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Editorial

Emerging Chinese Theory and Practice of Media

Hugo de Burgh, Emma Lupano, and Bettina Mottura

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Since the foundation of the People's Republic of China, the country has developed its own model of media management and journalism. This model, which traditionally encompasses a very strong relation between politics and media practices, has evolved over the last 40 years of reforms.

At the national level, it has transformed into a much more complex and nuanced system based on the mediation between political, commercial and professional interests. At the international level, the ambition of China to contribute to the media agenda and flow of information has grown significantly. These transformations are reflected in the discursive representations of the Chinese media coming from the political, academic and media realms, and in the practice of media production in the country.

This issue is aimed at providing original and up-to-date explorations and reflections on the role and functions of the media in today's China as well as on journalism values and products.

The issue contains contributions by scholars from different Chinese and international research institutions, each of whom approach the subject from diverse methodological perspectives, is divided in two sections: Discourses on the Chinese media and Chinese Media Practice and Products.

Discourses on the Chinese media focuses on the current political and theoretical discourses, aiming to offer insights as to how the political authorities and the media themselves understand, frame and present the Chinese media to the national and international publics.

In the first section, Xu Jing and Wang Dengfeng analyse the practice of political communication in China by focusing on the Party media's

activities. The two authors discuss the current evolution of the Party media's dual identity as both organizational communicator and mass communicator, showing their multi-faceted functions in Chinese political communication, from conventional publicizing of policy, to supervision of the media and guidance of public opinion.

Olivier Arifon compares and contrasts soft power discourses produced by the European Union and by China for their alignment with or discrepancy from reality. The study shows the importance of the credibility factor in both China's and Europe's implementation of soft power, and discusses the normative power of soft power in both cases. While assessing that individuals are able to decipher and understand messages, the author postulates that individuals attribute credibility or unreliability to policy messages framed by a state, an organization, or the media.

In the final contribution to this section, Emma Lupano presents the two main genres in which written journalistic production can be understood, i.e., "news" and "views", as well as their sub-genres, showing how they are interpreted in Chinese media studies. The contribution shows that, although journalistic genres in China have acquired distinctive characteristics and have shaped original sub-genres unique to the local journalistic tradition, European and Anglo-American principles of journalism still appear to be the most relevant in the theoretical definition of genres of Chinese journalism.

These contributions, from different angles, focus mainly on the Chinese political and academic discursive construction of the specific media context.

Chinese Media Practice and Products explores the application of theories and discourses on the media in cases of journalistic practice and in specific media products.

Qin Lei's study, opening the section, investigates the recent boom in the use of animated cartoons for political communication in China which began in late 2013. A series of political cartoons are examined against the background of a comprehensive media revolution following the Chinese Communist Party's new understanding of the role of media and public opinion. The author argues that the creative use of political cartoons, which is a sign of the adjustment of the Party's views on the role of media in the digital age, has given rise to a new communication model of mixing top-down and bottom-up flows of messages. The new model implies the CCP's changing understanding of the public from "target audience of propaganda" to guided audience, and then to central players in popularizing the Party.

Ma Yiben explores the case of Jin Jing, a disabled torchbearer and Paralympic fencer who protected the torch during the Paris leg of the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relay. By using a critical discourse analysis of online posts relating to the incident, this case study discusses the processes involved in the making of a national hero in a popular media discourse, and how the online discursive practices of creating, worshipping and defending a hero can contribute to the building of the nation.

Fake news, which the authors call a “severe problem” of the rapid development of the media industry in China, is at the centre of Li Xiguang, Su Jing, and Wang Lianfeng’s contribution. The scholars identify four types of fake news, arguing that the acceleration of the trend of media marketization, the loss of professional ethics by media practitioners, the influence of stakeholders, and the marketization of news value in university education have all been among the causes of the phenomenon in China. The contribution also investigates the influence of fake news on society and explores potential countermeasures.

The final contribution, by Bettina Mottura, analyses how the political discourse on the People’s Republic of China Constitution permeated the media from 2012 to 2018. Her aim is both to trace the influence that political language exerts on the press in China through a concrete case study, and to verify to what extent the growing importance accorded to the constitutional text by the leadership was conveyed by the press to the public before the adoption of the Fifth Constitutional Amendment in 2018.

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Dual Identity and Multiple Tasks: Contemporary Chinese Party Media's Involvement in Political Communication

Xu Jing and Wang Dengfeng

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ABSTRACT

Alongside the reform and opening-up policies in China since 1978, there has been a transformation of China's governmental functions and of its media system. While adapting to the complex political process towards democratization, the Chinese Communist Party media have further expanded their dual identity as both organizational communicator and mass communicator, and are involved in Chinese political communication in a variety of ways. To improve the role of internal organizational communication, the Party media have extended their sphere of activity from traditional Internal Reference (*xinwen neican* 新闻内参) to Online Public Opinion Monitoring (*yuqing jiance* 舆情监测) and Media Think Tank Consultation (*meiti zhiku* 媒体智库). As leaders in China's market-oriented media reform and tech-driven media integration, the Chinese Party media have remained dominant and privileged agents in China's mass media system, and active participants in social political communication in a number of ways, from traditional policy publicity, to media supervision and timely external opinion guiding.

Keywords: Chinese Party media; functionalism; media policy and system; political communication; public opinion.

Although political communication is the most important branch of communication research, the state of academic research into Chinese political communication is somewhat embarrassing. On the one hand, the huge difference between China's political reality and the electoral politics

of the West makes it difficult to apply the theories and methodologies of Western political communication research to China. On the other hand, it is hard for scholars researching China's political communication to avoid political and ideological interference and highlight its academic value. Thus, it is not easy for Chinese scholars to conduct effective dialogues with either their Western peers or Chinese practitioners.

“The historical context of the development of China's journalism is clearly different from the Western countries we study [...]. In many areas of the world, the role of the state is very different, but in more areas of the world, it is far closer to the centre of the media system structure than in the West” (Hallin and Mancini 2004). The subject of this article has not been taken from a literature review of Western political communication, nor from the use of so-called “advanced” research methods; it is based on long-term observation of the Chinese political reality from the perspective of political communication. We do hope that it will really help to refine the issues of Chinese political communication research and lead to an in-depth academic dialogue and exchange of ideas.

The concept of political communication should be derived from definitions. Among all the definitions of political communication, the author agrees with Nimmo and Sanders' relatively broad saying, “Political communication focuses on communication behaviour and its influence on the political process” (Nimmo and Sanders 1981, 12). This definition reflects the development of politics research from the initial political thought to the political system, and then to the political process and behavioural research.

Although the political process varies significantly from country to country, it is possible to identify and analyze agents of political communication within a specific political process. For that reason, we have chosen to study the dual identity of the Chinese Party's media roles and the way in which they fulfil the function of those roles through undertaking multiple tasks within the contemporary Chinese public policy process.

The term, “Party media” has been coined from a speech by Xi Jinping during a colloquium that he hosted in Beijing on 19 February 2016. During the colloquium, he emphasized that “all media run by the Party and the government are propaganda fronts of the Party and must have ‘Party’ as their surname” (Li and Huo 2016). Since then, “Party media” has largely replaced the former term “Party newspaper”, but until now there has been a lack of academic fruit on the Party media and political communication.

Jing Xu's *Political Communication in the Great Leap Forward Movement*, published in Hong Kong in 2004, did some ground-breaking research in the field of Chinese political communication (Xu 2004, 4-12). It featured an in-depth analysis of the Chinese Party media's communications during the mass political movement of Chairman Mao's era. Well, circumstances change with the passage of time. Since 1978, alongside China's reform and opening-up policies, adapting to the new market economy and international co-operation, China has gradually changed its ideas and practice on governance from strict control to social service.

Following this political transformation, the Chinese Party media have shifted their mission from "serving class struggle" to "serving socialist modernization", and have taken the lead in the media's commercialization reforms and media integration, which have been driven by ICTs since the beginning of this century. The composition of contemporary Chinese media is increasingly diverse in terms of technology, capital resources and operating mechanisms. As a privileged and dominant part of the Chinese media system, the Party media, including the *People's Daily*, Xinhua News Agency, CCTV¹ and many more Party and local governmental organs which constitute China's mainstream media, have undergone substantial change in terms of management ideas, capital composition, operating mechanisms and mediamorphosis. The political partisan nature of the Chinese Party media differentiates them from the Western mainstream media, and also determines their involvement in political communication with uniquely Chinese characteristics. Research on the current political communication of the Party media not only helps to uncover the true nature of Chinese political communication, but also examines the aim of such academic research.

¹ CCTV has been transformed through the creation of a new central radio and television network, to be known as "Voice of China". It is the amalgamation of China Central Television (including China Global Television Network), China National Radio, and China Radio International, and it now serves as an institution directly under the State Council.

1. CHINA'S PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS AND THE DUAL IDENTITY OF THE PARTY MEDIA

The political process in most countries is usually based on the public policy process. At present, China's public policy-making process still differs in many ways from those in the West. First, it is characterized in practice by a "combination of legislature and administration". The executive government is responsible for decision-making, implementation and major policy revision. As the legislative body, the People's Congress, from national to local level, in reality stands on the "second line". In recent years, with the reform of the government system, the role of the People's Congress has been strengthened, while the government still plays a central and dominant role in the decision-making process.

Second, the phenomenon of "unity of Party and government, with Party leading the government" (He and Kong 2011, 61-79) is quite obvious, and permeates all aspects of the policy-making process, official actions and behaviour. Political stability and the compliance of officials form the principles and basis of decision-making.

Finally, the intersection of "stripes" and "blocks" is a major feature of Chinese government administration. The "stripes" refer to the vertical lines of authority over various sectors, reaching down from the ministries of central government. The "blocks" refer to the horizontal level of authority of territorial government at the provincial or local level (Xue and Chen 2005, 99-103).

Even so, there has been an obvious change in Chinese public policy process in some respects.

During 1980, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up the first spokesman system, and regularly released government information. During the SARS outbreak of 2003, the Ministry of Health established its second press release system, in response to public concern. Since then, the theory of governmental responsiveness has gradually emerged. Based on the idea of social governance, it provides a conscious, stable and sustainable governmental response mechanism, providing a people-based, service-oriented response, in good time and within the rule of law. Although the national spokesman system largely reflects the Chinese social management model, overseen by the government as a single function, it is consistent with the concept of service-oriented government, with its focus on improving the government's capability and quality of public service.

In 1987, the 13th National Party Congress highlighted the principle of openness. Since then, China has gradually promoted the publicizing

of government affairs, Party affairs, and judicial openness. With the promulgation and implementation of the “Regulations of Governmental Information Disclosure” in 2007, the Chinese policy-making process has gradually changed from the covert authoritarian or élite decision-making set-up of Mao’s era to be more open and public, with institutional norms. Also in 1987, the 13th National Party Congress formally proposed the concept of “public opinion supervision”. This was the first time that the concept had been included in the Party’s documentation, and provided official assurance with regard to the Party’s role in media supervision.

Different countries use different mechanisms in the public policy process, with a number of internal or external participants. In the West, the mass media, as external opinion leaders in policy-making, usually spread information about elections, politics and related public issues. However, the Chinese Party media had always been characterized by internal organizational communication. Moreover, with the development of China’s mass media system, originating from the reform and opening-up of 1978, the Chinese Party media have gained important roles within the current media system. In competition with the other media for social news communication, they also function as external opinion leaders for political communication. In China, there are currently two opposing areas of public opinion. One is full of official slogans and discourse, while the other is full of alternative views (He and Chen 2010). For propaganda practitioners, how to bridge the two opinion fields and give full play to the role of the Party media is a major question. From our viewpoint, as researchers, understanding the dual identity of the Party media and their methods of communication may help towards a better understanding of the relationship between the media and public opinion in Chinese political communication.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHINESE PARTY MEDIA

Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, under the guidance of Chinese Proletariat Party journalism, with planned top-down, step-by-step adjustments, China has established a centralized and unified national media network, centred on the *People’s Daily* (人民日报), the Xinhua News Agency (新华通讯社), and the Central People’s Broadcasting Station (中央人民广播电台). The new media system differed in two ways from its pre-1949 predecessor. First, the ownership

system underwent a revolutionary change. Through the confiscation and socialist transformation of the old media, all media had by 1953 become state-owned or at least collective-owned, with no private ownership at all (Fang and Zhang 1998, 389). Second, the structure of the media system was also changed. Organs (*dang bao* 党报) and professional newspapers with a specific readership became the mainstay of the system, while private and independent coterie-run newspapers disappeared.

According to the January 1954 statistics, of the total 258 newspapers above the provincial level, 151 were Party organs, such as the *People's Daily*, which accounted for 58.5% of the total, and ranked first among all types of newspaper in China. This proportion has dropped, year on year, to 31.3%. However, beginning with the Anti-Rightist Campaign (*fanyou yundong* 反右运动) in 1957, the proportion of Party newspapers again rose each year, reaching 75% in 1961 and 84.4% in 1975 (Yu 1993, 16). The Party Central Committee controls the Party media's personnel appointments and the management structure, and has strict regulations on operations. Besides the Party Central Committee newspaper, at the same administrative level, all newspapers, periodicals, radio stations, publishing agencies, and other news and publishing organizations have to be supervised by the propaganda departments of the provincial (municipal) committees. Under the unified leadership of the Party and the government, the national media have formed a well-organized, top-down media communication network for different regions and readerships.

As to the relationship between the Party and the Party newspaper, Party journalism has stated that the Party newspaper must be "a truly militant organ (真正战斗的党的机关报). It is not only to be a propagandist or agitator, but also the organizer for the collective. The collective does not refer to the newsroom co-workers or coterie, but to the entire party organization. Therefore, the party organ is not 'simply a publicity product for external propaganda', but a 'leader of working for both the Party and the masses'". The Party organ should not only explain theories and strategies of Chinese revolution, but also "provide concrete suggestions for comrades to practise". "The Party must use organs to inform and mobilize masses to carry out miscellaneous political activities and movements. Organs are the mouthpiece of the Party. All people working for the organs as part of the Party must follow the will of the Party. Every act and every word must be taken into consideration of the Party's influence". All these quotations from the Party's documents clearly define the role of the party organs as organizational communicators, rather than mass media. In Mao's era, political movements constituted the main con-

tent of China's political life, in which party organs were fully used and gradually strengthened as vehicles for political mobilization and organization (Xu 2004, 4-12).

Since 1978, the relationship between the Party and its media has not changed in principle. However, with the shift of the Party's priorities, the role of the Party media has also shifted from serving the class struggle to serving socialist modernization. At the same time, the media have initiated their own reforms with regard to commercialization and marketization. New accounting systems have been introduced, modern enterprise management has been implemented, and various market-oriented sub-papers have been developed. Advertisements and multiple operations have been widely allowed to increase revenue, and China's media industry has revealed a trend towards conglomeration. During this process, media products and their circulation have increased enormously, while the share of party organs at all levels has steadily declined. In 2013, among the 1,915 types of newspaper published nationwide, there were only 400 Party newspapers, accounting for about 20% in total (China Journalists Association 2014). According to an official statement, China's newspaper industry has gradually achieved a "basic pattern of multi-level and multi-type co-existence, dominated by the party organs, while supplemented by evening newspapers, metropolitan newspapers and industry-specific newspapers/magazines" (China Journalists Association 2017).

During the 1980s, television gradually became the most influential of the media. Due to the huge operating costs the state has played a major role in developing the television industry, and has thus taken control of its development. In 1985, television surpassed radio for the first time in the population coverage range, "becoming the most widely-received and most widespread of the media" (National People's Broadcasting Station National Audience Survey Team 1988, 216). Television programmes are, in fact, more comprehensive, with news programmes accounting for only about 15% of total programmes.

Although the marketization and conglomeration of the Chinese media have a reputation for top-down guidance and control, this does reflect the Party's institutional adaptation to the new trends. The new administrative approval and licensing system for press and publications guarantees that the Party's power should extend to the entire body of the media. In addition, it has also turned the Chinese media industry into a true monopoly market, where the limits of supply and the huge marketing demand for advertising have brought enormous profits to the media.

In 1994, China formally joined the internet, followed by a large number of internet media companies. In 1998, sina.com, sohu.com, and netease.com launched portal websites, one after another. In 2000, they were listed on Nasdaq. At the same time, China announced relevant laws and regulations to clearly license the main body of network news dissemination, especially the private commercial websites, and stipulated a series of qualifying principles. Websites offering a news service were categorized either as news media websites or as comprehensive (non-news) media websites. The latter may issue material from a news website, but may not publish news from its own news-gathering or from any other non-news media source (Ministry of Information Industry 2000). This provision continued guaranteeing the Party's control of news content, but made the traditional media lose their advantages as news transmission channels. The traditional media also underestimated the potential of online media, and regarded non-news websites as just another "landing place", to which they could export their own news products. Thus, they "fed the new-born online media all the content at an ultra-low price, which were crying piteously for milk" (Yu 2014, 6-11).

However, portal websites gave full play to the advantages of mass information gathering, hyperlinks, information classification and free browsing, which were totally beyond the traditional media's ability and imagination. In addition, greater emphasis was placed on user preferences (such as categorizing information based on user preferences) and user interaction (such as open article comments). This user-oriented logic has become increasingly prominent in the new network format, from forums to blogs, to micro-blogs, to WeChats and micro-videos (such as TikTok). The internet industry went on building platforms to produce content for users and also to allow users to generate content (UGC).

The internet has demoted the Party media's status from their once dominant role as news providers to ordinary information communicators. In the past, the Party media controlled the whole process of news production, from news-making to news distribution, but they can now only maintain the monopoly of official news-making through Chinese media regulations. As to the distribution of news and information, they have been overwhelmed by the internet.

The internet has intensified the competition between the media. On the internet technology platform, various forms of media can be merged in various ways. Newspapers, radio and television are all competing for the attention of the audience on the same internet platform. The internet has also intensified competition in content production. More and

more self-media are breaking the monopoly of traditional news content production, and are competing with formal media organizations. The Party media used to be regarded as the “platform for *all* news-gathering and aggregating”, but now they are only the “platform for *authoritative* news-gathering and aggregating”.

The internet has also changed the ways in which information is disseminated. Nowadays, the dissemination of news mainly depends on social networks and word-of-mouth communication, which means that the Party media dissemination channels are no longer as important as before. The internet has also changed the ways in which the effects of communication are assessed. In the past, the media could only measure the effects of communication indirectly, through surveys, circulation or audience ratings. In China, some of the methods for evaluating media effects are unreliable with regard to whether a news product has stimulated practical problem-solving, or whether it has attracted high-level attention. However, the internet has brought user-oriented, measurable assessment methods, such as page views, number of fans, compliments and comments, to the media product. It can even attract high-level attention through opinion leaders and the “Internet Navy” (*wangluoshuijun* 网络水军).

The vast amount of information provided by the internet has greatly occupied the public's attention and has reduced their demand for the Party media's official news. In addition, there is an imbalance in the supply of news among the Party media. The most numerous and most influential central-level Party media are gathered around central government, which focuses on national policy-making and concentrates on vocalization to promote and spread government policies. The Party media can also be used as tools by central government to urge local and grass-roots governmental bodies to implement their policies. But among the local and grass-roots governments, which focus on policy implementation, there is a lack of sufficient resources from the Party media. When citizens spontaneously set public agendas through the internet, it is the local governments which are easily challenged and affected.

Xi's claim that “the Party media's surname must be ‘Party’ (党媒姓党)” once again set the original tone for the Party media, but while they all actively follow his call, they continue with media transformation and integration development as well. On the one hand, the Party media identify with “the organs of the ruling party at all levels” and stand firmly at the forefront of political propaganda making. On the other hand, they make full use of their political and brand resources as Party media to

catch up with technological progress and the needs of users, in order to be active participants in media market competition. This dual identity leads to multiple tasks and modes of communication in the name of the Party media's mission.

3. THE PARTY MEDIA'S MODES OF INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

In the West, most of the research on media and public policy is related to political elections. In general, the media play two main roles: first, the media are the means by which politicians pass on their campaign promises to voters (Strömberg 2004). Second, the media are the channels through which politicians can monitor the political environment (Deutsch 1963). If we regard the media merely as an intermediary, we may underestimate the power of media agenda-setting. American political scientists Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz particularly emphasize this point. They point out that one aspect of power is, of course, whether it can influence the decision-making process, but the other important aspect of power is whether it affects the setting of the agenda (Bachrach and Baratz 1962).

Owing to the tremendous energy of the media, Western scholars are profoundly introspective about the “mediatization phenomenon” (i.e., that the political institutions are increasingly being shaped by the media). Thomas Meyer calls this “media colonizing politics” and believes that the media's selection rules and presentation rules can control the logic of democracy (Meyer and Hinchman 2002, 49-72). Contrary to this, scholarly criticism of the Chinese media is mainly directed at the “politicization” and “non-democratic” nature of the media, i.e., that politics can easily influence and control the media. In this regard, in 2006, Chinese scholar Wang Shaoguang 王绍光 proposed a new perspective on how to judge whether a system is democratic (Wang 2006).

Wang Shaoguang also proposed that the key to judging whether a political system is “democracy” or not is to examine whether policy-makers in the public policy agenda can respond to social concerns (Wang 2006). He divided the public policy agenda into three categories: the media agenda, the public agenda, and the policy agenda. Wang noted the importance of the media agenda, but since his core concern was the issue of “democracy” (i.e., whether the policy agenda could reflect the

public agenda), he did not examine in detail how the media affected the public agenda and the policy agenda. Instead, he focused on the relationship between the public agenda and the policy agenda. According to the identity of the agenda presenter and the degree of public participation, he classified six kinds of agenda-setting models, as shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1. – Modes of Chinese public policy agenda-setting.

		AGENDA PRESENTER		
		Decision maker	Brains trust	Civic society
Degree of public participation	Low	(1) Closed-door mode	(3) Internal reference mode	(5) Submission mode
	High	(2) Mobilization mode	(4) Borrowing mode	(6) External pressure mode

In the table, Wang does not discuss the media as a subject that influences the policy agenda, but as an intermediary between the policy agenda and the public agenda. He does not present the media role in the three modes of “low level of public participation” (i.e., closed-door mode, internal reference mode and submission mode), but only talks about the importance of the media agenda in the modes of “high level of public participation” (mobilization mode, borrowing mode and external pressure mode). From Wang’s words, we can see that his knowledge of the Chinese media system, especially the role of the Chinese Party media, is far from adequate. Based on the interpretation of the Chinese Party media’s dual identity in both internal and external communication, this paper proposes six of the Party media’s typical communication modes for our observation and examination of contemporary Chinese media and political communication.

3.1. Internal reference

“Internal reference” (*neican* 内参) is a form of non-public media reporting with Chinese characteristics, which has been the main agent of the “eye-and-ear” function of the Party media for a long time. As early as 1931, when the Red China News Agency, the predecessor of the Xinhua News Agency, started publication, it was responsible for copying the news broadcast from the Kuomintang Central News Agency and other

radio stations. The collected news was compiled as a reference resource and was exclusively provided for the decision-making circle of the Soviet Central Bureau and the senior leadership of the Red Army.

Internal reference is different from public reporting. First, the focuses of reporting are different; internal reference is concerned with the more significant and sensitive issues. Second, the audience is different; internal reference belongs to state secret and quasi-state secret documents. Third, the two have different ways of generating social reaction; public reports promote problem-solving through public opinion, while internal reports solve problems through instructions from a high-ranking official (*lingdao pishi* 领导批示).

Xinhua News Agency was the first to carry out internal reference. There are two main internal materials within the CCP: “Reference News”, following international news, and “Internal Reference”, following domestic dynamics, and both are handled by the Xinhua News Agency. In 1953, in accordance with Mao Zedong’s instructions on the Xinhua News Agency’s internal reference system, all major regions, provinces and cities began to collect local news and publish their own internal reference materials. Since then, internal reference for news has been established as a system within the Party media. Today, media at all levels, as an extension of the Party and government, have internal reference mechanisms. Internal reference mainly consists of the following three types: (1) Xinhua News Agency’s internal reference; (2) the central Party media’s internal reference and the provincial Party media’s internal reference; and (3) some central ministries, who also use internal reference to report recent situations (Yin 2012).

Take the Xinhua News Agency, for example. There is an interior division in the Xinhua News Agency called the Reference News Editing Department². The writing for internal reference can be divided into two types: top-down and bottom-up. The top-down one is called “Mandatory Research” (*dianti diaoyan* 点题调研). The central political élites will usually make their concerns known by sending their written directive (*pishi* 批示) to the Xinhua News Agency. Members of the editorial meeting, chaired by the Chief Editor, will determine the focus and topic of research, set up a research team and send instructions to all branch agencies at home and abroad. Each branch agency will select topics according to their local conditions, and complete their research reports with important news. The

² See the official introduction to the Reference News Editing Department of Xinhua News Agency: http://203.192.6.89/xhs/jgsz/2009-11/03/c_1378162.htm.

bottom-up type is conducted by local branches themselves. The Reference News Editing Department edits and selects important news gathered from the various branches. All the selected materials will be included in the periodical series of journals, such as *Domestic Dynamic Samples* (国内动态清样), *Reference Samples* (参考清样), and other internal reference publications, such as “Internal Reference” and “Selected Internal Reference”.

In 2016, the Xinhua News Agency published more than 42,659 internal reference articles, covering 126 domestic-specific research topics, such as “economic hotspot tracking” and “innovation and new economic dynamics”, and nearly 82 international-specific research topics, such as “American election series reports” and “world-leading technologies” (Xinhua News Agency 2017, 218).

Internal reference aims to illustrate a situation and its issues, pays more attention to timeliness, and has lower requirements on writing skills or rhetoric, which can make editing easier and more efficient. Thus, it stimulates the enthusiasm of reporters in writing internal reports.

The criteria for evaluating internal reference news is just “thinking what the central government wants, urging the central government’s urgency”. Obtaining the central elite’s direct instructions means success. According to the statistics, in the first half of 2016, the Xinhua News Agency’s internal reference received 1,497 instructions from the political centre, of which the most senior leader, General Secretary Xi Jinping, gave 40 instructions (Xinhua News Agency 2017, 219). It is precisely because of this incentive mechanism that the internal reference focuses on the attention of the central leadership and it might be difficult to comprehensively identify problems.

3.2. *Online public opinion monitoring*

With the development of the internet, more and more people can expose hidden truths and express their opinions through the internet, and some posts even cause mass protests and media coverage of events. At the beginning, however, restricted by policies, the traditional Party media could not fully play their roles.

In 2004, the “Decision of the Central Committee of the CCP on Strengthening the Construction of the Party’s Governing Capacity”, passed by the Fourth Plenary Session of the 16th CPC Central Committee, put forward the requirement to strengthen the management of public sentiment, and thus prompted research on public sentiment.

After the responsive government theory was proposed, more and more government departments paid attention to responding through the internet. Since 2009, the Public Sentiment Monitoring Office of *People's Daily Online* has regularly published research findings, such as "Rankings of Local Government's Ability on Online Public Opinion Responsiveness" and "The Online Public Sentiment Index of Central Enterprises". It has also put forward a series of new ideas on responding to public sentiment, such as "four gold hours on handling emergencies", "cultivate in-system opinion leaders", "the internet's backward force mechanism on reform". It has also compiled reference books and provided long-term counselling on crisis public relations for government and business. These services bring additional economic benefits to the media. The *New Media Blue Book*, published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in July 2010 (Yin 2010), points out that the launch of the public opinion channel by *People's Daily Online* is remarkable. It shows that the Party Central Committee and the mainstream media attach great importance to the supervision of online media, exceeding traditional media supervision, and have also become the promoters and practitioners of China's democratic system in the New Media age.

3.3. *Media think tanks*

Media think tanks are the Party media's latest project. On 20 January 2015, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued "Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics", stressing that "a new type of think tank with Chinese characteristics is an important support for scientific and democratic decision-making. The decision-making consultation system is an important part of China's socialist democratic politics construction". It also states that it "supports the Party School of the Central Committee of CCP, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Engineering, the Development Research Centre of the State Council, the National School of Administration, the China Association for Science and Technology, the central news media, and some universities, research institutes [and] institutes of military systems, [which] should conduct pilot projects for high-end think tanks" (General Office of the Communist Party of China and General Office of the State Council 2015).

At the end of 2015, the Xinhua News Agency was approved as one of the first ten national high-end think tank pilots directly under the Party Central Committee, the State Council, and the Central Military Commission. Set up within the famous magazine *Outlook Weekly* (瞭望新闻周刊), the think tank was named Liaowang Institute (瞭望智库) and became a public policy research center. Marked by this, the Party media have embraced the media think tank era and formally participate in decision-making consultations.

When compared with media think tanks, news internal reference is still a form of news. It has strong time limits and authenticity, but only reflects objective conditions and does not recommend and conduct in-depth research on an issue. As for decision-making consultation, think tanks must undertake the entire task of presenting, analyzing and solving problems. In May 2016, fifteen Chinese media announced that they were establishing a think-tank, or an overall transition to a think tank, including four central Party media, two provincial Party media, four market-based media, and five portal sites (Wu, Xia, and Ma 2016).

The development of media think tanks took place against the background of media integration, and was the result of media transformation and media management. It has a strong market orientation, and its service targets include both government policy consulting and corporate consulting.

The methods of running media think tanks can be summarized by category. The first method is through the strategic co-operation of “media + think tanks”, that is, media associated with traditional think tanks, such as universities and research institutes, sharing intellectual resources and media resources. For example, the *Zhejiang Daily* and the Zhejiang Provincial Institute of Public Policy established that sort of co-operation: the Zhejiang Provincial Institute of Public Policy regularly provides the *Zhejiang Daily* with expert resources, while the *Zhejiang Daily* publishes the Institute’s research results and information on theme salons in a timely manner (Zhu, Wu, and Ma 2017, 40–43).

The second method is to conduct a special research programme with the “conference” at its core, that is, to take advantage of the media’s conference and public relations, and to invite scholars, experts, and practitioners to discuss and publish the conference’s important opinions.

The third is to establish the media’s own research team and conduct research services with media advantages. The Xinhua News Agency’s think tank is at the forefront of this project. Its Liaowang Research Report has already established a route to the General Office of the Central

Committee. It has also launched “Global Think Tank Tracking”, “Macro Risk Observation”, “Commodity Trend Observation” and “Commodity Special Report”, etc. The General Office of the Central Committee also provides tasks and topics for think tanks, such as “Deepening Reforms”, “Hong Kong Issues”, “Xinjiang Issues”, etc.

There are two main comparative advantages for the media’s self-employed research team: one is that the media’s reporter network has rapid access to information; the other is that reporters’ unofficial identity and their abilities in communication and research can provide unique insights for their reports. The Party media have accumulated valuable experience on public sentiment, and today many of the Party media have established a public opinion analysis team, and regularly provide monitoring services for the higher authorities.

3.4. *Policy advocacy*

Policy advocacy is one of the most important tasks of the Chinese Party media. As Chairman Mao said in his well-known “Talk to the Editors of *Jinsui Daily*”, “The role and power of the newspapers consists in their ability to bring the Party’s programme and line, the Party’s general and specific policies, its tasks and working methods before the masses in the quickest and most extensive way [...]. It is a leading art of Marxism-Leninism to be good at turning the Party’s policies into the actions of the masses and to make every movement and struggle known not only by the cadres but also by the masses” (Xu 2004, 70). Mao made full use of his Party newspaper to lead the Great Leap Forward Movement, with catastrophic results.

Nowadays in China, the Party media still shoulder the task of policy advocacy, but, in fact, the function of mobilizing the masses to carry out political movements has been greatly reduced, which means that Chinese politics has gradually bid farewell to political movements and turned to governmental administration and legalization.

The policy propaganda of the Party media breaks through the top-down communication process within the bureaucratic system. While the central policy is conveyed and mobilized in the form of documents and meetings within the bureaucratic system, it is also issued to the entire nation through the Party media, and the corresponding propaganda and mobilization campaign is carried out through the co-operation of the media and the organization “Media Campaign”. Through widely dis-

seminated publicity, the media try to create a positive opinion atmosphere, in order to attract the approval and participation of the masses. This kind of political communication is still very common in China, but the effect on social mobilization is not good. Many local organizations present the Party media's reports as their working achievements, but do not care about the effect of those reports, as there is little measurement of the audience's attention, understanding and approval.

3.5. *Media supervision*

In October 1987, the 13th National Congress of the Party for the first time put forward the concept of “public opinion supervision” (*yulun jian du* 舆论监督), which in fact referred to media supervision under the leadership of the Party. Since then, this concept has been mentioned and interpreted in all Party Congress documents. It was also brought into “The Regulations on Inner-Party Supervision (Trial)”, promulgated in 2004 (CPC Central Committee 2004).

Media supervision originates from the early critical media reports of the Party newspaper. It aimed to correct the shortcomings and mistakes of practical work through critical media reports, in order to realize the Party's principle of “seeking truth from facts”. However, the tradition of Party media criticism was totally destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, but gradually recovered following the reform and opening-up policies.

The choice of media supervision instead of critical reports is not a minor semantic modification, but a symbol of conceptual progress. In the past, the so-called critical reports were mainly used by the Party as tools for guidance. If something went wrong with the guiding line, the media critical reports could still follow the wrong track and thus amplify the error with terrible results. During the Great Leap Forward Movement, such examples could be seen almost everywhere. Media supervision emphasizes that the people should be allowed to criticize the shortcomings and mistakes in the Party's work, and thus the Party returned the right to criticize to the public and the media, a kind of empowerment, though to a limited degree. The Party media used to be tools for political mobilization and ideological education for the people; now the function of the tools has been officially extended to public criticism.

Media supervision has expanded the media coverage of news reporting, media comments, public discussion and the criticism of various

social phenomena. During this process, the media agenda may be set by media people themselves, and may exert influence on the public agenda or even the policy agenda. Although such supervision has to “adhere to the principle of Party spirit” and must be carried out under the leadership of the Party, it is clearly different from the so-called “Fourth Estate” function of the Western media.

Since 1987, media coverage in the name of supervision has gradually increased and has become the top priority in the media’s daily work. In 1994, CCTV launched a prime-time news programme called *Focus Interview* (焦点访谈), which was a very popular programme, because of its focus on practical problems and public concerns. When the audience ratings were at their highest, over 300 million people viewed it each evening. Many of the problems disclosed by the *Focus Interview* programme attracted the attention of the central and local government authorities, directly leading to the rapid solution of problems that had been overlooked for years. In 2002, the Office of the State Council set up a special feedback mechanism connected to *Focus Interview*, and 41 reports resulting from that were included in the State Council supervision mechanism (Sun 2003, 113). *Focus Interview* was once a milestone in media supervision in China, but it is now no longer in evidence.

Alongside the concept of media supervision, there has also been an emphasis on the principle of openness. Together with the step-by-step opening-up of government affairs, Party affairs and judicial affairs, and the establishment of the Government Information Disclosure, the news media have also extended their coverage to many more fields than before, in order to fulfil the people’s right to know.

The Party media have greater advantages in influencing the public agenda and the policy agenda through investigative criticism, but their limitations are also obvious. Supervision of the Party media must be carried out under the leadership of the Party, and some significant critical reports on Party members and cadres therefore need to be approved by the Party Committees at the same level and with regard to the direction of public opinion. Media supervision is not an independent media right, since all the Party media are directly or indirectly affiliated to different levels of party and governmental organizations, and are thus enabled to interview, report and criticize at different administrative levels. Some scholars have identified two methods of media supervision in practice: one method is supervision by the upper-level media of the lower-level government, which is more or less the extension of administrative

powers; the other method is cross-regional supervision, which means that critics are dominated by non-local media. Challenged by the supervision of non-local media, the local media either selectively lose their voice or become the tools of the government media in a counter-attack.

3.6. *Guidance of public opinion*

As mentioned above, in policy advocacy, the media agenda is deeply affected or shaped by the policy agenda, and the Party media have privileged access to authentic information from the highest level, while bearing the responsibility for attracting the public's attention and setting the direction of the public agenda. In media supervision mode, based on professional journalistic capabilities, the Party media need to compete with other media for agenda-setting, and this may actively influence the public agenda and even the policy agenda, depending on the media agency.

Along with the development of the internet, however, huge numbers of WeMedia keep on emerging, and citizen journalism is becoming the trend. More and more eye-catching news was first exposed by internet users through social media, and then inspired some network public opinion leaders, so that issues brewing online could finally set the public agenda. When online discussions become fierce, especially if they become a collective protest, this will inevitably attract the media's attention, or even set the media agenda. As an agent of mass communication, the Party media feel obliged to respond to the public agenda and strive to play a guiding role in bridging the gap between the public and the government. Thus, if the government is neutral to the focal event or just a referee, then the Party media usually intervene in time to guide the public agenda, prompting a solution of the issues. But if the critical spearhead is just directed at the government, then the Party media's agenda may not be able to reflect the public agenda, and may either go to aphasia or confront the public agenda. It thus depends on the Party media's awareness and its sensitivity to Chinese politics, especially to inner party struggles. Those who have courage, strategy and significant connections may finally win. Lu Xinning in the *People's Daily* set a good example. When most of the Party media hesitated to participate in online public debate, she elaborately planned a series of news comments in the *People's Daily*, which reflected both its "Party" surname and journalistic professionalism.

4. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER THEORETICAL INTROSPECTION

“The press always takes on the form and colouration of the social and political structures within which it operates” (Siebert *et al.* 1956, 2). Every society has its own developing trajectory. The nature of the media cannot be deduced from the technical aspect only, but needs to “contextualize the media, especially the news media” (Hallin and Mancini 2004). From this point of view, this paper has described and analyzed the Party media’s modes of political communication in the context of the political and socio-cultural changes in China since the reform and opening-up policies of 1978. However, the main purpose is not to explain “how the historical context of the development of China’s journalism is obviously different from that of Western countries” (*ibid.*), but an attempt to join in the study of comparative media systems, seeking similarities, while “highlighting the diversity of media systems in the world” (*ibid.*).

In terms of methodology, this article follows the paradigm of structural functionalism. Merton (2006) once praised functionalism as a super method; and J.C. Alexander, who advocates new functionalism, also believes that “functionalism does not mean a set of concepts, a sort of method, a kind of theoretical model, or an ideology; instead, it is a tradition” (Alexander 1985, 1-2). This paper hopes to inherit the theoretical tradition of functionalism concerning the relationship between totality and locality, function and structure, and to agree with Durkheim’s view that social change is a process of social differentiation. Unlike Parsonianism, it avoids the perspective of maintaining the “balance” of the social system, thus turning the study of structure and function into the study of social control.

From the description of the Chinese Party media’s participation in political communication, this paper will turn to functional analysis. The so-called “functional analysis” is what Merton explicitly states about “how one [of the social or cultural aspects] works in society” (Merton 2006). The definition of function comes from Radcliffe Brown, an anthropologist highly regarded by Merton. Starting from Durkheim’s interpretation of the function of social customs, he defines function as “the consistency between custom and the necessary conditions for the social organism’s survival” (Alexander 1985). In the author’s opinion, the fact is that the Party media’s participation in political communication is a kind of political “custom”. In Chairman Mao’s era, the function of the Party media in organizational communication was unilaterally played to the extreme, and finally ran counter to media characteristics.

By comparison, at present, the Party media are clear about their dual identities and constantly strive to exert their media function in different ways, adapting to contemporary Chinese social and political structures. In the process of adapting, the Chinese Party media have also produced some structural characteristics of their own. Owing to limited space, a detailed discussion on the structural changes to the Party media cannot be undertaken here. In order to evaluate the impact of the Party media's structural changes on the Chinese media system, an examination of the political and social structures may lead to further relevant questions for future research. In general, it is of great academic importance to study the Chinese Party media's involvement in political communication.

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Comparing Chinese and EU Soft Power: The Credibility Factor

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents arguments to evaluate soft power as perceived by the European Union (EU) and by China. Since the presentation of Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, it has become apparent that notions of audience and message reception are important. We will further argue for the relevance of the psychological idea of dissonance. We will compare and contrast soft power discourses for their alignment with reality, and assess them for discrepancy. Ultimately, we will conclude that such contradictions exist and create a "dissonance" or disjunction, which we will explore in relation to the concept of credibility. In the second section, an analysis of China's soft power serves to highlight the effects of the implementation by a "hard" state, in a centralized and controlled manner, of a soft power policy. We will examine tables in an effort to extend our comparison beyond the discourses perpetuated and promoted by both China and the EU. We will challenge these discourses using indices, including the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, the Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International, as well as The Good Country Index, The Soft Power 30, and the World Justice Index, each representing a component of soft power as proposed by Nye, i.e., culture, political values and foreign policy. Additionally, we will closely examine social questions to better develop our understanding of soft power policy. Results indicate that while credibility appears more important to China than to the EU, it is, nonetheless, a central tenet for both parties. The third section takes a comparative approach to its discussion of the normative power of European and Chinese soft power. It reveals contradictions within the policies of both political bodies, and simultaneously draws two conclusions. First, that a "cultural fool" does not exist, i.e., individuals are able to decipher and understand messages. Secondly, that individuals attribute credibility or unreliability to policy messages framed by a state, an organization, or the media.

Keywords: China; communication; credibility; dissonance; European Union; image; normative power; perception; soft power.

1. THE CONCEPT OF SOFT POWER: DIMENSIONS AND LIMITS

Soft power is defined as the capacity to convince others to adhere to the norms, values and institutions that shape comprehensive behaviour (Nye 2004). We may argue that the soft power concept has been extrapolated to non-American contexts and could be expanded to be more inclusive, and historicized, to take into account the role of other countries. We see this outlined by several Chinese scholars: Yan Xuetong¹ represents the political, while Yu (2007) details the cultural school. Yu argues that “soft power with Chinese characteristics should include values and principles represented by the state, national and international institutions and political decisions driven by the state” (Yu 2007). Wang (2013a, 97), in a similar vein, draws on culture, Confucius’s writing, and an historical perspective to expand on China’s model of public diplomacy in order to explain the focus of the Chinese approach.

1.1. *From a political to a communicative dimension*

Nye (2011, 84) proposes three resources for soft power: culture, political values, and foreign policies. He argues that, “with soft power, what the target thinks is particularly important, and the target matters as much as the agents. Attraction and persuasion are socially constructed. Soft power is a dance that requires partners”. This argument shifts from relying on international relations to a more psychological stance. This shift is the challenge of this paper.

Nye goes beyond his general framework by examining soft power behaviour: agenda setting, attraction, and persuasion. Attraction is composed of three elements: benignity, competence, and beauty (*charisma*). This framework is important from a theoretical point of view and for our discussion in comparing soft power manifestations in the EU and China.

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According to Alexander Vuying (cited in Nye 2011, 92), “Benignity is an aspect of how an agent relates to others. Being perceived as benign tends to generate sympathy, trust, credibility, and acquiescence. ‘Brilliance’ or ‘competence’ refers to how an agent does things and it produces admiration, respect, and emulation. ‘Beauty’ or ‘charisma’ is an aspect of an agent’s relation to ideals, values, and vision, and it tends to produce inspiration and adherence”.

Research shows that soft power should extend past the agent-based model, emitting attractive messages that “automatically” reach a foreign audience. Lee and Melissen (2011, 252) note that Nye’s “agent-focused approach to soft power overlooks critical evaluation of something that is basic in marketing public diplomacy work: the socialisation process that constitutes the necessary link between soft power and the mechanism of persuasion”.

Lee and Melissen (2011, 15) consider three other aspects when evaluating soft power resources: “The cognitive dimension refers to how other nations evaluate a state’s image and standing in international affairs. The affective dimension relates to whether other nations like or dislike a state despite its political, economic, and military strengths or weaknesses. The normative dimension reveals whether or not other countries regard a state policy and international role as legitimate and justifiable”.

1.2. *Credibility and dissonance*²

Nye (2011) introduces the concept of the receiver, a key element in the context of soft power and in communication theories – a notion briefly introduced in Lee and Melissen (2011). Nye (2011, 101) explores the question of credibility: “To be credible in a century where power is diffusing from state to non-state actors, government efforts to project soft power will have to accept that power is less hierarchical in an information age and that social networks have become more important”. In addition to social sciences, communication studies are developing research on public space, and exploring how individual, political or social identities are framed and portrayed in discourses. There are two noteworthy approaches. One is the theorization of the discourse itself (through content analysis);

² “Dissonance: unsuitable in combination; clashing” (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2008). Dissonance can relate to music and harmony, and to psychology.

the other uses the discourse to reveal the functionality of sociopolitical entities and identities. This is the approach we will focus on.

We ask why Nye does not introduce more reflections on ideas such as place, identity and the role of the receiver from communication theories (Wolton 2009). The importance of framing during the socialisation process should also be taken into consideration. The choices made by the authors of the messages spread by the media influence the perception of events and communication (Goffman 1967; Winkin 2001). In the interaction process, the credibility of each actor involved in the national diplomatic system (Hocking and Melissen 2016) is important; it is another element that contributes to the reception and decoding process. Introducing the receiver and the socialisation process shows that “there is an acknowledgment that soft power and the new public diplomacy have a distinctly introspective dimension and that they are related to a nation’s self-perceptions and confidence in its own institutions” (Lee and Melissen 2011, 252). The question of dissonance is psychological and can be seen from an individual’s perspective. That is, “Dissonance is a discomfort caused by holding conflicting cognitions simultaneously (e.g., ideas, beliefs, values, emotional reactions)” (Thefacts101 2016, n.p.). In a state of dissonance, people may feel surprise, dread, guilt, anger or embarrassment.

A culture becomes more powerful when people imagine themselves transformed and improved by adopting several new cultural values; such is the case for immigrants trying to integrate into a new society or for young men and women adopting fashions from Paris, Milan or London. When a society considers itself unique because of its political system or its lifestyle (for example, the US view of entrepreneurship or South Korea’s musical phenomenon “K-pop”), it exerts soft power as people increasingly participate in and subscribe to the system. Similarly, the migrants attracted by and to Europe positively perceive countries on the Continent.

Such emotions lead to controversial perceptions and opinions about certain countries, since a person’s interpretation of messages and/or facts can raise questions about the credibility of a broadcaster in an effort to minimize internalised dissonance. The cumulative impact of affective, cognitive and normative dimensions heightens the challenge of credibility.

2. COMPARING CHINESE AND EU SOFT POWER: THE CREDIBILITY FACTOR

2.1. *Challenges to a credible Chinese soft power*

We will examine the key factor(s) leading to China's lack of credibility and the creation of cognitive dissonance. We will then comparatively examine the EU's soft power. Both examinations will strive to highlight factors of credibility or non-credibility.

A survey of the historical discourses on China's diplomacy from 1949 to the present emphasizes the importance of pacific coexistence (Martin-Necker 2006). The intent of this position is to present China as a responsible power (Wang 2013a).

Another angle integral to our understanding of the decisions of Chinese leaders after 1989 is the emergence of cultural relativism. Facing criticism on human rights, freedom of expression, and rules of law from activists and, on occasion, Western governments, China argued that societal development should be considered through the lens of those cultural, social and economic conditions pertinent to individual civilizations. In the new millennium, traditional Chinese values have broadened to include peaceful and harmonious coexistence, a quality that has benefited both China and the larger world (Balme 2004; Billeter 2006). The concept of the harmonious society promoted by Chinese officials includes societal stability and openness and relies on a traditional understanding of Confucius's moral order. Accordingly, the ruling government should take care of the people by implementing a patriarchal attitude (Wang 2013b). Applied more widely, the theory of a harmonious world colours China's foreign policy by promoting it as a stable, reliable and responsible partner, as well as a power that can be trusted rather than feared (Huchet 2007; d'Hooghe 2014).

Following the debates before and during the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the Chinese government has begun to realize that the country should foster positive interactions based on culture and influence (Courmont 2012; Callahan 2015). This makes China integral to defining and cementing concepts and theories of soft power beyond the framework developed by Western scholars.

China has an organised policy devoted to influencing public opinion through public diplomacy. This serves four goals. First, to be seen as a country that strives to build a harmonious society. Second, to be a reliable economic partner with a dynamic market economy – an argument

that appears to encourage reliance on Chinese state policy³. The third goal is to be an active and responsible player in international affairs; and, fourth, to be a country that celebrates its ancient culture and traditions. The rapid spread of Confucius Institutes around the world, CGTN and CCTV channels, the National Chinese Network, and the development of Xinhua News Agency, which is devoted to transmitting official Chinese views of the world, are all well known to, and have been examined by, scholars. The ingredients of soft power, present here, work to counter reports of China made by European media, which are perceived as incorrectly understanding Chinese policy.

The discourse surrounding traditional culture promoted by China relies on a five-thousand-year heritage and includes approaches to medicine, cooking, martial arts, calligraphy, etc. If cooking, martial arts, medicine, Taoism and Buddhism are prevalent among European citizens, such cultural elements do not require involvement from the Chinese government. For example, as a practitioner of Qi Gong and Tai Chi Chuan between 1994 and 2014 in four European cities, we have seen three phases of its integration into non-Chinese communities. Initially, teachers came from China, or had experience of China. The next generation of teachers went to China to learn the basics at a time when the government recognised such practice as part of the country's cultural heritage. The final period saw the structuration of teaching and clubs through a national federation and the opening of hundreds of courses in small villages or health clubs. These practices evolved indirectly from official teaching systems in China. While such practices may be components of China's soft power in its traditional aspect, independent practitioners may perceive them as components of modern life. Nevertheless, they serve as a "channel" to Chinese culture.

Contemporary Chinese culture also bears examination. While products with "Made in China" labels appear to be everywhere, China is still no match for the US in cultural attractiveness. If Chinese companies such as Huawei, Xiaomi and Alibaba are famous, few cultural icons, movies or artists have yet become part of a wider cultural consciousness. For instance, few Western citizens are able to name Chinese contemporary writers, film-makers, rock singers, bands or football players. According to Martel (2010), China has produced no mainstream artists on the world stage, in spite of the rapid evolution of the cultural sphere.

³ Pr. Gao Fei, IEE Seminar: *Mutual Trust in International Relations*, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2013.

The Great Wall, a 2016 movie by Zhang Yimou, is an interesting example of this phenomenon. The movie was presented as a possible blockbuster, and accordingly featured a co-production between a Chinese film corporation and an American producer, with a screenplay to satisfy audiences. Not being experts on the film industry, we direct the reader to IMDb, a specialised website, for more detailed examination of the film's successes. Critically, these are not many, and reviews are seldom positive⁴.

Nobel Prizes are also worth mentioning here; Gao Xingjian was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000, but he has held French citizenship since 1998. In 2010, Liu Xiaobo received the Nobel Peace Prize, but he died in prison. In 2012, Mo Yan received the Nobel Prize for Literature, but he was identified as a supporter of the Chinese régime. Jirik (2016) draws similar conclusions about CCTV, arguing that its English representation should be indistinguishable from its competitors, in order to sustain credibility.

Consequently, China and its cultural values face a double bind. On the one hand, the country seeks to promote the idea that "China is attractive because its economy is successful". This primarily emphasizes China's economic dynamism. On the other hand, values promoted by the PRC face internal and external challenges. In other words, it becomes necessary for us to ask which narrative China presents to the rest of the world. If it is a harmonious society, Europeans will compare it against their own set of values and the reality in their country. If it is creativity from citizens, local actors, or civil society, the examples of the Confucius Institutes affiliated to the PRC Ministry of Education, the Tai Chi Chuan practices and the example of Ai Weiwei will be insufficient to convince well-informed citizens of the merits of Chinese values.

2.2. *The normative power of Europe: a mirror of Chinese soft power*

We will now examine the soft power of the European Union. We have chosen the European perspective for two reasons. First, the size of the two regions is similar and therefore lends itself to a more meaningful comparison. Second, the practice in Brussels is to support the research of both parties. Manners (2002) defined Europe as a normative power that promotes nine principles: "sustainable peace, freedom, democracy, human rights, rule of law, equality, social solidarity, sustainable devel-

⁴ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2034800/criticreviews?ref_=tt_ov_rt [16/10/2018].

opment, and good governance”. In Laïdi (2008b), Manners added that the EU disseminates in six ways: contagion, informational diffusion, procedural diffusion, transference, overt diffusion, and cultural filters. The procedure, sometimes called “Magnet Europa”, perceives “Europe as a normative power” (Laïdi 2008a). This author has identified the EU’s capacity for attraction through a normative process, as analysed in *Norms over Force: The Enigma of European Power* (Laïdi 2008a).

Applying a pragmatic approach, Rupnik (2014) examines the attractiveness of the EU by exploring the efforts of neighbouring countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldavia, the Balkans, Turkey, Ukraine) to implement European standards while pro-European parties are in power. Three angles are identified: conditionality (between the EU and the individual country), motivation of actors, and candidates’ interests. The criteria are “governance more than democracy, rule of law implementation through adhesion process (towards the EU), with adoption of norms and institutions, independent justice, non-partisan public administration, decentralisation, fight against corruption” (29-30)⁵.

For present purposes, a comparative approach is now required. Following the methodology of Jullien (1996), we start by examining the philosophical aspects of Chinese and European cultures. Such notions may be regarded as markers or characteristics of each society. Detailed in the table below is an example of a comparative approach. It is not, however, without limitations. Perhaps most notably, it is always possible for the level of representation to be contested. That is, it is difficult to assess at what level we should consider a certain generalisation as representative of the whole. The other important consideration in tabulating such an approach is a tendency towards amalgamating identical categories in order to create representative ones, and, therefore, a more acceptable analysis. Finally, one must be aware of the author’s culture and bias; even if he cannot abstract himself from them, he should retain awareness of them in line with anthropological research methods (Garfinkel 1967) (*Table 1*).

⁵ “La gouvernance plus que la démocratie, la construction d’État de droit à travers le processus d’adhésion centré sur l’adoption de normes et d’institutions, justice indépendante, administration publique non partisane, décentralisation, lutte contre la corruption” (Rupnik 2014, 29-30; our translation).

Table 1. – Comparing European and Chinese philosophical conceptions in order to introduce the comparative methodology for the next section.

IN EUROPE	IN CHINA
To oppose a “No” in order to identify its individuality, its personality	To reach wisdom by understanding the essence of the facts
Beliefs (in religion, in technologies)	Experiences
The goal	The path, the way
An absolute truth	A relative truth
A Creator	A cosmic energy (the Qi)
Man as a measure	Man as a part of the whole
Individual happiness	Social order

By using this approach to soft power and perceptions, we establish a comparison between the social markers of Europe (Läidi 2008b) and those of China. Simultaneously, we raise questions concerning credibility and dissonance. There are many rankings focusing on perceptions, image, reputation or global norms, such as the Best Countries Index, Human Development Index, Reputation Trak, Pew Research Center, Soft Power 3.0, World Justice Project, Reporters Without Borders, Soft Power Today, and the World Happiness Index. All of these use mixed methodology, and combine polls, media surveys and analysis based on a list of established criteria. The methodology of each index can be found on its respective website. They mostly combine items derived from the aggregation of data issued by international institutions (IMF, World Bank, UNESCO, etc.). Polls or correspondents in each country provide the qualitative aspects of the analysis. Each index could be contested, but that is not the purpose of this paper. We have selected five indices to illustrate the perception of countries with regard to specialised issues, and to highlight their behaviour on a global scale. In other words, these indices are a means of denoting soft power policy, and are: the World Press Freedom Index, Transparency Corruption Index, Good Country Index (i.e., how a country contributes to the common good), Soft Power 30 and the World Justice Project (*Table 2*).

Table 2. – *Indices for evaluating the attractiveness of the European Union and China.*

DATA OF 2017 INDEX AND NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	EU MEMBER STATES AMONG 10 FIRST PLACES IN EACH INDEX	CHINA
World Press Freedom, 180	SE, FI, DK, NL, BE, AU	176
Corruption Perception, 180	DK, FI, SE, LU, NL	77
Good Country Index, 163	NL, DK, FI, DE, SE, IR, UK, AU	64
Soft Power 30, 160	FR, UK, DE, SE, NL	25
World Justice Project, 113	FI, SE, DK, DE, AU, NL	75

The normative dimension, suggested by Lee (2011), depicts an acceptable framework to challenge credibility. The purpose of such a comparison is to reveal differences between EU member states and China. In other words, the indices may reveal elements of dissonance on both sides. Several European countries rank highly in the five indices, with a few included in the top ten. These countries adhere closely to European values and Europe's commitment to implementing press freedom, rule of law, good governance, and respecting their international commitments. European soft power is illustrated by, and in accordance with, such behaviours. By comparison, China is systematically ranked unfavourably. Could it be a sign of dissonance between discourse and reality, reflecting the perception, and, furthermore, the credibility of its soft power? This could also explain why Chinese scholars and officials emphasize discourses related to promoting another framework. It must, however, be conceded that the methodology behind the Good Country Index requires improvement, and that the World Press Freedom Index aligns closely with Western values. We, however, argue that the convergence of similar rankings is a reflection on the attractiveness of China.

As regards the EU, it is evident that coherence and the impact of norm diffusion are undermined by its limited influence. For example, a gap exists between the EU's human rights policy and the expectations of civil society or those of the European Parliament(s). Realistically, the EU dialogue on human rights should increase our understanding of those rights. Thus, contradictions exist both inside member states and in the EU as a whole. The migration crisis of 2015-2016 and the reaction to it by EU member states is a concrete example of such a discrepancy.

China considers that economic rights are crucial to the debate. This is dynamically different from the fundamental position on human rights emphasized by Europe (Balme, cited in Laïdi 2008b, 172).

2.3. *Limitations and discussion*

Nye has been criticised for his focus on the American image, because it has developed into a Western framework that hinges on concepts of power and culture. As noted in the Introduction, while soft power with Chinese characteristics can be discussed, the framework remains the same as that for Europe's soft power. For optimistic Chinese scholars and diplomats, it is possible for harmony, a notion integral to Chinese culture, to become a universally recognised value and thus gain a higher reputation and persuasive capability in the public lens. Traditional cultural values, with their prioritising of human perceptions, can serve to overcome the default Western focus on consumption and competition. The discourse of Chinese officials and media promotes economic growth, stability and harmony, in order to institutionalise these values.

Using culture to propose a vibrant soft power is not easy when there is inconsistency in the domestic reality, as noted by several scholars (d'Hooghe 2010; Nye 2011; Barr 2012). The development of soft power should not be a zero-sum game; ideas should circulate, draw from many sources, and include talents and members of civil society.

In conclusion, we propose two levels of analysis. The first stands at a micro or individual level, and emphasizes citizens' abilities. Wolton (2009) and Garfinkel (1967) consider that there is no "cultural fool" in the communication process. This means that each person, engaged in a digital world with a certain degree of media literacy, is able to decode messages and communication strategies. According to interactionism sociology (Ogien and Laugier 2014, 173), an individual has four attributes: "He has a pertinent vision of the world where he lives, and the universe in which he wants to engage; he evaluates in a reasonable manner the form and the progress in which collective action should function; he can adjust his behaviour to the circumstances of the action, and he can give a correct description of the reasons which motivate him". In other words, citizens, the general public and audiences are used to making distinctions between messages, their broadcasters and reality.

At a macro level, i.e., the national image, the problems remain the same. Li and Chitty (2009, 8) distinguish between "perceived images and projected media images of other nations". The perceived image is cognitive and connected to the mental constructions of the people. The projected image is the result of the framing undertaken by the author of a communication, and then by the methods of journalists and media (Neveu 2009). Private and public frames determine the cognitive image

held by the audience. Issuing more information will not automatically lead to a better understanding of China's reality by Europeans or vice versa.

On close examination of the affective, cognitive and normative dimensions, a soft power strategy emerges. This is predominantly integrated into the public diplomacy policy, and is not without difficulties. As communication theories make clear, there is always a difference between what a nation believes itself to be and what other nations perceive it to be. Polls and surveys are both considered reliable tools for highlighting such discrepancies. As regards the difference between the perceptions and outcomes of China's soft power actions, China argues that the Western media inaccurately depict the Chinese reality. Consequently, the government supports the Xinhua News Agency's portrayal and broadcast of China's image to diverse audiences⁶.

A comparison of available polls and analyses of China's online presence is necessary to further explore the concept of dissonance. Moreover, the combination of the cognitive and the framing approach together work to form a robust and comprehensive analytic framework (*Table 3*).

Table 3. – Conclusive results.

	EUROPEAN UNION	CHINA
Culture	Mainstream artists, acknowledged directors, sports players, etc.	Chinese contemporary culture has problems in publicizing names known in cinema, music, sports, and fine arts, etc. on a global scale.
Political values	Asserted values are inconsistently visible inside and outside the EU.	Asserted values are relatively visible.
Foreign policy	The migration crisis of Autumn 2015 demonstrates the dissonance between values and actions of member states and the European Commission.	Dissonance between peace as a value, and conflict in the South China Sea.

Examining China's soft power policy and accordance with global norms through indices reveals an indeterminate identity. China's policy focuses primarily on influence by news management, devoted to shaping a posi-

⁶ On that topic, see Anne Soetemont, *J'ai travaillé pour la propagande chinoise*, Paris: Éditions du Moment, 2001.

tive national image. Additionally, as a cultural dimension, the Confucius Institute network focuses predominantly on language teaching and on traditional culture, even though many authors believe that China's language promotion includes a political agenda (Hartig 2014). This conclusion is reached in view of the importing of books used by the CI from China by the Hanban, the administrative unit co-ordinating the CI in Beijing⁷.

We argue that China lacks an attractive contemporary culture, as explained by Zhang Yiwu (2018) from Peking University: "Even as global interest in China grows, its value system and cultural traditions have yet to be understood by the international community. Likewise, China's creative and cultural outputs have not yet captured the attention and imagination of wider global audiences" (Soft Power 30 2018, 70).

While we recognize that, as elaborated by Nye, soft power is the attractiveness of several aspects of a country, only the cultural dimensions are discussed in this paper. As said earlier, we argue that the place of a country in the rankings to some extent reflects its attractiveness dimension. Communication studies give a prominent place to the expansion and reflection of identity in these discourses. The indices inform us as to the perceptions of the receivers.

The position of a country in the indices reveals a dissonance between an official discourse and the reality of a soft power policy. If, as Nye suggests, we add foreign policy to the equation, we notice a decline in the attractiveness of the political values typified in China's political model. This reflects the perception of China as an authoritarian state or as deploying sharp power. Such results suggest that the political system is predominantly scrutinized by European citizens, both through cultural and foreign policy lenses, as Nye believes.

China has traditional cultural elements to promote, but no contemporary ones. Its strategy emphasizes media and broadcasting, in order to improve the alignment with China's perception of communication. Even so, the present perception of the country, as revealed by the indices, is less than favourable.

One of the most famous Chinese political scientists offers a conclusion that we adopt. For Yan Xuetong (2007), the Chinese reputation on the world stage largely depends on the international perceptions of its internal policies. Global social equilibrium, sustainable growth and some flexibility for citizens are key factors in revising depictions of China, and

⁷ Discussion with a CI Director, Bruxelles, March 2017.

enable it to be more favourably received on the world stage. That is, the internal and external soft power must be more cohesive. This is especially true in view of the difficulty that countries face in controlling images and perceptions, the importance of which cannot be overlooked. China's lack of credibility is related to its authoritarian régime. Here, China is its own worst enemy at making its culture acceptable at a global level, at least by the Western world. In 2016, Yan argued that the debate will focus on political might, in order to create a bipolar world (Yan 2016).

We began with culture, values and foreign policy and have ended with a reflection on and an evaluation of the norms where the core elements remain attractive. Combining attractiveness with credibility under a normative framework allows us to shift from culture, image and media to qualitative studies on norms elaborated by NGOs. From our point of view, this contributes to strengthening the analyses of soft power in action.

As Nye (2011) has said, the states that are ready to project soft power are those whose dominant ideas are closer to global norms, which now emphasise pluralism and autonomy. China as a global power faces major problems that may impede the efforts by the People's Republic of China to present an image of support for the country's cultural dimensions. In this context, we consider that there is a dissonance and a lack of credibility regarding Chinese messages and the country's influence on the world stage.

An expansion of traditional and contemporary Chinese culture requires a politically relaxed environment that encourages freedom of expression and a free exchange of ideas among Chinese and the world at large. As argued by Li and Chitty (2009), framing a national image cannot be constructed by spending money on messages, digital broadcasts or communication capacity without considering the target, the perceived and the projected media images. Despite an extensive use of soft power, the government of the PRC has not yet developed an ideal mix of soft-power resources to achieve their desired foreign policy objectives. The gap between an increasingly cosmopolitan and confident foreign policy and a closed and rigid domestic political system is responsible for the imbalance between the three pillars of soft power: cultural attractiveness, examples set by domestic values, and values expressed through foreign policy. Examining the efforts of China from 2008 to 2011, Nye (2011) concludes that China's offensive is ineffective, partly because of its internal policy, composed of censorship, harassment of citizens, laws against NGOs, and trials against foreign companies.

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News and Views: Definitions and Characteristics of Genres in Chinese Journalism

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ABSTRACT

Journalistic genres in China have acquired distinctive characteristics and have shaped original sub-genres that are unique to the local journalistic tradition. While many studies analyzing their characteristics have been written in Chinese, works on the subject in other languages are still scarce. This contribution aims to fill this void by presenting the two main genres in which written journalistic production can be understood, i.e., “news” and “views”, as well as their sub-genres, and showing how they are interpreted in Chinese media studies. The analysis is based on a corpus of recent academic publications that represent the current Chinese scholarly interpretations of local genres of journalism. In doing so, the paper also offers insights on recent theoretical reflections about the functions of journalistic writing in the People’s Republic of China.

Keywords: China; commentary; editorial; genre; investigative journalism; journalism; news; news report; opinion article; views.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of media language research, many studies focus on the linguistic characteristics of the genres of journalism, such as news reports and news commentaries (Lavid, Arus, and Moraton 2012; Bouzis and Creech 2018). However, the linguistic, cultural and socio-political peculiarities of the communities from which the genres develop can influence their characteristics, while the self-identification and goals of the

authors, who are part of the same discourse community, similarly shape the intended purposes of the genres (Shoemaker and Reese 1996).

Academic publications that analyze the definitions and characteristics of the genres of Chinese journalism, and compare the Chinese and the Anglo-American traditions are abundant. However, publications on the subject are mainly available in Chinese, being the product of Chinese academics working in Chinese universities. Publications in international languages on this subject are still scarce: important insights have been offered on single genres, as in the case of investigative journalism (Bandurski and Hala 2010; Tong 2011; Svensson, Saether, and Zhang 2013) and, to a lesser extent, news commentaries (Valli 2010; Lupano 2016), but comprehensive studies on the genres of Chinese journalism in languages other than Chinese are, to date, difficult to find.

The aim of this contribution is therefore to present, from a media studies perspective, how “news” and “views” – the two main genres in which written journalistic production can be understood – are interpreted in the Chinese tradition of media studies. Even if Chinese scholars widely apply Anglo-American definitions of journalistic genres to the local production (Wang and Lee 2014), they also hold that genres in China have acquired distinguishing characteristics and have shaped original sub-genres that are unique to the Chinese journalistic tradition (Xia 2014, 156).

The analysis is based on a corpus of recent academic publications that represent the current scholarly reflections on local journalism genres in China. In doing so, this paper also offers insights into the current state of research on the functions of journalistic texts and journalistic practice in the People’s Republic of China. Since such studies are included in publications that are commonly available in the country, they can be considered as accepted by the political authorities and in line with the official discourse.

2. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

2.1. *The corpus selection*

The corpus selected for this study consists of 14 academic publications that are currently available in China and have been produced between 2004 and 2017. I have selected works by authors who are media scholars

working in Journalism and Communication Departments of renowned Chinese universities, and whose studies have been promoted by established Chinese academic publishers connected to higher education institutions, such as Peking University, People's University of China, Suzhou University, Jin'an University and Zhongshan University.

All the publications included in the corpus focus on written journalism, either on both news and views or on just one of the two. While they all provide more or less extensive lists of sub-genres, some also study the genres of broadcast journalism. Those categories have not been taken into consideration in this study.

Only works that analyze the subject from a media studies perspective have been selected for this research. Nevertheless, their approach can vary: some treat the topic in a somewhat abstract way, dwelling on the theoretical aspects of the different genres; others offer a more practical approach to genre writing, aiming to support aspiring journalists or professionals who already work in the sector. The latter have a clear didactic purpose and provide samples of the genres and sub-genres that they discuss, reprinting and analyzing articles or parts of articles that have been published in Chinese newspapers. In doing so, they often refer to elements that define genres, such as texts sharing distinctive characteristics, a set of communicative purposes, constraints and conventions (Swales 1990; Bhatia 1993).

2.2. News and views writing in China

This contribution focuses on the two macro-genres of which journalism is comprised: news and views. I have so far deliberately used these rather vague terms, in order to focus on the differences between the two fundamental types of output of journalistic production that represent the main functions and goals of the profession: reporting facts and expressing opinions. News aspires to objectivity; views value subjectivity.

Chinese scholarly interpretations do consider objectivity and accuracy as prescriptive traits of news, and describe the effective expression of original opinions from an individual perspective as a fundamental element to the genre of views. Similar statements, however, do not seem to fully take into account the Chinese Communist Party's discourse on the role and function of journalism in the People's Republic of China, and overlook the reality of everyday professional practice in China, which is still very much affected by the political agenda and constraints. Ideologi-

cal control of news and views production in China is a fact, according to a long tradition of Chinese media studies¹, but this is not openly discussed in the texts selected for the corpus. The historical European and Anglo-American influence on the development of both modern journalistic practice and media studies in China could be a reason for this contradiction.

In terms of journalistic practice, European protestant missionaries founded the first periodicals that, since the early nineteenth century, have been introducing foreign concepts, know-how and professional values into the Chinese communication system, which, previously, had ensured the flow of information only between the imperial court and the peripheral levels of the administration (Mittler 2004).

Later, journalism in China incorporated different traditions and ethical systems, which continue to inform the current professional practice (Hassid 2011; Tong 2014; Lupano in press). Confucianism has played an important part in inspiring the work and goals of Chinese journalists from the end of the 1800s (Nathan 1986; Vittinghoff 2002) and, after the May 4th Movement in 1919, ideology became a fundamental ingredient of information. The idea that the media have to be the “throat and tongue” (*boushe* 喉舌)² of the CCP has strongly influenced the professional practice since the foundation of the People’s Republic of China, while the post-1978 process of commercialization has added another set of tensions and challenges to the work of journalists (Stockmann 2015; Lavagnino e Mottura 2016).

Nevertheless, the first official journalism programme in China was created by American envoys from the University of Missouri in 1920. Thus, when the field became academic, journalistic concepts and ethics taught in China had much in common with those taught in American journalism schools (Zhao J. 2008, 126; Weston 2010, 332-334). As the corpus used for this study shows, European and Anglo-American principles of journalism still appear to be the most relevant as far as the theoretical definition of genres of Chinese journalism is concerned.

¹ See Brady 2008, Young 2013, and Stockmann 2015 among the many relevant studies on the subject.

² The expression has been part of the CCP’s terminology since the 1940s, in connection with the spokesperson role assigned to the Party media. It became a full theory in 1985, when the General Secretary of the CCP, Hu Yaobang, claimed in an official discourse that “Party journalism has to be the ‘throat and tongue’ of the Party” (Lavagnino e Mottura 2016, 181-182).

3. NEWS

3.1. *The genre of news report*

The most common and comprehensive term for news in Chinese is *xinwen baodao* (新闻报道), which can be translated as “news report”. It is used in the title of many academic publications that discuss the meaning, structure and production of news and elaborate on the most relevant sub-genres.

The general understanding is that the news report genre³ can be defined by two fundamental principles: the “principle of truthfulness” (*zhenshi xing yuanze* 真实性原则) and the “principle of objectivity” (*keguan xing yuanze* 客观性原则). The first principle means that “facts are the source for a news report. The truthfulness of a news report requires an accurate reconstruction of the true colours of a news event” (Xue and Zhang 2013a, 42-43); while the second principle states that the news report consists of “reporting an event in a truthful, balanced, fair manner, without directly and openly expressing the writer’s personal bias and opinions” (Xue and Zhang 2013a, 75).

Other authors add further attributes to the news report genre: “fairness” (*gongzheng xing* 公正性), “timeliness” (*shixiao xing* 时效性), “readability” (*kedu xing* 可读性), and “other social concepts” (*qita shehui linian* 其他社会理念).

“Fairness” is considered the response to the readers’ expectation that journalists “act in a professional manner when they report, write, and edit” and “chase news having the common interest in mind”. Fairness is also described by its opposite: unfair journalism means to report facts that are “incorrect, incomplete, partial, superficial, without interpretation, without a background, and decontextualized” (Zhang 2014, 9).

“Timeliness” has to do with the speed with which facts are reported, without compromising the principles of news reporting (Xu 2013, 33-37).

³ References to the concept of genre are somewhat inconsistent in the corpus. Some scholars use the general term *leixing* (类型), defined by the *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* (现代汉语词典 Dictionary of Modern Chinese 2016) as a “category made of things that possess common characteristics” (791); others prefer the term *wenti* (文体), which means “genre of text” (1373); while others use *tikai* (体裁), defined as “the form of expression of a literary work” (1287).

“Readability” is linked to the readers’ ease in understanding the content of an article and to the journalist’s attempt to adapt the text to the target readers. The aim is to deliver the news efficiently to the most extensive readership by taking into account the gaps of age, education and cultural level of the receivers when writing. “Improving readability is the basis of the survival of the media”, which can be enhanced by “paying attention to the storytelling of a news story”, by providing a proper background, by offering detailed descriptions, by using a beautiful writing style, and by being creative in the use of language and in the structure of an article, thus “breaking worn-out expressions” (Zhang 2014, 10-11).

“Other social concepts” include the “guidance of society’s public opinion” (*yindao shebui yulun* 引导社会舆论), meaning the educational role of the news media and their capability to promote the development of Chinese society, and the “realisation of the supervision by public opinion” (*shixing yulun jiandu* 实行舆论监督), meaning the media’s function to serve as a means for the masses to exercise control over the government and administrative bodies, mainly through criticism (Xu 2013, 37-41)⁴.

After describing the principles of news reports, scholars often provide writing guidance and suggestions for the most common types of articles in Chinese journalism. By doing so, they list and analyze what can be understood as “sub-genres” (*ci leixing* 次类型). Some base this analysis on the content of the articles, distinguishing between “news report on current politics” (*shizheng xinwen baodao* 时政新闻报道), “financial news report” (*caijing xinwen baodao* 财经新闻报道), “social news report” (*shebui xinwen baodao* 社会新闻报道), “culture and entertainment news report” (*wenhua yule xinwen baodao* 文化娱乐新闻报道), and “crisis report” (*tufa shijian baodao* 突发事件报道) (Xue and Zhang 2013a). Others focus on the structural characteristics and the communicative purposes of each sub-genre, listing them as “news article” (*xinxi* 信息), “news story” (*tongxun* 通讯), “special interview” (*zhuanfang* 专访), “investigative report” (*diaocha baodao* 调查报道), “in-depth report” (*shendu baodao* 深度报道), “field report” (*xianchang xinwen* 现场新闻), and “event report” (*shijian xinwen* 事件新闻). Some scholars consider the means as part of the message when they add to the list the sub-genre of “e-media news” (*dianzi meiti xinwen* 电子媒体新闻) (Xia 2014; Zhang 2014).

⁴ The expression is considered controversial in the Chinese context and has been defined as a “euphemism for ‘agenda control’”. See Qian and Bandurski 2011; Lupano 2016, 81.

3.2. Sub-genres of news report

News article

As in the Anglo-American tradition, a news article in Chinese journalism is described as “a journalistic text that promptly covers relevant events that have recently happened in a succinct and straightforward manner” (Zhang 2014, 116). It is considered the most commonly used vehicle for journalistic information in the papers, on radio and on television. In terms of quantity, it is the most prolific sub-genre of news, covering two-thirds of the total of over three million articles that are published in China every day (Xu 2013, 173). Its characteristics are speed of reaction, clarity and brevity; accuracy and truthfulness; and the capability to take the readers straight into the story, as if they were seeing and perceiving the event directly. It is composed of a “headline” (*biaoti* 标题); a “date-line” (*xinxi tou* 信息头), used to give details of the source (news outlet) of the article, where it has been produced and the time it was published; an “introduction” (*daoyu* 导语); a “main body” (*zbuti* 主体); and a “conclusion” (*jieyu* 结语) (Xu 2013, 173-174; Zhang 2014, 116-120).

News story

The sub-genre of news story is defined as a text used to report in a detailed and lively manner the scene of an event or the features of a person. It uses narrative and descriptive means to convey emotions and present comments (Xia 2014, 157; Zhang 2014, 129). As the authors say, news story is “a genre of news report” that is “unique to our country. In the West, the genres of news report are distinguished as ‘pure news’ (*chun xinwen* 纯新闻) and ‘special article’ (*te gao* 特稿)”. The first one corresponds to the Chinese news article, while “our country’s news story belongs to the category of special article, [but] the scope of special article is wider” (Xia 2014, 156).

Its defining features are the “news character” (*xinwen xing* 新闻性), being the attention paid to truthfulness and to the “five Ws” of journalism writing (Who, Where, When, What, Why); the “commentary character” (*pinglun xing* 评论性), i.e., the focus on explaining the meaning of an event or on presenting points of view and opinions; and the “figurative character” (*xingxiang xing* 形象性), i.e., the use of different writing styles – such as descriptive, expressive and dialogic forms – in order to unfold a plot, describe a person or depict an environment (Zhang 2014, 129-130).

While news story shares some characteristics with news article, such as the goal “to describe meaningful people and facts of life in a timely and accurate way”, news article is a wider sub-genre. The subjects covered by news story “are more restricted, as it only concentrates on very important events that touch the lives of common people”. In terms of content, while news articles focus on giving a simple report of facts, news stories “do not just tell the readers which events have actually occurred, but also aim to explain the origins and development, the cause-effect relationship and the thoughts of the people involved” (Xia 2014, 157). News article is strictly tied to its codified structure, while news story can more freely use the structure most suited to a topic.

Special interview

Special interview targets personalities related to specific problems or events. It was originally just a means of investigating an issue and, as such, not distinguishable from news story, “but gradually it gained its own space and became an independent sub-genre” (Xue and Zhang 2013b, 263). Naturally, special interview and news story still share some characteristics: “Both strive for completeness and richness, and use many expressive systems to enhance their own liveliness and readability” (Zhang 2014, 138). Nevertheless, special interview gives priority to recorded words (the journalist’s job is to ask questions and record the interviewee’s answers, letting their words describe everything); has a specific communicative purpose and structure; is the result of questions, answers and follow-up questions, unlike interviewing spokespersons (Xue and Zhang 2013b, 263-271; Zhang 2014, 137-139). As such, it does not differ from the Anglo-American traditional interview.

Investigative report

Investigative report is a text written “after an objective investigation on the spot regarding an event”. The article must “show the pattern of development of an event”. It covers real life issues that affect a wide range of people: the stronger its focus, the more significant its relevance, the bigger its influence. Since it is based on facts, “its logic comes from facts, using facts as the tool to show patterns of phenomena” (Zhang 2014, 150-152). Its similarity to the Anglo-American homologue is probably among the reasons why, as mentioned above, it has been widely studied in international works.

In-depth report

The sub-genre of in-depth report “developed in the United States during the 1940s”, and made its way into Chinese journalism “in the 1980s, performing an important function in promoting the reform of our news industry” (Xia 2014, 188-189). It is defined as “a form of report that sheds light on the cause and consequences of an event and analyzes the trend of development of a phenomenon. It offers a further step to the five ‘Ws’ and one ‘H’, going deeper into the ‘Why’ and ‘How’”. Its depth is about content, because it provides longer and less timely reports; about meaning, because “it has to be strictly related to social development, or to expose problems, or to promote development”; and about influence, because “it has to be thought-provoking and difficult to forget for a long time” (Xia 2014, 189-190).

If compared with the sub-genre of news article, in-depth report “goes from the surface to the deeper levels, from the event to its understanding; from external features of a phenomenon to its inner relations or its relations with people”. It is also distinguished by its breadth of vision and its time extension, since “on the basis of the current situation it checks the past context, shedding light on the meaning of the future” (Xu 2013, 280-281).

Field report

Field report reproduces in a “witness” fashion the journalist’s personal visit to the field where a news event has happened or is developing. By doing so, it enhances the truthfulness and credibility of the report itself. It has to be timely. It is defined as “the equivalent of live radio and TV broadcasting” (Zhang 2014, 156-157).

Event report

Event report, which is similar to field report, focuses mainly on unexpected incidents, natural disasters, health crises, serious crimes, economic crises. As such, it is the most indicated sub-genre to cover war, social protests, policy changes, mutiny etc. (Zhang 2014, 158).

E-media journalism

A number of studies focusing on news writing also dwell on e-media journalism (or new media journalism), but instead of filing it as an inde-

pendent genre, they list it as a sub-genre of news report. Among its recognized features are the capability to break time and space boundaries; to use multi-media; to overcome financial constraints, allowing netizens to spread news at low cost; to allow readers to tailor their sources of information; to make producers and consumers of news more interactive (Zhang 2014, 169).

On this point, some scholars argue that, in addition to being able to broadcast news 24/7, unlike traditional media journalism, new media journalism also “enhances the supervisory function” of journalism, since “it is not limited by governmental and administrative organisations”, and since it “allows the audience to be informed about news that the institutions do not wish to broadcast” (Zhang 2014, 170). This is one of the very few instances in the corpus where authors acknowledge the limitations of expression that Chinese journalists face in their daily activity.

4. VIEWS

4.1. *The genre of news commentary*

Like other popular genres currently found in Chinese print and online media, the genre of “news commentary” (*xinwen pinglun* 新闻评论) has developed through the media reform period: as audiences craved original and appealing content, the new commercial newspapers used the most successful genres as marketing tools, effectively contributing to the change in subjects and forms of expression in the media, including Party media organisations (Shirk 2011).

This genre has become ubiquitous in Chinese papers and websites since the second half of the 1990s, gaining significant attention among Chinese media researchers, who have pointed out its innovative character (Cheng 2008; Wang W. 2008; Zhao Z. 2012; Du 2013, 31). It is defined as “commentary conducted on a news event” (Yang 2013, 4) and as a “very important ingredient in every paper”, used to express the organization’s “standpoint and political viewpoint”, aiming to “guide the readers’ orientation on the news” (Wang H. 2004, 8). Even if, as seen before, it is not a new genre in the history of the People’s Republic of China, the popularity and influence on public opinion achieved by news

commentary since the 1990s is new. News commentary is also a key ingredient for online news outlets: a button with the term “opinion” (*pinglun* 评论) or “views” (*guandian* 观点) can be found at the top of most news portals.

News commentary is characterized by a specific structure, comprising an “opening” (*kaitou* 开头), which is generally a neutral reference to the event or phenomenon that the commentary discusses; a “transition into the issue” (*ruti guocheng* 入题过程), which is needed to introduce the topic by making it interesting; an “argumentation” (*lunzheng bufen* 论证部分), which is the central and most dense part of a commentary; and an “ending” (*jiwei* 结尾), whose function is to conclude the reasoning by summarizing the previous points, by moving back to the specific case after a discussion in general terms, or by adding points that have not yet been mentioned (She 2013, 244-262).

An important aspect of the genre of news commentary lies in its production. Only a small percentage is written by employed journalists. Very often news commentaries are crafted by “independent editorial contributors” (*ziyou zhuangaren* 自由撰稿人): academics, media workers of other outlets and professionals of other fields, who are paid by the papers to produce single articles or columns (Shen W. 2003; Gongyang 2008; Yang 2013, 94-96; Lupano 2017a). Freelance contributors, who have emerged since the early 2000s, are not constrained by the official relationship that ties regularly employed journalists to the CCP (Young 2013): their financial and organisational autonomy, often linked by a specialist knowledge, places them in an innovative position when it comes to the possibility of voicing independent opinions and expanding the debate in China’s public arena. Obviously, editors remain the ultimate gatekeepers of what can and cannot be published (Gongyang 2008; Lupano 2017a, 2018).

4.2. *Sub-genres of news commentary: from the commentary department*

The genre of news commentary can be fragmented into a variety of sub-genres, but the main difference occurs between those that are produced internally, and therefore represent the voice of the publishing paper’s commentary department, and those that are produced externally by independent contributors. The following are the main sub-genres of commentaries produced internally.

The most authoritative sub-genre of news commentary is, as in the Anglo-American tradition, the editorial (*shelun* 社论), an article that represents a paper's position on the current political situation, on a very important news story, or on a crucial social phenomenon (Zhao Z. 2012, 134). Its importance is confirmed by its position – editorials often appear on the top right angle of page one, the area that most attracts the eye (Wang H. 2004).

As an expression of the paper's line, an editorial is not signed (Wang W. 2008, 361). Nevertheless, commentary departments often ask freelance contributors to provide editorials, which are paid more than other types of news commentary (Lupano 2016). When they are not written internally, the paper's editors give instructions to the contributor on the viewpoint that they want to be presented, resulting in stances that, even if produced by freelancers, are closer to the official discourse when compared with other types of commentary (Wang W. 2008; Lupano 2017b).

Editorials are considered “the media organization's political face and flag” (Yang 2013, 209), and only cover subjects that are extremely prominent. For this reason, in China, they do not appear regularly: *People's Daily* publishes six or seven editorials per month on average, while provincial papers publish two or three or even none in a month (Yang 2013, 209). The ones published by institutional papers are more authoritative than the ones published by commercial papers⁵: the *People's Daily* editorials are “the most authoritative commentary vehicle in use”, since they represent “by extension the CCP Central Committee” (Gitter and Fang 2018).

Commentary signed Ren Zhongping

A sub-genre that is strictly linked to the Chinese political setting is commentary signed with the alias Ren Zhongping (*Ren Zhongping shuming pinglun* 仁仲平署名评论), which has been published in the *People's Daily* since 1998. It generally appears on page one and is regularly republished by other outlets. These articles are very long (over 6,000 words). Although

⁵ Definitions of institutional and commercial papers and discussions of their characteristics can be found, among others, in Stockmann 2015 and Lupano 2016.

focusing on very important internal or international issues, their writing style is kept close to the spoken language (Li F. 2013, 231-234).

An alias such as Ren Zhongping conceals anonymous teams that, working under pen-names, are responsible for the production, editing and approval of such texts. Such groups exist in the most important Party papers, with the aim of establishing authoritative names, in order to better compete in the crowded commentary environment, while also diversifying the perceived sources of official commentaries. In fact, at first glance, the pen-names appear to be normal names, but they are actually homophones for the CCP organs that they come from (Gitter and Fang 2018). Their status is higher than that of other commentaries, and Ren Zhongping is the most authoritative of such names, being homophonous of “Important People’s Daily Commentary” (*Renmin Ribao zhongyao pinglun* 人民日报重要评论) (Mi 2009).

This system was in place before the foundation of the People’s Republic of China to protect the militants’ identity, and it was also widely used both during the Cultural Revolution and after Mao Zedong’s death, when it helped CCP reformists promote their views against the Party conservatives (Shen B. 2009). Since the second half of the 1990s, they have been rediscovered, with the aim of circumventing the public’s growing resistance to CCP propaganda. Nevertheless, pen-names are relatively easy to decode and collections of commentaries published as books under one or another pen-name are on sale in the country’s bookstores, describing the production process and the link with the institution for which they speak (Gitter and Fang 2018, 12).

Commentator’s article

Important subjects that are not considered crucial enough to make it into an editorial can become the topic of a commentator’s article (*pinglunyuan wenzhang* 评论员文章), a sub-genre that has grown significantly in recent years due to the decline of frequency of editorials. Like editorials, commentator’s articles are produced by the paper’s commentary department. Their main difference lies in their average size, which is shorter than editorial, and its importance, which is second only to editorial (Yang 2013, 209).

Commentator’s articles can also be anonymous (*bu shuming pinglunyuan wenzhang* 不署名评论员文章), but in this case, unlike editorials, they are considered a voice with “official character” (*guanfang secai* 官方色彩), instead of the official voice of the paper (Yang 2013, 210).

Short commentary and editor's commentary

Short commentary (*duanping* 短评) is defined as a “short and pithy commentary, with limited length, unitary content, to-the-point analysis and flexible use”. It focuses on one main point and is “short, new and lively”. It is short, because “it does not use many arguments, its theoretical features are not very strong and it is straightforward”. It is new, because it tends to “stick to the most sensitive point that can better resonate with the people”, but its analysis is carried out “from an independent point of view, with the result of often presenting new conceptions”. Its liveliness comes from its wording, which is “vivid and varied” (Yang 2013, 214-215).

Editor's commentary (*bianzhe anyu* 编者按语) is similar to short commentary, since both are attached to a news report and do not exist as independent texts. Editor's commentary can be a critique, an explanation or a suggestion added to a news report. It can “explain a situation connected to the main story, provide relevant background and present the identity of the author, in order to help the reader fully understand the content of the report” (Yang 2013, 215).

Narrative commentary

Defined as “a combination of news report and news commentary” (Yang 2013, 215), narrative commentary (*shuping* 述评) is an interesting sub-genre of news commentary. “News reports tell facts, clearly distinct from analytical comments”. However, if journalists feel that the mere narration of news does not fully allow it to express its meaning clearly, they can use narrative commentary. This sub-genre mixes a narrative part and a commentary part, but “even if the narrative part takes up the bigger space in the article, its purpose is to serve the commentary part, which is the soul of narrative commentary” (Yang 2013, 216). Its goal is to express the author's point of view and analysis of the facts that are central to the text.

4.3. *Sub-genres of news commentary: from external commentators*

Commentary on current affairs

Chinese researchers have highlighted the sub-genre of commentary on current affairs (*shiping* 时评), defined as an article that expresses the

author's opinion on a recent event or on a social issue (Lupano 2016, 63-65). The success of these articles, particularly in commercial newspapers, has been such that journalists and scholars have written about a "commentary on current affairs fever" (*shiping re* 时评热) (Nong 2002; Cheng 2008). The first commentary of this type appeared in the *South-ern Weekend* in 1994 (Li W. 2006; Ding 2009).

Commentary on current affairs is often published in conjunction with the most important news of the day. Newsworthiness and timeliness are described as its main features, along with an approach from an individual perspective, normally a specialist's angle: that of a lawyer, a doctor, a teacher, an IT expert, an engineer, a historian etc (Zhao 2012, 152; Yuan 2016, 105-106).

Since commentaries on current affairs are always signed, the author takes responsibility for the opinions expressed, which, in theory, could diverge from the orientation of the paper and from the official discourse on the specific subject. The name of the author is always followed by a basic profile: it can vary from "commentator" (*pinglunyuanyuan* 评论员) or "column writer" (*zhuannlan zuojia* 专栏作家) to the precise professional role of the person. The author can also be a reader, in which case the article falls into the category of "readers' letters" (*duzhe lai xin* 读者来信) (Wang W. 2008; Li F. 2013, 267-269).

Among the characteristics of commentary on current affairs, scholars mention the "citizen identity" (*gongmin shenfen* 公民身份), meaning that the authors are citizens who, due to their profession or personal experience, are entitled to express their opinion on the subject in hand. This feature is linked to the individuality (*geren xing* 个人性) of the writers, meaning that they do not represent a media organization or a social group, but voice their personal opinions arising from their own individual perspective. This produces a diversification of opinions and a diversification of styles. Another feature is a direct, poignant, simple and agile style of writing (Yang 2013, 219-224). The "critical character" has also been identified as an important attribute of this sub-genre, which is strictly structured into presentation of the original fact, main argument, discussion of the argument, conclusion, and ending (Yuan 2016, 106).

Column

Columns (*zhuannlan* 专栏) started to develop from the end of the 1970s as a sub-genre of news commentary. They belong to a single writer who regularly publishes under a recurrent title in a recurrent page space. The

writing style is diversified and so is the content, since column has a very pronounced individual character. Currently, many famous authors and freelance contributors have their own column in magazines and news portals (Liao 2017, 176-177).

Essay

The sub-genre of essay (*zawen* 杂文) is defined as an “artistic political comment” with vivid and hard-hitting features. Its focus is on minor news stories (Yang 2013, 224-226). Despite being considered a genre of literary writing due to its attention to narrative detail, its strong critical and argumentative features make it a common form of newspaper writing. Humour is an important element of this sub-genre and is used to unveil social fakes, evils and scandals (Liao 2017, 179-180).

5. FINAL REMARKS

This paper has aimed to present the ways in which news, views and their sub-genres are interpreted in Chinese media studies, a topic on which works in international languages are still scarce.

The analysis of a corpus of Chinese language scholarly books has demonstrated that such genres have, in some cases, acquired distinctive characteristics and shaped sub-genres that are unique to the local tradition. However, it has also shown how Chinese academic reflections on media studies, when focusing on the prescriptive characteristics of news and views, are still strongly inspired by the Anglo-American tradition, and therefore overlook the specific political and media context in which Chinese journalism operates.

This contradiction has an influence on the life and production of journalists working in the Chinese news media, who have to negotiate their professional identity in a context characterized by strong ideological constraints, high market competition and a demanding public.

Starting from this analysis of the established academic field on journalistic genres, I plan to deepen my research on the topic in future, taking two different directions. First, I will investigate texts produced by Chinese-language media outlets, in order to verify how far the definitions of genres described in this paper actually apply to the practice of journalistic production in China today. Since journalists can be consid-

ered members of a discourse community of professionals who produce texts that are codified in genres, a linguistic analysis of relevant journalistic texts could be carried out by applying Swales (1990) and Bhatia's (1993) approach to genre studies. Secondly, I will discuss my findings with members of the discourse community, in order to assess how the journalistic genres are understood and defined by the journalists who use them. The aim will be to clarify if, how and to what extent the media studies theory perspective and the reality of journalistic practice differ in today's China.

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From “Propaganda” to “Guided Communication”

Animating Political Communication in Digital China

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ABSTRACT

This essay investigates the recent boom in the use of animated cartoons for political communication in China which began in late 2013. A series of political cartoons are examined against the background of a comprehensive media revolution designed by top-following the Chinese Communist Party’s (hereafter CCP) new understanding of the role of media and public opinion. I argue, by looking closely at the creative use of political cartoons, that the CCP has adjusted its views on the role of media in the digital age – from propaganda mouthpiece, to guiding opinion unifier for popularizing the Party’s rule. Their efforts and success in stimulating a significant number of responses through the use of animated cartoons has given rise to a new communication model of mixing top-down and bottom-up flow of message. Behind the new model was the CCP’s changing understanding of the public: from “target audience of propaganda” to guided audience, and then to central players in popularizing the Party. The major media reform since Xi took office in early 2013 has laid institutional, managerial and editorial foundations to sustain this conceptual change in practice. The boom in political cartoons is the most conspicuous result of that.

Keywords: cartoon; China; media reform; new media; political communication; propaganda; public opinion; Xi Jinping.

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From its earliest days, the internet has been regarded as a “dictator’s dilemma”, i.e., it is very difficult to garner the benefits of the internet (e.g., social development and economic growth) without paying the potential political cost of destabilizing the rule (Dickson 2016). Ever since the burgeoning studies of the internet in the early 1990s, techno-optimism has featured strongly in Western scholarly debates on the role of internet in society. With his 1995 bestseller, *Being Digital*, Nicholas Negroponte, the former MIT media lab director, has paved the way for a future generation of techno-optimists. The book demonstrates his unapologetic optimism for the future of the internet on account of its capacity to break down national and linguistic barriers and bring the world together, as is evidenced from the title of the book’s epilogue, “An Age of Optimism”. The internet, as has been argued, is built as a robust decentralized communication system that is by its nature resilient to control.

Students of the internet in China have likewise been preoccupied with the internet’s potential political impact, which leads to a dichotomous theoretical framework of control vs. resistance, top-down vs. bottom-up, and mainstream vs. dissidence. The underlying implication of such studies is the potential impact that the internet has on the one-party state system.

In 1998, Yuezhi Zhao prepared the ground for the study of media commercialization from a politico-economic perspective. Her nuanced study of the history of the commercialization of the print media in China from the 1920s to the 1990s underlines the love-hate relationship of the Chinese government with media marketization, as well as the care that newspapers have to take to tread safely between the “Party line and the bottom line” (Zhao 1998). In his book, *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online* (2009), Guobin Yang has also provided a pioneering study of China’s cyberspace as a place of synthesis between creative energy, conflict, community and control. Xiaoling Zhang’s *The Transformation of Political Communication in China* (2001) goes one step further in examining the intricate relationship between media and politics as China emerges as a global superpower. Zhang investigates how discourses, ideologies and contentions negotiate with each other to give rise to what he calls “resilient authoritarianism”, i.e., how the Party has to allow a certain degree of contention in the media in order to improve governance while limiting the contention within controllable limits and maintain the stability of its rule. In a similar vein, Maria Repnikova (2017) argues for a more deep-seated connection between the Chinese media and political power. By examining the bureaucratic and personal

links and the intricate power relations between the central authorities and critical journalists, who are conventionally viewed as daring dissidents against authoritarian rule, Repnikova highlights the “fluid, state-dominated partnership characterized by continuous improvisation” (*ibid.*, 10) in Chinese critical journalism.

These monographs are among a long list of studies with wide-ranging themes, which include media control, especially internet control, e.g., Schambaugh (2007) and Tsui (2003); the development or deficiency of the “public sphere” and “civil society”, e.g., Luo (2014), Negro (2017), Tai (2006), Lei (2018), Herald (2011); and the synergy of Party ideology and market rationality, e.g., Shi (2008), Stockmann (2013), and Zhao (2000). The cohort of studies on China’s new media either focuses on its boom from a technological viewpoint or adopts a conventional analytical line in investigating new media’s relationship with the Party-state and the potential for social democratization, e.g., Lu, Chu and Shen (2016), Lee and Chan (2016) and so on. Discussions on the technological, economic and political significance of new media in China have underlined a similar problem, as to whether digital media lead to “convergence [with] or divergence [from]” the central political power, these being the actual words used in the titles of several articles on new media, such as that by Lun Zhang (2017).

Against the research paradigm of control vs. resistance, little has been said about how the internet and new media have changed the model of communication in China and the Party’s role in facilitating such a change. Brian McNair, in his textbook on political communication (2003), presents the twenty-first century as acceleration and deepening of the practice of politics in all its forms before a global audience. The internet and new media have turned McLuhan’s metaphor of the planet as a shrinking “global village” into a truism (1994). Hence, scholars like Brian McNair, Philippe Maarek and Gadi Wolfsfeld have called for a closer examination of the rising level of professionalization in political communication, i.e., the role of the agent between political organizations and the media (McNair 2003). Instead of inquiring about the effect of the new technology on political communication, it is better to ask, “Who is using the new technology, in what ways, within what social and political context, and with what effect?” (Maarek and Wolfsfeld 2003, 6). The essay asks precisely these questions with regard to the context of China under President Xi Jinping.

This essay examines the recent boom in political animated cartoons arising in China since late 2013. The most prominent was the “Thirteen

What”, a three-minute English music video featuring an animated image of Xi Jinping promoting China’s Thirteenth Five-Year Plan, referred to by *The Wall Street Journal* as “the psychedelic music video” (Dou 2015). The exploration of this phenomenon is followed by an investigation into the process of professionalization in political communication in Xi’s China. The essay situates the rise of political animation against the top-designed media revolution and the Chinese Communist Party’s new deployment of the media’s role. I argue, by looking closely at the creative use of political cartoons, that the CCP has been well aware of the internet’s “dilemma”, and has proactively adjusted the media’s role to thrive in new patterns of communication in the new media age. A review of media policies from Mao to Xi allows us to map the shifting understanding of the media: first, as the Party’s propaganda mouthpiece, then as a means of promoting social development, and now as an agent for popularizing the Party and its leader. The new role expected of the media matches the CCP’s changing understanding of the public: first, as the “target of propaganda”, then as guided recipients, and now as voluntary advocates for the Party. The wild spread of animated apps and videos, as well as their creative imitations from netizens, testifies to the breaking-down of the rigid dichotomy between top-down and bottom-up models. It was at least partially the expectations regarding Xi’s major media reform that swept away not only the conceptual, but also the institutional, managerial and editorial aspects of the Chinese media.

This study primarily adopts the methodologies of empirical investigation into new media texts, with quantitative effect analysis and a critical historical approach to China’s media policies. The materials examined in the study include online sources from new media platforms and published user data reports, as well as published media policies and quotes from Party leaders’ talks. The article thus consists of three sections: the first examines the phenomenon of the rise of political animation and cartoons, the second traces the Party’s changing understanding of the media’s role, against which these political cartoons arose; and the third further elaborates on the actualization of this changing conception in media reform since Xi Jinping came to power in 2013.

1. ANIMATING POLITICS

New animated political cartoons have been released since Xi took a firmer grip on the country's ideology. This was done in the light of the soaring number of internet users in China. As of December 2017, the total number of internet users in China hit 772 million (CNNIC 2018). Among them, 753 million were mobile internet users, constituting 97.5% of the total number of internet users. In June 2014, mobile internet users outnumbered PC users for the first time (CNNIC 2014). The 2018 report further shows that 93.3% of internet users were on WeChat, totalling 720 million. By the end of 2017, there were over 6 million public WeChat accounts, and over 280,000 government service WeChat accounts – a significant phenomenon arising since 2014 (Tencent Big Data Report 2018).

It was against the backdrop of this formidable force of internet users that, from late 2013, a series of political animated cartoons have been posted online and have reaped viral spreading. Most of these political animations are credited to the mysterious film production studio 复兴路上工作室 (“Studio on the Way to Rejuvenation”), a studio that has made its presence since Xi called for the forming of the “new-type mainstream media” in October 2013. The studio has neither a website, nor searchable basic information, and has been mentioned only briefly in some online articles¹. The word “rejuvenation” has been mentioned repeatedly since former president Hu Jintao's term of office. President Xi Jinping further equated the “rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” to his concept of “the Chinese dream” in talks during late 2012 and early 2013². However, the studio's name can also be understood as “Studio on the Fuxing Road”, a major boulevard in Beijing where the headquarters of CCTV and State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China (SAPPRFT) are located.

¹ These include 复兴路上工作室发布 ‘十三五’ 神曲 (“Studio on the Way to Rejuvenation Releases ‘Thirteen What’”) on *Southern Metropolis Daily* on 28 October 2015, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/2015/10/南方都市报-复兴路上工作室发布十三五神曲/>. And 复兴路上工作室再推新作 (“Studio on the Way to Rejuvenation Releases New Work”) on *cpcnews.cn* on 17 April 2015, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/xuexi/n/2015/0417/c385474-26863354.html>.

² The Party's official news website has published a summary of and the entirety of President Xi Jinping's talks during this period. The talks related to the topic of “the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” and “Chinese dream” and can be found at: <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2014/0901/c40531-25581189.html>.

The first political cartoon to emerge was 领导人是怎样炼成的 (“How Leaders Are Made”), a five-minute cartoon video comparing the presidential election in China with those in the West, such as the US and UK. The video was launched in October 2013, and attracted over 10 million viewings within five days of being posted online³. The wild growth of viewings earned the video special coverage on primetime CCTV News on 17 October 2013 (youku.com 2013). CCTV News, notorious for the rigid, stuffy format of its reports, gave credit to the video’s fun way of clarifying how state leaders were elected in China. Unlike any previous primetime news, the anchor used a few internet expressions that were very familiar to Chinese netizens. Among these was the word “little editor” (*xiao bian* 小 編), an online term for editors, but used in a playful, jokey way to demonstrate his/her creativeness in presenting sensitive topics in a light-hearted manner. In the same month, the cartoon’s viral spread also sparked an online debate, in which netizens widely regarded the video as being “down to earth”, “friendly” and “cute”⁴. In its never-before-seen characterization of Chinese political leaders, the video presents all of the then Politburo Standing Committee members, including President Xi Jinping, as well as past political leaders Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, in cute, little images with their ID photographs attached to animated cartoon bodies. Adding to the “mainstream” stance of the video content is the title’s apparent reference to a Soviet novel, widely read in socialist China, *How the Steel Was Tempered* by Nikolai Ostrovsky (1932). The video also presents the then US President Barack Obama dancing Psy, and the UK Prime Minister David Cameron turning somersaults. Relaxing and cheerful background music is used, along with a voice-over in a naïve, childlike voice. Behind the façade of this light entertainment format lies a highly political message: hard work is a must in the long, meritocratic path to becoming Chinese president. The video implicitly criticizes an over-simplified admiration for Western democracy, and concludes: “Every road can lead to presidency and every state adopts its own way. [...] As long as the public is satisfied, the state moves forward, society develops; [and] the way [one state undertakes] is the right way, isn’t it?” (*Figure 1*).

³ Statistics from total viewership on Youku, Youtube and Tudou.

⁴ The “Comment” area below the video on Youku remains open; a forum on “How Leaders Are Tempered” had been created on Baidu Tieba, the largest Chinese online community, with over 700 active comments from netizens. The forum was then shut down before the 19th Party Congress in 2017.



Figure 1. – “How Leaders Are Made” (screen capture from Youku by author).

The video was first posted by Fuxing Lushang Studio on Youku, and, according to Zhao Jianxin, editor-in-chief of Youku in an interview (news.ifeng.com 2015), surprised all video editors by successfully passing internet censorship (chinanews.com 2013). Zhao then made a bold decision to move the video from the “short video” section to the “information” section and the viewership immediately skyrocketed. The head portraits of members of the 18th Party Congress were taken from official photographs published on xinhua.net. The launch took place barely two months after Xi’s first national meeting on “propaganda and thought work”, convened in August 2013, when Xi particularly emphasized “creative ways for propaganda work” to “tell a better story of China”. Thus, the timing of the launch, as well as its unchecked, wild spread online, suggests that the video was at least approved and supported by state officials, if not directly funded by the government.

While similar critiques on the Western electorate system have long been discussed and circulated among intellectuals⁵, it was the refreshing image of political leaders in new media form and language that caused such high excitement. The voice-over speaks in a jovial tone, explaining political terms and concepts, and using an informal online language familiar to all young netizens. Excitement and shock combined to bring the video viral spread both within and without China. China reporter Austin Ramzy of *The New York Times*, known for covering political dissidence in China, grudgingly extolled the video as “such an effort

⁵ A search in *People’s Daily*, CCTV News, and the Party journal for political theories *Qiushi*, and commercial media like fenghuang.net with key words like “Western political elections” will suffice to show the abundance of discussion. Many of the titles bear words like 真相 (“truth”), with the purpose of exposing corruption behind modern elections and criticizing the self-congratulatory Western democratic model.

to humanize China's leader had hardly been seen before [...]” (Ramzy 2015). The fact that the video spread like wildfire over all the online media websites, such as Youku and Tudou, indicates the widespread public excitement in seeing brand-new images of their political leaders, who had been portrayed with fossilized images on mainstream TV for decades. In addition to viral spread and the positive audience response, the video triggered imitative efforts to “cutify” Party leaders from lower-level government-managed websites and creative netizens alike.

Municipal level government news portals took the lead. In February 2014, Qianlong.com under the management of Beijing's municipal propaganda department, released the cartoon series “Where Has President Xi Jinping's Time Gone?”. Here, Xi's image is similar to the one in “How Leaders Are Made”, and revolves around a graphic of activities such as investigation, state visits, meetings, study and personal hobbies of reading, hiking, football playing, etc. Xi's fully-packed schedule presents an image of a talented and versatile president, who, despite his many likings, sacrifices his personal leisure time to serve the state and its people. Towards the end, a graphic summarizing his activities shows that Xi made 12 trips for investigation within China, visited 14 different countries across five continents, and presided over 40 meetings during his first 15 months in office. The animated Xi holds up a sign, reading: “Undertaking this job means having basically no time of my own”, a highly publicized quote of Xi's to the Russian media, referring to a popular pop/folk song, “Where Has Time Gone?” (*Figure 2*).



Figure 2. – “Where Has President Xi Jinping's Time Gone?” (screen capture by author).

Since being published on 19 February 2014, the series has been reposted with front-page coverage by almost every major news outlet. Encouraged by this initial success, Qianlong upgraded the cartoon to a highly user-friendly, interactive interface, so that users could follow Xi's schedule during state affairs, such as APEC in November 2014, the BRICS summit, and his state visits to Latin America in late 2016. The constant progress in technological complexities in terms of visualization, design, data collection and editing, means that such a change is not just spurred by emotional encouragement, but through actual funding, and to no small degree. The fact that ordinary Chinese netizens can know where and what the president is doing by simply moving their fingertips over mobile screens brings political leaders closer to the public, while the formal layout of his schedules continually proves to users how devoted and busy the president is (*Figure 3*).

The success of the cartoon series on Qianlong has encouraged editors and journalists in both state-owned media and commercial new media to creatively cultivate the image of political leaders. In November 2014, the *People's Daily's* official WeChat account released a series of photographs of China's First Couple attending APEC meeting, under the title



Figure 3. – Animation series on Xi Jinping's schedule (screen capture by author).

“A Kind of Love Called Uncle Xi and Mommy Peng”. The photographs portray the President as a man of the people, showing love and care for the First Lady Peng Liyuan, who, unlike previous wives of Chinese presidents, regularly accompanies Xi in state visits, wearing designer outfits. The photographs capture moments when Xi casts a tender glance at the First Lady during a busy state visit, with the apparent purpose of characterizing the President as a good commoner husband.

Creative netizens quickly followed suit in cartoonizing the President as a good husband, and it quickly travelled back to the official media websites. A week after its release came the wildly popular song, 习大大爱着彭麻麻 (“Uncle Xi Loves Mommy Peng”), composed by Yu Runze, a grassroots live streamer and online singer from Henan province. The cheesy rap song was also made into a video by *People’s Daily*, with nine children singing the song, accompanied by original cartoon images and photographs of the First Couple. Within five days of being posted, the video reaped over 22 million viewings and was quickly reposted on all major news portals, including CCTV News and various video platforms. Cultivating the First Couple’s love story is a clear example of the combined efforts to do so by all sectors of the online community – state-owned media, commercial media, and grassroots netizens (*Figures 4-5*).



Figure 4. – “A Kind of Love Called Uncle Xi and Mummy Peng” (screen captures by author).



Figure 5. – “Uncle Xi Loves Mommy Peng” (screen capture by author).

These are videos that keep the Party happy, while harvesting a huge viewership for profit. Large media corporations and commercial platforms lead the game with their advantages in funding and human resources. Inspired by their huge success, a series of similar animated cartoons, entitled 跟着大大走 (“Follow Uncle Xi”), have been made to introduce Xi’s call for multilateral economic co-operation with bordering countries in Asia at the Bo’ao Forum in 2015. The animation also promotes the China-initiated pan-regional projects such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Belt and Road Initiative. The subsequently made 十三五神曲 (“Magic Song of the Thirteenth Five-Year-Plan”) not only caused a similar viral spread, but also became a widely known internet meme through its catchy lyrics and words.

New media accelerated the game with renewing creativity. Shortly before the 19th Party Congress, the *People’s Daily* launched an automated WeChat conversation app for the Two Sessions Conference. Users enter a simulated WeChat messaging window by clicking a link shared by other users, and a chat window pops up with greetings from Premier Li Keqiang, who invites questions about government’s work to be discussed the conference. When users type in simple replies, they are prompted to various answers concerning the government’s policies, vision and achievements in various aspects of the Chinese economy. In other words, users feel that they are chatting over WeChat with the Premier on China’s economic policies. Not surprisingly, official WeChat accounts were launched for Xi Jinping and the 19th Party Congress. The latter includes schedules, topics, discussions and other information for the public and journalists, making it the very first time that the CCP has proactively reached out to its people on social media accounts to promote its new members and policies (*Figure 6*).



Figure 6. – “Two Sessions Invite You to Group Chat” (app screen capture by author).

Most memorable of all is Tencent’s clapping app that invites users to digitally clap for Xi’s long opening speech at the 19th Party Congress. Users are required to listen to a short audio clip of Xi’s talk, and are then given 19 seconds to punch the “clap” button on the touch screen to applaud Xi’s talk. The more you mash the screen, the higher the scores you receive. The maximum possible number of claps in a round is about 1,000. The background image of the mobile game is a photograph taken from the back row of the meeting hall, so that users identify themselves as members at the Congress, actually clapping for Xi (Tencent 2017) (Figure 7).



Figure 7. – Tencent’s Clapping App (mobile app screen capture by author).

2. FROM PROPAGANDA TO GUIDED COMMUNICATION

These collaborative efforts across communication sectors suggest a changing communication model, as can be seen from the CCP's changing policy on the media. In the Mao era, the media were primarily understood as a tool for propaganda to mobilize the masses for revolution. Documents circulated internally during the 1930s (1928-35. Collection of Documents of the Chinese Communist Party Center) suggest the utmost importance that Mao placed on propaganda work. Before each uprising or military combat, a significant amount of time and effort had to be devoted to propaganda work – hence the famous Mao recipe of 30 per cent battling and 70 per cent propaganda work. Despite Mao's heavy emphasis on in-depth investigation to implement effective propaganda work, the media's role was merely understood as a tool for propaganda and the audience as targets of “education”.

This understanding of the audience was carried over to Deng Xiaoping's administration. Situating propaganda work within the framework of “spiritual civilization construction”, Deng paid great attention to the work of educating the people: “To cultivate new socialist successors is politics itself” (CPLRC 1994, 256). He referred to journalists and editors as “the warriors on the battlegrounds of thought” and likened them to “the engineers of the human soul”. “In this recent transitional period, in the work of socialist spiritual civilization and the whole socialist construction, their [journalists', editors' etc.] responsibilities in the aspects of thought education are particularly significant” (*ibid.*, 140).

The communication model of a one-directional flow of information remained largely intact with regard to Jiang Zemin's media policy. He pointed to the double nature of the news media: “not only as the mouthpiece, but also as a third industry” (Chen 2003, 21) that allowed the media to pursue not only social interests, but also economic interests, though serving as the mouthpiece remained the primary role (*ibid.*, 15).

Hu Jintao's administration has to some degree downplayed the media's propaganda function, by seeing it as an important means of improving governance. During his visit to the *People's Daily*, Hu pointed out the importance of the media, not only to “uphold the banner for the Party”, but also to serve the people and “create a good environment of public opinion to promote Party's proposals [...] to effectively channel public opinion and social situations (通达社情民意), to guide hot topics of society (引导社会热点), to dredge public emotion (疏导公众情绪), and to improve media supervision (搞好舆论监督)” (Hu 2008).

The time that Xi took office coincided with the crisis of Western major news outlets, where the news media were under severe attack for corrupting political democracy. The mainstream news media were entrapped in a credibility crisis, especially in the United States after the 2016 presidential campaign. “Platform media” like Facebook, Twitter and Google were accused of having led to inflammatory, sentiment-based communications that gave direct rise to right-wing momentum in events such as the election of Donald Trump, and Brexit. In November 2017, *Collins English Dictionary* assessed the facts, and chose “fake news” as the Word of the Year for 2017. Originating from the 2016 US presidential campaign, the term “fake news” is defined as “false, often sensational, information, disseminated under the guise of news reporting” (Collins 2017). The wild spread of unchecked, biased and fake news on the media has been heavily associated with Trump’s campaign. Best known is perhaps the study conducted by the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, led by media scholars such as Yochai Benkler and Ethan Zuckerman, who concluded that the mediascape had been subjected to “asymmetric vulnerabilities”, greatly to the favour of the political right wing (Benkler *et al.* 2017). Social media were accused of posing a fundamental challenge to the core principle of “informed democracy”, in which the West took great pride⁶, so much so that after the election former US President Barack Obama openly accused the media of helping to “undermine the US political process” (*The Guardian* 2017)⁷.

China was well aware of the debate and Xi, at the start of his presidency, decided to take a firm grip on the media. The Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee passed the “Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform” in November 2013 (china.org.cn 2014). The document was proposed by the central leading group – the top designers of China’s continuing reform, and incorporated specific guidelines for media construc-

⁶ In his “Opinion” article in *The New York Times*, Thomas B. Edsall, the renowned Professor of Political Journalism at Columbia University, accused new media of being the cause of “democracy, disrupted”.

⁷ The first half of 2017 has witnessed numerous articles on major Western media outlets, such as *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Guardian* and so on, discussing the effect of the radicalization of public opinion caused by political communications on new media. A quick search, using key words such as “new media” and “democracy”, will produce a long list of results.

tion as the key components towards China's success in continuing this reform. The document proposed to "construct internationally first-rate media [to] improve its capability for international communications and [to] strengthen the construction of the external discourse system". In the conference on "national propaganda and thought work" in August 2013, Xi Jinping asked for external propaganda work to be strengthened and improved, to "forge new concepts, new categories and new expressions to communicate throughout China and abroad (打造融通中外的新概念、新范畴和新表述)", as well as to "tell Chinese stories well, communicate the Chinese voice well, and demonstrate Chinese characteristics well (讲好中国故事、传播好中国声音、阐述好中国特色)" (Zheng 2016, 23).

Among the new tasks was the Party's leadership in the media: "The media organized by the Party and the government is the propaganda battleground, and must be surnamed 'Party'" (Xi Jinping talk, 2016a). Yet the emphasis on "new" indicates that the government has realized that the traditional means of propaganda no longer fits the digital age, and new means must be found for propaganda work to catch up with new media development. The traditional key word, "propaganda", which features in the Party-audience single-directional flow of information, has now been replaced by the more neutral term "news discourse (新闻舆论)", granting the public some agency under the Party's guidance. In his 19 February talk, Xi referred to "news discourse" as "an extremely important *work* of the Party", associated with governance, policy management, and stabilizing the state (治国理政、定国安邦(的大事)). "To manage well the Party's news discourse work concerns the flag and the road, concerns implementation of the Party's theories, guidelines and policies, concerns the smooth advancement of major works of the Party and the state, concerns cohering and attracting centrifugally the whole body of Party members and peoples of different ethnicities, and concerns the fate and future of the Party and the state".

Xi's policy called for a new model of communication. The public is no longer seen as the passive target for mobilization, nor as the target for social development through education. Instead, it has been realized that the online public now have unprecedented opportunities to air their opinions, so that netizens need to be attracted to the Party, not dictated to by it. For the first time, the non-political body of "netizens" is being regarded as "part of the people" in co-forming public opinion. Xi stated that "our officials need to go wherever the people go; or else how do we link with the people?" (Xi 2016a). Hence, the talk highlighted the 48-word sum-

mary – previously discursively mentioned in Xi’s visits to major news organizations of the *People’s Daily*, the Xinhua News Agency and China Central Television: “Raise high the banner (高举旗帜) [of Marxism-Leninism], direct [proper] guidance (引领导向) [of public opinion], focus on the central tasks (围绕中心) [of the Party], unite the people (团结人民), encourage high morale (鼓舞士气), spread public morals (成风化人), create cohesion (凝心聚力), clear up fallacies (澄清谬误), distinguish between truth and falsehood (明辨是非), join China and the outside (联接中外), connect with the world (沟通世界)”. In an internet age where control and one-directional propaganda have become impossible, Xi asked the media to increase the quality of its reportage and its “ability to attract and infect”, and should “respect the developmental rules of public opinion itself”.

These abstract guidelines were specified in Xi’s opening report at the 19th Party Congress, when he required the Party to place “high importance on constructing and innovating the means of communication” and, following the crisis in the major Western media, to “effectively improve the impact of propaganda (传播力), the guiding capacity (引导力), the influence (影响力) and the credibility (公信力)” of the Party’s news and public opinion. The popular cartoon videos have testified to the impact of new media’s propaganda, while their political message has exerted its guiding capacity by stimulating the rise of similar videos to further “spread the public morals” of Party-endorsed mainstream socialist values and to create cohesion.

3. MEDIA REFORM

Starting in 2014, a series of acts have been undertaken following the call from the top designers of reform. In 2014, the Central Internet Security and Information Leading Group (CISILG) was established under the direct leadership of Xi Jinping, in an attempt by government management to keep pace with the rapid development of the internet. In President Xi’s address to the group in 2014, internet security and development were viewed as core elements of national strategy: cybersecurity was seen as a matter of national security, and informatization was key to China’s modernization project (HPRC 2017).

On August 18, 2014, the top designers of China’s overall reform CLGCCR (Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Continuing Reform) passed the “Guiding Opinion on Promoting the Convergence

of Traditional and New Media” (Tang *et al.* 2014), within which media reform through convergence was seen specifically noted as an important part of the continuing reform in China. The document specifically notes the waning influence of traditional media and the soaring social role of new media, and prescribes general directives that traditional media, with their rich resources in personnel and capital, should actively incorporate talents, skills and flexible operation mechanisms from new media firms. Both, according to the document, should rely on converging their competitive edge and create updated communication methods better suited to the new position of Chinese society. Traditional media, i.e., those with closer tie to the Party, should take the lead in “reorganizing the media and redesigning communication processes by using their operating and managerial experience and human resources. They should also contribute to the functionally and structurally organic consolidation of new media groups and to the creation of reasonable, efficient development patterns” (Tang *et al.* 2012, 16).

The call for media convergence is far more profound than the superficial task of launching mobile clients’ accounts or public social media accounts. Instead, it is an in-depth media revolution that transforms many aspects of the media: the concept of the media now is a “new type of mainstream media (新型主流媒体)”, with rich human capital, resources and up-to-date communication skills; communication methods are envisaged as replacing the one-directional flow of information with a participatory role for the wider public; operating systems are to adopt a flexible form, with integrated co-operation between different departments, rather than departments working unilaterally under the vertical management of the corporate’s central leadership, as at CCTV in the past (CPC News 2015). In 2014, the mainstream media advanced fast-forward with convergence. The *People’s Daily* launched an unprecedented news production model, called the “Central Kitchen” (paper.people.com.cn 2014). The new system of operation fully absorbed the new media communication skills, streamlining a full team of programmers, service, sales, news-editing, contents customization and visualization, under an overall planning and monitoring group. In addition, since 2014, traditional media such as the *People’s Daily*, Xinhua News and CCTV quickly launched and promoted social media accounts on WeChat, Twitter, Facebook, and mobile clients. The Facebook and Twitter accounts of these media corporates grew so popular that each attracted a large number of subscribers. In 2015, the number of Facebook followers of CCTV and the *People’s Daily* surpassed that of CNN and *The New York Times*,

becoming the world's most popular mainstream media on new media (cctv.com 2015).

The viral political cartoons are only possible within this new context of media convergence. The supply of content material concerning political news and recent policies, and even the political leaders' personal lives, by Party-led traditional media like Xinhua or CCTV (e.g., Tencent's clapping app includes a key points summary of Xi's talk) will be based on close co-operation between political editors, news-gathering teams and leaders of the media corporates as gatekeepers, and possibly state officials in the propaganda department too. The next step is to closely align the content team with the visualization and animation teams, so that the political message can be accurately translated into immediate animation. This can be hardly done by using the pre-reform structure of media corporates, because their management is highly hierarchical under central leaders, with different teams for content, animation, print media and new media that function separately from each other in parallel departments. With new models like the "Central Kitchen", political sensitivity and knowledge of traditional media can be effectively translated into messages to the taste of the general public, in which the commercial media and new media like WeChat have long been proficient.

4. CONCLUSION

New developments and reforms in Chinese media organizations have suggested a destabilization of the single-directional flow of information from state to public. Efforts and success in the Party-initiated use of new media have triggered new dynamics in political communication, where the previously separated sectors of Party organs, commercial media, independent new media firms, and grassroots netizens now join hands to promote mainstream values, as the Party has liberalized forms in representation. The process of cartooning politics streamlines efforts and talent from different players in communication (e.g., Party mainstream media, commercial new media companies and independent visualization companies) and attracts the attention of millions of netizens. This is a clear result of Xi's call for media convergence. Since 2014, the dichotomy of "top-down" vs. "bottom-up" has no longer provided a satisfactory definition of political communication in China since 2014. The Chinese state is taking a proactive role in channelling the energy of its highly

talented civil society into political practice towards what it promises will be the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”. This study aims to serve as a starting-point in evaluating the altered communication model, from propaganda to guided communication, where audience response has been endowed with the utmost importance. Yet it remains to be seen how effective Xi’s media policy can actually be in changing public opinion about the Party or in achieving greater social coherence.

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Online Chinese Nationalism and the Discursive Construction of a Nationalist Hero: The Case of Jin Jing

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ABSTRACT

The rise of popular online Chinese nationalism has been interpreted by many researchers largely as a response to the alleged hostility and threat from foreign enemies. While the perceived enemies play a key role in shaping the dynamics of contemporary Chinese nationalism, little has been discussed so far as to the importance of a nationalist hero in the creation and mobilisation of online Chinese nationalism. This research attempts to address this gap by analysing the online discussion about the case of Jin Jing. Jin Jing, a disabled torchbearer and Paralympic fencer, was praised by Chinese netizens as a national hero after protecting the torch during the Paris leg of the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relay. By using a critical discourse analysis of online posts relating to Jin Jing and the incident, this paper aims to discuss the processes and interactions in the making of a national hero in a popular media discourse, and how the online discursive practices of creating, worshipping and defending a hero can contribute to the building of the nation.

Keywords: Chinese nationalism; critical discourse analysis; hero; Jin Jing; national identity.

1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The emergence of popular online Chinese nationalism has been viewed by many researchers largely as a response to the alleged hostility and

threat from the West, particularly the US and Japan, and much has been discussed about the dynamics of such reactive nationalism and its impact on China's domestic and foreign policies (Gries 2004; Wu 2007; Reilly 2012; Weiss 2014). While scholarly attention has been paid to the role of enemy (whether imagined or real) in the conceptualisation and perception of contemporary Chinese nationalism, it is also essential to shed light on the importance of national heroes as another key factor in shaping and mobilising Chinese nationalism.

A national hero is eulogized for his/her determination and self-sacrifice to defend a nation's independence, interest and pride, and his/her role in enhancing national unity and shaping nationalist identity is at the forefront (Smith 1991; 1999; 2009). Telling and retelling the stories of national heroes and martyrs has been a fundamental theme in Chinese "patriotic education", initiated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the 1990s, in an attempt to enhance the nationalist awareness of the Chinese public, especially young people (Zhao 2004; Hughes 2006). Model citizens from various sectors of Chinese society have been selected and established as heroes, and their devotion to the independence, modernisation and pride of China is extensively promoted and extolled throughout mass education and state media outlets (Einwalter 1998; Landsberger 2001; Wang 2011; Funari and Mees 2013). Lei Feng, for example, is probably one of the most publicized national heroes in contemporary Chinese society. As a soldier, he was characterized by the state propaganda apparatus as a model citizen, who was selfless, devoted and patriotic (Sheridan 1968). After his death in 1962, the CCP launched a nationwide campaign, "Learning from Comrade Lei Feng", to encourage the public to emulate his love for his country and its people.

From the above example, it is not difficult to realize that the creation and publicizing of a national hero in China is largely through top-down political propaganda, with the aim of enhancing people's identification with the nation, as well as promoting an officially desired model citizen for the rest of the nation to follow. However, such a top-down approach to the understanding of nation-building is being challenged, because the development of new information technologies, especially the internet, creates various mechanisms which enable ordinary people to imagine and support their nation. In China, regardless of information censorship (Wacker 2003; MacKinnon 2011; Morozov 2011), the internet has brought fundamental changes to the ways in which information is produced and consumed, and has enabled an increasing number of popular players to engage in social activism through Chinese cyberspace

(Tai 2006; Yang 2009). The role of the internet in the production and dissemination of Chinese nationalism has also been widely discussed, as have the cases of popular players using the internet to express alternative nationalist views and mobilize nationalist sentiments (Liu 2006; Nyíri, Zhang, and Varrall 2010; Ma 2015 and 2018).

Despite an increasing volume of research into online Chinese nationalism, few scholars pay adequate attention to the space the internet can create for popular players to single out and create their own national heroes, or interrogate how these online practice of hero-making can play a role in reinforcing people's nationalist awareness and identification. This empirical research aims to address this gap and focuses on the case of Jin Jing. As a Paralympic fencer and torchbearer, Jin Jing was attacked by a pro-Tibet protestor during the Paris leg of the international torch relay of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and the protestor almost succeeded in wrenching the torch away from her. Stories of Jin Jing in her wheelchair, tenaciously shielding the torch with her body, were rapidly circulating on the internet, and earned her overnight fame as a national hero for protecting the so-called symbol of China's national pride. Through a critical discourse analysis of online posts relating to Jin Jing and the incident, this paper aims to discuss the processes and interactions relating to the making of a national hero in a popular media discourse, and how the online discursive practices of creating, worshipping and defending a hero can contribute to the building and imagination of the nation.

2. CHINESE NATIONALISM AND THE MAKING OF HEROES

The Chinese Communist Party has long been using nationalism as an effective means of mobilizing state actions and enhancing the legitimacy of its rule (Zhao 2004). This was particularly true after the crackdown on the pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1989, when the CCP realized that the orthodox official doctrine of Marxism-Leninism was losing its ability to legitimize the state, and should therefore place greater emphasis on nationalism (Zheng 1999; Zhao 2000). To address this ideological bankruptcy, the CCP launched the “patriotic education programme” in 1994, stipulating that nationalist topics should be taught in schools at all levels on a daily basis, and should include the rise of the CCP, its great achievements in modernising China, its legendary and heroic stories, and so forth (Zhao 1998, 293).

The concept of “hero” is one of the most important themes in this patriotic education, but hero-making has been prevalent in the CCP’s propaganda since it took power in 1949, as heroes have been constantly created, not only as a means through which ideological messages can be conveyed, but also as officially desired role models for the rest of the citizens to emulate. In Mao’s era, several young People’s Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers were heroized, including Wang Jie and Ouyang Hai, who sacrificed their own lives for the sake of others (Landsberger 2001). Among those PLA soldiers who were proclaimed heroes, Lei Feng was the most prominent. As an ordinary soldier, Lei’s heroism was shown in the many good but unspectacular deeds he performed, his patriotism and his willingness to struggle with everyday hardship and serve the socialist nation and its people (Einwalter 1998). Being young, ordinary and prepared to serve the socialist cause were the common characteristics of soldier heroes in the 1960s. Most importantly, according to Sheridan (1968), they became heroes mainly because of their daily application of Mao’s teaching about serving the socialist country and its people, and their use of Mao’s thought as a weapon in the conquest of difficulties.

In the post-Mao era, Communism and Socialism were still being taught through patriotic education, but according to Hughes (2006, 57), they were “reduced to the stories of revolutionaries who illustrated the virtues of self-sacrifice for the interests of the collective and the need to always put the state before the individual”. Wang (2011, 361) finds that slogans such as “serving the people”, which were often used in Mao’s time, are still being used in the construction and popularization of heroes; however, they are “no longer connected to highly politicized ‘love for revolutionary comrades and class brothers’, but are reinterpreted as having the more humanistic and universal connotation of taking pleasure in helping those in need”. The party state continues to carefully select role models and heroes from all walks of life to provide political and moral guidance. Zhang Haidi, for instance, a paraplegic, was selected as a role model for her qualities which were seen as valuable for the public to emulate: her hunger for knowledge and her determination to overcome obstacles (Landsberger 2001). Even though times have changed, Wang (2011) argues that the *modus operandi* adopted by the state in the publicity of selected heroes remains similar to the one used in Mao’s era. The promotion of heroes normally takes place in the form of nationwide campaigns, with incessant official media reporting about their exploits and with their stories being transformed into artistic work, such as films and posters.

The existing literature has provided an abundance of useful insights into the techniques, rationales and ideologies relating to the hero-making processes in the Chinese official discourse. What is lacking, though, in the existing literature is a discussion about the possible roles that popular actors could play in the creation and commendation of heroes as a means of contributing to the building of a nation. The lack of a bottom-up view regarding the making of heroes becomes a problem that needs to be addressed, especially in the context where modern communication technologies have created opportunities for growing political participation. Much has already been discussed about the role of non-state actors in the production and dissemination of popular nationalism in contemporary China, and the ways in which they co-opt, challenge and compete with the state-led nationalism (Gries 2004; Liu 2006; Reilly 2012; Ma 2018). While this may be useful evidence to suggest that the CCP's domination of the Chinese nationalist discourse is under challenge, it does not necessarily mean that the CCP is losing its grip on nationalist politics. Researchers such as Weiss (2014) and Ma (2015; 2018) argue that, in fact, the CCP carefully and strategically engages with online popular nationalism to forward its own political interests, allowing some freedom for internet users to express their nationalist views, and occasionally co-opting online nationalist opinions into its policy-making. The power contests between state and popular actors over Chinese nationalist discourses make it relevant to discuss the extent to which online popular nationalism can challenge the CCP's domination of Chinese nationalist politics. With regard to this paper, one of the questions to be investigated is how the making of a nationalist hero from ground level can challenge the state-led nationalist hero-making politics.

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts Norman Fairclough's approach (Fairclough 1995) to critical discourse analysis as the main research method, and pays close attention to the ways in which online discussants discursively construct their nationalist identities and relations through the manipulation of language. Fairclough (1995) claims that social actors use language through a discursive structure, in order to establish identities and interpersonal relations between different groups involved in social interactions. Based on Fairclough's ideas on critical discourse analysis, this paper examines

various linguistic features of the collected data, such as the choice of word and sentence structure. Special attention is also paid to the use of pronouns, because they are frequently used in the discursive construction of identities and relations. As Bloor and Bloor (2007, 22) point out, the use of pronouns indicates “where a participant in the discourse positions himself/herself as a member of a social group and where others position him or her”.

All the data used in this paper were collected from *Tianya Forum*, which is one of the most visited online forums in China. Using a keyword search “Jin Jing + torch relay”, this research collected approximately 6,000 posts. Despite the large quantity of the collected data, they were actually highly repetitive¹. However, I by no means intend to ignore these repetitive online texts, because they enable me to understand the general attitudes of online participants. The sheer corpus of the data also allows me to make some claim to representativeness, because the data led to a saturation point where evidence arose for identifying the main trends, characteristics, and arguments relating to the online discussion about Jin Jing. It should also be noted that all the data were originally in Chinese, and the translation is mine. Moreover, for ethical reasons, the real IDs of the discussants quoted in this paper have been anonymized and replaced by Forum User A, B, C and so on.

4. THE CASE OF JIN JING

4.1. *Nationalist identification and the creation of a hero*

As Jin Jing’s stories spread widely and reached a large audience, praises for her patriotic deeds were prevalent in Chinese online forums, and she was eulogized by many Chinese netizens as an “angel in a wheelchair” and “the most beautiful torchbearer”. Such online passion for praising Jin Jing and identifying with her reached a climax when she posted a thread in *Tianya Forum*, expressing gratitude to all the supporters of the

¹ In the collected texts, slogans such as “Well done, Jin Jing!” and “You are the most beautiful girl!” were repeatedly seen. Moreover, repetition also takes place in the form of numerous red, heart-shaped icons and the Chinese national flags, which were used by netizens to show their nationalist passion.

Beijing Olympics, especially those who had supported her in the Paris leg of the torch relay. She insisted that she was not a hero, because she had just done what any patriotic Chinese should do; but, irrespective of that, the post still attracted a large number of replies with an overwhelmingly pro-Jin Jing tone. These comments enable us to understand not only the processes of hero-making in online popular discourse, but also how Chinese netizens assert and reinforce their nationalist identity through discursive practices of identifying with the alleged hero. Here are some comments by the forum participants:

The moment you used your body to protect the torch, my tears burst out. That moment I was completely touched. Not just me, but all the Chinese people around the world who love their own motherland were touched. You are the pride of the Chinese nation, you are the pride of the People's Republic of China. Your deed has told the whole world that: every individual of us Chinese who love the motherland would protect her, regardless of personal safety, when the pride of our country is under threat. (by Forum User A)

Jin Jing, every time I see the news about your protection of the torch, [I] am touched by your beauty, your determined expression, and your brave performance. It is never too exaggerated to use all the beautiful and sacred words to describe you. [...] In the picture, you look like a pure and holy angel, sacred and inviolable. Your splendid glory made the ugly look of the thugs even more despicable [...]. Many thanks for your protection of the dignity of our motherland and the Chinese nation. Their contemptible actions can only enhance the cohesion of our nation [...]. Jin Jing, we all feel proud to have such a compatriot as you, and [we all feel proud] that our motherland has children like you. Jin Jing, we all love you, too!!! (by Forum User B)

You are our angel, and your determination and smile inspire every Chinese. We become strong because of you, and we need to learn from you, [because you] fought the evil forces for our nation. (by Forum User C)

We love you, because you bear the Chinese soul. We love you, because you are the embodiment of the nation. (by Forum User D)

Someone becomes a national hero when s/he has done something for the sake of a nation, and the people of the nation firmly believe that what s/he has done is great. A national hero is in fact a discursive product, as the creation, publicity and cult of a hero are intrinsically related to the use of language in a particular socio-cultural practice. Whether or not someone becomes a national hero depends not only on how his/her nationalist deeds have been publicized and reproduced, but, more importantly, depends on how his/her nationalist deeds have been ele-

vated to a point where people believe that what s/he has done is a great contribution to the shared community. Jin Jing's story of protecting the torch was frequently reiterated in the online forum, and, as exemplified in the above online comments, the tendency to elevate Jin Jing's deeds to a nationalist height through the manipulation of language is obvious. As in the above texts, Jin Jing is hailed as "the pride of the Chinese nation", "the pride of the People's Republic of China" and the "embodiment of the nation". These particular words significantly contribute to the creation of Jin Jing as a national hero, and elevate her to a height that few people can reach. When Jin Jing has been extolled as the "pride" and "embodiment" of the Chinese nation, she is no longer an ordinary individual Chinese, but rather, has been turned into a symbol that represents a collection of values, wills and dreams of the Chinese community as a whole. It frequently seems to occur in a variety of cultures that someone who is upheld as a hero becomes more or less sacred (Smith 1991; 1999; 2009). In other words, Jin Jing is endowed with some divine features, and becomes an incarnation of a deity. Apotheosizing Jin Jing is frequent throughout the discussion in the forum, and the above selected posts provide some indication of this trend. In Forum User B's post, s/he comments, "You look like a pure and holy angel, sacred and inviolable". Similarly, Forum User C tells Jin Jing directly, "You are our angel". Thus, both Forum Users B and C choose the specific word "angel" to address Jin Jing. Forum User B even uses the adjectives "pure", "holy", "sacred" and "inviolable" to reinforce her divine quality. The binary opposition between hero and devil further underpins the sacredness of Jin Jing. The protestors are demonized by Forum User B as "thugs" and "devils" who are "ugly", "despicable" and "contemptible"; while, on the other hand, Jin Jing is depicted as a guardian angel who has divine strength for conquering the evil forces, and hence protects the "the dignity of our motherland and the Chinese nation".

The zeal for apotheosizing Jin Jing and amplifying her nationalist deeds is prominent, but the interesting thing is that many netizens do not seem to realize that the compliments they pay to Jin Jing may have exceeded what she is supposed to deserve. Rather, as Forum User B adds, "It is never too exaggerated to use all the beautiful and sacred words to describe you". The posts quoted above provide some examples that illustrate the efforts of netizens to establish Jin Jing's heroic status and their belief in the greatness of what she did. In Forum User A's post, for example, s/he proclaims that Jin Jing's action "completely" touched him/her. The word "completely" accentuates the extent to which s/he

was impressed by what Jin Jing did. Likewise, Forum User C stresses the greatness of Jin Jing by saying that “we become strong because of you”. The causality enabled by the phrase “because of” underlines the importance of Jin Jing to “us”, indicating that Jin Jing is the one who gives “us” strength and makes us “strong”, and without her, “we” would not be so strong.

The importance of Jin Jing in the discursive construction of the nationalist identity of “us” can be sensed from the above online comments. What is then worth examining in netizens’ language is the frequent mentioning of “you” (referring to Jin Jing) in relation to “we”. The coupling of “you” with “we” in a single sentence is common in the commentary of the netizens, and netizens attempt to clarify who “we” are by constantly interpreting and reinterpreting the relationship between “you” and “we” in the online popular discourse. There are many instances regarding how “we” is defined through the discursive identification with “you” (Jin Jing). In Forum User B’s claims, “You look like a pure and holy angel [...] many thanks for your protection of the dignity of our motherland and the Chinese nation”; and similarly in Forum User C’s sentence, “You are our angel, and your determination and smile inspire every Chinese”. The linguistic presence of “you” and “we” is apparent in both sentences. To put it in a more straightforward way, the former sentence can be translated as, “Thank YOU for protecting the dignity of OUR motherland”; and for the latter, “YOUR determination and smile inspire every Chinese (of US)”. The relation between “you” and “we” is clear: it is “you” who protected the dignity of our motherland”, and it is “your” determination and smile that inspire every Chinese (of us). In both sentences, the “you” is portrayed as an angel, and it gives the feeling that the “you” does not seem to be a member of “us”, but rather as a deity above the “we”, who is believed to look after “our” motherland and whose spirit enlightens “us”. The sense of “we-ness” is therefore underlined by a shared angel; that is to say, believing in and identifying with Jin Jing as an angel becomes a shared identity which determines whether or not one belongs to the “we”.

As has been illustrated in the above example, netizens attempt to circumscribe and construct who “we” are through identifying with Jin Jing. A similar example can also be found in Forum User A’s language: “Not just me, but all the Chinese people around the world who love their own motherland were touched”. The relationship between the “you” and “we” is not as explicit as the one in the previous examples; however, it becomes clearer once the sentence is put back into context. The “you” is

hidden because of the passive voice. To reorganize the whole sentence, it should read like this: “Not just me, but all the Chinese people around the world who love their own motherland were touched by you (or by your action of protecting the torch)”. By a careful examination, the sentence actually deals with the relationship amongst the three: “me” (Forum User A), all the Chinese people, and “you”. What Forum User A intends to express is that all the Chinese people around the world, including “me” (the forum user himself/herself), were touched by Jin Jing. The inclusion of “me” in the “we” is indicated by the conjunction “not just ... but”, emphasising that “me” and “all the Chinese around the world who love their own motherland” form the collective of the “we”. The attributive clause, “who love their own motherland” tries to show that it is not any Chinese around the world, but only those Chinese who love their own motherland, who constitute the “we”. By stressing that, Forum User A seems to suggest that those Chinese who love their motherland must have been touched by Jin Jing’s action, and those Chinese who were not touched are not considered as loving their motherland, and therefore do not belong to the “we”. Jin Jing’s nationalist action to some significant extent contributes to the identification of the “we”, because the “we” is defined by whether or not one was touched by her nationalist deed. From Forum User A’s perspective, who “we” are is what “we” feel; in other words, it is the same emotional feeling about Jin Jing’s action that defines and binds the “we”.

As Jin Jing’s nationalist story continued to spread through the forum, the netizens’ passion for embracing Jin Jing showed no signs of abating. Jin Jing is not only identified as the one whom “we” respect and whose nationalist deed “we” need to learn from, but also the one whom “I” want to associate with in “my” personal life. This inclination can be understood in the following two forum posts:

I have a daughter, and really hope that she will become a girl like you, who are determined and have great love for the nation. (by Forum User E)

Jin Jing, are you married? Do you have a boyfriend? If you don’t ... [...] I’m serious! To be honest, from the moment you instinctively acted to protect the torch, I knew you were my dream! You were my white swan! (by Forum User F)

From the two posts above, the netizens’ enthusiasm of self-identification with Jin Jing is obvious. Forum Users E and F were not alone, and there were many other peer users expressing similar wishes in the forum. Regardless of their longings for a daughter or a girlfriend like Jin Jing,

this shows that Jin Jing is no longer merely a national hero, but really has become the netizens' model of the ideal girl. In other words, the netizens' love for Jin Jing has grown from seeing her as a solemn angel or a model compatriot in the public domain for people to pay tribute to, to regarding her as a beloved girl that they could actually associate with in their private life. Both forum users highlight Jin Jing's nationalist deeds, and they seem to suggest that loving the motherland and being determined to protect its pride are the essential qualities for an ideal daughter or girlfriend to possess. Having a connection with the girl that many dream about is something that one can show off; however, in the case of Jin Jing, publicising one's strong wish to have a daughter or a girlfriend like Jin Jing means something more important. It may genuinely reflect what they think, but nevertheless, such blatant expressions appear more likely to be a way of declaring one's nationalist identity. Netizens seem to believe the notion "who I am is who I am with", and claiming association with Jin Jing or even imagining a connection with her could help them manifest and strengthen their nationalist position.

All the above paragraphs have illustrated how forum users made a clear statement of their nationalist identity and stance by passionately embracing Jin Jing as a national hero. It also demonstrates that the applications of language play an important role in the discursive construction of one's nationalist identity. In the online context of discussing Jin Jing's nationalist deeds of protecting the torch, the attempts of netizens to highlight their nationalist identity are evidenced not only by the specific words they choose to address Jin Jing (for instance, "great", "pride", and "angel", as a way of showing their appreciation of and support for her nationalist determination); but also by employing certain sentence structures that help establish the relationship between "we" or "I" and Jin Jing, as a means of stressing their identification with her. When Jin Jing becomes a primary symbol of the "we" community, and identification with her asserts one's nationalist identity, the problem arises that any voices that intend to question Jin Jing or netizens' efforts to elevate Jin Jing as a national hero can easily trigger fierce resistance.

4.2. *Defending Jin Jing's heroism*

Although pro-Jin Jing comments were dominant throughout the online discussion, and space for challenging voices was limited, there were still a few discussants who succeeded in expressing different views. They ques-

tioned netizens' excessive praise of Jin Jing, and argued that the online hype of Jin Jing's nationalist deeds should be cooled down, because they believed that Jin Jing only did something that anyone else would do. Most netizens, however, did not seem to be open to different opinions, and their tolerance of opposition was considerably low. The following series of posts provides examples that explain the intensity of attacks that a post challenging Jin Jing's heroic status could evoke:

(I) did not pay much attention to this incident, just feel that the hype of this small thing has made (me) a bit sick. Not until I had a look at the picture did I realize that she was just embracing an extinct torch. Was that torch very expensive? What would happen if the torch were snatched away? Was she just driven by her instinct? Look at the omnipresent publicity (about the incident), as if (she) suddenly becomes a national hero, is that too exaggerated? (by Forum User G)

How do you deserve to be a Chinese? You are bringing shame to the motherland!! (by Forum User H)

Her instinctive reaction was to protect national pride, what about you? Your fucking instinct is to squirt shit out of your mouth. What the fuck is flowing in your vessels? Is that urine? If I know you, I must open your shitty head to see what kind of fucking rubbish is used to make you as such? (by Forum User J)

The three above posts feature the opposing voice of Forum User G and the fierce attacks s/he received as exemplified by Forum Users H and J's replies. Although voices that challenge Jin Jing's heroic status are limited in number, the small number of these different opinions does provide an opportunity to understand how a discussant could articulate opposition in a space where certain voices already dominated. On the other hand, Forum User G's post was one of the few challenging posts that attracted significant resistance, and the replies to this post also enabled me to assess how netizens attempted to secure their nationalist stance through defending Jin Jing's heroic status. By looking at Forum User G's comment, it is not surprising to understand the attacks s/he received. First of all, Forum User G thinks that Jin Jing just did "a small thing". Secondly, s/he does not share the view held by many forum users that the torch was an epitome of China's pride, and his/her indifference to the torch is evidenced by the questions s/he poses: "Was that torch very expensive?" and "What would happen if the torch were snatched away?". Thirdly, s/he denies the greatness of Jin Jing's action by insinuating that Jin Jing's action in protecting the torch was only an instinctive reaction

and should not be excessively publicized. This is the point actually raised by some other netizens, who argued that it is a natural instinct for someone to turn and protect the thing s/he is holding if someone suddenly tries to grab it. Forum User G's comment is provocative in the sense that s/he not only denies Jin Jing's heroic deeds, but also criticizes people's enthusiasm for identifying her as a national hero.

As said earlier, Jin Jing has been transformed through massive online publicity into a national hero, and identification with her has become an effective way of asserting one's nationalist identity. Jin Jing's status as a nationalist hero needs to be defended, primarily because the netizens' identification with her as a means of declaring their nationalist identity can only make sense when Jin Jing's role as a national hero remains unchallenged. She is embraced by netizens as a nationalist symbol and, by identifying with her, netizens practise their nationalist identity and express their nationalist stance. Since Jin Jing did not regard herself as a hero, and her status as a national hero was largely bestowed by netizens, questioning Jin Jing's heroic status is actually questioning netizens' collective actions of creating and worshipping her as a hero. From this perspective, when netizens' nationalist credentials are determined by the discursive efforts they make to associate with Jin Jing, comments that challenge her supposedly heroic status are considered threatening, because netizens know that the collapse of Jin Jing as a national hero, if it happens, means the collapse of a form of nationalist identification that they have created. That is to say, the collapse can not only make their passion for identifying with Jin Jing irrelevant and meaningless; but, as a nationalist symbol to which netizens attach so many nationalist emotions and hopes, the collapse can also result in a crisis of nationalist identification. As a result, it is not difficult to understand why the challenging voice of Forum User G can provoke such aggressive replies.

Since a large number of netizens believe that embracing Jin Jing as a national hero is a shared nationalist belief, determining who "we" are as Chinese, Forum User G's indifference to Jin Jing's nationalist deeds and criticism of netizens' hype of her protection of the Olympic torch certainly deviate from and undermine the nationalist norms established by the majority of other online discussants. A person's membership of a community is obtained not only through identification with a figure that people of the community accept as a hero, but also through the efforts of defending the hero when his/her status is questioned. As soon as Forum User G makes the comment, s/he receives replies with strong emotions, and becomes exposed to nationalist attacks. While netizens like Forum

Users H and J attack Forum User G, they are also trying to draw a sharp line between themselves and Forum User G, in order to stress that s/he is not a member of “us”. This sense of demarcation can be felt in Forum User H’s post, and his/her rejection of Forum User G as a member of “we” the Chinese is clear in the rhetorical question, “How do you deserve to be a Chinese?”. Contrary to the “we” who are concerned with the national pride and praising Jin Jing’s nationalist action in Forum User H’s view, what Forum User G says disqualifies him/her from being considered a Chinese.

Forum User J’s strong determination to defend Jin Jing’s heroic status can be sensed in his/her frequent use of offensive words towards Forum User G. Interestingly, the way that s/he attacks Forum User G pretty much resembles the way that many Chinese netizens attack their nationalist enemies. When China’s national pride is supposedly under foreign threat, Chinese nationalists usually spare no effort to tarnish the alleged enemy, and the more they enthusiastically defame the enemy, the more they feel nationalistic. From what s/he says in the post, Forum User J’s hostility to Forum User G is overt, and it is clear that s/he treats Forum User G more as a hateful enemy than as a fellow citizen with a different point of view. Forum User J’s response does not show any patience to elaborate on how far and on which point(s) s/he disagrees with Forum User G; instead, s/he targets his/her anger and linguistic violence directly at Forum User G’s personality, and insults him/her by associating him/her with “shit”, “urine” and “rubbish”. When praising, idolising and defending Jin Jing as a nationalist symbol has been established by an overwhelming number of forum users as a nationalist norm, they consider any acts that aim to challenge the norm as threatening, because questioning Jin Jing’s role as a nationalist hero is actually questioning their nationalist credentials. As linguistic violence is considered a means of fighting back the enemy that threatens the established nationalist idol and norm, using violence becomes not only legitimized but also a means of claiming one’s nationalist ideals. In the Chinese cyberspace, as soon as certain nationalist voices dominate, there is little room for uttering different views and, because of the fear of becoming a target of nationalist fury, many netizens may choose to play safe by either joining the collective celebration of the hero, or simply remaining silent.

5. FURTHER DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Through discursive analysis, this paper has provided some empirical findings about the ways in which the online creation and discussion of a hero can contribute to the building of a nation. From what has been explained in the paper, it can be argued that online Chinese nationalism is largely about the politics of defining who “we” are. The concept of “hero” plays a considerable role in the mobilization of Chinese nationalism, and the online discussions about Jin Jing and her alleged heroism mirror the processes of defining the “we” community. A person’s nationalist identity is claimed and reinforced by, on the one hand, identifying with a national hero who is believed to have protected “our” pride; and on the other hand, by defending the hero when s/he is under challenge. As a consequence, “we” is defined as a community that shares the same “hero” to love and worship.

More importantly, this paper also suggests an alternative perspective for understanding Chinese nationalism, because the traditional idea of nationalism as an élite-led and top-down manipulation is under challenge, especially in the age of the internet. As illustrated in this paper, netizens demonstrated enormous enthusiasm for establishing and defending a nationalist hero, and, by discursively framing and interpreting the notion of “hero”, netizens have taken on some independent roles in mobilizing and sustaining Chinese nationalism. In discussing the power struggle between state and popular actors over Chinese nationalist discourses, Callahan (2010, 25) points out that “while it is popular to see the state as the actor and the masses as the audience, here the actor is the audience, and the audience is the actor”. This is true in Jin Jing’s case, where popular actors took the lead in the creation of a nationalist hero, while the state was pushed to respond. The official media such as the *People’s Daily* (the leading mouthpiece of the CCP) joined the netizens’ chorus of celebrating Jin Jing’s heroism three days after the incident occurred on 7th April 2008. On 10th April, the *People’s Daily* published an editorial entitled, “The Disabled Girl Who Protected the Torch with Her Life”, and praised Jin Jing for protecting China’s national pride. However, this does not mean that the CCP has lost its control over nationalist discourses. If the CCP had really felt challenged by such an online development, it could have stopped it at the beginning before it loomed large, given that the CCP has maintained a firm control of the internet where such online nationalism might emerge and be disseminated (Ma 2018). The reason why the CCP allowed the discussion about Jin Jing to circulate

on the internet was because such online discourses in fact showed some significant alignment with the Party's nationalist lines: for example, netizens believed that the Beijing Olympic torch was an epitome of China's national pride and that Tibet was an inseparable part of China.

Latest studies have also found that the CCP has actually been successful in co-opting online popular nationalist discourses into its own propaganda régime and using them to promote nationalist ideals and agendas approved by the Party (Schneider 2016). Soon after Jin Jing emerged as a hero hailed by netizens, she was adopted into the official propaganda régime and was constantly invited by the Chinese mainstream media to tell audiences around the country of her heroic story in Paris. Despite being a hero created by Chinese netizens, Jin Jing also fits well with the official hero-making system. When compared with most officially-created heroes in the post-Mao era, Jin Jing shares some common features: for example, she is young, ordinary and determined, and she performed some small but good deeds which she believed were something that she ought to do. Like Zhang Haidi, Jin Jing's disabled body yields extra value for official propaganda, because she shows that even a disabled person can make her own contribution to the defence of China's national honour and pride. Lastly, unlike the official hero-making régime which involves complex and strict selection criteria (Wang 2011), Jin Jing's case tells us that in the internet era, someone can become a national hero as long as s/he has done something that attracts enough attention from netizens; and instead of being treated as a political campaign, the online glorification of Jin Jing looks more like a loud and collective celebration by netizens. As Qiu (2003, 14) echoes, Chinese netizens "care less about the grand narratives of modernity – be it rationality, liberalism, or 'socialist democracy' – than subjects that can be discussed and celebrated, generating instant gratification for mass consumption".

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The Study of a Journalism Which Is almost 99% Fake

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of the media industry in China, fake news has become a severe problem. This paper identifies four types of fake news, with examples which include totally fake news, distorted fake news, fast news, and sensational journalism. The second part of the paper attempts to analyse the causes of fake news. The acceleration of the trend of media marketization, the loss of professional ethics by media practitioners, the influence of stakeholders, and the marketization of news value in university education, have all given rise to the emergence of fake news. The third part investigates the influence of fake news on society. Fake news can result in inappropriate policy making by the government. With the prevalence of fake news, public media literacy declines and social ethos becomes fickle. Finally, the paper attempts to explore possibly effective countermeasures, which involve establishing a fact-checking mechanism, calling for slow news instead of fast news, improving the public's media literacy, and reforming the news paradigm, in order to resist fake news in future.

Keywords: fact checking; fake news; media literacy; news value; slow news.

1. INTRODUCTION

As the disseminators of information in society and the inheritors of cultural symbols, the media play an important role in reflecting objective facts and recording social life. Adhering to the truth and objectivity of news is the basic requirement for the media and media workers. However, alongside the rapid development of the media industry in China,

fake news has already become a problem which cannot be neglected. It not only hurts the credibility of the media, but also has negative influences on government decision-making and social culture.

During the 2016 US presidential election, many fake news sources were seen spreading over Facebook and Twitter, potentially affecting the result of the election. Trump's surprise victory has further attracted attention to this issue. Some people believe that fake news was a key factor in Trump's victory (Bai, Jiang, and Chen 2017). While no evidence has emerged that fake news in Chinese news reports has affected the political agenda, there have been numerous fake news reports about people's lives in the daily news.

This paper divides fake news into "totally fake news" and "distorted fake news", based on how true it is. The following two categories are also regarded as fake news: "fast news" caused by the media's pursuit of a quick format of reporting, which results in a loss of the truth; and "sensational news", caused by extensive reporting of stimulating and hollow news, which excites people's interest, but is not based on fact.

1.1. *Totally false news*

In this paper, totally false news refers to a news item in which all "5W" elements are fake, the report having been fabricated by the news media. The term "totally false news" can apply to important social issues, public opinion focus, celebrity gossip, major events, and so on. Such news items tend to be sensationalized, provocative and sometimes pornographic, in order to attract attention and make an impact on the public.

Take the some sensational news reported in 2016, for example, "6.9-degree earthquake took place in Jiangxi" (Shen *et al.* 2016), "Shanghai girl fled from Jiangxi countryside" (Zheng and Ren 2017), "A Dongbei village's collapse in morality" (Li, Peng, and Ma 2016), "Secretary of the Discipline Inspection Commission of Shanxi Province Shanxi is removed" (Zhou 2016) and so on. Apart from the report that a "6.9-degree earthquake took place in Jiangxi", the items listed above are all fabricated stories.

Moreover, an analysis of these so-called "news" items reveals that widely-spread false news is often related to common social phenomena, which means that it will be a frequently discussed topic in people's daily lives. When journalists and media try to make up an exaggerated report, based on exaggerating some real problems prevalent in the develop-

ment of China, the report is likely to arouse public sympathy and spread quickly. So, the kind of topics related to articles such as “Shanghai girl fled from Jiangxi countryside” and “A Dongbei village’s collapse in morality” are actually the reflection of current social problems, including the inequality between rich and poor, widening disparities in regional economic development, ageing of the population, empty-nest syndrome in the countryside, and rethinking urbanization.

Online rumours have also become a major source of false news. With the development of Weibo and WeChat, “We-Media” and ordinary internet users are playing an increasingly active role in disseminating information to the public, and are now influencing public opinion. As a result, the boundaries between network posting and media news are gradually becoming blurred. Through the trend of “making network posting another kind of news”, some totally false rumours have become popular. Such “news” is widely circulated, with adverse effects on society.

Such online rumours appear even more ambiguous and incomplete – or even improbable – when compared with the totally false news reported by the media. Take the topic of food safety, for example: in the first half of 2017 there were five major network rumours related to that topic. Among them were rumours including: “Seaweed is made of plastic” (Ruan 2017), “Dried meat flesh is made of cotton” (Chen 2017), and “Hot peaches and watermelon are poisonous when eaten together” (Liu 2018). These stories are completely fabricated with no scientific base, but they are widely disseminated to the public, and even clarification by the government makes little difference.

1.2. *Distorted news*

This paper defines “distorted news” as news reports that are made for a certain purpose and offer distorted truth, reported by journalists or news media. Take the fake news reported during 2016, for example, “A security with cancer fund a poor girl in Sichuan” (Luo 2016), “The President of Zimbabwe arrests the Olympic team for missing out on medals” (Ma 2016) and “Female employees line up to kiss the boss” (Wang 2016). In these reports, the media provided apparently complete information, such as dates, locations, figures and so on. Images of the scene were also attached, making the reports seem much more credible to the public. In fact, journalists had just combined different pieces of stories and distorted them to look as though they were about real people in

China, resulting in a contradiction between the actual facts and what was reported.

The “reverse news” that sparked discussions in recent years is an example of distorting news. Related news items include “Zombie meat incident” (Shi, Wu, and Ma 2015), “Male driver in Chengdu gave female driver a severe beating” (Xiao 2015), “Beijing old lady extorted foreigners” (San 2015) and so on. Because of the novelty, sensitivity and attractive nature – photos and videos attached – of such news, these reported incidents can quickly spread across the internet. This distortion of news means that public opinion on such matters can deviate widely from the truth.

1.3. *Fast news*

“Fast news” is the phenomenon whereby media reporters emphasize the rapid publishing of news, ignoring the fact-checking aspects of it in the process (Ellis 2018). The element of timely reporting has always been an important factor in the media industry. From the early days of newspapers and magazines to the era of all-media mobile internet, “catching every minute and second” to convey messages to people at the fastest speed has been an important news value. However, in the current practice of the news media, some media outlets tend to over-emphasize the pursuit of “minute by minute” coverage, while neglecting the equally important “truth”, resulting in the creation of fake news.

1.3.1. Basic characteristics of fast news

The simplification of the narrative model: because of the time restrictions on editing and writing, media workers cannot write interesting news to an early deadline. In order to publish as soon as possible, some journalists choose to set the model of news based on related materials. After doing interviews, and as related events unfold, they supplement the news accordingly. The narrative structure basically follows the sequence of “introduction-details-people’s activities”, but lacks innovation. The topics do not have a high content value. From the audience’s perspective, the biggest value of fast news is to satisfy their curiosity in a short time. Fast news is frequently updated, so that its life-span is relatively short, with the result that audiences easily forget the news that they have already read.

1.3.2. The misperception of fast news

The first point is that fast news falls into the vicious circle of “competing for news”. In the competitive market for fast news, once eye-catching news has been reported by a media source, that news item loses its reporting value for other sources. In order to maintain vitality in the market, sources have to look for other related topics, finally falling into the vicious circle of “competing for news”, keeping constantly on the run to produce new “news”. Secondly, there is the emphasis on timeliness, while neglecting authenticity. Timeliness is important, but reality must be at the heart of news reporting. In the current fast news markets, reporters are over-emphasizing timeliness and, in doing so, they are neglecting the authenticity of news. Some reporters do not check the authenticity of information in earlier publishing. They copy other reporters’ statements, or intentionally publish wrong content, which finally leads to the creation of fake news. Thirdly, the frame of the topic is set in advance. The writing of fast news is not completely based on a reporter’s fieldwork, but is intentionally or unintentionally based on its special position, context, and agenda. For the sake of publishing as soon as possible, fast news probably involves taking a part of the whole and using a pre-set framework to report. However, in traditional news production, checking, editing, typesetting, and proofreading are indispensable procedures. For example, in the “Just now” event (Yan 2018), three editors at the Xinhua News Agency were unable to identify typing errors in a very short news item.

1.4. *Sensational journalism*

Compared with traditional news, “sensational journalism” refers to the phenomenon whereby the standards and principles observed under traditional newswriting have been abandoned in favour of hollow and eye-catching topics that attract audience attention.

1.4.1. Basic characteristics of sensational journalism

In the traditional interview and writing, both interview and writing should be true, correct, complete, objective, and balanced. Authenticity must be the essence of news. Sensational journalism emphasizes the provocation of audiences’ emotions. It is similar to fast food in the era

of information. In traditional journalism, the choice of topic focuses on reporting positive news, as well as tracking and reporting public opinion. It is often referred to as “gold-panning”. Before and after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, several excellent news reports about successful people and good initiatives emerged, such as “Why the suoma flower is so red” (Zhang and Tian 2014), “Who are the most lovable people?” (Wei 1951), “Jiao Yulu: a model for county secretary” (Mu, Feng, and Zhou 1966), and “Great warrior Lei Feng” (Xinhua News 1963). In addition, a series of TV programmes, represented by “Topics in Focus”, played an important function in media monitoring of public affairs and guiding the government on the public’s mood and opinion. These programs exposed certain problems with public development projects, and became important bridges between the government and the masses. Sensational journalism often chooses what is referred to as “dirty news” when selecting topics. Such topics are provocative, violent, bloody, or something unheard of or abnormal in society. In practice, “human bites dog” is news. Examples include: the Shenzhen public security defendant’s rape case in 2011 (Yang 2011); Lei Zhengfu’s case in Chongqing in 2012 (Wang 2013); the killing of a baby in Beijing Daxing in 2013 (Zhang 2013); and the murder case at McDonalds in Shandong Zhaoyuan in 2014 (Zhu 2014). On the front pages of Weibo and WeChat, the latest updates on stars and TV dramas always occupy the top positions, while news about the nation and people’s livelihoods cannot be found.

1.4.2. Rethinking sensational journalism

First, the ideas of traditional journalism have been abandoned. In traditional journalism, the production of news should follow the principles of objectivity, justice, reality, and wholeness. News reports should be as close to reality as possible. However, in the current news environment, “fake news”, “paid news”, “news blackmail” and other such phenomena are often observed. The motivation of news-workers in producing certain content over other content is becoming complicated. Many cases of journalists who make profits for themselves and their workplaces occur regularly. Furthermore, current news production over-emphasizes the timeliness of production, so that not enough attention is paid to the reality of the facts, which results in the spreading of rumours. Traditional procedures, such as proofreading, examination and verification, are abandoned. The quality of news reports is therefore deteriorating as a whole. Secondly, there has been a change from gold-panning news

to muckraking news. The Chinese traditional news standards advocate “gold-panning news”, with the purpose of setting an example for society to emulate and form unified social values, ideals and beliefs. On the contrary, “muckraking news” aims to satisfy individual desires, providing topics of conversation, and psychological fast-moving consumer goods. In the context of fiercer competition in the news market and the saturation of information, the media market prefers to report a variety of negative news, so as to grab readers’ attention and compete for ratings. Some media sources even abandon professional ethics and a moral baseline to distort the facts or produce fake news, in order to satisfy public demand. Swayed by interest and competition, some newspapers may lose their value orientation and professional position. Sometimes, they make profits their top priority.

2. THE CAUSES OF FAKE NEWS

2.1. *The acceleration of the trend to media marketization*

With the continual reformation of China’s media system and the continual opening up of media markets, competition among the media is growing and becoming fiercer, as a result of which media organizations need to take serious account of their financial situations. In order to survive this intense competition, they are forced to pursue a higher circulation and click-rate, and attract more advertising revenue. For the sake of “attractiveness”, some media groups have begun to produce fake news or to distort the reality of events, regardless of news authenticity, and thus news is becoming increasingly controversial. Commercialization has begun to permeate all aspects of the news media, while some news practitioners, to benefit themselves, have started prioritizing the sensational and entertaining elements of news, and are neglecting authenticity. This is the primary cause of the creation of fake news.

2.2. *The lack of professional ethics by news practitioners*

The lack of professional ethics by news practitioners is the direct cause of fake news. On the one hand, current news practitioners come from a variety of backgrounds, some of whom have not received professional

news training, and lack basic professionalism and professional ethics. On the other hand, some news practitioners, without self-discipline, are motivated by economic benefits and competition to intentionally produce fake news that will attract receivers' attention. In such an atmosphere, the authenticity of news is abandoned, interviews by these reporters become one-sided and shallow, and the examination by editors is not taken seriously. This not only increases the amount of fake news, but also boosts unhealthy competition in the market. In addition to such marketization, the public media may also have a moral deficiency that is often not limited to market-based media. In order to gain a particular propaganda coup, journalists' editors may also appear to ignore the ethics of journalism.

2.3. The influence of stakeholders from public relations and some industries

On the one hand, with the rise and flourishing of We-Media, some individuals, industries, professionals and other We-Media act as opinion leaders. Their increasing influence then allows them to garner a vast access to audiences, which they exploit to circulate their opinions to the masses. Once the news media lack caution, objectivity and comprehensive investigation in their approach, it is easy for them to be influenced by such interest groups. Thus, they often become spokespersons for these interest groups. On the other hand, the public relations service industry has started to play a major role in helping enterprises to reach certain goals. Through the medium of public relations, interest groups can pass their interest requirements to the news media. Consequently, media reporters conduct coverage without examination in order to gain personal benefits, such as the "incidental allowance" provided by public relations bodies.

2.4. The marketization of news values in university education

The shaping of a value system during college learning is essential for college news majors, who will become the future news practitioners. During the News Public Opinion Work Symposium, President Xi Jinping emphasized that "news value is the heart of news public opinion work" (Du 2016). Yet current news education has not established a news value system at its core; instead, it has taken the wrong path of

“market-oriented” news production, which will lead to further chaos in the news industry. For example, in various colleges and universities, media economics has now become a popular course. Through data and case analysis, the media’s business status is evaluated by ratings. Current education takes entity economic interest as the starting point for the news industry, and weakens the social responsibility awareness of media workers. News education puts the incidental before the fundamental, attaching massive importance to practical skills which could attract the interest of netizens, meanwhile ignoring the teaching of a news value system to students of journalism.

3. THE INFLUENCES OF FAKE NEWS

3.1. *Faults in government policy making*

Because of the rise of various opinion platforms, the government is showing increased concern about the opinions of media netizens. The prevalence of fake news means that the government cannot accurately garner public opinion and assess reality. First, fake news is unable to depict reality. On the one hand, the prevailing fake news and instant news intentionally clash with the truth, overstating and exaggerating controversial elements in order to concoct false news. On the other hand, due to the pursuit of timeliness of distribution, an investigation into the truthfulness of the distributed content is avoided, and thus the authenticity of reported content cannot be guaranteed. Content that involves individual subjectivity, reporters’ attitude bias, standpoint selection and event description all degrade its truthfulness. It is therefore difficult for the government to assess the reality or to monitor public opinion. Secondly, interests of all parties are involved. Compared with traditional news, fake news can be manipulated and designated. Media organizations and news reporters, for the sake of individual or group interests, can concoct the desired news according to the requirements of specific interest groups, or they can continue to highlight specific news items to create public pressure and force the government to make a compromise.

The Chinese government has now taken some measures to control fake news, such as establishing a rumour platform, increasing the punishment of false reports in the media, and responding promptly to fake

news. The emergence of fake news has made it impossible for the government to have an accurate understanding of public opinion through the data on the internet. However, while the government is busy dealing with false news, it is unable to carry out other work, thus affecting the government's agenda.

3.2. Decline in public media literacy and social ethos

At present, very little news is entirely fabricated, but what there is, combined with the increase of fast news, destroys the media advantages created by the traditional media.

First, news products present a fast-food style of news-reporting and lack enduring appeal. News represented by instant news and fake news has very limited reading value. The core of instant news, with limited coverage, is merely telling a straightforward story, with some additional information attached. Meanwhile, the depiction and structure of instant news is fairly stereotypical, and to the public it appears to lack freshness. Although fake news can stir the public's curiosity, interest and feelings of excitement, joy, anger or grief, all these stirrings are short-lived and barely touch the soul of the receivers. Consequently, fast-food styled news products ignore producing emotional resonance and thinking at the cognitive level with the receivers, and attract little long-lasting appeal. Secondly, the news topics covered are transient and inconsistent. The lifespan of recent hot news topics is becoming shorter and shorter. When a hot event happens, the press quickly flood to it and bombard the public with coverage, thus successfully gaining the public's attention within a short time. However, while the truthfulness of the hot event remains unidentified, the intense competition in the media market means that the press have already caught other hot topics and managed to attract public attention once again. The rapid change of hot news gives rise to the receivers' incomplete perception of the events, and makes the public take the initial fragmented report as the whole fact.

3.3. Traditional media authority is missing

Under the current news circumstances, the discourse power of traditional news has been destroyed. On the one hand, while the changing rate of news topics is becoming faster and the lifespan of news is becom-

ing shorter, receivers are becoming more and more inconsistent about certain news topics. The authorities need time to test the veracity of news, and the “slowness” of the authorities naturally conflicts with the “quickness” of the media and receivers. On the other hand, there are different interest groups and various voices in the current news atmosphere. But for those with limited knowledge and media literacy, it is difficult to distinguish each kind of voice. Furthermore, specific scientific knowledge has a threshold standard, and cannot be easily understood by most of the audience. It takes some time to popularize authoritative scientific knowledge.

Influenced by the circumstances of the news agency, audiences care greatly about news information. They tend to pursue “pleasure first”, as a result of which “clickbait with unusual headlines” becomes quite popular. The lower the audience’s media literacy and scientific literacy, the ficker is the overall atmosphere of public opinion. This manipulation of the public opinion field – which originally belonged to the public – by certain interest groups is a critical way for them to make profits, and thus finally leads to the colonization of the public’s life. The culture of constructive criticism is on the decline, while consumerism and the homogenization of individuals has become increasingly prevalent, and will eventually make “slaves” of the public at the cognitive level.

4. COUNTERMEASURES TO FAKE NEWS IN THE FUTURE

4.1. *Establishing a fact-checking mechanism*

The fact-checking mechanism originated from factual reality checks in reports by the Western media before publication. In the 1920s, *Time Magazine* set up a fact-checking group consisting of women, and its competitor, *The New Yorker*, later set up a fact-checking department too. In the mid- and late-twentieth century, with the rise of the media social responsibility theory and media professionalism, more newspapers and magazines established fact-checking departments, and eventually European media outlets in Britain and Germany did the same.

Since the 1990s, some of the traditional media have been taking a wide range of budget-reducing measures, such as employment cuts, resulting in a limited capacity for establishing strong fact-checking

mechanisms (Starr 2009). In recent years, with the arrival of social media and the era of post-truth, fact-checking has attracted renewed attention, creating debates on third-party fact-checking mechanisms and establishing procedures based on internet big data technology.

Theoretically, fact-checking the news adds to the cost of telling lies for politicians, which enables political debate to stand on a more solid basis and helps people form accurate perceptions (Wen and Zeng 2016). In the long-run, the popularity of fact-checking the news will phase out the unreliable news sources (Owen 2017a). But the role of the current fact-checking mechanisms of news is limited or even counter-productive. Facebook's fact-checking system tagged the fake news on an article from the *Newport Buzz*, but afterwards the articles went viral. Christian Winthrop, an editor of *Newport Buzz*, believed that Facebook's tagging of fake news would have the opposite effect, because the audience in this case thought that Facebook was blocking that news (Levin 2017). A research report by the New America Foundation shows that continuous denial of specific news will make it more attractive to audiences. The report also says that a psychological mechanism in humans allows them to differentiate the information, based on their inherent conception and beliefs, and true information is sometimes unpopular (Yu and Chen 2016).

"Position preceding truth" is the typical characteristic of the post-truth era, so there are socio-psychological factors behind the unpopularity of fact-checking the news. Poll data released by the mainstream media before the 2016 US General Election went completely against the historical outcome, bringing the objective results drawn from so-called "data statistics" into question. Some scholars assert that objectivity and rational principles are disappearing. Objective value is only used for different political positions. Preferable data analysis is used for specific political gains, while data supporting opposite claims is often thrown out. So the idea of "truth preceding position" is set aside, and extracting facts from objective data is no longer important (Lan 2017). Shi Anbin puts forward a concept of "reality bias" to illuminate the flood of fake news during the process of the US General Election. "Reality bias" means that people are inclined to believe the information that conforms to their own personal opinions. Trump's slogans of anti-globalization, anti-political correctness, and "America First" struck a chord with ordinary Americans suffering high unemployment (Shi and Wang 2017a). On the other hand, the mainstream media representing the so-called "real news" often exhibits the characteristics of "white elitism" (Shi and

Wang 2017b). The difficulties faced at the grassroots were therefore not channelled through the mainstream media and élites, and this deprived them of any means of expressing their grievances at the national level. Wang Weijia believes that Brexit and Trump's US presidency show the complete disconnect between the cultural establishments represented by mainstream media and the bottom of the social ladder (Wang 2017). With this confrontation in mind, it is easy to understand why the fact-checking mechanism upheld by the mainstream media, higher education institutions and academic circles failed to have a substantive effect.

So, in reality, the fundamental question lies in the representativeness of the topic for fact-checking the news. Judgements controlled by the mainstream media establishments and higher education institutions representing the white élite class cannot be widely accepted by the people. Google, Facebook, Twitter and other internet companies have no public power, so they lack legality as gatekeepers of true or fake information.

To resolve problems of subject representativeness of fact-checking the news, one optional route is the crowd-sourcing model, which allows wide participation by citizens. China's factual verification has only just started, and its work experience in this area is very weak. With the development of mobile internet and big data technology, the participants in fact-checking the news are no longer limited to practitioners of professional journalism, and the crowd-sourcing mechanism through mobile internet and social media can be adopted to check the truth behind events. This would allow the public to become participants in the fact-checking process (Xu 2017). The decline of the public credibility of the mainstream media also reflects the public's call for new kinds of media, representing all levels of the social strata. The development of internet technology enables people from the lower and middle levels of society to be brought into the public opinion fold. But due to the platform control of the internet media by internet capital groups, it is very difficult for the lower and middle levels of society to effectively make their voices heard. If this continues, the public's trust in media organizations and their so-called pursuit of truth will further decline. The other main defect in the fact-checking of news lies in the effectiveness of its communication. At present, the fact-check technique consumes a large amount of personal participation with a lengthy procedure and ineffective timeliness. The communication of rumour-hacking is ineffective and results in floods of fake news going viral. John Greenberg, the fact-checker for the website "Political Truth", said: "A frequent problem and challenge is that a statement is channelled to hundreds, thousands or millions of people and it

is very difficult to correct the wrong information by the original speakers. So you are always behind the curve. Sometimes you lack a little bit, but sometimes a lot” (Wu and Kasinitz 2015). “To resolve the problem, relevant computer technology can be adopted to shorten the time before the fake news goes out of control. The relevant computer technology means AI. At present, some investigation agencies have used positioning, portrait-checking, data evidence-collecting and other multiple technologies to conduct fact-checking to improve its efficiency” (Zhang and Jin 2017). Meanwhile, the use of big data technology also facilitates the data integration of the checking agencies to prevent repetitive checks and to improve the communication efficiency of fact-checking the news. Daniel Sieradski, a New York technician, invented a plug-in called “Chrome” to alert users to fake news websites through labelling the browsers and other forms. The Hackathon Team developed “Nadim Press” programmes, using smart calculation to check fake news. When the users use Google to browse websites, the Alexa ranking, emotion analysis, bounce rate, geographical location and title clickbait scores will appear automatically, in order to assist people to rapidly decide the level of truth and friendliness of the news website. Geofeedia is a location-based social media monitoring software that provides intelligence analysis for public affairs, corporate security, etc. (Zheng 2017). The website “Fake News Challenge” is adopting AI technology, mainly by machine learning and language-processing technology, to resolve the problem of fake news (Owen 2017b). British NPO Full Fact is developing an auto fact-checking tool which has two models. One is to distinguish the checked content to make a judgement, and the other is to automatically check the new content, based on statistical analysis technology (Han and Wang 2017). Full Fact has also developed a fact-checking App, based on statistical analysis and language-processing tools, to facilitate media editors in the process of checking information (Zheng 2017).

4.2. *A call for slow journalism*

“Slow journalism” is characterized by a combination of investigation and verification to reveal the reason, trend and influence of the news through thorough analysis. Specifically, slow journalism enjoys three features. First, it emphasizes the authenticity of news, and encourages reporters to do a number of interviews and repeatedly research and verify the authenticity of the news at the expense of speed, to ensure that each stage of

the report is convincing. Secondly, slow journalism has more profundity. It not only embodies truth, but more importantly advocates the excavation of further information from the facts as the basis of the news. It calls for an explanation of the reasons for and development of the news, in order to analyze its trend and influence. Thirdly, slow journalism is presented in a variety of ways. It has abundant and appropriate methods of presenting the news, including data visualization, integrated media and storytelling, with the aim of gaining a complete understanding of the news. At present, fake news, information explosion and fragmentation of news have raised the concerns of many media workers. The continual development of We-Media has had an enormous impact on professional media workers and the media agencies. Thus, an increasing number of people have started to re-examine news values and vocational concepts, and pursue a new path, because of the impact of new media.

In China, the first slow journalism App has been online since December 2016. The slogan of “Chongqing Evening News”, “Take products to excellence as a craftsman”, attempts to pursue in-depth and creative news whilst slowing down the pace (Wangyi Xinwen 2016). And so how should we go about producing “slow news”?

First of all, journalists should adopt the right attitude towards work and place the current news environment under serious examination. The rapid development of new media technologies has accelerated the flow rate of information. Following the general trend, some journalists ignore news ethics with the aim of obtaining first-hand information. In the current new media era, news ethics should not be abandoned, but further developed. Truth is the life-blood of news. Once it is distorted, any news produced, even at the fastest speed, is meaningless. We need to “slow” down not only the depth of the report, but also the general news, which should not depend on its timeliness, but on its authenticity. This should be done, not only to improve the credibility of the media and the news industry, but also to take responsibility for society.

Secondly, journalists should cultivate their capacity for critical thinking. In an age of information explosion, it is more difficult to disclose falsification, with network rumours spreading everywhere. In recent years, the media have blindly copied information from some We-Media-like forums and microblogging sites, and have published it without verification. This was later identified as fake news, but had already had a negative impact on the public, who tend to remember information as it was reported the first time. Thus, it is difficult to redeem its impact. Faced with complex information, journalists should, on the one hand,

undertake a careful verification and patiently implement an investigation into the truth. On the other hand, they cannot confine their investigation to the phenomenon itself, but need to consider a few related questions, conduct an in-depth analysis, and analyze the crux of the problem. Only in this way can journalists present society with genuine news. Next, journalists should look for new methods of news coverage. Now that the fragmentation of information has become so common, journalists need to provide a unique perspective on news reporting. The implications are that they have to meet certain requirements: highly specialized knowledge, abundant life experience, a high sensitivity for news, and an ability to discover an interesting standpoints for traditional and general events. Finally, journalists need to improve the richness of the content and form of a report. This era, full of large data and financial media, presents reporters with a lot of information in a short time, but also sets higher standards for their abilities. As to content, empirical data are playing a more important role in the news, and journalists should have the ability to obtain, analyze and explain data, in order to make the news more sophisticated and credible. With regard to form, full media coverage will become mainstream in the future. As for important news, team co-operation should be welcomed to complete the procedures of news gathering and processing in a timely way. Other channels must be employed to complete the report in order to improve the dissemination of news.

4.3. *Improve public media literacy*

“Media literacy” refers to the ability of people to understand and criticize media information, as well as the ability to use media information for the development of individuals and society (Hoffmann 2004). Public media literacy is the fundamental factor and the most active force in socialized media. In the defense against fake news, it is essential to raise public media literacy.

Public media literacy is not a new concept, but has enriched itself with time. The original concept of media literacy has now changed in the following two ways. First of all, the subject has been expanded. In an era of omni-media, the requirement for high-level media literacy is not only restricted to journalists, but extends to everyone. As anyone can now be a producer and receiver of news, everyone is obliged to acquire an in-depth understanding of news and improve their media literacy.

Secondly, object has become complicated. What we have learned about the traditional theories of news and media cannot catch up with the changing times. The creation of new media and We-Media have given rise to the ubiquity of the media, which are no longer a scarce resource. All the information we receive is in the form of news, which we need to understand through media literacy. The era of we media has come, however, the public lack the basic concept about what is media and what is news. The lack of news ethics, increasing rumours rising from a large amount of unclear information, an excess of media trials, frequent changes of public opinion on news, and other maladies are reminders that the improvement of public media literacy is imperative.

Although members of the public may not be formally trained in journalism, it is an integral part of their lives. A mass production of fake news is not conducive to daily work and life! On the other hand, the public are also, to some extent, the producers and disseminators of news, utilizing networks and connecting with the network. Thus, we are all responsible for improving our media literacy.

On the subjective level, the public should raise their levels of knowledge and strengthen their legal consciousness. Take WeChat as an example: in the early half of 2017, the series of rumours about food safety emerged, such as “plastic rice”, “plastic seaweed”, and “dried meat flesh”. These rumours were transmitted in large numbers, with negative results. In this era of information explosion, it is important for people to be able to assess the quality of news provided to them. The internet seems to broaden people’s horizons, but it uses models like “algorithm bubble” and “information cocoons” to solidify public information channels and content.

At the objective level, relevant government departments should attach importance to the revision of laws and regulations and strengthen supervision. Until now, China has not had laws and regulations on media literacy, and needs improvement at the legal level. In addition, media literacy awareness should be taught in education, so that it is a basic knowledge for everyone. The negative behaviour caused by lack of media literacy can thus be avoided at the grassroots. Young students are a new generation growing up with China’s web and new media, and they particularly need to master media literacy.

4.4. *Reforming the paradigm of news*

For a long time, news professionalism has been penetrating all aspects of news education and news production, and has become the general paradigm of news reports. However, the concepts of news professionalism such as “objectivity”, “independence”, “reality”, and “first time” are abstract concepts which cannot be practically realized. The Western media are now completely controlled by capitalism. China’s Party media and official media (Miazhevich 2007) have shown traits of capitalization during the reform of the Party media and the information revolution. The independence of the news media and journalists has been weakened. Alongside the development of the mobile internet and social media, internet capital has completely controlled the internet media platforms, manipulating the whole process of production, distribution, communication, and all the data.

In fact, objectivity and neutrality in news reporting may not exist either. Nowadays, every piece of news is ultimately influenced by social class. The producers and communicators belong to a certain class and have political affiliations. Choice of source materials, reporting frames and communication channels are based on certain political values and class. It is difficult for the media to be absolutely objective and neutral. The views of various stakeholders will influence the views of the media in some way. News is produced in certain social circumstances. Today, the news media are thoroughly commercialized and controlled by market forces. Although the media always claim to hold values of “freedom” and “democracy”, in a media environment dominated by the market economy, the guiding force is not truth, but high ratings and sensationalism. In the era of all-media, the guiding force is the click-rate behind every audience. The news which we usually see is not objective, but constructed. The news conveys opinions, not the truth; the news has a position, and does not regard people’s right to know as a primary objective. The news may cover the truth, if necessary. Media are a business and news reports are goods. The media’s top priority for news is to earn money; it has nothing to do with people’s right to know. Media of different ideologies, cultures and countries adopt different reporting frames, news contexts, and news positions. Fewer media now report the news neutrally, completely and objectively.

Because of the development of new media, some media will choose to sacrifice the value of their news, in order to obtain benefits, and will eventually become the mouthpiece of others, thus destroying the

excellence adhered to by the traditional media. Furthermore, with the triumph of news professionalism, the types of media product are highly standardized. Streamlined production mechanisms have been developed. The same content, thoughts, aesthetic tastes and value systems are spreading in different media forms, cultural contexts and media markets. Behind the news values of “objectivity”, “neutrality” and “freedom of speech”, different social classes are unequal in terms of the power that they hold over the media environment. The voices of the proletarian class and disadvantaged groups are neglected by the mainstream media. Newspaper offices, TV stations, and social media platforms are in the hands of large financial groups, and the will of capital controls the field of public opinion and mainstream ideology.

“News professionalism” has been unable to realize its goals of “objectivity, reality and independence”. News products following the so-called standards of “news professionalism” are not the reflection of reality. In order to change the status quo, whereby fake news is spread and media credibility lowered, a new news paradigm must be advocated. The new news paradigm will not only satisfy procedural justice, as prescribed by “news professionalism”. It will pursue the substantive justice and the result justice of the equal expression of various social groups. It will not be relegated to the achievement of partial and mechanical truth in news, but will pursue the holistic and dialectic truth of news. It will not satisfy the objectivity and neutrality of a single news report, but will pursue the objectivity and neutrality of the whole news production process and agenda setting.

Most fundamentally, the new news paradigms will be based on the nature of publicity and the public welfare of the news agencies. The ownership of news should be in the hands of the collective, and should not be owned by private or minority interest groups. Therefore, the ultimate goal of news work should benefit the whole of society, and must not cater to a particular class’s economic or political interests.

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The Chinese Press and the Constitution

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ABSTRACT

In March 2018, a qualified majority of members of the National People's Congress of China voted for the adoption of the fifth amendment to the current constitutional text. In the five years prior to the vote on the amendment, President Xi Jinping delivered a constellation of public speeches, and the CCP and state organs published a series of documents in order to reaffirm the centrality of the Constitution in the country's political life, thus building the discursive framework in which the new text was discussed and adopted. The Constitution hence became one of the keywords of the political discourse and the discursive framework stemming from the central leadership documents echoed in the news production of national and international media. This paper will map how the political discourse on the Constitution permeated Chinese press texts from 2012 to 2018. The aim of the contribution is both to illustrate the influence that political language exerts on the press in China through a specific case study, and to verify to what extent the importance accorded to the constitutional text by the leadership was conveyed by the press to public opinion before and after the adoption of the 2018 amendment.

Keywords: China; Chinese press; Constitution; corpus analysis; genre colony; political discourse; political stability; public opinion; specialised languages; Xi Jinping.

1. INTRODUCTION

In March 2018, a qualified majority of members of the National People's Congress of China (NPC), the supreme legislative power in the country, voted for the adoption of the fifth amendment to the current constitutional text.

Since 1982, the five sections of the constitutional text have performed a function that was supposed to go far beyond the crystallization of shared norms in the supreme law of the People's Republic of China. The vocation of the Constitution as a political text as well as the highest source of the legal system emerges first in the Preamble with a short narration of the political history of the country. There, the legitimacy of the Communist Party to rule the country is associated to the historical successful struggle for national independence and to the revolution, as well as to ideological principles characterising the institutional system and establishing CCP's unquestionable responsibility for the present and the future of the country. As for the next four chapters – which regulate the general principles of the country, the fundamental rights and duties of citizens, the structure of the state – which seem quite similar to those of the written constitutions elsewhere in the world, their history in the next decades confirmed that they keep playing a largely programmatic and political function in relation to the institutions and citizens.

Since its adoption, the Chinese Constitution has undergone a constant evolution through five sets of amendments adopted in 1988, 1993, 1999, 2004¹ and 2018. Generally speaking, several crucial moments in the political history of the People's Republic of China have been accompanied by an in-depth reflection on the Constitution carried out through wide debates on its contents and purposes. Through the political discourse on the Constitution, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party has set forth and consolidated the major stages of the transformation of its role in guiding the country. Thus the Constitution was reconfirmed as an instrument of legitimation not only of the structure of the current political system, but also of the balance of power between its main actors.

For example, the 2018 amendment includes the insertion of, at several points in the text, formulas peculiar to Xi's political discourse; in article 1 an explicit mention of the leading role of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the country; in article 27 the duty of public officials to swear loyalty to the Constitution; in article 79 the dismissal of the

¹ The main focus of the amendments in 1988 was to affirm the legal status of the private sector and allow transfer of land-use rights, in 1993 to declare China would practise a market economy instead of a planned economy, in 1999 the private sector was defined "an important component" in the country's market economy and in 2004 human rights protection was enshrined into the Constitution. See below in the article text for the latest amendment contents.

two-term limit for the President of the Republic; in chapter 3 a new paragraph for the establishment of a national supervisory commission entitled to supervise, inspect and punish public officials violating the laws (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo 2018). All these insertions highlight once more the dialectical relationship between the CCP's political project and the constitutional text, confirming the intent of using the Constitution to shape China's future.

In the five years prior to the adoption of the fifth constitutional amendment, President Xi Jinping delivered a series of public speeches dealing with the Constitution and its importance, thus building the discursive framework in which the new text would be discussed and adopted. Moreover, the CCP and state organs set a few milestones in the process of reaffirming the centrality of the Constitution in the country's political life. The commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the birth of the Constitution in 2012, the establishment in 2014 of a "Constitution Day" to be celebrated every year, and finally, the introduction of the oath of loyalty to the Constitution for all public officials in 2016 are good examples of the wide range of measures undertaken not only to highlight the importance of the constitutional text in Chinese politics, but also to disseminate a wider knowledge and awareness of its contents among the citizens.

In this discursive framework, Constitution became one of the keywords² of the leadership's speeches and documents and the institutional representation stemming from these political texts echoed in the news production of national and international media. It is against this political and legal background, that – for example – the expression "constitutional amendment (宪法修正案)" was listed the Top Ten Terms in the Chinese Media report of 2018 by the National Language Resources Monitoring and Research Centre for Print Media of Beijing Language and Culture University (Xinwen Zhongxin 2018)³.

² The "Constitution" is highlighted as a keyword in the *Xi Jinping's Series of Important Speech Large-scale Network Database* 习近平系列重要讲话大型网络数据库, <http://jhsjk.people.cn/article>, and the section devoted to this topic presents 253 entries.

³ The report is based on the *National Language Resource Monitoring Corpus*, which is obtained by using language information processing technology combined with manual post-processing extraction and screening on a full text corpus of articles published from January 1, 2018 until the end of November 2018 in 16 domestic newspapers. These newspapers include domestic government agencies, urban local newspapers, and evening newspapers with a large circulation. The corpus size is nearly 500 million words, representing the focus of mainstream Chinese media.

This paper will map how the political discourse on the Constitution and its function permeated Chinese press texts from 2012 to 2018. The aim of the contribution is both to trace the influence that political language exerts on the press in China through a specific case study, and to verify to what extent the importance accorded to the constitutional text by the leadership was conveyed by the press to public opinion before and after the adoption of the 2018 amendment.

2. THE CORPUS STRUCTURE

The case study was first designed by applying a quantitative approach to Chinese journalistic source analysis. The corpus for this paper has been extracted from the *China Core Newspapers Full-text Database* (CCND) *Zhongguo Zhongyao Baozhi Quanwen Shujuku* 中国重要报纸全文数据库⁴ by searching for “Constitution” (*xianfa* 宪法) in the article headlines.

Headings were chosen as focus for the analysis, as these are important on two levels: firstly, in a newspaper the choice of a title of an article is often driven by the editorial line of the outlet. Therefore, a word in the headings can be useful to draw an overall picture of the general position of the different actors in the media sphere. Secondly, the words located in the headings are meant to strike the reader’s attention and therefore have an important role in the eyes of the public.

Searching the whole database, the corpus extracted consisted of 1395 articles from 2009 to 2018. In this paragraph we shall examine the corpus as a whole and describe the texts distribution in terms of time and publishing context.

2.1. *The time distribution of the corpus*

The annual trend of publication of the corpus is quite interesting. As *Figure 1* shows, no titles meeting the search requirement were found

⁴ The *China Core Newspapers Full-text Database* (CCND) of the *Zhongguo Zhishi Jichu Sheshi Gongcheng* 中国知识基础设施工程 collects academic and informative documents from core newspapers in China since 2000 and is updated daily. To date it has collected 633 China newspapers (164 at the national level, 469 at the local level), and the full-text paper amount has reached to 17,021,961.

before 2009, although the database collects texts from the year 2000 and the Chinese Constitution had a long history and undergone a number of amendments before that year. Besides, in the ten years taken into consideration, the graph shows three peaks: 158 articles in 2012, 389 articles in 2014 and 340 articles in 2018.

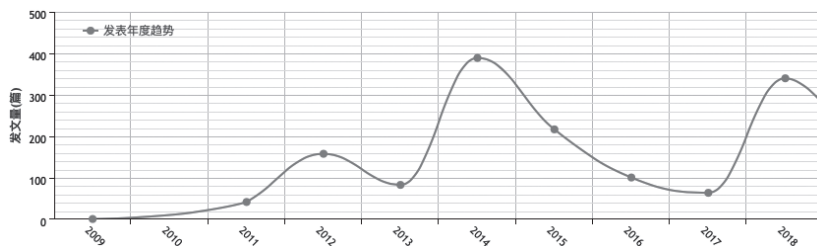


Figure 1. – The annual trend of publication 2009-2018.
Source: Zhongguo Zhongyao Baozhi Quanwen Shujuku 2018.

The graph peaks, at first glimpse, would seem to indicate three crucial years for newspaper interest in the Constitution. Therefore, the hypothesis of the existence of a close relationship between news production and political language can be easily verified by searching for important events in the official discourse on the Constitution produced in the peak years highlighted in the corpus.

In the context of our case study, we shall define political discourse as the complex and multifaceted set of texts issued by the party and the state organs and leaders in performing their functions. These texts are concrete realisations of a great variety of textual genres currently in use within the two institutions. For our purpose the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Republic of China organs, which are in legal terms distinct institutions, will be treated as different authors using one common language for the same objective: the stability of the political system.

The decision to adopt such a broad definition of political discourse is based on the Chinese context peculiarities. Not only, currently the CCP firmly leads the country political realm, but two recent norms – in different domains and with a different legal status – show that the 1987 project of a strong separation of functions between the party and the state is probably outdated. The first one is the publication in 2012 of a set of regulations defining a new common framework for party and government organs official document processing (Zhonggong Zhongyang

Bangongting, Guowuyuan Bangongting 2012). The second one is the insertion in article 1 of the Constitution of the leadership of the Communist Party of China as the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo 2018). In both cases the emphasis is laid on the synergy between the two political actors, not on the independence of one another.

We shall now see whether and how the graph peaks reflect major changes in the leadership's discourse on the Constitution by taking into account important political events which took place in the three mentioned years. In December 2012, Xi Jinping held a speech commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the entry into force of the constitutional text (Xi 2012). In October 2014 the Fourth Plenum of the XVIII Central committee of the CCP issued a document on governance and the legal system, which established the annual celebration of the Constitution and called it "Constitutional day" (Zhonggong Zhongyang 2014). Finally, the fifth constitutional amendment was voted by the members of the National People's Congress in 2018 (Xinhua 2018). The texts associated with these political events, although they were issued by different institutional subjects and belong to distinct textual genres, can all be identified as milestones in the construction of a discursive framework attributing a growing emphasis on the importance of the Constitution in Chinese politics. The coincidence in time between the political events (and related text publication) and the rise of newspapers interest in the Constitution testify to the existence of a close relationship between the news production and political discourse in the context of the case study.

2.2. *The sources in the corpus*

As far as the sources are concerned, close attention should be paid to the 37 media outlets publishing the selected articles of the corpus. In particular we shall focus on the first 10 media outlets listed in decreasing order by number of published articles in *Figure 2*, issuing 60.93% of the corpus texts, as the other newspapers listed in the corpus published only 8 to 20 articles on the topic in ten years.

The ten newspapers publishing sixty per cent of the articles of the corpus are official newspapers of top-level state or party organs (De Burgh 2017, 75; Lupano 2017, 128). Following the order of appearance in *Figure 2*, their English titles and affiliation are: the *Legal*

Daily is released by the Committee of Political and Legal Affairs of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee; the *Procuratorate Daily* by the Supreme People's Procuratorate of the People's Republic of China; the *People's Court Daily* by the Supreme People's Court of the People's Republic of China; the *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*) is the organ of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee; *Democracy and Law* is released by the China Law Society; *People's Liberation Army Daily* by the Central Military Commission of the Communist Party of China; *People's Representative Daily* by the National People's Congress; *Chinese Social Sciences Today* by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; *Guangmin Ribao* (*Enlightenment Daily*) by the Chinese Communist Party; *Qinghai Daily* by the Chinese Province of Qinghai.

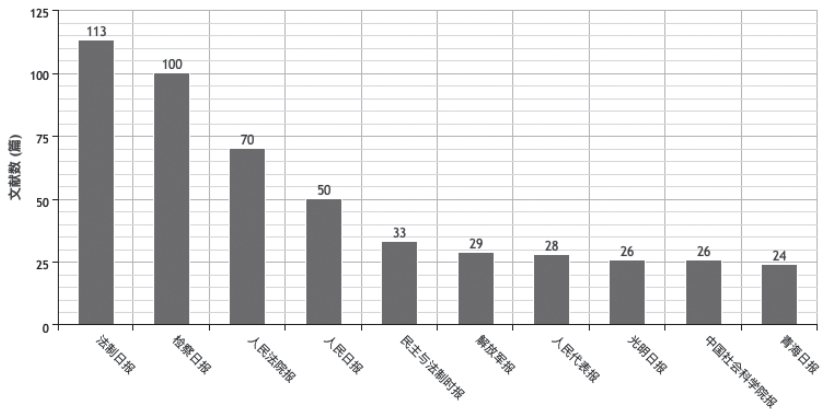


Figure 2. – The distribution of the 2009-2018 articles by newspaper, first 10 titles.
Source: Zhongguo Zhongyao Baozhi Quanwen Shujuku 2018.

This data strongly highlights a direct involvement of party or state organs in shaping the information flow on the Constitution even when it is published in newspapers. A trend that could possibly be rooted in the open government policy, promoted in China since 2008, and aimed at generating a steady and timely flow of information between the state and the citizens. Thank to an effort in guiding the circulation of news through the publication of selected information on the executive bodies' work, supported by documented opinions of eminent independent experts, the public institutions would reinforce their credibility and prestige (Mottura 2017).

3. THE CORPUS CONTENTS

With regard to content, as we can see below the data collected in the corpus are fully coherent with the landscape outlined in the previous paragraph. An exam of the articles as products of an academic discipline, performed through the database statistical analysis tools, shows that a vast majority of the items are identified as law studies or political discourse texts. In terms of linguistic complexity and intended purpose, the overwhelming majority of the texts fall under the classification of public policy research in social sciences, while just a few texts are labelled as aimed at professional training, fostering popular culture, promoting scientific popularisation for the masses, etc.

In this context we can examine the corpus content by identifying the most significant keywords (*guanjianci* 关键词) occurring in the texts.

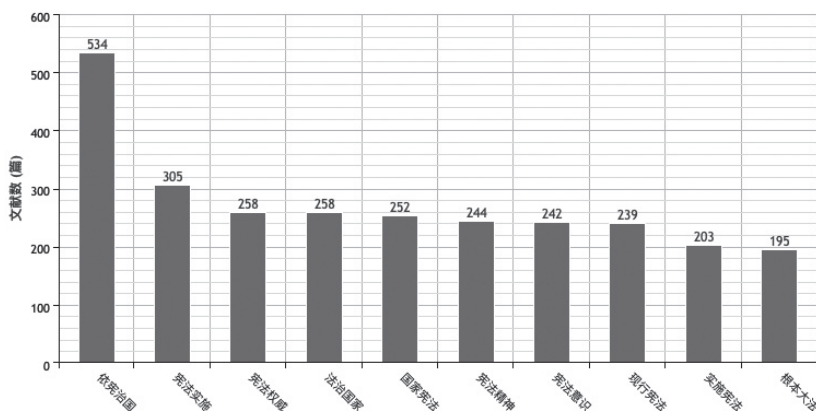


Figure 3. – Distribution by keywords.

Source: *Zhongguo Zhongyao Baozhi Quanwen Shujuku 2018*.

Figure 3 shows the top ten keywords listed in terms of frequency distribution in the 2009-2018 corpus and associate each of them with the number of documents where it occurs. The keywords are: to rule the country according to the Constitution (*yi xian zhiguo* 依宪治国), to implement the Constitution (*xianfa shishi* 宪法实施), authoritativeness of the Constitution (*xianfa quanwei* 宪法权威), country ruled by law (*fazhi guojia* 法治国家), spirit of the Constitution (*xianfa jingshen* 宪法精神), awareness of the Constitution (*xianfa yishi* 宪法意识), Constitution in force (*xianxing xianfa* 现行宪法), to implement the Constitution (*shishi xianfa* 实施宪法) and fundamental supreme law (*genben da fa* 根本大法).

Besides the general overview on the keywords in the 1395 articles of the corpus, in order to refine the analysis, we applied a qualitative approach in examining the data in a diachronic perspective. For this purpose, the 2009-2018 period was divided into three phases based on Xi Jinping's rise to power. A first phase included all the years before Xi Jinping became Secretary General of the CCP (2009 - October 2012). The five year of his first term of office would be the second phase (November 2012 - September 2017). The third, and shorter, phase would embrace the first fifteen months of his second mandate (October 2017 - December 2018). We then extracted from the corpus three lists of keywords based on the selected periods of time and labelled them KA, KB and KC.

Table 1. – List of top 14 keywords in three different political phases.
Source: *Zhongguo Zhongyao Baozhi Quanwen Shujuku 2018.*

KEYWORDS A (2009.1.1-2012.10.31)	KEYWORDS B (2012.11.1-2017.09.30)	KEYWORDS C (2017.10.1-2018.12.31)
(11)法治国家	(374)依宪治国	(151)依宪治国
(9)依宪治国	(219)宪法实施	(116)习近平
(8)根本大法	(204)国家宪法	(89)宪法修改
(7)宪法解释	(189)法治国家	(88)实施宪法
(7)宪法学	(173)现行宪法	(88)宪法权威
(6)韩大元	(167)宪法权威	(81)宪法实施
(6)社会主义法制	(165)宪法精神	(76)宪法意识
(5)检察机关	(163)宪法意识	(76)宪法精神
(5)合宪性	(145)根本大法	(65)宪法修正案
(5)法治精神	(136)宪法解释	(62)现行宪法
(5)美国宪法	(120)国家工作人员	(57)法治国家
(5)宪法实施	(115)实施宪法	(48)国家宪法
(4)宪政建设	(86)法治中国	(42)根本大法
(4)法制宣传	(80)法律权威	(42)修改宪法

In *Table 1* (KA, KB and KC columns) it is possible to compare the top 14 keywords of each of the three political phases. The words highlighted in each column are the ones appearing for the first time in the list, which obviously does not imply that they were totally absent in the articles before that period, but emphasise their frequency respective importance in the texts grew in a specific time lapse.

Here we shall discuss some selected entries peculiar to each list from a qualitative perspective focussing mainly on Xi Jinping's two terms of office (KB and KC columns). Due to the uneven fragmentation of time in our periodization, in this context we shall not take into account the numbers of texts associated with each keyword.

In KB list, the new keywords are national Constitution (*guojia xianfa* 国家宪法), Constitution in force (*xianxing xianfa* 现行宪法), authoritative-ness of the Constitution (*xianfa quanwei* 宪法权威), spirit of the Constitution (*xianfa jingshen* 宪法精神), awareness of the Constitution (*xianfa yishi* 宪法意识), country staff members (*guojia gongzuorenyuan* 国家工作人员), to implement the Constitution (*shishi xianfa* 实施宪法), China ruled by law (*fazhi Zhongguo* 法治中国), authoritative-ness of the law (*fali quanwei* 法律权威). As we can see from a diachronic perspective, there are nine new entries over fourteen keywords, nonetheless these expressions are often equivalents or synonyms of the most frequent keywords in the overall corpus. The only exception is "country staff members", which might be related to the oath of loyalty to the Constitution introduced for all public officials in 2016.

In KC column there are four new entries: Xi Jinping 习近平, amendment of the Constitution (*xianfa xiugai* 宪法修改), constitutional revised draft (*xianfa xiuzheng'an* 宪法修正案) and to amend the Constitution (*xiugai xianfa* 修改宪法). The emphasis on the amendment and the leader in the past year reflects the political decisions adopted both by the XIX Congress of the CCP in 2017 and by the first session of the XIII NPC in 2018. Conversely, the absence of these keywords amidst the most frequent keywords in the overall corpus is a predictable effect of the short duration of this one-year-long phase compared to the ten-year-long time span of the entire corpus.

The overall homogeneity of main contents in the three selected phases testifies to a general continuity in newspaper discourse on the Constitution over the last ten years. On the basis of this evidence from the corpus the analysis can be further developed by crosschecking the presence of significant keywords in the political language of the same period.

4. THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON NEWS PRODUCTION
IN THE PRESS

In order to investigate to what extent political discourse influences news production and newspaper language in this case study, we searched for lexical congruence between the corpus and three important political texts of the Xi Jinping era. In particular, we mapped the occurrence of four keywords of the corpus – which did appear in all KC, KA and KB columns – in the 2012 speech celebrating the constitutional text (Xi 2012), in the CCP Central Committee 2014 Decision on governing the country according to the law (Zhonggong Zhongyang 2014) and in the the People’s Republic of China Constitution text after the 2018 amendment (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo 2018).

Fundamental supreme law (*genben da fa* 根本大法) did not appear in the political texts, whereas country ruled by law (*fazhi guojia* 法治国家) occurred in the three of them in expressions such as: “Strongly promoted the process of socialist rule of law (有力推动了社会主义法治国家进程)” (Xi 2012), or as “Speed up the construction of a socialist country ruled by law (加快建设社会主义法治国家)” (Zhonggong Zhongyang 2014) and “Article 5 – The People’s Republic of China implements the rule of law and the construction of a socialist country ruled by law (第五条—中华人民共和国实行依法治国, 建设社会主义法治国家)” (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo 2018).

To rule the country according to the Constitution (*yi xian zhiguo* 依宪治国) did not occur in the Constitution, but appeared in the 2012 and 2014 political texts. It was located in highly sensitive sentences such as “To rule the country according to law, is first of all to govern the country according to the Constitution; the key to governing according to the law is to govern in accordance with the Constitution (依法治国, 首先是依宪治国; 依法执政, 关键是依宪执政)” (Xi 2012) and “To persist in ruling the country according to the law, we must first of all persist in ruling the country according to the Constitution, to persevere in holding power lawfully, we must first of all persevere in holding power according to the Constitution (坚持依法治国首先要坚持依宪治国, 坚持依法执政首先要坚持依宪执政)” (Zhonggong Zhongyang 2014).

When they were first published, these two sentences fostered a great deal of political speculation in China. The statement in Xi Jinping’s 2012 speech fuelled at the time a lively debate on Chinese media as some intellectuals first interpreted it as an evidence of the willingness of the newly appointed Secretary General of the CCP to promote political reforms

(Kellogg 2016). Giving full play to implementation of the constitutional norms would possibly restrict Party control over political life and society. On the contrary, the sentence in the 2014 Decision was understood as the demonstration of the prevalence of a much more restrictive interpretation of the commitment of the Xi Jinping leadership to a deep renegotiation of the equilibrium between the political authority of CCP and the implementation of national laws (Brødsgaard and Grünberg 2014).

Implementation of the Constitution (*xianfa shishi* 宪法实施), appears in the Preamble and in three articles of the Constitution. And other examples can be found both in CCP Central Committee Decision of 2014 and in Xi Jinping's 2012 speech, stating: "Ensuring the implementation of the Constitution is to ensure the realization of the fundamental interests of the people (保证宪法实施, 就是保证人民根本利益的实现)" (Xi 2012).

Although we are aware that this is just a preliminary attempt to locate the keyword highlighted in the newspaper's corpus in political discourse, we found evidence of lexical congruence between the texts and therefore we can confirm the influence that political language exerts on press language in China through the case study of constitutional discourse.

The continuity and coherence emerging from this data leads us to a further and last question: to what extent the importance accorded to the constitutional text by the leadership as conveyed by the press contributed to preparing public opinion to welcome the adoption of the 2018 amendment? Even though the answer to this question will be based on some considerations on media output and not on a public opinion survey, in this specific case study the corpus gives us a convincing tool to evaluate the impact of the texts.

The writing style of most journalistic sources found in the corpus was described in previous paragraphs as being quite complex since the overwhelming majority of the texts was labelled as being composed as pieces of public policy research in social sciences. Besides, the top ten media outlets issuing more than half of the corpus texts were newspapers published by state or party organs. These two items of information confirmed the assumption that the targeted public of the articles belongs to well-educated elites. In this perspective, it is unlikely that huge numbers of readers were reached by the information flow generated on the constitutional issue from 2012 to 2017, or at least it is implausible that lay people were deeply influenced by these articles.

5. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

In the previous paragraphs, in describing and examining from different angles the corpus extracted from the database, we have highlighted important connections between Chinese news production and political discourse. The first link has emerged from the variation in intensity of journalistic interest on the Constitution in different years. The peaks of news production focusing on the Constitution were found in coincidence with the publication of highly representative documents or speeches on the Constitution. The second tie was the permanence in the selected journalistic texts of keywords stemming from political discourse demonstrating the existence of a shared set of lexical and syntactic features. The writing style has been described as being similar to the one used in public policy research in social sciences, and this is the third link. The fourth strong relationship between media outlet language and the political one was the authorship: more than half of the articles collected in the corpus were published by newspapers directly dependent on CCP or state organs.

All these common characteristics between the corpus journalistic texts and the political discourse lead us to the conclusion that in this case study newspaper articles, Xi Jinping speeches, CCP decisions and the Constitution could be considered as being part of a definite genre colony (Bhatia 2004, 57-84). Even though these texts belong to different disciplinary domains (journalism, politics, law), they are the realisation of closely related genres (news report, oral political communication, official document and normative text) serving similar communicative purposes (Wodak and Forchtner 2018).

The programmatic and legitimating function of the constitutional text, the ideological significance of the party decision, the persuasive influence of the political speech, the amplifying ability of the mass media would foster people support for a policy or political action (Cap and Okulska 2013), i.e. constitutional amendment in this context, hence fostering trust in political institutions and strengthening the stability of the political system thus perpetuating the Chinese Communist Party leadership over the country (Ben Shu Bianxie Zu 2018). The complexity of this genre colony and its importance in the Chinese institutional context has emerged from this contribution and deserves further research in order to widen the scope of the map draw through the specific case study.

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