Microblogging and Media Policy in China: Xinhua's Strategic Communication on the Belt and Road Initiative
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Chapter Four
Policy Reviews and Fieldwork

This chapter starts with a review of the legal and policy documents from the Chinese central government's websites, and from the website of the Xinhua News Agency. By examining the expressions and terms adopted in these documents, I intend to relate this official language with the discourse on the social media platforms to conceptualize how the official language influences social media language. I then go on to present the results of the interviews I conducted in 2016. I connect the review of the policy papers and the interviews to examine the interplay between policymaking and media changes.

4.1 Policy Reviews

The current Chinese leadership constantly upgrades the governance policies and proactively adjusts the roles and responsibilities of the central and local administrative agencies. In a reorganisation for the media governance architecture in September 2018, the former State Administration of Press, Publication, Film, and Television (SAPPRFT) has been split up into the State Administration of Radio and Television (SART), the National Film Bureau, and the National Office of Press and Publication (NOPP). The SART is now a ministerial institute directly under the State Council. The National Film Bureau and the NOPP are now under the leadership of the Central Publicity Department (Ma, Damien and Thomas, Neil, 2018). In addition, the China Media Group (*Zhongyang guangbo dianshi zongtai*, 中央广播电视总台)—including China Central Television, China Radio International, and China National Radio—has been relocated from the State Council and is now also under the Central Publicity Department (CCTV, 2018a). In doing so, the leadership is taking a more active role in supervising the communication mechanism through the CCP's agencies. To enhance both internal and external communication power, the government continues to make efforts to enforce the necessary institutional changes. To understand the context of policymaking and policy changes, I will examine a range of the government documents in detail.

I reviewed the legal and policy documents that are available from the official websites in the year of 2016. The latest documents are issued in 2016, and the earliest document dates back to 2000. In its cultural governance, the CCP maintains its power of supervision and control. As

Schneider points out, there are two important types of government institutions in the Chinese broadcasting sector (Schneider, 2016). The first are government agencies that directly control the sector: the MIIT and the SAPPRFT under the SC (Schneider, 2016, pp. 195-196). The second are government agencies that are "indirectly linked either to cultural production or to specific policy issues" (Schneider, 2016, p. 197). This most prominently includes the MC. In addition, depending on a topic's relevance, it can also include the State Ethnic Affairs Commission or the Ministry of Education, providing "their consent when content touches on their area of expertise" (Schneider, 2016, p. 197). Schneider argues that "the role of the state and the Party has changed from institutions that govern cultural content in a straight-forward fashion to agencies that now mainly use soft controls and market mechanisms to influence the wider framework in which cultural production takes place" (Schneider, 2016, p. 189). In order to analyse the content of the government policy documents, it is necessary to understand the relations of these governmental departments. The hierarchical relations are illustrated in the diagram in figure 4.1 below:
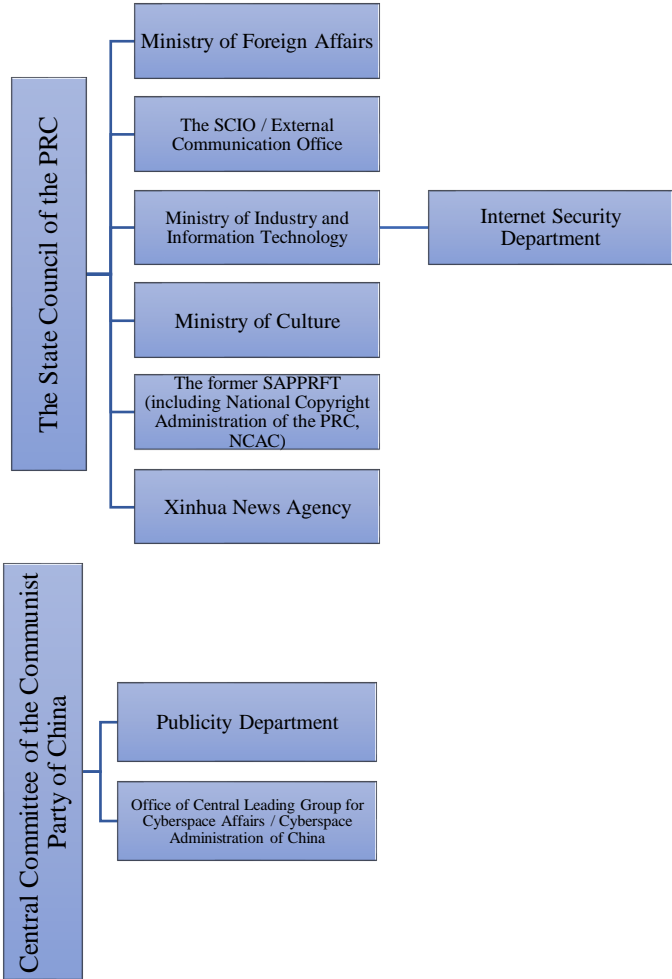
Figure 4.1. Hierarchical relations of the Chinese governmental departments

From 2011 till 2014, the Office of Central Leading Group for Cyberspace Affairs / Cyberspace Administration of China was named the State Internet Information Office, which was established within the SCIO. In 2014, the Chinese government separated this office from the SCIO and renamed it Cyberspace Administration of China.

The 62 documents are written in either Chinese or English, and some of them are overlapping in terms of content.[16] I categorized these documents into five main areas: foreign policy, media policies, cyber security, e-governance, and the BRI.

There are 14 documents on foreign policy (see Table 4.1). Nine are written in Chinese, and five in English. These documents were released by the MFA and the SCIO from 2014 to 2016. The topics include China's position papers at the UN General Assembly and China's military strategy, as well as China's foreign policy towards the European Union, African countries, Arab countries, and ASEAN countries.

Foreign Policy	Government Organizations	Year of Issue
2015 年后发展议程中方立场文件 (China's 2015 Position Paper)	MFA	2015
中国对非洲政策文件 (China's Africa Policy Paper)	MFA	2015
落实中国—东盟面向和平与繁荣的战略伙伴关系联合宣言的行动计划 (Implementation of the Joint Declaration of China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity)	MFA	2016
中国对阿拉伯国家政策文件 (China's Arab Policy Paper)	MFA	2016
China's Arab Policy Paper (English)	MFA	2016
中国对欧盟政策文件 (China's Policy Paper on the EU)	MFA	2014
China's Policy Paper on the EU (English)	MFA	2014
第 69 届联合国大会中方立场文件(Position Paper of the PRC at the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly)	MFA	2014
中国关于联合国成立 70 周年的立场文件(Position Paper of the PRC at the 70th Anniversary of the UN)	MFA	2015
第 71 届联合国大会中方立场文件(Position Paper of the PRC at the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly)	MFA	2016
Position Paper of the PRC at the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (English)	MFA	2015
Position Paper of the PRC at the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly (English)	MFA	2016
《中国的军事战略》白皮书 (China's Military Strategy White Paper)	SCIO	2015

[16] To make these resources accessible in English, scholar Rogier Creemers has translated many of the original policy documents from Chinese to English on his website (https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com).

China's Military Strategy (English)	SCIO	2015

Table 4.1 Documents on foreign policy

In the category of media policies, I collected 13 documents all in Chinese (see Table 4.2). Released by the SCIO, the MC, the SAPPRFT, and the CPD, these documents are about administration of "the blacklist" in the cultural market, cultural reform and strategy for the 12th five-year plan, responsibilities and staff establishment in SAPPRFT, supervision and protection of intellectual property, etc.

Media Policies	Government Organizations	Year of Issue
中宣部、新闻出版广电总局发通知：严格规范党报党刊发行工作 严禁报刊违规发行 (Notice on Tightening Regulations of the Party Periodicals Publication from the PD and the SAPPRFT)	PD, SAPPRFT	2013
中宣部通知要求认真学习宣传贯彻习近平总书记重要讲话精神 (Notice on the Study of the Spirit of Important Speeches of the General Secretary Xi Jinping from the PD)	SCIO	2016
全国环境宣传教育工作纲要(2016—2020 年) (Outline of National Environmental Publicity and Education Work)	Wenming.cn (hosted by PD and Civilization Office of the Central CPC)	2016
国务院办公厅关于贯彻落实全国知识产权保护与执法工作电视电话会议精神任务分工的通知 (Notice on Implementation of the National Intellectual Property Protection and Law Enforcement from the General Office of the State Council)	State Council	2010
国务院办公厅关于进一步加强政府网站管理工作的通知 (Notice on Further Strengthening the Administration of the Governmental Websites from the State Council)	State Council	2011
国家新闻出版广电总局主要职责内设机构和人员编制规定的通知 (Notice on Main Responsibilities of the Internal Organizations and Staffing Management from the SAPPRFT)	State Council	2013
文化建设"十一五"规划 (The Eleventh Five-year Plan of Cultural Construction)	Information Centre of MC	2006
文化部"十二五"文化科技发展规划 (The Twelfth Five-year Plan of Cultural and Scientific Construction)	Information Centre of MC	2012
文化部"十二五"时期文化改革发展规划 (The Twelfth Five-year Plan of Cultural Reform and Development)	Information Centre of MC	2012
文化部关于成立文化部网络安全和信息化领导小组的通知 (Notice on Establishing the Central Leading Group for Cyberspace Affairs from the Ministry of Culture)	Information Centre of MC	2014
文化部关于加强网络表演管理工作的通知 (Notice on Strengthening the Management of Internet Performing Programmes from the Ministry of Culture)	Information Centre of MC	2016
文化市场黑名单管理办法 (Measures on Administration of "the blacklist" in Cultural Market)	Information Centre of MC	2016

第十六届中国网络媒体论坛发布《贵阳共识》(The 16th Chinese Internet Media Seminar on the Guiyang Consensus)	CAC	2016

Table 4.2 Documents on media policies

There are 20 documents on cyber security, two of which are written in English (see Table 4.3). These documents are collected mainly from the websites of the SC, the NPC, Cyberspace Administration of China, the MIIT, and Xinhua News Agency. The content ranges from the administration of the internet information service and Li Keqiang's policy on Internet-Plus, to the Cyber Security Law.

Documents on Cyber Security	Government Organizations	Year of Issue
中华人民共和国网络安全法（草案）China's Cyber Security Law (draft)	NPC	2015
中华人民共和国网络安全法 China's Cyber Security Law	NPC	2016
中央网络安全和信息化领导小组成立 (Establishment of the Office of the Central Leading Group for Cyberspace Affairs)	Xinhuanet	2014
互联网信息服务管理办法 (Measures of Internet Information Service Management)	CAC	2000
互联网新闻信息服务管理规定 (Measures of the Administration of Internet Information Services)	CAC	2005
互联网治理 (Internet Governance)	MFA	2015
网络和信息安全 (Network and Information Security)	MFA	2015
信息安全国际行为准则 (Information Security International Code of Conduct)	MFA	2015
联合国大会第六十九届会议临时议程项目 91 从国际安全的角度来看信息和电信领域的发展 (Provisional Agenda on Item 91 in the Sixty-ninth Session of the General Assembly of the UN, Exploring the Telecommunications Development from the Perspective of International Security)	MFA	2015
互联网等信息网络传播视听节目管理办法(Measures of the Administration of Internet Information Audio-visual Programs)	CAC	2004
信息网络传播权保护条例(Regulations on the Protection of Information Networks)	CAC	2013
关于加强国家网络安全标准化工作的若干意见 (Suggestions on Strengthening the Standardization of National Cyber Security)	CAC	2016
国务院关于修改〈信息网络传播权保护条例〉的决定 (Decisions on Revising the Regulations of the Rights of Cyber Communication from the State Council)	State Council	2013
国务院关于推进物联网有序健康发展的指导意见 (State Council Guiding Opinions concerning Facilitating Systematic and Healthy Development of the Internet)	State Council	2013
国务院办公厅关于加快高速宽带网络建设 推进网络提速降费的指导意见 (State Council Guiding Opinions concerning Accelerating the Construction of High-Speed Broadband Networks and Stimulating the Increase of Network Speeds and Reduction of Costs)	State Council	2015
工业和信息化部关于加强电信和互联网行业网络安全工作的指导意见	MIIT	2014

(Guidance on Strengthening Cyber Security in Telecommunications and Internet Industries from the MIIT)		
通信网络安全防护管理办法 (Measures of Ensuring Communication Networks Security)	MIIT	2016
全国人民代表大会常务委员会关于加强网络信息保护的决定 (Decisions on Strengthening the Protection of Online Information from The Standing Committee of the NPC)	MIIT	2012
Internet Plus Services to Provide Convenience	State Council	2016
Simplified Procedures for Administrative Services	State Council	2016

Table 4.3 Documents on cyber security

In the category of e-governance, there are 13 documents, and three of them are in English (see Table 4.4). These documents are mainly from the websites of the SC and the CPD. They include the promotion of government services via Internet-Plus, plans for an internet-based government service system, and guidelines for strengthening thought work through internet channels.

Documents on E-governance	Government Organizations	Year of Issue
国务院关于"十二五"国家政务信息化工程建设规划的批复 (State Council Approval Concerning the Twelfth Five-year Plan on Government Affairs Informatization Project Construction)	State Council	2012
关于进一步加强和改进新形势下高校宣传思想工作的意见 (Leading Opinions concerning Strengthening and Improving the Current Thought Work in Higher Education)	Central Committee, State Council	2015
中央党内法规制定工作五年规划纲要(2013－2017 年) (CCP Outline of the Five-year Plan for the Formulation of Laws and Regulations)	The Central People's Government	2013
中宣部等关于 2013 年深入开展"三项学习教育"活动的意见 (Central Publicity Department Leading Opinions concerning Deepening "Three Studies Education" in 2013)	PD	2013
中方发布《中国落实 2030 年可持续发展议程国别方案》(China Releases the National Plan for Implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda)	MFA	2016
《关于培育和践行社会主义核心价值观的意见》印发 (Distribution of Guiding Opinions concerning Educating and Implementing Socialist Core Values)	Central Committee	2013
国务院关于落实《政府工作报告》和国务院第一次全体会议精神重点工作部门分工的意见 (State Council Leading Opinions concerning Implementing the Government Work Report and the First Plenary Meeting on Division of Labour for Major Departments)	State Council	2013
国务院办公厅关于印发当前政府信息公开重点工作安排的通知 (Notice on Regulation of Government Information Transparency in the PRC)	State Council	2013
全国政务公开领导小组《关于开展依托电子政务平台加强县级政府政务公开和政务服务试点工作的意见》(Leading Opinions concerning Improving the Transparency of the Government Affairs at the County Level with the Aid of E-governance and the Pilot Government Services)	State Council	2011
中央宣传部、国务院国资委关于加强和改进新形势下国有及国有控股企业思	Central	2010

	Committee, State Council	
想政治工作的意见 (Leading Opinions from the PD and the State Council on Strengthening the Thought Work in the State-owned and State-controlled Enterprises)		
China to Step up Efforts to Promote Internet-based Governance	State Council	2016
Premier Li Calls for Improving Government Services via Internet Plus	State Council	2016
State Council to Further Promote Openness in Government Affairs	State Council	2016

Table 4.4 Documents on E-governance

There are two documents on the BRI (see Table 4.5). "Media Consensus of the International Seminar on the Belt and Road Initiative" (*yidai yilu guoji yantaohui meiti gongshi*, "一带一路" 国际研讨会媒体共识) was drafted in Chinese by the SCIO. "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building a Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road" (*tuidong gongjian sichouzhilu jingjidai he ershiyi shiji haishang sichouzhilu de yuanjing yu xingdong*, 推动共建丝绸之路经济带和 21 世纪海上丝绸之路的愿景与行动) is issued in both Chinese and English by the NDRC, MFA, and MoC, with the authorization of the State Council.

Documents on the Belt and Road Initiative	Government Organizations	Year of Issue
"一带一路"国际研讨会媒体共识 (Media Consensus of the International Seminar on the Belt and Road Initiative)	SCIO	2016
推动共建丝绸之路经济带和 21 世纪海上丝绸之路的愿景与行动 (Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road)	National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce	2015

Table 4.5 Documents on the Belt and Road Initiative

The media policies and government documents on e-governance mainly function as guidelines for the government's internal communication, whereas the documents on cyber security apply to both internal and external communication. Implemented in the BRI, the government's communicative strategies revolve around its foreign policy.

The media policies aim to construct a "strong cultural country" (*wenhua qiangguo*, 文化强国) and a "cultural China" (*wenhua Zhongguo*, 文化中国) by advocating the "socialist core values" through media outlets and strengthening the mainstream ideology within China (PD, 2013a, 2015, 2016; MC, 2006). With their regulatory function, the former SAPPRFT and the MC

have specific licensing powers (Schneider, 2016). The SCIO and the former SAPPRFT are responsible for content management (Creemers, 2016).

The documents on e-governance provide the guidelines for managing the government's websites, sharing government information, and responding to the public's concerns. The government intends to build "an integrated online government service platform" by 2017 and "a nationwide 'Internet Plus governance' system" by 2020 (The Central People's Government, 2011a, 2011b, 2013d; SC, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d). The measures for publicising official information and decision-making mainly aim to improve the internal communication.

The policies on cyber security are to develop an "Internet Superpower" (*wangluo qiangguo*, 网络强国) through regulating the administrative licensing within China and controlling the information flow from both within and outside China (CAC, 2016a; MIIT, 2014). For instance, the MIIT and its provincial subordinates are in charge of the internet industry (Creemers, 2016).

The media policies and e-governance documents are implemented mainly by regulating the staff from the state-owned mass media and the government officials. For instance, the media policies aim to strengthen social and public surveillance (The Central People's Government, 2010); to guide public opinion by spreading the "main melody" (*zhuxuanlv*, 主旋律) and "positive energy" (*zhengnengliang*, 正能量) (PD, 2016; CAC, 2016b); and to avoid "content that may harm society" (MC, 2016a, 2016b). Compared to this, the documents on cyber security are more targeted at private sectors and individual internet users (CAC, 2000, 2004, 2013; MIIT, 2012; 2016; NPC, 2015, 2016). This may be due to the fact that most Internet enterprises are private, rather than state-owned, and therefore the regulations focus on the role and obligations of Internet service providers (ISPs), Internet content providers (ICPs), etc. (Creemers, 2016). For instance, compared to its draft version (NPC, 2015), China's Cyber Security Law has tightened the restrictions towards the ISPs and ICPs through laws, social responsibilities, and social moralities, and has specified penalties for breaking the law (NPC, 2016).

In the foreign policy documents and the documents about the BRI, there are more similarities than differences. First, similar terms are adopted. For instance, terms such as "互利共赢" (*huli*

gongying, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation), "合作" (*hezuo*, cooperation), "命运共同体" (*mingyun gongtongti*, a shared destiny) appear in both foreign policy documents since 2012 and in documents about the BRI, and have been highlighted as the main concepts. Used in the contexts of economic cooperation, information exchange, and political consensus, these terms indicate the government's intentions to improve its overall foreign relations.

Second, the communication strategies and the descriptions of foreign relations are similar. In the document "*Media Consensus of the International Seminar on the Belt and Road Initiative*" (SCIO, 2016b), the government emphasizes media cooperation and openness among all countries, by "finding common interests," "respecting diversity," "delivering positivity," and "telling new stories." In the foreign policy documents (MFA, 2014a, 2014b, 2016a, 2016b, 2015f, 2016c), in order to develop the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" with the European Union (EU), Arab states, African countries, and ASEAN countries, the government also stresses the importance of media cooperation. However, the means of cooperation vary according to different partnerships. China and the EU will "strengthen interactions and exchanges between government departments, support the institutional building and deepening of regular China-EU media exchanges" (MFA, 2014a), and use "new media tools" for information exchange. China-Arab media cooperation will be enhanced through business exchange, news exchange, and personnel training as well as through establishing "a long-term China-Arab exchange mechanism of think tanks" (MFA, 2016a). China-Africa media cooperation aims to ensure the government departments' communication, strengthen the cyber space administration, continue the information exchange, and encourage media digitalization in African countries (MFA, 2015f). China and ASEAN countries will continue communication in the mainstream media and cooperate through online news exchange, news reporting, and personnel exchange (MFA, 2016c). In spite of the different measures, the ultimate goal for media cooperation is to create "a favourable public opinion environment" for China and its partners' relations by letting the public "better understand each other's policies, ideas, development goals, strategic orientation, and cultural achievements" (MFA, 2014a, 2016c).

Third, the government's foreign policies and relations with different regions can be seen in the BRI. The government holds different views towards different partners. In the Policy Paper on the EU, by emphasizing the common interests with the EU and recognizing the differences

between the two cultures, the government holds that "with no fundamental conflict of interests, China and the EU have far more agreements than differences" and as the "two major forces for world peace," they share a "strategic consensus on building a multi-polar world" (MFA, 2014a). In the policy papers on Arab and African countries, through highlighting the friendship and history with these countries, the government states the importance for cooperation. In both policy papers, the government qualifies the relations with these countries as "brothers, friends and partners no matter what happens on [sic] the world arena" (MFA, 2016a, 2015f). For instance, "Over two thousand years ago, land and maritime Silk Roads already linked the Chinese and Arab nations. In the long stretches of history, peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, learning from each other, mutual benefit and win-win results have always been the main themes of exchanges between China and Arab countries" (MFA, 2016a). In the Policy Paper on the ASEAN countries, the government refers to the relationship with the ASEAN countries as "neighbours" and indicates the importance of economic collaboration, cultural exchange, and political dialogue (MFA, 2016c). In addition, the cooperation projects with different partner countries in the foreign policy documents are in line with the projects in the BRI, and the initiative is also mentioned in each policy paper. Overall, the terms and expressions in the policy papers show that the government maintains a closer attitude towards the Arab countries and African countries than the EU and the ASEAN countries. Regarding the Arab countries and African countries as "friends and "brothers" may imply that the government perceives its relations with these regions as already "developed and mature" partnerships, and the relations with the EU and ASEAN countries as the ones yet "to be developed and explored." In its foreign policy towards the ASEAN countries, China intends to ensure its leading position in the region. In its foreign policy towards the EU, China emphasizes on the collaboration with the EU with respect to global governance.

The policy papers show that the government intends to enhance its international communication power through institutional changes. The responsibilities for local communication have been transferred from the central to the local administrative levels, and the tasks for international communication are to be carried out by the central government level. This means that, for internal communication, the government is to adopt differentiated measures towards the domestic audience, in order to promote the public opinion work; in terms of external communication, the government aims to implement a more centralized strategy to strengthen China's "voice." A marked outcome of centralizing external communication is the change of the administration level for the China Media Group that

includes the state television and radio stations. As of April 2018, CCTV no longer is a vice-ministerial unit under the SAPPRFT, and the China Media Group has become a ministerial-level institution under the PD (Ma, Damien and Thomas, Neil, 2018). However, the centralized management of external communication does not necessarily mean that the same tone and a monolithic "voice" are used towards all international audiences. The nuances of the relations with different geopolitical regions potentially influence the tones and attitudes held in China's communication.

4.2 Qualitative Interviews

The qualitative interviews serve as a reality check on whether the government's external and internal communication policies have any effect on the media industry, and if so, how influential the changes are.

From December 2015 until June 2016, I conducted 33 interviews with scholars, policymakers, and media practitioners. These interviews took place in different cities across different regions. Five of them were held in Leiden and The Hague in the Netherlands, and the remaining 28 interviews were held in China. In the period January to April 2016, I conducted 12 interviews in Beijing, four interviews in Shanghai, two interviews in Hangzhou, and ten interviews in Xi'an. As mentioned in Chapter Three, I keep my respondents anonymous. However, I divided them into three identifiable groups, each group indicated by a letter code. Group "A" contains academics, "M" has media workers, and "P" has policymakers. Table 4.6 shows a more detailed overview of the respondents in each category.

A (Academics)	M (Media workers)	P (Policymakers)
A01 Beijing, 01.2016 radio and communication	M01 Leiden, 12.2015 contract journalist	P01 The Hague, 06.2015 international law
A02 Beijing, 02.2016 communication and digital media	M02 Leiden, 12.2015 editor	P02 The Hague, 12.2015 public diplomacy
A03 Beijing, 02.2016 external communication	M03 Beijing, 01.2016 financial journalist	P03 Leiden, 12.2015 internal communication
A04 Beijing, 02.2016 media studies and politics	M04 Beijing, 01.2016 new media analyst	P04 Beijing, 01.2016 media policy
A05 Beijing, 03.2016 soft power and cultural studies	M05 Beijing, 01.2016 Guangming Daily journalist	P05 Beijing, 03.2016 external communication
A06 Shanghai, 03.2016 public diplomacy and soft power	M06 Beijing, 01.2016 English news editor	P06 Xi'an, 04.2016 local media policy
A07 Hangzhou, 03.2016 communication studies	M07 Beijing, 02.2016 producer/journalist	P07 Xi'an, 04.2016 retired official/cadre

A08 Hangzhou, 03.2016 culture and discourse analysis	M08 Shanghai, 03.2016 former journalist/PR officer	
A09 Xi'an, 03.2016 language and comparative culture	M09 Shanghai,03.2016 chief correspondent	
A10 Xi'an, 03.2016 journalism	M10 Shanghai, 03.2016 journal editor	
A11 Xi'an, 04.2016 journalism	M11 Xi'an, 03.2016 former TV journalist	
	M12 Xi'an, 03.2016 former journalist from Lanzhou	
	M13 Xi'an, 04.2016 former editor at Beijing Review	
	M14 Xi'an, 04.2016 former journalist from Reuters	
	M15 Xi'an, 04.2016 internet administration	

Table 4.6 Respondents in three groups

My interviews with the policymakers indicate that policymaking consists of three main stages. First, officials formulate a policy in general during their term of office—based on policy demands and external events as well as on their personal education and professional experiences. Then, in the second stage, a process of compromising takes place, as the policy has to go through many meetings with officials from other departments. Last, to adopt a new policy, high-ranking officials from the central government have to take responsibility for it. According to my respondents, the last stage is deemed the most critical part, as a person has to be confident and powerful enough to take on the task.

In terms of media policy, the policymaking process concerns the state media outlets. For instance, Xinhua's media study centre, located in Beijing, formerly a journalism school, plays a major role in the making of media policy for the central government. On a regular basis, the news workers and technicians from the media study centre are assigned to Xinhua's other departments to work on specific projects for periods lasting between one to six months. Eventually they provide analysis reports to the media study centre and the Central Publicity Department. One official from the media study centre says:

> We have daily meetings and also weekly meetings. When our staff attends the weekly meeting, they
> will hand in the reports with data and analysis from their work in Xinhua's other departments. In
> addition, we also submit the reports to the central government [sic] leaders,[17] including the officials

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[17] In this quote, "the central government leaders" are from the Central Publicity Department, not the first and foremost government officials. The fact that my respondent did not make that distinction shows that, in practice, the interlocking directorates between party and state bodies make the distinction between the two sets of

from the Central Publicity Department, SAPPRFT, Chinese Journalists' Association, etc. We provide them with short- and long-term research results according to the meetings they are about to organize. Our job is to update the central government leaders with the situations and issues before the meeting and we also participate in media policymaking. (P04)

Policymaking in China goes through many procedures and involves players from different institutions. As digital media platforms provide more channels for political expression and discussion within and outside China, which might not always be in favour of the government, the government is facing more challenges in legislation and policymaking in terms of creating a favourable public opinion environment. Two of my respondents who take part in policy consultations for the SC and the Information Council comment that the central government leaders are very up-to-date with the information and are open to collect information from all sources, but they are missing policy advice and the expertise on how to use the information (A05; P01).

In order to implement and promote its policies, the government has adopted various measures and intends to adjust the ways of communication. One example is that the government and the state media have changed certain expressions and terms in the official language, such as the name change from "Propaganda Department" to "Publicity Department," and changes in the Chinese translation of the term "social media,"[18] from "社会化媒体" (*shehuihua meiti*) to "社交媒体" (*shejiao meiti*) to "自媒体" (*zimeiti*). In addition, in its latest foreign policy pronouncements, the government introduced the concepts of "互利共赢" (*huli gongying*, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation) in 2014 (*People.cn*, 2014) and "命运共同体" (*mingyun gongtongti*, a shared destiny) at the 18th National Congress of the CCP in 2012 (*People.cn*, 2017a). In terms of external communication, the government has introduced expressions such as "building an international discourse system" (*dazao rongtong zhongwai de huayu tixi*, 打造融通中外的话语体系) and "expressing China's position, voice and opinions" (*duiwai chuanbo Zhongguo lichang*, *Zhongguo shengyin*, *Zhongguo guandian*, 对外传播中国立场、中国声音、中国观点).

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organizations meaningless to many practitioners. Such an idiosyncrasy implies a difference between how policymakers and practitioners talk about the policymaking process in my interviews.

[18] In English, the term "social media" can also refer to "social network sites (SNSs)," see (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

Both the scholars and the policymakers I interviewed voiced their familiarity with these terms. The majority hold that government leaders acquire their sensitivity in international communication and attempt to demonstrate more modern governing methods. Changes of the terms in the official language are meant to construct a new discourse system that supports the government's communicative strategies and emphasizes China's peaceful rise. However, a few of my respondents also add that, in an effort to adjust to the "right" language, the government merely changed the expressions rather than the nature of its communication, that is, to ultimately gain power to manipulate and control internal communication, and to create a positive image of the government internationally.

According to the respondents from the state media outlets, state media have a better audience reception in developing countries than in developed countries. The reasons are that the news products from Chinese state media are less expensive than other international news agencies, such as AP and Reuters, and the governments from many developing countries in Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa tend to have a more cooperative relationship with the Chinese government.

For instance, with regard to the communication strategy on the government's BRI, Xinhua News Agency is creating the Silk Road database for its reports on political, economic, and cultural topics. A respondent from Xinhua says that this database is eventually to be established as an independent company from Xinhua (M07). As part of China Economic Information Service (CEIS), a company owned wholly by Xinhua News Agency and launched in July 2015, the database is meant to work on a commodity-logic. It is to be developed into a multi-language platform providing information products, consulting services, information search engines, and international trade-related services for companies from within and outside China (Silk Road Database, 2015). "Anchored by a large and still rapidly growing domestic market, and overseen by a strong and capable state," the national capital for information and communications continually supports the business and the state agencies to become "vital actors within a globally mutating digital capitalism" (Schiller, 2014, p. 235). Schiller underlines that huge data centres from the US, as "hubs for the more widely recomposing infrastructure," continue to structure its "capital logic" with profit strategies in communications markets (Schiller, 2014, pp. 113-114). Compared to this, Xinhua also is acquiring digital capital: the monetary value of the data centre.

Through my interviews with media practitioners working in both Chinese and international media outlets in China, it becomes clear that the BRI shows that China is trying to communicate its intentions in Asia in a positive way, while laying the groundwork for commercial profit. However, the state media's communication strategies are ineffective so far. This is, according to my respondents, due to the "dry" content full of "big words" with vague meanings (*da er quan*, 大而全), and "the very old and traditional Chinese approach," meaning a hectoring tone adopted by the state media outlets (M06; M07; M09). A respondent says, "This is like the 'One Hundred Flowers' 30 years ago. Xinhua does not wait for the results, but just writes about it all over the page, by quoting 'an expert's saying that it is a great policy'" (M09).

The following comparisons of the interviews from the three groups are to disentangle the relations of the policymaking, the state media, and digital media in China. To explore the working mechanisms of the state media, I focused on what roles digital media and the state media play in the government's communication strategies, and how effective they are with respect to the media outlets.

4.2.1   *Digital Media in External Communication Policy*

In its media and cyber security policies, the government aims to strengthen its discursive power and international influence by constructing a more centralized external communication strategy. According to the academic respondents, digital media are of vital importance to the government's external communication policy. Internet becomes an important tool for soft power construction and external communication. The central government has established the State Internet Information Office (*hulianwang xinxi bangongshi*, 互联网信息办公室) within the External Communication Office (外宣办) (Xinhua net, 2011b). The development of digital media has popularized the concept of "public diplomacy" (*gonggong waijiao*, 公共外交). Compared to official diplomacy, public diplomacy is different in terms of scale, functions and strategies. External communication that used to be only part of the government activities/behaviour (*zhengfu xingwei*, 政府行为) can now involve public activities. As a well-developed concept in Europe and America, public diplomacy has also been explored and expanded in China. State actors and non-state actors have both been involved in the external

communication with different geopolitical regions. The instruments of public diplomacy include both traditional mass media and digital media. "Public diplomacy" is meant to soften "the rough image of government policies" and strengthen "the image of a country that is moving toward a pluralistic and increasingly empowered society" (d'Hooghe, 2015, p. 133). According to the government's media and cyber security policies, the pluralistic society that is presented through digital media is to be guided at the official level.

The academics I interviewed tend to agree that digital media have created challenges for the government, especially in restricting unlawful conduct and sensitive topics on the internet. As social media provide platforms for information exchange, spaces for equal dialogue, and investigative journalism, digital media are already decentralizing the government's voice. A professor mentions that if the government wants to achieve its economic and political goals, then it must adapt to this new discursive environment (A01).

The answers from the policymakers show similarities with the answers from the academics. According to them, the government's media policy cannot actually keep up with the fast development of information technology. By empowering users against the state and making the public more informed, digital media inevitably create challenges for the government, so goes the argument. A former official says:

> The strategy of "keeping people ignorant" (*yumin zhengce*, 愚民政策) that has been adopted in the long history to stabilize the system no longer applies in the current situation with the development of digital media. In fact, the working efficiency of the central government has been slowed down, as any information the government holds, demands more investment and time to ensure its security in cyberspace. (P03)

4.2.2 *National Image Construction*

According to the policymakers, the purpose of external communication is to construct a more positive national image through ideological persuasion on the targeted "three mainstreams" (*sange zhuliu*, 三个主流): mainstream media, mainstream institutions, and mainstream society.

The majority of scholars tends to regard the government's efforts in constructing a positive national image as unsuccessful, citing three reasons. First, culture has different layers, including material culture, the social system, spiritual culture, and social values. China's

material culture and spiritual culture are widely accepted outside the country. China's social system and values, however, are not as appealing to the audiences abroad. The work of external communication that is based on promoting Chinese material and spiritual culture will not directly make the Chinese social system and values acceptable and appreciated. Second, the government's project of "external communication capacity" (*duiwai chuanboli gongcheng*, 对外传播力工程), a massive investment, shows that the government sees itself as more of a message sender than as a receiver. The government has been focusing only on unilaterally informing the public, but has ignored the possibility of receiving comments back from the public, and therefore is not familiar with how to deal with those. Third, the government's work on external communication has only involved political interest and sensitivity, based on its own perspective. The government-led communicative strategy to tell China stories has been inconsistent in reflecting the public perspective. Therefore, China's image building has led to the impression that its image building is mostly government propaganda.

Regarding this issue, the policymakers highlight the resources and efforts that the government has invested in image construction. During the interviews, one of the officials reveals that the government uses any resources it could think of for external communication:

> Financially, the government can always justify the expense as "maintaining national stability" (*weiwen ziji*, 维稳资金), which in fact has no budget limit. However, the fact that the government deploys nearly unlimited resources in its image campaigns might have confirmed the foreign impression that this is a case of a rising power selling propaganda with its newly established wealth. Politically, the official leaders will hold meetings for ideological persuasion at all levels (*dongyuan dahui*, 动员大会), which proved to work very efficiently in China. (P03)

The government's policy and financial backup to expand the scale of official media are to make sure that the official media are known worldwide. However, a lack of concrete plans or directions is probably the reason why the government has not proven successful in image construction. A government official says:

China's core values are well summarized in the "Socialism twenty-four characters,"[19] which can present China's national image. The problem is that the government's external communication policy has not integrated these national values. (P01)

4.2.3 The Position of the State Media

With respect to the extent of the Chinese official media's open and critical attitude about news and policy reporting, the respondents from both academic and policymaking institutes hold similar views. They believe that the central government tends to tighten the control on the official media and aims to continue their role as the mouthpieces of the Communist Party, that is, as merely "explaining" or "stating" the government's points of view.

In President Xi Jinping's remarks at the opening ceremony of the Second World Internet Conference in December 2015, he highlighted that "[c]yberspace is not a place beyond the rule of law" (MFA, 2015g). During Xi's visits to official media outlets including Xinhua News Agency, CCTV, and the *People's Daily* in February 2016, he emphasized the importance to control the "orientation" of the media in the information age, including both mass media and digital media. Compared to mass media, digital media are more challenging for the government to control, as digital media make it possible for the audiences to become both producers and consumers. An official from a local Internet Supervision Office says that the PD and the Information Council are "controlling the digital media by collaborating with the commercial media companies in China, and local staff working in the Internet Supervision Office regularly go to the commercial media companies like Tencent and Sina to gather information and data" (P06).

My interviews with the academics demonstrate that the Chinese official media are constantly balancing government control and news workers' professionalism, and the media's openness and ability to criticise vary on different topics and issues.

From the interviews with the policymakers, it becomes clear that the government's ideological control through the media is reinforced through concepts of "national security"

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[19] The Core Socialist Values include national goals of prosperity, democracy, civility, and harmony; social goals of freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law; and individual values of patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship. The CCP issued guidelines in 2013 bolstering the Core Socialist Values and pooling positive energy to realize the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation (China Daily USA, 2013).

(*guojia anquan*, 国家安全) and "national interest" (*guojia liyi*, 国家利益). An official from Beijing who participates in media policymaking says:

> The openness of the Chinese media is a political issue rather than a matter of communication, as this is a much smaller issue within national security and national interests. It is not about when the Chinese media will be open; it is about the competition between China and other countries. (P04)

In addition, controlling the media is often in the government officials' own interest. A former official from the Central Party School comments:

> China has a long tradition in ideological control and media is always a battlefield. Any government official who is not alert on controlling media will face losing his/her position. For instance, Hu Yaobang's "three tolerances" policy (*Sankuan fangzhen: kuanhou, kuanrong, kuansong*; "三宽"方针：宽厚、宽容、宽松) was to promote democracy and freedom, which soon made him lose power in the central government at the time. (P03)

This former official's responsibility in the Central Party School was to train younger officials who were competing for higher positions. Before getting promoted, these young officials were obliged to study full time in the Central Party School for six months to one year, during which they needed to be on job leave from their original positions, go to classes, and go for field work in different regions. This is to train their "Party loyalty" (*dangxing*, 党性).

Therefore, even though Chinese officials can express liberal opinions in non-official circumstances, they are restricted by their position in terms of what they say in their official capacities. Media policy is in fact guarded and shaped through different levels of administrative departments.

During my interviews with scholars and media practitioners, they frequently use the term "the position of the media" (*meiti daoxiang*, 媒体导向) and "national interest" (*guojia liyi*, 国家利益). While the policymakers compare the control over the state media to securing the national interest, the scholars and media practitioners tend to normalize the media's position under the same notion: national interest. One respondent from the Communication University of China holds that media would not have their value if they were not to work for politics, and the

Chinese government expands its influence through the media just like any other government (A01). According to Maria Repnikova (2017), the relationship between Chinese journalists and the government is an uneasy partnership. In media politics, journalists negotiate their space for investigative reporting through standing by the government's position and agenda. Government officials treat investigative reporting as a feedback mechanism on their end (Repnikova, Maria, 2017).

Based on the responses from the journalists, the connections between the position of the media and national interest are often placed in three contexts. First, all media have a position. Every media organization has its interpretation that is based on its worldview and Chinese media generally all promote the government's agenda. Second, there is competition between Chinese and English media in terms of the power to influence international public opinion (*guoji yulun*, 国际舆论). According to the respondents from the official media outlets, Chinese media often face a hostile public opinion environment that is dominated by the mainstream English-language media outlets from Western European and Northern American countries. Protecting the national interest for news workers means guarding against "Western universal values" (*xifang pushi jiazhiguan*, 西方普世价值观)[20] and "peaceful evolution" (*heping yanbian*, 和平演变).[21] Third, to maintain a system that is highly efficient and considered suitable for Chinese society is of national interest, and this often applies to the current system run by the government. As the government never sets itself apart from the Communist Party, media serving the Party and the state are presumed to serve the national interest.

However, these news workers' perceptions of the national interest do not equal government interest. They do not always agree with the government's control over the media and internet access, but they tend to agree with the government's efforts to have a different voice to tell China stories. The framework for making sense of politics is primarily the nation, and the media in China are by default "nationalist."

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[20] Universal value refers to a common value applicable for many human beings in terms of social behaviour, emotion, morality, etc. According to Schwartz, "values" are "conceptions of the desirable" that influence people's choices and events (Schwartz, 1992). Proposed in the 1990s, Asian values became a political ideology among the countries in Southeast and East Asia in terms of societal and cultural common values, which contrasted with the European universal values (Langguth, 2003, pp.25-42).

[21] The concept of Peaceful Evolution was introduced by John Foster Dulles, former US secretary of state, during the Cold War in the 1950s. The marketization of Chinese media is often referred to as the "peaceful evolution" against the Party and the state (Lee, Chin-Chuan & Pan, Zhongdang, 2000, pp.95-104).

4.2.4 Xinhua's Interpretation of the Government's Guidelines

Xinhua News Agency, as the state medium, adjusts its communication strategy largely to the central government's policies. In terms of what the government's guidelines are and how Xinhua interprets and implements them, my respondents from the group of media workers, including journalists, editors and producers, provide their insights based on their work experiences.

The respondents working in the state media mention that the government's national policies provide the guidelines for news production. However, for foreign correspondents and domestic journalists, their understanding towards these guidelines tends to vary.

One respondent comments that journalists working at the Xinhua Overseas Bureau feel enough freedom as the news organization is not yet well developed in terms of international news reporting, and almost any news packages they submit from abroad will be published somewhere at some point (M01). However, the reason that the overseas correspondents feel free might be that they have implemented the guidelines from Xinhua's headquarters in Beijing in a fitting manner.

Four other respondents, who worked as foreign correspondents in London, The Hague, Riyadh, and Zurich, mention that before they could become foreign correspondents, they needed to apply for the positions of assigned foreign correspondents and meet the headquarter's requirements for foreign language and independent reporting. Once they were assigned to the overseas bureaus, their work relations (*gongzuo guanxi*, 工作关系) would be transferred from Xinhua to the Foreign Affairs Bureau (*waishiju*, 外事局) until they returned to their original departments. The Foreign Affairs Bureau, set up by Xinhua's Communist party group and the headquarter, is in charge of the foreign affairs management, foreign correspondents' annual assessment, and inspections of Xinhua's foreign bureaus (Xinhua News Agency, Foreign Affairs Bureau).

According to them, the government's foreign policies provide the guidelines for foreign correspondents. For instance, when reporting on the conflicts between Israel and Palestine, Ukraine and Russia, and India and Pakistan, they need to strike a balance between the specific incidents, the government's foreign policy, and international public opinion. Based on these

factors, they then decide whether to adopt a neutral tone or a critical opinion towards the parties involved. One editor from Xinhua and a journalist from Guangming Daily (*Guangming Ribao*, 光明日报) both mention that when it comes to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, they would just provide figures and data, without providing any comment on or criticism of either side. As Russia is China's diplomatic partner, it becomes a very sensitive topic. When reporting on the relations between India and Pakistan, they simply cannot criticize either Pakistan or India. When handling cases like this, the correspondents tend to keep a distant tone in reporting. "Not directly choosing a stance is also a stance; not making a comment is also an attitude," the respondent from Xinhua puts it (M06).

The news packages from foreign correspondents need to be sent first to Xinhua's headquarters in Beijing. The Editorial Department from Xinhua, called "big radio" (*da guang bo*, 大广播)[22] by the news workers, will collect and edit the news packages for broadcasting or posting online. A journalist comments that the top-down system decides the importance of the news. For instance, top leaders' activities are deemed the most important news.

While the guidelines for foreign correspondents are about understanding the government's foreign policy, the guidelines for domestic news workers are more about political correctness. One journalist from Xinhua's headquarters in Beijing says that the bottom line in terms of reporting style and content is already decided by the position of Xinhua, that is, as the mouthpiece of the Party and the state (M03). When journalists are hired by the state media, the first course they are required to attend is politics. As foreign correspondents submit their news packages from abroad, the information will be filtered and processed before they reach the domestic audiences. An English news editor from Xinhua says, "All media express their government's opinion, including Xinhua. Media should have the responsibility to guide their audience to a positive and correct direction" (M06).

The domestic journalists and editors in my interviews mention that the most common and efficient way to be in tune with the government's guidelines is through "political education"

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[22] The name "big radio" may have originated when Xinhua News Agency established the Yan'an Xinhua Radio Station (*Yan'an Xinhua guangbo diantai*, 延安新华广播电台), which is the former body of China National Radio (CNR) (*zhongyang renmin guangbo diantai*, 中央人民广播电台) and China Radio International (CRI) (*Zhongguo guoji guangbo diantai*, 中国国际广播电台) (Xinhua News Agency, Xinhua history). Journalists from CNR can access Xinhua's "big radio" to directly select and edit news for CNR's radio program (Li, Haiming, 2013).

and the monthly and weekly meetings. These meetings are held at different levels, such as meetings among the department leaders (*lingdao*, 领导) and meetings for all staff. The meetings inform them what is considered to be important and sensitive news, and senior editors will also give advice to journalists on the tone and phrases in news writing. In February 2016, President Xi Jinping visited Xinhua and held meetings with the directors of Xinhua, addressing the importance of news media in terms of news reporting, communication strategies, and orientation of public opinion. After these meetings, Xinhua's directors in turn organized meetings in each department with journalists and editors to inform and pass on the messages from the earlier meetings.

With the development of the internet, more players are engaged in and shaping the government's guidelines on the media. The PD can directly order the media outlets to leave out certain details in reporting or not to report on certain news entirely (M13), and also hires staff from other institutions including research institutes and universities throughout China. Then the PD sets up a "reading group" (*yuebing xiaozu*, 阅兵小组) to check on the media outlets by reviewing the news content online (M05).

4.2.5 *Xinhua's Performance on Social Media Platforms*

Xinhua has increased its presence on social media platforms such as Sina Weibo, Weixin (Wechat), Twitter, Facebook, etc. Through social media, Xinhua aims to communicate with its audiences more directly. In my interviews with journalists and editors, they see Xinhua's strategy of attracting audiences through interactions on social media as a success.

In order to understand Xinhua's communication strategies on social media platforms, I inquired of staff from Xinhua as to who is posting and tweeting for Xinhua on Weibo and on Twitter, who Xinhua's target audiences on these social media platforms are, if there are different communication strategies, and how interactive Xinhua has been when it comes to communicating with its followers.

From the interviews, I learned that Xinhua's headquarters in Beijing set up the new media centre (*Xinmeiti Zhongxin*, 新媒体中心) to specialize in managing the news and tweets distribution on social media platforms. Xinhua organizes a team, consisting of one to two

hundred journalists from different departments, to update Xinhua's Weibo and Twitter accounts.[23]

On Twitter's platform, journalists from all news bureaus submit what they regard as important news every day to Xinhua's headquarters in Beijing, and then the team working on social media will select and post the feeds on Twitter.

A foreign correspondent reveals that Xinhua rewards journalists through its promotion system if they get the news out faster than AP and Reuters. Xinhua's foreign correspondents are encouraged to register on Twitter and to retweet the messages from Xinhua's Twitter account "New China." Even though Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are blocked in China, the staff from Xinhua's new media centre as well as the international news office in the media study centre have access to log on to these sites. However, journalists from other domestic departments do not have authorized access to Twitter.

"The fact that Twitter and Facebook are not registered in China," says one correspondent, "is a matter of business and law. As foreign companies, if they want to join the Chinese market, then they are obliged to obey our local laws. For us, we use these social media to keep in touch with our colleagues abroad. In this way of management, Xinhua intends to form a more centralized voice" (M07).

Currently, Xinhua only hires contracted foreign journalists and editors to polish the language and there are very few cases where foreign experts write news for Xinhua.

Therefore, there are filtering procedures before Xinhua tweets on Twitter. International news will first go through the foreign correspondents' personal choices, and then through the selection by the team of the new media centre. This process, as I distill it from the interview data, is illustrated schematically in the following diagram.

Correspondents	→	Headquarters in Beijing	→	New media center	→	Single account on Twitter

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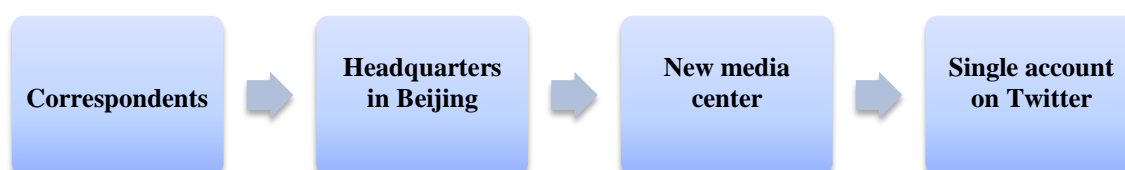
[23] These journalists' work relations would still be at their original departments. According to my respondents, their work at the new media centre is only temporary and usually lasts about three to six months.

In the case of Weibo, Xinhua relies on Weibo to reach a broad audience. By reposting news on Weibo, Xinhua acquires a network with its online followers and so reaches the audiences on social media. One analyst from Xinhua's media study centre comments: "Social media have redefined the traditional media like Xinhua, in every part of news production and distribution, and Xinhua leads, supervises, and guides public opinion on Weibo (M04)."

In order to increase the number of followers on Weibo, Xinhua sets up different accounts according to the functions of departments. According to the respondents, these accounts have not much connection with each other, as this is more of a strategy to increase the total number of followers in competition with other state media outlets, such as CCTV and the *People's Daily*. These different state media outlets compete with each other for the share of the budget from the central government on internal and external communication. According to a respondent, Xinhua puts a lot of emphasis on follower numbers when assessing the impact of the *People's Daily*, Xinhua, and CCTV on social media platforms such as Weibo, Twitter, and Facebook (M04). To manage its many accounts on Weibo, Xinhua's team in the new media centre will supervise all its accounts, in order to make sure the content does not contain political mistakes.

The difference between Xinhua's International Department (*Guojibu*, 国际部) and Xinhua's Foreign Affairs Department (*Duiwaibu*, 对外部) is that the former reports international news in Chinese to domestic audiences and the latter is responsible for distributing news to international audiences, mainly in English, but also in other languages. Therefore, the foreign correspondents send back the news packages to the International Department before they are broadcasted to Chinese audiences. In terms of how Xinhua reaches out to the target audiences, there are different communication strategies on Weibo and Twitter.

First, Xinhua's accounts on international social media platforms (including Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube) have all changed their names to "New China." This new name,

commented on by Xinhua journalists, is a literal translation of Xinhua's Chinese characters "新华," in order to provide a name easier for international audiences to remember. Setting up all these accounts under a uniform name, "New China," also symbolizes a more modern and centralized way of management in Xinhua. In contrast to this, Xinhua has set up different accounts on Weibo, with different focuses according to department. For instance, Xinhua Viewpoint (translated from 新华视点) and China Net Affairs (translated from 中国网事), set up by Xinhua's domestic department and the online news program, provide information on what happens in China. Xinhua International (新华国际) and Xinhua iReport (新华我报道) that are set up by the international department and the overseas department, mainly distribute international news. This is to attract larger audiences who are interested in different types of news. Second, in order to study the international target audiences, the international news office will study popular articles on Twitter and then send them to each bureau and individual journalist with comments on why these articles are shared by many followers. With domestic audiences on Weibo, Xinhua's staff can directly get information and users' data from the Weibo company to observe and analyse what interests different groups of audiences.

My respondents from Xinhua tend to agree that there are differences in Xinhua's external and internal communication strategies. Xinhua's external communication strategies are to centralize China's voice for international audiences. Even though the strategy to counter the impression of China being a monolithic and totalitarian regime would be to let more different voices speak, the approach of "centralize the strength, centralize the voice" (*jizhong liliang*, *tongyi fasheng*, 统一力量, 集中发声) is widely acknowledged among my respondents from Xinhua. Xinhua provides news about what is happening in China as well as reviews from Chinese media on events happening abroad. The editors' choices are based on the government's foreign policy to not interfere with other countries' domestic affairs, and to keep a balance between conflicting powers. For internal communication, Xinhua plays the role of the mouthpiece of the Party. The principle is to repost positive stories and the policies and decisions of the Party to domestic audiences. However, in reports on disasters and major international events, Xinhua does not distinguish between internal and external communication. The journalists will be very proactive in providing lots of facts and data for objective and factual reports. Noticing that the social media platforms have speeded up the spread of news within and outside China, the journalists also see the tendency that the line between Xinhua's internal and external communication strategies is getting blurred.

Based on my respondents' perceptions of what constitutes international news for Xinhua, there is a tendency to select more international occurrences that relate to China or relate to more developed countries. From Xinhua's administrative perspective, the most important distinction in international news is: news related to China, and news not related to China. From the journalists' reporting perspective, however, the most important distinction is between emergencies and daily events. Xinhua's news workers often have to decide between Xinhua's news values and their own journalistic values. One editor says:

> We use common journalistic values when reporting on international events that do not involve China. These values are accuracy, timeliness, and audience rate. However, as editors, we have to choose very selectively when it comes to events involving China and especially the negative comments about China. As the news written by foreign journalists also contains their opinions and positions, we will decide if it is necessary to keep the negative comments or omit them, based on our judgment of whether they are abusive or constructive criticism. If they are abusive, then there is no need to pass them on to the audiences. (M10)

This argument of selecting what to report to domestic audiences is not uncommon among the Xinhua editors. The yardstick for judging what is or is not "abusive" is based on the editors' interpretation of national interest. On the one hand, the idea of "letting people hear what is being said about China by others" was originally a task assigned to the newspaper *Cankao Xiaoxi* (参考消息) by Chairman Mao. According to Mao, receiving "criticism" was to "give a vaccination to the Chinese people" (*gei Zhongguoren zhongniudou*, 给中国人种牛痘). On the other hand, the central government also guides the media outlets to "spread positive energy" (*chuanbo zhengnengliang,* 传播正能量) throughout society. This is partially because, according to my respondents, journalists are better trained to assess such news, whereas the domestic audiences are not necessarily prepared and "the quality of the people" (*renkou suzhi*, 人口素质) is still quite low. One editor from *Cankao Xiaoxi* adds: "even if we report negative news from abroad, what is the use and how does it contribute to the people?" (M06).

Most of the journalists in the interviews mention that Xinhua as the state media outlet is not trying to compete in international news coverage with English media such as AP and Reuters, but to have a different voice to tell China stories. This means that there is potentially a target conflict here between journalists and policymakers. The policymakers view discourses as

effectively a zero-sum game between competing nations, meaning that they would be in favour of replacing the one-sided stories about China that the foreign media tell with equally one-sided stories about China that the authorities have approved. This is a rather different approach than the agenda of most journalists: to assure diversity in news reports about China or any other topic. The target conflict may lead to different understandings of "information," "news," and "discourse" between journalists and policymakers.

4.3 Conclusion

The government's external and internal communication policies have significant effects on the quickly developing media industry, particularly on the management styles and working environment for the news workers in the state media outlets. However, the changes in the media industry do not necessarily contribute to a successful national image building that is in favour of the central government. Digital media have raised both challenges and opportunities for the government and have shaped its communication strategies. On the one hand, the government is formulating new policies and rules to regulate online activities of both state and non-state actors and to catch up with the "empowering network society" (Castells, 2010a); on the other hand, digital media have become the instruments for the government to guide public diplomacy, to facilitate e-governance, to develop means for cyber security, and to reach target audiences through different media platforms.

The yardstick of what is right, what is positive, and what is to be avoided or omitted in news reporting and social media messaging relies on the news workers' judgments of national security and national interest. The notion of national interest is often referred to as "the big picture" (*daju*, 大局) in the policy papers, which indicates the government's overall aim to maintain stability and to ensure its "peaceful rise." Therefore, "national interest" in terms of internal and external communication includes ensuring cyber security, keeping a safe and stable environment for domestic public opinion, improving China's foreign relations, and constructing a positive national image. Rather than always being in line with the government's interest, the news workers' interpretation of national interest is in the broader framework of nationhood in which they define their national identity of being Chinese. In this framework of nationhood, which is larger than the nation-state, news workers from the state media outlets interpret the government's guidelines, negotiate for more space of reporting,

and even push for media change. The government's directions for a de-centralized internal communication are to ensure the state media outlets' leading position in the pluralistic media platforms. Compared to this, the steps to form a centralized voice in external communication are intended to make the media adapt to more nuanced and changing foreign relations. However, the question of whether this centralized voice, together with a unified story, will ever be convincing to foreign audiences, who expect debate and conflict, still remains.

Hassid's analysis of the typology of contemporary Chinese journalists identifies four types of journalists. These include "mouthpieces" of the Communist Party who tend to work for "old-line CCP papers"; "American-style professionals" who are committed to neutral and independent reporting; "advocacy professionals" who aim to push for policy change; and "workaday journalists" who are usually freelance or contract news workers and do not necessarily hold a professional ethos (Hassid, 2011). In his opinion, both "mouthpieces" of the Communist Party and "American-style professionals" do not represent and dominate the Chinese news environment; it is in fact the "advocate professionals" who cover the sensitive events and engage in policymaking and media change. In this regard, my respondents tend to share similar features with the "advocate professionals" identified in Hassid's analysis. These "advocate professionals," some of whom were possibly "old-line CCP reporters" or "American-style professionals" before, have demonstrated their will to push for policy change over time. By accepting my requests for interviews, these journalists and editors are open to share their opinions and answer my questions. They have shown a passion for working in the media industry and yet are concerned about telling good China stories to the outside world. My interviews with policymakers, academics, and media practitioners indicate that there are strong currents in China's media that push for policy changes. However, my respondents also express that in order to ensure domestic stability, the process of institutional and media change will take a long time.