The Amateur Computerist

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Forward

This issue of the *Amateur Computerist*, Vol. 34 No. 3, is the third issue in a series, each containing possible chapters for a second netizen book. The chapters in this issue document some of the contributions netizens have been making to society in China, mainly looking at the time period 2003 to 2010.

The opening article is a speech given in 2009 at the First Netizens Celebration Day. Around 500,000 netizens had voted on what day the celebration of their day should be. The winning date was Sept 14. The last article in this issue tells the history of how China was connected to CSNet, an international email network. The first email message to be sent on this connection that began China's connection to international computer networking was composed on Sept 14,1987. That beginning is what the netizens voting on

the date wanted to celebrate.

The second article, "China in the Era of the Netizen," comments on the rapid development of Beijing in the first 10 years of this century. That development is put in the context of what an article in the magazine *NewsChina* called the Netizens Republic of China. The next article is about the Anti-cnn website which was put online in 2008 to counter foreign media distortions of China. That was a few months before the Beijing Summer Olympics. The website's goal was to open lines of communication between people in China and the rest of the world so there would be a more accurate picture of China in the West and a better understanding among people in China of the West.

The article, "China: Netizens Impact on Government Policy and Media Practice" is a collection of six case studies of the role of netizens in Chinese society, 1995 to 2008. The first case was in 1995 when students in Beijing used the online newsgroup system Usenet to help save the life of a dying friend, an early example of telemedicine. The other cases include netizen activity in 2001 which forced an almost unprecedented apology from the Chinese Premier and netizen activity in 2003 which led to the withdrawal of a long standing oppressive and discriminatory law against migrants. In the BMW case, netizen activity did not lead to a different legal outcome. But it was an example when ferment around a not very uncommon event led to examination of contradictions in Chinese society. The South China Tiger case in 2007 was a successful fight of netizens to expose fraud and have the perpetrators held accountable. The last case study in the article is again about the Anti-cnn website.

The article, "The Most Awesome Nail House Saga and Kidnaped Children Rescued," provides two additional case studies of how netizens in China were able to struggle against problems in their society.

The first case study describes how a noted Chinese blogger Zola Zhou was able to help a couple in their fight against unfair treatment at the hands of real estate developers. The second case study documents how the online post by a relative of one of several children abducted by brick kiln operators was able to get action by law enforcement officials to stop their inaction against this crime.

Perhaps the articles in this issue will draw attention to the importance of netizens in China. That the netizens in China have been able to

play the roles documented here suggests a political dynamism in Chinese society that is often denied by critics of China.

[Editor's Note: The following talk was presented in Beijing on September 14, 2009 as part of the first national Netizens Celebration Day sponsored by the Internet Society of China.*]

First Netizen Celebration Day Held in Beijing, China
Honoring the Netizen

by Ronda Hauben

I would like to thank the Internet Society of China for inviting me to offer brief remarks today. I want also to congratulate the honored guests for their role in helping to make possible the development of the Internet and the emergence of the netizens.

It is wonderful that China is holding this netizen day, the first ever to be held anywhere in the world. Often there have been events celebrating the origin and development of the Internet but only rarely has there been recognition offered for the netizen, for those online users who have taken on to contribute to the development and spread of the Net and to making possible the better world that more communication among people will make possible.

The concept of netizen comes from the research and writing of Michael Hauben while he was a college student in the early 1990s. Michael was interested not only in how the Internet would develop and spread, but also in the impact it would have on society.

In 1992 he sent out a set of questions across the computer networks asking users about their experiences online. He was surprised to find that not only were many of those who responded to his questions interested in what the Net made possible for them, but also they were interested in spreading the Net and in exploring how it would make a better world

possible. Network users with this social perspective, or this public interest focus Michael called netizens. Thus the netizen was not all users, but users with a public purpose.

Another aspect is that the Net is international, so that netizenship isn't a geographically limited concept. To be a netizen is to be not only a citizen of one country but also a citizen of the Net. These users are citizens who were empowered by the Net, or netizens. Based on his research, Michael wrote the article "The Net and Netizens: The Impact the Net has on People's Lives." The article and the concept of the netizen spread around the world via the Internet.

Michael and I included his influential article as part of a book titled *Netizens* which we put online on January 12, 1994. Today's celebration of Netizen Day in China is for me also a fitting celebration of the 15th anniversary of putting the first edition of the book "Netizens" online.

Though today is the first national netizen day, I have recently seen on the Internet a call for a World Netizen Day. So the importance of establishing a netizen day begun by the Internet Society of China is a proud beginning of what I hope will become a new tradition, recognizing the importance of the contributions made by netizens to the continuing spread and development of the Internet.

Congratulations not only to those who have been honored here today, but to all netizens in China and to netizens around the world. May the tradition of the netizen, along with the development of the Internet, grow and flourish.

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* For a Youku video of part of the talk with the translation into Chinese see: http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMTE5MTY3OTU y.html. Also, there were a number of online accounts in Chinese of the September 14 event. Here is one URL: http://tech.qq.com /zt/2009 /wangminjie09/#top/.

China in the Era of the Netizen*

by Ronda Hauben

I recently returned home from a trip to China. Back in New York City, I was left with the feeling that there is something significant happening in China. Some have referred to Beijing as the equivalent in the 21st century of the interesting environment that Prague symbolized for the 1990s. In the air in Beijing one senses that something new is emerging, something that must build on the old but will emerge with its new characteristics.

In Beijing, I had many interesting conversations trying to understand the significance of what is happening there. One was with a friend who is from China but who has lived outside of China for over 20 years. She was back visiting China for a special event and also planned to visit her parents who live in China, as she does every year.

Comparing current day Beijing with the Beijing she knew as a university student, she observed that Beijing has grown and developed in the Era of the Internet. Her observation helped me to realize that not only was Beijing being developed with the benefit of the Internet's contribution, but also that Beijing is a world class city developing in the Era of the Netizen.

In some notes I wrote as I left Beijing, I observed:

The insight of the trip was that Beijing is a city being developed in the Netizen Era. It is perhaps one of the first world class cities substantially developed in the Netizen Era. So perhaps a special characteristic of Beijing has to do with the emergence of the netizen.

It was not clear to me what the significance was of this observation at the time.

When I returned home from my trip, I came across a publication about the importance of the netizens in China. The publication was the July 5, 2009 edition of the magazine *NewsChina*.[1] This is the English language version published each month of the Chinese weekly magazine

China Newsweek. The subject of this particular issue was "The Netizens' Republic of China."

The magazine contains several articles and an editorial about the impact of netizens on the political sphere in China. The editorial was titled "The Netizens Public Square." One of the articles, "Netizens, the New Watchdogs,"[2] had an equally alluring subtitle which asked the question, "Has the era of 'Internet supervision' pitted Chinese netizens against the government in the promotion of democracy and political reform?"

The particular form of 'Internet supervision' the article was discussing was whether netizens empowered by the Internet could effectively monitor the actions of their government officials. Can the "era of 'Internet supervision,'" be "one in which netizens can compel visible transformation in the behavior of government bureaucrats," the article asks.

The question of whether or not netizens can affect the actions of their government officials is a question raised by netizens around the world from the early days of Internet development. How this question is being explored by netizens in China is an important development. Yet few around the world, especially those who do not read Mandarin, are aware that this question is being actively explored by netizens in China.

The issue of *NewsChina* devoted to netizens presents several examples of netizens speaking out online in Chinese discussion groups and forums. Their actions are having an impact on government decision-making processes and on uncovering fraud or corruption. A particular case described in the magazine was the case of Deng Yujiao, a 21-year old waitress who was sexually assaulted by a government official. She tried to defend herself using a knife and in self defense killed her assailant. The magazine describes how her plight became a cause célèbre (famous) among netizens in China, who helped her to get a lawyer and to have the charge against her reduced so she did not have to serve any time in jail.

The magazine gives several other examples of cases of injustice that Chinese netizens championed so as to have justice prevail. Among these is the case of a young college graduate who moved to a different city to take a job, but who did not have the appropriate temporary residence permit. Picked up for his permit violation, he was placed in a detention center. He became a victim of foul play by residents of the center and

security guards and was murdered, but the story was covered up by the police. Netizens began to discuss what had happened to him and the real story of his death began to be unraveled. His assailants were arrested and tried. Eventually the measures the young college graduate was detained under were abolished by the State Council.[3]

Similarly, Chinese netizens have challenged some of the many inaccurate reports about China in the mainstream western media. In 2008 some netizens started a web site that they called www.anti-cnn.com. On the web site they documented many distortions or misrepresentations that appear in the western media.[4]

These are just a few of the many examples of netizen action online that have had an important impact on what the government does. Discussing such netizen actions, Zhan Jiang, a Professor at the China Youth College for Political Science, maintains that "the public supervision [of government] via the Internet serves to promote public participation in political life."[5]

My visit to Beijing in September 2009 was my third trip to China. The first had been in November 2005 when I was participating in a panel at an international history of science conference held in Beijing. The title of my talk for the conference was, "The International and Scientific Origins of the Internet and the Emergence of the Netizens." The second trip was in April 2008 when I gave a talk at the Internet Society of China raising the question whether this is a new Age, the Age of the Netizen? One of the reasons for my trip one year latter in September 2009 was to participate in a 'Netizens Day' the first such day anywhere in the world, which was to be observed on September 14, 2009. The importance of this date is that it marks the date listed on the first e-mail message (Sept. 14, 1987) that was to be sent from China onto the international e-mail network known as CSNET. The e-mail message and link were the result of collaborative research between German and Chinese computer science researchers.[6]

The netizens celebration on September 14, 2009 was held at the CCTV Tower in Beijing. There was a stage set up in front of the tower for the ceremony. I was invited to give one of the presentations for the program.[7] My talk, which was presented in English and then translated into Chinese, explained the origin of the concept of the netizen through the

research in 1992-3 of Michael Hauben who was a university student doing pioneering online studies about the social impact of the development of the Internet.[8]

I described how in the early 1990s, Hauben sent out a set of questions across the networks asking users about their experiences online. He was surprised to find that not only were many of those who responded to his questions interested in what the Net made possible for them, but also they were interested in spreading the Net and in exploring how it could make a better world possible. Based on his research Hauben wrote his article "The Net and the Netizens."[9]

The netizen, Hauben recognized, was the emergence of a new form of citizen, who was using the power made possible by the Net for a public purpose, and who was not limited by geographical boundaries. The Net for Hauben was a new social institution and the discovery of the emergence of the netizen was the special contribution that he made to the field of network study.

The celebration on September 14, 2009 in Beijing thus was an event not only to celebrate the research and technological advance making possible the connection of China to the international network CSNET. But it was similarly, and perhaps even more significantly, an event recognizing the emergence of the netizens in China and hence, of a new social identity.

The September 14 event was covered in the online media and other media.[10] Being the first such Netizens Day, knowledge of the day was not yet widespread. Some net users commented that they weren't aware that there had been a Netizen Day. For me, however, the event on September 14, 2009 in Beijing was remarkable. In 1994, 15 years earlier, the first edition of the Netizens netbook with Hauben's article about netizens had been put online.[11] At the time there was much less access to the Internet and many fewer netizens. Nevertheless, the phenomenon first identified more than 15 years earlier had continued to develop and spread around the world. And in Beijing, in a city where much is new, and grand, and hopeful toward the future, there was a ceremony in front of the tallest of structures in Beijing, the CCTV Tower, recognizing the importance of the Internet and of the netizen.

This event in Beijing was the first Netizen Day, the first official recognition of the netizen anywhere in the world. It was a celebration to

honor the fact that the phenomenon of the netizen continues to develop and spread and to be recognized as a new and important achievement of our times.

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Notes

1. *NewsChina*, Vol. 12, July 5, 2009. The magazine website is: http://www.news chinamag.com/. See also, https://www.facebook .com/NewsChinaMag/. (Requires Facebook logon.)

2. Ibid, p. 17, Yu Xiaodong, "Netizens, the New Watchdogs,"

3. This is the case of Sun Zhigang. See "Selected Cases Exposed on the Internet," *NewsChina* July 5, 2009, p. 20. This and other examples are described in a paper by Jay Hauben, "China: Netizen Impact on Government Policy and Media Practice." http://www .columbia.edu/~hauben/j-paper.doc. (Also, in this issue.)

4. Ronda Hauben, "Netizens Defy Western Media Fictions of China: Ronda Hauben on the 'Anti-cnn' forum and Web site," *OhmyNews International*, May 8, 2008. Also, in https://www.ais .org/~jrh/acn/ACn20-2.pdf, p.7.

5. Quoted in Yu Xiaodong, "Netizens, the New Watchdogs," *NewsChina*, July 5, 2009, p. 17.

6. Jay Hauben, "The Story of China's First Email Link and How It Got Corrected." https://www.informatik.kit.edu/downloads/Hau benJay-ChongqingSpeech-12Jan2010.pdf.

7. See "Honoring the Netizen," talk presented on September 14, 2009. The URL is: http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2009/10/02/first_netizen_celebration_day_held _in_beijing_china_/.

8. See, for example: Michael Hauben, "Preface: What is a Netizen" in *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, online version: http://www.columbia edu/~rh120/ch106.xpr.

9. Michael Hauben, "The Net and the Netizens" in *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, online version: http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/ch106.x01.

10. On September 15, 2009 there was a program on the China Radio International (CRI) English language show "Beijing and Beyond" discussing the development of the netizen in China. The part of the program about netizens is hour one.

11. The book put online in 1994 is also now published in a print edition titled *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*. The co-authors are Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben. Originally published by the IEEE Computer Society, the book is now distributed by John Wiley. The print edition was published in 1997. The URL for the online edition is:
http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120.

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*This article appeared on the netizen blog on Feb 14, 2010 at:
http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2010/02/14/china_in_the_era_of_the_netizen/.

[Editor's Note: The following article was written after the author visited China and South Korea in Spring 2008.]

Netizens Create Anti-cnn Forum to Challenge Media Distortions of China*

by Ronda Hauben

Who will win the contest to be the new global media, CNN or netizen media like the Anti-cnn online forum and web site? This is a question that students in the global media literacy seminar at Tsinghua University in Beijing were given to grapple with as their final project in April 2008.

The creation of the Anti-cnn online forum and web site by netizens in China has been a significant development. The global media literacy seminar at Tsinghua University is taught by Professor Li Xiguang. Professor Li's background is as a journalist, covering science and technology, and as a journalism professor who is the author of significant papers about the role of the Internet in the development of the changing media environment in China. Professor Li had invited me to speak to his students in the global media literacy seminar about the spread of netizens and the impact of the Internet on society for his April 16 class.

Shortly before my 2008 trip to China was to begin, however, something quite unexpected occurred. When the western mainstream media, like CNN and BBC, pictured the events that occurred in Lhasa, Tibet, as a "peaceful demonstration," Chinese netizens immediately documented that their coverage was often inaccurate or misleading. Within a few days of the inaccurate reports, an online forum appeared on the Internet called Anti-cnn. It was online at the time at http://www.anti-cnn.com. The forum included articles and videos documenting some of the many distortions in the coverage of the Tibet events. The forum also had areas in English and in Chinese for discussion and debate.

I had discovered the online forum while still in New York and was intrigued by the fact that it not only provided an important source of clarification about the misrepresentations in the media, but also it made available a space for discussion in both English and Chinese about the importance of identifying and countering the false narrative that the mainstream western media had been creating of the events in Tibet. While the online forum was named Anti-cnn it was not limited to countering errors in reporting on CNN. Rather the founder had chosen Anti-cnn for the name as CNN has a global spread and the purpose of the Anti-cnn forum was to counter the misrepresentations of China and events in China in the global media.

I was particularly excited to be going to China at a time when a netizen media forum had been created to critique the narratives being circulated by mainstream western media organizations.

We arrived in Beijing early in the morning on April 16, the day I was to give my talk to Professor Li's seminar. We had arrangements to see Professor Li's assistant in order to get ready to go to the class for my talk. It was 3 p.m., a little while before I was to get ready to go to the class, when Professor Li's assistant called up to our room and asked if she could come up. It was good to see her. I was in the process of putting some finishing touches on my slides for my talk. She came into our room out of breath, explaining that she had tried to send an e-mail, which I hadn't seen. She said that several journalists had come to debate with Tsinghua University students about the frustrations netizens in China had with the reporting by several of the western media organizations. She urged us to come immediately with her to hear the debate.

I saved the version I had of my slides and we left to follow her across the Tsinghua University campus to the meeting between the students and the journalists. The meeting was in a large room in the journalism building. Four journalists from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) were seated at a large table, along with Professor Li and a number of students. Other students filled the rest of the room. The conversation was being held in English and Chinese with Professor Li doing translation from one language to the other depending on the speaker. There were perhaps as many as 80 people filling the room.

I later learned that the journalists were probably part of a nine person

delegation from the IFJ who had come to speak with the Chinese government about working conditions for the 30,000 journalists who were expected to come to Beijing to cover the 2008 Summer Olympics. While the purpose of the IFJ delegation appeared to be as advocates for the journalists who were to be covering the Olympics, the situation in the debate they were having with Tsinghua students was quite different.

At this meeting the students were presenting their frustrations and complaints about the kind of erroneous reporting that had been documented on the Anti-cnn forum and asking for an explanation of how such misrepresentations could have happened. One of the students asked why the Western media did not report about the victims who had died in the fires set by those who took part in the riots. Another student asked why the western media reported that religious effigies had been burned but didn't report about the people who had died as a result of the fires and other violence in the riot. The student wondered why journalists would give more weight to the destruction of property rather than of human life.

Still another student asked how journalists could cover the story of Tibet if they didn't first take the time to learn the history of what had happened in Tibet in the past. "Does a free press mean the freedom of the journalist to present his or her own personal views or does it mean the freedom for the public to know the information," asked one of the students. Many students had hands up when there was the call for questions. The head of the delegation, Aidan Patrick White, who is the General Secretary of the IFJ, headquartered in Brussels, gave most of the responses, though others in the delegation also answered some of the questions raised by the students. White explained that when he went into journalism he thought it would be something connected with public service. He had since learned that there is political pressure on journalists no matter what country they are from.

The manager of the Anti-cnn web site, Qi Hanting, is a Tsinghua University student. He was at the meeting and his presentation to the journalists was eagerly greeted by the students. He explained why the students were upset with the distorted coverage they had documented as prevalent in the reports of western media organizations. Qi explained that there was a difference between a mistake in a story and a distortion. He offered as an analogy the core of an atom and the electrons surrounding it.

The electrons can appear any place around the atom, but if an electron goes too far away it can break away. Though reporters might write about different aspects of a story, he explained, their stories still can be accurate. But if the report is too far from the reality, it could be explosive. The journalists from the IFJ responded that they weren't trying to justify bad reporting. There wasn't a conspiracy in the western media against China. Qi proposed that there was a need to have reporters who emphasize different aspects of a story in order to help there to be the proper understanding of a story, but that was different from presenting a distorted or inaccurate presentation of the story as had happened with a number of the reports of the Tibet riot in the western media.

With less than 100 days remaining until the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, the issues and questions presented by Qi and the other Tsinghua University students to the IFJ journalists take on a broader significance. How will the 30,000 journalists who are expected to come to China to report on the Olympics, portray the story of China?

China has recently gone through a significant transformation. One indication of the changes is the many new buildings, the huge majestic structures that fill the Beijing skyline. These new structures, along with the people who live and work in them, are a sign that Beijing is a world class city. Can the journalists who will come to Beijing in August recognize that there is an important story about what is developing in China? Can they become a force to investigate this story and present it, so that that there is an accurate portrayal in the media for people around the world?

This question is being considered by netizens in China and abroad.

Formerly, it may have seemed to netizens in China that the western media could be a reliable source of information about events and viewpoints that were not available in the Chinese media. Now the view that the western media could be relied on to present accurate news has been transformed in just a few short weeks in March and April 2008.

Instead netizens working together online are telling the story, not only of what they see is happening in Tibet, but even more importantly, they are documenting the failure of the western media to be a reliable source of information about China.

In place of the western media has sprung up a netizen media, contributed to by some of the 210 million Internet users in China, and

some of the many overseas netizens. There are many online sites where discussion among Chinese netizens takes place.

The story of these netizens in China and abroad is an important story as they have demonstrated a resolve not to surrender the framing of the story of the Beijing Olympics to the distortions of a powerful Western media. Through their own active participation and collaboration, they are working to provide an alternative narrative.

Qi explained that the Anti-cnn forum and web site has a staff of over 40 volunteers. These netizens do the technical work, and the fact checking of the posts and the responses to the posts. If a submission to the web site is emotional, he explained, it will appear, but the moderators will not allow any responses to it in order to prevent the discussion from becoming too heated.

A post in the Anti-cnn forum raised the question of whether it would be possible to create an East-West cultural exchange platform to facilitate communication across the cultural differences between the Chinese people and those from other cultures who will come to China for the Olympics.

Even if people can't agree, they can communicate, he proposed. He was hopeful that discussion would go in more communicative directions rather than netizens in China just feeling that they wanted an apology from western journalists who distort the news about China. His hope was that the Anti-cnn forum on the Internet would make it possible to have comments on issues from a wide range of differing perspectives, rather than such differences leading to polarization and hostility.

His long term goal was that the forum become a site to support many different points of view but also where deviations from the truth would be critiqued. Talking with Qi I found it important that he was seeking to open lines of communication with western journalists despite the fact it seemed so difficult to do so. He was actually proposing a conceptual framework to make such a communication process possible.

Listening to his views made me remember a struggle netizens had with the U.S. media in the early 1990s. There was a plan for the privatization of the U.S. section of the Internet which had been built with public funds. The U.S. press was misrepresenting the struggle of netizens who were challenging the illegitimate privatization process and who were upset with the spate of commercial ads that had begun to flood the Internet.

One reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* had written an article that misunderstood what the struggle was about. Netizens contacted him and asked if he would be willing to learn some of the history and background of the struggle. He welcomed the input. The next article he wrote was very different from the previous one. It talked about how netizens were struggling over the "soul of the Internet." This was indeed a helpful description of the struggle and it was good to see that this reporter had changed in his perspective.[1] It is not to dismiss the possibility of journalists who are part of the western media who are interested in learning about what is happening in China and in providing an accurate portrayal. It is a worthy effort to seek out a means to make such communication possible.

The goal of the netizens who are contributing to the Anti-cnn forum and web site is a goal that is an important one for China and for the many people around the world who want the 2008 Beijing Olympics to contribute to friendship and further understanding among the people of the world. This is also a worthy goal for those of the western media and for other netizens around the world who want to be part of the creation of a 21st century media that spreads understanding rather than the political propaganda of one's own government. The Internet and netizens have begun to create such a truly global media.

Note:

1. Steve Stecklow, "Cyberspace Clash: Computer Users Battle High-Tech Marketers Over Soul of Internet," *Wall Street Journal*, September 16, 1993, p. 1.

China: Netizen Impact on Government Policy and Media Practice

by Jay Hauben

In this article, I present several examples where the activity of netizens between 1995 and 2008 had an impact on Chinese society. I seek to demonstrate developing relations between netizens and the media in China and netizens and the government of China. I hope to show that Chinese speaking netizens have demonstrated that active participation by a critical mass of net users in online discussions, petitions, posts and protests can influence national public opinion, activate the mainstream media, check actions of the authorities and set some of the political agenda of China. There is evidence that netizens are developing into a substantial force beginning to exercise some political power and contributing to developing Chinese society in the direction of greater citizen participation. In the process netizens are finding new forms and new means to assert the will of the people whether or not it is in line with current government policies.

I. Introduction

Internet adoption in China is rapidly expanding as it has been since 1995. Such expansion is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. It was reported in July 2008 by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) that there are more than 253 million Internet users in China.[1] In comparison, the U.S. was reported to have 223 million users. Such numbers are only approximations and in the Chinese case probably unknowable because of wide spread account sharing and multiple aliases. Approximately 40% or over 100 million of these users in China participate in online forums, some of whom also contribute to the over 100 million Chinese language blogs. CNNIC reports that a still smaller set of net users, about 23% or 59 million are active contributors to forum and chat room

discussions. Among the users in this group, I would locate net users who are "netizens," who practice some form of netizenship, that is, contribute actively to the Internet to effect social and political change.

Netizen as a concept of scholarly interest was first analyzed in the research of Michael Hauben at Columbia University starting in 1992. Hauben had participated in the mid and late 1980s on local hobbyist run bulletin board systems (BBSs) and in global Usenet newsgroups. He writes that he became aware of "a new social institution, an electronic commons developing."[2] He undertook research to explore how and why these communications forums served as an electronic commons. He posted questions on newsgroups, mailing lists and portals and found a very high level "of mutual respect and sharing of research and ideas fostering a sense of community and participation."[3] Hauben found social and political issues being discussed with seriousness in this online community which the conventional media and his school courses rarely if ever covered or covered only from a narrow angle.

Hauben documented in the book, *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*[4] which he co-authored with Ronda Hauben that he found in this community of net users many for whom their self-identity was generated by their online participation. Users who found online forums were tempted to participate and identify with others who participated. Such users often found others with shared interest. As social beings, when they can participate, have others to participate with and see the chance to have an effect, most people will be active. Hauben found that there were people online who identify the net as their "place," who actively use and take up to defend public communication, they oppose censorship and disruptive online behavior. He recognized this identification and behavior as a form of network citizenship. He contracted "net.citizen," the name on Usenet for such people, into "netizen" to express the new online non-geographically based social identity and net citizenship he attributed to these people.

As the Internet spread in the mid and late 1990s around the world so did the online self-identity and practice of netizenship. Two uses of the word netizen emerged. Especially in analyzing the net in China, it is necessary to distinguish between all net users (*wang min* meaning 'network people' in Chinese) and those users who participate construc-

tively concerning social and political issues in forums and chat rooms or on their blogs.[5] This second category is the users who come online for public rather than simply for personal and entertainment purposes. They act as citizens of the net (*wang luo gong min* meaning 'network citizens' in Chinese) and are the netizens of this article. The distinction must be emphasized because the Chinese characters for network person *wang min* are very often translated into English as "netizen."

I strictly adopt the second usage. Not all net users are netizens. My usage is similar to that of Haiqing Yu who writes, "I use 'netizen' in a narrow sense to mean 'Net plus citizen.' or 'citizen on the net.' Netizens are those who use the Internet as a venue for exercising citizenship through rational public debates on social and political issues of common concern."[6] I add, however, that netizens are not only 'citizens on the net' but also 'citizens of the net' signifying those who actively contribute to the development and defense of the net as a global communications platform.[7]

In the examples and discussion to follow, it is important to recognize that the Internet is basically global. Geographic and political boundaries on the net are weaker than in the physical world. There are approximately 34 million Chinese speaking people living outside of mainland China including in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and. Singapore. There are perhaps at any one time 380,000 Chinese students studying aboard.[8] For example, in 2008 there were approximately 67,000 students from China studying temporarily in the U.S. Many Chinese-speaking people outside of China take a keen interest in social and political issues in China. Those online often participate in forums, chat rooms and blogs hosted on servers in China and outside. Chinese-speaking netizens outside China gain from the richness and vibrancy of the mainland netizen community and add viewpoints, media clips and information which further enrich the information environment and discussions in which netizens in China participate. Efforts at what the government and party of China call supervision and netizens call censorship have only a limited effect in part because of the borderless essence of the Internet. In the examples that follow it is often likely but difficult to tell whether netizens from outside China have participated.

Information and communication technology (ICT), for at least the last 15 or 20 years, has been officially promoted as one of the most

important driving forces of China's economic development. The Chinese government and party actively support the spread of the Internet and its active use by people within China. Zixue Tai in his 2006 book, *The Internet in China: Cyberspace and Civil Society* reports, "The Chinese government has displayed an unusual level of enthusiasm in embracing the Internet since the mid-1990s … by investing heavily in the infrastructure and in promoting Internet use among its government agencies, businesses, and citizens."[9] Another scholar commented, "In China, if the government does not push, hardly anything grows so quickly."[10] When reporting about the Internet by media outside of China, the predominant stress of censorship in China misses this level of support and adoption. The long standing governance philosophy and practice of "benevolent" supervision and guidance in all aspects of Chinese society is still prevalent and results in the censorship emphasized by that media.[11] But official emphasis on "reform and opening" especially economic market oriented development is changing the nature of such supervision and guidance. The result is the rapid spread of the Internet and its active use (in 2007 averaging for net users in China almost three hours per day) supported by the highest government and party officials. Broadband and mobile access was, by the middle of 2008, already available to about 20% of the population. Although still disproportionately in the urban areas and with 80% of the people of China without Internet access, the level, speed of adoption and the active participation by net users is significant. A foreign journalist working in Beijing commented that users in China "are usually too busy enjoying the Internet they have to lament the Internet they do not have." And, as the examples which follow show, many of them are using it with the purpose of social and political improvement.

II. Examples

Thallium Poisoning (1995)[12]

After an official top level decision in 1994 to connect China to the Internet, the government of China supported and encouraged Internet use for science and education. By 1995, students, at least in the major Chinese universities, began to have Internet access.

In March of that year, a student at Beijing University, Ms. Zhu Lay,

lie near death from a mysterious disease that was stumping the doctors at Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH), one of the best in China. Ms. Zhu's high school friends, Cai Quanqing and Bei Zhicheng decided it was not inappropriate to use the Internet to seek help for her. They composed in English a description of the symptoms and searched for where online to post it. They found on Usenet, a world wide bulletin board system (BBS), newsgroups (forums) like sci.med, sci.med.diseases.cancer and sci.med.pathology. On these they posted their description with a subject "Urgent!!! Need diagnostic advice for sick friend." They included an email address at Tsinghua University where they could be reached.

The message was transmitted via telephone circuits and satellites to users of Usenet at hospitals and universities in the U.S., Germany, India, Scotland, and elsewhere. Some who read the message reposted it to email lists and other forums. Within a few hours Ms. Zhu's friends were receiving the first messages of sympathy, encouragement and help. Within two weeks over 600 email messages arrived. The disease was diagnosed by 30% of the doctors responding as thallium poisoning. One of those doctors had colleagues at the PUMCH whom he contacted with the reasons for the diagnosis. Many students helped translate the email messages into Chinese so the doctors could understand them. But still Ms. Zhu's parents had on their own to get a lab to test for thallium. The test was positive. The email messages suggested possible treatments. With the help of two poison centers in the U.S., a recommended treatment saved Ms. Zhu's life. By then because of the damage she suffered from the poison she had serious neurological damage and permanent physical impairment.

The story of this online request from Chinese students for diagnostic and therapeutic assistance led the field of telemedicine to appreciate the Internet as a potential diagnostic tool. The students, using the net for a constructive social purpose and contributing to online telemedicine were acting as early netizens.

In the years that followed the saving of her life, the same friends of Ms. Zhu put up a Help Zhu website. In 2006, netizens in China used a forum on the popular site Tianya to again discuss Ms. Zhu's disease and the possibility that her roommate in1995 had deliberately poisoned her. Some netizens argued that the evidence was enough to accuse the room

mate of attempted murder. Others felt accusing the room mate 11 years later adds the room mate as a victim of the crime. The case remains unsolved.

Jiangxi Village School Explosion (2001)

On March 6, 2001 at 11:10 a.m., a large explosion caused the collapse of a two story school building in Fanglin Village, Wanzi County, Jiangxi Province about 900 miles South of Beijing. At the time, the National People's congress was in its annual session. Many domestic and overseas journalists where in Beijing to cover the Congress. The local, national and international press gave substantial coverage of the explosion. Thirty-six school children, four teachers and one villager were reported killed. At the time of the explosion, fireworks production dominated the economy of Jiangxi Province. There was the possibility that fireworks were somehow involved in the tragedy.

Portal[13] sites hosted in China such as sina.com, sohu.com, yahoo.com and netease.com are required by Chinese law to post news only from licensed news sources. So all portals have partnered with licensed newspapers. In this case, there was much news coverage and the portal news sections quickly contained many stories about the explosion, eagerly but sadly read by many net users. To begin with, the portal news sections posted details of the explosion including speculation about the possibility that firework production had had something to do with it. Besides their news sections, as soon as it was clear many people were upset by the tragedy, portals created hot topic sections, special chat room sessions and forum topics for the discussion of the explosion. In the first few days, over 1000 netizens commented on sina.com alone, expressing for example dissatisfaction with low government spending on education or speculating on the role of corruption in the explosion. Many messages questioned why children had to make money for their school through manufacturing fireworks.[14] But three days after the explosion, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji answering questions from Hong Kong journalists explained that fireworks were not the cause. Instead a man with a mental problem caused the explosion and died in the blast. Most Chinese news media from then on framed their stories about the explosion as the tragic result of the action of a "lone mad man."

News coverage of the official explanation had wide and rapid distribution among internet users. But that did not close the door to online speculation that fireworks manufacture may have been involved. Many netizens expressed a high level of disbelief in the "lone mad man" explanation, considering it a cover up. Apparently referring to the Premier, someone posted on sina.com, "Here comes a 'madman'."[15] Many netizens tried to gather more evidence and analyze the facts uncovered. News coverage by Hong Kong and foreign media was reposted on forums and discussed in chat rooms where netizens questioned why reporters were blocked from reporting from the village. Local netizens in Wanzi county posted first hand accounts and interviews they did with parents, surviving students and government officials. They also posted background information about their county and local school practices relative to firework manufacture. Even after Premier Zhu's endorsement of the official story, these posts suggested the involvement of fireworks since many schools in the county have some such arrangements to generate income for the schools.

Angry netizens from all over China vented disbelief and disgust at the tragedy. The under funding of rural schools was criticized especially when large amounts of money were being spent with higher priority like to procure the Olympic Games for China. One poster wrote, "If the military budget is 1000 yuan, 10 percent increase is 100. But if funding for education is one yuan, 100% increase gives only two yuan. Education per capita needs absolute not percentage increase."[16] There were calls online for the resignation or firing of the Governor and Minister of Education of Jiangxi Province and even of Premier Zhu. As in many similar situations, a social issue was becoming a political issue. One early comment on a sina.com forum read, "The government conclusion may be truthful. But why so many people don't believe it? It seems our government's credibility among the public is reduced to nil, which is the most pitiful."[17]

On March 9, after a flood of comments criticizing and questioning the government, sina.com closed the subsection of its forum devoted to the school explosion. Whether the closing was the result of government action or solely on the part of sina.com management's own judgment has not been established. But the Strong Nation Forum (qiangguo luntan) on People's Net (renmin wang) did not close a similar forum, only monitored

it closely and deleted messages judged as inappropriate. Many netizens continued posting in other sections of the sina.com, playing word games to avoid using sensitive words like 'explosion' or 'Jiangxi' that were being used to filter posts. The issue of the death of children was overwhelming and many Chinese people had a means and chose to speak out despite efforts at control.

On March 15, 2001 in a televised press conference,[18] Premier Zhu Rongji made a statement admitting that "the school in 1999 did ask some students to mount fuse to fireworks in the name of work-for-study." He promised that "we will never allow anyone to ask students or minors to engage in activities and work that will pose danger to their lives." Premier Zhu did not directly reverse his earlier explanation but he did say, "The State Council has not performed its mission properly. I feel very sad and I carry a very heavy heart. I want to apologize and review and reflect on my own work." Premier Zhu reported that he had ordered the Ministry of Public Security to find the truth using a team of undercover agents. The result was Premier Zhu's nearly unprecedented apology. Three weeks later the party secretary and governor of Jiangxi Province were both removed from office. The netizens had quickly and continuously gathered and distributed facts and analysis and skepticism not only for themselves and the rest of the public but also for journalists and for the government, and not just locally but nationally.

The Death of Sun Zhigang (2003)[19]

In 1982, to help control migration of rural Chinese people to the cities, the Chinese government instituted "Measures for Internment and Deportation of Urban Vagrants."[20] On March 17, 2003 a college graduate from the city of Wuhan working in Guangzhou (formally also known by the English name Canton) was stopped for an identity check perhaps connected with the then ongoing SARS epidemic. He was detained because he did not have the necessary temporary residence card. In the police station he contacted two friends who came quickly to vouch for him and his employed status. The police would not release him. Three days later his friends tried to contact him and were notified that he died from a heart attack. After learning of Mr. Sun' death, his relatives and friends contacted the local police for an explanation but received no definite

answer.

With financial help from Mr. Sun's former classmates, his family was able to have an autopsy performed which indicated that Mr. Sun was brutally beaten before his death. One of the classmates studying media in Beijing posted an appeal for help concerning Mr. Sun's death on Peach Flower Port, a cyber forum for discussion among media professionals from all over China. A journalist working for the *South Metropolitan Daily* (Nanfang Dushi Bao) took the Peach Flower Port post as a lead and decided to initiate interviews of the family and authorities involved.[21] About one month after the death, a detailed report about it appeared in the *South Metropolitan Daily* with the headline, "University graduate detained and cruelly beaten to death for not showing temporary residence card."[22] On the same day, the journalist also made the report available online on Southern Net (Nanfang Wang).[23]

Following the *South Metropolitan Daily* and Southern Net reports, the news was picked up by editors of other online news portals. The net was quickly flooded with comments and appeals for justice. Major national forums like Strong Nation Forum (qiangguo luntan), Development Forum (fazhan luntan) and China Youth Forum (zhongqing luntan) featured extensive, sometimes very serious discussions of the detention system, the death of Mr. Sun and its implications. Other netizens commented on their blogs about the obvious injustice and denial of his constitutional rights. Portal sites made the case a hot topic where all related stories were posted. Chinese language forums outside of China like United Morning Post Forum (zaobao luntan) in Singapore and Current Affair Review (shishi pingshu) based in North America also featured active discussions of the case.

A memorial page was launched by a software engineer. It eventually received over 200,000 visits, many visitors leaving comments, messages of sadness and some money donations to the family. On this site and in the forums, netizens criticized this and other cases of police brutality. Others went further, demanding an end to the official policy that treated migrants as lower class citizens.

Other newspapers picked up the story or published their own, feeding more online ferment. The intense online reaction influenced further reporting first by big non-governmental media and then by the

mainstream national media including CCTV (China Central TV) and *People's Daily* (voice of the CCP). A special committee was formed by the Guangzhou government to investigate Sun's death. The blunt denial to the investigators of responsibility by the police enraged the netizens. They reacted with critical comments now focusing on the investigation procedures.

Contributions of articles, responses, comments and calls for action appeared on portals and in forums from online activists, lawyers, and academics all of whom had no other option but online where their critical analysis could be published. Online news articles typically received tens of thousands of responses. Blog entries and live chat discussions formulated demands for a thorough investigation, punishment for those involved, change or abolition of vagrancy measures and other anti-vagrant regulations, and an immediate end to deportations. The combination of online outrage and mainstream media coverage made the case a topic of household conversation everywhere in China. *People's Daily* began to publish selected netizen comments in its online news section. Pressure from online communities, social groups and the central government prompted the local officials to initiate a more serious investigation. The investigators acknowledged that netizen pressure, in particular an online post "The Sun Zhigang Case: Who is Playing Deaf?" criticizing local government evasiveness, added to their determination resulting in thirteen arrests reported on May 13. An open trial from June 5 to 9 ended with 12 convictions including one death sentence. Twenty-three governmental officials and police officers were disciplined for their roles in the death.

Even after the arrest, online petitions were circulated and online protest letters were addressed to the National People's Congress and the Supreme People's Procuratorate calling for abolition of the current custody and repatriation system. Such letters almost never appear in Chinese offline media. On May 15, a netizen posted an article, "On the Violation of 'Legislation Law' by the Holding System: The Case of Sun Zhigang" on People Net (Renmin wang) a government site which was followed by an examination of the existing anti-vagrancy laws. On June 18, after over 20 years of enforcement, the State Council decide to abolished the 1982 Measures on Custody and Repatriation of Urban Vagrants under which Mr. Sun had been detained. New measures were

initiated which did not allow for detention but required a system of help for homeless people be available on a voluntary basis.

The collaboration of netizen and traditional media set the news agenda and helped public opinion to form so that the death of Sun Zhigang an ordinary person was given extensive national coverage. This lead to the relatively quick end of a long standing oppressive and discriminatory law. One scholar described this as "one of the first cases of popular opinion overriding and resetting official agendas and the first demonstration of the sociopolitical power of Chinese netizenship."[24]

The BMW Incident (2003)

On Oct 16, 2003, Liu Zhongxia and her husband rode their tractor loaded with onions through a narrow street in Harbin, capital city of Heilongjiang Province in Northeast China. The tractor accidentally scrapped the rearview mirror of a car parked on the side of the street. The car was a BMW owned by Su Xiuwen's businessman husband. Ms. Su caused a commotion hitting and haranguing the two farmers because of the damage to her husband's car. Then she got back into the car and drove it into the crowd which had gathered because of the commotion. Ms. Liu was killed and 12 bystanders were injured.

Ms. Su was tried in a Harbin court on Dec. 20. None of the bystanders testified. They had each received money from Ms. Su's husband. After two hours, the court ruled Ms. Su had not been properly handling her car. The death of Ms. Liu was accidental not intentional. Ms. Su was given a two year sentence which was suspended. There was brief local media coverage of the trial and it seemed it would pass as a minor accident, one of many every day in every country.

But two days after the trial, a post about the case appeared on the Strong Nation Forum, "Attention: The BMW killed a farmer." The person posting made three main points: 1. Ms. Su was related to a high ranking official. 2. Ms. Su had killed Ms. Liu deliberately. 3. The trial did not follow legal procedures. The post unleashed a wide spread questioning and discussion of the case not just on Strong Nation Forum but throughout Chinese language cyberspace. Soon there were over 70,000 comments and opinions relating to the case on sina.com alone. Many netizens saw in the incident a posing of the questions of rich versus poor in China, and justice

versus corruption.

Within two weeks the BMW incident became the online hottest topic in the China. Journalists from outside the province who followed the online commotion went to Harbin to investigate and report for their newspapers. After January 8, China's mainstream national media (CCTV, *People's Daily*, Xinhua News Agency and others) began intensive coverage. After all this attention, local authorities and legal organs began a reinvestigation.

The first post and the subsequent online uproar over the case put it on the national news agenda and offered an alternative framing to that of the court and the local media. Now there were different sides. Was Ms. Liu's death accidental or deliberate? Were there any evidence for Ms. Su's official connections or was that only a rumor? Almost half of the early posts looked for "behind the scenes" reasons for Ms. Su's light sentence. Less than ten percent accepted the court's decision. There were many more suspicions than calls for precaution against spreading rumors about official connections. Other netizens sought to understand the underlying causes. Some suggested remedies like greater government accountability to public opinion. (See Appendix for a sample of comments posted on bbs.chinadaily.com.cn.)

As the discussion went on there was a growing call for the authorities to open a new investigation and hold a new trial. But when it was reported in the press that province officials leaders promised "a satisfactory solution to the 'BMW case' will be offered to the public," a post on the Strong Nation Forum titled "Why should we trust you?" precipitated a cynical thread casting doubt on the credibility of the officials.[25] More and more the question raised was what kind of China do we want? A netizen with the alias *stellyshi* commented that history shows that "… justice originates with the truth. But now in the world, or in China, the truth means nothing. In modern China, with power and money, you can say anything as you like. Even you can kill one person as you want. So, what is this? Is this fare (sic)? Is this so-called socialist country? I don't think so. Never!!! … ."[26]

The hundreds of thousands of online posts took many forms including analysis, argumentation, poems, novels, dramas, letters, animations, and jokes. Most posts were sympathetic to Ms. Liu and hostile

to Ms. Su. For many netizens, Ms. Su and Ms. Liu, the BMW and the onion cart became symbols of the gap and the character differences between the rich and the poor in China. While much coverage in the mainstream media called for government transparency and social improvement, a major direction taken in netizen posts was to raise the question of the direction in which China should be going. The mainstream media called for step-by-step social improvement, the online discussion raised deeper systemic questions.

The offline media and the government in response to the massive netizen activity took more action than they would have. A new investigation was promised and a retrial of Ms. Su. But by mid January the government forbad the mainstream media from any further investigation and coverage. It also required the deletion of some and finally all old posts and any new netizen contributions on the major forums and portals. At the new trial there was no greater penalty for Ms. Su and the monitoring and deleting of BMW related posts caused online attention to shift to other incidents and issues.

In this incident all the netizen activity did not lead to a different legal outcome. But it was another example that ferment around a not very uncommon event can lead to examination of contradictions buried in society. It is arguable that this netizen uprising had an effect on Chinese society regardless of the legal outcome or the deletion of hundreds of thousands of netizen comments.

The next example is about the exposure of fraud.

South China Tiger (2007)

Although there are occasional reports in China that signs of the South China tiger have been seen or roars heard, the species has been thought to be extinct in the wild. There has been no confirmed sighting since 1986. However on Oct. 12, 2007 in a press conference, the Forestry Department of Shaanxi Province in northwest China announced a verified sighting. A South China tiger, the Department spokesperson claimed was photographed by a farmer with optical and digital cameras on Oct. 3. One photo was released. The spokesperson also said that experts had confirmed that the 40 digital and 31 film photographs were authentic.

That afternoon, the one released digital photo was posted along with

the news release on a forum frequented by photographers and users of the Photoshop software application. Six hours later a forum member raised suspicion that the photograph seemed to have been composed using Photoshop. The photo was reposted on other forums discussing photo presentation technologies. Soon a wave of doubt spread with posters citing irregular effects of illumination and focus, unreal fur color, lack of three dimensional effect, etc. Some netizens speculated that the digital photo may have been taken from a cardboard enlargement placed in the bushes to be photographed. The next day a self described Photoshop expert argued that based on the size of the leaves in the released photo, if authentic, the actual size of the tiger would be near that of a rat.

Comments were reposted and other online communities became involved in the dispute. Various hypotheses were proposed but there was near unanimous conviction, despite the official announcement of authenticity, the photo was faked. National and international media picked up and welcomed the story of the sighting but also included mention of netizen skepticism. Experts answered some of the posts agreeing or disagreeing about the authenticity of the photos. The farmer reasserted that he had risked his life to photograph the tiger and that he photos were genuine. Shaanxi Province officials defended the announcement. Well-known wildlife photographers joined the online debate.

The demand arose online for more expert analysis of all the photos and an independent investigation of the farmer's claim. The motive of the Forestry Department was questioned. Why did it not take more time to verify the photos? Was it hoping for increased tourism or new money for a wild life preserve? The online discussion questioned much more the motives of the authorities than the farmer who also received reward money for the photos. One netizen posted on the Tianya Forum under the name *First Impression 1*. The post was a response to a CCTV broadcast welcoming the sighting and declaring it authentic. The netizen used Photoshop to make an animation of two photos that appeared online to show they had "identical facial features, outlines, stripes and height." He or she wrote, "At first sight, this photograph could not be more fake. The lighting, the expressions, the color, the environment … how can this pass through the examination by experts on the South China wild tiger as well as photography experts? Did they make the examination with eyes

shut?"[27] On Fu Jianfeng's blog (Oct. 20),[28] it was reported that the Shaanxi "Animal Protection Bureau director Wang Wanyun … told the media: 'I am willing to guarantee the authenticity of this photograph with my head.'" The blogger also reported that a Chinese Academy of Science plant researcher, Fu Dezhi posted on the Yuanmu Shanchuan Forum that the leaves in the photos were either oak or hazelnut which are about 3mm in size. In all photos one of the leaves is covering the tiger's forehead so the tiger in the photo must be part of a cropped photograph about 8 inches square. Fu Jiangfeng ended his blog writing "… people don't need their heads, they don't need to swear, they only need to know the truth."

On Nov 15, a netizen posted that he had found the original picture that was used to fake the South China tiger sighting. He had discovered a lunar new year's calendar for 2001 which had all the features of the photos being debated. The Shaanxi authorities responded that they would continue the investigation. Eight months later, they tried to end the 'paper tiger saga,' as it was called on the net, by announcing the photos were fake. The farmer was arrested on charges of fraud and 13 provincial officials were dismissed or disciplined for their role in the episode. But, netizen comments which followed mostly complained about official sluggishness. Despite the efforts of the "pro-tiger" officials and the experts they found to defend the authenticity of the sighting, many netizens had kept up the exposure of fraud. As in the Hwang Wu-sook case in S. Korea netizens were willing to challenge the photos as fake even when the authorities backed their authenticity. In the end the search for the truth prevailed.

Netizen attention to detail in photographs was repeated when media reports appeared especially in North America and Europe about the violence in Tibet in March 2008.

Anti-cnn (2008)

On March 14, 2008, Tibetan demonstrators in Lhasa the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region in China turned violent. A Canadian tourist and the one or two foreign journalists who witnessed the situation put photos, videos and descriptions documenting the violence of the rioters against citizens and property[29] online even before the Chinese media started to report it. The Chinese media framed the story as violence against

Han and Muslim Chinese fomented by the Tibetan government in exile. Much of the mainstream international media like BBC, VOA, and CNN framed the violence as the result of discriminatory Chinese rule and Chinese police brutality.

Wide anger was expressed by many Chinese aboard when they discovered that some of the media in the U.S., Germany, and the U.K., were using photos and videos from clashes between police and pro-Tibetan independence protestors in Nepal and India to support that media's claim of violence by Chinese police. A digital slide show that contained a narrated presentation of 11 mislabeled photos inappropriate for the articles with which they appeared[30] spread widely in cyberspace in and outside China.

Within a few days of the appearance of the inaccurate reports, Rau Jin a recent university graduate launched the Anti-cnn website (http://www.anti-cnn.com). He explained that after netizen anger and discussion he wanted to "speak out our thoughts and let the westerners learn about the truth."[31] The top page of Anti-cnn featured articles, videos and photos documenting some of the alleged distortions in the coverage of the Tibet events. The website also had forum sections first in Chinese then also in English. The organizers set as the goal of Anti-cnn to overcome media bias in the West by fostering communication between Chinese netizens and netizens outside of China so that the people of the world and of China could have accurate knowledge about each other. They wrote on their website, "We are not against the western media, but against the lies and fabricated stories in the media." Anti-cnn was chosen as the site name, one of the organizers said, "because CNN is the media superpower. It can do great damage so it must be watched and challenged when it is wrong."[32] But the site was not limited to countering errors in the reporting of CNN. It invited submissions that documented bias or countered misrepresentations of China in the global media.

Rau received hundreds of offers of help finding examples of media distortions. He gathered a team of 40 volunteers to monitor the submissions for factualness and to limit emotional threads. Posts that were name calling or attacks on individuals or groups were to be deleted. Emotional posts were not to be allowed follow-up comments. Forum discussions were started on "Western Media Bias," "The Facts of Tibet" and "Modern

China." In the first five days the site attracted 200,000 visits many from outside of China. Over time serious threads contained debates between Han Chinese and both Westerners and Tibetan and Uyghur Chinese trying to show each other who they were and where they differ or where they agree.

On Anti-cnn in answer to the exposure of the Western media practice, many visitors from outside China posted their criticism of Chinese government media censorship. In their responses to such criticism, some Chinese acknowledged such censorship but argued it was easy to circumnavigate, that all societies have their systems of bias or censorship and that netizens everywhere must dare to think for themselves and get information from many sources. One netizen with the alias 'kylin' wrote:

> I can say free media works the same way as less-free media. So what's most important? The people I'd say – … . If people dare to doubt, dare to think own (sic) their own, do not take whatever comes to them, then we'll have a clear mind, not easily be fooled. I can say, if such people exist, then should be Chinese … the least likely to be brainwashed, when have suffered from all those incidents, cultural revolution, plus a whole long history with all kinds of tricks.[33]

Some analysis of Anti-cnn in the Western media criticized it as a form of nationalism[34] or of being somehow connected with the Chinese government. The Chinese government and Anti-cnn organizers deny any connection with each other and no verifiable evidence of such a connection has been produced. There are often expressions of nationalist emotions in Chinese cyberspace, for example calls for boycotting Japanese and French products. After the riot in Lhasa and the Chinese government and media blamed the Dalai Lama and "splitists" there was an upsurge of nationalist defense of China including on Anti-cnn. The moderators on Anti-cnn and netizens in general however are opponents of nationalism arguing that it is a form of emotionalism and needs to be countered by rational discourse and the presentation of facts and an airing of all opinions. The moderators often answered Chinese nationalists with admonitions to "calm down and present facts." While nationalist sentiment and love of country and anger appears often on the Anti-cnn forums, the

opportunity for a dialogue across national and ethnic barriers is an expression of the internationalism characteristic of netizens.

Chinese citizens in general know that the mainstream Chinese media have a long history as a controlled and propaganda press. Since the 1990s there has been a commercialization of that media and more openness but still much of the national media has strong remnants from its past. On the other hand the mainstream international media had been widely assumed in China as a more reliable source of information about some events such as SARS and for alternative viewpoints. The widespread distribution by netizens like Mr. Rau of exposure of distortions and bias in major examples of the international mainstream media called into question for many Chinese people their positive expectation about that media. It also attracted the attention of others who questioned whether the so called Western mainstream media is any less a propaganda or political media than the Chinese mainstream media. After the framing of the war in the country of Georgia in August 2008 as the fault of Russia, a Russian netizen started a thread on Anti-cnn suggesting a Russian-Chinese alliance. He wrote, "Russian problems with the Western media are identical to Chinese problems … . What [do] we need to do so that their publications about countries like China and Russia will be written in a fair tone rather than being politically motivated? I would be most happy to hear your opinion on these matters."[35]

Discussion

Every year since 2003, there has been dozens of such national netizen uprisings and commotions around social and political issues, sometimes exposing fraud or corruption or questioning government actions or explanations, sometimes discussing foreign events like disruption of the Olympic touch relay. They have become a normal aspect of Chinese society.

The Chinese government has signaled its support for active posting on forums.[36] Government officials at all levels are encouraged to take part in forums or on blogs. Government related news sites tolerate very active and often highly critical forum discussions. President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen both said publicly that netizen activity at the time of SARS was helpful. Summaries of each day's hottest netizen activity are made for

the State Council. The dominant stress of censorship reported by media outside of China misses this level of support and the rapidly expanding new use for social and political discussion and debate.

Often ahead of the mainstream media, netizen up risings set the news agenda. Local events are given by netizen activity national or international attention. In alliance with more independent journalists and editors, online issues can spread to the main stream national media and to the whole Chinese people. Netizen critical framing of issues differs from government and mainstream media framing. When popular opinion is formed about these issues it often follows the netizen rather than the government or media framing. The fight around censorship is creative and spirited. A possible result is that the percent of net users who view forums is increasing.

In line with the policy of "reform and openness" initiated in China after 1978, a program of media reform was started in the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s. The result is that the media are no longer solely vehicles for Party propaganda but have been commercialized into "a multi-functional and multi-structured cultural industry that reflects the accelerated pace of economic internationalization."[37] In addition to the government and party media, there are commercial media and regional media. The number of TV and radio stations and newspapers has exploded. Even though there is still a significant level of media supervision and control, a growing body of critical reporting is occurring often encouraged by or encouraging netizen excitement.

Some journalists come online for their leads and to find contacts to interview. Some are emboldened by netizen exposures and numbers to dig deeper and take on more controversial topics. The result is the media environment in China is livelier than in societies with less netizen activity even if those societies have less media supervision and guidance.

Setting the agenda, framing issues and arousing public opinion are all aspects of political power in modern society. That the netizens in China are able occasionally to play these roles suggests a political dynamism in Chinese society that is often denied by critics of China. Netizen activity in China is relatively recent. It has many obstacles including a trend toward nationalism and a contest over supervision and control. But the netizens in China are developing into a force contributing to motion of

Chinese society in the direction of greater citizen participation. This makes the netizen activity in China fertile soil for scholarly attention.

Notes

1. China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) 2008 Annual Report, July 31, 2008.

2. "Preface: What is a netizen" in *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben, IEEE Computer Society Press, Los Alamitos, CA, 1997, p. ix. Also, a version is online at: https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/606/527.

3. Ibid.

4. See note 2 above.

5. Forum software hosted on internet accessible servers allows for sequential and threaded online text discussions which can be monitored and moderated. Similarly hosted chat room software allows for simultaneous multiple participant real time text conversations. In China, most forums allow alias registration and are often archived. Chat room sessions are ephemeral and are not easily monitored.

6. "From Active Audience to Media Citizenship: The Case of Post-Mao China," *Social Semiotics* 16 (2) June 2006, p. 304.

7. See Michael Hauben, Ibid., note 2 above pp. ix-x.

8. In 2002, Chinese students were studying in some 103 countries and most densely populated in schools in the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada, Germany, France and Japan.

9. Zieue Tai, *The Internet in China: Cyberspace and Civil Society*, Routledge, New York, 2006, p. 158.

10. Guo Liang, "China's Internet Development and Its Impact on Public Opinion," speech April 26, 2004, (in Chinese).

11.For a discussion of Internet control in China, see Randy Kluver, "Open Systems and Opening Societies: Guo Liang on China's Internet," interview Brisbane Australia, Sept 27-30, 2006. 12. This case was documented at http://www.helpzhuling.org, (No longer available.) the Help Zhu Ling Foundation website initiated by her friends.

13. In China, a portal is a website where a visitor can undertake a variety of net activities like read email, post on or read blogs, use a search engine, enter forum discussions, join a chat room, read news, follow stock prices, play games and other forms of infotainment, etc.

14. Zieue Tai, *The Internet in China: Cyberspace and Civil Society*, Routledge, New York, 2006, pp. 250-251.

15. English translation in http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj /fa03/gmj-fa03-xiguang.htm. (No longer available.)

16. http://www.bignews.org/20010307.txt (No longer available.)

17. Ibid., Tai, p. 251, English translation of http://www.dajiyuan.com/gb/1/3/11n 56883.htm. (No longer available.)

18. http://english.gov.cn/official/2005-07/26/content_17166.htm. (No longer available.)

19. This case is well covered in the scholarly literature. See for example, Ibid., Tai, pp. 259-268 and other references in the following notes.

20. Ibid., p. 260.

21. Shaoguag Wang, "Changing Models of China's Policy Agenda Setting," *Modern China*, 2008, 34 p. 79. http://mcx.sage_pub.com/cgi/content/abstract/34/1/56. (Access restricted.)

22. http://news.sina.com.cn/s/2003-04-25/09501015845.shtml.
See also, Haiqing Yu, "From Active Audience to Media Citizenship: The Case of Post-Mao China," *Social Semiotics*, 16 (2), June 2006.

23. http://news.21cn.com/social/shixiang/2003-04-25/1021755 .html. (No longer available.)

24. Haiqing Yu, "Talking, Linking, Clicking: The Politics of AIDS and SARS in Urban China," positions: east asia cultures critique, 15 (1) Spring 2007. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/214311. (Access restricted.)

25. Christina Yuqiong Zhuo and Patricia Moy, "Frame Building and Frame Setting: The Interplay Between Online Public Opinion and Media Coverage," paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Dresden, June 16, 2006.

26. Comment #11 at http://bbs.chinadaily.com.cn/redirect.php?tid=39672&goto=last post&highlight=. (No longer available.)

27. English translation on the ESWN blog. http://zonaeuropa.com /20071019_1.htm.

28. Ibid.

29. See for example: Blog entry by Kadfly March 15, 2008. http://kadfly.blog spot.com/2008/03/lhasa-burning.html. (No longer available.) See the report on March 15 by *Al Jezeera*. http://www .youtube.com/watch?v=zfnBVKrzX6Y. Video posted on You-Tube by **cali2882** on March 15, 2008.

30. "Riot in Tibet: True Face of Western Media," posted by **dionysos615** on YouTube on March 19, 2008. http://www.you tube.com/watch?v=uSQnK5FcKas&feature=related.

31. Quoted in China Daily, April 2, 2008.

32. Interview with Anti-cnn webmaster Qi Hangting, April 19, 2008, translated from Chinese. See Ronda Hauben, "Netizens Defy Western Media Fictions of China," https://www.ais.org/~jrh /acn/ACn20-2.pdf, p. 7.

33. http://www.anti-cnn/forum/en/thread-2316-1-1.html. (No longer available.)

34. See e.g., "Web Site Rips West's Reports on China-Tibet Conflict," by Anthony Kuhn at: http://www.npr.org/templates/story /story.php?storyId=89831099.

35. http://www.anti-cnn.com/forum/en/thread-2413-1-1.html. (No longer available.)

36. Information and communication technology (ICT) has been officially promoted for the last 15 or 20 years as one of the most important driving forces of China's economic development. The government and party publicly support the spread of the Internet and its use by people within China. The result is the rapid spread of the Internet and its active use China. Also, enthusiastic netizens have found ways to minimize the effect of the censorship. And many of them are using it with the purpose of rational public debates on social and political issues.

37. Haiqing Yu, "From Active Audience to Media Citizenship: The Case of Post-Mao China," Social Semiotics, 16 (2), June 2006, p. 316. https://www.tandfonline.com /doi/abs/10.1080/1035 0330600664888.

Appendix

Comments on the BMW Incident

[On January 6, 2004 a post was submitted to the forum bbs.chinadaily.com* with the subject: "BMW rammed into crowd, arousing heated debate." Fifty-seven comments were added by visitors to the forum. The first 18 comments are presented below. The article and posts were submitted in English.]

2004-1-6 03:57 p.m. #1 xiaozhu (xiaozhu)
No matter who she is. Justice should go to him. Did she do this deliberately? Or is it just a misoperation? The police should shrug off outside interference and investigate the case in a just way. So do the judges.

2004-1-6 04:11 p.m. #2 doubter (doubter)
Police in China can read minds … . From the article above: "Local police said that Su made a mistake by stepping on the accelerator instead of the brake pedal that she intended to strike, due to being flustered." So local police in China can read minds? How did they know what she "intended" to do? Can you just stick to the facts, officer? Like perhaps the fact that the BMW X5 is a huge car that doesn't smash through a crowd of people into a tree unless you STAMP on the accelerator. Like the fact that there had been an argument, and if you are "flustered" you don't try to drive. Like the fact that this is the kind of woman who starts an argument about a tiny scratch on her HUGE expensive car that is too big for Chinese streets. The kind of car that is called a "pedestrian killer" in overseas countries. The previous person made a comment that the police should ignore outside interference and just focus on the case. Too late for that, I think … .

2004-1-7 01:28 a.m. #3 wendylanlan (Wendy)
Su acted as if human life is not worth a straw! She makes me sick!

2004-1-7 02:05 a.m. #4 abraham (abraham)
Sue and her socially superlunary relative are to blame and deserve curses!! On the side of the pitied victims and the general public, if only it had been out of Sue's inability and inexperience in driving that the accident occurred. But, how did such a killing driver get onto the road with her shining licence? What did she do to take the responsibility of her killing, showing her own respect to the law and mercy on her own morality and virtue? She just stepped onto the demanded justice not onto the accelerator by mistake!

2004-1-7 06:56 p.m. #5 bchung (bchung)
Definitely death penalty, in front of the public. Two year is just ridiculous. Corruption

have played a big part again.

2004-1-7 07:57 p.m. #6 bchung (bchung)
Giving a bullet is lucky for some criminal like her. She should definitely be tortured to death, when she thinks she can kill anyone she wants to.

2004-1-8 10:16 a.m. #7 delpyh (delpyh)
Corruption has played a big part again. Yes, you are right. Money and Relationship mean too much in now a day world … .

2004-1-8 05:30 p.m. #8 harry09 (harry09)
Sad and sick with the evil government. Any people with sane mind and mercy can see and make judgement with the simplest fact except the people whose brains are corrupted and rusted and rotten. It is impossible to accelerate a car to a speed that is enough to kill and hurt so many people in such a short distance and in a short time if the driver just intended to start the car and mover the car a little. Ridiculous judger, ridiculous lawyer and hopelessly poor people. :-(

2004-1-10 01:56 p.m. #9 coldblue (coldblue)
Corruption seems to die hard. The absolute fact behind the case is just corruption in China, in large scale at every level. It's rooted from the very faraway time. So it seems to die very hard, even our government have taken numerous actives to try to crack down on it. But it still goes on all the time at every corner of our country. I believe that all the attention and supervision and prosecution and hard fighting from the whole society and the all-level governments can help in part better the situation. Due to factors such as the complication of money-right relationship, and it's historical reason, it's current social and economic situation, there is still a long way for us to pull through. Let's help build a more just and fair world.

2004-1-10 09:20 p.m. #10 guess3times (guess3times)
Two years' imprisonment? But "reprieve" means she can be almost free! What will happen next?

2004-1-11 06:13 p.m. #11 stellyshi (stellyshi)
Let us look back on the past of our forefathers. What they did? Let us prefer to the history book. What they did? Which one leads to justice? Of course, the justice originates from the truth. But now in the world, or in China, the truth means nothing. In the modern China, with power and money, you can do anything as you like. Even you can kill one person as you want. So, what is this? Is this fare? Is this so-called socialist country? I don't think so. Never!!! I hope our government should investigate the case again and give us a fare explanation.
Let's wait and see!

2004-1-11 08:22 p.m. #12 nasriding (nasriding)

Do you call that law? Police is synonymous to corruption and incapability as well as violence nowadays in China. They wag their tails faced with the rich and powerful while brandishing their fists in front of the ordinary. Can you expect justice from such people? Think about how the police force is originated in China! School drop-outs, loafers, or any other unimaginable contaminated sources that are merely disguised under the police uniform! If law is left for such people to exercise, do you call that law!

2004-1-12 09:34 a.m. #13 deschiong (deschiong)

Have compassion. Please have compassion and forgiveness to the person that did the wrong. It was a wrong act, but what will you get from demanding revenge accept you will get more anger grief and frustration for you and others concerned. There is already enough trouble in the world. Demanding to killing others for the killing done on them. One wrong can't be righted by another wrong … look more for the long run … . What impact this action will have on our future generations if we suddenly turn barbaric.

To demand an eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth … freedom comes with a big responsibility and a big responsibility comes with the need for generating and cultivating compassion for the dead and the living, for those that have been wronged and the wrong doers too. Start a good responsible good freedom of expression but no an irresponsible free expression with big bad consequences for the future, our own future … deep bows, des.

2004-1-15 03:56 a.m. #14 bevshine (bevshine)

I feel sick when I read this new. Don't mind the Woman who drive BMW or Benz, I think this case told us that money can purchase life, even you kill the people. How many people died in last year at JIANXI coal mine? Each victim only got pay 20,000 RMB to the victim's relation. What is civil right in China? Money and power can overturn the fact. This case is very clearly show the power of Money how to effect the Law equality.

2004-1-16 04:38 p.m. #15 seneca (seneca)

and yes, it is an opinion: Punish that woman, but not as barbarously as she did to her victim: she should wither in prison, so she has time to repent and readjust to societal norms. It is pretty obvious she acted in flagrant arrogance; from what I read in other publications an argument had occurred before the fatal accident, and the victim was the person she had a quarrel with. As an outsider, I think human lives are too precious to eliminate, no matter whether the owner of such a life is a scoundrel; people must be reformed, and wherever that is impossible, locked up and be taken care of by society. We all are born neutral – neither good nor bad; we choose the path that eventually earns us opprobrium or glory, usually we get both because nobody is perfect. That the woman is guilty emerges from the fact she offered a compensation to the family of the victim – to me this is a tacit admission of guilt. Let me say as a foreign national I have had a number of near-misses and bad experiences with unruly and antisocial owners of vehicles. Scooters driving on heavily-populated curbsides, hitting pedestrians more or less

inadvertently with their protruding rearview-mirrors. I once got almost knocked down by a woman on such a vehicle, and in reflex I hit back at her scooter; a plastic part came off her scooter's front, and she got so wild she began shaking her fist under my nose; her scooter had a white number plate with red characters, so you know who she was! I had to pay a fine, and the woman didn't have to even offer an apology for colliding with me headlong in the crowd on a curb!

2004-1-26 02:32 p.m. #16 lordofwind (lordofwind)
Su is human scum but I'm wondering how come this sort of scum is able to be wrapped up by BMW. The only thing they deserve is be naked like an animal in a labour camp.

2004-1-28 11:02 a.m. #17 cynthiayql (angelina)
take it easy
what I only want to say is that let all of us forgot it! so many such things happened in china, because of money and power, we, the public and even the victims themselves can do nothing! this is the law in china now! a long time ago, when I first heard this kind of things, I was so angry that I can't sleep all the night! what and where is the justice? how could it happen! I was so angry and feel so sad! but now I am used to this. they happen everyday in our life we just do not know all of them! So, just let us don't talk it anymore! I do not think it helps. it is the real life! we have to accept it? or what should we do?

2004-1-29 01:07 p.m. #18 nationalism (Nationalism)
Posted from the Article Section, written by Chairman, I think says it all: "Right or Wrong. Accident or Anger and Rage. The MEDIA should never be the Judge or the Jury and heaven forbid, they are ever both. TRIAL by MEDIA is an evil thing. Maybe more evil than the crime itself. The MEDIA is for Information. I hope we never see the day, that the MEDIA is the Government of China as the media is the Government of many other country's."

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*The forum is on the website of *China Daily*, the major English language daily newspaper in China. It is affiliated with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

[Editor's Note: The following is an edited version of part of a talk presented in Potsdam on Sept 19, 2007. The slides from this presentation can be seen at: http://www.ais.org/~jrh/acn/talk_netizenmovementslides.pdf]

The Most Awesome Nail House Saga and Kidnaped Children Rescued

by Ronda Hauben

One of the most widely known activities of Chinese bloggers is "the Most Awesome Nail House" saga.

A nail house is the name given by real estate developers to describe the building of an owner who opposes moving even when his property is slated for demolition.

In February 2007, a blogger posted a photograph of one such building on the Internet. The picture spread around the Internet. The building was owned by Yang Wu and his wife Wu Ping. It was the building where they had lived and had a small restaurant. The nail house was located on number 17 Hexing Road, Yangjiaping, Chongqing.

Real estate developers planned to build a shopping center on that spot and had successfully acquired all the surrounding buildings. Yang Wu and his wife, however, were determined to resist until their demand for what they felt was fair compensation was met.

In September 2004, demolition of the surrounding buildings began and by February 2007 only Yang's building remained. The developers cut off the water and electricity even though this was illegal.

The story spread not only in blogs but soon also in the mainstream Chinese media. At one point, however, the story was not being reported any more in the Chinese press. A blogger from Hunan, Zola Zhou wrote in his blog, "I realize this is a one-time chance and so from far far away I came to Chongqing to conduct a thorough investigation in an attempt to understand a variety of viewpoints."

On his blog, Zola reported that he took a train and arrived two days later at the Chongqing train station. On his way to the nail house, he stopped to have rice noodles, and asked the shop owner what he thought

of the nail house saga. Along the way he spoke to other people he met. He reported on the variety of views of the people he met on his blog. Some of those he spoke with supported Yang Wu and Wu Ping. Others felt Yang Wu and Wu Ping were asking for a lot of money (20 million RMB) and that the developer was justified in refusing to pay such an outlandish amount. Another person told Zola that Yang Wu was only asking for the ability to be relocated to a comparable place and that the developer was offering too little for the property.

After arriving in Chongqing, Zola reported on his blog that he bought the newspapers and looked to see if there was any news that day about the Nail House Saga. He reported he didn't find any coverage, though he was told there may have been some in the paper from the previous day.

One of the surprises for Zola in Chongqing was to find that other people who were losing their homes and businesses had gathered around the Nail House hoping to find reporters to cover their struggles against developers.

One such person offered Zola some money to help the young blogger's expenses.

"I'd never come across a situation like this before," he wrote, "and never thought to take money from people I'd help by writing about, so I firmly said I didn't want it, saying I only came to help him out of a sense of justice and that it might not necessarily prove successful." Zola explained that he wondered if accepting the money "would lead me to stray further and further from my emerging sense of justice." Eventually, he let the person buy him lunch and later, he accepted money to be able to stay in a hotel room for a few days to continue to cover the story on his blog.

Also Zola eventually asked Yang Wu's wife Wu Ping what her demand of the developer was. Her answer, she wrote, was "I don't want money. What I want is a place of the same size anywhere in this area.

Zola had heard a rumor that Wu Ping could hold out for her demands to be met by the developers because her father was a delegate for the National People's Congress. Zola asked Wu Ping if her father was a delegate for the National People's Congress. Wu Ping responded that "No" her father wasn't a delegate. She had had some background,

however, reading law books and had had the experience of going through a law suit which she won. But Wu Ping didn't want a law suit against the developer because she said that "A lawsuit goes on for three to five years. I may win the law suit but I end up losing money."

In April, the Awesome Nail House was demolished.

In preparing a talk I was to give later in 2007, I sent Zola email asking a few questions. I asked him what the outcome was of the Nail House struggle. He said that Yang Wu and Wu Ping were given another house and 900,000 RMB for what they lost during the time they couldn't operate their restaurant.

I also asked him, "Do you consider yourself a netizen? Can you say why?" He answered, "Yes, I do. Because I read news from Internet, make friends from Internet, communicate with friends by Internet, and write a blog on the Internet.

Another example of netizen activity on the Net in China is the story that Xin Yanhua posted about young people in the provinces of Shanxi and Henan being kidnaped and then subjected to slave labor working conditions. Families reported the disappearance of young people in the vicinity of the Zhengzhou Railway Station, bus stations, or nearby roads. A discovery was made that a number of young people had been abducted and then sold for 500 yuan (about $62) to be used as slave labor for illegal brick kilns operating in Shanxi.

On the evening of June 5, 2007, a post appeared on the online forum at "Dahe Net," which attracted much attention and many page views.

The post appeared as an open letter from 400 fathers of abducted children. The letter described how when the fathers went to the local government to ask for help they were turned away, with the excuse given that the kilns where the slave labor conditions existed, were in a different police jurisdiction from where the abductions had taken place. "Henan and Shanxi police pass the buck back and forth," the letter explained.

"Who can rescue them," the letter asked. "With the governments of Henan and Shanxi passing the buck to each other, whom should we ask for help? This is extremely urgent and concerns the life and death of our children. Who can help us."

Xin Yanhua, who wrote the letter, was a 32 year old woman who was the aunt of one of the abducted young people. She originally posted

it under an anonymous name (as Central Plain Old Pi). Her nephew had been abducted, but then rescued and returned home by some of the fathers looking for their own children. She was grateful to those who found her nephew and wanted to find a way to express her gratitude. Originally she tried to offer the fathers who found her nephew money, but they said "This is not about the money. This is about the wretched children." She tried to get the local newspapers and television to cover the story. The 400 word article that appeared in the local newspaper didn't lead to any helpful action. The TV coverage wasn't followed up with any further stories. Nothing resulted from it. Xin Yanhua finally drafted the letter from the 400 Fathers of the Missing Children and posted it in an Internet forum.

The forum moderator placed the post in a prominent position on the Dahe Net forum and posted it with some of the photographs from the Henan TV Metro Channel coverage. It was subsequently reposted on the Tianya forum. As of June 18, the Dahe post generated more than 300,000 page views and the reposting of it at the Tianya forum had generated more than 580,000 page views and many many comments. Many of the comments expressed dismay that such conditions existed and expressed empathy for the victims and their families.

A few weeks later Xin Yanhua posted a second letter titled, "Failing to Find their Children, 400 Parents petition again."

The media converged from around the country to cover the story. As a result of the posts and discussion on the Internet, state officials issued directives and the Shanxi and Henan provincial governments initiated an unprecedented campaign against the illegal brick kilns.

When Xin Yanhua was asked why she had done the posts, she emphasized that she didn't want fame or credit. The Internet had become the only option to obtain aid for the situation. She had wanted to express her gratitude to the parents who had rescued her nephew even though they hadn't been able to find their own missing children. Xin wanted to be able to obtain justice.

"This case is yet another in a growing list of cases of citizen activism on the Chinese Internet and another sign that the government is listening to the online chatter," one post explained.

I hope that these examples help to show that, "Focusing too closely on Internet censorship overlooks the expanded freedoms of expression

made possible in China by the Internet," as one Chinese computer researcher has commented.

These two examples help to demonstrate that in China at least by 2007, netizens were having an impact not only on the role of the media on society, but on the very nature of the press itself.

[Editor's Note: The genesis of this article was a conversation with Werner Zorn and Ronda and Jay Hauben in Berlin in 2004.]

The 1987 Birth of the China-CSNET E-mail Link and How Its History Got Corrected*

by Jay Hauben

In September 1987 an e-mail link was established between the People's Republic of China and the Federal Republic of Germany. That link allowed China to participate in the CSNET, an international e-mail network. It was the first link of China into an international e-mail system based on a mail server in China and a major step toward China's joining the Internet.

The following article tells some of the details of how that link was developed and how the story of that development was corrected in China. It documents some of the international collaboration that characterizes the science and technology on which the Internet is based.

I. Finding Werner Zorn

In the early 1990s, Ronda Hauben and Michael Hauben sought to find and document where the Internet came from, how it was developed and how it was spreading. They found substantial evidence that the Internet developed as an open, scientific and engineering collaboration. All the evidence was that the process was international from the very beginning and was guided by a vision of a major advance to human

society from a new universal inexpensive communication system.[1]

In 2004, Ronda Hauben and I were in Germany. Ronda had heard that the first permanent e-mail link between China and the rest of the world was connected to the University of Karlsruhe,[2] a major institute for education and research in western Germany. While in Germany, we were told if you want to know about the Germany-China link see Werner Zorn.

We located and interviewed Professor Werner Zorn in Berlin. He shared his memories and some documents from 1983 to 1987. During those four years, a Chinese-German international collaboration prepared the link so that China would be part of a worldwide e-mail system called CSNET. Professor Zorn particularly gave credit on the Chinese side to Professor Wang Yunfeng who was the Senior Advisor of the Institute for Computer Applications (ICA) in Beijing. The Institute of Computer Applications was located at the Beijing Institute of Technology (BIT). It was under the Chinese Ministry of Machinery and Electronics Industry. The ICA was created to provide data processing and computer services to small and medium organizations that were not large enough to have their own computer installations. It became a foremost computer networking center. From 1987 to 1994, ICA was the mailserver and hub on the Chinese side for the CSNET e-mail exchange between China and the rest of the world.

II. A Chinese-German Collaboration Builds China's First International E-mail Link

Many factors contributed to make that link possible. In the early 1980s, the World Bank supported the import of computers for use in universities in China. At that time, export of computers from the U.S. to China was forbidden by the U.S. government. The German government also subscribed to the COCOM[3] export rules but some computers made by the German company Siemens met the criteria to be allowed export to China. In 1982, the World Bank Chinese University Development Project I was allotted $200 million. It used some of that money for the import into China of 19 Siemens BS2000 mainframe computers manufactured in Germany. One of these Siemens computers was delivered to the ICA.

As part of the project, Professors Zorn and Wang collaborated to

organize the first Chinese Siemens Computer Users Conference (CASCO – Symposium '83)[4] which took place in September 1983 in Beijing. At the conference, Professor Zorn led a seminar on the German Research Network project. One of the Chinese interpreters challenged Professor Zorn, remarking that lecturing was not enough. Would Professor Zorn do something more for China? That planted the seed that grew into the Chinese-German computer networking collaboration which developed the e-mail link based on the Siemens BS2000 computers installed at the ICA in China and in the Karlsruhe University in West Germany.

In 1983-4, Professor Zorn was part of the effort that connected Germany to the CSNET,[5] a network begun in the U.S. in 1980 to provide e-mail connections among university computer science departments. To connect to CSNET, a computer would need particular communication functionality as part of its operating system. The specifications or protocols providing that functionality for CSNET had not yet been implemented in the Siemens BS2000 operating system. In late 1984, Professor Zorn decided to undertake this task together with his students but only as a background job. It took two years to complete. The work was financially supported in part by the government of the West German state of Baden-Wuerttemberg. Its Prime Minister Lothar Späth was friendly to China.

The CSNET international e-mail network was based on ordinary telephone lines and switches using a communication protocol with the name X.25[6]. In 1985, both China and West Germany were developing internal X.25 e-mail traffic systems. But there was no physical path to carry such e-mail traffic between them. With the help of the PKTELCOM data network administered by the Beijing Telecommunications Administration, the Karlsruhe team made contact with the Italian cable company Italcable. Italcable had some leased lines via satellite between China and Italy. The Italian company agreed to open its switches to route X.25 e-mail traffic between China and Germany. Italcable was able to open its switches on Aug. 26 1986. From that day on, reliable remote computer-to-computer dialogue was available between Karlsruhe University and ICA through PKTELCOM. But a CSNET e-mail link was not yet possible because the Siemens computers at the ICA and in Karlsruhe did not have the necessary functionality to handle CSNET e-mail messages.

In late summer 1987, Professor Zorn was in Beijing for the third CASCO conference but also to work with the staff of the ICA to set up the e-mail link between China and Germany. His team at Karlsruhe University had succeeded in getting the CSNET protocols to work on their Siemens BS2000 computer.

In a little over two weeks, September 4 to 20, 1987 the Chinese and the German teams implemented within the operating system of the ICA Siemens computer the necessary protocols, installed the necessary communications equipment and overcame the many technical problems to make possible e-mail connectivity with Karlsruhe.

III. The First E-mail Message from China to the CSNET

On September 14, 1987, the joint German and Chinese team composed an e-mail message with the subject line, "First Electronic Mail from China to Germany." The message began in German and English "Across the Great Wall we can reach every corner in the world." Not only was the message addressed to Karlsruhe in Germany, it was also addressed to CSNET computer scientists Lawrence Landweber and David Farber in the U.S. and Dennis Jennings in Ireland. It was signed by Professor Werner Zorn for the University of Karlsruhe Computer Science Department and Professor Wang Yunfeng for the ICA. Eleven coworkers are also listed as signatories, Michael Finken, Stefan Paulisch, Michael Rotert, Gerhard Wacker and Hans Lackner on the Karlsruhe side and Dr. Li Cheng Chiung, Qiu Lei Nan, Ruan Ren Cheng, Wei Bao Xian, Zhu Jiang and Zhao Li Hua on the ICA side, suggesting the complexity of the task. But they could not send the message they composed. To their great disappointment, the message failed to leave China.[7] There was a last technical problem to solve. Successful connectivity was achieved in a few more days. On September 20, 1987, the first CSNET e-mail message, the one composed on September 14, could actually be sent to Karlsruhe.

The transmission of this first e-mail message went over an X.25 connection. At ICA, the sender dialed using a 300 baud modem to one of the X.25 ports of the PKTELCOM Beijing. PKTELCOM Beijing was connected over a satellite link to ITAPAC, which was the X.25 packet network of Italy. From there the message was sent via a gateway to the German X.25 network DATEX-P, to be delivered to the Karlsruhe

Siemens host. This route was very expensive because it included international telephone charges for each separate link.

```
(Message # 50: 1532 bytes, KEEP, Forwarded)
Received: from unika1 by irau1l.germany.csnet id aa21216; 20 Sep 87 17:36 MET
Received: from Peking by unika1; Sun, 20 Sep 87 16:55 (MET dst)
Date:    Mon, 14 Sep 87 21:07 China Time
From:    Mail Administration for China <MAIL@ze1>
To:      Zorn@germany, Rotert@germany, Wacker@germany, Finken@unika1
CC:      lhl@parmesan.wisc.edu, farber@udel.edu,
         jennings%irlean.bitnet@germany, cic%relay.cs.net@germany, Wang@ze1,
         RZLI@ze1
Subject: First Electronic Mail from China to Germany

"Ueber die Grosse Mauer erreichen wie alle Ecken der Welt"
"Across the Great Wall we can reach every corner in the world"
Dies ist die erste ELECTRONIC MAIL, die von China aus ueber Rechnerkopplung
in die internationalen Wissenschaftsnetze geschickt wird.
This is the first ELECTRONIC MAIL supposed to be sent from China into the
international scientific networks via computer interconnection between
Beijing and Karlsruhe, West Germany (using CSNET/PMDF BS2000 Version).
   University of Karlsruhe        Institute for Computer Application of
-Informatik Rechnerabteilung-     State Commission of Machine Industry
       (IRA)                      (ICA)
Prof. Werner Zorn                 Prof. Wang Yuen Fung
Michael Finken                    Dr. Li Cheng Chiung
Stefan Paulisch                   Qiu Lei Nan
Michael Rotert                    Ruan Ren Cheng
Gerhard Wacker                    Wei Bao Xian
Hans Lackner                      Zhu Jiang
                                  Zhao Li Hua
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The First E-mail Message for CSNET to Leave China

The Siemens host in Karlsruhe was connected via the Karlsruhe local area network with a VAX 11/750. That computer acted as the central CSNET node for Germany. It polled the CSNET relay in Boston several times a day. Thus the CSNET node in Beijing was, with that first e-mail message, fully integrated into CSNET and via CSNET to the rest of the e-mail world. With this first e-mail node in China, a step was taken for the people of China to begin online communication with people around the world. But this was not an Internet connection but only a very expensive e-mail link.

IV. China Welcomed into the International E-mail Community

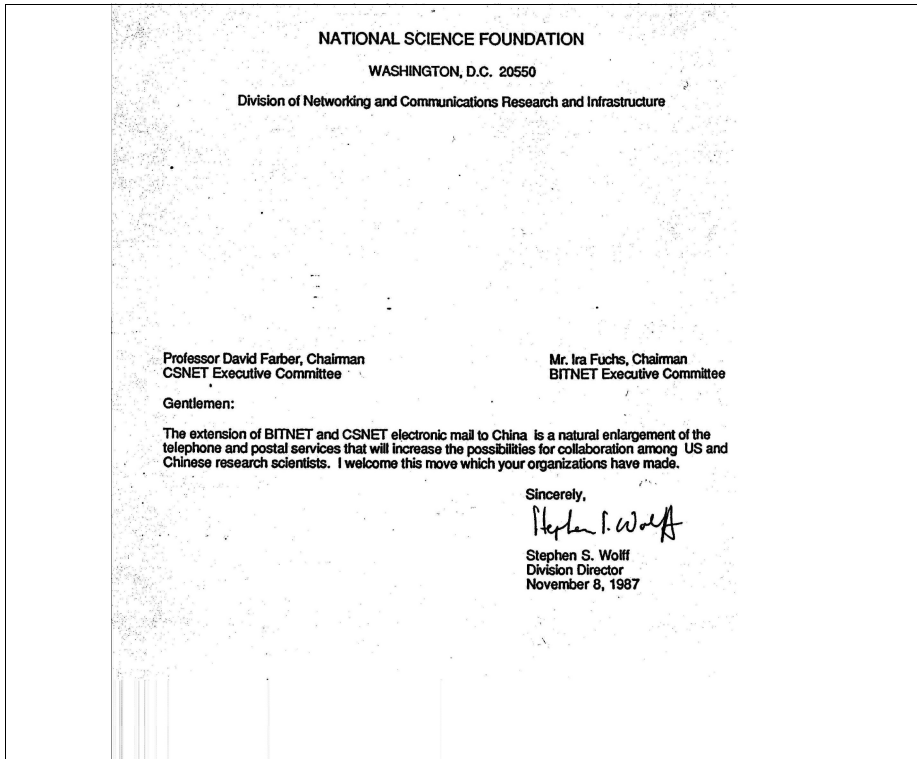E-mail connectivity between China and Germany was only the

necessary technical precondition for an e-mail service. What was missing was the official approval of the U.S. authorities that funded CSNET. The U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) was the umbrella institution for all CSNET networking within the U.S. and also abroad at that time. Immediately after the technical connectivity was achieved, Professor Zorn worked with Professor Wang to win acceptance from the NSF for worldwide e-mail traffic to and from China. With the help of Lawrence Landweber, the Chairman of the CSNET project, and other U.S. computer scientists, acceptance by the NSF was achieved less than two months later. On November 8, 1987, in a letter to the executive committees of CSNET and BITNET, Stephen Wolff, Director of the NSF Division of Networking and Communications Research and Infrastructure welcomed the CSNET e-mail connectivity with China.

This letter was the official political approval of what technically was already implemented. As far as I can tell there was no government to government activity, no treaty or signed agreement. The story is told that Stephen Wolff did get a command from the U.S. White House to rescind permission after he had already given it, but as he says, "you don't ask permission in advance. You ask forgiveness afterwards."[8]

Without Wolff's letter, the China-Germany e-mail connection would have been vulnerable to a cutoff. The NSF could decide to deny forwarding of e-mail messages to and from ICA in Beijing. Professor Zorn considers November 8, 1987 as the time China became officially connected with the rest of the world via the CSNET e-mail system. E-mail received from China at Karlsruhe would be relayed from there to whichever CSNET host worldwide it was addressed. And the reverse, any CSNET host worldwide could send e-mail to ICA in Beijing and it would be relayed from there to users of the China Academic Net (CANET) throughout China as well as to users in other Chinese institutions outside CANET. The international computer science community and Chinese students abroad who learned of this connectivity answered with their warm congratulations.

Still these were small steps. Even with the support of the Chinese State Science and Technology Commission, hardly any Chinese institution and no individual scientist could afford to send or receive e-mail messages to or from abroad. That was because X.25 for international traffic

increased in cost as the size of the e-mail message increased. The cost on the Chinese side included charges for every message received as well as sent. Longer e-mail messages could cost 150 RMB,** for a professor the equivalent of a whole month's salary. The monthly charges for the link, between $2000 and $5000 paid by each side, were more of a burden for the Chinese side than the German side.[9] E-mail usage was thus severely restricted.

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20550

Division of Networking and Communications Research and Infrastructure

Professor David Farber, Chairman
CSNET Executive Committee

Mr. Ira Fuchs, Chairman
BITNET Executive Committee

Gentlemen:

The extension of BITNET and CSNET electronic mail to China is a natural enlargement of the telephone and postal services that will increase the possibilities for collaboration among US and Chinese research scientists. I welcome this move which your organizations have made.

Sincerely,

Stephen S. Wolff
Division Director
November 8, 1987

Letter from Stephen Wolff, Nov. 8, 1987

But for the five years during which expensive e-mail connectivity was the only network connectivity that could reach the rest of the world, China prepared itself to truly join the Internet.

With encouragement from the Chinese government, knowledge and

understanding of international computer networking was spreading in China, especially in the scientific and computer communities. The Institute for High Energy Physics (IHEP) belonging to the Chinese Academy of Sciences opened an e-mail connection in 1989 with its partner in the U.S., the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC) in California. Message Handling Systems (MHS) were set up in 1990 between the German Research Network (DFN) and the Chinese Research Network (CRN) and between the Beijing Tsinghua University Network (TUNET) and its partner in Canada at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

The e-mail and remote logon only phase of connectivity between China and the rest of the world came to an end in 1994. That is when IHEP worked together with SLAC to take the next big step in connectivity between the people of China and the people of the world. On May 17, 1994, IHEP and SLAC established a full TCP/IP connection between China and the U.S.[10] The use of the TCP/IP protocols allows data packets to take independent paths which meant the cost for e-mail could come down and file transfer (FTP) and remote logon (Telnet) would now be available. That connectivity opened the Internet to China and China to the Internet.

V. Getting the Accurate Story

After Ronda and I interviewed Professor Zorn in 2004, I took up to write an article about this history for the *Amateur Computerist*, an online news journal. My online journalism research for the article took me mostly to web sites in China. The story told there gave most credit for the China-CSNET connection to a Chinese engineer, Qian Tianbai whom Professor Zorn had hardly mentioned. Missing from the history on the websites in China that I found was any credit to Professor Wang or to the international component which Professor Zorn had stressed.

I sent e-mail to Professor Zorn asking him about the discrepancy. I also sent e-mail to Liu Zhijiang at the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) asking if there was any evidence for citing on the CNNIC website that Qian Tianbai was responsible for the first e-mail message. Professor Zorn sent me via e-mail more documents and the e-mail addresses for two Chinese scientists, Dr. Li Cheng Chiung and Ruan Ren Cheng, who had signed the first e-mail message. Dr. Li Cheng Chiung was

the Director of the ICA from 1980 to 1990. A copy of the first e-mail message was online. I saw that Qian Tianbai's name was not among the 13 signatures.

The two Chinese scientists answered with more information about the September 1987 e-mail message and about Qian Tianbai. Particularly they both answered that Qian Tianbai was not in China at the time of the opening of the link in 1987 and that Qian Tianbai had not participated in this project. I found no evidence otherwise.

Through further digging and via e-mail correspondence with Dr. Li Cheng Chiung and Ruan Ren Cheng, I was able to confirm to my satisfaction Professor Zorn's story of the events.

VI. Spreading the Accurate Story

I wrote my article[11] and it was published in the *Amateur Computerist* giving justified credit to Professors Wang and Zorn and their teams and to Lawrence Landweber of the CSNET and Stephen Wolff. My article appeared online and I sent copies to CNNIC and other contacts I had made in China. Encouraged by my journalism, Professor Zorn intensified his efforts to get the story corrected in China.

A bit later Professor Zorn was invited by Ronda to tell the story at a panel planned in conjunction with the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) for Nov 2005 in Tunis in North Africa. In Tunis, Professor Zorn presented his story of the international effort and collaboration especially between himself and his team in Germany and Professor Wang and Dr. Li and the team in Beijing. Professor Zorn put up many slides showing the Chinese and German teams during the period and he put up one slide which said:

> The official timelines contain some seriously mistaken information and are also omitting important facts. They cause hereby fatal misinformation meanwhile spread all over the world.

In the audience in Tunis was Madam Hu Qiheng, Vice President, China Association for Science & Technology, and Chair of Internet Society of China. Mme Hu rose and spoke of her friendship with Qian Tianbai but said she would investigate why the story told in China differed from the one Professor Zorn told. I gave her a copy of my article and

Professor Zorn gave her copies of some of the documents he had given me.

VII. The CNNIC Internet Time Line Gets Corrected

Just before the Tunis event, Professor Zorn had sent documents to CNNIC supporting the roles of Professor Wang and the ICA team and of the Karlsruhe team. Also, Nanjun Li one of Professor Zorn's PhD students made contact with Wang Enhai Director of the Information Service Department at CNNIC to help it investigate the discrepancy between the CNNIC Internet Time Line and Professor Zorn's documents. When Mme Hu returned to China from Tunis she asked CNNIC to investigate the 1987 e-mail message. As the editor of the CNNIC Internet Time Line, Wang Enhai took the task. He was assisted by Chen Jiangong.[12] During the investigation different experts and participants in the events gave different stories. Min Dahong of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences helped explain publicly the controversies that CNNIC had to investigate.[13]

The Internet Time Line Committee of CNNIC[14] met in March 2007 and decided, based on all the evidence, that entries on the official CNNIC website Internet Time Line should be changed to give proper credit to the work of Professors Zorn and Wang, their teams and the international effort that made the first e-mail link between China and the world via CSNET possible. It had taken 18 months. The first entry of the CNNIC Internet Time Line was changed in May 2007 to read:

> In September 1987, with the support from a scientific research group led by Professor Werner Zorn of Karlsruhe University in Germany, a working group led by Professor Wang Yunfeng and Doctor Li Chengjiong built up an email node in ICA, and successfully sent out an email to Germany on Sep 20. The email title was "Across the Great Wall we can reach every corner in the world."

VIII. Celebrating the International Collaboration

In spring 2007, Professor Zorn was organizing a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the success of the opening of the China-CSNET link for September 2007 in Potsdam Germany. He was overjoyed by the news

he was receiving that Professor Wang and Dr. Li and himself and the ICA and Karlsruhe teams were being recognized in China for their hard work in setting up the China-Germany CSNET link. He invited to Potsdam many of the international pioneers who helped spread the Internet. And he invited Mme Hu because the accurate story about that link was now spreading in China. For me, the celebration was for both the success of the e-mail link and the success of helping correct how the history was being told. At the celebration, Mme Hu representing the Internet community in China presented a souvenir from China to Werner Zorn, Lawrence Landweber and Stephen Wolff as representatives of the international Internet pioneers. In her presentation she emphasized what Professor Zorn had always stressed:

> The international collaboration in science and technology is the driving force for computer networking across the country borders and facilitating the early Internet development in China.[15]

But this is not the end of the story.

In late 2008, the Internet Society of China asked online users in China what date would they chose for a National Net Citizens (Netizens) Cultural Festival? It is reported that about 500,000 users voted. The largest number of those voting chose September 14. That is the day in 1987 when the first message to be sent on the China-CSNET link was composed. When the Internet Society of China organized the first-in-the-world Net Citizens (Netizens) Cultural Festival Day, it invited Professor Zorn. It also invited Ronda Hauben and me for our work about netizenship and about the international collaboration that made the Internet possible.

The first Netizens Cultural Festival Day was held September 14, 2009 in Beijing at the CCTV Tower. It was a lively event with speeches and awards for some bloggers. An oral history panel was held discussing some of the problems of opening an Internet link to China in 1994 so the Chinese people could have full Internet connectivity. This first net citizens' day was not yet well known among the public or even among the then 350 million net users. It was like a baby being born, small but of a big potential.

Instead of seeing that potential, a *Wall Street Journal* blog post framed the event as an "official day" that "didn't seem to muster much

enthusiasm."[16] But the *Wall Street Journal* was not the only media covering the events. About 40 online media journalists attended and reported on the celebration. They did live online blogging of the event and put up text, photo and video reports so that online users could see and judge the event for themselves.[17]

On the oral history panel at the CCTV Tower, Qian Hualin, Chief Scientist and Vice President of the Internet Society of China informed the audience that:

> Just as Germany was helpful with China establishing an e-mail link with the CSNET in 1987, today China is offering its experience to Vietnam in network construction and to the DPRK in setting up and managing the domain name system of dot KP.

With this statement, Qian Hualin showed that the international collaboration that characterizes the Internet continues.

IX. Summary

From 1983-1987, despite the Cold War, computer scientists in China and West Germany were able to collaborate to build up a link between China and the international CSNET e-mail network. They had support from the international computer networking community to transcend national borders, ideological differences, and political restrictions. After a false start, the history of this international collaboration is known and respected in China. With such collaborations and efforts to spread accurate stories, the Internet will continue to develop and bring the people of the world closer together.

Epilogue

In a talk she gave in Potsdam in 2007, Madame Hu described how the final step for China's connection to the Internet came about. See: ACN Vol. 16 No. 2, page 15. https://www.ais .org/~jrh/acn/ACn16-2pdf

It was in early April of 1994, all the needed technology was functioning, "Just the gate is still closed somehow." Madame Hu remembered. She was in Washington, DC as a member of the China delegation attending the U.S.-China Combined Committee Meeting on the collaboration in Science and Technology between the two countries.

"I remember very clearly when I came up to Dr. Neal Lane, the NSF Director at

that time, to ask for help," she explains, "Dr. Neal Lane immediately made a chance for me to talk with Stephen Wolff. Stephen just told me, 'Don't worry. No problem. You will be connected to the Internet.' I was not very sure about that. I asked him, is it that simple? He said yes it is simple. No contract, no signing, no document. The only document we had before that was the AUP (Accepted Use Policy). And then after a few days I got the news from my colleagues in China that the connection is done. It goes through smoothly. Everything is OK. Then I thought, 'Oh, Stephen Wolff is really great!' This man had a magic stick. The magic stick pointed and the gate opened. Is it that simple? I guess it is."

Notes

1. See for example, "Part II The Past: Where it has Come From" in Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben, *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, IEEE Computer Society Press, Los Alamitos, CA., 1997. There is an online version of the book at http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/netbook/.

2. See Cindy Zheng, "Current Computing/Networking Status in China," *China News Digest*, Special Issue on Networking in China, July 11, 1993, http://www.sdsc.edu/~zhengc/93trip.html. (No longer available.)

3. COCOM, the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls, was established during the Cold War to put an embargo on Western exports to East Bloc countries. It established multilateral export controls for strategic and military goods/materiel and technologies to proscribed destinations.

4. CASCO – Chinesische Anwender von Siemens Computern.

5. The CSNET was the result of a proposal in 1979 submitted to the U.S. NSF by Lawrence Landweber to make computer network connections among U.S. and other university computer science departments. It started as a simple telephone-based e-mail relay network which became known as PhoneNet. By 1984, computer science departments outside of the U.S. began to connect. Canada, Israel, Germany and France had early connections, soon followed by South Korea, Australia and Japan.

6. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/X.25

7. Wang Enhai tells this story at http://tech.sina.com.cn/i/2008-11-06/09452560594.shtml. (in Chinese)

8. See, "Panel Discussion: The Road to the First E-mail," *The Amateur Computerist*, Vol. 16 No. 2, Summer 2008, p. 5. Available online at: http://www.ais.org/~jrh/acn/ACn16-2.pdf.

9. For computer networking activity, ICA was financially better off than were the Chinese universities. ICA was funded by the Ministry of Machinery and Electronics Industry. The universities were funded by the Ministry of Education which could not distribute as much money to each university as ICA received.

10. http://www.nsrc.org/db/lookup/operation=lookup-report/ID= 890202373777:497422478/fromPage=CN (No longer available.)

11. "'Across the Great Wall': The China-Germany Email Connection 1987-1994." See: http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben /china-e-mail.doc.

12. E-mail message from Wang Enhai to the author, August 27, 2008. Wang Enhai gave an interview in 2008 to SINA which details the method and results of this investigation. It is online at: http://tech.sina.com.cn/i/2008-11-06/09452560595.shtml. (in Chinese).

13. See for example, Min Dahong, "China's first e-mail exactly who and when issued," Xinhuanet, Nov 22, 2006.

14. The Committee had been established in 2002. Its members were experts from governments, research institutes, newspaper agencies, Internet companies, universities, and retired Internet contributors. In 2007 Min Dahong was on the Committee.

15. See "Cordial Thanks to Our Friends," *The Amateur Computerist*, Vol. 16 No. 2, Summer 2008, pp. 13-14. Online at: http://www.ais.org/~jrh/acn/ACn16-2.pdf.

16. "China's Netizens Day Gets Scant Attention" by Juliet Ye. See: http://blogs.wsj.com/digits/2009/09/15/chinas-netizens-day-gets-scant-attention/tab/article/. (Access restricted.)

17. See for example, the video at: http://my.tv.sohu.com/u/vw /21977107, or https://tv.sohu.com/v/dXMvNjMzMTc0MDQvMjE 5NzcxMDcuc2h0bWw=.html.

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* This article is a slightly revised version of a presentation made at the Institute for the History of Natural Sciences, Chinese Academy of Sciences, in Beijing, July 10, 2012. The presentation was accompanied by a slideshow which is online at: http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/beijing2012/j-china2012-email-link-slides.ppt. Part of this presentation was given at the International Conference on Media Education and Global Agendas, Southwest University of Political Science and Law, Chongqing, China, January 12-13, 2010. There is a version of this article in Chinese in *Science & Culture Review*, Vol. 10 No. 1, February 2013, pp. 81-89, published by the Institute for the History of Natural Sciences, CAS.

**The RMB (Renmibi, currency symbol is CN¥) is the official currency of China.