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Online Censorship War and Free Speech
— Google in China

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We can't have democracy if we're having to protect you and our users from the government over stuff we've never had a conversation about. We need to know what the parameters are, what kind of surveillance the government is going to do, and how and why. [Q-1]

— Larry Page

1. Background Information

Google or **Google Web Search** is web search engine owned by Google Inc. Handling more than three billion searches each day, [1]Google is the most-used and popular search engine on the World Wide Web. Available in 123 language and owning 160 domain names for each of the countries/regions, it is not only popular in the US with 64.5% market share, also the most-used search engine in the world. [2]

Baidu or **Baidu Search** is a Chinese search engine for websites owned by Baidu Inc. It incorporated on January 18, 2000 and located in Beijing's Haidian District. Baidu handled 4.02 billion search queries during the Q4 of 2010 and occupied 56.6% market share in China.[3]

Internet censorship in China is about a wide variety of laws and administrative regulations established by Chinese government to constrain the internet information exchange and communication, such as sensitive political contents. More than sixty Internet regulations have been created by the government of China, which had implemented by all state-owned ISPs, companies, and organizations from local government to federal government. [4]

The Great Firewall of China also known as the **Golden Shield Project** is a censorship and surveillance project that blocks potentially unfavorable incoming data from outside of China. The purpose of the project is “to integrate a gigantic online database with an all-encompassing surveillance



Fig-1 Chinese Search Engine baidu.com, Home Page

network – incorporating speech and face recognition, closed-circuit television, smart cards, credit records, and Internet surveillance technologies”. [5]

2. The Search Engine War in China: Google vs Censorship

The early history of Google in China

In the year 1999, before choosing to launch google.cn, U.S.-based Google.com had been available to Chinese users through worldwide. At that time, Google did not rush to set up a China-based version of its search engine, and thus no government censorship regulations implanted in google search compared to other search engine, such as Yahoo in China, had to implemented self-censor. By 2002, with the U.S.-based version of Google.com, the company was able to occupy an estimated 25% of the Chinese search market, and to avoid Chinese government censorship completely. [6]

However, it didn't last long. In the year 2002, problems happened. In September, the google users in China, all of a sudden, could not access google.com, and the google search site was directed to Chinese search sites automatically - the google.com had been blocked by Chinese Government. Two weeks later, it was possible to access google.com again, but the connection of the google search engine was either on and off or far slower and less reliable due to the interference from government censorship system.[7]

Much speculation exists to guess why China suddenly chose to shut down google.com. Opinions varies, yet, without a doubt that one of the reason is China tightens its internet censorship policy.

The internet censorship in China

Back to 1996, Chinese government established the new regulations that restricted access to ideas and information that are outlawed in China as the rapidly growing of internet in China.

As Collings notes on his book:

"all private subscribers to China net, the main Internet service provider, run by the state telecommunications monopoly, were required to register with the Public Security Bureau, provide the government with detailed personal information about themselves, and sign a pledge not to 'read, copy or disseminate information that threatens state security'. . . . In addition to the state-run China net, all Internet service providers were required to take steps to filter out anything deemed harmful ". [8]

In the year 2000, China's Ministry of Public Service (MPS) started its new system - the Golden Shield project, which aimed to censored the web sites that include: Web sites belonging to "outlawed" or suppressed groups, such as democracy activists and Falun Gong; Web sites that contain anything the Chinese authorities regard as obscenity or pornography; Sites linked with

the Dalai Lama, his teachings or the International Tibet Independence Movement; Sites related to the Taiwanese government, media, or other organizations, including sites dedicated to religious content, and most large Taiwanese community websites or blogs; etc. [9]

At this time, google.com was still available by the user in China. However, those new activities and related policies leading by Chinese Government didn't arise great attention by top management of Google, which didn't take effective measures to deal with the next problem strike - google.com was blocked in China in the year 2002. The other side, baidu.com - a Chinese based search engine began to grow, blossoming from a

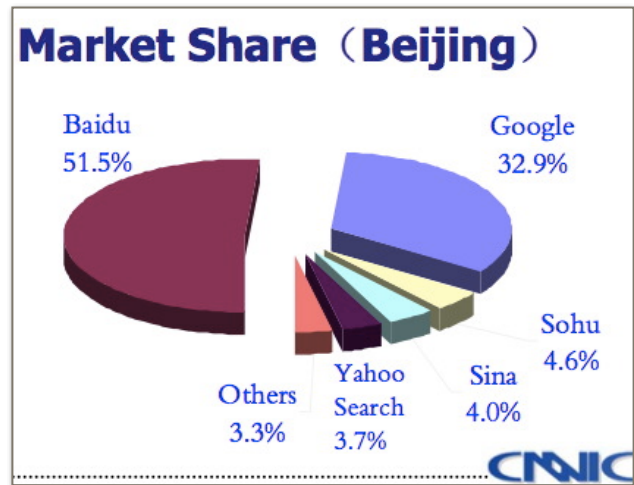


Fig-2 Baidu 51.5%, 2005, Market Share, "Baidu Beating Google in China, John Yunker, Global by Design

3% market share player in 2002 to a 63.7% market share player in fall 2006.[10] At the same time, Google dropped its market share from 25% in 2002 to 19.2% in 2006.[11]

Google's Dilemma: Chinese Markets vs Chinese Government Censorship

Seeking the opportunities to return to Chinese search engine market, google faced the difficulty and challenge: is it worth to occupy the market share in China at the price of having to self-censor? To discuss the problem and make the decision, Elliot Schrage, Vice President, Global Communications and Public Affairs, Google Inc., said, "There is no question that, as a matter of business, we want to be active in China. It is a huge, rapidly growing, and enormously important market, and our key competitors are already there. It would be disingenuous to say that

we don't care about that because, of course, we do. We are a business with stockholders, and we want to prosper and grow in a highly competitive world.”[12] What's more, after the Chinese government's Internet censorship crackdown in 2002, each search from google.com had to pass through the Great Firewall of China, which resulting in extreme long time for loading the data information. The user experience terrible poor compared to Google's competitors - Baidu, Yahoo China, who put the host in China and implemented Chinese censor system.

To change the decrease in Chinese market, in the year2006, Google and Chinese government reached agreement that google will launch its Chinese version search engine - google.cn in China. And in exchange, google.cn accepted to implement self-censor, removing content that is considered illegal from search results. Such censored content ranges from political subjects such as “Taiwan” and “Tiananmen massacre”, to religious subjects such as “Dalai Lama” and “Falun Gong,” and all other contents that assumed rumors and actions that have blemished Chinese image and reputation.

On the edge of getting kicked out of the Chinese market, Google chose to compromise to the Chinese government's demands and launch google.cn. **The decision, self-censor, seems to go against Google's consistent missions and values, which result in significant ethical criticism in Google at the time.**

3. Google's Ethical Dilemma: Censorship vs Free Speech

Before the year 2006 - the year google entering China and launching google.cn, Google had successfully stand itself out from other technology giants and its competitors, such as Yahoo and Microsoft. In years, it trusted by millions of users: their matured search technology, reliable

search results and data information, excellent speed has earned them good reputation among all the search engine company. However, after the year 2006, Google, this technology giant, found itself suffering from a unprecedented moral crisis.

Google Missions and Values

Core values are the beliefs and values that an organization holds constantly. What is Google's missions and values? As Google said:

" Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."[13]

" 'Don't be evil.' Googlers generally apply those words to how we serve our users. But 'Don't be evil' is much more than that. Yes, it's about providing our users unbiased access to information, focusing on their needs and giving them the best products and services that we can."[14]

Google's objective is to make the world's information accessible to everyone, everywhere, all the time. From engineers perspective, **the key value of search engines is information sharing, which make the information be assessable by all people and make the world a better, more informed, and freer place.** Google's mission is to provide their customers "unbiased access to information", apparently, **google.cn with its self-censor system runs counter to its value and ethics.** To gain a deeper understanding of the core value of Google, here are the google code of conduct:

" Integrity — Our reputation as a company that our users can trust is our most valuable asset, and it is up to all of us to make sure that we continually earn that trust. All of our communications and other interactions with our users should increase their trust in us."[15]

Google values its reputation and motivated by the trust from users, who believe that the users and customers trust and value Google not only because it deliver great products and services, but because it hold a higher moral standard than other technology companies. Google thinks a important way to gain the trust from people is following its codes. Thus, google established its code of ethics to guide their people. It requires googlers to maintain a high standard and keep the following principles:

“ Privacy, Security and Freedom of Expression — ... Google is committed to advancing privacy and freedom of expression for our users around the world. Where user privacy and freedom of expression face government challenges, we seek to implement internationally recognized standards that respect those rights as we develop products, do business in diverse markets, and respond to government requests to access user information or remove user content. Contact Legal or Ethics & Compliance if you have questions on implementing these standards in connection with what you do at Google.” [16]

As google stated, google is committee to “freedom of expression of their users and customers around the world”. It will respect the user’s rights and seek to international standards whenever its users freedom of expression face “ government challenges”.

If Google itself bowed to the challenge from Chinese government, how could it expect all its users to trust Google and choose follow it in future? And if Google can not keep its commitment - freedom of expression, how could it make people believe Google is capable handle the challenges in future? All those questions about the Google’s spirits - trust and freedom, are challenging the foundation of company. Google’s choice to accept self-censorship, and the following discussion and debate related by this choice, forced Google to reexamine itself as a company. It also forced the the company to reconsider the implications of censorship.

4. Google's Ethical Choice: Human Right

The censorship against human rights

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states that:
" Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice." [17]

With the rapid development of computer technology, the Internet is essentially the biggest, fastest, and most efficient communications medium in the world. Internet is growing to the biggest virtual social community that have largest number of people for information sharing. Under international law, certain situation are considered to narrowly restrict the free flow of information, such as the information related to national security or public morals.

And any decision to limit or restrict access to information should not against international standards and protect the rights to information. [18] **The Chinese Censorship - Great Firewall and the broad content restrictions found in Chinese Internet law and regulations are way to far and go against the human rights in international law.**

Google: the withdraw from China

Since the year 2006, when Google launched its Chinese version search engine - google.cn, of which the search result under an arrangement by government, Google has been under fire for increasing restricts what can be read online. After four years struggling with the Chinese's government controversial censorship policy. In the year 2010, March, Google announced

its stop cooperating with Chinese Internet censorship and shutting down its operations in China. [19] David Drummond, senior vice president of Google, stated in the official Google blog that Google moved its all search queries from Google.cn to Google.com.hk in Hong Kong, avoiding the internet censorship. He said the absence of censorship making Google more effective and fast. The most important thing is the Internet users in mainland China could search and share information with greater freedom and a wider range of choices .[20] The same time, The Chinese government banned the searching queries via all Google search sites in all language on March 30, 2010; any attempt to search using Google resulted in a DNS error. [21]

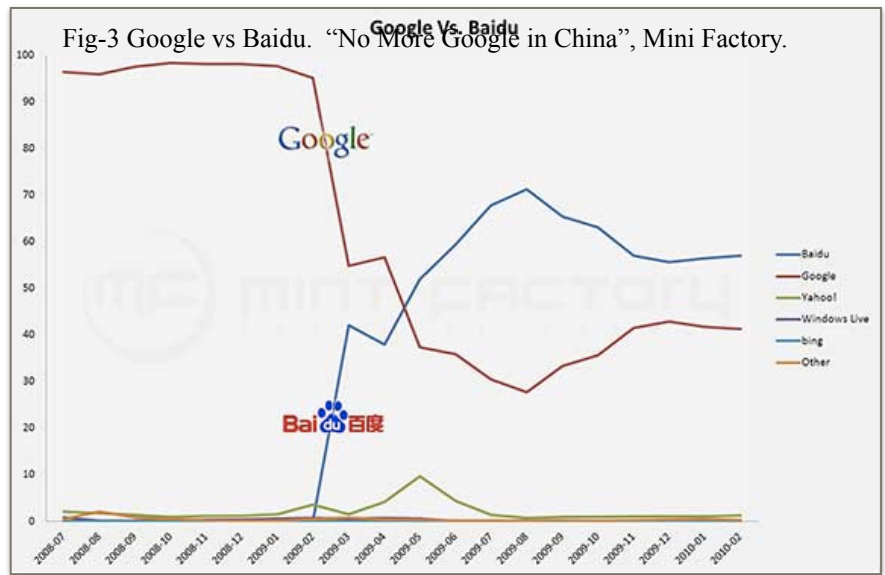
Google's move in and withdraw from China is an extreme example of corporations extended business in more than one country, accompanying business and social complications will raise new moral challenges: if they want to do business, they have to abide by local laws, which can include moral issues. In general, they should follow the laws and culture of the host country, not increase unjust institutions. However, when the moral issues involve in, they need respect the basic rights of human beings, such as the right to free speech, by international standards. **Here, Google had set an google example for other international institutions:** In front of morality — the freedom of expression, and self-interests and benefits from Chinese marketplace, it stand by its core value and chose conscience.

5. Ethical Issues on Chinese Government and Baidu

Baidu: a different path as Google

Baidu, Google's chief search engine competitor in China, started in the year 2000. It was the time China's Ministry of Public Service (MPS) started its new system - the Golden Shield

project, and also the time Google was been disturbed by Chinese government's Internet censorship system. During the years, Google tried every possible to avoid censorship, however, **Baidu chose immoral side and to defect the Chinese gov-**



ernment, which built the the most proactive and restrictive online censor in the search area. With government support and propaganda of Chinese media, Baidu growing rapidly had a market share of 56.6% till the year 2010.[22]

Ethical Issues on Chinese Government

In general, a decision to block access to online material should be subject to related national security level activities. The government could only block the websites or informations proved threat, harm or jeopardize national or public security and interest. **At present, it apparently that China censors an immense amount of material that no threat to security, such as Google.com.**

As of September 2015, around 3,000 websites were blocked in mainland China because of Chinese government's Internet censorship, including many popular websites: facebook.com, youtube.com, wikipedia.org, etc.[23] **This block-list of websites against the basic human rights of obtaining information freely.**

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