



China's Main Internet Censor Addresses Tech Execs, Gov't Officials in D.C.

China has long been a major player in the business of censoring the Internet, but if one man get his way, the future will make the past look like “the good old days.”

Lu Wei (shown), the new minister of the Cyberspace Administration of China, has risen to his current position by enacting and enforcing restrictive policies and gaining the approval of Communist Party leaders every step of the way. Now he has his sights on more international goals. He met Tuesday morning with American officials and business executives who are at the top of the technology companies behind the Internet — a medium he is very familiar with since he has spent much of his career censoring it.



The meeting was the seventh China-United States Internet Industry Forum, which was held at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Washington, D.C. The event was hosted jointly by Microsoft and the Internet Society of China. Lu delivered a speech entitled “Enhancing Trust in Communication, Creating Win-Win through Cooperation,” in which he called for greater cooperation between the United States and China where technology in general, and the Internet in particular, are concerned.

While addressing the differences in the way the United States and China approach the Internet, Lu declared, “It is precisely through these differences that we can complement each other and create all kinds of possibilities for cooperation and mutual benefits.” Chinese news site [xinhuanet.com](#) reported Catherine Novelli, the U.S. under secretary of state for economic growth, energy and environment, as saying that the United States and China should continue to cooperate, as the two countries share common interests on cyber issues, and that perhaps our differences aren't really all that big an obstacle after all.

One need not look far to determine what Lu's view of “enhancing trust” is. During his time in office he has worked to strengthen “The Great Firewall of China.” According to a report by the [New York Times](#), “On his watch, the government increased blocks on foreign websites and issued new regulations to restrict sharing on social media and increase censorship of popular online video sites.” One example of China restricting social media sharing is the Chinese Supreme Court decision, reportedly orchestrated by Lu, which expands the law against spreading “false rumors.” Now if a post on social media is shared or reposted 500 times, the person who made the original post has to take legal responsibility and could face jail time for a post that in any way criticizes the government or its policies.

Soon after assuming his most recent post, Lu issued a challenge to the country's most popular social media users. The users he targeted are called the “Big V's” because of their “verified accounts.” With some of them reaching millions of followers, they were a large thorn in the flesh of Lu and his censors.



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on December 2, 2014

He ordered them to keep their posts “positive” and to take responsibility for them. When they did not heed his warning, he closed many of their accounts and limited others. At least one man, Charles Xue, an American businessman, was detained for months.

Fortunately for the citizens of repressive nations such as China, technology is somewhat like Pandora’s Box. As long as people seek a place to express themselves freely, technology will find a way for them to do it. In the face of many of these restrictive policies, protesters (many of them quite young) have found ways to communicate and share “banned” information anyway. Apps such as FireChat, which uses the radio and Bluetooth signals that mobile phones send and receive to create ad hoc networks, allow them to bypass cell towers and the censored Internet and communicate directly and in groups.

The New American [previously reported](#) on a variety of technology solutions for increasing privacy and circumventing both censorship and surveillance.

Photo of Lu Wei: AP Images



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