

6

Xi's *dao* on new censorship: The party's new approaches to media control in the digital era

Shuyu Zhang

This chapter offers new insights into the Communist Party of China's (CPC) renewed determination and updated apparatuses to tame social media and control online discourse. Using Chinese President Xi Jinping's speeches on media control from 2013 through 2019 as points of departure, it explores several key themes in online censorship in China, which has become more internalised, systematic and far-reaching in the population under Xi's leadership. Xi's conceptualisation of censorship dictates continuities and shifts in the party's policies on media control: while state censorship is further confirmed on structural and legislative levels, it is now realised by a network of censorious agents, with the party and Xi himself at the apex of power. The CPC's authority and control over agencies and individuals largely occur through Foucauldian 'self-managing', where internet platforms and netizens alike are driven to become their own censors. The purpose, as Xi defines it in culturally ingrained terms, is to achieve a clear and uncontaminated online ecology filled with 'positive energy', a grassroots term manipulated to represent the CPC's ideology superiority and to clamp down on free expression online on the pretext that they embody only negativity uncondusive to the nation's grand agenda.

New language for new censorship

Censorship practised in its strict sense often involves repressive intervention and/or the removal of undesired materials from transmission by an authoritative power (Müller, 2004, p. 4). The socialist media censorship system that came into existence after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 is of a similar repressive nature. It incorporates the Leninist conceptualisation of the media as 'the eyes, ears, tongue and throat of the party' (cf. Brady, 2017, p. 129) and remains largely effective to this day, as a result of the *nomenklatura* system it borrowed from its Soviet 'brother-in-arms': trusted cadres are appointed to senior management roles in propaganda departments and media organisations such as editorial committees in news agencies to facilitate the party's surveillance over what China's vast population read, watch and listen to.

In the face of the ideological confrontation between gradually commercialising media and the party-state since the 1990s, the party adjusted its approach to media control and began to focus on market incentives, institutional control and coercive mechanisms (Esarey, 2005; Hassid, 2008). In addition to these external control mechanisms, the party also obtained compliance from media actors through the pervasive practice of self-censorship (Chin, 2018), which is best captured in Perry Link's (2002) 'anaconda on the chandelier' metaphor: the party's manipulation of uncertainty over what is permissible and what is not keeps journalists on their toes and fearful of punitive actions from the censorial authority, or 'the anaconda's strike'.

Nonetheless, while traditional censorship in its repressive and coercive form—consisting mainly of the surveillance, prohibition and manipulation of information—remains alive in today's China, new censorship in the digital age needs to be contextualised to take into consideration how the internet has changed journalistic practices and the shaping of public discourse and censorship understood beyond the dyad of control and resistance, as an interplay of power negotiation among the public, local agents and the party-state.

The 50th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China recorded 1.051 billion internet users in China as of August 2022, accounting for 74.4 per cent of its total population and one-fifth of global internet users (China Internet Network Information Centre, 2022). The sheer volume and speed of information transmitted online make it impossible for any

censor to remove every piece of information deemed politically sensitive or even regime-threatening (Xu, 2015; Zeng et al., 2019; S. Zhao et al., 2013). 'New media' also fundamentally transformed how people access and consume information, producing a burgeoning number of citizen journalists (Xin, 2010) as well as self-media (自媒体, *zimeiti*): internet-based, independently operated media accounts on social media (Sun & Zhao, 2022). The newly emerged forms of media are swift to fill the silence when traditional media are delayed or absent (Wu, 2018), especially during large-scale emergencies such as the 2017 Tianjin Explosion.

Meanwhile, state censors struggle to catch up, and thanks to the networking nature of social media, the viral spread of sensitive information can easily lead to online discourse management crises and social instability (Guo & Zhang, 2020; Han, 2018). The internet poses a challenge for authoritarian regimes because it empowers society to mobilise and exert a more active role in decision-making (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017). For example, the streak of anti-PX (Para-Xylene) rallies that went on from 2007 to 2014 in several Chinese cities represents one of the most successful offline protests mobilised and facilitated through social media (Lee & Ho, 2014).

The online mass has also become more adept at circumventing censorship. From VPN software to long picture texts (texts that are transformed into long pictures to evade word limits) and taboo words detection, the tools and measures constantly evolve, forcing the censorship mechanism to stay on par with technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence detection, which can now screen long pictures for censorable content with surprisingly high accuracy and efficiency. This applies to languages other than Chinese as well, from the author's experience. In less than 10 seconds after publication, the long picture containing a piece of text on 'political correctness in communist propaganda'—inverted, turned upside down and marked with random emojis/lines throughout as an effort to confuse the artificial intelligence detection—was censored and no longer accessible.

Language, in the form of homophones and memes, becomes the last resort for netizens to evade censorship in a witty and almost coded way, as exemplified in the cat-and-mouse race between the censors and people eager to find out Peng Shuai's allegation of being sexually assaulted by former vice president Zhang Gaoli. Her original post was deleted within 20 minutes and her name censored on Weibo and other social media platforms. Netizens first discussed the instances using 'PS' and 'ZGL', the first capital letters in

the pinyin of their Chinese names and, when the shorthand was censored as well, created memes by referring to their respective equivalents in the American context: ‘Have you heard about Serena Williams and Mike Pence?’

The internet and the new media that comes along with it have put traditional media and old censorship apparatuses—pre- and post-publication/posting censorship, the Great Firewall and keyword blocking—to test. Effective as they may be, the party-state headed by Xi Jinping recognises a pressing need to further tighten the clamp on the internet, which it sees as ‘the biggest variant on the battleground of public discourse’ and ‘a thorn in our side planted by the West to bring down China’ (China Digital Times, 2013). Propaganda and thought work have been elevated to an unprecedented status, as Xi warned top cadres and propagandists that ‘the fall of a regime always starts from the head’ and ‘irreversible historical mistakes would bear upon us if the party lost its firm grip on the power to lead, manage and speak on ideological work’.

It is this view that has given rise to Xi’s *dao* on new censorship, embodied in his series of talks on the party-state’s media control, written into official discourse through legislatures and policies, practised by his propagandists at all levels and incrementally materialised into the digital reality that we see in China today. This chapter examines a corpus made up of Xi’s six speeches, sourced from the National Propaganda and Thought Work conferences in 2013 and 2018, the Cyber Security and Digitalisation Work conferences in 2016 and 2018, the party’s News and Propaganda Work Seminar in 2016 and the 12th Politburo Group Study Session in 2019. These speeches showcase how language as an embodiment of power and knowledge is used to ‘maintain the status quo and to structure power relationships’ (Lovell, 2014, p. 221).

Excerpts from the corpus are supplemented with ethnographical observations and readings of laws and policies to illustrate how Xi’s rhetoric on media governance translates into strategies of media censorship and control, diligently implemented by various institutions and agents as guiding morals to shape the media landscape in China. This chapter proposes that the state as the ‘external, coercive and repressive’ censor is merely a secondary form of thought control (Bunn, 2015). It is internal to a much broader category of censorship by social institutions, realised through a communication network of censorious agents. The myriad of state and non-state actors involved in censoring contravening dissonance showcases a complex and

nuanced censorship mechanism in China's digital society, whereby the reach of state censorship is greatly extended through delegated censorship, censorship through reporting and increasingly heightened self-censorship.

The new language around the party-state's renewed approach to censorship and media control, while reiterating the party's all-encompassing role in media control ('the party leads the media'), departs from the traditional lines on authoritarian censorship as top-down and repressive. Instead, the new language stresses censorship internalised in a network of 'self-managing' censorious institutions and agents ('firm control is the absolute rule'). Xi conceptualises a 'comprehensive governing system of China's online ecology', in which service providers, as well as average netizens, are driven to take a more proactive role in maintaining and guarding a 'clear and uncontaminated digital space', as delegated censors and moderators.

It is also a space imbued with 'positive energy'—a concept embedded in grassroots cultural language yet redefined to preach populist 'political correctness' in the Chinese context ('positive energy is the overarching principle'). Members of the digital society who hold contravening beliefs are expected to self-edit their expressions or self-silence altogether, while the party digitalises its own propaganda apparatuses in order to stay uplifting and advantaged in the increasingly liberalised battlefield of discourse.

The party leads the media

The key theme at the core of Xi's rhetoric on media control and censorship is that the party has a firm grip on the media. In his 2013 speech at the National Propaganda and Thought Work Conference, Xi revived two slogans on media control from the Mao era: 'the party leads the media' (党管媒体, *dang guan meiti*) and 'the politicians run the newspaper' (政治家办报, *zhengzhijia ban bao*):

We must firmly hold onto the principle of the party leading the media and the politicians running the newspaper, the publications, the TV stations and the news websites. We must have enhanced Marxist values in news. Whatever we insist on or resist, whatever we say or do must fall in line with the party's interests and requirements. Be resilient and reliable. [要坚持党管媒体原则不动摇，坚持政治家办报、办刊、办台、办新闻网站，加强马克思主义新闻观教育。坚持什么、反对什么，说什么话、做什么事，都要符合党的要求，过得硬、靠得住。]

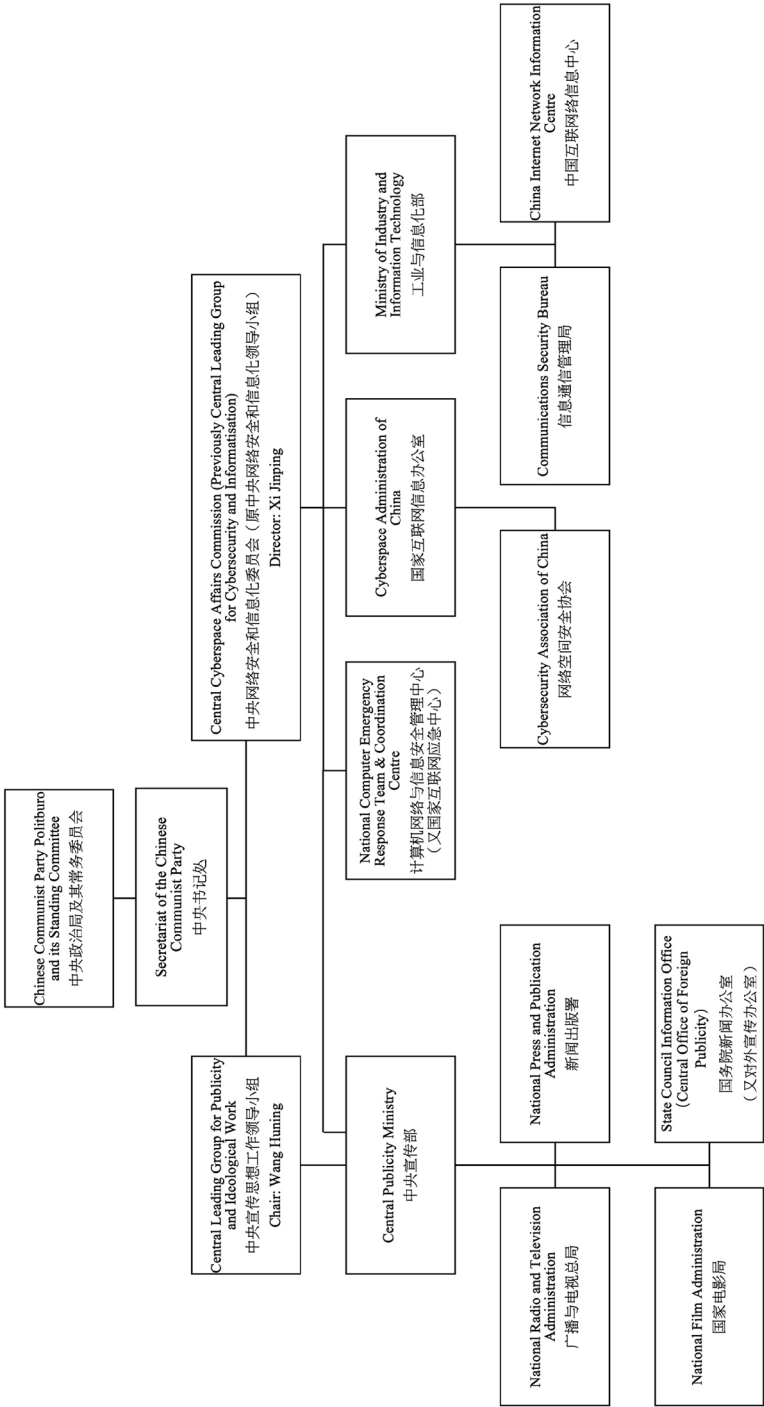


Figure 6.1: Organisational structure for media control and censorship following CPC institutional reforms of 2018

Source: Created by author.

While repetitively calling on his propagandists to resist 'temptations' and 'nihilism' with 'Marxism' and 'party character' (党性, *dangxing*), Xi sees the dire need to supervise their demeanour through 'centralised leadership on cybersecurity and information' at the state level. As shown in figure 6.1, this is realised through the centralisation of power in the party's organisational matrix, with the Politburo Standing Committee at the apex of oversight over multiple powerful bureaus and departments, coordinating with one another in media control and censorship. The structure consolidated power to the Leading Small Groups at the top of the hierarchy: (1) the Central Leading Small Group for Propaganda and Thought Work, headed by Politburo Standing Committee member Wang Huning, and (2) the former Central Leading Small Group for Internet Security and Informatisation, now the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, headed by Xi Jinping himself.

Together, the Leading Small Group and the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission develop and issue guiding principles on all matters related to propaganda and information media policies, as well as supervise their implementation. However, since the party's 2018 institutional reform of its organisational structure, the two bodies have had different points of focus in their objectives and distribution of power. The Leading Small Group for Propaganda and Thought Work now directly harnesses both old and new media through the Central Publicity Department. It administers control over radio, television, film, the press, publications and the like—traditionally referred to as 'old media'—as well as some forms of 'new media', including online publications, news and games.

Meanwhile, the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, under Xi's directorship, bears more authority over media control and censorship on the internet (Cheung, 2018, p. 316). The commission supplants the roles previously carried out by the State Council, coordinating the Central Publicity Department and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. Zhuang Rongwen, one of the eight deputy heads of the Central Publicity Department, leads the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC).

As the enforcement agency for the commission, the CAC, along with its branch offices at the provincial, municipal and, on occasion, local levels, is responsible for the management of online services and internet security, as well as regulating and censoring content that is published online. It exercises control over online discourse through directives issued to social media platforms and major news portals, a measure traditional to the party's

propaganda work that provides guidelines on information distribution and agenda-setting on specific social issues, especially those of a sensitive nature or relevant to national interests, such as China's stance on the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Moreover, under the aegis of Xi, the CAC is further empowered to 'legalise the internet' through CAC-issued legislatures and CAC-led joint law enforcement with other ministries and government bodies, which Xi envisaged in his talks as an essential component of 'governing under the rule of law' (依法治国, *yifa zhiguo*): 'Rule the internet, operate the internet and use the internet by law. And ensure that the internet operates in a healthy manner on law-abiding tracks' (要推动依法管网、依法办网、依法上网，确保互联网在法治轨道上健康运行).

As shown in table 6.1, this vision was subsequently materialised into a comprehensive and ever-growing list of laws, regulations, provisions, rules and CPC decisions on telecommunications and internet use, all either drawn up or revised after 2012, the year Xi took office. A majority of those that concern internet control were issued by the Cyberspace Administration of China or the State Internet Information Office, which are both under the supervision of the Xi-led Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission.

Table 6.1: Laws and regulations on information control through telecommunication (inclusive of media content)

Name — Chinese	Name — English	Issuing authority
全国人大常委会关于加强网路资讯保护的決定	Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on Strengthening Information Protections on Networks	Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2012
中华人民共和国电信条例	Regulations on Telecommunications of the People's Republic of China	Issuing and revision authority: The State Council (issued in 2000, revised in 2014 and 2016)
中华人民共和国网路安全法	Cybersecurity Law of the People's Republic of China	Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2016
互联网群组资讯服务管理规定	Provisions on the Administration of Internet Group Information Services	Cyberspace Administration of China, 2017
互联网跟贴评论服务管理规定	Provisions on the Administration of Internet Comment Posting Services	Cyberspace Administration of China, 2017

Name — Chinese	Name — English	Issuing authority
互联网新闻信息服务许可管理实施细则	Detailed Rules for the Licensed Management of Internet News Information Services	State Internet Information Office, 2017
微博客信息服务管理规定	Provisions on the Administration of Microblog Information Services	Cyberspace Administration of China, 2018
网络资讯内容生态治理规定	Provisions on Ecological Governance of Network Information Content	Cyberspace Administration of China, 2019
中国共产党宣传工作条例	Regulations on the Party's Publicity Work	Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 2019
互联网资讯服务管理办法	Provisions on the Administration of Internet Information Services (Draft Revisions for the Solicitation of Public Comments)	Issuing authority: the State Council, 2000 Revision authority: Cyberspace Administration of China, 2021

Source: Authors' summary.

The rules provide legal grounds for censorship and online discourse management on the whole. For example, the *Provisions on Ecological Governance of Network Information Content* (2021) dedicates an entire section to topics that internet content creators are encouraged to produce, replicate and publish, including those that promote Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era, in other words, Xi Jinping Thought (习近平思想, *Xi Jinping sixiang*). Conversely, there are also topics that content creators should not engage in or should take preventative and boycotting measures against; that is, topics that are censorable or even punishable under the 'rule of law', such as those that 'threaten the honour and interests of the nation' or 'distort, defame, insult or deny stories and spirits of national heroes or martyrs'.

The legislative arm extends to every aspect of online discussion, casting a wide legal dragnet over anyone who voices their opinion online. For one, the *Provisions on the Administration of Internet Comment Posting Services* made real-name registration a prerequisite for commenting online, be it in the form of 'texts, emoticons, emojis, pictures or *danmu* [bullet comments commonly used in animation, comics and gaming websites]'. Even discussions taking place in private chat groups are not free from scrutiny, and in-group members may be subjected to 'warnings, suspension from posting, or group termination', according to the *Provisions on the Administration of Internet Group Information Services*.

Joining the forces from other government agencies—specifically, that of the public security system—the CAC and its local branches are able to govern most of the internet censorship, effectively silencing and deterring dissonance online and offline. Depending on the scale of harm that the information might have caused in the online sphere, further prosecution in reality could follow. This can be as simple as a ‘chat over a cup of tea’ (请喝茶, *qǐng he cha*), a phrase that refers to informal questioning or detention by public security (Han, 2018, p. 43), or as serious as imprisonment.

This was what happened to Wuhan doctor Li Wenliang after he published information about a ‘suspected new virus outbreak’ in a private WeChat group to warn his university classmates who also worked as doctors in December 2019. He was summoned to the local public security bureau and reprimanded for ‘publishing untruthful speech and seriously disturbing social order’, after screenshots of his in-group post were disseminated to the wider public on Weibo. A similar fate was shared by investigative journalist Luo Changping, one of the latest to join the growing list of journalists and commentators who have been detained and imprisoned for questioning China’s role in the Korean War on Weibo (Myers & Chien, 2021). His original Weibo post was censored and his social media accounts ‘permanently terminated’ on the grounds that he ‘defames national heroes’. Furthermore, Luo was detained by public security and later sentenced to seven months in prison, a ‘voluntary donation’ of ¥80,000 (equivalent to A\$18,000) to the Memorial of the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea, and a public apology.

Beyond the Great Firewall, Chinese living and studying overseas have become new targets of state censorship as their social media behaviour on international platforms such as Twitter (now X) is closely scrutinised by Chinese authorities. However mild or facetious it may be, any negative portrayal of the country or content considered to be ‘reactionary’ or ‘national interest threatening’ could lead to their families in China being harassed and monitored or to the original poster being summoned to the local Public Security Bureau and reprimanded once they return to China (Xiao & Mozur, 2021).

Nonetheless, the ultimate role of the CAC resides in not only tackling individual dissidents but also reining in the internet as a whole and ensuring the party’s unyielding lead on the new media. In addition to the ongoing Operation Qinglang (清朗行动) to ‘cleanse and de-contaminate

the online space', taking its name from Xi's quote 'returning a clear and uncontaminated sky to the online space', the CAC further chaired or engaged in cross-ministry law enforcement campaigns against specific 'chaos in the cyberspace', including fandom fights, rigged algorithms, internet water armies and commentators paid by commercial interests to manipulate public opinion through news, gossip and disinformation (also known as marketing accounts; 营销号, *yinxiashaohao*). In its most recently announced campaign in September 2022, the CAC is going to collaborate with nine other ministries, including the Department of Public Security and the Supreme People's Court, in sweeping away 'internet Black and Evil crimes'.

These campaigns established the CAC as the overlord that, despite the dispersion and perversion of power in media control and censorship, rules over other state actors in exercising the party's will on controlling internet discourse through administrative and legislative means. The level of power centralisation also allows the CAC unprecedented control over internet service providers, which now assume a dual role. On the one hand, they are expected to act in coordination with CAC directives and follow suit in CAC-led campaigns to regulate and censor its users. In August 2022, Weibo reported censoring 18,000 accounts and more than 19 million posts as part of its response to the CAC Counter Cyberbullying campaign. Weibo further culled some 251 million accounts following the CAC's Counter Water Army campaign starting from December 2021.

At the same time, they are bound by law to become their own censors, enforcing state censorship as delegated censors. As clarified in the *Provisions on Ecological Governance of Network Information Content*, internet platforms are by law the 'main bodies to shoulder the responsibility of content management', which means promoting and recommending favourable content on trending topics or on their front page, while not featuring any 'inappropriate contents' that might adversely affect the internet ecology, such as inappropriate comments on large-scale emergencies. Internet platforms are driven to innovate and upgrade their own censorship apparatus to keep unfavourable content under control, while the party-state maintains its firm control on the platforms through administrative and punitive actions.

Firm control is the absolute rule

Despite its command of the control room, the party relies on a myriad of intermediary actors within a ‘regime of truth’ to implement the ambitions and visions of the upper echelon of media control and censorship at local levels (G. Yang, 2011, p. 1044). While the CPC’s control of the new media and online discourse is absolute, the control apparatus is not monolithic. It involves a dynamic set of measures realised and internalised through various agents and institutions, or, in Xi’s words, a comprehensive, multi-agent governing system: ‘We need to improve on the capability to govern the internet comprehensively and form a comprehensive governing system that incorporates economic, legislative and technical measures, a system that is led by the party, administered by the government, delegated to responsible enterprises, supervised by the society and netizen’s self-discipline’ (要提高网络综合治理能力，形成党委领导、政府管理、企业履责、社会监督、网民自律等多主体参与，经济、法律、技术等多种手段相结合的综合治网格局).

Xi calls on internet service providers to shoulder their ‘social and moral responsibility’ and take a more proactive role in bearing the cost and responsibility of censorship, all in the name of ‘industry self-management’ (行业自律, *hangye zizhi*) while the CAC remains the supervising body. This arrangement was confirmed by law, first in 2017 by the *Detailed Rules for the Licensed Management of Internet News Information Services* and again in 2019 by the *Provisions on Ecological Governance of Network Information Content*. The provisions clearly outline the responsibility of internet service platforms to censor published information and comments, as well as real-time surveillance (实时巡查, *shishi xuncha*) to identify potentially ‘harmful’ posts and first response to public opinion crises. They also make it compulsory for platforms to set up a designated role for the delegation of censorship or, consistent with the theme of Operation Qinglang, for ‘internet ecology governance’.

Failure to perform proper and timely censorship leads to jurisdictional talks with the local branch of the CAC or, worse still, direct penalties. In December 2021, Weibo was fined an additional ¥3 million (equivalent to A\$600,000) for ‘repeatedly publishing illegal information’, on top of 44 penalties—totalling ¥14.30 million (almost A\$3 million)—imposed by the CAC from January to November that year.

Through its heavy-handed punitive actions, the party-state fosters a chilling environment in which internet platforms as delegated censors respond with excessive caution and enthusiasm, censoring any information that might catch the attention of higher authority and in turn trigger a penalty. This allows the party-state to remain less visible in the actual censorship process while remaining present in its control through the delegation of censorship. In fact, empirical data compiled by Sun Taiyi and Zhao Quanshan (2022) suggest that, of the 73 articles censored in their self-media account on WeChat, two-thirds resulted from delegated censorship rather than direct state censorship.

The majority of delegated censorship is carried out as prevention rather than mitigation as service providers are prompted to stay on the safe side and practise strict pre-posting censorship and swift post-posting censorship, rather than waiting for sensitive information to develop into potential public opinion crises.

In the case of Weibo, for example, pre-posting can take the form of the traditional blacklist of taboo words, as well as smarter technologies that attend to censorship evasion. Service or content providers constantly monitor the frequently updated list of taboo words (Vuori & Paltemaa, 2015). A list leaked in 2016 by a previous censor who worked for Leshi, an online video company, contains some 35,467 words or word combinations related to Xi. Some of the latest filtered words include the name and works of Xi's critics (China Digital Space, 2020). In just two days, Yan Geling, a renowned Chinese American novelist, was entirely wiped out on Chinese social media for calling out the Xi administration on its inert response and lack of transparency in addressing women's rights issues and human trafficking, following the astonishing story of the chained mother of eight (China Digital Times, 2022).

Online content containing a taboo word is automatically filtered and saved to a draft box, where it remains until the sensitive content has been removed. This often requires a trial-and-error process to determine which word is the culprit. The latest blacklisting nonetheless involves the creation of an echo chamber of one's own, where censorship takes place without the original poster even realising that it is in effect. The Weibo posts deemed to be 'inappropriate for public dissemination' or comments that contain 'inappropriate speech'—most likely in violation of Article 27 of Weibo's Community Management Regulations (Sina Weibo, 2021; see table 6.2), which cites extensively from *Provisions on Ecological Governance of Network*

Information Content—may appear to the original poster as successfully posted while in fact being subject to a ‘cap on readership’ (限流, *xianliu*), which limits its likelihood of being pushed to their followers’ timeline, or downright ‘screened’ (过滤, *guolü*), that is, not readable to anyone but the original posters themselves.

Table 6.2: Article 27 of Sina Weibo’s Community Management Regulations

Article 27: Users should not publish any information harmful to [discussion of] current affairs, which includes information that endangers national and social security under current laws and regulations. That is, information that:
1. Opposes the basic principles established by the constitution
2. Harms the unity, sovereignty, or territorial integrity of the nation
3. Reveals national secrets, endangers national security, or threatens the honor or interests of the nation
4. Promotes terrorism, extremism, or incites acts of terrorism or extremism
5. Incites ethnic hatred or ethnic discrimination, undermines ethnic unity, or harms ethnic traditions and customs
6. Undermines national policies on region, promotes evil teachings and superstitions
7. Spreads rumours, disrupts social order and destroys societal stability
8. Distorts, defames, insults, or denies stories and spirits of national heroes or martyrs
9. Promotes illicit activity, gambling, violence, or calls for the committing of crimes
10. Calls for disruption of social order through illegal gatherings, formation of organisations, protests, demonstrations, mass gatherings and assemblies
11. Has other content which is forbidden by laws, administrative regulations and national regulations.

Source: Sina Weibo Community Management Regulations, May 2020.

Weibo censors also actively surveil digital platforms, taking precautions by shutting down the comment sections, allowing only ‘carefully picked comments’ or no comments at all, on posts that are likely to draw public outcry. One of the latest such posts includes a one-liner posted by commentator/stand-up comedian Chen Di: ‘For how long will this performance go on?’ Posted on 18 September 2022, the day after the quarantine bus crash in Guizhou, in which 27 people on board were killed, Chen’s post seems to have been interpreted by censors not as a reference to his own show business, in all likelihood, but as a criticism of the province’s mass transportation policy, which sought to ship all confirmed cases and contacts to quarantine centres in order to meet its Zero-COVID deadline. First, comments to this post were made unavailable and subsequently the reposting function, as people reposted the original line and invited thoughts on possible interpretations of ‘a performance’. Another instance involves

the post by the official account of the Office of Foreign Spokesperson on 9 September 2022 that commended the CPC as 'people-centred and deeply loved by its people'. Unsurprisingly, only comments that resonate with this party-loving line were 'carefully picked' and made available in the comment section.

However, when sensitive information does slide under the radar, post-censorship through reporting needs to be involved. Weibo recruits its own service users as moderators (监督员, *jianduyuan*), or 'community volunteers', to help facilitate delegated censorship through reporting on posts that are 'violative of laws and regulations'. The active participation of netizens constitutes an integral element of the internet industry's effort to self-censor, or, as Xi remarks, 'self-discipline': 'We need to enhance the self-discipline of the internet industry, call on netizens to take an active part and mobilise all sectors to join forces in the governance' (要加强互联网行业自律, 调动网民积极性, 动员各方面力量参与治理).

As translated and included in table 6.3, the recruitment process, outlined in the official account of Weibo Community Volunteers, puts a strong emphasis on the applicant's ability to identify not only contents that are in violation of national laws and Weibo's own regulations but also the code used to encrypt such information and evade censorship. The moderators should preferably have prior experience of detecting and reporting sensitive information when automatic identification falls short.

Table 6.3: How to become a Weibo volunteer

<p>Weibo users can apply to become a volunteer on a voluntary basis, providing that they:</p> <p>Are older than 18 years of age;</p> <p>Have a registered Weibo account for at least a year that is linked to a phone number;</p> <p>Have Weibo Credit score higher than 120;</p> <p>Must ensure the provision of factual and up-to-date personal information. They need to have some experience with reporting to correctly report on contents violative of laws and regulations;</p> <p>Pass the ability test on identifying contents violative of laws and regulations. The test mainly examines the applicant's ability to identify contents violative of laws and regulations and reportable within their responsibility as moderators, such as those related to obscenity, gambling, evil teachings and martyr defamation. It also tests the applicant's familiarity with relevant regulations and requirements. Those who are unfamiliar with the basic features of these contents, including internet jargon, coded language and coreference, are not likely to pass the test.</p>
--

Source: Official account of Weibo Community Volunteers, September 2022.

On top of the prior screening in recruitment to ensure their readiness for the job, Weibo moderators are further subsidised with self-enrichment incentives attached to the action of reporting, making them less compliant or merciful with discussions of sensitive social issues. Moderators are ranked monthly on the total number of their valid reports, or ‘complaints’, as well as the ‘accuracy rate’ of these reports. A subsidy of as much as ¥5,000 (approximately A\$1,000 or US\$760) per month is awarded to moderators whose total number of reports rank top 500, with an ‘accuracy rate’ of more than 99 per cent; that is, more than 99 per cent of their reported posts include information that may be considered ‘harmful to the [discussion of] current affairs’ (时政有害, *shizheng youhai*)—again quoting Article 27 in its Community Management Regulations on ‘information that violates relevant laws and regulations’—and therefore censorable.

According to the official Weibo Moderators account, more than 2.44 million pieces of information (posts and comments) were taken down in August 2022 alone following complaints from ‘volunteers’. Should a piece of information be determined to be ‘harmful or dangerous’, the account might be ‘muted’ (禁言, *jin yan*), suspended (停用, *ting yong*) or permanently terminated (封号, *feng hao*). Real-name registration also makes possible real, offline consequences for any virtual, online non-conformity, as enforced through the public security system. Paid ‘volunteers’ work hand in hand with Weibo censors to create the comprehensive governing network of censorious agents as envisaged in Xi’s quote at the beginning of this section.

Positive energy is the overarching principle

The media’s adherence to the CPC agenda is an integral means by which the party shapes public opinion and influences it in the desired direction. The party has long adopted a hegemonic approach to controlling media coverage of internal affairs. Chinese media are expected to ‘accentuate the positive and minimize the negative’ (Brady, 2017, p. 136), especially when news topics involve domestic politics, national unity or social stability.

At the same time, as Maria Repnikova (2017) observed in her seminal work on media politics in China, media policy before Xi recognised the crucial role of media in public opinion supervision (舆论监督, *yulun jiandu*), through which ‘constructive criticism’ could serve as a measure of accountability, especially at the local level. While not dropping the idea of ‘positive reporting’ (正面报道, *zhengmian baodao*) altogether,

the Hu-Wen administration was not short of high-level statements in favour of the media's alternative role as the accountability and feedback channel, including the direct mentioning of the term 'public opinion supervision' in the 16th, 17th and 18th party congresses.

While the continuity is obvious in Xi's discourse on staying positive, in direct contrast to his predecessors is the scrapping of the term 'public opinion supervision' almost entirely from his speeches. The only mention of the term nonetheless comes together with 'positive propaganda': 'Public opinion supervision is in line with positive propaganda' (舆论监督和正面宣传是统一的).

The key to remaining critical and positive at the same time, according to Xi, rests in the renewed expression taken from the language of the grassroots: 'positive energy' (正能量, *zheng nengliang*), which could be roughly defined as 'any uplifting power and emotion, representing hope' (P. Yang & Tang, 2018).

Xi first adopted the term in his 2013 speech on propaganda and thought work and has since reiterated the importance of positive energy in multiple speeches. His redefinition of 'positive energy' closely aligns the concept with the party's political and ideological agenda, highlighting the positivity embodied in 'the achievements on reform and development, the economy and the improvement of the people's livelihood' and how these achievements essentially lay the foundation for the realisation of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (中华民族伟大复兴, *Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*) and the Chinese dream (中国梦, *Zhongguo meng*).

However, by reinforcing a sense of common duty for 'the greater good and the positive', it seeks to create a discourse that is itself hegemonic and functions as 'an impersonal form of control' (Bunn, 2015, p. 41). The semantic versatility of the catchphrase has been harnessed to reimagine the boundary of the 'speakeable'. The phrase 'positive energy' has been used to preach 'correct political direction' (正确政治方向, *zhengque zhengzhi fangxiang*), or 'political correctness' in the Chinese context, despite the fallacy in logic in this new definition: conflating 'the positive' with 'the party' and 'the party' with 'the people': 'Only through reporting on positivity can we add positive energy to society. Mainstream media need to take active leadership in this. The "party character" is in line with the "people character". We must insist on the media's political stance and follow the correct direction' (要报道这

些正面积积极的事情，这样才能给社会增添正能量。主流媒体在这方面要积极发挥引导作用。坚持党性和人民性相统一，就是要坚持讲政治，把握正确导向)。

The ‘political correctness’ prescribes an intolerance of ‘unpopular or critical opinions’ and thus endorses the silencing of contravening voices riddled with ‘negative energy’ (负能量, *fu nengliang*). Meanwhile, the intentional vagueness in what is considered negative left anyone whose opinion varies from the party line susceptible to censorship. Delegated censors adopt similar vague rules in telling the negative voices from the positive ones.

Since 2020 Weibo has been censoring information ‘harmful to [discussion on] current affairs’, despite its not being specified in its Community Management Regulations, on the grounds that it contains ‘negative information that breaches the boundaries set out by social morals or the institution’ (制度底线, *zhidu dixian*). Followers of Lao Dongyan, a law professor and a policy critic, suspect that this was the reason her Weibo account was wiped clean on 17 September 2022, after she voiced concerns about the infringement of privacy and risks to personal information in big-data tracing and blanket surveillance. As China’s Zero-COVID policy continues, it could well be that Lao’s negative posts breached the boundaries set out by the party-state’s determination to wipe out the virus entirely.

The conflation of the party and the people further adds a populist undertone to negative connotations attached to party critics, who, according to Xi, attack the party and the country ‘with bias’, ‘for fame’ or ‘out of self-deprecation’. Recent years have seen critics being subjected not only to institutional censorship facilitated by the state or the platforms but also to online ostracism, compelling them to self-correct or self-censor. Unless they can verify their good intentions in providing ‘normal, reasonable and kind criticisms and supervision’—deemed acceptable by Xi—they would have to hold back their opinion for fear of possible persecution offline, as well as attacks by the offended netizens online, who tend to question not the merits and validity of their criticism but their intention and identity.

Netizens were quick to question Luo Xiang, a criminal law scholar who garnered more than 250 million followers on Weibo for his humorous way of explaining legal cases to the general public, on the intention of his post, ‘one should adhere to good virtues and not be enslaved by honour’. The post was made on 8 September 2020, the day when President Xi awarded the Medal of the Republic to respiratory expert Zhong Nanshan to commend

his contribution to China's combat of COVID-19. The timing of the post led to speculations that Luo was mocking the celebration of the country's victory over the pandemic. Despite the denial of such ill intention, Luo was nonetheless attacked by netizens for this seemingly out-of-place 'negativity'. He announced on the same day that he would temporarily 'refrain from posting on Weibo' and subsequently aborted his Weibo account entirely in June 2021.

With the withering of contravening voices, Xi further calls on his propagandists to fill the void with 'positive energy', cancelling out the negativity online through adeptly steering propaganda and thought work through innovation and digitalisation. In the past, state-owned media was frequently ridiculed by the public for its archaic preaching, obtuse language and laughable attempts at astroturfing through its 'Fifty-cent Army' (五毛党, *wu mao dang*), who pose as spontaneous grassroots voices by extensively posting pro-party content online when they are in fact organised and sponsored by it (Benney & Xu, 2018; Han, 2015).

The party-state realised that to drown out the negative with the positive in the digital era, it needed a formidable 'internet army' (网军, *wang jun*) with insider knowledge of new media and online platforms to secure the ideological high ground with a form of speech that is charged with 'positive energy'. In a 2013 speech on propaganda and thought work, Xi stated: 'The internet is our latest battleground of public discourse. We need to fully appreciate the characteristics and art of this war and exert ourselves in building a force online. We need to form a strong internet army to stave off the one-foot-tall devil with ten-foot-tall virtues' (网上斗争，是一种新的舆论斗争形态。要深入分析网上斗争的特点和规律，精心组织网上斗争力量。要建设一支强大网军，做到魔高一尺、道高一丈)。

The 'internet army' consists of barrages of official public accounts (公众号, *gongzhong hao*) and political accounts (政务微博, *zhengwu weibo*), increasingly present on all kinds of Chinese social media: Weibo, WeChat, even the Chinese TikTok, Douyin. By 2020, the number of agency and official Weibo accounts had risen to 164,522, a jump of 173 per cent compared to the number in 2012 (Sina Weibo Data Centre, 2021). The official public accounts are directly run by propaganda departments or official institutions at all geographical and administrative levels: central, provincial, municipal, county and township, contributing to the party-

state's effort to shape the online media landscape into one of harmonious homogeneity and ensuring that party-endorsed news and information can reach as many recipients as possible and extend to a hyperlocal level.

These official accounts are further amplified as the favoured voices to pass on positivity in the supposedly pluralistic world of online expression through the party's whitelisting scheme (白名单, *baimingdan*), drafted and updated under the watch of the Cyberspace Administration of China (2021). Dividing online news service providers into three categories, the CAC grants only those in the first category—the 'whitelisted' category—the permission to report on current affairs, whereas the other two categories can reprint only content produced by those in the first category. In the latest revision of the list in 2021, hundreds of official public accounts on WeChat and Weibo were added to the whitelist, most owned by politically credible media outlets or directly run by propaganda departments at the national, provincial or prefectural levels. Meanwhile, several prestigious news agencies, including Caixin—known for its credible, in-depth, yet sometimes critical investigative journalism—were eliminated from the whitelist, ostensibly out of concern for their 'seriousness and credibility'. This move has been interpreted as Xi's strike on the negative voices that counter the positive voices in the realm of thought and public opinion.

These efforts result in the affluence of 'positive energy' online, produced by various official accounts and in all forms. In its 2021 round-up of top 500 'positive energy' paeans, the CAC listed the most 'positive' 100 pieces of online content across five categories: 'positive energy role models', 'positive energy writings', 'positive energy pictures', 'positive energy animation and audio-visual contents' and 'positive energy-themed activities' (results published on CCTV.com, 2021). Almost all are produced by official accounts, such as those affiliated with the Ministry of Public Security and state-run media, such as the *People's Daily* and *Global Times*. Topping the list was 'Learning in Progress' (学习进行时, *xuexi jinxingshi*)—*xuexi* as a homonym for both 'learning' and 'learning from Xi', a digital version of Xi's *Little Red Book*. Ran by the Xinhua News Agency, it was commended for its digital- and youth-friendly ways to propagate 'positive energy'—Xi's discourse—to the online population.

The 'positive energy' guards also contribute to the sanitation of stories that may contain 'negative energy' yet are redemptive through a positive spin. Official media were quick to jump on the story of the 'second uncle', an 11-minute video originally posted on the video-streaming website Bilibili,

featuring a middle-aged village carpenter who remains optimistic and positive despite a life of poverty, disability and other suffering. Although the experience of the 'second uncle' represents an obvious failed case of the party's poverty alleviation campaign and social welfare scheme for the disabled population, it was nonetheless turned into a dose of 'positive energy' for China's youth, fraught with 'mental burnouts' and tired of the rat race.

A collective of official accounts and state media reposted the video on Weibo, as part of an information campaign to promote the 'correct' attitude and virtues in the face of hardships. As shown in figure 6.2, of the 2,092 media that reported on the 'second uncle', 1,912 were official-affiliated media at different administrative levels, attracting a staggering 630 million clicks on the 'positive energy' hashtag #Second Uncle Cured My Mental Burnouts#. Meanwhile, questions about the root causes of the 'second uncle's' adversity, as well as criticisms of institutional negligence and the official move to extol individual misery, were conveniently censored and received little publicity, let alone follow-up investigation or discussion.

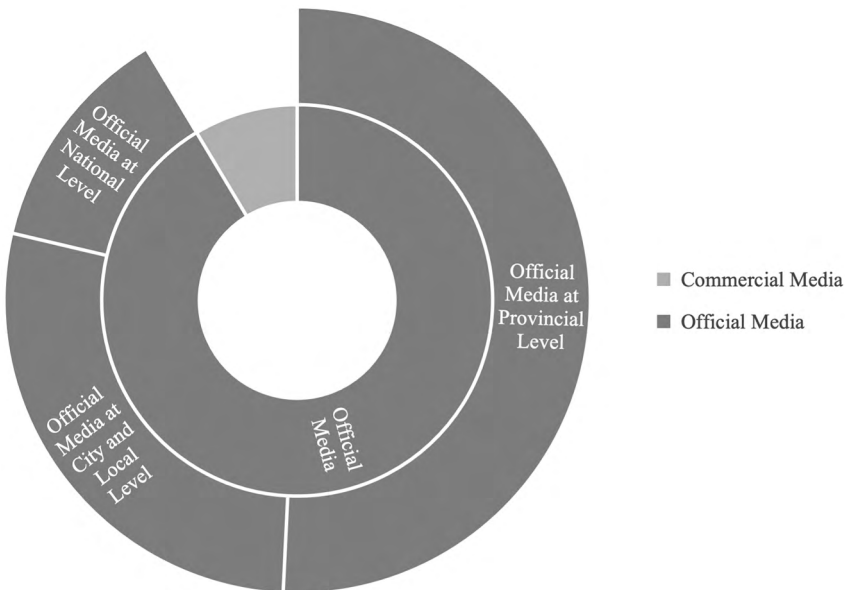


Figure 6.2: Percentage of official and commercial media that reported on the 'second uncle'

Source: Data extracted from Weibo trending topic and figure created by author.

By upholding ‘positive energy’ as the overarching rule, the media landscape under Xi’s leadership was revamped drastically and its main functions were redefined: its function of supervising public opinion was strongly repressed in the name of ‘political correctness’, while its channelling function was placed in the hands of those who are trusted and endorsed to set the agenda in a direction favourable to the party—official accounts and state media.

Conclusion

Using Xi’s speeches as a thread, this chapter examines the party-state’s control and censorship of Chinese media during the time of Xi’s leadership. While the censorship and media control apparatuses under Xi continue their repressive measures—recast in more technologically savvy forms to sift through sensitive information that has also evolved in its censorship evasion measures—it has become more ‘productive’ at the same time. This is reflected in its firmer control of internet platforms, which now have to shoulder the responsibility and cost, acting as their own censors through the delegation of state censorship, as well as censorship in ‘new forms of discourse, new forms of communication and new genres of speech’ (Bunn, 2015, p. 26).

Since 2012, when Xi took the helm, the party has reasserted its dominance of public discourse by establishing the Central Leading Small Group for Propaganda and Thought Work and the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission. These CPC-led groups encroach on the power of the State Council to coordinate and oversee China’s bureaucracy and administration, which is tasked with media control and censorship. Xi’s vision to ‘legalise’ the Chinese internet materialised into a growing volume of laws and regulations that cover every aspect of online discourse, drawn up and enforced by the CAC in concert with other state actors, specifically the public security system. It provides a firmer legal ground for censorship and persecution, equally effective to whistleblowers and critics within and beyond the Great Firewall.

At the same time, rather than rule information with an iron fist as it did in the Maoist era, the party has adopted an increasingly subtle and indirect approach to media surveillance and censorship. The social power that this imposes on various institutions and agents serves to enforce censorship in a nuanced and internalised way. Internet platforms are now, by law, the censor of themselves, while the CAC stays behind the scenes while remaining

in control through regular directives and administrative talks, as well as occasional heavy-handed penalties. Platforms as delegated censors are forced to draw up their own rules as guidelines for censorship, citing heavily from national laws and regulations and enforced with utmost caution to rule out any potential violation. Aside from active pre-censorship, manual censorship through reporting, where average netizens were made into accomplices in censorship, also contributes to the identification and silencing of sensitive or 'harmful' information.

The numerous control mechanisms introduced to tighten the party's grip on the media have been justified as a pursuit of 'positive energy'. The semantic versatility of this catchphrase has been exploited and appropriated as a guiding principle to suit the CPC's political agenda. 'Negative energy' embodied in dissonance and criticism is now subjected not only to state censorship and delegated censorship but also to heightened self-censorship. By aligning the positive with the correct and the people, the party acquiesced in online ostracism and cyber violence against negativity on populist grounds. Nonetheless, this is on the premise that the critics can speak loud enough on top of the deafening 'positive energy' to be heard in the first place.

The Xi administration has greatly improved its mastery of technology and discourse specific to digital-era propaganda and is successfully countering the grey and black forces that Xi Jinping identified as threats when he first came to power. Armed with updated knowledge of new media and guarded by a formidable 'internet army' of official accounts, the party is able to preach 'political correctness' in the Chinese context in a more digital-friendly way and drown out the negative voices through an overflow of 'positive energy', setting or even rewriting the agenda for the online population, which is subjected to the digital reality, modelled, recreated and heavily influenced by Xi's vision of a 'clear and uncontaminated space online'.

References

- Benney, J., & Xu, J. (2018) 'The decline of Sina Weibo: A technological, political and market analysis.' *Chinese Social Media: Social, Cultural and Political Implications*, ed. M. Kent, K. Ellis & J. Xu, pp. 221–35, Routledge. doi.org/10.4324/9781315160214

- Brady, M.A. (2017) 'Magic weapons: China's political influence activities under Xi Jinping' (paper presentation). Conference on the Corrosion of Democracy under China's Global Influence, Arlington, VA, 16–17 September. www.wilsoncenter.org/article/magic-weapons-chinas-political-influence-activities-under-xi-jinping
- Bunn, M. (2015) 'Reimagining repression: New censorship theory and after.' *History and Theory* 54(1): 25–44. doi.org/10.1111/hith.10739
- Cheung, T.M. (2018) 'The rise of China as a cybersecurity industrial power: Balancing national security, geopolitical and development priorities.' *Journal of Cyber Policy* 3(3): 306–26. doi.org/10.1080/23738871.2018.1556720
- Chin, S.J. (2018) 'Institutional origins of the media censorship in China: The making of the socialist media censorship system in 1950s Shanghai.' *Journal of Contemporary China* 27(114): 956–72. doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1488108
- China Central Television (2022) '2021 zhongguo zhengnengliang “wuge yibai” wangluo jingping pingxuan jieguo jiexiao' [2021中國正能量“五個一百”網絡精品評選結果揭曉, Results revealed on top 100 internet content on Chinese positive energy in five categories]. January. news.cctv.com/2022/01/29/ARTIA8heXcsrIhMzPvtPvtCk220128.shtml
- China Digital Space (2020) 'Guoxinban Xi Jinping min'gan ciku' [國新辦習近平敏感詞庫, Lists of censored words relevant to Xi Jinping (issued by State Council Information Office to Leshi)]. chinadigitaltimes.net/space/%E5%B0%BD%E6%96%B0%E5%8A%9E%E4%B9%A0%E8%BF%91%E5%B9%B3%E6%95%8F%E6%84%9F%E8%AF%8D%E5%BA%93
- China Digital Times (2013) 'Xi Jinping Bayijiu jianghua jingshen chuanda tigang quanwen' [習近平“8.19”講話精神傳達提綱全文, Full text of Xi Jinping's speech on 19th August 2013], November. chinadigitaltimes.net/space/习近平%228.19%22讲话精神传达提纲全文
- (2022) 'Dearth of official information on Xuzhou's shackled woman spurs citizen journalists and online sleuths.' chinadigitaltimes.net/2022/02/dearth-of-official-information-on-xuzhous-shackled-woman-spurs-citizen-journalists-and-online-sleuths
- China Internet Network Information Center (2022) 'The 50th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China.' www.cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/202204/P020220424336135612575.pdf
- Cyberspace Administration of China (2021a) 'Wangluo xinxi neirong shengtai zhili guiding' [網絡信息內容生態治理規定, Provisions on Ecological Governance of Network Information Content]. Retrieved 15 September 2022. www.cac.gov.cn/2019-12/20/c_1578375159509309.htm

- (2021b) 'Zuixinban hulianwang xinwen xinxi gaoyuan danwei mingdan' [最新版互聯網新聞信息稿源單位名單, The latest internet news information source list]. www.cac.gov.cn/2021-10/18/c_1636153133379560.htm
- Esarey, A. (2005) 'Cornering the market: State strategies for controlling China's commercial media.' *Asian Perspective* 29(4): 37–83. jstor.org/stable/42704523
- Guo, L., & Zhang, Y. (2020) 'Information flow within and across online media platforms: An agenda-setting analysis of rumor diffusion on news websites, Weibo, and WeChat in China.' *Journalism Studies* 21(15): 2176–95. doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1827012
- Han, R. (2015) 'Manufacturing consent in cyberspace: China's "Fifty-Cent Army".' *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 44(2): 105–34. doi.org/10.1177/186810261504400205
- (2018) *Contesting Cyberspace in China: Online Expression and Authoritarian Resilience*. Columbia University Press
- Hassid, J. (2008) 'Controlling the Chinese media: An uncertain business.' *Asian Survey* 48(3): 414–30. doi.org/10.1525/as.2008.48.3.414
- Lee, K., & Ho, M.S. (2014) 'The Maoming Anti-PX protest of 2014: An environmental movement in contemporary China.' *China Perspectives* 2014(2014/3): 33–9. doi.org/10.4000/chinapersonpectives.6537
- Lilleker, D.G., & Koc-Michalska, K. (2017) 'What drives political participation? Motivations and mobilization in a digital age.' *Political Communication* 34(1): 21–43. doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2016.1225235
- Link, P. (2002) 'China: The anaconda in the chandelier.' *New York Review of Books* 49(6): 1230–54. www.nybooks.com/articles/2002/04/11/china-the-anaconda-in-the-chandelier/
- Lovell, M. (2014) 'Languages of neoliberal critique: The production of coercive government in the Northern Territory Intervention.' In *Studies in Australian Political Rhetoric*, ed. J. Uhr & R. Walter, pp. 221–40. ANU Press. doi.org/10.22459/SAPR.09.2014
- Müller, B. (2004) 'Censorship and cultural regulation: Mapping the territory.' In *Censorship and Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age*, ed. B. Müller, pp. 1–31. Rodopi
- Myers, S.L., & Chien, A.C. (2021) 'Chinese journalist detained after criticizing government-sponsored blockbuster.' *New York Times*, October. www.nytimes.com/2021/10/08/world/asia/luo-changping-china-battle-at-lake-changjin.html

- Repnikova, M. (2017) *Media Politics in China: Improvising Power under Authoritarianism*. University Printing House
- Sina Weibo (2021) 'Weibo Shequ Gongyue' [微博社區公約, Weibo shequ gongyue], May. service.account.weibo.com/roles/gongyue?from=10B5395010&wzm=9006_2001&weiboauthorid=7504817032
- Sina Weibo Data Centre (2021) 'Weibo 2020 Yonghu Fazhan Baogao' [微博2020用戶發展報告, 2020 Official Report on Weibo Users]. data.weibo.com/report/reportDetail?id=456
- Sun, T., & Zhao, Q. (2022) 'Delegated censorship: The dynamic, layered and multistage information control regime in China.' *Politics and Society* 50(2): 191–221. doi.org/10.1177/00323292211013181
- Vuori, J.A., & Paltemaa, L. (2015) 'The lexicon of fear: Chinese internet control practice in Sina Weibo microblog censorship.' *Surveillance and Society* 13(3–4): 400–21. doi.org/10.24908/SS.V13I3/4.5404
- Wu, X. (2018) 'Discursive strategies of resistance on Weibo: A case study of the 2015 Tianjin explosions in China.' *Discourse, Context and Media* 26: 64–73. doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2018.05.002
- Xiao, M., & Mozur, P. (2021) 'A digital manhunt: How Chinese police track critics on Twitter and Facebook.' *New York Times*, December. www.nytimes.com/2021/12/31/technology/china-internet-police-twitter.html
- Xin, X. (2010) 'The impact of "citizen journalism" on Chinese media and society.' *Journalism Practice* 4(3): 333–44. doi.org/10.1080/17512781003642931
- Xu, D. (2015) 'Online censorship and journalists' tactics: A Chinese perspective.' *Journalism Practice* 9(5): 704–20. doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2014.982968
- Yang, G. (2011) 'Technology and its contents: Issues in the study of the Chinese internet.' *Journal of Asian Studies* 70(4): 1043–50. doi.org/10.1017/S0021911811001598
- Yang, P., & Tang, L. (2018) "'Positive energy": Hegemonic intervention and online media discourse in China's Xi Jinping era.' *China: An International Journal* 16(1): 1–22. doi.org/10.1353/chn.2018.0000
- Zeng, X., Jain, S., Nguyen, A., & Allan, S. (2019) 'New perspectives on citizen journalism.' *Global Media and China* 4(1): 3–12. doi.org/10.1177/2059436419836459
- Zhao, S., Gu, Y., Kang, L., & Dang, H. (2013) 'Circumventing the Great Firewall: The accommodation and defiance of Internet censorship among Chinese students.' Social Science Research Network. ssrn.com/abstract=2258659. doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2258659

This text is taken from *Political and Social Control in China: The Consolidation of Single-Party Rule*, edited by Ben Hillman and Chien-wen Kou, published 2024 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/PSCC.2024.06