

Curating activist journalism to defy China's "mainstream" narrative on X (Twitter)

Altman Yuzhu Peng, Chunyan Wu & Yu Sun

To cite this article: Altman Yuzhu Peng, Chunyan Wu & Yu Sun (19 Nov 2024): Curating activist journalism to defy China's "mainstream" narrative on X (Twitter), Critical Discourse Studies, DOI: [10.1080/17405904.2024.2430519](https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2024.2430519)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2024.2430519>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 19 Nov 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)




View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Curating activist journalism to defy China's "mainstream" narrative on X (Twitter)

Altman Yuzhu Peng ^a, Chunyan Wu ^b and Yu Sun ^c

^aApplied Linguistics, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK; ^bFaculty of Social Sciences, Northeastern University London, London, UK; ^cSchool of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

ABSTRACT

This article foregrounds the great translation movement (GTM), initially mobilised on X (formerly Twitter) in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as an example of activist journalism countering China's 'mainstream' narrative of the war and its broader implications. Using Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach, adapted to the specifics of social media communication, we examine GTM postings throughout the first calendar year of the war, highlighting how the GTM evolves into a broader activist-journalistic initiative that challenges the party-state beyond its involvement in the war. This paradigm of intervention unfolds as GTM activists report on evidential events within China that bear the potential to spark public contention outside of the party-state's censorship reach. By examining the dialectical relations between reportage and advocacy, this analysis demonstrates how activist journalism constitutes an emerging cross-border civic engagement, challenging a Southern authoritarian regime from the outside. A critical evaluation of activist journalism and its broader societal impacts is also provided, highlighting its progressive potential and future development in the Chinese context and beyond.

ARTICLE HISTORY



Received 27 December 2023
Accepted 13 November 2024

KEYWORDS

Activist journalism; China; dialectical-relational approach; Twitter; X

Introduction

Today, social media empower individual netizens to disseminate content across geographical boundaries, thereby enabling grassroots actors to renegotiate their power relations with resourceful institutions (Chouliaraki & Mortensen, 2022; Gray, 2019; Martini, 2018; Ristovska, 2016). In the context of such evolving power dynamics, activist journalism has emerged as a distinct variant of citizen journalism, characterised by members of the public producing newsworthy content ready for social-mediated communication¹ (Ginosar & Reich, 2022; Hartley & Askanius, 2021). Instead of merely reporting on events, activist journalism is primarily organised to stimulate public contention (Barnard, 2018). Traversing the conventional divisions between activism and journalism,

CONTACT Altman Yuzhu Peng  altman.peng@warwick.ac.uk  Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

it constitutes an emerging form of digital civic engagement that contributes grassroots dynamics to the democratic matrix (Nah & Chung, 2020).

Activist journalism plays a vital role in China, where its authoritarian rule urges civil society to retain resilience through grassroots self-mobilisation (Liu, 2020; Yang, 2016). Given the sophisticated censorship on domestic platforms, these initiatives demonstrate an increasing dependence on global digital infrastructure (Lu et al., 2024). An up-to-date example of this trend is the great translation movement (GTM), which is orchestrated by members of the Chinese diaspora who share an ambition to challenge the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) pro-Kremlin stance regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Establishing an official account on X (formerly known as Twitter), GTM activists relentlessly source Chinese texts and translate them into various languages to cover evidential events occurring within China (Liu, 2022). Intentionally foregrounding content that has the potential to provoke public contention, GTM postings invite international criticism of China's pro-Kremlin propaganda and its repercussions on the Chinese populace, thereby holding the CCP collaterally responsible for Russia's aggression.

Understanding the GTM as an activist-journalistic initiative, this article probes into the interplay between reportage and advocacy within its operations. Drawing on Fairclough's (2016) dialectical-relational approach, whilst acknowledging the nuances of social-mediated communication, we elicit how GTM activists mobilise various linguistic and intertextual properties to not only curate journalistic accounts of evidential events but also to convert them into contentious issues. In this process, they strategically stage the initiative on X to stimulate public contention insofar as to undermine the CCP's authoritarian rule. These findings shed light on the progressive potential of activist journalism and its implications for cross-border civic engagement.

Literature review

Defining the terrain of activist journalism

Capturing various strands, Allan and Peters (2020, p. 156) delineate a heuristic four-cluster spectrum, defining the roles of grassroots actors within the realm of citizen journalism as 'news observer and circulator, accidental news [...] maker and contributor, purposeful news [...] maker and activist, as well as creative maker and commentator'. While the former two clusters pertain to netizens' engagement in news consumption or unintentional news-making, the latter two foreground their self-reflexive involvement in reporting activities. The conceptualisation, particularly of the latter, contributes to scholarly observations of activist journalism. In contrast to other variants of civic engagement, activist journalism involves netizens' self-reflexive and proactive participation in the news-making process (Barnard, 2018; Ginosar & Reich, 2022). Continuing a much-appreciated tradition in the media profession, activist journalism seizes the opportunities offered by social-mediated communication to democratise the institutionalised news-making process (Hartley & Askanius, 2021). It enables an overarching range of grassroots actors, providing a remarkable array of first-person narratives that enhance the diversity of information accessible to the masses (Allan & Peters, 2020). The emergence of activist journalism highlights how digital technologies empower individual citizens to renegotiate their

agendas with socioeconomic and political institutions (Chouliaraki & Mortensen, 2022; Nah & Chung, 2020).

Activist journalism blurs the distinction between reportage and advocacy, prompting a re-evaluation of the applicability of conventional media ethics in such initiatives (Russell, 2016). Although it may be challenging to offer an unambiguous definition that captures the philosophical nuances, objective reporting is frequently advocated as a fundamental principle for media professionals (Allan, 2016). This form of reporting is predicated on the pursuit of factuality through 'privileged (raw, authentic) proximity to facts' (Peters, 2001, p. 79). Yet, objective reporting is also inherently performative, as it does not repudiate the tactical presentation of contingent evidence in news-making (Schwalbe et al., 2015). Under the rubric of impartiality, the media industry has standardised certain journalistic repertoires, often through performing emotional neutrality to accommodate diverse political perspectives (Cohen-Almagor, 2008). This enables the media to enact an observer role, as these journalistic repertoires are institutionalised to prevent the reception of news from being jeopardised by overtly biased stance-taking (Allan, 2016).

Rather than prohibiting media professionals' involvement, activist journalism distances its organisers from institutionalised positions, thereby enabling them to work together to champion a cause through news-making (Hartley & Askanius, 2021). In the absence of institutional support or constraints, activist journalism is not obligated to generate content that adheres to industrial standards (Gregory, 2022). Instead, such initiatives arise from members of the public who bear witness to fellow citizens' sufferings (Barnard, 2018; Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009; Ginosar & Reich, 2022). The first-person, subjective nature of activist journalism transforms its journalistic repertoire into 'a sustained campaign of claim-making', aiming to advocate for the marginalised (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, p. 11). Consequently, activist journalism never merely records facts but emphasises the importance of expressing solidarity and contributing to broader debates (Allan & Peters, 2020). Delivering the experience of being present, such journalistic repertoires serve to politicise contentious issues, challenging institutional interpretations of events on one hand while fostering the assemblage of the citizenry on the other (Kavada & Poell, 2021). This context necessitates an appreciation of the dialectical relations between reportage and advocacy to foreground activist-journalistic initiatives.

Understanding activist journalism in China

Activist journalism often flourishes in Southern regimes characterised by limited media plurality (Mutsvairo & Salgado, 2022). Certainly, it is an oversimplification to frame all media outlets operating in China as mere propaganda apparatuses, as evidence indicates that the central government once retained a certain level of tolerance towards specific media criticisms of local officials (Wang et al., 2018). Nevertheless, in light of the current leadership's consolidation of power, critical voices from within the political establishment have been rapidly diminishing, thereby further undermining the media's ability to enact its fourth-estate role within Chinese territories (Svensson, 2017). Grassroots actors are, thus, being turned to the foreground (Liu, 2020; Yang, 2022), giving rise to activist-journalistic initiatives in China today.

Environmental and gender issues constitute two significant trajectories of intervention for Chinese activist-journalistic actors. In terms of environmental concerns, there has been

a notable trend of high-profile media professionals resigning from their official positions to establish non-governmental organisations (NGOs) aimed at advocating for shifts in official policymaking to champion environmental causes (Svensson, 2017). Their endeavours often involve using the release of environmental data to enhance public awareness of and stimulate contention over the environmental challenges faced by China (Deluca et al., 2016; Sun & Huang, 2022). In relation to gender issues, activist journalism has invigorated the momentum of the Chinese MeToo movement. With the assistance of skilled former reporters, domestic women's NGOs, for instance, have effectively adapted their narratives to highlight women's daily encounters with sexual harassment and sex-based crime through social media postings (Luqiu & Liao, 2021). Maximising the visibility of notorious cases, their persistent efforts have catalysed public debates regarding gender injustice. While the environmental and gender vectors certainly do not encompass all strands of activist journalism, they exemplify how grassroots actors emulate journalistic repertoires to sustain their vitality within the Chinese context (Luo & Harrison, 2019; Wu & Montgomery, 2020; Zeng et al., 2019).

The Chinese public is currently confronted with a deteriorating political climate characterised by stringent censorship of domestic platforms (Han, 2018; Yang, 2016). Under the present leadership, the government has identified feminist activism as a source of instability that threatens social harmony (Liao & Luqiu, 2022). Despite it being once considered as a relatively secure domain, environmental activism is now collectively damaged, as a result of the CCP's holistic crackdowns on civil liberties (Svensson, 2017). Accompanied by the hardened censorship rule is the emergence of an insular echo chamber on the Chinese-language Internet, reflecting the outcomes of the state's decade-long, orchestrated propaganda efforts (Repnikova & Fang, 2018). This phenomenon sanctions a participatory feature of China's authoritarian governance, manifested in the collaborative reporting by pro-regime netizens of postings that contradict official ideologies (Wang & Tan, 2023), as well as their collaborative propagation to disseminate official rhetoric to reinforce the legitimacy of the government (de Kloet et al., 2021; Schneider, 2018).

Domestic conditions have considerably squashed the space for free expression on the Chinese-language Internet, pressuring grassroots actors to advance alternative strategies (Liu, 2020; Yang, 2022). While domestic dissidents have adopted tactics to circumvent official censorship from within the country (Han, 2018; Yang, 2016), their counterparts abroad have mobilised communicative channels outside of China's digital sovereignty to further their causes (Lu et al., 2024). In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a segment of the Chinese diaspora initiated the great translation movement (GTM) on X, primarily sourcing Chinese-language content that exposes the pro-Russian stance of the government and its supporters and translating this material into other languages as a form of protest against the CCP (Liu, 2022). The interplay between reportage and advocacy is dialectically connected, as GTM postings oscillate between staging journalistic repertoires and projecting political critiques. This renders Fairclough's (2016) dialectical-relational approach a pertinent theoretical framework to unpack how GTM activists curate their activist-journalistic initiative on X.

Conceptualising a dialectical-relational approach

Critical discourse studies (CDS) are recognised by their co-founders as a comprehensive array of theoretical approaches that extend beyond mere methodological debates

(Fairclough, 2016; van Dijk, 2014; Wodak, 2009). These approaches, which are grounded in diverse conceptual emphases, position CDS as a critical response to social dominance (KhosraviNik, 2022; Lazar, 2020; Milani & Richardson, 2023; Richardson, 2017). Illustrative of such a critical lens, Fairclough (2016, p. 91) proposes a four-step research design for discourse analysts, which includes: (1) a 'focus upon a social wrong', aiming to (2) 'identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong', (3) 'consider whether the social order 'needs' the social wrong', and (4) 'identify possible ways past the obstacles'. Integrating the perpetuation of inequalities and injustices through discursive practices, this progressive manifesto underscores how CDS functions as a sociolinguistic endeavour aimed at diagnosing structural issues.

Drawing on sociolinguistic scholarship, Fairclough (2016) conceptualises discourse in two primary dimensions: (1) as the language utilised in conjunction with a specific practice or field, and (2) as a means of representing the external world through a particular lens. Departing from overly loose interpretations of the term, his definition yields a text-centric focus, which facilitates an examination of sensemaking in language use. With this text-centric perspective, Fairclough (1992) advocates for a dialectical-relational approach that addresses the internal relations manifested within the discursive structures of a text, as well as its external relations with the broader world. While the former is inclusive of the interactions between interlocutors in specific communicative events, as well as that between these events and related discursive objects, the latter pertains to the dynamics between discourse and a wide array of entities, including individuals, material objects, institutions, and power relations (Fairclough, 2016). Describing such internal and external relations as dialectical, this approach decodes the multiple layers of power dynamics embedded in the text to elicit its discursive construction of reality.

Advocating for the dialectical-relational approach, Fairclough (2016) emphasises the necessity of engaging methodologically with both linguistic and intertextual analyses. In his terms, linguistic and intertextual analyses respectively elicit 'how texts draw upon linguistic systems [...] and orders of discourse' (Fairclough, 1992, p. 194). The former primarily seeks to interpret a text by identifying various textual properties, including lexical choices, discursive strategies, and operational features. In contrast, the latter focuses on the dependence of a text on other interrelated texts in the processes of sensemaking (Hart, 2017). This analytical framework highlights the very characteristics of textual production, which frequently incorporates snatches of texts from elsewhere (Fairclough, 1992). Intertextual properties are inherently multi-dimensional, taking the shape of either implicit allusions or explicit appropriations of prior texts (Hart, 2017). Being attentive to such intertextual properties, the dialectical-relational approach transcends a limited understanding of texts as singular, unified entities, thereby elucidating discursive practice as forms of social practice situated within specific historical backdrops and political contexts, ultimately revealing the discursive functioning of power.

The dialectical-relational approach unpacks GTM activists' power struggles through an analysis of their X postings. Yet, the implementation of this approach in the present study necessitates both theoretical and methodological modifications to accommodate the specifics of social media, where these very power struggles unfold.

While recent scholarship has initiated novel inquiries into CDS (Glapka, 2019; Yang, 2021), a significant portion of the existing literature continues to rely on analyses of media coverage, press releases, and political speeches (Breeze, 2019; Esposito & Breeze,

2022). This prevailing tradition yields disproportionate foci on institutionalised discourses, which risk inadvertently obscuring bottom-up dynamics in social-mediated communication (van Dijk, 2014). It is undeniable that a top-down mode of discursive control remains vital on social media, attributable to various forms and patterns of institutional monopoly over digital infrastructures (Papacharissi, 2015). However, the emergence of decentralised social-mediated communication is progressively reshaping societal interactions in an interlocutory fashion (KhosraviNik, 2022). This evolving landscape presents opportunities for grassroots actors to propagate counter-narratives that challenge institutional monopolies (Bouvier & Machin, 2023). Consequently, CDS analysts are urged to adopt a constructive perspective that recognises bottom-up resistance, while also treating this positive lens as a complement to negative critiques, thereby maintaining vigilance against distorted expressions of dissent (Hughes, 2018).

Second, social-mediated communication is contingent on social media affordances, which delineate their suitability for various forms of interaction and the facilitation of such usage (Kavada & Poell, 2021). Outside conventional, institutional processes, discursive practices as such never occur in a coherent or homogeneous manner (Richardson et al., 2024). The ability of individuals to generate their own content renders engagement an ephemeral phenomenon characterised by fuzzy edges, unclear agendas, and continual metamorphoses (Lunenborg, 2019; Papacharissi, 2015). Amid the treads and feeds of non-linear dissemination on social media, which perpetually vies for user attention, netizens are often mobilised not by 'clearly laid-out issues' but rather by 'charged emotions' (Bouvier & Machin, 2023, p. 725). To conduct a dialectical-relational analysis of social-mediated communication, CDS analysts should integrate accounts of affordances to probe into the context-specific and technology-assisted nature of these discursive actions.

Research questions and the dataset

In light of theoretical and methodological adjustments to the dialectical-relational approach, we pose the following questions to investigate how GTM activists operationalise activist journalism on X.

1. How do GTM activists mobilise various linguistic and intertextual properties to stage journalistic repertoires through X postings?
2. How do such journalistic repertoires dialectically inform public contention to prime collective actions defying the CCP?

To address these questions, we retrieved tweets from the GTM's official X account (handle: @TGTM_Official), where the initiative is primarily organised. The GTM has gained significant traction through its account, co-administered by activists from various regions around the world. Posting tweets almost daily, the GTM official account has amassed approximately 240,000 followers within a span of two years (March 2024). These tweets provide valuable insights into how overseas dissidents engage in a dual performance of reportage and advocacy, thereby challenging the CCP on X.

The sampling period for this study was established at ten months, commencing on 7 March (the first tweet being posted) and concluding on 31 December 2022 (the end of the

first calendar year following the account's launch). This sample captured GTM postings throughout the inaugural calendar year of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, reflecting three distinct and evolving stages of the initiative. The initial stage, spanning from March to April, was characterised by GTM postings that predominantly addressed the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The second stage, occurring from May to September, coincided with the first stalemate of the war, during which GTM postings transitioned to cover events beyond the military conflict. The final stage, from September to December, focused on high-profile street protests that erupted within China. A total of 1,675 tweets were collected, capturing an overarching range of GTM postings with diverse foci to facilitate an in-depth analysis. The data collection process was conducted manually by one of the authors and subsequently verified by the lead author to ensure accuracy.

The data analysis was primarily conducted by operationalising Fairclough's (2016) dialectical-relational approach, which was adjusted both theoretically and methodologically to scaffold the empirical inquiry. Specifically, we first categorised GTM postings into two broad clusters based on whether a tweet contained literal references to prior texts. Scrutinising each cluster of tweets while considering their interconnectedness, we identified how linguistic and intertextual properties function respectively to substantiate GTM activists' political critiques. Additionally, in recognition of the sociotechnological foundations upon which the initiative was staged, we paid particular attention to the explicit utilisation of social media affordances in GTM postings, including how hashtags, at-tags, and other infrastructural resources were deployed.

As a case study, the research by no means attempts to deliver an overgeneralised account of the landscape of activist journalism; through qualitative analysis of textual data, neither does the research fully capture GTM activists' lived experiences in organising the initiative. Yet, considering the GTM as an ideal-type case pertinent to the challenges faced by Chinese dissidents, the study seeks to offer a contextualised interpretation of the strategic and tactical characteristics of the initiative. In this manner, we sketch out an evolving paradigm of activist journalism that informs future grassroots resistance against Southern regimes, while ensuring a critical evaluation of dissent is not overlooked.

Analytical discussion

Covering news through intertextuality-assisted sensemaking

The initial phase of GTM postings was defined by a significant influx of tweets reporting both official apparatuses and grassroots netizens' contentious accounts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Tweets 15 and 154 (Figure 1) exemplify this type of posting.

Textually, these tweets present word-saving, sentence-length statements totalling roughly 25 words. Mimicking a journalistic narrative style, the first tweet debunks the disinformation campaign propagated by Chinese state TV, which asserts that Ukrainian soldiers and anti-war protestors are freelancers hired by its government. In contrast to the foci on state actors in tweet 15, the second tweet addresses a social media sensation observed Zhihu, the Chinese equivalent of Quora, where a digital influencer garnered over 11,000 upvotes for voicing his hope for Moscow's victory in the ongoing warfare. Visually, both two tweets incorporate two screenshots that document the cited evidential events. One is presented in its original form, while the other is translated into the English

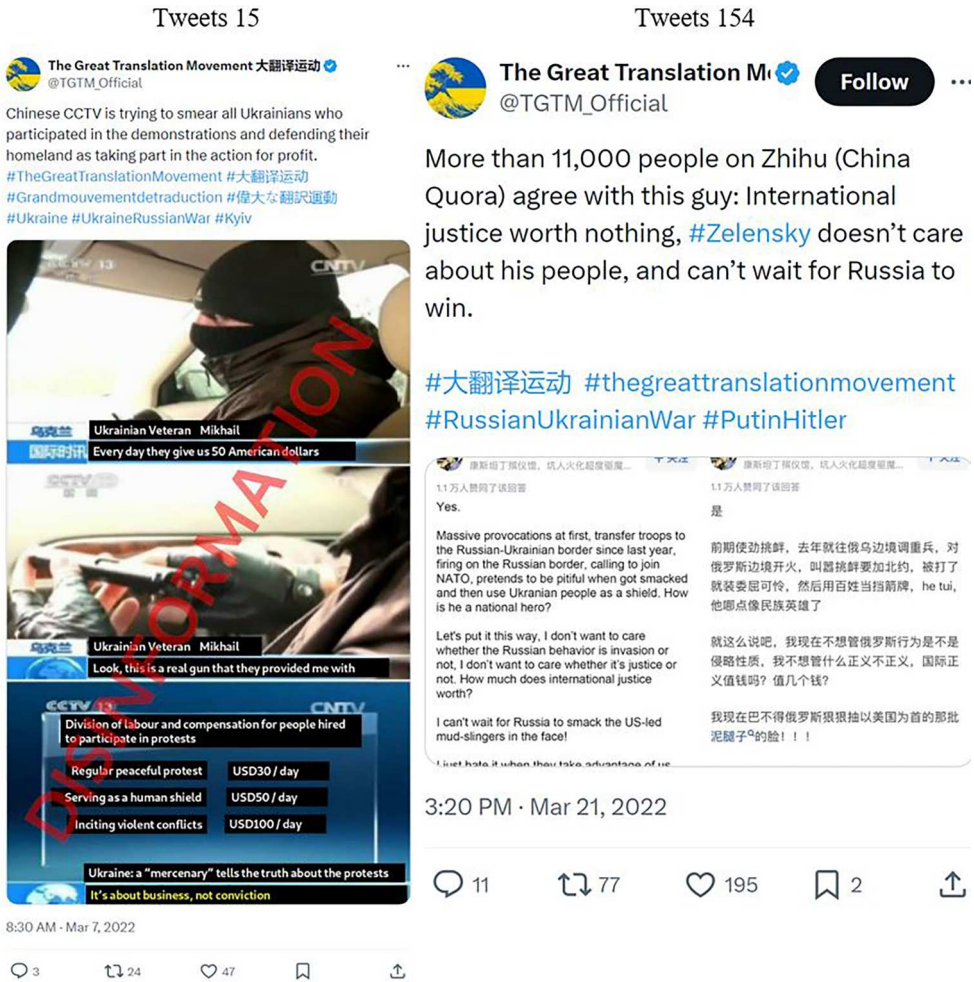


Figure 1. Tweets 15 and 154.

language. The sensemaking of both tweets requires recognising their intertextual properties.

As Fairclough (1992, p. 195) observes, intertextual properties illustrate the ‘dependence of texts upon society and history in the form of the resources made available within the order of discourse’. Specific to these two tweets, their intertextual properties can be understood in two distinct dimensions. First, both tweets explicitly reappropriate pre-existing texts sourced from China’s state TV and domestic social media to portray the government’s orchestration of pro-Russian propaganda, as well as its impacts on China’s ‘mainstream’ public opinion. The forefront intertextual properties of these tweets involve the utilisation of technological affordances, which include, but are not limited to, the screenshot functionality of mobile devices, the interconnectedness of the global digital infrastructure, and the facilitation of multimodal content uploading, all of which serve to extrapolate prior texts for X postings. Offering fact-based coverage of evidential events, these forefront intertextual properties bear the potential to stage a form of

journalistic repertoire that is structured within the sociotechnological context of social-mediated communication.

Furthermore, the intertextual properties of the tweets are manifested implicitly through their linguistic features. The textual components of both tweets exhibit a simple structure, but this simplicity does not undermine their capacity to convey profound meanings. Within the first tweet, words with adjudicating connotations, such as 'smear', are strategically employed to align with the visual content, which prominently features a red, capitalised 'disinformation' badge that starkly contrasts with the background. Bearing a degree of linguistic homogeneousness across both textual and visual components, the complete tweet consistently expresses disapproval of the state media's pro-Russian disinformation campaign. In contrast, the textual content of tweet 154 introduces a self-constrained undertone that contradicts its visual component, which utilises screenshots to capture an emotionally charged Zhihu posting. This post is characterised by the frequent usage of words with strongly negative connotations, such as 'pretend' and 'provocation', and the exclamatory punctuation. Indeed, intertextual properties enable a text to incorporate 'elements which have varying and sometimes contradictory stylistic and semantic values' (Fairclough, 1992, p. 195). Specifically, tweet 154 creates a scenario of juxtaposition through its inclusion of linguistically heterogeneous parts, implicitly portraying GTM activists as sensible observers to construct an extremist imaginary of the influencer and his followers.

In the absence of extensive, literal takeaways, the political critiques embedded in GTM postings are contextualised within the current political climate. Amid the global resurgence of Cold War mentalities, US hegemony in the international geopolitical order has been weaponised by the CCP to justify its ambition to rebuild China into an alternative superpower (Repnikova & Chen, 2023). Sharing anti-US agendas with Russia on the world stage, the CCP is incentivised to coordinate pro-Kremlin propaganda to legitimise the Beijing-Moscow strategic partnership. Such campaigns have been executed to an extreme extent during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, manifesting as 'an alignment of values between the official Russian view and China's position on the conflict' (Ji et al., 2024, p. 61). In this process, an insular echo chamber is created on the Chinese-language Internet, where, despite some discordant voices, 'mainstream' public opinion is predominantly shaped by grassroots netizens expressing a twofold support for both the CCP and the Kremlin (Rogers & Zhang, 2024; Wang, 2024). Yet, differing from China's situation, the mainstream media across major Western democracies have increasingly adopted a negative stance towards Moscow over the past decade (Liu, 2024). The disjunction between public opinions within and outside of China renders its party-state's disinformation campaigns a contentious issue on X.

As noted by Kavada and Poell (2021, p. 193), the concept of 'publicness', which embodies 'a process of making things public', defines an organisational feature of contemporary cross-border civic engagement. Building on the global digital infrastructure, particularly the interconnectedness facilitated by social media, allows civic engagement to transcend national boundaries (Bouvier & Machin, 2023). Rather than merely reflecting the citizenry's coordinated actions, cross-border civic engagement emerges as a dynamic process through which grassroots actors are aggregated to engage in contentious issues (Kavada & Poell, 2021). To a certain extent, the GTM provides an up-to-date case study that illustrates how public contention can be mobilised through journalistic repertoires.

Exploiting the cross-border disjunction in popular geopolitical opinions, GTM activists tactically report on China's domestic events to foreground the controversial narratives propagated by the CCP and its supporters regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The publicisation of such narratives beyond the Chinese-language Internet transforms the CCP's pro-Kremlin disinformation campaigns from effective domestic propaganda into a highly contentious issue on X. This public exposure invites international criticisms, thereby creating an opportunity to hold the CCP collectively accountable for its strategic partner's aggression.



Figure 2. Tweet 976.

GTM postings have gained traction on X by primarily exposing the CCP and its supporters' distorted narratives and actions. This trajectory of intervention not only reflects GTM activists' strategic decision to organise the initiative from a confrontational stance against the CCP's authoritarian rule but is also informed by their emotionally charged repudiation of a Chinese national identity, which they associate with China's nationalist politics. The sentiment is notably illustrated by a core member of the administrative collective of the initiative's X account, who, in a media interview, articulated that the objectives of their cause encompass not only confronting the CCP's propaganda but also revealing the 'perceived truth' about the entire Chinese citizenry (Liu, 2022, n.p.).

Reiterating GTM activists' repudiation of Chinese national identity, a salient feature of their X postings is their stylised operationalisation of a nomination strategy that designates individual pro-regime netizens as 'the Chinese people' (Figure 2). As a discursive strategy, nomination entails the construction of group membership to sanction an oversimplified framing of events for specific communicative purposes (Wodak, 2009). The use of the definite article subtly shifts the foci of the takeaway, qualifying individual pro-regime netizens as a collective entity that purportedly represents the entirety of the Chinese population. This discursive practice, which recurs throughout a significant proportion of GTM postings, is inherently problematic, as it fails to account for a sizable cohort of the population, albeit a minority, that harbours ambivalent sentiments towards Russia and expresses dissatisfaction with the CCP's stance in the war and beyond (Wang, 2024). By obscuring the complexities of China's civil society, this oversimplified framing poses a risk of exacerbating the global surge of Sinophobia, which has intensified significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic (Yang, 2022).

The recent popularisation of Sinophobia has geopolitical roots, reflecting the cross-border resurgence of Cold-War mentalities, amid the CCP assertively promoting China's status as a superpower in opposition to the US-led coalition (Sullivan & Wang, 2023). Concurrently, this phenomenon pertains to the domestic political climate of Euro-American nations, where right-wing politicians frequently mobilise populist rhetoric with strong emotional appeals to incite xenophobia insofar as to consolidate their electoral support (Richardson et al., 2024). While such rhetoric resonates with 'orthodox' Euro-American conservatives, it paradoxically also appeals to a sizable group of Chinese netizens who identify with the broadly defined liberal end of the spectrum (Lin, 2021). This seemingly self-contradictory phenomenon reflects a long-established, distorted 'progressive' tradition in China, wherein the rejection of an imagined 'Chinese national character' is deemed imperative (Li, 2022, n.p.). With deeply ingrained mentalities that align their nation-building efforts with wholesale Westernisation, this liberal-leaning camp of Chinese netizens is particularly vulnerable to the Sinophobic rhetoric that permeates various aspects of Euro-American societies. Indicative of such a problematic dimension of dissent in the Chinese context, the potential for GTM postings to further energise Sinophobia on X emerges as a critical concern, thereby necessitating critical scholarly scrutiny.

Broadening reportage beyond the Russian invasion of Ukraine

A broader scope of coverage extending beyond the Russian invasion of Ukraine was observed in GTM postings, amid frontline warfare reaching a stalemate stage. Such

shifting foci were swayed by the public's fatigue with omnipresent war correspondence, coinciding with other significant geopolitical events, such as Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, which occurred during the same period.

The CCP has consistently identified the 'reunification' between China and Taiwan as a defining agenda in its foreign affairs. This emphasis has intensified under the current leadership, with Chinese diplomats frequently adopting an aggressive 'Wolf-Warrior' posture to bolster the government's domestic nationalist campaigns (Sullivan & Wang, 2023). Against this backdrop, Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022, during her tenure as Speaker of the US House of Representatives, held significant geopolitical implications for cross-strait relations within the Sino-Taiwanese-US triangle (Zhao, 2023). Voicing American support for Taipei amidst escalated cross-strait tensions, the visit was strategically staged to counter the CCP's aggressive diplomatic rhetoric. The build-up and the aftermath of this event generated considerable attention on social media, both within China and internationally, in the wake of Beijing mobilising its extensive propaganda apparatuses and issuing military threats, yet ultimately failed to deter the USA from altering its course.

Tweets 1072 and 1077 (Figure 3) are typical of a troop of GTM tweets disseminated in August 2022 that foreground the Pelosi visit, with memes emerging as a significant visual medium utilised to depict the reactions of China's pro-regime netizens to the

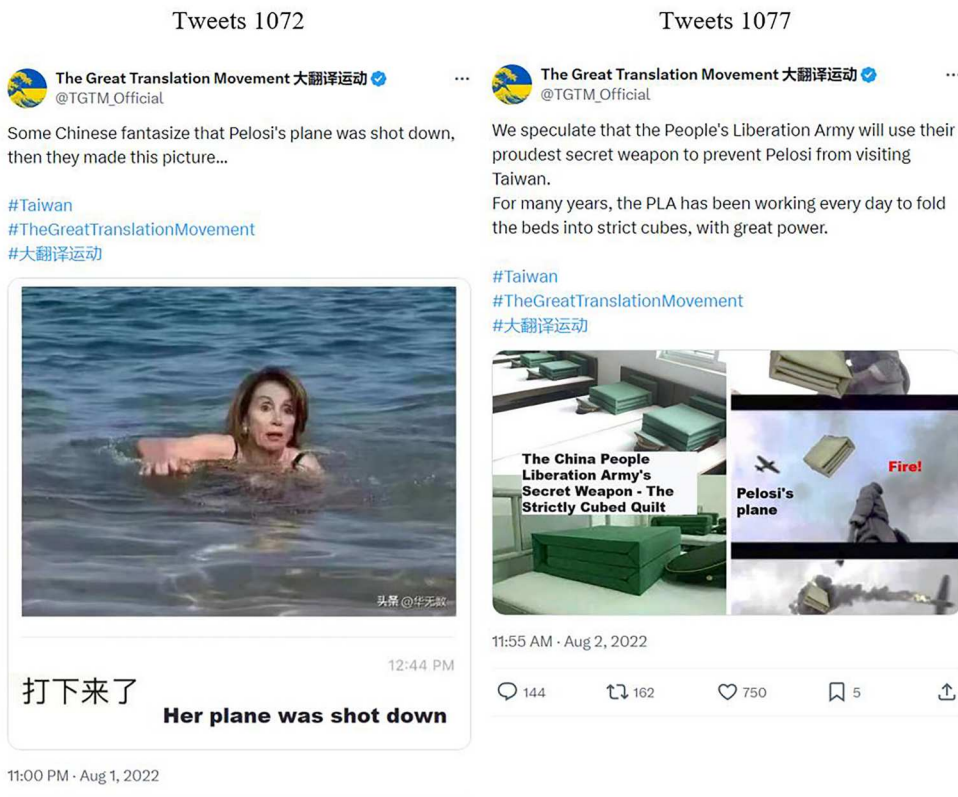


Figure 3. Tweets 1072 and 1077.

event. Departing from the original definition of memes as mere fragments of culture, Shifman (2014, p. 41) reconceptualises them as collections of artefacts 'sharing common characteristics of content, form and/or stance', which are 'created with awareness of each other' and are 'circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet', to capture their functionalities in social-mediated communication. Produced out of parodies, mashups, and remixes, memes are not confined to unambitious interpretations, but they frequently carry substantial political weight on the Chinese-language Internet by facilitating the expression of divergent opinions, particularly in the context of stringent censorship regulations. Specific to the current tweets, the first tweet features a meme depicting the scenario of the US congresswoman swimming in the sea, which alludes to the hypothetical scenario of her plane being shot down by the Chinese army. The second tweet, on the contrary, comprises a series that satirises China's pedantic military traditions, making intertextual remarks on the CCP's aggressive rhetoric, which, despite its intensity, lacks substantial actions throughout the course of the event.

In both instances, the memes were extrapolated from Weibo, the Chinese-language microblogging platform analogous to X. Tweet 1072 was generated prior to the planned visit, while tweet 1077 was posted upon her enroute journey, establishing an interlocutory connection between the two. This relationship crafts the latter tweet into a double-ironic response to the former. Constituting semiotic residues of nationalists' expressions of political opinions on the Chinese-language Internet, these pre-existing memes are repurposed by GTM activists on X to publicise their temporal frustrations with the leadership. In this manner, public contention is once again solicited from the X community to confront the Chinese regime by emphasising its perceived failures during the Pelosi visit, as interpreted by its own supporters. By leveraging the spreadability of memes in social-mediated communication (Shifman, 2014), this utilisation of memes simultaneously reiterates the open-ended sensemaking of such artefacts, which often extends beyond their creators' original expectations. It is worth noting that the political undertones of these memes allude to a tendency to glorify US interference in regional geopolitics, a sentiment towards US hegemony that is shared by many liberal-leaning critics of the CCP in China, driven by their emotionally charged dissent against the political establishment and their disillusionment with democratic reforms within the nation (Lin, 2021). The problematic implications of this sentiment underscore the imperative to pursue a dual anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian agenda to scaffold progressive initiatives in Southern regimes (Zhang, 2023).

In addition to memes, hashtags also form a key aspect of the social media affordances appropriated by GTM activists to amplify the resonance of public contention. While the operational logic of social media as profitable platforms generally works against political participation, certain design features do support collective action as a by-product of facilitating interactions (Kavada & Poell, 2021). Hashtags are one such feature, enabling a degree of homogeneity across inherently heterogeneous texts (Bouvier & Machin, 2023; Dawson, 2020). This creates a recognised pattern across these texts, forming 'collective conversations' that maximise the assemblage of emotionally charged netizens in social-mediated communication (Richardson et al., 2024, p. 1,112). In current instances, hashtags such as '#Taiwan' are used to regulate and define the relevance of GTM postings and their intertextual relations with related debates on X. This catalyses the aggregation of

Tweets 24



The Great Translation Movement @TGTM_Official

Follow

(3/3) Here is the BBC report about Xuzhou mother who gave birth to 8 children, and chained. She is likely a victim of human trafficking.
bbc.com/news/uk-601940...

@StephenMcDonell @serpentza
 @sjoerddendaas

#TheGreatTranslationMovement #大翻译运动



From bbc.com

8:37 AM · Mar 9, 2022

2
12
27
1
↑

Tweets 797



The Great Translation Movement @TGTM_Official

Follow

It is worth bringing attention of what happened in #Tangshan, where women were harassed and attacked in a 'BBQ safe' country.

#大翻译运动
 #thegreattranslationmovement



3:30 PM · Jun 11, 2022

59
419
1.2K
13
↑

Figure 5. Tweets 24 and 797.

by two men, while the latter involves four female customers being sexually harassed and brutally beaten by male gangsters (Thornton, 2023). The salience of these incidents lies in their exposure to local government officials' malpractices, shedding light on the structural roots of China's gender injustice. Given the current leadership's preceding crackdowns on feminist activism, these two incidents, alongside the preceding official censorship aimed at localised MeToo movements, have escalated into contentious national issues on the Chinese-language Internet, leading to the emergence of a confrontational group of civil rights advocates striving to align the agenda for women's emancipation with broader political reforms (Peng, 2024). Despite facing severe repression from the CCP and a masculinist backlash on domestic platforms, such intersectional quests offer a glimmer of hope for China's future progressive politics.

The GTM is not exclusively led by female activists, nor does it explicitly identify as a feminist initiative. Nevertheless, by actively curating reports on the Xuzhou and Tangshan incidents on X, GTM postings seek to invigorate public discourse surrounding contentious issues, thereby facilitating the transmission of domestic feminist activism beyond China's borders. Both tweets exhibit a self-constrained fashion of postings, postulating pertinent



Figure 6. Tweets 1550 and 1567.

news photographs to create vivid representations of the brutalities inflicted by male perpetrators on women. The distinguishing feature of these two tweets lies in their explicit calls for public contention, which underscore the official censorship of related discussions on domestic social-mediated platforms, as evidenced throughout the events (Peng, 2024). On this note, a strategic variation is observed across these tweets, the former predominantly employs targeted at-tags, while the latter arranges itself as part of a barrage of hashtagged postings. In both scenarios, assessments of China's structural gender asymmetry are invited from the X community, keeping the GTM's initial, geopolitical foci remaining in the background. Building an international channel for domestic progressive voices to traverse the heavily censored Chinese-language Internet, the GTM positions itself as a relay campaign that supports parallel domestic initiatives from abroad.

The potential of the GTM to relay domestic activism is further exemplified by the short-lived A4 revolution, during which its X account posted a total of 62 related tweets over the span of one week, from 25 November to 2 December 2022. The A4 revolution, a term coined by the media to capture the protesters' display of A4-sized papers as a symbol of dissent, refers to the street demonstrations that erupted in China, in the aftermath of a building fire in Urumqi, where unnecessary casualties were allegedly caused by the government's excessive Covid-19 lockdowns that hampered rescue efforts (Peng, 2024). The street protests lasted only for days; neither did they lead to major power shifts within the political establishment. Yet, aggregating a substantial array of domestic protesters, the A4 revolution unfolded as the largest mass disobedience in China's recent history, providing a glimmer of hope for democratic forces to incubate within its civil society.

The tweet identified as 1550 (Figure 6) features a brief 20-second video that showcases footage uploaded by netizens from near the scene on Weibo, capturing victims screaming for rescue amidst a building fire. Offering synchronous, near-scene coverage of the incident, the tweet bears witness to the humanitarian disaster instigated by the CCP's stringent lockdown measures, which symbolise institutional violence during the Covid-19 pandemic. With 879 follow-up commentaries, over 6,500 retweets, and 11,000 likes, this tweet stands out as the most engaged GTM posting throughout the first calendar year following the account's launch. Being juxtaposed with the embedded video, the tweet includes a concise 43-word description that resembles factuality-based reportage, contrasting sharply with the graphic nature of the video content. In conjunction with a substantial barrage of postings, such as tweet 1567, which employs a comparable journalistic repertoire to document street protests ignited by the fire, this tweet contributes to wider contention over the Chinese regime's brutality and injustice. Notably, considering the un-presidential scale of the protests, the A4 revolution has garnered significant global attention. Li Ying, an X-based influencer nicknamed 'Teacher Li', is widely recognised as the most impactful figure from the outset owing to his provision of the 'most complete compendium of videos, photos, and short descriptions of events' (Connery, 2024, p. 157). Yet, positioning itself as an initiative paralleling the A4 Revolution, the GTM remains part of collective efforts to amplify the vocal chants of domestic protesters on X.

In the events of relaying domestic protests, postings on GTM serve as a pertinent example of how the notion of bearing witness is integrated into activist journalism. As Peters (2001, p. 79) notes, a witness can be defined as either an observer 'who bears witness' or an act of making 'a special sort of statement'. The latter is inclusive of both the statement per se that contains the 'semiotic residue of that act' and the 'inward experience that authorises the statement' (Peters, 2001, p. 79). Bearing witness is, thus, 'a sensory experience' of witnessing an event unfolding before one's eyes and 'a discursive act' of stating the experience for those absent at the scenes (Allan, 2016, p. 273). This practice constitutes a vital component of journalistic repertoires, enabling media professionals to engage audiences and foster a sense of responsibility among them. Concurrently curating near-scene coverage of evidential events, GTM activists replicate these journalistic repertoires by providing eyewitness testimonies of grassroots resistance to institutional violence occurring within China on X. This deliberate coverage navigates away from the confinement of institutionalised news-making to maximise the visibility of domestic grassroots mobilisation. An alternative, discursive space is, thereby, crafted to consolidate emotional connections between viewers of the X postings and the domestic protesters on the street. Such connections serve to prepare concerned members of the international community for further actions in solidarity with their peers in China, ultimately contributing to the build-up of cross-border dissent against the CCP.

Indeed, the retention of resilience amongst grassroots actors in China is a critical issue, particularly in the context of the current political climate (Han, 2018; Yang, 2016). Rather than competing with official propaganda apparatuses on domestic platforms, the GTM is enforced from outside the heavily censored Chinese-language Internet. Evolving into an initiative serving to scaffold a solidified cross-border alliance between domestic and overseas actors, GTM activists leverage the affordances of X to maximise the international exposure of domestic protests, thereby positioning the initiative as a counterbalance within the dynamics of state-grassroots power struggles. In doing so, interlocutory

connections amongst progressive-leaning members of the Chinese citizenry, both within the nation and abroad, are fostered, energising a diverse array of public contention to undermine the CCP's authority. In addition to domestic counterparts who employ resilient strategies to maintain the visibility of resistance under stringent controls (Sun & Wright, 2024), the GTM constitutes an archetype initiative organised by Chinese dissidents in exile. It sheds light on how activist journalism offers a conceptual basis to elucidate the strategic characteristics of contemporary civic engagement that counters Southern authoritarian propaganda, setting itself apart from other accidental variants organised under the overarching rubric of citizen journalism.

Concluding remarks

In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the GTM emerges as an X-based activist-journalistic initiative contesting the CCP's authority both within the context of the military conflict and beyond. Adopting a dialectical-relational approach specific to social-mediated communication, this article probes into how various linguistic and intertextual properties are deployed in GTM postings to curate journalistic repertoires on X. These discursive practices are manifest both explicitly, through literal references to pre-existing texts that deliver factuality-based reportage, and implicitly, through the incorporation of linguistically homogeneous or heterogeneous components. Consequently, evidential events are dialectically converted into contentious issues, reconfiguring the reportage into a public expression of dissent against the CCP.

The operationalisation of activist journalism is indicative of the salience of publicness in civic engagement. Indeed, the conceptual essence of civic engagement is characterised as 'a sustained campaign of claim-making', often adopting repeated repertoires to 'advertise the claim' (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, p. 11). The societal ramifications of civic engagement are predicated on public contention, rendering dissent visible and, thereby, inspiring further resistance (Kavada & Poell, 2021). On this note, activist journalism constitutes a genre-specific dimension of civic engagement, centred on the proactive involvement of individual citizens in the news-making process to hold institutional violence and structural injustices accountable (Hartley & Askanius, 2021). Prioritising the assemblage of concerned citizens over the mere documentation of evidential events, such journalistic repertoires are tactically staged to articulate contentious issues (Barnard, 2018). This sanctions the personal and subjective nature of activist journalism, yielding the ideologically informed essence of the repertoires (Allan, 2016). The GTM is very much organised along this logic, evidenced by how its activists endeavour to asymmetrically expose the CCP and its domestic supporters' controversial narratives and actions to undermine its authority.

Challenging authoritarian regimes, activist journalism increasingly relies on the interconnectedness facilitated by the global digital infrastructure. As illustrated in the GTM, due to the omnipresence of censorship on domestic platforms, an alternative, level-playing field is needed for Chinese dissidents to sustain the visibility of their initiatives (Liu, 2020; Yang, 2016). Beyond China's digital sovereignty, international social media now offer the necessary digital infrastructure for these purposes (Lu et al., 2024). Capitalising on the available infrastructural affordances, members of the Chinese diaspora exploit the affordances of specific platforms to orchestrate sustained journalistic repertoires. Whilst maximising the resonance of public contention to engage the CCP and its

supporters, these overseas dissidents seek to express solidarity with their domestic counterparts to relay causes originating from within China. The momentum of dissent being energised through this dynamic process underscores the infrastructural value of international social media in fostering cross-border civic engagement that transcends geographical constraints (Kavada & Poell, 2021), offering the sociotechnological grounds for grassroots actors to counter Southern regimes from abroad.

Certainly, activist journalism, alongside other forms of dissent, cannot be unreflexively interpreted as devoid of toxicity (Gregory, 2022). In recent years, anti-CCP disinformation campaigns have been observed on X (Bolsover & Howard, 2019), emerging as the other side of the same coin as the CCP's coordinated propaganda on domestic platforms (Chen, 2024; Fan et al., 2024; Repnikova & Fang, 2018). Such anti-regime disinformation campaigns, in conjunction with right-wing populists' anti-China rhetoric, prescribe a problematic democratic formula that jeopardises the establishment of an overarching cross-border alliance aimed at collectively contesting the CCP's authoritarian governance. Therefore, while appreciating its progressive values for Southern regimes, activist journalism also needs scaffolding to prevent its interventionist essence from being hijacked by malicious intents. This situation is particularly noteworthy, amid the credibility crisis arising today, which has exacerbated the erosion of public trust in democratic processes across the board (Gregory, 2022). Future studies are, thus, advised to scrutinise activist journalism to both scaffold its development and hold distorted mobilisations to account.

Note

1. By "social-mediated communication," we refer to communication taking place on social media.

Acknowledgements

We thank John E. Richardson, editor of *Critical Discourse Studies*, and two anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback on an earlier version of this article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This research was supported by the British Academy through its Small Research Grant Scheme (grant number: SRG2324\240347).

Notes on contributors

Altman Yuzhu Peng (PhD, Newcastle University, UK) is Associate Professor in Intercultural Communication at the University of Warwick. His research interests lie at the intersections of critical discourse studies, feminism, media and cultural studies, and masculinity studies. **Email:** altman.peng@warwick.ac.uk.

Chunyan Wu (PhD, Loughborough University, UK) is Assistant Professor in Communication Studies at Northeastern University London. Her research interests focus on social media analysis, digital journalism, political communication, international communication, and media and cultural analysis. Email: chunyan.wu@nulondon.ac.uk.

Yu Sun (PhD, University of Groningen, NL) is Lecturer in Media, Culture and Society at the University of Glasgow. Her research interests include data activism and data publics, the public sphere, online deliberation, civic engagement, feminist studies, digital infrastructure, and social governance. Email: yu.sun@glasgow.ac.uk.

ORCID

Altman Yuzhu Peng  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3440-0761>

Chunyan Wu  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6531-1219>

Yu Sun  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7319-8933>

References

- Allan, S. (2016). Citizen witnesses. In T. Witschge, C. Anderson, D. Domingo, & A. Hermida (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of digital journalism* (pp. 266–279). Sage.
- Allan, S., & Peters, C. (2020). The visual citizen in a digital news landscape. *Communication Theory*, 30(2), 149–168. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtz028>
- Barnard, S. R. (2018). Tweeting #Ferguson: Mediatized fields and the new activist journalist. *New Media & Society*, 20(7), 2252–2271. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817712723>
- Bolsover, G., & Howard, P. (2019). Chinese computational propaganda: Automation, algorithms and the manipulation of information about Chinese politics on Twitter and Weibo. *Information, Communication & Society*, 22(14), 2063–2080. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1476576>
- Bouvier, G., & Machin, D. (2023). #Stand with women in Afghanistan: Civic participation, symbolism, and morality in political activism on twitter. *Discourse & Communication*, 17(6), 721–740. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17504813231174802>
- Breeze, R. (2019). Emotion in politics: Affective-discursive practices in UKIP and labour. *Discourse & Society*, 30(1), 24–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926518801074>
- Chen, D. (2024). How propaganda affects public opinion in China: Evidence from the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Asian Studies Review*, 48(3), 504–523. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2023.2251665>
- Chouliaraki, L., & Mortensen, M. (2022). Flesh witnessing: Smartphones, UGC, and embodied testimony. *Journalism*, 23(3), 591–598. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211060646>
- Cohen-Almagor, R. (2008). The limits of objective reporting. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 7(1), 136–155. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.7.1.07alm>
- Connery, C. L. (2024). Wulumuqi road. *Cultural Studies*, 38(1), 149–162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2023.2261950>
- Dawson, P. (2020). Hashtag narrative: Emergent storytelling and affective publics in the digital age. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23(6), 968–983. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877920921417>
- de Kloet, J., Lin, J., & Hu, J. (2021). The politics of emotion during COVID-19: Turning fear into pride in China's WeChat discourse. *China Information*, 35(3), 366–392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X211048290>
- Deluca, K. M., Brunner, E., & Sun, Y. (2016). Weibo, WeChat, and the transformative events of environmental activism on China's wild public screens. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 321–339. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/3841/1539>
- Esposito, E., & Breeze, R. (2022). Gender and politics in a digitalised world: Investigating online hostility against UK female MPs. *Discourse & Society*, 33(3), 303–323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265221076608>

- Fairclough, N. (1992). Discourse and text: Linguistic and intertextual analysis within discourse analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 3(2), 193–217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926592003002004>
- Fairclough, N. (2016). A dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis. In R. Wodak, & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse studies* (pp. 230–254). Sage.
- Fan, Y., Pan, J., & Sheng, J. (2024). Strategies of Chinese state media on Twitter. *Political Communication*, 41(1), 4–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2023.2233911>
- Frosh, P., & Pinchevski, A. (Eds.). 2009. *Media witnessing*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ginosar, A., & Reich, Z. (2022). Obsessive–activist journalists: A New model of journalism? *Journalism Practice*, 16(4), 660–680. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1816488>
- Glapka, E. (2019). Critical affect studies: On applying discourse analysis in research on affect, body, and power. *Discourse & Society*, 30(6), 600–621. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926519870039>
- Gray, J. (2019). Data witnessing: Attending to injustice with data in Amnesty International’s decoders project. *Information, Communication & Society*, 22(7), 971–991. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1573915>
- Gregory, S. (2022). Deepfakes, misinformation, and disinformation and authenticity infrastructure responses: Impacts on frontline witnessing, distant witnessing, and civic journalism. *Journalism*, 23(3), 708–729. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211060644>
- Han, R. (2018). *Contesting cyberspace in China*. Columbia University Press.
- Hart, C. (2017). Metaphor and intertextuality in media framings of the (1984–1985) British miners’ strike: A multimodal analysis. *Discourse & Communication*, 11(1), 3–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481316683291>
- Hartley, J. M., & Askanius, T. (2021). Activist-journalism and the norm of objectivity: Role performance in the reporting of the #MeToo movement in Denmark and Sweden. *Journalism Practice*, 15(6), 860–877. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1805792>
- Hughes, J. M. F. (2018). Progressing positive discourse analysis and/in critical discourse studies: Reconstructing resistance through progressive discourse analysis. *Review of Communication*, 18(3), 193–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2018.1479880>
- Ji, D., Jiang, X., & Wang, L. (2024). Domesticating international news: China’s media coverage of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. *International Communication Gazette*, 86(1), 55–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17480485231220145>
- Kavada, A., & Poell, T. (2021). From counterpublics to contentious publicness: Tracing the temporal, spatial, and material articulations of popular protest through social media. *Communication Theory*, 31(2), 190–208. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtaa025>
- KhosraviNik, M. (2022). Digital meaning-making across content and practice in social media critical discourse studies. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 19(2), 119–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2020.1835683>
- Lazar, M. M. (2020). Politics of the ‘South’: Discourses and praxis. *Discourse & Society*, 31(1), 5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926519886126>
- Li, P. (2022). From the ‘Chinese national character’ debates of yesterday to the anti-China foreign policy of today. *Made in China Journal*, 6(3), 47–53. <https://madeinchinajournal.com/2022/03/08/from-the-chinese-national-character-debates-of-yesterday-to-the-anti-china-foreign-policy-of-today/>
- Liao, S., & Luqiu, L. R. (2022). #Metoo in China: The dynamic of digital activism against sexual assault and harassment in higher education. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 47(3), 741–764. <https://doi.org/10.1086/717712>
- Lin, Y. (2021). Beaconism and the Trumpian metamorphosis of Chinese liberal intellectuals. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 30(127), 85–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1766911>
- Liu, J. (2020). Information and communication technologies as contentious repertoire. *European Journal of Sociology*, 61(1), 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000397562000003X>
- Liu, W. (2022). *The great translation movement* [大翻译运动]. Deutsche Welle. <https://www.dw.com/zh/a-61105169>
- Liu, Z. (2024). News framing of the 2014–15 Ukraine conflict by the BBC and RT. *International Communication Gazette*, 86(4), 277–306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17480485231158904>

- Lu, Y., Schaefer, J., Park, K., Joo, J., & Pan, J. (2024). How information flows from the world to China. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 29(2), 305–327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612221117470>
- Lunenborg, M. (2019). Affective publics. In J. Slaby, & C. von Scheve (Eds.), *Affective societies* (pp. 319–329). Routledge.
- Luo, Y., & Harrison, T. M. (2019). How citizen journalists impact the agendas of traditional media and the government policymaking process in China. *Global Media and China*, 4(1), 72–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436419835771>
- Luqiu, R. L., & Liao, S. X. (2021). Rethinking ‘the personal is political’: enacting agency in the narrative of sexual harassment experiences in China. *Discourse & Society*, 32(6), 708–727. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265211023225>
- Martini, M. (2018). On the user’s side. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies*, 24(1), 33–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856517736980>
- Milani, T. M., & Richardson, J. E. (2023). Discourses of collective remembering: Contestation, politics, affect. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 20(5), 459–476. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2022.2090979>
- Mutsvairo, B., & Salgado, S. (2022). Is citizen journalism dead? An examination of recent developments in the field. *Journalism*, 23(2), 354–371. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920968440>
- Nah, S., & Chung, D. S. (2020). *Understanding citizen journalism as civic participation*. Routledge.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2015). *Affective publics*. Oxford University Press.
- Peng, A. Y. (2024). When street protests meet feminist activism in the A4 revolution. *Feminist Review*, 137(1), 87–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01417789241240457>
- Peters, J. D. (2001). Witnessing. *Media, Culture & Society*, 23(6), 707–723. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016344301023006002>
- Repnikova, M., & Chen, K. A. (2023). Asymmetrical discursive competition: China-United States digital diplomacy in Africa. *International Communication Gazette*, 85(1), 15–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17480485221139460>
- Repnikova, M., & Fang, K. (2018). Authoritarian participatory persuasion 2.0: Netizens as thought work collaborators in China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 27(113), 763–779. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1458063>
- Richardson, J. E. (2017). *Analysing newspapers*. Bloomsbury.
- Richardson, J. E., Giraud, E. H., Poole, E., & de Quincey, E. (2024). ‘Hypocrite!’ affective and argumentative engagement on twitter, following the Christchurch terrorist attack. *Media, Culture & Society*, 46(6), 1105–1123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437241229322>
- Ristovska, S. (2016). Strategic witnessing in an age of video activism. *Media, Culture & Society*, 38(7), 1034–1047. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443716635866>
- Rogers, R., & Zhang, X. (2024). The Russia-Ukraine war in Chinese social media: LLM analysis yields a bias toward neutrality. *Social Media + Society*, 10(2), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241254379>
- Russell, A. (2016). *Journalism as activism*. Polity.
- Schneider, F. (2018). *China’s digital nationalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Schwalbe, C. B., Silcock, W. B., & Candello, E. (2015). Gatecheckers at the visual news stream. *Journalism Practice*, 9(4), 465–483. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1030133>
- Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in digital culture*. MIT Press.
- Sullivan, J., & Wang, W. (2023). China’s “wolf warrior diplomacy”: The interaction of formal diplomacy and cyber-nationalism. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 52(1), 68–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681026221079841>
- Sun, Y., & Huang, V. G. (2022). Embedded data activism: The institutionalization of a grassroots environmental data initiative in China. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 15(1), 115–137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2021.1963997>
- Sun, Y., & Wright, S. (2024). Relay activism and the flows of contentious publicness on WeChat: A case study of COVID-19 in China. *Information, Communication & Society*, 27(2), 257–277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2023.2205474>

- Svensson, M. (2017). The rise and fall of investigative journalism in China: Digital opportunities and political challenges. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(3), 440–445. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717690820>
- Thornton, P. M. (2023). The A4 movement: Mapping its background and impact. *China Leadership Monitor*, 75(1), 1–13. <https://www.prleader.org/post/the-a4-movement-mapping-its-background-and-impact>
- Tilly, C., & Tarrow, S. G. (2015). *Contentious politics*. Oxford University Press.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2014). *Discourse and knowledge*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wang, Y. (2024). The divisive past and the conflicted other: How Chinese netizens view Russia. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 33(148), 634–648. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2023.2183768>
- Wang, H., Sparks, C., & Yu, H. (2018). Popular journalism in China: A study of *China Youth Daily*. *Journalism*, 19(9-10), 1203–1219. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884917691987>
- Wang, Y., & Tan, J. (2023). Participatory censorship and digital queer fandom: The commercialisation of boys' love culture in China. *International Journal of Communication*, 17, 2554–2572. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/19802/4126>
- Wodak, R. (2009). *The discourse of politics in action*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wu, X., & Montgomery, M. (2020). Witnessing in crisis contexts in the social media age: The case of the 2015 Tianjin blasts on Weibo. *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(5), 675–691. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443719855300>
- Yang, F. (2016). Rethinking China's Internet censorship: The practice of recoding and the politics of visibility. *New Media & Society*, 18(7), 1364–1381. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814555951>
- Yang, J. (2021). "Bureaucraticshiyuzheng: Silence, affect, and the politics of voice in China". *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 11(3), 972–985. <https://doi.org/10.1086/717956>
- Yang, G. (2022). *The Wuhan lockdown*. Columbia University Press.
- Zeng, J., Burgess, J., & Bruns, A. (2019). Is citizen journalism better than professional journalism for fact-checking rumours in China? How Weibo users verified information following the 2015 Tianjin blasts. *Global Media and China*, 4(1), 13–35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436419834124>
- Zhang, C. (2023). Postcolonial nationalism and the global right. *Geoforum: Journal of Physical, Human, and Regional Geosciences*, 144, 103824–103825. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2023.103824>
- Zhao, S. (2023). Is Beijing's long game on Taiwan about to end? Peaceful unification, brinkmanship, and military takeover. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 32(143), 705–726. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2022.2124349>