China has sought to use information technology to promote its image, strengthen its policies, enhance its competitiveness, and encourage foreign investment. But China's filtering toolkit now allows the government to block information at will. Blocked sites will return, but with limited access. In essence, the Internet's development in China, dedicated to changing the way people live, work, and communicate, may not bode well for stability or liberalisation. The Internet will follow, not lead, China's reforms – unless, of course, the authorities experience a change of heart. If the Chinese authorities make the right decisions amid the potential for significant change, the Internet in China may be very different in the near future.

Penalties

If anything, many of the people who write blogs are free to do so. The penalties they face are much more likely to be punitive actions to the subtle manipulation of the Chinese populace. The authorities claim that blogs are semi-protected. Chinese nationals who operate blogs must register with international organisations. Beijing's municipal government has demonstrated the danger of focused blocking.

The Net will follow, not lead, China's reforms

Of course, the authorities may decide to alter their policies. The authorities may alter their policies if they decide that the Internet is not useful to them.