerging meeting places of world cultures, to the pessimistic—imagining engagement with other cultures as something that is best avoided for fear of being dominated. As shown in this article, the latter view is prevalent among Chinese thinkers more or less loosely connected to the Chinese Communist Party. A wide range of publications analyzing the social effects of Internet development highlight the negative sides of 'informatization' in the PRC. Some of the writers under scrutiny in this analysis are party intellectuals who demonstrate a more vigilant

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69. See J. Lull, *China Turned on: Television, Reform and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 171; Price, *Media and Sovereignty*, p. 177; Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, p. 174. Several case studies that are included in James Curran and Myung-Jin Park, eds, *De-Westernizing Media Studies* (London: Routledge, 2000), also show that aspects of globalization such as value orientations may mean different things in, and to, different cultures.

70. According to a media scholar I met in Beijing in January 2003, everything changed with the bombing in 1999. The central government then realized it had to build a strong presence on the Internet, focusing on news production. This refocusing had to be implemented in order to disseminate the official Chinese view of this piece of news. A concomitant goal was, of course, to advance the government's general policy objectives in the world. The initiatives included the Internet versions of traditional newspapers and setting up the *Xinhua wang* website of the official news agency New China.

71. Zhang and Woesler, *China's Digital Dream*, p. 168.

72. A. J. Nathan, 'Authoritarian resilience: China's changing of the guard', *Journal of Democracy* 14(1), (2003), p. 16.

approach to the negative impact (*fumian yingxiang*) they believe Internet development brings forth. Therefore, they want the Communist Party to both increase controls over the Internet and work harder to enhance its own legitimacy among the Chinese population—something more independent and liberal-minded intellectuals do not worry about. For the Party intellectuals, though, the interconnected global village is viewed as a place of 'cultural invasions' and electronic clashes between different civilizations. One important response to this perceived challenge, they argue, is the need to rethink the outdated strategies of propaganda. Other solutions to perceived vulnerability caused by rapid Internet development proposed by these writers are already being enforced by the Chinese government, such as the ongoing process of controlling individual Internet use and forcing national and foreign IT companies to cooperate with the security apparatus to achieve more effective control over China's networks.

How should the ideological motives and intellectual rationale behind the regulations of China's Internet be conceptualized? And how should Chinese intellectuals' responses toward cultural globalization on the Internet be understood? Judging from the many texts analyzed as part of this project, the Internet is sketched out as a threat to Chinese culture and youth, which need to be protected by the power sources available to China. However, the Party's political thought work and ideology as played out to this day is also threatened by cultural globalization flows over the Internet. This is a fact that the ideologues and propagandists in the Party take very seriously. Moreover, they are trying to find an effective solution for this challenge, which is taking place on China's networks today. According to many Party intellectuals, the Internet poses an evident threat to the political system, its ideology, and the current leadership's control of the media system. What emerges in the texts written by those arguably standing closer to the party-state line are propositions of countermeasures needed against an Internet-based Western cultural invasion.

To sum up, the Chinese ideoscape of today is an area of defense and legitimacy building for the current political system of China, with the monopoly of the Communist Party as an axiomatic principle not to be opposed by the people. Policies and regulations targeting the policy area of the Internet serve to maintain social stability and the political status quo, but these policies also have a proactive element aimed at persuading and defending the policies in order to prop up legitimacy for them. In this article, I have called this element *ideotainment,* by which I mean that the images, symbolic representations, and sounds and jingles of popular Web and mobile phone culture are juxtaposed with subtle ideological constructs and nationalistically inclined propaganda.[73] The blunt propaganda format used in the campaign that targeted Falungong as an 'evil cult' still exists, but as I have shown in this article, a process is underway in which it is complemented by two forms of ideotainment: hardly noticeable persuasion messages or overt persuasive tactics arguing for the correctness of government policies. Thus, it can be seen that the Party's faithful propagandists want to 'go with the times', catering to Jiang Zemin's

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73. Nationalistic computer games marketed to a young audience are also being tried out. A notable example is *Kangri Online* [*Resist Japan Online*], which is promoted by the Communist Youth League; available at: http://bjyouth.gov.cn/ywdd/tzyyw/56998.shtml, (accessed 1 August 2006).

legacy of constructing a realistic post-Marxist ideology on the solid foundations of national culture.

I believe the introduction of this working concept is timely and necessary, since existing descriptions or models of China's propaganda lack the precision needed to fully comprehend how changes in technology and society have led propaganda workers to reformulate strategies and reinvent the instruments of propaganda to effectively engage the perceived enemies of the current state-sanctioned Chinese ideoscape in cyberspace. The makeup of ideotainment is clearly observed when examining the countermeasures against Western value intrusions on Chinese networks proposed by the most fervent party-loyal among the writers analyzed in this article.

As I have shown, the prescription for curing what is seen as an insalubrious condition includes the innovative use of commercial Web culture in the design of the party-state's propaganda efforts. Therefore, it is premature to dismiss the propaganda bureaucrats' powerful role in the Chinese political system. The reasons for this are twofold: first, the Chinese government is enforcing several measures to 'build a large, coordinated online propaganda system'.[74] Therefore, state-owned and municipal web-portals are under a certain pressure, due to financial support and administrative obligations, to serve the Party's propaganda units in funneling out newly designed ideotainment products on their websites.[75] And as Ashley Esarey has pointed out, financial incentives are increasingly used to instill compliance with the Communist Party's dissemination of propaganda.[76] Second, a sense of having an important mission among propaganda workers is most likely generated by the consolidation of nationalism as the dominating political trend in contemporary China. Fervent nationalism runs deep in Chinese society—particularly since the beginning of the 1990s—and this assertive nationalism is fed by what is perceived by many as American bullying and containment strategies aimed at China. The role of popular and state-orchestrated nationalism, utilized to strengthen the legitimacy of Communist Party policy, is growing in importance. This helps to boost the Party's insistent claim to be the only legitimate political force in Chinese society.

Although the ongoing commercialization of the media sector puts pressure on China to liberalize its media system, including much-needed foreign investment, the Party's traditional mechanisms for controlling the press are likely to remain in spite of increasing criticism from both foreign and domestic voices. I believe the Communist Party to be so firmly rooted in its history that its instincts to control mass media and its fears of citizens' independent communication will continue to merit our close attention. Under Hu Jintao's reign, the harsh policies against the mass media and the Internet have increased, not become any milder.

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74. See S. Kalathil and T. Boas, *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), p. 33.

75. This information was received in an interview in January 2003 with a leading representative of Qianlong news portal in Beijing. According to this informant, the central government clearly understood that it had to establish a presence on the Internet, in order to 'guide opinion' in the Internet age. Consequently, it set up the large online news portals *Qianlong* in Beijing and *Dongfang* in Shanghai.

76. A. Esarey, 'Cornering the market: state strategies for controlling China's commercial media', *Asian Perspective* 29(4), (2005), p. 39.

It remains to be seen how China's Fourth-Generation leaders will juggle the conflicting demands of transparency in the political system and the new propaganda strategies, as formulated by some establishment and Party intellectuals. There is reason to doubt whether efforts aimed at regime promotion on the Internet will be effective in the long run. But as long as the Communist Party needs the services of its propaganda apparatus, it will continue to play an important role in Chinese society and political life. Even as Chinese society today is liberalizing with great speed, in part due to the growth of alternative voices in the expanding mediascape, China's leaders continue to be wary of political liberalization. Apart from the obvious legitimacy generated from higher standards of living for the Chinese people, the Chinese party-state also stands to gain political currency from a continued focus on nationalistic pride, skyrocketing economic growth, hi-tech successes such as the space program, and a worldwide tendency to admire China's rise among world powers. To this end, strategies of ideotainment may, indeed, be very helpful.