

A DIRTY DOUBLE STANDARD

BY CHU YICHU

While the Chinese authorities imprison writers for expressing political views on the Internet, pornography proliferates even on official Web sites.

“If you are lonely and looking for excitement, come to the ‘Sexual Happiness’ broadband site at <<http://eee.g9004.net/momo.htm>>.”

“Whatever type of girl you are into, we’ve got them all: schoolgirls, married women, catwalk models, office girls. To make friends and experience wild pleasure online, visit <<ftp://xx51.%6E%65%74/mm.htm>>.”

If you have a Chinese QQ number¹ or a Chinese ISP account, or visit Chinese online chat rooms or entertainment sites, you will be bombarded with pornography. In addition to sexually explicit content, the Internet is flooded with advertisements and computer games. In recent years, the government-controlled Chinese Internet has been turned into a long, foul-smelling sewer.

On April 9, the Qianlongwang portal joined 13 other Chinese Web site companies in publishing the Proposal for Civilized Internet Management, which drew an immediate and very strong public response.² Sohu.com, which posted the proposal on prominent locations on its Internet forums, received more than two million hits by 4:30 P.M. on April 10, making the proposal Sohu’s most viewed item within a span of two hours. Chinese Internet users, who are most affected by online smut, made surprisingly vocal calls for “civilized Internet management.”

The formulation “civilized Internet management” bears careful reading. Originally, the Internet was an emblem of social progress and civilization, and “civilized Internet management” was seen as a keystone of the Internet era. The new demands for “civilized Internet management” indicate that in the past few years, the Internet has become substandard, indecent and barbaric.

With more than 700,000 Web sites currently operating in China, the Internet now plays a key role in every aspect of economic and social development. The unchecked proliferation of

pornography and violence on the Internet can be attributed to several factors:

The first is that Internet companies provide unreliable and monotonous news content. The big Chinese portal <www.123.com> (NetEase.com) hosts hundreds of Web sites whose news content consists almost exclusively of boilerplate Party propaganda. No dissenting opinions are posted on government-approved Internet forums and blogs. These official Web sites inspire repugnance or indifference in the vast majority of Internet users, who eventually look elsewhere for entertainment. Web sites specializing in pornography and violence take advantage of this opportunity to peddle their own content.

The second factor is official venality. Internet, telecommunications and software development companies owned in full or in part by the government pursue massive profits by collaborating to set up countless Web sites specializing in pornographic and violent content. Almost all Web sites generate revenue from cell phone charges by selling images of naked women and pornographic films.

One of the 14 Web sites that issued the Proposal for Civilized Internet Management on April 9 was the government news portal Xinhuanet.com. On April 15, I visited the Xinhua News Agency portal. When I clicked on a link labeled “Xinhua Mail,” a Web page opened inviting me to watch or download porn films with very suggestive titles.³ By merely entering my cell phone number, I could become a “member” and view porn films for one yuan a day. “Gold members” are given access to additional pornographic content. So much for “civilized Internet management.” In reality, Xinhuanet behaves like a thief crying “Stop thief!”

This is a regime that spreads lies and prevents the normal circulation of news and information but tolerates all manner of filth and enables the dregs of society to gain the upper hand in politics, culture and the economy. Public chat rooms hosted by Sina.com, NetEase and Sohu.com filter or block sensitive terms such as “politics” and “Communist Party member” but allow obscene and violent messages to be posted unhindered.

These public chat rooms are a hi-tech marketplace for pimps and prostitutes to advertise their services. Anyone who visits these chat rooms is bombarded with detailed information about prostitutes’ schedules, addresses, prices for various sexual services and contact information. Prostitutes and clients

from all over China meet up in these online chat rooms to bargain over prices and arrange assignations.

With more than 30 million registered users in China, the QQ instant messaging system is the world's biggest marketplace.⁴ It is also an ideal forum for the dissemination of obscene and pornographic messages. I recently got my own QQ number, and within a week received more than 500 messages claiming to be from women with suggestive online aliases such as "Enchanting Young Flirt," "Perfect Figure," "Bare Ecstasy" and "Big-Breasted Girl." Almost all the messages invited visitors to engage in video chat or view porn films and videos. One of the countless URLs QQ customers are invited to visit is <www.liao51.com>. This particular Web site is full of images of scantily clad young beauties and explicit invitations to get to know them online. Users pay by entering their cell phone numbers in exchange for passwords or PIN numbers that enable them to view explicit videos.

Government officials and business interests are clearly in cahoots to profit from pornography. How could online porn site operators generate revenue from cell phone charges without the assistance of state-owned telecommunications companies and banks?

And where are China's cyber police in all this?

China is unique in employing 110,000 Web police, but

these cyber-snoops turn a blind eye to ubiquitous pornographic Web sites and obscene content. Instead, they monitor foreign Web sites around the clock, block and censor political writings, and monitor and control e-mail messages and Internet posts by Chinese dissidents and independent writers, as detailed in the U.S. State Department's 2006 annual global human rights report.

On April 13, the freelance Internet writer Li Jianping was put on trial in Shandong Province on charges of "incitement to subvert state power." He was accused of having posted articles on overseas Web sites. Li is the 15th writer known to have been arrested for publishing articles on the Internet, but to date there has not been a single report of a person arrested in China for disseminating or publishing pornography on the Internet.

Avaricious officials and businessmen collude to spread filth and pornography on the Internet with utter indifference to the fact that they are producing a generation of morally bankrupt young people. Statistical evidence shows that since 2000, more than 2.6 million Chinese youngsters have become addicted to playing online games.⁵ In the space of a few months, World of Warcraft, a multiplayer online role-playing game developed by Blizzard Entertainment, became one of the most popular online games in the world, with more than 5.5 million active subscriptions. This game is very popular in China.



China's sex-lure Web-sites: in your face.

In many countries, Internet cafés are required to impose age and time restrictions on their patrons and to bar entry to minors except on public holidays. But in fact, about half the clientele of China's Internet cafés are minors. Although, in most regions, there are explicit regulations governing the management of Internet cafés, both cyber police and café operators have a vested interest in turning a blind eye. They are directly responsible for the widespread addiction to online games among minors.

To date there has not been a single report of a person arrested in China for disseminating pornography on the Internet.

Addiction to online games is not the only way young people are harmed. Online games supplant humane feelings with viciousness and violence. Western, Japanese and Korean online game developers, who are subject to all sorts of restrictions in their own countries, are allowed to target the Chinese market without hindrance and have consequently penetrated the Chinese Internet on a massive scale with the assistance of Chinese government officials.

According to statistical estimates, by the end of 2005, Chinese Internet users had spent 13.25 billion yuan on online games; most of these players were teenagers and people in their early twenties. Last year, the Xinhua News Agency published survey results showing that the ranks of Chinese online gamers are expanding by 100,000-300,000 a month. With a value of output exceeding 30 billion yuan, the online games market is driving the telecommunications, Internet and software industries. While government officials and businessmen reap huge profits from this business, thousands upon thousands of parents pay for it with rivers of tears. Following are some examples:

Case 1, reported by Childeye.com: A mother in the town of Hushu near Nanjing called her local newspaper's hotline and recounted the following story. Her 14-year-old son had gone to attend a makeup class at school, in accordance with a schedule pasted on a wall in their home. Later the mother noticed that her son had forgotten his schoolbag and took it over to his school, only to be informed that the school never scheduled makeup classes on weekends or holidays, and that the "makeup schedule" was forged. After scouring Hushu's Internet cafés, the woman finally found her son deeply engrossed in an online game.

Case 2: Little Peng, a 14-year-old sixth-grader in Ronggui Township, Shunde District, Guangdong Province, was stabbed in the chest by a classmate while playing during recess. By the time Little Peng was taken to hospital, he had lost so much blood that doctors were unable to save him. A subsequent investigation revealed that a boy named Gong was imitating an online game scenario when he killed his classmate.

Case 3: On April 6, a woman named Zhao phoned a reporter in Chongqing and told him, sobbing, that her son, a second-year middle school student, was unable to overcome his addiction to online games. Mrs. Zhao told the reporter that

her son, Little Hua, had always excelled both in his studies and his behavior in school, but after becoming addicted to online war games, he gave up studying and spent most evenings in Internet cafés. Little Hua's parents and teachers admonished him repeatedly but without effect. Finally one morning, Little Hua told his parents, "I can take care of myself. I'm not going to school anymore."

Under the control of the Chinese government, the Chinese Internet has become a massive marketplace for pornography and online games. Given that the regime has enabled private Web site operators to spread pornographic and violent content, the recent call by official Web sites for "civilized Web management" can be considered nothing more than an empty slogan.

April 16, 2006

Translated by Paul Frank

The original Chinese article was posted on the Web site of *China Monthly*, http://www.chinamz.org/MZ_Magzine/153issue/2006-5-1-7s.htm

EDITOR'S AND TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

1. QQ is a Chinese online chat program similar to ICQ or Yahoo Messenger.
2. The 14 Chinese Web site operators were Qianlong.com, Sohu.com, Sina.com, Netease, Tom.com, China.com, Baidu.com, Ynet, Zhongsou.com, Xilu.com, Xici.net, Yahoo, Hexun and Daqi.com. Qianlongwang was launched in March 2000 as the online platform for about a dozen Beijing news outlets, including *Beijing Ribao* (Beijing Daily), *Beijing Wanbao* (Beijing Evening News), Beijing Renmin Guangbo Diantai (Beijing People's Broadcasting Station), Beijing Dianshitai (Beijing Television) and *Beijing Qingnianbao* (Beijing Youth Daily). According to Nicolai Volland, "Qianlongwang belongs to a group of ten national key point projects that receive massive state funding and support." See "14 Chinese Websites Advocate Civilized Online Behavior," China CRS.com, April 11, 2006, <http://www.chinacsr.com/2006/04/11/14-chinese-websites-advocate-civilized-online-behavior/>; Nicolai Volland, "A Harbinger of the New(s)? The Chinese Internet and the Media," Paper presented at the 56th Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, San Diego, March 4-7, 2004, www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/staff/volland/materi-alien/volland2004.pdf.
3. http://www.2008red.com/member_pic_4/files/zhaopian/html/article_119426_1.shtml. The link was still accessible and as described on May 17, 2006, but was no longer active at the end of May.
4. QQ.com is owned by the Shenzhen-based company Tencent. On April 29, 2006, Tencent CEO Pony Ma won the 8th May Fourth Medal for Youth in Guangdong Province, sponsored by the Guangdong Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League and the Youth Federation of Guangdong Province. The Medal is described as "the highest honor the government gives to young people" and "aims at setting good examples for and introducing outstanding achievements of the excellent to young people in Guangdong." http://www.tencent.com/about/mo_dt_e.shtml?/about/2006/20060429_e.shtml. Tencent's Chief Operation Officer and Chief Information Officer both formerly worked in the Shenzhen Data Telecommunications Bureau.
5. This figure is quoted in Wang Hongsheng, "Jiujiu haizi ba!", *People's Daily Online*, January 31, 2006, <http://it.people.com.cn/GB/8219/61651/61652/4273834.html>.