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contradictions and tensions**

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EXPLORING DIGITAL DISCOURSE WITH CHINESE
CHARACTERISTICS: CONTRADICTIONS AND TENSIONS

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of the University of Westminster
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Abstract

Capitalism in China is under transformations. This research aims to register and interpret China's discourse on network technologies, reveal the underlying ideologies, and tie this discourse to the transformation of China's capitalism of which it is a part. Digital discourse, as this thesis defines it, is about the contemporary discourse on network technology under Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics. China's state-led capitalism has gone through all aspects of changes that are enabled by network technologies, ranging from production, consumption and the market, to the relations between international capital, the State, domestic capital, and individuals are experiencing changes. Along with the economic, political and technological changes are ideological transformations. Digital discourse is part of the social process that is related to other social changes. This thesis will focus on the particular forms of digital discourse as a channel to investigate both social and ideological transformations in China's digital capitalism.

In particular, this thesis looks at the digital discourse from three social and political actors. It analyses discourse from the current central government's information society policies and President Xi Jinping's speeches, from CEOs of the dominant Internet companies in China, and from young workers in China's 'Silicon Valley' Shenzhen. Through the lens of ideology, this thesis provides a critique of how digital discourse from different actors legitimate social relations in the current capitalism in China. In particular, at the international level, the government and BAT have appropriated a nationalist discourse to legitimate the global expansion of China's capital and enterprises. At the domestic level, these actors have produced different types of discourse to legitimate the concentration of the market and the commercialisation of Internet platforms. At the individual level, there is a tendency among all actors to construct a consumer identity to replace a more politically active citizen identity.

Through analysing digital discourse from these three actors, this thesis also identifies several features of ideology and the mechanisms of how ideologies work in contemporary capitalism. While the study illustrates the discrepancy of ideological discourse between by the dominant groups and subaltern groups, it also identifies one crucial ideology that legitimates, internalises and naturalises the dominant socio-political arrangements surrounding the commercialised Internet – This is no alternative. This finding suggests a double-layer and multi-dimensional understandings of the ideologies about China's digital capitalism.

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“Whatever causes night in our souls may leave stars.” – Victor Hugo

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I hereby declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work

Yuqi Na

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Digital Capitalism in China is under transformations.

The Xi-Li Administration began in 2013 has emphasised the Internet-enabled Economic ‘New Normal’ and new socio-political arrangements in the digital age. This ‘New Normal’ focuses on ‘high-quality’ development, at the centre of which is the ICT and Internet-enabled new production, domestic consumption and technology development. At the 2015 World Internet Conference, Xi announced to the whole world that China’s goal is “to ensure that the more than 1.3 billion Chinese people and people across the world can all enjoy the benefits of Internet development”. In the same speech, Xi made the two phrases famous: ‘Cyber Sovereignty’ and ‘a community of shared future in cyberspace’. The government is both looking both inwards and outwards for an economic restructuring plan.

Around 2010, the Chinese Internet market has become gradually dominated by three companies, Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent, known by the acronym BAT. Started their core businesses in areas of the search engine, e-commerce and instant messaging software, BAT have now expanded into almost all areas of people’s life, from social media communication and online shopping to home delivery and finance services. Along with the expansion of their empires is the violation of user privacy, surveillance, and ignorance of user need. In 2004, one user sued Baidu for using her browsing history and cookies for targeted advertising as a violation of her privacy. The final judgement from Nanjing Gulou Peoples’ Court went against her appeal, claiming a verdict against Baidu will significantly hinder the normal healthy development of Internet innovative technologies and service.

In 2018, A group of workers in Shenzhen Jasic Technology Company, dissatisfied with the poor working conditions and low pay, organised demonstrations, strikes and attempted to form Trade Union that would be independent of the Chinese authority. This protests gained support from Marxist and Maoist student group, left-wing scholars and sympathisers. However, the protests were soon cracked down by the authorities, and radical students and activists were detained.

In March 2019, a developer created a webpage on Github, one of the largest online community for programmers, owned by Microsoft since 2018. The webpage was named 996.

ICU that refers to the long working hours for programmers in China. 996 means to work from 9 am to 9 pm and 6 days per week. ICU means that programmers who work overtime risk poor health conditions and could end up in an intensive care unit. This webpage developed into a campaign against the 996 working system. Programmers started to post whitelist and blacklist of technology companies in China about their working conditions. This campaign attracted heating debate on Chinese social media platforms such as Zhihu, Sina Weibo and WeChat. The CEOs soon responded with counter-discourse. Jack Ma, for example, claims it is a ‘blessing’ to work for 996 systems. Qiangdong Liu, CEO of JD, another e-commerce giant, backed Ma’s statements and claims that the economic growth in China has created ‘slackers’ and ‘slackers are not my brothers’.

These changes in societies attracted my attention and concerns about the development of China’s digital capitalism. With the alienated and exploited work, highly concentrated market, strictly censored and occasional loosened control over the online space, how are the power relations maintained? How could change happen? Or what prohibits changes from happening? What are the cultural and ideological underpinnings of the current institutional changes that enabled by network technologies in China?

1.1. Key Concepts

These questions brought me to the first key concept of ideology. Ideology itself is a term of complexity. As Eagleton (1991/2007) illustrated, there are at least six different ways to define ideology, and each of them has different epistemological and ontological commitments (Eagleton, 2007: 28). This thesis chooses to focus on a Marxist critical tradition in understanding what ideology *is* and *does*. Ideology, in brief, legitimates the current social relations and in particular the dominant power relations. It is about promotion, legitimation, deception with or without intentions.

This understanding of ideology is determined by the philosophical underpinnings of this study. This study will be conducted from a critical approach which refers to the ‘theory of society’ in Adorno’s term. According to Adorno, the ‘theory of society’ investigates “societal totality and its laws of movement” (Adorno, 1976b: 68). The critical approach focuses on the “structural basic conditions”. Its purpose is to reveal the “deceit of appearances” and to seek

the “alteration of the manifest” (ibid.). Therefore, it will neither satisfy itself with a mere collection of immediate empirical findings (individual, concrete observations), nor with some empty general laws that are deprived of substantive content (ibid.: p70). As Adorno points out, and as Horkheimer developed on critical theory, “critical sociology is... necessarily also a critique of society” (ibid.: 114).

Critical social research thus should possess not only the explanatory and descriptive but also evaluate the objects it studies. First of all, it emphasises the meaning given by individuals or groups. It recognises its study objects as subjects with self-understanding and their actions full of meaning. But this cannot be separated from an understanding of the material structures behind those meanings and activities. These structures, though ignored by some social scientists, should be isolated and clarified. All human practices are mediations between objects and subjects. A single focus on either side is not comprehensive. As Harvey points out, the role of critical social research is to “keep alert to the structural factors while probing meanings”(Harvey, 1990: 13).

Moreover, this dialectical perception of social reality inevitably leads to an evaluation of it. Since the study object of social science is society, which is the product of people’s activities under certain conditions, it should “develop a critical self-awareness in people as subjects and indeed assist in their emancipation” (Sayer, 2010: 28). Society is not something external to people, but a complex entity produced by and *for* human beings. Therefore, critical social research inevitably deals with deconstructing the existing dominant social order. It is critical in the sense of discovering and criticising the otherwise ignored oppressive social structures.

The discussions of ideology and critical approach of this research pose another question about how to understand the nature of the Chinese economy and its socio-political arrangements. Since critical social research aims to evaluate the object from understanding society as a whole, it is crucial for this research to discuss the totality of Chinese society. With the socialist heritage inherited from the revolutionary past, Whether China is a socialist or capitalist country is always under debate. This thesis, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, understands China as a capitalist country with special characteristics. This is important for this thesis to understand the contradictions in Chinese society and thus ideologies regarding network technologies. The changing ownership of land, enterprises, the integration into the global capitalist market through FDI, export and investments, the social relations derived

from the economic and political relations all pose new contradictions in the Chinese society. Ideologies thus not only reflect these unsolved problems in reality but also respond to them. Study of digital discourse thus cannot be separated from an analysis of capitalism with Chinese characteristics.

Digital discourse, as this thesis defines it, is about the contemporary discourse on network technology under Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics. Since China's state-led capitalism has gone through the political-economic changes enabled by network technologies, along with the economic, political and technological changes are ideological transformations. Digital discourse is part of the social process that is related to other social changes. This thesis will focus on the particular forms of digital discourse as a channel to investigate both social and ideological transformations in China's digital capitalism.

1.2. Ideology Critique in Media and Technology Studies

Ideological critique in media studies is nothing new and indeed motivated the discussion of the previous chapter. Derived from the Marxist tradition, adopted by the Frankfurt School and later British cultural studies, a lot of developments have been made in this area (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002; Hall, 1982; Marcuse, 1964) and contributed to the very 'opening up' or elaboration of the very idea of ideology in the Marxist tradition, especially as regards 'ideology in practice' as opposed to or in distinction to more 'abstract' theorisations of ideology.

However, there are two main disagreements about the traditional ideology critique in media and culture studies. First of all, as criticised by several analysts of political economy (Fuchs, 2011; Garnham, 1998; D Smythe, 1994), cultural studies tend to focus mainly on ideology critique and not enough on the political economic aspects of media in terms of capital accumulation, media concentration, and so on.

The second issue is that ideology critique in communication and media studies focuses mainly on the content presented *in* the media, instead of the narratives of media *itself* (with some exceptions, see discussions made by Slack and Wise, 2005). In other words, ideology critique tends to neglect the discourses about how media technologies are, can or should be

developed and used, i.e. the politics of/behind media. As argued by Gillespie and his colleagues, while media and communication researchers focus on texts, media industries and audiences/users, “the materiality of these devices and networks has been consistently overlooked” (Gillespie et al., 2014: 1). The main problem of this unbalanced focus is that it will cause a tendency to neglect social relations behind those media or communication means, i.e. how these means are developed and applied. This concentration on the content itself reflects a reified understanding of information and media. This has become a crucial issue especially with the fast development of ICTs and the Internet, when people’s engagement with media technologies as such has become a major issue. How does one conduct critique of ideology in an environment that media not only present content but also provide a channel, a medium for communication and the technology itself is one major source of profit and with which users primarily engage with so much pleasure and involvement? What does it mean when a platform such as Facebook claims that it is not a media company but only provides connections to people? Is it true that we have entered a new era in which everyone has the power to speak out, thus all hierarchies have been abolished? These questions force us to look beyond the textuality of the media, and draw our attention to the materiality of media technology and the broader socio-political contexts in which they are developed, indeed encouraged. Ideology critique thus should go beyond examinations and interpretations of media texts (though this does not mean that textual analysis is irrelevant or less important), but of discourses about media and technologies, their developments and usages. It means that media researchers cannot neglect the development and impacts of the technologies and materiality behind the screens any more.

Among the discussions about the relationship between technology and society, technological determinism is one of the established study areas. Every time a new technology is invented or introduced the issue of technological determinism arises both in academic and popular discourse. New technologies, it is claimed, either provide new, exciting and positive solutions to certain problems or represent some kind of dominating or all-consuming threat. Similarly, every time when new technologies are improved or expanded, discourse on how they will hold the power to change the whole world (in a good way or bad way) emerges. The optimistic outlook will emphasise ‘technological fixes’ or, more cosmically, the ‘technological sublime’, later adapted by Mosco (2005) as the ‘digital sublime’. The more pessimistic outlook may be less pervasive among most users but expressed in various political discourses or debates in a variety of media themselves. This pessimistic view

expresses concerns about ‘addiction’ to new media or a topic of fictional fantasies about being dominated or replaced by AI technologies or of a population pacified by such technologies and their use. Both reactions can be said to be a product of reductive thinking, highly criticised as technological determinism. Technological determinism here is perceived as a one-dimensional understanding of the development of technologies and such debates about technological determinism have always been a focus of historians of technologies (Bimber, 1994; ML Smith, 1994; MR Smith, 1994).

Some studies have focused on the connection between ideologies regarding new technologies and the transformation of advanced capitalism. These studies focus on the digital discourse, digital sublime, or ‘spirit of network’. Mosco has pointed out that “cyberspace is a central force in the growth of three of the central myths of our time, each linked in the vision of an end point: the end of history, the end of geography, and the end of politics” (Mosco, 2005: 13). For Fisher, digital discourse on network technology “has been a centrepiece in the legitimation of the transformation of advanced capitalist societies from Fordism to post-Fordism” (Fisher, 2010: 10).

While there are sporadic studies about China’s digital discourse (Gewirtz, 2019; Hong, 2008; Wu and Yun, 2015; Zhao, 2007), no previous research was dedicated to provide an overall picture and to link it to China’s social changes. This research will make a contribution to provide some preliminary discussions on how digital discourse contribute to the legitimation of the current transformation of China’s capitalism.

1.3. Research Questions and the Overall Structure of this Thesis

This research aims to register and interpret China’s discourse on network technologies, reveal the underlying ideologies, and tie this discourse to the transformation of China’s capitalism of which it is a part. This research will address the following research questions:

- RQ1: What kinds of digital discourse regarding the Internet economy and politics are created and promoted? How does the government discursively construct China’s developmental path in ICT- and Internet-related documents?

- RQ2: What kinds of digital discourse regarding the Internet economy and politics are created and promoted? How do BAT discursively represent themselves and their relations with other stakeholders in the CEO's speeches?
- RQ3: What kinds of digital discourse on China's Internet is constructed among workers?
- RQ4: How does the ideological digital discourse legitimate the institutional arrangements and power relations in the transformation of China's capitalism?

To find out the answers to these questions is the task of this thesis. Chapter 2 and 3 set up the theoretical and contextual foundations further in details. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical discussions on ideology. Based on the methodological and philosophical background of this thesis, it reflects on discussions of classical Marxist tradition of ideology, including works from Marx, Lukács, Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, Williams and Hall. These authors represent two approaches towards ideology theorisation. The first one emphasises the material structure of society as a whole. Through analysing the fundamental contradictions in capitalist societies and late capitalist societies, this approach argues that reification and identical thinking derived from the *commodity fetishism* disguise the real relations between human beings. The relations of things thus disguise the relations of human beings. Ideology for this type of argument is pejorative, but not necessarily class-genetic. The second approach emphasises the *legitimation* and *promotion* of dominant social power. From this sense, ideologies serve the interests of the dominant power and secure the complicity of subaltern groups and classes. They might be chaotic and episodic, but functions to limit people's capacity for revolutionary thought. It is worth noticing that not all of the ideas from the ruling class or a ruling group are ideological unless they are promoting dominant interests. It is also worth noticing that discourse that is not subject to dominant power relations is not ideological.

After setting out how I use the term ideology in this thesis, I then turn to the context of analysis in China. Chapter 3 addresses the question of how to understand the political economy of China. It first positions itself in the academic discussions of two stances to understand China's political economy: Socialist Market Economy or Capitalist society with Chinese characteristics. To further engage in the debate, this chapter then illustrates some basic characteristics of the Chinese political economy. These focal points under debate are

land issues, ownership of domestic enterprises, foreign-invested enterprises, political reforms and the Party-State. This chapter ends with a reflection on the contradictions in Chinese society and the unfortunate decline of its Socialist heritage. This chapter is necessary as it illustrates the economic structural and political contradictions in China. As discussed in Chapter 2, to understand and identify ideology is necessarily linked to the critical examination of contradictions in society as a whole.

Chapter 4 and 5 serve to form the analytical framework in this thesis. Chapter 4 focuses on digital discourse in advanced capitalism. First, it addresses one prominent ideology regarding the relations between technology and society – technological determinism. Techno-determinism emphasises the independence of technology from society, the determinant role of technology in society and technology itself as human progress. All these aspects neglect or downplay the discussions of social relations. Second, this chapter reviews the literature on the digital discourse that is connected to the political economy analysis of capitalist society. This approach is in line with the philosophical background of this thesis. The discussions in advanced capitalism are embedded in the transformation from Fordism to the so-called Post-Fordism (Harvey, 1990). Along with the changes in economic, socio-political arrangements are ideological changes. From an economic perspective, these ideologies argue that network technologies have brought a decentralised and de-hierarchised market, flexible production and working process, and participatory culture (Fisher, 2010; Freedman, 2012; Fuchs, 2014a; Fuchs and Sandoval, 2013). From a political perspective, these ideologies emphasise that the Internet will automatically bring democratisation and empowerment in society, thus facilitate de-regulation and de-politicisation (Dean, 2004, 2013; Mosco, 2005).

Chapter 5 turns the focus back to China. It examines China's digital discourse with a discussion of the matrix of power relations in China brought by network technologies. First, it addresses the techno-determinism in the Chinese context: techno-nationalist discourse and de-politicisation of technology. China's historical background as a de-colonised periphery country during the imperialist expansion of capitalism, endeavour of modernisation and industrialisation, and reform and open-up in a post-revolution situation together shape the development of this type of digital discourse (Dai, 2003; Wu and Yun, 2015; Yang and Mueller, 2014; Zhao, 2007, 2010). Second, China's digital discourse has gone through the changes from 'post-industrial' ideologies to 'neo-industrialisation' (Gewirtz, 2019; Hong, 2008; Zhao, 2007). Third, to investigate ideologies regarding network technology in China's

society better, this chapter further provides an analysis of the matrix of power relations in China's ICT industry (Meng, 2018; Schiller, 2005; Yang, 2009; Zhao and Schiller, 2001). In particular, it outlines the relations between global capital, the State, the market, and society. The tensions among these stakeholders highlight some unique contradictions and power relations in the development and transformation, enabled by network technologies, of China's capitalism. This chapter also deepens the discussions in Chapter 3 on Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics. Finally, Chapter 5 provides an analytical framework for investigating China's digital discourse, emphasising several aspects from economic and political aspects.

Chapter 6 explains how this thesis will investigate the research questions. It first introduces CDA as the main methodology, emphasising the 'heterogeneous' feature of CDA or CDS (Wodak and Meyer, 2015b). The end of this chapter reflects on some methodological issues in this research. The rest of the chapter is divided into three sections. Each section explains the sampling and analysing strategies applied for three types of materials: the government documents, speeches from CEOs of the BAT, and data generated from focus groups with workers.

Chapter 7, 8, and 9 present findings from these three important stakeholders and their digital discourse – the government, the BAT, and the workers. Chapter 7 finds out three main themes of government digital discourse under the ultimate goal to 'build a Cyber Superpower' and the claimed core value to 'serve the people'. The first main theme is about information economy. The Xi-Li administration has promoted a 'New Normal' of the Chinese economy. The 'New Normal' claims an 'upgrade' of the Chinese economy that promotes digital economy, mass entrepreneurship and innovation, and the role of the Chinese enterprises. The second main theme in the government digital discourse is cybersecurity that emphasises core Internet technologies, Cyber Sovereignty and a 'clean environment in the Cyberspace'. Finally, there is a global aspect in China's digital discourse in which, China's soft power and the participation in the global digital economy and global Internet governance are key issues.

Chapter 8 outlines three main themes from the CEOs' digital discourse. First, the BAT has represented their platforms as the Internet 'infrastructure' and 'utility' to downplay their *de facto* domination in the market. Since the first years of BAT, they are in conflicts with

China's 'real economy'. Therefore, a second main theme in their discourse is about a reconcile with the traditional industrial sectors. The BAT have claimed to facilitate the upgrade China's economy, help traditional industries, and increase domestic consumption. Finally, there are contradictions in BAT's discourse on its global identity and Chinese identity. The Chinese identity is used to legitimate its business expansion into new areas and the world market.

Chapter 9 presents the results from focus groups with three types of workers. It focuses on the lived experiences of workers about the highly commercialised and politically controlled Internet in China. Do they legitimate the current power relations surrounding the Chinese Internet and how? Are there any internalised ideologies regarding the current power relations? Do they pose any challenges or alternatives, in their everyday life, against the dominant companies and political controls? This chapter addresses these questions. It finds out that while workers' digital discourse legitimate the Internet economy and politics in several ways, these ideologies embedded in the discourse are not necessarily *internalised*. Among all the ideologies, 'There is no alternative' stands out as the main ideology regarding the Internet. It includes three types of arguments: there are not alternative platforms, no direct political participation, and more importantly, no other ways to organise social relations.

To wrap these findings up, Chapter 10 serves to conclude the whole thesis. It argues that the digital discourse from different actors legitimates the power relations in the development and transformation, enabled by network technologies, of Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics. In particular, first, the digital discourse legitimates the current global expansion of China's capital and enterprises. Second, it legitimates the concentration of the market, intensifying the positive aspects and mitigating the negative consequences. Third, it also actively constructs a consumer identity to replace a more politically active citizen identity. This thesis thus proposes a double-layer, multi-dimensional understanding of ideology under digital capitalism. On the one hand, the dominant power relations can promote certain types of ideologies to legitimate the current situation. On the other hand, ideology can arise from the economic structure. In digital capitalism, *the* internalised ideology might be that the only feasible way to organise the Internet is through commercialised platforms. This reflects the commodity fetishism in the capitalist society.

CHAPTER 2. DEFINING IDEOLOGY IN THIS THESIS

This chapter will serve to discuss and define the term ideology used in this thesis. Discussing the differing approaches to ideology and examining the social functions of ideology are essential for understanding domination, oppression and struggles in social reality. This chapter refers to traditional Marxist theories because their focus on class, domination and ideology fits my fundamental understanding of Chinese society as an authoritarian capitalist society in a transnational informational capitalist system (see discussions about China's capitalism in Chapter 3).

This chapter will focus on three aspects of ideology from a Marxist critical tradition. Firstly, it will discuss the Marxist traditions in understanding what ideology is (2.1). Secondly, it will discuss the functions of ideology and whose interests ideology serves (2.2). Finally, by way of conclusion, this chapter will give a comprehensive account of how this thesis will identify and understand ideology. It will also provide a hypothesis for understanding ideology and how it may be said to operate in China regarding the Internet as a social practice (2.3).

2.1. Defining Ideology

This section will discuss what ideology is and where ideology comes from. These two closely related questions are fundamental to identifying and distinguishing what ideologies are and what they are not. There are several ways to approach these questions. Following Lukács, Adorno and Horkheimer, it is possible to understand ideologies as being defined by and emerging from basic economic structures. Following Gramsci and Hall, ideologies might be understood as akin to existing systems of political ideas which are in contradiction with one another. It is also possible to identify ideologies from historical analysis, following Williams.

The discussion of what ideology is and where it emerges from will shed light on how to identify ideological discourses through a combination with critical political economic analysis of the Internet.

As I will demonstrate in this section, if ideology derives from economic and political tensions in reality, such as the conflicting interests among internet companies, states and users, then it is necessary first of all to identify the conflicts in Internet-related areas, such as digital labour issues, political control, *etc.* The need to identify these conflicts will be further developed in this thesis in the literature review, part of which will discuss such issues.

2.1.1. Ideology which emerges from economic contradictions

One way of understanding ideology is in terms of the economic structure of a society and its contradictions. This kind of understanding is based on Marx's analysis of economic structure in class society in general and capitalist society in particular. As Eagleton argues, there are two main categories of ideological analysis which are derived from Marxist economic structural thinking: the commodity form and exchange value (Eagleton, 2007: 125). Lukács' notion of ideology derives from the commodity form; Adorno's notion of ideology derives from the mechanism of exchange value.

First of all, Marx's critique of ideology, that is, his conceptualisation of it, is the primary notion of what it is and how it operates that subsequent Marxist theory elaborates on, debates and often reconceptualises, often radically, or, much more complexly. For Marx, ideology is a type of consciousness that derives from the real conditions of existence in any social formation. Building on his establishment of historical materialism in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels make it clear that consciousness should be understood as "conscious

existence” deriving from reality. People’s ideas are “direct efflux”, “reflexes”, or “echoes” of reality (Marx and Engels, 1845: 42). Consciousness, then, is the product of an individual’s material activity and their material intercourse; individuals are active subjects instead of passive products of the environment. The same applies to ideology. Ideology can only derive from real struggles in social reality, corresponding to certain economic and political contradictions.

To explain this further, I would refer to Marx’s conceptualisation of ideology as working like a ‘camera obscura’. As Marx points out, “If in all ideology men and their relations appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process” (Marx and Engels, 1845: 42). This is Marx’s metaphor explaining how ideology emerges from a reversed representation of social reality: just as when one looks through a ‘camera obscura’ and sees an upside-down version of reality, so ideology inverts our understanding of the social formation.

There are two main concepts in Marx’s works that are closely related to ideology: alienation and fetishism, though these might be seen as one and the same concept with different emphases. Along with Marx’s emphasis of analysis on economy in his later works, he discusses the *alienation* of social power in *The Germany Ideology*. According to Marx, alienation of social power takes the form, in capitalist society, of the domination of apparently autonomous relations between commodities over relations between human beings, of capital over labour, of dead labour over living labour. In other words, alienation means that people cannot control their own products or means of production, so the relationship

between products and means of production take precedence over individual human relationships.

Marx also refers to *commodity fetishism* which is connected to his notion of alienation.

Commodity fetishism means “the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things” (Marx, 1867: 165). A commodity thus obtains a mysterious character that “reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristic of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things” (ibid.: 164-165). The real social relations between human beings seem to be governed by the interactions of commodities.

Georg Lukács expanded Marx’s critique of commodity fetishism with his use of the concept of *reification*, and connected it to Weber’s idea of rationalisation in modern society. Deriving from Marx’s critique of commodity fetishism, Lukács defines the phenomenon of reification as “a relation between people [which] takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a ‘phantom objectivity’ and autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people” (Lukács, 1971: 83). He then expands this phenomenon to all aspects of the social system based on Weber’s critique of rationalism: “capitalism has created a form for the state and a system of law corresponding to its needs and harmonising with its own structure” (ibid.: 95). And he finally expanded reification into the “ever more reified levels” of social consciousness (Rehmann, 2014: 79). Following this theory, all aspects of human life are rationally and mechanically divided into isolated parts, detached from a totality.

Lukács' arguments about 'false consciousness' can also shed light on my understanding of what is 'false' about ideology and is perhaps the most familiar notion arising from the Marxist analysis of what ideology 'is'. As Eagleton points out, commodity fetishism for Marx and reification for Lukács are "an objective material structure of capitalism" and not just "a state of mind" (Eagleton, 2007: 100). It is from this prevalent phenomenon of reification in capitalist society that the reified consciousness, 'false consciousness', emerges. Since this relation between things in everyday life-process obscures internal relations between people, it appears in people's mind as the authentic, unadulterated form of reality. 'False' means not the "true representatives of his [human] societal existence" (Lukács, 1971: 93). Ideology is the "empirically given", the "psychologically describable and explicable ideas which men form about their situation in life" (ibid.: 51). Ideology is psychologically given consciousness derived from the domination of commodity-structures in everyday life. Lukács therefore develops Marx's definition of ideology as 'false consciousness' to the partial, immediate, empirical, psychological understanding of social reality that disguises the real dialectical relations between men and nature. This is one aspect of the concept of ideology which will inform my thesis.

Another line of analysis of ideology, closely related to Marx's analysis of the capitalist economy, is derived from the key concept of exchange value mainly developed by the Frankfurt School scholar Theodor Adorno (Eagleton, 2007: 125). For Adorno, the mechanism of abstract value is the origin of ideology. Abstract value is exchange value as opposed to use value. Abstract value refers, for example, to the amount paid for a product. Use value, by comparison, refers to the usefulness of a product. A chair, for instance, is useful in the sense that it can be sat on (its use value); a chair that is sold in the marketplace is given a price (its abstract value). In *Capital*, Marx explains that every commodity could be

seen from qualitative and quantitative perspectives. The qualitative aspect is a commodity's usefulness; that is, the use value that is produced by concrete labour. Exchange value "appears first of all as the quantitative relation, the proportion, in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind" (Marx, 1867: 126). The labour that produces this exchange value is abstract labour, which appears to have no relationship with the usefulness of a product. All kinds of concrete labour are "together reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract" (ibid.: 128). Different kinds of labour can only be distinguished in quantity by measuring the duration of labour-time on the scale of hours, days *etc.* The heterogeneous characteristics of commodities and individual labourers are thus subordinated to an abstract homogeneity.

For Adorno, this abstract exchange value is the basis for ideology. It makes the supposedly incommensurable characteristics of things disappear, as well as people's thinking. Ideology for Adorno is a form of 'identical thinking', which "homogenises the world" (Eagleton, 2007: 126). Ideology suppresses the distinctions, differences and uniqueness of human thinking. Adorno further develops this notion of 'identical thinking' and emphasises its function in reproducing the current system of social reality. I will discuss this in more detail in the next section (2.2).

To sum up, Marx, Lukács and Adorno's theorisation of ideology are based on a critique of the economic structure in capitalism. From this perspective, ideology is seen as an expression of illusory ideas generated from contradictory social relations.

- It derives from the phenomenon of the domination of relations between things over the relations between human beings (Marx);

- It is the partial, immediate, empirical and psychological way people understand the world, based on their isolated situation in life (Lukács);
- It is a form of ‘identical thinking’ which eliminates heterogeneous characteristics of objects and other possibilities of life (Adorno).

2.1.2. Ideologies embedded in political conflicts

Another main line of enquiry useful for understanding ideology in Marxist theories is that suggested by political struggles among classes or in a certain class. Analysis of ideology informed by such struggles emphasise the point that “economic relations themselves cannot prescribe a single, fixed and unalterable way of conceptualizing” social reality (Hall, 1996: 38). Reality “can be ‘expressed’ within different ideological discourses” (ibid.). This section will focus on Gramsci and Hall’s analysis of ideology.

Several refinements or distinctions in Gramsci’s work can shed light on my discussion of ideology. First of all, Gramsci distinguishes two kinds of ideology: the first one is “organic ideologies” which is given to “the necessary superstructure of a particular structure”, and the other is “the arbitrary elucubrations of particular individuals” (Gramsci, 1971: 376). Another notion refers to “common sense”. With the elaboration of this term, Gramsci points out an important feature of people’s empirical consciousness, that it is chaotic. Common sense for Gramsci is the “realistic, materialistic element” which is “superstitious and acritical”, and an “immediate product of crude sensation” (ibid.: 420). It is “the spontaneous philosophy of the multitude” (ibid.: 421). Finally, there is the term ‘hegemony’ which will be discussed in next chapter about the function of ideology (see 2.2).

It is clear that Gramsci refers to ideology in a more neutral way than Marx and Lukács' negative conception of ideology. However, the similarity implicit in these two perspectives of ideology should not be ignored; that similarity is the combination of objective and subjective aspects of ideology. Ideologies, for Gramsci, are on the one hand historically given and on the other hand actively organised by individuals. They correspond to a particular historical structure and political moment, which means that they have their basis in reality. Moreover, they are at the same time arbitrary interpretations of daily experience and practices produced by subjects. In this sense, ideology for Gramsci has the same meaning as for Lukács in that it refers to an immediate and empirical expression of lived experience, though Gramsci abandons the negative ideological function of disguising the proper perception of a contradictory reality.

Hall also abandons the negative concept of ideology in the Marxist tradition and reinserts class struggle "at the centre of the problematic of ideology" (Larrain, 1996: 47). For Hall, ideology is a term used to refer to "those images, concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand and 'make sense' of some aspect of social existence" (Hall, 1995: 89). These concepts of ideologies include the key notions that ideology operates (a) "in the articulation of different elements into a distinctive set or chain of meanings" and ideologies "take place through social practice and political struggle"; (b) that ideology "pre-date individuals, and form part of the determinate social formations and conditions in which individuals are born"; (c) and works by "constructing for their subject positions of identification and knowledge which allow them to 'utter' ideological truths as if they were their authentic authors" (ibid.: 89-90). From this re-articulation, it is clear that this concept of ideology does not necessarily point to a certain

ruling class but rather Hall is describing ideological discourses that can represent different classes or groups.

Hall's understanding of ideologies can be better illustrated by scrutinising his concrete analysis of Thatcherism. By raising the question of internal contestation within the dominant classes and the novel elements in ruling ideas, Hall criticises the classical Marxist theory for its "lack of adequate explanatory power about the concrete empirical development of consciousness and practice in the working classes of the advanced capitalist world" (Hall, 1995: 43). He therefore adopts a Gramscian approach to analysis how Thatcherism gained hegemonic power within the ruling class and over the dominated classes. He tries to understand "Thatcherism's capacity to become popular" and the "ideological effectivity of Thatcherism in defining new contours in political language and calculation" (ibid.: 41). If Lukács' focus on the economic situation which distinguishes the empirical consciousness from possible class consciousness, then Hall's analysis concentrates on how this empirical consciousness is formed, encoded and made popular and thus has hegemonic power. As Larrain points out, by the analysis of the concrete political problem of Thatcherism, Hall contributes significantly to "the understanding of how political discourses and currents of thought are formed or transformed, and how social groups seek to articulate their interests with those of other groups" (Larrain, 1996: 63).

Gramsci and Hall focus on the complexity of political ideologies *within* different classes and groups. Though their concept of ideology is different from what Lukács and Adorno emphasise about the origin of ideology deriving from economic structure of capitalism, these thinkers do not necessarily contradict one another. For example, Hall discusses the historical and cultural construction of ideologies of masculinity and femininity: the complexity of

which does not in contrast with the fact that these ideologies are derived from social economic structure (Hall, 1995: 90). The discussion of racist issues, broadly considered, are also compatible with discussions of class and economic issues from an ideological perspective. To take another example, conservatism or nationalism in Thatcherism may derive from people's inverted economic condition, from an impartial understanding of reality; they also derive from the ideologies which have existed for a long time and which obtain renewed characteristics in modern times.

To sum up, this category of ideology influences the concept of ideology as used in this thesis along the following lines:

- Common sense ideology is chaotic, disjointed, and episodic (Gramsci)
- Ideology could mean a framework for people to make sense of social existence (Hall)
- Ideology is important in political struggles (function of ideology, see 2.2)

2.1.3. Tensions and Reconciliation: a summary

The following section will discuss key ideas from Raymond Williams relating to concepts of ideology and also serve to summarise the preceding discussion. The differences between the two categories discussed previously– the negative and the neutral – from my understanding, could be interpreted in Raymond Williams' words as “epochal questions” and “historical questions”. While the first one refers to “large features of different epochs of society, as between feudal and bourgeois”, the second one refers to “different phases of bourgeois society, and different moments within the phases” (Williams, 2005: 38). The former requires a perspective from economic conditions, the modes of production to discern some epochal features such as, commodity fetishism or reification or identity in capitalist society. The latter

focuses more on those active, dynamic, concrete meanings, values, ideas in social practices and political struggles.

For Williams, there are three types of culture: the dominant, alternative and oppositional. The dominant meanings and values have gone through a “selective tradition”. This is a process through which “from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and practices are neglected and excluded” (Williams, 2005: 39). Alternative and oppositional culture derive from previous the social formation and the formation of new social classes. While he is discussing culture and social consciousness, Williams’ analysis of culture can also serve as a framework for analysing where ideological or non-ideological consciousness derives from. Working with Williams’ analytical framework we can understand that ideologies derive from a historical selection process; conquering these ideologies requires the practice and coming to consciousness of new classes.

Williams’ understanding of the relations between base and superstructure can also shed some light on my understanding of two categories of ideology/ideologies illustrated in the previous two sub-sections (2.1.1 and 2.1.2). According to Williams, in the phrase “social being determines consciousness”, determination means “setting limits, exerting pressures” (Williams, 2005: 34). We could also say that the general ideology generated by economic conditions sets limits to the arena in which ideologies of political struggles could play out. In this way, we could combine together the two categories of ideologies analysed in the section 2.1.1 and 2.1.2.

2.2. The Functions of Ideology

This section will focus on the functions of ideology. The discussion of the functions of ideology will be helpful in this thesis for two main reasons. Firstly, it is a complementary way to identify specific forms of ideologies (i.e., whether certain arguments are ideological and why). Secondly, it will help to analyse how ideologies work. There are three main types of functions in traditional Marxist arguments. First, ideology serves to distort solutions and to restrain real revolutionary thoughts and alternatives. Second, ideology is used to disguise the reality of capitalist means of production as a whole: it is a partial representation of reality, which may or may not be produced intentionally. Third, ideologies are used to win consent and legitimate the ruling power. Fourth, ideologies are said to reproduce and maintain the current capitalist system.

2.2.1. Ideology as distorted solutions and limiting revolutionary thoughts

As ideologies derive from real contradictions which cannot be solved in reality, they are applied as ‘distorted solutions’ according to Marx. As discussed in 2.1.1, according to Marx, ideology arises from a contradictory reality and a distorted appearance of those material limitations. It refers to “idealist, speculative, mental expressions” of real empirical contradictions, fetters, and limitations (Marx and Engels, 1845: 51). It is a significant point for Marx to show that the origin of ideology is in the contradictory nature of reality. Because those real contradictions cannot be overcome by people’s will at the moment, they can only be solved in their consciousness. As Marx points out, increase in the productive forces is the material premise of Communism, so before people can arrive at an adequate level of productive forces, they can only liberate themselves “each time to the extent that was dictated and permitted not by their ideal of man, but by the existing productive forces” and based on the historical conditions, the “restricted productive forces” at that time (Marx and Engels, 1976: 431). As long as contradictions exist, and as long as people cannot solve them all in

reality, they can only reach “distorted solutions” in their minds (Larrain, 1979: 46). Yet, these “distorted solutions” do not come from nowhere; they usually derive from inverted appearances. As Eagleton points out, ideology is “an imaginary resolution of real contradictions which blinds men and women to the harsh actuality of their social conditions” (Eagleton, 2007: 77). It functions by distracting people’s attention from real conflicts to distorted solutions.

Gramsci’s discussion of the function of common sense is useful for the understanding of ideology, as well as his main discussions of hegemony. First of all, he states that common sense functions as a limit on revolutionary thought. Through a critique of Bukharin’s *Theories of Historical Materialism*, the focus of which is a critique of his systematic philosophies, Gramsci claims that the starting point to understand consciousness should be “the philosophy of common sense, which is the ‘philosophy of non-philosophers’” (Gramsci, 1971: 419). He claims this because philosophical and religious systems are actually “unknown to the multitude and have no direct influence on its way of thinking and action” (ibid.: 419-20). Common sense instead functions in an indirect way which limits people’s capacity for revolutionary thought.

Adorno’s critique of identical thinking also touches on this issue of distorted solutions and limits to revolutionary thinking (see 2.1.1). In a key criticism of Adorno’s understanding of ideology as identical thinking and a totalitarian system, it is claimed that modern capitalist society is very different from Nazi society thus there is more room for “variousness, plurality, cultural relativity, concrete particularity” (Eagleton, 2007: 128). While it might be hard to claim “it is the way it is” in modern society, there should be no doubt that “it cannot be different from what it is” (Rehmann translated from Adorno’s German text, 2014: 92–3). In

other words, we should understand this identical character of ideology in a broader way: though it seems that there is a range of variations and oscillation in capitalist society, this range can only be tolerated under the basic principle of developing the whole society in a capitalist manner. There is no alternative possibility of developing a large-scale social formation or social order in a socialist manner. For example, there is ‘common sense’ that socialism is an ideal that is impossible to achieve and therefore dangerous; or that is not in accord with ‘human nature’ and therefore will always fail; or the means used to try to achieve it lead to worse outcomes than those contradictions and suffering that capitalism gives rise to. All these notions are examples of ‘common sense’ and set limits to revolutionary thinking.

We have seen then, that while there is a range of perspectives concerning the distorted solutions and limits on revolutionary thinking, with some disagreement over the nature of identical thinking, it is clear that a key function of ideology is to prevent people from formulating alternative solutions or organising themselves in an alternative way, other than within the capitalist system.

2.2.2. Ideology as a partial understanding of reality

‘Distorted solution’ is a kind of disguise of total reality which only partially represents reality. It is based on the economic system in capitalism and which ideology derives from (see 2.1). For example, commodity fetishism in capitalist society has ideological functions, as a form of distorted solution. According to Eagleton, this commodity fetishism has three consequences for ideology. It firstly conceals the social character of labour. This “atomising operation of the commodity” makes it harder to grasp society as a whole which renders the capitalist order “less vulnerable to political critique”. This domination of social life by

“inanimate entities” also leads to a feeling of a capitalist social system as something natural and inevitable (Eagleton, 2007: 85).

Another example is the exchange of labour-power. When analysing the commodity exchange of labour-power, Marx points out four important realms of human rights relating to ideology in capitalist society: freedom, equality, property and Bentham (Marx, 1867: 280). These are all derived from the economic appearance of commodities. Workers are free to sell their labour-power. They exchange commodities equally with each other in the market. Everyone only disposes his own property. Furthermore, everyone simply struggles for his individual interest disregarding others’ interest or common interest. Therefore, freedom, equality, individual ownership and individualism can be seen as significant types of ideology inherent in capitalist society which restrict a total understanding of reality.

Reification and rationalisation, as criticised by Lukács, have a similar function as ideology. The appearance of atomisation, caused by abstraction, rationalisation and quantification in capitalism under the domination of commodity-structure, has a significant influence on consciousness and has its functions. First of all, rationalisation in modern Taylorism denotes a break of work-processes from the “organic, irrational and qualitatively determined unity of the product” (Lukács, 1971: 88). This then breaks down the object of production into isolated parts in order to calculate the results accurately. A commodity is no longer an organic unity of use-value. This separation of objects of production necessarily leads to the breakdown of subjects. Workers are no longer the master of the production process but only a “mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system” (ibid.: 89). This mechanised labour results in an increasingly “contemplative” activity and lack of will of workers (ibid.). This ‘independence’

of the process from human consciousness and intervention then changes individuals' immediate attitude to the world.

Moreover, the rational and isolated exchange between commodity owner (or owners of labour-power as commodity) also gives an "immediate, practical as well as intellectual confrontation of the individual with society, production and reproduction of life" (ibid.: 92). Various forms of capital (such as merchant capital, finance capital), still serve in the exploitation of surplus value, yet "in the minds of people in bourgeois society they constitute the pure, authentic, unadulterated forms of capital" (ibid.: 93). The immediate commodity relations conceal the actual relations between men and relations between men and objects, so the reified mind regards these forms as the representations of the whole social existence. The immediate experience of commodity exchange, as only part of the story, is understood as the whole reality.

2.2.3. Hegemony used to gain consent for the dominant power

Another function of ideology is for the ruling power to gain consent. I would like to, first of all, emphasise the distinguish made by Gramsci between "historically organic ideologies, those, that is, which are necessary to a given structure, and ideologies that are arbitrary, rationalistic, or 'willed'". He further confirms that both could direct human behaviours as "to the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is 'psychological'; they 'organise' human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggles, etc. To the extent that they are arbitrary they only create individual 'movements, polemics and so on'"(Gramsci, 1971: 377).

This function of ideology to gain consent is then best illustrated by Gramsci through his arguments about hegemony and its arena, which is civil society. Gramsci uses the term hegemony instead of ideology to emphasise the practical dynamic process through which a ruling power wins consent from those subordinate to it. Thus it is a process of language and culture (that is, discourse) as well as economic and political means. For example, the ruling class could use the tax system to gain favour from those people it needs to support it or at the least tolerate it. It could also create a wealthy but politically uninterested middle class. On the political level, the parliamentary system gives people an illusion of self-government and freedom. The legal system should seem as equal to everyone. These are normal economic and political strategies to build hegemony in Gramsci's terms or, we can say, appearances which bring about ideology in Marx or Lukács' terms. It is obvious that the success of this strategy is highly related to ideology's functions to disguise reality and to the partial representation of reality. The difference is that Gramsci places more emphasis on how ideology/hegemony is used in political struggles.

The arena for people to explain these appearances actively and for the ruling class to strategically gain consent is civil society. Instead of employing the power of coercion, as the state does through repressive apparatuses such as the army, the police or the criminal system, ideology in civil society operates through "hegemonic apparatuses" such as schools, churches, families and other private institutions. It is these "hegemonic apparatuses" that "bind individuals to the ruling power by consent rather than by coercion" (Eagleton, 2007: 114). For Gramsci, then, civil society is the mediation between state and the economic structure, the terrain for class contestation, and the place where hegemony is fought for. It is the stage of various competing interpretations of appearances, daily practices. And thus the

social and cultural superstructure is not utterly determined by the base (the economic structure) as there would be no contestation or no need for ideology to operate as a discourse.

Ideology from Gramsci's perspective thus comes about through class struggles in reality. The arbitrary character of ideologies and the chaotic character of common sense do not mean they are just speculations of individuals but that they have their roots in historical social reality both at the economic structural level and at the political superstructural level. Hegemony means the practical strategies for a dominant class to win consent from those subjugated groups. Ideology therefore necessarily serves the interest of a dominant social group.

2.2.4. Ideology used to reproduce the current system

Another important function of ideology is mainly pointed out by the critique of ideology made by the Frankfurt School, which is to immortalise and reproduce the current system. Ideology is an instrument of domination, derived from this instrumental reason. Horkheimer and Adorno discuss this category of ideology in their classic work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. For them, ideology “functions as an instrument of control” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 118). It is characterised by its reproduction of a given social order and its manipulation (Rehmann, 2014: 85). It keeps people to stay in common with others and to fit into the existing social order. Ideology does this by “duplicating appearances”, and this “omnipresent and impenetrable world of appearances” then “blocks insight” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 118). Ideology is therefore actually a “blatant lie about its meaning [of brute existence], a lie which is not articulated directly but drummed in by suggestion” (ibid.). Because this “world of appearances” is so prevalent, ideology becomes powerful enough to “consolidate the immutability of the existing circumstances” (ibid.: 119). This understanding can be understood to be very close to Marx's founding conception of ideology as disguised

reality. The appearances, the fetishism of commodity for Marx or reification for Lukács, disguise reality, that is, the real relationship between man and products and between human beings (the ‘real conditions of existence’).

This deceptive function of ideology is realised through what Adorno and Horkheimer conceived of as ‘the culture industry’ in late capitalist society. The ideology behind it is the positivistic technocratic thinking used to immortalise the current situation as something unchangeable. It thus legitimates the existing social power: “technical rationality today is the rationality of domination” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 95). Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the main purpose of the culture industry is to degrade people to pure objects that are subjected voluntarily to the current system, thus to the domination of existing power. The culture industry successfully fulfils this aim by reproducing reality and leading people to follow this reproduced, i.e. current, social relations. By uncritically duplicating the alienated reality in Marx’s terms or reified relations in Lukács’ terms, instrumental ideology “exploits the cult of fact by describing bad existence with utmost exactitude in order to elevate it into the realm of facts” and through such elevation “existence itself becomes a surrogate of meaning and justice” (ibid.: 119). In the calculation of possibilities, people are reduced to a human species without different individualities and they can thus be interchangeable with one other. Everyone seems to have the chance to succeed as long as you obey the rules and accept the planned opportunities given by the powerful. It is a choice to be an insider or outsider. The culture industry promotes the promise of a welfare state on the one hand, and uses tragic stories to remind those who want to leave the system of a miserable existence once being abandoned by the system on the other hand.

To sum up, this section discusses several functions of ideology in the Marxist tradition, especially from a negative aspect which guide this thesis in its empirical research to identify ideologies and to understand how they work. The functions identified in this section serve:

- to disrupt people's attentions (as imagined solutions of contradictions in reality);
- to limit revolutionary thought (chaotic common sense);
- to limit options through identical thinking;
- To disguise contradictions through partial representation of social existence (e.g. the 'fair' exchange of wage labour);
- To win consent from subordinate groups through hegemony;
- To control and manipulate through instrumental reason;
- To immortalise and reproduce the current system.

2.3. A Model of Ideology

With the analysis of ideology in the previous sections, this section will attempt to approach a model to understand ideology. This model will pave the way for my further analysis of ideology of the Internet and illustrate a hypothesis for my empirical research (See Figure 2.1).

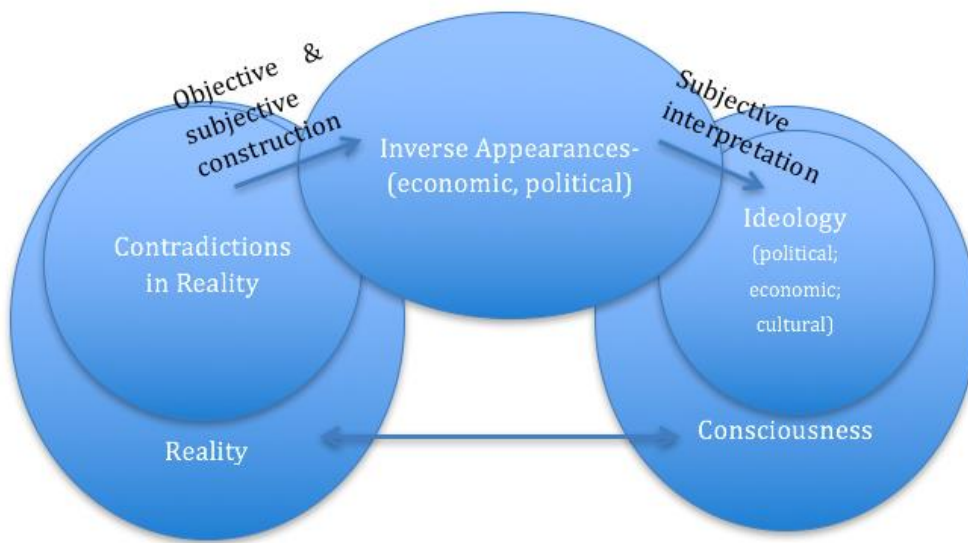


Figure 2.1. The Relationship between Reality, Appearances and Ideology

The previous sections have limited the use of ideology in this thesis. It will focus on the role of ideology in *legitimation*, to gain consent for the dominant power and to reproduce the current system, through distorted or partial representation of the reality.

First and the foremost, the understanding of ideology has to be rooted in social reality. It necessarily corresponds to the contradictions in reality. The fundamental conflicts in capitalist society is economic struggles within its structure. But ideology does not reflect this reality directly. There are inverse appearances between reality and ideology. These appearances have a deceptive character to disguise the contradictory reality. It is shown both on the level of economic structure and on the level of political superstructure. From the economic aspect, there is the phenomenon of reification, derived from commodity fetishism, in the economic base that disguises the real relations between human beings. The exchange of labour power suppresses immeasurable heterogeneous characteristics of human beings and form a kind of identical thinking. From a political perspective, ideology serves the political

oppressions and struggles. The modern parliamentary system manifests an illusion of self-organised government, and the juridical institutions disguise the real inequality. The welfare state makes people believe that the state feeds people instead of the other way round. The culture industry tries to immortalise the current existing social order by reproducing it again and again. These appearances of these phenomena all correspond to contradictions in reality in capitalist society and have an ideological influence on people's cognition. So, ideology is not just the arbitrary speculations of individuals (and thus it is absurd when one hears people referring to their own personal or individual ideologies). It has its root in reality constructed throughout the interactions between objects and subjects.

The roots of ideology in contradictory reality determines that ideology necessarily serves the interests of the ruling class. Its three main functions: distorted solution, partial representation of reality, reproducing the current system, are all closely related to the dominant class and ruling power. However, ideology should not be perceived as a static and single mode of thinking. Ideology has a *complex* and *dynamic* character. We can easily identify competing ideas within the ruling class. Subjects could interpret those appearances within a wide range of different meanings. Yet, these differences are limited within a closed system. When the rule of the dominant class is in danger, those differences will be vanished. The fundamental function of ideology of preserving the current social order in the interest of dominant class is shown. Pragmatic interests or class situation limits class consciousness or ideology. As Eagleton puts it, "at a certain points its [bourgeois] genuinely cognitive discourse becomes blacked, forced up against certain conceptual limits which mark the real historical frontiers of bourgeois society itself" (Eagleton, 2007: 51).

In conclusion, ideology corresponds to a variety of inverse appearances. It reproduces the current system and disguises the contradictions through distorted solutions in mind and partial representations of the reality. To think and to act ideologically means to conceal the real contradictions in favour of the dominant class. Though ideology necessarily serves the interests of the ruling class, it is held by both the ruling class and dominated groups.

CHAPTER 3. CAPITALISM WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter aims to describe the main characteristics of Chinese political economy. There are two main stances towards Chinese political economy. The first one claims that China is a socialist market economy and the second one China is a capitalist society with special characteristics. This thesis argues in line with the second position. China's political economy has its own characteristics in its transformation from the earlier centre-planned (commanding-height) economy and socialist revolutionary heritage towards a market economy or capitalist economy. This chapter first outlines some of the discussions on various forms of capitalism and different perspectives that have been put forward to understand China's political economy (3.1). It then focuses on four main aspects in the current discussions of China's political economy: land issues (3.2); ownership of domestic enterprises (3.3); foreign relationships, especially foreign investment (3.4); and the controversial role of the party-state in political reforms (3.5). Finally, I will discuss the decline of China's socialist tradition and provide a summary of the political and economic *contradictions* in contemporary China (3.6). Discussion on these issues will prepare for my further investigation of China's contemporary ideologies and ICT-related discourses.

3.1. The Capitalist Economy and Chinese model

The last four decades have seen what is called 'the rise of China'. This phrase normally indicates the fast development of the Chinese economy. Figure 3.1 and Table 3.1 show China and other regions' share of the worldwide GDP based on purchasing power parity (data source: IMF World Economic Outlook Database, data after 2012 are estimated by IMF staff). China has a much larger share than other BRICS countries, as well as Japan and Germany that has the third and fourth largest share of the world economy. China has been increasingly involved in the global economy in terms of export and import of goods, foreign direct investment (FDI), etc.

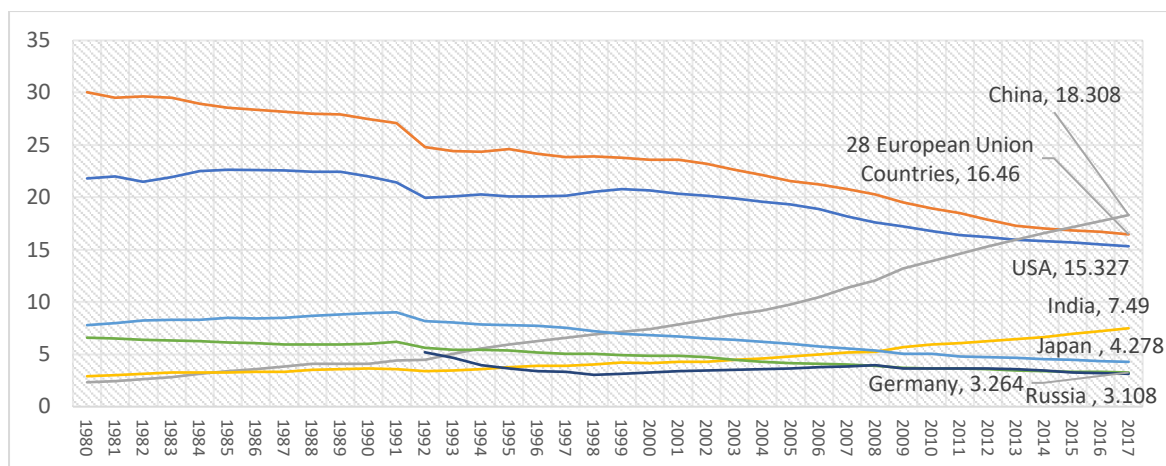


Figure 3.1. Percentage share of world GDP based on purchasing-power-parity (PPP), by selected countries and regions, data source: IMF World Economic Outlook Database, April 2017

	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
USA	21.78	22.50	22.45	19.94	20.11	20.63	19.60	17.63	16.21	15.48
EU (28)	30.04	28.94	28.01	24.78	24.16	23.58	22.09	20.30	17.83	
China	2.328	3.114	4.105	4.506	6.265	7.421	9.2	12.06	15.29	17.76
India	2.907	3.248	3.503	3.391	3.878	4.169	4.585	5.217	6.235	7.226
Japan	7.816	8.288	8.673	8.164	7.73	6.833	6.175	5.346	4.745	4.369
Germany	6.592	6.253	5.91	5.622	5.186	4.877	4.302	3.924	3.574	3.32
Russia	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.195	3.386	3.281	3.6	3.952	3.642	3.169

Table 3.2. Percentage share of selected countries and regions in world GDP (PPP), data source: IMF World Economic Outlook Database, April 2017

GDP change is another indicator normally used to show the fast development of the Chinese economy. While GDP per capita is still relatively low and inequality is increasing fast, this fast growth in GDP is often presented to give confidence to both citizens and global capital markets. Figure 3.2 shows the GDP changes of the seven countries and regions that are

estimated by IMF staff to have developed the fastest in 2022 (predicted statistics). This rapid growth is always seen as evidence of a strong economy in China, in comparison to both advanced economies as well as emerging and developing countries.

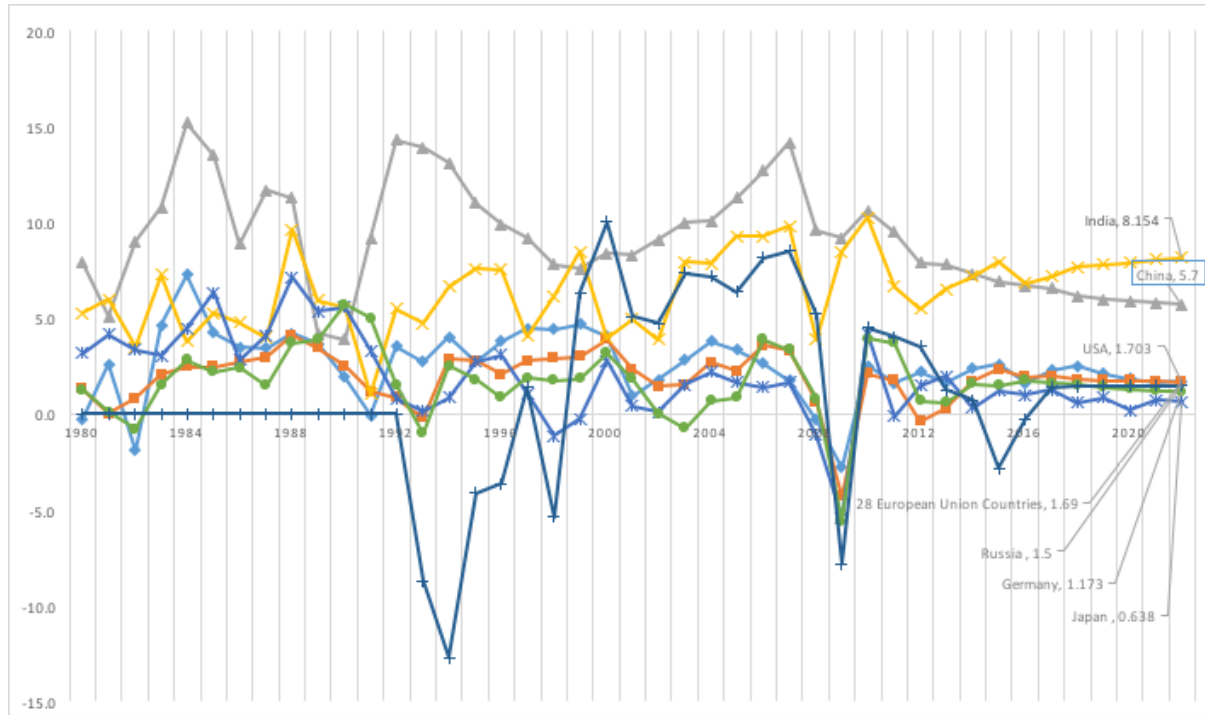


Figure 3.2. GDP Change in China and other regions, data source: IMF World Economic Outlook Database, April 2017

However, when we look at the statistics of GDP per capita, the scenario looks different. Figure 3.3 shows that national income per person in China or India is only a fraction of that of the USA or EU countries. The GINI index is a widely-used measurement to indicate the inequality of wealth distribution in a country. The values of the index are between 0 and 1: a higher value indicates a higher level of inequality. Figure 3.4 shows the high level of inequality in China compared to other regions.

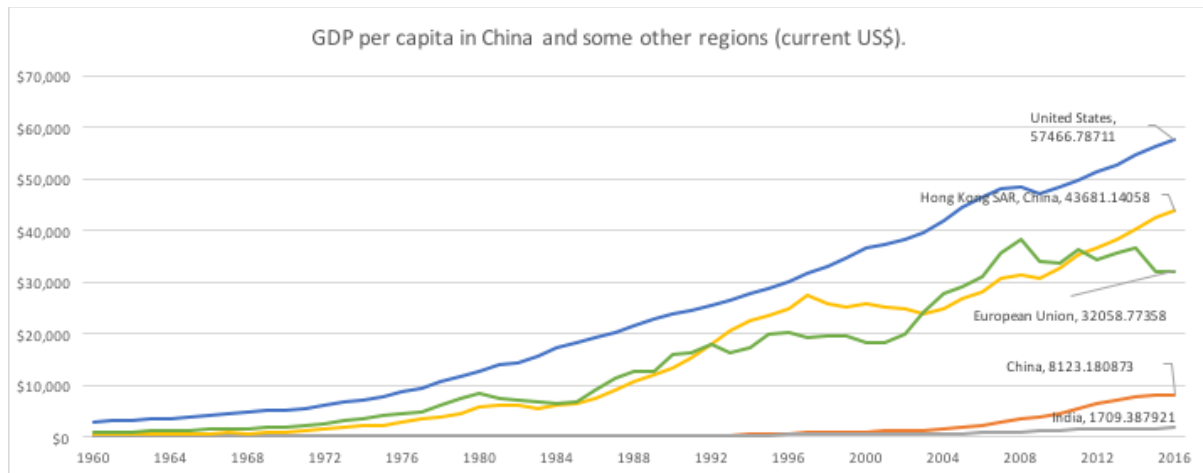


Figure 3.3. GDP per capita in China and other regions, data Source: World Bank, Sep, 2017

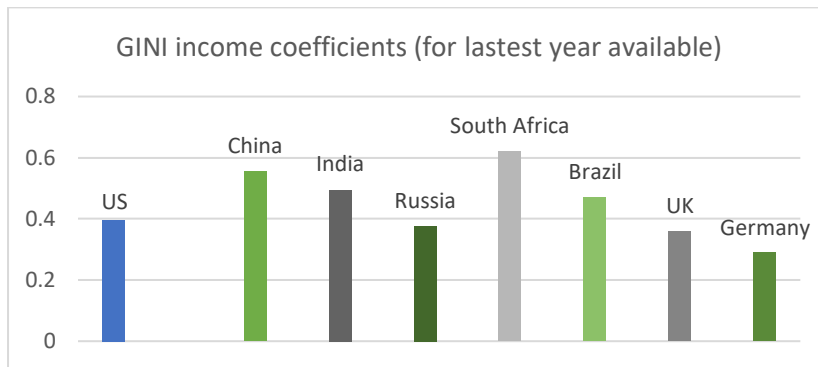


Figure 3.4. GINI income coefficients (for latest year available), data source: OECD, Sep 2017.

There is little doubt that China has been highly involved in the modern capitalist world market, as a consequence of a series of reforms from within and pressures from the outside world. The dramatic changes in China have led to significant debates on the “nature” of China’s political economy, especially on the question of whether China has a capitalist or socialist market economy (Amin, 2013; Arrighi, 2007; Harvey, 1990, 2005; Lin, 2006, 2013).

This section will start with one simple question – what is an “authentic” capitalist society – for obvious reasons, before I enter into the debates between the view of China as a capitalist society as opposed to a socialist market economy. I will argue that there are many “faces” or “varieties” of capitalism, therefore it is counterproductive to argue about the degree of difference of China’s political economy compared to other capitalist societies. It would be more appropriate, instead, to address some of the main characteristics of China’s political economy.

First of all, there should be little doubt that it is difficult to argue for an “authentic” capitalist society or capitalist model. While it is important to acknowledge the fierce expansion of capitalism into non-capitalist societies (Harvey, 2003; Lenin, 1917; Luxemburg, 1913; Marx, 1867), the claim of a “capitalist homogenization of the world” (Lin, 2006: 6) is debatable. On the contrary, researchers and authors have long been arguing for a diversity of capitalism and different characteristics of capitalist countries. For example, comparative political economy and international political economy have long been focusing on the varieties of capitalism (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hall, 2015; Hall and Soskice, 2001; Hall and Thelen, 2009), especially on the between the UK, US and German economies (Chandler et al., 2009). Some scholars also distinguish “good capitalism” from “bad capitalism”, using the categories of state-guided capitalism, oligarchic capitalism, big-firm capitalism, and entrepreneurial capitalism (Baumol et al., 2007). Studies focusing on new emerging economies and developing countries, such as the BRICS, also identify special characteristics of these countries’ economies (Prashad, 2013). There are also different types of socialism. For example, socialism in Marx’s understanding is probably very different from Lenin’s practices, and even further from Stalinism. Therefore, the diversity of forms of capitalism poses a difficult question in terms of identifying the “nature” of China’s economy. However, one thing is clear, as pointed out in Halliday’s description of China’s situation after the 1980s, there is no “third way” between state-centred and capitalist economy: there are only “variations on the two main ways” (Halliday, 1999: 283–5).

Before arguing for the view of China as a socialist market or as a capitalist society with Chinese characteristics, I will outline several representative theories that have been developed for defining China’s economy to help illustrate what is meant by “Chinese Characteristics”.

Some scholars emphasise the socialist elements in China’s development. For example, at the early stage of China’s reforms, some authors hold positive prospective views of China’s development (Nee, 1989; Schweickart, 1998: 8; White, 1996). They are supportive of China’s “market socialism” and predict that China’s market transition will stimulate the private market, encourage entrepreneurship, and bring redistribution of power, equal rights and social justice. A different view which also stresses the socialist elements of China’s economy defines China as a combination of state socialism and private capitalism (Amin,

1990, 2013; Arrighi, 2007; Therborn, 2000). The key points of this view are (1) the transformation of land into commodity in China is finished (Amin, 2013: 66); (2) socialist principles continue to be important in areas such as health care, education and welfare (Arrighi, 2007: 351); (3) collective ownership in rural areas and Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) enable accumulation without dispossession (Arrighi, 2007: 361–7).

The other side of the argument asserts that the true nature of China's political economy lies in capitalism. Some economists emphasise the dominant role of the market in China, under the label of "state capitalism" (Naughton and Tsai, 2015: 2). They believe that China has successfully transformed from a centrally planned economy to a market economy and the market is now the predominant institution in China (Naughton, 2017: 5; see also Qian, 2002). Some others express concerns about economic reforms that have taken place without genuine political reforms. They claim that China is "crony capitalism built on systemic corruption and raw political power" (Y Huang, 2008: 236, 276; Pei, 2016).

One aspect is especially worth noticing: the perspective of international relations, or the global capitalist system. This perspective emphasises the international pressures faced by revolutionary states in history and contemporary times. Recalling the history of revolutionary states and the failure of the "de-link" project, Halliday describes the difficulties faced by post-revolutionary countries and the pressures from the international capitalist system (Halliday, 1999: 283–7). Considering contemporary neoliberal developments, some critical globalisation scholars argue that globalisation essentially serves the interest of global capital and transnational corporations (Chase-Dunn and Gills, 2005: 54). Some argue that China was forced into the world market after the collapse of the USSR. Others in turn criticise how internal [?] reform policies have pushed China into the world market and led it to fulfil the demands of global capital and multinational corporations (Hong, 2010; Huang, 2003).

In studies of the Chinese reforms, two models are always compared with China: the Latin American model and the East Asian model. Scholars and researchers look to identify similarities and differences between these regions in order to seek an alternative path for modernisation, with the aim of supporting stable sustainable economic development, political democratisation and social justice and welfare. The comparisons between these models can also shed light on the definition of Chinese characteristics (for more discussions see Lin, 2006; Huang, 2008).

The least disputed aspect of China's capitalist development might be the increase of social costs (housing, education, and health care) and the penetration of a capitalist logic throughout society. Criticisms have come from both the left and from the liberal side, especially focusing on the degradation of social welfare in China. Arguing from a left perspective, Lin criticises that "the persistence of sweatshops, the collusion of money and power, the dictatorship of capital, and the reign of developmentalism all violate socialist promises" (Lin, 2013: 87). Liberal economists also criticise the decline of social welfare in China. For example, Huang points out that the Chinese rural policies in the 1990s led to the increase of adult illiteracy by 30 million between 2000 and 2005 (Huang, 2003: 244–9). He also points out the decline of public financing for health care (*ibid.*: 249–51).

To sum up, there are "varieties of capitalism" as well as socialism, and linked to these are perspectives to understand China's political economy. Therefore, in order to decide which of the views prevails, the following sections will scrutinise some of the main issues under debate, and illustrate some basic characteristics of the Chinese political economy.

3.2. The Land Issue

Issues of land, modes of production in rural areas and the life of peasants are important in China. China's economy and people's livelihoods [?] rely largely on agriculture. China's reforms in rural areas underwent several phases (Y Huang, 2008; Kroeber, 2016; Perkins, 1988: 605). One key issue in the debates related to these reforms is the ownership of land. Scholars who emphasise the socialist character of China's economy argue that the fact that land in China is still, officially, collectively owned by the peasants, makes China different from other capitalist countries. This logic is based on Marx's description of the "primitive accumulation" in the history of Britain. In the transition from a non-capitalist to a capitalist society, land is acquired as property by individuals and exchanged in the market as commodities. Under unequal power relations (oftentimes involving violence), the trading of land as a commodity would often lead to the proletarianisation of farmers, i.e. the deprivation from their means of production (land), which led them to be forced into labour market in the industrialised cities. These peasants eventually become the "double free" workers in the cities, selling their own labour to capitalists. In Marx, the double freedom is workers'

freedom to sell their labour-power on the market and the freedom from any ownership of the means of production (Marx, 1976).

One representative of this type of argument that still presents China as socialist based on collective land ownership is Samir Amin. He argues that this “Chinese specificity” – whose consequences are of major importance – absolutely prevents us from characterizing contemporary China (even in 2013) as “capitalist” because the capitalist road is based on the transformation of land into a commodity” (Amin, 2013: 68). Besides, Amin also claims that “the range of users’ rights has expanded considerably” since the transition of communes (ibid.: 70). Similarly, Giovanni Arrighi shares Amin’s view that “equal access to land” in China guarantees China’s continued development as a non-capitalist society (Arrighi, 2007: 16). According to the policymaker, state leader and then Premier in the late 1970s and 80s, Zhao Ziyang, this is partly true. Since the late 1970s, communes (*gongshe*) in China started to be dissolved. Through the “rural land contract policy” (*bao chan dao hu*), peasants started to hold *de facto* control over the land they farm (Zhao et al., 2009: 97). This transformation in rural areas brought astonishing income increases for peasants between 1978 and 1984 (Harvey, 2005: 126).

However, this is not the whole story. Land issues in rural area have been some of the most complex issues in contemporary China. As Harvey shows, after the initial income growth during the first years of the rural land contract policy, incomes in rural areas faced stagnation, and challenges caused by the loss of collective social rights soon appeared (Harvey, 2005: 127). The idea of “equal access to land” held by Amin and Arrighi might just be indicative of a rosy-tinted view provided by official statements and needs to be updated to take into account what happened over several decades of development. Two groups of scholars have made extensive contributions to the critique of this view. The first group argues for privatisation of land in rural China with the purpose to give peasants more power in controlling their land (including scholars such as Yang Xiaokai, Wen Guanzhong, Chen Zhiwu). The second one argues for the opposite: to strengthen collective ownership of rural land (including writers such as Wen Tiejun, Pan Wei, Cao Jinqing, Li Changping; see He, 2009).

Economists from both sides have discussed the problems with the current land system. For example, liberal economists have criticised the polarization between the rich and the poor

parts of rural society caused by the privilege held by village cadres. They claim that the actual power holders of control over land in rural areas are not peasants, as is claimed in official documents. Rather, in reality, the officials at different levels of government get to decide how to use, convert (*Liu zhuan*) and rent the land. They thus argue for privatisation of land, in order to give peasants private land ownership and use rights. Several mass incidents caused by corruption and abuse of power in land conversion have supported their views. For example, in 2011, villagers from Wukan protested against corruption conducted by local officials who sold land without properly compensating the villagers.

While arriving at a similar judgement on corruption in rural villages as liberal economists, some scholars who work more closely with peasants in China propose to strengthen collective ownership to protect peasant rights. For example, He Xuefeng, based on his long-term fieldwork with peasants, divided Chinese peasants into five categories and argues that only strengthening collective ownership could best guarantee equality in rural areas. Collective ownership will enable a flexible dynamic redistribution of land based on the categories proposed by He. According to his argument, roughly speaking, peasants either work on the land with limited rights, or have left the land behind when they migrated to cities. Either way, the current land system cannot prevent deprivation of peasants, and neither can it guarantee their livelihood. For the former (those who still work in their land), the current collective ownership prohibits them from extending their farming area and improving farming equipment and land situation (because those who left their land still own the land are not willing to permanently converse or to invest in their own land). For the latter, while migrant workers still own the land, there is little income they can earn from this. This is because either nobody is working on their land, or they can earn only little rent from the land due to the poor condition of their land (for more explanations of why this has happened, see He, 2009: 61). Moreover, those who have left their land and work in cities are *de facto* wage workers in cities (Chase-Dunn, 2010: 47–8). Therefore, being aware of the risks of moving their family entirely into the city, most migrant workers prefer not to give away their land in exchange for money or residential rights in cities (He, 2009). Several empirical researchers have observed this (See, for example, Le, 2010; Zhang, 2011). Therefore, the current land system cannot guarantee peasants' livelihood, nor function as real safety net for migrant workers.

A series of urbanisation developments after the 2000s has made the situation worse for peasants whose livelihoods are entirely or partly dependent on farming activities. On a positive note, urbanisation is needed in China. First of all, migrant workers (*nongmingong*) have contributed significantly to China's rapid development since 1979. According to different estimates, there are about 150 to 200 million migrant workers in China (He and Dong, 2009b). The massive migration of peasants has left some villages with smaller populations, worse living conditions and reduced efficiency in land use. Secondly, because of the particularities of the process of modernisation in China, China's urbanisation lagged much behind its industrialisation (Ding, 2003). Finally, as Harvey observed, huge mega-projects come along with rapid urbanisation and construction of physical infrastructure, which can absorb surplus capital and the vast labour surpluses caused by the destruction of state-owned enterprises (hereinafter SOEs) (Harvey, 2005: 130–2). Therefore, there are actual needs for urbanisation. Some local governments have thus tried to relocate rural populations through different projects, such as Withdrawing Villages and Combining Residences (*Che cun bing ju*), or Moving Villagers to Urban Housing (*ju min shang lou*) (for more examples see Zhou and Wang, 2015).

However, in reality, urbanisation has faced many challenges, which have in parts brought further deprivation to rural populations, instead of improving their living standards. Two policies play important roles in the process. First of all, since local governments have been financing themselves since the tax-sharing reform (*fen shui zhi*) in 1994, “land development (expropriation, conveyance, and leasing)” has “become so important to local public finance” (Lin and Yi, 2011: 54). Therefore, local governments are eager to acquire more rural land that can be used for the expansion of urban areas and for making profits by selling this land. However, this practice was curbed by the central government's new policy aimed at protecting and guaranteeing the amount of farming land in China, known as Linking New Land Used for Urban Construction with the Decrease of Land Used for Rural Construction (*Chengxiang Jianshe Yongdi Zengjian Guagou*). According to this policy, there are restrictions on local governments for expanding construction land. They have to balance the increase of land used for construction in urban areas with a corresponding decrease in rural areas. Therefore, local governments have huge incentives to destroy peasants' own houses scattered around farm land in rural areas, and to encourage or force peasants to move to government/local-built and more concentrated new buildings (in rural or urban areas). In this way, a lot of rural land can be vacated. This newly reclaimed land, according to the latter

policy, can then be transformed into urban areas for commercial construction use and sold to construction companies. Local governments thus could earn money from this transformation which they can invest into other municipal affairs. The growth of local GDP brought by the sale of land can be presented as a great political achievement by local politicians and help promote their careers in the Party, in addition to the benefits gained by local officials through receiving bribes.

The process might seem promising to peasants, however is not necessarily beneficial for them in reality. There are two ways in which this transformation generally happens. The first one involves peasants getting some compensation for the destruction of their own house, and these peasants then are encouraged to buy a new home (a flat in an apartment block) in an urban area. In this case, peasants become urban citizens and are thrown into the “reserve army” of wage labour (in some cases they are willing participants in this because they can earn more money in the city than from the land, such as is the case in Chengdu). In some of these cases, peasants do not have much negotiating power against the local government and thus do not receive enough money to get education in cities, or start businesses, i.e. to acquire new means and skills of production.

In the second type of process, peasants stay in rural areas, which are transformed from areas containing individual dwellings to containing blocks of flats. These peasants can still keep their land for farming. However, in reality, the new-built houses usually are far away from their farming land. These conditions are not suitable for China’s agricultural model, in which each peasant has a small amount of land instead of large farmland. Moreover, peasants’ living costs also increase in this process: they need to pay more for utility bills, as well as for food which they used to grow on land adjacent to their previous houses. Therefore, the urbanisation projects actually have created many difficulties for those who are willing to continue farming. Peasants are in fact deprived by the Party-State, whether they end up with or without access to land, with only some exceptions in areas very close to big cities (for example, local residents in some *Chengzhongcun* in Shenzhen or Beijing).

Finally, “access to land”, as described by Arrighi mentioned earlier, in reality cannot guarantee peasants’ ownership and use of the land, nor can it ensure that peasants will not be involved in capitalist production. In other words, even for those peasants who still live from agricultural production, who neither move to cities nor become migrant workers, “access to

land” cannot entirely guarantee their livelihood. For example, Zhang and Donaldson studied the capitalist forms of agrarian production taking hold in farming activities where peasants sell “labor to the owner of substantial land rights and capital” (Zhang and Donaldson, 2010: 459); see also Zhang and Donaldson, 2008). They found this to be on the rise in rural China. Therefore, even though in practice, “access to land” is more than official rhetoric, peasants can still end up mostly involved in capitalist production within the broader Chinese context.

To sum up, what is seen by some as the main characteristic of “socialist” China – peasants’ equal access to land – has already lost its socialist essence and has largely been subsumed by capitalist mode of production.

3.3. Domestic Enterprise Ownership

Another main aspect of debates on China’s economy relates to the ownership of domestic enterprise. From a classical Marxist point of view, the capitalist system is based on the commodification of labour and exploitation of surplus-value from workers (Marx, 1867). This mode of production by its very nature leads to crisis, either because of under-consumption or over-accumulation. On the one hand, capitalists need to lower wages as much as possible to squeeze more profits. On the other hand, this low level of wages leads to insufficient consumption of products from workers, thus causing the crisis of under-consumption. There are several attempts from within the capitalist system, such as Keynesians, Roosevelt’s New Deal, and the welfare state, i.e. demand-side economics, which attempt to solve this problem by creating jobs and providing for basic needs through state intervention. These policies, however, have been condemned to failure after the 1970s. Moreover, there is another related issue: the accumulation of capital would finally reach a point at which capital cannot be invested to extract profits from the domestic market anymore. This is the crisis of over-accumulation of capital. This then leads capitalists to invest capital in foreign countries. In the contemporary capitalist world system, every nation state, especially less developed countries, tries to attract more investment through lowering tax for transnational corporations. The resulting flows of capital have led to an asymmetric world system. They have also caused problems for modern capitalist welfare states. Inequality is one of these negative consequences.

This mechanics of the capitalist system partly explain why TVEs and SOEs are important in the debates about China's economy: they are involved in the redistribution of profits/capital. The basic idea behind public ownership is that local governments (townships and villages) or the state can be involved in the redistribution of profits from production, thus decreasing exploitation in enterprises. The ideal type of public or state ownership would market-oriented, however with workers owning the means of production, controlling how to run the enterprises, and equally distributing profits of production. As Arrighi understands it, TVEs should be "collectively owned" with "a variety of local arrangements and practices" (Arrighi, 2007: 362–3). The main features include management authority held by local governments, assigned allocation of profits, and in general a transformation of ownership from collective to private (ibid.). Arrighi believes that the innovation and development of TVEs has contributed to "the success of reforms" for four reasons: by absorbing rural surplus-value and increasing rural income, by increasing competition in the market, by contributing to local tax revenue thus alleviating the tax burden of peasants, and by reinvesting back to improve local conditions (ibid.: 263-4). Due to these reasons, he argues that China is facing "accumulation without dispossession" and thus a path different from a capitalist one (ibid.: 361). Stiglitz also argues that TVEs are an effective way to prevent public assets from being appropriated by private capitalists (Stiglitz, 2006). Many economists and social scientists share this view and praise the innovation of TVEs (Roland, 2000: 282; Naughton, 2018: 271). It is claimed that TVEs are not only magically efficient micro-economic forms, but also that they guarantee the protection of public interests.

However, the real situation of TVEs is more complex than this view. For one thing, TVEs are not based on collective ownership as believed by many Western economists. Rather, as Huang Yasheng points out, "the official definition and the official data include both TVEs controlled by townships and TVEs controlled by private entrepreneurs" (Y Huang, 2008: 75). TVEs are a "locational concept – enterprises located in the townships and villages" (ibid.: 77). In another word, the category of the TVEs includes collective enterprises, private-owned enterprises and household businesses. In a more detailed breakdown of the different types of TVEs, Huang, using official data from the Ministry of Agriculture from 1985 to 2002, shows that "private TVEs absolutely dominated the total pool of TVEs" (ibid.: 78). In 2002, there were 0.73 million units of collective TVEs, 2.3 million private TVEs and 18.3 household businesses. As to number of employees, collective TVEs hired 38 million persons (this number was 41.5 in 1985), private 35 (4.75 in 1985) and household businesses 59.8 (23.5 in

1985) (ibid.: 79). This convincingly shows that TVEs in China are not all collectively owned, as opposed to the consensus view. Rather, the private sector increasingly dominates TVEs. These TVEs were “private operations in all but name” (Harvey, 2005: 129). This finding is in line with China’s privatisation since the 1980s (Jefferson and Su, 2006).

Moreover, the power relations within TVEs only serve to make the situation more complex. First of all, the private ownership of TVEs means that employees do not hold the right to organise themselves and control the production process. Secondly, the privatisation of previously collectively owned TVEs has led to a massive change of public assets from public into private hands of local elites (for more discussion on this topic, see section 3.5). Therefore, the ideal type of TVEs described by Arrighi, controlled and owned by workers, is far from the real situation. Smythe, when expressing his concerns in the 1970s about China’s path to developing ICTs, made a similar mistake (Zhao, 2007). He assumed that the official rhetoric of the “mass line” describes a democratic form of decision-making. However, in reality “mass line” “was easily subverted from above and from below” (ibid., 95). Therefore, the power dynamic in TVEs was never a democratic socialist one.

State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) have also seen a steady decline in importance in China’s economy. As shown by statistics about structural changes in employment in China between 1980 and 2002, the number of workers employed by SOEs dropped from 67 million in 1980 to 35.3 million, while the number of employees in private companies multiplied from 0.8 million in 1980 to 42.7 (Harvey, 2005: 128). Moreover, SOEs have experienced transformation into limited liability or shareholding companies, and later into “share-based co-operatives” and even full foreign ownership. They are also allowed to hire “contract workers” with little social protections and insurance. In general, manufacturing employment has seen a dramatic decrease since the 1990s (ibid.). More specifically in the electronic components manufacturing sector, SOEs only account for 8.3 percent of the annual sales income as compared to 91.7 percent coming from private, shareholding and foreign-invested enterprises (Hong, 2011b: 45).

Moreover, similar to the situation of TVEs, the current ownership of SOEs is not held by the people, but by the Party-State. Before the reforms of the 1980s, “public ownership” (*gongyouzhi*) meant collective ownership and enterprises “owned by the whole people” (*quanmin suoyouzhi*) (Zhu, 2018: 11). The administrative institutions were only

representatives of this “ownership by the whole people”. However, after these reforms, the “ownership by the whole people” has been transformed to state ownership. These state-owned enterprises actually include wholly state-owned companies or enterprises of which the state is the sole investor, or companies in which the state has a stake, whether controlling or non-controlling. As Zhu points out, the main difference between capitalism and socialism is in fact ownership by the whole people, not the state (ibid.). Moreover, without proper democratic popular control, public ownership could easily lead to “an *actual separation* of the popular working classes from the means of production and distribution” (Wu, 2005: 49, italics in original). Changes which happened to workers’ conditions in the ICT industries reflect this phenomenon very well. As illustrated by Zhao, industrial workers soon lost their control over production and technological innovation once privatisation of SOEs and the “digital revolution” took hold in China, as technocratic elites seized power (Zhao, 2007). Therefore, the actual situation of ownership of SOEs has already lost its original purpose as a socialist means to protect the people’s ownership and property rights.

3.4. Foreign Relationships

Another type of ownership that is important in China is foreign-invested enterprises. China’s fast export-driven development is inseparable from the country’s position in the world capitalist system and represents one of the main characteristics of China’s political economy. Figures 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 show the development of FDI inflows into China. China’s development accounts for a large part of the increase of FDI inflows in developing economies in general. According to Zhao Ziyang’s account, there were serious debates and divergences within the CCP during the first years of reforms on the issue of allowing foreign investment (Zhao et al., 2009: 102). These disputes within the party leadership might partly explain the weak legal protections and limited success of foreign capitalist enterprises in the 1980s observed by Harvey (Harvey, 2005: 130). Neither was export-led growth a planning priority at the beginning of the reforms. It was not until 1987 with the successful experiments in Guangdong that the party started to accept this developmental path (ibid.: 135). The 1990s then saw the first peak of FDI inflows into China as well as foreign trade, after the full establishment of the Reform and Open Up Policy in 1992 following Deng’s “southern tour”. During the beginning of the 2000s there was a second peak partly because of China joining

into the WTO in 2001. The general economic trends and political arrangements indicate China's greater integration in the global market.

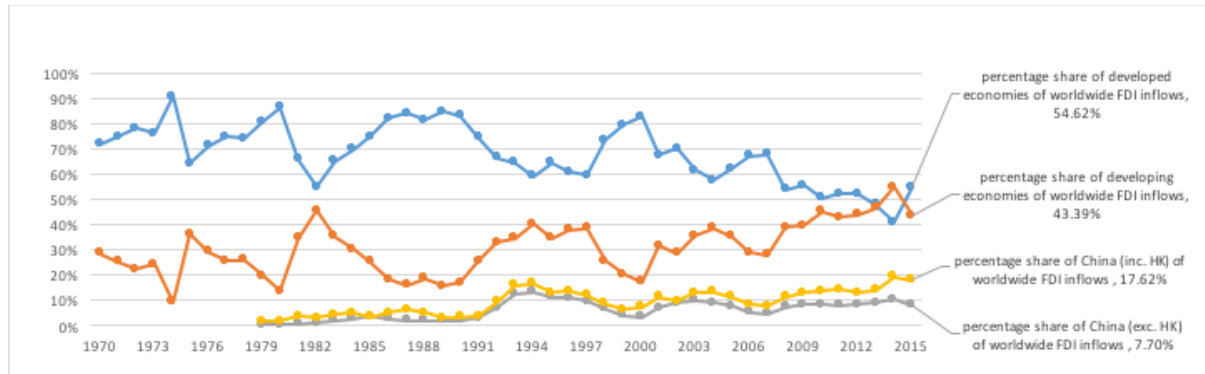


Figure 3.5. Percentage share of worldwide FDI inflows of selected economies, data source: UNCTAD

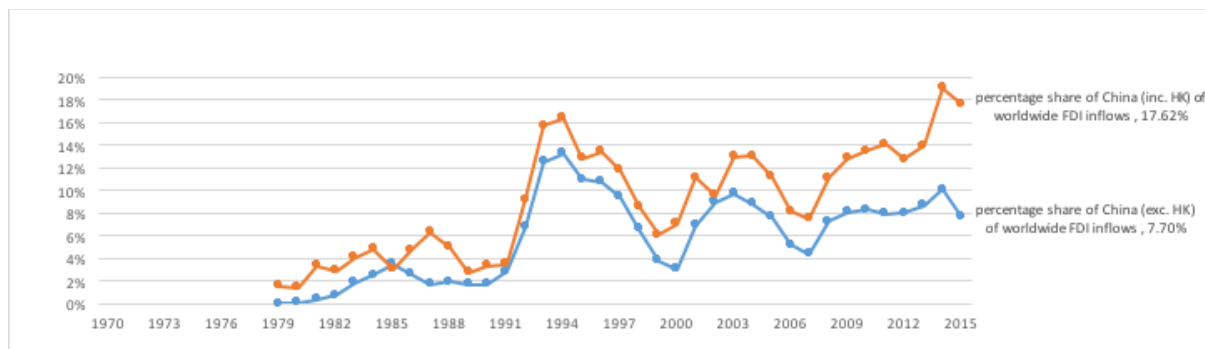


Figure 3.6. Percentage share of China's FDI inflows in the worldwide economy, data source: UNCTAD

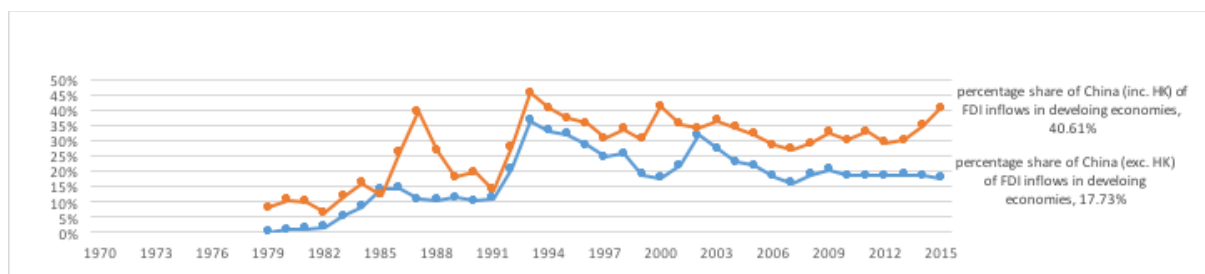


Figure 3.7. Percentage share of China's FDI inflows in relation to developing economies as a whole, data source: UNCTAD

While China is one of the most attractive countries for investment, the majority of China's FDI comes from one region or area. Figure 3.8 shows the eleven most attractive economies for FDI in 2015. They together compose 62% of worldwide FDI inward flows. While the five leading economies for FDI are the U.S. (22%), Hong Kong (6%), UK (6%), China (excl. HK, 5%), and Germany (5%), if Hong Kong is included, China is the second-largest country in terms of cumulative FDI. However, as shown in Figure 3.9, more than 83% of the total value of inward FDI actually utilised by China in 2015 comes from Asia. Moreover, Hong Kong is the leading source of mainland China's FDI (Figure 3.10), ranging from 30% to 70% of the total value in different years (about the relationship between China's FDI and Hong Kong, see Nolan, 2012) (data from UNCTAD). Figure 3.11 further shows the other top 4 Asian countries that are sources for China's FDI.

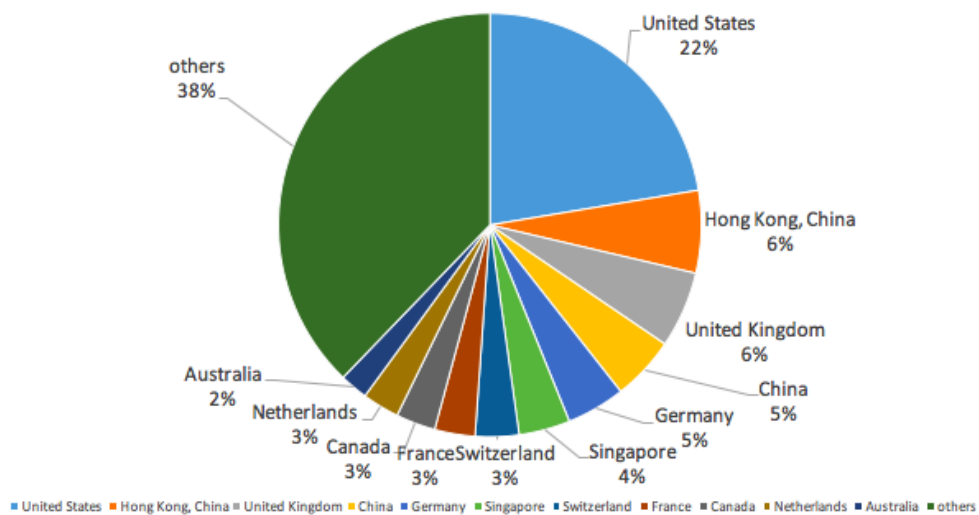


Figure 3.8. Percentage share of worldwide FDI inward flows in 2015, by selected economies, data source: UNCTAD.

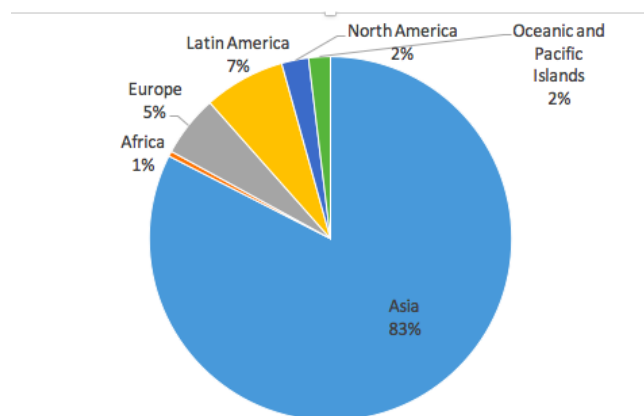


Figure 3.9. Sources of FDI flows in China, by regions, data source: UNCTAD

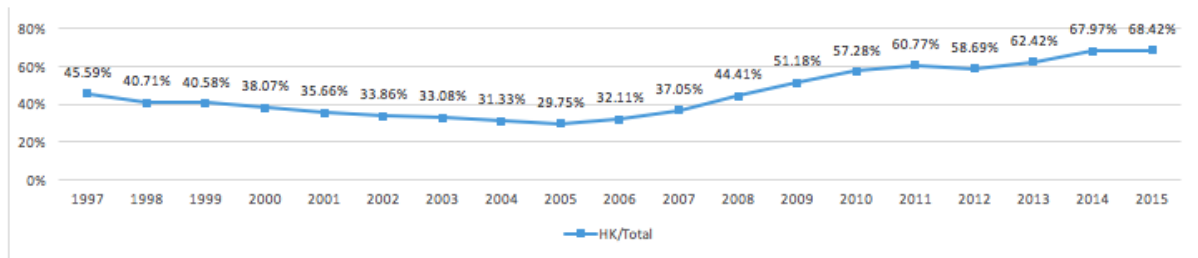


Figure 3.10. Percentage share of HK FDI in total value of FDI actually utilised by China, data source: UNCTAD

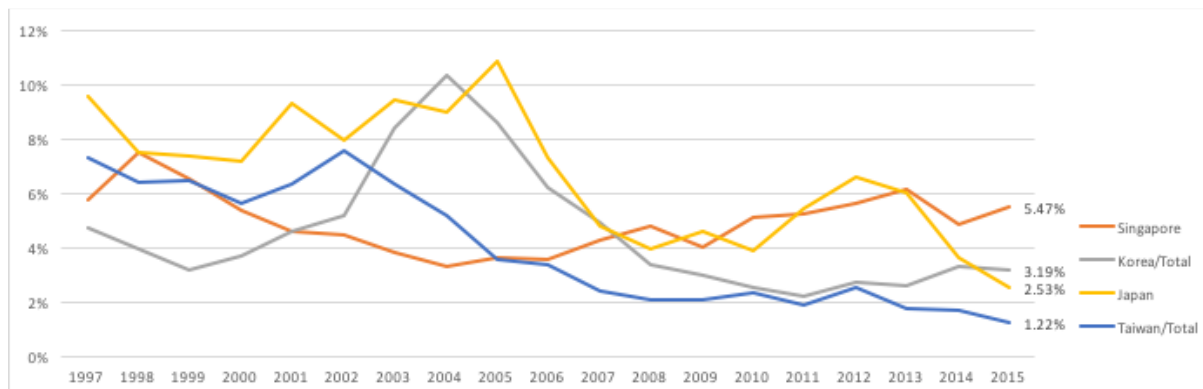


Figure 3.11. Percentage share of other Asian countries' FDI in total value of FDI actually utilised by China (top 4 excluding HK), data source: National Bureau of Statistics of China

While political restrictions could be one of the main reasons for this dependency on FDI from one area or region, there is little doubt that China is continuously opening up to foreign investment. According to the 2016 world investment report published by UNCTAD, China and India are said to be “most active in opening up various industries to foreign investors” (UNCTAD, 2016: 90). According to the report, China has loosened restrictions on foreign investment in the real estate market, the manufacturing sector and certain service sectors (ibid.).

At the same time, China's outward investment is increasing (See Figure 3.12), which leads to questions such as “Is China buying out the world?”. However, as shown in Figure 3.12, FDI outflow still makes up only a small part of GDP, and net outflow is still smaller than net inflow. As stated by Nolan in 2012, “two thirds of China's outward FDI would go to Hong Kong”, and “China would hardly participate in mergers and acquisitions of TNCs” (Fuchs, 2015: 249). However, this situation is also changing rapidly. As shown in Figure 3.12, since

2013, China's investment outflow has grown dramatically, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), necessitates closer observation of this tendency. As observed by Lee, Chinese state capital has distinct characteristics compared to global private capital. One such characteristic is that Chinese foreign investment focuses on mining, construction and manufacturing industries (Lee, 2018). It is also worth noting that Chinese state capital plays a crucial role in China's global capital expansion with the aim to strengthen China's political influence all over the world.

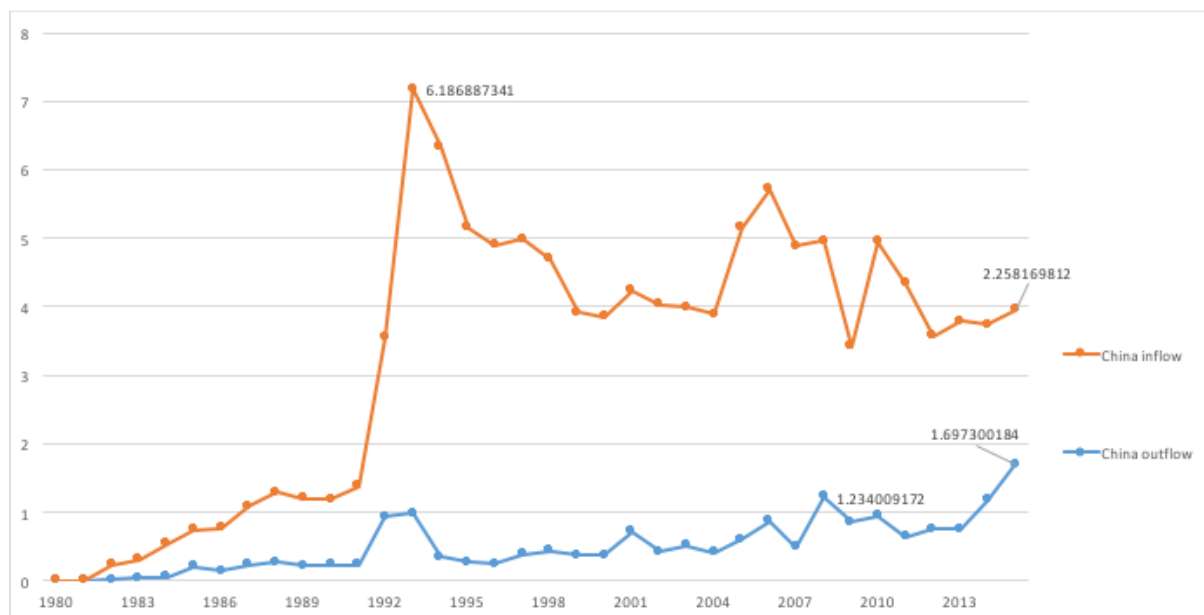


Figure 3.12. Foreign Direct Investment, net outflow and inflow (% of Chinese GDP), Mainland China (excl. HK, Macao), data source: World Development Indicators (26/05/2017)

The privatisation of TVEs and SOEs as well as the opening up to foreign investment in China has led to further exploitation of workers. In an estimate created by Huang from two different sets of data of private-sector shares of industrial value added/profits in large Chinese industrial firms, both datasets show increases of indigenous and foreign private ownership (Y Huang, 2008: 15). According to the OECD data, the sum of indigenous and foreign private sector ownership has increased from 28.9% in 1998 to 44.7% in 2001 and 71.2% in 2005. In to the Guangdong Statistical Manual, the change in private ownership is estimated differently (31.8% in 1998, 38.8% in 2001 and 50.8% in 2005). Despite the differences, both data sets show the increasing domination of capitalist private ownership in China. As Li points out, both Chinese and foreign capitalists can profit from “intense and massive exploitation” in the

Chinese capitalist system (Li, 2008: 27). According to his estimate, the wage share has dropped from “51–52 percent in the 1980s to 38 percent in the early 2000s” (ibid.: 28). To sum up, the ownership changes of TVEs, SOEs, and foreign-invested enterprises since the 1990s show the increasing dominance of the capitalist mode of production in the industrial sector in China.

3.5. Political Reforms and the Party-State

The role of the Party-State is arguably the most controversial issue in analyses of China’s reform drive. In the literature, there are three main stances regarding the role of the state and potential political reforms from the 1990s onwards. Proponents of all of these positions agree that democratisation is the ultimate goal of China’s political reforms to some extent, but they disagree on how and when these political reforms should happen.

The first position puts forward the view that modernisation in developing countries is possible, if not *only* possible, through authoritarian rule and a strong state (Yang and He, 1994). This perspective is popularised by the so-called New Authoritarianism or New Conservatism in China (representatives of this view include Wu Jiaxiang, Zhang Bingjiu and Xiao Gongqin). People who hold this perspective believe that New Authoritarianism is suitable for the early stage of modernisation in third-world developing countries. What makes it different from the ‘old’ authoritarian is that its ultimate goal is democracy. However, because of the lack of existing democratic and civil society institutions in developing countries, it is difficult to develop the economy or pursue modernisation in these societies using the power of democracy. Therefore, in order to pursue the goal of development, it is necessary to build a new political authority and political monopoly in order to drive economic development and economic liberalisation. To sum up, according to this position, stability is the most important feature needed for China to develop its economy, thus a strong state is necessary at this stage in China’s development. The position of New Authoritarianism is that the development of a liberal economy will gradually, eventually bring democracy (Lu, 2009). These arguments are based on the examples of the Asian Four Tigers and Huntington’s theory in *Political Order in Changing Societies*. A main characteristic of New Authoritarianism is the separation of economic reforms from political reforms.

However, this argument has been highly criticised since its early days. Critics point out that New Authoritarianism holds an idealised assumption of political power (Yang and He, 1994). New Authoritarianism is based on expectations that the government will democratise itself after economic liberalisation. However, taking into account the deep entanglements of political and economic interests in the hands of the powerful, this is unlikely to happen. The main precondition needed for New Authoritarianism, i.e. the separation of politics and the economy, is also not a reality in China. Social problems such as corruption take hold exactly because of political power, not because of the lack of it. Moreover, New Authoritarianism believes that economic development will lead to a stronger civil society. However, what is missing from this view is the fact that civil society does not come automatically but needs to be cultivated and struggled for. Experiences from Latin American have illustrated that economic development does not necessarily lead to democratisation (Diamond et al., 1999). Examples from the Asian Four Tigers cannot apply to China directly either (Zheng, 2004: 176). For one thing, the so-called “East Asian model” countries developed within an environment that was conditioned by the Cold War and advanced capitalist countries’ transformation from Fordism to post-Fordism. The Asian Four Tigers received support from the U.S. and developed through growing their manufacturing industries. This development path has also led to their military and economic dependency on the U.S. For China, these preconditions do not exist anymore, and the U.S. is unlikely to support a more competitive Chinese economy (Liu, 1994; Zheng, 2004). Moreover, the examples of Taiwan and Hong Kong have shown that the coming together of several factors led to political reforms, not economic development alone (So and May, 1993).

The second position also emphasises the importance of the Party-State, however this is argued from a different and more left-wing perspective (e.g. Hu Angang, Wang Hui, Kuang Xinnian, Cui Zhiyuan, Lin Chun, Lv Xinyv; for more discussions related to this New Left discourse, see Xu, 2000; Wang, 2002, 2003; Zheng, 2004: 174–7). This stance takes a global perspective, and its proponents argue that in the asymmetric capitalist world system, the CCP “remained the only institution powerful enough to shield national unity and to bring itself...to the authority of constitutionalism and legality” (Lin, 2006: 4, although in the corresponding endnote, she holds a more negative view about the CCP, see Note 4, 289). This view is based on de-colonisation theory, dependency theory and world system theory. It puts forward a sceptical view of globalisation and foreign capital, which includes opposition to the FDI-driven approach of development. Moreover, this perspective emphasises the historical

heritage of the CCP from its revolutionary past and its official ideological claims to guarantee that the needs of the population will be met (Lin, 2006: 6; Riskin, 1987: 319). Its defenders also believe in the potential for political reform and democratisation within the CCP. For example, there is a consensus view that there are political struggles and factions within the CCP (Lin, 2006: 3,6; Meng, 2018; Zhao, 2012: 167). To summarise this position, because of the revolutionary past of the CCP and the necessity of having a strong national state that can defend national interests in the global capitalist world system, scholars with this point of view anchor their hope for China to be able to fight neoliberalism and serve people's interests to the CCP.

However, there are several flaws in the arguments put forward by this position. For one, it is argued here that the CCP will defend China's national interests against global capital because of the CCP's revolutionary history. However, it is difficult to say to what extent the elites in the Party these days still serve to defend the national interest of China, and more specifically, the Chinese people. For example, some critical scholars have pointed out the active collaboration of elites from the core and peripheral countries, through which the self-interests of these elites move to the fore at the expense of national concerns (Robinson, 2012). At the same time, this criticism should not lead to a blanket denial of the role of states in the global South when it comes to defining and defending national interests in relation to processes of globalisation and neo-liberalisation. However, it is too early to reach a conclusion on this actually being the case with the Chinese state. As opposed to defending its citizens against global market pressures, the Chinese government is notorious for attacking labour rights and implementing policies in favour of FDI, local governments are known for grabbing land from peasants, and all levels of government are notorious for corruption (see for example Lee, 2007; Ngai, 2005, 2016).

Moreover, advocates of this stance believe that the Chinese model is concerned with "how not to lose the people and their interests and power central to government commitment and policy decisions" (Lin, 2010: 72). However, concentration of power is more likely to lead to inequality in redistribution. As much as I agree with the arguments that systemic economic reforms would not "be possible without thorough political changes" (Lin, 2006, p3), there is one more important question: how much deeper can these political changes and even reforms reach without encompassing more wide-ranging institutional changes such as restrictions of power, transparency of information and freedom of speech. At this point, left-wing advocates

of the Party-State may make the same mistake as the New Authoritarianism advocates: they are motivated by a somewhat naive belief that the political and economic elites (most of the time they are the same groups of people) would be willing to give up their privilege voluntarily. Contrary to the romanticised notion of benevolent political power, people's everyday life experiences and many studies have proven that economic reforms without simultaneous sufficient political reforms have led to massive corruption, violation of people's basic rights, removal of peasants from their land, violent exploitation of workers (including both migrant workers and workers from previous SOEs), and people being deprived of basic education, healthcare and housing, all of which are the most profound achievements from Mao's era (see also the discussions about crony capitalism in section 3.1).

More detailed examination and research has highlighted the positive correspondences between concentration of power and corruption, even before China's reforms (D Huang, 2008; Yang, 2007). Since the late 1980s, there was a prominent debate on whether China's economic transformation would change the political power structure. The debate originated with the publication of Victor Nee's "market transition theory". Victor Nee argued that China's economic transition would change the dominance of the administrative power structures over the distribution of resources, thus will be more advantageous to direct producers, including peasants, workers, and small entrepreneurs (Nee, 1989). However, in later research, he found that a handover of power from the political elites to direct producers without political power was not particularly prevalent (Nee, 1991). Other studies of rural (Oi, 1992) and urban areas (Bian and Logan, 1996) also prove the limitations of Nee's market transition theory. Rona-Tas thus argues that China's economic transition actually provides new ways for those in positions of political power to acquire economic and social benefits (Rona-Tas, 1994). Parish and Michelson further point out that economic transition actually is a political transition, during which the political elites can gain more benefits for themselves through influencing the new ways in which power and resources are distributed (Parish and Michelson, 1996). After separating "cadres" with real power from those without, they show that through China's transformation its administrative powers gained even more benefits than they had before. To sum up, the expectation to arrive at equality and democracy without thorough institutional changes probably is just a wishful fancy. Concentration of power has led to increased social inequality, rather than its opposite, from the beginning of the reform era.

Contrary to the first two views that have been discussed, the third perspective proposes a more dramatic reform of political systems, which is best illustrated by liberal economists. Leading liberal economists have argued that some of the social issues in China, such as corruption, inefficient productivity, inequity and lack of welfare, are attributed to the inefficient institutions created by the visible hand of the state (Y Huang, 2008: 276). This kind of thinking has even been published in official newspapers such as *Beijing Youth* and on the *People's Daily* website, argued by leading economist Wu JingLian (Wu, 2001). Some have classified Chinese economy as crony capitalism or statist capitalism (Pei, 2008, see also Huang's summary of this point of view in Huang, 2008: 276). These writers have voiced strong criticism regarding the corruption caused by the current power relations and the political system in China. For example, Zhu Jiaming, one of the most important reformers from the 1980s, criticises the process of privatisation of SOEs and the appropriation of public interests by officials or managers (Zhu, 2013: 118–9).

When considering the range of these arguments, the actual situation in China is probably closest to the blueprint of China's development proposed by the advocates of New Authoritarianism. According to the account given by Yang, Deng Xiaoping encountered the ideas of New Authoritarianism in 1988 and modelled his strategy for holding political power in a developing economy in accordance with this idea (Yang, 2004: 546). The current pattern of Xi's strong leadership also shows the party's continuing aversion to political reforms. From the perspective of power relations, the economic transition actually strengthened and benefitted political power holders (in terms of the stability and political legitimacy gained by the CCP via economic development). There are clear correlations between economic and political power. Some thus perceive China's political economy as "crony capitalism" (Pei, 2016) or a combination of authoritarianism with neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005).

3.6. Contradictions in Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics and the Decline of Socialist Welfare

Just as it is undeniable that China has achieved huge successes in developing its economy and decreasing absolute poverty, there is also little doubt about the decline of socialist welfare in China. The heritage of socialist welfare from Mao's era and its subsequent decline are important features of China's contemporary political economy.

First of all, during Mao's era, China has achieved admirable progress in several areas (Lin, 2006; Meisner, 1999). For example, in his historical study of China's contemporary history, Meisner outlines several achievements of Mao's socialist government. First of all, during Mao's era, China has transformed from "a primarily agrarian country to a relatively industrialized nation". Secondly, this industrialisation has changed China's social structure, in terms of an increase in industrial workers and technological intellectuals. Thirdly, several "mammoth irrigation and water control works" were constructed which are beneficial to agricultural production and have helped increase productivity (Meisner, 1999: 415–6). Moreover, during Mao's era popular welfare in terms of education and health improved (ibid.: 419). These achievements paved the way for the fast industrial development in both urban and rural areas after Mao (Andreas, 2010; Naughton, 1996). Any assessment of Mao's era cannot ignore this historical socialist heritage. To some extent, China's current development continues on from the modernisation of Mao's era (Lin, 2006: 1–2), and the CCPs continued political legitimacy is connected to this (Meng, 2018).

On the other hand, it is undeniable that Mao's era has also included disasters in Chinese history, in terms of the devastation of traditional culture and large numbers of dead (Yang, 2012). It would be a lack of common sense to emphasise the benefits coming from industrialisation over the massive numbers of deaths of human beings. Moreover, though impressive achievements were made from 1949 to 1978, economic development was extremely unbalanced between the industrial and agricultural sectors, and between urban and rural areas. Economic efficiency and people's living standards, especially for peasants in rural areas, barely increased (Meisner, 1999: 418–9; Zhao et al., 2009: 112). In terms of politics, while Mao launched several political movements to practice his "continuous revolution" theory to stop corruption within the Party, almost all of these movements failed – either because of external threats (such as the Soviet Union) or of the power struggles within the Party. Most importantly, these political movements failed to establish real democratic socialist institutions (Meisner, 1999: 369–70), though they might have planted seeds relating to ideas of rights and struggles into peasants' and workers' minds. Several recent Maoist struggles in China (e.g. the Jasic Incident) demonstrates this long-lasting influence of Maoism and the social movement tradition beyond Mao's era.

Therefore, after Mao's death, it is safe to say that in China both the left and liberal sides of the political spectrum, as well as both officials and the public, supported reforms and the

development of a market economy. For the liberal side, the capitalist market represented the way to bring political liberation to the people. For the left side, following a more or less deterministic view meant that if socialism is the ultimate goal for China, developing a capitalist market economy would be “unavoidable” as the “preliminary phase in the potential commitment of any society to liberating itself from historical capitalism on the long route to socialism/communism” (Amin, 2013; 71; also see the official discourses of the Primary Stage of Socialism). As controversial as this argument is, there is a consensus among the left and the right that a market economy is necessary for economic development in China.

China has seen massive growth since these reforms. First and foremost, China has succeeded in alleviating poverty (Amin, 2013; Lin, 2006). For example, China’s “gigantic antipoverty project” has reduced the number of people living below China’s subsistence line from 250 million in 1977 to 50 million in 2003 (Lin, 2006: 7). As Amin claims, China’s recent development shows a “striking contrast” to the “former China of hunger and extreme poverty” (Amin, 2013: 70). Moreover, China’s reform has involved massive urbanisation, accommodating around 400 million new urban inhabitants over two decades (ibid.: 73). Along with this urbanisation, there are parallel developments in infrastructure, transport, financial systems and diversity of consumer commodities (ibid.). The spectacular development China has experienced might be one of the reasons why scholars and the whole world is obsessed with understanding this Chinese model, and why there are numerous debates on whether China is a socialist or a capitalist country.

However, trying to deny the fact that China has become a capitalist society and thus shares some issues with other capitalist societies would be counterproductive. In contemporary China, even the most devoted enthusiasts of the Party-State have to admit the decline of socialist welfare. For example, Lin has pointed out the social issues brought by the neoliberal form of development after the late 1970s. These issues include “overcapacity”, decline of social welfare (such as education and public health care), increase of inequalities along regional, sectoral, class, gender, ethnic and other dimensions, as well as increase of corruption in parallel with increased FDI (Lin, 2006: 8–10). Harvey also points out the inequalities between rural and urban areas, regional inequalities, proletarianisation and exploitation of wage labourers, the privileged status of party members, government officials, capitalists and bankers, as well as a reconstitution of class power (Harvey, 2005: 142–151).

Inequality has increased dramatically. Sun uses the term “Cleavage of the society” to describe the social inequality and the unbalanced development in China since the 1990s (Sun, 2003). Hu and his colleagues referred to China as “one country, four worlds”, pointing out the huge inequalities between different regions, areas, and social structures in China in 2001 (Hu et al., 2001). In a book edited by Whyte, the authors claim that there are two societies within China due to rural-urban inequality (Whyte, 2010). These observations were made one or two decades ago. Though the situation has improved now, especially with economic growth in poorer regions, inequality is still high. The GINI index mentioned in the first section of this chapter (3.1) illustrates the high level of inequality in China. Along with the dissolution of SOEs, TVEs and the commune system, the social care system, especially in the rural areas, has been damaged: housing, and education have become burdens covered by most people privately. The neoliberal development has brought sharp conflict between (domestic and foreign) capital and workers. Recent examples include manufacturing workers’ suicides at Foxconn factories and the “996, ICU” movement of programmers. Moreover, since the economic crisis in 2008, the government has realised the limitations of the export-oriented development path, and thus incessantly promotes domestic consumption. Consumerism has been prominent all over China. Finally, as Meng points out, the economic reforms have not only led to increasing economic and social inequality but also to unequal distribution of symbolic resources (Meng, 2018: 12–3; Meng and Huang, 2017). The developments of party organs on the one hand and commercial media at the other have made it more difficult for disadvantaged groups to produce and distribute their own meaning and symbols. Therefore, the decline of many aspects of the socialist heritage since the reforms is clearly visible.

To summarise, in terms of contradictions, China shares some contradictions with other capitalist countries: overproduction and under-consumption, and overaccumulation of capital (Fuchs, 2015; Harvey, 2005). Moreover, based on the preceding discussion in this chapter, one can identify several unique contradictions shaping the Chinese political economy (see Table 3.2). The first one is that the “equal access to land” which is mentioned in official discourses cannot guarantee peasants’ rights. Land distribution and land rights in reality are much more complex, especially with significant corruption in governments at local and village levels. Moreover, as part of the process of urbanisation in China, more peasants have become migrant workers, living in the cities partly or entirely. They have become *de-facto* wage labours. On the other hand, the current land system cannot serve the interests or guarantee the rights of those who still live on the land and are farming. In addition, new

developments of urbanisation after the 2000s have made the situation of peasants worse, by further depriving peasants of their land, which was instead used for urban construction. These developments have either thrown more peasants into wage labour or made it harder for peasants to live on their land. There are some exceptional cases in which peasants benefit from urbanisation, especially in geographical locations which are close to cities, where peasants can get paid a large amount of money for their land. However, for most peasants who live in remote areas who and are living off farming activities, the new developments cannot improve their livelihood. Peasants are still highly deprived in China's modernisation process.

Secondly, the tendency for privatisation of SOEs and TVEs after the reforms is clearly noticeable. TVEs are not always collectively owned in reality, no matter what the official discourse implies. The privatisation of TVEs has led to huge levels of corruption at different levels of government. Similarly, the actual ownership of SOEs worth investigating. There is a substantial difference between being "owned by the whole people" and being owned by the state. In most cases, SOEs in China are in state ownership, which means that it cannot be guaranteed that they are run in the public interest. Similarly to what happened with TVEs, massive levels of corruption occurred during the privatisation of SOEs, and workers' rights were dismantled significantly during the process.

Thirdly, FDI has become an important part of China's export-driven development strategy, especially after the 1990s. Foreign ownership of enterprises has increased dramatically. This illustrates China's position in the global capitalist system. Moreover, while the government hopes to learn from the Asian Four Tigers, i.e. through utilising foreign capital to bring in new technologies, upgrading management skills and workers' skills, the real situation is different for China. Opening to FDI has led China into a downstream position in the global capitalist manufacturing system. China has become famous as the "world factory" with workers experiencing increased exploitation.

Finally, while the country is gradually changing from a centre-planned commanding-height economy into a "market economy", the government is still playing a conspicuous role in the economy. The lack of democratic reform has led to a loss of large amounts of public assets into the hands of the powerful at different levels of government, for example, through land redistribution in rural areas, construction in the process of urbanisation, and privatisation of

SOEs and TVEs. The leaked Panama Papers also contain evidence of the involvement in corruption of several leaders in the central government. Therefore, it might be safe to say that without thoroughly democratic political reforms, the problem of corruption and unequal redistribution of wealth will continue to exist for a long time.

Along with these developments since the beginning of the reform process, China’s socialist heritage from Mao’s era has declined. Inequality has dramatically increased, social welfare (education, health care and housing) has declined, and precarious and unsecure labour have dominated the jobs market. These contradictions and the decline of the socialist tradition, according to the discussions of ideology in Chapter 2, are the basis for the understanding of contemporary ideologies prevalent in Chinese society. Moreover, ICT development is not only part of this neoliberal development (as Schiller states, China and ICT as two “pillars” of digital capitalism), it is also seen to be able to solve all problems encountered in the course of China’s development. Recent policies have focused on using ICTs as a means to update traditional industries and to solve social issues such as poverty and inequality without necessarily changing social relations. Acknowledging that China has turned to capitalism is thus crucial to identify the ideological discourses which disguise this reality.

Capitalist contradictions share in common: Overproduction, underconsumption, over-accumulation of capital	Class struggles and social relations
Ownership issue: ‘equal access to land’ cannot guarantee peasants’ ownership and rights in reality.	Social relations between the State, capital and peasants and migrant workers
Ownership issue: SOEs and TVEs are not <i>de facto</i> collectively owned since the privatisation.	Social relations between the State, capital and workers
Capital and ownership issue: FDI has become an important part of China’s export-driven development strategy after the 1990s	Social relations between the international capital, the State, and workers
Political reform: the government is still playing a conspicuous role in the economy.	Social relations between the State, domestic capital, and workers
Decline of Socialist Heritage	Social security for the working class worsens

Table 3.1. Contradictions under Chinese Capitalism and the corresponding social relations.

CHAPTER 4. DIGITAL DISCOURSE IN ADVANCED CAPITALIST SOCIETIES

This chapter will review the literature on digital discourse in advanced capitalist societies. Based on discussions on ideology in Chapter 2, there are two main categories of functions of ideology: disguise or misrepresent the reality, and legitimate existing reality and immortalise the current social order.

This chapter will, first of all, discuss the prevalent ideology to understand the relationship between technology and society – technological determinism (4.1). It will then focus on technology ideologies that are specifically related to the capitalist economy, in production, exchange and consumption processes (4.2). Thirdly, this chapter will try to bridge analysis of ideology and discourse to a political economic analysis of the Internet-related issues (4.3). Section 4.4 will turn its focus to review technology discourses in the political arena. Finally, this chapter will provide a summary of digital discourse in advanced capitalist societies. This summary will serve as a framework for further analysis.

4.1. Technological Determinism

One prevalent approach to understanding the relationship between technology and society is that technology shapes society. Every time a new type of medium is introduced into the society, a binary discussion of either optimist or pessimist views about the technology begins. This was the case when radio, television and cable TV were introduced to society, as well as for the Internet. As pointed out by Fenton, both approaches of understanding media are reductive and partly come from a media centrism, failing to capture complex relationships between new technologies and societies (Fenton, 2012: 124).

Many scholars have contributed to the discussions about technological determinism (TD). Distinctions have been made through the so-called ‘spectrum’ between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ theories of TD (Marx and Smith, 1994: pxii, or see a revisit of TD made by Heilbroner, 1994: 74–7; MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1999: 4). Several researchers have objected to this distinction between hard and soft theories of TD (Bimber, 1994; Misa, 1988; Robertson, 1992). Some scholars have distinguished technological optimism from technological pessimism (or in Kling’s term as technological utopian and anti-utopian, 1994; Fuchs 2011).

Within these differences, two dimensions about technological determinism are settled. To be technological deterministic, whether techno-optimist or techno-pessimist, means that (1) the development of technology has its own logic, and (2) new technology, as an independent agency alone or as a secondary force in collaboration with other social agencies, has great influences on societies, no matter if the consequences are considered good or bad (MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1999). It either neglects the complex development of technology or holds a deterministic view that ICT will automatically bring a better or worse world in terms of economy, politics and culture. Furthermore, Fisher identifies a third assumption regarding technological determinism – ‘benevolence’ – that technological progress is related to human progress and in itself positive (Fisher, 2010: 17).

First of all, technological determinism means isolation of technology from society. It sees the development of technologies happening in a fixed, predictable and necessary sequence, as ruled by a naturally given law independent from social forces. TD neglects the social forces in the development and application of technologies, such as economic, political, cultural and even individual factors (for case studies about how these factors could influence the development of technologies, see Mackenzie and Wajcman, 1999). In some deeper latent assumptions, TD asserts that, in the long term, only those intrinsically best technologies can survive. Thus technology will develop in certain ways. However, this is not a tenable argument, as argued by some scholars with a social construction approach or applying actor-network theory (ANT). The so-called ‘best’ is more about a concept constructed by society and less about the technology itself (for the social construction approach see (Bijker, Hughes and Pinch, 1987; Bijker, 1997, and about ANT see Callon, 1986; Latour, 1996; Law and Hassard, 1999).

Moreover, technologies are seen as either scapegoat or elixir for social issues. TD argues that certain economic, social and cultural changes (i.e. social structures) will automatically evolve by adapting specific technologies. It asserts that society can only evolve in a certain sequence. In other words, it is a claim of historical necessities over contingencies. It neglects the complexity and uncertainty in the development of technology and its mutual construction with society (for critiques of the arguments about automatic changes, see Staudenmaier, 1985; Cohen, 2000; Kling, Rosenbaum and Sawyer, 2005; Fuchs, 2011).

Another techno-determinist assumption is that technological development is human progress (for critiques of this argument, see Marx, 1987; Smith, 1986, 1994). In general, this perspective perceives technological improvement is the basis for and an index of social progress. It assumes that any innovations and changes in technologies “almost certainly would be for better” (Marx, 1987: 33). However, the danger of this assumption is that if technology advancement becomes a means and an end of itself, then it no longer serves its genuine ultimate goal – progressive development of the society and humankind. Within capitalist systems, technological innovations could serve the interests of capital accumulation or political domination, instead of a better and more equal society.

In media and communication studies, TD argues for a deterministic understanding of certain ‘effects’ brought by media, and isolation of technology from societies (critiques see Williams, 1974/2004; Gillespie, Boczkowski and Foot, 2014). Both optimistic arguments, such as that the Internet or Web 2.0 will automatically bring about an expansion in the economy, greater democracy or worldwide understanding, and pessimistic ones, such as that the Internet will distort or ruin ‘authentic’ human inter-relationships or leading us to “amusing ourselves to death”, are techno-deterministic, failing to grasp social factors behind technologies themselves and real social contradictions leading to these phenomena.

TD is a one-sided deterministic thinking about the relationships between technology and society (Fuchs, 2011). It has to be technological and determinist at the same time (Cohen, 2000, p147). Concerns of this domination of this cause/effect or input/output logic in modern society has been expressed by Western Marxists, and is termed as reification by Lukács (1923/1972), as instrumental reason by Horkheimer and Adorno (1944/2002), or one-dimensionality by Marcuse (1964) (see also Fuchs, 2011). From a critical dialectic perspective, this logic conceals contradictions, antagonistic forces and the coexistence of risks and potentials in reality. This is why both techno-optimistic and techno-pessimistic understandings of ICT and the Internet are identified as ideologies themselves rather than analyses of the ‘real situation’ itself. They are ideologies because they, in Kling’s terms, technological utopian and anti-utopian analyses, both neglect the complex situations in reality that they are supposedly describing. These situations could include real conflicts and resistance, distribution of technological skills, social relations for technologies to be effective and important contingencies (Kling, 1994). As Smythe (1994) and Williams (1974) remind

us, the development and application of technology are full of historical ‘intentions’ and need ‘cultural screening’ all the time (Smythe, 1994; Williams, 1974/2004).

The critique of techno-determinism (TD) is crucial because TD facilitates a passive response to technological developments (Curran et al., 2012; MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1999; Mosco, 2005). It purposely neglects social factors such as economic, political, institutional or cultural aspects. While promoting one-dimensional thinking about how technology should be developed and how it could influence society, it discourages people from actively participating in liberating the potentials of science and technology. Therefore, the first and most important approach that will be applied in this thesis is a critique of technological determinism.

To sum up, technological determinism has three primary branches. The first one is that the development of technology has its own logic, independent from society. The second one is that technology can act as an independent actor to bring inevitable changes to the whole society. Thirdly, technological developments are seen as human progress. All types can be found in discourses about ICT and the Internet, encompassing either a techno-optimism or techno-pessimism. Techno-determinism is an ideology because it disguises the relationship between technology and society. It conceals contradictions, antagonistic forces, and the coexistence of risks and potentials in reality. TD expects to change society via technologies instead of challenging any social relations. Therefore, it serves the interests of the ruling powers.

4.2. Digital Discourse and Capitalist Economy

When the Internet was first commercialised and introduced to the public in 1990s, it was welcomed as a promise for prosperity and wealth for all. Advocators of the New Economy claims that it will work as a vehicle for everyone to have an economic and productivity growth. This claim emphasises the discontinuity between ‘New’ and ‘Old’ economy. Representatives such as Alvin Toffler (*The Third Wave* 1980), John Naisbitt (*Megatrends* 1982), Kevin Kelly (*Out of Control* 1994 and *Wired* Magazine founded in 1993), and Nicholas Negroponte (*Being Digital* 1995) promote a radical break from the past in all kinds of areas. These ideological discourses have been studied by other scholars under the broader

cluster of ‘culture’ (Fuchs 2015, Van Dijck 2013), ‘spirit’ (Fisher, 2010), ‘myths’ (Mosco, 2005), ‘predictions’ or ‘prophecies’ (Curran, 2012).

Curran illustrates the development of this ideology through a historical narrative and shows how the Internet economy was described as a vehicle to generate “wealth and prosperity for all” even during and after the crisis (Curran, 2012: 4). Then in 2004, Tim O’Reilly made popular the term Web 2.0 as a fully real two-way network. Scholz points out that Web 2.0 is actually a marketing ideology (Scholz, 2008). This newness, says Scholz (2012), “is aimed at potential investors”. A lot of speculative money was indeed invested into this new 2.0 economy, although the first Internet boom between 1995 and 2000 had been proved to be a bubble (Curran, 2012: 6). Some authors have proposed new terms of economy, showing an optimistic view of the new development with the Internet: such as attention economy (Doyle, 2013; Vukanovic, 2009) and Gift economy (Barbrook, 2005; Barbrook and Cameron, 1996). However, the promised new potentiality for national economic growth never came. The contribution of the Internet economy to GDP is never as good as it was boosted (Curran, 2012). These ideologies conceal or only partially represent the real conditions of capitalist economy. They thus serve to legitimate capitalism and its latest development. As Des Freedman points it out precisely, these ideologies, the “insider knowledge and cutting-edge perspectives”, articulate “a deterministic vision of a frictionless capitalism in which questions of property have been side-lined, profit making naturalised and exploitation minimised” (Freedman, 2012: 91)

This section will review the digital discourses and critiques of these discourses in the economic areas. This section will review debates about the New Economy from three aspects: market, production and consumption.

4.2.1. Decentralised and de-hierarchised market

To understand the digital discourse and its relation to the market, one needs to first of all look at the broader political-economic context starting from the last decades of the previous century: neoliberalism. Neoliberalism could refer to a political theory which “posits that society works best when business runs things and there is as little possibility of government ‘interference’ with business as possible” (McChesney, 2000: 6). It could also refer to a theory

of political economic practices that “proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005: 2). In short, neoliberalism refers to a series of institutional arrangements that severely restrict government’s interference with the market on the one hand, and maximise the role of a free market and profit-making corporations on the other hand. Moreover, neoliberal political economic development would not sweep all over the world without a set of parallel ideologies, influencing government and public’s practices, through advocating a free market, deregulation, and *laissez faire* economy.

Digital discourse functions as advocates of this neoliberal tendency, promising a decentralised global market. Through a critical analysis of the *Wired* magazine, Fisher (2010) has illustrated how digital discourse is used to legitimate the transformation from liberal Fordism to neoliberal Post-Fordism in advanced capitalist societies. On the one hand, as the market is integrated into network technology, it has become more spontaneous, self-regulating, and requires no external regulations and governing coordination. On the other hand, since the market has become more chaotic and unpredictable, network technology is necessary to enable individuals and companies to become adaptive to this fast-changing environment and to become more flexible (Fisher, 2010: 45–79).

For example, Larry Downes, a best-selling author on information technology and business changes, claims that the “markets generally work better than traditional forms of government in establishing rules for disruptive technologies” (Downes, 2009, cited in Freedman, 2012: 78). This disruptive technology shakes up the status quo and forces firms to adapt to the drastic transformations. According to this view, new technologies serve the ‘rebels’ and ‘pioneers’ who are sceptical of the traditional hierarchical industries and authoritarian state. These pioneers suspect the traditional government and believe in the rule of the free market. They believe that the new capitalist phrase brought by network technologies is “an overcoming of the pitfalls of Fordist society” and “the embodiment of the humanist critique of capitalism” (Fisher, 2010: 72).

According to the advocates, new technologies have changed the dynamism of the market in terms of rediscovering the niche market all over the world. The Internet will decentralise the market, challenge the old rule of monopolies and provide new opportunities to start-ups

(Curran, 2012: 5; Freedman, 2012). For example, in the media sector, the ‘long tail’ of media markets, accessible digital equipment and low marginal costs (the cost for every extra unit of products) will facilitate a more diverse range of content, especially in the niche markets. This tendency will not only encourage innovations but also expose consumers to more choices (Freedman, 2012: 72). Therefore, according to this view, the Internet environment is an ‘open’, ‘connected’, and ‘decentralised’ market, as compared to the old ‘closed’, ‘proprietary’, and ‘hierarchical’ system. Even there are oligopolies such as Google (Alphabet) and Facebook, these companies claim themselves as platforms and pipes that are facilitating ‘sharing’, ‘openness’ through API or other technologies. They also claim to have a more horizontal company structure which enables better collaboration and innovation within the companies.

Therefore, from the market perspective, New Economy advocators claim that new technologies bring a de-centralised market which requires no external regulation, and a de-hierarchised market that challenges monopoly. However, it is clear that this understanding of the free market, enabled by and in need of network technology, legitimates the neoliberal shift away from the Keynesian consensus since the 80s.

4.2.2. The Flexible production process and working process

In the 1970s and 80s, ‘post-’, whether it is postmodern, post-Fordism, or post-industrial societies, and ‘flexibility’ became the buzzwords (MacDonald, 1991). The emergence of these new words is related to the structural-technological transformation, in advanced capitalist societies after World War II, from Fordist production to Post-Fordist mode of production and capitalist accumulation. The New Economy proponent said that a restructuring of firms, industries, and the labour market is necessary for the age of tightened international competition and ‘dramatic’ technological changes. According to this view, the post-war mass production and standardised consumption are not suitable any more for the rapidly changing international market (Piore and Sabel, 1986). The firms, therefore, should restructure themselves with more ‘flexibility’ to respond to capital and market need. From the workforce perspective, this restructure of firms means several dimensions of changes: more multi-skilled workers, changeable size of the workforce, and a flexible wage system (Atkinson and Gregory, 1986). The structure of firms has become more decentralised and de-

hierarchised, as Castells claims that corporations have dramatically transformed from vertical bureaucracies to more horizontal structures (Castells, 1996: 164). These flexible managements will thus increase profits for companies.

From worker's perspective, the New Economy supporters also claim that this new mode of production could democratise production and liberate labour. Several types of new 'work culture', such as 'fun work' 'creative work' 'happy work', has come along with this restructuring of corporations. More recently with the development of the Internet, a lot of scholars have observed the transformation of manual work towards more informational one in the developed countries, such as immaterial labour, affective labour, cognitive work, prosumer and plabour (Hardt and Negri, 2001; Kitcher, 1990; Kücklich, 2005; Lazzarato, 1996; Ross, 2009, 2012). According to the New Economy proponents, 'knowledge worker' (Drucker, 1999) or 'informational worker' (Castells, 1996) have replaced the traditional industrial, blue-collar workers. These new white-collar workers or knowledge workers are said to be dramatically different from their predecessors. These new workers, or professionals or expertise as they would avoid the title of worker, have more control over and acquire more freedom during the work process instead of only implanting orders from their supervisors. Their jobs are also portrayed by technology companies as more fun and creative (Barbrook and Cameron, 1996). The 'New Economy' theorists such as Tapscott and Williams and companies such as Google celebrate the benefits brought to the companies by involving employees and consumers into decision-making processes (Freedman, 2012: 77). According to this kind of discourses, individual workers have more say in their working process and can engage in their working process more meaningfully. The production process also becomes more democratic and collaborative (see critiques from Fisher, 2010: 141). According to Fisher, this type of discourse is a response to the alienated nature of industrial work. It thus shows some potentials of individual emancipation but enables more implicit exploitation in the post-industrial work process.

Another new 'work culture' is "the 'entrepreneurship' ideal – where workers would fend for themselves" (Greenbaum, 1995: 92). As Harvey points out, one feature of neoliberalism is to promote individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills (Harvey, 2005: 2). Work enabled by information and network technologies facilitates this entrepreneurship ideal. Workers are also "conceived in more individualized and privatized terms rather than in terms of members of a class" (Fisher, 2010: 88). As Howard puts it, for neoliberalism, "individuals are interpreted as

rational and self-interested beings who seek material advancement, while rejecting public or social intervention into their lives" (Howard, 2007, p4). Individuals are encouraged to "become self-critical, to take personal responsibility for their lives, to adapt specific practices of self-regulation and improvement, and to embrace entrepreneurial and materialistic self-identities" (ibid., p5). The traditional notions of class in industrial factories are dissolved. Knowledge worker could choose to work for companies or as freelancers or start their own business, as Kelly calls "polyemployment" (Kelly, 1999, cited in Fisher, 2010: 95). On the one hand, these knowledge workers enjoy the freedom and mobility. On the other hand, their connections to any corporations decrease. They are expected to be responsible for their equipment and training. They also enjoy a lower level of protection and security and a higher level of precarity (Sandoval, 2016).

Mosco (2005) does a similar critique of the entrepreneur ideology of the Internet economy. He critically analyses the claim of the End of History made by Fukuyama (2001). He accuses Fukuyama as a mythmaker who possesses mythical thinking, the main purpose of whom is to promote transcendent vision by ignoring contradictions in reality. One main problem of Fukuyama's claim is his failure to take into account the problems of market power. He assumes that Fukuyama equals markets with freedom – "they are free by definition" (60), thus neglects the conflicts in the post-Fordism economy and politics. Fukuyama is never alone. To some extent, Castells (2013) has made a similar claim about what he calls the "Network Enterprise" (29). It is said that the value theory, work, labour, class and gender issues have all changed with the rise of the network enterprise. However, though Fukuyama and Castells have made similar claims, we need to be cautious about calling someone as ideological workers or ideologues. We can refer to how Mosco (2005) distinguish mythical thinking (Fukuyama as a representative) and analytical thinking (Daniel Bell) for this matter. While the first serves as "a transcendent vision, eliminating impurities, and inoculating against harmful forces in order not just to present that vision but to promote it fully and forcefully", the later rooted "in the banal experience of day-to-day life, with all its impurities, tensions, conflicts, and contradictions" (68).

4.2.3. Consumerism, participatory culture, sharing, and prosumer

This new mode of production is inseparable from changes on the users' side.

The first feature is an increase of consumerism in the society facilitated by new technologies. Campbell points out two broad strands in the contemporary sociology of consumption in Britain (Campbell, 2005). His discussion is used to inform my analysis of two fundamental ideological aspects of consumerism. The first one is that the shifting of focus/paradigm to consumption conceals the still fundamental contradictions of production in capitalism, especially in developing countries and the global capitalist system. As illustrated by Harvey in his discussions about the conditions of post-modernity, consumption is rather an ideological reflection of changes in production. It has an ideological function to "keep capitalist production profitable" (Harvey, 1989: 61). The second one is that the celebration of consumption and consumer power neglects the fact of capitalism's capability and wiliness to forge a particular type of workers suited to new productive processes or work. It disguises the fact that consumer decisions may not reflect their political interests but "not surprisingly favour the global economy's search for the cheapest possible prices, irrespective of the consequences for labour" (Miller, 2005: 8). Consumption can be rather better defined as "lack of choice" (Miller, 2005: 16, see also Miller 1987). This 'lack of choice' links back to Marx's concept of alienation which means the producers are alienated from the means of production, their own labour power and their own products. Therefore, as a consumer, people only have secondary relationship to goods, instead of a direct control of production or distribution of goods.

Secondly, Related to the more flexible and entrepreneurial work are the increasingly blurred boundaries between work time and leisure time, production and consumption. It is claimed, according to some commentators, that new technologies and the Internet have changed how people live together. The Web has brought openness, sharing, community, collaboration. Terms such as 'prosumer' and 'playbour' are used to describe this new phenomenon. Consumers and Internet users are more actively participating in the production process and surplus-value production by contributing to open source projects, crowdsourcing or 'sharing'.

New technologies, through the promises of creativity, joy and participation, let more people engage more meaningfully in the productive process. It means a deeper involvement in the capitalist logic of production in almost every aspect of life with the help of communication technologies (Fisher, 2010). Audiences of mass or new media, users online, player of games, etc. are all integrated into a type of production for the benefits of big companies or Internet

platforms (Ross 2013, Terranova 2013, Fuchs 2013, 2014, 2015, Freedman, 2012: 76). However, these productive labour are disguised by the ideological discourses of ‘participation’, ‘sharing’, ‘friending’, ‘liking’, ‘joyful’, ‘fun’, ‘open source’ (Van Dijck 2013, Fisher 2010). For example, van Dijck (2013) analyses the replacement of connectedness by connectivity, and the related terms of sharing, friending, liking, etc. These terms disguise the usage of users’ data, especially metadata, to make profits by the companies. As Fuchs (2014) points out in the critical introductory book of social media, Jenkins’ claim about participatory culture on social media is “a form of cultural reductionism and determinism that neglects structural constraints of human behaviour and the dialectic of structure and agency” (66). These celebratory discourses of new media and the Internet functions as ideologies, which conceals the exploitation of users as conducting productive labour. As Freedman points out, the so-called Internet economy is actually constructed by “contradictory forces” that “promise dispersion but reward concentration and that fetishise openness but encourage proprietary behaviour” (Freedman, 2012: 92). The is, above all, on a the basis of the capitalist pursuit of profit.

Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De-centralised (needs no external regulation from the government) • De-hierarchised (challenge monopolies and facilitate niche markets)
Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies: restructuring of the workplace • Workers: democratic working processes and creative and fun work (encourage individual personality and creativity, emancipation, personal freedom) • Entrepreneurship (individualism)
Consumption/ Prosumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumerism • Participatory culture, sharing • Openness (democratisation)

Table 4.1. Typology of New Economy Ideology

To sum up, the ideologies of the New Economy are prominent in the capitalist economy, ranging from market to production to consumption. As shown in Table 4.1, these discourses intend to deviate people’s attention from exploitation to liberation, in terms of deregulation of market, flexible work, joyful prosumer or playbour, all have ideological functions.

4.3. Political Economy: A Complement

This section will try to understand this New Economy from a political economy perspective. Critical political economists have been trying to reveal what's hiding behind the ideological discourses illustrated in the last section.

4.3.1. Commodification of information and user data

First of all, one primary question regarding the new digital or network technologies is 'how to think about information (Schiller, 2007). The main idea of the Information Age is that media and communication technologies will drive the economy. Information, it is said, is "a resource like other resources... which have values and costs and are used in achieving program goals" (Horton 1983, cited in Schiller, 2007: 3). More recently, we see "data is the new oil", said to be credited to a UK mathematician Clive Humby in 2006. It is true that information is a vital resource. However, the problem is that this kind of discourse has been appropriated to legitimate the commodification of information and data under the current capitalist mode of production. To solely emphasise information as a resource is to represent its usefulness partially and to ignore the surplus-value extracted by capital, thus the social relations behind. The fundamental question is who has the power to control and utilise information and data.

From a Marxist view of capitalism, it is necessary to find a certain form of commodity used by capital to accumulate because 'the wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an "immense collection of commodities"; the individual commodity appears as its elementary form (Marx, 1867: 125). According to Dallas Smythe (1977), the commodity form of 'mass-produced, advertiser-supported communications under monopoly capitalism' is 'audiences and readerships' (Smythe, 1994: 3). This means that on advertising-supported social media, the commodity is the user. And the time users spend on social media becomes work time, a time during which they are engaged in producing user-commodities and economic value. In this way, they become unpaid user-workers (Fuchs, 2014a: 74). And social media companies accumulate capital by exploiting this new kind of

labour through selling audience/user-commodities. The users are ‘fairly active and creative, which reflects Cultural Studies’ insights about the active character of recipients, but this active and creative user character is the very source of exploitation, which reflects Critical Political Economy’s stress on class and exploitation’ (ibid.: 100). And we can even say that the more active users are on corporate social media that advertising-financed, the more heavily they are exploited. Not only users’ participation and social networks are sold by social media companies as commodities, but also the audience’s personal information (ibid.). Targeted advertising is a method based on user data and personal information make capital accumulation more efficient.

4.3.2. Labour issues in general

Labour is another focal point throughout the development of the Internet and social media. Though the New Economy advocators celebrate the ‘flexibility’ brought by the Post-Fordist production and new technologies (see 4.2.2), critical political-economic scholars have pointed out the underlying logic of ‘flexible accumulation’ for capital, and the negative consequences of it. As Terranova (2013) correctly reminds us, the understanding of ‘digital economy’ cannot be separated from the broader background of late capitalism, especially after the crisis of Fordism. If we consider the capitalist mode of production as a dynamic system from a historical perspective, then it is clear that the labour process is always changing, based on a larger mechanism of capitalist extraction of value. The debate about “flexibility” in the 1980s had already shown this trend. Back in the 1980s, a lot of people were celebrating new ‘post-industrial’ sectors. Because of the development of technology, it is said that competition had been replaced by corporation. A lot of small businesses were built up because they were said to be more sensitive to the market with the help of direct communication between producers and consumers. And the upgrade of work, the replacement of hard manual work by white-collar mental work, seemed to be nothing but plausible.

However, as Harvey (2000) points out from the other side of the story through his analysis of the change of labour process, labour markets, products and patterns of consumption after the recession in the 1970s and 80s (Harvey, 1990: 141–172). Harvey argues that the enhanced flexibility and mobility have allowed stronger labour control at the workplace, through “high

levels of ‘structural’ unemployment, rapid destruction and reconstruction of skills, modest gains in the real wage, and the roll-back of trade union power” (ibid.: 147, 150). He shows how the labour market structure has been divided into core and periphery. The former is consist of employees with more secured and permanent jobs while the latter refers to those who suffer much lower level of protected and secured jobs (such as part-time, fixed-term or lesser skilled work). Moreover, the seemly ‘flexible’ production and geographical mobility and ‘disorganised’ market, enabled by institutional and technological innovation, facilitate an “ever more tightly organized” capitalism (ibid.: 159).

Therefore, the seemingly more flexible work exert tighter control over workers. For example, Armstrong and his colleagues (1984) have shown while the ‘flexible management’ in workplace seemed to give more autonomy (in terms of less direct control from the managers) to workers, changes in workplace under this flexible discourse have pushed workers to do more work and deploy ‘collective self-discipline’ (Armstrong et al., 1984: 399). Greenbaum also points out the ‘violent’ restructuring of workplace forces workers to acquire more skills, to perform more functions and to shift between tasks and positions (Greenbaum, 1995: 100). The formal control in technology companies, thus, is replaced by softer normative control (Fisher, 2010: 102).

In the ‘digital economy’, while work, in general, are more informationalised – mental work becomes more informational in advanced countries and manual work more industrialised in developing countries – it is hard to say whether the working conditions are getting better. As some critical scholars have pointed out that though forces of production have developed in digital area, the relations of production have not changed so much (Fuchs and Sandoval 2013; Fuchs 2014). The production is still based on the logic of extracting surplus value, thus is exploitative. Studies have been conducted in different industries, such as call-centre (Huws, 2009), knowledge-based economy (Huws, 2014), manufacturing factories in the Global South (Qiu, 2016), the so-called Gig Economy (Woodcock and Graham, 2019). Labour issues within the Internet companies, which claims their employees enjoy more freedom at the workplace, are also repetitively reported (see case studies in Birkinbine et al., 2016).

4.3.3. User labourer as an analytical category

As a result of new ICTs technologies and the Internet, along with the transformations in the workplace, the production processes in general go under changes as well. User issues become a significant topic around the Internet and social media. It is said that new technologies have brought more democratic, participatory, playful and voluntary work. However, some scholars have pointed out that the commercial usage of users' personal information is a type of exploitation (Andrejevic 2013; Fuchs 2014). Undoubtedly, not everyone agrees with this argument. Three main reasons are given: 1) users are not exploited because they are not paying money; 2) exploitation only exists in the area of wage labour, users are not paid thus are not generating value thus they cannot be exploited; 3) because users are willingly and voluntarily to submit their personal data online and they surf the Internet with pleasure, thus they are not exploited.

Unfortunately, all of these three arguments are not convincing. It is true that users are not paying for the service. It is because they are the commodities that are sold to the advertising companies by the platforms. As early as 1977, Dallas Smythe has already pointed out this blindspot in communication studies. As for the second argument, feminist studies about domestic labour have already successfully developed the theory that unpaid labour could also be highly exploited. In terms of user labour, Fuchs (2014) conducts a comprehensive study, applying Marx's theory of value and exploitation, to demonstrate that users do generate both value and use-value for the platforms. Exploitation happens when value is generated by workers but expropriated by capitalists. From an examination of the financial report of several large Internet companies, it is clear that users have made huge profits for these companies but get with no paycheck. For the last claim, users' willingness to go online is not necessarily contradicted to the fact that they are exploited. Moreover, it could be used by those platforms as a type of ideology to keep users stay online and continuously being under exploitation.

However, it is worth noting that exploitations happening online could be, in many ways, different from that in traditional sweatshop or workplace. For the first reason is that, as Andrejevic pointed out, the Internet is a realm "inhabited by those with the time and access to participate in online activities" (Andrejevic, 2013: 153). However, as the penetration rate of the Internet is increasing fast, people from different classes, race, gender and nation background are all going online. Another difference that makes people tend to reject the term exploitation for online behaviours is that users tend to see their own behaviours as personal

choices, lacking coercion. However, as Andrejevic points out, coercion is not solely about individuals making decisions, but also about “social relations that structure them” (ibid.: 161). As long as the companies and governments still possess the rights to dispose of users’ online personal data at their will, there is coercion. Let alone there is also a kind of social coercion to be online in order to be connected to friends, relatives and society (Fuchs, 2014). However, these differences are not the reasons to claim that user labour is not being exploited – such claims could be seen to conceal the reality and thus are ideologies.

4.3.4. Company concentration

Scholars from a critical political-economic perspective have expanded their study of the power relationships around traditional media into the new digital area. The Internet economy took off in a socio-political background of de-regulation and neoliberalism, which facilitated the expansion of multinational companies and digital media companies. The mergers and takeovers among media companies, including electronic/digital media companies, have led to a higher rate of integration and concentration, letting several companies monopolise the market (Mosco, 1996, 2005; Schiller, 2007). Curran points out that the New Economy discourse has failed to fulfil its promise to create “a level playing field between small and large enterprise” and take into account the “continuing economic advantage of corporate size”(Curran, 2012: 7). Instead, the large corporations and conglomerates continue to dominate leading market sectors. The very existence of Internet giants such as Facebook, Alphabet, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft proves this argument.

Van Dijck (2013) also reminds us to pay attention to a variant of takeover, particularly in the digital age– partnership (37). While this partnership could mean the integration in a traditional way – an integration of companies from different positions in the production chain (e.g. traditional media as content providers, Internet platforms as channels, search engines, and advertising agencies, etc.). Van Dijck acutely points out that a new kind of integration has created a “nirvana of interoperability” in which exists the “frictionless sharing” of users’ data between big Internet companies and platforms (Van Dijck, 2013: 164). This will benefit those for-profit companies, but even non-profit platforms, such as Wikipedia, cannot escape from it.

Political economy of the Internet	Ideologies
Commodification (production)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information or data as a new resource
Labour issues (production and consumption)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playbour • Free and Sharing
Consolidation (market)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connectivity

Table 4.1. Analysis of ideologies of the Internet from a political economic aspect.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of Internet-related ideologies and to help to reveal some of the ideologies discussed in section 4.2, this section provides a complementary analysis. The review of the political economy of the Internet mainly focus on three aspects: commodification of information and data, labour issues, and Internet company consolidation. Each of these three aspects has corresponding ideological discourses.

To combine what has been reviewed so far from Table 4.1 and 4.2, we can identify several ideologies from the aspects of market, production and consumption (see Table 4.3).

Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De-centralised (needs no external regulation from the government) • De-hierarchised (challenge monopolies and facilitate niche markets) • Connectivity
Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies: restructuring of the workplace • Workers: democratic working processes and creative and fun work (encourage individual personality and creativity, emancipation, personal freedom) • Entrepreneurship (individualism) • How to understand information: Information or data as new resource
Consumption/ Prosumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumerism • Participatory culture, sharing • Openness (democratisation) • Plabour

Table 4.2. typology of New Economy ideologies from political economic perspective.

4.4. Digital Discourse and Politics

While most of the ‘network society’ or ‘information society’ discourse is about the New Economy, there are several main political dimensions in it.

4.4.1. Deregulation

It is clear that the arguments of the decentralised market, free trade with the help of network technologies and flexible production of ‘New Economy’ all lead to one seemingly reasonable conclusion in governance: deregulation. The development of neoliberalism in the US (under the Reagan administration), UK (Thatcher) and all over the world have highly undermined the Post-War Fordist welfare state. The state withdrew from economic activities and restricted itself in providing limited social services. Transnational Corporations not only control businesses, importations and exportations in the home country but also businesses within nations other than its home country. Neoliberalism advocates strong private property rights, free markets, free trade, individual entrepreneurship and little government interference. Therefore, we see a transfer of power from government to private sectors and waves of deregulation of removing or reducing regulations in sectors, including industrial and service sectors.

Not only the corporations are crucial actors in constructing technology discourse to promote de-regulation. As Mosco points out, government plays an enormous role in constructing digital ideologies because “much of its legitimacy today is based on identification with this future wave” (Mosco, 2005: 43). As the power has largely transferred from the government to private sectors, keeping up with the technology is what left to the government to gain a genuine universally recognised legitimacy in the Western liberal democratic societies. Therefore, the government do “whatever it takes to strengthen identification with the new technologies” (ibid.). The governments thus are enthusiastic in publishing favourable policies for investments in high-tech sectors, attracting international technology companies, spending money in increasing access, emphasising education in technology-related disciplines in schools and universities. These actions not only endorse the ‘New Economy’ discourse but also legitimate its development.

4.4.2. Democratisation and the ‘end of history’

One prominent argument of technology discourse is that new technologies and the free market will automatically bring democratisation to societies. For example, Francis Fukuyama provides “a mythic umbrella that shelters visions of cyberspace and the end of history” (Mosco, 2005: 59). According to him, the global belief in the free market, technology and empirical science will lead to a worldwide spread of liberal democracy. Similarly, recent scholarly and popular publications have emphasised an ‘essential’ role played by the Internet and social media in radical social movements. A series of social movements from 2009 on was called “Twitter revolution”. Castells (2012) claims that the Arab uprisings were “spontaneous processes of mobilization that emerged from calls from the Internet and wireless communication networks” (106). According to him “the digital social networks based on the Internet and on wireless platforms are *decisive* tools for mobilizing, for organizing, for deliberating, for coordinating and for deciding” (229, emphasis added).

However, with a more in-depth analysis of these movements, some scholars have pointed out that this is not the case. Putting social media in the centre of movements reflects a lack of “deep and critical contextualisation of social and political life” (Fenton, 2012: 125). The political impacts of the Internet on social media have to be understood through a broader analysis of the social context (Aday et al., 2012; Anderson, 2011; Newsom et al., 2011). For example, Curran (2012) points out, the Arab spring had “deeper underlying causes and were prefigured by protests over many years” (54). Through a comparison between Singapore and Malaysia, he shows the importance to take more detailed socio-political context into consideration, though they are both claimed to be authoritarian democracies (23). This shows the importance to pay attention to concrete local social background.

Some scholars have conducted empirical researches on the role of media in social movements. Results show a complex usage of media by protesters. For example, Tufekci and Wilson (2012), through a survey study, shows face-to-face was the most important way of communication for Tahrir Square activists (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). Traditional interpersonal communication and traditional media played a more important role in providing information and communicating. A result from a survey with Occupy Wall Street activists

shows that both interpersonal and mediated interaction are important for activists, and older online media (email, website) were more important than web 2.0 social media (Fuchs, 2014b). These empirical results not only show the importance to put questions in a concrete situation, but also make clear that the role played by social media and the Internet in radical social movements should not be overestimated.

The proclamation made by Fukuyama that the inherently free Internet will necessarily bring democracy has been proved to be an illusion (Curran, 2012). As Curran points out, the Internet could be controlled, though maybe not comprehensive, but efficient enough (12). This has already been proved by some researches done in both western and eastern countries. The roles played by the Internet for radical social movements need to be carefully scrutinised, put into the specific socio-political context.

4.4.3. Empowerment through the Internet and identity politics

The Internet is claimed to have changed our everyday life. Along with the changes in the workplace and the blurred boundaries between work and leisure (4.2.3) is the blurred boundaries between private and public. It is not surprising that this development has been celebrated by some early enthusiasts (Benkler, 2006; Jenkins, 2006). According to them, new technologies could empower users to build new public sphere for connection and creation. Some scholars have welcomed this transformation. For instance, this fusion of public and private sphere, according to Papacharissi (2009), could bring power to people's hand and push private concern into public's eyes. Therefore, it could open up new discussions about issues otherwise could be ignored in traditional politics (Papacharissi, 2009). The Internet could then give people the ability to "watch the powerful" (Castells, 2013: 413). It is said that the Internet could automatically bring this because of its inherent technological design as decentralised with nodes. Thus it would be difficult to maintain total control, though the powerful always try hard to utilise new technologies in the service of their interests.

These changes, it is claimed, happen in a new society which Castells claims as a "network society" (Castells, 1996, 2009, 2013). A network society, according to Castells' definition, is a society "whose social structure is made around networks activated by microelectronics-based, digitally processed information and communication technologies" (Castells, 2013: 24).

According to him, power relations in this network society has “decisively transformed” (ibid.: 4) with the help of the “global digital networks of communication”. Castells identifies one specific novel type of communication which he terms as “mass self-communication”. According to him, this mass self-communication could “decisively” (4) increase users’ autonomy vis-à-vis power centres. This transformation from traditional mass communication to a mass self-communication, it is said, could largely empower users’ in horizontal organisational structures.

Another new possibility brought by this networked connected society is the fluid identity (Papacharissi, 2010). This is also observed by Negri and Hardt in the *Empire* when they talk about the transformation from a disciplinary society to a society of control, or in their celebration of the *Multitude*, who are fluid, hybrid, and mobile subjectivities, constituted by multiplicity (Hardt and Negri, 2001). People now are free to choose any identity, without being bonded to obligations (Bauman, 2004). Some have claimed this fluid, ever-changing identity as a way to escape from or a refusal to power.

On the other hand, there are some criticisms about the optimistic view of the empowerment role of the Internet. First of all, as Castells himself also points out, there is a difference between inclusion and exclusion. For one thing, not everyone has equal access to the Internet (Curran, 2012: 13). Moreover, poverty could demotivate people to participate in politics, let alone online participation (ibid.: 14). Secondly, even for those who have been guaranteed of access to the Internet, the questions of “who is communicating what to whom” still matters a lot (Fenton, 2012: 127). It is hard to say that the power structures online have been dramatically changed. The main problem of the Internet is still who has power, or in terms of the communication technology who is communicating what to whom. As Van Dijck points out, with an analysis of the way platforms treat their users, some users are “more equal than others owing to the hierarchical system inscribed in their interface design” on a judgement of who are more valuable and who are not (Van Dijck, 2013). Moreover, as critical political economists remind us several times, no matter who gets attention, it is the companies who get benefits from users’ online creative, enthusiastic participation (Fuchs, 2014a; Ross, 2009; Tiziana, 2013). This commercial activity could harm the potential empowerment capability of the Internet.

Thirdly, some criticisms have paid attention to issues about privacy and surveillance on the Internet. Lyon, for example, claims that new media have facilitated the mass surveillance by government and companies, especially in the broader social context of fighting terrorism, pushing it to an unprecedented scale that people would never accept in traditional politics (Lyon, 2003). With the help of massive collection and storage of data and metadata, everyone is under scrutinising in cyberspace. However, this is in no way a mere technology issue. As Mosco (2005) points out, the threat to privacy is “arguably intrinsic to the commodification process”. Put it in Harvey’s term (2005), the process of accumulation by dispossession has extended its area into personal data.

4.4.4. Legitimation, de-politicisation and the end of politics

This emphasis on deregulation, democratisation brought by new technologies and identity politics have ideological consequences. They serve to legitimate or disguise the broader social power relations and to distract public attention away from politics.

This kind of individualistic discourse fits well to the broader social context of neoliberalism and individualism. Instead of liberating people from old power relations, it serves for deeper involvement in capitalist exploitation and *de-politicisation*. For example, Borsook criticised the “cyber-selfishness” in the culture of Silicon Valley (Borsook, 2001). Sunstein claims that the display of “daily me” on the Internet could personalise and depoliticise public issues (Sunstein, 2007). As Dean points out, the personalised media, distinguished from mass media, cultivate merely particularities. Individuals only coexist, without collective identity and representative culture. This absence of firm identity, as she puts it, not only can and has been tolerated by the state, but itself can “generate processes of surveillance and incitement to speech useful for producing and maintaining power” (Dean, 2013: 142).

This idea of Internet as liberator still has its popularity. Besides the claims of the end of history, this ‘end of’ series also includes the end of space, with its variations of the end of the nation-state, of vertical relationships, of traditional identities, of war. It is claimed that the Internet facilitates communication across territorial boundaries. The nation focused space has been replaced by global cyberspace. Moreover, it is said that the foundation, the infrastructure, of the Internet also annihilate virtual space, the vertical social structures.

Instead, it has established a type of horizontal organisations and relationships. The traditional power relationships that constitute politics and struggles are now replaced by new types of citizens and identities with horizontal communications brought by digital informational technologies. With this annihilation of territorial and social space, the traditional nation-states and identities will come to an end, automatically bringing together an end to war and inequality. There will only exist a global way of life without unequal identities. Therefore, the end of space means “a process of freeing people from spatial constraint with all its confining economic and social implications” (Mosco, 2005: 92).

However, this is an ideology. Arguments about the death of distance and the end of history always direct to the *end of politics*. First of all, there seems to be no need for fighting for equal education or the sustainable environment in the real world since the Internet could provide everything and technologies could solve all the problems (Wertheim, 2000). Secondly, and arguably more fundamental aspect, the plausible potentials of the new technologies to empower people and to negate boundaries deviate people’s attention from concrete political-economic concerns, but focusing on a ‘daily me’ (Sunstein 2007) that personalises and depoliticises public issues (Fenton, 2012). The autonomy of multitudes proposed by Negri and Hardt (2004) is set to be achieved through individuals. However, it is this personalisation, the sole emphasis on individuality, that is the real problem. As Dean (2013), getting her ideas from Agamben’s ‘whatever being’, points out: this personalised new media enables passive subjects who “seek nothing” and “lack nothing” (141), thus will lead to the evacuation of politics. The class struggle should have already come to an end and democracy will come through simple online participations on whatever issues interest you. Once again, the discourses of ‘online participation’ function as ideologies in terms of its concealment of the needs form struggles in reality.

Different actors	Ideologies
State/institutional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De-regulation
Group, Societal level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralised structure, horizontal organisation → Internet will bring democratisation (optimistic) • Internet will ruin society (pessimistic)
Individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet and empowerment → identity politics

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualism and de-politicisation
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Table 4.1. typology of technology discourse and politics

To sum up, as shown in Table 4.4, there are Internet-related ideologies at the state institutional, societal and individual level. These ideologies function to legitimate the political-economic development in the informational capitalism, to undermine the understanding of power relations in the society as a whole, and to depoliticise political issues.

4.5. Mapping Internet Ideologies in Advanced Capitalism

To sum up, this chapter has outlined several technology discourse and Internet ideologies in advanced capitalism from three aspects:

- Technological determinism, which is a crucial type of ideological discourse to understand the relationship of technology and society (partly belongs to the New Economy discourse, partly to the New Politics discourse);
- The New Economy which focuses on technology discourse regarding the market, production and consumption process in the advanced capitalism; and
- The New Politics which discusses the new power relations between the state, society and individuals.

While Western scholars have conducted comprehensive analysis of technology discourse and ideologies in the advanced capitalist societies, there are no enough discussions to contextualise these ideologies in the Chinese society which has relatively different ways of economic accumulation, political arrangements and culture. Next chapter will thus focus on the situation in China.

CHAPTER 5. CHINA'S DIGITAL REVOLUTION

This chapter will focus on China's digital revolution from both ideology aspect and political-economy aspect. As a peripheral country in the world capitalist system (Wallerstein, 2004), China's development has been influenced by the advanced capitalism and restricted by the world system. On the one hand, China has been actively learning from the Western experiences and concepts, including the Information Superhighway and Information Society. On the other hand, China's pre-industrialised situation restricted the extent to which China could copy the Western path. Therefore, this chapter will show some unique characteristics of China's ICT- and internet- related ideologies and development. This chapter will first of all focus on the techno-determinist ideologies in China's digital discourse (5.1). It will then discuss influence of the Western futurist discourse about the New Economy in China and how this discourse was later adjusted in the Chinese context as 'neo-industrialisation' (5.2). Section 5.3 will investigate the matrix of power relations in China's ICT industries from the perspective of political economy and political science. It will serve as a complement to scrutinise the power dynamics in China. This investigation will be helpful to identify ideological discourse in my further research. Finally, Section 5.4 provides a summary of current discussions of digital discourse in China.

5.1. Techno-determinism with Chinese Characteristics

This section will focus on two unique aspects of China's techno-determinist discourse: techno-nationalistic discourse (5.1.1) and the detachment of technology development from politics (5.1.2).

5.1.1. Techno-Nationalist discourse

Informatisation in the Chinese historical context is inseparable from China's endeavour of modernisation and industrialisation (Dai, 2003; Hong, 2008; Mueller and Tan, 1997; Wu and Yun, 2015; Yang and Mueller, 2014; Zhao, 2007, 2010). This informatisation is highly integrated into nationalist discourses. Several themes can be identified under this nationalist discourses: a) national security, b) competition with the West, c) national progress. However, with China's integration into the global economy, this techno-nationalist discourse also clashes with techno-globalism.

First of all, military concerns and national security are prominent themes in China's early endeavours to industrialise its industries. Mueller and Tan (1997), for example, noticed the similarity among the previous Communist regimes, such as the Soviet Union and China, which "equated economic development with forced 'industrialization' – that is, with the construction of large factories devoted to heavy industry" (Mueller and Tan, 1997: 14). They point out the close relationship, perceived by the Chinese leaders, between economic development and industrialisation, as well as the importance of technology in Mao's era. However, Mueller and Tan failed to address the Cold War context during that period and China's leaders' determination to achieve self-determination, especially through military technologies. As Zhao (2007) accurately remarks, Chinese leadership in Mao's era was "compelled to address the most pressing problem of the post-revolutionary regime in the Cold War context to survive militarily in the age of high-tech wars and nuclear deterrence" (Zhao, 2007: 95). China has developed a 'military-led Chinese techno-nationalism' under Mao since the early 1950s (Feigenbaum, 2003: 29). This developmental path sees technology as being fundamental to national security and prosperity. In other words, Chinese military programmes were of great significance for Communist China's survival, national security and self-defence. One prominent example is the "two bombs and one satellite" project. The belief in this developmental path was reinforced through China's confrontation with US military in Korea and China's witnessing of America's Gulf War as an 'information war' (Zhao, 2007: 97). Moreover, as Wang (2014) points out in his historical narrative of "the computer as the nexus of technology and class politics in China 1955-1984", the pursuit of national independence was the primary motivation in the early development of ICT in China. Therefore, technological development in China is closely connected to discourse on national security and the nation's self-determination since an early stage. Post-Mao reformers also embraced the military-led techno-nationalism. One representative example is the launch of the 863 Plan, "a massive military and industrial research and development plan initiated in March 1986" (Zhao, 2007: 97). This military-led technological development sets the basic tone of China's techno-nationalism.

Another main contribution to China's nationalist discourse on technology is the 'century of humiliation' which is believed to be caused by the inferiority of science and technology development in China. This kind of discourse and thinking that the Chinese nation's past humiliations were caused by technologically superior foreign empires existed among Chinese

intellectuals much earlier before the establishment of CCP. For example, in the late Qing Dynasty, activists such as Kang Youwei, Sun Yat-sen and scholars as Yan Fu have discussed this issue under the themes of enlightenment (*QiMeng*) and salvation (*JiuWang*) (Li, 1994). In fact, CCP was established in the very background of China's pursuing of salvation and modernisation.

This theme has been preserved throughout CCP's design of national development strategies. For example, China's economic reforms, first of all, came up with the slogan of 'four modernisations': agriculture, industry, national defence and science and technology. It then followed by projects such as '863' which aims to develop high technologies and to equip China with the capacity to 'compete with the West' (Dai, 2003: 9; Zhao, 2007: 97). Later on, this modernization is seen as impossible without informatisation (Mueller and Tan, 1997: 22; Wu and Yun, 2015; Zhao and Schiller, 2001). Following this consensus, the state initiated several projects, such as the 'Golden Projects' in the 90s (Zhao, 2007) and Informatisation of the National Economy (INE) programme (Dai, 2003). More recently, the state has tried to take greater control of domestic communication infrastructure and technological development, through projects such as National Informatisation Development Strategy (Year 2006-2020), accompanied with the discourse such as 'Internet Sovereignty', 'State Information security' (Zhao, 2010: 267, 271). Along with these projects or national strategies, the narrative of 'Us' (China could refer to the State, CCP, Chinese people, as well as Chinese companies) versus 'Them' (actors and agencies from foreign countries) has existed for long. This nationalistic ideologies is prominent in the Internet era as well. For example, Yang observed a return of popular nationalist discourse, using the "nationalist and anti-imperialist ideological discourses of the Mao era" under Xi Jinping's leadership, and how this nationalist discourse has influenced China's Internet policy (Yang, 2014, p111). Therefore, this nationalist discourse of 'century of humiliation' is intertwined with the discourse on technological development in China.

Finally, ICT and Internet technology have been closely associated with the idea of national progress and the hope for 'the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'. As observed by Smythe (1973) in China, officials saw (communication) technology as a neutral tool, free from any specific class characteristics, and could be seen as a representation of national progress (Smythe, 1973/1994). While Smythe's main concern is the consumer culture behind the changes of the public's consumption habits from bicycles to cars, the main reason for putting

technology development as a primary task is still mainly political – in response to the international historical situation (Zhao, 2007). Later on, after the reforms, industrialisation and modernisation gain closer relationship with economic prosperity and development. A more recent example is from Wu and Yun's analysis of the discourses about technological changes and the 'Internet Plus' in China. They point out how technological nationalism has shaped China's imagination of modernisation and the 'Internet Plus' (Wu and Yun, 2015).

The connection of technology to national progress not only exists in official discourse but also is prevail in Chinese society. One famous example is the 'Needham Puzzle: Why the Industrial Revolution Did Not Originate in China' (Lin, 1995; Needham and Wang, 2004). This has been a difficult question preoccupying a lot of Chinese nationalists. This question was further developed into a question of why (Western) modernity did not originate in China, as reflected in a famous documentary *Heshang (River Elegy)*. This documentary was broadcast nationally by China Central Television (CCTV) in 1988 and received massive responses and discussions from the public. The idea of developing technology as a primary task for China was further confirmed by Deng Xiaoping, when he put forward his famous policy, "Science and technology are primary productive forces" in 1988.

However, while not being directly challenged, this techno-nationalism has clashed with 'techno-globalism' since China's integration into the world economic system. The latter emphasises the multiple players and their diverse, if not conflicted, interests in the contemporary development of networked technologies (Zhao, 2010: 273). As shown in Zhao's study of China's pursuit of indigenous innovation of networked technologies, the consensus in supporting this objective among domestic actors cannot guarantee an easy way to achieve the goal, not least because of the interaction between transnational and domestic forces and among domestic actors themselves. This phenomenon is not new. The dynamics of China's telecommunication and information reform are complex since the very beginning: the central-local power relations, the competition between different ministries for economic benefits and political power, the pressure of spontaneous privatisation, the danger of foreign dependency and the imperative of political repression (Mueller and Tan, 1997: 9–12). This complexity is also reflected in discourse. Through a throughout study of People's Daily, Hong points out the contradictions shown in the official organ newspaper. On the one hand, PD tries to play down the danger of losing national autonomy and self-reliance brought by China's global participation while emphasising China's advantage in cheap labour and huge

market potential. On the other hand, PD occasionally emphasises the importance of creating self-sufficiency in pillar industries and national capacities of military defence (Hong, 2008: 35–6). Therefore, we can expect some extent of clashes of techno-nationalism and technoglobalism in the current context of China's deeper integration into the global economy and online world.

Moreover, after what happened in Tiananmen Square in 1989, nationalism has become a handy discourse for the CCP to repress domestic dissent. While claiming legitimacy through rapid economic growth (especially through the FDI-driven, export-oriented and ICT-related industries), the political repression is not loosened (though the situation varies under different leadership). The Internet has become a crucial site for CCP to control the flow of ideas and information. Techno-nationalism and nationalist discourse are important for CCP to gain support of this control from the public. The repression of any domestic dissent can be legitimated under the name of 'national security'. As Zhao acutely points out the anti-democratic nature of the Chinese 'digital revolution' (Zhao, 2007: 99), the development of Internet is by no means designed to serve socialist democracy because of the explicit technocratic developmental path set out since the reform. Instead, it is not surprising to see that the role of Internet as profit-making instruments are separable from its role as political and social liberation.

5.1.2. The 'Non-political' technology

The second type of discourse on technology is highly related to techno-nationalism – depoliticisation of technology, or, in other words, to detach technology from the political domain. Both of these ideological discourses belong to a broader techno-determinist ideology.

It is worth noticing that techno-nationalism is not a fixed concept that has never changed. Rather, it has experienced subtle changes throughout China's technological development. It has changed from technology for 'self-determination' in Mao's era to Post-Mao reformers' understanding of technology as depoliticised 'neutral tool' and to the more recent statements of technology as the main instruments for economic development. In other words, there is an increasingly techno-deterministic and instrumentalist tones of technologies under the name of

techno-nationalism in China. The international technological competition, including military clashes, and capitalist consumerism gradually eroded Mao's 'de-link' project to find an alternative technological path for 'self-determination' (Halliday, 1999). Instead of insisting on alternative ways to develop technologies that are different from the West, there is a "prevailing Chinese mindset to 'catch up with' or 'leap frog' ahead of capitalist technology" (Zhao, 2007, p94). I will briefly discuss the historical changes in this section.

This de-politicisation of technology in CCP can be retrieved back to 1970s when the cultural revolution is about to finish. During Mao's ear, technology was used to enhance workers' control over the production process under the socialist relations of production (Wang, 2014). In 1971-2, when Dallas Smythe visited China he discovered that the political economists, philosophers and political scientists he met regarded "technique and technology as autonomous and non-political" (Smythe 1994, cited in Zhao, 2007: 93). As Zhao points out, this detachment of technology "from the politicized domain of culture as a terrain of struggle within and against capitalism and an economism beyond social division and political conflicts" had "a particular ideological appeal to a post-Mao Chinese ruling elite victimized by the excesses of Cultural Revolution politics and its rhetoric of class struggle" (Zhao, 2007: 98). This deliberate detachment of technology from the political debate was a reflection of the broader consensus in China's society during after-Mao ear when Mao's industrialisation strategies and policies were seen as a failure, a pursuit of unrealistic radical relations of production and political struggles (Wu and Yun, 2015: 3).

This de-politicisation thus needs to be understood in the broader context. As famously framed by Deng Xiaoping as 'it doesn't matter if a cat is black or white so long as it catches mice'. Economic and political reforms face a huge uncertain in the first few years of the post-Mao ear. "Crossing the river by feeling for the stones" (*Mozhe Shitou Guohe*) is more of an accurate description of the real complex and difficult situations than a mere excuse to legitimate the later on fully-developed capitalist approach. During the 1980s, CCP's leaders realised the severe situation of economic crisis and the urgency to develop the economy, not only for economic growth but for the increase in people's living standard. As stated by Zhao Ziyang (the third Premier of PRC and one of the most important figures in China's economic reform) in his memoirs *Prisoner of the State*, from 1952 to 1980 China's "industrial output had grown 8.1 times, GDP had grown 4.2 times, and industrial fixed assets had grown 26 times", yet "average consumption had only doubled" (Zhao et al., 2009: 112). The most

pressing task for leaders, elites and intellectuals during that period is thus to recover the national economy and people's lives, instead of continuing political ideological debate between capitalist and socialist approaches (though there are exceptions among the leaderships such as Chen Yun, see Zhao p101-2). As Zhao stated in his memoir that was published after he died, he "did not have any preconceived model or a systematic idea in mind" when he started his work on the economic reform. He "started with only the desire to improve economic efficiency" (Zhao et al., 2009: 113). Zhao also believes that technology is "like economics, a realm distinct from political affairs" which is opposite to Mao's idea of a connection between politics and technology (Gewirtz, 2019: 123). Therefore, this broader context – putting economic recovery and economic efficiency over the political debate of socialist path – is also reflected in the leadership and elite groups' attitudes towards technology.

China's economic reform, especially in the 90s when China's economic developments started to roar, pursues a "globally integrated, market-based, ICT-driven mode of economic development" (Hong, 2011b: 31). The deployment of ICTs and the informatisation then became the top priority for the post-Mao elites and their developmental approach (Zhao, 2007: 98; Zhao and Schiller, 2001). In other words, technologies have been used as *instruments* for economic development (Gewirtz, 2019). Moreover, they are seen as *neutral instruments* detached from any social relations and thus political debates.

However, this depoliticization is an ideology, a 'digital sublime' (Mosco), serving the purpose to argue for the 'end of politics'. For one thing, as Smythe argues, there is a danger to measure the technological development against capitalist technique achievement. The pursuit and consumption of "capitalist luxury goods such as private automobiles, family-sized washing machines, family-sized refrigerators, one-way TV, etc.", argued by Smythe, will educate and prepare Chinese consumers to capitalist social relations and thus China a capitalist path of development (DW Smythe, 1994, cited by Zhao, 2007: 94).

Both techno-nationalism and the understanding of technology as neutral are techno-determinism. The former partially emphasises how technology could *shape* society and equal technology development to national development, and the latter perceives the development of technology as an independent process, devoid of intervention from any social relations and

power dynamics. While de-politicisation of technology has its roots in China's historical context, it was also influenced by Western technology discourse.

5.2. From 'Post-industrial' Ideology to 'neo-industrialisation'

This section will focus on the impact of the Western optimistic and futurist ideologies about ICTs in China. This type of digital discourse is highly influenced by ideological discourses of New Economy in advanced capitalism (see 4.2) but also shows its own features.

Since China's self-reliance was broken during the late Qing Dynasty in the Opium Wars, the Chinese intellectuals and political activists have constantly been looking at the West (including Japan) to learn not only technologies but also socio-political institutions. One prominent example is the arguments between *Ti* (institutions) and *Yong* (technology). The arguments focused on whether China should adopt Western political institutions and constitutions or learn technologies from the West (Li, 1994).

During Mao's era, China's pursuit of technological development is clearly embedded in China's pursuit of modernisation, especially industrialisation. Chinese leaders were enthusiastic about catching up with the West, especially in technology. However, because of the Cold War context and imposed economic blockade, China's linkage to the world economy is highly restricted (Hong, 2011b: 33). During that time, China strategically imported foreign technology "on an import-substitution basis" (ibid., see also Tian, 1998). The main purpose was to develop domestic industries.

During the reforms, China's ICT- and FDI-driven, the exported-oriented open-up policy has reintegrated China into the world economy. China's emphasis of informatisation and industrialisation were in parallel with the international optimism about technology (Dai, 2003; Hong, 2008; Mueller and Tan, 1997; Wu and Yun, 2015; Zhao, 2007). As Dai observed, the Chinese government's launch of Informatisation of the National Economy (INE) programme occurred during the period when a consensus was emerging in international societies. The main point of this consensus was that information technologies can serve as a revolutionary force for developing countries to 'leapfrog' in technological and economic development, especially among G7/8, European Commission and UN (Dai, 2003:

10). These post-industrial ideologies then “reincarnated itself into numerous developmental policies promoted by international organisations” and to some extent benefited some newly industrialised countries, such as the Four Little Tigers in Asia (Hong, 2008: 25). It is not difficult to find this kind of discourse about ‘leapfrog’ and ‘catch up with the West’ in China’s official discourse during that time. For example, The 16th Party Congress in 2002 posits “IT applications as the ‘logical choice’ for accelerated industrialization and modernization” (Zhao, 2007: 98). Wu and Yun (2016), in their analysis of the discourses about technological changes and the ‘Internet Plus’ in China, points out how technological nationalism has shaped China’s imagination of modernisation. This type of discourse among China’s officials is not only a heritage of national struggle against global imperialism inherited from Mao’s era, but also an appropriation of Western techno-utopianism.

One prominent phenomenon is the ‘Toffler Fever’ in China during the 80s and its enduring influence on Chinese leadership’s policy agenda for China’s modernization. At the peak of this fever, the Toffler couple, Alvin Toffler and his wife Heidi Toffler, were invited to China by officials and the party organ (People’s Daily) several times to discuss “China’s economic construction and its future development” since December 1982 (Toffler 1998, cited in Gewirtz, 2019: 132). Later on, Zhao Ziyang, then Premier and General Secretary, met the couple formally at Zhongnanhai, the centre headquarter of CCP and the State Council, in September 1988. Gewirtz’ historical investigation shows that Toffler and other foreign futurists’ ideas towards modernisation and technology development had a direct impact on Chinese leaders’ agenda for policy-making and action planning, including the premier multibillion-dollar state industrial R&D programme, the 863 Programme (863 *jihua*) (Gewirtz, 2019). According to Toffler, developing countries with backwards in industrial development might be able to take a new route to leap ahead of the capitalist developed world in technology development. Toffler’s ideas and imagination of the future were attractive Chinese leaders, especially his promise of a dramatically transformed future brought by technology. Besides Toffler, other futurists such as Naisbitt and his description of information as a strategic resource also attracted elite discussions (Gewirtz, 2019: 124–5). China’s elite groups and top official even hosted a World Futures Studies Federations’ annual conference in 1988 (ibid.: 132). During that period, the Chinese leaders were struggling to “feel the stones” to boost productivity and economic development. With Toffler and others new technology missionaries’ promises, technology development could help China to catch

the opportunity of the emerging trends to overcome the backwards in the industry sector and finally lead ahead of capitalist countries in the '*Third Wave*'.

During the 90s, new Buzz words such as 'Surf the Internet' 'Information Highway' gained popularity in the public and media discourse. Internet began to become a phenomenon in China and ICTs became the "most popularized and commercialized area of hi-tech development in China" (Zhao, 2007: 98). 'Information society' became a popular slogan. Public opinion leaders during that time include elites who received American postgraduate education coming back to China and local scientists and media elites who noticed the fast development of information and opportunities information technologies can bring to China (Wu and Yun, 2015). First, these new words and concepts fit well with China's pursuit of modernisation through a more pragmatic way starting from the reforms (as Deng Xiaoping put it as the metaphor of white cat and black cat thus leave the ideological debate aside). Second, the claimed opportunity brought by information technology to catch up with or even 'leapfrog' Western societies intertwined with China's techno-nationalist discourse, together forming a new social fever in this new type of technologies, especially personal computers.

However, Western techno-utopianism also faces challenges in China. Through an analysis of articles on People's Daily in several months from 1995 to 2003, Hong (2008) finds out that the official discourse is not totally in line with the Western utopian discourse on information and post-industrialisation. Instead, after the first few years' obsession of 'post-' discourse in the 90s, People's Daily slightly changed into a more modest tone. Using Hong's word, the term 'neo-industrialisation' used by People's Daily reflects the recognition of China's reality of uncompleted urbanisation and agriculture industrialisation and China's low-end position in the global information economy (Hong, 2008: 29–30). Moreover, the concept of neo-industrialisation is used to promote market forces and values. Therefore, China's information society is featured with a combination of informatisation and industrialisation, instead of de-industrialisation (ibid. p37). Hong's observation is confirmed by Gewirtz' historical study of Zhao Ziyang and his policies on economy and technology. As Gewirtz points out, for Zhao and his peer leaders, science and technology development and innovation should serve China's economic innovation and development, "targeted at both 'promoting the traditional industrial revolution' and 'catching up with the new task of the global New Technological Revolution' (Gewirtz, 2019: 132). Moreover, this economic innovation should not be, not surprisingly, in contradictions with China's political system (ibid., p133).

This neo-industrialisation is inseparable from China's neoliberal development since the reforms. The next section will focus on the power relations in China's ICT development.

5.3. Matrix of Power Relations in China's ICT industry

To better understand the unique features of China's digital discourse and why the optimistic Western view about Information society is not fully accepted in China, this section will focus on the political economy of China's ICT industry. It serves as a complement to the last section to build a framework for further empirical analysis. This section will focus on three areas of power dynamics (Zhao, 2007) and power "matrix" (Meng, 2018: 7): tensions between global capital and the state (5.3.1), and between the state and the market (5.3.2), as well as labour struggles in the society (5.3.3) (see Figure 5.1). These three areas of tensions highlight the three facets and forces in the ICT development in China: the state, the capital and the society.

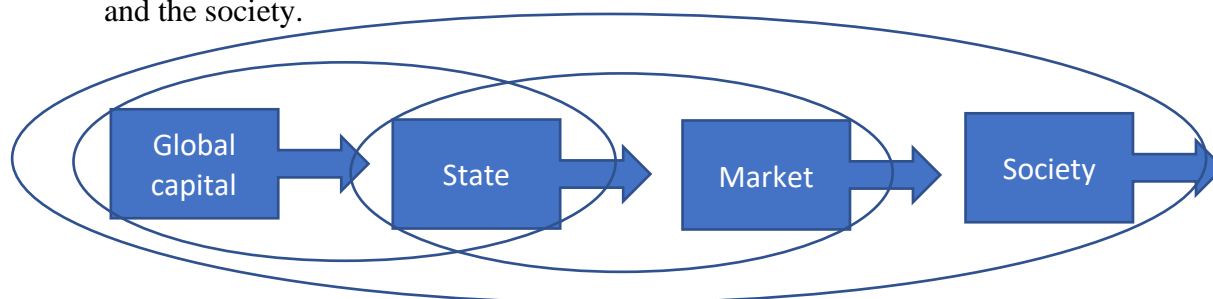


Figure 5.13. Power dynamics between different forces in ICT development in China.

5.3.1. The Post-revolutionary state and the modern globalised world

There are two seemingly contradictory but interconnected ways to understand China's relationship with the world in the ICT area. As illustrated in section 5.1.1, the long-standing techno-nationalism has clashed with an increasing techno-globalism in operations. Though the former is still a dominant ideology, the emergence of the latter demonstrates the new development in ICT and Internet industries in China.

Partly due to the need to 'catch up' with the Western technology and the techno-deterministic understanding of technology as 'neutral instrument to economic development' (see section 5.1.1 and 5.1.2), the party-state and technocratic elites chose to modernise and industrialise China through integration into the global market system (Hong, 2011b; Zhao, 2007; Zhao and Schiller, 2001). In contemporary political economy, ICTs and the Internet have become the frontrunner of the expansion of transnational informational capitalism (Fuchs, 2010; Schiller, 2005; Zhao and Schiller, 2001). China's pursuit of modernisation since reform encountered

the expansion of the world market system through information networks and technologies. China has since made informatisation as the “top developmental priority of the state” (Hong, 2011b: 31). As Schiller points out, ICT industry as “capitalism’s most dynamic industry” and China as “its most expansionary growth zone” are two poles of growth after the financial crisis for the transnational capitalism (Schiller, 2005: 80). These ‘two poles’ are increasingly integrated into each other. The ICT manufacturing industry has been crucial in China’s integration into the world economy (Schiller, 2008: 112). The stark contrast of investments received between China’s special economic zones and coastal regions and central and western areas shows how developments of China’s ICTs during reforms “have been prioritized to coordinate with the shift of transnational capital to flexible production” (Zhao, 2007: 99–100). The market-oriented reform and open-up process further unleashed “rampant consumerism in China” and turned itself into the “workshop of the world” (ibid, p95). There is little doubt that China has pursued a “globally integrated, market-based, ICT-driven mode of economic development”, especially during the 90s (Hong, 2011b: 31). As Meng (2018) points out, Xi Jinping’s Davos speech about embracing globalisation while Trump building barriers might be a “surprise to those who maintain a cold-war image of China” (Meng, 2018: 9). Therefore, the ICT sector is one of the main areas for China to integrate into the world capitalist system successfully.

Similarly, in media and Internet sectors, there is a strong resistance against the penetration and influence of imperialist and hegemonic Western media in non-Western media systems on the one hand (Zhao, 2012: 146), and an economic imperative to learn from the Western media operations on the other (such as entertainment industry, see Sparks, 2012). As Zhao points out, analysis of non-Western media systems cannot enjoy the ‘privilege’ to “focus more on the relationships between a media system and the social and political settings of a given country within the containment of the modern (Western) nation-state” (Zhao, 2012: 146). It is crucial to consider the power relations between central and peripheral media systems in the world. For example, all media students in China understand that the first modern newspapers in China were set up by missionary agents in colonised cities and in foreign languages. Another example is that during the Cold War, China devoted a lot of resources to prevent broadcasting signals from the ‘enemies’. Even today, there is still strong resistance against the influence and penetration of Western media in non-Western countries, partly because of the Third World nationalism (ibid.).

On the other hand, media, and the Internet in particular, as a business has seen an increasing integration into the world financial system. For example, Xia and Fuchs (2016) examine the intense financialization of major Internet companies in China (Xia and Fuchs, 2016). Similarly, Hong (2017) expresses a similar concern of the increasing financed character of Chinese Internet economy and how the involvement of transnational finance capital have impacted the state-corporate relations (Hong, 2017b). In a more detailed study by Jia and Winseck, it shows “the centrality of financial institutions in the ownership” of Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent. In particular, they find out the intensive scale of foreign investors ownership stakes in Alibaba (40%) and Tencent (45%) (Jia and Winseck, 2018: 54).

Therefore, ICT industries and media sectors have seen the entangled relationship between China and the world. On the one hand, techno-nationalism, the underlying competitive relations between China and the West, has always been one of the main themes in China’s development of ICTs and the Internet. On the other hand, CCP’s pursuit of the market-based and export-oriented path of development after the ‘reform and open-up’ policies has integrated China more closely into the world market. It is worth exploring how ideological discourses have developed to reconcile this contradictory development.

5.3.2. The Party-state and marketisation of the media and the Internet

In the area of control over access and content of the Internet in Chinese society, there shows a complex nexus between the coercive state power and the capitalist logic of the market.

Historical development of marketisation has shaped Chinese media into two roles: as an ideological apparatus and as commodities (Ma, 2000; Zhao, 2012). On the one hand, CCP’s media system, inherited from the Soviet system, has defined the function of media positively to motivate the public. During the revolutionary period, CCP emphasised the mass media’s role to win “cultural leadership” and to forge a “revolutionary hegemony” (Zhao, 2012: 151). For the post-Mao period, CCP still actively use mass media to “shape the contours of Chinese modernity” (ibid.). Moreover, after 1989, CCP has tightened its control of media, strengthening its “leading role in media and ideology” (ibid.). From the ownership perspective, news production and distribution, i.e. news media outlets, are monopolised by the State.

On the other hand, commercial papers are always one part of China's media system even before the reforms. Before 1949, there were commercial papers in semi-colonial metropolitan cities in China. These papers continue to exist after 1949. Moreover, CCP also created other afternoon tabloids to "establish its revolutionary hegemony over an urban population" (ibid., p157). During Mao's era, there were several liberal attempts. For example, in 1957, the liberal intellectuals made efforts to challenge the party's monopoly of the media system during the 'one hundred flowers campaign', but soon oppressed in the afterwards 'Anti-Rightist Campaign'. Another example of struggles for liberalisation of media was after the 'reform and open up' during the 1989 pro-democracy moments. However, these attempts all failed or later oppressed by the State, and some even ironically "contributed to the Chinese State's fortification of its regime of control" (Zhao, 2012: 150).

After 89 and especially after Deng's southern tour 1992 that further established the direction of China's reform, commercialisation has become one key component of and it also happens in the media system. Though as part of official propaganda machines, news media cannot be privatised, the more 'soft' parts and peripheral areas of the media and cultural industries, such as the entertainment industry, and advertising, are open to private and foreign capital (Zhao, 2012: 153). These areas are seen as profit-making enterprises instead of official organs. As pointed out by Meng, on the one hand, media institutions in China as "the mouthpiece of a revolutionary party has given way to the maintenance of social stability by a bureaucratic authoritarian state" (Meng, 2018: 3). On the other hand, the "functioning of capitalist logic in allocating communication resources" is crucial in the Chinese context (ibid., 9). Therefore, the Chinese media system has a history of a combination of two types of media sector: one as party organ, and the other as market-oriented media.

TV, news agencies, and the Internet have similar stories. Television, which is arguably more important for Chinese people's everyday life, faces a similar situation. TV in China is "state controlled, monopolistically operated, and highly commercialized" (Zhao, 2012: 159–60). News agencies in China experienced a similar process of marketisation (Xin, 2012). Understanding the Chinese state's control of the Internet can follow the same differentiation. A detailed study of the first ten years of China's online media shows this complex picture (Peng, 2005). On the one hand, the state sees the Internet as part of its state-dominant news media system and a new instrument to continue its propaganda online. On the other hand,

CCP has opened peripheral, less political (in a narrow sense) areas of the Internet to private capital. This opening-up policy is also partly because of the lag behind of regulation of new technologies. As a result, commercial Internet platforms in China started to dominate the market. Because of the particular feature of the Internet, these private-owned platforms not only function as media, but also provide other services, such as e-commerce, and bring economic growth. The State has thus not only allowed these platforms to exist but also encourage and support their developments, as long as they conduct proper self-censorship on content. More recently, the fast development of Internet business and the tight control over the content, such as on Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent, shows clearly that the Internet is the main area for generating profits while following strict control of the content.

The marketisation of media in China after reforms has complex consequences. As Ma points out, the media market in China is “both restraining and enabling”(Ma, 2000: 22). On the one hand, the market, as criticised from a critical political economic view, facilitates media commodities, audience commodities, consumerism, and media conglomerates which not only restrict content but also exploit media workers (Fuchs, 2014a; Mosco, 1996; Schiller, 1997, 2007; Dallas W. Smythe, 1994). Besides, in the Chinese context, commercialisation has brought side effects such as paid journalism, uneven development in different regions (Ma, 2000: 22; Tong and Sparks, 2009). However, on the other hand, in the Chinese or other authoritarian contexts, marketisation and economic independence, indeed “weaken political control and enhance editorial autonomy” and widen “personal spaces” to a limited extent (Ma, 2000: 18, 26). From this perspective, the market does serve as a liberating force. Many scholars have discussed the positive effects of China’s marketisation of media (Lee, 2001; Xin, 2008). Several official media outlets under commercial operations have seen positive development of investigative journalism and citizen journalism (Repnikova, 2017). Internet, as new technology developed and adopted in Chinese society after post-Mao reforms, is celebrated by many scholars of its liberating power (Yang, 2009).

Therefore, it is not difficult to identify two types of discourses regarding the Internet in China. On the one hand, there are strict restrictions on political content, especially political news. As part of the party organ, Internet news media are controlled under a similar fashion as other propaganda machines. On the other hand, as for-profit enterprises, Internet companies operate in a more liberal market setting, deflecting more or less from direct

political control. Therefore, it is worth exploring how the State perceives its relationship with these Internet companies and vice versa.

5.3.3. The Social dimension

Besides the capitalist logic and the State, there is another key dimension to understand the power dynamics of China's ICT and Internet: the social dimension. Scholars from both political economy and political science discuss this issue from different perspectives. While the former focuses on labour issues in ICT-related industries, the latter mainly investigates the democratisation potentials of the Internet.

Chinese society has seen constant labour struggles in ICT-related industries. Since the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism in advanced capitalist societies, most of the manufacturing industries have been transferred to developing economies, such as China. At the same time, China's reform has enabled greater integration into the global market, especially with an increasing number of manufacturing factories in the coastal areas. Along with this global transformation of industries is the transformation of acute labour struggles. China has become the world factory with acute labour struggles (Hong, 2011b). Several scholars have focused on investigating labour issues in China. For example, Ching Kwan Lee studied the transformation of Chinese capitalism through the lens of labour and working-class experiences and struggles, especially through gender issues in South China (Lee, 1998), labour protests in Rustbelt areas and newly developed areas (Lee, 2007). Pun Ngai and her colleagues have published several articles on labour issues in transnational factories in South China, especially in Foxconn (Chan et al., 2013; Chan and Pun, 2010). Jack Linchuan Qiu and Christian Fuchs have studied the issue from a more global perspective, defining digital labour in a broader sense, from manufacturing factory workers to programmers to Internet users (Fuchs, 2014a; Qiu, 2016). More recently, Lee has studied a more recent development of state capitalism in Africa and its impact on local labour struggles (Lee, 2018).

While political economy scholars' discussions mainly focus on the relations between the State and capital, political science provides another angle to understand China's Internet (Meng, 2018; Yang, 2009). Political scientists try to understand the democratisation role of the Internet (or the lack of it) in China. There are three stances. The first one holds positive

attitudes towards the liberation role of the Internet in China. As shown in the title of Yong Hu's book (2008), the Internet provides an arena for 'the rising cacophony' where public discussions and personal expression emerge. In his discussions of distinction between the personal and the public, Hu believes that the Internet provides a unique opportunity for the public to express opinions and criticisms that are not normally allowed in everyday life. Yet Hu also acknowledges the sophisticated control system the Chinese government implements (p318) and the weak civil society in China that could limit the possibility of dramatic changes brought by the Internet. However, Hu concludes, in countries with limited political liberty like China, the Internet shows huge potential for democratisation (p330). The Internet, according to Hu, would serve as an efficient and flexible tool to give voices to citizens and thus help to build a public sphere in China, though not necessarily guarantee democratisation in China (Hu, 2008). Through studying online activism in China, Yang (2009) also provides an optimistic view of the Internet's role in democratisation or at least in facilitating protests and struggles (Yang, 2009). Similarly, Ashley Esarey and Qiang Xiao through their analysis of online media and blogs show how the Internet has empowered Chinese netizens to challenge the state agenda and political repressions. Citizens, according to their study, have used creative and sophisticated ways to express their critiques towards the regime (Esarey and Xiao, 2008, 2011). Some researchers have dedicated to unpuzzle the mechanism behind China's censorship. One prominent example is from Gary King and his colleagues (2013) who use a well-designed quantitative research method to show convincingly that China's censorship has allowed government criticisms but silenced collective expressions (King et al., 2013). With slightly different tones, these researches focus on the positive role of the Internet in facilitating public expressions and criticisms, and finally democratises China.

What is worth noticing is the time of these publications. From their publication time we can see that in the early age of the Internet, especially the first few years of Sina Weibo (launched in August 2009) and before Xi's administration (since 2013), observers of Internet in China held a much more optimistic view towards the Internet, in terms of its potential for changing the society. It is understandable. During that period, the Internet was still a new area for the government to exert total control, thus was a much freer space in China than it is now. Weibo was then seen as a public sphere in China where government officials corruptions were exposed, local governments were held to take responsibility, and political criticisms enjoyed some extent of freedom.

This situation has gradually changed since 2010 and control was increasingly tightened after Xi Jinping became China's supreme leader in 2013 (Yang, 2015: 3–4). Series of actions have been taken by different agencies, ranging from 'hard measurement' such as establishing the new ministerial-level Cyberspace Administration of China (*Wang Xin Ban*) in 2014, the publication of China Internet Security Law (*Wangluo Anquan Fa*) in 2016, to 'soft management' such as asking Internet companies to commit to manage online comments (Xinhua Net, 2014), and boosting Chinese government agencies and official media's presence online.

While this democratisation approach is crucial and fruitful, some scholars have argued to think beyond this approach (Meng, 2010; Sparks, 2012; Zhou, 2009). For one thing, the liberal democratic view always equalises freedom of speech with freedom of the market (Meng, 2010: 502). The pursuit of democracy is thus normally reduced to the pursuit of the free market. This is very problematic, as shown by researchers from political economists. For example, it is dubious that the already highly divided society in China due to the economic reforms (see Chapter 3) could be changed for better with more dramatic commercialisation and marketisation. The commercialisation of media has also oppressed the disenfranchised groups to have a voice (Zhao, 2007). Moreover, the free market is not necessarily in conflict with the State. As Colin Sparks correctly points out, "some writers retain an ideological attachment to the notion that marketization of the media will lead it into conflict with the party"(Sparks, 2012: 62). However, researches, such as those conducted by Chin-Chuan Lee and her colleagues, found that journalists show little difficulty in serving both the party and the market while some other times avoid censorship instead of direct confronting (Lee et al., 2006, 2007). The state censorship could also serve to protect domestic companies (Schiller, 2008: 114), while in other cases, party-state power and the market rationality could work together (Zhao, 2009: 175). Therefore, there is a danger to equal freedom of the market to the freedom of speech.

Moreover, the focus on the control exerted by the State will lead to an overlook of other subtle types of control and struggles in society. For example, as early as 2000, Ma has pointed out the flexible governance by administrative and regulatory technologies to "contain strong commercial development within political control" (Ma, 2000: 23). Ma also points out the irony of marketisation in China that the authority tolerates media conglomerates and groups because "they can serve as the means to control chaotic free competition and limit the

proliferation of minor papers ” (Ma, 2000: 18). Zhao Yuezhi also points out that commercialisation of media system in China has not “undermined political instrumentalization in any substantial way” (Zhao, 2012: 162). Rather, there exist “blunt forms of commercial instrumentalization and the abuse of the party’s journalistic power”, including paid journalism and blackmailing companies through writing negative stories (ibid.). In other words, instead of conflicting political systems, commercialisation of media system could see a concerto of political and economic power abuse.

Recent studies show a more nuanced analysis of the complex dynamics of the situation. Meng, for example, emphasises the importance of online political discourse to understand the nuanced power relations in China between official rhetoric and civic culture (Meng, 2009, 2011; Meng and Huang, 2017). Repnikova points out that the Western study of China’s media and the Internet tend to focus solely on “a fearful, loyal agent of the ruthless party-state, which exudes no tolerance towards its critics” (Repnikova, 2017: 3). The main focus thus is put on censorship, coercion, and official propaganda. Through her fieldwork, she tries to outline the web of negotiations between the State and what she calls ‘critical journalism’ which includes investigative and critical reports of social issues. She clearly shows how media in China is a highly contested space and how different actors negotiate and mutually adapted in the process. However, she also shows the potential of “flexible collaboration” between critical actors and “the state under authoritarian regime” (Repnikova, 2017: 13). The book edited by Yang also shows different attempts to scrutinise these flexible collaborations and subtle negotiations online (Yang, 2015).

Finally, moving beyond the conventional research approach towards the Internet in China means to pay more attention to the ideological facets. As Yang (2015) points out, critical analysis of Chinese Internet should not be confined to the “old dichotomies of resistance and control”, instead, it should give more attention to the subtle state power such as its propagandistic and ideological methods (Yang, 2015: 4). As Meng (2010) points out, China’s revolutionary past has “rendered the authoritarian state historically grounded legitimacy” thus an assumption of an antithetical relationship between the regime and the State is not accurate (Meng, 2010: 502; see also Zhao, 2009). These arguments demonstrate the necessity to conduct more studies on ideology in China.

5.4. Summary

Through the historical review of the Chinese digital revolution and the matrix of power relations among different forces and actors, there are several themes can be identified in China's digital discourse from three dimensions: techno-determinism, the New Economy and the New Politics (see Table 5.1). From this chapter's discussions, we can identify several similarities and differences in digital discourse and contradictions in reality between China and the advanced capitalist societies. These discussions will shed light on my further research.

	themes
New Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Techno-nationalism (national security, competition with the West, national progress) • Different from the post-industrialisation discourse in the Western society (Fordism to Post-Fordism), China expresses a 'neo-industrialisation' discourse • Same to emphasise the influence of new technology on society in the market, production and consumption (technology dramatically transforms society)
New politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International level: how the State reacts to global capital • State level: deregulation for commercial companies & State control of the content • Societal level: democratisation brought by the market and new technology • Individual level: empowerment and freedom of express • De-politicisation (technology is non-political)

Table 5.1. Digital discourse in China's context

CHAPTER 6. METHODOLOGY

6.1. CDA as a Methodology

This thesis chooses critical discourse analysis (CDA) as its primary research method. There are various approaches to CDA. According to Wodak and Meyer, researchers under the name of CDA can be more usefully thought of as a heterogeneous ‘school’ instead of providing one “single or specific theory” or methodology (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 5). They have formulated several different approaches within CDA, such as a Discourse-Historical Approach (Wodak and Reisigl), Corpus-Linguistics Approach (Mautner), Social Actors Approach (van Leeuwen), Dispositive Analysis (Jager and Maier), Sociocognitive Approach (van Dijk), and Dialectical-Relational Approach (Fairclough) (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 20). Despite these differences, most researchers in CDA address the issues concerning discourse, critique, power and ideology. It will go beyond the purpose of this section to go into details about the differences and similarities between these approaches. I will briefly introduce CDA in this section and discuss why CDA is suitable for this research.

CDA is more like a methodology other than merely a method (Fairclough, 2010: 225; Wodak and Meyer, 2015a: 13). The methodological approaches of CDA influence every decision throughout the research process, from the selection of theories to data processing. This research shares the same methodological position as CDA does from a critical dialectical perspective. The key issues in CDA - discourse, transdisciplinary, critical - are at the same time the main elements of this research.

Despite all the differences and diversities in the paradigm, according to Wodak and Meyer (2015), critical discourse studies (they use this term in place of CDA to emphasis the diverse approaches in the paradigm or school) can be roughly defined as “fundamentally interested in analysing hidden, opaque, and visible structures of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak and Meyer, 2015a: 12). This characterisation highlights two features of CDA that are essential to this research.

First of all, it is problem-oriented. It is derived from the tradition of critical theory that aims at enlightenment and emancipation. This thesis embeds itself in the critical dialectical

Marxist tradition. Theory, for discourse analysis studies, is “not only essential to formulate research questions that guide the data selection, data collection, analysis of data and interpretation”, but is “grounded in prior interpretations of empirical analyses” (ibid.: 14). It is also clear that in this thesis, theory plays an essential role throughout the whole process of the research. Moreover, the critical tradition of CDS requires it inevitably deals with the issue of power and ideologies that are the focal point of this thesis.

Secondly, the interests in power and ideologies of CDS are represented in the analysis of discourse. CDS/CDA sees discourse as social practices that could, on the one hand, express, (re)produce and change the power relations in social structures and could, on the other hand, be determined by social structure. Ideology is the “more hidden and latent inherent in everyday-beliefs, which often appear disguised as conceptual metaphors and analogies” (ibid.: 8). CDS perceive discourse as “the result of jointly constructed meanings of the world” and they “emerge as social constructs, but do have ‘real’ consequences in social structure” (ibid.: 16). This understanding of language and its ideological function fits well in this research since it aims to reveal ideological expressions through the analysis of several types of discourses. Moreover, as illustrated by Reisigl and Wodak (2016) in explaining their Discourse-Historical Approach, power is “discursively realized not only by grammatical forms, but also by a person’s control of the social occasion, by means of the genre of a text, or by the regulation of access to specific public spheres” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2015: 26). Therefore, discourse, in a broader sense, is a type of social practice in relationship with ideology and power.

Thus, CDA suits this thesis well because of the two fundamental features of a problem-oriented approach and an interest in power and ideologies in discourses.

6.2. Researching Digital Discourse from the Government

To research official documents, I will collect data from both policies and Xi’s speech. Section 6.3.1 will explain sampling strategies. Isabela Fairclough and Norman Fairclough have developed a specific approach, on the basis of CDA, to analyse policy. Section 6.2.2 will explain their critical policy analysis approach.

6.2.1. Sampling official documents

The sampling process went through two steps. First of all, to get a general understanding of all policies regarding the Internet that are published by the government, I went through a throughout searching for documents on the government website.

There are three categories in my search. The first category includes Law, Administrative ordinances and departmental regulations (both in content and industry). In particular, I search for the policies published by

- the State Council
- CAC (Cyberspace Administration of China)
- MIIT (Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, set up in 2008)
- SAPPRFT (State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television)

- For searching policies published by the State Council, I use the official website: <http://sousuo.gov.cn/a.htm?t=zhengce>. Using the options in advanced search, my searching strategy is (a) to search in Titles of policies (b) for keywords: ‘Internet’ (互联网), ‘Big Data’ (大数据), ‘Net’ (网/网络), ‘electro-’ (电子), ‘New Media’ (新媒体), ‘Digital’ (数字), (c) issuers: Central Committee of CCP and State Council (d) issue date: all. I have excluded policies not relevant to Informatisation due to the use of words, for example, *the Network for Eco-Environmental Test*. I have also excluded specific genre that is not regulation-related content, for example, ‘Letter’ (函), and ‘Announcement’ (会议通知). I added one new keyword ‘manufacturing’ ‘Made in China’ because of the importance of ICT manufacturing in China’s economic development. In total, I have identified 27 documents from the State Council, including 2 that were announced invalid.

- CAC’s official documents published can be found on their website: http://www.cac.gov.cn/zcfg/sfjs/A090904index_1.htm. I have collected all laws and policies published by CAC, including 6 laws, 10 administrative ordinances, 13 departmental regulations, 17 regulatory documents, and 7 other policy paper. In total, I have identified 53 relevant documents from CAC.

- Regarding MIIT, I have search through all their policy documents on their official website <http://www.miit.gov.cn/n1146295/n1652858/n7280902/index.html> using keywords

‘Internet’, ‘Net’, ‘Digital’, ‘Data’, and ‘New Media’. There are 18 documents in total from MIIT.

- In terms of SAPPRFT, I used two steps. The first one is to search for the keyword ‘Net’ (网) on their official website

http://www.sapprft.gov.cn/sapprft/govpublic/6682_5.shtml. I found 4 departmental regulations and 2 laws in terms of content regulation. In the second step, I searched for keyword ‘Internet’ ‘New’ ‘New Media’ ‘Digital Publishing’ and ‘Data’ through ‘advanced search’ option. I have excluded some irrelevant documents, such as purchasing documents and announcements. In total, there are 37 documents in total from SAPPRFT.

For the second category, I focus on the top-level policies that direct the government’s work. This category includes

- the Outline of National IT Development Strategy (published in 2016),
- 13th Five-Year-Plan,
- 13th Five-Year-Plan for National Informatisation, and
- Government Work Report (GWRs) from 2014 (the first year conducted by Premier Li Keqiang) to 2019.

The third category focuses on Xi Jinping’s speech. There are several important speeches that are repetitively cited and referred to by media and official documents. For example, People’s Daily and CAC have published several articles and special issues on Xi’s statements on the Internet¹. The following speeches have appeared repetitively. These speeches also include the most important meeting regarding a crucial leading group in the central government (1), Chinas’ cybersecurity and Informatization meetings (3,4) and the most important Internet-related conference for the industry (2):

1. Xi’s speech at the first meeting of the new Central Leading Group for Cybersecurity and Informatization (2014.02.27)

¹ For example, People’s Daily’s article titled: Important statements on the Internet made by Xi Jinping

http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-12/05/content_5244492.htm

Website published by CAC on Xi’s important speeches <http://www.cac.gov.cn/ztzl/xzt/10/zt/index.htm>

Website published by CAC 2 <http://www.cac.gov.cn/2018zt/xxgc420hy/index.htm>

Special issues published by CAC <http://www.cac.gov.cn/gzzt/ztzl/More.htm>

2. Address at the 2nd World Internet Conference (2015.12.16)
3. Speech at the 2016 Work Conference for Cybersecurity and Informatization (2016.04.19)²
4. Speech at the 2018 Work Conference for Cybersecurity and Informatization (2018.04.20)

After going through all the documents and policies' titles, I have chosen 21 documents for further thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis. My focus was on the documents that address the whole industry instead of specific sectors (e.g. e-commerce, or e-governance) and specific groups (e.g. children). I also made my judgement through how often they are constantly referred to by other documents. For example, in terms of content regulation, *Provisions on Ecological Governance of Network Information Content* refers to both *Cybersecurity Law* and *Administrative Measures for Internet Information Services* (2011Revision).

Law, Administrative ordinances and departmental regulations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provisions on Ecological Governance of Network Information Content 2. Administrative Measures for Internet Information Services (2011Revision) 3. the Opinions on Promoting the Sound and Orderly Development of the Mobile Internet 4. Cybersecurity Law 5. Guiding Opinions on Actively Promoting the “Internet Plus” Action (Internet Plus Action Plan) 6. Outline of Actions to Promote Big Data Strategy 7. Made in China 2020
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² The 4.19 speech is one of the most important speeches about the development of the Internet in China in several aspects. It is the first time the central government and CPC held a conference about national cybersecurity and informatisation. All members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee participated the conference, as well as top officials from several Ministries and local governments. Official media have repetitively reported this event and published the whole speech. It has been published as a pamphlet and sold in bookshops nationwide and is often referred to subsequently. The first sentence from the extract above was later repetitively reported and reprinted in media, official and unofficial (e.g. Xinhua Net), and especially after American’s sanctions against China in April 2018, (e.g. in people.cn, Chinanews, Chinadaily, geekpark.com). The 4.19 speech can be taken to set a strategic, fundamental, comprehensive agenda for the development of the Internet and IT.

	8. Opinions of the State Council on Promoting the Innovative Development of Cloud Computing and Cultivating New Business Forms of the Information Industry
Top-level policies that direct the government's work	9. the Outline of National IT Development Strategy (published in 2016), 10. 13 th Five-Year-Plan, 11. 13 th Five-Year-Plan for National Informatisation, and 12-17. Government Work Report (GWRs) from 2014 (the first year conducted by Premier Li Keqiang) to 2019.
Xi's speeches	18. Xi's speech at the first meeting of the new Central Leading Group for Cybersecurity and Informatization (2014.02.27) 19. Address at the 2 nd World Internet Conference (2015.12.16) 20. Speech at the 2016 Work Conference for Cybersecurity and Informatization (2016.04.19) 21. Speech at the 2018 Work Conference for Cybersecurity and Informatization (2018.04.20)
Total: 21 out of 148	

Table 6.1. List of Government documents.

6.2.2. Analysing official documents with CDA

There are several methods to interpret documents, including official documents from the State (Bryman, 2012: 556). Bryman has identified three approaches: qualitative content analysis; semiotics; and hermeneutics (ibid.: 557). This thesis has identified several themes of interest (see framework developed in Chapter 4 and 5). Therefore, on the basis of the methodology of this thesis, I will use CDA as the main method to analyse official documents from the government, especially the approach of CDA developed by Isabela Fairclough and Norman Fairclough.

This approach of CDA sees policymaking as “having a ‘problem-solution’ character” (Fairclough, 2013: 183). It understands policy as arguing for action, starting from describing a current situation, with underlying values and concerns, and marching towards a desirable future. This approach of CDA focuses on *practical argumentation* when conducting policy analysis (Fairclough, 2013). Focusing on practical argumentation “has the advantage of

bringing to bear upon policy analysis a coherent approach to problem–solution relations” (ibid.). According to Isabela Fairclough and Norman Fairclough (2012), practical arguments include:

- A *Circumstantial premise* represents the current states of affairs and/or problems,
- A *Goal* premise describes possible and desirable future states of affairs,
- A *Value* premise refers to the underlying values and concerns,
- A *Means-Goal* premise emphasises that if a certain *Action A* is pursued, it will change the current situation *C* and take us to the desirable *G* in according with *V*
- A *Claim* (or conclusion) advocates pursuing this action

For a typical policy or official speech to advocate a certain policy, one can identify several key elements in the arguments. The purpose of the policy or speech should be clear – to advocate certain action or actions, i.e. to solve the question of what should we do. The policy maker proposes the answer to this question on the basis of, first of all, describing the current states of affairs or pointing out certain problems in the existing situation. She will also illustrate the desirable goals that ‘we’ want to achieve. Sometimes, she might outline several possible solutions and legitimate or justify the one solution she chose. She might also dismiss other options, claims that there are no alternatives, or argues that all other options either are unavailable or will cause undesirable consequences. The Value premises are important in this process not only “for how circumstances are problematized but also for what solutions are advocated” (Fairclough, 2013: 184). The means could also be complex for there are “chains of means-goals-circumstances relations” (ibid.). In other words, one means could be part of a solution that is part of a means to achieve further goals.

Therefore, analysis is “a matter of identifying within an argument its premises and its conclusion and the relations between them” (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 11).

Evaluation of a policy will focus on analysing these premises and the relations between them, as well as a critical examination of the arguments and claims (conclusions, actions). We can “criticize a claim by showing that the action will have negative consequences that will undermine the goals and values that the agent is committed to, hence the action should *not* be performed” (ibid.: 12). This type of analysis and evaluation will avoid a mere descriptive analysis of policy, but bridge the gap between texts and social contexts. It thus serves well the purpose of this thesis to connect textual analysis to critical political-economic analysis.

Isabela Fairclough outlines six critical questions for the evaluation of practical arguments. The questions include three ways to challenge a practical argument (Fairclough, 2016: 60):

<i>To challenge the rational acceptability ('truth') of the premises</i>
CQ1: Is it true that, in principle, doing A leads to G?
CQ2: Is it true that the Agent is in circumstances C?
CQ3: Is it true that the Agent actually has the stated goals and values (motives)?
<i>To challenge the reasonableness of the conclusion</i>
CQ4: Are the intended consequences of A (i.e. the goal) acceptable?
CQ5: Are the foreseeable unintended consequences (e.g. risks) of acceptable?
<i>To challenge the inference</i>
CQ6: [Among reasonable alternatives,] is A comparatively better in the context?

Table 6.2. Critical questions for evaluating practical arguments

I will briefly explain these critical questions.

- The first three CQs focus on the truth of the premises. The CQ1 focuses on whether the proposed actions (means-goal premise) can achieve the intended goals. It also asks whether there is enough convincing evidence to support the decision. CQ2 investigates the circumstances. It asks questions such as whether the current states of affairs are as they are being described, and whether the associated explanations for the current states of affairs (or the causes of the current problems) are correct. CQ3 talks about motives and values: are the stated motives the real motives (or, e.g. just for a political party to seize power)? Or does the values or concerns stated are genuine concerns (e.g. just a fraud or something rhetoric)?
- The CQ4 and 5 then challenge the reasonableness of the conclusions, i.e. whether there will be undesirable consequences. While CQ4 asks whether the stated goals are acceptable, CQ5 addresses whether there will be unintended consequences (e.g. fail the goals, esp. clash with other political commitments, legitimate goals, or socially accepted values). On the other hand, defenders of the proposal could argue that even there are side effects, there are ways to mitigate or compensate for the side effects, or the side effects are outweighed/overridden by long-term benefits, or if the proposal is not conducted, then there will be more serious consequences.
- Finally, CQ6 ask whether there are alternatives. It could ask are there any other facts about the context (that will make the proposal impossible to achieve, or there are other reasonable alternatives that have not been considered).

I would argue that these critical questions are not only useful for the evaluation of practical arguments in government documents, but also for investigating ideological discourses in general.

6.3. Researching Digital Discourse from Companies

To research digital discourse from companies, this thesis will focus on CEOs' speeches from BAT, the dominant players in China's Internet-related market. Section 6.3.1 will demonstrate my sampling strategies. Section 6.3.2 and 6.3.3 will explain how to combine thematic analysis and CDA for analysing digital discourse from BAT.

6.3.1. Sampling BAT

First of all, there are two most important national events about the Internet in China: The World Internet Conference (hereinafter WIC, launched since 2014) and Big Data Expo (launched since 2015). CEOs of BAT all participated in these two events almost every year. These two events also have an official background. For example, Xi made speeches every year at WIC since 2015. The analysis of these events can shed lights on 'intertextuality' of analysing BAT and government discourse. Therefore, I collected all speeches from Jack Ma, Pony Ma, and Robin Li at these two events.

Secondly, BAT all organised events for their partners or clients. In the following subsections, I will first of all briefly introduce the history of BAT, the most important events for them, and explains how I collect materials. I will restrict my search among Robin Li, Jack Ma, and Pony Ma as representatives of BAT.

Baidu

Established by Robin Li in 2000, Baidu spent 5 years to be listed in NASDAQ in 2005, In the five years, Baidu has established its position in China's market and make profits through its core service – search engine and ranking. The main profits come from advertising. In 2002,

Baidu established Baidu Union. In 2006, Baidu for the first time launched Baidu Union Conference. In the same year (2006), Baidu started World Conference.

In 2002, the Great Fire Wall (GFW) was launched. Since that time, Internet users started to have problems using Google. Baidu gradually became more popular than Google in China. It also gradually expanded its businesses into the content community, including MP3 music (Nov 2002), Tieba (Dec 2003), Zhidao (June 2005), Baike (April 2006). While establishing its dominant position in creating online content community, Baidu has been trying to expand its businesses into other areas, including Baidu Video, Baidu Map, Baidu Hi, and so on. Baidu has also tried to create applications in social media (Baidu Space, launched in 2006, closed in 2015) and e-commerce (Baidu Youa, launched in 2008, closed in 2011) to compete with Tencent and Alibaba. However, all these attempts were not so successful.

In 2009, Baidu launched a new service called ‘Box Computing’. This new service has expanded Baidu’s search engine from searching for content to searching for all types of services and established technology standard. If other applications want to be shown through Baidu Search Engine, then they all need to apply Baidu technology standards. Also, users don’t need to go to specific websites for information. Baidu can decide what users can see and use online through the only entry– Baidu search engine. One year later, Baidu further launched its Open Platform and mobile Box Computing. The logic behind these business operations is to become the entry of all online information and service, thus dominate the market.

One year later, Google stopped its service in Mainland China. Baidu became *the* dominant player in the search engine market in China. In 2011, Baidu overtook Tencent became the most valuable Internet company in China on NASDAQ.

According to Robin Li, Baidu started to develop and apply AI in 2010, and deep learning in 2012. In 2013, Baidu launched IDL, the first institute that was titled with deep learning (Robin Li, 2018 WIC, AI panel). Since 2014, Robin Li started to emphasise Big Data and AI on different occasions. In 2016, Baidu launched Baidu Brain (ibid.). In 2017, Baidu officially changed its mission into ‘awaken everything’ (Robin Li, 2017 Baidu Union), signifying a fundamental change in Baidu’s developmental strategy. In 2018, Robin Li claims that Baidu

Apollo Platform has become the first ecosystem of autonomous vehicles in the world (Robin Li, 2018 WIC).

Throughout Baidu's development, there are several important events. These events are also important discursive events given their role in delivering Robin Li and Baidu's message to the whole industry. These events also receive lots of attention from the media and the public. There are three important events that Baidu organises every year. According to Robin Li in 2012, Baidu has "two very important events every year: one is Baidu World, we will launch new products from Baidu, the other is Baidu Union in which I share my thoughts of the whole industry with everyone" (Robin Li, 2012 Baidu Union). In 2017, since Baidu's strategy in developing AI, it started another event called Baidu AI Developer Conference. This conference is very technology-oriented, mainly focusing on discussions of new tech-developments. As discussed earlier, since Baidu announced Box Computing in 2009 that signifies the start of its 'open system', I will collect data from 2009. Therefore, I will not include this event in my samples:

- Baidu World Congress (since 2006-) (collect from 2009)
- Baidu Union(since 2006-) (collect from 2009)

Alibaba

Established in 1999, Alibaba first focused on B2B business model. It provides webpages for Chinese medium-sized and small businesses for international trade. It then expands operations overseas. However, after 2000, the huge expense overseas and Internet bubble made Alibaba had to retreat its focus back to China. By 2002, Alibaba has established its profit model on the basis of a membership fee and value-added service.

In 2003, Alibaba Group founded Taobao, a shopping website facilitates C2C retail. In the same year, Alibaba also launched Alipay. Later in 2010, Tmall was launched to replace the B2C service developed out of Taobao. In 2010, Alibaba also launched YiTao, focusing on the search engine in the e-commerce sector.

Since 2005, Alibaba started to expand its business into other areas to support its core e-commerce service, including search engine (merger Yahoo China in 2005 but failed in 2006), community website (purchase Koubei in 2006), advertising (founded Alimama in 2007, adapted into AliUnion in 2010), enterprise software (Alibaba Software in 2007), AI and Cloud (Alibaba Cloud in 2009), logistic (founded Cainiao in 2013). It is worth noticing that since 2007, Alibaba started to provide loan service for medium-sized and small businesses, signifying a further step into financial services. In 2008, Alibaba founded Alibaba Capital Partners. Since then, Alibaba expanded its business into the cultural and entertainment industry, O2O, and other industries through investment. By 2015, Alibaba has integrated its businesses into 7 main categories, including E-commerce, Ant Finance, Cainiao Logistic, Big Data and Cloud Computing, Advertising service, International Trade, and Internet service.

As a company started from, and whose core business still is, e-commerce, Alibaba launched Wshang Conference in 2004 to promote its construction of 'e-commerce ecosystem'. In 2009, Alibaba created the 'Double Eleven' shopping festival. In 2008, the Wshang Conference announced to upgrade it to a global e-commerce conference. This study will collect Jack Ma's speech in Wshang Conference since 2008-2012 (the annual conference was cancelled since 2013). Since 2015, Alibaba launched Apsara Conference as the most important events for Alibaba every year. Between 2016 to 2018, Alibaba has Investor's Day where Jack Ma speaks to Investors. This is another important event to understand Alibaba's discourse. Moreover, Jack Ma has published a compilation of his speeches, *The Future Has Come* (2017) to promote his ideas. I will also include this book in the materials. Therefore, I have collected data from the following events in Alibaba:

- Apsara Conference (2015-2018)
- Investor's Day (2016-2018)
- WShang Conference (2004-) (collect from 2008)
- *The Future Has Come* (2017)

Tencent

Tencent was established in 1998, first focusing on instant messaging service OICQ, later adapted into QQ. Since 2003, Tencent started to expand its businesses into other areas,

including games, Internet portals, SNS, e-commerce, etc. It also established its profits model through charging for a membership fee on IM (e.g. QQ show) and through games. As shown in its financial reports, since 2014, more than half of Tencent's income comes from games.

During its fast developing period between 2003 and 2010, Tencent was notorious as a copycat. It copied ideas from start-ups and soon overpassed them. This type of developmental path was stopped in 2010. In November 2010, Tencent claimed to cease the operation of QQ software on computers that installed 360 software. This has received a lot of backlashes from users for Tencent exerting too much power over users' personal computers. The backlashes also reflected the long-standing dissatisfaction of Tencent's misbehaviours in the market. With intervention from the government authorities, QQ and 360 became compatible again. However, this incident has caused Tencent to rethink its business operations, as Pony Ma claimed.

By the end of 2010, Pony Ma published *8 Guiding Principles for the future of the Internet*. Later in 2011, Tencent announced its 'open platform' strategy and promised to build an open and sharing platform that means to share profits with Tencent's partners. Pony Ma claims that a real platform is about the social network, including networks of accounts, traffic, and payment (Pony Ma, 2011 Tencent Global Partner Conference). It was since this year Pony Ma repeated the idea of 'Tencent ecosystem' on different occasions. With the 'open platform' strategy, Tencent further expanded its 'ecosystem' into other business areas, such as search engine (collaborate with Sougou), e-commerce (partner with JD). Partners within this 'ecosystem' can share resources (and probably customers and their data) openly and freely (Pony Ma, 2016 Tencent Global Partner Conference). Moreover, Tencent started to invest in other companies and venture capital firms. According to its official website, Tencent Investment has invested in the cultural and entertainment industry, retailing, service industry, education, finance, and high-tech in China and overseas. It claims to have invested more than 800 enterprises, covering more than 20 countries and regions ³.

Another important thing happened during Tencent's transformation is the launch of WeChat, now become Tencent's most important mobile application and the entrance to the mobile Internet for millions of users in China. Since 2016, Tencent published a new function within

³ Tencent Investment official website <https://investment.tencent.com/portfolio.html>

the app called Mini-Programme. What is important of this Mini-programme is its capability to direct users to retailers. This is obviously a strategy to compete with Alibaba in e-commerce. The launch of Mini-Programme has helped Tencent to further become conglomerates, especially stepping into retailing and finance.

Since Tencent started to develop AI, it slightly changes its statement from connecting its partners and users to connecting everything, including equipment. It chooses to use the word “connector”. Furthermore, Tencent claims to build a ‘digital eco-community’.

There were three important events for Tencent since 2011. In 2019, Tencent announced to integrate these three conferences into one: Tencent Global Digital Ecosystem Summit (TGDES, Pony Ma did not give speech in this conference) Therefore I will collect Pony Ma’s speeches/addresses in these three events:

- Tencent Global Partner Conference (2011-2018)
- Tencent Cloud + Future (2015-2018) (Pony Ma participated in 2016-2018)
- Internet Plus Digital Economy (2015-2018)

To sum up, I will collect the following materials for analysing digital discourse from BAT:

Alibaba	<i>Apsara Conference</i> (2015-2018)	4
	Investor’s day (2016-2018)	3
	Wangshang (2008-2012, including a speech from 10 year anniversary in 2009)	6
	WIC (2014-2017, including all speeches from Jack Ma in several panels)	7
	Big Data Expo (2015-2018)	3
	TFHC	41 (plus 3 speeches already collected in other categories)

Baidu	Baidu World Congress (2009-2018)	10
	Baidu Union (2009-2017)	9
	WIC (2014-2019, including all speeches from Robin Li in several panels)	Total 10
	Big Data Expo (2016-2018)	3
Tencent	Partner (2011-2018)	8
	Cloud + Future (2016-2018)	3
	Internet Plus Digital Economy	4
	WIC (2014-2018, including all speeches from Pony Ma in several panels)	7
	Big Data Expo (2015-2018)	4
		Total: 122

Table 6.1. List of documents from BAT.

6.3.2. Combining thematic analysis with CDA

To avoid cherry-picking in CDA, I will combine thematic analysis (Bryman, 2012: 578) with CDA in analysing materials from BAT. I will mainly use thematic analysis to identify the main arguments and then apply CDA to analyse the underlying ideologies from key texts.

Indexing/coding

With the framework developed in Chapter 4 and 5, and my research question (RQ 2), I have applied a descriptive coding scheme on the following criteria:

- Self-definitions:
 - What is BAT (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, ‘we’ ‘us’)
 - how do BAT represent themselves (e.g. ‘infrastructure’ ‘platform’)
 - How do BAT describe their business expansion, their business transformations (e.g. ‘ecosystem’, ‘open platform’, ‘open system’; new technologies, AI)

- Relations with
 - Partners, other businesses
 - Users
 - Clients (advertisers)
 - Government
 - Employers

Furthermore, regarding the analytical framework, I identified the following keywords:

- Internet Economy:
 - ‘Market’ (e.g. free market, niche markets, entrepreneurship, innovation, SC, monopoly, oligopoly, domination, business) ;
 - ‘Production’ (especially focusing on BAT’s clashes with ‘traditional economy’/‘real economy’, agriculture, manufacturing, service sector; upgrade of the economy; flexible production; restructure of companies; workplace; work; labour; play); What is data and data collection for BAT, privacy concerns
 - ‘Consumption’ (participatory culture, participation; consumer; sharing; openness)
- Internet Politics (keywords):
 - ‘International’, ‘global’, ‘foreign’
 - ‘State’, ‘nation’, ‘China’, ‘government’
 - ‘Society’ (poverty; rural; social issues; democratisation; liberal; class)
 - ‘Individual’ (free; expression; empowerment;)

These codes have been refined through reading through the documents. Some second-level codes were added. For example, poverty was not included in my first coding sets. However, it was covered in BAT’s narrative of upgrading the national economy. I noticed this coding and started to pay attention to relevant codes at the social level, such as rural areas.

6.3.3. Dimensions of analysis and toolkits in CAD

This section will focus on practical issues of how to apply CDA to analysing data from companies.

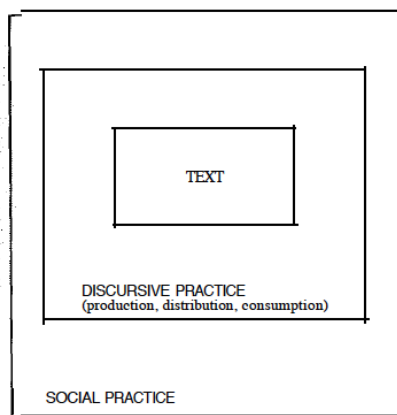


Figure 6.14. Fairclough's three-dimensional conception of discourse. Source: *Discourse and Social Change*, 1992: 72.

There are several levels of critical discourse analysis. Fairclough proposed a three-dimensional conception of discourse: text, discursive practice (the production, distribution, consumption of discourse) and social practice (Fairclough, 1992: 72–3) (see Figure 6.1). In responding to the three dimensions of discourse, for Fairclough, there are three dimensions of critical discourse analysis: description, interpretation and explanation. Description deals with “formal properties of the text”; interpretation with “the relationship between text and interaction”; explanation with “the relationship between interaction and social context” (Fairclough, 2015b: 58–9).

Fairclough distinguishes the “‘external’ relations of texts and the ‘internal’ relations of texts” (Fairclough, 2003: 36). The ‘external relations’ include the relations of texts with a) other elements of social events, practices, and structures, as well as b) other texts. In terms of understanding how the texts are related to other elements (social events), Fairclough proposes to analyse “how they [texts] figure in Actions, Identifications, and Representations” (ibid.). Texts are (part of) actions, and they can provide representations, and they can help to form identities. For analysing the texts’ relations to other (external) texts, Fairclough uses the term ‘intertextuality’. The ‘internal relations’ includes analysis of “semantic relations”, “grammatical relations”, “vocabulary relations” and “phonological relations” (Fairclough, 2003: 36-7, see also Fairclough, 1992: 75-7).

Similarly, the DHA approach argues that there are four dimensions of a ‘context’: 1) the immediate language texts, 2) “intertextual and interdiscursive relationships”, 3) “social variables and institutional frames of a specific ‘context of situation’”, and 4) the “broader socio-political and historical context” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2015: 30-1).

Analysis in this thesis will adapt the analysis framework/dimensions from DRA and DHA. I will focus on four main aspects of the selected materials:

- a) a textual analysis of discursive strategies (e.g. the use of words, the structures of argumentation, assumptions, etc.); In particular, this thesis will apply the *toolkits* provided by Fairclough and Reisigl and Wodak (Fairclough, 2015b; Reisigl and Wodak, 2001).
- b) an intertextual and interdiscursive analysis, dealing with external relations of texts (especially in the analysis of data collected from focus groups, their relations to the government policies or Internet tycoons);
- c) a contextual analysis, including an analysis of institutional context and situational context (especially in the analysis of documents from government and companies, e.g. in what institutional frames and under what situations are the documents or speeches published), and an analysis of the broader social and historical situation (struggles and power relations).

DRA and DHA focus on the use of language as indicated in the original terms used for them, Critical Linguistics. Compared to Fairclough’s approach, DHA includes more detailed linguistic operationalisation. DHA also provides a detailed selection of discursive strategies (see Reisigl and Wodak, 2015: 33). However, both approaches emphasise the importance of linguistic or semiotic analysis. Fairclough states that “one cannot research relations between discourse and other social elements, including the constructive effects of discourse, in the absence of methods for analysing linguistic, semiotic and interdiscursive features of texts in some detail” (Fairclough, 2010: 360). Therefore, in order to analyse data, the first step is to analyse linguistic strategies.

On the other hand, the attention paid to linguistic analysis does not undermine the importance of social, including economic, political and cultural analysis. Both approaches emphasise the importance of social analysis. As Fairclough argues, critical discourse analysis focuses on

“two dialectical relations: between structure (especially social practices as an intermediate level of structuring) and events (or: structure and action, structure and strategy); and, within each, between semiotic and other elements” (Fairclough, 2015a: 88). The close dialectical relations between language and social change is always the main consideration of Fairclough in his critical analysis of discourse (see also Fairclough, 1992). Reisigl and Wodak illustrate the four dimensions of the concept of ‘context’ in DHA (Reisigl and Wodak, 2015: 30). Both of these approaches emphasise the importance of intertextuality and interdiscursivity.

Another focal point of both approaches is the emphasis on history. As clearly indicated in the concept of DHA, historical context is important in interpreting texts and discourse for DHA. This historical orientation “permits the reconstruction of how recontextualization functions as an important process of linking texts and discourse intertextually and interdiscursively over time” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2015: 32). Fairclough also shows the importance of analysing materials in its “historical process” and the concept of “recontextualisation” (Fairclough, 2010: 292).

6.4. Researching Digital Discourse from Workers

This section will explain the research methods I will use for collecting and analysing data from workers.

6.4.1. Applying focus groups to this research

There are several reasons to deploy focus groups to study users’ opinions and attitudes. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods can be used to study ideas and opinions. There is no simple designation of certain methods for a specific methodology. Applying a critical methodology does not necessarily refer to a specific research method. As Harvey points out, critical social research is the way “the empirical evidence is approached and interpreted”, and it is the methodology not the method of data collection *per se*, which characterizes critical social research” (Harvey, 1990: 8). For studying ideas and opinions, two types of methods are normally applied: one is a quantitative research method survey, and the other is a qualitative procedure interview. I will briefly discuss the differences between survey, interview and focus groups and argue that the focus group is the best method to collect data from users.

The differences between surveys and interviews are the ones between the data types gained by quantitative and qualitative research methods. Compared to a survey, focus groups use ‘purposive samples’ instead of ‘probabilistic sampling’; they have more flexible and open questions; they involve a more subjective process of selecting, coding and presenting the results. Generally speaking, focus groups, compared to surveys, have the strengths of qualitative methods, such as “exploration and discovery, understanding things in-depth and in context, and interpreting why things are the way they are and how they got that way” (Morgan, 1998: 31). As Kvale and Brinkmann point out, interviews (including focus group interviews) could “go further than charting subjects’ experiences, or using the subjects as informants about events, and attempt to get beyond the self-presentations of the subjects and critically examine the personal assumptions and general ideologies expressed in their statements” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 106). These features are more suitable for my study of people’s opinions and ideologies.

The other widely used method to study interpretations given by people is interviewing. Bryman defines as a focus group as “a method of interviewing that involves more than one, usually at least four, interviewees” (Bryman, 2012: 501). May points out four types of interviews that are normally used in social research: the structured interview, semi-structured interview, unstructured or focused interview, and group interview or focus group (May, 2011: 132). They all have the same feature of “maintaining and generating conversations with people on a specific topic or range of topics” and “the interpretations which social researchers make of the resultant data constitute the fundamentals of interviews and interviewing” (ibid.: 131).

Focus groups share these features with other interviewing methods and have more advantages over other interviewing methods. The first one involves group dynamics. Focus groups have the merit of “prompting a discussion” (Babbie, 2007: 308). Participants in focus groups are “encouraged to talk to one another” (May, 2011: 137). Such discussion and interaction, questioning and reflection can reveal “the reasoning and underlying logic used by participants” and thus “gives the researcher an insight into not only what people think, but also why they hold those views” (Denscombe, 2007: 179). Through the discussions and comparisons, focus groups can provide “a valuable insight into both social relations in general and the examination of processes and social dynamics in particular” (May, 2011:

139). The second advantage of focus groups over interviews is that the group dynamics in focus groups are more likely to generate a situation comparable to everyday life. One of the main problems about a standardised one-to-one interview is that “interviewee is separated from all everyday relations during the interview”, and the interaction is thus “not comparable in any way to everyday interactions” (Flick, 2009: 195). When “studying opinions and attitudes about taboo subjects”, it is “suggested that the dynamics of a group discussing such topics should be used, because this is more appropriate than a clear and well-ordered single interview situation” (ibid.). So focus groups can generate interactions more likely to happen in everyday life, compared to one-to-one interviews or group interviews. This research will ask questions about some political issues, and these questions could be sensitive to some participants. So people might be more likely to talk about their own opinions when someone else in the group has similar or opposite views.

Conducting focus groups also has certain risks. As stated, conducting focus groups requires participants to talk to each other and everyone’s opinion needs to be valued and encouraged. While it is good to have these group dynamics, in reality, there is also a risk of having one or several participants dominate the discussion. It is also easy to generate the problem of “group conformity or groupthink” which is “the tendency for people in a group to conform to opinions and decisions of the most outspoken members of the group” (Babbie, 2007: 309). Therefore, the moderator plays an important role in controlling the group dynamics to encourage everyone to have the opportunity to express their own opinion.

There are some concerns about whether and how results gathered from focus groups can be generalised to a broader population. This problem of generalisation is normal to quantitative research. Flick distinguishes a theoretical generalisation from a numerical generalisation (Flick, 2009: 130). For the former situation, “the number of individuals or situations studied is less decisive than the differences between cases involved (maximal variation) or the theoretical scope of the case interpretations” (ibid.). As discussed in the subsection about methodology, critical social research should not constrain its results according to merely individual interpretations. These interpretations should be understood in relation to the broader social context. This indicates the importance of sampling and questioning. Concerns such as criteria of dividing potential participants into various categories, or comparative characteristics of different groups are important (see a more detailed discussion about sampling in the next subsection). Moreover, the main purpose of conducting focus groups is

“to explore rather than to describe or explain in any definitive sense” (Babbie, 2007: 309). It can also be seen as “an excellent device for generating questionnaire items for a subsequent survey” (ibid.). A much larger scale of empirical research could be used to confirm or falsify the results generated by focus groups.

This research then uses thematic analysis to probe the topics among workers and ideologies behind.

6.4.2. Sampling

According to Bryman, whereas quantitative research conduct probability sampling, qualitative research tends to use ‘purposive sampling’ (Bryman, 2012: 416). It uses a ‘priopi’ and ‘fixed’ purpose sampling strategy which means that the sample and “the criteria for selecting participants” are “more or less established at the outset of the research” (Bryman, 2012: 418). Similarly, Babbie argues that social research normally uses “nonprobability sampling” (Babbie, 2007: 183). It refers to the technique “in which samples are selected in some way not suggested by probability theory” (ibid.).

There are different opinions regarding what should be referred to as ‘purposive sampling’. For Bryman ,among the different types of purposive sampling, snowballing is one type of it (Bryman, 2012: 422) (see also the section of participation below). However, Babbie identifies four types of sampling that distinguishes these two: “reliance on available subjects”, “purposive or judgmental sampling”, “snowball sampling”, and “quota sampling” (Babbie, 2007: 183). Morgan states that in focus groups, researchers use the purposive sampling technique to select participants “who meet the needs of a particular project” based on their own judgement (Morgan, 1998: 30).

There are three levels of sampling I will do for this research: location, groups, and individuals. This research will choose Shenzhen for the research location, three types of workers to study and several individuals for the focus groups.

Shenzhen as the location for this research

China is a geographically large country with a very unbalanced economic development. Considering this research is related to the use of and ideas about the Internet, the specific economic situation is important. Shenzhen was chosen as the location to conduct focus groups. First of all, Shenzhen is one of the most developed cities in China. It was nominated as a ‘Special Economic Zone’ by the Chinese government in 1980. Secondly, it is a major manufacturing centre in China. It has several famous manufacturing and assembling factories relating to ICT, such as Foxconn and ZTE. Thirdly, Shenzhen is called China’s Silicon Valley. It is a location for numerous high-tech companies, such as Tencent and Huawei. Relating to my criteria of dividing participants into groups according to their relations to ICT, Shenzhen is a productive location to conduct the research.

Three types of young workers chosen for this research

This research will choose three types of young workers in Shenzhen for conducting focus groups. These three types are:

1. Manufacturing workers,
2. Programmers, and
3. White-collar workers

I have chosen these three groups for two reasons. The first reason is that they all belong to subaltern and exploited working class from a Marxist tradition. My understanding of class then is based on Marx’s theorisation of exploitation and relations of production. As Marx states in the *Capital*, workers are free “in the double sense that they neither form part of the means of production themselves, as would be the case with slaves, serfs, etc., nor do they own the means of production, as would be the case with self-employed peasant proprietor” (Marx, 1867: 874). He continues that free works are “therefore free from, unencumbered by, any means of production of their own” (ibid.). In another place, Marx explains that for capital to realise surplus-value during the process of commodity exchange, he must find the ‘free worker’ on the commodity-market. This worker “must be free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for sale, i.e. he is rid of them, he is free of all the objects needed for the realization of his labour-power” (Marx, 1867: 272–3). Workers thus produce surplus-value for capital. As I explained in Chapter 2 about Capitalism with Chinese

Characteristics, China is a *de facto* capitalist society in the sense that it is dominated by commodity, commodity-market, and free labour being exploited. This is also true in rural areas, because of (a) the large number of migrant workers, (b) most of the production process of agriculture is determined by the commodity-market. For programmers and white-collar workers, they are also selling free labour and getting exploited. In this sense, all these three categories of participants are workers. Moreover, they all belong to the broad category of digital labour. For example, Fuchs analysed various types of labour relating to ICTs, including assembly line workers at Foxconn, programmers working in the software industry, and social media users whose online data are sold to advertisers, and other types of labour (Fuchs, 2014a). Qiu explains how manufacturing workers and addicted consumers both belong to what he framed as ‘iSlave’ (Qiu, 2016).

Secondly, they are representative categories in China’s digital capitalism. First, The manufacturing workers are essential for China’s development of digital capitalism, especially during the FDI- and export-oriented period. They also represent a large number of Internet user groups but who are under-represented. The second group are programmers. They represent China’s economic transformation to a high-tech developmental path. China has made efforts to develop core technologies and applications. Programmers are thus new emerging knowledge workers. They seem to possess new types of power and resources in digital capitalism. However, they are, at the same time, highly exploited. There are repetitive news coverages about their poor working conditions and overtime working schedule. Finally, white collar-workers represent the (quasi) middle-class in urban China. They are important workers under China’s ‘neo-industrialisation’ and the most important consumer group of the online prosumer, plabour, and shopping. Under the context of China’s economic transformation, especially the emphasis of domestic consumption, I hope to understand how these three types of workers perceive the highly commercialised and politically controlled Internet under digital capitalism.

Third, another reason to choose three groups of working-class instead of one homogeneous sample is to focus on structured ideology. As I discussed in Chapter 2 about ‘false consciousness’, according to Marx, Lukács and Adorno, that arises from capitalist structures and contradictions. I would like to test whether there is any common core of experience among different groups while, according to various types of categorisation, they might belong to different classes or have different ideologies. For example, from a Gramscian

approach, lived experiences would provide different cultural resources for members to draw on. Bourdieu emphasises different forms of capital such as economic, cultural, social and symbolic forms. From a Weberian categorisation, education, income, status, culture are important elements. While acknowledging all these possible categories and the importance of them to understand modern society, my research question and my theoretical discussions of ideology direct me to explore these different groups of the working class.

Participants

On the individual level, this study combines generic purposive sample and snowballing approach. Bryman cited Hood's explanation of a 'generic inductive qualitative model' "which is relatively open-ended and emphasizes the generation of concepts and theories but does not entail (among other things) the iterative style of grounded theory". In this 'generic inductive qualitative model', sampling is "conducted purposively but not necessarily with regard to the generation of theory and theoretical categories" (Bryman, 2012: 422). Snowball sampling is, according to Bryman, a type of purposive sampling. It is "a sampling technique in which the researcher samples initially a small group of people relevant to the research questions, and these sampled participants propose other participants who have had the experience or characteristics relevant to the research" (Bryman, 2012: 424). Both methods will be employed in my fieldwork (I will show my reflections on the fieldwork in 6.5).

Bryman suggests the typical focus group size is six to ten members (Bryman, 2012: 505-507). There is no strict rule, but a group of 6-8 participants is normal. When deciding the size of the groups, one should also take the topic into consideration. The topic for this research is interesting and easy for participants to talk about in a way that relates to everyday life. It can also be complex at some points when explaining the issues such as online surveillance and privacy policies. This led me to sample a relatively smaller group of 5-8 people. Two groups were made for each category to avoid the "serious danger" of one group alone being "too atypical to offer any generalizable insights" (Babbie, 2007: 309). There were two group with 5-8 intense users, two with 5-8 software engineers, and two with 5-8 manual workers. So six groups in total were involved. Table 6.4 shows the final group composition. I have attached a table with information of participants with age and gender as an appendix (see Appendix 3).

Group	Participant category	Number of participants
1	White collar user Group 1	5
2	White collar user group 2	6
3	Programmer group 1	6
4	Programmer group 2	5
5	Assembly line worker user group 1	7
6	Assembly line worker user group 2	8

Table 6.1. Final Focus Group Composition.

6.4.3. Questionnaire and stimulus materials

I have attached the final focus group questionnaire and content of stimulus materials as appendix at the end of this thesis (see Appendix 1 for focus groups questionnaire and video content and Appendix 2 for Guideline for focus group questioning). The questionnaire was developed around three aspects regarding participants' understanding of the Internet: economic, political and cultural aspects. The purpose of conducting focus groups is to probe workers' ideological and non-ideological opinions about the Internet.

It aims to investigate how workers legitimate the development of the highly commercialised and politically controlled Internet in China. What kinds of resources have they drawn upon to make the arguments? What kinds of ideologies could be identified from their discussions? What kinds of ideologies are internalised? Do they challenge the dominant discourse? If so, how?

To answer these questions, I have made a video to list some existing discussions around the key issues regarding economic, political and cultural aspects of the Internet in China (for content of the video, see Appendix 1). The content was made based on my previous review and study on 'digital discourse' and ideologies from commercial platforms and the government. This video was made to (a) stimulate discussions on the topics, (b) to show views from both sides of the arguments. Before and after showing the video, I have reminded the participants that there is no right or wrong answer to the views, and any discussions would be welcomed. I would argue that the most important role of this video is probably to

relax my participants and to stimulate discussions. Rather than telling participants that both sides of arguments (positive, negative) could be accepted, I used this video to confirm this assertion. For example, one participant from the group asked me whether my work was about to make suggestions for big companies about how to show advertising online. Another participant asked me whether I wanted to build a non-commercial platform. The use of videos to show discussions from both side had, hopefully, to some extent, eliminate their concerns.

6.5. Reflections on Methodology

This research has encountered several problems and limitations. The first one is about how to connect critical theories to empirical research and the rationale of enquiry. This thesis has gone through three structural changes in the process of writing. These changes imply some difficulties in the research process. The first version aimed at discovering ideologies from an analysis of the political economy of the Internet. There was an underlying assumption, derived from my discussions of ideology as ‘false consciousness’, that ideologies are all linked and derived from structural problems. This view was later abandoned with deeper understandings of ideology. The second version of the study was claimed to be deductive to illustrate several types of ideologies in discourse. These ideologies, however, was discovered during the procedure of the first round of data processing. I discovered several patterns from my preliminary analysis of data: the nationalist, neoliberal and individualist discourse. These patterns have inspired me to rearrange my whole writings, including the literature review and theoretical framework. I then applied the new frameworks to analysis in a deductive way. This way of coding, however, risk the possibility of overlooking certain important themes and not getting a whole picture of the materials. This third version, this current one, was based on a new theoretical framework developed in literature review and a combination of political-economic analysis of China’s digital capitalism. From Chapter 4 and 5, I have developed a framework for coding and thematic analysis that focuses on the economic (market, production, consumption) and political (international relations, state, society and individual) aspects.

The second one is the amount of data and methods used in this research. This research has used documents from the government (148, analysed 21 of them), BAT (122) and focus group interviews (6). The diversity of data poses some serious questions in analysing data.

While I use CDA to analyse both government documents and CEOs' speeches, CDA itself is a heterogeneous method, including different approaches (Wodak and Meyer, 2015a). As shown in 6.2 and 6.3, I have used different approaches of CDA for analysis. Section 6.2 explained the critical policy analysis developed by Fairclough and Fairclough (Fairclough, 2013). This approach sees government documents as practical argumentations. CEO's discourse was analysed through a combination of thematic analysis and CDA. I have referred to the toolkits provided by Fairclough and Reisigl and Wodak (Fairclough, 2015b; Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). Finally, I have used focus groups to collect data from workers and thematic analysis for identifying the main discourse. All these data belongs to different genres and requires distinct logic for enquiry.

Snowball sampling was used when I stayed in Shenzhen for two months to conduct interviews and focus groups. To get access to manufacturing workers, at first, I went to the factories and tried to approach people, spread flyers during the time when they left work. However, it was very unsuccessful, I was either seen as a fraud or totally ignored. I only got one woman who was willing to talk to me privately. Then I had to change my sampling strategy. With the help of a friend, I gained access to a local worker NGO *Qinghu Xuetao* (unfortunately now shut down by the local authority) near *Longhu* Foxconn. It was from there I finally got talked to and gained some level of trust from workers. Snowballing was the strategy I used to form groups. Once I got trust from one worker, s/he managed to ask other friends, roommates or colleges to come together. This strategy has both cons and pros. On the one hand, this trusted environment and NGO backgrounds facilitate some critical discussions towards companies and censorship. Participants knew that they could talk more freely and I was not some suspicious people from authorities (though, as in any real context, there will still be concerns). On the other hand, it could limit the range of answers from the groups. They might be familiar with each other and shared some common interests or experiences. However, I managed to exclude managers or line managers from factories. I realised, from my fieldwork, experiences from other researchers and theoretical discussions, that the classification of managers is more complex. I spent some time in the NGO group after research and helped to organise some classes and taught there. I learned how they organise workers through providing some basic training in computers, music, painting and even English. They also tried to organise workers to exchange skills for free, sell products from hometown, etc. Another important thing is to mobilise workers with their own experiences. However, I constantly feel the guilt of not contributing enough to their work. I

do hope publishing on critical studies could raise consciousness from the whole society and thus push for changes for better.

The difficulty in conducting focus groups with programmers come from their overtime work. I gained access to programmers through friends and used snowball sampling. At first in 2016, I only managed to conduct interviews with programmers, since they are always working overtime on 996 system and rarely have free time at weekends. It was also difficult to ask them to adjust their time for group meetings. Later in 2016 and 2017, I managed to conduct two groups. They are colleges from two companies. I managed to organise the first group after their work time in one weekday. They finished work around the same time that day and one of my participants managed to borrow an empty room from their company. The other group I conducted was during participants' lunchtime.

The white-collar group is more or less easier. I first managed to find a reliable conference room through a friend from the company she is working for. The room was not in use during weekends when the company was not working. I then spread information about my research on several Social Media popular among white-collar workers, such as Douban, Weibo, and Zhihu. I then selected the proper participants based on my criteria. Most of the participants are young, just graduated from university for 1 or 2 years. One of them suggested me to study older people's use, experiences and understanding of WeChat. It reminds an important dimension of age in understanding the digital world.

It poses an important question: would those who experienced the cultural revolution and the fast growth of the economy in the 80s and 90s have a totally different perception of China's current developmental path? I thus conducted an experimental research in my hometown, a city located in the Rust Belt area in the Northeast. With some help from my parents who were born and grown up in factories, I managed to gather a group of elders who worked in factories until they retired. I asked some questions about their view on current development. They are, interesting but not surprisingly, more conscious about what they say to me, because I am studying in a foreign university. Yet they were still quite open in criticising the current housing, health caring, and education systems. The past poor living condition made them endorse the 'reform and opening-up', but their experiences with socialist nation have provided them with more 'cultural resources' to criticise and reflect on the current system. This was different from what I experienced with young people who lack the cultural or

linguistic resources to think outside the current framework and think about alternatives. This small experiment might also shed some lights on struggles in class consciousness: to show alternatives.

CHAPTER 7. GOVERNMENT DIGITAL DISCOURSE

Applying Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) approach of critical policy analysis, this chapter will focus on practical argumentation (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012, see also Fairclough 2013) in government discourse. This approach considers policy as having the ultimate goal of proposing a solution for current problems. The government policies or official speeches follow this logic: (1) what the current situation is and what the current problems are, (2) what the desirable goals are, (3) what actions are proposed to take us from the current situation to the desirable future. During the process of developing the arguments, there are also (4) important underlying values and concerns that direct the identification of current problems and possible solutions (more discussions about this method, see Chapter 6).

This approach is suitable for analysing the Chinese government policies and official speeches. For example, in the 2015 *'Internet Plus' Action Plan*, the first two paragraphs of the document describe the current situation and the problems faced by China and Chinese companies. The main body of the documents outlines the goals (section 1.1 and 1.3), principles that show values and concerns (section 1.2), and several actions (the rest of the whole document). Similarly, in the 2016 *Outline of the National Informatisation Development Strategy*, the document consists of several parts: (section 1) description of the current situation, (section 2) guiding principles and goals, and (section 3-6) actions. Though the official speeches might not follow this exact structure, yet the actual arguments normally consist of these same key elements. For example, in one of Xi's most important Internet-related speech, the *Speech at the Work Conference for Cybersecurity and Informatisation* (hereinafter *4.19 speech*), he describes the current development of China's Internet, what new goals the government has proposed, and what actions should be taken to realise these goals. On one specific topic of the 'key technology', he tries to argue against different opinions and claims that his proposed solution is the best option. This is a typical example of political speech that can be analysed by CDA from the point of view of argumentation theory (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 86). Therefore, it is clear that a focus of practical argumentation in CDA can be applied to analyse Chinese government's digital discourse in policies and official speeches.

7.1. The Ultimate Goal and Core Value

This section will, first of all, demonstrate the description of the current digital age in government documents: a wave of the digital revolution. It will then introduce the ultimate goal of ‘Building a Cyber Superpower’⁴ and the core value of ‘Serving the people’. These three aspects – description of the current state of affairs, ultimate goal, and core value – provide a general understanding of the government’s digital discourse.

7.1.1. Joining the wave

Most government documents start with a description of the current circumstances. The Internet-related documents start by emphasising that we are experiencing a digital revolution; thus, it is pressing to join this revolution. Metaphor is an important way for policymakers to describe reality (Fairclough, 2016). The use of metaphors such as ‘tide’ and ‘wave’ is common in Internet-related policies. For example, Xi claims that

- [1] Informatisation and economic globalisation are promoting each other. The Internet has been integrated into every aspect of social life, and profoundly changed people’s production and lifestyle. Our country is in the middle of this tide, and will be influenced increasingly deeper. ⁱ (Xi, 2014, *speech* at the first meeting of the new Central Leading Group for Cybersecurity and Informatisation)

It is not rare that there is an emergent tone in the discourse of the Internet- and ICT-related policies, to emphasise the urgency of the issues. For example, the first sentence of the *Outline of the National Informatisation Development Strategy* is that:

- [2] In the present world, information technology innovation changes every day. A tide of informatisation, characterised by digitisation, networking and smartification has

⁴ There are several versions of the translation of *Wang Luo Qiang Guo Zhan Lue* (“网络强国战略”). The translation “national cyber development strategy” used here comes from the State Council Information Office of PRC. <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zhzc/35353/35354/Document/1507446/1507446.htm> This document announces how certain important terms should be translated into foreign languages. ‘the Strategy to build Cyber Superpower’ is another commonly referred to the translation of this term in media (e.g. [Wired](#), the [Economist](#), [Foreign Affairs](#)). The rest of this chapter will use ‘Cyber Superpower’ to refer to *Wang Luo Qiang Guo* (“网络强国”).

vigorously arisen. ii (General Office of the Communist Party of China and General Office of the State Council, 2016, *Outline of the National Informatisation Development Strategy*)

Another example is the use of ‘wave’ in the *‘Internet +’ Action Plan*. The government identifies the current states of affairs in the following way:

[3] In the new *wave* of global technological revolution and industrial transformation, the integration of the Internet with all areas has a full future and infinite potential, and has become *an overwhelming tidal wave* of the time, is exerting strategic and systematic influences on every country’s economic and societal development. iii (State Council, 2015, *Guiding Opinions on Actively Promoting the “Internet Plus” Action*)

Metaphor is a common strategy used to describe changes to imply an inevitable future. The *metaphors* used in this extract express the irresistible future brought by the Internet: you cannot resist such a wave, you must ride it. The *Action Plan* continues that one can only go with this flow. This metaphor of a wave is also obvious in Xi’s speeches. When mentioning the necessity to develop information technologies, he uses the expression “We must forge ahead or otherwise will be swept downstream” (*Bu jin ze tui*) (Xi, 2016, 4.19 speech). In Chinese, this expression is followed by ‘like a boat sailing against the current’ (*Ni shui xing zhou*). This is another powerful metaphor to describe the irresistible changes.

There is a danger of this type of discourse to lead to techno-determinism, i.e. to join the wave without questioning questions such as how to develop new technologies, for what and for whom. The emphasis of the inevitable future brought by big data could also downplay the ethical concerns and political discussions of relevant issues, such as privacy issues. In other words, if big data and technologies will bring uncontrollable and inevitable changes, then we can only follow the logic of the technology, instead of seeking ways to control their development and to change the social relations behind them. Finally, this type of metaphors could also be used by governments from different countries to emphasise nation competition, thus to form a narrative of ‘us vs them’. Whether this metaphor serves such purposes need to be further scrutinised through analysing other premises, such as descriptions of problems, goals, mean-goal premises, etc.

7.1.2. Build a Cyber Superpower

In official documents, the ultimate goal of ‘Building the country into a Cyber Superpower’ is part of the broader ambitious goal of the ‘great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’. The term ‘Cyber Superpower’ (*Wang Luo Qiang Guo* ‘网络强国’, hereinafter WLQG) has become prominent since 2014. In February 2014, Xi led the first meeting of the Central Leading Group for Cybersecurity and Informatisation (it changed its name into the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission in 2018). In the meeting, Xi explicitly distinguishes ‘a country with Cyber Superpower’ (*Wang Luo Qiang Guo*) from ‘a country with Cyber Power’ (*Wang Luo Da Guo* ‘网络大国’). The latter, according to Xi, mainly refers to the extensive Internet presence, and it has been achieved in China through the extraordinary development in Internet penetration rate. However, China has not yet become a ‘Cyber Superpower’. Xi, in particular, points out the following problems “that China is lagging behind in innovation, that there are obvious differences between rural and urban areas, that especially the average bandwidth per capita is largely lagging behind advanced countries, and there is an obvious bottleneck in the Internet development” (Xi’s speech at *the first meeting of the new Central Leading Group for Cybersecurity and Informatisation*, 2014). How Xi perceived the problems in current states of affairs in his first prominent speech on WLQG provides some basic understandings of the term.

The term WLQG has then become a keyword of China’s Internet development. The government then discusses national Internet development, cybersecurity, and informatisation policies on the basis of this ultimate goal of building a ‘Cyber Superpower’. The Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee in 2015 approved the Central Committee's Proposal for Formulating the *13th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development* (2016-20). This was the first time CCP launched the *National Big Data Strategy* and *National Cyber Development Strategy* (*WLQG Strategy*). Then in 2015 World Internet Conference, Xi mentions that China will vigorously implement National Cyber Development Strategy, National Big Data Strategy, and the ‘Internet Plus’ Strategy. After that, Xi also repetitively emphasises the National Cyber Development Strategy, such as in the most two important speeches at the *Work Conference for Cybersecurity and Informatisation* in 2016 and 2018. This term has also been the top-line strategic concept, as shown in government reports and policies, such as the 19th Party Congress in 2017. It has also become an ‘umbrella term’ covering a wide terrain of the

Internet- and digital technology- related policies, including Internet governance, online public opinion, content control, cybersecurity, technology development, international competition and cooperation.

It is thus difficult to define this term in any simple way. The emphasis and connotations of this term could vary depending on the circumstances. However, due to the importance of this term, several official interpretations have been published on Party-leading and State-owned media. These interpretations can shed some light on the understanding of the term.

In September 2017, *Qiushi*, the Party's leading journal on theory, published an article titled "Deepening the Implementation of General Secretary Xi Jinping's Strategic Thinking on Building China into a Cyber Superpower, Steadily Advancing Cybersecurity and Informatisation Work"⁵. This article was written by Theoretical Studies Centre Group under the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC). This article provides an important guideline to understand Xi's thinking and to set agenda for discussions on the topic. The group outlines six key areas regarding Xi's WLQG thinking. These six areas are: Strengthen overarching planning, Strengthen the construction and management of online content, Construct a cybersecurity assurance system, Give full play to the leading role of informatisation, Strengthen China's international voice and influence, Strengthen the Party's leadership of cybersecurity and informatisation work. Overall, the CAC emphasises content control, cybersecurity, the leading role of the informatisation in economic development and China's role in Internet governance internationally.

One year later, *Qiushi* published another article on the topic. In explaining the strategic goal of building WLQG, the article cited Xi claiming that cybersecurity and Informatisation industries represent the new force of production and the new directions of development. It means that to become a Cyber Superpower, an China should, first of all, become a powerful nation in force of production, i.e. in technology. Secondly, China should become a powerful nation in Internet governance, at both domestic and international levels.

⁵ The original article in Chinese: http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2017-09/15/c_1121647633.htm
Translation: <https://www.newamerica.org/cybersecurity-initiative/blog/chinas-strategic-thinking-building-power-cyberspace/>

Later on, several articles are published by official party-led state-owned media on the topic. For example, after Xi's 2018 speech at the Work Conference for Cybersecurity and Informatisation, *People's Daily* published an article to review Xi's most important statements on building a national Cyber Superpower. The article has several sections, including serving the people, assuring cybersecurity, building strong information economy, strengthening technology innovations, managing the cyberspace, and strengthening international cooperation. Another example is from *Xinhua*. In 2019, *Xinhua* reviewed Xi's statements on WLQG and divided them into seven categories. These categories are: understanding the current states of affair, ensuring the path through developing technologies and the economy, serving the people, assuring cybersecurity, managing cyberspace, cultivating talents, and strengthening China's role in Internet governance internationally. Later in the same year, *People's Daily* published an article emphasising these similar aspects of WLQG and republished by *Qiushi*. Again, the article emphasises several aspects of building the Cyber Superpower: the importance of developing cybersecurity and informatisation industries, serving the people, managing the cyberspace, assuring cybersecurity, and international cooperation. These interpretations could shed light on the identification of key themes in government documents in the following sections.

7.1.3. Serve the People

Along with the ultimate goal of building a WLQG, the government claims its key value as to 'serve the people'. As a country that claims itself as a socialist country, the traditional socialist values are still important in official discourse. This is the same case for Internet-related discourses. In particular, the Internet is expected to 'serve the people' by providing public service and reducing poverty. For example, Xi claims that developing the Internet and Informatisation should put the people at the centre. In the first WIC, he states that "China is actively pushing the development of the Internet and will China is actively advancing the development of the Internet and extending its benefit to the 1.3 billion Chinese people" (Xi's speech at the 1st WIC, 2014). In the *4.19 speech* in 2016, he re-emphasises this core value. He says:

- [4] For the cybersecurity and informatisation undertaking to develop, we must implement the development idea of people being central. This is an important viewpoint put forward at the 5th Plenum of the 18th Party Congress. We must adapt to the people's

expectations and requirements, accelerate the universalisation of informatised services, reduce application costs, provide information services that the common people can use, can afford to use and can use well, and let hundreds of millions of people have an even greater sense of gain in sharing the development fruits of the Internet. ^{iv} (Xi, 2016, 4.19 *Speech*)

I have now pointed out the ultimate goal of building ‘a National Cyber Power’ (WLQG) and the key value of ‘serving the people’ claimed by the CPC. The following sections will not only provide an overview of the key aspects of government’s digital discourses but also aim to show a critical evaluation of the government policies surrounding this key value and ultimate goal. More specifically, by evaluation, I intend to address the following questions: What does it mean to realise WLQG? Will the proposed actions achieve the goal to realise WLQG? Will the proposed actions be the best means to serve the people? Will there be unintended negative consequences happen in the process? Are these consequences violate CPC’s promises to serve the people or clash with CPC’s political commitments? Are there any other facts that need to be taken into consideration?

From a thematic analysis, there are three main themes in the government’s digital discourse regarding how to build a national Cyber Superpower and to serve the people: the Information Economy (7.2), Cybersecurity (7.3), and ‘A Community of Shared Destiny in the Cyber Space’ (7.3). Instead of just describing these themes, I use CDA to conduct a critical investigation of the discourse and their implications.

7.2. Information Economy

Information Economy is the main theme in the government’s digital discourse. The government tries to develop the Chinese economy under the ‘New Normal’, to implement national Big Data strategy, to encourage mass entrepreneurship and innovation, to support key Chinese Enterprises. In order to fulfil these economic goals, the government claims to deepen the (political) reform.

7.2.1. A ‘New Normal’ of the Chinese Economy

The argument of ‘New Normal’ is based on the judgement of the current international and domestic situation. As Green and Stern define it, the New Normal “ is understood by China’s leadership and policy elite as having better quality growth at its core, with a particular emphasis on four sub-themes: services, innovation, reduced inequality and environmental sustainability” (Green and Stern, 2015: 10). Internet is seen as a useful tool to stable the increase of economy, as the new driving force for this new type of economic development. As Xi points out, the “Information Economy” has become increasingly important for the Chinese economy. He states: “ Our country’s economic development has entered a new normal. New normal requires new driving force, and the Internet could play an important role in this aspect” (Xi, 2016, *4.19 Speech*). The Internet is seen as an instrument for economic development here. More specifically, the Internet is expected to upgrade the agricultural and manufacturing industries, to develop the service industry, and to stimulate consumption.

[5] We must strengthen the construction of our information infrastructure, strengthen the deep integration of information resources, and open up information “arteries” for economic and social development. The 5th Plenum of the 18th Party Congress and the “13th Five-Year Plan” outline have deployed the implementation of the national strategy to build a Cyber Superpower (WLQG Strategy), the “Internet Plus” Action Plan, the Big Data Strategy and so on, we must effectively implement these well, strive to promote the converged development of the Internet and the real economy, drive technology flows, talent flows and material flows through information flows, stimulate the optimisation of resource allocation, promote the improvement of the productivity of all factors, and play a vigorous role in promoting innovative development, the transformation of economic development methods and the adjustment of economic structures. v (Xi, 2016, *4.19 Speech*)

Two years later, Xi further summarises the actions as: “to promote the deep convergence of the Internet, Big Data, AI and the real economy, to promote digitalised, networked and AI-enabled manufacturing, agriculture and service industries ” (Xi, 2018, *4.20 Speech*). It clearly shows that the government has changed its developmental strategy. To develop ICT is no longer merely for the purpose of attracting investment and increasing export in the manufacturing industry. Instead, the government has planned to move China’s industries up to a higher level of the global value chain.

Furthermore, unlike the emphasis of new technologies as a way to fight against alienation (Fisher, 2010), the government rarely mentions how the integration of the Internet would benefit workers. The government digital discourse represents Internet technologies as new forces of production, as Xi claims in 2018:

[6] Informatisation and cybersecurity undertaking represent the new forces of production and new directions of development. It should practice new ideas in advance, centring around the construction of a modern economic system, to realise high-quality development, to accelerate informatisation development, to drive and improve the new type of industrialisation, urbanisation, and agriculture modernisation as a whole.^{vi} (Xi, 2018, *4.20 Speech*)

As illustrated in this excerpt, informatisation represents the new forces of production and new directions of development, not relations of production. While the government discourse mentions using the Internet to reduce differences between rural and urban areas, to reduce poverty and provide better governance services to the public, there is no mention of relations of production, nor how the new technologies could change the alienated working conditions.

7.2.2. Digital economy and Big Data

Another related key concept to the ‘Information Economy’ is the ‘Digital Economy’. As Xi points out in the 2nd WIC China will vigorously implement the national strategy to build a Cyber Superpower (WLQG), national Big Data Strategy and the ‘Internet Plus’ Strategy. Big Data Strategy is one of the most important strategies. Based on this principle, Xi claims that China should “construct the Digital Economy in which data is a key element” and “constructing a modern economic system cannot be separated from the development and implementation of Big Data”⁶ (Xi, 2017).

While emphasising the importance of data and Big Data in China’s economic development, there is no equal level of emphasis on the accountability principle of data, i.e. which stakeholder take responsibility for what has been done with the data. This is in contrast with the government’s discourse on cybersecurity and online content control for which the

⁶ available at <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1209/c64094-29696290.html>

responsibility and accountability of enterprises and other agents are clearly pointed out and emphasised.

One prominent example is that data is discursively expressed as a *subject* which is exerting influence on the society through other grammatical features. For example, in one of the most important documents published by the State Council, the chief administrative authority of China, *Outline of Actions to Promote Big Data Strategy*, big data is seen as a crucial strategic resource that influences every aspect of human life:

[7] The integration of Information technologies and economic society has triggered a rapid increase in data. Data has become a fundamental national strategic resource. Big data is gradually *exerting a significant influence* on global production, circulation, distribution, consumption and economic mechanisms, social life and the capacity of national governance. ^{vii} (State Council, *Outline of Actions to Promote Big Data Strategy*, italics added)

The following sections of the document also claim that “Big data has become a new *driving force* to promote economic transformation and development”; “Big data has become a new opportunity to reshape national competitive advantage”; “Big data has become a new way to improve the capacity of governance”. Big data is seen as a cause for inevitable and significant changes in the world, instead of something collected by the government and companies via complex processes. The primary purpose of the policy documents is to point out how to share data, how to use data, instead of how and why to collect data.

The linguistic construction of data as an independent agent and as a denial of corporate responsibility in the process is problematic and ideological because it leaves out the issues of the actual processing of data: what kinds of data are collected? Who decides what data to collect? How are these data collected? How are they used? Who has the power to determine how to use these data, and for what purpose? Instead, this type of discourse portrays data as an independent entity that grows by itself. It is one form of techno-determinism: technology (data in this case) develops in its own logic. It portrays the development or the ‘growing’ of data as a ‘natural’ process. However, the development of technology is never natural, and it is full of human ‘intentions’. Raymond Williams (1990), in his seminal study about television in the 1970s, puts forwards the essential role ‘intention’ plays in the development of

technologies. Similarly, Dallas Smythe (1994) claims the possibility to technologically develop a two-way TV system in history, but this intention was failed. Smythe criticises the tendency of the commodification of audiences in the commercial TV industry harmed the development of a TV system which could be more beneficial for democracy and participation. However, if, according to the discourse shown in excerpt [3], data and technology grow by themselves, both an alternative way of development and possible criticism of the commodification of users are elided.

The reality is apparently different from what is stated: data (especially data on social media) is collected and utilised for specific purposes and usually by powerful companies and governments. For example, Premier Li Keqiang claimed in the 2016 China Big Data Industry Summit that the government controls more than 80% of the information and data recourses when he tried to promote the government to open up and share information with businesses and the public (Li, 2016). Big companies might not agree with this statistic. Ginni Rometty (Chairman, President and CEO of IBM) in the 2018 China Development Forum, claims that 20% of data is on the Internet, while companies control the rest of the 80% (China Development Forum, 2018). No matter whether 80% of data is controlled by the government or companies, it is not controlled and utilised by the public. When the dominant class claims that databases are open to all, this usually refers to corporate enterprises or their partners. For example, one tendency in China is to open databases in the education and healthcare systems for commercial exploitation. However, the voices of students and patients are not considered in this decision. This is the same for information stored in government departments. In modern society, data should be a new kind of public resource and is supposed to be used for the good of the public. However, what used to be unsalable has been turned into commodities by governments and companies through the process of privatisation in accordance with the neoliberal trend. This process is also referred to as accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2005, p137).

The construction of data as an independent agent whose influence is independently deterministic is also problematic because it indicates an uncontrollable situation: data is growing by itself thus out of the control of the public or simply not within their ability to control so such control should be left to those who have the ability to do so. This is techno-deterministic thinking which sees data as an independent determinant responsible for other changes in the society. This type of arguments facilitates the existing situation that

technologies and data cannot be controlled by users and the public, i.e. people who contribute to the generation of those data, especially concerning the Internet and social media. If the current and future situation cannot be controlled, then the only choice is to follow the logic of technology and let the free market lead the future.

7.2.3. Mass entrepreneurship and innovation

One buzzword which is related to the Internet economy is Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation (*Shuang Chuang* ‘双创’, hereinafter SC). SC is a term that appears in Internet-related documents oftentimes. The Internet, according to the government, could be useful to promote innovation and facilitate enterprises.

For example, in the ‘*Internet Plus*’ *Action Plan*, the very first key Action proposed is to use the Internet to promote entrepreneurialism and innovation. It claims to

- [8] Fully give rein to the innovation driving role of the Internet, promote the collection, openness and sharing of all categories of factors with stimulating start-ups and innovation as a focus point, forcefully develop mass creation spaces, open innovation, etc., guide and promote all of society to create a thick atmosphere for mass start-ups and mass innovation, and forge new engines for economic development.^{viii} (State Council, 2015, ‘*Internet Plus*’ *Action Plan*)

The Xi-Li Administration has been actively encouraging SC with the help of the Internet. According to the official website, the first relevant official document about SC can be traced back to 2012.⁷ SC became a buzzword in China when it was used by Prime Minister Li Keqiang in the 2014 World Economy Forum and written into the 2015 Government Work Report. The creation of this term is closely related to the Chinese government’s efforts to encourage the vitality of the market and withdraw some of its own control of the market.⁸ The ‘Internet Plus’ is combined with the government’s promotion of innovation and

⁷ According to search results on the government’s online archive of official documents published by the State Council, available at <http://sousuo.gov.cn/column/30142/2.htm>, last accessed on 08 Nov, 2018

⁸ For more explanation of *Shuang Chuang*, see Premier Li Keqiang’s Meeting with the Press after the 12th National People’s Congress 3rd Session, 2015, available at <http://lianghui.people.com.cn/2015npc/n/2015/0315/c394537-26695490-2.html>

entrepreneurship. ‘Internet Plus’ refers to the application of Internet and Information technologies to traditional industries. It is similar to the idea of the Information Superhighway and Industry 4.0. The ‘Internet Plus’ is expected to promote the economy and public services. It is especially useful for creating new jobs and innovation. Typical arguments for SC and ‘Internet Plus’ made by the government use *topos of usefulness*: If the Internet brings economic benefits for the country and individuals, then the enterprise should be encouraged.

In 2015, *Opinions to promote innovation and entrepreneurship* argued that to promote SC is (a) a necessary choice to cultivate and promote new driving forces for socio-economic development; (b) an essential act to expand employment and enrich people; (c) an effective way to stimulate the whole society’s innovation potentials and entrepreneur vitality. Premier Li once argued that the purpose of SC is to “make more people rich and realise their life value”.⁹ In the GWR in the same year, SC is said to be able “to enlarge employment, to increase residents’ income, and to promote social mobility and justice” (Li Keqiang, 2015 GWR). According to this claim, the SC is not only beneficial for the prosperity of the nation and individuals to become wealthy, but also for social equality and justice. Based on this argument, everyone should join the wave, take advantage of the Internet and become an entrepreneur.

There is one outstanding example of the government document that uses the term ‘relations of production’. While productive force and mode of production are keywords in those documents, the relation of production is barely mentioned. The only exception is from the *Outline of the National Informatisation Development Strategy*, which uses a strong tone to claim that

[9] The Internet and information undertaking represent new productive forces and new development orientations. It promotes an unprecedented enhancement of humanity’s capacity to understand the world and change the world. It is currently profoundly changing people’s ways of production and life, it brings a qualitative leap in productivity, triggers a major change in the relation of production, and is becoming a

⁹ Premiere Li Keqiang’s Meeting with the Press after the 12th National People’s Congress 3rd Session, 2015, available at <http://lianghui.people.com.cn/2015npc/n/2015/0315/c394537-26695490-4.html>

guiding force remoulding a new structure in the development of the international economy, politics, culture, society, ecology, and military affairs. ix (General Office of the Communist Party of China and General Office of the State Council, 2016, *Outline of the National Informatisation Development Strategy*)

However, in the rest of the whole document, and any other documents in my samples, ‘relations of production’ was never mentioned. It is not clear how the Internet and information undertaking would trigger major a change in the relation of production either. Unlike technology discourse in advanced capitalism, emancipation from exploitation for workers and farmers and democratisation is not a primary concern in government’s technology discourse. Instead, economic growth, industry upgrade, company interests are the main concerns. The main problems regarding inequality are outlined as no enough infrastructure, inequality between regions, between rural and urban areas, instead of between capitalists and workers and farmers (including migrant workers). What is similar to ideological discourses on the Information Society in advanced capitalism is the emphasises of new forces of production but neglect the continuous existence of the old exploitative relation of production (Fuchs, 2014a; Fuchs and Sandoval, 2013).

7.2.4. The Chinese Enterprises

Enterprises appear to be an important stakeholder in government discourse. For example, in 4.19 speech, Xi especially emphasises the missions and responsibilities of enterprises. He specifically states that “to foster a sustained and healthy development of the enterprises is not only the objectives of entrepreneurs but also the need for national development”. Moreover, Xi continues as “the fate of enterprises is closely bound up with the development of the country” (4.19). He also emphasises the important role played by enterprises in Internet governance.

This equivalence between China and Chinese businesses is not abnormal in the government discourses, especially when in relation to international competition. In ICT-related documents, there are implications that Chinese Internet businesses represent China’s national interests and represent how advanced Chinese technologies are. Chinese businesses are also expected to lead China’s ‘go aboard strategy’ (e.g. the BRI). This type of discourse is a combination of nationalism and neoliberalism. As stated in 7.1, the relationships between the

state and capital should not be simplified as the ruler and the controlled. The Chinese government is trying to build a more positive relationship with capital and businesses (Hong Y., 2017).

This equivalence between China and Chinese businesses is shown in the government's discursive events. For example, in Xi's *4.19 speech* (see 7.1), when he praises China's achievements in developing new technologies, he says:

[10] China's notable achievements in the development of the Internet over the past 20 years or more have included a number of technological accomplishments. At present, four of the world's top 10 *Internet companies* are Chinese. While attending the Second World Internet Conference last year, I visited the "Light of the Internet" Expo, where more than 250 *companies* from across the globe showcased more than 1,000 new technologies. It was exciting to see that many of them were *ours*.^x (Xi, 2016, *4.19 speech*, translation from the official magazine *Qiushi*, italics added)

This extract has no explicit claims such as 'Chinese businesses stand for China or Chinese people'. However, it implicitly carries such a message. According to Fairclough, *local coherence* is a level of interpretation that "establishes meaning connections between utterances, producing (where feasible) coherent interpretations of pairs and sequences of them" (Fairclough, 2015, p157). It is a matter of "local coherence relations within a particular part of a text" (ibid.). Moreover, local coherence is not only about formal cohesion (linguistic form) but also exist "even in the absence of formal cohesive cues" (ibid.). This is the case for this example: there is no formal cohesive cue in it. However, in the *4.19 speech*, after talking about achievements *China* has made in the last 20 years, Xi soon slips into the successes Chinese Internet companies have achieved: 4 out of the 10 top Internet companies are from China, and Chinese companies have developed much new technology (all of which are 'ours'). In other words, Chinese companies are competing with foreign companies at the international level on behalf of China and 'us'. If Chinese companies succeed in the global market or international competition, then China wins. This is also the case when Xi talks about 'core technologies' in *4.19 speech* (see the first excerpt in 7.3) – Xi starts by talking about the weakness of China in not acquiring 'core technologies', and he then soon turns to the *topos of threat* claiming a threat due to Chinese Internet companies having to rely on the 'core elements' under the control of foreign entities. This is then followed by his proposal to

realise a breakthrough in ‘core technologies’: “If we are to seize the initiative in the development of the Internet [then] we overcome the hurdle posed by core technologies”. It is ambivalent whether this ‘we’ means the government or the Internet companies, exhibiting a slippage, thus equivalence, between China, Chinese Internet companies and the government.

The claim has gone beyond a mere equivalence between China and Chinese businesses. More than this, it claims that if China is forced into the intense and inevitable global competition and companies are crucial actors to represent the nation’s interests, then the government should encourage, support and ‘serve’ the companies. This is in accordance with the government’s promotion of “innovation and entrepreneurship” (*Shuang Chuang*) and to “streamline government functions and administration, delegate powers” (*JianZheng FangQuan*) which means a retreat of government power from the market (but not necessarily from political control).

The emphasis on enterprises can also be shown from a qualitative perspective. In Xi’s important 4.19 speech, the Chinese word for enterprise/business (*Qiye*) appears 54 times (6 of them refers to enterprisers, or entrepreneurs, (*Qiyejia*), while words about research (including research departments and research institutions) only appear 3 times, experts (*Zhuanjia*) 8 times, scholars (*Xuezhe*) 6 times, researchers/scientists (*Keji Renyuan* and *Keji Rencai*) 4 times (see table 7.1). Among the six sections in Xi’s speech, enterprises (*Qiye*) and entrepreneurs (*Qiyejia*) appear in five of them: besides one section specially dedicated to enterprise (focusing on the “mission and responsibility of Internet companies”), the other four parts are about people’s life, core technologies, cybersecurity and resources of human talents (Xi, 2016, *4.19 speech*). Xi talks about the essential roles enterprises should or could play in all these five sectors, encompassing the importance of other institutions.

Specific Word Used	number	total
enterprise/business (<i>Qiye</i>)	48	54
entrepreneurs: <i>Qiyejia</i>	6	
research (including research departments and research institutions)	3	
experts (<i>zhuanjia</i>)	8	

scholars (<i>xuezhe</i>)	6	21
researchers/scientists (<i>Keji Renyuan and Keji Rencai</i>)	4	

Table 7.1. Times specific words used in Xi's 4.19 speech.

This equation also means to understand technology development through the lens of how 'successful' they are in the market. This understanding of technology is techno-determinism because it ignores the political-economic factors that influence what can be or cannot be successful in the market. It also ignores the exploitative relation of production behind those technology companies. Though Xi claims that the "market exchange cannot bring core technology" (Xi, 2016, 4.19 speech), he still believes that companies are the best means for China to develop core technology and to participate in global competition.

This indication is not rare in government discourse. In line with 'streamlining administration and delegating administrative power', the overall tone is that market can best serve the interest of the nation and the people and that companies should represent China's national interests both in the domestic market and the International market. For example, the government determinates to support 'key enterprises' (*Long Tou Qi Ye* '龙头企业') to "play a leading and driving role" to "establish research and development bodies and expand market abroad, effectively use global resources, and enhance their internationalised development levels" (2016, *National Informatisation Strategy*). Similarly, in the 13th Five-Year Plan for National Informatisation, the government plans to cultivate innovative enterprises for developing core technologies that could compete globally and become the top 500. Chinese companies are also expected to play important roles in participating International Open Source Organisations (see also 7.4).

7.2.5. Deepening the reform

One area that is related to the Information Economy in governance is deepening the reform. It is one of the main themes in Internet-related government documents. There are two main themes. The first one is to promote an open market in the Internet-related areas. The second one is to use the Internet to serve the 'free market'.

On the one hand, the government is making it easier for business to enter the Internet-related market. For example, the General Office of the Communist Party of China and General Office of the State Council published a document emphasising the need to improve the market access system through the simplification of administrative procedures, delegation of powers to lower levels, a combination of decentralisation and control (*Fang, Guang, Fu* “放、管、服”) (2017, the *Opinions on Promoting the Sound and Orderly Development of the Mobile Internet*). The Internet-related industries are open to the market to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation (SC).

Deepening the transformation of the government’s role in the market is also closely related to the Informatisation project in China, as stated in one of the main principles of the 13th Five-Year Plan for National Informatisation:

[11] Insist on the comprehensive deep reform, strike a balance between the role of the government and that of the market, insist on the decisive role of the market in allocating resources, and let the government play its functions better. Get rid of defects that harm innovative development of informatisation in various systems and mechanisms, stimulate the vigour of innovation, strengthen the law-based social management system, release digital dividends, and to provide an instant drive for the economic and social development. ^{xi}(State Council, 2016, 13th Five-year Plan for National Informatisation)

On the other hand, the Internet and Big Data are believed to be useful for the government to better serve the market. For example, the General Office of the State Council published *Several Opinions on Strengthening the Services and Supervision over Market Entities by Means of Big Data Analysis* in 2015. This expression – using Big Data and new technologies to better serve the market – exists in all types of Internet-related government documents, such as the *Internet Plus Action Plan*, *Outline of National IT Development Strategy, Made in China 2025*, *Opinions on Cloud Computing*, *Guiding Opinions on IP*, and *Opinions on Big Data*. The government plans to withdraw its power over the market in less politically sensitive areas. The development of big data could serve this purpose well: to improve government’s work efficiency and to promote the transformation of its functions. All the documents listed above emphasise the importance to ‘streamline administration and delegate

powers'. Another example is that the *Opinion on BD* aims at "increasing the effectiveness of government services and regulation by improving its ability to use big data. It aims to create a fair and honest market environment by offering support for administrative streamlining through big data as well as lowering the cost of government services and supervisory responsibilities by making full use of big data technologies and resources" (State Council, 2015).

The claims of opening the market and restricting government power in the Internet-related areas is in line with the government's promotion of reforms in general. At the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee in November 2013, after the first year of Xi-Li leadership, the government made an important shift in the language used to describe the role of the market in China. The *Session* passed *The Decision on Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reforms*. It claims that economic reform is the centre of deepening reform comprehensively and "[The] basic economic system should evolve through the *decisive role* of the market in resource allocation" (CPC, 2013). The *Session* proposed to build a fair, open, transparent and unified market system and to reform the market regulation system in order to promote competition and "the survival of the fittest" (ibid.). This expression of '*decisive role*' is in clear contrast with the previous expression of a 'basic' role of the market in resource allocation. The 2014 Government Work Report (GWR) explicitly claims that it is difficult to make decisions through 'Microeconomic regulation and control', thus should facilitate the free market, the 'invisible hand' to promote economic growth (Li Keqiang, 2014, GWR).

With the transformation of the market's role comes the change of government's role. The government claims to retreat from its previous commanding role in the market. As it claims in the Third Plenary Session, the underlying issue is to "strike a balance between the role of the government and that of the market, and let the market play the decisive role in allocating resources and let the government play its functions better". The *Decision* also makes clear to transform government's functions so as to "streamline administration, delegate more powers" (*Jian Zheng Fang Quan* '简政放权'). The first State Council executive meeting Premier Li hosted in 2014 was titled 'streamline administration, delegate more powers'. After the meeting, the State Council removed many administrative approval items and delegated administrative power. This term has since been used by Premier Li's Report on the Work of

the Government every year. One strong example comes from the 2015 GWR, Premier Li, for the first time, uses a strong term – ‘revolution’ (the translation on ChinaDaily used below translates the original word *Ge Ming* into “bold in imposing a reform”) – to describe the government’s reform. He emphasises “to deepen the reform, to streamline administration, delegate more powers” and “to multiple the market’s vigour through reducing the government’s power” (Li Keqiang, 2015 GWR). Li Further claims that

[12] China has a population of 1.3 billion and a workforce of 900 million. Our people are hardworking and talented, and there is no limit to their ingenuity. When an abundance of market cells spring into life, they will form a mighty driving force for development, ensuring China’s economy remains resilient in spite of the downward pressure on it and continues to be full of life and dynamism. The government should be bold in imposing reform on itself so as to leave ample space for the market and society to play their respective roles and level the playing field for fair competition. Individuals and enterprises must have the mettle to promote their business development and make innovations, and our society needs to nurture a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation. In this way, while creating wealth, people will be able to meet their cultural and intellectual needs and realise their full potential in life. xii (Li Keqiang, 2015 GWR, translation published on ChinaDaily)

It is not difficult to find the similarity between this statement from the government and David Harvey’s definition of neoliberalism that believes “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005: 2). The metaphor of market cells emphasises to promote entrepreneurship among individual and business. Another neoliberal aspect of the government’s policies is how the government promote the Internet for uplifting poverty. The government’s primary role, according to several documents, is to provide infrastructures in rural and poor areas. The government has retreated from providing social security, education and employment directly. Instead, with the help of the Internet, E-commerce and different types of business, such as education and healthcare, are encouraged to take the role of uplifting poverty (e.g. as shown in *the Opinions on Promoting the Sound and Orderly Development of the Mobile Internet*, and *13th five-year plan for national informatisation*). Therefore, the market, enabled by the Internet, is seen as the best way to uplift poverty, and to solve social problems.

7.3. Cybersecurity

The second prominent theme in the government's digital discourse is cybersecurity. This type of discourse includes discussions about developing core technologies, ensuring cyber Sovereignty and constructing a 'clean environment in the cyberspace'.

7.3.1. Core Internet technologies

The most important discourse on the Internet is probably about core technology. In one of the most important speeches about informatisation given by President Xi Jinping (4.19 speech), he points out that

[13] Core Internet technologies are our greatest weakness, and the fact we rely on others for core technologies is our biggest threat. It matters little how large an Internet company is or how much that company is worth if it relies heavily on foreign countries for core components and its supply chains are controlled by others. It is like building a house on someone else's foundation. It might be big and impressive, but it could be torn down at any time. If we are to seize the initiative in the development of the Internet, and guarantee our cybersecurity and national security, it is imperative that we overcome the hurdle posed by core technologies, and try to perform an "overtake on the bend" in certain fields and areas. ^{xiii} (Xi, 2016, *Speech at a Symposium on Cybersecurity and IT Application*, English translation from CPC's official magazine *Qiushi*)

This extract is a typical argument from the Chinese government about 'core technologies'. The 4.19 speech is one of the most important speeches about the development of the Internet in China in several aspects. It is the first time the central government and CPC held a conference about national cybersecurity and informatisation. All members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee participated in the conference, as well as top officials from several Ministries and local governments. Official media have repetitively reported this event and published the whole speech. It has been published as a pamphlet and sold in bookshops nationwide and is often referred to subsequently. The first sentence from the extract above was later repetitively reported and reprinted in media, official and unofficial (e.g. Xinhua Net), and especially after American's sanctions against China in April 2018, (e.g. in people.cn, Chinanews, Chinadaily,

geekpark.com). The 4.19 speech can be taken to set a strategic, fundamental, comprehensive agenda for the development of the Internet and IT.

Xi uses *topos of threats* in this example. According to Reisigl and Wodak, this strategy can be formulated as “if there are specific dangers and threats, one should do something against them” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, p77). This is a frequently used strategy when shaping conflicts and antagonism between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Xi emphasises the danger of being restricted by or dependent on other countries in ‘core technologies’. He then stresses the importance to develop technologies to seize and hold the initiatives about the development of the Chinese Internet, to guarantee cybersecurity and national security. He also sets goals to surpass other countries in some areas in the future. This example also implies an equivalence of China and Chinese enterprises. There is a slippage between ‘us’ as a nation and the ICT sector. There is a *local coherence* relation within this text (see extract 7.2 Chinese enterprises). In this extract, Xi emphasises the threats to Internet companies which rely on foreign countries for ‘core elements’. Thus specific actions should be taken by the government and the whole nation to overcome these threats.

It could be argued that from a historical context, nationalist discourses in China have often arisen out of a concern about new technology or ‘modernisation’: the humiliations suffered in the 19th Century are sometimes explained to be caused by or were conditional contributions arising out of China’s industrial and scientific backwardness. This understanding of the importance of technology might be best illustrated by the famous phrase: “Lagging behind leaves one vulnerable to attacks” (*Luo Hou Jiu Yao Ai Da*) which was first used by Stalin in 1931 and then propagated by the CPC. According to this view, the reason why China was invaded and attacked by the ‘West’ in the 19th Century was in part due to the failure to develop advanced industrial processes and economies that fuelled them. One representative expression of this argument is the ‘The Needham Puzzle’: why the industrial revolution did not originate in China. Another example is *He Shang* (River Elegy) which brings forward the question why (Western) modernity did not originate in China (see also Chapter 5).

This type of nationalist discourse about technological competition has an underlying techno-deterministic tone. It ignores the politics (in a broad sense) in the development and application of technologies. This type of techno-determinism has been criticised by critical political economists of long-standing. As Smythe (1994) and Williams (1974) remind us, the

development and application of technology are full of historical ‘intentions’ and need ‘cultural screening’ all the time. In other words, technology does not develop independently from society. Rather, technology develops out of power struggles and serves certain interests in society. Emphasising competition with other countries on the same type of ‘core technologies’ means to develop technologies in the same way as other countries do: a way that does not necessarily serve the interests of people. For example, as Smythe (1994) points out, the differences between bicycles and motors not only lie in technologies behind them but also social relations. The fast development of the motor industry and the wide adoption of motor cars facilitates the transformation of public production resources, such as investment and space, from the public area (e.g. education) into individualised consumption area.

While international relationship and international competition are indeed important aspects to be considered by all policymakers, yet it risks to deviate people’s attention from domestic issues and to form a mentality of ‘us’ vs ‘them’. The emphasis on international confrontations and competition could facilitate the CPC’s attempt to build a stronger authoritarian regime. Since there are threats from other countries, the government should be given more power in order to defend Chinese people from the outside ‘enemy’. According to Zhao, this strategy of shaping itself as defending China’s national interests was used by the government after the Tiananmen incident when the West imposed sanctions on China (Zhao, 2004, p67). It was also used when the government fought to enter the WTO and bid for hosting the Olympic Games. This nationalist narrative is also associated with the historical context of the hundred years of suffering and humiliation brought by foreign imperialism. These narratives give sanction to the government to build a strong party-state at the cost of its people’s freedom.

7.3.2. Cyber Sovereignty and Cyber Security

Another buzzword in the Internet-related policies and Xi’s speech, and being used by the media and the public repetitively, is ‘Cyber Sovereignty’ (*Wang Luo Zhu Quan*, 网络主权). In government discourse, ‘Cyber Sovereignty’ is always mixed with the statement of cyber security¹⁰.

¹⁰ For example, http://www.xinhuanet.com/zgjx/2016-09/19/c_135697024.htm

In his remark at the Second World Internet Conference (2nd WIC), Xi Jinping implicitly describes the current situation as full of conflict and antagonism between nations:

[14] No double standards should be allowed in upholding cybersecurity. We cannot just have the security of *one or some countries* while leaving *the rest* insecure, still less should one seek the so-called absolute security of *itself* at the expense of the security of *others*.^{xiv} (Xi, 2015, 2nd WIC, originally in Chinese with official English translation, italics added)

It is in this 2nd WIC, that Xi made the phrase ‘Cyber Sovereignty’ known to the country and the world. In this remark, Xi proposes four principles to “make progress in the transformation of the global Internet governance system”. This is on the basis of his conceptualisation of the current situation, the conflicts and antagonism between nations. This extract aims to argue for the maintenance of secure, stable and prosperous cyberspace.

At the textual analysis level, this extract applies the *strategy of collectivisation* (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, p48): Xi Jinping uses deictic (some countries, the rest, others, etc.) to indicate differences between two types of nations, one of which is presented as conducting hostile behaviour (leaving the rest insecure, at the expense of the security of others, etc.) while the other is more like a victim. There is a clear narrative of ‘us’ vs ‘them’. The *predicational strategy* of explicit comparisons (ibid. p54) is also used in these two examples. It means that responsibilities are explicitly predicated to the first group of countries which are accused of pursuing cyber hegemony. A more implicit discursive strategy is the *topos of threat*. In this excerpt, Xi implies that there exist some implicit antagonisms in the current Internet governance system: “leaving the rest insecure” when seeking its own security. Therefore, every country should make efforts for the “respect for cyber sovereignty” and the “maintenance of peace and security” (Xi, 2015, 2nd WIC). There is little doubt that Xi is implying America hegemony in the speech.

Cyber sovereignty is in close relation to national security. From the *2016 National Informatisation Development Strategy*, there is one section with the title of “Retaining Cyber Sovereignty and National Security”. It claims to prevent and to crack down on online behaviour that intends to “divide the country, provoke rebellion, overthrow the regime, damage integrity, and leak confidential information” (*2016 National Informatisation*

Development Strategy, 2016, article 54). This cyber sovereignty then is used to legitimate the government's control of the Internet in China.

Xi's invention and use of the phrase "cyber sovereignty" have attracted a lot of attention. The assertion of sovereignty, however, is not an innovation of the current CPC and the current Chinese government. National sovereignty has always been a vital issue in China. Zhao explains how this issue is always influential to China's International Relations on issues triggered by "historical sensitivities": "pragmatic leaders are deeply committed to the preservation of national sovereignty, the reunification of China, and the attainment of national wealth and power" (Zhao S., 2000, p16). The pragmatic nationalism, observed by Zhao, is assertive in issues relating to territorial integrity. In other words, the Chinese government is uncompromising in defending and seeking Chinese national interests (*ibid.*, p14).

Though Xi's emphasis on national sovereignty is not novel, there are some new characters in the current government's discourse relating to sovereignty. The first one is its expansion from the geographical territory into cyberspace. The language of historical territory issues (invasion by the imperialist countries as well as the issues of Hong Kong and Taiwan) is thus appropriated to have a say over the Internet. Secondly and more crucial, a discourse of sovereignty has been gradually used for instrumentalist nationalism. For example, in Mao's era, a discourse about sovereignty was articulated as a conflict between capitalist countries and communist/socialist countries. In other words, there was an element of class conflict in the traditional Maoist-left discourses of international competition. However, this class element has gradually disappeared since the Reform in the 1980s. This deletion of elements of class conflict turns the discourse of 'cyber sovereignty' into a nationalist ideological discourse. The emphasis on sovereignty is not for the purpose of emancipation and liberation of people being oppressed by imperialist countries and domestic capitalist and an aristocratic ruling class (as in Mao's era) but for the purpose of diverting people's attention from domestic problems and thus serves the interests of the domestic ruling class (as Xi does).

While there is nothing wrong to protect national security, the mixture of cyber sovereignty and national security could risk the appropriation of the latter to legitimate Internet control. Just as nationalism could serve both the role to promote national sovereignty and freedom and to conceal real issues within the society, the Internet Sovereignty could play the similar

role as the Chinese government has tight control over the Internet (King et al., 2013; Yang, 2015).

7.3.3. A clean environment in the Cyberspace

The goal to build ‘a clean environment in the cyberspace’ (WIC 2015) is related to Internet governance¹¹. According to Xi, “Having a clear sky, fresh air and a good ecology in the cyberspace conforms to the people’s interests. A pestilent atmosphere and a deteriorating ecology in the cyberspace do not conform to the people’s interest” (4.19 Speech). Therefore, the motive, according to Xi, is to “be responsible towards the society and the people”, especially towards the youth. Xi further claims to strengthen governance in cyberspace, strengthen the construction of online content, to strengthen positive online publicity.

Moreover, to build a ‘good’ environment in the cyberspace requires China to be a unitary nation. As Xi puts it in the 4.19 speech:

[15] Attaining the “Two Centenary Goals”¹² requires that our entire society works together in *one heart and one mind*. It requires that people of all ethnic groups focus the thoughts and efforts towards *the same goal*. A society that lacks *common ideals, goals and values*, and that finds itself in permanent disorder will never achieve anything. China has a population of more than 1.3 billion people, and neither the people nor the country would benefit if *we* ended up like that. Forming a consensus is no easy task, and so *we* all need to work together. To attain our goals, *we* will need to form *concentric circles, both online and offline*. What do I mean by concentric circles? I mean rallying all Chinese people under the leadership of the CPC, and motivating all parties to engage in a concerted effort to bring about the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. ^{xv} (Xi, 2016, Speech at a Symposium on Cybersecurity and IT Application (4.19 speech), adapted English translation from the official magazine *Qiushi*, italics added)

¹¹ For example, as stated in this article on people.cn <http://cpc.people.com.cn/xuexi/n1/2018/0421/c385474-29941405-6.html>

¹² “Two Centenary Goals”, according to Xinhua, means that “by 2021, to celebrate the CPC’s centenary, the goal is to “build a moderately prosperous society in all respects” and “by 2049, the centenary of the People’s Republic of China, the goal is to “build a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious”. Available at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/17/c_136686770.htm, last accessed at 10 Nov., 2018.

In this extract, Xi uses a *metaphor*: the entire society has “one heart and one mind” and the *strategy of collectivisation* (we, our society, us). Chinese society is seen as one human body which *only* has one heart and one mind, and all ethnic groups must have *only* one and the same goal. It is obvious that Xi is trying to construct one unitary country through this metaphor. This extract also uses the *topos of usefulness* and the *topos of threat*. This is a typical example of his claim to form a unitary national identity: the “common ideals, goals, and values” are beneficial for all. If there are no common goals, then nothing will be achieved. This type of argument is about directing action, and all action must be to this purpose. In this case, the action is to “form concentric circles both online and offline”, under the leadership of the party.

There is no explicit explanation about what these ‘concentric circles’ mean as regards taking action, though censorship and control of the Internet are implied. In the speech, Xi suggests government officials use the Internet as a way to understand opinions from netizens and the general public. He claims that the Internet could be used as a bridge to facilitate communication between the government and the general public. However, he also emphasises the necessity of censorship and content control: “Cyberspace is a common virtual home for millions upon millions of people. A clean and sound online environment is in the best interests of the people, while a foul and volatile one is not. Nobody wants to live in a space full of fraud, scams, attacks, slander, terror, obscenity, and violence” (Xi, 2016, 4.19 *speech*). This statement about building “a clean and sound online environment” then appears repetitively in official media reports.

In another occasion, Xi makes it clear which agencies should be involved in this formation of concentric circles and how. He claims to “improve the comprehensive capacity for online governance”, and to form a comprehensive management system with the participation of several agencies – Party Committee lead, government administrate, enterprises take responsibility, society to act as a watchdog, and netizens self-discipline (Xi, 2018, 4.20 *Speech*).

The CPC has always been trying to construct a unitary Chinese nation. It is a crucial task for the CPC to build a unified, collective national identity with the help of nationalism.

According to Zhao, instrumental nationalism was first used to replace communism after the

1980s to maintain the stability of Chinese society (Zhao, 2000, p17-8). After that, the CPC repeats this strategy of using nationalism to maintain loyalty and legitimacy.

Cyberspace is an arena for the government/CPC to construct a unitary nation: to both oppress dissidents' opinions and to win over consent. As Carlson points out, the Chinese state has realised the importance of "the production of national identity" for the purpose to "maintain a monopoly within its borders" (Carlson, 2009, p32). This intention to 'maintain a monopoly' is also to be seen in the contradictory aspects of the need to control online space. With the help of the Internet, there is more discontent expressed online, and more social activist movements are organised and initiated online. The state thus has to pay more attention to control online content and to extend its power into cyberspace (for example, to compare Xi's government to his predecessors, people are experiencing stricter censorship and surveillance). The oppression of online expression from the state has, to some extent, given rise to more disputes and criticisms (for studies about this issue, see Yang G., 2009 and King, 2013). Therefore, for the CPC, there is an immediate need to legitimate its control. The way to fulfil this task of legitimation of the CPC's power is to construct a unitary national identity and to propagate one single national goal that is claimed to be beneficial for all Chinese people.

While actively emphasising the importance of one unitary national identity, in contrast, there is neglect, if not a negation, of dramatic conflicts within the society. It is clear that the nationalist discourse of shaping 'a clean and sound' cyberspace is ideological in disguising struggles in society. As stated by Zhao, "pragmatic leaders have fashioned nationalism, because it has the effect of removing differences within the country and replacing it with a common, hegemonic order of political values" (Zhao, 2000, p17). The deliberate neglect of internal conflicts, or, of course, as re-articulating them as 'slander, terror', etc., can be seen in the official discourse. For example, in the *2016 Outline of National IT Development Strategy*, two main inequalities are mentioned in the document. The first one is the differences between rural and urban areas about which the document suggests addressing by improving access and infrastructures in rural areas, accelerating the modernisation of agriculture, and decreasing differences of education in rural and urban areas. The second one is regional differences, and the document suggests increasing access in the central and western areas of the country, building a national network to connect all regions especially as regards the healthcare system and social security system. From a qualitative methodological perspective, the word 'differences' (*Chaju*) only appears three times in the document (the first one is about

differences between reality and goals, the second one about differences of internet infrastructures between regions and rural and urban areas, and the third one about differences of education levels between rural and urban areas, regions and schools). Regarding poverty, there is one sub-section (42) about using the Internet to decrease poverty which shows some emphasis on the poverty issue to some extent. However, sub-section 42 implies the inequality exists only between different regions (mentioned as poor areas or poor regions). It also encourages Internet and ICT enterprises as main actors to help decrease poverty. In the same document, there is no mention of workers (only one mention of labour-power as a resource: to facilitate the migration of labour resources among regions). There is no single implication of class, either. On the contrary, the word 'enterprise' (*Qiyè*) appears 30 times. This is hardly like a document put forward by a communist party which claims to lead a socialist country addressing the doctrines of Marxism.

However, the politically and economically dominant groups' efforts to form one unified national identity in China have been facing increasing domestic challenges. The neoliberal development and openness of China have brought more substantial inequality, class differences and more diversities and pluralities. The Chinese national identity is becoming more contested than before. The Internet and ICT related industries have generated huge inequalities and exploitation. These industries have become key arenas for struggle in China. A lot of discontent and opinion challenging the government are expressed (and also repressed) in these industry-related arenas. The living and working situations for Chinese labourers are severe, though not shown publicly in official ICT policies such as the 2016 *Outline of National IT Development Strategy*. For example, Liuchuan Jack Qiu (2016) has studied the working and living conditions of Foxconn workers and called them modern iSlaves. Ping Sun (2016) has conducted research studying Chinese programmers' identities and their high-pressure schedules.

There is also an underlying techno-determinism behind this type of nationalist discourse. They imply (or at least why it is believed to be able to win over people's consent) an optimistic claim that technologies will eventually bring economic growth, prosperity and progress. What people need to do is to follow the development of technology, instead of shaping technology in order to achieve a more equal and free society.

7.4. 'A Community of Shared Destiny in the Cyberspace'

While both arguments about core technologies and declaration of cyber sovereignty have constructed a more or less implicit narrative of antagonism between China and other countries, there are more explicit discourses about cooperation in the government discourse. For example, in the same remark at the 2nd WIC, Xi utters the famous phrase, which was then repetitively cited by Chinese media, "a community of shared destiny in cyberspace" (*Wang Luo Kong Jian Ming Yun Gong Tong Ti*). He also calls for constructing a "multilateral, democratic and transparent global Internet governance system" which needs to "follow the concept of mutual support, mutual trust and mutual benefit and reject the old mentality of the zero-sum game or winner takes all" (Xi, 2015, 2nd WIC). Clearly, Xi's government emphasises cooperation between countries and all levels of institutions, organisations and individual actors ("including governments, international organisations, Internet companies, technology communities, non-government institutions and individual citizens") (ibid.). This section will discuss China's 'going out' strategy from three aspects: the global digital economy, soft power (culture), and the global Internet governance (politics).

7.4.1. The global digital economy

There are three main layers of cooperation in the government discourses. First and foremost, cooperation shows China's determination to continue the integration into the global economy. It will continue the open up policy that aims to attract investment and to support Chinese capital and IT and Internet companies to operate businesses in the global market. For example, Xi has made a clear statement in the 2nd WIC that China will continue to welcome investments and companies from all over the world.

[16] The robust growth of China's Internet has provided a big market for enterprises and business starters of all countries. China's door of opening-up will never close. Our policy towards foreign investment will not change. Our protection of legitimate rights and interests of foreign-invested enterprises will not change. And the direction of providing better services to foreign companies in their investment and business activities in China will not change. As long as they abide by China's laws, we warmly welcome enterprises and business starters from all countries to invest and do business

in China. We are ready to step up cooperation with all countries. Through the development of cross-border e-commerce and the building of information economy demonstration zones, we will be able to spur the growth of worldwide investment and trade and promote the global development of the digital economy. ^{xvi} (Xi, 2015 2nd WIC, official translation published by CGTN)

Secondly, the government has dedicated to supporting Chinese capital and companies to ‘go out’, to invest and operate businesses in the global market. The government will provide support for information, law service and help on taxation service. These actions are in line with the Belts and Roads Initiative (BRI, previously called One Belt One Road). The BRI project is emphasised in these government documents. For example, in the 4.19 speech, Xi states that

[17] China’s open gate cannot be closed and will not be closed. We must encourage and support our country’s cybersecurity and informatisation enterprises to ‘go out’, deepen international Internet exchange and collaboration, vigorously participate in the construction of ‘One Belt One Road’, ensure that ‘wherever there is the national interest, there shall be informatisation coverage’. ^{xvii} (Xi, 2016, *4.19 Speech*)

More specifically, the document outlines how the government could support global expansion, the ‘going-out’ strategy. “Give full play to the effects of governments, industrial alliances, industrial associations and relevant intermediaries, and form joint forces to support the Internet plus enterprises to go out. Encourage intermediaries to provide information consultancy, legal assistance, tax intermediary and other such services for enterprises to expand into the overseas market. Support industrial association, industrial alliances and enterprises to jointly promote Chinese technologies and standards and drive the overseas promotion and application of products and services by the going out of technical standards” (State Council, 2015, ‘Internet Plus’ Action Plan).

Compared to the discourse to attract foreign investment, the government’s ‘going out’ discourse shows more elements of nationalism. As shown explicitly in the 4.19 speech excerpt, this ‘going out’ strategy represents national interest – ‘wherever there is the national interest, there shall be informatisation coverage’ (Xi, 2016, *4.19 Speech*).

It is clear that the Chinese Internet and information companies are now integrated into the world economy in a much larger scale, transforming from accepting FDI and importing products to investing capital and operating businesses in other countries. The government's role, thus, is to better support these business operations, providing consulting service, legal advice and tax agency. This expansion of businesses is accompanied by government discourse of Cyberspace governance.

7.4.2. Soft Power

Secondly, along with the exportation of products and services, the government is actively promoting 'soft power' project. It aims to strengthen international communication capacity, i.e. to use the Internet for telling the 'Chinese stories' (Central Office and the General Office of the State Council, 2016, *Outline of the National Informatisation Development Strategy*; 2017, *the Opinions on Promoting the Sound and Orderly Development of the Mobile Internet*). According to a 'dictionary', aiming to teach Xi's keywords, published by People.cn¹³, at the National Publicity and Ideological Work Conference in August 2013, Xi Jinping indicated that we must do a better job of "telling China's stories, and conveying China's voice" ¹⁴.

For example, regarding international communication, Xi claims that the Internet is important to promote mutual understandings between different people and culture and propose to "build an online platform for cultural exchange and mutual learning" in the 2nd World Internet Conference. He claims that:

[18] The Internet is an important carrier to spread mankind's fine cultures and promote positive energy. China is willing to build, through the Internet, a bridge of international cultural interaction for the fine cultures of the world to learn from each other and for people of all countries to share their feelings and enhance mutual understanding. We will work with all other countries to leverage the strength of the Internet as a communication platform so that people of other countries will come to know more about China's fine culture and the Chinese people will learn more of theirs. Together,

¹³ Available at <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/40557/413700/>, accessed on 20 June 2020

¹⁴ Available at http://keywords.china.org.cn/2018-11/30/content_74227030.htm, accessed on 20 June 2020

we will promote the prosperity and development of cyberculture, which will enrich people's mind and thinking and advance human civilisation and progress. xviii (Xi, 2015, 2nd World Internet Conference, official translation on CGTN)

In order to ‘tell Chinese stories’, the government emphasises several aspects of actions, including enhancing content production and distribution capacity, supporting the development of several important news websites and media groups, and strengthening disciplines and management of online communication. China has done so through different media, including Television, documentary, and feature film (Thussu, 2019: 193). In particular, the state is funding ‘central media’ – Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television, China Radio International, People’s Daily and the English -language China Daily, for their global expansion (Shambaugh, 2013). However, as Thussu points out, “none of the Chinese international media has so far broken a major global story” (Thussu, 2019: 194). These Chinese international media are oftentimes seen as vehicles for propaganda and/or under state censorship, thus lack credibility to gain global influence.

7.4.3. The global Internet Governance

Finally, The government is actively promoting the idea to participate in global cyberspace governance. There are several main aspects of participating in global Internet governance. The first one is to participate in establishing the rule. For example, the 13th Five-Year Plan for National Informatisation claims to deeply participate in the establishment of Internet governance rules and technology standards, to actively participate in those organisations that are responsible for Internet Name and Numbers allocation, and those International Internet technology and management activities. Another example is from the ‘Internet Plus’ Action Plan. It specifically claims to “incessantly perfect ‘Internet Plus’ convergence standards systems, simultaneously move forward with international and domestic standardisation work, have a greater say in international organisations such as the ISO, IEC, ITU, etc.

Secondly, global Internet governance is necessary for cybersecurity. For example, the 13th Five-Year Plan for National Informatisation states that it is necessary to establish an international cooperation mechanism to fight cyber-crime, to work together to prevent and fight against commercial espionage, hacker attack, and terrorist crime. The final goal is thus to “foster peaceful, secure, open and cooperative cyberspace and put in place a multilateral,

democratic and transparent global Internet governance system” (Xi, 2015, speech at the 2nd WIC; see also in Cybersecurity Law).

To sum up, the government’s digital discourse on global cooperation includes three main aspects, including to participate in the global digital economy (by attracting investments and ‘going out’), to actively construct ‘soft power’ through ‘telling China’s stories’, and to participate in the global Internet governance under the name of cybersecurity. This type of discourse of ‘A Community of Shared Destiny’ reflects China’s greater integration into the process of globalisation and China’s efforts to make a greater impact in the world’s economy, politics and culture.

7.5. Conclusion

So far, I have illustrated several key aspects of the Chinese government’s Internet- and ICT-related discourses. The first section (7.1) focused on the ultimate goal stated by the government, i.e. to build a Cyber Superpower (*Wang Luo Qiang Guo*), and the main value it claims, i.e. to serve the people. These claims are formed on the basis a description of the current situation that emphasises the international technological competition ‘wave’.

The following sections covered the goals (short-term), description of circumstances, means-goal premises (proposed actions) from three main aspects of the government discourse. Section 7.2 illustrates the government’s digital discourse on the Information Economy. Under this theme, the government use *topos of usefulness* has emphasised the importance of upgrading the national economy, developing digital economy and Big Data, encouraging mass entrepreneurship and innovation (SC). Through an analysis of *local coherence*, there is also an implicit equivalence between China and Chinese enterprises.

Section 7.3 discusses the government’s digital discourse on Cybersecurity. Several discursive strategies and linguistic features can be identified in the government’s digital discourse, illustrating the nationalist ideologies embedded. For example, Xi uses *topos of threats*, in his most important speech regarding cybersecurity and informatisation (the *4.19 speech*), to emphasise the danger of being restricted by or dependent on other countries in ‘core technologies’. This strategy is also used by the government to argue for the importance to

guarantee cybersecurity and national security. This construction of ‘us vs them’ is normally combined with a further argument of ‘a unitary nation’ narrative that, according to Zhao, gives sanction to the government to build a strong party-state at the cost of its people’s freedom (Zhao, 2004). *Cohesion* is the key linguistic strategy in this connection between the ‘us vs them’ and ‘a unitary nation’ narratives. For example, in Xi’s 4.19 speech, following the necessity for China to develop ‘core technologies’, Xi emphasised the threat to Chinese Internet companies which rely on foreign countries for ‘core technologies’. There is an implicit equivalence of China and Chinese enterprises. In this process, *pronouns* or *strategy of collectivisation* in Wodak’s term (some countries, other countries, our countries, etc.) and metaphor (‘concentric circles’, the entire society has ‘one heart and one mind’) are employed to emphasise the nation as a whole further. They emphasise the unity of the people, country and society, at the expense of recognition of divisions of interest. The government has repetitively used the same strategies in the digital discourse on core technologies, cyber sovereignty, and ‘a clean environment of cyberspace’.

Finally, the governments’ discourse on globalization is quite explicit (7.4). The logic of capital in the nation’s expansion of power has become more apparent. For example, the *Outline of National IT Development Strategy (2016)* (*Guojia Xinxihua Fazhan Zhanlue Gangyao*) emphasises the importance of international cooperation and mutual benefits as one of its main principles. It claims that informatisation should serve national interests and improve international cooperation relating to the Internet. It also emphasises to utilise BRI, “the community of shared future in cyberspace”, “domestic and international market”, etc. to improve international influence. This emphasis on national interests confirms the pragmatic approach of the current leaders’ nationalism. In contrast, in the same section of six principles in the document, it only briefly mentioned international competition under the theme of innovation and no mention of international relations, even under the theme of security.

My analysis raised some critical questions about the Chinese government’s digital discourse. Table 7.2 illustrates the main arguments and their corresponding Premises in practical argumentation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Build a Cyber Superpower’ • Realise ‘China’s great rejuvenation’ 	Ultimate Goal
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Serve the people’ 	Key Value
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Join the Wave’ 	Circumstances
Information Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build the ‘New Normal’ of the Chinese Economy • Build a vigorous Digital Economy • Encourage Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation • The Chinese enterprises represent China in the global competition • Deepening the reform 	Actions (what to do) & Circumstances
Cybersecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Core Technologies • Ensure Cyber Sovereignty • Construct a ‘Clean Environment in the Cyberspace’ 	Actions (what to do) & Circumstances
Global Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in the Global Digital Economy • Construct a Strong National ‘Soft Power’ • Participate in the Construction of ‘A Community of Shared Destiny in the Cyberspace’ 	Actions (what to do) & Circumstances

Table 7.1. The Government’s Digital Discourse and the Corresponding Premises in Practical Arguments.

Applying the analytical framework, regarding the Internet economy and politics, developed in Chapter 4 and 5, Table 7.3 and 7.4 illustrate the government’s digital discourse on the New Economy and New Politics. As shown in this chapter, though there are some similar proposed actions or developments along with the Internet and digital technologies, the logic behind is different, so are the discourses. The digital discourse from the government developed out of the Chinese context and reacting to China’s political-economic situation.

In this area	the government claims to:
The market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open market and deepen reform to better serve the economy

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support key Enterprises for National Interests • Make full use of the Innovation-driving role of the Internet to promote Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation for a vigorous economy
Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade the agricultural and manufacturing industry and develop the service industry to acquire new economic growth (the ‘New Normal’) • Open Data as a national strategy
Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding domestic consumption with the help of the Internet for economic development

Table 7.2. Chinese government’s Digital Discourse on the New Economy.

International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop core technologies to win the international competition • Increase international cooperation to build “A Community of Shared Destiny in the Cyberspace” • Tightening Internet control to acquire Cyber Sovereignty and to ensure national security • Construct a strong national ‘soft power’
State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepen reform for economic growth • Supporting key Chinese enterprises (oligopolies) because they represent China
Societal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tighten Internet content control to build ‘a clean environment in the cyberspace’
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce poverty with the help of the Internet • Make the Internet accessible to all

Table 7.3. Chinese government’s Digital Discourse on the New Policies.

CHAPTER 8. BAT'S DIGITAL DISCOURSE

This chapter will start by introducing the political economy of BAT, focusing on BAT's data collection and their dominant positions in the market (8.1). It will then investigate BAT's discursive strategies under three themes with focuses on BAT's dominant position in the domestic market (8.2), BAT's expansion into new industries (8.3) and BAT's global expansion (8.4). Each of these three sections will discuss BAT's discursive strategies to represent the reality, their self-definitions and their relations with different stakeholders. From a CDA perspective, these discourses are not simply neutral reflecting or describing of the world, but is instead constructive and performative. BAT's description of the world and themselves legitimate their domination of the market, their attempts to build multi-industry conglomerates, and their collection of personal data. Their discursive constructions of relations with other stakeholders reveal how BAT maintain an exploitative relationship within the companies, keep violating user privacy, keep a pragmatic relationship with the government, and expand businesses into the global market. Finally, this chapter (8.5) will provide a summary with the help of the analytical framework illustrated in Chapter 4 and 5. It will show how these discourses of BAT's features fit into the main categories of digital discourses on the New Economy and the New Politics. Studying BAT's discursive strategies reveal some important features of China's digital discourses.

8.1. The Political Economy of BAT

This section will briefly introduce two key aspects of the political economy of BAT: their data collection and expansion of businesses.

8.1.1. BAT's data collection

Data is probably one of the most important resources for BAT. As Jack Ma once speaks out boldly that "Alibaba is not a GMV company. Instead, it is a data company... We sell products is because we want to acquire data" (Jack Ma, 2016 Investor's Day). The importance of this exchange value can be demonstrated by how much revenue platforms make from selling advertising. QQ and WeChat are not operated as independent companies and thus do not have revenue reports separate from Tencent. However, we can examine another major Chinese social media platform, Weibo. The importance of revenue in relation

to advertising is clearly shown by Weibo’s financial report (see Table 8.1). The figure shows that a large proportion of revenue (77-87%) comes from online advertising services Weibo provides. Notice that Ali WB Investment Holding Limited (Alibaba) is the second-largest shareholder of Sina Weibo, which holds 30.4% of ordinary shares with 15.9% voting power (Weibo Corp, Financial Report, 2017). Weibo’s financial report emphasises that “Alibaba is our largest customer and an important strategic partner. If we fail to maintain our collaboration with Alibaba, our results of operations and growth prospects may be adversely and materially affected” (ibid. p10). Advertising revenue is also important for Baidu (see Table 8.2). As the largest online search engine in China, more than 85% of revenue comes from online marketing.

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Revenue from advertising	\$996,745	\$570,982	\$402,415	\$264,782	\$148,426	\$51,049
Total revenue	\$1,150,054	\$655,800	\$477,891	\$334,172	\$188,313	\$65,929
Percentage of revenue from advertising	86.67%	87.07%	84.21%	79.24%	78.82%	77.43%

Table 8.1. Weibo revenue, source: annual report 2017-2014, data source: Weibo Form 20-F (revenue in \$000).

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Revenues from Online marketing	\$73,146	\$64,525	\$64,037	\$48,495	\$31,802	\$22,246
Total Revenues	\$84,809	\$70,549	\$66,3812	\$49,052	\$31,944	\$22,306
Percentage	86.25%	91.46%	96.47%	98.86%	99.56%	99.73%
Net Income (profits)	\$18,288	\$11,596	\$32,432	\$12,253	\$10,389	\$10.391

Table 8.2. Baidu Revenues. Source: Annual Report 2017-2014, Form 20-F (in millions, RMB)

The importance of this exchange value could also be shown from an investigation of the marketing industry from a different angle. The exchange of audience/user online behaviour and online data into advertising income used to be called “monetisation of traffic” (*Liuliang Bianxian* in Chinese). This kind of language is prevalent in the digital media and advertising industries. Now ‘Big Data’ and ‘AI’ have become buzz words in the marketing area. Not surprisingly, Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent (BAT) have their marketing services for advertising

customers, based on their control of a large amount of user data and algorithms to harvest them.

Baidu has two main services devoted to advertising and data: Baidu Union (BU) and Baidu Advertising (*Baidu Tuiguang*). Baidu Union consists of several third-party websites and software applications: it mainly provides platforms to display online advertising arranged by Baidu and obtain profits from this. Baidu *Tuiguang* is Baidu's primary advertising service which offers marketing services to advertisers to show advertising on Baidu search results pages and partners of Baidu Union. Both Baidu Union and Baidu *Tuiguang* emphasise that Baidu can conduct precise and accurate analyses of users' needs and interests, facilitating a directed or targeted advertising service. This is claimed to be achieved with the help of large databases and AI technologies.

Similarly, Tencent also has two services: Tencent Social Ads for partners (third-party websites and apps) and for advertisers. The capability to target specific groups of users is emphasised. It also stresses the large number of users of Tencent social media networks, including QQ and WeChat.

Alibaba's marketing platform Alimama (a marketing service providing platform owned by Alibaba), claims that it is a "data-powered marketing technology platform". It also claims that a "data marketing era" has come, and Alimama will realise its marketing services by using big data and AI technologies. It emphasises the Ali Group's capacity to "provide a complete picture" of individual consumers, "from consumer consumption patterns and preferences to insights on their geographical location and social media activities" (Alimama, PR video¹⁵). It thus enables more effective business harvesting of consumer behaviour. As shown in one of its PR videos, Alimama is watching every consumer closely (Figure 8.1). This first figure shows an image of an eye, in the core of which is a representation of information Ali has gathered from consumers via its own or cooperate platforms (see the last image in Figure 8.1).

¹⁵Alimama, PR video, <https://v.qq.com/x/page/d053602jqcw.html>

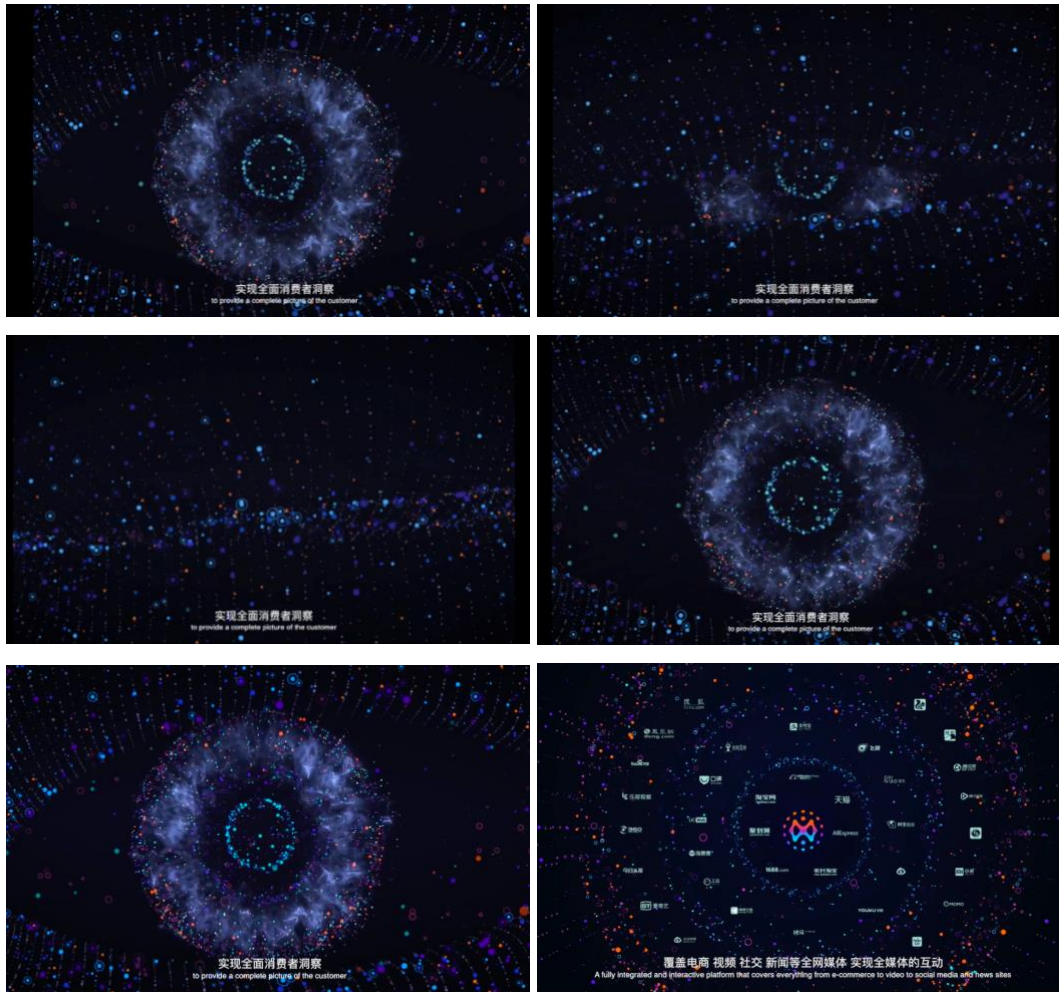


Figure 8.15. Screenshots from Alimama's PR video.

Though with slight differences, the core mechanisms behind BAT's concept of AI and big data marketing are similar: selling people's personal data that BAT collect from their platforms and their partners to advertisers. These companies thus make huge profits from this mechanism. As early as 1977, Smythe pointed out the neglect of perceiving users as commodities as a blind spot in communication studies (Dallas W. Smythe, 1994). Fuchs conducts a comprehensive study, applying Marx's theory of value and exploitation, to demonstrate that users do generate both value and use value for their platforms (Fuchs, 2014a). Exploitation happens when value is generated by workers but expropriated by capitalists. The commercial use of users' personal information is a type of exploitation (Andrejevic, 2013; Fuchs, 2014a).

Finally, user labour is not the only problem of the use of new technologies as privacy violations caused by big data and algorithms in marketing is another issue. Data can be

misused by big companies in another way. A recent debate about big data in China is about a new type of ‘price discrimination’ based on big data (*Dashuju Shashu*). Users of some platforms found that different prices were shown based on some of their characteristics: such as devices used (e.g. the IOS system or Android system),¹⁶ or new users or frequent users.¹⁷ Prices shown to frequent users are higher than new users which can be even higher than the normal standard prices. Once cookies are cleared or once changed to another device, the prices then decrease to the normal level. It is clear that the more data ‘understands’ users, the better companies can set ‘more proper’ (i.e. higher) prices for frequent users.

8.1.2. BAT’s expansion

BAT are oligopolies, cross-industry conglomerates and multi-national corporations. There is no doubt about the dominant position of BAT in the market in China. According to CNNIC (41st), for the financial year ended December 2017, Tencent, Alibaba and Baidu have the market value of RMB 3.1 trillion, 2.9 trillion and 0.5 trillion, respectively. Together BAT account for 73.9% of the total market value of China’s listed Internet companies (CNNIC, The 41st China Statistical Report on Internet Development, p71, my translation). Baidu.com ranks the first place in Alexa’s top site rankings in China.¹⁸ According to the CNNIC statistics, the three most frequently used social media platforms are WeChat Moments, QQ zone and Weibo (used by 87.3%, 64.4%, 40.9% of netizens, respectively) in 2017 (CNNIC, 41st report, 2017). Tencent owns WeChat and QQ and Alibaba holds 30.4% of Weibo ordinary shares with 15.9 voting power (Weibo Corp, Financial report, 2017). Alibaba also owns the largest online shopping website Taobao.com in China which ranks third in the Alexa top sites ranking.

Not satisfied with their current dominant positions, all company groups are seeking to expand into new industries and areas. For example, Baidu is extending from the online search area to online entertainment area. According to its financial report, Baidu’s business consists of two segments: Baidu Core and iQIYI. Baidu Core is “primarily comprised of keyword-based

¹⁶Alimama, PR video, official website:

<https://www.alimama.com/index.htm?spm=a2320.9441193.ca214tr8.d9bda87b1.4b8c2030N8f340>

¹⁷Alimama, PR video, official website:

<https://www.alimama.com/index.htm?spm=a2320.9441193.ca214tr8.d9bda87b1.4b8c2030N8f340>

¹⁸ Alexa, Top Sites in China, accessed 15 June 2018

marketing services, which target and are triggered by internet users’ search queries” and IQIYI is “an innovative market-leading online entertainment service provider in China” (Baidu, Annual Report, Form 20-F, 2017). According to the report, Baidu Core consists of 19 main products and services provided to users through Baidu App and Baidu.com on PCs, mobile and smart devices (including search, news feed, videos, encyclopaedia, education, e-wallet, etc.). IQIYI mainly provides online entertainment content. Figure 8.2 shows the complex organisational structure of Baidu, including its principal subsidiaries and consolidated affiliated entities (Baidu, Annual Report, Form 20-F).

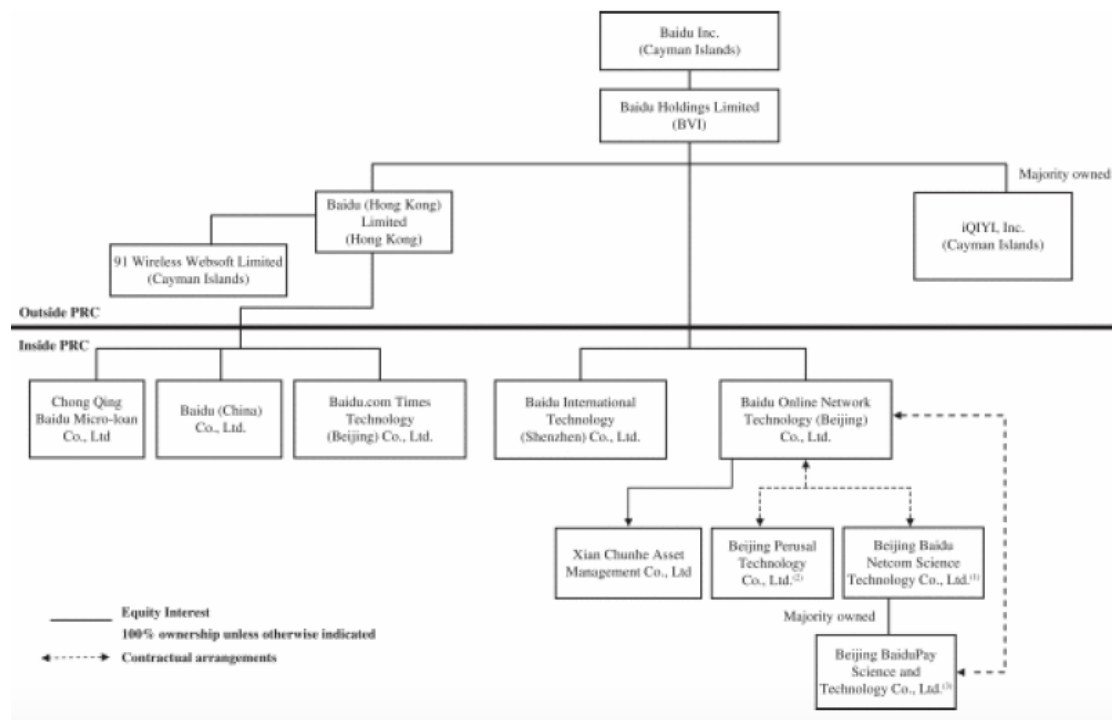


Figure 8.16. Organisational Structure of Baidu, data source: Annual Report, Form 20-F, 2017.

Similarly, Alibaba started its business with e-commerce and then expanded its business into other areas. According to their Financial Report 2017, their businesses consist of (a) ‘core commerce’, including retail commerce in China and the global market and wholesale commerce in China and the global market; (b) ‘cloud computing’; (c) ‘Digital Media and Entertainment’; (d) ‘Innovation Initiatives and Others’, including operating systems, digital maps, etc. Moreover, through investee affiliates, Alibaba also participates in the logistics (the Cainiao Network) and local service sectors (Koubei), as well as online financial services (Ant Financial Services) through Alipay (an online payment platform). It claims its ‘ecosystem’

“has developed around our platforms and businesses that consist of consumers, merchants, brands, other businesses, third-party service providers and strategic alliance partners” (ibid., p60). Figure 8.3 shows Ali's main business bands and affiliates. The cover of Ali's 2018 March Quarter Financial Report (Figure 8.4) gives a straightforward illustration of Ali's Ecosystem: it aims to cover all aspects of people's lives, from shopping to entertainment, in both the domestic and global market.



Figure 8.17. The Ali 'Ecosystem' (including Alibaba's key businesses and selected major investee companies and cooperative partners), data sources: Annual Report Form 20-F, 2017; Fiscal 2018 Segment Reporting



Figure 8.18. The Alibaba Ecosystem and life. Image Source: 2018 March Quarter Financial Report.

While acknowledging that Internet oligopolies exist, there are differences between such new oligopolistic tendencies and traditional ones. Different from oligopolies in traditional industries, businesses in the media and communication industries are more flexible in expanding control and exerting power (Mosco, 2009, p169). Technology or Internet companies expand their power through obtaining more data. A new type of oligopoly is emerging from the obsession with data: ‘data oligopoly’. Big companies are constantly competing to ‘cooperate’ with more partners to connect through the Application Programming Interface (API) and ‘share’ data with each other. This is different from traditional an oligopoly which is pursued through acquisition and mergers. For technology and Internet companies, such as BAT, it is not necessary to control or obtain other companies (though they do so sometimes), and that is why they use the metaphor of an ‘ecosystem’. They claim that small businesses and enterprises can ‘grow’ and develop by themselves. They claim that the BATs will not intervene in their business because what they want is data. It aims to get a ‘complete picture’ of each customer or users, as shown in Figure 8.4.

Data is also crucial for Tencent. One advantage of Tencent is its control of two of the largest social media platforms in China: QQ and WeChat. Both platforms are convenient tools to apply API to direct users to other websites, Apps, as well as advertising. For example, the launch of Mini Programs in January 2017 “connect users across a wide spectrum of online and offline services including retail, eCommerce, lifestyle services, municipal services and games” (Financial Report, 2017, p5). Tencent tries to build its own ‘ecosystem’ (see 8.2).

Tencent has hosted the Tencent Global Partner Conference since 2011 when Pony Ma officially launched his idea of “building a new open and shared Internet ecosystem without boundaries” (Pony Ma, 2011 TGPC). Since then, Tencent has held this conference for its partners every year. Pony Ma once stated Tencent’s position clearly: “We hope we can work together with co-partners in the future. Tencent has its clear position: we only make connections. We hope to co-construct the ecosystem of big data together with everyone” (Pony Ma, 2016 Big Data Expo). In its 2017 Annual Report, the first “Company Outlook and Strategies for 2018” is “strengthening our social platforms to encourage user *sharing*, enhancing *connections* with users’ daily lives and facilitating interactions with ecosystem partners” (Tencent Annual Report Form 20-F, 2017, italics added).

There is a reason behind this enthusiasm in building the ‘ecosystem’: to increase profit. Tencent has two major sources of revenue: ‘value added services’ (VAS) and advertising. For the year ended 31 December 2017, 65% of Tencent total revenue came from VAS, 17% from online advertising and 18% from other sources. VAS mainly refers to games and online content subscriptions. The ‘other’ sources of revenue are mainly related to Cloud services (ibid.). The online advertising revenue is our interest here. According to Tencent, “social and other advertising revenues increased by 65%” in 2017, and this increase was primarily driven by growth in Weixin (WeChat), other mobile apps and advertising networks (ibid. p13). In the Chairman’s Statement in the financial report, Pony Ma explains in more detail about this increase in ‘social and other advertising’: “Our advertising revenue year-on-year increase was primarily driven by higher advertising demand due to the enhanced targeting capability of our platforms and an expanded advertiser base leveraging our partner platforms... Advertising impressions also increased in Weixin Moments and Official Accounts, and on our mobile advertising network. We are now testing CPC-based advertising links in Official Accounts which connect users to advertisers’ Mini Programs” (ibid., p10). This clearly states that Tencent is trying to enhance its targeting capability with the help of gathering more data, from its own platforms and its partners.

8.2. A Boundaryless Internet or A Centralised Market?

Through a critical political-economic view, BAT are oligopolies dominating the Chinese Internet industry. In response to the accusation of suppressing innovations and competition,

BAT use several discursive strategies to mitigate the negative sides of their *de facto* dominant market position in China. They claim the necessity to build online ‘ecosystems’ *because of* the Internet’s feature of boundarylessness. BAT define themselves as ‘connectors’, ‘community’, ‘infrastructure’, ‘utility’ and ‘ecosystems’ that enable the functions of the whole Internet system. On the basis of this argument, BAT claims that they are building, or part of, a de-centralised Internet ecosystem that helps and facilitates small businesses. Instead of anti-competition, according to BAT, they are encouraging innovations and supporting new businesses. However, this language appropriates the Internet’s de-centralised and boundaryless features to describe BAT’s own organisational structures. This type of digital discourse not only disguise their past and continuous purchase of small businesses and suppression of competition, but also deliberately confuse the Internet as a *public* space for communication with BAT as *private* entities for making profits.

8.2.1. The Internet is boundaryless

BAT choose words carefully to describe and legitimate the expansion of their businesses, and to avoid straightforward terms – ‘oligopolies’ or/and ‘monopolies’. *Rewording* of vocabulary is a frequently used linguistic strategy in this case. It is a strategy to represent the world according to specific perspectives (Fairclough, 2015b: 131). Language ‘constructs’ the reality it seeks to make sense of and thus builds a particular representation of that reality.

More specifically, BAT are using different but similar words to describe the expansions of their business operations. Pony Ma claims that Tencent’s dream after transformation in 2011 is “to build a boundaryless, open and sharing Internet new ecosystem (Pony Ma, 2011 TGPC). He continuously called Tencent as ‘connector’ of the Internet (Pony Ma, 2012 TGPC). Alibaba, whose core business is e-commerce, share this rhetoric of sharing and openness. For example, Jack Ma uses terms such as ‘community’ to emphasise that Alibaba is a platform for sharing and participation. When compared Alibaba to Tencent (Alibaba has been investing in Sina Weibo since 2013 to compete with Tencent WeChat and other social media platforms), Jack ma claims that Alibaba is trying “to build a widely participatory community” and the Internet will become a society (Jack Ma, 2016, TFHC, p186). As a company that started its business from search engine, Baidu is promoting itself as an open platform. Robin Li presents Baidu as a ‘medium’ between users and content providers (Robin Li, 2010 BWC). Baidu is also an ‘open platform’ and the ‘best entry’ to connect people and

service (Robin Li, 2015 BWC). Furthermore, since 2014, Baidu started to promote the concept of ‘connecting people and service’. According to its own explanation, ‘connecting people and service’ means to serve as a platform to facilitate the gig economy and the so-called ‘sharing economy’ (Robin Li, 2015 BU). This ‘connectivity’ to service has paved the way for Baidu to extend its businesses to the AI industry. Since 2014, Robin Li started to mention AI and Big Data in his speeches to Baidu Union. In 2017, Baidu officially announced to change its mission from “connecting information” to “awakening all thing” (Robin Li, 2017 BU) (for more discussions on BAT’s expansion with AI, see 8.3).

What is most interesting is the use of ‘infrastructure’ and ‘utility’ to describe the Internet and BAT. For example, according to Jack Ma, Alibaba needs to be boundaryless because it wants to become the infrastructure for e-commerce (Jack Ma, 2014 WIC). Later on, Jack Ma further claims that big companies should take the “social responsibility” to build infrastructures to facilitate entrepreneurship and to provide resources (Jack Ma, 2016, TFHC, p32). In response to the question of dominating the market, Jack Ma states that:

[1] People always ask me that is there any boundary for Internet companies? Alibaba seems to be ubiquitous, Tencent seems to be ubiquitous, and so does Facebook. Do you Internet companies have boundaries? My answer is that the Internet has no boundaries, just like electricity has no boundaries. 100 years ago, you wouldn’t say that this industry could use electricity and that one couldn’t, because electricity has no boundaries. ^{xix}

Jack Ma is not the only one among CEOs who claim to build the ‘new infrastructure’ in the digital age. Pony Ma also claims that Tencent wants to be the “bottom layer” where traditional sectors can build their own applications on it. For example, Pony Ma claims to build “a boundaryless ecosystem-like organisation” on which “Tencent Functions as a ‘connector’ to build a new type of *infrastructure* in the new era” (Pony Ma, 2015, TGPC). The latest argument about *infrastructure* comes from Robin Li’s discourse on Baidu’s development of AI. In this new area of AI, Baidu claims to have been strategically making efforts to build AI *infrastructures* – “Baidu Brain and PaddlePaddle Deep Learning Framework are all Baidu’s strategic blueprint on the layer of infrastructure (Robin Li, 2019, WIC).

One can easily identify the *fallacy of ignoration elenchi*, or ‘irrelevant conclusion’ in these statements. The fallacy of ‘irrelevant conclusion’, according to Reisigl and Wodak, refers to the ignorance of “the counter-proof or counter-argument”, consisting of “discussing or proving a thesis or standpoint that is not the thesis or standpoint in question, but a totally different and irrelevant one that is ascribed to the antagonist and does not matter in the actual ‘discourse’ (in the sense of ‘discussion’)” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001: 73). In Jack Ma’s argument, for example, it is obvious that he disguisedly changed the topic of Internet companies to the Internet. In this way, he managed to confuse the open Internet as a public common with the private for-profit Internet companies. For Pony Ma and Robin Li, they also claim to build online infrastructure on which other application and industries can be developed. However, none of the CEOs points out the essential question of who should own this infrastructure, or whether such an important ‘utility’ should be owned by for-profit private companies. In other words, they all omit the point of power relations and public ownership with the new technological development.

8.2.2. BAT and their partners

The discursive construction of BAT as ‘infrastructure’ is always connected with their language of ‘helping small businesses’. These small businesses are BAT’s partners, including those who provide products and services (developers) to Internet users through BAT and advertisers. Every year, the most important events for BAT are those about their partners, such as the Tencent Global Partner Conference (TGPC), Baidu Union (BU), Alibaba’s Wshang and Apsara Conference (AC). These events clearly show how much attention BAT pay to their partners.

Jack Ma emphasises in several occasions that since the beginning of Alibaba, its dream or aim is to ‘help small businesses’ and start-ups (Jack Ma, 2013, TFHC, p55, p175) and to make doing businesses easier for middle and small enterprises (Jack Ma, 2015, TFHC, p194). This is, of course, because Alibaba starts its business with a focus on e-commerce. Jack Ma explains the logic in this way – in order to help small businesses, Alibaba has to build an ecosystem and they are ‘forced’ to become an infrastructure provider of e-commerce (Jack Ma, 2014, WIC). In other occasions, Alibaba is a ‘platform’ (Jack Ma, 2014, TFHC, p124) that ‘enables’ other businesses and helps these businesses to fulfil their dreams (Jack Ma, 2015, TFHC, p156). In 2015 Davos, Jack Ma emphasises that Alibaba’s mission is “to make

running businesses easier for small and medium-sized companies” (Jack Ma, 2015, TFHC, p194). Another strong statement comes from Jack Ma’s speech to all employees in 2015. He claims that:

- [2] Many say that Alibaba is always investing in other companies and buying stocks. It seems like we are everywhere. In fact, this is true... Only when we are everywhere, our clients can benefit, our small and medium-sized company clients can develop. Therefore, we must be omnipresent (Jack Ma, 2015, TFHC, p67). xx

This extract from Jack Ma reveals the logic behind this type of discourse. To claim that Alibaba is helping small businesses, it can easily legitimate its expansion of businesses and its *de facto* domination of the market.

Similarly, Tencent claims that it has created opportunities for businesses. According to Pony Ma, Tencent “chooses to prioritise its partners’ success and then its own success” (Pony Ma, 2011 TGPC). It wants to become the ‘connector’ between partners and users. Tencent puts partners’ interests prior to its own interests (Pony Ma, 2012 TGPC). Tencent is able to help to build small businesses and to make sure these businesses maintain loyal user groups, according to Pony Ma, because Tencent’s ‘social gene’ encourages openness and sharing among friends (Pony Ma, 2016 TGPC). The keywords for Tencent is to ‘enable people’, a phrase first used by Pony Ma in 2015 TGPC. After the launch of Mini-programme, Tencent claims itself to also ‘enable’ brands and retailers (Pony Ma, 2017 TGPC). According to Pony Ma, Tencent will be able to provide more sustainable business environments where businesses could gain and maintain loyalty among consumers and users. This is clearly a step for Tencent to become conglomerates, not only specialising in online games and social network, but also step in retailing. Furthermore, in 2017, Pony Ma states that Internet companies will ‘enable all traditional industries’ (Pony Ma, 2017 WIC). It will help manufacturing companies to better converge into the digital world.

Baidu, as a company started from search engine, claims itself to be an open platform from an early stage. Every year in Baidu Union Conference, Robin Li ‘shares some thought about the industry in Union’ as an entrepreneur himself (Robin Li, 2011 BU). The main purpose of this conference is to promote Baidu Union and attract new companies to join the Union. As an ‘open platform’, Baidu claims to have supported application and programme developers

and content providers. In this way, developers and content providers could approach a large number of users (Robin Li, 2010 BU). In a different occasion in the same year (2010 was the year when Google terminated its service in mainland China), Robin Li emphasises that Baidu is providing the “most open information on China’s Internet”. Baidu is playing the role of “a medium” between users, developers, and advertisers, as well as between businesses and individuals (Robin Li, 2010 BWC). Since 2012, Baidu launched Baidu Cloud, claiming to provide developers open access to Baidu’s capacity of ‘Cloud’ storage, calculation, AI and Big Data (Robin Li, 2012 BWC). This open-access will further help developers to provide applications to users. It also paves the way for Baidu to develop AI and Big Data thus provides services to other industries. Since Baidu started to expand its business into traditional industries, such as manufacturing and service industries, similar to Alibaba and Tencent, it also states its aim to help businesses. This transformation has broadened its partners from developers, advertisers or content providers to all types of different businesses.

8.2.3. Participating online and sharing data

Users participation and data sharing are crucial for Internet companies. Many scholars have discussed how Internet companies use positive languages, such as ‘connection’, ‘sharing’, and ‘participation’, to encourage users to upload more personal data and networks online (e.g. Van Dijck, 2013), and to confuse the use value and exchange value of data (e.g. Fuchs, 2014). This section aims to show how BAT apply these discursive strategies. Moreover, as China lacks efficient methods for civic participation, including consumers’ rights groups, or effective legal system for political participation to file a lawsuit against large companies (there are few attempts though), big companies are less responsive to public criticisms. Regarding user privacy specifically, for example, BAT are less likely to be held accountable when violating users’ rights. CEO’s statements about data also demonstrate the neglect of users’ voices and thus the power relations between BAT and users.

To represent the positive side of data collection and the for-profit Internet platforms in general, linguistic and semantic choices are crucial. *Rewording* of vocabulary is a frequently used linguistic strategy in this case. It is a strategy to represent the world according to specific perspectives (Fairclough, 2015, p131). Language ‘constructs’ the reality it seeks to make sense of and thus builds a particular representation of that reality. Under the particular theme of data, ‘sharing’ is a most frequently used word when CEOs refer to the Internet.

Huateng Pony Ma, CEO of Tencent that owns the largest Chinese social media platforms QQ and Wechat, frequently expresses this kind of discourse:

[3] From 2010 to 2011, I spent an entire year to think about how to make Tencent an open platform that could facilitate more partners to create their own businesses *freely* and more users to share *freely*.^{xxi} (Pony Ma, 2014, TGPC, italics added)

[4] ...the Tencent Open Platform insists on facilitating a ‘de-centralised’ *open* and *sharing* network. This is related to the embedded *gene* of social networking in Tencent. Our open platform was based on QQ and later WeChat at the beginning, deriving from the structure of social networks. Social networks are *naturally* net-like and encourage friends to *share openly*.^{xxii} (Pony Ma, 2016, TGPC, italics added)

These are typical arguments from for-profit social media platforms, such as Facebook: they encourage users to participate in social connections and to share openly on their platforms. Similarly, in the 2014 WIC, Ma evokes two principles for Tencent: connection and openness. These two principles have one and the same goal: to ‘connect’ is to gather a significant amount of data that therefore needs to be openly available. The preferred discourse accentuates the positive side of uploading personal information online and elides the extremely complex processes of the tracking of user online behaviour, analysing personal data and the selling of this information to advertising and other companies to make profits.

Another way to represent the data collection positively is through the *topos of usefulness*. Yanhong Robin Li, CEO of Baidu, encourages companies to collect data and develop new tools to collect data for the good of people:

[5] The new generation of data collection – whether it is about tools of collection or data itself – will develop significantly. The difficult point, however, is not to manufacture a new type of hardware, but to find what data is valuable to people.^{xxiii} (Robin Li, 2014 BU, my translation)

According to Reisigl and Wodak, the *topos of usefulness* is when one wants to argue that if a certain action is seen as useful, then it should be conducted. There are also subtypes of *topos*

that this extract articulates: the topos of ‘pro bono publico’ (to the advantage of all), the topos of ‘pro bono nobis’ (to the advantage of ‘us’)(Reisigl and Wodak, 2001: 75).

Both *rewording* and the *topos of usefulness* represent data collection partially and positively. These representations are ideological because they hide the full features of reality. They hide the exchange value commercial platforms gain through selling users’ data. Adapted from Marx’s theory of commodity, Fuchs (2014) distinguishes two types of value of data: the use value and the exchange value. While the use value refers to the usefulness of data in people’s social activities for sharing, connecting and participating, the exchange value mainly means the value social media companies obtain in the exchange process when selling data to advertising companies. The topos of usefulness emphasises the first kind of use value of data, but intentionally neglects the second kind of exchange value. As Van Dijck has pointed out, Internet companies have discursively rhetorically stressed the importance of “human connectedness”, transparency and openness to actually promote the “automated connectivity” that “engineer and manipulate connections”. It is a “conflation that is cultivated by many CEOs” and a “deliberate ambiguity” (Van Dijck, 2013, p12). This second type of discourse is a typical ideological expression in the sense that it partially represents reality.

More recently, BAT have brought data collection onto a different level. For Alibaba and Tencent, data is now used to build ‘credit system’ and to provide financial service. For BAT, data is also used to develop AI and to train machines. For example, Pony Ma claims that a ‘real open platform’ has its own network chains and network of payment (Pony Ma, 2011 TGPC). Jack Ma claims to Alibaba’s investors that Alibaba is a “data company”. The reason why Alibaba sells products is “because it wants to acquire data” (Jack Ma, 2016 Investor’s Day). Jack Ma not only claims that Alibaba is a data-driven company (Jack Ma, 2017 AC) and a manufacturing company of data (Jack Ma, 2017 WIC, Entrepreneur Session). More importantly, he explicitly explains that a new credit system based on varieties of data is necessary for the New Finance in the future (Jack Ma, 2017 BDE). Therefore, with a large amount of data, BAT is expanding their businesses into new areas, especially finance and AI, and goes further to become cross-industry conglomerates.

8.2.4. Relationship with government

CEOs of BAT have a slightly different approach towards the Chinese central and local governments. While Robin Li and Pony Ma are more cautious in commenting on the government's involvements, Jack Ma's statements are much bolder. First of all, Jack Ma clearly follows the neoliberal arguments that the free market is the best way to advance human well-being. According to Jack Ma, the government is not so effective in solving problems and developing the economy. He mentions several times that China's economy is now depending on domestic consumptions, and the government is not effective in pushing consumption. Therefore, it should leave the market and entrepreneurs to solve this problem (Jack Ma, 2015 WIC; Jack MA, 2016, TFHC, p182-6). Moreover, the invention from the government could harm China's economy. As early as 2010, Jack Ma claims that if the government started to publish policies on one specific area then it won't work (Jack Ma, 2010 Wshang). In another occasion, he explicitly claims that "running businesses should depend on the market" and "in principle, businesses should comply with the market and the mayor (government), but I choose to rely more on the market since the mayor could be wrong" (Jack Ma, 2015, TFHC, p110-5). Furthermore, Jack Ma proposes to self-regulate the market, especially trade, e-commerce and the 'commercial society' (Jack Ma, 2014 WIC; 2016 Investor's Day; Jack Ma, 2016, TFHC, p140).

What is distinguishing in Jack Ma's neoliberal discourse is that he connects it to the Internet. According to Jack Ma, the Internet and Big Data could help the market to do what the government cannot do, to make it possible to predict and plan the economy (Jack Ma, 2017 BDE). Governments all over the world should retreat from the market and let businessmen make deals:

[6] We must build a real commercial society through the market economy and by entrepreneurs. The Internet today has provided such an opportunity... The Internet will change the whole trend and pattern of global trade... In the next 30 to 50 years, nobody could stop the Internet. The Internet itself is a huge ecosystem, and it could improve by itself. ^{xxiv} (Jack Ma, 2014 WIC)

In order to facilitate this e-trade rule, Jack Ma even started the e-WTP (Electronic World Trade Platform), a private sector-led and multi-stakeholder involved initiative to incubate transnational e-commerce rules¹⁹. As Jack Ma explains this e-WTP:

[7] ...We hope to support 80% of the small global companies, so we want to build e-WTP, it's not e-WTO, WTO is an organisation that governments sit together and negotiate... Taobao's business covers 30 provinces in China, but we never put the 30 governors in the same room negotiate. We just do it through the business way, using the market economy.^{xxv} (Jack Ma, 2016 Investor's Day)

Another feature is how Jack Ma promotes deregulation through the warning about the possible negative consequences of regulation. For example, in an address to the first World Internet Conference in 2014, Wuzhen, China, Jack Ma talks about privacy issues on the Internet:

[8] "In the 21 century, because of data and the Internet, whatever you want to do, you cannot hide anything or escape. Therefore, privacy has become a very interesting issue. Today we talk about concerns about privacy. But after 20 years, all the basic ideas will change. I remember in 1995 I went to an Internet conference in Beijing for the first time. There were some experts assembled by the Chinese Science Association. There were about 20 experts invited to talk about the Internet, including me. I was thinking how come the Internet in China has not come yet, but the 20 experts have already started to talk about what's wrong with the Internet and what needs to be controlled. I didn't take them seriously at that time anyway. Because firstly I believed there were no experts in China back then, and secondly I believed they worried too much – they started to worry even before the Internet appeared. In fact, what they worried about 20 years ago didn't appear, and what they didn't worry about appears now."^{xxvi} (Ma, 2014a, my translation).

Several linguistic features are worth noticing in this quotation. First of all, there is a clear *cohesion* in the first two sentences. *Cohesion* is a term used by Fairclough to refer to "general formal connections between sentences in a text" (Fairclough, 2015, p145). It involves

¹⁹ From EWTP official website: <https://www.ewtp.org/about/introduction.html>

vocabulary links between sentences, connectors marking relationships between sentences, or a reference referring back to an earlier sentence or foreshadowing a later one (ibid.). It is interesting to notice the word Ma uses to connect the first two sentences: “therefore”. In the first sentence, he talks about hiding things and then uses the word “therefore” to connect to the second sentence about the privacy issue. This connection implies that Ma equates privacy issues to “hiding anything or escape”. Hiding or escape is more often used for people who are doing something wrong, so if you did not do anything wrong, you do not need to hide, and thus you do not need privacy. After establishing a fundamental tone for dismissing or indeed ignoring privacy issues, he then goes on to describe one conference he attended in 1995 where experts discussed some concerns about the Internet and how all the problems they worried about did not come true. With the help of this example, Ma implies that: 1) the Internet should not be controlled, 2) there is no need to worry about privacy issues. He does so by telling a story about what the experts worried decades ago did not come true. In this way, Ma argues that privacy concerns are misdirected or simply bad thinking and thus argues any proposed regulation related to it is unnecessary or even mistaken.

The *topos of history* is another strategy to argue for deregulation. According to Reisigl and Wodak, the *topos of history* means: “because history teaches that specific actions have specific consequences, one should perform or omit a specific action in a specific situation (allegedly) comparable with the historical example referred to” and it is sometimes used to “warn of a repetition of the past” (2001, p80). Ma uses this example or ‘lessons’ from the past several times. Besides the example above, Red Flag Traffic Law is another example he uses several times. This Law refers to the laws enacted in the 19th Century in the UK and US that limits the maximum speed of automobiles and wave a red flag in front of the vehicle as a safety warning. Jack Ma claims that the Red Flag Traffic Law was the reason why Britain missed the opportunity to develop its auto manufacture industry and thus was bypassed by Germany. Therefore, China should avoid the same mistakes and should not set regulations similar to the Red Flag Traffic Law which he claims will prohibit the development of the Internet in China. There is also an underlying nationalist tone on deregulation – to maintain competitiveness in the global market, China should not restrict the development of new technologies (in fact, practices of companies).

The economic elites’ appeal for no regulation or deregulation seems to be bold at first glance, as China is always referred to as an authoritarian state with tight control of the market and

‘information’ itself. However, it is actually in line with the general tendency within the state. The recent guidelines or/and opinions about the development of the Internet and big data build on significant decisions made and published at the *Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of CPC* in November 2013: “[T]he basic economic system should evolve through the *decisive* role of the market in resource allocation” (CPC, 2013). First of all, the *Session* proposed to build a fair, open, transparent and unified market system and to reform the market regulation system in order to promote competition and “the survival of the fittest” (ibid.). This expression ‘decisive role’ is in clear contrast with the previous expression of a ‘basic’ role of the market in resource allocation. Moreover, the government will retreat from its previous powerful role in the market. This point is further developed so as to “streamline administration, delegate more powers, improve regulation and provide better services” (*JianZheng FangQuan*) in Premier Li’s Report on the Work of the Government in 2016 (Li, 2016) (more discussions on the government discourse, see Chapter 7).

8.2.5. Sum up

To sum up, BAT describe the Internet as boundaryless and de-centralised and emphasise the positive aspects of online participation and data sharing. Throughout BAT’s developments, they all claim to build infrastructure and to expand business areas *in order to* better help small businesses and facilitate innovations. As van Dijck points out, to “call a platform ‘social’ or liken it to a ‘utility’ is part of the battle to define the corporate in terms of the public and the nonprofit” (Van Dijck, 2013: 166). As shown in the examples, BAT try to define themselves as ‘utilities’ of the Internet era. It is easy to find the *fallacy of ‘irrelevant conclusion’* in BAT’s discourses and how BAT *reword* oligopolies using more positive words. As shown in the discussions, instead of responding to the accusation of BAT’s dominant positions in the market, their CEOs disguisedly replace BAT with the Internet. If the Internet is boundaryless, then BAT should be the same because they serve as ‘utilities’ in the Internet era. Through these positive self-representations that linked to the Internet’s characteristics, BAT disguise the reality of themselves being for-profit private companies, instead of neutral public utility providers. Their discourse also shows the complex relations with the government, their neglect of users’ rights of control over data and partnership with advertisers and developers.

8.3. Industry Upgrading or BAT Expanding?

BAT develop through their constant clashes with the so-called traditional industries. BAT's relations with traditional industries roughly experienced two phrases. Since an early stage, BAT are accused of depriving opportunities of the real economy or taking customers away from traditional industries. There were severe competitions between BAT and traditional industries. BAT denied the accusation and claimed that they are providing a larger market for traditional industries through, for example, providing selling platforms (Alibaba, Tencent) and advertising platforms (Baidu). BAT also urged the traditional industries to *adapt to the new trends*. Later on, especially after the government launched the 'Internet Plus' Action Plan, BAT started to propose to converge with traditional industries. BAT claims that they could provide new technologies and data to enable traditional industries to upgrade. The changes in discourse reflect BAT's development from Internet platforms into conglomerates that expand their businesses into various sectors, such as logistics, finance, and high-technology.

8.3.1. Clashes with the 'Real Economy'

In the early stage, as illustrated in the last section, BAT aim to become 'platforms' through which people and services can get connected. Baidu focuses on search engine, Tencent concentrates on online gaming and social media, and Alibaba specialises in e-commerce. However, as BAT develop fast, they started to expand their businesses into various areas and attempted to establish themselves as conglomerates. For example, Baidu has expanded its 'core business' from search engine into online entertainment (iQiyi) and AI technology (Baidu Brain and PaddlePaddle Deep Learning). Alibaba 'ecosystem' goes far beyond e-commerce, including finance (Ant Financial Service and Alipay), logistics (Cainiao), entertainment (Weibo and Youku) and cloud computing (Alibaba Cloud). Tencent has taken advantage of its ubiquitous social media network to launch Mini-programmes, financial services, AI-enabled services (see also 8.1).

BAT's discourse has also changed correspondingly. The changes can best be illustrated through BAT's involvement in the debate between traditional (real economy) and new industries (virtue economy). Since the very beginning, Alibaba is at the centre of this debate.

Jack Ma was the first to emphasise the importance of flexible production. For example, in 2012, he claims that e-commerce will transform from B2C to C2B:

[9] We will enter from the consumption area to the manufacturing area, and to changes in lifestyle. We will enter from B2C to C2B. There must be flexible production, to solve problems for consumers, to realise the real personalised production. This will be realised gradually in 3 to 5 years. No matter we do it or not, this is an inevitable trend of society (Jack Ma, 2012 Wshang)^{xxvii}.

Having received constant accusation from traditional industries, Jack Ma claims that the traditional industry should accept new technologies to conduct flexible and personalised production. If they failed in the market, they should ask themselves why they didn't catch up with the new trend (Jack Ma, 2016, TFHC, p76). Later on, Jack Ma goes further to promote the idea that traditional manufacturing companies should learn to use data to provide personalised products.

[10] Manufacturers *must be* personalised, or otherwise, it will be very difficult for them to survive. Machines produced by manufacturers in the future not only need to produce but also 'talk' and 'think'. Machines will not only be driven by oil and electricity, but also by data. Enterprises in the future will not only focus on scale and standardisation but also on *flexibility, agility and personalisation* (Jack Ma, 2015, TFHC, p82, italics added). ^{xxviii}

We see the use of *topos of usefulness* here: personalisation could solve problems for consumers. Moreover, these two quotes show strong *expressive value* which is "a trace of and a cue to the producers' evaluation of the bit of the reality it relates to" (Fairclough, 2015b: 130). Expressive value illustrates the producers "subjects and social identities" (ibid.). These two extracts clearly illustrate Jack Ma's certainty and authenticity. Through representing the reality and the future, in an authoritative way, and to identify Alibaba's business with this future, Jack Ma paves the way for Alibaba's further business expansion.

8.3.2. BAT help to upgrade traditional industries

Gradually, Jack Ma softens his tone and claims that traditional industries still have opportunities (Jack Ma, 2015 AC). There also comes a certain nationalist tone in the discourse, especially after the government's release of the 'Internet Plus' project. For example, in 2016, Jack Ma claims that the Internet industry (virtue economy) is part of the service sector (real economy).

[11] I think that it is a necessary process that China's economy transforms from manufacturing-powered real economy to service-centric economy. It is society's need. There is no need to oppose the real economy to virtue economy. In fact, bank and Internet industry are also parts of the service economy (Jack Ma, 2016, TFHC, p52).^{xxix}

More recently, Jack Ma emphasises the transformation of the traditional economy to digital economy, and the importance of the traditional companies to use the Internet. He claims that the future belongs to those companies who can make good use of the Internet (Jack Ma, 2016, WIC). He also states the importance of convergence of the manufacturing and service economy. He claims that to develop the real economy should not only include the manufacturing sector but also include the service sector. He even claims that BAT are manufacturing companies.

[12] There is no pure manufacturing sector nor pure service sector. In the future, the manufacturing sector must also be the service sector, especially with IoT (Internet of Things). There is no pure manufacturing industry in the future. The future service sector must be manufacturing sector... How to tell that BAT belong to the manufacturing sector or the service sector? We are manufacturing sector. We produce a large amount of data, process the information and share with others (Jack Ma, 2017 WIF, Entrepreneur Session).^{xxx}

Pony Ma claims that he is the first person to come up with the term 'Internet Plus' which then became a phenomenon in 2015 after Premier Li Keqiang used the term (Pony Ma, 2015 BDE). Tencent's ambition to converge into traditional industries is illustrated most clearly in its 2018 TGPC when Pony Ma states that Tencent's new aim is to "take roots in Internet-enabled consumption and embrace Internet-enabled industrialisation" (Pony Ma, 2018 TGPC). As he states, Tencent is constantly promoting the convergence of traditional industries with the Internet in response to the clashes between traditional and new industries.

He uses this term to help the government and companies better to understand the ‘utility’ feature of the Internet. He then encourages traditional industries to upgrade through joining Tencent ecosystem, using the platforms and technologies provided by Tencent (Pony Ma, 2016 TGPC, 2017 WIC, 2017 BDE). The Internet, according to Pony Ma, can benefit traditional industries:

[13] In the future, the traditional industries...will need to converge with Internet companies, to reach massive users, to realise the capability of building an ecosystem with hardware, software and service (Pony MA, 2018 TGPC).^{xxxix}

In the 2019 Tencent Global Digital Ecosystem Summit (TGDES), Martin Lau, the current president and the Executive Director of Tencent, explains this point well. In the conference, Lau connects the upgrade of China’s economy with the Internet and new manufacturing. He claims that the Internet will become a “core capacity” of all industries:

[14] We believe that the Internet will be important for all industries to upgrade productivity and for digital transformation. It will transform China’s economic development from relying on fast speed to high quality. If we can effectively connect personalised demands and production on a large scale, we will create many new business models and increase productivity. This is difficult to realise in the industrial age. Therefore, the Internet won’t be just an industry. Rather it will be a core capacity of all industries. In the future, all successful enterprises will be digitalised enterprises (Lau, 2019 TGDES).^{xxxix}

Similarly, Robin Li has changed his claim that “China’s Internet is replacing traditional industries” (Robin Li, 2013 BU) to the statement that a future where “traditional companies figure out how to embrace the Internet and use the Internet to develop themselves” is more desirable (Robin Li, 2015 BU). Later on, Robin Li claims that for China to transform and upgrade its economy, it is necessary to use the Internet and AI, to maintain the fast development of the economy. In the more recent World Internet Conference in 2019, he explains AI’s importance in driving China’s economic development.

[15] AI and other technologies will become important forces to drive high-quality economic development. On the one hand, the essential requirement of economic transformation

and upgrade provides huge potentials for AI-powered real economy. On the other hand, China's market provides technology companies with great opportunities to develop applications. Millions of Internet users produce massive data as raw materials for machine learning. These have accelerated the development of technologies and AI economy (Robin Li, 2019 WIC).^{xxxiii}

It is clear that, as BAT expanded their business into various areas and especially AI technologies, their discourses have gradually changed. They have paid more attention to how traditional industries can be converged with the Internet. Moreover, there is an underlying nationalist tone in BAT's discourses – the convergence or upgrading of traditional industries are beneficial for China's economic development. It will help China's economy to grow in a faster way with higher qualities.

This nationalist language can also be illustrated through BAT's discourses on the agriculture industry. For example, BAT all, to some extent, pay attention to the transformation of agriculture and how to use the Internet to develop rural areas. Tencent comes up with the plan of 'Internet Plus villages' as one of its main non-profit projects. Baidu claims to use AI and remote sensing technology to help farmers know how and when to use pesticide. Alibaba has launched its plan to help to reduce poverty in rural areas by selling agricultural products for farmers. These new developments, on the one hand, reflect their responses to the government's 'Internet Plus' project in rural areas. The government has proposed to develop 'Internet Plus Agriculture' and made efforts to develop rural areas with the help of the Internet. On the other hand, it also shows how BAT try to expand their businesses into agricultural industries. BAT all pay attention to the huge market and development potentials in rural areas in China. They strategically expand their businesses into agriculture- or country-related sectors. However, the essential question about social relations and ownership of land is rarely mentioned.

This nationalist discourse of 'upgrading China's economy' is linked to Baidu and Tencent's discursive construction of their relations with the government (for BAT's relations with the government, see also 8.2). The support from the governments, according to Robin Li and Pony Ma, is important. Moreover, they are seeking active cooperation with governments of different levels.

Baidu, like other Chinese companies, pays a lot of attention to government policies and government intentions. Robin Li states several times how his interpretation of the government's intentions guides Baidu's development strategy. He is also using his interpretation to persuade partners. For example, in 2010, when he tries to illustrate the importance of Baidu search engine and Baidu's contribution to China's economy, he argues how "governments at all levels" are not willing to continue the export-driven economy and thus will turn to domestic consumption (Robin Li, 2010 BU). In another occasion, he uses the government's 'Internet Plus' project to endorse Baidu's expansion into traditional industries.

The most explicit examples come from Baidu's recent development in AI and its application. Robin Li clearly points out the importance of support from local governments for Baidu to develop its AI applications. He further identifies Baidu's technology development with China's technology advancement. In this way, Baidu has represented China – the government should and must support Baidu's experiments. For example, Robin Li mentions Baidu's cooperation with local governments in Shanghai, Wuhu (in Anhui Province), Gui Yang (in Guizhou Province) to carry out AI applications' experiments. He mentions Baidu's cooperation with Wuhu government and emphasises that the government will provide an area that only unmanned cars are allowed to enter. He claims that because of the strong government support of Baidu, China could be the first country to have AI-powered unmanned-car-only city (Robin Li, 2016 BDE). Two years later, Robin Li repeats his argument, saying that the development of AI needs support from different stakeholders, including government, manufacturing factors, research institutions, and so on. He especially emphasises the importance of government support:

[16] [The development of] unmanned cars does not only rely on one company. It needs a huge ecosystem that includes all actors. I believe China is most likely to realise this development *because we* have a strong government that could provide world-leading construction of infrastructures. xxxiv (Robin Li, 2018 BDE)

Tencent clearly treats the government as an important partner and client. Tony Ma hopes the Cloud + Future Conference could facilitate Tencent's cooperation with the government (Pony Ma, 2016 C+F). According to Pony Ma, digitalisation has expanded the idea of *user* from individual customer (to C), to business (to B), and even government (to G). Therefore, Tencent wants to be the connector for C, B and G types of users (Pony MA, 2018 BDE). The

cooperation with governments is important for Tencent as Pony Ma provides different examples. One is ‘Digital Guangdong’, a new type of e-commerce through using WeChat mini-programme (Pony MA, 2018 C+F). Another cooperation is with Yunnan Province. Tencent connects apps, WeChat mini-programme, WeChat public Accounts with government departments and businesses in Yunnan. This project aims to promote tourism in Yunnan (Pony MA, 2018 BDE). In 2019 BDE, Dowson Tong, as the representative of Tencent, also provides examples of Tencent’s cooperation with Guiyang to provide new types of e-commerce (Dowson Tong, 2019 BDE). Tencent claims to use these successful examples to spread Tencent’s service to the whole of China (Pony Ma, 2018 C+F; Dowson Tong, 2019 BDE).

While as a company whose headquarter located in China, it would be inevitable to have some extent of involvements with the Chinese government. For example, Jack Ma expresses appreciation for support Alibaba received from HangZhou local government (Jack Ma, 2006 Wshang; 2009 Alibaba Ten Years; 2015 AC). However, Jack Ma clearly tries to keep a distance with the government. For example, Jack Ma was asked at 2015 Davos about Alibaba’s relations with the Chinese government. He states that Alibaba never got money from the government. He also claims that if the government asks Alibaba to provide services, Ali will make it free as a way to serve the public (Jack Ma, 2015, TFHC, p192) (see also 8.2).

8.3.3. Saving costs with AI

BAT all mention the usefulness of the Internet to help restructure companies’ organisations and to save management cost. For example, Robin Li once emphasised the potentials of enterprise software in China’s Internet Industry. The Internet was claimed to be able to solve the ‘big problem’ China’s economy will face that is the increase in labour cost.

[17] ...In the past, labour cost in China was very low. Enterprise software could solve the problem of improving operational efficiency. If the operational efficiency increased, then enterprises could hire fewer people...China’s labour cost is increasing very, very fast recently. This will be a huge problem in China’s economic development (Robin Li, 2014 BU). xxxv

Pony Ma provides another example to illustrate the benefits of saving labour costs with the help of the Internet economy. Pony Ma uses an example when he explains ‘Tencent Cloud’ – a cloud computing service provided by Tencent. He mentioned that Tencent purchased a majority stock of the largest mobile game company, Supercell. It has only about 180 employees, but the evaluated value in the stock market of Supercell is more than \$10 billion. Pony Ma claims that it was unimaginable in the past that a company with only 180 employees would have an annual income of \$ 2 billion and a net income of \$1 billion. According to Pony Ma, it is because of the use of cloud service:

[18] It was unimaginable in traditional companies. In the past, how could one company that earns more than 10 billion Yuan has only 100 employees? Any department within the company would have more people than this. It is exactly because of the use of Cloud technologies. All of its [Supercell] operations and services use hosting services on the Cloud. Therefore its headquarter is very simple with only a small number of developers. This is a very good case of the social division of labour and the use of Cloud.^{xxxvi} (Pony Ma, 2016 C+F)

Jack Ma uses its own example to show how to save money by restricting employee numbers while expanding business scale several times. For example, in its 2015 employee conference, Jack Ma uses interesting rhetoric to explain why Alibaba is restricting the number of employees.

[19] Having more employees does not necessarily mean a good thing. The more employees we have, the fewer jobs could be created for society. There will be at least 10 million people in the logistic industry, why I only give Cainiao (a logistic network owned by Alibaba) the budgets of 5,000 employees? Because only if I do so, there could be 10 million job opportunities created for the world. The more employees we have within our company, the fewer opportunities could be created outside the company. We should create jobs for others. This is what our company is going to do. We will not hire any more people in 2015...^{xxxvii} (Jack Ma, 2015, TFHC, p65-6)

This language is different from the more frequently used rhetoric of flexibility in the West. It is not so clear what does “jobs opportunities created for the world” mean. Does it mean Alibaba or Cainiao will outsource these work to other companies? Or will these work be done

through ‘sharing economy’? While Jack Ma tries to explain the restriction of employee numbers as ‘saving jobs for the society’, the real reason might be different, as he explained in a different occasion for other businessmen one year later:

[20] Alibaba made a budget in 2012 that in 2013 all targets, benefit and income indexes will double. In 2012 Taobao and Tmall were performing more than good. I said we must double though I know that it will realise even I don’t say so. But what is the basis for doubling these indexes? I ask them to do a ‘budget’ on employees. How many people will we need for these sales numbers to be doubled? At that time, Alibaba has already had 20 thousand employees. They made the budget and told me that we need 8700 more people to reach the goal. I said no, I don’t accept it. The second time they tried 7800 people, I still didn’t accept. The last time they said 5000, I still said no. I said I only accept 200 people. If it goes beyond 200 people, all employees, including managers and myself, will receive no bonus of the year. What is the final result? All indexes have doubled with only 300 more employees. This proves that reforms of the company need to be pushed. ^{xxxviii} (Jack Ma, 2016, TFHC, p138)

What is striking is that there are few statements about what kind of work BAT have in their discourse. Unlike the rhetoric discourses of fun work, democratic work process, and freedom used by Silicon Valley, BAT pay little attention to promote how jobs have changed in the ‘information age’ or in their own companies. There is no sign of ‘post-industrialisation’ in this aspect in these Internet giants. Instead, they perform exactly like other traditional companies. This shows the real essence of these Internet companies. They use the old language of flexibility and saving labour costs to describe workplace. In some occasions when they want to encourage employees, they emphasise employee’s payment and benefits as the main attraction.

One Campaign in March 2019 reveals the real working conditions for developers in China. On March 2019, a web page on Github was created called 996. ICU. This name refers to the developers who work under the intensive 996 system (working from 9 am to 9 pm, and six days per week) would risk a possibility to be hospitalised in an intensive care unit (ICU). There are already studies about programmers’ work in China (e.g. Sun Ping). What is even more revealing is the responses to this campaign from the CEOs of some largest Chinese Internet companies, including Alibaba and JingDong (another Chinese e-commerce company

and partly owned by Tencent). Jack Ma claims that “996 in BAT is a blessing for everyone”²⁰. This type of language reveals his understanding of work and employee’s identities in the digital age.

8.3.4. BAT help to increase domestic consumption

To increase domestic consumption is another theme under BAT’s discourse on upgrading China’s economy. For example, In Jack Ma’s speech in Alibaba’s 2015 *Apsara Conference* (AC) he encourages his audience to start their own businesses, and claims that stimulating domestic demand opens great opportunities for innovators and enterprises:

[21] The three driving forces of the Chinese economy used to be investment, export and domestic demand. Investment and export are the strengths of the government, but the government can hardly force people to spend money to consume. Today we can use new technologies, use the ‘cloud’ to stimulate domestic demand, use the ‘cloud’ to start domestic demand, use cloud computing and the Internet to cultivate domestic demand. I believe, in the coming 20 years, China will enter an era of real domestic demand. This is a huge opportunity for innovators and entrepreneurs.^{.xxxix} (Jack Ma, 2015, *The Future Has Come*, p44)

He uses the *topos of usefulness and advantage* in his argument. According to him, consumption facilitated by new technologies (e.g., the ‘cloud’) is not only good for the Chinese economy, but also for people’s lives and a great opportunity for innovators and enterprises. It is also a combination of nationalist, neoliberal and individualist language. He also points out that it is hard for the government to ‘force’ people to consume, but it is the strength of new technologies (as well as businesses) to promote domestic consumption. This quotation shows a clear direction to develop technologies for facilitating consumption: the innovators and start-ups should participate in promoting consumption demand through new technologies.

The most interesting statement comes from Robin Li. His attitude towards domestic consumption to some extent reflects Baidu’s expansion of businesses. As Baidu officially

²⁰ See the report of Jack Ma’s statements https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_3291793

started its open platform in 2010 to connect businesses and services, Robin Li's statement changes from a negative tone towards domestic consumption (in order to advocate that Baidu's business model of utilising user-generated data is more promising) to a more positive tone of stating domestic consumption's role in developing China's economy:

[22] In the first 50 years, people are trying hard to produce the same things in large scales to satisfy needs, and to some point, there is no more consumption need. In the last 50 years, we think about how to release consumption needs from consumers, how to make him buy stuff, so there came the credit card and eventually led to the financial crisis. The new financial services and unlimited leverage produced the victims of over-consumption.^{.xi} (Robin L, 2009 BU)

[23] ... The search engine is all about driving industries related to domestic demand. The 300 thousand clients of Baidu are all related to domestic demand. In other words, we make contributions to the economy entirely through increasing domestic demand – and this is the best way for China's economic growth. ^{.xli} (Robin Li, 2010 BU)

In promoting consumer culture, Pony Ma even equates the spirit of the Internet to instruments for business: he claims that the communicative functions of the Internet, freely expressing opinions and communicating with each other, exist *for* marketing. For example, in his open letter to Partners in 2014, Huateng Pony Ma emphasises the importance of understanding young consumer groups, because:

[24] Consumers interact fast through the Internet to convey their preferences and feedback. This reflects *the spirit of the Internet, which is to pursue an extremely good experience of products and extremely good feedback from users*. The first-class products created by word-of-mouth marketing and fan culture will make people talk with each other about it. Moreover, making consumers participate in decision making is also very important for the competitive capability of mobile Internet products.^{.xlii} (Pony Ma, 2014 TGPC, italics added)

According to him, consumer culture represents the spirit of the Internet. *Coherence* is used to build an equivalence in the first several sentences: consumer preference and feedback constitutes the spirit of the Internet and equates with pursuing consumption experience and

user feedback. What is behind this equivalence is a neoliberal and instrumentalist understanding of the Internet as something merely for business and consumption. The geek spirit and the spirit of openness, freedom of the Internet are totally ignored. It is also worth noticing the use of the *ideologically contested word* ‘participate’ by Pony Ma in this extract. The use of ‘participate in decision making’ is normally used in politics, referring to people’s democratic participation. However, in this extract, Pony Ma is using it to refer to consumption and people’s economics behaviour and eliminate its political meanings. This implicit change of meaning of ‘participation’ appears to be a “surreptitious piece of ideological struggle under the veil of semantics” (Fairclough, 2015, p132). The extract also implies that user power lies in their identity as consumers, through a ‘participation in decision making in consumption’ instead of participation in political activities to change the way the Internet develops.

The increasing consumption culture could be shown from a glimpse of Alibaba’s rapid increase of volume of transactions on the Singles’ Day or Double Eleven event. The phenomenon of Double Eleven has thus become an important phenomenon to understand the current political economy and ideological hegemony in China. Since the first year of the celebration, the volume of transition (sales within 24 hours) has increased year on year (see Figure 8.5). Only three minutes after 12 pm on 11th November 2017, sales in Alibaba’s sites Tmall reached 10billion Yuan, and this sales number took 6 mins and 58 secs in 2016.

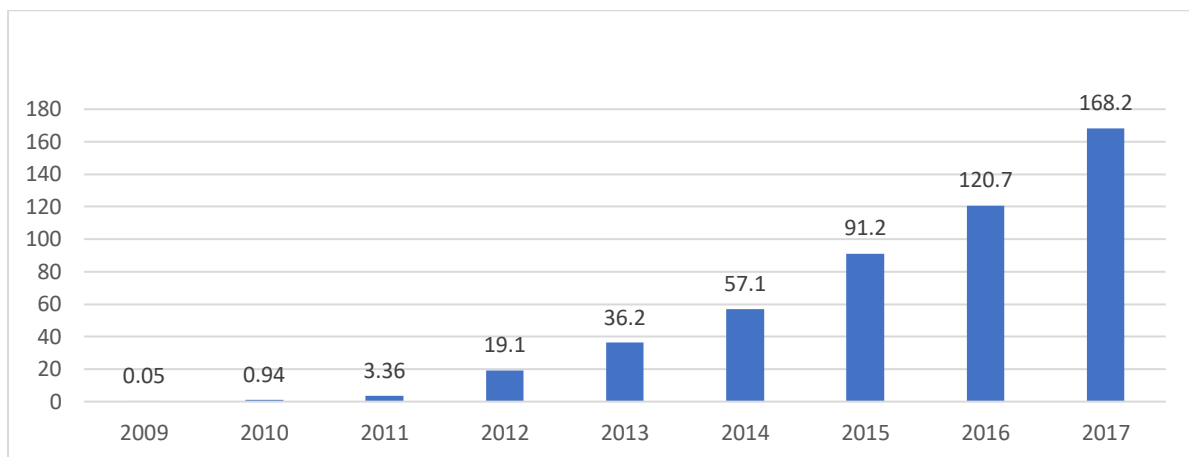


Figure 8.19. Volume of sales transaction within 24 hours on Singles’ Day in Alibaba’s websites (in Billions Yuan)

It is clear that Internet companies welcome this fast increase of consumerism, especially Alibaba. I have discussed the expansion of Alibaba’s business into different areas (see 8.1).

Table 8.3 focuses on Alibaba’s retail commerce’s development in China. Annual active consumers (buyers) on Alibaba’s retail platforms are increasing fast, and along with the increase in annual active consumers is the faster increase of revenue generated from retail commerce in China. As claimed in its 2015 Form 20-F, Alibaba aims to “attract new buyers as well as increase the wallet share of existing buyers through more frequent buying and buying across more product categories. We intend to achieve growth through customer loyalty programs, high-quality customer service, marketplace security upgrades, marketing and promoting our China retail marketplaces, especially in lower-tier cities and rural areas, as well as by promoting the use of our various mobile commerce apps such as our Mobile Taobao App” (Alibaba Financial Report Form 20-F, 2015).

There has always been a focus on how to use new technologies to expand their market and attract more consumers. While in 2015, the focus was mobile apps, in 2018, the technology focus is big data. In its 2018 Financial Report, Alibaba claims to increase active consumers “by leveraging our data capabilities to identify better, analyse and serve their needs through personalisation across channels” (Alibaba Financial Report Form 20-F, 2018).

	Year ended March 31,				
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Annual active consumers²¹ (million)	255	350	423	454	522
Revenue generated from China commerce retail (RMB, in millions)	¥42,832	¥59,732	¥80,033	¥114,109	¥176,559
% of Revenue generated from retail commerce	82%	78%	79%	72%	71%

Table 8.1. Alibaba’s retail commerce in China, resources: Form 20-F, financial report 2015-2018

8.3.5. Sum up

²¹ "annual active consumers", according to Alibaba, are “user accounts that had one or more confirmed orders on the relevant platform during the previous twelve months, regardless of whether or not the buyer and seller settles the transaction”

To sum up, this section demonstrated how BAT changed their discourse on traditional industries. As BAT expanded their business into areas beyond their original focuses (e-commerce, social media, online gaming and search engine), their discourse has changed accordingly. This is best illustrated through their discourse on the relationship between traditional industries and the Internet. While they first claimed that virtual economy would replace the real economy, the discourse gradually changed into that traditional economy should converge with the Internet. In particular, this section showed BAT's nationalist emphasis of the necessity to utilise the Internet and digital technologies to develop China's economy, through upgrading manufacturing and agriculture industry and increasing domestic consumption. BAT described the urgency in the current situation to upgrade China's economic development. They also emphasise the positive consequences of using AI for companies to save costs. Accordingly, BAT represent themselves as being able to help traditional industries to upgrade and restructure and to increase domestic consumption. Baidu and Tencent use this nationalist self-representation to legitimate their relations with the government. There is little mention of how new technologies could change the workplace.

This type of discourse is different from the Western digital discourse that emphasises de-industrialisation or new services. Embedded in China's social context where agriculture and manufacturing industries are still a crucial part of the economy (see Chapter 3), BAT's discourse has gradually developed its characteristics. They have changed to focus more on how the traditional industries could benefit from 'embracing' the Internet, instead of how the Internet could overturn or replace traditional industries.

8.4. Globalised or Chinese Companies

There are two different types of discourse in BAT's description of their identity. The first one states that BAT are global companies, especially with the development of AI. While BAT are *de facto* transnational companies, BAT also emphasises their Chinese identity to legitimate their domination in the Chinese market and support from the government and industries.

8.4.1. Globalised BAT

This section will demonstrate the transformation in BAT's discourse as they gradually developed into cross-industry multi-national corporations. BAT's discourse on globalisation changes over time. BAT have transformed from copying Western platforms, to exploiting unique features of China's domestic market, to expanding businesses into the global market.

From the beginning, BAT all learned from the Western platforms. As Robin Li speaks out straightforward "in the past, many Chinese companies just copy what successful foreign companies do" (Robin Li, 2011 BU). One common strategy in his language is to use the market analysis and statistics from America or global Internet industries to persuade partners about the huge potential of Baidu's model (Robin Li, 2009 BU, 2012 BU).

After a while, Robin Li started to emphasise the differences between China and America, and the unique opportunities provided by China's huge market (Robin Li, 2011 BU, 2013 BU). Google, as the major competitor to Baidu, was one key theme in Robin Li's speech even after Google terminated its service in Mainland China. Robin Li states that Baidu is different from Google as early as 2003, and Baidu understands Chinese users better (Robin Li, 2011 BU). In 2013, he continued that Baidu can provide better search results due to innovation. He provides examples to use Chinese on Baidu and English on Google to search for the same question about people's networks and relationships (Robin Li, 2013 BWC). Similarly, Pony Ma claims that he hopes Tencent and its partners could 'take root in China' (Pony MA, 2013 TGPC). He later claims that the reason why China's Internet companies could succeed is that their innovations are catered to domestic consumers (Pony Ma, 2015 WIC, interview).

With the fast development of China's Internet economy and technologies in more recent years, BAT started to compete with global companies. This competition has been reflected in their discourse. For example, in 2015, Robin Li claims that in some O2O (online to offline) areas, China's Internet is on the top in the world. One year later, in the WIC, he further claims that the global centre of innovation will transfer from America to other places. He hopes that Chinese companies could compete with Silicon Valley to attract global talents and migrants (Robin Li, 2016 WIC, Entrepreneur Section). This global vision is clearly illustrated by Robin Li when he points out Baidu's new slogan – "make the complex world simpler" (Robin Li, 2017 BWC). He later reemphasises that Baidu's mid- to long- term aim is "to become a leading AI platform company in the world, to accelerate AI's application, to practice Baidu's mission – using technology to make the complex world simpler" (Robin Li,

2019 WIC). Similarly, Pony Ma claims that in the past Chinese companies mainly followed and learned from others, and now need to become innovators and contributors to new technologies (Pony Ma, 2017 TGPC). He then talks about Tencent's technological innovations and its AI Lab. He especially emphasises the competitiveness of Tencent's AI technologies in the world.

Slightly different from Baidu and Tencent, Alibaba embraced globalisation from an early stage as an e-commerce company. Like Pony Ma and Robin Li, Jack Ma also emphasises the differences between China and other countries and the importance the China's local market. He explains why e-commerce in China is different from Japan and America – because China doesn't have good credit, payment and logistic system (Jack Ma, 2007 Wshang). Jack Ma claims several times that Alibaba is born unique and different from American companies (Jack Ma, 2014 WIC). It is because it was born in China, in a different context (Jack Ma, 2011 Wshang).

However, in general, Jack Ma emphasises that Alibaba is a global company. For example, in 2007 Wshang, Jack Ma claims that e-commerce should not only develop in Hangzhou and China, but all over the world. *Because* the Internet is global, so should be the e-commerce (Jack Ma, 2007 Wshang). Companies should have the spirit of open and sharing, and global vision (Jack Ma, 2008 Wshang, 2009 Alibaba Ten Years). Since 2008, the Chinese Wshang officially changed its name into Global Wshang. In 2009, when Alibaba celebrates its 10th anniversary, Jack Ma claims that Alibaba will create “an e-commerce platform for 10 million small businesses and 100 million jobs for the whole world” and “a consumption platform for one billion population all over the world”. Several years later, Jack Ma expanded this aim to create a platform which will “provide 100 million job opportunities, serve 2 billion population, and profit 10 million businesses”. He also claims that Alibaba's aim in 20 years is to become the fifth-largest economy entity (Jack Ma, 2017 AC). He claims that Alibaba is “the company of the century” and “we must be a globalised company” (Jack Ma, 2017 AC). He also claims that Alibaba can connect China's domestic market with global businesses (Jack Ma, 2015, TFHC, p62). As Jack Ma stated in 2016:

[25] “Alibaba was born in China, but Alibaba is not a Chinese company, nor an American company, of course. People ask to which country Alibaba belongs. My answer is that

our investors come from all over the world. I tell people, though Alibaba was born in China, *yet it is a globalised company*".^{xliii} (Jack MA, 2016, TFHC, p72)

There is little doubt that BAT are expanding their businesses all over the world.

8.4.2. AI for global expansion

One recent prominent theme in BAT's discourses on global expansion is AI. AI has opened new opportunities for BAT to enter the global market. As they all started to develop AI technologies, their language has shown a shift from domestic to a global market. AI has enabled Baidu to provide services and technologies to the global auto manufacturing industry, through its Apollo Platform. According to Robin Li, there are more than 113 partners and more than 11 thousands developers in Baidu's AI system. He claims that almost all auto-related companies have joined Apollo Platform (Robin Li, 2018 WIC). As Robin Li points it out:

[26] AI is different from the Internet in the past – it has a strong capability for *vertical convergence*. In other words...[AI is useful to build] a community of shared future in cyberspace (Robin Li, 2017 WIC).^{xliv}

This language is interesting since it clearly shows why Baidu has put so many efforts in developing AI and how AI could benefit Baidu in its global expansion. It also shows how and what kind of technology attract big tech giants attention – those have most market potentials for global expansion. Martin Lau from Tencent made a similar statement:

[27] In the next 20 years, the digital world and the physical world will be deeply converged. The boundaries between commodities and services will be further blurred. Global digitalisation process will fully start. At that time, not only the Internet and technology companies, but all industries will accelerate their process of digitalisation. Along with the global digitalisation, digital technology and information technology will become important ties to connect the global economy. Many traditional industries and newly developed regions will be able to realise leapfrog development. I believe this is an important opportunity for Chinese companies to engage with the world, and to open the global market. We must seize this good opportunity (Lau, 2019 TGDES).^{xlv}

This is in line with Pony Ma's earlier statements to urge Chinese companies to enter the global market. For example, Pony Ma mentions that the digital economy has provided more possibilities for trans-regional cooperation. He urges Chinese companies to "coil into a fist" to enter the global market and to attract global talents. The aim of competition in the digital 'community' (*gong tong ti*, a term used in President Xi Jinping's speech), according to Pony Ma, is to make the whole ecosystem more sustainable (Pony Ma, 2017 TGPC). One year later, Pony Ma referred to President Xi's speech again, claiming that China's economy provides huge market opportunities and space for innovations. He says that it is not only the opportunities for Chinese companies but also for global companies (Pony Ma, 2018 WIC).

As Baidu and Tencent, Jack Ma also noticed the importance of new technologies for Alibaba to realise its global ambitions. Jack Ma is good at creating new terms, in 2017 when Alibaba redefined itself from e-commerce company to e-commerce infrastructure provider, Alibaba restarted Wshang with the theme 'Made in Internet', In this year, Jack Ma used this term 'Made in the Internet' in several occasions. He explained the term with connection to the "community with shared destiny":

[28] We will face new problems in the new era, but also new opportunities. Only through becoming a 'community with shared destiny', through building this shared community, mankind can face the new era and challenges together. The problems faced by mankind are common – the global value chain is going to be revolutionised for sure. There will not be huge containers, but fast deliveries for small parcels, not Made in China or Made in America, but Made in Internet, not B2C, but C2B ^{xlvi}. (Jack Ma, 2017 WIC)

He further explains how AI technology will enable this 'Made in Internet', and this is after Jack Ma claims that Alibaba is a data-driven and data-processing company:

[29] In the future, all small and medium-sized businesses will be transnational enterprises. There will be no Made in China, Made in America, but only Made in Internet. What DAMO (Alibaba's 2017 established research and innovation centre) wants to do is to make technologies inclusive (Jack Ma, 2017 AC)^{xlvii}.

To sum up, the changes in BAT's language illustrate BAT's globalisation process. BAT have transformed from learning and following Western platforms, to focusing on the domestic market and developing unique features, to competing in the global market. Moreover, AI has become increasingly important for BAT, as it opens up new opportunities for BAT's globalisation.

8.4.3. Chinese companies

However, in their CEO's speeches, BAT are not only discursively constructed as Chinese companies (as Facebook is normally referred to as American company although its businesses expand all over the world), but also constructed as representations of China, Chinese entrepreneurship and Chinese technology development. BAT use this type of nationalist discourse to legitimate their dominant positions in the market and their expansion of businesses into new areas (see also 8.2).

On the other hand, in spite of BAT's *de facto* status as multi-national corporations, they discursively construct themselves as Chinese companies that are representatives of China in the global competition and global market. It is not only a description of their national identity as they enter into the global competition, but also a strategy to positively frame their dominant position in the domestic market and their status as conglomerates. In other words, the underlying logic by BAT is that if they are competing in the global market to represent China, they should be supported by the government and the industries.

One prominent example is from Jack Ma. It shows how Jack Ma links Alibaba to the future of China, and this identification legitimates Alibaba's dominant position in the market. It is in clear contrast with Jack Ma's claim that Alibaba is a globalised company:

[30] Alibaba is not a normal business company. We have huge responsibilities in this country and this age. Even from 10 years ago, I was speaking inside Alibaba that if China's e-commerce developed well, it has nothing to do with Alibaba. But if China's e-commerce developed badly, then it has relations with Alibaba. Because at that time, 90% of e-commerce talents were in Alibaba, if we did things wrong, it means the whole country did things wrong.^{xlvi} (Jack Ma, 2017 AC)

Similarly, while the global market and investment are important for Baidu, it also emphasises its Chinese identity and the contribution it makes to China's economy. To identify itself with China's development serves Baidu's interests to establish its dominant position in the market and to expand businesses into different industries. For example, Robin Li claims that Baidu makes a large contribution to stimulating the domestic economy in China (Robin Li, 2010 BU). Baidu has made China's mobile Internet ecosystem better, prosper and healthier (Robin Li, 2013 BWC). Pony Ma also claims several times to take more responsibilities to realise the 'Chinese Dream'. In 2017 WIC, Pony Ma states that he hopes "Tencent could take more responsibility to become part of the 'Chinese power' and 'Chinese Scheme', to make bigger contributions to build and maintain the 'community of shared future in cyberspace'" (Pony Ma, 2017 WIC). One year later in the same conference, he appreciates Chinese government's support for the private economy, and encourages Chinese companies, including Tencent, to build China into a country that is strong in the Internet and technology (Pony Ma, 2018 WIC).

The *pronoun* 'we' is, in particular, used when BAT want to expand their businesses into new areas. BAT need to use the discursive strategy of constructing an in-group to legitimate their expansion into other industries in China. For example, Tony Ma claims that Tencent is a representative of China's Internet Company, not only in terms of technology but also Internet culture and the whole cultural industry (Pony Ma, 2018 WIC). In 2017 WIC, the conference in which President Xi addresses every year since 2015, Pony Ma claims that:

[31] In the past, Chinese companies mainly play the role of followers of new technologies, but today we need to become the drivers and contributors to new technologies. For example, Tencent uses Cloud technology to provide our products and technologies to enterprises in our ecosystem. We will also use the open content platform to promote the development of the creative cultural industry. ^{xlix} (Pony Ma, 2017 WIC)

There are clearly two types of 'we' in this excerpt. The first one is an 'inclusive' *we* that includes the whole country. The others are more 'exclusive' *we* that refers to Tencent. The inclusive *we* makes an implicit authority claim – that Tencent has the authority to speak for (the technology development of) the country and to identify with the whole nation. The purpose of this type of discourse is illustrated clearly when in 2017 TGPC Pony Ma points out that Chinese companies should work together to "coil into a fist to attract market and

talents from all over the world” and “to make the digital technology ecosystem of innovation bigger” (Pony Ma, 2017 TGPC) ⁱ.

Since Baidu expanded its businesses into new areas through AI, Robin Li emphasises how Baidu AI has helped to upgrade China’s economy (see also 8.3). He uses ‘*we*’ to emphasises Baidu’s Chinese identity. For example, when he mentions the example of Baidu AI in the agricultural and manufacturing industries, he says:

[32] The use of AI in the agricultural industry is very obvious. If *we* want to harvest good Chinese grain, and to provide good Chinese food, using AI is inevitable (Robin Li, 2018 BWC). ⁱⁱ

[33] Baidu has been working on investing in AI for more than ten years. We hope to work together with other entrepreneurs here to do what we should do for *China’s AI technology development and advancement* in the future. We expect China to become the world-leading country in AI technology, and hope the first city that only allows driverless cars on the road to appear in China in the future. ⁱⁱⁱ (Robin Li, 2016 BDE)

Jack Ma also uses nationalist discourse to promote the new Damo Lab that was established by Alibaba in 2017. One remarkable phenomenon is how often Jack Ma talks about *China’s* technology development after he announced to establish DAMO Lab. For example, in 2017 AC, he asks “why China can’t develop its own road”. He then continues that “DAMO must surpass Intel, Microsoft and IBM” (Jack Ma, 2017 AC). In another occasion in 2017 BDE, he claims that China now has technology, funding, and market, so China should redefine the future (Jack Ma, 2017 BDE). He especially appeals to the nationalist statements that China should develop “*our* own core technology”. It is not difficult to recognise the similarity in this type of discourses on ‘core technology’ between Alibaba and China’s government, between President Xi and Jack Ma:

[34] Chip is the core technology, and there is indeed a huge difference between *us* and developed countries. However, in the area of IoT chip, we do have an opportunity to catch up. ⁱⁱⁱⁱ (Jack Ma, 2018 AC)

Again, in these excerpts from Robin Li and Jack Ma, the pronoun ‘we’ is used to include the whole nation and to identify their companies with the whole nation, their technological developments with the nation’s developments, their business interests as the whole nation’s interests.

8.4.4. Sum up

To sum up, while BAT are *de facto* globalised companies in terms of business operations and investors, they all emphasise their Chinese identities in their discourse. This is especially true when they try to enter new business areas and industries. It is clear that BAT use this type of nationalist discourse to legitimate their dominant position in China’s domestic market and their ever-lasting expansion into new areas, such as cultural industries and traditional industries, through AI and Big Data. This type of discourse can also deviate criticisms in the domestic market. It also legitimates BAT’s relations with the government – receiving support from and providing services for the government.

8.5. Conclusion

This chapter has investigated BAT’s digital discourse. It reveals BAT’s discursive construction of the current state of affairs, self-definition, and relations with other stakeholders to legitimate their dominant position in the market (8.2), their expansion into new industries (8.3) and their global expansion (8.4). First, BAT use *rewording* to claim that they are ‘infrastructure’ and ‘utility’ of the Internet and are helping medium sized and small businesses. Second, BAT emphasises its *usefulness* for companies to restructure, traditional industries to upgrade and the whole Chinese economy to develop. Third, while they are global companies, BAT employ nationalist discourse to legitimate their expansion and to gain support from the government.

According to the analytical framework provided in Chapter 4 and 5, BAT’s digital discourse can be summarised as below:

	What the BAT says about it:
Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Internet is boundaryless, so should be the BAT

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BAT are providing Internet infrastructures, not dominating the market • The Internet is de-centralised, so is the BAT • BAT are facilitating niche markets and helping small businesses (partners) • De-regulation (Jack Ma)
Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Information Age requires companies to rethink production modes (e.g. convergence with the Internet; flexible and personalised production; prosumption) • BAT can help companies to save operational costs with AI and digital technologies • BAT are helping agricultural and manufacturing industries to upgrade • Data is an important resource for the Information Age thus should be open to all
Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory culture is one important spirit of the Internet • BAT are contributing to China's economic growth by promoting domestic consumption

Table 8.1. BAT's Digital Discourse on the New Economy.

	How BAT describe these agencies and construct relations with them:
International level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BAT are globalised companies • BAT are representing China in global competition and market
State level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping distance with the government, de-regulation (Alibaba) • Getting support from the state and provide services to the government (Baidu and Tencent's AI development, cooperation with the government)
Societal level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online participation is restricted to prosumption • Little mention of how new technologies could change the workplace and exploitative, alienated work
Individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users are consumers not active citizens • Little mention of users' privacy and rights of control over data

Table 8.2. BAT Digital Discourse on the New Politics.

CHAPTER 9. NEGOTIATING DIGITAL DISCOURSE

So far, I have discussed digital discourse from the government and BAT. What, then, do workers think about the Internet in their everyday use of it. As discussed in Chapter 5 and 8, BAT are dominating the market and ubiquitous in people's everyday life. Issues such as personal data, targeted advertising, appropriation of user generated content, and alternative platforms are under some heated debate. How do workers legitimate these business behaviours conducted by Internet companies? From a political aspect, how do workers conceive the government's control of the Internet? Do they believe the Internet is a free space for democracy and freedom? How do they, if they do, legitimate the current power relations regarding the highly commercialised and politically controlled Internet? This chapter will focus on workers' statements on these issues.

I have used focus groups to collect data from workers. The focus group questionnaire focuses on three aspects: the cultural, economic and political aspects (see Appendix 1). The questions focus on the online experiences of three types of workers in China's digital capitalism, and how they interpret/understand these experiences. This chapter will focus on their digital discourse on the Internet Economy (9.1), and Internet Politics, regarding both content control and market regulation (9.2). Furthermore, this chapter will also identify one specific salient ideology among participants: There Is No Alternative (TINA). Finally, I will provide a summary of participants' digital discourse with the help of the framework developed in Chapter 4 and 5.

9.1. The Internet Economy

This section will analyse three types of workers' digital discourse on the Internet economy. It will try to answer the following questions:

- What do they think about the New Economy, and in particular, SC? (9.1.1)
- What do they feel about Internet companies (9.1.2)
- What do they think about data collection (9.1.3)
- How do they discursively construct their relationship with companies? (9.1.4)

9.1.1. A de-centralised market with new opportunities?

It is not surprising that, under the neoliberal paradigm of the Internet, as well as the active promotion of mass innovation and entrepreneurship (SC) by the government and companies (see Chapter 7), people consider the Internet and ICT provide new opportunities for individuals and economic growth for companies and nations. This section focuses on how participants perceive the Internet as providing new opportunities in the market. This type of argument from workers is consistent with the propagation of the ideology of the ‘New Economy’ or ‘Digital Economy’ from the dominant groups. With the help of the Internet, it is claimed, there are new opportunities and niche markets for individuals to start their businesses. By emphasising economic benefits brought by the Internet, individuals are encouraged to participate in the wave to start their businesses. This argument also shows a one-dimensional understanding of the Internet as economic instruments.

One most direct expression comes from one programmer group. When asked to use three words to describe their impressions about the Internet, one programmer argues that:

[1] I think that the Internet is all about making money [Moderator: can you explain more?]. The Internet, I mean from the perspective of companies, many high-tech things have shaken traditional industries heavily. They are very good at making money... We know Xiaomi [a large ICT] right? It is great (*Lihai*)! When it first came out, Xiaomi used hungry marketing ... Someone says it uses the spirit of the Internet ... then it makes a lot of money. I mean after the Internet comes out, the whole industry, a lot of production patterns, a lot of production modes emerge.^{liv}

Another participant from white-collar group uses the example of Guokr, an online website provides scientific and educational knowledge to the public, and Douban, a Chinese social media. According to the participant, starting their brands and selling products is a new business model for platforms to make profits (While collar group 2, #4, 21’26’’). This participant holds a positive attitude towards the ‘new economic forms’, with a positive conception of the companies and their developers because they win the competition in the market and make a lot of money through beating other competitors.

Several participants talked of their experiences of using the Internet to find opportunities to make money, such as joining Weishang (businesses built through WeChat networks), opening shops on Taobao, or engaging in other types of the ‘gig economy’ concerning the Internet.

For example, one participant from the manufacturing worker groups, when asked to express their impressions of the Internet in general, claims that:

[2] It means more opportunities to make money. I mean because of the development of the Internet, it drives the growth of online shopping and provides many people opportunities for employment.^{lv}

Note this is an answer to the question about impressions about the Internet in general. This participant answers from a mere economic perspective. There is no mention of what kind of opportunities and jobs the Internet economy is providing. The *coherence* between texts (question and answer) implies a presupposition of an instrumentalist view of the Internet.

However, the discussions of new opportunities and business models do not necessarily mean that participants believe in the de-centralised market or niche markets. For example, one programmer points out:

[3] ... So all industries start with lots of new businesses, and after a while, who seize the largest group of users, who become the tycoon of this industry (programmer group 2, #4, 29.00)^{lvi}.

There are also discussions, especially within manufacturing worker groups, about the reality of start-ups through e-commerce and new jobs created by the Internet, such as jobs in logistics. This is probably related to their lived experience. A lot of manufacturing workers try to find other life opportunities through e-commerce, such as opening online shops through Taobao or WeChat (*Weishang*). However, while the ruling class are celebrating how the Internet creates more small businesses and opportunities, some participants have more concerns and are more critical about this argument.

For example, one manufacturing worker from group 2 states that she started a small online shop on Taobao, but it is “difficult to make money” by selling products on Taobao:

[4] “I didn’t make any money, because [if you open a shop] on Taobao, if you always stay in front of your computer, then there might be some business, but it also requires you to have high credibility or profile ... If you are a new shop, it is hardly visited ... Millions of people are opening shops on Taobao, I mean, there is little chance that your shop will be paid attention to, it is very hard to make money, you need to invest a lot of money, and to *Shuadan* [to construct fake visiting and buying numbers]”.lvii

Another participant uses her friend’s experience to be *Weishang*, saying that “she invested tens of thousands of Yuan and didn’t make money” (#8, manufacturing worker group 2). *Weishang* is a new phenomenon relating to the development of WeChat. Through WeChat, people can post advertising on their timeline available to all the friends on WeChat. Because WeChat is a relatively private communication tool in China, it means that *Weishang* shows such advertising to their friends, relatives or acquaintances. *Weishang* literally means ‘small business(men)’. There are discussions about *Weishang* in most of the groups. While in other groups there are more complains about *Weishang* advertisings in their timeline on Wechat moments, in manufacturing worker groups, there are more participants who tried or whose friends tried to start *Weishang* business before.

To sum up, while there are arguments about how the Internet brings new opportunities in the market, there are also critical concerns. In particular, manufacturing worker group are more critical about the working situation of this type of ‘new job’ created by the Internet because they are more familiar with the real situation of these ‘new jobs’.

9.1.2. “We trust big companies”

Different from companies’ legitimation of oligopolies through talking about the Internet features (see 8.2), participants legitimate the oligopolies with the discourse of ‘trust’. According to this type of discourse, participants willingly express that they give up their privacy to big companies as an exchange for convenience and security. This is because,

according to participants, big companies have better technologies to protect their personal data.

For example, participants would like to use one or two social media accounts (normally a WeChat or Weibo account) to sign up to other platforms (through API) because it is convenient and they believe the big companies can best protect their personal information. Application programme interface (API) is a set of procedures that allow the application to connect to and exchange data with an open operating system. On social media, when users use one social media account to sign in to another application, it is through API. Platforms then share user data and information and show advertising to users based on the integrated information about individuals gathered from different platforms, also through API. The concerns about information security, ironically, facilitate the commercialised collection of personal data by big companies, through API.

This type of argument prevails in all groups of participants researched, among programmers, white-collars and manufacturing workers. For example, in the first group of programmers, when asked about how they protect personal information online, #4 states that Alibaba has great technologies and thus there is no need to worry about information uploaded to Alibaba:

[5] I will first check whether the website has some basic encryption... such as protocols, whether encrypted or not, whether it's https or not, and if it is a big platform, such as Alibaba and such, they have good technologies, then they *must be fine* in these aspects, *there is no need to worry*, but if it's a small website, it doesn't even register with the police office, then I would rather fill in fake information or minimum information.^{lviii}

One participant from the manufacturing worker group expressed a similar view:

[6] I trust QQ and WeChat more. I know as a bigger company, Tencent is *unlikely to cheat you*, I feel I trust it more, but about those less popular platforms, if I have never seen their name before, I will definitely never give them [personal information].^{lix}

Another example comes from programmers:

[7] I think, for now, big companies have relatively better protection of users' information, but small companies are totally irresponsible ... I think if one day Alibaba leaks tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands people's information, it might fail because of this ... such big companies.... they will definitely protect users' information well.^{ix}

The extract [5-7] show participants' trust in big companies to have better technological means to protect their personal data. Participants equate information security issues to private data issues. Therefore, concerns about information security could lead participants to 'trust' big companies because they are supposed to have better technologies to protect users' data from leaking or being stolen by hackers. This argument deflects a focus of discussion from violation of privacy by big companies to information security issues concerning hacking and thus also favours oligopolistic practices, as 'big' is perceived as both more secure and more convenient (the convenience of media convergence via API).

However, this argument is only partially true and functions as ideology. Big companies, indeed, are less likely to steal users' data and sell sensitive personal information (such as credit card information or names) to the third party directly or use the information for illegal financial fraud. However, they do collect as much information as they can, analyse these data, sell these data to advertisers, and display targeted advertisements to users. This is a more indirect, underlying, disguised way of making profits from users' data. As another programmer in group one (#6) points out that users are not fully informed about what information is collected from them and what risks are there behind this collection of data (programmer group 1, #6, 19'07''). I will also argue that this 'trust' is based on a deeper ideology of 'there is no alternative' (see section 9.3).

To sum up, participants legitimate Internet companies' oligopolies through the language of 'trust'. This type of argument functions to facilitate Internet oligopolies by partially and positively representing the companies' business operations. It describes big companies as trustworthy and reliable. Thus people could put all information through one platform or open system. Linking to my discussions in Chapter 8 about how Baidu, Tencent and Alibaba build 'ecosystems' by collecting data from individuals, this type of arguments support the oligopolies' operations.

9.1.3. Data Collection: ‘There is simply no privacy online’ and ‘Internet companies need advertising to survive’

There are two ways among the participants to legitimate Internet companies’ collection of user data. First of all, there is one salient phenomenon detected from my user groups which are to confuse data security issues with companies’ for-profit operations of data collection. This section demonstrates how these specific concerns of data security could be misused to legitimate Internet companies’ data collection.

Since data collection is the foundation of commercial online platforms, opinions about data commodification (data collection) are my first question addressed to participants in the focus groups. While acknowledging that personal data are collected by the platforms to make money, most of the participants’ concerns focus on data security, disruptive advertising, or data leaks, instead of companies making profits from those data, though these issues are highly related. Therefore, it is necessary to, first of all, clarify the differences between the collection of personal data conducted by commercial Internet companies and leaks of data by hackers. The Internet companies collect data, encourage users to give more information about themselves and sell those data to advertising companies. This is different from what hackers do to break security and steal personal data. However, when discussing concerns of online privacy data, participants always mix these two issues up.

This conflation is especially prominent among programmer groups. For example, when asked about their concerns about private data online and their knowledge of how platforms acquire users’ personal data, one programmer (group1, #4) claims that people who study Internet security might have fewer concerns or worries. It is because, as he works in a cybersecurity company and thus more familiar with technologies about cybersecurity, it is possible to get any information from users with some techniques. He claimed that according to his expert knowledge about cybersecurity:

[8] Although we keep emphasising users’ privacy, yet actually on the Internet, every user is running naked, it means that through technological means, you can acquire any information.^{ix}

This is a typical argument from programmer groups: data breaches or data leaks are inevitable. As #4 further explained why he has few cares about collection and leaks of personal data. He gives two reasons, one of which is that data leakage is inevitable:

[9] If people don't consider, for example, mobile numbers, QQ numbers, date of birth, etc., information as private, then there won't be any issues, *because it is unrealistic to consider these as private*. There are so many ways to leak the information. Several years ago in China, many websites used unreliable security protection, so, if you used, including QQ, if you registered, you filled your information online, if there were leakage incidents a few years ago on these websites, they called it 'Drag Database'...then this information has already been leaked, your [information] has already been leaked, then [after the leak] you made some extra security protections in other occasions, what is the result? It just means that [your information] will be leaked fewer times, but *eventually, it will be leaked anyway*.^{lxvii}

He also uses the example of the leakage of personal data of Mark Zuckerberg to emphasise that hackers will always have opportunities, and there is no absolute security online. Therefore, according to him, people should give up their concerns about privacy online since it is impossible to have absolute security online. Statements in extracts [8] and [9] falsely equate the issue of personal data collection and violation of privacy caused by the companies to personal data-stealing by hackers. While asked about how the commercial platforms collect and analyse users' personal data, the programmer immediately linked it to security issues and argues that data leaks are inevitable. The argument that there is no absolute security to protect personal data blurs the focus of discussion about how companies collect and sell personal data 'legally' in the interests of profit. This type of discourse is thus ideological because it deflects the attention from the problematic practice of commercial companies to hacking issues. According to this argument, as long as people use the Internet, there are traces online, and any behaviour and information online can be leaked. Therefore, it is useless to worry about privacy and personal data online because of the inevitability arising out of the technologies as they exist. Furthermore, this type of argument also implies that the commercial platforms' practice of collecting data is acceptable, or less harmful, as the very consequence of this inevitability, and thus is a kind of technologically determinant argument. Interestingly, it is a kind of 'pessimistic' one that is then turned around as if to say "It's OK". It thus helps to legitimate the collection, analysis and commodification of personal data.

Another type of arguments to legitimate companies' data collection is to claim that the market rules are dominant. Thus Internet platforms have to survive by selling users to advertisers. This type of argument accepts the neoliberal logic that data collection is the necessary foundation of Internet-related business: selling advertising is *the* inevitable way for the platforms to survive in the market. The main argument here is that if one Internet platform or company wants to survive, it has to collect data and sell them for advertising purposes. For example, one participant from the manufacturing workers group, after describing some forms of disruptive and disturbing advertising he experienced before, argued that "these ads might be its [the companies/platforms] ways of survival" and "ways to make money". Another participant adds that it is "their important way to survive" (see also 9.3).

However, there are oppositional positions about companies collecting user data for their benefit. Programmers are probably more familiar about how Internet companies 'mislead' users to upload or 'share' more personal information with them. For example, one programmer (#6) in programmer group 1 disagrees with #4 who used the metaphor of users running naked online and equates user privacy to information security. He argues that:

[10] The companies are probably misleading [users] (Moderator: Why?) because, as they [other participants] discussed earlier, to make themselves easier for users to use, many apps can be installed by only one click ... If you want to use the new apps, normally you need to register, but if you use WeChat or QQ to authorise the app, you can skip all the steps, so before you log in to a new app, it asks whether you agree to use QQ or WeChat to log in ... You think it's convenient, then you authorise the app, then because it's authorised, then they can get your information on social media such as WeChat and QQ, and through this way, they can gain some personal private information, but as a normal user, you probably think [it's fine], *but they don't tell you what the risks behind this authorisation are, they didn't tell you that actually, they have gained your privacy* .lxiii

Moreover, besides acquiring the knowledge of companies' data collection, there is also oppositional behaviour against data collection through a more passive use of social media. There are participants who hold oppositional positions by claiming to use social media platforms less frequently (who exhibit a kind of critical consciousness and do not follow

ideologies in Fuchs' 16 categories). These participants' behaviours show that the collection of data and violence of user privacy conducted by commercial platforms could harm the connective functions of the Internet.

One phenomenon that deserves more attention is that while all types of participants are critical about online advertising and data commodification, white-collar groups and programmers are more capable of conducting oppositional behaviour (e.g. the use of ad-block software or browser extension add-ons) compared to assembly line workers. For example, all participants in white-collar group 1 state that they use some kind of software to block advertising online (e.g. 360, Tencent PC Manager, add-ons on Chrome, etc.). In addition, one participant of group 2 mentions using VPN to go to YouTube because then she can use iblock on YouTube instead of watching videos on Chinese websites on which ads cannot be blocked. Another participant from white-collar group 2 mentions he learned how to 'opt-out' on Baidu after the death of Wei Zexi who went to an unqualified private hospital because of the promoted advertising on the Baidu search engine. Programmer groups also manifest a general knowledge and use of blocking software.

In marked distinction from white-collar and programmer groups, participants from the assembly line worker groups all claimed that there is no way to block advertising. For example, when asked about whether they knew any way to block online advertising, one manufacturing worker claimed that "there is no way to block [ads]" (group 2, #8,56'04"). Another worker claimed that "it needs professionals/experts [to block online ads]" (assembly line worker group 2, #4, 57'05).

To sum up, there are two types of arguments to justify Internet companies' data collection: to claim that 'privacy' in the digital age is impossible and to claim that being funded by advertising is the only way for Internet companies to survive. However, participants are also critical about online advertising. There are obvious differences in the expressed behaviour between white-collar, programmer and assembly line worker groups. While participants from white-collar and programmer groups are more likely to know and to use blocking software or add-ons, assembly workers lack the relevant knowledge, thus are unlikely to take oppositional action.

9.1.4. 'We are powerful consumers'

One prominent concept articulated in the focus groups is that participants, to a large extent, view themselves as consumers of commercial platforms or Internet companies. When asked about their opinions of the Internet in general, and their concerns about privacy or security issues, participants discuss these issues from their perspective as consumers. This exactly reflects the neoliberal understanding of the market and human well-being that human well-being can best be advanced through the market (Harvey, 2005: 2).

For example, when asked questions about alternative platforms not carrying advertising, some participants asked whether such platforms are membership or subscription funded. In other words, they see users as members or consumers who buy a service from Internet companies. One participant, who used to donate for two free, community-built CC software, specifically emphasises that she perceives her actions as paying for the service instead of donating:

[11] Moderator: So did you donate for the software because you think it was helpful for you?

(#5): It is not like a donation; I think it is worth it spending money to purchase their products

(#2): [we are] willing to pay for our use

(#5): yes, I think I am really willing to pay for it, and also they didn't charge a lot, or maybe it's just me, I think my current situation is that if the product is worth the money. I wouldn't waste a lot of energy to find a free replacement, to find free software for bypassing the GFW [She donated to the software for this purpose]. If there is a good service, I would like to pay for it.^{lxiv}

This is an extraordinary example because the Moderator asked the participants' opinions about non-commercial platforms such as Wikipedia and whether they think the Wikipedia model is feasible in China. In response to this question, participant [#5] gives two examples of software she donated to and supported, but explicitly points out she perceives her actions as purchasing the service: if the service is worth spending money for, then she would like to pay for it. Notice the first two lines in the extract [12]. #5 does not answer the Moderator's

question but reframes the Moderator's use of the word 'donate'. There is a strong *negation* in the sentence, which implies her perception of her identity as a consumer. The identity constructed in the discourse is a user as a consumer. In this way, she positions herself as a consumer, even of the two free, non-commercial, community-supported software. It is not surprising that on the basis of the current situation where commercial Internet platforms dominate the market in China, there is a general lack of imagination of alternative, not for profit, and publicly owned or shared Internet platforms.

Moreover, many participants believe that the power of Internet users lies in their economic identity as consumers, instead of more political identities such as active citizens or netizens. For example, one programmer says:

[12] I think, from now on, Internet companies and some big companies will pay a lot of attention on issues about Internet security, including individual privacy, because since they have attracted these user groups, then the privacy of these user groups and the security of these individuals' information have become an important task of the company, as *if one day they lose this information, they will lose a majority of users*, and for Internet companies, *if they don't have users, then they don't have a future.*^{lxv} (programmer group 2, 40.53, #4)

There are two main types of *subject identities* involved: commercial Internet companies (instead of, e.g. public-owned platforms or not-for-profit platforms) as product/service providers, and users as consumers who receive the services (instead of, e.g. more politically involved citizens or netizens). As shown in this example, the programmer believes that as Internet users, their power lies in their consumer choice. Their choices as consumers require or 'force' the companies to provide better services and carefully protect their personal information and ensure not to misuse this information. This echoes the 'positive' dynamic of a free market/neoliberal economic philosophy which is a philosophy because it is considered to be based on the uncontrolled free will that defines a particular social contract: a product or service is developed by a creative entrepreneur; individuals freely decide to pay for that product if they want it and can pay for it; entrepreneurs further refine or develop their product to more fully meet the needs of the purchaser; if they do not, buyers will look elsewhere for a better product; and so on. In contrast to this perception, there are few discussions about how to involve in political decision making in legislation to restrict the companies' collection and

use of personal data. Rather, when talking about laws or regulations on the Internet, it is something for the government to solve (or even to ignore, by leaving to all to business practice), and not for the people to participate in. This also demonstrates a deeper ideology of ‘there is no alternative’ (see section 9.3).

To sum up, participants construct their identity as consumers who purchase service online, instead of citizens who use the Internet for civic participation. This is an instrumental understanding of the Internet and ignores its communicative function as a public sphere (Habermas, 1991).

9.2. Internet Politics

This section will focus on participants’ experience with online censorship and content control in China. My questions focused on how participants justify this content control conducted by both the government and the companies. In particular, these are three salient themes of arguments: threats and negative influences from ‘enemy states’, threats of instability, and China’s unique ‘national condition’ (*Guo Qing* ‘国情’).

While the main focus of this section is to illustrate participants’ ideological acceptance of the government’s censorship, I by no means claim that this is the case for everyone. I have no intention to claim those participants who hold ideological opinions have narrow understandings or practices against censorship. As theorised by Gramsci and explained by Hall, ideology could be spontaneous and chaotic (see Chapter 2). While the participants argue that it is necessary to censor and control the Internet in China for several reasons, such as negative influences from the West on people’s thinking, national security, etc., the focus groups show that many participants hold *negotiated* positions. It means that while accepting the ideologies at an abstract level, participants make their rules at the situational level, such as supporting the use of VPN to bypass the GFW. This is a *negotiated position* illustrated by Hall (1980). More specifically, participants holding this type of negotiated position might have different knowledge of an ideology (unconscious, conscious, partly conscious or critically conscious), and only partly accede to the nationalist ideology. For example, the participant in the extract [15] below (who uses the term ‘enemy state’) also legitimated

people's behaviour to use VPN to know "the truth about history" (white-collar group 1, #3, 01:23'50"). Therefore, his acceptance of censorship only works at an abstract level.

9.2.1. The 'Enemy State'

One prominent theme in the discussions of international relationship and the Internet is participants' construction of a friend/enemy scheme. It represents other countries (especially from the West) as enemies that should be opposed. Interviewees from the focus groups legitimate the Chinese government's control of the Internet through a narrative of antagonism between China (as 'us') and other countries, especially America (as 'them'). This section identifies two ways to build this narrative. The first way is to claim that some online content (mainly from the West) has negative influences on Chinese people's worldview. The second one is to describe threats from other countries to China's national security.

First of all, censorship is claimed to be 'necessary' by some participants because the West tries to 'corrupt' Chinese people's thinking. One salient example is that one participant in the white-collar group used the term "enemy state" (*Di Guo* '敌国') when he expressed his opinions about censorship:

[13] First of all, one country's *own* politics surely serves the interests of its *own* country. And *enemy states*' (slight laughter), I mean *other country's politics* (slight laughter) surely also serves the interests of *their* own country. First of all, just one simple example, often some *foreign anti-China forces influence Chinese people's thinking* on some websites, such as Weibo. Therefore, it [the government] needs [to apply censorship]. lxxvi

These expressions construct a clear narrative of other countries as enemies. The participant uses the deictic 'them' to distinguish China from other countries. This construction is what is called by Reisigl and Wodak as *strategies of collectivisation* (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, p48). Using pronouns, this *strategy of collectivisation* indicates the similarities among 'us' and differences between 'us' and 'them'. Moreover, this extract also uses *topos of threat*: the participant negatively typifies 'enemy states' as "foreign anti-China forces", and they want to "influence [meaning corrupt] Chinese people's thinking". There is also one implication about

the *equivalence* between China and the Chinese government. He understands politics that serves the interests of the ‘state’, instead of serving the interests of its people.

The second way to construct the confrontational relations between China and other countries is through the claims of national security. From this perspective, Internet control conducted by the government is ‘necessary’ to protect national security and national interests. For example, one programmer expresses the reason why she supports the government to ban Facebook and Google in China:

[14] I have different opinions [about whether the Chinese government should allow Facebook to enter China or not]. *I think there are some concerns at the state level to ban Facebook* because if people use some means for social communication so widely, there are some very, very important issues about information, for example, some officials, if [they] all chat through Facebook, *America can gain our information easily, then it can do something about this information*, for example, two Chinese officials talk to each other, and talk about something, then Facebook, it, *after all, it is from a foreign country, we cannot have full control, perhaps, maybe, Facebook, for example, it and America, it and its government, conduct some [exchange of information] and its information must not only be stored in Facebook but also in some of its national stuff, right? It perhaps could collect this information, or do something, for example [if] China has some issues with some other countries, it [Facebook/America] could conduct some actions, I think from the national level, it [the Chinese government] should not want it [Facebook] to come in... lxxvii*

In this extract, the participant points out straightforwardly that Facebook is a “foreign” company and to co-operates with the American government or that it is very likely to be doing so. There is an *equivalence* of the American government and an American company. On a discursive level, she uses several times the deictics ‘we’ and ‘our’ to distinguish China from other countries, especially America. There is a strong distinction between ‘we’ as China and Chinese state versus ‘them’ as America, American companies (Facebook), and the American government (*strategies of collectivisation*).

I then followed up with the question of whether the interviewee thinks that Facebook could represent the interests of the American government. She explains that America Intelligent

Agencies could get information about China if Chinese people and officials use Facebook. She also claims that Facebook can also spread ‘some information’ (that could be harmful to the Chinese government) for American government through Facebook easier (as shown in the excerpt [16]).

This ideological construction simplifies the relationships between America, the FBI (or out of a certain understandable lack of knowledge, the speaker implies other US government intelligence agencies) and American companies (such as Facebook, Apple).²² This (possible) misunderstanding of the complex relations between government and businesses might relate to a more direct relationship between the Chinese government and Chinese companies. In China, the government has more power over companies (though, of course, the US government has its own powers of access to all electronic flows of information). One famous case is that Google left China because of its disputes with the Chinese government.²³ A more recent example is Apple agreeing to build a new database within mainland China and store all its Chinese user data in this database. This perception of state power as primary over the business power is prevalent among Chinese Internet users, and there is a tendency to identify with its positive necessity by internalising as a friend/enemy nationalist discourse.

However, there are also explicit arguments against the equivalence between China and Chinese Internet companies. There are also expectations that some banned foreign platforms, such as Google and Facebook, will gain entry to China and provide unfiltered information for Chinese people. The most common complaint is to compare Baidu to Google and the expectation of Google returning to China. For example, #2 in white-collar group 2 argues that Wikipedia and Google are much more reliable than Baidu-Baike and Baidu (white-collar group 2, #2, 59.58). One programmer criticises that Baidu charges money for the documents shared by other users for free on the Baidu platform. It is, according to him, against the spirit of the Internet (programmer group 1, #4, 01.28.30). Therefore, from participants’ non-

²² About the complex relations between Apple, Facebook and American government, see reports for example: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/feb/22/mark-zuckerberg-sympathetic-apple-fbi-encryption-battle>, and <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/feb/17/inside-the-fbis-encryption-battle-with-apple>, accessed 18 Sep. 2018.

²³ The latest news about Google and China is a confirmation of Google’s plan return to China with a censored Chinese search engine. See reports on this project, for example, from the Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/02/google-working-on-censored-search-engine-for-china>

ideological opinions, the Chinese Internet companies do not equal to China and are not serving for Chinese people's interests.

To sum up, there are two types of arguments regarding Internet control from an international perspective. The first one is to claim that censorship and surveillance are necessary to protect Chinese people's thinking from negative Western influences. The second one endorses online control through the claims of national security and national interests.

9.2.2. 'We need a Stable Country.'

This type of discourse argues that government control of the Internet (including censorship and surveillance) is necessary for China to maintain necessary stability. According to this view, a stable environment surpasses any other demands of Chinese people, such as freedom and democracy or even to claim the 'right' to be able to 'struggle' (even if only in the realm of ideas). There are two main types of assertions. Firstly, oppression is necessary for social stability. Secondly, instability caused by any fight for democracy is just a threat rather than one that can be positively explained.

First of all, a nationalist construction of one nation claims that oppression is necessary to keep China stable. One salient phenomenon discovered in the focus groups is how the necessity of oppression to keep social stability is taken as common sense (a *basic* ideological construction) and 'background knowledge' for participants. Almost all participants perceive stability as an undisputed priority, and Internet control is necessary to maintain this stability (ironically echoing similar notions of social media use in the supposedly entirely free-market/capitalist West, that social media pacifies a happy consumer population through them acceding to adopting consumer and individualist identities).

In contrast, there are few discussions about, for example, where the discontent that causes the instability comes from, who benefits most from the oppression of dissidents, who loses rights and freedom when under a regime of strict control, and what consequences this control can bring. One specific topic of the argument about national stability is the claim for the necessity to oppress certain ethnic minority groups. This type of discourse is a racist one. For example, one participant claims that some ethnic minority groups might make the country more

unstable. Thus some information about these ethnic minority groups *needs* to be controlled or censored online [programmer group 1, #2, 01:05:04]. The focus group was asked to discuss issues about the government's censorship and closing down of websites (not relevant to ethnic groups), but the participant *spontaneously* started to legitimate the government's censorship by referring to ethnic minorities. This spontaneous connection demonstrates how some people presuppose the link between ethnic issues and Internet control. The former is used to legitimate the latter.

Another typical example comes from a manufacturing worker group. The participant states that some online posts are 'extreme' and are related to 'sensitive' issues and thus should be censored in case they cause instability:

[15] If some individuals make extreme [statements], or use some sensitive terms, I mean, if [the statements and terms are] browsed by other people, *I mean* [they] *might cause others' to have, similar attitudes or similar opinions*, so it is *normal to have some information deleted*, and then now there is a lot of 'positive energy' (slight laughter).lxviii

This participant argues that if people's speech is not controlled, the society will become unstable. Therefore, it is 'normal' (reasonable, right), even necessary, for the government to conduct censorship. There are no further explanations about the problem of instability: it is 'common sense' that stability takes priority over everything else in the development of the Chinese economy (and well-being). Furthermore, the participant uses the term 'positive energy' to refer to the government's behaviour in conducting censorship. 'Positive energy' is a word promoted by the government to describe how to shape 'Internet culture'. For example, in Xi's 4.19 speech, he claims that "Cyberspace is a common virtual home for millions upon millions of people... [we need to] ensure that positive energy and mainstream values prevail. By doing so, we will be able to create clean and upright cyberspace for Internet users, especially young ones". There is no clear explanation of what 'positive energy' means in this speech. However, it can be indicated from his speech that only a controlled Internet can be "full of positive energy". In the same paragraph, he claims that "The Internet is not a lawless place: the use of the Internet to advocate, incite and preach the toppling of the government, religious extremism, separatism, and terrorism must be resolutely stopped and cracked down upon. Under absolutely no circumstances can such activities be allowed to go unchecked".

Therefore, the participant's attitude towards Internet control can also be identified from the specific use of the term 'positive energy'.

Another way to argue for the importance of stability in China is to emphasise the negative consequences of instability in other countries, especially in countries where instability is caused by pro-democracy movements. For example, one programmer uses the example of the Arab Spring movements to emphasise the necessity to control the Internet:

[16] For example a few years ago, like Syria in the Middle East, what is it called, hmm, such as the Middle East Spring (Moderator: Arab Spring), in fact, it was because the local government *lost discourse power over the Internet*, I mean [the local government did] not intervene to control this special type of capital [he explicitly refers to information as a special type of capital in his previous statements] to exert its power, it leads to continuous wars in the Middle East, all the governments were overthrown. Therefore I think this type of capital [information] *must be controlled*.

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The example of the Arab Spring is seen as a history lesson or a warning for people who want a looser control of the Internet in China: it will lead to war and instability. Therefore, the Internet in China should be subject to government control. However, The participant says nothing about the complex processes giving rise to the Arab Spring and why people rebelled. He then comes to the conclusion that the lack of control of the Internet would lead to instability and implies that stability should surpass any other concern in China.

At a sociological level, this type of argument about the priority of stability in China has existed long before it is adapted to Internet-related arguments. Some scholars have tried to explain the possibly very long history of this dominant idea and how it has gained such ideological power in China. In the very long term it could be traced back as far as Confucian thought, when, taking Confucius as a political philosopher, rather than just a 'wise man', he teaches the necessity of hierarchical stability as a primary function of a state, based on correct ethical behaviour and ritual. In the short term, it is related to (1) the disaster of the Cultural Revolution and (2) the social upheavals and instability of the 1980s all over the world and in China. Zheng Yongnian (2004) illustrates the formation of "China's model of reform" for the Jiang Zemin-centred third-generation leadership, which is "economic reform without political

reform” (Zheng, 2004, p54). He points out that one characteristic of the legitimization of “China’s model of reform” was to emphasise the issue of socio-political stability. At first, in the 1980s, it was difficult for the CPC to justify “the use of stability as a prerequisite of economic reform”. Some social forces emerged during that time to call for political reform and finally grew into pre-democracy movements in the late 1980s. However, the situation changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. As Zheng puts it “the necessity of political stability seemed to have been ‘naturally’ justified by what happened outside China” (ibid., p56). Popular perceptions of stability have changed: radical political reform would lead China along the same path as the Soviet Union, and thus “authoritarian rule became more acceptable as a price to pay for continuing economic improvement” (ibid.). Wang Hui also argues how the state utilised the upheaval of 1989 “as the premise of its own legitimacy” (Wang, 2003, p62). He further points out how ironically this request for maintaining stability “eventually obscured the crisis of state legitimacy that had gradually come into being since the onset of the (neoliberal) reforms” (ibid.). Therefore, arguments about the necessity to keep stability through tighter control in China has its historical context and has always been an ideological discourse.

However, there are also arguments that identify the fallacy within this type of arguments about stability and claim that there are oppressed interests from minority groups that should be recognised. The confrontational arguments are more prevalent in manufacturing worker groups. The manufacturing worker groups, in general, express a stronger attitude and behaviour to fight against censorship. Many participants from the manufacturing worker groups claim that they have experienced accounts being banned or deleted, posts being deleted, etc. Then they choose to change an account or wait for some time until their accounts are active again. Compared to other groups, manufacturing worker groups are more likely to hold *oppositional positions* (deconstruct the message and reconstruct the meanings within alternative and contrary frameworks) to the dominant ideology, instead of, for example, a *negotiated position* (acceptance of dominant ideology at an abstract level but make its own rules at a situational level based on their life experiences and self-interests) from the white-collar group (explanation of these two positions, see Chapter 2). The main reason why manufacturing worker groups hold more confrontational attitudes might be that they are more severely exploited in China’s integration into the world of informational capitalism. What they post online and later deleted by platforms and the government are closely related to their lived experience, such as their life in factories, human rights movements, the revelation of

exploitation by the factories, etc. Compared to the situation of assembly line worker groups workers, posts censored or deleted from white-collar workers and programmers are more about freedom of expression, rights to information, etc. Moreover, the government has intentionally looser control about the rights movement concerning single, individual, urban, middle-class issues, compared to collective farmers and worker issues relating to provocative social movements (Yan, 2009, p292). Therefore, the other two groups, in general, hold more *negotiated positions*.

To sum up, the second type of arguments to justify Internet control emphasises the importance of stability and thus the necessity of the control.

9.2.3. 'We have a Unique National Condition' (*Guoqing*)

The third type of discourse to justify online content control is the claim for China's unique 'national condition' (*Guoqing*) among focus groups. Participants argue that China has a unique 'national condition' and thus 'Western' liberal democracy is not suitable for China. One term related to 'national condition' is 'national quality' (*Guomin Suzhi*) which refers to the whole population's 'quality'. It is claimed that because of the low level of 'national quality', Chinese people are not ready for democracy and need a strong authoritarian state. This section will focus on discourse about these two terms: 'national condition' (*Guoqing*) and 'national quality' (*Guomin Suzhi*).

First of all, when asked about the group's opinions about online censorship and surveillance, one programmer deployed the argument that China has a unique 'national condition':

[17] #3: This is, I think related to the national condition (*Guoqing*), China... there are many ethnic groups, the national condition is more complex, indeed, if there are some rumours and you don't block it, let it spread, this is a very serious issue, easy to cause social instability and such like, therefore, about things such as spreading rumours, I personally think, they should be blocked, other things such as what you said about history issues, these things are harder to say.^{lxx}

Another programmer follows with:

[18] I think this (censorship) is one stage of the development of society, I mean perhaps, our country is experiencing a stage from isolation to openness, perhaps now it is in the stage of somewhere in between, so perhaps now every aspect, because of national quality (*Suzhi*), or domestic or external environments are not ready, so [the government] conducts some control. I think it is reasonable or it suits the current situation. I think in the future, when the environment or the nation or people, etc. are ready, when it has reached a certain stage, it should be when the society develops or the politics develop to a certain stage, hmm, then the problem [of censorship] will be solved easily, then [the society] will be more open, I think so.^{lxxi}

The main claim of the extract [19] and [20] is that China has a unique ‘national condition’; thus censorship is necessary. These two excerpts are typical – [19] claims about the unique ‘national condition’, [20] argues for the ‘China’s stage of development’. In extract [19], what is unique about China’s ‘national condition’ is a large number of ethnic minority groups. Although extract [20] does not use the term *Guoqing*, yet it exhibits a typical argument about ‘national condition’: China is going through a specific development stage (in terms of both the internal and external environment), so China is not ready for a more open and free society. In discussions in the focus groups, the ‘national condition’ also refers to, for example, Chinese traditional culture, China’s political culture, or ‘national quality’ (*Guomin Suzhi*) and so on. However, there is no one single understanding of ‘national condition’. Rather, it is an ambiguous term that allows so many factors to be claimed as a unique condition. Despite the variety of differences in defining ‘national condition’, the purpose of claiming it is clear: censorship is necessary for China’s unique *Guoqing*.

While most arguments about ‘national condition’, as shown in [19] and [20], see the society as a whole, thus focus on why the society cannot be democratised, there is one specific type of argument concentrate on individuals. The discourse on ‘quality’ (*Suzhi*) specifically argues that individuals in China are not ready for democratisation. For example, when asked about the group’s opinions and attitudes towards the government’s online censorship, one programmer draws on a typical discourse of ‘national quality’ (*Suzhi*):

[19] In fact, perhaps compared to foreign countries, [China] is not free enough in terms of speech, but in fact, this is due to the national quality (*Suzhi*). If national quality

(*Suzhi*) rises to a certain (higher) level, then there will be more freedom of speech. Freedom is relative, if the national quality is not (high) enough, is low, *it (the state) gives you freedom* it will actually bring more harm to society, for example, if the whole or average national education level keeps increasing, from the previous primary school average gradually to the current high school and university level, if when the country, or say from *our generation*, I think gradually, when *in the future* everyone can go to university, I think when in that way the national quality (*Suzhi*) increases to a certain level, then *the state will give you much greater freedom of speech*, including, for example, though our country has voting rights now, we actually don't have it, meaning there are some delegates, who represent us to vote, that is because it [the state] thinks we can't make decisions, can't vote. In the future I think, after *our* government and nation gradually develop, including our whole level comes up, gradually [the state] *will give us more freedom and rights*, and this is also for the purpose to maintain social stability.^{.lxxii}

This participant argues that Chinese people are not ready for pro-democracy reform because of the low level of *suzhi*, and if people are given freedom, it will be harmful to society. For people who hold this argument, democracy needs people in the country to have a high level of *Suzhi*. However, it is worth asking what type of institution can cultivate and increase people's *Suzhi* for democracy: a perfect authoritarian one or an imperfect democratic one?

Therefore, claims about the national quality of the population (*Guomin Suzhi*) is ideological in terms that legitimate the undemocratic situation in China. This can be taken as a mainstream argument in China. According to Kipnis, there are more than 32 different translations of *Suzhi* into English as early as 1999, but no one single English term can fully explain the exact meaning of this word (Kipnis, 2006, p296). Several studies are dedicated to explaining the meaning of *Suzhi* in the socio-political context in China (for example, Anagnost 1997; Judd, 2002; Murphy 2004, Kipnis 2006²⁴). *Suzhi*, according to these studies, is used to legitimate neoliberal tendency and increasing inequality in China (e.g. Judd 2002,

²⁴ For example, Ellen Judd (2002) examines the rural reforms in the early 1980s in China how low *Suzhi* (quality) was seen as a decisive factor in women's disadvantages, and how a set of policies and programmes were set to improve women's quality to make them more competitive in China's 'Socialist market economy'. Another example is from Ann Anagnost (1997) shows how the improvement of national quality of the population, especially that of its children, is linked to the survival of China as a nation. Murphy, Rachel (2004) shows how *suzhi* is central to legitimise party-state and its policies in rural areas in four aspects.

Murphy 2004, Kipnis,2006). *Suzhi* is also seen as crucial for the survival of the nation in nationalistic discourses (e.g. Anagnost 1997, see also a popular book embedded in this argument written by Xie Sizhong, *The Quality Crisis of Our Nation*). In other situations, *Suzhi* is deployed as an evaluation of patriotism by the Chinese government (Kipnis, 2006, p311, Murphy 2004, p16). Whatever the exact meaning of *Suzhi* is, the main purpose of this term is clear: to legitimate the current situation in China. It is a nationalist discourse used to support the authoritarian socio-political arrangements in China.

In extract [21], *Suzhi* has two main meanings concerning nationalist ideology. First of all, it is related to technocracy and patriarchy in Chinese politics. As stated by Yan Hairong, the phrase *Guomin Suzhi* (the quality of the national population) is “appropriately technocratic in a context where technocratic leaders dominate national politics and politics is itself deployed as a technocracy” (Yan, 2003, p514). Extract [21] makes the argument that the low level of the quality of the national population makes it inappropriate for the population to have more freedom of speech and rights. This is a highly technocratic argument. It implies that the government (or people with a higher level of *Suzhi*) could and should make decisions for the country and the population because of the average low level of national quality. Moreover, extract [21] argues that the government “will give people more freedom and rights”. This is a patriarchal argument. The government is seen as an active subject while the people are seen as a passive receiver/object. This sentence expresses a ‘relational value’ which indicates a specific relationship between the government and the population.

Secondly, the vagueness of the term *Suzhi* in this extract further reveals its function as an ideology to legitimate the government’s domination and control. The vagueness of its meaning makes it hard to envisage any detailed institutional reforms. In extract [21] for example, the participant wavers about when is a proper time for democratic reform: “gradually in the future”, “our generation”, or “when everyone can go to universities”, etc. There is no settled standard or time for reform; improving the national quality of the population is an ambiguous concept. This lack of specificity reveals a key point in the discursive function of *Suzhi*: whenever may be a proper time for reform, it is not now. Because of the vagueness of measurement of *Suzhi*, the Chinese people will never be ready for reform. This ideological function of *suzhi* as a way to prevent reform can be shown from popular intellectual writings. For example, the popular intellectual Xie Sizhong in his famous book about Chinese national quality in 2004 argued that improving people’s *Suzhi* is more

important than institutional reform.²⁵ This argument, however, could be used as an ideology to postpone or decline any possible political pro-democratic reforms in China.

To sum up, the third type of discourse to justify online censorship and content control argues that China has a unique ‘national condition’ (*Guoqing*) and low level of ‘national quality’ (*Guomin Suzhi*) and thus both the society and individuals are not suitable for or not ready for (‘Western’) democracy.

9.2.4. The State or the Companies?

While the last three sub-sections discussed participants’ legitimation of Internet content control, this part will focus on participants’ discourse on the relations between the state and companies. The relations between the Chinese state and Internet companies are more complex than deregulation or regulation in the neoliberal sense. Besides the regulation in the marketplace, there are issues about content control struggles among the users, the State, International companies, and domestic Internet companies.

The relationship between the government and the market in China has been a focal point in discussions about neoliberalism between the right and the left (especially there are several debates between the New Left and the neoliberal side²⁶). The neoliberal side argues that the government should not intervene too much in market competition and ‘only’ guarantee a free market. On the other hand, the left argues that the government should limit the expansion of the market as regards its neoliberal tendency and represent the rights of the people more (more discussions, see Chapter 3).

Whether to regulate the market or not and the government’s role have always been a focal point in Internet-related discussions. There are two main types of arguments among participants regarding the relations between the state and the companies. First of all, there are expectations from participants that the government could intervene to protect the security of their personal data. Unlike the heated debate in liberal democracies about whether the

²⁵ See Xie Sizhong, 2004, *The Crisis of China’s National Quality (Zhongguo Guomin Suzhi Weiji)*, Beijing: China’s Changan Publishing House)

²⁶ See debates between New Left and Neoliberalists, Pan, Li, Lu, Lao, etc.

government should intervene in Internet platforms' operations, appeals for government intervention of some extent or aspects of content regulation is prevailing among participants. This type of discourse usually resonates the government and official's discourse of 'positive energy' or 'a clean environment in the cyberspace'. Internet fraud, gambling, sexual content and personal information leak are the most concerned content. The government thus are expected to govern and intervene the Internet from a more or less authoritative way.

Secondly, a more important and interesting discussion is participants' expectations of companies. If Google's entry into the Chinese market in 2006 and the commercial social media platform Sina Weibo attracted heated public issue debate since its launch in 2009 demonstrate some liberation and empowerment brought by a free Internet market, then the end of Google China's service in 2010 and the decline of Weibo's function as a public sphere shed light on the bankruptcy of the neoliberal claim that free-market must automatically bring freedom of speech and thus democracy. While there used to be such a hope, it is now tending to decline, especially after some recent parallel developments of more intensive control of content and loosened control of the market in China. For example, one participant expressed her disappointment after Apple gives users' data to the Chinese government.

[20] In China no company can fight the government's power, for example, Apple said they didn't want to give away users' information, but if you don't give it [to the government], you will die [other participants: Yes], so there is no other way. The big companies also can't protect personal data, individual privacy.^{lxxiii} (white-collar group 2, 39'48'')

The neoliberal development of the Internet and increasing corporate power is not necessarily followed by a loosening of content control from the government. Rather, government power and corporate power work together to appropriate power from the public through, for example, online advertising, surveillance and censorship from both the government and the platforms.

Participants are also aware that platforms conduct self-censorship to meet the government's needs or demands. For example, one programmer argues that censorship does not only come from the government:

[21] There is also some [censorship], maybe because platforms have some concerns about their profits, for example, Douban [a community-oriented social media platform in China], maybe if it feels that if you post something on my platform and attract a lot of attention and followers, probably the government will put some pressures on Douban. ^{lxxiv}(programmer group 1, 01:03'25'')

From the focus groups, there are indications that some participants expected the free market and the Internet would bring democracy to China. However, this expectation or myth has been broken by reality. Participants realise that the companies and government work together in terms of censorship and control. The myth that the free market could bring free Internet and freedom of speech has lessened in its ideological power. Though the companies are gaining more power and expanding fast in the neoliberal tendency, it is unlikely for the Internet to equally empower users in China. Under this situation, deregulation could bring more harm than benefits to users.

Therefore, there are some sways between regulation and deregulation, the state and commercial companies among participants. While expecting the confrontations of power between the political and economic elites could bring some public space for the civic society, there is also stated that no power could change the censorship and surveillance conducted by the state. What is more common is the techno-deterministic claims about relations between technology and society and thus between the economically and politically dominant class and subaltern groups as I will show in the next section.

9.3. TINA

One salient theme in participants' discussions is 'There is no alternative'. This section will illustrate this type of discourse among the focus groups. More specifically, I identify three types of 'no alternative' discourse.

First of all, participants legitimate companies' business operations of data collection because *there are no other ways* for the companies to survive in the market. As shown in 9.1.3, participants claim that collecting data is the way for Internet companies to 'survive'. A similar conclusion is argued from a different perspective: Internet companies cannot survive without advertising. The questions in focus groups about participants' opinions of current

predominant commercialised platforms are followed by questions about alternatives. It is perhaps not surprising that the current neoliberal situation leads to a paucity of the imagination of possible alternative futures involving non-commercialised platforms.

For example, when asked about whether they have used not-for-profit platforms without advertising, one programmer stated that there are no such platforms: “As long as it wants to make money, they must have advertising (laughter)”. When asked then to imagine a similar website like Wikipedia in China, another programmer soon argues that “it might cost a lot of money.” He then explains that there are some online forums about computer technologies, and there is no advertising online, but he further poses the question where the income could come from:

[22] There are some websites (with no advertising), such as some online forums about technologies. They don't have advertising, but without advertising, how do they get income? Although they don't make a profit, such as [forum name], it can be used all over the world (Moderator: Does it rely on donations?). Yes, it might still cost a lot.^{lxxv}

When asked about alternative non-commercial platforms without advertising, the manufacturing worker group gave rise to similar one-sided reactions:

[23] (Participant #2): Such a website won't appear, and even if there will be one, I think, after a while, it will have to charge a fee in some way or other.

(#1): There can't be such websites at the moment, there are none now.

(#2): No, there are no such websites.

(#7): There will be no such websites that you can watch videos online for free, without advertising, free.^{lxxvi}

In these two extracts, the premise that Internet companies have to survive by selling data to advertisers is not true, as alternative non-profit user-owned platforms such as Wikipedia and Diaspora are existing successful examples. However, it has to be pointed out that it might be harder for Chinese Internet users to imagine alternative platforms since Wikipedia in the Chinese language cannot be accessed (zh.wikipedia) though the English version can be accessed. This type of argument is thus an accurate observation about the current industry,

for most of the websites are built on being able to sell advertising in various ways. As the BAT companies continuously declare, any website can cooperate with them (through API), inserting a series of codes in the website and showing targeted advertising to users. The neoliberalist sphere (both its ‘reality’ and its discourse) has left little space for non-commercial corporations and alternatives, almost by definition, as the ‘ideal’ of neoliberalism is that the free market gives rise to the best of all possible worlds because it rewards talent and invention that meet the requirements of consumers who freely choose via the market to reward that product by paying for it (in one way or another). Of course, a non-commercial enterprise that survives through (individual) voluntary donations might not be seen as contradicting a neoliberal economic climate as, in effect, the donors can be seen to be ‘paying’ for something they want.

The second and most straightforward one is that *there are no alternative public service Internet platforms* in China. For example, when asked about whether they have concerns about online personal data and how they protect and use their personal data on different platforms, #6 in programmer group 1 states that he has more trust in big companies compared to small ones because he has to use their platforms for communication:

[24] I believe ... those big companies, big brands are trustworthy, and if we can't even trust them, then basically you lose connections with the outside world in the Internet society.^{lxxvii}

This excerpt shows exactly the conflict between participants’ need of a public-owned social and communicative platform and the private companies’ appropriation of their personal data for profits making purpose. Linking back to companies’ digital discourse of describing themselves as ‘public utility’ (see 8.2), participants clearly recognise that these companies are not providing ‘public utility’ but to exploit this public need to make profits. As Van Dijck points out, the public’s “need for connectedness is what drove many users to these sites” yet soon appropriated by platforms for ‘connectivity’ of data as a valuable recourse (Van Dijck, 2013: 4). In other words, as Fuchs distinguishes the differences, while participants choose social media for its use value, the companies are making profits from the exchange value of users’ data and connection (Fuchs, 2014a). According to the participants, their trust of big companies is more like a choice but without other options as the only other ‘option’ is to withdraw entirely from a society defined by the *necessity* of social media use.

Finally and the most important TINA discourse among participants is that *there is no effective direct method for political participation (in a broader sense) thus for political solutions*. This type of argument claims that the collection of personal information by platforms has already happened and will happen all the time. Thus participants have to accept the ‘fact’ and nothing can be changed. It believes that participants have no power to stop companies from collect personal data. One participant from white-collar group 1 argues that:

[25] It [Internet platform] records my browsing history, and it will recommend me relevant things [through ads]. I think it is acceptable because *you can't totally stop websites from recording your information anyway, because it is already a default option that you can't say no and have to say yes*.^{lxxviii}

When asked about whether they have concerns that Internet companies get information about their location, one participant from the same group argues that:

[26] #1: You mean that [the platforms] use your information to find out your location? *It's useless to worry about it, because they do whatever they want, you can only accept passively, you know, you can't do anything, even if you are worried*

#5: [users are] *are at the mercy of* [the platforms]

#Moderator: is that because they are in charge of algorithms and design of the programmes?

#5: Because in China I think *it's useless to fight against these things*, also there is only one platform, and if you don't want to accept their terms, then you don't use it. *The platform will never change for you*.^{lxxix}

When asked about whether they care about the collection of personal data and the companies' violation of privacy after some participants' legitimating the ‘business models’, one participant from the other white-collar group expressed her attitude through one extreme metaphoric expression:

[27] It doesn't mean we don't care. How to say, it's like you are getting used to being raped, then after a while, you don't care anymore, you know, I mean it's a passive acceptance.^{lxxx}

These excerpts claim that users have no or few controls over the development of the Internet and platforms. The conclusion is thus that if users do not have the power to influence or change the companies anyway, then no action should be taken or even considered because it is useless. For example, One programmer from group 2 claims that he tries as much as he can to use QQ and WeChat to log in to all possible websites and apps (through API) because information on these two social media has been leaked anyway.

This type of pessimistic view about user control and political participation is prevalence. Participants find that there is no way they can control how the platforms collect and use their information ‘legally’ to display advertising. Although participants find targeted advertising as ‘annoying’ and sometimes ‘embarrassing’, yet there is no effective direct way for political participation and changes. A recent example indicative of this situation is the huge dispute caused by Baidu CEO Robin Yanhong Lee, who claimed that Chinese users are willing to give up their privacy in exchange for convenience²⁷. This statement caused heated discussion online, and a lot of people criticised this arrogant formula, arguing that Baidu dominates the market only because there are no other options, other than of course ‘no option’.

Participants also realise the inequality of power relationships involved in practice and chose ‘passives reactions’. For example, one participant from a white-collar group explains his reactions to social media platforms as “passive reactions”. He claims that since Weibo and other platform require more and more personal information from users, including location, he tries to turn all these functions off, and use them less frequently. He argues that these demands have pushed him away from using those platforms. However, he also claims that it is “almost impossible” not to use them, because of the social needs of ICT and Internet participation, but he pays extra attention not to post anything or as little as possible about himself on the platforms (white-collar group 1, 54.17).

This type of argument falls into the category illustrated by Fuchs as being “critically conscious of an ideology and they (still, partly) do it” (Fuchs, 2015, p87). It is different from the *negotiated position* described by Hall (1980) because users are seemingly fully aware of

²⁷ See reports of Robin Li’s statement: <https://www.abacusnews.com/big-guns/chinese-internet-users-criticize-baidu-ceo-saying-people-china-are-willing-give-data-privacy/article/2139313>

ideological coercion and do not like it, but in reality, they accept and submit to the ideological behaviour under concrete situations. This type of argument is ideological not because users who hold them are unconscious of or uncritical about the neoliberal ideology, but because users submit to that discourse or the behaviour it makes possible without alternatives other than not to engage at all with the ‘system’. The argument that ‘there is no alternative’ (TINA) functions as an ideology because it facilitates ideological behaviour as regards the neoliberal development of the Chinese Internet. At the other end of ‘response’ it discourages people to actively participate in building alternative non-commercial platforms and thus facilitates the arguments of deregulation.

This pessimistic thinking about technology and Internet platforms has led to individualist solutions to information collection and data leak problems. For example, participants shared their solutions of how to avoid information leaks from an individualist sphere of action: use fake information, check whether the website is secured (https instead of http), trust larger companies (to avoid fraudulent websites and greater security of information), etc. It is a prevalent argument among all groups that people should take their responsibility to try to avoid leaks of personal data. This is a highly depoliticised solution as regards data and privacy issues.

These individualist solutions reflect the lack of social protection from the government. While some participants from focus groups call for government protection (9.2.4), the actual actions taken by the Chinese government or judicial system are rare. While the EU has applied the General Data Protection Regulation, the Chinese government is still lagging behind. One prominent example is the first law case in China about privacy violation by an Internet company (2014). One user sued Baidu for using her browsing history and cookies for targeted advertising as a violation of her privacy. She won her case in the court at the first instance, but a final judgement went against her after Baidu appealed. In the verdict of the final judgement, the Nanjing Gulou People's Court pronounced that “The original verdict will greatly hinder a normal healthy development of Internet innovative technologies and services. The more personalised service for users in the Internet era represents a universal need of users. The original verdict will largely shrink the development space for new services of the Internet” (Nanjing Gulou People’s Court, 2014). In other words, this verdict claims to protect the Internet industry. This verdict is in line with the government’s strategy to develop

the Internet-related industries where economic aims are weighted much more than social concerns.

The deterministic arguments about technology's development and the powerlessness of participants are ideological for two main reasons. First, they deflect people's attention from Internet companies' operations of data collection and exploitation. They thus function to conceal the reality of the neoliberal tendency of data use and user commodification online. Second, these arguments show a deterministic understanding of the relations between human beings and technology, as well as relations between human beings. They thus conceal the underlying issues of the politics of technology, i.e. social relations behind certain developments of technology.

9.4. Conclusion

To summarise this chapter applying the framework developed in Chapter 4 and 5, table 9.1 and 9.2 illustrate the ideological discourse used by participants to justify the Internet Economy and to legitimate China's censorship and the Internet control.

The purpose of the focus group research is to understand how users legitimate or challenge the current social relations and the political economy of the Internet. Critical methodology is different from the conventional interpretivist approach in the way it relates back to the social structure in understanding empirical data. As pointed out by Habermas "the dependence of these ideas and interpretations upon the interests of an object of an objective configuration of societal reproduction makes it impossible to remain at the level of subjective meaning-comprehending hermeneutics; an objective meaning-comprehending theory must also account for that moment of reification which the objectifying procedures exclusively have in mind" (Habermas, 1976: 139). A person's understanding of the external world is inevitably shaped by her/his living experiences which is shaped by the social structure. A dialectic concept of meaning, according to Adorno, relates to "the societal essence which shapes appearances, appears in them and conceals itself in them" (Adorno, 1976a: 37).

This chapter has shown the diversity of workers' responses to the power relations regarding the Internet in China. This chapter has chosen the ideologies that respond to the political economy of the Internet. From an economic perspective, workers have legitimated the

domination of several companies in the market through the language of ‘trust’. They have argued that data collection is either inevitable with either a techno-determinist discourse or ‘TINA’ arguments. Regarding the Internet control, nationalist arguments of ‘us vs them’, ‘stability’, and ‘unique national condition’ is drawn upon.

In particular, one prominent discourse is worth mentioning: TINA. According to workers, they have no public-owned alternatives, no control over the platforms, and moreover, no other ways for Internet companies to survive without selling users’ data. This argument, I would argue, is the most powerful ideology among workers to legitimate the current power relations. It de-politicise the discussions surrounding the political economy of the Internet.

	How participants understand and justify the Internet Economy	Alternative arguments from focus groups
Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Internet provides new opportunities, especially to start own small businesses • We trust in big companies • No Internet platforms are trustworthy, but if we don’t trust big companies, we will lose connection with the society (TINA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The opportunities provided are not as good as promoted
Production (focus on data collection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection is the way for Internet companies to survive • There is no privacy online anyway (TINA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical about data collection • There are ways to block ads (differences between groups)
Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are consumers who use the Internet companies’ service, and our power lies in this consumer identity • This consumer power is limited, but there are no ways to change it (TINA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Companies’ name] is charging users for the documents they share for free, this is against the spirit of the Internet

Table 9.1. Public digital discourse on the Internet Economy in China

	How participants legitimate China's censorship and Internet control	Alternative arguments
International level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are threats from other countries in the cyberspace • Online content from other countries (especially from the West) could have negative influences on Chinese people's worldview • Us (China, Chinese companies, Chinese people) VS. them (Facebook=America) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hoped the international commercial Internet companies could confront the Chinese government's control (bankrupted)
State level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability is central for the Chinese society • Asking for authoritative content regulation regarding fraud, gambling, sexual and rumours online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hope commercial companies could confront political power (bankrupted)
Societal level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China has a unique national condition (<i>Guoqing</i>) so not ready for democratisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Internet failed to provide democratisation it has promised
Individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese people's 'quality' (<i>Suzhi</i>) is not high enough for free expression online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Internet is not free

Table 9.2. Public digital discourse on Internet Politics in China

CHAPTER 10. CONCLUSION

10.1. Introduction

China has gone through socio-economic and political transformations in the global informational capitalism. Accompanied by these transformations is the rise of new discourse, culture, ethos, spirit and ideologies. This thesis provides a preliminary investigation into the contemporary discourse that direct the Chinese information society, enabled by network technologies, to develop in certain ways.

To address this question, I have to, first of all, make clear two key concepts: what is ideology and how to understand contemporary Chinese society. To understand the first concept, I focused my attention mainly on a classical Marxist tradition or trajectory, including works from Marx, Lukács, Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, Williams and Hall (Chapter 2). This is because that their critique of ideology relates closely to the analysis of class relations and social structures but increasingly takes into account the complexities of language, communication and representation, not to ‘dissolve’ the very idea of ideology but to admit and analyse its complex workings in social and cultural formations. Class, social power relations and social structures are essential to understand the current informational capitalism yet are frequently neglected. The critical meaning of ideology and the emphasis of its relation to power domination and social structure, as emphasised by traditional Marxists, were important for this thesis. Ideology is thus defined in this thesis as reproducing the current system and disguising the contradictions through distorted solutions in mind and partial representation of reality. To think and to act ideologically means to conceal real contradictions in favour of the dominant class.

I investigated Chinese society through a critical analysis of China’s capitalism. Through a discussion of the land issue, enterprise’s ownership, foreign relationship, and the role of the Party-state (Amin, 2013; Arrighi, 2007; Harvey, 2003; He and Dong, 2009a; Y Huang, 2008; Lin, 2013; Naughton, 2018; Yang and He, 1994), Chapter 3 discussed why China should be seen as a capitalist society. It has shown that, on the one hand, all these key areas in China economy has been involved in a capitalist mode of production. Socialist heritage, on the other, is on the decline.

Methodologically, I use CDA to investigate ideologies in China's digital capitalism (Chapter 6). CDA address the issues in relation to discourse, critique, power and ideology. According to Fairclough, CDA "investigates how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony"(Fairclough, 2010: 132). As Wodak and Meyer put it, CDA can be roughly defined as "fundamentally interested in analysing hidden, opaque, and visible structures of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language" (Wodak and Meyer, 2015a: 12). Therefore, CDA suits the purpose of this research. In particular, I apply a critical policy analysis to examine government documents, a combination of thematic analysis and CDA to investigate CEOs' discourse. I have used focus groups to collect data from workers, and thematic analysis for analysing focus group data.

Based on the theoretical and methodological discussions, I have further refined my overarching aim as to register and interpret China's discourse on network technologies, reveal the underlying ideologies, and tie this discourse to the transformation of China's capitalism of which it is a part. In particular, I have focused on three stakeholders in my investigation: the government, the BAT, and workers. Therefore, this thesis addressed the following research questions and will answer them in the next sections:

- RQ1: What kinds of digital discourse regarding the Internet economy and politics are created and promoted? How does the government discursively construct China's developmental path in ICT- and Internet-related documents? (10.2.1)
- RQ2: What kinds of digital discourse regarding the Internet economy and politics are created and promoted? How do BAT discursively represent themselves and their relations with other stakeholders in the CEO's speeches? (10.2.2)
- RQ3: What kinds of digital discourse on China's Internet is constructed among workers? (10.2.3)
- RQ4: How does the ideological digital discourse legitimate the institutional arrangements and power relations in the transformation of China's capitalism? (10.3)

Chapter 4 and 5 have developed an analytical framework for this research. Chapter 4 reviewed important literature on digital discourse in advanced capitalism. This chapter made

a theoretical contribution by connecting the discussions of digital discourse to the political-economic analysis. Advanced capitalist countries have experienced the transformation from Fordism to the so-called Post-Fordism with the development of digital technologies (Harvey, 1990). Digital discourse is thus largely applied to legitimate these changes of economic and socio-political arrangements in the societies (Fisher, 2010; Mosco, 2005). The main discourse can be divided into economic and political aspects. The former mainly focuses on a new decentralised and de-hierarchised market, flexible production, de-alienated work, and participatory culture enabled by the Internet. The latter claims that the Internet and digital technologies will automatically bring liberation, democratisation, empowerment and emancipation for the society and individuals (Andrejevic, 2013; Dean, 2013; Fenton, 2012; Fuchs, 2010, 2011, 2014a; Fuchs and Sandoval, 2013; Hardt and Negri, 2001; Harvey, 1990; Huws, 2014; Lazzarato, 1996; Ross, 2009, 2012; Sandoval, 2016; Schiller, 2007; Tiziana, 2013; Zhao, 2007; Zhao and Schiller, 2001).

To contextualise this research, Chapter 5 provided specific discussions about the Chinese situation. It has set a basic tone of the discussions of China in this thesis – that China is an emerging state-led capitalist country in the transnational informational capitalist system. First, informatisation is key to China's modernisation (Dai, 2003; Hong, 2008; Mueller and Tan, 1997; Wu and Yun, 2015; Zhao, 2007). Second, China's developmental path has been a capitalist one. ICT forms a key pillar for China's long-standing FDI- and export-led economy (Hong, 2017a; Schiller, 2005), and a key area for transformation after 2008 and under the current Xi-Li Administration. Third, any understanding of China's development should be embedded in the background of global capitalism. China's integration into and being as one pole of global digital capitalism are the important global context of China's domestic ICT development (Fuchs, 2010; Hong, 2011a; Schiller, 2005; Zhao and Schiller, 2001). Fourth, the Internet has arguably brought the most vigorous and contested arena for struggles and creative participation (Meng, 2009, 2018; Yang, 2009, 2015). These discussions have helped to adapt the framework developed in Chapter 4 to suit the Chinese context. A preliminary framework for identifying themes and coding schemes can be found in Table 5.1.

In the next section, I will answer the first three RQs in each of the sub-sections. I will then answer the question of how digital discourse informs our understanding of China's capitalism under transformation in section 10.3. Section 10.4 will provide some reflections on studying ideology. Focusing on workers group discussions, it will link back to my theoretical

discussions about ideology. Finally, Section 10.5 will discuss the contributions, limitations, and implications for future research.

10.2. Digital Discourse and Chinese Capitalism

This thesis has analysed discourse from the government, the BAT regarding the economic and political aspects of the transformations enabled by the network technologies under China's capitalism.

In particular, the government has determined to utilise network technologies to solve the problems of productivity in traditional industries, to increase domestic consumption with the help of the Internet, to integrate into the global informational capitalism deeper, and to harness the new technologies under the name of Cyber Sovereignty.

The BAT have constructed a positive representation of themselves as Internet infrastructures, a strong image in helping traditional industries and China's economy, and a contradictory identity as being global and Chinese enterprises. They use these arguments to legitimate their domination in the market, facilitating their expansion into new areas and in the global market.

This thesis has also conducted focus groups with three types of young workers in Shenzhen. It aims to explore how workers legitimate, if they do, the current power relations with the highly commercialised and controlled Internet. While workers have diverse opinions and arguments, their legitimisation of the power relations is not entirely firm nor internalised. There is space for workers to negotiate with the current situation regarding the online politics though they constantly refer to nationalist ideologies. However, there is one highly internalised ideology: TINA that depoliticised workers' discussions of changes.

10.2.1. Digital discourse from the government

The Xi-Li Administration began in 2013 has largely emphasised the Internet-enabled Economic 'New Normal' and new socio-political arrangements in the digital age. This research has chosen 21 government documents, including official documents addressing ICT- and Internet-related industries' development, top-level strategies, and Xi's important speeches addressing informatisation and cybersecurity (more details for sampling strategies,

see Chapter 6). Some other documents from state-owned media are referred to as official explanations of the documents. This thesis first conducted a thematic analysis, with the help of the framework developed in Chapter 4 and 5, to identify the main themes in these documents regarding the development of China's informatisation. It then applies CDA to analyse the key arguments under these themes.

The current Xi-Li central government has set the ultimate goal to 'build a Cyber Superpower' (*Wang Luo Qiang Guo*) thus to realise 'China's great rejuvenation'. The key value stated is to 'serve the people' that reflects the rhetoric of socialist history. The current fast technology revolution is the key circumstance for the government to make the decision – China, it is claimed, should join the wave of the digital revolution and not lag behind. Based on descriptions of the particular current state of affairs and goals, the central government has proposed actions focusing on the information economy, cybersecurity and global cooperation (see Table 7.2). With the help of CDA, Chapter 7 not only described the discursive strategies applied in the official discourse but also provided detailed interpretations and explanations of the discourse.

The official digital discourse is largely integrated into China's modernisation. First, the Xi-Li Administration has put Internet and ICT development at the core of their claimed economic transformation from export-orientated and FDI-led economy to an economic 'New Normal'. This 'New Normal' emphasises 'high-quality' development at the centre of which is the ICT and Internet-enabled new production, domestic consumption and technology development. Second, the central government and Xi, in particular, have shown a tougher political image to the world. This image is well reflected in the official digital discourse. One salient example is the claim of 'Cyber Sovereignty'. The use and application of this term have delivered a strong nationalist message on the central government's determination on domestic Internet control. Third, different from this tough political image, the government has claimed to deepen global cooperation. This cooperation covers all aspects from political participation in international Internet governance to economic expansion of Chinese investments and companies, and to cultural aspects of 'soft power'.

However, there are gaps between official rhetoric and reality. This is not to say that there is only one reality, but "different representations of reality, drawing on different discourse" (Fairclough, 2000: 155). In other words, there are under-represented realities in government

discourse. For example, there is little mention of changes in relations of production in China's digital capitalism. The discussion of inequality is largely restricted in rural and western areas instead of, for example, classes. Public's participation in the digital world is limited to the digital economy or 'opinion expression' – not to facilitate democratisation or personal empowerment. While promoting Internet-enabled entrepreneurs, there is little mention of how to protect the worker's security and insurance. Therefore, the official digital discourse and what it ignores provide a valuable perspective to understand how the government wants to shape China's current development and modernisation.

10.2.2. Digital discourse from the BAT

Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent, known as BAT, have successfully transferred from domestic-focused Internet companies into global conglomerates whose businesses cover almost all aspects of Chinese people's life. This thesis has chosen the most important discourse events of BAT (more details of the sampling strategy, please see Chapter 6). Most of the speeches are from the CEOs of BAT. I have combined thematic analysis and CDA in analysing these materials.

BAT share several similar argument themes regarding their political economy. Chapter 8 illustrated how they justify their domination in the domestic Internet-focused market, their expansion into new industries and the global market through using different discursive strategies and through responding to the government's discourse (see Table 8.4 and 8.5). BAT use several discursive strategies to construct positive self-representations, favourable relations with other stakeholders such as the government, advertisers and users. First, BAT legitimated their dominant position in the market by claiming to build an 'infrastructure' to 'help small businesses' in the 'boundaryless Internet'. BAT define 'infrastructure' as 'ubiquitous' and 'boundaryless' instead of 'public' and 'neutral'. They also claim to have supported businesses (clients) in a 'de-centralised' Internet-enabled market. The use of several discursive strategies has mitigated 'the other' reality of oligopolies. Second, BAT claim to support China's economic upgrade. With nationalist statements, BAT won the debate with traditional industries and successfully expanded their businesses into the manufacturing, agricultural and service industries, including finance, logistics and AI. Third, there are contradictions in BAT's discourse to construct themselves as global companies and

Chinese companies. The contradictory discourse illustrates the main purpose of expanding their businesses into new sectors and the world. BAT have intentionally appropriate nationalist discourse to legitimate and promote their *de facto* domination and expansion.

The critical discourse analysis is helpful not only to identify main themes in BAT's discourse but also to identify BAT's operational strategies and their underlying interests. BAT's neoliberal discourse has represented only part of the reality. Their business expansions are constructed in a much more positive way or even distorted ways. BAT has constant purchased and oppressed of new technology start-ups and companies in other areas, along with their expansion of businesses into all areas of public life. They have reframed these business operations as 'building ecosystems' and even 'facilitating small businesses'. Their violation of user data and privacy has largely been ignored in the discourse. Moreover, there is little mention of their constant manipulation of public discussions. This manipulation includes conducting censorship ordered by the government and self-censorship driven by economic interests, promoting non-political and entertainment information over public political discussions, tolerating the spread of rumours and misinformation for attracting 'traffic', avoiding responsibility as the most powerful communication and media platforms in the digital age. All these important discussions about the public's digital life are absent from BAT's discourse. What stated is only neoliberal and nationalist discourse driven by economic and political interests.

10.2.3. Digital discourse from the workers

While discourse from the government and companies normally receive more attention, the public discourse or 'street talks' about China's digital development made by non-elite, subaltern groups can easily be under-represented or/and under-studied. What are the other groups' or classes' attitudes and beliefs towards China's developmental path of digital capitalism? Do they accept or reject the dominant ideologies, official discourse and narratives? How they interpret, legitimate and justify their lived experiences regarding the Internet in China's state-led digital capitalism? Chapter 9 investigated these questions.

This research chose focus groups to collect data. Methodologically speaking, public opinions can be studied through surveys with a large number of participants. However, this method

could either only get simple answers or cost a huge amount of resources. In China's authoritarian settings, it is harder to ensure the accuracy of survey results regarding political issues. Another way to study public opinions is through online data mining with digital technologies. However, this method could risk not collecting real thoughts from online discussions, regarding the censorship in China and discrepancies of people's behaviours between online and offline. Therefore, this research chose to use focus groups to imitate real settings for 'street talks'.

Furthermore, this research chose to focus on three types of workers in China's digital capitalism. Expressions from certain groups or professionals among the public have attracted more attention, such as radical dissents and investigative journalists. While acknowledging the importance of these studies, Chapter 9 chose to investigate the discourse from three subaltern groups that attracted less attention. These groups are not as powerful as the dominant government and CEOs. Nor are they groups with more communicative or symbolic power. However, they are representative workers who are at the same time users and digital labourers. The first type of groups focuses on manufacturing workers, most of whom are migrant workers with lower education level. These manufacturing workers are essential for China's development of digital capitalism, especially during the FDI- and export-oriented period. They also represent one of the largest Internet user groups but always under-represented. With the help of the Internet, they started to make a voice, though it could be distorted and misrepresented. The second type focuses on programmers who represent the newly emerging knowledge worker. This group of people has special positions in the new era of digital capitalism with their most required skills, innovation capability and creativity, highly exploited working conditions, and deep understanding and knowledge of the Internet and new technologies. The final type consists of white-collar workers, most of whom work in the service industry in urban cities. They are not necessarily middle-class, but normally are the 'loudest' group online, especially in the area of online entertainment, game, and consumption. This type of groups excludes the first two types of workers.

These three groups were brought together to form a complex, yet in some aspects strikingly similar, understanding of the digital discourse prevalent in Chinese society. Chapter 9 scrutinised these groups' discourse through a critical lens. It found out how the dominant ideologies are legitimated and, more importantly, challenged. From the perspective of the Internet Economy, discussions focused on participants' experiences of opportunities brought

by the Internet, data collected by companies, and their discursive constructions of identities as consumers. From the political aspect, participants justified and challenged the current states of affairs. One salient ideology in their discourse is ‘There is no Alternative’ (TINA) that clearly consists of neoliberal, individualistic and techno-deterministic elements. This type of digital discourse oftentimes uses *topos of uselessness* in their arguments. As discussed in Chapter 9, there are three main arguments under this theme – there are (a) no alternative public service available in China, (b) no effective methods for political participation to solve the current problems regarding Internet platforms, and (c) no alternative ways to fund Internet platforms except through advertising. However, there are also criticisms of the current situation. As shown in the discussions, users could be critical about the dominant ideologies though negatively accepting the reality. The discussions from focus groups provide the highly contested nature of hegemony.

10.3. Legitimizing the Transformation of Chinese Capitalism

Digital discourse is part of social changes. The digital discourse discussed in this thesis does not only reflect but also construct the transformations of China’s Capitalism. In this section, I will show how digital discourse legitimates the institutional arrangements and social power relations in the transformation of China’s capitalism in the information society. In particular, digital discourse legitimates the global expansion of China’s capital and enterprises, legitimates the concentration of Internet-related market, and discursively construct consumer identities to replace a more political class identities.

10.3.1. Legitimizing the global expansion of China’s capital and enterprises

China has been increasingly involved in the global capitalist system. The government and BAT’s digital discourse has legitimated and promoted the global expansion of China’s capital and enterprises.

The government has explicitly promoted international cooperation under Xi’s phrase of ‘a community of shared destiny in the Cyberspace’. The government’s globalisation discourse is not just about attracting foreign investments but also a clear strategy to ‘go out’. The government promote cooperation in all areas from the global digital economy to soft power

(culture), and to the global Internet governance (politics). Moreover, this ‘going out’ strategy has been connected to ‘national interests’ – nationalist discourse has been appropriated to legitimate China’s global expansion. As Xi puts it “wherever there is the national interest, there shall be informatisation coverage” (Xi, 2016, 4.19 *Speech*). As on other occasions, Xi has equalised the interests of Chinese companies’ transnational business operations to China’s national interests, as discussed in Chapter 7.

Along with the government’s active ‘going out’ strategy is Internet companies’ global expansion. BAT has also employed nationalist discourse to back their global expansion. As BAT started to expand their businesses to the global market and new technology areas, their digital discourse has constantly drawn upon nationalist ideologies. For example, BAT claims to help upgrade China’s economic growth and increase domestic consumption in entering ‘traditional industries’. They also claim to represent China’s technology development and national interests in global competition and in the global market. While in other occasions they frame themselves as international companies, when they try to enter new industries, for example when they need support from the government to conduct AI experiments as discussed in Chapter, BAT discursively construct themselves as Chinese companies. Their description of Chinese national identity is thus a pragmatic strategy to positively frame their dominant position in the domestic market and their status as conglomerates. In other words, the underlying logic of BAT is that if they are competing in the global market to represent China, they should be supported by the government and the industries.

This tension between nationalist discourse as a ‘defend’ or ‘catch up’ and a nationalist discourse for ‘going out’ can be illustrated from worker groups’ discourse. There are three main types of nationalist arguments among workers – ‘us vs them’, ‘a unitary nation’, and the ‘unique national condition’ arguments. Similar to the government and CEO’s digital discourse, dominated groups use *topos of threat*, *strategy of collectivisation*, pronouns of ‘us’ and ‘them’ to construct national identity, the equivalence between China and Chinese companies, and the relations between China and other countries. However, the nationalist discourse among workers is used to legitimate the government’s domestic control over the Internet. It was not used to justify the Chinese capital’s global expansion. It is not clear, however, with the promotion of the ‘going out’ nationalist discourse by the dominant groups, to what extent the new discourse will be accepted. For example, *Wolf Warrior 2* has become one of the highest-grossing movies in 2017 that depicts a Chinese soldier who saved the lives

of oversea Chinese in an African country. Moreover, workers' digital discourse has shed light on a different framework for globalism. For example, some participants have challenged the equivalence between China and Chinese companies in the domestic market. For them, the Chinese Internet companies do not equal to China and are not serving for Chinese people's interests.

10.3.2. Legitimizing the concentration of the market

China's Internet market is *de facto* dominated by oligopolies. Digital discourse is used to legitimate the concentration of the market or to downplay the negative sides. There is no doubt that BAT are the most active actors in legitimating their domination in the market. As discussed in Chapter 7, they have appropriated the features of the Internet to describe themselves. For example, they use terms such as 'boundaryless', 'connector', 'ecosystem' and 'infrastructure' to represent themselves. They also try to downplay the negative sides of their domination by claiming that they are creating new jobs in niche markets.

The government legitimate the domination of Internet-related market in a more implicit way. As shown in Chapter 7, the government supports 'key enterprises' (*Long Tou Qi Ye* '龙头企业') because they are seen as representing China's technological development, facilitating China's economic transformation, Chinese capital's global expansion, and China's soft power. The nationalist discourse of 'us' plays a key role. For example, the government claims to support 'key enterprises' to "play a leading and driving role" to "establish research and development bodies and expand market abroad, effectively use global resources, and enhance their internationalised development levels" (2016 NIDS). Similarly, in the 13th Five-Year Plan for National Informatisation, the government plans to cultivate innovative enterprises for developing core technologies that could compete globally and become the top 500.

Workers, however, legitimate the concentration of the market with the discourse of 'trust'. As shown in Chapter 9, participants express that they willingly give up their privacy to big companies as an exchange for convenience and security. This is because, according to participants, big companies have better technologies to protect their personal data, as compared to other small companies. Moreover, there is one salient ideological discourse among workers: TINA (see 10.2.3).

10.3.3. Constructing a consumer identity to replace class politics

China's digital discourse also emphasises citizen's identity as consumers and downplays the class politics. The government rarely mentions what kind of work and workplace digital age provides. Discourse on equality is restricted to, for example, rural and urban area differences, instead of class inequality. Considering CCP's claims as being representatives of workers and farmers, the lack of enough discussions of work in the digital age is unacceptable. There are even fewer mentions of exploitation and relations of production in the official documents. While the phrase 'relations of production' did appear in the 2014 Government Work Report (GWR), the first GWR under Xi-Li Administration, it was never shown in any official documents after. Discussions of inequality are restricted to poverty in rural and western areas in the government discourse. Eliminating poverty is expected to be done through the development of forces of production, instead of changes in relations of production.

At the same time, CEOs also chose to neglect this aspect in their discourse, which consists of the main differences between China's digital discourse and the digital discourse in advanced capitalist societies. Discussions of jobs within BAT, as shown in Chapter 8, are still limited in salaries and bonus, instead of working conditions. There are little discussions of alienated work, the workplace arrangement, relations of production among BAT. Similar to the government, there are discussions about poverty in China in BAT's discourse. Their proposal to eliminate poverty is through providing Internet services and e-commerce to rural areas and low-income families. This e-commerce service has opened a large market of rural areas to these Internet companies. In fact, some participants who used to join the 'digital economy', such as opening online stores on Taobao or Weishang, expressed that 'it is hard to really make money'.

While class identities are rarely mentioned, consumer identities are actively constructed in digital discourse. Both government and companies have promoted the Internet for driving domestic consumption. One key element of the government's economic 'New Normal' is to promote service industry and consumption as the main factors of China's economy. The government emphasises the importance of 'information consumption', with a focus on increasing Internet penetration rate and improving Internet speed for 'releasing the enormous consumption potentials'. *Topos of usefulness* is a key strategy here to promote domestic consumption.

BAT welcomed this type of digital discourse. As illustrated in Chapter 8, Jack Ma stated the role of the Internet to promote domestic consumption of China's economic growth since an early stage. Moreover, BAT have appropriated the 'participatory' discourse to promote prosumption and consumption brought by the Internet. For example, Pony Ma claims that '*the spirit of the Internet*' is 'to pursue an extremely good experience of products and extremely good feedback from users' (Pony Ma, 2014 TGPC). *Topos of usefulness* and *rewording* are always used by BAT to promote Internet-related consumptions.

This consumerism gains hegemony among workers. Through the critical discourse analysis, workers discursively construct their identities as consumers, as shown in Chapter 9. This identity has overtaken other identities, such as politically involved citizens or netizens. However, this is not to say that the Internet is not used as a political struggle space in China. It is exactly the contrast between the use of the Internet for online participation and the lack of democratisation elements in digital discourse form one feature of China's digital capitalism. While subaltern groups use the Internet for free expression, this is not a key element in digital discourse, neither from the government, BAT, nor from the focus groups. The government and BAT tend to neglect the discussions of democratisation and empowerment, or use nationalist discourse to restrict the discussions to 'online expression'. The government, as Xi claims, can 'listen to' the public's online opinions. The focus groups constantly refer to the cyberspace as 'unfree' and 'unequal' space. In particular, the participants claim that 'there is no alternative'.

To summaries, the digital discourse legitimates and facilitates the power relations in the transformation of China's capitalism. In particular, it serves to legitimate the global expansion of China's capital, the concentration of the market, and to promote a consumer identity.

10.4. Reflections on Ideology Study

The study of workers' digital discourse has provided some insights in understanding the features of ideology and the mechanisms of how ideologies work, in particular, in contemporary capitalism.

Workers create their explanations that are different from the ideological discourse promoted by the dominant groups to justify the current power relations. In other words, workers do not necessarily respond to the dominant ideologies. Instead, *various ideological discourse is created to deal with contradictions* in social life that cannot be solved in reality. There is a discrepancy between the ideologies from dominant groups and subaltern groups. For example, as shown in Chapter 9, workers justify the current state of market concentration, data collection and the dominant companies in the ways that are different from governments and CEOs. It shows the necessity of this research to study ideology and digital discourse through focus groups with subaltern groups.

This discrepancy demonstrates an important feature of ideology – the legitimated ruling power might not be a successfully *internalised* one. The ruling class or dominant groups simply have material means, distribution power and communication means at their disposal to gain or ‘manufacture’ consent. As Eagleton points out, we must distinguish the ‘normative’ acceptance of dominant ideology and the ‘pragmatic’ acceptance. The former means that “a legitimated power is always one successfully internalised by those who are its targets” while the latter refers to the condition “in which subaltern groups endorse the right of their rulers to govern because they can see no realistic alternative” (Eagleton, 2007: 56).

It is within this gap we see a possible rejection of the more monolithic, pessimistic conceptions of ideology. As illustrated by Williams’s ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams, 1977: 125), there are ‘emergent’ forms of consciousness created from social experiences in specific social relationships and perceptions. These social experiences are active yet not fully articulated. These social experiences can be ignored or repressed by the dominant groups, and there is a potential risk of them being integrated into the dominant ideologies. However, there is “a potential conflict between ‘practical’ and ‘official’ forms of consciousness, and the possibility of variable relations between them: compromise, adjustment, incorporation, outright opposition” (Eagleton, 2007: 49). This phenomenon can be identified from my focus groups. Workers’ experiences show some socially inter-connected struggles that attempt to break through the current dominant digital discourse, yet have not fully articulated or formulated into systematic ideas or beliefs.

Moreover, there are differences between groups, depending on their social reality and *lived experiences*. These lived experiences confirm what Gramsci discussed about ‘practical consciousness’ that is different from official consciousness and which arises from their ‘life situations’. This ‘practical consciousness’ provide alternative interpretations of official political ideologies and thus space for struggles. The differences between groups also illustrated the class situation in contemporary China. From an orthodox Marxist perspective perceive all these worker groups belong to an exploited class in their relations of production as they are selling their labour to make a life. From a Weberian approach, however, they belong to different categories in the taxonomy of social stratification.

Finally, despite the importance to recognise the chaotic feature of common sense ideologies, I would stress the structured ideology arising from capitalist economic structure. The statement TINA from worker groups reflects the existence of a more fundamental ideology that emerges from the very economic contradictions in the capitalist system. As discussed in Chapter 2, Marx, Lukács and Adorno’s theorisation of ideology is on the basis of a critique of the *alienation*, commodity fetishism, reification, and abstract homogeneity. As Rehmann points out, the ideology critique made by Marx is based on the “fatalistic arrangement as the naturalisation of social relations based on the fetishism of commodities: movements of ‘things’ as ‘natural forms of social life’” (Rehmann, 2014: 93). This first type of TINA shows a modern example of the *naturalisation* feature of ideology through *commodity fetishism*. The commodification of user data, the overtaking of use-value by the exchange value of data, and the replacement of communicative actions by for-profits economic behaviours on the Internet have been taken as the only fate for the society and for arranging social relations. This fatalism in groups is the ‘axiom’ in the public discourse, leading to a pessimistic attitude towards changes in social relations in informational capitalism (Fuchs and Sandoval, 2013) or communicative capitalism (Dean, 2004).

As illustrated in Chapter 2, the understanding of ideology should be multi-layered. There are also tensions between different definitions of ideology. On the one hand, ideologies, in terms of common sense, should be understood as chaotic, disjointed and dynamic that raises from political interests and lived experiences. As shown in my research, focus group participants show a variety of interpretations and challenges of the ideologies promoted by the dominant class. On the other hand, there is one particular ideology derived from the very fundamental contradiction in capitalist society: alienation. Workers have experienced in the class society

alienated from their labour process, from the products of their labour, from other workers and from the human nature. The group discussion of TINA has illustrated how workers believe that they would not be able to control one of the very fundamental communicative tool created by modern capitalism: the Internet and the platforms. This fundamental ideology has surpassed all other types of ideologies, common sense and ‘practical consciousness’ that dominate workers’ mind.

Therefore, I would argue against a dichotomy between ideology as being derived from capitalist structure and ideologies raising from lived experiences. As Gramsci points out “the name ideology is given both to the necessary superstructure of a particular structure and to the arbitrary elucubrations of particular individuals” (Gramsci, 1971: 376). One thus needs to distinguish between “historically organic ideologies, those, that is, which are necessary to a given structure, and ideologies that are arbitrary, rationalistic, or ‘willed’”. He further confirms that both could direct human behaviours as “to the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is ‘psychological’; they ‘organise’ human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggles, etc. To the extent that they are arbitrary they only create individual ‘movements, polemics and so on’”. (ibid.: 377). Accordingly, Figure 2.1 from Chapter 2 could be adjusted (see Figure 10.1).

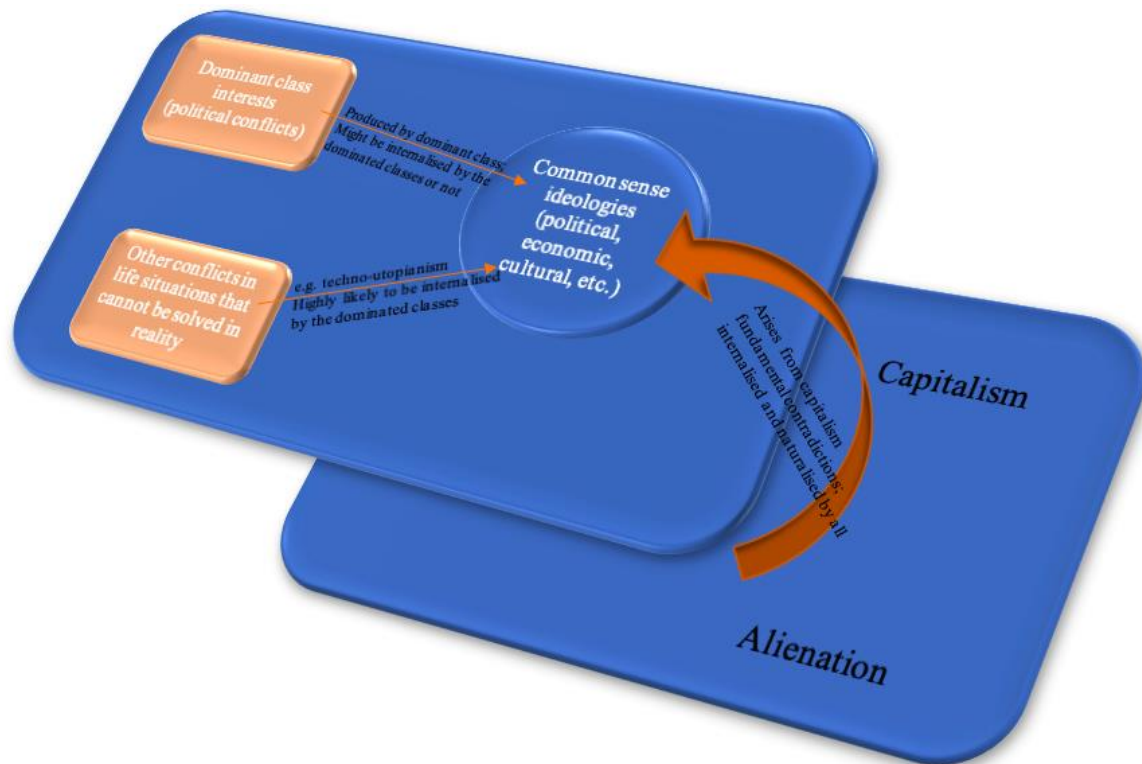


Figure 10.20. *The Double-Layered and Multi-Dimensional Model of Ideologies under Capitalism.*

10.5. Contribution, Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Finally, I will show some reflexivity in this section. In the end, I summarise the implications of this thesis for future research studying digital discourse and ideologies in the Chinese context and worldwide.

This thesis makes contributions in three aspects. First of all, understanding ICT and the Internet development in China requires researchers to engage with the individual and collective meanings that different actors give to the technologies and the political-economic settings surrounding them. This research has shown how different groups or classes use discursive strategies in China in the process of shaping the relationship between technology and society. It aims to draw attention to digital discourse as a contested field full of competing intentions. Secondly, this thesis connected culture studies to the political-economic analysis of ICT and the Internet – political economy has informed and complemented the analysis framework of discourse. On the one hand, ICT has become

deeply involved in China's socio-economic development and politics. On the other hand, the digital discourse has normalised the dominant set of political and economic arrangements. Finally, this research showed the usefulness of CDA not only to understand the discursive construction from dominant groups (e.g. government and companies) but also to interpret ideologies in the public discourse. One key concept here is 'intersectionality'. In my worker groups, when participants explained or legitimated dominant ideologies, they frequently referred to government discourse and occasionally companies. Furthermore, how subaltern group members understand their identities (e.g. as consumers) confirms to the dominant ideological construction of power relations. This is, however, not to say that there are no alternative explanations, but to emphasise that the discursive sources can restrict the subaltern groups' interpretations.

Yet, this research has several limitations. First of all, while this thesis tried to present an overall picture of the dynamics of production and interpretation of digital discourse through investigating both the dominant and subaltern groups, it is beyond the limits of one thesis to discuss all aspects. I thus restricted the scope of my investigation in several aspects. In terms of actors, I had to focus on two types of dominant stakeholders, the government and BAT, and three types of subaltern groups, the programmers, the manufacturing workers, and the white-collar workers. In terms of the period under investigation, this thesis focused on contemporary digital discourse. More specifically, the study of government discourse focused on the current Xi-Li Administration since 2013. BAT's discourse started from when they established their dominant status in the market and started to expand businesses with 'open-' discourse around 2008 (each company could be slightly different). Focus groups were conducted in 2016 and 2017.

Focus groups in this thesis are under several constraints. I did 5 focus groups from June to August 2016 and 1 in June 2017. Besides focus groups, I also did 6 individual interviews as pilot research before the focus groups. These interviews helped me to fulfil the questionnaires for conducting focus groups. The relatively small number of interviewees, biased sample and time restrictions of focus groups set limitations to this research. My first intention was to see how subaltern groups understand and interpret the dominant power relations, focusing on their experiences such as data collection, online advertisings and censorship. In other words, I wanted to understand why or why not these groups choose to comply with these arrangements under the highly commercialised and state-controlled digital capitalism in

China. During this research, I realised the heterogeneity of ‘common sense’. Workers could refer to all types of ‘cultural’ resources to legitimate the current power relations and social relations. My analysis thus can only focus on (a) their discourse that ‘talk back’ to the dominant digital discourse and omit other diverse discourse among workers, (b) the reasoning logics instead of all reasons behind the ideological discourse, and (c) their behaviours, according to themselves, that challenge the dominant socio-political arrangements. These focuses mean that one practical recommendation can be made out of my research is how to form counter-arguments against the dominant ideologies, on the basis of the current existing logics in workers’ digital discourse and the workers’ own behaviours and resources.

Given the contributions and limitations of this thesis, I would like to propose some further areas to be explored. This research opens the question to investigate contemporary digital discourse under Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics. Given the complexity of China’s state-led capitalism, the power dynamics in allocating not only physical but also communication resources in the Chinese context (Meng, 2018), more work needs to be done.

First of all, in terms of the scope of materials, this study has focused on the analysis of digital discourse from the government, BAT, and three types of workers. This is an approach different from the traditional approach to analyse media content for ideology investigation. Scholars have analysed diverse types of content including content from artists, advertisers and professional historians when Smith analysed techno-determinism in American culture (MR Smith, 1994); books from intellectuals, as Mosco did when analysing Digital Sublime (Mosco, 2005); magazines, as Fisher did for analysing ‘the spirit of networks’ (Fisher, 2010); newspapers, as Hong did for investigating China’s information society discourse (Hong, 2008); or entertainment media content and online ethnography, as Meng did for understanding media politics (Meng, 2018). Three types of discourse are particularly interesting to be added. The first one comes from theorists and serious writers. How they understand China’s digital capitalism is worth studying. It would provide more insights for understanding contradictions in Chinese society. The second is from the state-owned media, such as People’s Daily and CCTV. They function as a mediation between the dominant groups and dominated groups. Third, one can analyse the increasingly commercialised media content, including popular books advertisings, films, entertainment TV, online discussions. It could provide another way to understand public discourse and sentiments.

Secondly, in terms of time span, this thesis has restricted itself in studying contemporary digital discourse – the current Xi-Li Administration, BAT as oligopolies and fieldwork in 2016 and 2017. Though I have reviewed the literature on China's context to provide a historical perspective, this was not the main focus of this study. Theoretically speaking, history studies could inform the transformation and context of contemporary issues (Meng, 2018: 1; Zhao, 2009). Methodologically speaking, a historical perspective is important for CDA (Reisigl and Wodak, 2015). Further researches could be done, for example, to study the historical changes of (aspects of) China's digital discourse.

Thirdly, in terms of social actors, this research studied the government, CEOs of BAT, and three types of workers together. From a Weberian perspective, there are more groups in the taxonomy of social stratification. The study of actors could expand to types of groups in contemporary Chinese society on the basis of other categories, such as age, levels of education, income, and gender. This is not to argue against a Marxist view of class and the importance of this concept in contemporary China. As I have shown in my research, there are huge similarities and structured ideology in the worker groups under investigation. Yet studying groups with different social status could shed lights on studying 'member's resources (MR)', the interpretative procedures (Fairclough, 2015b: 155). It could help to understand better how ideologies work in discourse.

In particular, I would like to highlight two types of actors to be studied, according to my fieldwork experiences. The first type is those practitioners and start-up entrepreneurs who work on the 'frontline' of developing technology interferences and applications. They are those who are (or are not) implanting the 'systematic' technological ideologies into the people's everyday use through applications. How do they understand the problems that need to be solved by technologies? How do they perceive the further of the society enabled by digital technologies? Taking them as the connecting points between the digital 'spirits' and practitioners of these 'spirits', new studies could further link the study of ideologies to the political-economic analysis. I have conducted 10 interviews with entrepreneurs and managers in Huawei in 2017. This exploratory study provides me with deeper understandings of China's technological developmental path and digital discourse. Another type of actor I would like to emphasise is hackers or more radical programmers. I conducted extra interviews with programmers in 2016 and 2017 both in China and the UK that are not included in this thesis (to keep consistency in research methods). Programmers, to some

extent, have more knowledge and are more aware of the problems in the digital world, such as the collection of data, security issues. Taking technology, algorithm and data as tools, they are more likely to develop alternative imaginations of organising the Internet and digital world in a different way. It would be interesting to see how hacker and radical programmers would organise social relations differently through, for example, blockchains.

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APPENDIX 1. THE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

Before the Start

Participants will be welcomed and assigned seats. The discussion will be arranged in a U-shape so everyone can see each other.

Moderators will give out and explain the consent form. Moderators will remind participants that this discussion will be recorded for the purpose of research. The recordings will not be given to any third party and will be kept confidential. This is especially important for participants in China as regards talking about sensitive political issues about the government censorship.

Moderators will ask participants to speak in a clear voice for the purpose of further data analysis.

Moderators will encourage everyone to speak because they appreciate everyone's opinions. The participants are also very welcome to talk about their own experiences about the topics.

Initial questions or requests for clarifications of the process are invited.

Part 1: Cultural Issues

This aspect will be discussed first because it is relatively easy and relaxing. People could talk about their own opinions or experiences more freely.

- Can you think of three words to describe your impression about the Internet Spirit and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)? And why?
- Can you use three words to describe your experiences of using Baidu, Weibo, Renren, Youku, Douban, Zhihu, etc.?
- Do you use them a lot? Why or why not?

If participants do not come up with enough words for the discussion, they will be asked to choose from several words the three most appropriate words to describe the Internet and ICTs.

[Note: to probe a bit more when they are talking about their own experiences.]

Part 2: Economic Issues and Alternative Platforms

In this part, I am especially interested to record people’s opinions about exploitation relating to the Internet and social media. In this part and the next part, in order to facilitate a vivid discussion, I will show the participants a video within which two people discuss questions with totally different perspectives. I will then ask questions relating to these topics, and ask the participants to relate these questions to their own experiences.

Video: two people discussing several issues about the Internet, table A1 shows the scripts for the actors:

Issues:	Discussant A	Discussant B
Personal data on social media	I’m very relaxed about my online personal data. For one thing, I always supply fake information. I use a fake name, gender, age - everything I upload online is fake! Those companies can’t get any information about me! Even though they can get my personal data, so what?	I’m very concerned about my personal information. Others might be able to find my information online easily.
Advertising shown based on online behaviour	I’m totally happy with it. It saves time for me. Those advertisements could show me interesting things and normally the things I love! If someone is influenced by those advertisements and thus buy unnecessary stuff, it is his own fault! I wouldn’t do that. I can control myself perfectly. I only buy stuff I need. So I have no problems with a search engine collecting my data.	Those advertisements are disturbing. They induce me to buy a lot of unnecessary stuff. It is also very annoying. It shows that the search engine knows my online behaviour. They know what I want to wear, what I like to eat, what movies I’d like to watch!
Exploitation	Of course, the Internet companies do not exploit me! They provide their service for free! I don’t need to pay for their service. They are brilliant in how they earn money from the advertisers! Moreover, they have	The platforms are selling users to the advertisers. They are making money from us! If nobody uses

	to keep updating their service in order to attract my interest! And of course I'm not 'working' for the companies, I'm just having fun! I also like to post videos online!	their service, they won't exist anymore.
Ad-free alternative platforms	I don't need another ad-free Weibo! Why should I? If you don't have advertisements on your platform, where can you get money? I don't want to pay for it. I don't need to pay for Baidu or Weibo anyway. Also, I have all my contacts on Facebook. It's too difficult to move all my posts and contacts to another platform!	I'd like to have this kind of platform. I would want to use it and I'd like to donate for it! I hope they could find a way to move all of the data on Weibo onto this new platform.

Table A.1. Scripts for actors in the video: economic issues.

Part 3: Political Issues

Issues	A	B
Identification	I'm not worried about my personal identification online. Only bad persons like terrorists are worried about it. I'm not doing anything wrong, so I'm not scared of the revelation of my identification based on my online personal data.	I'm so worried about my online identity. I feel like I am being watched all the time.
Participatory and Democracy	The Internet absolutely promotes the progress of democracy! The new media provides a lot of news that is not be allowed to be shown in traditional media. We are empowered by the Internet!	I don't think the Internet actually changes anything. There are a lot of clicktivists. These days it's getting even harder to post political stuff online.
Freedom	Our Internet is a free place! It defends our right of freedom of expression. Nothing can change it! I don't think it is a problem that the government shuts down some	Nobody should be forced to delete his or her opinions posted online, or even get arrested! The government makes me afraid of saying

	Weibo accounts. The government has its own reasons to keep the society stable. The Western countries also do the same.	anything that is not 'politically correct' online. I feel scared that the government can put me in prison if I said something wrong. So I have to censor my own speech online.
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Table A.2. Scripts for actors in the video, political issues.

APPENDIX 2. GUIDELINE FOR FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONING

Part 1. Introduction

1. What platforms do you often use and why? What do you like and dislike about the platforms?

Part 2. Economic aspects and advertisements advertising

2. Do you know how online platforms make money? Are you aware of their Business Model?
3. What do you think of online advertising?
4. Do you share your personal information online? Why or why not? Do you use fake identities online?
5. Have you ever used non-profit websites? Or websites without advertisements?
6. If there was a platform or website with no ads, are you willing to use it and donate to it in order to maintain it?

Part 3. Political aspects

7. Have you ever commented or complained about issues about your life, such as your work, living environment, city construction, etc. online?
8. Have you ever commented or complained about political issues concerning current affairs online?
9. Do you use your real name online? Are you worried about being identified [monitored?] by the government? Do you conduct self-censorship before you post online?
10. What do you think about censorship?

Part 4. Cultural aspects

11. Please use three words to describe your experiences with the Internet (pros and/or cons)
12. What do you think is the spirit of the Internet? Please use three words or phrases to summarise it.

Note:

1. According to the specific situation and discussion in each group, the moderator may change the sequence of these questions.
2. Some issues under different topics (e.g. privacy as regards the political aspect and personal information from an economic perspective) may come under discussion at the same time.
3. If because of the limitation of time and place, the video cannot be shown to participants and the discussion seems homogeneous, the moderator will take on the role of trying to uncover diverse or opposed opinions, without actually leading the discussion.

APPENDIX 3. FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

1. programmer	M	27
2. programmer	M	29
3. Worker group 1	M	28
4. Worker group 1	F	28
5. Worker group 1	F	27
6. Worker group 1	M	34
7. Worker group 1	M	30
8. Worker group 1	M	24
9. Worker group 1	M	28
10. Worker group 1	F	27
11. programmer	M	28
12. worker group 2	M	34
13. worker group 2	M	32
14. worker group 2	M	28
15. worker group 2	M	25
16. worker group 2	M	26
17. worker group 2	F	36
18. worker group 2	F	26
19. worker group 2	M	28
20. White-collar group 1	F	26
21. White-collar group 1	F	26
22. White-collar group 1	F	23
23. White-collar group 1	M	26
24. White-collar group 2	F	26
25. White-collar group 1	F	27
26. White-collar group 1	F	25
27. White-collar group 1	F	30
28. White-collar group 1	M	23
29. White-collar group 1	F	24
30. Programmer group 1	M	26
31. Programmer group 1	M	26
32. Programmer group 1	M	25
33. Programmer group 1	M	27
34. Programmer group 1	M	26
35. Programmer group 1	M	27
36. Programmer	M	24
37. Programmer	M	26
38. Worker	M	23

39. Programmer group 2	F	27
40. Programmer group 2	M	27
41. Programmer group 2	M	29
42. Programmer group 2	M	28
43. Programmer group 2	M	30

APPENDIX 4. CITATIONS

Citations in Chapter 7

- i 信息化和经济全球化相互促进，互联网已经融入社会生活方方面面，深刻改变了人们的生产和生活方式。我国正处在这个大潮之中，受到的影响越来越深。（习近平，2014年2月27日，在中央网络安全和信息化领导小组第一次会议上的讲话）
- ii 当今世界，信息技术创新日新月异，以数字化、网络化、智能化为特征的信息化浪潮蓬勃兴起。（中共中央办公厅，国务院办公厅，2016，国家信息化发展战略纲要）
- iii 在全球新一轮科技革命和产业变革中，互联网与各领域的融合发展具有广阔前景和无限潜力，已成为不可阻挡的时代潮流，正对各国经济社会发展产生着战略性和全局性的影响。（国务院，2015，关于积极推进“互联网+”行动的指导意见）
- iv 网信事业要发展，必须贯彻以人民为中心的发展思想。要适应人民期待和需求，加快信息化服务普及，降低应用成本，为老百姓提供用得上、用得起、用得好的信息服务，让亿万人民在共享互联网发展成果上有更多获得感。（习近平，2016年4月9日，在网络安全和信息化座谈会上的讲话）
- v 我们要加强信息基础设施建设，强化信息资源深度整合，打通经济社会发展的信息“大动脉”。党的十八届五中全会、“十三五”规划纲要都对实施网络强国战略、“互联网+”行动计划、大数据战略等作了部署，要切实贯彻落实好，着力推动互联网和实体经济深度融合，以信息流带动技术流、资金流、人才流、物资流，促进资源配置优化，促进全要素生产率提升，为推动创新发展、转变经济发展方式、调整经济结构发挥积极作用。（习近平，2016年4月19日，在网络安全和信息化工作座谈会上的讲话）
- vi 网信事业代表着新的生产力和新的发展方向，应该在践行新发展理念上先行一步，围绕建设现代化经济体系、实现高质量发展，加快信息化发展，整体带动和提升新型工业化、城镇化、农业现代化发展。（习近平，2018年4月20日至21日，在全国网络安全和信息化工作会议上的讲话）
- vii 信息技术与经济社会的交汇融合引发了数据迅猛增长，数据已成为国家基础性战略资源，大数据正日益对全球生产、流通、分配、消费活动以及经济运行机制、社会生活方式和国家治理能力产生重要影响。（国务院，2015，促进大数据发展行动纲要）
- viii 充分发挥互联网的创新驱动作用，以促进创新创业为重点，推动各类要素资源聚集、开放和共享，大力发展众创空间、开放式创新等，引导和推动全社会形成大众创业、万众创新的浓厚氛围，打造经济发展新引擎。（国务院，2015，关于积极推进“互联网+”行动的指导意见）
- ix 网信事业代表新的生产力、新的发展方向，推动人类认识世界、改造世界的能力空前提升，正在深刻改变着人们的生产生活方式，带来生产力质的飞跃，引发生产关系重大变革，成为重塑国际经济、政治、文化、社会、生态、军事发展新格局的主导力量。（国务院，2015，关于积极推进“互联网+”行动的指导意见）
- x 20多年来，我国互联网发展取得的显著成就中，包括一批技术方面的成就。目前，在世界互联网企业前10强中，我们占了4席。在第二届世界互联网大会期间，我去看了“互联网之光”博览会，来自全球

的 250 多家企业展出的 1000 多项新技术新成果中，我们也占了不少，这令人高兴。（习近平，2016 年 4 月 19 日，在网络安全和信息化工作座谈会上的讲话）

xii “坚持全面深化改革，正确处理政府和市场关系，坚持发挥市场在资源配置中的决定性作用，更好发挥政府作用，破除不利于信息化创新发展的体制机制障碍，激发创新活力，加强法治保障，释放数字红利，为经济社会发展提供持续动力”（国务院，2016，十三五”国家信息化规划）

xiii 我国有 13 亿人口、9 亿劳动力资源，人民勤劳而智慧，蕴藏着无穷的创造力，千千万万个市场细胞活跃起来，必将汇聚成发展的巨大动能，一定能够顶住经济下行压力，让中国经济始终充满勃勃生机。政府要勇于自我革命，给市场和社会留足空间，为公平竞争搭好舞台。个人和企业要勇于创业创新，全社会要厚植创业创新文化，让人们在创造财富的过程中，更好地实现精神追求和自身价值。（李克强，2015，政府工作报告）

xiiii 互联网核心技术是我们最大的“命门”，核心技术受制于人是我们最大的隐患。一个互联网企业即便规模再大、市值再高，如果核心元器件严重依赖外国，供应链的“命门”掌握在别人手里，那就好比在别人的墙基上砌房子，再大再漂亮也可能经不起风雨，甚至会不堪一击。我们要掌握我国互联网发展主动权，保障互联网安全、国家安全，就必须突破核心技术这个难题，争取在某些领域、某些方面实现“弯道超车”。（习近平，2016 年 4 月 19 日，在网络安全和信息化工作座谈会上的讲话）

xv 维护网络安全不应有双重标准，不能一个国家安全而其他国家不安全，一部分国家安全而另一部分国家不安全，更不能以牺牲别国安全谋求自身所谓绝对安全。（习近平，2015，世界互联网大会，官方翻译）

xvi 实现“两个一百年”奋斗目标，需要全社会方方面面同心干，需要全国各族人民心往一处想、劲往一处使。如果一个社会没有共同理想，没有共同目标，没有共同价值观，整天乱哄哄的，那就什么事也办不成。我国有 13 亿多人，如果弄成那样一个局面，就不符合人民利益，也不符合国家利益。凝聚共识工作不容易做，大家要共同努力。为了实现我们的目标，网上网下要形成同心圆。什么是同心圆？就是在党的领导下，动员全国各族人民，调动各方面积极性，共同为实现中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦而奋斗。（习近平，2016，4.19 讲话）

xvii 中国互联网蓬勃发展，为各国企业和创业者提供了广阔市场空间。中国开放的大门永远不会关上，利用外资的政策不会变，对外商投资企业合法权益的保障不会变，为各国企业在华投资兴业提供更好服务的方向不会变。只要遵守中国法律，我们热情欢迎各国企业和创业者在华投资兴业。我们愿意同各国加强合作，通过发展跨境电子商务、建设信息经济示范区等，促进世界范围内投资和贸易发展，推动全球数字经济发展。（习近平，2015，世界互联网大会）

xviii 中国开放的大门不能关上，也不会关上。我们要鼓励和支持我国网信企业走出去，深化互联网国际交流合作，积极参与“一带一路”建设，做到“国家利益在哪里，信息化就覆盖到哪里”。（习近平，2016，4.19 讲话）

xix 互联网是传播人类优秀文化、弘扬正能量的重要载体。中国愿通过互联网架设国际交流桥梁，推动世界优秀文化交流互鉴，推动各国人民情感交流、心灵沟通。我们愿同各国一道，发挥互联网传播平台

优势·让各国人民了解中华优秀传统文化·让中国人民了解各国优秀文化·共同推动网络文化繁荣发展·丰富人们精神世界·促进人类文明进步（习近平·2015·世界互联网大会）

Citations in Chapter 8

^{xix}最近一直有人问我，互联网公司有没有边界？阿里巴巴似乎无处不在，腾讯似乎无处不在，facebook也一样，你们这些互联网公司有没有边界？我的回答是，互联网没有边界，就像电没有边界一样。100多年以前，你不会说这个行业可以用电，那个行业不能用电，电是没有应用边界的。互联网是一种平台，一种技术；从某个角度来说，也可以说它是一种思想，一种未来。（马云，2016云栖，未来已来 p32）

^{xx}很多人讲阿里今天投资这投资那，参股这参股那，似乎我们无处不在。事实上，的确是这样...只有我们无处不在，我们的客户才能受益，我们的中小企业客户才能得到发展。为此，我们必须做到无处不在！（马云，2015员工大会，未来已来 p67）

^{xxi}从2010年到2011年间，我花了一年时间思考如何将腾讯打造成一个供更多合作伙伴自由创业、供更多用户自由分享的开放平台。（马化腾，2014合作伙伴大会）

^{xxii}腾讯自身的开放平台，也一直在坚持促成一个“去中心化”的开放分享网络。这和腾讯的社交基因有关。我们的开放平台最早是基于QQ及后来的微信，从社交关系链的架构推演出来。社交网络天然呈网状，鼓励朋友间开放分享。（马化腾，2016全球合作伙伴大会）

^{xxiii}新一代的数据收集，不管是收集工具也好，或者说数据本身也好，都会有很大的发展。但是这里面，难点并不在于你制造出来一个新型的硬件，而在于能够找到那个点，找到什么数据对人们是有价值的。（李彦宏，2014，百度联盟）

^{xxiv}地球已经真正成为一个村落...原来的贸易方式会因为互联网彻底改变，WTO是一个伟大的创举，但是这是在上一个世纪，WTO是政府制定的游戏规则，企业执行，而政府制定的游戏规则，有的时候是非常难让企业执行的，各国之间出于政治的原因，中国跟日本的谈判，日本跟韩国的谈判，根本坐不在一起，各国都有自己的思考，必定影响市场，我们应该建立一个真正通过市场经济、通过企业家组建起来的商业社会，而今天互联网给了我们这样的机会。也许由于互联网的出现、DT的出现，全世界的小企业因为这个技术、因为这个支付、因为这个跨境的整个物流会联合在一起，就像今天淘宝网站上，青海和浙江、浙江和海南、海南和广东，整个贸易如果是各省政府坐下来谈判搞一个协议，一定做不成，一定是商人之间达成一个协议。...互联网将会改变整个全球贸易的走势和格局，随着电子商务越来越多，这才是巨大的机会所在...所以大家在未来的三十年到五十年以内，我相信没有人能阻挡互联网的力量，互联网本身巨大的生态，它是能自己完善的（马云，2014，互联网大会2014）

^{xxv}我们希望支持全球80%的小公司，所以我们倡议建立E-WTP（不是EWTO，EWTO是个组织，是政府行为）。淘宝上有30个省，我们从来不让30个省长坐在一起讨论决策，生态会自己发展。所以我们要做E-WTP，E-ROAD，用商业的模式改变世界。（马云，2016投资者日）

^{xxvi}二十一世纪由于出现了数据，出现了互联网，你要想隐隐藏藏躲一点东西基本没可能，所以隐私这个问题很有意思，今天讨论隐私担忧的问题，二十年以后基本上观念都转变了，我记得1995年我第一次到北京去讨论互联网，有一批专家是中国科协召开的会议，二十几个专家坐在一起讨论未来互联网，我是被邀请的其中一个，我想中国互联网还没出现，怎么二十几个专家出来了，大家在讨论未来互联网这个不对那个不对，我们必须控制这个控制那个，不控制就会出问题。反正我那时候不以为然，我第一认为中国那时候没有专家，第二，我觉得他们担心的问题是瞎担心，都还没长出来。（马云，2014互联网大会）

^{xxvii}我们将会从消费流通领域里面进入到生产制造，然后再进入到第三步生活方式的改变，我们将从B2C全面挺进C2B，必须进行柔性化定制，真正为消费者解决问题，真正的个性化制造。这将会在未来三年到五年逐步实现，不管我们做与不做，这是社会的必然趋势。（马云，2012，网商大会）

xxviii 制造商们也必须个性化，否则他们的生存将非常困难。未来制造商们生产的机器，不仅要会生产，还要会“说话”，会“思考”。机器不再仅仅由石油和电力驱动，还要靠数据来支撑。未来的企业将不再仅仅关注于规模，关注于标准化，它们会更多地关注于灵活性、敏捷性、个性化。（马云，2015 汉诺威，未来已来 p82）

xxix 我觉得中国的产品从数量走向品质、质量，是一个必需的逐步完善的过程。中国经济从制造业为主的实体经济，走向服务业为主的经济是必然的过程，是社会进步的需求。现在没必要把实体经济和虚拟经济对立起来，其实银行、互联网产业也是服务产业的一个组成部分。（马云，2016 南华早报，未来已来 p52）

xxx 更何况未来没有纯制造业，没有纯服务业，未来的制造业一定是服务业，尤其到了 IOT 时代，你的纯制造时代已经过去了，未来得服务业一定是制造业。

...
你说 BAT 是制造业还是服务业，我们是制造业，我们是制造了大量的数据，处理信息制造过以后，跟别人去分享。（马云，2017 互联网大会，企业家会场，）

xxxi 对于大量的传统企业来说，要尽快打通从生产制造到消费服务的价值链，要实现从智慧零售到智能制造、从消费到产业（C2B）的生态协同，就不能仅仅满足于一个完整的传统产业链，未来更需要与互联网公司进行跨界融合，真正触达海量用户，并实现硬件、软件与服务三位一体的生态化能力。（马化腾，2018 合作伙伴）

xxxii 我们相信，产业互联网是各行各业全面提升生产力、进行数字化转型升级的重要载体，将会帮助中国经济从高速度向高质量转型。如果我们能够把个性化的需求和规模化的生产力进行有效连接的话，我们将会创造出很多新的商业模式，并且产生更多的生产力。这在工业时代是难以实现的。所以，互联网再不是一个产业，而是所有产业的核心能力之一。在未来，所有的成功企业，都会是数字化企业。（Martin Lau，数字生态大会 2019）

xxxiii 人工智能等技术成为推动经济高质量发展的重要力量，一方面经济转型升级的内在要求为人工智能服务的实体经济提供了广阔的空间，另一方面，国内很多应用场景为科技企业提供宝贵的机会，亿万网民产生的海量数据为机器学习提供原料，大大加速技术迭代，加速智能经济的高速发展。（李彦宏，互联网大会 2019）

xxxiv 无人车确实不是某一个公司单方面的努力，它是方方面面的巨大生态，而它的这种演进，我觉得中国最有希望，因为我们有一个强势的政府，它在很多很多基础设施的建设上都是在全世界是超前的。（李彦宏，2018 数博会）

xxxv 中国过去劳动力成本很低，而企业级软件在过去解决的问题是什么呢？是提高企业内部的运营效率，运营效率提高了，可以少雇人... 中国的劳动力成本上升非常非常快，这是整个中国经济发展面临的非常大的问题。（李彦宏，2014 百度联盟）

xxxvi 第二，我想谈谈分享经济。大家知道最近这一两年分享经济非常热，它跟云的发展是息息相关的，它们的发展周期几乎一致。云其实也是一种分享经济，我们过去看到分享经济中比较成功的，像交通出行、房屋，以及快递等等很多领域，他们都是把我们社会中的服务能力共享出来、分享出去，这从我的角度定义就是生产力的云化，就是把每一个企业、每一个个人拥有的生产力能够放到云端，给需要这个能力的人共享。我们看到这个趋势是非常明显的。另外一个就是社会分工的精细化，术业有专攻，每个企业都不可能是万能的，我们现在看到未来的趋势是越来越往生态化走，每个企业都在自己最擅长的一个领域，可能很薄，但是又非常广的层面上发挥自己的优势，然后进行上下游的合作。最近腾讯发起了一个财团，这个财团并购了一个在芬兰的只有 180 多人的小公司，但是它的估值却超过 100 亿美金，它是一个全球最大的手机游戏公司 Supercell，我们这个财团用了 86 亿美金收购了 84% 的股份。应该说这是腾讯有史以来最大的一个并购。但你很难想象，一家企业 20 多亿美金的收入，接近 10 亿美金的利润，它只有 180 多人。这在传统企业是不可想象的，像我们过去讲，年收入 100 多亿人民币的企业，怎么可能才 100 多人？任何一个部门都不止这个数字。它恰恰就是使用了云的技术，它的所有的运营、服

务全部都使用云端，所以它的总部和它的开发人员非常精简，这就是一个非常好的社会化分工，以及云的使用的案例。（马化腾，2016，云+未来）

xxxvii 员工不是越多越好，自己的员工越多，为社会创造的就业机会就越少。

将来至少有 1000 万人从事物流行业，为什么只给菜鸟 5000 人的预算？因为只有这么做，才有可能在物流行业为世界创造 1000 万个就业机会。自己的人员越多，给外面创造的机会就越少。我们应该给别人创造饭碗，这是我们企业要做的事情。2015 年我们不会再增加一名新员工（马云，2015 员工大会，未来 p65-6）

xxxviii 2012 年，阿里做过一个预算，2013 年所有指标、利润、收入翻一番。2012 年，淘宝、天猫如日中天，我说我们必须翻一番，其实我心里知道，我不说也会翻一番的，但翻一番的基础是什么？当时，我请大家做一个“人”的预算，翻一番要招多少员工？那时候，阿里总共已有两万多名员工，做出来的预算说如果要翻一番，需要再增加 8700 人。我说不行，不能接受；第二次重新做计划是 7800 人，我仍然不能接受；最后一次缩到 5000 人，我还是说不行，只能 200 人！超过 200 人，所有员工，包括管理层，包括我在内，统统没有奖金，没有年终奖。最终的结果是什么？所有的指标翻了一番还多，而新招人数只有将近 300 人。这说明，改革就是逼出来的。（马云，2016 浙商，未来已来 p138）

xxxix 以前中国经济的“三驾马车”，即所谓的投资、出口和内需，投资和出口是政府的强项，但政府很难让老百姓把钱掏出来进行消费。今天，我们可以用新的技术，用“云”去激发内需，用“云”去启动内需，用云计算、用互联网去培养内需。我相信未来的 20 年，中国会进入真正的内需时代。这是所有创新者、创业者的巨大机会所在。（马云，2015 云栖，未来已来 p44）

xl 前五十年大家拼命的去生产，大规模生产同样的东西来满足这个需求，到一定阶段以后人民没有消费领域了，到了后五十年咱们怎么让消费者消费需求的释放出来，怎么样让他去买东西，于是就产生了信用卡，以及最后直接导致金融危机，不同的金融创新东西，还有无限制的杠杆使得我们现在变成了这样一种可以说是说过度消费的受害者。（李彦宏，2009 百度联盟）

xli ...搜索基本上全部是拉动内需行业，百度 30 多万家客户都是面向内需的，也就是说我们对经济所做的贡献，对经济的推动全部是内需方面，而这恰恰是中国经济最良性的增长（李彦宏，2010 百度联盟）

xlii 消费者的喜好、反馈是快速地通过网络来参与互动，同时还代表着互联网精神，就是追求极致的产品体验，极致的用户口碑。用口碑营销、粉丝文化创造出一线互联网化的产品，让人们口口相传，并让消费者参与决策，对移动互联网产品的竞争力也非常重要。（马化腾，2014 腾讯全球合作伙伴大会）

xliii 阿里巴巴诞生在中国，但阿里巴巴不是一家中国公司，当然也不是美国的公司。人家问阿里巴巴是哪个国家的公司，我回答，我们的股东来自世界各地。我跟大家讲，阿里巴巴虽然诞生在中国，但它是全球化的公司。（马云，2016 百年阿里，未来已来 p72）

xliiv 人工智能还有一个和过去互联网不一样的地方，就是它有强大的垂直整合的特点，或者用我们这次会议的主题来说，就是网络空间的命运共同体。（李彦宏，2017 互联网大会）

xliv 第三个演化是，从“数字全球化”演化到“全球数字化”。过去二十年，互联网与科技公司在全球化浪潮中获得了快速发展，推动着数字技术在全球的应用与普及，培育了多家市值达到千亿，甚至万亿美元的公司。未来二十年，数字世界与物理世界将深度融合，商品与服务之间的界限会进一步模糊，全球的数字化进程将全面启动。这时，不单单是互联网与科技企业，各行各业都将驶入数字化增长的“快车道”。随着全球数字化，数字技术和信息科技将成为连接全球经济的重要纽带。大量的传统产业和新兴地区，有望通过数字化升级实现跨越式发展。我相信，这也是中国企业跟全球接轨，并且打开全球市场的一个重要契机，我们在这里一定要把握好这个机会。（刘炽平，2019 全球数字生态大会）

xlvi 新时代我们将面临新的问题，而同时又是新的机遇。人类只有成为“命运共同体”，共建“命运共同体”，才能一起迎接新的时代和挑战。人类面临一系列的问题是共同的，全球产业链一定会彻底变革，

不是集装箱，而是小件快运，不是 Made In China 或者 Made In America，而是 Made In Internet，不是 B2C，而是 C2B。（马云，2017 互联网大会，开幕）

xlvi 将来的中小企业都是跨国企业，将来没有中国制造、美国制造，只有 Made IN Internet。达摩院要做的，就是真正要把技术进行普惠。（马云，2017 云栖）

xlvi 阿里巴巴已经不是一家普通的商业公司，我们在这个国家、在这个时代担当有巨大的责任。十年以前我就在阿里巴巴讲：中国电商发展得好，跟阿里巴巴没有关系；但是中国电商发展得不好，跟阿里巴巴有关系。因为那时候 90% 的中国电子商务人才在我们公司，我们做得不对，就意味着这个国家做得不对。（马云，2017 云栖）

xlii 过去，中国企业主要扮演的是新技术的跟随者，但是今天我们需要成为新技术的驱动者和贡献者。例如，腾讯将用云的技术把我们的很多产品和技术开放给生态企业，我们也将通过内容开放平台促进文化创意产业的发展，未来更多的科技和文化产品将通过数字丝绸之路走向世界。（马化腾，2017 互联网大会 2017）

i 同样，数字经济的发展让跨地域的协作创新产生了更多可能。比如今年我多次谈到的粤港澳大湾区，也需要采用“宽平台”思维来鼓励协作创新，过去大家之间有竞争，现在更需要握成一个拳头去向全球要市场、要人才，共同把数字科技的创新生态做大。（马化腾，2017 合作伙伴）

ii 农业的 AI 化已经非常显现了，我们要打好中国粮，端好中国碗，AI 是不可或缺的。（李彦宏，2018 世界大会）

iii 百度在过去十多年一直致力于人工智能技术的投入，我们未来也希望跟在座很多的同行企业家一起为中国的人工智能技术发展和进步作出我们应该做的事情，也非常期待中国能够成为全球领先的人工智能技术的国家，也很希望看到未来第一个完全只允许无人车行驶的城市出现在中国，谢谢。（李彦宏，2016 数博会）

iiii 芯片是核心技术，而我们和发达国家确实有不少差距，但是在 IoT 芯片领域，我们有机会弯道超车。中国拥有全球最大的互联网用户和市场，有机会发展自己的芯片。很多时候，因为基础不好才有可能更快地发展。（马云，2018 云栖）

Citations in Chapter 9

lv 我觉得这个互联网就是挣钱（NA:挣钱，怎么说？）互联网，我就指公司方面…好多高科技的东西，就把很多传统的行业都已经给冲击的特别的厉害，他就是赚钱赚的挺厉害的…大家知道那个小米对不对，特别厉害的，当时小米刚出来的时候他就采用了一种饥饿销售…有人分析它是一种互联网思维…这时候他就一下子赚很多很多钱。就是就是互联网这个东西出来之后知道吧，就是整个的这个产业，这个生产的经济格局都有好多好多种…好多好多种模式就是生长出来…（programmer group 2, #3, 01.45.12）

lv 也就是说出现赚钱的机会，就是由于互联网的发展，然后就是推动了网络购物，给很多人提供了一些就业的机会。（manufacturing worker group 2, 01.46.14）

lvi 所以每个行业都是刚开始出现的时候就像雨后春笋啊什么都有，然后谁谁抓住了这最终的主体群体的话，他就会成为这个行业的巨头。[programmer group 2, 29.00, #4]

lvii 没有赚到钱，因为那个淘宝的话，如果说你经常坐电脑前的话，还可以有点生意，但是，但是他那个主要就是信誉度…如果说你是个新店的话，很少被光顾到，因为淘宝的话，做淘宝的话也差不多，几百上亿的人都在做淘宝，就是说的话，人家来关注你的店的机会是很小，就也是很不好做的，要砸很多钱，因为他说要刷单… (#5, manufacturing worker group 2, 23'48'').

^{lviii} 我首先是看他网站是否有一些最基本的加密… 比如说协议啊，是不是加密的协议啊，是不是 https 的，然后，比如说是那种很大的网站，比如说阿里巴巴这种啊，你人家的技术很牛了，应该在这方面也做的肯定很 ok 了，就不用去担心这些，但是如果那种小的网站，你甚至连个备案信息都看不到的这种网站，那就可能要么填假的，要么就不填啊… (程 1, #4, 30.37)

^{lix} 我对这个这个东西比较信任，比如 QQ 微信啊，我就知道他是一个比较大的公司，腾讯这个公司，他不太可能欺骗你，我觉得可能比较信任一点，但是像那些不知名的话，我没见过的那种，我绝对不会输入[实名信息]的 (工人小组 1, #4, 58'05'')

^{lx} (4) 目前我觉得大公司来说，它对用户的一个信息安全应该是做的相对比较好的，然后对于小公司它其实是完全不负责任的… 我觉得如果哪一天阿里巴巴比如说达到了上万人或者几千万人的一些信息掉了的话，他可能会就因此而衰败… 对于它们来说其实如果是大公司… 它肯定会守护住你用户的这个信息 (programmer group 2, 45.20)

^{lxi} …虽然我们一直在强调用户隐私，但是实际上在互联网上，每一个用户都是裸奔的，就是可以通过技术手段获得，你可以获取到的任何信息 [programmer group 1, #4, 18'49'']

^{lxii} 比如说大家不把手机号码呀，QQ 号码呀，出生年月日啊，这种东西当作隐私的话，没有这么多事情，因为这种你想当作隐私不现实的，有各种途径已经给它泄露出去了，就是在国内很早之前，前几年吧，有很多网站，他安全其实做得很不靠谱的，你使用了，也包括 QQ，以前也一样，你注册了，你的信息已经填过去了，如果这可能这几年前一批已经发生过一次泄露了，他们叫脱库… 这些信息都已经泄露了，那么你就是泄露了，然后你在另外一个场合，你做了一些安全加固，那结果是什么？就是保证少泄露一次嘛，但是终究还是要泄露的 (programmer group 1, #4)

^{lxiii} 他也可能是一种诱导，（怎么说？）就是因为就像他们刚才说的，因为现在好多应用，可能你用户为了方便吗？就相当于是一键式的… 如果其他的那些软件或者是一些新的 app，你要想登陆的话，正常的方式你是要注册的嘛，但是你要通过这些微信或者 QQ 让他们来授权的话，你就省去了很多步骤嘛，然后他就是你来登陆一个新的 app 之前，他就问你同不同意用 QQ 或者微信来登录… 你觉得很方便，然后就授权了，然后他们因为你授权了，然后他们就可以得到你这边的，就是 QQ 微信的这些，这些就是社交信息了，通过这种方式，然后来达到自己原有的一些，就是个人隐私嘛这些东西，但是你自己，可能普通用户来说，可能觉得就是，但他并没有告诉你，告诉你授权背后的，是到底有什么风险，没有告诉你，其实他们是拿到了你自己的隐私的 (programmer group 1, 19: 07, #6)

^{lxiv} Moderator :所以就是你觉得这两个[软件]对你可以有帮助，然后你觉得给他们捐一下款也可以是吗？

(#5): 也不是捐款，我就觉得我他值得我花一笔钱去买他们这个东西，

(#2): 是可以付费使用的

(#5): 对，我是觉得我真的可以付费使用，而且收费又不高，就是有可能，反正我现在是到了那种，就是，嗯，就是我觉得他值那个价的话，我就不会说为了图免费去花很多精力，去找一个免费的东西去翻墙，如果有一个很好的一个服务，我愿意付这个钱… (white-collar group 2, 01:02'44'')

^{lxv} (#4): 嗯我觉得网络安全吧，包括个人隐私这一方面，应该是今后互联网以及一些大公司，或者说互联网大咖，这些公司应该非常注重的，因为它既然拥有了这些用户群体，而这些用户群体的隐私以及它的个人信息安全就会成为他一个非常重要的一个部分，如果他哪一天把这些用户信息泄露了，所以他会损失很大一部分的用户，而对于这种公司来说，如果他没有用户，那他就没有未来… (programmer group 2, 40.53, #4)

^{lxvi} 首先的话，一，本国的那个政治肯定是为本国服务啊。然后，敌国（笑），就是说其他国家的政治（笑）也肯定是为他们自己国家去服务。首先的话很简单，经常吧，一些网站上就是那个像国内的微博上也说有一些就是外国反华势力，渗透国家中国国民的思想，所以说他那个要[审查]… (white-collar group 1, #3, 01'23'27)

lxvii 我有不同意见，我觉得不让 Facebook 进来是有国家层面的一些考虑的，因为一些社交手段哈，人们如果大范围普及使用的话，存在一些特别特别重要的信息问题，比如说一些官员，如果聊天都使用 Facebook 的话，美国可以很容易地获取到我们的信息，然后针对这些信息他进行一些手段。比如说，中国的两个官员，然后聊天，然后说怎么样怎么样怎么样，然后他 Facebook，因为毕竟是国外的东西，我们是没办法掌握这个主动权的，是不是，它可能就会，Facebook 比如说它跟美国，他跟它的政府，进行一些信息，它信息肯定不光在 Facebook，还在它国家的一些东西里面存着是不是，他可能就会收集到这些信息，或进行一些那个说，比如说中国跟哪个国家怎么样怎么样，他可能就会进行一些行动。我觉得从国家层面的话，他完全就是不太想让他进来。[Programmer group 2, #1, 01: 24: 02]

lxviii ...如果有一些个人比较极端一点，或者说敏感一些词汇，就是如果被其他人浏览到，就是说也可能引起别人这种，啊，这种心态或者说这种，想法，所以正常的屏蔽掉，恩，这种“正能量”（微弱的笑声）很多吧...[manufacturing worker group 2,01.23.48]

lxix ...你比如说前两年呢，像中东的叙利亚，那个应该叫什么，嗯，中东之春就是这些事件吗，（NA:阿拉伯之春）其实就属于当地的政府吧，丧失了网络的话语权，就是放任，嗯，这一种特殊形式的资本 [he means information as a special type of capital in his previous statements]在肆意发挥它的力量，就导致现在中东战火连连，各个政府都被推翻，所以我觉得这个资本肯定是要被管的 [programmer group 2, 01: 10: 19]

lxx 就是这个，我觉得跟国情有关嘛，中国，像刚才 2 号说的，民族比较多嘛，国情比较复杂嘛，确实如果说传出什么谣言，你不封的话，任他传播的话，这是一个很严重的问题，容易导致社会动荡之类的事情，所以说对于传播谣言这种，我个人觉得，应该封，其他的像你所说的那个历史问题，这些东西，这个真的不好评价 [programmer group 1, 01: 05: 44]

lxxi 我觉得这应该是社会发展的一个阶段。可能就是说，我们国家现在由一个封闭走向开放的阶段，现在就可能是处在这个中间的一个阶段，所以现在可能各方面，由于国民素质啊，或者国内啊，或者是周边环境都没有准备，所以说做这样的一些控制，我觉得也是有道理或者说是符合现在的这些，现在的一些事情吧。我觉得未来就是说，环境或者是国家或者是人民什么什么都准备好，到一定阶段了，那是应该是社会的发展或者政治发展到一定阶段的时候，嗯，这方面东西应该是迎刃而解，到时候会更加开放，我这样想。 [Programmer group 1. 01.06.33]

lxxii ...其实国内，恩，可能对于国外是言论还不够自由，但其实也是根据全民的一个素质，嗯如果全民素质提高到了一个层次，那么言论就会相对自由，自由是相对的。如果如果全民的一些素质还不够，低下的话，他给你自由，其实是给社会带来更多的危害。如果整个，比如说国内现在的教育水平不断上升，从以前的小学到现在慢慢高中大学，如果到国内嗯，或者说从我们这一代吧，我觉得慢慢的，等以后大家每个人都能够上过大学的话，我觉得整个全民素质提上来了以后，那国家给你的言论自由也会特别强。包括，现在我们国家虽然有，啊，自主一个选举权，但我们实际上都没有拿到，啊，会有一些人民代表，代表了我们选举，那是因为他自认为我们根本就做不了主，选不了，等以后我觉得啊，我们的政府以及国家慢慢的发展，包括我们整体的一个水平上来以后，慢慢的会给我们更多的一些自由和权利，这样的话也是为了维护社会的一个稳定 [programmer group 2, 01:42'26"]

lxxiii 在中国就是这个没有什么企业能对抗公权力的，比如像苹果说我们那个东西就不交了，你不交那个东西就是死（大家说：对）所以就是没办法，他公司也不能保证个人安全，个人隐私的（普 2， 39.48）

lxxiv 有一些，可能也是它平台为了个人利益考虑，比如说豆瓣的话，可能他觉得，你在我的豆瓣上发了这个帖子，豆瓣关注人比较多，可能政府会不会对我豆瓣有什么压力啊... (程 1, 01.03.25)

lxxv 应该有还是有的，有一些技术论坛啊，人家确实就没有广告，但是没有广告的话，他的收入来源怎么办呢？他虽说不盈利，比如[论坛名]，全球都可以使用，（NA:他是靠捐款什么的？）对啊，可能也是比较花钱吧（programmer group 1, 41.24 (4)）

lxxvi (2: 不会有这种网站出现, 就算有的话, 我觉得他是, 到一定的程度, 他都会变相收费) (1: 目前不会有, 目前呢还没有这种) (2: 对啊, 就是没有这种网站) (7: 就是不会有那种一个网站可以看电视啊, 然后就是说没广告, 他免费的) (manufacturing worker group 1, 01.04.07)

lxxvii 我是觉得..那些大公司, 大的品牌还是可以信任的, 如果他们都信任不了的话, 你对于这个互联网社会基本上就失去了跟外界交流的那些渠道... (程 1, #6, 34.40)

lxxviii 他会记录我的浏览记录, 然后他就会给我推荐相关的东西, 我觉得这个是可以接受的, 因为你也没有办法彻底屏蔽掉网站对你的记录, 因为这个已经是一个默认的你不接受也得接受的事实... (white-collar group 1, #5, 28'40'')

lxxix #1: 就是说通过你的信息去探测你地点这件事情吗? 你顾虑也没用啊, 因为他想做就做呀, 你就是只能被动接受, 你知道吗? 你顾虑也没用

#5: 任人鱼肉

NA:是因为他负责这个算法和一些程序的设计?

#5: 因为在国内会觉得这些东西你去反抗也没有用, 然后就只有这一个平台, 你说你不愿意接受, 但那你就不要用, 然后平台永远不会为了你改变的 (white-collar group 1, 52'24'')

lxxx 不是说无所谓, 怎么说呢, 他就被强奸强奸惯了, 后来你也也也无所谓了, 你知道吗? 就那种感觉消极接受 (white-collar group 2, #5, 58'50'')