# "Internet +" or "+ Internet" ? The Changing Power Structure of Media System in China

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# "Internet+" as official discourse for economic growth in China

- The Internet Plus action plan was unveiled for the first time in the government work report that Premier Li Keqiang delivered to national lawmakers on March 5, 2015.

- "Internet Plus"strategy means integrating Internet with other industries including traditional industries through Internet platform and information and communication technologies.(Betty XU, 2015)
- Traditional and emerging industries related to Internet

- The State Council on July 4 2015 unveiled its Internet Plus action plan which maps development targets and supportive measures for key sectors, which the government hopes can establish new industrial modes, including mass entrepreneurship and innovation, manufacturing, agriculture, energy, finance, public services, logistics, e-commerce, traffic, biology and artificial intelligence. (www.gov.cn)

# The "Internet way of thinking" (*hulianwang siwei*)
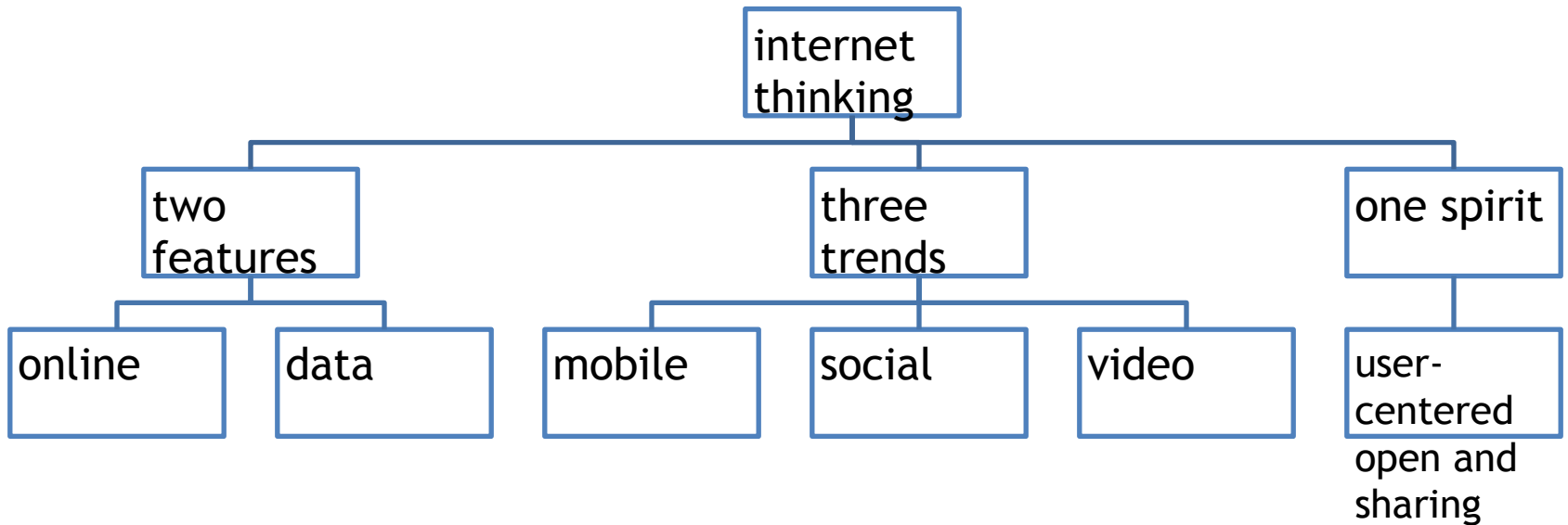


(Zhengrong Hu & Deqiang Ji, 2015)

# "Internet+" and its consequences in media sector

- Media convergence: being digital, online and connected; the fusion of different media industries; the mutual entrance of broadcasting and telecommunication

- Media reform: system (regulation) and mechanism (production process reengineering)

- Internet companies take the lead and play a transformative role: BAT

"互联网+" 创新涌现
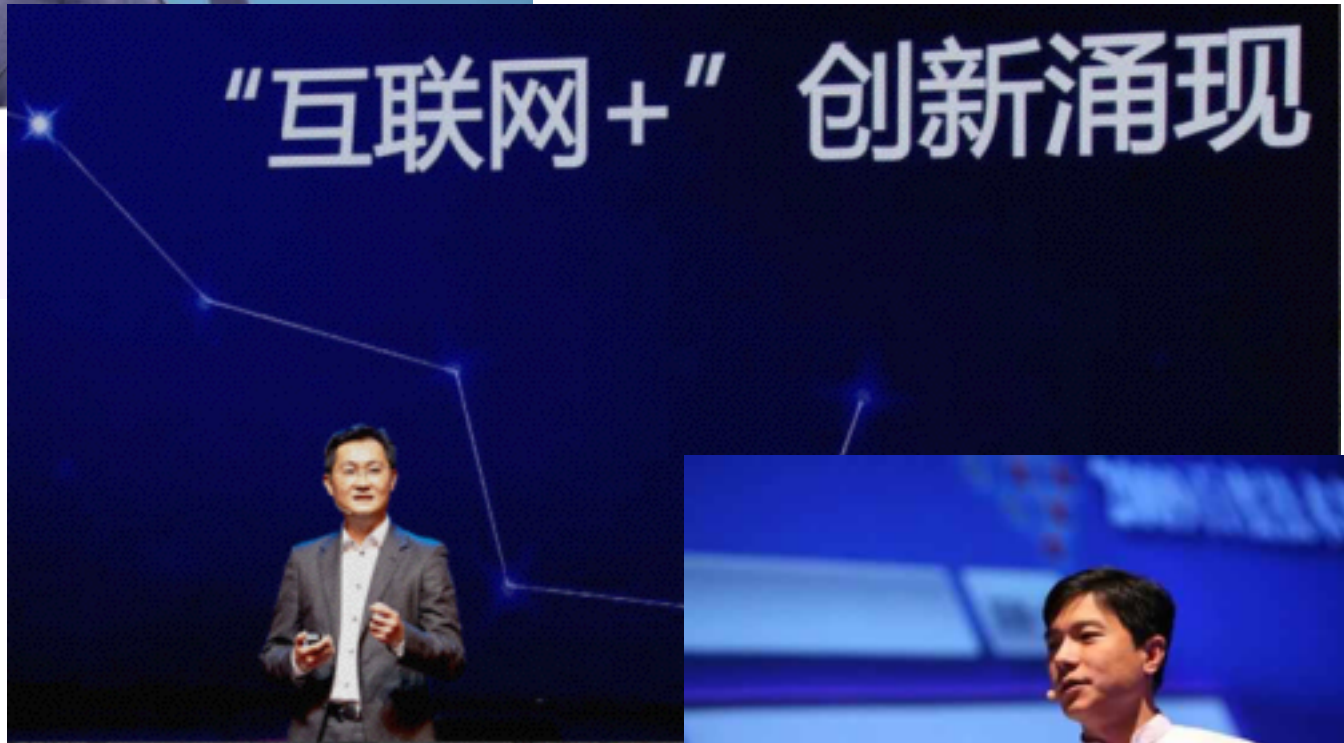
# "+internet" and the claim of the CCP's cultural leadership

- Convergence, divergence, consolidation…
- "Convergence is more a mobilizing project than a tangible reality." (Éric George, 2010)

# 8·18 (August 18, 2014)



Speaking at a meeting of the central leading group to deepen overall reform, Xi Jinping urged media to strengthen what he called the "Internet way of thinking" and speed up the "convergence" between traditional media and the Internet and mobile Internet. (China Daily, 2014-08-20)

# Convergence

- "Convergence cannot be successful if it is just for the sake of convergence." (Huang Chuxin, 2015)

- Convergence: technological innovation ? Or sustaining ideological leadership through the convergent development between traditional media and new media forms ?

- Traditional media should take the lead..

- "+ internet" rather than "internet +"

# President Xi visits China's national news outlets on Feb. 19 2016

- President Xi visits China's national news outlets (Xinhua)
- In Rare State Media Tour, Xi Jinping Takes the Anchor's Chair (WSJ)
- Xi Jinping asks for 'absolute loyalty' from Chinese state media (The Guardian)
- Xi Jinping's News Alert: Chinese Media Must Serve the Party (The New York Times)
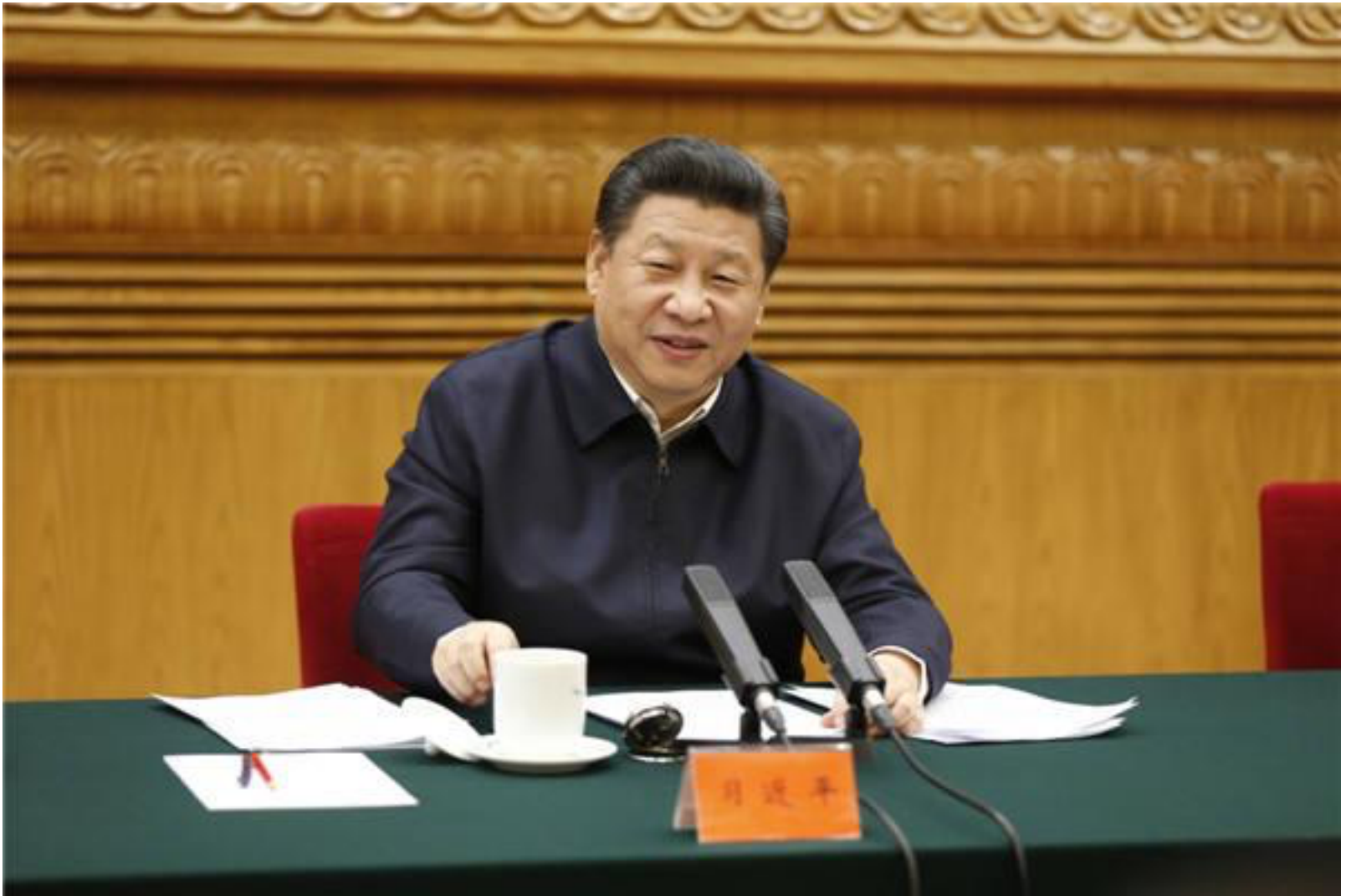
- In a meeting after the tour, Xi announced a series of directives to the media leaders, including:

 The importance of journalism in China's national development

 The coherence of the Party, people and media's interest

 The leading position of Marxist journalism theory in guiding journalistic practices

 How to build an army of politically-loyal journalists with competent communication capacities in a media-saturated society

 The critical role of the propaganda officials

 Nine innovations to catch the development of ICTs and to fit in the changing communication environment (agenda-setting, timing, formats, etc.)

 And the Mass Line

# From the masses, to the masses

- The process is said to include investigating the conditions of people, learning about and participating in their struggles, gathering ideas from them, and creating a plan of action based on these ideas and concerns of the people, and also based on an analysis of the objective conditions and in light of the revolutionary goal.

# Two principles for media

- Claiming the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party over the media system, particularly the Party-owned media

- Innovating communication strategies

- The transformation of media landscape in China: media in the nexus of the Party line, the bottom line (Zhao, 1998) and the technology line.

# The Party Line

- Sustaining the commanding height
- The complex formation of ideological leadership
- The intended containment of the market expansion and social differentiation facilitated by constant technological innovation (if not revolution)
- Reclaiming the moral high ground of international communication and the discursive power over China and the Global South

# The Bottom Line

- Informatization of Chinese economy: ICTs, creative industries, media, etc.
- Media system: single ownership, dual operations
- A controlled commodification (Ian Weber, 2005)
- Marketization since early 1980s:

    Phase 1: the declining government subsidies and the rising advertising income

    Phase 2: media conglomeration against the background of entering the WTO

    Phase 3: capitalization in the 21 century

# The Technology Line

- Information and communication technologies
- Technological rationality
- Hardware: infrastructure (CNNIC) and new products (the new world factory)
- Software: applications, etc.
- Internet companies lead the technological innovation: the natural relationship between capital and technology, BAT
- Marketization and cultural security...
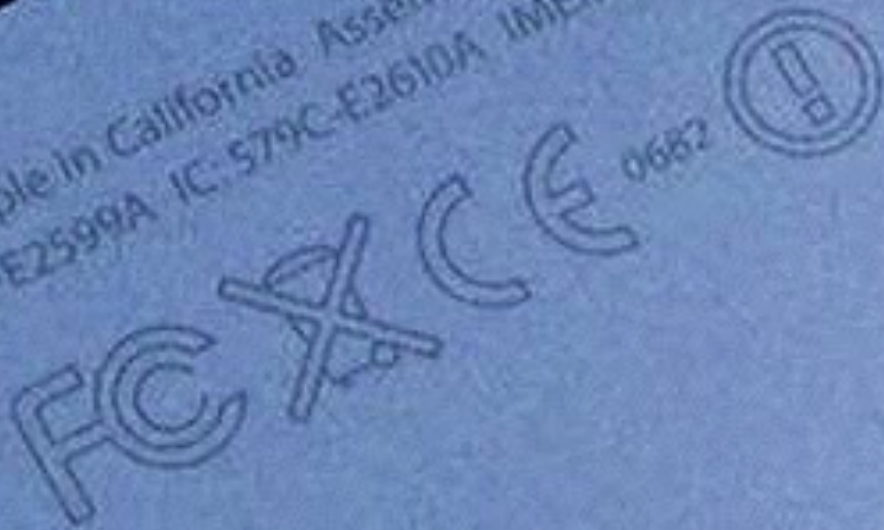
# The dynamics of state-capital relations

- The state-owned media are embracing the internet way of thinking and operation but lack of expertise, investment and institutional advantages, meanwhile develop unevenly in terms of technological and commercial success.

- Internet companies are marching into the broaderly-defined media market by acquisition or collaboration.

- The Chinese state is attempting to contain the unevenness and diversification of media market, and to reclaim the commanding height in such a flattening communication structure.
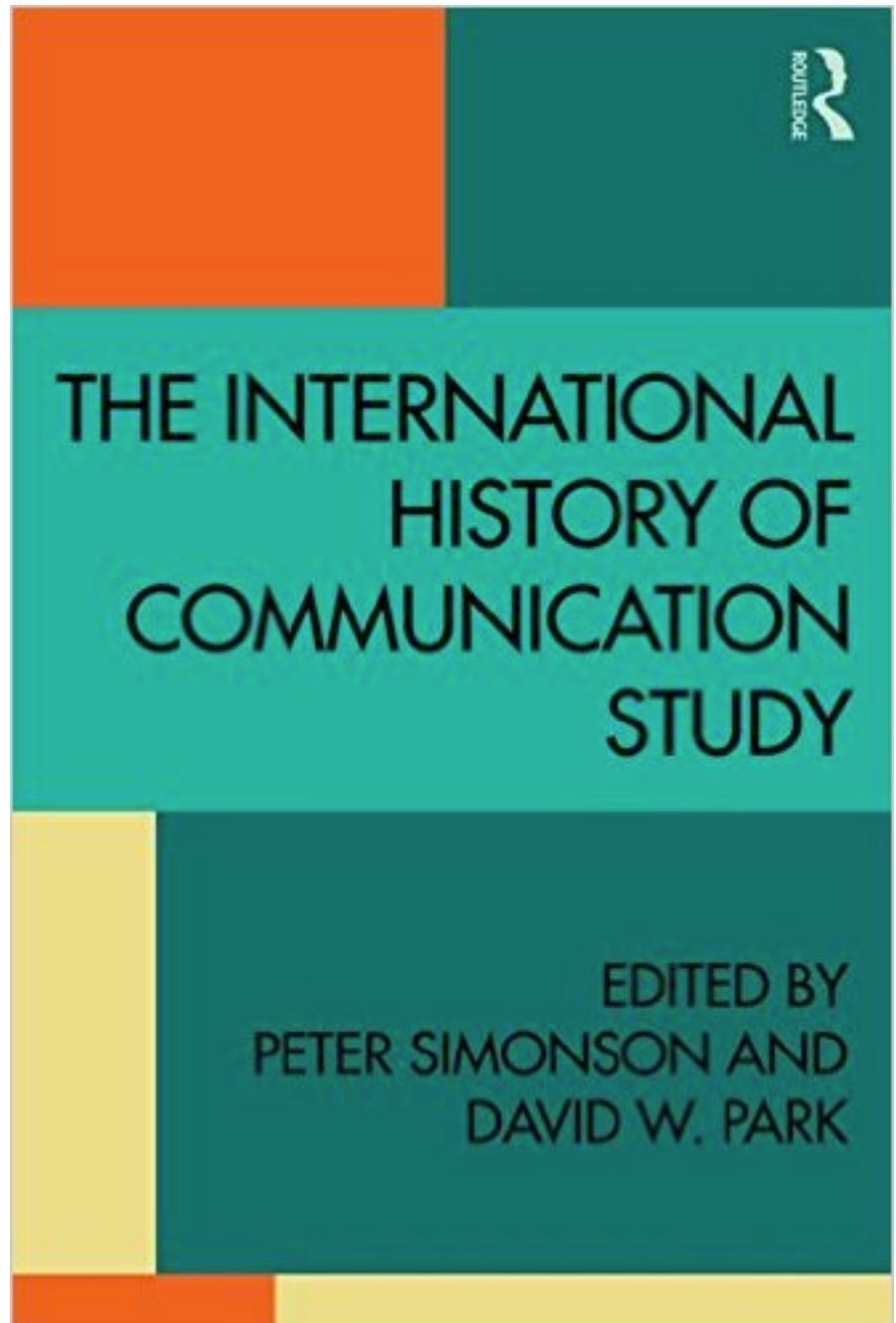
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# Thanks!