

- primary news source. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*. Retrieved July 12, 2008, from http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/131/report_display.asp
- Hur, K. K. (1984). A critical analysis of international news flow research. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 1, 365–378.
- International Monetary Fund. (2004). *Direction of trade statistics yearbook*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Kim, K., & Barnett, G. A. (1996). The determinants of international news flow: A network analysis. *Communication Research*, 23, 323–352.
- Meyer, W. H. (1984). Global news flows: Dependency and neoimperialism. *Comparative Political Studies*, 22(3), 243–264.
- Myers, J. L., & Well, A. D. (2003). *Research design and statistical analysis* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Oneal, J., & Russett, B. (1997, June). The classical liberals were right: Democracy, interdependence, and conflicts, 1950–1989. *International Studies Quarterly*, 41, 267–294.
- Osgard, E. (1965). Factors influencing the flow of news. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(1), 39–63.
- Sosale, S. (2003). Envisioning a new world order through journalism. *Journalism: Theory, practice and criticism*, 4(3), 377–392.
- Sreberny-Mohammadi, A. (1995). Global news media cover the world. In J. Downing, A. Mohammadi, & A. Sreberny-Mohammadi (Eds.), *Questioning the media: A critical introduction* (pp. 428–433). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tuchman, G. (1997). Making news by doing work: Routinizing the unexpected. In D. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Social meanings of news: A text-reader* (pp. 173–192). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Van Belle, D. A. (2000). *New York Times and network TV news coverage of foreign disasters: The significance of the insignificant variables. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 77, 50–70.
- The war in Iraq: ADF operations in the Middle East in 2003. (n.d.). *Australian Government, Department of Defense*. Retrieved July 12, 2008 from <http://www.defence.gov.au/publications/lessons.pdf>
- The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2006*. (2006). New York: World Almanac Books.
- World Tourism Organization. (2005). *Annuaire des Statistiques du Tourisme* [Yearbook of Tourism Statistics] (56th ed.). Madrid: Organisation Mondiale du Tourisme.
- Wu, H. D. (1998). Investigating the determinants of international news flow: A meta-analysis. *Gazette: International Journal of Communication Studies*, 60(6), 493–512.
- Wu, H. D. (2003). Homogeneity around the world? Comparing the systemic determinants of international news flow between developed and developing countries. *Gazette*, 65(1), 9–24.
- Yahoo!7 redefines Australian media landscape: Partnership announces new corporate identity & chairman. (n.d.). *Yahoo! Media Relations*. Retrieved January 30, 2006, from <http://au.docs.yahoo.com/info/pr/pr.html?id=57>
- Yeomans, K. (1999). Commonwealth island states in the global information society: A narrow window of opportunity. *The Round Table*, 351, 423–431.

Blogs as Stealth Dissent?

“Eighteen Touch Dog Newspaper” and the Tactics, Ambiguity, and Limits of Internet Resistance in China

Wei Zha and David D. Perlmutter

The Problem: The People's Media?

Here we consider two paradoxes of modern global media. First, in an age when all online communication is accessible to international audiences even if produced for local consumption, how do we “read” across borders, cultures, and symbol systems? Second, how can a local communicator produce oppositional communication within a restrictive society that, in theory and legal fact, controls the information its citizens can gather, disseminate, and exhibit? The polity at issue is the People's Republic of China, a nation that is accelerating its development of the infrastructure of the Internet and other modern telecommunications technology. At the same time, the Middle Kingdom has, within the last decade, widely expanded the types and degrees of its restrictions on the political content of new media, especially on the booming native online blog community.

In the West, the weblog is often portrayed as the ultimate expression of “people's media,” allowing individuals to create idiosyncratic, interactive online journals of news and commentary that bypass the normal channels of the elite media. In China, the situation is different: Outright public affairs argumentation is either banned or discouraged, and the use of legal sanctions and technological blocks and filters are on the increase. At the same time, worldwide, China leads the blog population in terms of growth (Perlmutter, 2008; Perlmutter & Hamilton, 2007; Sifry, 2005, 2006). Can blogs operate in their ascribed democratizing tendency in such a controlled environment? In this study we examine a famous and extremely popular Chinese blog and discuss how it can be a vehicle of dissent *without* incurring the wrath of the state. We further speculate whether this blog might serve as a model for others wishing to express unapproved messages via personal Web sites in societies that limit freedom of expression.

Three Kinds of Dissent in Controlled Societies

Dissent in a controlled society, where open physical, written, or verbal protest against the ruling regime is dangerous, can operate in several forms. Each is in tension with the state not only because it is in opposition but because it can erupt into outright rebellion. The first and most common variety of indirect dissent is nonmediated interpersonal or small-group communication: gossip, rumor, and conversation. Anthropologist James Scott has argued that among all subordinate groups there is a rich history of the "hidden transcript" ... [that] represents the critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant" (Scott, 1990, p. xiii). In Chinese tradition these "common voices" of the streets, marketplace, fields, and now the office water cooler is "small way" or "folk talk" and *xiaodao xiaoxi* (rumors or gossip) (Chang, 1990; Dittmer, 1994; Hamrin, 1994).

A second form of indirect opposition is *samizdat* (literally, to "do the publishing oneself"), protest literature not printed by formal means. The term arose from dissenters against Communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, whose clandestine mimeographs and newsletters laid the groundwork for popular upheavals against many governments (Johnston, 1999; Telein, 1973). China has a tradition of such literature through its most famous incarnation, the *dazibao* ("big character posters"), pasted on the "democracy wall" near Tiananmen Square both in the late 1980s and in earlier times (Hamrin, 1994; Liu, 1996; Zhao, 1998).

A third traditional way in which people can express dissent in a controlled society is via visual or verbal allusions (from irony to allegories, metaphors, and symbols): Creating media content that seems to be about one thing (an innocuous subject or even praise of the regime) but is understood (that is, decoded) by oppositional audiences to be actually criticism of the regime. *The key for such media to survive is their very ambiguity and indeterminacy of meaning.* China's most famous modern case of protest of this kind in the pre-Tiananmen era was probably *He Shang*, translated variously as "River Dirge," "River Elegy," or "early death on the river," a six-part documentary film shown on Beijing's Central Television starting June 12, 1988. By one estimate, it drew 600 million viewers in its various showings. A version of the series script became a bestseller and was renowned for its symbolic and inferred criticism of the ruling regime (Cheng, 1990, pp. 89–90).

The Prospects and Perils of International e-Dissent

Chinese dissidents have always been entrepreneurial in exploiting technology to get their messages out to the world. During the Tiananmen

movement, while the "whole world was watching" via television, other media such as faxes constituted significant venues for internal dissidents to get out their message and receive information from abroad (Evan, 1981; Forsythe, 1991; Johnson-Eilola, 1997; Sproull & Keisler, 1991; Vanej, Gance, & Mar, 2000). And then, on the surface, the Internet offered an opportunity to revert from indirection, circumspection, and subtlety and proceed to open opposition in word and image in the PRC. By 2001, China comprised the second largest population of Internet users in the world (Bowman, 2002) and by 2007 the numbers of Chinese Web users was greater than the adult population of the United States (Internet Coaching Library, 2007; *Wall Street Journal*, 2007). From the 1990s through today, thousands of Internet newspapers and other kinds of Web sites that directly criticized the Chinese government sprang up on servers outside China and were available to the careful Chinese Internet user. Among the major players in oppositional information are Big Reference [Da Cankaol], Small Reference [Xiao Cankaol], and the "Huaxia Digest" (<http://www.cnd.org>), which are forwarded by e-mail or available to Chinese who can access their sites (China's Internet Information Skirmish, 2000). By January 2005, China also boasted an estimated 700,000 bloggers (Gillmor, 2005). By late 2007 that number had reached an estimated 47 million, with the number of blog spaces jumping to 72.82 million in China (The Survey Report, 2007). Hundreds of thousands of blogs about China are posted by Chinese and foreigners and members of the ethnic Chinese Diaspora abroad.

The Chinese government, however, has worked actively to control Internet-derived content through the Ministry of Information Industry, which regulates access to the Internet, and the Ministry of Public and State Security, which monitors use of the Internet (Cox, 2003). These agencies now have Internet administrative offices in more than 700 cities and provinces and search the Web as well as personal and commercial e-mails for "heretical teachings or feudal superstitions" and any postings harmful to the dignity or interests of the state—commonly referred to in state literature as "poisonous weeds" (*New Scientist*, 2004).

Techniques for censorship include blocking certain Web sites from Chinese servers and filtering e-mails with search engines that seek out trigger words, ranging from the names of Chinese leaders to suspicious terms such as *freedom* and *democracy* (Zittrain & Edelman, 2003). Other methods include changing IP addresses on forbidden Web sites and redirecting them to a single server for deletion (Dong, 2002; IDC News Service, 2002). Government officials log onto foreign Internet chat rooms to argue in favor of PRC policies; the Ministries also issued a decree warning "Web administrators at popular online services...that they will be held responsible for politically offensive communications, thereby enlisting them in the policing efforts" (French, 2005).

The "great firewall of China" is variable and spotty, however. Sometimes officials block Web sites because proscribed groups are associated with them. For example, the Web site of Stanford University is blocked because of a Falungong (the banned Chinese spiritual society) club on campus (China's Internet Information Skirmish, 2000). On the other hand, Web content may be blocked via one portal but not another. *Foreign Affairs* magazine published an article on the Tiananmen protests in its first issue of 2001; its site was consequently blocked by the PRC censors but the article was still available to Chinese Internet users via the Web site of the Council on Foreign Relations (Chase & Mulvenon, 2002). In other instances, a foreign site will find itself unblocked, only to be blocked again a few weeks later. In a major case in October 2004, the PRC government tried to ban "links to foreign Chinese language newspapers from PRC news Web sites" but apparently stopped the policy a few months later (China's Internet Information Skirmish, 2000; see also BBC, 2005; Boxun.com, 2005; Shen, 2005; Zittrain & Edelman, 2003).

More recently, in the run-up to the Olympics, restrictions on censorship of the Internet in China have grown. Among the new targets are Web sites that transmit video content. Most recently, foreign Web sites outside China, including YouTube.com, have been blocked due to their video presentation of contentious issues like protests in Tibet (China Times U.S., 2008). This is not an isolated event, since January 31, 2008, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television has stipulated that those Chinese sites will be punished if they distribute online videos that concern national secrets, hurt the reputation of the country, destabilize the society, or promote pornography. One of the victims is Torou.com, one of the well-known Chinese Web sites that carry videos (China to Shut or Punish, 2008). In May 2008, China's technology minister, Wan Gang, promised that China would guarantee Internet access but defended the country's censorship, which he said aims at illegal and offensive content (Serric, 2008).

Self-censorship has also accelerated. The supervisory bodies of the government have established different kinds of communication channels to monitor the leading commercial Web sites through phone, e-mail, SMS text messages, MSN, QQ, and RTX (Real Time eXchange) instant messaging, Web platforms, and a weekly meeting. The most preferred is RTX, an instant messaging service offered by Chinese company Tengxun (China Journey to the Heart, 2007). In order to have ideological control over its employees and to conduct better censorship and self-censorship practices, relevant government institutions have sponsored training courses, and only executives and editors who get a certificate of compliance can work at Internet companies (China Journey to the Heart, 2007).

Ironically, and to the surprise of Westerners, a new study (Surveying Internet Usage, 2007) founded by the Markle Foundation found that the majority of Chinese approve of the government's control over the Internet, perhaps because "Internet addiction" is a large social concern in China (Fallows, 2008). Even though there are many Chinese Internet users writing blogs, and many participate in online discussions, most of them are actually using blogs as a record of their daily lives. The most popular topics on Chinese blogs are hobbies, pets, pop culture, and rumors about entertainers. The Internet has brought an unprecedented chance for ordinary people to be heard or to communicate with each other (Fallows, 2008).

The future, of course, is unwritten (and as yet unlogged). Certainly, as has been claimed, "you can't stop the flow of information by tanks" (Berkowitz & Quirner, 1991). But obviously the challenges to dissident blogs in the PRC are numerous. High-level filterware, tough laws, and dedicated "Internet police" can restrict information and intimidate those who seek to disseminate or consume it. Of some controversy is the fact that Microsoft, Cisco Systems, Norrel Networks, Sun Microsystems, and WebSense have assisted the Chinese government in creating detection, filtering, and blocking software (International Freedom of Expression eXchange, 2005). As a result, as one major report noted:

China's Internet filtering regime is the most sophisticated effort of its kind in the world. Compared to similar efforts in other states, China's filtering regime is pervasive, sophisticated, and effective. It comprises multiple levels of legal regulation and technical control. It involves numerous state agencies and thousands of public and private personnel. (Open Initiative, 2005)

Some observers, however, believe that the sheer numbers of Chinese Internet users, and the great weight of complaints about the government on issues ranging from corruption to lack of civil liberties and freedoms, will eventually break through the web of censorship. The *Guardian's* John Gittings wrote:

The government is engaged in a losing battle against a news-hungry and increasingly sophisticated people who are finding creative ways to get past the high-tech word-based filters. Chairman Mao was right when he said that the course of battle was determined not by machines but people. (*Yaleglobal*, 2003, p. 2)

Taking more of a middle ground, a 2002 Rand Corporation study on strategies of Internet dissent and censorship in China suggested:

While Beijing has done a remarkable job of finding effective counterstrategies to the potential negative effects of the information revolution, the scale of China's information-technology modernization would suggest that time is eventually on the side of the regime's opponents. (cited in Chase & Mulvenon, 2002, p. 89)

Nevertheless, two of the normal channels for dissent in China are no longer available to online dissidents. They cannot "small talk" other Web sites and they cannot engage in open "posting" on their own blogs or foreign blogs via e-mail. For those who violate the laws, the outcome is potentially grim. Amnesty International lists a number of Chinese bloggers and Web posters who have been jailed for their activities (Amnesty International, 2004).

It follows that the third option, stealth dissent by allusion, is the only one available that provides any modicum of safety. This paper examines a major Chinese blog—indeed, the most famous PRC-based blog in the world—that, to the outside eye, may be an example of indirect opposition. We seek to understand how the content, style, and language of this blog can create ambiguities that allow it to be seen by some audiences as shrewd political allegory, irony, and satire, and others (presumably the PRC government) as innocuous or inconsequential. We use the results of the analysis to speculate on the future of blogging in China and the role of the Internet as a medium of opposition in controlled societies. Our intention is not to render a final verdict, nor to propel the bloggers into jail; we will argue, rather, that the very indeterminacy of the Chinese blog allows it to survive as a meaningful tool of political communication.

And the Winner Is...Eighteen Touch Dog Newspaper

In 2004, the Best Weblog Award of Deutsche Welle's 2004 International Weblog Awards was conferred on blogger Aggressive Little Snake's (*Meng Xiaoshe*) *Eighteen Touch Dog Newspaper*, a blog that, as its title suggests, focused on the canine. According to Guido Baumhauer, one of the jury members of the Awards, the blog was "a good example of Weblogs bringing up an issue that is not tackled by the traditional media"; furthermore, the blog constituted a successful metaphor for the situation of people living in China and other nations by presenting the unfair conditions suffered by dogs in China and Asia compared to the treatment of animals in the Western world (DW-WORLD DE, 2004). In short, the judges clearly assumed that *Eighteen Touch Dog Newspaper* was, like George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, concerned with the political affairs of humans, not the life of our four-legged friends. But how could they, or anyone, be sure? When examined closely, the content of the blog

does not lend itself to one-to-one allegorical explication and extrapolation; this fact in itself suggests some of the parameters of quasi-oppositional media in modern China.

Metaphors and Allusions: Dogs and Fondling

Eighteen Touch Dog Newspaper made its debut on December 9, 2003. The blog's title, pronounced as "ShiBaMo GouRiBao," was posted in Chinese characters at the left side of the blog banner. Its layout consisted of four major columns, respectively titled "Dog," "Coquette," "Causality," and "Amorism." The "Dog" column is ostensibly devoted primarily to dogs and dog-related events. Most stories deal with relations between dogs and human beings and sometimes dogs and other animals. Some of the stories focus not so much on dogs as they do on entertainment news, partly in connection with dogs, such as films, cartoons, Christmas postcards, and high-tech products with images of dogs. For example, on January 28, 2005, a posted message in the "Dog" column introduced a new intelligent dog toy, developed by a well-known Japanese company, possessing (virtual) "emotions" and an ability to "communicate" with its master.

The column "Coquette" is attributed to a woman named XiaoMo Zhang (who, presumably, is a pseudonym of Aggressive Little Snake). The name translates to "someone named Zhang who would like to be (sexually) fondled." Zhang presents herself as a concubine of Aggressive Little Snake. The tone of her writing suggests that this is meant in jest. In her column, she describes her personal life, her work, and her relations with colleagues and friends. She often uses puns and intentionally misconstructs Chinese characters as well as using exaggerated language to describe events occurring around her. For instance, in April 2004, she wrote,

Sister Yang wants to co-rent a house with me. Applying a well-known line of the leading actor Wei Xiaobao in a well-known martial arts film, *Fighting for the Almighty Power*, "I only know that I am lovely, but don't know how lovely I am." Now, working in a company and getting along with those decent persons, I really know the degree of my loveliness. Oh, Sister Yang, don't be so Delphic as to eat and live together with me; I will get married someday, and living together with somebody else will smudge my reputation. (Zhang, 2004)

The "Causality" column is used by Aggressive Little Snake and several other pseudonymous authors to address general subjects unrelated to the canine. For example, Snake posted a thank-you letter for a friend who found him a beautiful knife. Another message showed that

he was once invited to write a one-sentence commentary on the film *Cell Phone* (*Shou Ji*), a 2004 black comedy portraying the psychological distance between people, especially spouses, enabled by the use of cell phones for all conversations. In his review, Snake used his trademark “sexing up” of formerly august and somber Communist Party dictums and platitudes. In 1976, after the death of Mao, there was a leadership struggle in China; as a result, the so-called Gang of Four—the ultra-leftists, including Mao’s wife—were purged. The rallying cry of the coup was, “Practice is the only criterion of testing truth.” Snake, in his movie review, quipped, “Cell Phone is the only criterion of testing fornication” (Aggressive Little Snake, 2003a).

The final column, “Amorism,” highlights the daily life of one “Alice Kelp” (Ailisi Haidai), which reads like a conventional personal Web page with no attempts to make fun of anything. For example, in February 2004, Alice Kelp wrote, “Due to vanity or love, I really care about what my boyfriend will do on Valentine’s Day. There is no need for him to spend a lot of money to buy flowers or other expensive gifts; I do want him to show his love [with a] postcard, a phone call, or a message” (Alice Kelp, 2004).

Although entitled *Eighteen Touch Dog Newspaper*, the weblog content seemed to be distributed equally among its four major columns, with a slight emphasis toward “Coquette,” until it highlighted its dog theme on June 17, 2004. After that time, almost all the news stories ostensibly focused on dogs.

What does this all signify? The complexities of the meanings of elements of the blog defy easy translation (and transliteration) into English and Western culture. Puns, in particular, do not cross borders well. Take the original title of the blog itself: *Eighteen Touch Dog Newspaper* (Shi-BaMo GouRiBao). The Chinese character *Mo*, in the context of *Eighteen Touch*, could only be interpreted as “touch or grope for an object.” The title *Eighteen Touch* is the same as a well-known song of the “Kejia,” that is, Han (the majority ethnicity of China) people who migrated from the north of China to the south after the end of the reign of the Ximin Dynasty (A.D. 265–316) (Qiao, 2005). The lively tune is composed of 18 lines of Chinese characters and describes—in the vocative tense—the process of a male fondling his female lover. An approximation of the song in English is as follows (Qiao, 2005):

the head smells wonderful like [incense];
the hair is really dark,
the hair in the front looks attractive,
the hair on the back
of the head curls beautifully,
the hair at the sides holds upward,

the forehead shines with light,
both sides of the eyebrow raise upward,
the eyes glance attractively upward,
the breath is sweet,
the lip is red,
the chin is lovely,
the ear listens keenly,
the neck is white and clean,
the shoulder curves upward,
the hands are white and delicate,
and the back could be
touched and scratched.

In each line, the first three Chinese characters detail the places on the woman’s body to be fondled, with the following five characters depicting the feeling of touching or viewing or smelling the body parts. The second through 6th lines refer to the sensation of stroking the lover’s hair, with the 7th to 13th focusing elsewhere on her head, and the next 4 parsing out the touch of, respectively, her neck, shoulders, hands, and back. But the implied concluding two sentences are missing. Generations have mentally filled in the body parts to be fondled next accompanied by the Chinese versions of a smirk and wink (Gu, 2005).¹ *Eighteen Touch* falls into the genre of the ribald folk song, sung by peasants in the field, soldiers in the bivouac, or workers trudging home from the factory, but it is also a famous tune of the bordello, sung and pantomimed by prostitutes, or even in prerevolutionary China a “gorging song,” to be sung for patrons at high-end restaurants while they feasted on large meals.

The rest of the blog’s title, *Dog Newspaper*, in Chinese characters, could be interpreted as even more directly obscene, figuratively “*dog fornicating paper*.” In Chinese, “daily newspaper” is composed of two characters, with the first sounding the same as “fornicate” and the second meaning “paper.” *Gouri* is a malicious cursing term, equivalent to “son of a bitch” in English. When asked once in person why the weblog was named *Dog Newspaper*, Aggressive Little Snake replied, holding up a copy of *People’s Daily*, the official newspaper of the Chinese government, “Human beings fornicate, so do dogs; if someday human beings stop fornicating, dogs will never stop” (Aggressive Little Snake, 2003b).

Snake has repeatedly stated within the blog that it is about dogs and other common subjects and has no political content (Aggressive Little Snake, 2003b). However, on another occasion, when Sina.com interviewed Snake after he received the blog award, he admitted that he introduced some social factors into his dog news (Interview Dog Newspaper Webmaster, 2004).

Dogs by the Numbers

The story behind *Eighteen Touch Dog Newspaper's* startling victory in the weblog contest establishes a method by which to measure its level of political dissent. According to the introduction of Aggressive Little Snake, after he submitted his Web content for the competition, the single Chinese judge Muzimei briefed other judges (who did not understand Chinese) about the substance of the weblog. She implied, and they concluded, that the blog presented the unfair conditions suffered by dogs in China and other Asian countries by *comparing and contrasting them to the happy lives of animals in the Western world* (Interview Dog News paper Webmaster, 2004). The judges apparently reasoned then that the blog delivered brilliant political satire, cunning in its subtlety, and bold in its allegory.

When we examined the content of *Dog* from December 2003 (the first day this blog made its debut) to March 2005, we found that there were altogether 228 entries referring to dogs and anecdotes occurring around dogs. Among them, 146 entries referred to dogs in China and Asian countries, while 78 were about dogs in the West, with four not discernible as being in either category (see Table 14.1). Our inferential measure of the political implications of the blog's theme was to contrast its portrayal of Chinese and non-Chinese dogs.

Among all the entries about dogs in China and other Asian countries, 23 (15.8%) showed dogs being badly treated by human beings. Here, abuse is defined as when dogs were killed, captured, or used for brutal entertainment by human beings or neglected without care while ill. For example, there was a news item about dog fights in Handan, China that left the dogs severely injured (Deng, 2004). "Good" stories refer to those situations when human beings attended to dogs' welfare, as, for example, by building various facilities to make them comfortable or rescuing them from danger, and stories of dogs that rescued or helped their masters. The majority of the message entries referring to dogs in China or Asian countries (74, nearly 51%) constituted news stories indicating that dogs were well treated or that dogs had good relations with their masters. "Neutral" stories (49, or around 34%) were defined as those that did not

Table 14.1 Frequency and Percentage of Dog News

	Bad	Neutral	Good	Others	Total
China or Asian Countries	23 (15.8%)	49 (33.6%)	74 (50.6%)		146
Western Countries	17 (21.8)	37 (47.4%)	24 (30.8%)	4 (missing)	78

$$\chi^2 = 8.197, p = .017$$

rough relations between human beings and dogs and focused only on dogs. For example, a post on February 19, 2005 described a dog show in which a dog called Cali won the championship.

As for the stories concerning dogs of Western countries, 17 entries belong to the "bad" category, while those in the "good" category numbered 24 (30.8% of the total stories concerning dogs—20 percentage points less than the same category for Chinese and Asian dogs).

Although there are 74 dog news stories that depict good relations between dogs and human beings in China and other Asian countries (50 stories more than those about Western dogs), the Western judges viewed the blog content as a whole as alluding to Chinese people's "terrible" lives by discussing dogs having been killed or eaten. This leap could be attributed to Muzimei's subjective introduction of the content of the blog as mentioned earlier. Another reason might be that Western judges saw the *Dog* blog through native values and practices (cf. Gans, 1979). Perhaps, for example, the judges had heard about dogs being killed and eaten in Asia, and these photos further confirmed their expectation about dogs' fate. But economics also may have played a role. In Western Europe, the dog no longer has a work life, except for security or in a service capacity for the blind. Most dogs are family pets; their role is that of pampered companion and entertainer. In folk legend in China, for many years, the Western dog has been conceived of as a creature living a better life than most poor people in the rest of the world.

In China, in contrast, a dog might be found in a small village pulling a cart for its owner. Yet, we can understand the willingness of the European judges to read in metaphor. After all, and perhaps significantly, Aggressive Little Snake did not add any commentary to the photos he posted; what he wanted was to let the photos or stories speak for themselves (Zhou, 2004), thus creating a situation in which anyone could interpret what he or she was inclined or wanted to interpret from the blog according to his or her own expectations and values.

Other hints that *Dog* is satire come from its humor. In fact, here political metaphor seems downright transparent. Aggressive Little Snake graduated from the Chinese department of Nankai University in Tianjin around 1994. After graduation, he worked as both a magazine and newspaper editor for several years. Then he became an Internet commentary writer and often appeared on the IT bulletin board service of Sina.com.cn. His style was metaphorical: He used wrongly written Chinese characters to express his daily work routine, his contacts with friends, and sometimes his feelings about life. For example, he used the word *laози* as satire. In China, if you have children, you can tell them that you are their *laози* (dad). The word when used to others, however, stands somewhere between cynicism and hooliganism, mostly meaning you are afraid of nothing with nothing to lose, or even with the implication that you have

fathered children illegitimately. When discussing J. R. R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings* (who died in 1973), Aggressive Little Snake said, "Laoshi was born in 1973 when a foreigner died. Even though he was a dead person, he earned \$22 million in 2002, which make me envious and angry" (Aggressive Little Snake, 2003c). Snake estimated that all the authors together in China could not have made so much money that year and would himself have been satisfied to earn one thousandth of the money.

It was typical of Aggressive Little Snake, or the blogger Zhang Xiaoma, to deprecate others' personal lives with such salty language. Occasionally, the result has been conflict with *Dog's* audience. Some wrote to him in anger about his 2004 annual review's cornucopia of expletives and obscenities. But Snake fought back, saying that "these groups of doggerels surpass illusionary realism and could be called 'mind-wanton realism.' You should raise your literature common sense. Otherwise, I will have others and dogs fornicate you one hundred times" (Aggressive Little Snake, 2005). In short, from the Chinese perspective, such self-critical humor is political. It reminds the reader of the practice during the Cultural Revolution of subjecting suspected and real dissidents to "self-criticism" sessions (Macfarquhar, 1974; Schoenhals, 1996; Wen, 2005).

But Snake satirizes a broad range of targets besides his own situation. According to a legend, Chinese (Han) people were created by a goddess from the rich earth of the banks of the Yellow River. In one post, Aggressive Little Snake referred to this story and delved into the origin of this goddess. He said that because of the yellow soil, Chinese are yellow. But he expressed in a somewhat sarcastic way that Chinese seemed to demand more of their complexion, willing to be black through tanning or white by using various cosmetics (Aggressive Little Snake, 2003d). When talking about Majiang (mah-jongg in the West), a popular game in China, he said Sichuan province was renowned for its skilled players. But he added that the people across the Taiwan Straits were experts at playing Majiang. His suggestion: Reunite China and Taiwan via the board game (Aggressive Little Snake, 2004)—an allusion to the "Ping-Pong" diplomacy that helped bring Nixon to China? It is hard not to read in these statements explicit sociopolitical commentary.

Snake also makes reference to Mao Zedong. For example, Chairman Mao once wrote a poem that reads, "Dating back to ancient history, we try to find real heroes, but eventually we can only find them in the current era." With this verse, Chairman Mao referred to himself as one of China's heroes. But Aggressive Little Snake changed the poem to, "Dating back to ancient history, the heroes are doing eighteen tough and fornicating," apparently suggesting that today's "hero" leaders were overpaid, overbearing, and oversexed—a perspective that would not

have pleased the Chairman or his heirs (Aggressive Little Snake, 2003e). In another poem, Mao urged people to be physically fit, to study well, and to work diligently. Snake morphed those high-minded exhortations into the following satire of modern China's mores and social issues: "to be physically well, with energy to fornicate; to study well, with skill to spread rumor; and to work well, with supporting skill to migrate" (Aggressive Little Snake, 2003f).

Another technique used by Snake is to expose a phenomenon without mentioning the factors precipitating it. One may complain about poor inner city transit service, for example, but not speculate on those government policies that led to the problem. Symptoms are usually allowable as the objects of critique; causes are dangerous to ruminate upon. One may, within limits, attack a corrupt individual or government section—again, while not implying that the government itself is the problem. For example, one of Snake's copied posts concerned a prevalent situation in China of private or public building contractors delaying or skipping out altogether on paying construction workers for jobs completed (Aggressive Little Snake, 2003g). One CCTV program, "News 30 Minutes," revealed that a Hebei province labor department delayed handling complaints from a group of laborers of nonpayment by their employer (a contractor) for months, but quickly solved the problem when the news crew's camera appeared on the scene. Snake attributed the original outrage to the social tendency of "admiring richness." He stated, "Admiring richness directly leads to local officials' greed for economic achievements, the most obvious representative of which was real estate development" (Aggressive Little Snake, 2003f). In another article, Snake sneered at the newly issued "Lowest Salary Regulation" for its complicated and unreasonable calculation method. Nevertheless, he said the exploitation of Chinese workers was a phenomenon occurring not only in China but also in other countries.

Conclusions

This paper has been an exercise in ambiguity—intentionally so, in light of the case studies—a blog that survives by slippery allusions and puns but also ambiguity in the context of understanding other cultures via new media or any media. The West has had a long history of looking at China and seeing, for good and ill, what it wanted to see. General views of China paralleled this structure of enthusiasm followed by disdain. Indeed, the weight of scholarship on this issue argues that American and Western views of China followed cyclical patterns. As Harold Isaacs described it, the 18th century followed the "Age of Respect" while the 19th century through World War I was the "Age of Contempt" (Isaacs, 1958; Perlmutter, 2007). Writing before the 1989 Tiananmen events,

Warren Cohen argues that American views of China followed eras in which one cultural filter tended to dominate (Cohen, 1978). As shifts occurred, the same Chinese character types, holding the same social positions, espousing the same values, making the same actions, could be viewed with opposite attitudes:

The Chinese are seen as a superior people and an inferior people; devilishly exasperating heathens and wonderfully attractive humanists; wise sages and sadistic executioners; thrifty and honorable men and sly and devious villains; comic opera soldiers and dangerous fighters. (Isaacs, 1958, p. 4)

Today's China represents a similar paradox. Polling in America and Europe shows a favorable view of China's people (which probably has been heightened by the politeness and respect to all athletes shown by the Chinese Olympic audiences) and a negative view of its government. China is ubiquitous in American and European life: toys, clothes, and other merchandise made in China and exported. Its energy consumption is surpassing our own, with a consequential effect on global climate change. It is one of the leading holders of American debt. There are many worries about China's military build-up and threats of forced unification with Taiwan. In looking at China via its blogs, we naturally assume that dissent must be there, indeed should be there, since of course, for most Westerners, Western democracy is the gold standard of all other polities.

But Aggressive Little Snake's *Eighteen Touch Dog Newspaper* is perhaps a new way of looking at Chinese through Western eyes and seeing what we want to see. On the one hand, the case for its winning an award for political satire because of its main subject, canines, is thin: We found that there was no pattern of Chinese and Asian dogs appearing worse off than Western dogs. So it was probably the case that Western European judges were grasping at the metaphorical wind, assuming that a few examples of canine contrasts were examples of deep political satire. Nevertheless, they may not have been wholly off the mark. After all, in the China of the Mao era *any* showing of negativity in society was forbidden: All dogs and all people (save traitors and dissidents) were happy. To show dog fights and malnourished dogs in China in 2004 was, by the standards of 1964, a revolutionary act, although an even more subtle one than the award judges noticed. But parceling out "bad" dog images to East and West allows Snake, if confronted by the Ministry police, to say, "Look, I'm even-handed." Perhaps that is a sign that the climate of political tolerance in the Middle Kingdom is appreciably greater than in many periods in China's past.

In short, we argue that Snake overturned the typical linear convention

of China watching. He presented the awards committee with interesting, arresting pictures that seemed to hint at metaphorical and allegorical dissent. But those same pictures could be shown to prove to the China censor that the site had no political content. Meanwhile, Snake, the jester, is using words to make clever political satire about China's situation.

Only one of the judges in the competition was Chinese, and she did not translate the written parts of the blog that did not pertain to dogs. In fact, according to Aggressive Little Snake's introduction, what the Chinese judge Muzimei passed on to other judges were visual portions of the blog, without mentioning any written parts. The Western judges did not know about the rich puns, wordplays, allusions, and text of Snake's and his partners' posts that were politically oriented. Those items stopped short of actually blaming the government of China for any of the problems he lamented and lampooned. Snake's political satire is both brilliant and skirting the bounds of a prison offense. To "sex up" the injunctions and aphorisms of Mao, to complain of the corruptions and thieveries of Chinese society—again, these would have been offenses that would have merited prison sentences in 1954, 1964, 1974, and 1994.

Here, too, is confusion. Why is this critical mass communicator not in prison? In discussion with Chinese students and academics abroad, this is a topic of extensive "small talk" debate. Some suggest that the government cannot pay attention to all blogs, so Snake is under the radar. But certainly the award brought him front and center into the scan zone of the Internet police. Alternatively, it is possible that his international status makes it politically unwise to persecute him. The problem with that conjecture is that notoriety has never stopped the Chinese government from curtailing the activities of opponents, although human rights protesters from abroad have resulted in some political prisoners being released after imprisonment.

Another possibility is that the government realizes that China has so many problems that a safety valve of complaint is needed, that no one can ban all political satire because the alternative, keeping a lid on a boiling pot, would be worse. Is Snake, then, a jester of the Web, tolerated as long as he seems to restrict himself to veiled humor, not outright protest? In any case, Dog blog is a premier example of the complexity of the Internet as a tool of political argumentation in a society trying to control political dissent while spurring economic development. It is not just about dogs, or sex, or the trivia of everyday life.² And that is perhaps as it should be: If Dog blog were simple and clear and direct enough to fit into preconceptions of either the government of China or that of liberal Europeans eager to see signs of dissent in China, then ironically *Eighteen Touch Dog Newspaper* would not have survived and prospered long enough to gain world attention. Aggressive Little Snake

endures, at least as of this writing, because he is not what anyone wants or expects him to be.

Notes

1. Another *Eighteen Touch* folk song prevails in Taiwan, but the places touched or viewed are somewhat different, but with 10 of them identical to the former song.
2. One Chinese acquaintance who has lived in America called it "China's Seinfeld."

References

- Aggressive Little Snake. (2003a). Mobile phone is the only criterion of testing fornication. Retrieved June 19, 2005, from <http://www.18mo.com/index.asp?vt=default&page=33>
- Aggressive Little Snake. (2003b). Reply to a newspaper reporter. Retrieved June 20, 2005, from http://www.18mo.com/index.asp?vt=bycat&cat_id=39
- Aggressive Little Snake. (2003c). Superb Foreign Writer. Retrieved June 19, 2005, from <http://www.18mo.com/index.asp?vt=default&page=32>
- Aggressive Little Snake. (2003d). Yellow complexion. Retrieved June 19, 2005, from <http://www.18mo.com/index.asp?vt=default&page=32>
- Aggressive Little Snake. (2003e). Long live Chairman Mao. Retrieved June 19, 2005, from <http://www.18mo.com/index.asp?vt=default&page=32>
- Aggressive Little Snake. (2003f). Chairman Mao guides us. Retrieved June 19, 2005, from <http://www.18mo.com/index.asp?vt=default&page=32>
- Aggressive Little Snake. (2003g). 100 billion Yuan owed to construction workers. Retrieved June 19, 2005, from <http://18mo.com/index.asp?vt=default&page=31>
- Aggressive Little Snake. (2004). Maijiang with Red China. Retrieved June 19, 2005, from <http://www.18mo.com/index.asp?vt=default&page=30>
- Aggressive Little Snake. (2005). Don't drive Laozi crazy, otherwise I will loose my dog to bite you. Retrieved June 20, 2005, from http://www.18mo.com/showlog.asp?cat_id=26&log_id=657
- Alice Kelp. (2004). I am really afraid of having Valentine Day. Retrieved June 18, 2005, from <http://www.18mo.com/index.asp?vt=default&page=21>
- Amnesty International. (2004, January 28). People's Republic of China: Controls tighten as Internet activism grows. Retrieved June 19, 2005, from <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA170012004>
- BBC News World Edition. (2005, June 7). Chinese blogs face restrictions. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4617657.stm>.
- Bell, D. A. (1999). Democracy with Chinese characteristics: A political proposal for the post-Communist era. *Philosophy East & West*, 49, 451–493.
- Berkowitz, H., & Qutnner, J. (1991, August 22). Media and message. *Newsday*, pp. 14, 16.
- Bowman, L. M. (2002, July 31). China No. 2 in web population. *CNET News.com*. Retrieved June 20, 2005, from http://news.com.com/China+No.+2+in+Web+population/2110-1023_3-947458.html?tag=nl
- Bokun.com. (2005, June 7). China: Authorities declare war on unregistered web sites and blogs. Retrieved June 25, 2005, from <http://www.peacehall.com/news/gb/english/2005/06/200506070644.shtml>
- Chang, S. H. (1990). *History and legend, ideas and images in the Ming historical novels*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Chase, M. S., & Mulvenon, J. C. (2002). You've got dissent! Chinese dissident use of the Internet and Beijing's counter-strategies. Washington, DC: Rand Publishing.
- Cheng, C. Y. (1990). *Behind the Tiananmen massacre: Social, political, and economic ferment in China* (pp. 89–90). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- China journey to the heart of internet censorship: Investigative report. (2007). <http://crd-net.org/Article/ShowClass.asp?ClassID=9>
- China ties US in total number of users. (2008, April 24). Associated Press. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,352412,00.html>. China to shut or punish video-sharing sites over security, threats, porn, violence. (2008, March 21.). Associated Press. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,340410,00.html>
- China's Internet information skirmish (2000). A January 2000 report from U.S. Embassy, Beijing. Available at: <http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/sand/wbwar.htm>
- Cohen, W. I. (1978). American perceptions of China. In M. Oksenberg & R. B. Oxnam (Eds.), *Dragon and eagle: United States-China relations, past and future* (pp. 54–86). New York: Basic Books.
- Cox, C. (2003). Establishing global internet freedom. In C. W. Crews Jr. & A. Thierer (Eds.), *Who rules the net? Internet governance and jurisdiction* (pp. 3–12). Washington, DC: Caro Institute.
- Deng, Y. (2004). Handan bloody dog-fighting place. Retrieved June 26, 2005, from <http://www.18mo.com/index.asp?vt=default&page=25>
- Ditmer, L. (1994). The politics of publicity in reform China. In C. C. Lee (Ed.), *China's media, media's China* (pp. 89–112). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Dog Newspaper Webmaster, Aggressive Little Snake, Interview. (2004). Retrieved June 21, 2005, from <http://life.sina.com.cn/art/2004-12-21/59962.shtml>
- Dong, B. (2002). How China censors the Net by domain name hijacking. Retrieved June 20, 2005, from <http://www.rense.com/general30/sasse.htm>
- DW-WORLD DE. (2004, June 12). Chinese blog wins "Best Blog Awards." <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,1564,1418080,00.html>
- Evan, W. M. (1981). *Knowledge and power in a global society*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Fallows, D. (2008, March 27.). Few in China complain about internet controls. Pew Research. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/776/china-internet>
- Forsythe, D. P. (1991). *The internationalization of human rights*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- French, H. W. (2005, June 8). China tightens restrictions on bloggers and web sites. *The New York Times*, p. 6.
- Gans, H. J. (1979). *Deciding What's News — a Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Random House.