Media landscape questions: China

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1. **What characterizes the difference between national, regional, and local in relation to media in your country?**
   Owned by the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese government under CCP's leadership, mainstream media (newspaper, TV, radio, etc.) in general is established in accordance with the administrative structure in China. For example, the Party and government system is vertically constructed at four levels, namely, the central, provincial, city and county. Media is accordingly owned and supervised respectively by central, provincial, city and county governments. In addition to the vertical coherence, media system in China is horizontally diverse, uneven and sometimes full of conflicts.
   Since China is becoming one of the most uneven societies in the world today, media development in different regions of China also shows unprecedented unevenness. In the first-tier cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, etc.), media receives comparatively more financial support from both advertising market and local government (i.e. subsidies), and is also easier to recruit employees of high quality from their fiercely competitive labor market. But for other cities and counties, let alone the countryside, less money and labor force could be found than those big cities. Similar with the inter-city and urban-rural divide, media develops unevenly between east and west inside China. In other words, media industry in the eastern coastal areas is more prosperous while media in the west and the hinterland has less potential for economic growth. This national media landscape is consistent with the domestic economic geography.
   However, speaking of the political attributes of media in China, another map should be drawn. Since each media outlet is owned and supervised by a certain level of the government, media in China is responsible for maintaining the commanding height and the leading position of the government in public opinion in respective administrative regions. But the Chinese state does allow cross-region reporting, despite the dominant influence of central media organizations (Xinhua, CCTV etc.) in distributing regional news from the central level. Some regional media, therefore, achieve nationwide influence by reporting news outside the region they are from. For example, Southern Weekly is widely recognized because of its investigative journalism. For Chinese media and its complex relationship with the politics, this cross-region news reporting, or in a more precise and localized sense, media supervision (meijie jiandu), is proved complementary to the top-down hierarchy of media operation.
   As a result, any simplistic conceptualization of Chinese media system as one homogeneous unity is problematic. In addition, along with the prosperity of information and communication technologies, internet-based new media forms flourished in the past two decades. Interestingly, though internet is market-oriented and not institutionally operated as those mainstream media, the development of internet is also following the similar geographical logic with old media, for instance, the digital divide between urban and rural areas and between developed east and underdeveloped west in China. The headquarters of major internet companies are all situated in first-tier cities, except Alibaba that is located in Hangzhou, Zhejiang. As to the media system itself, we have been witnessing the trend towards convergence between old and new platforms. Old media are privileged in gathering

news and other content production, while new media are more professional in technological innovation and marketing. The convergence in between will be a main approach for media development in China in the next decade. The dynamics of media at different geographical and institutional levels will also deserve careful examination in the future.

2. **What is the role of newspapers in your society?**

Newspapers are politically essential for the Chinese state since the very beginning of its foundation. Drawn from its nearly three decades-long history of anti-imperialist and civil wars, the early Chinese Communist Party leaders believe that newspapers, as major mass media of that time, is essential for the diffusion of the Party's political claims, the propaganda war against its enemies, and therefore the survival for the Party.

This tradition is inherited in the new China after 1949, and continually casts a shadow on the propaganda work for today's CCP. Therefore, the role of newspapers in China is by nature political. No matter how less money that newspapers can earn through advertising today, and how many people have switched to television, computer and mobile phones to access news, newspapers in general is still enjoying a politically essential and integral position for the Party's propaganda arm.

However, newspapers also changed itself in the reform China. Since the introduction of market mechanism, namely the rising role of advertising in the income structure, new genres of newspapers emerged. For example, while the mouthpiece of the Party at all levels remains (People's Daily, etc.), more affiliated newspapers turned to the market in pursuit of wider readership and finally the profit through advertising, which led to a wave of tabloidization of newspapers in urban China since the middle of 1990s. By popularizing the news narratives and reporting sensational stories, those newspapers soon succeed in attracting advertisers and became unprecedented wealthy than their parent Party's mouthpiece newspapers. But this wave ended when the cost of computer and use of internet declined in the middle of 2000s, let alone the boom of private-owned smart phones.

Nowadays, newspapers is widely considered (or judges) to die soon by technocrats and the ICTs industries, but it hasn't. One hard truth that we must admit is that newspapers, as we mentioned above, is not only a media outlet that falls into the evolutionary logic of modern technology, but also a political organization for the Party, a news production entity for all media content, and a collective memory about a media form with either high authority or huge popularity for the public in China.

3. **What characterizes the magazine sector in your country?**

According to the latest statistical report of the national news and publication industries (2014), by the end of 2013, there are 9877 magazines in China, including the following sub-categorizes: comprehensive (368), philosophy and social science (2577), science and technology (4944), culture and education (1353), as well as literature and art (635).

In the history of reform China, among all media outlets, magazine is the first to be commercialized and capitalized, which leads the market-oriented media reform since early 1980s. Nowadays, the market of magazines has to a large extent been differentiated. For each professional sector, as shown in the above statistics, there is a mature system of magazines, but with different systematic characteristics. For example, in philosophy and social sciences sector, most magazines are affiliated to a research or education entity. As a publication resource, they are equally distributed.

However, since the inception of commercialization, some magazines soon become popular beyond their professional circle in order to cater the taste of a broader readership, for instance, the fashion magazines.

In addition, more magazines have launched the online version and even developed applications for smart phones, in order to reach the users with a high mobility.

4. **What characterizes the radio sector in your country? If your country has community radio as phenomena, please include them. If not, please reflect on how minority groups (ex.: migrant/immigrant diasporas, national groups, language-based groups, etc.) use ICTs for articulation, mobilization, cultural resistance, etc.**

Similar with other mainstream media, radio in China is also consistent with the administrative structure from central to provincial, city and county, even village level. For each level, there is a set of radio channels that is established by the government and operated by an affiliated radio organization.

In order to understand the role of radio in China, we may start with the call sign (and for most cases the name) of each radio station, which is the People's Radio Station (renmin guangbo diantai) with the name of different regions in the front. For example, the China National Radio (english name, its Chinese name is same with the call sign) uses the call sign of the Central People's Radio Station, while the Beijing People's Radio Station represents other regional radio stations in terms of the name and call sign.

By remembering the word "People" in Chinese radio stations' call sign, we encourage a historical analysis of the role of radio in new China and its people's lives. As radio (both wired and wireless) was the only mass media affordable for most Chinese people before the introduction of television, the Chinese state utilized radio to reach people with news, entertainment and weather forecast. In other words, radio did play a role in bridging the state and the people in the pre-television era, let alone the great power of mobilization.

Soon after the Cultural Revolution, the political role of radio comparatively declined while the economic role rose. Radio, therefore, became an important platform of media commercialization by opening space for commercials. Though still owned by the Party, radio channels in China embraced the advertising market and became the most profitable media outlet in China in terms of per capital income. In this transformation, radio differentiated into various genres, including news, music, sports and particularly the urban transportation channels that enjoy the biggest market share of advertising over a long period of time.

However, with the proliferation of internet, radio stations in China are facing the same challenge with the television, namely maintaining the role of mass media and integrating into the trend of media convergence facilitated by the digital and network technologies. Therefore, there is a two-fold story happening right now: first, the differentiation of traditional radio genres, for example, music and urban transportation channels are still dominant especially in the urban market, while other genres including news and opera channels are in sharp decline in terms of the population of audience and the advertising income.

5. **What characterizes the television sector in your country?**

Television is still the leading mass media in China today, no matter how many challenges emerged over the past decade due to the proliferation of internet. In order to understand the characteristics of Chinese television, we should start from an official meeting in 1983, when

the central government decided to encourage the whole nation to develop television, particularly through building television stations and cable network. The central government could not provide any financial support or subsidy for this national project. Instead, the central government offered a policy benefit, namely, any local government could build its own television system if enough resources were mobilized. As a result, the television system in China is a consequence of a bottom-up policy initiative, and thus demonstrated a high variety.

If we shift the attention from history to the present, television sector in China has a three-fold story to tell. First, the political role of television as the leading mass media is still evident. The Chinese Communist Party repeatedly claims the ownership of television. Most content on television are under strict regulation and supervision in order to secure the Party's commanding height and the patriarchic discipline over Chinese society. Second, the television industry used to be the most profitable one in terms of advertising income, partially because of its monopolistic position in the mass media. But internet changes the market share, especially since the inception of social media after 2009. Nowadays, on the one hand, the overall industry of television is facing a huge challenge from the redistribution of advertising investment from old mass media to internet-based new media; on the other hand, a handful of provincial satellite television stations (CCTV, Hunan, Zhejiang and Jiangsu, etc.) are proved quite successful in innovating the content and therefore enjoying a bigger share of the advertising market. Third, in the process of so-called media convergence, television is still holding a comparative advantage to take the lead, namely the professional capacity of content production. But the problem is that internet-based new media are always capital-laden. Those new media companies have enough money to attract the professionals who used to work in traditional television industries. Therefore, a new risk of labor shortage is occurring to the television industry in China.

Besides the political-economic analysis, for the Chinese households, the use of television started to differentiate in different areas for different social classes. People who are living and working in urban areas, the multi-screen life has come true. Less time of watching television becomes a new normal. However, for the rural people, watching television is still a main way of killing the time after work and entertaining themselves, though the internet and smartphones have already shifted their attention. This communicative gap also exists between different social classes. In a typical family space in reform China, television used to be arranged at the center of all furniture. But perhaps in the near future, this centrality of television would be replaced by other information and communication technologies, but which one?

6. **Describe the telephony sector in your country. What are the roles and penetration rates of the landlines? What is the role of the mobile telephony sector? How do people commonly use mobile phones (including smartphones and tablets)?**
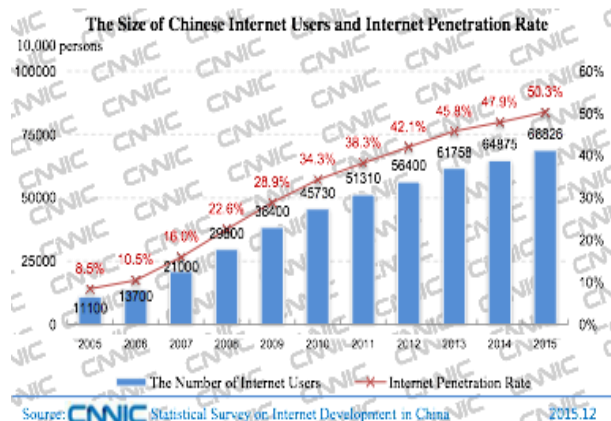
   Similar with other countries, China also has fixed-line telephone and mobile phones. As of January 2016, the population of mobile phone users reaches 1.3 billion. In other words, almost every Chinese person has one mobile phone. The penetration rate is 95.5%. But meanwhile, the amount of fix-line telephone users is sharply declining to 231 million, the penetration rate is accordingly decreasing to 16.9 per hundreds persons.
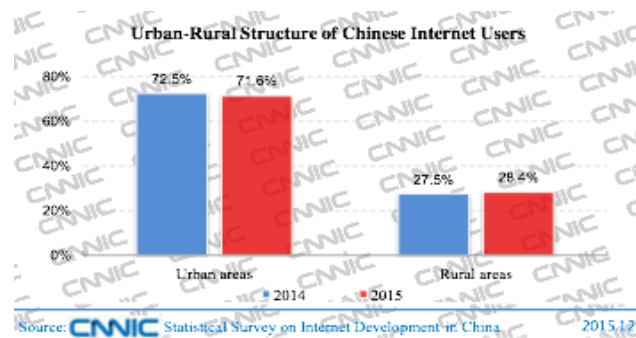
单位：部/百人
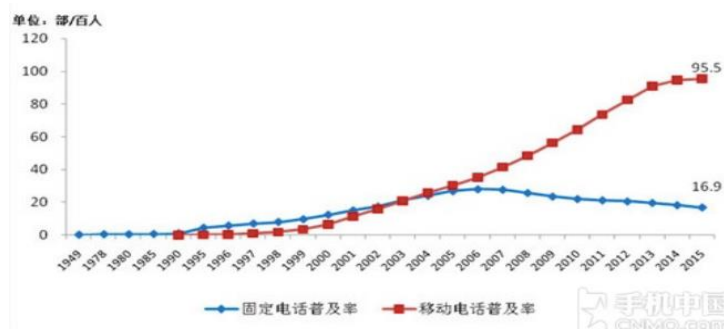
As the most prosperous communicative tool, mobile phone is becoming essential for Chinese people to connect with each other in their daily lives.

7. **Describe the historical development and current situation of Internet in your country. Also consider: technical infrastructure, digital divide, common uses, influence of Internet content in public debates, etc.**

The first email from China to the world was sent on September 14 1987, which symbolizes the coming of internet era for China. This email contains the following message that reform China wanted to say to the outside world, namely "Across the Great Wall we can reach every corner in the world". Since then on, China jumped on the fast train of internet development across the globe and has become the biggest country in terms of internet users. Soon after the US' information highway project in early 1990s, China launched the three "Golden Projects" of building national internet infrastructure, namely Golden Bridge, Golden Gate and Golden Card. Nearly two decades passed, according to the latest statistical report on internet development in China issued by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC): as of December 2015, China had 688 million Internet users, with a yearly increase of 39.51 million. The Internet penetration rate reached 50.3%, up 2.4 percentage points from the end of 2014. The number of mobile Internet users in China reached 620 million, an increase of 63.03 million from the end of 2014. Mobile netizens accounted for 90.1% of the total netizen population. As of December 2015, China had a total of 4.23 million websites, of which 2.13 million were under ".CN", meanwhile, China had a total of 31.02 million domain names, of which 52.8% or 16.36 million were ".CN" domains, and 350, 000 were ".中国"domains. In terms of the geographical difference, Chinese rural netizens accounted for 28.4% of the national total, reaching 195 million, up by 16.94 million from the end of 2014. The urban-rural divide is gradually decreasing, especially because of the proliferation of low-cost smartphones and mobile internet service.

The Size of Chinese Internet Users and Internet Penetration Rate

Source: CNNIC Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China 2015.12

Source: CNNIC Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China   2015.12

For transitional Chinese society, internet is a transformative power. First, the technological potential of flattening the communication system is self-evident. The traditional hierarchical structure of propaganda and its affiliated mass media system is challenged by the prosperity of internet-based new media forms, including news portal, search engine and social networking/media. Individuals are empowered to network with each other and to disseminate information in various ways outside the mass media. Second, internet has become a major facilitator and contributor to upgrade Chinese economy in the following matters, including bridging the supply and demand domestically and internationally, monitoring the market by data-driven computing tools, and the development of internet companies, etc. Thirdly, internet also becomes a space of public debate for both national and local issues. Some internet-initiated or internet-mediated public debates have real social consequences, for example, the anti-corruption voices from average netizens often cause the resign of target government officials or the intervention from national or local judicial system.

However, the role of internet in China today is multiple and full of uncertainties, because internet is not only a constructive force for the society, but also a consequence of the interplay of government, market, technology and even individuals in Chinese society.

8. **About the registered domains: what are the most common kinds of websites registered and what are the most accessed kinds of website?**

According to the 37th statistical report on internet development in China issued by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), by the end of 2015, the total number of domain names in China had increased to 31.02 million, up 50.6% annually.

	Number	Proportion in total domain names
CN	16,363,594	52.8%
COM	10,997,941	35.5%
NET	1,415,001	4.6%
ORG	397,970	1.3%
中国	352,785	1.1%
BIZ	70,770	0.2%
INFO	26,107	0.1%
Others	1,396,346	4.5%
Total	31,020,514	100.0%

(Number of Domain Names in Each Category)

As of December 2015, China had 4.23 million websites3, representing a yearly increase of 26.3%.
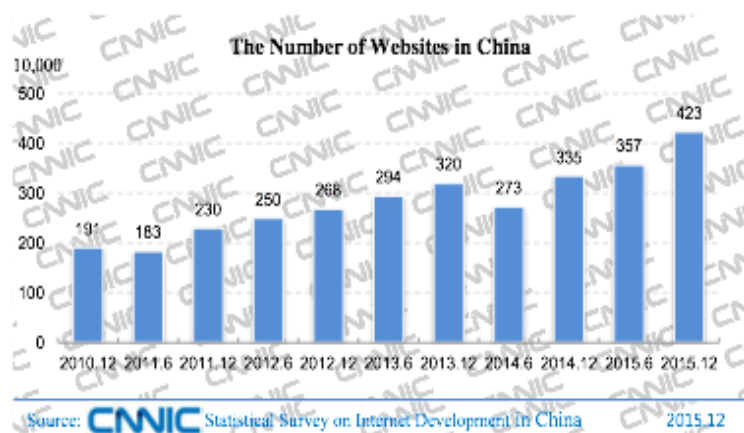
The most visited websites in China include news portals (Sina, Netease, Sohu,etc.), search engine (Baidu as monopoly), online retailing/shopping websites (Taobao, JD, etc.) and social networking websites (Renren, etc.).

9. **About social media: what social media platforms are the most common (e.x. blogs, social networks, video-sharing websites, etc)? How influent in public debates are issues raised in social media? Does your country follow international patterns of social media usage (ex.: are global platforms like facebook the most popular or are there national/regional/local ones)?**

Several social networking sites are popular in China nowadays, including Renren and Douban. As to the video-sharing websites, Youku, Tudou, Iqiyi and the video websites of Sohu and Tencent are most common for Chinese netizens. Since Facebook, WhatsApp and other popular social media from the outside are not allowed to operate and to be used in Mainland China, Chinese internet companies invented local counterparts to fulfill the needs of social communication for Chinese internet users. Among others, QQ, WeChat and Weibo (microblogging) are most popular. Different from WeChat and Weibo, QQ has a long history of more than 15 years. Instant messenger is its major function of communication, though it integrated a series of new functions (news, game and music, etc.) over the years. By May 20 2016, the monthly active users of QQ are 877 million, while WeChat has 762 million though just launched for 4 years. Weibo (Sina, Tencent, etc.) used to be the major social media platform, but since its inception, WeChat soon became the challenger for Weibo's dominant position. Comparing the fast growth of WeChat users, Weibo was reported to have only 212 million monthly active users by the end of September in 2015. The success of WeChat is not only proved in the domestic market, but also in the international market. It is argued that wherever there is Chinese people or Chinese community, there is a space for the installation of WeChat in their smart phones. In this sense, WeChat plays a societal role to re-bond Chinese society.

Social media does provoke some public debates, particularly on the Weibo platform, because WeChat is comparatively closed to certain social circles in which individuals are involved. Over the past years, Weibo-initiated debates have successfully set the agenda for public discussion and even the mass media. For example, the debate between Han Han, a youth writer and liberal intellectual, and Fang Zhouzi, a scientist and online activist, started

from their personal Weibo accounts with millions of fans respectively, but soon became the headline of national news. In this sense, social media is not only a platform for social communication and connection, but also a source for mass communication and demonstrated a broad range of interactions with other media forms.