

# China compiles its own Wikipedia, but public can't edit it

May 4 2017, by Louise Watt



A Chinese man walks by a cabinets displaying Chinese encyclopedias at a book store in Beijing, Thursday, May 4, 2017. China is compiling a free online encyclopedia to rival Wikipedia, but it will likely only give Beijing's official version of sensitive historical events, and the public won't be able to write or edit it. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

It'll be free. It'll be uniquely Chinese. It'll be an online encyclopedia to rival Wikipedia—but without the participation of the public. And don't

expect entries on "Tiananmen Square 1989" or "Falun Gong spiritual group" to come up in your searches, either.

Scholars and experts hand-picked by Beijing to work on the project say only they will be able to make entries—the latest example of the Chinese government's efforts to control information available on the internet.

The scholars say truth is their guiding light, and their editing and review process is a rigorous one. If there is a difference of opinion, a committee should figure it out, said Zhang Baichun, chief editor of the history of science and technology section.

"Of course, science does not come from democratic votes, to convince others you will have to present the most convincing proof," he told The Associated Press.

The effort to compile 300,000 entries that span science, literature, politics and history is being led by the ruling Communist Party's Central Propaganda Department, which guides public opinion through instructions to China's media, internet companies and publishing industry as well as overseeing the education sector. It has instructed the Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, known for its offline Chinese Encyclopedia, to produce it.

The ruling party has struggled to manage public opinion in the internet age, when citizens can comment on news and topics of outrage and post photos of protests on social media—at least until such messages are scrubbed away or rendered unsearchable by censors. China also regularly blocks overseas sites including Facebook and Twitter, and has periodically blocked Wikipedia's English and Chinese versions. Currently, the Chinese Wikipedia is inaccessible on the mainland.

Jiang Lijun, senior editor at the Encyclopedia of China Publishing

House, said they had met with a team from San Francisco-based Wikipedia to learn from their experience.

China has had a private sector version of Wikipedia since 2006, run by Baidu, the operator of the country's most popular internet search engine. It has more than 14 million entries, and more than 6 million people have edited it, according to its website.

Jiang said Thursday that they plan to have entries on political leaders, the history of the Communist Party, and subjects such as virtual reality, artificial intelligence and the European Union.

The online Chinese Encyclopedia will focus primarily on entries that are less likely to change as opposed to recent events, and with academic value, "while also trying to strike a balance between that, being timely and what people are searching for," she said. She declined to comment on how events that are politically sensitive in China, like the Cultural Revolution and the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, would be treated.



A woman walks by a cabinets displaying Chinese version of foreign and local encyclopedias at a book store in Beijing, Thursday, May 4, 2017. China is compiling a free online encyclopedia to rival Wikipedia, but it will likely only give Beijing's official version of sensitive historical events, and the public won't be able to write or edit it. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

Qiao Mu, an independent media analyst in Beijing, said the Chinese Encyclopedia would be "quite different" from Wikipedia because of the need to toe the line on political taboos.

"If it's not blocked in China, the publisher must accept censorship, either self-censorship or censored by authorities," he said.

He said the encyclopedia would likely present a single, official version of sensitive historical events, and exclude items like the Tiananmen crackdown and the outlawed Falun Gong spiritual group, which "never exist on the internet."

The publishing house behind the Chinese Encyclopedia is paying 20,000 scholars and experts from universities and research institutes to write entries and it is slated to go online next year. Jiang said initially the encyclopedia will just be in Chinese, but they are also doing research to see how viable an English version would be.

Wikipedia is edited and maintained by hundreds of thousands of volunteers around the world, and has more than 40 million articles encompassing nearly 300 languages. More than 900,000 entries are in Chinese, compared with more than 5 million in English.

"There is Chinese content on Wikipedia too, but sometimes it is not as accurate as it could be," said Jiang, the senior editor.

Jiang said that as Wikipedia's content is generated by users, they can create more entries faster. "But we try to eliminate self-promotion and inaccuracy as much as possible."

Zhang, the professor of history of science and technology, said the online version will make it easier to reach more people, particularly young readers.

To create the history of science and technology entries, Zhang said professors from the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Natural Sciences first hold meetings with veterans and young experts in their fields to form a committee. The committee will then find the most authoritative person on the topic to write the draft, including sometimes foreign experts, said Zhang, who is director of the institute.

The draft is reviewed by a section chief editor and then the committee.

"If there is a difference of opinion, all deputy and chief editors should participate in the discussion and figure it out together," Zhang said. "We

will reason things out with the author until we reach an agreement, or change the author."

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