2010

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Almost three weeks have passed since Google's January 12 announcement that it would be reconsidering its Chinese operations, and although the company has not yet indicated a final decision about its future in China, the issues raised by this matter have sparked a number of thoughtful analyses. Yesterday, *China Beat*featured a piece by Geremie Barmé on "The Harmonious Evolution of Information in China"; below, some more recent commentaries on the Google and China story that have gotten our attention:

1. NPR's *Fresh Air* program, "Fighting Cybercrime, One Digital Thug at a Time."*Fresh Air* contributor Dave Davies interviews Joseph Menn, a journalist who has been investigating hacker collectives and daily lives of hackers (chronicled in his new book, *Fatal System Error*), and Barrett Lyon of 3Crowd Technologies.

2. At *Foreign Policy*, Adam Segal writes of "The Chinese Internet Century." Segal considers Hillary Clinton's January 21 speech, "Internet Freedom," but has little hope that Clinton's words will effect much change:

Censorship, hacking, and economic warfare as practiced in China are rooted in a political and economic calculus that is unlikely to change. From the first introduction of modern information technologies, the Chinese have viewed them as a double-edged sword: essential to economic growth, but a threat to regime stability. Using a combination of old-school intimidation and high-tech surveillance, Beijing has managed to keep most materials it deems harmful off most computer screens in China and still promote economic growth.

The fact is that the majority of Chinese simply don't care, giving the government even less incentive to change its ways. Technologically savvy Chinese "netizens" — if that term even has meaning in a place like China — find ways to fan qiang (scale the "Great Firewall"), but most users, like their counterparts elsewhere, are more interested in entertainment gossip, pirated MP3s, and updates from their friends than missives from Falun Gong or the latest report from Human Rights Watch. U.S. State Department spending on proxy servers or technologies that hide users' identities temporarily allow some Chinese greater access to information online, but won't substantially change the underlying dynamics.

3. Two conversations about China, Google, and internet freedom have been posted at the Carnegie Council's website. Alexandra Harney and Devin Stewart discuss "A Question of Values" in one conversation; in the other (originally at Newsweek on Air), Devin Stewart and Daniel Gross consider Google's threat to pull out of China.

4. At *History Compass Exchange*, Shellen Xiao Wu relates today's "Google v. China" story to conflicts between China and foreign powers going back to the eighteenth century:

Admittedly, historians are rather annoying creatures, prone to making pronouncements like, "Well, actually in 1740…." But I can't help feeling that when the dust settles, the great Google v. China show-down of 2010 will be seen as only a minor episode in an ongoing debate over the boundaries between commerce and state intervention.

5. YaleGlobal Online features a two-part story, "China and Google: Searching For Trouble." Part One, by Jonathan Fenby, is here; Part Two, by Jeffrey Garten, can be found here.

6. Thanks to Danwei for directing our attention to this video of Thomas Crampton interviewing Orville Schell, who remarks that Google functions much like a country. Asked if any other company could take a stance similar to Google's vis-a-vis censorship, Schell declares that "*Only* Google could do it alone and not be vulnerable."

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