

China Is a One-Party Dictatorship.

Since the 1949 Revolution, the government has been controlled by the Chinese Communist Party. Every key government official also has a leadership role in the Party. The Party's top body is called the Politburo (political bureau). Most important decisions, including choosing the country's leaders, are made by that organization's Standing Committee, an elite group that today has nine members.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH: The President, Hu Jintao, is China's chief of state as well as General Secretary of the Communist Party. He serves a five-year term. The Premier, Wen Jiabao, is the head of the State Council, a body of 50 officials who are responsible for the day-to-day running of the country.



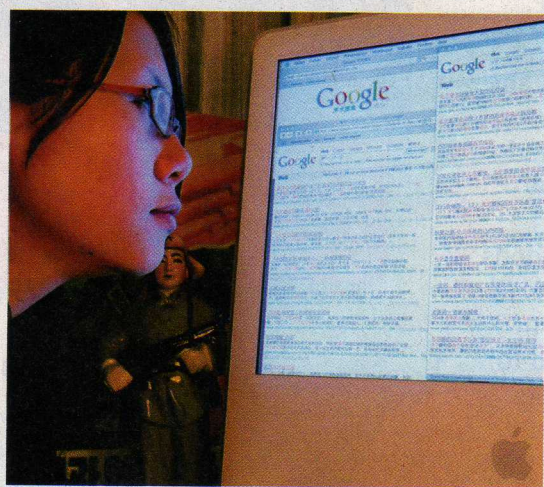
President Barack Obama meets with Chinese President Hu Jintao.

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH: In theory, the National People's Congress is charged with passing the country's laws. In reality, the Congress—whose members are appointed by regional governmental bodies—mostly ratifies decisions made by the State Council and the Party.

JUDICIAL BRANCH: China doesn't have an independent judicial branch. The Supreme People's Court is the nation's highest. Like all lower courts, it bases its rulings on Communist Party policies.

◀ A guard in Beijing's Forbidden City stands at attention below a portrait of Mao Zedong, China's longtime Communist dictator.

▼ A student in Beijing looks at the Google China site. Many Web sites are blocked, but young Chinese often find a way around that.



foreign Web sites, such as YouTube. Asked if she had a Facebook page, Wanzhu asked, "What's that?"

Those Chinese who reveal corruption, demand human rights, or promote democracy can face severe punishment from the government. One of the country's most prominent human rights activists, Liu Xiaobo (*lee-oo shao-BOH*), was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last December. He could not attend the ceremony in Oslo, Norway, because the government had put him in prison for speaking out.

Police Listen In

Xiao* (*SHAO*), a 16-year-old from Beijing, has grown up knowing this risk personally. His father, a lawyer, has defended people who the government considers enemies. The police listen in on his father's phone conversations and sometimes won't let him leave his apartment. Once, while trying to meet with a foreign journalist, he was detained and forced to spend the night in jail.

"I know a lot more about this society than my classmates," Xiao says. "What I'm being taught in class is not always true."

In his history class, the lessons strictly follow the Communist Party's version of events. "We learn a lot about how the United States is a terrible country that has done bad things," Xiao says. "All this anti-American stuff is forced down our throats. And even though I don't believe it, I have to give those answers in order to graduate."

To escape from the endless studying, Xiao watches Japanese anime cartoons and hopes to one day translate them into Chinese. He relates to the weird characters because he too feels like he doesn't fit in, especially at school. There he has to wear the same uniform and have the same opinions as everyone else.

"In China you're not supposed to think for yourself," he says. "The government controls so much of what we do and who we are. But at least I know the truth."

TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: ALY SONG/REUTERS/CORBIS; AP IMAGES/EYE/EPRESS; MARTIN PUDDY/AGE FOTOSTOCK; PIERRE BESSARD/REX/REDDUX; FAR RIGHT, SIDEBAR: FENG LI/GETTY IMAGES

*To protect his family, Xiao's real name is not used.