Author: Lokman Tsui
Affiliation: National Taiwan University / University of Leiden
Address: Marshallsingel 30, 1187 LG, Amstelveen, The Netherlands
Email: mail@lokman.nu

Internet opening up China: Fact or Fiction?

Abstract

"*Imagine if the Internet took hold in China. Imagine how freedom would spread.*"
(George W. Bush in Phoenix, Arizona during a GOP Debate, Dec 7, 1999)

It is widely presupposed that the Internet will expose China to a plethora of new media and open up China. Despite the Chinese government's attempts to censor the Internet, to what degree can and will Chinese Internet users access this new and previously unavailable media? Will China, as a result of the exposure to new information and ideas, grow towards a more Western model in terms of freedom of speech and democracy? The current developments so far seem to point out that the exact opposite is happening: nationalist sentiments are rampant online.

This paper will analyze how China, the people and its government, interacts with the Internet. We will analyze to what degree Internet users have access to unfettered information, whether they are interested and whether they are actually able to comprehend the alternative information and communication possibilities facilitated by the Internet. Lastly, drawing upon the culture shock experience as a referencing framework, it will put the rise of nationalism and the impact of the internet in a broader perspective. The conclusion is that China is currently in the midst of a culture shock and attempting to find its own unique position in the world system.

Introduction

Information technology has been a crucial factor in spurring forward the development of globalization. Globalization brings people closer together and in the process leads to reflexivity, the process of evaluating oneself as a result of exposure to elements different from oneself. The Internet, as the epitome of globalization, makes it possible to read news, participate in discussions and interact with people on and from the other side of the world, defying geographical borders and time restraints. Dialogue between people from different places, cultures and political beliefs will become ever more commonplace, and lead to new information and ideas, and new ways to evaluate oneself.

How will exposure to all this new information and ideas, brought by the Internet and globalization, affect China?

A popular belief is that the Internet is inexorably going to facilitate a free flow of information in China, breaking the age-old information monopoly of the totalitarian government. Along with the rise of a new middle-class, this should lead to the creation of a Habermasian public sphere and the inevitable democratization of China. For the longest time, China has attempted to guard and protect its borders against foreign influences and only recently in 1978 decided to "open its door" to the West. The Internet was allowed in 1987, although the Internet was and still is subject to the government's long running policy of information control. This policy is well implemented amongst all the forms of media, including cable television, radio, film and last but not least, the Internet. Information control always has been a crucial factor in maintaining a totalitarian regime and a necessary condition to uphold the Party's legitimacy. Advances in information technology seem to undermine this basic condition, with the Internet only being the latest example. The fax has likewise been credited for making the downfall of the Soviet regime possible and for playing a crucial role in the 1989 Tiananmen massacre by circumventing the traditional information channels and providing the Chinese population with a non-state sanctioned information source. If the fax can make such a difference, one wonders what will happen if the Internet in China becomes ubiquitous. An inevitable conclusion seems to be that it will prove sheer impossible to censor the free flow of information, thus causing immense political and social changes in China; usually the word democracy is not far away.

But will it? There are a few oversights with the assumption above. The first one is to what degree the Internet actually allows for unfettered accessibility to alternative and diverse information. The assumption that Internet access equals access to all the information available on the Internet is naive. Second, even if information is accessible, it does not mean people are

interested or even able to read it. Third, one should try to avoid a deterministic or what Morley calls a hypodermic attitude, where media is considered to have certain fixed cultural effects on people, regardless of the socio-political context.[1] We will examine these three problems using China as the subject.

An often-made assumption is that having access to the Internet automatically means access to *all* the information on the Internet. This is simply not true, as companies and now governments are very capable of censoring out certain information deemed undesirable, control the information flow of the national Internet infrastructure (NII) and most importantly, even control the behavior of the online population. As I argue in my MA thesis, this control is enacted in a legal, economical, social and technical sphere, culminating in a situation that can be described by Foucault's Panopticon.[2] The Panopticon is a prison, originally invented by Jeremy Bentham and mediated by Foucault, where the prisoner is being watched by an invisible guard, inducing a constant state of surveillance. In China, laws codify this panoptic infrastructure of surveillance, stipulating that each network level is responsible for itself and the one below, resulting in a situation where each level engenders a mode of self-regulation and self-censorship. Users also keep a check on each other for behavior that is out of line: the moderators of discussion boards, tentatively named "big mamas"   .[3] Self-censorship is often much more effective than censorship from above, as the arbitrariness of the limitations often lean strongly towards a conformist attitude. [4] In addition, the private sector has all the economic incentives to keep in line with the government, as non-compliance means no business. The latest example is "The Pledge", a code based on self-regulation, which multiple companies signed.[5] Additionally, there is a big demand for software that helps to shield away, filter out, censor and block information deemed undesirable, whether it be porn in the case for companies or a *Falun Gong*   website in the case of the Chinese government. The market for this kind of filtering software continues to grow and is expected to become a billion dollar industry in 2004.[6] Although technologies exist that enable circumvention of online censorship, these all suffer from flaws that prohibit large scale usage.[7]

---

[1] David Morley and Kevin Robbins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries.* London: Routledge, 1995. pp.126-127.
[2] Tsui, Lokman, *Big Mama is Watching You: Internet Control and the Chinese Government*. University of Leiden, 2001. Unpublished MA Thesis. Available online at http://www.lokman.nu/thesis
[3] ibidem
[4] Hamelink, Cees J., *The Ethics of Cyberspace*. London: Sage Publications, 2000. p.145
[5] "China's Internet Industry Wants Self-Discipline," People's Daily (March 27, 2002) http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200203/26/eng20020326_92885.shtml
[6] Deidre Silva, "Companies Take Steps to Combat Internet Abuse," Puget Sound Business Journal (October 12, 2001) Available online at http://seattle.bizjournals.com/seattle/stories/2001/10/15/focus4.html
[7] Tsui, *Big Mama is Watching You: Internet Control and the Chinese Government*.

The second assumption is that people are interested and able to comprehend the information. Being able to access certain information does not necessarily lead to exposure or even acceptance if people are simply unwilling or lethargic. In general, one prefers reading material that reconfirms existing views and tends to avoid views that contradict existing beliefs and views, a trait psychologists call "cognitive dissonance". Kluver argues that "users are allowed to insulate themselves almost completely from anything they don't choose to see" and that this might be "a death knell for public discourse."[8] So far, it seems he has a point. According to a report from Zhu, current Internet users in China visit domestic websites 80% of their time.[9] The other 20% is split between overseas Chinese websites and English-language websites. Chinese users stick to their designated protected environment, what Hartford calls "a safe sandbox environment".[10] A good example is how Chinese users stay away from Usenet, because on the one hand Usenet is practically non-existent in China and on the other, language is also a natural barrier and used as a way of exclusion from a community, since English is the dominant language on Usenet. Chinese people, therefore, gather mainly in bulletin boards (BBS) where everything is conveniently communicated in Chinese. Mere accessibility of information, nevertheless, means nothing without taking other issues, such as diversity and quality of the information into account.

Even if people are able and willing to access information, they cannot necessarily comprehend it. English literacy is still low in China and forms an immense barrier to access content on the Internet. 78% Of content on the Internet in 2000 was in English, making it the *de facto lingua franca*.[11] This problem only covers a passive knowledge of English, which is already quite low in China. However, if more meaningful synergies are to be realized from the Internet, people need to interact and in this regard the language will form an even more immense barrier, for it requires active command of the English language.[12] A community, by its very essence defined by its exclusiveness and borders, will find easy ways to exclude members who do not fully command the English language, not only affecting Chinese or Asians but in general all non-native English speakers. An often seen apology therefore is

---

[8] Kluver, Randy, "New Media and the End of Nationalism: China and the US in a War of Words," *Mots Pluriels* (special issue: The Net: New Apprentices and Old Masters),
No 18. August 2001. Available online at http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP1801ak.html.
[9] Jonathan Zhu & Zhou He, "Information Accessibility, User Sophistication, and Source Credibility: The Impact of the Internet on Value Orientations in Mainland China," *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* Vol. 7 issue 2, 2002. Available online at
http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol7/issue2/china.html
[10] Hartford, Kate, "Cyberspace with Chinese Characteristics," *Current History* (September 2000). Available online at http://www.china-wired.com/pubs/ch/home.htm
[11] "State of the Internet 2000," *United States Internet Council & ITTA Inc.,* Available online at http://usic.wslogic.com/intro.html
[12] The other possibility of the conversation being conducted in Chinese is ignored here, since arguably only a statistically insignificant number of Western people command the Chinese language.

asking for forgiveness for the use of poor English. The situation in China is improving though, as learning English is stimulated and seen as a necessary ability to be able to compete on the world market. Still, learning English and learning through English make a big difference, and according to McConnell, only 5% of the students who enjoy post-secondary education learn *through* English.[13] It will take a long time before the level of English of a significant number of people in China will not form a barrier for intercultural interaction. Having mentioned English, the Chinese language itself is not without problems. Political borders equal linguistic borders as well, as Hong Kong and Taiwan both use a distinct set of Chinese characters (traditional) that differs fundamentally from the character set used on the Mainland (simplified). These two character sets are hardly able to co-exist.[14] Thus, users overseas wishing to communicate with the Chinese, whether on the Mainland or in Hong Kong or Taiwan need to have the proper software installed in order to be able to read or write Chinese, and again, either traditional or simplified.

Lastly, we should avoid the trap Morley describes as a hypodermic model, thus assuming that media, once a group of people is exposed to them, will cause certain fixed and predictable cultural effects, not taking socio-cultural factors in account.[15] How media exposure will affect a group of people depends on more than only the characteristics of the media itself. We will therefore take a look at the characteristics of the Internet population in Mainland China. The typical Internet user, although slowly diverging with regard to previous years, in China is still predominantly male (60%), lives in the city (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong and Jiangsu province together hold over 37% of the internet population alone), highly educated (more than 30% has a bachelor degree) and relatively young (18-24 years make up 36,2%).[16] Internet penetration, with about 33 million on a 1,2 billion population, is only about 2%, but growing each year in leaps as the Internet population increased from 22 million Internet users in January 2001 to 33 million Internet users in January 2002.[17] Keeping the hypodermic model in mind, the effects of the Chinese being exposed to the Internet is far from what was being predicted. Instead of leading to a higher degree of freedom of speech and democratization or even the demise of nationalism, the Internet quickly became a platform and facilitator for excessive nationalism. International incidents such as the riots in Indonesia

---

[13] McConnell, Grant D., "The Expansion of English as a Language of Science and Communication: East and Southeast Asia," in Ulrich Ammon (ed.), *The Dominance of English as a Language of Science: Effects on Other Languages and Language Communities*. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001. p.119.
[14] Although a technical solution is available in Unicode that supports both simplified and traditional characters, this is not broadly supported at all.
[15] Morley and Robbins, *Spaces of Identity,* pp.126-127.
[16] CNNIC, *Semiannual Survey Report on the Development of China's Internet*. Available online at http://www.cnnic.net.cn/develst/repindex-e.shtml
[17] ibidem

in 1998, the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade by the US of 1999 and the US surveillance plane incident in 2001 all led to high spirited nationalism on the Internet and as the reactions to the 9-11 incident showed, exhibited a growing resistance against 'Americanization'. The Internet, thus, is far from being a catalyst in producing an environment that encourages more freedom of speech and democracy. Considering that the current Internet population already consists of a relatively high-educated group that live in the big cities and supposedly have less cultural and language barriers to overcome, the rise of nationalism online cannot be chastised as merely non-intellectual nonsense and certainly does not leave a positive taste lingering.[18] The next section will use a model of culture shock to explain this rise and the development of nationalism as a result of exposure to new information and ideas.

Culture Shock

A person in China needs at least a sufficient level of English and technical knowledge to stay anonymous and evade censorship. He also needs adequate financial resources and should know where to look for information in order to be able to fully appreciate the Internet. How will new information and ideas, stemming from divergent cultural mindsets, affect this person? The field of intercultural communication researches exactly the impact of interaction between two distinctly different cultures. I will turn to a framework of Adler describing the "culture shock" for analysis. The culture shock model attempts to analyze the process one undergoes when exposed to a different culture. By treating the culture shock as a multi-phase process, it allows for an analysis of globalization and its impact on China in a wider context.

Adler describes culture shock as "a profound learning experience that leads to a high degree of self-awareness and personal growth. Rather than being only a disease for which adaptation is the cure, culture shock is likewise at the very heart of the cross-cultural learning experience. It is an experience in self-understanding and change."[19] Whereas sometimes globalization is seen as a form of Americanization or even colonization, drawing parallels with viewing culture shock as a disease for which adaptation is the cure, the model of Adler can provide us with insight in the impact of the Internet and the cross-cultural experiences it will bring. He sets out five stages that comprise a culture shock:

1. **contact phase** – excitement prevails and the new culture is placed in the foreground

---

[18] idem, p.61.
[19] Adler, P.S., "An Alternative View of Culture Shock," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 15(4), 1975. p.29.

2. **disintegration phase** – confrontation with cultural differences lead to alienation and depression

3. **reintegration phase** - strong rejection of the other culture leads to either further regression or a higher level of adaptation

4. **autonomy phase** – a higher understanding of the other culture and a sense of competence and autonomy is achieved

5. **independence phase** – an improved sense of cultural and self-awareness, appreciation for the other culture and the acquired ability to create a synergy by combining the distinct views of the different cultures are the characteristics of the independence phase.[20]

In China, the decade after the Open Door Policy of initial exposure corresponds exactly with the contact phase, the first phase of the culture shock model. Chinese intellectuals were favoring anti-traditionalism accompanied by a strong penchant towards Westernization. This led to the rise of the notion of a "Western learning fever"   .[21] The West itself became fetishized and Westernization became a synonym for modernization. A clear illustration of this trend was the sudden increase of translations of Western scholarly works, such as those from Popper, Weber, Sartre, Heidegger and Nietzsche, spurred by the rise of academic status one gained merely by translating a well-known Western book.[22] Chinese people were very open to Western ideas, as a nationwide survey pointed out in 1987, where 75% expressed positively to the influx of Western ideas.[23] This era is symbolized by the "River Elegy"   , a television series that portrayed a romanticized image of "the vitality of the Blue Ocean civilization of the modern West" as opposed to "the lifelessness of the backward Yellow Earth civilization of traditional China."[24] The series signified the belief that only through Westernization China could develop itself. In general, the 1980s was a typical example for the initial contact phase where excitement over the new culture prevailed.

The fetishization of the West was brought to an abrupt end by the Tiananmen massacre of 1989. A "Chinese learning fever"   gained the upper hand and a re-appreciation of the self appeared, symptomatic of the disintegration phase. The anti-traditionalist and Westernization movement of the 1980s was criticized for romanticizing the Western culture.[25] The Chinese intellectuals became increasingly disappointed and disillusioned with the West

---

[20] idem, pp.15-20.
[21] Zhao, S, "Chinese Intellectuals' Quest for National Greatness and Nationalistic Writing in the 1990s," *The China Quarterly* 152 (1997), pp.725-745.
[22] ibidem
[23] Zheng, Yongnian, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. p.50.
[24] Lin, Min, *The Search for Modernity: Chinese Intellectuals and Cultural Discourse in the Post-Mao Era.* London: MacMillan Press, 1999. p.160.
[25] Gu Xin (   ),   (The Poverty of Chinese Anti-Traditionalism). Taipei: (Fengyun Shidai Chubanshe), 1993.

and especially with the United States, blaming the Westernization movement for a decline in national identity and traditional values.[26] After the initial phase of economic growth, they felt that the United States started to fear China and were following a policy that sought to contain China because it was afraid that a strong China would upset the balance of trade and the balance of power in Asia. As China felt the West was trying to hold it back, nationalism grew strong due to a sense of indignity, developed around this belief that was referred to as the "China Threat" theory.[27]

The strong resentments shared by non-intellectuals and intellectuals alike, both offline and online, during the international incidents of the past few years seem to point out that China is currently in the reintegration phase, a crucial point that is characterized by a strong rejection of the other culture and where either regression or a further adaptation will take place.[28] The increased contact with the West caused a reversal of the tide and an anti-Westernization movement took hold, signified by the instant success of books like "China Can Say No"

, which sold more than 2 million copies in 1996.[29] Qiu states that "nationalism is the predominant theme of political discussion among Chinese netizens in both quantity and persistence."[30] This was possible due to the decline of central state power that led to the belief reinforcement of a strong state was needed to guide China through the transition of modernization. Ironically, modernization in China was coupled with de-centralization, as opposed to in the West where modernization and centralization went hand in hand. Modernization in China consists foremost of economic growth as Deng Xiaoping put "economics in command" above "politics in command".[31] In addition, the aftermath of the Cold War had a significant effect on China. The downfall of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of Eastern Europe in the 1990s convinced the Chinese intellectuals that a 'shock therapy' or 'big bang' was not applicable to China, a clear example of reflexivity at work. The Chinese were convinced that democracy and a free-market economy could not be introduced without having the proper institutions in place, otherwise changes would result in chaos as was apparent in Russia and Eastern Europe. Rather, a safe and stable authoritarian government is preferred, signifying the Hobbesian state where personal freedom is exchanged for a sense of safety and security of the greater whole.

---

[26] Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism*, p.47.
[27] idem. p.1.
[28] See for a detailed account of nationalist sentiment online after the spy plane incident in 2001, Qiu, J.L., "Chinese Opinions Collide Online," *Online Journalism Review* (April 12, 2001). Accessible online at http://www.ojr.org/ojr/technology/1017959697.php
[29] Zhao, S., "Chinese Intellectuals' Quest for National Greatness and Nationalistic Writing in the 1990s," *The China Quarterly* 152 (1997), pp.725-745.
[30] Qiu, Jack Linchuan, *Chinese Nationalism on the Net: An Odd Myth with Normalcy*. Paper presented at the NCA Annual Convention, Atlanta, November 1-4, 2001.
[31] Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism*. p.32.

The autonomy phase, characterized by a higher understanding of the other and self, is the next step for China. Whereas Eastern Europe, exposed to new ideas of a free market economy and democracy, attempted to adapt unconditionally and failed, China has been following a policy of adjusting the new ideas to fit itself, characterized by the diverse concepts "with Chinese characteristics".[32] Although this discourse can be seen in the light of legitimatising nationalism, they can also be considered as a way to find a unique path that uses Western ideas but adjusted to specific Chinese characteristics, signifying a higher level of understanding of the other and self. Historically, this is similar to what happened in the middle of the 19th century, when China was first exposed to the West and the ideal of *tiyong*

was coined as a way to harmonize the dilemma of using Western technologies but preserving a Chinese identity. *Tiyong* stands short for   ,   "Chinese learning for substance, Western learning for practical use".[33] The change in mentality and achieved personal growth is best illustrated by the popularity of the book of "A China That Can Say No"   in 1996 that was countered by "A China That Does Not Want to be a 'Mr. No'"   in 1998.[34] As Zheng states: "They are no longer fetishistic towards the West and are reluctant to accept what the outsiders tell them to do. They attempt to build a Chinese way of national building by 'selecting' different elements from various countries."[35] However, even though China might want to seek a policy poised to join instead of exclude itself from the world community, the West might not necessarily allow them to. Ang made the point that Western culture has the same rigid assumptions of cultural essentialism as Chinese culture.[36] The West, confronted with a China that seeks closer ties, is forcing China to stay "Chinese", or how the West perceives China to be.

Although the culture shock model has its limitations due to its teleological nature and the process of change rarely fits nor follows a staged process neatly, it still serves a useful purpose by offering new insights in providing a multi-phase framework and giving a sense of orientation. While people, such as Nicolas Negroponte, the director of the M.I.T. Media Lab, argue that the Internet will signify the end of nationalism because it facilitates greater mutual understanding, some China experts observe that the Internet has not erased but even facilitated a strong sense of nationalism. Both sides look at the exposure to a new culture by

---

[32] A quick search at Google for "with Chinese characteristics" turned up approximately 6000 hits (April 1, 2002).
[33] Ssu-Yu Teng and John K. Fairbank (eds), *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey 1839-1923*. New York: Atheneum, 1963 [1954], pp. 50-51, 164-166.
[34] Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China*. p.150.
[35] idem, p.154.
[36] Ang, Ien, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*. London: Routledge, 2001. p.46.

information technology as a one-end process leading to either the demise or the rise of nationalism, whereas the culture shock model provides multiple phases to this process of exposure and suggests that the current nationalism dominated discourse can be directed towards a higher level of understanding of oneself and the other.

The Internet and its Role in the Culture Shock

Globalization made its mark in China only after Deng Xiaoping initiated the Open Door policy, signifying a distinct change from the exclusion policy of the previous era. The Internet did not coincide with the opening up and made its debut relatively late in China in 1987. The Internet was initially just reserved for academic use and the first commercial network was not set up until May 1995. From then on, the development of the Internet took off, causing an increase of the Internet population in China that so far almost doubles each year, with the number currently around thirty million people. It is thus not strange, given that the Internet did not reach the mass until the late nineties, that nationalism so far is the current dominant form of political discourse to be found online. A new development the Internet has introduced is the online political mobilization in the form of hacktivism – the act of hacking out of political motives.[37] In addition, nationalist sentiments are augmented during international crises, where a lot of heated comments and replies, usually directed against the US are found on diverse Chinese BBS. This was the case on April 1, 2001, when an American surveillance plane collided with a Chinese jet fighter. Nationalist emotions ran equally high, but ironically, both confined to their own 'safe sandbox environment', where Chinese users ranted on Chinese boards and American users on American boards, rarely trespassing each other's turf with language being one of the most obvious deterrents. In a free environment, such as the Internet, where everyone has equal right of speech, the one yelling the loudest gains the most attention. Online censorship that seeks to filter out more diverse opinions in favor of the mainstream supplements and augments this effect. The Internet, therefore, has a converging effect, nullifying diversity in favor of the dominant, nationalist, view. Reassuring is the fact that specifically during international incidents where national news sources are more one-sided, the need for an alternative news source becomes stronger and causes a sudden burst of access to foreign news sources to gain a more complete view of the situation.[38] However, we

---

[37] Niall McKay, "China: The Great Firewall," *Wired* (December 1, 1998). Available online at http://www.wired.com/news/politics/0,1283,16545,00.html or more recently, see Michelle Delio, "It's (Cyber) War: China vs. US," *Wired* (April 30, 2001). Available online at http://www.wired.com/news/politics/0,1283,43437,00.html

[38] He, Z. & Zhu, J.H., "The Voice of America and China: Zeroing in on Tiananmen Square," *Journalism Monographs* 43, 1994. pp.1-45.

can conclude that thus far, the Internet has not played a significant role in facilitating a higher degree of mutual understanding between China and the West.

Further Research

Using the culture shock as a model, we can predict how a person or a group of people will respond to exposure to a new culture. It will be increasingly important to understand this process in the era of globalization. Crucial in dealing with a new culture is the reintegration phase, where it is determined whether the individual makes a further regression or adapts to a higher level of understanding. In overcoming a culture shock, a strong sense of self, curiosity, open-mindedness, communicativeness, flexibility and adaptability and tolerance for differences are all essential elements. Not much is clear yet how these elements translate to online and offline stimulants which the process of either regression or growth is dependent on; an area that warrants further research. In this paper, the fact that cyberspace is a distinct culture in its own right, is ignored as well. People going online experience the culture shock as a transitional experience not only by being confronted with 'the Other' culture, but also the culture of cyberspace itself. Furthermore, there is a glaring lack of research in the field of intercultural communication on culture shock mediated over electronic media, such as the Internet, especially in the case of China.[39] I hope to provide a first lead with this paper to instigate further research in this matter.

Globalization implies a mutual understanding. Although the question how China will undergo changes is currently the topic of this paper and prevalent in current discourse, the equally paramount question of how China will affect the rest of the world should not be forgotten. As China will continue to develop, the question of globalization and the effects on China should be reconsidered and China and its effects on globalization cannot be ignored. The role the Internet plays will be crucial as the current Internet population, despite numbering more than 30 million, has yet to reach a significant size in China. From the way the cellular phone developed and reached 100 million subscribers in China, surpassing the United States and making it the largest market base world wide, we can learn that developments can come at a blurring pace. As an illustration of things that might come, Chinese is expected to become the dominant language on the Internet in 2007, surpassing English.[40] It would not be the first time

---

[39] An exception to the case is Ringo Ma's article. See Ma, Ringo, "Computer-Mediated Conversations as a New Dimension of Intercultural Communication between East Asian and North American College Students," in Susan C. Herring (ed.), *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1996. pp.173-185.
[40] Report by the WIPO, "Multi-lingual Domain Names: Joint ITU/WIPO Symposium. Accessible online at http://ecommerce.wipo.int/domains/international/pdf/paper.pdf

Asia makes an impact on the West as in the 1980s Japan and its efficient way of doing business was a source of inspiration and many businesses underwent a process of Japanization. This also caused a shift in the discourse, where Japan was depicted as a country with people 'who stay up all night thinking about ways to screw the Americans and Europeans'.[41] Morley called this 'techno-orientalism'.[42] The West should learn its lessons and avoid the same trap in the case of China. While in times of international crisis China turns to alternative sources of news to gain a broader view of the situation, the West stick with the same news sources and do not make an effort to understand the situation from the Chinese perspective.[43] Ironically, although there is a lack of understanding from both sides, it is China who seems to be ahead of the West in terms of understanding the Other.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the limitations that prevent the Internet from making an impact in China. We have also sought to explain why the Internet did not have the results in China as predicted, but instead serves as a platform for nationalist sentiment.

The government has ample modes to prevent users from accessing the information it deems undesirable. Furthermore, an infrastructure that instills a strong sense of self-censorship is installed, obviating the need to install a policeman at every computer with Internet access.[44] Thus, merely Internet access hardly means that Internet users will be exposed to new, diverse and alternative news sources. Thereby we should also keep in mind to what degree users are willing and interested enough to access elements of a new culture, or even able to comprehend it because of a lacking command of the English language. The current state of the online political discussion is dominated by nationalist discourse, and much more easily maneuvered towards the authoritarian status quo than any democracy-related political ideology. Using the culture shock as a framework for analysis, China currently is in a reintegration phase, characterized by a nationalist sentiment and a strong denunciation of the Western culture. The decade after 1979 was a characteristic contact phase, with Westernization being a synonym for modernization. This phase ended with the Tiananmen

---

[41] Quote from former French prime minister, Edith Cresson. Quoted after Morley and Robbins, *Spaces of Identity*. p.147.
[42] ibidem
[43] Kluver, Randy, "New Media and the End of Nationalism: China and the US in a War of Words," *Mots Pluriels* (special issue: The Net: New Apprentices and Old Masters), No 18. August 2001. Accessible online at http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP1801ak.html
[44] Professor Li Xiguang of the Center for International Communication Studies at Tsinghua University deemend necessary to install a policeman at every computer with Internet access as the only way of controlling the Internet. See a transcript of his speech "The Internet's Impact on China's Press" at http://www.rthk.org.hk/mediadigest/20020115_76_10450.html

massacre in 1989, initiating the second disintegration phase where the West is no longer being fetishized and China increasingly favors its own culture and values again. In the end, we should refrain from either an overly positive view of information technology as inherently being capable of facilitating freedom of speech and democracy or an overly negative view where information technology only helps augment the status quo of nationalism. Information technology as a way of communication, just like language, can either divide or unite. As Kalathil warns us:

> "Yet they (the advocates of technological advances) would do well to keep in mind that information technology can augment balkanization and isolation just as easily as global engagement."[45]

China, looking to create a synergy between Western ideas by adjusting them to the specific Chinese context, is resolute to find its own unique position in the world community. An additional problem is whether the world community will allow China to do so. As Said warned us:

> "One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media's resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of 'the mysterious Orient.'"[46]

The call is, therefore, not only to urge China to understand 'the Other' better, but also for the West to understand 'the Other' better. Media, including the Internet, responsible for creating narrating frameworks that influence public awareness, can be abused to produce stereotypes, but also used to facilitate a mutual understanding. I would like to end this paper with a quote from Adler:

> "As interactions across barriers of human existence increase, and as the world comes closer to the physical realities of the "global village," new understandings of change experiences will hopefully broaden the challenges to ethnocentrism, chauvinism, and nationalism."[47]

---

[45] Kalathil, Shanti, "Nationalism on the Net," *The Asian Wall Street Journal* (February 22, 2002). Accessible online at http://www.ceip.org/files/news/kalathil_Bushtrip.asp?p=5
[46] Said, Edward W., *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. p.26.
[47] Adler, "An Alternative View to Culture Shock," p.22.

Bibliography

All online publications last visited on April 1, 2002.
A copy of each online article is archived by the author and available upon request.

Adler, P.S., "An Alternative View of Culture Shock," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 15(4), 1975.

Ang, Ien, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Hamelink, Cees J., *The Ethics of Cyberspace*. London: Sage Publications, 2000.

Hartford, Kate, "Cyberspace with Chinese Characteristics," *Current History* (September 2000). Available online at http://www.china-wired.com/pubs/ch/home.htm

He, Z. & Zhu, J.H., "The Voice of America and China: Zeroing in on Tiananmen Square," *Journalism Monographs* 43, 1994. pp.1-45.

Kalathil, Shanti, "Nationalism on the Net," *The Asian Wall Street Journal* (February 22, 2002). Available online at http://www.ceip.org/files/news/kalathil_Bushtrip.asp?p=5

Kluver, Randy, "New Media and the End of Nationalism: China and the US in a War of Words," *Mots Pluriels* (special issue: The Net: New Apprentices and Old Masters), No 18. August 2001. Available online at http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP1801ak.html

Lin, Min, *The Search for Modernity: Chinese Intellectuals and Cultural Discourse in the Post-Mao Era*. London: MacMillan Press, 1999.

Ma, Ringo, "Computer-Mediated Conversations as a New Dimension of Intercultural Communication between East Asian and North American College Students," in Susan C. Herring (ed.), *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1996. pp.173-185.

McConnell, Grant D., "The Expansion of English as a Language of Science and Communication: East and Southeast Asia," in Ulrich Ammon (ed.), *The Dominance of English as a Language of Science: Effects on Other Languages and Language Communities*. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001. pp.113-136.

David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Qiu, J.L., *Chinese Nationalism on the Net: An Odd Myth with Normalcy*. Paper presented at the NCA Annual Convention, Atlanta, November 1-4, 2001

Qiu, J.L., "Chinese Opinions Collide Online," *Online Journalism Review* (April 12, 2001). Available online at http://www.ojr.org/ojr/technology/1017959697.php

Said, Edward W., *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Ssu-Yu Teng and John K. Fairbank (eds.), *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey 1839-1923*. New York: Atheneum, 1963 [1954].

Tsui, Lokman, *Big Mama is Watching You: Internet Control and the Chinese Government*. University of Leiden, 2001. Unpublished MA Thesis. Available online at http://www.lokman.nu/thesis

Wang, Jing, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Zhao, S., "Chinese Intellectuals' Quest for National Greatness and Nationalistic Writing in the 1990s," *The China Quarterly* 152 (1997), pp.725-745.

Zheng, Yongnian, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Jonathan Zhu & Zhou He, "Information Accessibility, User Sophistication, and Source Credibility: The Impact of the Internet on Value Orientations in Mainland China," *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* vol. 7 issue 2 (2002). Available online at http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol7/issue2/china.html