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Author’s Biography

Fabio Calzolari is currently working inside Mae Fah Luang University as a lecturer in Human Rights Studies. He has a passion for this academic field due to its legal and political relevance for the contemporary world. Specifically, he is interested in how international norms have been adapted by social groups, and governments. Through the years, his work has been focused on cross-cultural communication, Human Right-based approach to development, and postcolonial critique of western systems of mental health. Fabio Calzolari is also a founding member of the research unit Human Rights, and Sustainability in the Greater Mekong (HUSUME) of Mae Fah Luang University.
Research Highlights

In the People Republic of China (PRC), ideological apparatuses, and censorship exert strong influence over Internet’ users experiences. Allegedly, the aim of the government is to manufacture (Foucauldian) “docile bodies.” This would explain why, in the last decades, en entire corpus of empirical research has been built around organizational citizenship behavior. Although the PRC has the right to determine its own domestic policies on the principle of (cybers-) sovereignty, a variety of NGOs, and other non-state actors, have criticized its growing restrictions on grassroots activisms, and bottom-up governance (Wright, 2006). Per contra, proponents of the status quo points to the benefits of security, and of stability. An argument that seems to be validated by the country’ extraordinary economic rise (Li, 1998).

Research Objectives

The purpose of the study is to highlight users’ perspectives on on-line censorship, and control (e.g. behavioral modelling/patterning). In addition, it seeks to explore the possibility of a cyber-democracy in the mare magnum of the Internet. The above-mentioned is done via a review of up-to-date literature, and through semi-structured interviews (SSI). The sample universe is made of 12 Chinese students, with medium-level digital literacy skills, enrolled in 3 Thai public universities. To form the cohort, reverse snow-ball sampling, and digital advertising (e.g. Facebook) were employed. Importantly, the work intends to contribute to the emerging field of sociology of the cyber-space. By evaluating Chinese historical trajectories of agency, it also helps to clarify the logic of the “censor,” and the implementation of propaganda. In that regard, emphasis is given to the nexus (disobedient) innovation-indigenous knowledge.

Methodology

The author mixes narrative inquiry with an (instrumental) case study methodoloy. As highlighted by Çalışkan (2018), the first is used to interpret meanings, while the second permits an accrued level of data generalization (Stake, 2005). Finally, the whole approach serves the rationale stating that all social phenomena are complex inter-actions with non-clear causes (Harling, 2012).

Results

The PRC is a major player in the global order, and its GDP per capita growth rate is fascinating. Nevertheless, investigations on its development model reveal that, in a “surveillance” state, the dyad of privacy, and freedom might be undermined (Tsui, 2003). Most citizens are happy with the circumstances while others – a small but significant minority - seems to prefer a different paradigm. Perhaps one built on a liberal framework (e.g. openness toward multiculturalism and a different set of thinking skills). Reading the scenarios, we should take no thought of who is right or wrong because both groups contribute to the evolution of China.

Findings

There are discordant voices across research participants. Many embraced the governmental shaping of the cyber-space as a justifiable over-all plan for social well-being. Some were afraid of its biases. Yet others asked themselves if a different relationship between state and citizenry could be achieved. Regarding the expansion of information infrastructures, all interviewees believed it to be necessary. Apropos, they mentioned how technology improves day to day...
lives. For example, it has been acknowledged that access to microblogging services like Weibo – the Chinese version of Twitter, facilitated critical debates on phenomena of common concern. An idea that is also shared by Sullivan (2014), and Rauchfleisch et al. (2015), who notice that Weibo brought into existence virtual public spheres. Finally, several students hoped that in a tech-saturated world, digital tools will mitigate inequality.

Acknowledgement
I want to extend my thanks to all the students who volunteered to take part in this project. Thanks to my friends as well, for the countless time they have spent reading the manuscript.

References