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| 1. Annotate the article to show evidence of understanding and thinking. 2. Write a 1-page response that includes an introduction with a thesis, supporting body paragraphs, and a conclusion.  * Why do you think China is so strict about regulating Internet content inside its borders? Explain. * How do you feel about the efforts of people who work to undermine government restrictions? Explain. * Pick another way to respond to the article. |

**Getting around China's great information firewall**

by McClatchy Foreign staff, adapted by Newsela staff*,* April 26, 2015

BEIJING — China's governing Communist Party operates out of a vast walled-off Beijing compound known as Zhongnanhai. It is here that party leaders oversee China’s 24-hour control of the Internet and run a content-blocking operation that critics call the Great Firewall.

Some 5,900 miles away, in a cottage in Berkeley, California, the staff of China Digital Times tries to poke holes in the Great Firewall. Every day, they collect, translate and publish many of the official requests for censorship the party sends to state media. Such requests are known as censorship directives. They also collect breaking news deemed “sensitive” by China’s rulers and highlight the code words Chinese people invent to get around the censors.

“There is no way you could take all these critical voices and party directives and put them together on one website in China. It would be taken down immediately,” said 53-year-old Xiao Qiang, chief editor of China Digital Times. “But outside the Great Firewall you can do that. And that is what we do.”

**Blocked But Not Stopped**

Xiao founded China Digital Times in 2003. Since then, it has become a go-to site for English speakers wanting to keep up with China’s Internet and its 640 million users.

China Digital Times is not only aimed at English speakers, however. After China blocked access to the site in 2006, Xiao made plans for a Chinese-language site, which he launched in 2011. China blocked that site as well, but Xiao said his team uses a variety of methods to make China Digital Times accessible in China. These include email lists, social media and “mirror sites” that cannot easily be blocked.

Imagine confronting Goliath with pebbles, and you have some sense of China Digital Times. China is thought to employ as many as 100,000 people to monitor and remove online posts it finds objectionable. China Digital Times consists of six people, spread from California to Washington, D.C., and Vancouver in Canada's British Columbia.

**Tipsters Are Not Deterred**

Since Xi Jinping became China's president in late 2013, China has unleashed a broad crackdown on online activists. One example is Ilham Tohti, who used his blog to criticize the treatment of Uighurs, an ethnic minority group. Last September, a Chinese court sentenced him to life imprisonment on charges of promoting “separatism.”

Despite such consequences numerous Chinese tipsters continue to supply China Digital Times with items for one of its popular features — “Minitrue,” short for Ministry of Truth. These are directives sent to state media to remove or tone down postings on sensitive matters.

In a typical posting, China Digital Times reported Wednesday that censors have instructed media not to play up coverage of recent explosions at a factory. The factory in question produces paraxylene, a highly toxic chemical. “Do not place news of the Zhangzhou, Fujian PX explosion in lead story sections of news agency websites,” the directive read. Several websites quickly complied.

**"A Vast Ocean Of Content"**

According to Xiao, the Chinese and English sites of China Digital Times have a combined monthly audience of 250,000 to 500,000 readers, about two-thirds of them in mainland China. The numbers go up and down, he said, depending on China’s success in preventing China Digital Times from burrowing through the Great Firewall.

Chinese media specialist Sarah Cook said Xiao and China Digital Times have provided a real service, through their decade-long tracking of the “Minitrue” directives. “They must have quite a network of contacts in the country,” Cook said, adding that the censorship directives help researchers track trends within China.

Jeremy Goldkorn, another China media specialist, agrees that China Digital Times has been valuable, partly because “they have kept at it for so long.”  The organization’s six team members are split between the Chinese-language and English-language sites. “Every day, there is just so much out there — a vast ocean of content,” said Sophie Beach, who edits the English-language site. She said the job requires tag-teaming in different time zones, night and day, to keep up with the news cycle.

**Readers Keep Him Positive**

The websites have an annual budget of “less than a million” dollars — largely from foundation grants — which makes it a lean operation. Xiao says it is “an uphill struggle” to raise money, but he keeps doing it because of feedback from readers.

Many of those readers, Xiao said, share his belief that the current Chinese regime feels insecure and is cracking down as a result. “If the economic situation goes well, they can hang on for another decade or longer,” he said. “But they know they are in trouble. The legitimacy of the regime is in question.”

For Xiao, political reform in China cannot happen soon enough. Beijing currently forbids Xiao from returning to China, even to visit his family. While that did not matter to him a few years ago, Xiao said his 80-year-old father is now ill and unable to visit him in the United States. Asked about China’s future, Xiao had this to say: “I have no fear China will be unable to change. What I fear is that I will not be able to see my father before he dies.”