

**Supervision for the middleman?  
– Active Citizenship as basis for good governance in the P.R. China**

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**Abstract**

The central governments of China have historically always been remote, and largely uninvolved in the lives of ordinary citizens, and even in the People's Republic of China, "*heaven is high, and the emperor far away*". Local officials, and their personal 'convictions' have often disregarded communications from the central government, and superseded national guidelines, regulations, or even laws, leading to local inequalities, the potential for corruption, etc.

The explosive growth of the number of Internet users in China, and the relative freedom enjoyed by these Chinese netizens (interNET + citIZENS) has led to many complaints against local officials online. Netizens have convicted local officials of fraud and corruption online, attacked them over public misbehavior, criticized them for specific remarks, scrutinized criminal investigations, etc.

Instead of silencing the online critics of party members and government officials, though, the central government appears to welcome their criticism, and is willing to act upon evidence supplied by netizens online. In marked contrast to the treatment of *offline* protest actions and dissidents, *online* dissent has been accepted by the highest levels of the PRC government, with even Hu Jintao inviting critical comments online.

In a government White Paper, published in June 2010, the central government formally approved of the Internet as an appropriate channel of communication between ordinary citizens and the highest levels of government. As this paper will demonstrate, this attitude of the central government towards the Internet could be seen as a new form of social contract between the government and the governed in the People's Republic of China that provides for direct channels of communication between the central government and ordinary citizens as a way of ensuring good governance at the local level through the officially accepted supervision of local officials by active citizens – 'active Citizenship' replacing the unenforceable 'rule of law'.

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In early 2011, China's online population has grown to over 457 million netizens (Internet + citizens), or 34% of the People's Republic of China's total population, which can be seen as one part of China's amazing development since 1978, and its resultant rise in the level of living standards of most segments of the population. The Internet has become very important across all levels of Chinese society, from disadvantaged migrant workers who access the Internet at a local Internet Cafe or on their mobile phones to network with other migrants in the search for jobs, to highly paid managers in international joint-venture companies, who communicate with others online, shop online, book their holidays online, etc. The Spring Festival Gala of 2011 demonstrated this importance with its inclusion of a number of the most popular Internet phrases of 2010 in the sketches that were performed, and by featuring two acts who had become famous online, and had been chosen for the Gala through a survey of Chinese netizens.

Apart from its importance as entertainment, employment, purchasing, etc. platform, this paper wants to demonstrate that the *internetisation* of Chinese society has also brought about a new *politicalisation* of Chinese people – albeit under a very *apolitical* guise. Chinese netizens are getting involved in political action, and are doing so at the invitation and with the apparent blessing of the central government who is encouraging netizens to contribute to the supervision and control of local government officials.

*Offline* public protest is normally suppressed in China (e.g. Xiao, 2009), dissidents are arrested or confined to their place of abode (e.g. Kahn, 2007), and negative news reports are censored (e.g. O'Brien, 2009). Despite occasional demonstrations of a willingness to reform China (e.g. Buxi, 2008), public criticism of Chinese government institutions by organised groups of citizens is still not acceptable in 2011.

*Online*, the situation is often described in similar terms in the academic literature, although individual netizens are thought to be in a better position to counter moves by government officials to curtail their protests. Chinese netizens are shown circumventing restrictions of the government (e.g. Chase and Mulvenon, 2002; Giese, 2006; Hachigian, 2001; MacKinnon, 2008), while the relationship between government and netizens is often portrayed as being more equal than in offline China, i.e. online, netizens can compete with the government, or 'contest' its power (e.g. Yang, 2008; 2009), while private Internet companies are caught between the two contending forces, at times enabling protest by netizens, at times being co-opted by the Chinese government (e.g. Goldsmith and Wu, 2006; MacKinnon, 2009a).

This paper will argue, though, that the contention between government and netizens online is not quite the issue it is made out to be. While *local* officials are wary of the Internet, and have at times attempted to prevent the discussion of local issues online, the *central* authorities appear to intend to *use* the Internet to keep local and provincial authorities in line. Despite nation-wide campaigns against certain types of online content, and a strict censorship of many political topics, the central government has repeatedly issued statements encouraging

online criticism of local officials and the discussion of local problems (see also Herold, 2011a).

Hu Jintao's succession of Jiang Zemin as President of the People's Republic of China and General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party brought with it a government-sanctioned revival of Confucian ideas and of the veneration of Confucius (e.g. Chang, 2011; Sisci, 2011), in particular in the form of an increased emphasis on the Confucian ideal of the 'harmonious society'. Amidst the societal upheavals and the increasing levels of corruption in China's state apparatus, the declared goal of the central government became to 'forge an ever closer relationship between the people and the government', while promoting 'stability and unity' (Xinhua New Agency, 2005).

As part of these efforts, in 2008, Hu Jintao engaged netizens in a brief, but highly symbolic, online chat (see e.g. Mu, 2008a for a video clip and an English summary, also for the quotes below), which was pre-scripted and meant to set the tone for the government's engagement with netizens. Hu Jintao 'said the Internet is an important source of news', referring to Chinese and international news sources, thereby officially condoning the access of foreign news sites by Chinese netizens. Additionally, he stated the internet was 'a channel where the president can find out what netizens' concerns are, and a way to gather their opinions', which constituted an invitation for netizens to use online forums, in particular the People's Daily Strong Country Forum, which hosted the online chat, to air their grievances so that they would be noticed (and could be acted upon) by China's central government. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao followed this up by engaging Chinese netizens in online chats in 2009 and 2010 (e.g. Wu, & Dean, 2010).

Chinese netizens appear to have responded to the encouragements by the Chinese government, and have used the Internet to investigate, supervise, attack, and punish local officials and Party members whose conduct they found unacceptable. The next part of this paper will discuss a few selected example cases in which local officials were held to account by Chinese netizens, which will be followed by a closer look at statements made by China's central government about the role, the function, and the rights of netizens vis-à-vis the supervision of local officials. The paper will conclude that a new form of political contract is emerging in China between the central government and the citizens of China that promotes citizen activism online as a form of 'checks and balances' for local officials who have proved hard to control for the centre throughout China's history. This allows the central government to exert more control over local officials, while the citizens of China gain the right to supervise the government at the local level and have their complaints heard and acted upon. It permits government and citizens to engage in *political* interactions aimed at improving the governance of the People's Republic of China, while ostensibly focusing on solving *apolitical*, local problems.

## 1. ONLINE POLITICAL ACTION

Over the past few years, numerous government officials have been attacked online by netizens for a variety of transgressions, which included corruption, collusion with criminals, crimes, etc. The result of these online campaigns against targeted officials has often been the dismissal of the officials from both their position and from the Chinese Communist Party, which has not escaped the attention of China's large online population (see also Herold, 2011b).

One such case in 2007 started with the posting of an open letter signed by 400 desperate fathers on several online message boards. The fathers' letter stated that their children had been missing for some time and had probably been kidnapped, but that the

authorities were refusing to help the parents find their children. The response by netizens was enormous, and within a few days, numerous children had been found, working as virtual slaves in small brick-making factories throughout Henan province. The online furore was noticed by foreign media organisations, and shortly after their reports (e.g. Watts, 2007; Associated Press, 2007), the central government sent special police forces into the area from Beijing who freed thousands of young Chinese and arrested hundreds of owners of brick-making factories, and officials and local police who were found to have colluded with them. The information collected by netizens had managed to avoid local censorship and reached the central government, who then cracked down on the criminal behaviour of local officials based on the evidence provided by netizens.

In a much smaller case in 2008, a video clip was uploaded to sites across the Chinese internet that showed how a drunk man walked towards the toilets in the company of a little girl. The accompanying text claimed that the man in the video had attempted to molest the 11 year old girl sexually, but that she had run away and gone back to her parents (Fauna, 2008). Her parents attempted to confront the man, who proceeded to shout at them and the restaurant staff, claiming to be a high ranking official from Beijing. He demanded to be treated with respect, but admitted to having molested the child, and offered the parents some money (Tang, 2008). The parents called the police who allowed the 'Beijing official' to leave the restaurant shortly after their arrival, while admonishing the parents to forget about the incident.

Shortly afterwards, someone uploaded the video footage from a surveillance camera inside the restaurant to several Chinese video sharing sites, and the story managed to grab the attention of netizens from across China. A frame-by-frame analysis of the video and the combing of official photo archives by thousands of netizens quickly led to the identification of the 'Beijing official'. The man's name was published online as Lin Jiexiang, who was the Communist Party secretary for the Shenzhen Marine Office. Ironically, the photo that led to his identification showed him receiving an award for his services to the people, which had been posted online. Lin Jiexiang's contact details, including his official address and telephone numbers, as well as his personal mobile number were published online, together with the details of how to get into contact with the Marine Administrations Disciplinary Inspection Office (Fauna, 2008) and large numbers of netizens used the information to complain about him and to accuse him of attempted rape of an 11-year old child.

The central party committee of the Ministry of Transport in Beijing decided to step in very fast, and announced that Lin Jiexiang had been relieved of all his duties, and stripped of his party membership for embarrassing the Chinese Communist Party (Chen, H., 2008a). The police investigation ended without any concrete results, though, and he was cleared of all criminal charges due to a lack of conclusive evidence against him (Chen, H., 2008b). In legal terms this means that Lin Jiexiang was punished not for (alleged) attempted rape, but for causing and embarrassment for the party with China's netizens, i.e. he was punished for causing a storm online.

Another official who aroused the anger of China's online population in 2008, was the Nanjing housing department director Zhou Jiugeng, who gave an interview during which he not only defended the high property prices in Nanjing, but also indicated that they were too low and should rise further. When a recording of the interview was uploaded to several video sharing sites, it immediately began to spread through Chinese cyberspace (Soong, 2008a). Angry netizens began to analyse the video clip from the interview, and pointed out that both the cigarettes Zhou Jiugeng was smoking, as well as the watch he was wearing were far beyond the means of an official on the government's payroll. A dossier was compiled online and then forwarded to the Nanjing housing department, who used the materials to relieve

Zhou Jiugeng of his duties (Mu, 2008b), before issuing a statement correcting his comments from the interview (Soong, 2008b). After a trial lasting ten months, in 2009 Zhou Jiugeng was sentenced to eleven years in prison (Macartney, 2009b). The netizens had won.

In 2009, a case involving the sexual misconduct of Party members was even widely reported by news organisations in Europe and America (e.g. Branigan, 2009; Canaves, 2009b; Macartney, 2009a), and resulted in an article on Wikipedia (2009). A young woman called the police to give herself up, after killing a government official and wounding another one at a foot massage centre in Hubei. She was arrested and charged with homicide, and the outcome of the case seemed to be a foregone conclusion, until details of the case were posted online and managed to attract the attention of large numbers of netizens. Following their investigations, it emerged that Deng Yujiao, the young woman, had been assaulted by the officials after refusing to have sex with them for money. The officials had attempted to force her down on a sofa, ripped open her clothes, and tried to rape her, when she managed to get hold of a small fruit knife, which she used against her attackers, killing one, and wounding the other. Outrage over the case spread online and the number of netizens involved grew dramatically, which led to the police re-opening the case to conduct another investigation (Soong, 2009a; 2009b). The publicity resulted in proper representation for Deng Yujiao by several lawyers from Beijing who took on her case pro-bono (Martinsen, 2009a), and online China followed the case with continuous posts on discussion forums across the Chinese internet (Chen, B., 2009). The verdict of the court concluded that Deng Yujiao had used excessive force in defending herself, but the judges decided to release her on the grounds that she was allegedly mentally impaired (Martinsen, 2009b). This means, she was declared guilty, but let go anyway, while the officials involved were punished by the Communist Party Discipline Inspection Committee with expulsion from the Party, demotion, termination of employment, and in one case with an arrest for committing offences against the public order. Both the non-Chinese media, as well as Chinese netizens celebrated the outcome as a huge victory of netizens against criminal local officials, while the Chinese government could point to their responsiveness to the wishes of the people.

In September 2010, three members of a family in Jiangxi tried to prevent the forced eviction of their family from their home by local government officials and property developers by setting themselves on fire. One died, and the other two were taken to a hospital, from which the local officials removed the body of the deceased. Two of the daughters of the family then attempted to fly to Beijing to complain to the central government's petition office, but were prevented from boarding their flights by the local county's Party secretary and his henchmen. The two women managed to phone a reporter who posted updates of their story to his microblog on Sina.com, whose Weibo service is very similar to the American Twitter, which resulted in the sisters being able to leave the airport under the protection of reporters alerted to the developing story. One of the sisters, Zhong Rujiu, then decided that Sina's Weibo promised to be more effective than continuing to attempt to file an official complaint, and began posting updates to an account she established for this purpose (Soong, 2010). Despite continuing attempts to delete the posted information, her updates were read and reposted by rapidly increasing numbers of Chinese netizens, and by national media outlets, which led to the central government intervening in the case (Fang, & Lin, 2010; Zhao, 2010). By the time, online attention moved on, four officials had been removed from their posts, eight further officials were still under investigation, and the Zhong family had received a large compensation from the government (Colwell, 2010). Again, online attention had circumvented local attempts to suppress information and led to direct action by the central government to punish local officials for illegal activities.

A final, quite curious incident that demonstrates the speed and power of Chinese netizens, as well as the government's reluctance to interfere, happened in December 2010. Fang Binxing, the president of the Beijing University for Posts and Telecommunications, decided to open an account on the Sina Weibo microblogging site. His claim to fame in China is that he is seen as the 'father of the Great Firewall', i.e. the person behind the development of the Chinese government's censorship and surveillance technology for the internet. Shortly after he posted his second comment to his microblog, it was spotted by other microbloggers who spread the news about his posts on their own microblogs, and on many other sites and forums. This resulted in a flood of negative comments, attacking Fang Binxing that were posted faster than they could be deleted by Sina.com's moderators, and just over three hours after he had created his account, Fang Binxing's Sina Weibo account was closed down and deleted – with all the comments it had and still was attracting (Xiao, 2010). China's netizens had forced his unwanted presence off the internet.

While many more examples could be presented here, the cases mentioned above all demonstrate certain common features, which suffice as illustration of the argument presented here. In all of the cases (except for Fang Binxing's), local officials had become involved in corrupt and/or criminal activities, and local people were unable to obtain justice from them. A presentation of their cases on the Chinese Internet, or in Fang Binxing's case the spreading of news about his presence on Sina Weibo, led to a rapid mobilisation of thousands, if not millions of Chinese netizens, who began posting comments online, attacking the local officials, and complaining about their behaviour. The growing disturbances online caught the attention of central authorities, who then proceeded to intervene in the situation by investigating and disciplining the guilty local official, after which the internet agitation quieted down, while netizens celebrated another victory over local corruption, and praised the central government for helping ordinary citizens. Both netizens and the central government emerge as winners from these incidents, while the individual local officials (and Fang Binxing) are seen to be 'justly' punished. Local officials are given notice that misbehaviour will no longer be tolerated, while the connection between the central government and the citizens of China grows stronger.

## **2. (CENTRAL) GOVERNMENT AND NETIZEN SUPERVISION**

Looking at the protests from the opposite side, it soon becomes apparent that the central government is not only suffering these online protests to exist, but actively encourages the supervision of local officials by Chinese netizens. While *offline* protests are still curtailed by the police, *online* protests are allowed to proceed.

In 2009 and 2010 the Chinese central government demonstrated in a very unequivocal manner that activities on the Chinese internet happened with their tacit approval, and that they were in a position to crush all online opposition if they so chose. The Muslim Uighur riots during the summer of 2009 led to a decision by the Chinese government to shut down the internet for the entire Xinjiang province. In December 2009, they then directed several Chinese internet companies to create a miniature Internet, consisting of 20 websites that was made available to the people of Xinjiang. When the province remained quiet, 'normal' internet access was restored in May 2010 (Heacock, 2009; Lewis, 2010; Mudie, 2010; Summers, 2009).

This unchallenged interference with internet access for an entire province proved that the Chinese authorities have both the technological capabilities, as well as the political will to shape the internet as they see fit. Even private internet companies were willing to be co-opted into service along strict government guidelines. The level of control over the internet in China this exercise demonstrated underlines the contention stated above that everything that

happens on the Chinese internet does have at the very least the central government's tacit approval.

In statements made in 2009, government spokespeople went a lot further, though, in explicitly lauding and encouraging online efforts to supervise local officials and to attack corruption and crime. The Vice Minister of Supervision, the central government's lead figure in the fight against corruption, Hao Mingjin remarked in an interview that his office took tips from the internet very seriously. In a similar interview the head of the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP), Liu Binjie went even further:

'Internet supervision is playing a very important role in promoting democracy and ensuring the people's right to know, which should be fully encouraged and supported'.

(Xinhua News Agency, 2009)

Steven Dong, an adviser speaking for the State Council, underlined these sentiments in an interview with the foreign press, by emphasising that the

'Internet has become the most powerful media in every government official's daily life [...]. Last year [= 2008], we had over 84 government officials who were (affected by cyber-vigilantism) and one third of them lost their jobs'.

(Agence France Presse, 2009)

These statements are remarkable in that they create an interesting re-interpretation of the concept of democracy. Western notions of democracy argue for the election of representatives by the population of a country who are then expected to govern on behalf of their voters. By contrast, the 'people power' alluded to in statements by the central government representatives seems to consist more of an increased accountability of especially local officials to the people they are governing on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party and the central government of the People's Republic of China. Put differently,

'the Internet is introducing a new measure of public accountability and civic action into China's [...] political system. [...] For the moment, the central government in Beijing appears to be allowing Internet protests to continue, and in some instances even encouraging them -- as long as the campaigns are confined to local issues and target local officials.'

(Richburg, 2009)

According to these statements, and several other publications by the central government, Chinese officials are expected to pay attention to Chinese netizens, their concerns and grievances, and are punished, if netizens begin complaining about them in large numbers (Chen, J., 2009; Canaves, 2009a; Liu, 2009). While Heaven is still high in China, and the emperors of Zhongnanhai are still far away, it seems as if China's rulers have decided to employ ordinary citizens to ensure the compliance of local officials with Beijing directives, and they have done so with a remarkable degree of success:

'If the Communist Party manages things well, they may stay in power longer if they use the Internet than they would if the Internet didn't exist'.

(Fletcher, 2009)

In June 2010, the Chinese government went beyond statements of individual officials, and published a White Paper on the future of the Chinese Internet, which spelled out the role of the internet and of Chinese netizens in supervising local officials and solving local problems.

The Paper argued for the internet's importance by pointing to its contribution in three areas, namely the 'development of the national economy', the need to 'meet people's increasing demands for information', and the creation of an 'e-government while enhancing the capability of governance', calling the internet 'an important infrastructure facility for the nation'. (Information Office ..., 2010).

While the Paper emphasises the economic importance of the Internet, calling it vital to China's development, as it had an 'irreplaceable role in accelerating the development of the national economy', a large part of the White Paper focuses on the exchange of information between netizens, and their right to use such information exchanges to supervise government officials. The Paper asserts that Chinese people have 'increasing demands for information', which officials should not ignore, and which are supposed to be met 'government at all levels', so as to answer the 'people's right to know', as 'the Internet has become an important channel for people to obtain news' (Ibid.).

'In China more and more people are collecting information, enriching their knowledge, establishing businesses and realizing their aspirations, and communicating to know each other better through the Internet. Soon after earthquakes hit Wenchuan in Sichuan Province and Yushu in Qinghai Province, and a severe drought plagued southwest China, netizens used the Internet to spread disaster relief information, initiate rescue efforts and express sympathy and concern, fully demonstrating the irreplaceable role of the Internet. The Internet has revolutionized our way of work and lifestyle.'

(Ibid.)

The White Paper also formally outlined the duty of officials at all levels of the state to 'give prompt explanations to issues of public concern', i.e. questions raised on the Chinese internet about events offline should be answered promptly by local officials. The stated goal is that 'the Internet's role in supervision is given full play', a goal that in early 2011 was pursued to almost ridiculous levels when repeated online doubts about the police handling of a suspicious traffic accident in Zhejiang led to numerous investigations by a succession of independent committees chosen by Chinese netizens, who were given access to police reports and local witnesses and who reported their findings online (see the collection of stories translated and collated by Soong, 2011). According to the White Paper, the Chinese state requires 'governments at all levels to [...] give prompt explanations to issues of public concern', so that 'the Internet's role in supervision is given full play' (Information Office ..., 2010).

'The Chinese government has actively created conditions for the people to supervise the government, and attaches great importance to the Internet's role in supervision. Governments at all levels are required to investigate and resolve in a timely manner all problems reported to the government by the public via the Internet, and to inform the public of the results.'

(Ibid.)

This supervision of government officials by the people, in particular by Chinese netizens, through direct communication between the people and top people in China's central government is a very innovative approach in politics. Even more so as this engagement with citizens is not just the informal twittering or blogging of a presidential contender or president, but a formal announcement in and framed by an official policy document on the future of the Internet as seen by the government of the People's Republic of China. MacKinnon (2010) is probably right when she says about the Chinese government that 'the regime actually uses the



Internet not only to extend its control but also to enhance its legitimacy', rather than attempting to solve some of the problems caused by China's existing legal and political system. Nevertheless, the past few years have shown that the central government is serious in its desire to engage Chinese netizens in a direct dialogue aimed at solving local problems and supervising local officials.

'The authorities attach great importance to [...] public opinion as reflected on the Internet, which has become a bridge facilitating direct communication between the government and the public. [...] The opinions expressed by the public online are receiving unprecedented attention. The leaders of China frequently log onto the Internet to get to know the public's wishes, and sometimes have direct online communication with netizens to discuss state affairs and answer their questions. It has become a common practice for governments at all levels to consult the public via the Internet before formulating policies of particular importance. The public's opinions have been sought through the Internet during the annual sessions of the NPC and CPPCC. For each of the past three years, as many as several million items of advice and suggestions have been received through the Internet, providing valuable reference for the government to improve its work.'

(Information Office ..., 2010)

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

In European and American political thinking good governance is usually equated with a system of interlocking, but independent institutions providing checks and balances for each other, that is connected to the citizens of a country through well-defined and strictly applied laws, i.e. 'the rule of law' (see e.g. Berg-Schlosser, 2004; Bouckaert, & van de Walle, 2003). In China, by contrast, such a system is currently not in place, nor will it be for the foreseeable future. Neither are political institutions independent from each other, nor do different institutions have the right to supervise each other, while the rule of law simply does not exist in China, where the breaking or circumventing of laws is still regarded as a socially acceptable status symbol for the rich and/or well-connected.

'Good governance' in the Chinese context means contributing to the creation of a 'harmonious society', both in the Confucian sense, as well as in current political usage, and not necessarily the introduction of a democracy patterned on Euro-American political philosophies (Chu, & Cheng, 2011; Ott, 2010). The Chinese central government appears to be interested in the creation of what Rebecca MacKinnon calls a 'cybertarian' system of government (MacKinnon, 2009b) that combines an *offline* authoritarian style of government with some form of permitted or encouraged *online* feedback, which provides individual citizens with a sense of freedom online, as their concerns are being heard, and even responded to, while offline restrictions on their freedom become more acceptable.

The channelling of existing feelings of aggression, frustrations, anger, betrayal, helplessness, etc. of ordinary citizens into the online participation in governance of active citizens constitutes a huge achievement for the Chinese government, if it is successful, and will certainly contribute to the longevity of the current system of government in China. Nor should the efforts of the Chinese government be denigrated as mere window dressing for propaganda purposes. *Real* officials have received *real* punishments based on the efforts of active netizens. While corruption and officially condoned crime have become near endemic in China, the blame for which lies squarely with the Chinese Communist Party, it is naive to assume that a Euro-American rule of law and a democratic system could be established in China through either revolutionary or government-directed change within the near future.

The on-going experimentations with new forms of governance by the Chinese leadership, in an attempt both to hold on to their power, as well as to discover a genuinely *Chinese* alternative to Euro-American forms of governance, deserves a lot of respect, and should be analysed carefully. Parliamentary democracy as it has evolved in European and American countries is based on the curious mixture of the philosophical ideas of ancient Greek and Roman thinkers with Judaeo-Christian religious thinking. To assume that it is the best possible form of governance for human societies constitutes both ethnocentrism, as well as arrogance.

Citizens throughout Europe and America have been growing increasingly apathetic during the past 30 years. People feel that their concerns are ignored by politicians and that their political power has been reduced to the casting of meaningless votes in periodically held elections contested by dishonest politicians, whose promises are indistinguishable from each other. Recent political events that involved 'the people', like the emergence of the Tea Party in the USA, the protests against a rise in study-fees in the UK, or against the raising of the retirement age in France, or against the construction of a massive, underground railway station in Germany, have mostly served to demonstrate the contempt politicians feel for ordinary citizens and their opinions.

By contrast, the central government of the People's Republic of China has repeatedly stated that they are interested in the opinions of ordinary citizens, if their opinions are aired online, and have proved their interest by acting on complaints they received from netizens. Active netizens are encouraged by the Chinese government to contribute to the good governance of China – in a very restricted and prescribed manner, but in a form not available to the citizens of other countries. It is going to be interesting to see how this very *Chinese* system of good governance continues to develop.

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