

Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission

Hearing on “China’s Information Controls, Global Media Influence, and Cyber Warfare Strategy” Access to Information in the People’s Republic of China

Panel I: China’s Domestic Information Controls and Their Implications

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Chairman Carolyn Bartholomew, Commissioner Larry M. Wortzel, and Distinguished Commission members,

My name is XIAO Qiang. I am an adjunct professor at the School of Information of UC Berkeley, and the principal investigator of Berkeley Counter-Power Lab, an interdisciplinary faculty-student research group focusing on Internet freedom, based in the School of Information, UC Berkeley. I am also the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of China Digital Times, an independent bilingual news website about China. Over the last 14 years, I have been documenting Chinese government censorship, tracking the impact of emerging social media and online activism, especially in the form of “cultural resistance,” and developing cloud-based technologies which can circumvent the Great Firewall. It is an honor to be among my distinguished fellow panelists, in front of this important commission.

Ever since assuming power, Chinese president Xi Jinping has attempted to legitimize the authority of the Communist Party by introducing far-ranging measures to enforce party’s rule, including gaining firm ideological and informational control over the media and Internet. Xi has made China’s “cyber sovereignty” a top priority in his sweeping campaign to bolster “regime security”. In March 2014, the Chinese Communist Party established the Central Leading Group for Cyberspace Affairs with President Xi Jinping as chairman. In November 2016, the country’s first cybersecurity law was adopted which requires internet companies to conduct increased surveillance of their networks, conduct mandated security reviews of their equipment, and to provide data to government investigators when requested, among other stipulations. Several foreign business groups opposed the law out of fear of being shut out of various sectors in China.

Over the course of the past five years, Xi’s government has issued numerous regulations that increased restrictions on internet communications, and aim to tighten control over news dissemination channels, including social media and mobile phone applications.

Just two days ago, on May 2, 2017, the Cyberspace Administration of China issued a comprehensive update to regulations requiring all websites that distribute news—including “websites, apps, forums, blogs, microblogs, public accounts, instant messaging tools and internet broadcasts”—to obtain government licenses. The rules mark the first comprehensive update to such regulations in 12 years and come into effect on June 1. The rules also require domestic businesses that want to set up a joint venture with a foreign partner or accept foreign funding to get permission from the State Internet Information Office. Also in other recently issued regulations, CAC requires “network providers and products” used by people who might touch upon “national security and the public interest” to go through security reviews.

Another major development in the Chinese government’s control of online public opinion in recent years is to utilize mass numbers of “internet commentators,” otherwise known as the “Fifty Cent Party.” In China, when major events unfold, a combination of government directives, keyword filtering, post deletion, paid pro-government commentary, and other forms of censorship and propaganda guides the narrative in the direction that the state determines. The name “Fifty Cent Party” refers to internet commentators who are organized and often paid by the government, to write online in favor of government policies, attack “public intellectuals,” boost Xi Jinping’s image, and monitor netizens’ activities, often using fake identities.

In 2015, an anonymous Chinese Twitter user leaked archives of the email communications of propaganda officials in different parts of China, including a Communist Youth League branch in charge of all universities in Shanghai and a local Internet Information Office in Jiangxi Province, which shed light on the secretive work of the “Fifty Cent Party.” These archives include correspondence, photos, directories of “internet commentators,” summaries of commentary work, and records of the online activities of specific individuals, among other documents, ranging from 2002 to 2015. From those leaked documents, it is clear that in recent years, the Chinese government has mobilized over ten million college students through its Communist Youth League organization to take on such “online public opinion struggle” tasks. China Digital Times has set up a website fiftycentsleaks.info to publicize these leaked emails, making them accessible and searchable by the general public outside of China.

As part of our efforts to monitor and expose censorship, we also track censored content, using tools to archive deleted Weibo posts. Over the past five years, China Digital Times has collected over 2700 leaked censorship instructions from various government bodies, issued from 2004 to 2017. The directives are issued to website managers and editors, often orally, to limit or guide reporting on sensitive subjects, and then leaked online by journalists or others who have a vested interest in free speech. We also have detected and published over 2500 keywords banned from Sina Weibo search results. Among these keywords are 157 words on the subject of the Tiananmen Massacre.

For the Chinese government, censorship and propaganda go hand in hand; “consent” and intimidation are backed by the use of physical force, including police visits, arrests, and targeted personal attacks through state media against those who are simply expressing

their political views online. According to Freedom House' 2016 report, "as in past years, dozens of domestic internet users were investigated for digital crimes from disseminating misinformation to promoting tools to circumvent censorship, and one Uyghur teenager was reported to have been imprisoned for life for watching banned videos on a cellphone." These intensified censorship and information control measures are aimed at shaping public opinion and rationalizing, internalizing, and legitimizing the Party's primacy and its monopoly of power through public discourse in China.

Finally, as a critical component of the Chinese government's information control infrastructure, the so-called "Great Firewall of China" has been constantly updated in order to restrict transnational internet connections and block potentially subversive sites. A research project from my Counter-Power Lab at the School of Information, UC Berkeley has systematically measured the blocking technology deployed by the Chinese Great Firewall in recent years. On the HikingGFW.org website, we have displayed domain names of 1382 blocked websites, compiled from Alexa's top 10,000 globally ranked websites. These websites include YouTube, Google, Facebook, Flickr, Twitter and WordPress. Early this year, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology started a campaign against unauthorized internet connections, including virtual private network services, that enable internet users to bypass the Great Firewall.

One thing worth noting is that such censorship and propaganda efforts are most effective when Internet users are not aware of such manipulation and control. Once exposed, these efforts, including deleting online contents, blocking foreign websites and polluting the online information environment via the "Fifty Cent Party," can also expedite the demise of public trust in the government. This is one of the major consequences of censorship and a primary challenge facing the Chinese government today.

The government's pervasive and intrusive censorship system has also generated massive resentment among Chinese netizens. This is true especially since the advent of Weibo and WeChat in recent years. Keyword filtering, post deletion, closing of user accounts, and real name registration policies have not been able to fully control online political discussion and public opinion. In fact, censorship often fuels netizens' determination to discuss sensitive topics. As a result, new forms of social resistance and demands for greater freedom of information and expression are often expressed in coded language and implicit metaphors, which allow them to avoid outright censorship.

As one of the latest examples of such coded-resistance, since last year, an ordinary Chinese family name "Zhao" became popular political lingo, conveying subversive meaning in social media conversations. Originally named after a landlord family in Chinese writer Lu Xun's novel, *The True Story of Ah Q*, "Zhaos" now refers to someone enmeshed in China's power structure. For millions of netizens who are commonly using this new term, looking at China as "Zhao country" sheds light on the true nature of power. What's more, the use of "Zhao family" represents resistance to false patriotic propaganda, and dissatisfaction with the current political situation.

According to Qiao Mu, a former associate professor of communications at Beijing

Foreign Studies University and a well-known political commentator on Chinese social media, this is an example of “a rebellious deconstruction of official language in the Internet age.” It converts the terms from the relatively narrow role of expressing resistance to the much broader one of conceiving how the world really is, and offers a way to change the status quo. When “Zhao country” is used specifically as a jab at the regime, it is a tool with a purpose and can be countered with a return jab. But when it reflects and expresses normality, much more is at stake. The question of an alternative worldview and new political identity emerges. There, in those myriad corners, such “resistance discourse” can begin to rot the foundation on which bullying and corruption rest, and “prepare the ground” for more significant change. By engaging such “cultural resistance,” Chinese netizens overcome the powerlessness of their solitary despair, they become “citizens of the information age,” and produce an alternative discourse that has the potential to overwhelm the censorship and propaganda capacity of the Chinese state. One can even hope that regime change, when it eventually arrives, will be more likely to be peaceful than violent insofar as the ground for it has been softened.

Let’s also take a look at some other recent examples that demonstrate the widespread online resistance in Chinese society today. In June 2016, 78 scientists from the Chinese Academy of Science submitted a joint statement to Chinese President Xi Jinping, urging the authorities to loosen control over the web and grant them expanded access. On March 1, 2017, Chinese educator and agriculture scientist Luo Fuhe issued a proposal to speed up access to foreign websites. In the proposal, Luo complained of the scientific and economic cost of current internet controls, citing long load times for some valuable sites and the unreliable VPNs or even foreign travel to which many researchers resort. His suggested remedies included a general unblocking of academic and scientific resources, and greater clarity around remaining controls with the compilation of an authoritative list of “negative foreign sites.” Even in the case of news, he added, information should not be blocked simply because it is “contested.”

What’s significant about Luo’s seemingly moderate proposal is that he is also a current vice-chair of Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, a political consultative body that meets annually alongside the National People’s Congress. It is also interesting as Luo’s approach is apparently aimed at rallying public opinion to put pressure on the government to act. Otherwise, he could have used the traditional approach of submitting his proposal without making it public.

In Spring 2017, Tsinghua University Professor of Sociology Sun Liping , who has 5.2 million followers on his Weibo account, posted an essay titled “Between Civilization and Barbarism, We Must Not Lose Our Way.” As an influential public intellectual in China, Professor Sun asked the following powerful questions in his essay:

The transfer of power may be reached via a river of blood, or it may be achieved through a procedure and election that have the approval of the people. Is there any doubt which is civilized and which barbaric?

Public affairs may be handled by a small group acting arbitrarily, or with broader participation, thus embodying the will of more people. Is there any doubt which is civilized and which barbaric?

In social life, one group of people can have the power to discriminate against and oppress another, or everyone can coexist equally. When genuine equality cannot be realized, at least equality in the sense of the law and of rights can be guaranteed. Is there any doubt which is civilized and which barbaric?

I am quoting these voices of online resistance to demonstrate the following trend I have observed in Chinese cyberspace over the past decade: despite the intensified state censorship and information control, the rise of the internet and social media has increased the ability of Chinese citizens to produce their own messages and consistently contest the Chinese government's ideological control and propaganda. But it is also true that due to the stricter internet control across all platforms in past four years, there is a clear decline in the lively discussion of social causes which used to characterize popular microblogs.

However, beneath the surface of these constantly increasing and intensified control measures, digital activism has been and remains a vital driver of change in Chinese society, and the erosion of the Party's old ideological and social control is underway. There are still hundreds of millions of Chinese netizens create new content with the raw materials of their suffering, fears, dreams, and hopes, and sharing their common experiences on social media everyday. There are also millions of grass-root voices, public opinion leaders, digital activists and an insurgent community of circumvention practitioners who constantly push to expand the free flow of information in Chinese society. It remains to be seen when resistance and rejection become significantly stronger than compliance and acceptance, whether government's control of communication and repressive efforts will still be sustainable in the long run.

Conclusion:

I would like to use this opportunity to urge the Congress to significantly increase the Internet freedom funds to support the efforts of civil society countering the development of repressive internet-related laws and regulations, researching of key threats to Internet freedom; and developing technologies that provide or enhance access to the Internet.

APPENDIX 1. Proposal to Improve and Increase Speed of Access to Foreign Websites

(Ahead of the recent Two Sessions meetings of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Beijing, 2017, CPPCC vice-chair Luo Fuhe raised a proposal on improving the speed of access to foreign websites. Propaganda authorities ordered websites to immediately find and delete coverage of Luo's proposal, which framed an argument for liberalization of China's intense internet controls in terms of scientific progress and economic development.)

The Fifth Plenary Session of the CCP's 18th Central Committee systematically discussed "Five Great Development Concepts." Included among these was the important topic of Open Development. In his 2015 Government Work Report, Premier Li Keqiang debuted the concept of "Internet Plus," emphasizing its importance in the context of Open Development, and expressing hope to use the internet, the internet of things, 24-hour design and other means to drive traditional industries to create a new economic growth point. Normal State Council meetings also focused on the construction of high-speed broadband internet, proposing that "increased speed and reduced fees can improve people's lives and also reduce the cost of entrepreneurial innovation, and provide strong support for 'Internet Plus'." We wholeheartedly endorse this development concept, and recognize that the establishment of fast, efficient, and free-flowing international and domestic network environments will become an important method to better implement the concept of Open Development, and to promote the economic and social development of the nation.

However, the current trend is that the speed of accessing foreign websites from within China is becoming increasingly slow. This will have an enormous impact on China's social and economic development, and on scientific research, and so we need to elevate our concern. For example, connections to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations or many foreign university websites are all very slow, opening a single page needing a minimum of 10-20 seconds. Some foreign university websites require a half hour or longer before finally loading. The research needs of many domestic expert scholars and graduate students require them to purchase circumvention software in order to access foreign websites. Some international students visiting family back in China are unable to complete and file required forms because they are unable to open their foreign university websites. Some expert scholars working in China must use their weekends or vacations to go to Hong Kong or other places to visit sites required for their research. Firms in China who visit foreign sites and find it very slow also have complaints: in September 2016 the German Chamber of Commerce in China conducted its annual confidence survey of German businesses in China, which showed network supervision, slow access to overseas sites, and a lack of intellectual property protection to be unfavorable restricting factors. This year, Taiwanese delegates to the CPPCC and major leaders of the forum also reported in an informal discussion that many sites couldn't be accessed normally from the mainland. Additionally, some well-known foreign search engines do not operate normally in China.

The following factors lead to slow domestic access of overseas sites:

- 1) China's outbound internet bandwidth is not sufficient. China's access to the global internet has bandwidth restrictions, known as international gateway. The greater the bandwidth, the faster the connection to foreign websites. With the steadily increasing number of internet users, China's present international internet gateway bandwidth is clearly insufficient. According to CNNIC data, by the end of 2015, China's backbone international export bandwidth was 5,392,116Mb/second, an increase of 30.9% from 2014; but, the per capita bandwidth was only 4.04Kb/sec. This data is only 1/12 of the world's per capita main bandwidth, and only 1/2 of Africa's.
- 2) Internet supplier restrictions. Currently, there are very few providers of international network acceleration services, and they cannot meet network access needs. At the same time, mobile internet users are increasing rapidly. Ministry of Industry and Information Technology statistics show that at the end of 2015 China had reached 946 million mobile internet users, of which over 900 million were cellphone internet users. As a result, many network providers have switched their service focus to mobile terminals, making computer network speed improvement more of a challenge.
- 3) Strict internet supervision. According to provisions related to the State Council's "Regulation on Internet Information Service Management," and "Regulation on Telecommunications of the PRC," China inspects and blocks certain foreign websites, mainly targeting search engines which refuse to filter results in accordance with Chinese laws and regulations; social networking sites which allow illegal domestic organizations to publicize their activities; as well as propaganda sites for hostile forces and terrorist groups. While we agree that the monitoring and blocking of foreign websites cannot be neglected as part of government efforts to protect the nation's peace and stability, we must also note that many foreign sites are not political, such as common websites for research, education, news, etc. In the interest of domestic scientific research, these foreign sites are a preferred source for obtaining the latest and most accurate information. If these sources cannot be accessed smoothly, the accuracy and timeliness of studies cannot be guaranteed. At present, there are many influential foreign news channels among the sites that have been checked and blocked, sites that are key for both retrieving and publishing information. It is worth debating the fact that all of this information is cut off simply because some of it is contested.

For these reasons, I raise the following suggestions:

- 1) Increase the outbound internet bandwidth. Increase investment and efforts in network service hardware infrastructure construction, accelerate submarine fiber optic cable construction, and take another step towards raising the outbound internet bandwidth. This would also encourage China's telecommunications companies and IT service firms to build networks and servers overseas, and to provide network infrastructure and acceleration services.

- 2) Encourage operators to increase attention to computer terminal speed upgrades. Rapidly develop the supply of international network acceleration services, encourage network operators to consider computer terminal speed, increase the use of computer network bandwidth, and raise the speed of accessing foreign sites.
- 3) Establish an authoritative list of negative foreign sites. Websites that contain content in violation of the “Regulation on Internet Information Service Management,” and “Regulation on Telecommunications of the PRC,” and other relevant laws and regulations should be on the list; they need to be strictly regulated and blocked from access; regarding non-political websites, especially foreign university and research sites frequently visited by expert researchers and scholars, lift access restrictions and inspect them regularly; regarding neutral websites including search engines, news, technology, etc., filter sensitive content and carry out regular inspections in order to increase the efficiency of utilizing foreign internet resources. At the same time, websites with content that varies from page to page should be treated differently. Narrow down the negative list to specific webpages for more precise control over content access.

(Source: <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2017/03/translation-censored-proposal-ease-internet-control/>)

APPENDIX 2: Deconstructing Family and Country: The Bankruptcy of Patriotism in “Zhao Country”

Xiyu Xuefan

1. As a country of powerful officials, it's an indisputable fact that China is practicing bigwig capitalism. It's been years since the name “Celestial Empire” replaced “China.” A deconstruction that serves as a redefinition must always come close to the essence. Recently, there's also been the expression “your country,” which is the kind of demarcation that gradually creates distance. In short, fart people are at odds with this country's identity, no matter if you call it New China, the republic, our country, or the motherland.

The benefits paid out after the death of farmer Xu Chunhe demonstrated how difficult, disappointing, violent, and costly it can be for a country's “underclass” to demand its rights. Education, medical treatment, retirement, and housing are four huge mountains to the ordinary citizen, and those mountains can crush them. Recently, a rural girl with good grades in her second year of high school committed suicide by jumping off an overpass because she was hungry. An ordinary woman who couldn't afford to seek medical treatment guiltily gave way to her illness. Left behind children commit joint suicide. Capsizing, exploding, collapsing... On one hand, calamity rains down on ordinary citizens, and on the other hand, the Big Guy is out seeing the world and spending money. The Red Empire looks a lot like the Celestial Empire of the Qing. It's as if they're all abiding by the royal teaching that one should “prefer the company of foreign countries over domestic slaves.” Otherwise, there wouldn't be talk on the street of how “the U.S. can use China's money, Africa can, South Korea can, the government can, the officials can, the rich second generation can, and the mistresses can; it's only the common people who can't use it.” But while “Celestial Empire” may fit the current dynasty, it's from the Qing. In this age where reality is bigger than imagination, using something just once dooms it to transience.

2. Downstairs from my home is a nursery school franchise. Every day when it's time to raise the flag, I hear this kind of mania: “I love China, I love the five-star red flag” This isn't unusual. Patriotism is a lifelong process of brainwashing that starts from infancy. Thus, love of country is equated to love of government, and tyrants are really great liberators. The inability to distinguish between despotic totalitarianism and universal democracy, common sense and heresy, human rights and sovereignty, is the result of brainwashing. Even so, whatever is forcibly implanted, the concepts that accompany this indoctrination can only be violent, coercive, and false. They confound black and white, they rape the truth. But as soon as the truth slips out, it will be deconstructed, and endlessly deconstructed, until it is put back together.

Patriotism is the first victim of rape. To whom does the country belong? If a country has no civil liberties, to whom can it belong? Just as Great Ancestor Mao said, “That which is fake is fake. The disguise should be stripped away.” Currently, the new term “Zhao Country” is an excellent deconstruction of our country, the republic, and New China.

Deconstruction is the dismantling of something to reveal its true essence. “Zhao Country” comes from Lu Xun’s “True Story of Ah Q,” in which the young Master Zhao passes the imperial examination at the county level, and Ah Q also wants to boast a bit. He immediately gets a slap on the face from old Master Zhao, who says, “Are you also worthy of the surname Zhao?”

The master’s household and country will categorically forbid a slave from taking a cut of its ill-gotten gains. Otherwise, Empress Dowager Ci Xi could have made it a national policy to “prefer the company of foreign countries over domestic slaves.” The Big Guy’s ceaseless scattering of money appears to have the same origin. Wang Shi’s recent anger over the purchase of thousands of shares by Baoneng’s Yao Zhenghua is the result of the inertia of the master and his power. In the past, business was a matter of you selling and me buying. There was a contract and a transaction, and it was fair and reasonable. But even so, if you were from a family that sold produce, and you wanted equal footing with me, suddenly anger would arise in the Wang Shis of the world, who represent the influential. You thought that because you have money now, you could assume the surname Zhao? Ha! In the eyes of the red bigwigs, slaves are slaves, lowly slaves. And it’s like Captain Bo’s disdain for Xu Ming. What position does Xu Ming have, and position do I have?

3. The saying “we are the successors of communism” has gone viral. Busybodies ask the question, when will our succession take place? Hehe, that’s a question to ask Heaven. When it’s your turn for succession, will you also be worthy of the surname Zhao? There’s no need to mention that positions serving the renminbi are scarce. It’s a red latrine full of people squatting. When patriotism was considered a concept of devotion, no one was denied access to it, but as soon as it became an appeal for profit, it could only be a weapon in the hands of the powerful. All the powerless fart people are the meat on the chopping board. Patriotism—“love for the cooking pot”—is a joke for willing fools. Someone else can dupe you, but if you believe it, you’re a real idiot, because your surname isn’t Zhao. The house belongs to the Zhaos, and so does the country.

The “love for the cooking pot” dream of volunteer fifty centers, and all ordinary citizens, should be put to rest. Deconstructing “love for the cooking pot” to reveal Zhao Country could be called a total overhaul. This is an inspired work of borrowism, where creativity has deconstructed something limitlessly, to the point where it comes very close to its true appearance. The fifty centers who say, “if you aren’t a patriot, get out of China” are dejected slaves earning their measly fifty cents. Passing yourself off as a master is categorically unsuccessful: “Are you also worthy of the surname Zhao?” As soon as this is raised, these dog-like slaves surrender their weapons. This dynasty, when deconstructed using the Zhao Country method, could be overhauled, and all the fakery would end as bridges go back to being bridges, roads go back to being roads, the Eight Banners go back to being the Eight Banners, the slaves go back to being the slaves, the fart people go back to being the fart people. This would also put the halo back over patriotism. Just as the slaves of the Qing Dynasty couldn’t say “my great Qing” but instead had to say “your great Qing,” Zhao Country, and the industries of the people of Zhao Country, would already be demarcated. As with the separation of a natural moat,

the powerful would be clearly distinguished, and just like that, the dust would settle in the most remarkable and definitive way.

December 30, 2015



I Don't Believe in the Zhao Family Model

There's a type of rebellion called a revolution,
there's a type of betrayal of country called foreign aid;
there's a type of capture by the enemy called liberation,

there's a type of robbery called communism;
there's a type of retreat called the Long March,
there's a type of despotism called a characteristic;
there's a type of corruption called national spirit,
there's a type of propaganda called news;
there's a type of indoctrination called education,
there's a type of enslavement called unification;
there's a type of promiscuity called adultery,
there's a type of emperor called a secretary.

(Source: <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2016/01/translation-zhao-country/>)

Appendix 3: Sun Liping: Between Civilization and Barbarism

Tsinghua University Professor of Sociology Sun Liping last week launched the WeChat public account “Sun Liping’s Social Observations.” In his first post, he provides an introduction to his new channel of expression, translated below:

Introduction to Sun Liping’s Social Observations

I am naturally lazy and slow to react. Now that WeChat is ubiquitous, and under the persuasion and goading of my friends, I’ve finally come to try this out.

Winter is gone and spring is here. One after the other, the black swans fly. Perhaps we are living in an era of more and more confusion, more and more uncertainty. The world, life, demand that we keep coming back to understand them, to recognize them.

That people have different opinions on myriad social phenomena is perfectly natural. But differing opinions cannot be grounds for exposing past mistakes and breeding hostility. Society needs a voice of calm and reason. A point of view, whether it is right or wrong, more often than not enhances our perception of life.

As of four or five years ago, I no longer publish lengthy articles in academic journals or in standard media. But fragments of thought rush forth from time to time. I hope this WeChat public account may serve as a platform for constructive discussion of and communication about social phenomena.

May China, and the world, progress.

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Following the introduction, Sun reposted a recent essay of his inspired by global events, offering his readers a warning on the importance of maintaining commitment to social progress. That essay is also translated in full:

Repost of Essay from a Few Months Ago: Between Civilization and Barbarism, We Must Not Lose Our Way

In contrast to barbarism, civilization is the accumulated progress of culture, behavior, lifestyle, and institutions for the betterment of humanity.

The general contours of civilization and barbarism are indisputable. If we deny this, then there is no right or wrong in the world.

A few days ago, I said, “In the face of dazzling change, as we struggle to agree on what is right, we must not blur one essential boundary—that which divides civilization and barbarism.” I’d like to talk a bit about this now.

Trump's rise to power. Brexit. The reassessment of political correctness. The resurgence of populism. The whole world has become confused, as if clear prospects had turned into a chaotic mass. What I want to stress is that we must not get lost during this unpredictable, dizzying time. If developed countries have some potential to lose their way, that is a price we cannot pay.

Several months ago I posed questions on China's sense of direction, the elite's sense of security, and the common people's sense of hope. In the new international climate, these questions, the first in particular, seem more real.

Amidst all this, if at a certain place and time right and wrong are hard to discern, it is key that we not muddy one essential coordinate, that of civilization and barbarism.

There are those who do not recognize civilization, who say that civilization and barbarism are relative. This is relativistic sophistry.

Do we not recognize the difference between living well and living poorly? The difference between happiness and suffering? Defined in contrast to barbarism, civilization is the accumulated progress of culture, behavior, lifestyle, and institutions for the betterment of humanity. Human history is the process of moving from barbarism to civilization. Of course I must admit that no one can guarantee what the endpoint will look like.

In an example I have given before, there are often land disputes in the countryside. There are some places that resolve these disputes through archaic community battle, but today more locales rely on modern law. Is there any doubt about the distinction between the civilized and the barbaric in this case?

On a grander scale, international conflict can be solved through endless warfare, or it can be resolved by establishing international organizations, signing treaties, and negotiating compromise. Is there any doubt which is civilized and which is barbaric?

The transfer of power may be reached via a river of blood, or it may be achieved through a procedure and election that have the approval of the people. Is there any doubt which is civilized and which barbaric?

Public affairs may be handled by a small group acting arbitrarily, or with broader participation, thus embodying the will of more people. Is there any doubt which is civilized and which barbaric?

In social life, one group of people can have the power to discriminate against and oppress another, or everyone can coexist equally. When genuine equality cannot be realized, at least equality in the sense of the law and of rights can be guaranteed. Is there any doubt which is civilized and which barbaric?

I could come up with an endless list of such examples.

Of course, I agree that not every situation is black-and-white. For instance, Buddhists, Christians, and atheists clearly have different understandings of life and its meaning. But the broad outlines of civilization and barbarism cannot be denied. If we deny this, then there is no right or wrong in the world.

I will say it once again: between civilization and barbarism, our nation cannot afford the price of losing.

(Source: <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2017/04/sun-liping-%e5%ad%99%e7%ab%8b%e5%b9%b3-civilization-barbarism/>)