

Politics of the Internet in the People's Republic of China: Unveiling users' experiences



Fabio Calzolari

Abstract:- *The work explores internet governance in China, via a review of the most recent literature, and through a sociological analysis of users' narratives. For this investigation, relevant scholarships were retrieved from Google Scholar (GS). The criteria for inclusion encompassed articles, conferences' proceedings, and books' chapters. To disclose subjective experiences, 12 Chinese nationals studying in 3 Thai universities were interviewed in depth. All members of the cohort had English language competence, but they were heterogenous in terms of background. The interviews were semi-structured, and they occurred at places selected by the target population. Due to privacy concerns, names were modified in reports. Findings suggest that attitudes towards information technology (IT), are controversial. On the one hand, interviewees recognize the cyberspace as a vector of growth, and freedom. On the other hand, they evaluate possible risks that may threaten stability. Suggested recommendations are the promotion of adequate administrative protection of citizens' interests against arbitrary executive power, and the creation of anonymous fora for policy dialogue on issues of Internet governance.*

Index Terms: China, Internet, Modernity, Users' experiences

I. INTRODUCTION

With the birth of the internet, there has been a talk about how physical space became meaningless, and national boundaries blurred. But the initial predictions were built on wrong assumptions about technology. The myth was that the cyberspace brings freedom, and, ultimately, democracy. This certainty surfaced for long in the vast bulk of sociological literature. As for its direct consequences, it clouded the view of the future. There are, to be sure, other ways of looking at the world but this particular caveat has been crucial in one specific region: East-Asia. Those familiar with historical records are aware that the People's Republic of China (PRC) achieved online connectivity in 1994, and after a bit more than a decennium, the number of users was in the order of hundredth of millions. In both work and leisure, netizens became dependent on the cyberspace. Observers agreed that it contributed to a large-scale transformation of personhood. Yet, the paradigm-shift permitted also the harvesting of users' metadata, by state actors, and their proxies. Thus, the encroachment of the 'Net' came at the expense of privacy. Because, information can be exploited in a variety of ways, from behavioral

pattering, to GPS localization, the individual was placed beneath an (asymmetrical) electronic gaze. In this scenario, the constant feeling of surveillance calls to mind Panopticism – a theory named after a 'mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example' [1 p. 29]. The Panopticon, refers to an 18th century facility where the in-habitants are spied upon by an invisible omnipresence. In the specific context, the architectural innovation ensured uncertainty as a mean to submission. The theory underpinning panoptical control was humanitarian, and thought to achieve the greatest happiness by balancing discipline with punishment. Although, this idea never realized, its resemblance with modern administrative techniques is unequivocal. Of course, China is not the first (nor it will be the last) to implement a legacy of unobserved inspection but, —for several reasons discussed below— it *allegedly* takes it to extremes. Furthermore, even before the digital age, it sustained disciplinary institutions with laboratories of poverty eradication, and technologies of the self. It is argued here that, during the Mao era, China' ambitious plans for the peasantry had setting the description of which as 'panoptic' is even more evident than was the case with respect to European societies during the epoch of Enlightenment. Drawing on the afore-cited, the following essay discusses China's internet vision. However, the question that it is asked is not if it projects Beijing as a champion of the cyberspace, rather how its citizens evaluates, accepts, or challenges digital policies. And the deeper question is whether juridical techniques for the normalization of on-line behavior should be tolerated. Finally, the author thinks that is useful to set up a dialogue with regards to subjective perspectives, so that people can address changes that happen in their lives.

A. Liberal Democracy v People Democratic Dictatorship

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR) on December 25, 1991, democracy, and liberalism have been deemed optimal political arrangements. As to what they are, there are discordant hypotheses. In the classic model, democracy refers to a system in which human rights (HR) are protected, leaders are held accountable, and the rule of law is praised. Put differently, no segment of social, and economic life is excluded from public control [2]. In parallel, liberalism points to a doctrine stressing the value of individual independence. Cranston suggested that, a liberal is a man who believes in liberty [3]. Nowadays, in the official jargon, the two terms are aligned in the formula 'liberal democracy' (often with capital letters). China,

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* Correspondence Author (s)

Fabio Calzolari, School of Social Innovation, Mae Fah Luang University (MFU), 333 Moo 1, Tha Suea Muang Amphoe Mueang Chiang Rai, Chang Wat Chiang Rai 57100, Thailand.

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despite an opening toward foreign economies in mid-1977, did not accept the rationale but offered instead a corpus of knowledge linked in ‘a circular relation to systems of power which produce it and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which redirect it’ [4 p. 112]. Through the lens of postmaterialist theory, it can be recognized that the situation is due to a society more attracted to economic performance than participation rights or liberty. Perhaps, the situation is more complex. Confucianism – an ethic focused on meritocracy, and stability, might have played a role in obstructing the rise of alternative ideologies [5]. What is certain is that Chinese political skeleton was described by Mao Zedong, as a ‘People Democratic Dictatorship’ (PDD). To cite Bracher [6], it is ‘a model of centralized, uniform control of all provinces of political, social and intellectual life’ [p. 11]. It advocates, at the maximum of the spectrum, the suspension of civil society, and at the minimum, the weakening of dissident voices. When comparing PDD to other frameworks, one must remain attentive to its unique multi-level structure: a totalitarian apparatus at the macro level, a set of democratizing practices at the micro level; market driven individualism at the economic level; and a hybridization of different philosophies at the cultural level [7]. On top of that, despite Western doubts about PDD leadership, international polls suggest that most locals approve it. Under this light, if for legitimacy, we consider a government ‘treated by its citizens as rightfully holding and exercising political power’ [8 p. 500], the Chinese one must be held as such. In the conventional fashion, this has been largely ignored by Western media that far from defusing political tension, have instead sharpened it.

B. The Golden Dragon

At the turn of the 21st century, the global political pendulum swinging to East. The occurrence was caused by the massive growth of Chinese economy, and the consequential expansion of national GDP. More importantly, the phenomenon was telling evidence of the indigenous ability in trade, and political negotiations. Given such progress, one might think that the country would eventually become a new hegemon. And there is a very sensible reason for that. It is rapidly displacing the influence of the USA. And, the East-Asia region is becoming China-centric, in a process that is likely to be irresistible. Nonetheless, for better or worse, the increasing complexity of the world has also impacted its rise. Societies have evolved, and so have their problems. In terms of public administration, digital devices, have challenged communication patterns, borders, and monopolies. Sketched out in broad outlines, myopic focuses on national units of analysis are now obsolete, and they obstacle socio-economic development, due to the oversize gaps between project design and on-the-ground reality. There are other issues. In China, beginning around the '90s, the “Me” culture concerned with identity exhibition, the individualization of social structures, and the increasing abundance of choices in the cyberspace, opened the door to new demands. There are remedies, but their advocates, are at the fringe of the polity. Though perhaps not for long.

C. The Manufacturing of Consent

Herman, and Chomsky [9], explained that public conscience can be shaped through communication techniques. These consist of (a) the restriction of the gamut of acceptable opinion, and, once it is obtained, (b) the permission of discussions within it. The propaganda model (PM) functions because knowledgeable reality is filtered by segments of the population that are dominant. In parallel, only discursive information that support regimes of truth, are introjected by the masses, by means of social pression, and/or collective routines. The latter point is quite significant. And there have been good scholarships that ought to be read, by Miller [10], and Aldrich et al. [11].

D. The Internet

In China, and elsewhere, the penetration of the Internet impacted all human activities. From climate-smart agriculture to disaster management tools, examples are many and rather famous. Its rapid expansion brought e-commerce, distance education, and on-line medical treatment. Moreover, it transformed civil society, by producing novel organizational skills [12]. According to Hacker, and Van Dijk [13], the Internet converted people into narrators, and broadcasters. Recent works revealed that it provided dialogue-oriented spheres [14], enlarged civic culture [15], reinvented genders [16], and reshaped democracy [17]. Today we are witnessing a communicative liquefaction of politics [18], which seems to be a consequence of a turn towards an information economy [19], and information networks [20].

E. The Cyber Security Law

The Cyber Security Law (CSL) is a regulation with directives that enhances awareness, and protection from cyber-threats. It went into effect on June 1, 2017, and it marked a fundamental milestone in Chinese legal strata [21]. Consisting of 7 chapters, and 79 articles, the CSL granted the state control over the ‘content’ and the ‘type’ of on-line traffic. Failure to comply with its requirements can result in hefty fines, suspension of business activities, and/or prison sentences. International NGOs, and think-tanks claimed that the CSL is a repressive measure. And on a closely related matter, they zeroed in on it as too broad in scope. The source of the instruction is the criminalization of all activities that are against national security. However, there is no accepted definition of what constitutes a menace. Per contra, proponents maintain that it is the vagueness of CSL itself that consents an effective protection of critical infrastructures.

F. The Great Firewall

The Great Firewall of China (GFW), is a security system covering the country’s mainland (it is not in effect in special administrative regions like Hong Kong, and Macau). On-line connections are possible via eight service providers (ISPs) that are managed, and authorized by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT). The GFW employs five methods: (a) IP address blocking; (b) DNS hijacking; (c) Manual or AI censoring; (d) URL filtering;

and, recently (e) VPN blocking. From the technical side of things, it can be said that it is porous, and that occasionally fails, allowing netizens to reach blacklisted servers [22]. As the gatekeeper of the cyberspace, it acts ‘not as a ban but as a tax on information, forcing users to pay money or spend more time if they want to access the censored material’ [23 p. 2]. But something else appeared. Since GFW is known to have liabilities, the state, and private businesses enhance its effectiveness with a sophisticate PM. And this far more radical factor that deserves attention.

G. The Social Credit System

Unveiled in 2014, the Social Credit Score System (SCS) is a reputational risk management program that rates trustworthiness of individuals, institutions, and enterprises, in complying with national jurisprudence, and ethic [24]. Basically, negative evaluations (e.g. due to the spreading of “fake news”) can bar someone from leaving the country, whilst positive ones (e.g. stemming from donation to charity) can bring better job or educational opportunities. Through persuasion, and coercion SCS nudge the collective Self toward legitimated behavior. For Kostka [25] it has received a certain degree of approval across politically literate urban residents who have found in SCS an incentive for the advancement of personal integrity. But one comparable example comes to mind: digital flash mobbing on platforms like Facebook.

H. Sina-Weibo

The impact of the Internet on Chinese society is noteworthy, because it offers opportunities that are simply unfathomable in other media outlets [26]. But what exactly makes this statement true? Up until a few years ago, it played a minor role in governance, campaigns, and activism. Yet, dramatic metamorphoses in individual subjective well-being (SWB), pushed citizens to turn their attention to the cyberspace as its de-centralized nature made cooptation, and suppression difficult. There is growing recognition that Sina Weibo – the local micro-blogging version of Twitter [27] - is an arena where civil society got more independence, and where in-group/out-group affiliations are reinforced. In its ecosystem, communication is made of small messages, public by default, and topically heterogeneous [28]. Due to its perceived accessibility, millions of blogs are spotted every-day. As reflected in the complex links between the state and novel associations, there is another reason: Weibo fosters the exchange of politically sensible material [29]. And, an even more fascinating consideration is that, for a vast audience, it is a valve for the externalization of grievance. Of course, there is a flip side to all this: the array of remote hardware, and software that aids the citizenry, facilitates the identification dissidents [30]. From that, it derives that Social Network Services (SNS) lie in the intersection between juridico-institutional, and grassroots model of power. There is, similarly, a degree of elision, and apparent paradox in the figure of fundamental rights.

I. The Micro-Blogosphere

In his illuminating and judicious scholarly study of democracy, Habermas coined the term ‘public sphere’ to delineate ‘a space made up of private people gathered together as a community, and articulating the needs of

society with the state’ [31 p.176]. In European history, these collectives of speakers, and listeners transformed governance within institutions and in-between them. A similar point of view is discernable in Arendt writings, when she stressed that ‘societies indicate an alliance between people for a specific purpose, as and when men organize to rule others or to commit a crime’ [32 p. 24]. Granted that their philosophies are rooted in a Judeo-Christian humus, some similarities can be spotted in China. Specifically, internet-based technologies have enabled open conversations. Indeed, of all the areas where the relationship between state and society is troubled, the information highway has been the most contentious [33]. By ways of illustration, micro-blogging platforms, transformed how people relate to themselves. The online protests over the highspeed bullet train crash in July 2011 exemplifies it. On a strictly related matter, even if many of the initial hopes for (e-) liberal democracy have gone unfulfilled, popular resistance is vibrant, and it is making a difference.

J. Personal Narratives

Biographies are stories, either written or spoken, that provide an account of events from the perspective of the narrators. While self-referential discourses have some facets of artificiality (e.g. authors decide the density of language), they are not fictions. And, the fact that first-person stories are less accurate than non-narrative statements, should not cause their a-priori dismissal [34].

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In this research, the main framework for observations, and facts is guided by the ‘norm theory’ which establishes a link between human agency, customs, and ground rules [35]. For Svensson [36], norms have 3 attributes: the ought-dimension (imperatives), the is-dimension, (social facts), and the psychological-dimension (believes). The ‘ought’ and ‘is’ facets are intended practices, and (their) factual implementations. The last set of premises imply that norms are convictions ‘in the form of the individual’s understanding of the surrounding expectations regarding his or her own behavior’ [37 p. 266]. Importantly, even when someone’s choices are not fully independent, the extent to which they are shaped by external factors is not limitless. Because people can assess options, and determine which best satisfy their goals. For instance, judgements make some norms more resilient, and others more difficult to endorse. The conflation of subjective will, and norms produces spurious results.

For some time now, in the context of social media, it has been hypnotized that people are submitted themselves to voluntary servitude. In this atmosphere, academics started viewing the traditional concept of vertical surveillance as inadequate. The (autonomous) digital configuration of the Self - as a reversed Panopticon – produces data that can be storage, and sold. From a Foucauldian perspective, platforms like Facebook, Instagram or Weibo, incite people to disclose their thoughts as a tradeoff for benefits they

receive. Thus, reality is profoundly dialogical: one confesses to an Otherness that cannot be grasped. It also comes into sight that state sovereignty cannot be a matter of a single actor (being it a King, a prime minister or a president) but a network of independent agents in which one occupies a dominant position. On closer inspection, the power of the ruler is dependent on the will of the masses. People themselves accept submission. But this cannot be simply attribute to cowardice, not constriction. For the 'System Justification Theory', hierarchy in a group is maintained by favoritism, and the complicity of subordinate members. Paradoxically, social arrangements are legitimized, and defended by those who suffer. Yet, they could decide any time to break free if they chose to. In the end, emancipation is an act of self-realization (political servitude is linked to the constitution of subjectivity), and abstention from practices that re-produce oppression, being it off-line or on-line.

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UD) on 10 December 1948, there has been a chasm between what are counted as civil and political rights and what are deemed economic, cultural and social rights. It was this (ideological) fracture that prevented their inclusion in the same covenant. Though there are some slight theoretical differences across countries, the main argument is centered on the idea of liberty (negative v positive). While in one group, liberty is value-neutral, in the other, it is value-driven/instrumental (because it is conceived as a tool for the well-being of a community). And the same holds true for the UN-sponsored 'right of a person to decent living conditions for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services'. Not to value liberty as an end in itself, does not negate its pivotal position in a civilized society. It is rather to indicate that, like any other elements of organized life, it has advantages, and disadvantages; and if the demos is truly concerned with the common good, they should be balanced carefully. And this is the understandable perception across most of East-Asia. There are actually scholarly studies on this but they are often under-reported in the Western press.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

At the outset, to determine the current state of knowledge, the author conducted a literature review (LR). This was done by (a) condensing raw data in meaning units (b) defining, and supporting links between objectives-summary findings, and (c) progressing to generalizations/theories. Articles, conferences' proceedings, and books' chapters were retrieved via Google Scholar (GS). Because of its broad range, GS sustained meta-analytical thinking. Since it is a free web-based engine it did not weight on the budget. To formulate effective queries, the author worked on a list of keywords, paired with Boolean operators. For example, (some of) the strings were << (China OR People's Republic of China OR PRC) AND (online sovereignty OR internet control OR online ruling)>>, or << (China OR People's Republic of China OR PRC) AND (Weibo, OR micro-blogging, OR micro-blogsphere) >>. Once downloaded, the material was stored in Google Drive, filtered, and organized (e.g. key authors, and topics). In the work-field, the author utilized semi-structured interviews (SSI) to let

participants speak about themselves without being afraid of committing mistakes. Besides, SSI strengthened cross-comparison of dominant representations with actual experiences. Prompting, and probing were deployed to assure an lv of standardization, end to extend discussions. All conversations were audio-taped, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed via thematic content analysis (TCA).

A. Research Questions

As the methodological point of departure of the survey, the research questions (RQ) were: How can we explain Chinese computer-mediated communication (CMC)? And, how do Chinese students make sense of the expansion of state power into their life?

B. Sampling

To form the cohort, the author adopted digital advertisements on social networks (e.g. Facebook), and chain-referral/snowball sampling, across stakeholders. The goal was to survey 10-15 students from 3 Thai universities. For this sample, eligibility criteria were: (a) Chinese nationality, (b) Medium-to-high proficiency in English; (c) Enrollment in a Thai Bachelor's degree or in a Sino-Thai cultural exchange program. (d) Basic internet proficiency (e.g. Web-browsing). And (e) Legal adulthood. All candidates contacted the author, or were contacted by him, through email and/or FB Messenger. Among the persons who did not take part in the project, there were 5 persons who first applied but later declined involvement. At the end, 12 were registered. Informed written consent – a prerequisite for a subject's participation - was obtained before commencing SSI. As maintained by Guest et al. [38], to have < 20 informants guarantee a frank exchange, and avoid the saturation of knowledge (in homogenous groups). Likewise, Saunders, [39] advocates for 5 – 25. Interviews were conducted in public spaces (inside or outside campuses) most convenient to the students. To let respondents, tell their own story on their own terms, the meetings had a (mean) length of circa 50 minutes. Real names, places of origin, and of study were removed from transcripts, while genders were altered (to prevent deductive disclosure). Digital records were secured off-line (no Cloud/Google Drive) in a password-protected memory stick that was placed inside the author's office in Mae Fah Luang University. To validate, and confirm texts, electronic copies were sent via e-mail to each respondent. Paper records when present (e.g. post-interviews notes) were later shredded. To avoid bias, no monetary incentives was provided.

C. Data Analysis

To bring order to the mass of collected information, the author employed thematic content analysis (TCA). The first step was that of familiarization with the data. In this phase, all documents were read, indexed, and entered in Nvivo (Microsoft version), a qualitative data analysis software (QDAS). Then, words, and/or expressions that captured something interesting about RQs were highlighted. The author used open-coding, which means that there was not a

pre-established operational background. The search of commonalities across, and within transcripts helped organize codes, and collate them into (macro) themes. Because, they had to be coherent, and distinct from each other, supporting information were continuously reviewed. A thematic map was also construed to summarize broader patterns of meanings. Lastly, analytical narrative, and data segments were summarized in a report that, consequentially, was compared with previous literature.

D. Comparison of Previous Literature

Surveillance, censorship, and propaganda are being increasingly utilized in the majority of countries, to direct size, nature and structure of information. The only difference is the degree. The GFW (China), and “Snowden” leaks (USA) have brought warranted attention to the all-seeing eye of the state. Restrictions have been primarily implemented through regulatory means. In the telecommunication industry, there have been other less obvious strategies such as the withholding of (objectionable) documents, and the nourishment of a public self-censorship orientation. There is, however, considerable overlap between the activities. Given these precedents, it is understandable that the chasm between sympathizers, and opponents on these matters reflected different position on human rights (HR). All of this has been explored in depth by Western, and Asian scientists, throughout the course of the last decade. Amid calls to address the polarized climate, although China has been often criticized by overseas observers, it can be affirmed that by concentrating in poverty reduction, it lifted from abject living conditions millions of people since the 1980s. This is a point of overwhelming significance.

E. Strengths, and limitations

This contribution inspects the nexus Chinese citizens-*digital un-freedom*, on a qualitative design. Because of that, in relation to knowledge claims, broad inferences are problematic. Moreover, bias could have been introduced by an unconscious tendency from the interviewee’s side to present data in a way that is in line with personal commitments. Yet, the analysis of some aspects of Internet-related experiences reaches scientific standards, and careful attention was paid to the explanation of subjective perception, and the contextual parameters that impact liberty.

IV. RESULTS

Chinese socio-economic key-factors are products of the market opening of 1978 (that ignited a ‘locally-made’ individualism), and the cultural closing of 1989 (that re-affirmed hierarchical structures). Whereas much of international scholarships explained that once a country becomes wealthy, the rise of liberal democracy is inevitable, in China, if anything, we witnessed its demise. This is not necessarily wrong. And, to a certain degree, if PDD manages to reduce social stresses, and maintain economic stability, it could offer a viable option for emerging countries. In fact, it is possible that the Beijing Consensus will replace the Washington Consensus. However, authoritarianism has its own drawbacks. The Internet is

afflicted by cyclical expurgation of written and pictorial material (e.g. films, speech, art, and etcetera). Meanwhile, government intervention in business strengthen elites’ resources. But there is a common strategic concern underlying it: preventing chaos. On the topic it’s worth bearing in mind that students had discordant views. Concerns have been expressed on various topics including but not limited to books, religious belief, and public expression of displeasure. It was also noticed that slowdowns on information sharing could break down indigenous innovation. While some of them accepted the status quo, others looked for a different equilibrium. Or, as they said, for a better trade off. A noteworthy conclusion was that the suppression of civil rights (if needed) must be temporary. Regarding the social credit system (SCS), the cohort was split between a majority who saw in it a defense against illicit trades, and a minority who was alarmed by its biases. In developing this point further, a few argued that the ranking is in-fieri ethically wrong, and that it should be abandoned.

V. DISCUSSION

In China there is a strong statal stewardship on human capital management. This system, ‘expressed in regulatory praxes, occurring at more than one place and at more than one-time, de-constructs and builds opinions, ideas, and perceptions’ [40 p. 127]. Tales of crackdowns are common but, while there is an appetite for rights, not everybody looks for an immediate opening. As Tom reported:

“We have a strong economic and because of that we have a good life. I and my friends have no big problems. On-line security is there to protect us. If you do not break the law you have nothing to worry”

Contrary to expectations, respondents’ stories challenge (Western) mainstream conjectures on perception, preparedness, and desire for a big leap (under the aegis of a more flexible political doctrine at home, and abroad). Of course, discordant voices were also present. A case in point is Julia who asserted that:

“I need more opportunities to express myself. Maybe it is just me, maybe I am different.”

Though it is only a small sentence in a speech, the case is nonetheless highly instructive. One aspect is the reaction when someone cannot fulfilled his or her expectations. Another girl, Lin called attention to the same friction, and the emotional association it has:

“I know that censorship is useful but I do not really like it. When I finish here (in Thailand), I will go to Australia, to stay with the one I love.”

All participants recognized the possibility of state-driven micro- and macro- data manipulation. At the grass-roots level, they confessed to benefit from private network services (VPNs) and/or encryption tools (ETs). Thus, it is revealing to look at the attitude of John:

“I like readings news in English but many foreign websites are blocked. To access Facebook, I must have a (private) VPN.”

Though there is a gray area as to whether VPNs are legally tolerated, they offer smooth on-line experiences, and anonymity. About their accrued benefit, Larsson et al [41]. indicates that cryptography is a 'double-edged sword, working to de-identify whichever master it serves' [p.80]. China's plan to rank all its citizen, and its reconfiguration of self-centered values, was largely welcomed. Eight students insisted that SCS scoring "is effective because it establishes rules across people" (Zen), and it "promotes trust" (Maria). Five recognized also that "its efficacy is based on shame" (Tom). For three, the scheme blew open the long-simmering question of what a government can do to its own citizen. Most respondents were skeptical about the idea of liberal democracy, and how it is defended in the West. To take the last point first, the USA were accused (by Zen) of "preaching well but scratching evil". For the students, judgments over PDD are biased. In general, they realized that those who criticize China committed violations without facing consequences, and with extraordinary advantages not approached anywhere. Hence, one can infer, - as it happened - a certain level of hypocrisy behind (Western) pronouncements of outrage. Chinese bio-politics, and the broadening of government powers in response to putative threats, were generally justified. This is not to say that power-dynamics were not questioned or, in a few occasions, even re-negotiated but that a certain vertical axis was reckoned among the necessary conditions for the well-being of the nation. The discussion about what constitutes sovereignty, and how the concepts can co-exist with HR in the cybers-space begun and ended with the respondents affirming that domestic surveillance programs cannot be avoided. Granted that, to strike the right balance among competing interests -as they specified- steps should be taken to make the echelons of politics themselves more open to scrutiny.

VI. CONCLUSION

'Where has he acquired enough eyes to spy upon you, if you do not provide them yourselves? How can he have so many arms to beat you with, if he does not borrow them from you? The feet that trample down your cities, where does he get them if they are not your own? How does he have any power over you except through you?' [42 p. 48]

There is disagreement among students about the notion of nation-state, HR, and their inter-connectedness. In this terrain of struggle, the adoption of the internet was a paradigm-shift. Yet, as it was pointed out, regulations, propaganda, and censorship have eroded its contentious spirit. And, by a routine that is not even secret, they have targeted everyone. One standard response was that liberty can be traded with security. As it stands, this decision has been widely endorsed. Even so, a few persons have been at odd with it, and hoped for a different solution. All of this is of sociological significance, as it has been in the past with other popular struggles.

VII. RECOMMENDATION

Over the past 40 years, China's economic growth, and active diplomacy transformed East-Asia. For all of that,

such progress has never been cost-free. Since its beginning one of the main downsides has been the restriction of HR (apparently to keep the country on track). In that regards, although the author recognizes the principle of sovereign authority, two recommendations can still be offered. At things stand presently, there is the need to recognize that on-line content filtering might curb indigenous innovation, and provoke a loss of competitive edge among homegrown entrepreneurs. As the digital economy expands, future damage can even be higher. Secondly, PDD's soft power - or the ability to persuade others to get results one wants, can be ameliorated through the empowerment of civil society. When done, together with courageous, and persistent engagement, it will surely convey a message of peace to foreign communities. In a world of inter-dependence, there is a plenty of other advices as well. But these are the ones that need most attention.

VIII. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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IX. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author certifies NO conflicts of interest.

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AUTHORS PROFILE



First Author Fabio Calzolari is currently working inside Mae Fah Luang University as a lecturer in Human Rights