

China's Google dilemma: Soften on censorship or anger millions of Internet users

By Steven Mufson
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BEIJING -- Google's threat to shut down its Chinese Web site and offices over cyberattacks and censorship puts the government here in the awkward position of having to choose between relaxing restrictions and raising the ire of the roughly 80 million Chinese people who use the search engine.

Few political and Internet analysts appear to doubt that China will stick to its tough stance and reject Google's proposal to stop censoring search results on its Chinese sites. But Google's audience of Chinese "netizens," a few of whom placed flowers outside the company's Beijing offices Wednesday, is large enough to make such a reaction risky.

"This would adversely affect a lot of people, not just the technorati elite that is Western-oriented anyway," said Kaiser Kuo, an independent technology consultant. "The government could face a serious backlash this time."

On Wednesday, the Google story was the top trending topic on a Twitter-like microblog on the Chinese site Sina.com, with about 60,000 people weighing in before the conversation was taken down. Most commenters expressed dismay at the prospect of losing Google's China-based service; some lashed out at the government, while others begged Google to stay. A substantial minority wished the company good riddance.

"This will make the extent of Chinese censorship a lot clearer, even to ordinary Chinese people who are not aware of it," said Jeremy Goldkorn, a China Internet specialist who posts on Sina's blog site and runs a Web site called Danwei, which has been blocked since July.

"Many people think Google should negotiate with the Chinese government," said Zhou Shuguang, a blogger who has done investigative reporting across the country. He added, though, that its withdrawal would lead more Chinese to discover that China lacks freedom on the Internet. "There are no benefits to people at all if Google continues to make concessions with Chinese authorities," he said.

The government has backed down once in the face of outcries on the Internet. Last year, it attempted to require the makers of personal computers sold here to install Green Dam, a filtering software. But it reversed itself after widespread online protests that the software slowed down and damaged computers.

Still, businesspeople in Beijing were pessimistic Wednesday about the prospect of a crack in what is known as the Great Firewall of China. "China can't lose face over this, and it's not going to let anybody run an open search engine," said an industry source close to Google.

The government has shut down or blocked thousands of Web sites. Twitter, YouTube and Facebook are all blocked. Just this week, the General Administration of Press and Publication boasted of taking down 136,000 non-registered Web sites and more than 1.5 million pieces of "bad information." It also said it had shut down 15,000 pornographic Web sites.

For now, the government has said only that it will seek more information from Google. Virtually the only official comment came in the form of a signed opinion article on the People's Daily Web site, lacking the weight of an officially vetted unsigned editorial. The article likened Google to a "spoiled child" and said that even if it stormed out of China, it would be back because of the importance of the Chinese market.

Other pro-government online comments said that Google, which lags far behind the Chinese-based search engine Baidu, was simply dressing up a business decision in moral clothing. Baidu has about two-thirds of the market. Some independent analysts have estimated a 30 percent market share for Google, but well-placed industry sources put the number closer to 20 percent.

Dan Brody, who set up Google's China office and now runs the Koolanoo Group, a Beijing-based Internet media investment firm, estimates that Google has annual revenue of \$300 million to \$400 million in China -- an amount that he said pales next to the revenue it earns elsewhere.

Moreover, he said, if Google loses even a small percentage of its users in Europe or the United States because it is seen as compromising too much with China, it could lose more than it earns in the country. "From a business and moral perspective, user trust in the West is so important to them," he said.

The company has clashed with the Chinese government since it set up google.cn in 2005. Google agreed to remove information that China's leadership might find too sensitive but differed with officials over what should fall into that category.

Last summer, state-run media denounced the firm for providing access to "pornography." Another industry source close to Google said that in addition to well-publicized incidents, Chinese officials were demanding weekly that items be removed. When cyberattacks were discovered, he said, "it was the last straw." The industry sources spoke on the condition of anonymity.

If Google closes down its Chinese site, or if the Chinese government closes it down, Chinese users could still try to use the U.S.-based site. But the U.S. site works more slowly, and access to many pages is blocked.

Where would that leave the Chinese market?

The closing of Google's China site would boost Baidu and Sina and hurt Google, industry analysts said.

Despite expensive campaigns in universities and schools, Google has had trouble catching up to its domestic competitors. Analysts say Chinese Internet users prefer the crowded, busy sites of

Baidu and Sina to the no-nonsense sparseness of Google's home page. Unlike Google, Baidu and Sina also feature bulletin boards and music-downloading services. And surveys have shown that most Chinese people have trouble spelling Google or don't know its Chinese name, Guge, which means "valley song."

Google China has also suffered from high turnover and was recently forced to replace some of its locally hired, Mandarin-speaking staff with managers from its California headquarters. The head of Google China, Kai-Fu Lee, who was recruited from Microsoft, quit in September.

Ironically, however, the possible departure of Google is no guarantee of harmony on the Chinese Internet. This week, Baidu's site was attacked by hackers who said they were from Iran.

"This is a lose-lose solution for both Google and China," said Hu Yong of Beijing University's School of Journalism and Communication.

"For Google, China is a huge market with very big business potential," Hu said. "For Chinese netizens, it's a bad result as well. A search engine is very important for the free transportation of information online. And we need competition," he added, or "the number of information sources will decrease."

Staff researchers Zhang Jie and Wang Juan contributed to this report.

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China Daily: China Reports Progress in Importing Overseas Talents (U)

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[Unattributed article from the "Bizchina" page: "China Reports Progress in Importing Overseas Talents" (U)]

[OSC Transcribed Text]

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China recruited about 480,000 talents from foreign countries, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan last year, according to a leading Chinese official in charge of the affairs.

While addressing a national conference on importing foreign talents held in Beijing Tuesday, Ji Yunshi, general director of the State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs (SAFEA), said 50,000 Chinese officials and professionals went overseas for diverse training programs last year.

Chinese programs to bring in top talents to tackle the global financial crisis progressed smoothly in 2009, said Ji, who failed to give an exact figure regarding how many foreign talents were imported in this regard last year.

According to Ji, 1,754 overseas talents were imported by China's agricultural sector last year to help popularize advanced technology for planting and cultivation in the country's rural areas.

Some 3,164 overseas talents served on 900 programs designed to boost the development of the country's western provinces and autonomous regions in the past year, said Ji.

An extra 3,376 overseas professionals also worked for programs to rejuvenate northeastern China which consists of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces, commonly known as China's "rust belt". This region now lags behind the eastern Chinese provinces after the reform and opening-up policy was introduced in 1978.

According to Ji, China plans to invite more scientists who specialize in the fields of new energy, new material, information networking, life sciences and large aircraft building, among others, this year.

He added that efforts would also be made to advance promulgation of regulations conducive to encouraging inflow of more foreign talents to China.

[Description of Source: Beijing China Daily Online in English -- Website of China's official English-language newspaper, offering both the website of the paper and additional content; URL: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/>]

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Far From Border, U.S. Detains Foreign Students



Will Yurman for The Chronicle

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers check passengers' citizenship on a bus in Rochester, N.Y., more than 75 miles from Canada. Some college officials whose students have been stopped believe the customs agency has more resources than it knows what to do with.

By Colin Woodard

Old Town, Me.

Six miles north of the University of Maine's flagship campus, on the only real highway in these parts, students and professors traveling south might encounter a surprise: a roadblock manned by armed Border Patrol agents, backed by drug-sniffing dogs, state policemen, and county sheriff's deputies.

Although the Canadian border is nearly 100 miles behind them—and Bangor, Maine's second-largest city, just 15 miles ahead—motorists are queried about their citizenship and immigration status. Those who raise an agent's suspicions are sent to an adjacent weigh station for further questioning and, sometimes, searches. Any foreign students or scholars unable to produce all of their original documentation are detained and could be arrested.

Thus far, nobody from the University of Maine has actually been arrested at this ephemeral checkpoint, which usually appears near the start of the academic year, when migrant laborers happen to be leaving eastern Maine's blueberry fields. One student had to wait at the roadblock until university authorities had satisfied agents that the individual was in the country legally, university officials say.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection says it can stop travelers anywhere within 100 miles of a U.S. border. It has an aggressive presence in Rochester, N.Y., where agents questioned travelers at a bus station on Christmas Eve.



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Cary M. Jensen is director of the International Services Office at the U. of Rochester, where hundreds of students have been questioned or inconvenienced: "It feels a lot like East Germany did when I visited in 1980."

But elsewhere on the northern border, foreign students and scholars experience fear and uncertainty every time they leave campus, pick up a friend at the bus station, or board a domestic train or flight, even when they have all their documents with them.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection has greatly increased its manpower along the northern border, allowing for more-frequent use of roving patrols or surprise checkpoints on buses, trains, and highways far from the border itself. Students who failed to carry their original documents have been delayed and fined, apprehended even when they're just a few miles from campus.

"We used to tell students: When you get here, put your passport and I-90 form away so you don't lose it, because you don't need anything special when you travel around the country," says Thy Yang, director of international programs at Michigan Technological University, located a few miles from the shores of Lake Superior. "Now we tell them to carry it at all times."

She adds, "Some students have gotten citations and a \$75 fine for not carrying their documents, and they weren't happy about it. We told them it could have been worse."

For a broad category of students and scholars, even having one's documents in hand and in order offers no guarantee against being arrested and locked up in a detention facility hundreds of miles away. University officials and immigration attorneys interviewed by *The Chronicle* told of nearly two dozen incidents in which students or scholars were inappropriately detained at domestic stops by customs officers. Most were in the midst of the lengthy but not uncommon process of changing their immigration status and had followed all the rules. Others were apparently detained because the agents were unaware that while a student's visa might have expired, his or her permission to study in the country had not. All

were in the country legally under the rules set forth by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which, like Customs and Border Protection, is part of the Department of Homeland Security.

"Border Patrol sometimes interprets immigration regulations differently than Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services do," says Ellen A. Dussourd, director of international student and scholar services at the University at Buffalo. "This causes a lot of difficulty for international student and scholar offices when they need to advise their international students and scholars about travel in the U.S."

Frank A. Novak, an immigration lawyer at Harter Secrest & Emery, a law firm in Rochester, N.Y., says students and scholars typically run afoul of the customs agency when changing status from a nonimmigrant student or work visa (such as F-1, H1B, or O-1) to an immigrant one, perhaps because they have married a U.S. national or been offered a permanent job. They apply before their visa expires and receive permission to work, live, and travel until their application is processed, which may take years. "Inherent in the policy is that your old [nonimmigrant] status will expire," he says, but customs officers sees this as grounds to arrest them.

"These people are following all the rules, but the government-enforcement authorities are detaining them and really wreaking havoc on their lives and scaring the heck out of them," says Mr. Novak, whose clients have included foreign scholars so treated. "It seems an insane policy to be arresting scientists, artists, professors, and students who have done everything properly and do a great job for our country."

'Temporary Permanent'

Customs and Border Protection officials did not make themselves available for an interview, despite repeated requests. A written statement ignored questions on the topic, instead providing general commentary on the purpose of internal checkpoints. "CBP Border Patrol agents conduct these types of operations periodically in key locations that serve as conduits for human and narcotics smuggling," the statement said. "These operations serve as a vital component to our overall border security efforts and help sustain security efforts implemented in recent years."

Customs and Border Protection also maintains that it can set up roadblocks—it prefers the term "temporary permanent checkpoints" for legal reasons—and question people on trains and buses or at transportation stations anywhere within 100 air miles of a U.S. border or seacoast. This broadly defined border zone encompasses most of the nation's major cities and the entirety of several states, including Florida, Michigan, Hawaii, Delaware, New Jersey, and five of the six New England states. The American Civil Liberties Union—concerned about the erosion of Fourth Amendment protections against arbitrary searches and seizures—has called it the "Constitution-Free Zone."

Officials of several universities located within 100 miles of the Canadian frontier told *The Chronicle* that their foreign students and faculty have experienced few serious problems as a result of the checkpoints, though they now tell students to carry their original documents with them at all times. The institutions include the University of Maine at Orono, University of Vermont, Wayne State University, Michigan Tech, and Western Washington University.

"You'll always have a quirk here and there or an error now and then, but for the most part, things are working pretty well at the border, and we don't have any troubles away from the border at all," says Linda Seatts, director of Wayne State's Office of International Students and Scholars. "We're just elated about that."