China - The Censor State

Why is the issue?

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- China Quarterly, a reputed journal on China studies was recently ordered to block hundreds of its articles in China.
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- The order faced severe criticism & was eventually withdrawn.
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What is the reason?

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- While it is common that scholars remove ‘sensitive’ information from their work published in Chinese in China, academic work published in other languages isn’t subjected to severe censorships.
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- In an unprecedented move, “China Quarterly” (CQ) - a reputed academic journal for China studies, published by the “Cambridge University Press” (CUP) in English was asked to remove many of its articles in China.
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- The censorship was sought with retrospective effect going back to the first issue in 1960.
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- The intension was to remove all content that wasn’t compliant with the government’s version..
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- Most of the articles to be removed were on Tibet, the Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen Square protests, Taiwan independence, Falun Gong, Xinjiang, Democracy and human rights.
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What impact did this move have?

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- China’s invasive censorship to academic content in English was perceieved as an alarming sign.
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- This kind of censorship would effectively prevent Chinese scholars from participating in China related academic conversation abroad.
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- This predictably saw the academic community reacting swiftly with stinging criticism of the Chinese government for the ban & the CUP was for its failure to stand up for academic freedom.
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- This backlash worked and within three days and the CQ reinstated the banned content in China.
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How has surveillance sustained for so long?

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- The Chinese surveillance has evolved greatly from the initial years of communism to the current online regime.
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- **The Markets -** It has successfully bent global companies and its own citizens to cooperate with it.
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- The latest casualty is the “virtual private networks” (VPNs) used by Chinese and foreigners on the mainland to access banned content.
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- **Academia -** While the Chinese universities and research institutes have always functioned under tight political boundaries, the government periodically tightens things further.
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- This aids in turning universities into uncritical factories churning out loyal foot soldiers of the state.
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- While surveillance network has been robust, it remains an Achilles heel requiring constant political interventions.
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What are the emerging challenges?

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- To better its surveillance, China has been advocating changes in the rules of Internet's functionality globally.
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- It has proposed the concept of '**Internet sovereignty'** to territorialise cyberspace, giving national governments greater control over online content.
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- This is philosophically opposed to the very vision of the Internet as global space for building communities without borders.
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Source: The Hindu

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