

Question: How have restrictions on freedom of speech in China created an environment for public corruption?

Abstract

The current study examined the correlation of freedom of speech and public corruption in China. Seventeen people who currently reside in China completed a survey on Internet censorship in relation to widespread government corruption. This study elicits political, social, economic, and futuristic perspectives on the topic of freedom of speech in China.

INTRODUCTION

China's Modern History of Attempted Reform

After years of imperial rule and one hundred years of colonial influence, the Communist Party of China (CPC) established the Peoples Republic of China (China or PRC) in 1949¹. At the time, the CPC was weak; they hated the idea of foreign influence and had many internal enemies, such as those who sided with Chiang Kai Shek, the head of the Nationalist government². In order to establish control over the country, Mao Zedong and the CPC maintained complete control over the media and used it for propaganda. Decades later, during the Cultural Revolution the CPC lost some of its control over free speech. Researchers have analyzed several events that occurred during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 that relate to the lack of civil liberties given to China's people³. According to Jonathan Spence, the author of *The Search for Modern China*, prior to the Cultural Revolution, the people of China were denied freedom of expression and lived their lives in obedience of the government and without control of

¹ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Chinese Communist Party (CCP)." *Encyclopaedia of Britannica*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Web. 8 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.britannica.com/topic/Chinese-Communist-Party>>.

² The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "*Chiang Kai Shek, Chinese Statesmen*." N.p.: n.p., n.d. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Web. 8 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Chiang-Kai-shek>>.

³ Spence, Jonathan D. *The Search for Modern China*. N.p.: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991. Print.

their own lives. During the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing (江青), the wife of Mao ZeDong (毛泽东) and a notable political leader during the Cultural Revolution, criticized that various cultural groups were “openly criticizing a new revolutionary movement”--in favor of communism⁴. Jiang Qing then forced groups of students to wear red armbands and established them as “Red Guards”. The Red Guards were encouraged to continue the stream of repression that occurred two decades before the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. However, riots between those protesting for their civil liberties and the Red Guards began and soon unraveled into violent outbreaks. These violent outbreaks seemed like a revolution to citizens of China and a watershed moment for the advocacy of freedom of speech. Spence states that the Cultural Revolution represented “a release from all their (those in favor of freedom of speech) shackles, frustrations, and feelings of powerlessness.” However, by the spring of 1989, these “shackles” began to be re-secured as students who were a part of the liberalization era following the Cultural Revolution gathered in Tiananmen Square on the day of the death of Hu Yaobang, the CPC general secretary who had actually encouraged democratic reforms⁵ on the heels of Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms that began to take hold in the late 1970s. Among the democratic reforms being demanded was the request for the development of a more positive stigma surrounding the concept of freedom of speech. After months of protesting, however, the Chinese government declared martial law and sent in tanks which later killed an estimated 241 people (possibly more), primarily dissidents advocating for freedom of speech. Following this event, named by the Western media as the “Tiananmen Square Massacre”, the Chinese government began a crackdown and attempted to eradicate any democratic and liberal reform-oriented influence, including the right to freedom of speech. However, with the decrease in freedom of speech, liberty and the increase in government opacity, China political environment took a turn for the worse.

⁴ "Jiang Qing". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2016. Web. 05 Mar. 2016

⁵ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "Tiananmen Square Incident." *Encyclopedia of Britannica*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Web. 8 Mar. 2016. <http://www.britannica.com/event/Tiananmen-Square-incident>

China's Government's Response to the Internet

Since the Tiananmen Square Massacre, China has dealt with the ebb and flow of foreign influence and the development of technology, specifically the commercial availability of the Internet in 1995⁶. The establishment of the Internet created many potential opportunities for the reform of the freedom of speech rules and regulations in China. However, following the introduction of the Internet in China, the current state of China--in terms of freedom of speech--contradicts the Chinese constitution. According to *The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China*, Article 35 of the Chinese constitution, written in 1995 and modified in 2004, states "citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration"⁷. Contrarily, article 5 of the *Computer Information Network and Internet Security, Protection and Management Regulations in China* states that "no unit or individual may use the Internet to create, replicate, retrieve, or transmit the following kinds of information... inciting to resist or violate the Constitution or laws or the implementation of administrative regulations; inciting to overthrow the government or the socialist system; making falsehoods or distorting the truth, spreading rumors, destroying the order of society,"⁸. These restrictions are seemingly justifiable; the Chinese government states that Internet usage must not get out of hand, and that it must not be used to start a revolution that could disrupt China's society. However, since 1995, since the transition into a virtual world and with the people of China's increase in the desire to assimilate to Western society and culture, the Chinese government has gone farther than simply restricting Internet usage that may "[incite] to overthrow the government or the socialist system"; the government has restricted hundreds of Western websites. If

⁶ Freedom of Expression and the Internet in China." *Human Rights News*. N.p., n.d. Web. 5 Mar. 2016. <<https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/asia/china-bck-0701.htm>>

⁷ "Constitution of the People's Republic of China." *The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China*. N.p., 14 Mar. 2004. Web. 5 Mar. 2016.

⁸ Freedom of Expression and the Internet in China." *Human Rights News*. N.p., n.d. Web. 5 Mar. 2016. <<https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/asia/china-bck-0701.htm>>

Chinese citizens are granted freedom of speech, then why has the Chinese government increased its Internet restrictions? More specifically, why does a just-born communist regime want to control the media as tightly as they have?

Widespread Government Corruption: A reason for no freedom of speech?

The Communist Party of China operates in an opaque manner most Westerners would have a hard time understanding. The government system is filled with opportunities for corruption and there have been hundreds of corruption scandals. There are eight notable cases of high-ranking officials whose punishments for inside-government corruption range from temporary imprisonment to execution. For example, Li Chuncheng, “a former high-ranking official in Sichuan province, was sentenced to 13 years in jail for bribery and abuse of power,”⁹. Li Chuncheng was, according to CNN, “the highest-ranking Chinese official to fall foul”. A more popular case of a government corruption scandal is Bo Xilai, a former Communist Party chief. He was involved in the murder of a British parliament member and several other suspicious acts¹⁰. China’s corruption conflict turned into an international ordeal when around one hundred and fifty corrupt Chinese officials fled to America. China has sent a list of suspects to the United States in hopes of prosecuting or potentially deporting them¹¹. From a legal standpoint, American lawyers involved with international affairs must investigate the corrupt actions committed by various Chinese Communist Party officials. President Xi Jinping is the first Chinese president to take initiative and to have attempted to end the widespread corruption within the walls of the communist government system. His improvements show hope for the future of China, but this hope will not be achieved unless the government becomes more democratic and more accessible to the people of China.

⁹ China's Corruption Crackdown: The Biggest Victims so Far." *CNN*. N.p., 11 Jan. 2016. Web. 6 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/21/china/gallery/china-corruption-campaign-targets/>>

¹⁰ "Bo Xilai Scandal: Timeline." *BBC News* 11 Nov. 2013: n. pag. Print.

¹¹ Yan, Sophia. China's anti-corruption crackdown reaches U.S." *CNN Money*. N.p., n.d. Web. 5 Oct. 2015. <<http://money.cnn.com/2015/03/26/news/china-anti-corruption-us/>>

Detainment of Citizens for Reasons Pertaining to Freedom of Speech

As studies from recent years show, “hope” for the modern future seems unfeasible. Those in favor of freedom of speech have attempted to speak up for their beliefs. In 2011 Carl Minzner, a law professor at Fordham University, completed a study titled *Countries at the Crossroads*¹². This study brings forth examples of instances where the Chinese government has both repressed and oppressed its citizens for various reasons pertaining to freedom of speech. In 2009, the Chinese government initiated a proposal to require every China-sold computer to be installed with filtering software prohibiting any political, religious or pornographic content. When Chinese citizens fought back, the government revoked this proposal. However, in late 2010, government authorities detained and threatened dozens of citizens who were attempting to celebrate the revoking using the Internet. Among those threatened to be detained was Chinese Nobel Peace Prize winner, Liu Xiaobo (刘晓波). In certain cases of those who attempt to practice their alleged government-given right of freedom of speech, detainment is a common punishment. Some reasons for detainment are far more substantial than others. Examples include women’s rights activists, anti-corruption and environmental campaigners, but most importantly, those who urge political and legal reform debates. In addition to detainment, however, several Chinese citizens have been sentenced to several years of prison for practicing a right that is stated in the constitution. Zhen Yong Wang (真用网), “a former assistant professor of psychology at Southwestern Normal University in Chongqing, Sichuan, was arrested on June 2, 2001 in Shenzhen for downloading and distributing by e-mail promotional material on the Falun Gong spiritual movement”¹³. It is evident by the aforementioned article 35¹⁴ of China’s constitution, that the reason for this arrestment--the expression of one’s religious

¹² Minzner, Carl. "Freedom House." *Countries at the Crossroads* (2011): n. pag. Print.

¹³ Freedom of Expression and the Internet in China." *Human Rights News*. N.p., n.d. Web. 5 Mar. 2016. <<https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/asia/china-bck-0701.htm>>

¹⁴ "Constitution of the People's Republic of China." *The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China*. N.p., 14 Mar. 2004. Web. 5 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.npc.gov.cn/>>.

and spiritual beliefs--is, in fact, permitted by the Chinese constitution. This furthers the idea of the government's oppression of China's citizens. The only people who are exempt from this potential prosecution or detainment are senior members of the party¹⁵. Li Rui, former senior member of the Chinese Communist Party and a previous aide to Mao ZeDong, published a letter in the Beijing Magazine: "China Chronicle". In his letter, he calls for greater democracy- "only with democratization can there be modernization". From an analytical standpoint, Li Rui is saying that in order for China to innovate and modernize just as quickly as the rest of the world, there must be democracy, and more specifically, there must be freedom of speech. Li Rui and the many imprisoned activists, campaigners and other various politically opinionated citizens believe that democracy is the best solution and that it will eventually end widespread government corruption.

Ethical Perspective

Robert Christian, a writer for the Millennial Journal, connects this idea of the Chinese government system with human rights. Christian states that the world should not be fooled by China's current positive reforms, such as a change from the one child policy to a two child policy. China still continues to have a "repressive regime". Christian states "the Chinese regime continues to restrict fundamental human rights that belong to all members of the human family, and this will continue even if reforms are fully implemented"¹⁶. Evidently, not only are several of China's major leaders becoming more and more involved in widespread government corruption but China also restricts the fundamental rights of a human being. Westerners see their freedom of speech as a fundamental right, while those living in China see freedom of speech as a perilous and tedious task. President Xi Jinping's launching of the

¹⁵ *Freedom of Expression in China: A Privilege, Not a Right*.
Congressional-Executive: Commission on China. Web. 24 Sept. 2015.
 <<http://www.cecc.gov/freedom-of-expression-in-china-a-privilege-not-a-right>>.

¹⁶ "China's Positive Reforms and its Enduring Totalitarian Tendencies."
Millennial. Ed. Robert Christian. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Sept. 2015.
 <<http://millennialjournal.com/2013/11/21/chinas-positive-reforms-and-its-enduring-totalitarian-tendencies/>>.

crackdown on corruption is so extensive that the government officials who have fled overseas, mainly to the United States, are being tracked by the government. This represents a lack of trust among high-ranking government officials. A concept of trust--between officials and the citizens of China--is exactly what China needs within its Communist government system in order to ameliorate corruption problems.

A Penal System Other Than Detainment

The aforementioned imprisoned advocates-for-human-rights, such as freedom of speech, are potentially in line for China's penal system which involves labor camps used to "reform" people through labor¹⁷. The purpose of the camps are to remove political opposition while also attempting to improve the economy. Whether this process of removal of opposition will work is what the Chinese government looks forward to see in the future. Daniel A. Bell interviewed Indian economist, Jagdish Bhagwati on dishonest government officials in China¹⁸. Bhagwati states, "the Chinese have what I call profit-sharing corruption: the Communist party puts a straw into the milkshake so they have an interest in having the milkshake grow larger". This means that Chinese government officials have acknowledged the presence of corruption, and yet feed on it as they watch it slowly grow larger. President Xi Jin Ping's anti-corruption crackdown seeks to ameliorate the corruption filled crisis of the Chinese government; however, it is not clear that it is working.

Economic Perspective on the Fight Against Widespread Government Corruption

From an economic standpoint, how exactly is China executing their anti-corruption crackdown? The Chinese government is now encouraging frugality¹⁹. For example, luxury meals that were once frequently shared amongst high-ranking government officials and business people no longer occur as

¹⁷ Negriff, Liza. "The Past, Present, and Future of Freedom of Speech and Expression in the People's Republic of China." *University of Denver*. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 Mar. 2016

¹⁸ Bell, Daniel A. "Chinese Democracy Isn't Inevitable." *The Atlantic*. N.p., 29 May 2015. Web. 5 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.theatlantic.com>>

¹⁹ Perkowski, Jack. "The Price of Fighting Corruption In China." *Forbes*. N.p., 5 June 2014. Web. 6 Mar. 2016.

frequently as before. The anti-graft campaign could potentially cost more than \$100 billion and unfortunately political corruption is not the only corruption imbued throughout China. Andrew F. Quinlan, the President and Co-Founder of the Center for Freedom and Prosperity and the Center for Freedom and Prosperity Foundation, states, “to protect domestic economic interests, administration officials should press harder for key reforms that move China further away from its command-and control roots and toward a freer society built upon the robust rule of law”. This concept elicits the main idea that for overall betterment of the nation, citizens must receive access to more freedom and fundamental human rights.

In all, the anti-corruption crackdown and campaign will fail unless more fundamental reforms are made in the government of China, specifically putting into effect the right of freedom of speech. In order to move towards China’s reform goals, there must be an independent judiciary, a free press, an end to one party rule, and trust²⁰. All prior research brings together, through several different lenses, the effects on the lack of freedom of speech in China as well as the effects of a corrupt Chinese government, however not one article officially establishes the correlation between freedom of speech and the corruption of the Chinese government. The following research looks into, from the perspective of a number of people living in China, the correlation between the lack of freedom of speech and widespread government corruption.

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study were 17 people who currently reside in China, 10 women and 7 men, aged between 16 and 50 years old, 9 of whom are native (born and raised in China), and 8 of whom are expatriates (raised elsewhere, but reside in China). The survey was conducted using *SurveyMonkey.com*, rather than *Google Forms* due to the Chinese government’s Internet censorship.

Procedure

Participants were contacted via e-mail and had one month to complete the survey.

²⁰ "China's Positive Reforms and its Enduring Totalitarian Tendencies."
Millennial. Ed. Robert Christian. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Sept. 2015.
<<http://millennialjournal.com/2013/11/21/>

Table 2: Expatriates (8 Participants)

2A) How free is the media in the United States?	4	5	2	3	5	5	5	5	4.25
2B) How free is the media in China?	3	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	1.875
2C) What level of censorship exists in China?	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	4.25
3A) How comfortable do you feel expressing your opinion of the U.S. gov't while in the U.S?	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4.75
3B) How comfortable do you feel expressing your opinion of China's gov't while living in China?	3	1	2	4	2	3	3	2	2.5
4) Do you believe that the lack of freedom of speech and press for those living in China is a reason for widespread gov't corruption?	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Qualitative answers (why?) for if the participant answered “**yes**” for “*do you believe that the lack of freedom of speech and press for those living in China is a reason for widespread government corruption?*”

Native: There's no transparency and government accountability.

Expatriate: No transparency leads to more corruption.

Expatriate: No independent institution with incentive to investigate.

Expatriate: Lack of accountability.

Expatriate: Media reluctant to report of Gov't corruption.

Expatriate: As media is censored, there is no checks and balances in the system. Citizens 'know' there is corruption but it is not called in public media. There is no shame and no punishment.

Expatriate: For example, journalists are not allowed to report on the trampling of people on the Bund, or why dead pigs are floating down the river, or even why there were tons of toxic explosive chemicals in Tianjin. If journalists were allowed to report on these stories then maybe someone would be held accountable. Currently, the new "hoverboards" are exploding here in China and also in the US Local journalists are not covering this story. They are not encouraged to become investigative journalists. Journalists were not allowed access to the boat that capsized on the Yangtze River. When they were finally allowed in, they had to write about how brave the rescue divers were not about the other issues. The students in the US wanting a "safe space" where only journalists who agree with them are permitted to enter the room. Well, that is how it is over here. Only write what we want you to write. Only write good things. Happy news.

Expatriate: Without the transparency of reporting on stories and issues that matter, it can lead to an abuse of power.

Qualitative answers (why?) for if the participant answered “no” for “*do you believe that the lack of freedom of speech and press for those living in China is a reason for widespread government corruption?*”

Expatriate: If there was free speech, the government will corrupt faster.

Native: People are still relatively free to express individual opinions, so the "lack of freedom of speech" doesn't really exist. Government corruption is due to all levels of factors including economic & social & cultural aspects.

Native: Government corruption is a stage every developing country needs to go through, even U.S. went through a period of government corruption.

Native: I think that the government censors press because it needs to maintain legitimacy and prevent any power locus outside of the state.

Native: Government corruption is an accumulated effect through decades of built up of personal favor/connections and relates more to the political culture. Now President Xi is waging anti-corruption campaign, but the freedom of speech is not necessarily improved by any means.

Native: There are government officials arrested for corruption almost everyday now in China. The information were all over the news and the government did not hide them.

Native: It's a tradition, you cannot say “no” to the government.

DISCUSSION

The current study investigated whether there are statistical differences between a native's point of view and an expatriate's point of view on Internet censorship and the lack of freedom of speech in China.

It is clear from this study that when it comes down to questions about Chinese censorship, there is a significant difference between the opinions of the two groups.

Question **2A** “how free is the media in the United States?”, received similar answers amongst both natives and expatriates-- the averages of both groups were 4.44 and 4.25. Similarly, question **3A**, “how comfortable do you feel expressing your opinion of the United States government while in the United States?” received a 4.11 from natives and a 4.75 from expatriates. Both groups believe that the United States has a free media and free grounds for comfortable expression of freedom of speech.

However, questions pertaining to China's censorship and freedom of speech policies created a larger gap between the opinions of natives and expatriates. For example, question **2C**, “what level of censorship exists in China?”, had an average of 3.56 for natives and an average of 4.25 for expatriates. Evidently, the

level of censorship believed by expatriates in China is greater than the level of censorship believed by natives of China. A major factor for this disparity of opinions is the idea of a oblivious mentality of social liberties found in natives. While the majority of expatriates in this study grew up in an environment with freedom of speech and liberal social views, the majority of natives in this study conversely grew up in an environment with no freedom of speech--China in the age of Internet restriction.

In addition to the awareness of different life development situations, the idea of self-censorship is also a major factor in the differing result of the two groups. Self-censorship is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “the exercising of control over what one says and does, especially to avoid castigation”²¹. It is possible that self-censorship may have overtaken the native participants as the majority of the native participants answered “no” for the question “do you believe that the lack of freedom of speech and press for those living in China is a reason for widespread gov’t corruption?”.

CONCLUSIONS

The Chinese government has created an environment so hostile and so full of corruption that the government has decided to oppress its citizens by reducing their ability to speak out about the government’s problems. The government does not want to show its vulnerable and weak state, thus it prohibits any sort of negative publication that may be viewed by the rest of the world. If the government simply listened to citizens through allowing freedom of speech and expression and ultimately eradicated any form of corruption, China could be a politically positive leading country.

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