

**CHINESE SOCIAL MEDIA AS LABORATORY:  
WHAT WE CAN LEARN ABOUT CHINA FROM RESEARCH INTO SINA WEIBO**

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts of East Asian Studies

University of Pittsburgh

2013

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
THE DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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## **CHINESE SOCIAL MEDIA AS LABORATORY:**

### **WHAT WE CAN LEARN ABOUT CHINA FROM RESEARCH INTO SINA WEIBO**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2013

Like all nations, China has been profoundly affected by the emergence of the Internet, particularly new forms of social media—that is, media that relies less on mainstream sources to broadcast news and instead relies directly on individuals themselves to share information. I use mixed methods to examine how three different but intertwined groups—companies, the government, and Chinese Internet users themselves (so-called “netizens”)—have confronted social media in China. In chapter one, I outline how and why China’s most important social media company, Sina Weibo, censors its website. In addition, I describe my research into blocked search terms on Sina Weibo, and explain why particular keywords are sensitive. In chapter two, I take a quantitative approach informed by political science methodology to examine how the names of Chinese politicians were handled by Sina Weibo during a major political event: the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in November 2012. In response to research by Gary King which finds that online criticism of the government in China is allowed so long as it does not involve topics related to collective action, my study concludes that Sina Weibo actively filtered the search results of Communist Party delegates, particularly higher-ranked politicians and incumbents, during the observation period, often regardless of whether or not the individuals were controversial figures or linked to issues of collective action. In chapter three, I focus specifically on the end user, the microbloggers of Sina Weibo. Relying on communications and media studies research as well as content analysis, I

report on the contentious comments netizens made in response to a post by the Japanese celebrity and porn star Sora Aoi—specifically ethnic slurs and nationalist rhetoric—during the Diaoyu Islands dispute between China and Japan in September 2012. These three components will allow readers to understand the power of social media in China—both contained within users and employed by authorities.

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## PREFACE

Primary thanks goes to the Asian Studies Center at the University of Pittsburgh, whose generous funding allowed me the opportunity to enroll in Pitt's IDMA program in East Asian Studies.

Much gratitude also goes to the following for their academic, financial, and spiritual support—without them, these past two years would not have been possible: Pierre Landry, Katherine Carlitz, Ronald and Mary Zboray, James Cook, Cecile Sun, Juchun Wei, instructors, and classmates at the University of Pittsburgh; Xiao Qiang and the team at *China Digital Times*; The New Press; *Waging Nonviolence*; fellow participants of the 2012 CUHK-Yale summer workshop; fellow classmates at IUP-Tsinghua; friends and family, including Josephine Landback, Ching-Wen Lee, Haan Lee, Audrea Lim, Jay Nelson, Mom, Norman Ng, Shaolida, Hippo Wong, and many, many others. Thank you.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is a seeming maxim that all nations have been profoundly affected by the emergence of the Internet, and that despite a country's best intentions to resist the globalizing power of the World Wide Web and its ancillary online networks, all will bow down to its inevitable transformative effects. In a way, this utopian mythos of the Internet, a place beyond the borders of petty earthbound law and issues—enshrined in such quotes as John Gilmore's "The Net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it" and Richard Stallman's "Information want to be free," which have been glibly re-appropriated by cyber-slacktivists as mottos to be parroted as opposed to complex points worthy of discussion<sup>1</sup>—has had a bit of a comeuppance in recent years. As digital surveillance and the gathering of online data by governments continue to expand, fears of cyber-espionage and cyber-terrorism have come to reality, and online free-speech advocates ranging from WikiLeaks to the recently deceased Aaron Swartz have been ensnared in criminal indictments, one cannot help but begin to become jaded about our predecessors' utopian dream about the Internet.

Though I won't go so far as the Internet cynic Evgeny Morozov has and declare that holding hope that the Internet might have positive effects on offline society to be "digital Orientalism," (Morozov 2011) after having studied this past year how China has managed the

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<sup>1</sup> Stallman is much more realistic about technology and the Internet. His classic 1997 science fiction essay "The Right to Read" establishes his fear of a copyright-mad state that controls even the ability of its citizens to read.

transition into the digital age, I have had to personally re-evaluate many of my ideal notions of what a successful model for regulating media and information can be. China would appear to be a perfect example for Morozov: an authoritarian regime which has exploited the great power of the Internet for anti-democratic ends, easily crushing the dissent, diversity, and transparency promised by the Internet. And yet, this would be a facile argument as well.

The Internet has profoundly affected China—and when I speak of China, I mean not just those who run the country from Zhongnanhai, but also its entrepreneurs, its students, its citizens—in ways both undoubtedly positive (new business opportunities) and negative (fears of a mutually destructive cyber-war). But in all spaces and levels, the issue cannot be simply reduced to a matter of either the “The Internet is good, China is evil” nor one of “China and other authoritarian regimes are powerful; the Internet is merely another repressive tool for them,” but rather is much more complex. So much of what is happening with regards to Internet issues in China today is one of conversation, contention, and, inevitably, compromise. Like nations around the globe, China and its citizens are grappling with how best to utilize the Internet—which serves as both a medium and a culture unto itself—to build the idealized society that they themselves want. And because citizens and governments often are at odds over what that idealized society should be, a tension exists online as well between such players. The Internet is certainly transformative, but it is not fully exceptional. The Internet and the debates about it as a space reflect offline concerns.

China is difficult to study for myriad reasons, and often the conclusions researchers reach when studying the country seem to fly in the face of Western models and conventional thinking. Francis Fukuyama’s so-called “The End of History” theory is apparently upended when applied to China: for example, Stockman and Gallagher show that contrary to initial assumptions, market

reforms to media in authoritarian regimes like China not only don't add diversity, but instead allow Party officials to tie journalists even closer to the party line (2011). Whole books revolve around solving the various language, cultural and political barriers to performing rigorous research about the country (Carlson et al. 2010). But as scholars have acknowledged, the Internet offers a whole new vast trove of information for scholars to investigate. My hope is that this thesis will offer several different approaches on how best to leverage these new sources—the availability and ease of collecting such data making up much of the so-called “Big Data” revolution—without also ignoring the unique features which make China such a fascinating country to study.

In particular, I focus on the contention which takes place online between various groups in China—between the government and companies in chapter one, between the government and its Internet users in chapter two, between Chinese Internet users themselves in chapter three—as a way to begin understanding how these online issues might reflect offline ones. In many ways, this thesis is driven by a point that Guobin Yang raises: “Not only is [the] Internet. . . not apolitical, but political control itself is an arena of struggle. Contention about all other domains of Chinese life fills the Chinese cyberspace and surges out of it. Is it still possible to understand social change in China without understanding the popular struggles linked to the Internet?” (Yang 2008:1).

And thus, while I do recognize in some ways that the Internet is a truly unique space which requires some wholesale changes in the way we study media and politics, I also believe that by studying the various flashpoints that take place on the Internet in China, we can gain deeper appreciation for offline debates. By looking at the conflicts taking place in this still emerging and developing space, we can get a sense of how things will be shaped in the future in

China—and the world—as the Internet plays a larger and larger role “in real life” politics and society, and as China plays a larger and larger role in the world. As mentioned previously, I have sought out three instances which crystallized the sorts of challenges and confrontations taking place online. In chapter one, I investigate how it is that a private Internet company is able to survive in an environment where the government sees it merely as a tool for propaganda and crisis management. I use Sina Weibo, the most important social media website in China, as my target for study, explaining the steps it takes to censor its website, the restrictions placed upon it by the government, and the sort of topics that are considered sensitive and thus off-limits for discussion. In short, the chapter intends to answer questions including: How do Internet companies in China interact with the government? How successful is Weibo at performing its assigned tasks? And how does the government handle sensitive topics online?

In chapter two, I take a closer look at one of those sensitive topics: the discussion and potential criticism of elite politicians. The confrontation in question here is a bit less overt, but no less important: is the government gradually becoming more accepting of online criticism of the government by its citizens—so long as it does not involve collective action—as some have posited (King, Pan, Roberts 2013)? In efforts to respond to such research, I actively monitored the search results of the names of 2,270 Chinese Communist Party officials on Weibo. After collecting data about whether searches were censored or not, I connected each name with biographic info in an attempt to uncover which groups, if any, were being targeted for censorship.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is a good reminder that being censored does not carry a value judgment of good or bad. As I’ll discuss in Chapter one, the fact that something is censored in China is likely an indication that the government would rather not Internet users discuss the topic, even if it is one they would support.

In my third chapter, I outline my attempts to examine anti-Japanese sentiment in the comments of a Weibo post. Confrontation and contention erupt between the users and the poster of the message, the Japanese porn star and celebrity Sora Aoi, and then between users themselves as some rush to defend Ms. Aoi and others to criticize her and them for not supporting China in its dispute over the contested Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. Here, the question I hope to answer is how will Internet users converse with each other online when discussing sensitive topics? I spend much of the essay reporting on the context surrounding the discussion, after which I provide translations of a few key comments, and present some research on online comment typologies and social media use, particularly Vincent Miller's "phatic communication." The analysis presented in this chapter is still in preliminary stages, thus the conclusion to the chapter discusses future approaches toward using this unique corpus of comments, including investigating whether offline events and discussions influence and are reflected online, or rather whether such online comments in turn trigger offline events.

For all three projects, I ask some general big-picture questions, but my scope is fairly narrow and targeted because of the virtual space I have chosen as my laboratory: Sina Weibo. My approach is primarily data driven, though I also incorporate relevant information on Sina Weibo's role in framing the contention. In the end, I hope to convince others that using the data generated on Sina Weibo is an effective way to gather information not only about online issues but also offline ones as well. In some ways, because of the ease in gathering vast arrays of data quickly and efficiently, Sina Weibo has become the leading indicator for the mood of Internet users in China, which, as Internet adoption crosses the half billion mark in China, is gradually becoming more representative of the country's population as a whole.



Indeed, Sina Weibo has had a positive, beneficial effect on numerous aspects of Chinese society, and Chinese officials in some ways have come to recognize it as an avenue to enact and spread progressive reforms as well as an effective way to gauge public opinion (吕晶 2012). This thesis doesn't pretend to offer pronouncements on the continued path of Chinese media regulation in the coming years, but it hopefully contains data and suggestions on how to use Sina Weibo to acquire even more data that will eventually assist readers in building conclusions that hint at how the Internet may continue to develop in China. How and why does Sina Weibo censor its website and what particular topics are sensitive? During a major political event, does the Chinese government attempt to shape the public conversation about politics? In an online debate, how do Chinese Internet users converse with each other? The hope is that with these three narrow projects, one will get a sense of the dynamism occurring on the Internet in China and the many ways in which struggle is taking place every day.

## 2.0 CHAPTER ONE—BLOCKED ON WEIBO: HOW AND WHY SINA CONTROLS THE SPREAD OF SENSITIVE TOPICS

The project described in this chapter started with an image. No, it wasn't the famed image of the “tank man” staring down a column of armored vehicles outside Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Nor was it an image of any specific dissident act or photo of protesters. In fact, this image wasn't meant to be artistic at all. But in the stark way it communicates its contents, one might even call it poetic.



**Figure 1.** Search result activity coming from Xinjiang Province as reported by Google Trends from Dec 2008 to October 2010

The graph in Figure 1 shows the volume of online search activity, as tracked by Google, originating from the northwestern Chinese province of Xinjiang.<sup>3</sup> While it may not be as vivid as

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<sup>3</sup> You can generate this graph yourself: <http://www.google.com/trends/explore#q=a&geo=CN-65&date=10/2008%2025m&cmpt=q>. If you're skeptical of Google's data, you can replicate similar results of a large gap in search activity in Xinjiang using China's largest search engine, Baidu: <http://index.baidu.com/main/word.php?type=1&area=926&time=200901-201101&word=q>.

the tank man photo, the figure certainly conveys a different, powerful message; even someone without any knowledge of how the Internet works can look at this chart and conclude, “Looks like somebody turned something off.” And indeed, for roughly ten months, from July 2009 to May 2010, web access was essentially shut down in the entire province of Xinjiang after rioting and protests erupted there.<sup>4</sup> The graph lays bare the ability of a government to control what was thought to be uncontrollable: the Internet.

Inspired by this graph and by *China Digital Times*'s impressive attempts to track banned words across various Chinese online services (“敏感词库” 2012), I concocted a plan in late-2011 to systematically uncover as many blocked words as I could on Sina Weibo, China's most important social media website. I designed a computer script<sup>5</sup> to use 700,000 Chinese Wikipedia titles<sup>6</sup> as search terms on Weibo to see what would happen. For three months, the script performed searches on Weibo and recorded whether any of the terms were reported to be censored, and in the end, nearly 500 unique keywords were found to be blocked.

I then organized and categorized these 500 keywords into nine general categories: 1) politics and government; 2) dissent, censorship, and justice; 3) sex, drugs, and immorality; 4) people; 5) scandals, disasters, and rumors; 6) information and media; 7) security, violence, and suppression; 8) miscellaneous; 9) unsure. Rather than take a quantitative approach to analyzing

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<sup>4</sup> According to state media, in late June 2009, a Chinese Han worker (Han being the majority ethnic group in China) in Guangdong province falsely alleged that six Uyghur men had raped a woman. Commentators surmised that the antagonism might have arisen from the perception that Uyghurs, who mostly hail from the province of Xinjiang, thousands of miles away, are stealing local jobs by working for lower wages. Whatever the reason, a bloody fight along ethnic lines took place in and around the factory, with at least two Uyghur men killed. Demonstrations demanding a full investigation into their deaths were planned in the capital city of Ürümqi in their home province in Xinjiang, and violent confrontations broke out between protesters and police on July 5. Who triggered the violence and whether the protest was organized by overseas Uyghur separatist groups (as Chinese authorities claim) are disputed matters. Thousands took to the streets, several hundred people were killed, and hundreds detained. Among the government reactions to prevent further spread of the protests and to hinder organizers was to cut off cell phone service and Internet access in the region.

<sup>5</sup> More detail about the script can be found in chapter two.

<sup>6</sup> You can download them for yourself here: <http://dumps.wikimedia.org/zhwiki/>

these keywords, I have selected five keywords<sup>7</sup> and performed a sort of miniature case study into how these keywords came to be considered sensitive.<sup>8</sup> In hypothesizing about why certain words might be blocked, my project serves as a way to think about issues of media, censorship, and democracy in a fast-changing technological world.

What this chapter—and thesis project on a whole—does not provide is a scathing critique of China’s Internet policies, a position I feel is better left to those who are more directly connected to, more knowledgeable of, and more affected by the situation. Rather, this project shares an affinity with the mission statement of the now defunct *Tunnel*, an underground mainland Chinese electronic magazine, which once wrote,

Instead of indulging in the talk of noble causes and great aspirations, it is a better idea to quietly and patiently study the details of the technology. If we have turned our inaugural statement into a technical manual, it is because we are trying to practice this idea. It may be easier for us to approach our shared dream of freedom and democracy through the sideways of technical details than the public square of seething emotions. (Yang 2010:92)

Thus, by impartially examining these various censored keywords, we may perhaps see more clearly the sorts of challenges facing Chinese officials, companies, and Internet users as they confront and utilize social media. If nothing else, you’ll get a little Chinese history lesson from each word’s gloss.

The rest of the chapter will describe how and why Sina Weibo censors its website.

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<sup>7</sup> An additional 150 annotated terms can be found in the forthcoming book *Blocked on Weibo* (Ng 2013).

<sup>8</sup> The glosses of those keywords can be found in Appendix A and full table of several hundred sensitive keywords is posted online on the Blocked on Weibo blog (<http://blockedonweibo.com>).

## 2.1 SINA WEIBO: A RICH SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Weibo is run by a private company, Sina, which is legally responsible for the content that users upload to the website. Weibo (微博)<sup>9</sup> is a general term for microblogging—literally, “tiny blog”—representing a whole host of Twitter-like websites in China. However, Weibo has become synonymous with the most active microblogging site, Sina Weibo. Sina wasn’t the first company to launch a weibo service in China, but it is by far the most significant such site in China today. The site is not just a virtual playground for people to share photos of their pets with stuffed animals (最爱摆弄家 2012)<sup>10</sup> but also an avenue used to organize protests and share grievances (Lu 2012).

Weibo may have started as a Twitter clone, and for Western readers unfamiliar with the service it’s still probably easiest to refer to it as such. But in recent years, Weibo has developed a number of features that Twitter doesn’t have, including semi-threaded comments, events, polls, games, Facebook-like apps, instant messaging, and community portals. Aided by China’s banning of Twitter and the addition of these attractive features, Sina Weibo has become the undisputed first source for real-time information in China, with over 350 million registered users. Whenever I refer to Weibo in this thesis (unless otherwise specified, for instance, Tencent, Sina’s primary competitor, and their weibo site) I am referring to Sina’s weibo service. Sina Weibo is allowed in China, whereas Facebook and Twitter are not, because Sina, like all major Chinese Internet websites, is willing to censor the site’s content. Chinese websites are required

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<sup>9</sup> Weibo (*Wēibó* in pinyin) is pronounced “way-baw” (“baw” like in the word “bawl”).

<sup>10</sup> A 2011 analysis from HP Labs showed that Weibo users had a propensity for sharing jokes and images, especially via retweets, that is, by reposting another user’s original message to their own microblog (Yu, Asur, and Huberman 2011).

by law to monitor themselves and remove any material that is deemed offensive by the government.



**Figure 2.** Screenshot of message returned by Sina Weibo when searching for blocked keyword like 温家宝 (Wen Jiabao)

The websites can do this in a number of ways, including deleting individual posts—an admittedly manpower intensive task. In many ways, one of the easiest and most flexible ways to censor the flow of information on a site, however, is to block users from searching for specific terms. In addition to not returning any results for these sensitive keywords, Weibo notes when it has in fact blocked your search, helpfully displaying an error message as seen in Figure 2: “根据相关法律法规和政策，[the blocked keyword] 搜索结果未予显示” (“According to relevant laws, regulations and policies, search results for [the blocked keyword] cannot be displayed”). Thus, one is literally aware when search results are blocked, unlike other instances when the

Great Firewall and Golden Shield may leave a user ignorant that his connection and searches are being filtered or degraded.

The blocked keywords I've uncovered do not make up a definitive list of words banned in China. This is merely what one website—albeit the most important social media website in China—does not allow its users to search for on its site. The hope with the word glosses in the appendix is to make it clear that censorship in China is a complex and nuanced issue,<sup>11</sup> and in each entry I hope to provide the proper context for why a word might be singled out for censorship. Sometimes the reason seems to be historical, sometimes it is very contemporary. Sometimes I'm just plain mystified. Though some of these sensitive words were no doubt ordered to be placed on Weibo's blacklist by government officials, many others are here due to enforced self-censorship on the part of Sina.<sup>12</sup> Rather than risk a government reprimand for accidentally letting offensive material slip through, the company over-censors, blocking even seemingly innocent keywords.

The noted political scientist Gary King says that research into China's online censorship “exposes an extraordinarily rich source of information about the Chinese government's interests, intentions, and goals—a subject of longstanding interest to the scholarly and policy

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<sup>11</sup> China, like any country, has its flaws, but one can't merely reduce the issue of censorship, online culture, and Chinese culture described in this book to “Hey, look at those crazy Chinese.” And in China's defense, based on the political upheaval and social turmoil taking place all across the world, especially in developing nations, it may have a legitimate case for wanting to control its transition to a more open society (if that is indeed the goal); can it continue to do so in the heavy-handed manner that it does so today? Probably not. But to automatically declare any Internet regulation evil without considering IRL (“in real life”) politics and social issues is unfair to the countries that have to grapple with such complicated issues.

<sup>12</sup> Though seemingly oxymoronic, the self-censorship is indeed “enforced,” that is, companies are held accountable if their quasi-voluntary regulatory efforts do not meet the CCP's strict (but vague) standards; for instance Tencent's and Sina's commenting featuring on their Weibo sites were disabled in the aftermath of the Bo Xilai scandal in March 2012. Xinhua quoted an unnamed State Internet Information Office spokesman who confirmed the shutdown was a punishment: “The SIIO spokesman also said with regard to a number of rumors having appeared on weibo.com [Sina Weibo] and t.qq.com [Tencent Weibo], the two popular microblogging sites have been ‘criticized and punished accordingly’ by Internet information administration authorities in Beijing and Guangdong respectively” (“China's major microblogs suspend comment function to ‘clean up rumors’” 2012).

communities” (King, Pan, and Roberts 2012). This chapter tries to do something similar: by tracking the various words blocked on Weibo, we might be able to get a general sense of what is considered a sensitive topic to Chinese authorities and achieve a more nuanced understanding of the politics at play in Chinese social media—and society—today.<sup>13</sup>

Studying the Internet is complex enough, what with rapid changes in technology rendering that which was cutting-edge just last year totally obsolete today, but trying to get a sense of how the Internet is being managed in China is like trying to identify a car in a pitch black garage. Over the years the mechanics in the shop (Chinese authorities) have made adjustments to the car, and sometimes all that we can do is confirm that the engine sounds different today than it did yesterday—but as for why, well, we can conjecture, but unless we get an answer from the mechanics themselves,<sup>14</sup> that’s all we can do: make reasoned conjectures.

Unfortunately, in this case our mechanics are incredibly tight-lipped about how they go about their jobs, leaving it up to researchers interested in Chinese Internet issues to develop the tools to probe the machine and work backwards to fill in the car manual’s blank pages.

Over the past decade, many smart people have taken up this task—looking into how and what exactly China censors on the Internet—among them David Bamman and his colleagues at Carnegie Mellon University (Bamman, O’Connor, and Smith 2012), the developers of Weiboscope (Sam et al. 2012) and other researchers at the University of Hong Kong (Fu, Chan, and Chau 2013), Jedidiah R. Crandall at the University of New Mexico and his associated

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<sup>13</sup> David Bamman and his colleagues confirmed that they could identify the sensitive words that caused certain messages to be deleted at much higher rates than typical. Those sensitive words were found to be blocked on Weibo’s search engine at a much higher rate as well, verifying that a link exists between this “hard” censorship (the search blocks which Weibo tells the user about) and “soft” censorship (the posts which are covertly deleted), both of which are connected to these sensitive terms.

<sup>14</sup> Which is why reading the government’s leaked censorship instructions to Chinese media is so fascinating and instructive. Some of that correspondence has been collected by *China Digital Times* (“Directives from the Ministry of Truth” 2013).



Internet research partners and students (Crandall et al. 2007; Park and Crandall 2010; Zhu et al. 2013; Knockel, Crandall, and Saia 2011), Xiao Qiang and *China Digital Times* (“新浪微博搜索敏感词列表(更新中)” 2013), Martin Johnson and GreatFire.org, Jonathan Zittrain and his colleagues at the Harvard Berkman Center (Zittrain and Edelman 2003), the aforementioned Gary King, and many others—and I have often extrapolated from their insights. But, of course, any conclusions I make are suspect to being off base and all errors are my own.

## 2.2 HOW WEIBO CENSORS

In the end, I came up with over a thousand blocked terms, roughly 500 of which were unique. The largest share of the blocked words are names of people, the majority of whom are Communist Party members—protection from criticism on Weibo seems to be a perk for rising up the ranks—while dissidents and people caught up in scandals or crimes make up the rest. Some of the other words I uncovered are equally unsurprising—for instance, political terms such as 六四 (64, short for June 4, 1989, the day of the crackdown in Tiananmen Square) and 反共 (anti-communism). Others, such as 乱伦 (incest), 暴露狂 (exhibitionism), and 吹箫 (literally blowing a flute, slang for blowjob) spoke to social mores and topics that were sensitive for prurient reasons. A few terms, such as 伊斯兰 (Islam) and 同性恋 (homosexuality) were surprising in their reactionary nature. And finally, some words such as 黄色 (yellow, slang for something pornographic) seemed to border on the ridiculous<sup>15</sup>—until one comes to understand the context

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<sup>15</sup> A user on Stack Exchange cites a Chinese article that presents four possible explanations for how yellow came to be slang for pornography, though none are definitive (Rudy 2013). The most commonly given explanation is that at

and the sub-surface significance of the word. When I say “banned” or “censored” on Weibo in this book, I generally mean that the word is “blocked” in the search function of the site. Users can post just about anything they want to the site. But many words subsequently yield no results when they are searched for, such as 温家宝 (Wen Jiabao, the former Premier of China). Some other sites primarily rely on filters that will deny users the ability to post a message if they use a banned word—a practice that Weibo also employs, to a lesser extent.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, successfully posting a message doesn’t necessarily mean it can be read and shared. At times, if a post contains a sensitive word, it might be rendered invisible to others even though you can see it on your own timeline.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, Weibo’s censors can also summarily delete inflammatory messages without any notice (Marks 2012). However, the censors are not infallible, and it is possible for posts with banned words to escape the censor’s eye—so long as they don’t gain too much attention or advocate collective action,<sup>18</sup> or perhaps if they’re cleverly embedded inside images or obscured in coded language. Blocking a user’s ability to find a term makes it impossible to look for sensitive content, and the censors don’t have to delete or filter posts one at a time. Not only is this method more flexible, it’s less intrusive. Users might feel outraged if they were faced with

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some point, either historically in China or during the nineteenth century in France, erotic books were given either yellow covers or interiors to set them apart, and thus yellow came to be closely associated with pornography. Mercifully, yellow has been unblocked since February 2012.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, trying to post a message with the word Bloomberg will return this message: 抱歉，此内容违反了《新浪微博社区管理规定(试行)》或相关法规政策... (Sorry, this content violates “Sina Weibo’s Community Guidelines” or related regulations and policies. . .).

<sup>17</sup> For several months in 2012, any post with the word 遊行 (march) would cause your post to be disappeared. The Beijing blogger Jason Ng (no relation) documented these vanishing posts and the myriad other ways that Weibo censors in a 2011 post. You can read an English summary at Tech in Asia (Millward 2011).

<sup>18</sup> The Gary King article referenced earlier argues that contrary to popular wisdom, censors allow users to criticize the government online but treat topics that concern potential collective action—demonstrations, protests, petitions, etc.—with widespread deletions, even if the individual post supports the government. The breadth of data collected and new computer-assisted techniques they employ are awe-inspiring, but with regards to this thesis, their paper only concerns the deletions of posts—not the monitoring of search blocks—and did not encompass Weibo and microblog posts, which they deem to be too short for the content analysis performed with their techniques. Thus, their rigorous conclusions may not be totally applicable to the type of censorship discussed in this thesis.

an error message when posting their own content, but being unable to find results for a term probably just elicits a shrug. And words that are only temporarily sensitive can be added to the blacklist of search terms one day and removed the next without having had to delete the underlying content (Custer 2012). So when censors decide a certain search term is no longer sensitive, as they have done for hundreds of words such as 恋足 (foot fetish) and 九一一袭击 (the 9/11 attacks) in late-January 2012, the switch is flipped and users can suddenly search for foot fetish posts to their heart's content—so long as they haven't been intimidated by the chilling effects of the previous block.

“Transparency” comes in the form of a notice posted when content is blocked—the same policy promoted by Twitter as a check against censorship (“Tweets Still Must Flow” 2012). While transparency is generally laudable, it could be argued that these reminders of censorship serves as a form of intimidation, a caution that your Internet activities are being monitored—not unlike how in recent years, cartoon police figures have been prominently displayed on numerous Chinese websites (Gharbia 2007). In a way, the search blocks condition users to recognize the limits of acceptable discourse, and even when the limitations are taken away later, the residual effect of the censorship remains. Such “transparency” serves as an effective training mechanism, thus furthering the goal of decentralizing the censorship and moving the onus for it from the government to the media company and, finally, to the individual.

At the moment, Weibo's search-filtering mechanism is not particularly sophisticated (though post deletions—the so-called “soft censorship” that takes place behind the scenes without the user ever being aware of it—is relatively more nuanced). The search-filtering mechanism checks the keyword against a blacklist, and if any part of the search term matches any word on the blacklist, the term is blocked. For example, “Nintendo 64” is blocked because

“64” is short for June 4, the day of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. Thus, any search containing “64” will be blocked, even harmless ones like “Nintendo 64.”<sup>19</sup> This is an issue known as the Scunthorpe Problem, so named because the denizens of Scunthorpe, England, were prevented from signing up for AOL in 1996 because the word “cunt,” part of the city’s name, was censored (“Surfing the net in bonny Sconny” 1996).

Over the years, in a series of cat-and-mouse games, Chinese Internet users have developed an extensive series of puns—both visual and homophones—slang, acronyms and memes, and images to skirt restrictions and censors (“Glossary” 2013). Such creative usages may still be helpful in evading the censor’s eye on Weibo—using a code makes one’s post not only less likely to get caught in any automatic search filter, but also less likely to be found by a human censor later on. Furthermore, Chinese Internet users have mastered the use of irony as protest, reaching the point where emphatically pro-government comments such as “Socialism is good” (Abrahamsen 2011) or “I have been represented by my local official” (Kuhn 2010) are often meant to be interpreted satirically. Filtering tools including the ones Weibo uses in its search engine certainly can’t recognize such subtleties. In some respects, the filters are “easy” to defeat, emphasizing just how important those human monitors employed by Weibo are. They have the ability to delete individual posts and even entire accounts, which is what happened to the account of Ai Weiwei, the dissident artist (Custer 2011).

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<sup>19</sup> The number “64” has since been unblocked on Weibo. This is a reminder that to check the latest status of whether a word is still blocked or not, one can reference the list at the end of the book, go to <http://s.weibo.com> and search for it, or go to <http://GreatFire.org> and test there.

### 2.3 WHY WEIBO IS CENSORED

Who owns the Internet, and who has the right to control what content is available on it? Is it sovereign territory, or is it free from antiquated earthbound laws? These questions have engaged Internet activists and scholars for over a decade, though to the disappointment of technotopians, it turns out that the Internet is very much capable of being regulated, and many governments—even ones in the free Western world who champion free speech and democracy<sup>20</sup>—have been perfectly willing to do so. China’s “Great Firewall” and “Golden Shield,” a vast network of technical controls by which it regulates Internet content, is only the most obvious and extensive. In 2000, Bill Clinton compared censoring the Internet to nailing Jell-O to a wall. But ten years later, China appears to have built an effective harness—self-censorship by companies and netizens (Internet citizens)—to go along with the world’s biggest nail gun: tens of thousands of state-employed Internet censors, total government control of overseas Internet data connections, and next-generation monitoring hardware to keep that Jell-O from reaching the floor.

China’s ability to censor the Internet extends far beyond being able to flip a “killswitch” as the government did in Xinjiang and turning the Internet off altogether. The way the Chinese government censors the Internet includes technical, behind-the-scenes methods such as bandwidth throttling and keyword filtering, in addition to more overt intervention, including the wholesale blocking of access to websites including Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook.<sup>21</sup> As illustrated by this book, a more subtle method of censorship is to compel Internet companies in

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<sup>20</sup> For more about how countries around the world are dealing with issues of Internet regulation, read Rebecca MacKinnon’s *Consent of the Networked*.

<sup>21</sup> For two easy-to-read overviews of the various technical ways China censors the Internet: James Fallows’s “The Connection Has Been Reset,” (2008) and Dinah Gardner’s “The mechanics of China’s internet censorship” (2012).

China to remove offensive content from their sites and to prevent people from finding and sharing such material.

Like all major licensed websites in China, Weibo has numerous restrictions on what sort of content it is allowed to host and distribute. In June 2010, China's State Council Information Office released a white paper on Internet usage for the country. Though the paper asserts that Chinese users have the right to freedom of expression online, it also enumerates a prohibition against content that is:

endangering state security, divulging state secrets, subverting state power and jeopardizing national unification; damaging state honor and interests; instigating ethnic hatred or discrimination and jeopardizing ethnic unity; jeopardizing state religious policy, propagating heretical or superstitious ideas; spreading rumors, disrupting social order and stability; disseminating obscenity, pornography, gambling, violence, brutality and terror or abetting crime; humiliating or slandering others, trespassing on the lawful rights and interests of others; and other contents forbidden by laws and administrative regulations.

(“Protecting Internet Security” 2010)

This is a broad array of off-limit topics, and the fact that a phrase such as “damaging state honor and interests” is not clearly defined is an intentional feature of the Chinese censorship system, a mechanism coined by Perry Link as “the anaconda in the chandelier” (Link 2001)—everyone is aware that it is there, haunting the room, but no one is certain when and why it might strike. The vagueness inevitably leads content providers including Sina Weibo to self-censor excessively in order to stay well within the bounds of acceptable discourse. Furthermore, Rachel E. Stern and Kevin J. O'Brien note that the decentralized nature of the Chinese government—politically as well as fiscally (Landry 2008)—means that any number of officials at various levels might take

offense at a single controversial post. Thus, there is no single judge of what is allowed or not—instead disparate actors sometimes send out “mixed signals” about what is acceptable, leaving it up to the content provider to interpret and decide (Stern and O’Brien 2011).

The company and its users may have a sort of sixth sense for knowing what may or may not be off limits, but the fact that there is no officially published blacklist from the government, coupled with the fear of punishments (including closure of the site), compels them to step even farther back from the imaginary line. As Internet scholar Rebecca MacKinnon noted:

Recent academic research on global Internet censorship has found that in countries where heavy legal liability is imposed on companies, employees tasked with day-to-day censorship jobs have a strong incentive to play it safe and over-censor—even in the case of content whose legality might stand a good chance of holding up in a court of law. Why invite legal hassle when you can just hit “delete”? (2011)

Chinese Internet companies are now required to sign the “Public Pledge on Self-Discipline for China Internet Industry,” a document with even stricter rules than those listed in the 2010 white paper. Thus, it’s no wonder there are companies censoring topics like Islam, even though the religion is officially sanctioned under Chinese law.

Chinese government officials send weekly updates to media providers on topics expected to be censored. Otherwise, however, the onus is on the content provider to self-censor, a practice that Weibo’s head editor admitted is “a very big headache” (Chow 2010) and during the Southern Weekend censorship controversy (Appendix A.2) even caused one Sina censor to publicly complain, “We were under a lot of pressure. We tried to resist and let the [anti-censorship] messages spread . . . [but] then we got the order from [the Propaganda Department] and we had to delete it. . . . This is a battle” (Lam 2013).

Thus, there are multiple layers of censorship occurring. There is the government mandated blacklist of off-limit topics<sup>22</sup>—what we’d typically consider censorship—as well as two more subtle forms: the enforced self-censorship by content providers, who must make judgment calls on what needs to be censored in order to stay in the government’s good graces, and self-censorship by users, who face the threat of being detained and punished for perceived anti-government posts. Users are at greater risk than ever now that Weibo and other microblogs request real names in order to register (Branigan 2012). Though the company and government claim that this is merely to hold users accountable for spreading misinformation and malicious rumors, it seems clear that such a measure is designed to head off the type of political commentary that could lead to an online-inspired Jasmine Revolution.

China has opened up considerably during its transition from the depths of the Cultural Revolution to where it is today, but vestiges of a level of government control unthinkable in Western countries remain prominent features of Chinese life. On the morning of November 8, less than twenty-four hours after the majority of 125 million Americans voted to give Barack Obama a second term, over 2,000 delegates of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), along with a number of special attendees including former head of state Jiang Zemin, filed into Beijing’s Great Hall of the People for the CCP’s 18th National Congress (the event at the center of my next chapter). They were there to elect<sup>23</sup> the slate of politicians who would be charged with

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<sup>22</sup> These censorship instructions to publishers, broadcasters, and media companies have occasionally been leaked and are catalogued by *China Digital Times* (“Directives from the Ministry of Truth” 2013)

<sup>23</sup> Or “rubberstamp” if one is a bit more cynical. The delegates who elect the 25 member Politburo do indeed hold elections, but the number of candidates is always the same number as positions to be filled, making the process a mere formality. (A delegate can choose to leave the ballot blank for certain individuals as a form of disapproval of that candidate, but this has no bearing on the outcome outside of marring the candidate’s ability to claim unanimous approval.) However, some results are left to a greater degree of chance. For example, in choosing the 204 member Central Committee, delegates are given more than 204 candidates to select from and there are cases of Party favorites who don’t in the end get elected to the Central Committee. But the process certainly isn’t democratic: the slate of candidates that the delegates choose from for the Central Committee has been heavily scrutinized



leading China's national government for the next five years; a week later, the political line-ups were carefully unveiled to the media as well as to China's 1.3 billion citizens. The process was a piece of highly-choreographed and familiar stagecraft, with the new top leader Xi Jinping leading his fellow Politburo Standing Committee colleagues onto the stage and China's state television blaring the names of those newly elected in wall-to-wall Party Congress coverage.

However, events leading up to that choreographed "election" were anything but orderly and predictable. The Chinese economy shows signs of slowing down due to continued global financial stress and bad domestic bank loans, with rising inequality causing unrest. China was the villain in a pair of international headline-grabbing human rights stories in back-to-back years; first for disappearing the notorious Chinese artist Ai Weiwei in 2011, and then for inadvertently letting the blind activist-lawyer Chen Guangcheng escape from house arrest to the United States in 2012. Other high-profile controversies included the burial of train cars when survivors were still to be found after the high speed rail crash in Wenzhou in July 2011, which in turn was dwarfed by the mother of all scandals in March 2012: the Bo Xilao affair, in which the government official in charge of Chongqing, one of China's largest cities, was sacked due to accusations of corruption, among other improprieties.

Throughout it all, Weibo users commented, laughed, and railed against the system, despite the government and Sina's best efforts to prevent discussion of such matters. As for what this portends for the future, nothing is certain, but the sharing of real-time information in China online—be it through Weibo or through another service, if Weibo is ultimately shut down—is undoubtedly here to stay. The cat-and-mouse game will continue, but Internet users are clever,

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beforehand to ensure that only candidates acceptable to the Party are capable of being selected. Trying to guess whether a candidate didn't get elected to the Central Committee because the Party did not put their name up for election on the slate or because they were voted down is a fun parlor game to play with China watchers who follow Beijing politics.

and with ever-growing information about how companies and governments censor content online, the mice will be harder to silence.

### **3.0 CHAPTER TWO—HOW SOCIAL MEDIA HANDLED THE 18TH NATIONAL CONGRESS OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY: AN ANALYSIS OF INTERNET CENSORSHIP ON SINA WEIBO BEFORE AND AFTER THE 2012 ELECTION**

As King, Pan, and Roberts write in their 2013 study on Chinese social media, research into the dynamics of Internet censorship in China “exposes an extraordinarily rich source of information about the Chinese government’s interests, intentions and goals.” This paper seeks to use the dynamics of Internet censorship by China’s most important social media site, Sina Weibo, to achieve a better understanding of the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in November 2012. To this end, searches were performed daily on the names of all 2,270 delegates to the Party Congress on Sina Weibo for five weeks before and after the event. The Party Congress allows us to neatly cleave the observation period into three primary stages: before, during and after, giving us an opportunity to perform a “natural experiment” (Morton and Williams 2010). Data recorded included information on the number of results reported and whether the keywords were reported to be blocked or not. As a complement to studies into Chinese social media censorship by researchers including Gary King, David Bamman, King-wa Fu, and Tao Zhu, our study concludes that Sina Weibo actively manipulated and filtered the search results of Communist Party delegates, particularly higher-ranked and incumbent officials, during the observation period, with an apparent decrease in search blocks

after the Party Congress. This study offers evidence that the Party, through proxies like Sina Weibo, proactively attempts to shape public opinion online, just as they do in traditional media—though the decrease in search blocks indicates that the Party is potentially still seeking to find a balance between utilizing the Internet as a check on officials and suppressing the Internet to prevent dissent or is perhaps a short-term effect due to a new wave of leaders taking office.

With this experiment, I show that a statistical study of Internet censorship on Sina Weibo during the 18th National Congress provides us with a more nuanced understanding of the micro- and macro-politics at play in Chinese social media today.

### 3.1 BACKGROUND

In its short three-year existence, Sina Weibo has had a profound effect on the actions of Chinese leaders at both national and local levels, influencing government reaction to events like the Wenzhou train crash and the Bo Xilai scandal. Indeed, the Party's management of microblogs for propaganda purposes is a topic of great interest. An essay in the *Study Times*, the official journal of the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China, offers the following advice to party politicians and administrators regarding Weibo:

It's like a double-edged sword; it not only allows us to respond to crises and provide a tool that is more scientific and more expedient, but it also has limitations and negative effects that are very prominent, raising for us new challenges in order to have effective responses to crises; at the same time, it could be said to be an administrative opportunity and crisis. (吕晶 2012)

As the most important social media site in China, Sina Weibo serves as the primary vehicle for citizens to express and share their opinions online in real-time. Consequently, officials have sought to regulate the website, both implicitly through an enforced self-censorship and explicitly through direct censorship instructions to media companies.<sup>24</sup>

By analyzing the deletion of content from Chinese websites, researchers like Gary King (2013), David Bamman (2012), and others have confirmed that government responses to major events do indeed extend to the Internet and have shown that they can identify the types of content most likely to be censored. By tracing the reactions back to specific events that have taken place, their research gives evidence of government intervention and, potentially, hints at the CCP's intentions. And the way the Party elevates officials and the ways that it nudges others into retirement has been of great interest to China hands, including scholars such as Victor Shih (2012) and Andrew Nathan as well as policy analysts like Cheng Li (2012), who study intensely the biographical backgrounds of the men (and the very few women) who have come to rule China.

### **3.2 COMMUNIST PARTY HIERARCHY**

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the primary ruling group in the Chinese government despite the fact that the body of the constitution that the PRC adopted in 1982 does not mention the party once (“Constitution” n.d.) Indeed, technically the government is made up of several state organs, including the National People's Congress, the official legislature of the land; the

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<sup>24</sup> These instructions have occasionally been leaked and are catalogued by the website *China Digital Times* (“Directives from the Ministry of Truth” 2013).

State Council, which carries out day-to-day activities; and the Supreme People's Court, the highest judicial organ in the country but one which is supervised by the People's Congress. In theory, this set of administrative bodies should serve as a counterweight to the other two de facto primary branches of government: the military, whose power is codified in the constitution proper, and the CCP, the leader of the political branch whose status was recognized in a 1993 amendment to the constitution: "The system of multi-party cooperation and political consultation led by the Communist Party of China will exist and develop in China for a long time to come." However, in reality, these three branches, which potentially establish a separation of powers in government, share overlapping membership and thus more often than not work as an interlocked whole led by the CCP.

Thus, it is a given that those who lead the Communist Party in fact lead the People's Republic of China, and though distinctions between the state and the Party are worth examining (Schurmann 1966:109), for all practical purposes it is widely acknowledged that the Party leads the state. Therefore, in order to understand how China governs, one must examine the structure of the Communist Party and the often opaque process of how one is elevated to positions of power within it (Figure 4).

Since 1977, the CCP has met as a full congress roughly every five years, with generally 1,500-2,000 delegates converging on Beijing's Great Hall of the People. At that meeting, a carefully scrutinized and curated list of candidates to the Central Committee are put up for election to the entire body, with roughly 200 members earning the distinction and another 150 who missed the cut being named as alternate members to the Central Committee. Of those Central Committee members, 20-25 are elevated to the Politburo, and of these select few, less

than ten are chosen to form the Politburo Standing Committee, the most elite political body in the party, and by extension, the country (Sheng 2005).

Though the nomination and election of the Politburo is even more obscure than the comparatively more open Central Committee election, Susan Shirk claims that Politburo members do indeed have to placate their lower-level peers in the Central Committee in order to be promoted (Shirk 1993:83). Thus, even the elite Politburo members of CCP are beholden to a “selectorate” (Shirk 2007:40). However, such a selectorate for elite CCP officials is an extremely limited slice of the population, and thus, the reason for why search blocks for their names on Weibo are effective. For those of us most familiar with the U.S. political system, it seems counterintuitive for a politician to voluntarily restrict publicity about oneself. A *Mashable* article in the lead-up to the 2012 U.S. presidential election notes, “One of the battles in the war for the White House is being fought on Twitter” and breaks down how each politician is faring at engaging Internet users (Fitzpatrick 2012). A desire to block discussion only makes sense if one’s model for promotion and staying power does not require reaching out to the general populace—the mass selectorate—via an extremely unpredictable form of new media, but instead is dependent on convincing a small group of individuals who are not greatly swayed by positive online coverage. However, that small group of Central Committee members is highly attuned to public inklings of malfeasance. Thus, while a certain level of corruption or scandal might be accepted within the Party, if any specific scandal is covered and disseminated amongst the wider public and causes the legitimacy of the Party to be put in question, this would be looked upon much more harshly. Thus, a much greater utility comes from blocking criticism—since it potentially causes political instability—than there is to be gained from positive online coverage—coverage which will be broadcasted via traditional outlets like state media anyway.

### 3.3 PATHWAYS TO POWER

During the National Congress, the delegates meet to confirm personnel decisions, some of which are pre-decided by top central leaders. The most prominent of these are the confirmations of the Politburo Standing Committee, the Politburo, and the somewhat more genuine elections of the Central Committee. I hypothesized that depending on their rank as well as whether they were retiring from their positions or being elevated to a higher one, certain groups of political leaders would get treated differently on Weibo. Thus, for the purposes of teasing out the potential ways in which Weibo would treat these groups differently, I assigned a delegate to a group using the following transition matrix, which takes into account what rank a politician was at before the congress and what rank they ended up in after.

**Table 1.** Number of delegates holding specified rank within Communist Party before and after 18th National Congress

|        |                               | After               |                               |                          |
|--------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
|        |                               | Ordinary member (0) | 18th Central Committee (18cc) | 18th Politburo (polit18) |
| Before | Ordinary member (0)           | 2,010               | 111                           | 1                        |
|        | 17th Central Committee (17cc) | 46                  | 64                            | 14                       |
|        | 17th Politburo (polit17)      | 14                  | 0                             | 10                       |

Since historically less than 10 percent of delegates are elected to the Central Committee—in the 18th Congress roughly a third were re-elected incumbents and two-thirds



were newcomers to the higher body<sup>25</sup>—ordinary members make up the largest number of the delegates, with 2,010 of the 2,270 total delegates starting and ending as ordinary members.<sup>26</sup> I did not break it down at the Politburo Standing Committee level because since there are less than ten members, we begin to suffer from small cell issues when attempting to analyze a subgroup at that size. Obviously, the lone member who made the jump from an ordinary member in the 17th Congress to a full Politburo member in the 18th Congress<sup>27</sup> was exceptional and not capable of being studied statistically, so for the purposes of data analysis, I allowed him to be absorbed in with the ordinary members. And as no retiring 17th Politburo member was appointed to the 18th Central Committee, we are left with seven usable pathways to categorize the delegates for the experiment explained in the next section.

### 3.4 EXPERIMENT DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

Extending on my research into the words blocked on Weibo (Ng 2013), I sought to examine which of the 2,270 delegates to the 18th Party Congress would be blocked before and after the event. We collected daily data about the Weibo status of each Congress delegate (not blocked, partially blocked, completely blocked). Our approach is to model this variable as a function of

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<sup>25</sup> If one adds up the total number of 18th Central Committee members in the matrix (which includes those on the 18th Politburo), one might note with curiosity that only 200 of the 205 announced members are accounted for in my study. This is indeed correct: 5 Central Committee members were elected despite not even being formal delegates to the National Congress. They were all military generals in charge of sensitive regions: Wang Jiaocheng (王教成), lieutenant general in Shenyang; Tian Zhong (田中), vice admiral in charge of the North Sea Fleet; Yang Jinshan (杨金山), lieutenant general overseeing Tibet; Zheng Weipeng (郑卫平) lieutenant general and political commissar of the Nanjing region; and Peng Yong (彭勇) lieutenant general in charge of Xinjiang.

<sup>26</sup> Alternate members of the Central Committee, who are not full members, were considered to be ordinary members.

<sup>27</sup> Li Zhanshu's (栗战书) swift rise wasn't a total surprise: he replaced Ling Jihua as Chief of the General Office of the CPC Central Committee in September 2012.

the political status before and after the congress—promotion, retirement, no change—of each delegate, which allows us to assess how Sina Weibo—and by extension, the CCP propaganda system—approached or reacted to the (s)election. The considerable differences in the way in which particular names were handled on Sina Weibo before and after the event allowed us to identify a number of subgroups that were significantly more likely to have changes in censorship status: from unblocked to blocked, or vice versa.

I used a similar Ruby script as developed for the project described in chapter one. It utilized the browser automation library Selenium and the HTML parser Nokogiri to extract data. The 2,270 names<sup>28</sup> are stored in a SQLite database array. The script initiates by opening a browser window (Firefox 16.0.2), navigates to weibo.com, and logs in.<sup>29</sup> It then reads each name one at a time from the SQLite database, inputs the Chinese characters of the name into the Weibo search bar, and executes a search just as a human would. The script then identifies through HTML/CSS tags in the source code whether the search returned any results and whether the results are filtered or not. If no results are produced, a second test occurs to check whether the given name (that is the last two characters of a three-character name) is also blocked and the status of that search is also identified. All this information is recorded and stored. The script waits a short period (in order not to butt up against the rate limits) and then executes the next search. In this way, the script searches through all 2,270 names in roughly 10 hours. Searches

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<sup>28</sup> The list of names to be tested was pulled from: <http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/static/htm/2012dbmd.html>.

<sup>29</sup> The Weibo actually allows high-level developers to connect directly to the API in order to perform searches. This is the ideal method for extracting search result data, but unfortunately, I was not able to obtain such access in time to perform the test and had to rely on the front-end user interface. Furthermore, subsequent tests with the Weibo search API proved relatively fruitless, since the API doesn't indicate whether a search result is blocked or not nor does it give a hard count of how many results there are.

were performed daily from October 2 through December 20, with the Party Congress on November 6-13 neatly splitting the observation period in two.<sup>30</sup>

The number of results was stored along with the “block type.” There are numerous overt ways that Weibo filters its results. The most obvious is a complete, explicit block of the searched for term: the message “根据相关法律法规和政策， . . . 搜索结果未予显示” is given, which translates to “According to relevant laws, regulations and policies, search results for [the blocked keyword] cannot be displayed.” Such results are marked as fully blocked. Weibo can also return the message “抱歉，未找到 [the keyword] 相关结果” which translates to “Sorry, no relevant results could be found for [the keyword].” Such a return may genuinely indicate that no results exist for the term (for instance, searching for a nonsensical term like “QAZWSCEDC” will yield such an error message) but it is also commonly used as a semi-transparent method of censorship. As seen in the data, terms which are blocked with the first type of error message can suddenly switch to the second and sometimes searches which once produced results suddenly produce none; it is not that no search results ever existed, but rather in fact that the term is implicitly censored. Thus, these keywords which return no results are also considered to be fully blocked.

A third type of filtering message is: “根据相关法律法规和政策，部分搜索结果未予显示” which translates to “According to relevant laws, regulations and policies, some of the search results cannot be displayed.” This semi-censorship, which returns some search results, is not considered to be a full block like the other two methods listed above, but rather as a partial block. Thus, in summary, the search results of a name could be categorized as follows:

- Explicitly blocked: considered to the fully blocked

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<sup>30</sup> A few tests were skipped or spread across multiple days due to technical issues: October 6, October 14, the November 8 test,<sup>30</sup> November 27, and December 18.

- Blocked with a no results message: considered to be fully blocked
- Shows results but notes that some results are not shown due to legal reasons: considered to be partially blocked, but not fully blocked; number of results is recorded
- Shows results: considered to be neither fully blocked nor partially blocked; number of results is recorded

The date and time of the test are also recorded. Other variables mentioned in this chapter are generated from these primary data.

Biographical data, including birthdate, birth province, and most importantly, ranks and positions, was pulled from a number of sources including China Vitae, the People's Daily's 18th National Congress Press Center, and Wikipedia. When possible, information was cross-checked against each other to verify that it was correct and up-to-date.

### 3.5 SUMMARY STATISTICS

Of the 2,270 individuals, 207 were blocked at least once, with twenty of the names being blocked throughout the entire observation period and sixty-seven being blocked only once (Figure 5). Of the 167,980 total observations, 4,551 were either explicitly blocked or blocked with no results, a total rate of 2.71 percent. Eleven of the fourteen retiring Politburo members (meaning they were members of the 17th Politburo but not the 18th) were blocked at least once (Figure 10) while ten of the fifteen incoming 18th Politburo members were blocked at least once (Figure 11). All ten of the re-elected 18th Politburo members were blocked at some point (Figure 12). The peak number of names blocked in a day was 87 and the minimum was 42 (Figure 6).

Variables for whether an observation had a change in status were also derived by looking at the previous test for that name. For instance, if a name went from 10,000 results on November 1 to zero results on the next test on November 2, the test which returned zero results would be marked as one where a change occurred in the way a name was blocked as well as one where a large drop in results occurred.<sup>31</sup> The same is true the other way around. One doesn't see much switching of block statuses until the start of the Party Congress, spiking with a large number of blocks on the second day just after the end of the event (Figure 13). This pattern is mostly echoed in the Figure 14, which charts the number of names showing a large jump or drop in search results. After virtually no occurrences in the early part of the observation period, there is a small spike just at the start of the Congress and then a huge increase in drops two days after the end of the Congress. Some of those drops overlap of course with the onset of full blocks, which also spiked that day, but many more were due to the huge increase in partial blocks (Figure 9)<sup>32</sup> and the more modest increase in terms being fully blocked. A spike in large jumps followed the next day (three days after the end of the Congress) as Sina corrected for the over-censorship, and blocks of all types plummeted in the period following.

However, of note is that a seeming policy shift has taken place with regard to search blocks: an across the board decrease in search blocks has taken place in the post-Party Congress period, perhaps an indication that Party officials are striving for greater transparency online.<sup>33</sup> In fact, for one extended stretch of the observation period, re-elected Politburo members were more likely to be unblocked than even non-Politburo members, an indication of a potential change in

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<sup>31</sup> In order to eliminate identifying minor increases and decreases (for instance, a name jumping from 200 results to 400 the next day, or falling from 400 to 200), the number of results the previous day must be over 1,000 to start with.

<sup>32</sup> 108 of the 302 total names that showed a large drop in search results on that day were also reported to be partially blocked; 183 of those did not indicate they were partially blocked.

<sup>33</sup> Though it is debatable whether or not such a shift is genuine since the results that are returned for what were once politically sensitive names are typically sanitized and do not include real criticism

practices by Party leaders or Sina censors on how to handle their most “sensitive” members, or perhaps a case where Sina has not yet decided how to implement their blocks yet—an interesting choice considering their confirmed capacity to react quickly to events—even within minutes (Phelps 2012; Zhu et al. 2013).

### **3.6 IMPORTANCE OF TIME**

Along with the Party rank of the name searched, time played a crucial role in whether an observation was blocked or not—as well as how a name was blocked. My hypothesis that the Party Congress would serve as a shock to Sina’s pattern in blocking CCP officials proved to be correct—in fact there were not just two or three significant periods as theorized (before, during, and after), but in fact five distinct periods of names being handled in identifiably different ways were evident.

Partial blocks occurred 9,991 times, comprising 5.95 percent of all observations. Partial blocks gradually decreased from the start of the observation period until the start of the Party Congress, at which time they began to increase and then spiked in the days just after the close of the Party Congress (Figure 9). They then decreased before ticking upwards again. This downward trend immediately after the end of the Party Congress is echoed in the number of names returning zero results (Figure 8). The number of names returning zero results spiked in the week preceding the Congress because most of the names which were explicitly blocked (Figure 7) switched over to this type of block. From Figure 6, one can see the disappearance of these explicit blocks before the Congress and then their return during the Congress, albeit at a much lower rate (less than half of what it was before the Congress).

Just looking at the figures, one gets an intuitive sense that the Party Congress was a significant date, with drastic shifts in the way names are blocked before and after the event.

Analyzing the charts, we can break up the observation period into five distinct periods:

- Phase 1, before (42 to 13 days before the close of the Congress): baseline block status
- Phase 2, just before the Party Congress (12 to 7 days before the close of the Congress): removal of explicit blocks and elevated level of blocks with no results
- Phase 3, during the Party Congress (6 days before the close of the Congress to 1 day after): decreased level of explicit blocks and normal level of blocks with no results
- Phase 4, just after the Party Congress (2 to 3 days after the close of the Party Congress): elevated level of blocks with no results and spike in partial blocks
- Phase 5, after (4 to 35 days after the close of the Party Congress): gradual decrease in blocks with no results and slight increase in explicit blocks until new baseline

To visually see these five phases more clearly, I generated a multivariable logistic regression model of what type of block an individual would receive based on time (making sure to cluster the observations by each name in order to adjust the standard error properly) after controlling for personal traits. I then performed a calculation that plotted that probable likelihood of a name having that block status based on each day in the observation period (Figure 15). Thus, we can see over the course of the observation period when a certain type of block is more likely to occur.

The five phases that I identified earlier are delineated with the red dashed lines, making clear that changes in policy were taking place with regards to how names were being blocked. The probability that an individual suffered no censorship dropped to a predicted low of 77 percent in phase four, coinciding with the spike in predicted probability of partial blocking. The

elimination of explicit blocks in phase two is also graphed alongside the corresponding predicted increase in names that are blocked with no results in phase two. Whereas in the baseline, phase one period, there is very little change across all four block types, the extreme volatility throughout the rest of the observation period confirms that the Party Congress had a significant impact on Weibo.

Below is a timeline of selected major events leading up to and during the Party Congress along with indications of when the above phases and the associated changes in how names are blocked on Weibo occurred, with the dates of major political events seeming to coincide neatly with the changes block policy.

- August 13, 2012: List of 2,270 delegates to Party Congress announced<sup>34</sup>
- August 16: Organization Department provides statistics on delegates<sup>35</sup>
- September 28: Date of Party Congress opening announced; Bo Xilai formally expelled from party<sup>36</sup>
- **October 3: TESTING BEGINS (baseline status)**
- October 15, 2012: Central Committee meets at Jingxi Hotel
- October 25: New Central Military Commission (CMC) members announced<sup>37</sup>
- November 1: 7th Plenum of the 17th Central Committee starts<sup>38</sup>
- **November 2: PHASE 2 BEGINS (elimination of explicit blocks, elevated number of names blocked with no results)**
- November 3: 8th Plenum of 17th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection starts<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Chinese announcement of the raw list of delegates: <http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/static/htm/2012dbmd.html>.  
English-language announcement: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/13/c\\_131782084.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-08/13/c_131782084.htm)

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2012-08/14/content\\_26228775.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2012-08/14/content_26228775.htm)

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/29/world/asia/bo-xilai-expelled-from-chinas-communist-party.html>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/26/world/asia/china-names-new-military-leaders-as-transition-nears.html>

<sup>38</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/04/c\\_131950272.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/04/c_131950272.htm)



- November 4: 17th Central Committee and Central Commission for Discipline Inspection conclude<sup>40</sup>
- November 4: The new vice-chairmen of CMC announced<sup>41, 42</sup>
- **November 8: PHASE 3 BEGINS (limited return of explicit blocks and return to baseline level of those blocked with no results)**
- November 8: Party Congress opens
- November 14: 18th Central Committee list announced around 6pm Beijing time<sup>43</sup>
- November 15: Xi Jinping leads the new PSC members on stage at 11:54 AM<sup>44</sup>
- **November 16: PHASE 4 BEGINS (large spike in partial blocks and elevated number of names blocked with no results)**
- **November 18: PHASE 5 BEGINS (new baseline)**
- November 19-21: Central Committee announces new party secretaries in Chongqing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Sichuan, as well as the new heads of Propaganda Department, the Organization Department, and Politics and Law Commission.
- December 18: Central Committee announces new party secretaries in Jilin, Shaanxi, Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Inner Mongolia.<sup>45</sup>
- **December 20: TESTING CONCLUDES**

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<sup>39</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/04/c\\_131950266.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/04/c_131950266.htm)

<sup>40</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/04/c\\_131950272.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/04/c_131950272.htm)

<sup>41</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/04/c\\_131950268.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/04/c_131950268.htm)

<sup>42</sup> One of the favorites for the position, Chang Wangquan, was overtaken by a dark horse, Fan Changlong (Choi 2012).

<sup>43</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpcnc/2012-11/14/c\\_131974817.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpcnc/2012-11/14/c_131974817.htm)

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/9679477/Xi-Jinping-crowned-new-leader-of-China-Communist-Party.html>

<sup>45</sup> [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-12/18/content\\_16029886.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-12/18/content_16029886.htm);  
<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90785/8063089.html>

### 3.7 IMPORTANCE OF RANK

It may come as no surprise that the data here shows that delegates with higher ranks in the Communist Party were more likely to be blocked than ordinary delegates who have no special rank or status. Politburo members much more likely to be blocked than Central Committee members, and Central Committee members much more likely to be blocked than ordinary delegates. Furthermore, within each of these elite bodies, there is a further division in hierarchy apparent in the search blocks: newly-elected members to both the Central Committee and the Politburo were blocked at significantly lower rates than their peers throughout the observation period.

A blunt way of demonstrating this is presented in Figure 16, which shows the effects of having a higher rank on how many times a name is blocked in the observation period. Individuals with a low rank score (an index which adds up how many various positions the individual holds<sup>46</sup>) are blocked less times, while someone with the maximum rank score of five is predicted to be blocked over thirty times out of the seventy-four total tests I performed.

Tables 2 and 3 show a more fine-grained approach to which ranks matter most when seeing whose search results are actively adjusted on Weibo as well as at which phases these adjustments are most apparent. Each regression model is just a different way of empirically testing if Central Committee members and Politburo members—in the various pathways outlined

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<sup>46</sup> An individual was given one point for being a member of each of the following: alternate member to the 17th Central Committee, alternate member to the 18th Central Committee, provincial governor, full member of the 17th Central Committee, full member of the 18th Central Committee, member of the 17th Politburo, member of the 18th Politburo, member of the 17th Politburo Standing Committee, member of the 18th Politburo Standing Committee, member of the Central Military Commission during the 17th National Congress, member of the Central Military Commission during the 18th National Congress, member of the Disciplinary Commission during the 17th National Congress, member of the Disciplinary Commission during the 18th National Congress, a current State Council Executive, a current State Council Minister, and current provincial secretary. The 6 individuals who had a rank score of over 5 were all recoded to 5.

above—are significantly more likely to be blocked at various times. In most models and time periods, not surprisingly, Politburo members are the group most likely to be blocked. To get a sense of the scale, converting the coefficients to odds ratios of Model 1 of Table 2 shows that the retiring members of the 17th Central Committee (meaning they became ordinary members of the 18th Party Congress) were roughly forty-five times more likely to be fully blocked than ordinary members who remained ordinary members. Meanwhile, promoted members of the 17th Central Committee (meaning they became members of the 18th Politburo), were more than 1,700 times more likely to be fully blocked than an ordinary delegate (Figure 17).

Table 2 clearly shows how elite members are specially treated, with Politburo members of all stripes, both incoming, outgoing, and returning being fully blocked at much higher rates and at significant levels compared with ordinary members across all phases.<sup>47</sup> Incumbent Central Committee members are also blocked at elevated rates at significant levels during various phases, particularly retiring incumbents. On the contrary, those who go from ordinary membership to being a member of the 18th Central Committee, are statistically indistinguishable from ordinary members, and in some phases even show signs of being more likely to be unblocked. If one ascribes the blocking of such high-level officials to the CCP itself rather than Sina,<sup>48</sup> then one political rationale for why these incoming delegates are unblocked is because a kind of vetting process is taking place: such members have not yet achieved the high rank and the protection from criticism that comes with the rank. Thus, top officials might use this period to evaluate newly-elected officials to see what sorts of online chatter occur on Weibo regarding

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<sup>47</sup> The only phase to buck the trend is phase four, when every single Politburo member except for three retiring ones were unblocked.

<sup>48</sup> *China Digital Times* has released a number of leaked missives intended for journalists which show the Propaganda Department calling on media organizations to not mention or censor certain topics. Thus, while self-censorship is the assumed mode of content regulation for most cases, for particularly sensitive issues, the Party takes no chances and mandates certain censorship (“Ministry of Truth” 2013).

their new colleagues. Or it just might be a case of a slow bureaucracy at work, one that hasn't submitted to Sina the newly updated list of names to be blocked (if indeed such an exchange occurs). Regardless of the actual motive, the data is clear that incumbents are much more likely to be blocked than newcomers to the Central Committee in the period immediately after the Party Congress.

Table 3 breaks down the three major types of block statuses—explicitly blocked, blocked with a message, and partially blocked—and shows how different groups compare to unblocked members at receiving such distinct statuses at different phases. The key difference between Table 3 and Table 2 is the ability to differentiate between the two types of full blocks and how some groups are treated with one type of block more than the other. Again, the table starkly shows how much less likely incoming Central Committee members are to be blocked as compared to their returning or retiring Central Committee colleagues, with members significantly less likely to have a name be blocked with no results than even ordinary members. On the contrary, lest one thinks being blocked with no results is not associated with actual censorship and is in fact a sign of lack of name recognition and lack of online Weibo chatter, Politburo members are significantly more likely to be blocked with no results at various phases than ordinary members, confirming that such an outcome is more likely to be censorship than a genuine reflection of a lack of Weibo discussion.

Finally, Table 4 shows a slightly different variant of the previous two tables. Instead of tracking whether or not an observation is blocked or partially blocked, instead, Table 4 reports on whether or not an observation for a particular name has shown a change in block status or dramatic drop in search results since the previous day's test. Table 3 is a reflection of how likely Sina intervened to adjust the search results for a certain name. This table reveals the special

status of the incoming class of Central Committee members—however, surprisingly, the bulk of the search result manipulation takes place in phase one. The coefficient for these incoming Central Committee members isn't as high as those of their retiring and re-elected Central Committee peers, but it is significantly higher than ordinary members. And upon further examination of the various Central Committee member pathways, those who were re-elected continued to show signs of manipulation in phases three to five whereas those retiring members mostly did not change, an indication that less attention was being paid to the no longer relevant retirees.

At the Politburo level, the lower coefficient of the retirees echoes what happened at the Central Committee level; compared to their Politburo peers, retiring Politburo members had their search results adjusted less.

### **3.8 IMPORTANCE OF MINORITY STATUS AND GENDER**

Minority status and gender, which were included for what were thought to be control purposes, ended up being significant in a number of the regressions: minorities most significantly in those who are blocked in phase two of Table 2 and with partial blocks in Table 3; women most significantly in the drop-off of blocks after the Party Congress in Table 2. However, while the case of the unblocked women can be explained away as a small cell issue (there were only three women who were explicitly blocked before the Party Congress<sup>49</sup> and all were unblocked after) the minority partial block case is more perplexing as there were eighty-six different individuals

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<sup>49</sup> Ceng Qinghong, Liu Yandong, and Yang Jie.

of minority status who were partially blocked at least once. Examining Table 3, one can see that minorities were most likely to be blocked at significant levels throughout all phases except for phase four, when they became momentarily indistinguishable from the general population, who experienced a spike in partial blocking during that period.

### **3.9 CONCLUSION**

The data confirms our intuition that higher-ranked officials are more likely to be blocked on Weibo than lower-ranked ones. Furthermore, incumbents, who have already attained a high rank, are also more likely to be blocked than incoming officials of the same rank in the period tested before and after the Party Congress. This could either be an indication of an intentional vetting process wherein officials purposely leave newcomers unblocked in order to monitor and track the types of discussions involving the promoted officials, or it may merely be a case where Sina is slow in adding names to its blocked list. However, other data show that Sina actively manipulated and adjusted search results at much higher rates during and just after the Party Congress than in the control period before the Party Congress. Such data indicates that Sina was actively monitoring and changing the block statuses of high-ranked officials of all stripes depending upon whether they were promoted, maintained power, or retired. Specific subgroups were generated based upon each official's position before and after the Party Congress. These seven subgroups at times move in sync with each other across the five identified phases of censorship and at other times are censored in unique ways compared to others. Such data strongly indicates that the blocking of Party officials on Weibo is a calculated and intentional act.

A potential next step with the data would be to look closely at whether or not there are any indicators in the data that might predict eventual outcomes. Did certain search blocks or search result manipulations before the Party Congress foretell one's promotion or retirement? In order to answer such a question, one might also be best served by looking at the pre-Congress predictions, for example Cheng Li's "China's Midterm Jockeying: Gearing Up for 2012" and other prognostications as indication of expected outcomes. One could then uncover those outcomes which were indeed surprises and work backwards to see if there are any hints of such an event in the data.

Lastly, in some ways the data seems to support the early perception that a Xi Jinping administration might be amenable to jump-starting liberal reforms and relaxing restrictions on media and press. As of January 13, 2013, only two of the twenty-five current Politburo members were still blocked: Liu Qibao and Li Zhanshu; of the retiring Seventeenth Politburo members, three were still blocked: Xu Caihou, Guo Boxiong, and Wen Jiabao. Though some have argued that the lack of blocks on certain politicians like Xi Jinping following the congress indicated that the government was opening up the Internet (Moore 2012), in fact a search of websites that track deleted posts on Weibo (for instance, Weiboscope or FreeWeibo) would have showed that posts about Xi Jinping and other top leaders were still being deleted and that the search results being returned were highly filtered. It may still be too early to tell whether or not the new changes in leadership might bode positively for Internet users. On a superficial level, the fact that users are now able to search for certain top leaders is certainly a step in the direction of liberalization, however, a more realist/cynical theory might be that China specifically sought to relax restrictions in order to garner positive foreign coverage of the leadership change. Whatever the case may be, there are no apparent sea changes as of yet with regards to censorship in the

broader Internet, but if Sina is indeed shifting away from a shotgun usage of search blocks toward greater reliance on soft censorship like the targeted deletion of posts, then the next step would be to focus on analyzing deleted posts in the run-up to the next major political event in China, with this project serving as a potential model for such future experiments.



#### **4.0 CHAPTER THREE—SLOGANS AND SLURS, SEXISM AND NATIONALISM: A CASE STUDY OF ANTI-JAPANESE SENTIMENT BY CHINESE NETIZENS IN A CONTENTIOUS SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATION**

Last fall, China and Japan engaged in a clash of diplomatic brinksmanship over a series of disputed islands—known as the Diaoyu Islands in China and the Senkaku Islands in Japan—in the East China Sea. As Japan threatened to buy the contested islands, which China claimed were rightfully theirs, online forums and social media went into nationalist overdrive. Tens of thousands of Chinese citizens heeded the call to arms and took to the streets to protest the perceived affront to national sovereignty, in some cases rioting against Japanese businesses and property.

During the midst of these demonstrations, the Japanese celebrity and porn star Sora Aoi—the 57th most popular person on Weibo, with over 13 million followers—took to her Sina Weibo account—a microblogging site where Chinese users upload 140 character messages in a similar fashion to Twitter in China—and posted two Chinese-language messages just after midnight on September 14. She wrote in her first post, “I hope we can have good relations with each other. I am just like you all. I’m deeply hurt.” She then attached a photo of her writing in Chinese calligraphy, “Japan-China: friendship.”<sup>50</sup> Less than 20 minutes later, she wrote again, “Our country’s populaces are good friends,” and attached another photo of her calligraphy which

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.weibo.com/1739928273/yBJYNt70l>

read, “Chinese and Japanese citizens: friendship.”<sup>51</sup> The two messages quickly elicited over 200,000 impassioned comments, the bulk of which came in the first twenty-four hours.

Utilizing creative web scraping techniques, I have downloaded and parsed all 200,000-plus comments to Aoi’s posts, building a unique corpus that captures how netizens engage in what Chinese scholars term *wangluo yuyuan baoli*, that is online verbal violence((李贤斌 2008; 戴玉磊 2009; 雷莎莎 2010). Having performed content analysis of the entire corpus, I have identified certain sexist and ethnic slurs and built sets of keywords to hone in on how the two sets of slurs are used—particularly how certain commenters deploy sexist slurs to promote Chinese nationalist sentiment. By engaging recent scholarship regarding social media, including research into typologies of comments (Mishne and Glance 2006; Mackay and Tong 2011) as well as Vincent Miller’s argument that social media promotes “phatic communication,” I discuss how the contentious conversation in question unfolds, and I examine cases where sets of slurs interact with each other. I conclude that such words serve not only to express strong emotion or simply to engage fellow commenters, but they also reference historical events and emphatically convey one’s national identity.

As the conversation in question references historical events, I will briefly provide background on the Japanese occupation of China as well as the modern-day dispute between the two countries in the East China Sea. I will then trace the general outline of Sora Aoi’s posts and the comments that followed. Next, I will discuss the types of responses and the slurs utilized, performing close readings of several comments that I have translated in order to show how users utilize slurs to succinctly express emotion, reference history, and convey national identity all at

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<sup>51</sup> <http://www.weibo.com/1739928273/yBK5M4frh>

once. As this project is still in its early stages, I will close by considering how this corpus of comments might be used for future study.

#### **4.1 A SEMI-PUBLIC DISCUSSION SPACE: CENSORSHIP AND ANTI-JAPANESE SENTIMENT IN THE COMMENTS SECTION**

Whereas the previous chapters focus primarily on the mechanisms and “features” used by Sina to restrict users from gaining access to content, this chapter examines some of the systems and methods Sina has created to allow users to respond and circulate content. Rather than hypothesizing and assigning motives to actors (Sina in chapter one, the Chinese Communist Party in chapter two) by looking at what content is missing or inaccessible, here in this chapter, I will be using the content which exists in order to gain insight into how Chinese Internet users interact on Weibo.

A caveat: as with the discussion of any sensitive topic on Weibo, the elephant in the room (or as Perry Link puts it, the anaconda in the chandelier) is censorship: Sina may have deleted certain comments to Sora Aoi’s posts, and if they did, based on this dataset, we would have no way of knowing. Since the comments were not downloaded in real-time as the conversation took place in September 2012 and were only downloaded from Weibo five months later, the corpus of comments being studied is what remains after whatever potential censorship may have taken place.

The reason these comments are sensitive is because of the anti-Japanese nature of the conversation. Though technically on peaceful terms today, Japan and China share a fraught past, with the Japanese invasions during the First Sino-Japanese War and World War II still not

forgiven by most Chinese, leading to flashpoints like former Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi's annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine<sup>52</sup> and controversy in 2005 over Japan's adoption of textbooks that reportedly glossed over the country's World War II atrocities. Though Chinese officials have long exploited anti-foreign sentiment for political gain, these recent flashpoints were among the first to fully leverage the power of the Internet mob in ways that are still seen today. Even in 2005, journalist Paul Mooney presciently foretold,

Anti-Japanese sentiment among younger people here is unprecedented—and increasing significantly. Ironically, China's opening up and the internet are playing a key role in this trend. . . . What began as hyperventilating in cyberspace has now spread to the streets. It's still not clear whether the government condoned the increasing online anti-Japanese sentiment out of fear of domestic criticism or to pressure Japan. But as the recent dilemma with Japan shows, riding the internet can be like riding a tiger: Once you get on, it can be very hard to get off. (Mooney 2005)

In September 2010, a Chinese fishing trawler collided with a Japanese Coast Guard boat in disputed waters. An international incident was touched off when Japan initially detained the trawler's crew but later released them after facing intense Chinese diplomatic pressure and mass protest by Chinese citizens. And most recently, a similar sequence of events took place in August and September of 2012. After the Japanese government was pressured into purchasing the disputed Diaoyu Islands from the private citizens who owned them,<sup>53</sup> Chinese citizens retaliated

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<sup>52</sup> The shrine is dedicated to Japan's war heroes and martyrs. Fourteen of the people enshrined there are convicted war criminals from World War II. China and Korea have both protested the against visits to the shrine by Japanese politicians, claiming that such visits are provocative and more evidence of Japanese attempts to whitewash their past atrocities.

<sup>53</sup> For all the fiscal cliff drama and political gridlock in Washington, at least America didn't have to deal with a rogue governor dictating foreign policy and instigating hostilities with a neighboring superpower the way Japan did in 2012. Tokyo's controversial governor Shintaro Ishihara unilaterally decided to buy the Diaoyu Islands from the Japanese citizens who privately owned them in order to officially claim the territory for Japan. Such a maneuver

by rioting across the country, targeting and vandalizing Japanese businesses and cars. Certainly, any topic capable of causing rioting on the streets is of concern to the government.

However, one might also legitimately question whether or not anti-Japanese sentiment would be a topic automatically restricted by China's censors, particularly in light of the seeming official support of past protests against Japan, most notably in 2005 when Chinese officials strenuously objected to Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the United National Security Council. Not only were complaints lodged through diplomatic channels, but Xinhua, the official government news agency, hosted a popular Internet petition that garnered over 41 million signatures against Japan (Yang 2009:75). Street protests took place in front of the Japanese embassy and spread across southern China. The *Christian Science Monitor* reported that "Beijing [was] widely thought to have tacitly supported the protests" (Marquand 2005), a perception repeated by the BBC.<sup>54</sup> If so, this would certainly not be the first time in recent history that Chinese authorities had exploited nationalist fervor and the memory of past victimization<sup>55</sup> for geopolitical gain both domestically and abroad: in May 1999, after U.S. planes mistakenly bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during operations against Yugoslav forces during the Kosovo War, China's state newspaper the *People's Daily* similarly took to the Internet to organize netizens to stand up for China. The online forum the newspaper's website created, "Strengthening the Nation," served as a gathering ground for Chinese patriots to make their

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upended the status quo and China had long threatened retaliation if Japan ever took such steps. However, with the purchase of the islands a fait accompli, the Japanese government was forced to intervene and buy the islands—lest it look like a regional governor was running the show, which, in fact, Ishihara was doing. The situation would be akin to if Texas governor Rick Perry decided to annex some desolate border town in Mexico (solely to infuriate Washington and to gain local popularity) and President Barack Obama's only option—if he didn't want to appear weak and not in control—was to claim it first on behalf of America—after which Mexicans rioted and the Mexican government warned that it was a provocation for war. ("Central government plans to buy Senkaku Islands" 2012)

<sup>54</sup> "The outbreak of protests was almost certainly sanctioned by the Chinese authorities, as they were well policed" ("Anti-Japan protests across China over islands dispute" 2012).

<sup>55</sup> Captured in the slogan 毋忘国耻" or, more commonly, "勿忘国耻" (Don't forget the national humiliation) ("81st anniversary of 'September 18 Incident'" 2012).

voices heard. Unsurprisingly, the forum was not simply about promoting a stronger China, but also about attacking foreign powers, what David Shambaugh terms “defensive nationalism.” Citing Shambaugh, Suiheng Zhao writes, “Defensive nationalism does not exclude a threat of prejudice and hostility toward other nations. The memory of ‘national humiliation’ is a strong element of Chinese rhetoric. China’s vulnerability engenders an urge to take a turn at being a great power” (Zhao 2000).

Unfortunately for the government, in a future sign of how uncontrollable nationalist netizens would be in the coming years,<sup>56</sup> the forum not only was used to lodge objections against the United States as planned (many took to surmising the attack was all part of a Western conspiracy to secretly undermine China), but also became a virtual space for arguing in favor of an even stronger government reaction (Yang 2009:170). In this new medium, citizens took to publicly “providing input for government decision making” on a scale that was unprecedented, even offering critiques of the government’s performance. As Yang notes, one commentator on the forum disparagingly wrote that “the purpose of having an online forum is not to have another place to sing eulogies for the government—the official newspapers serve that purpose only too well!”

Thus it is unsurprising to learn in this latest case of anti-Japanese protesting over the Diaoyu Islands that Weibo was closely monitored and censored. *China Digital Times* collected a series of violent images of rioters looting and overturning Japanese cars that were promptly removed from the site (Henochoicz 2012). A recent research study on deleted posts on Weibo found that after a wave of smaller-scale protests in August 2012, for several days the term most

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<sup>56</sup> Suiheng Zhao notes: “Nationalism is a double-edged sword. Its destructive effects may set a limit on the utility of nationalism to Chinese leaders. It is not hard for pragmatic leaders to realize that the Boxer Rebellion-style xenophobia that prevailed during the Cultural Revolution may cause more harm than good to the communist regime” (Zhao 2000).

commonly found to trigger censorship was “anti-Japanese” (Zhu et al. 2013). And when organized protests took place in over eighty major cities across China (Gao 2012), with some demonstrations turning violent, Weibo posts that both supported and castigated the rioters were similarly deleted (Sandra 2012).

However, upon examining the comments section to Sora Aoi’s posts, one finds tens of thousands of virulently anti-Japanese and sexist comments filled with obscenities—some of which, such as 屄 (cunt), are blocked from searching on Weibo—violent threats, and inflammatory language from both those attacking Aoi as well as her supporters. While it has been reported that Weibo posts were strictly controlled and censored, it appears comments to posts—which users can optionally decide to simultaneously publicly post to their microblog, though most do not—were much less strictly censored. Of course, there’s no way to know after the fact how heavily censored the comments section was, but it does seem notable that comments to posts—unlike microblog posts themselves—are not searchable from Weibo’s search tool, and thus much less likely to go “viral.” Comments typically exist solely within their own space in the comments section and appear not to have been tracked as carefully by Weibo or central authorities since, theoretically, their potential to reach the general user base is limited—a notion which fits with Gary King’s assertion that it is only content which advocates collective action which is censored, hence the deletion of images of riots from Weibo as documented by *China Digital Times* but not of comments that verbally abuse Japanese citizens in a non-specific manner as found in these comments.

This narrowing of the audience is a feature, not a bug, of comments discussion: it is a discussion space for the audience to talk back to the blogger and fellow commentators regarding a specific topic. It is in this space that users both seek engagement and offer their opinion, but the

audience for a comment is radically different than a blog post. Thus, while the comments themselves are technically public and accessible to all, in many ways the comments sections is not meant to be viewed by general readers, particularly because the very nature of the comments system is so fragmented that keeping track of who said what to whom is extremely difficult, not only for outsiders but even for the commenting community itself,<sup>57</sup> who not only have to be current with all the specific vocabulary of the group and the inside jokes/memes, but also must recognize callbacks and quotes to earlier comments and posts. Indeed, though Weibo's semi-threaded comments system<sup>58</sup> is certainly better than Twitter's hodgepodge presentation of replies to posts, untangling the responses for even a short conversation can be difficult—let alone one with over 200,000 comments spread across two posts.

#### 4.2 SORA AOI AND THE TWO INITIAL POSTS

As mentioned, a first wave of protests, initially peaceful, roiled China in August 2012. However, it was widely acknowledged that larger-scale protests would coalesce around the anniversary of the Mukden incident on September 18 (Bradsher 2012), a commemoration of the date in 1931 when Japan invaded the northern region of China known as Manchuria under false pretenses, precipitating the Second Sino-Japanese War.<sup>59</sup> The annual marking which takes place across the

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<sup>57</sup> “There is the notorious fragmentation of these conversations, which make it very hard to reconstruct them, not only for researchers, but also for the bloggers themselves” (de Moor and Efimova 2004).

<sup>58</sup> All the comments to a post are conveniently collected in a page linked to the original post, ordered by when the commenter posted them. However, though Weibo does note who is replying to specific commenters by appending the phrase “Replying to@” (回复@), it does not specify which particular comment it is in response to as a true threaded comments system would do.

<sup>59</sup> Technically, Japan began its invasion on the morning of September 19, the day after a weak bomb was planted by Japanese soldiers near a set of train tracks in Manchuria, a contested region of northern China. The explosion, which caused minimal damage, was blamed on China, and junior Japanese military officers took immediate acts of



country is supposedly a memorial, but more often than not has morphed in recent years to become a catch-all opportunity to publicly vent anti-Japanese emotions.

It was within this turmoil that Sora Aoi, a Japanese “AV” idol (an English abbreviation, short for adult video, popularly used by Japanese pornography consumers and marketers) posted her opinion. Aoi has an extremely wide following across Asia for her lead roles in pornographic films, but in recent years she has sought to expand her career, appearing in mainstream films and television shows. She is also among the most successful Japanese celebrities at engaging her fans around the world—an Asahi survey in China found her to be the fourth most recognized Japanese person in China, even ahead of the Japanese prime minister (Matsubara 2012). Her official blog is translated into both traditional and simplified Chinese (Liu 2010), she posts in Japanese, Chinese, and English to her 380,000 followers on Twitter (she earned the goodwill of Chinese netizens after taking to Twitter in April 2010 to raise money for earthquake victims in Qinghai Province), and since November 2010, she has been among the most followed celebrities on Sina Weibo, with over 13.7 million fans.

It was to these fans that she posted at 12:01 a.m. on September 14, as reports of the start of the second wave of major protests across China began to trickle in, a photograph of calligraphy that she’d written which said “Japan-China: friendship” along with the following message: “I hope that between our people we can have good relations... I am also like you all. Broken-hearted.”<sup>60</sup> Within 9 seconds, the first comment was made to the post: a single period. Twenty-five seconds after her first post, the first comment about the order of her words in the calligraphy was made: “It should be ‘China-Japan friendship!’” Three seconds later, the first

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aggression, including an artillery barrage that had been secretly planned months in advance. Though officially unsanctioned by the Japanese high command, commanding officers recognized that there was no turning back and sent in reinforcements.

<sup>60</sup> <http://weibo.com/1739928273/yBJYNt70I>

anti-Japanese statement was made, “Japan belongs to China,” and by the end of the first minute after the initial post, 270 comments had already responded to Aoi, including the first of many slurs: “Go away you Japanese dog” (滾, 日本狗).

Eighteen minutes after her initial post, Aoi responded to the criticism in the comments regarding the ordering of China and Japan by posting a follow-up weibo with the sequence flipped in the calligraphy: “Chinese and Japanese citizens: friendship.” This would be her only reply regarding the topic throughout the whole controversy: unlike some microbloggers, she made no comments in her comments section and did not respond to those who criticized or defended her.

Comment activity slowed after a flurry during the first hour as netizens went to sleep, but they picked up again the following day (Figure 18). Within the first twenty-four hours, 135,711 comments had been made to her two posts, and during the peak period during that first hour, roughly ten comments poured in every second.

### **4.3 TYPOLOGIES OF RESPONSES**

Much research has been done on online bulletin board systems (BBS) both within China (Jin 2008) and outside (Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo 2002), and some of that work is applicable to analysis of the comments section to Aoi’s posts, which operates in some ways like a BBS. Mackay and Tong’s study of a Chinese web forum organized by the British Broadcasting Company (2011) concluded that messages could be categorized as either:

1. providing information (“A post that provides information or the poster’s views, but does not respond to another post”);

2. seeking information (“A post that raises a question or seeks information from, or the viewpoint of, another poster”);
3. responding (“A post that responds to another poster”); or
4. irrelevant (“A post that is irrelevant to the topic or issues being discussed”).

Another set of researchers, Mishne and Glance, published one of the earlier studies on online comments, with their corpus primarily in English, and they similarly concluded that comments were of a few standard types, including “personal-oriented ones (posted by friends), comments thanking the author for raising an interesting issue or pointing to additional related content” and, of particular interest to them, “disputative comments, comments which disagree with the blogger” (2006).

Both Mackay and Tong’s definition as well as Mishne and Glance’s classifications are useful in conceptualizing what sorts of typical response modes the audience has available to it. Indeed, mirroring Mackay and Tong’s study, the majority of the comments to Aoi’s posts fall in the “providing information” category—or rather the commenter’s personal opinion. And similar to the BBC forum, due to the nature of the original post and the type of conversation that sprouted out from it, much fewer of the comments would be classified as the genuine “seeking information” variety. Aoi’s two initial posts aren’t news—and as such there is no “information” that inherently begs to be sought out, even though a very credible discussion could be had regarding the Diaoyu Islands and Japanese-Chinese relations. Social theorists like Vincent Miller have argued that it is the very structure of digital communication technologies, particularly microblogs like Twitter and Weibo, which encourage this sort of “phatic communication” that “promotes generic ‘announcements’ over dialogue” (Miller 2008). Miller argues that social media is used more and more for “simple maintenance of ever expanding networks” and “as

much about interaction with others as it has about accessing information” (2008:398), a sentiment seemingly applicable to the situation here with Sora Aoi.

Certainly, those comments classified as “irrelevant” by Mishne and Glance’s standards would fit the notion that microblogs encourage phatic communication. And indeed, the majority of the first several hundred comments to Aoi’s post could be classified as ones that don’t convey any information but rather simply engage others and make the commenter’s presence known. Similar to American commenters who race to post “First” simply for the recognition, Chinese users rush to claim such an “honor” as well. Thus, it isn’t surprising that, as noted previously, that the first comment was simply “.” and dozens of short responses followed: “Good” (好); “1”; “!”; “Sofa” (沙发). “Sofa” is a common early comment, signifying that the commenter is declaring himself the first to arrive in the thread and thus claiming the imagined sofa for himself. The comment thread as house analogy is continued with those claiming the “second floor” (2楼).

As for the last of Mackay and Tong’s categories, responses, it is somewhat difficult to differentiate those from the other three in our corpus. In fact, all of the posts could be classified as responses—if not to other commenters directly, then to Aoi’s post. However, as mentioned previously with regards to Weibo’s semi-threaded comments system, we can identify just how many commenters explicitly declared their message to be a response to another commenter: 67,494 of the 211,134 total comments are marked as replies, a little less than one-third of the entire set, and not surprisingly as seen in Figure 19, a greater percentage of the total posts were addressed to fellow commenters later in the discussion rather than at the beginning (when most comments were unaddressed, and thus assumed to be directed toward Aoi). However, some commenters quote other comments without explicitly directing their message at them. Thus, the

line between response and not is much blurrier, and often, even comments addressed to other users don't indicate a genuine desire to engage in conversation, for example, the hundreds of replies to fellow commenters that contain nothing more than variations of "Fuck your mother" ("操你妈"; "草你老母"; "草尼玛的"; "艹你妈逼"); these are unlikely to be real discussion starters. However, even if very few of the comments actually engage each other in the sort of serious, meaningful discussion we idealize as being possible in the non-hierarchical world of cyberspace, the way that users do respond to each other as well as to Aoi's initial posts are meaningful in and of themselves. As Miller acknowledges,

One should not assume that these phatic communications are 'meaningless', in fact, in many ways they are very meaningful, and imply the recognition, intimacy and sociability in which a strong sense of community is founded. Phatic messages potentially carry a lot more weight to them than the content itself suggests. However, although they may not always be 'meaningless', they are almost always content-less in any substantive sense. The overall result is that in phatic media culture, content is not king, but 'keeping in touch' is. More important than anything said, it is the connection to the other that becomes significant, and the exchange of words becomes superfluous. (2008:395)

And though Miller is quite convincing in his pronouncement that for most social media, the words themselves are indeed growing superfluous, I would argue that in this particular case, examining the content of the comments to Aoi's posts is very worthwhile in developing not just a sense of how users keep in touch with each other and interact with a celebrity, but also the way Chinese netizens approach the topic of Chinese-Japanese relations and the types of discourse they employ.

#### 4.4 SLURS

A porn star, a history of foreign invasion and occupation, and a contemporary geopolitical flashpoint: Sora Aoi ignited an almost perfect storm of controversy and online verbal violence with her innocent posts. Because of Aoi's line of work, sexist, misogynist slurs directed at her were inevitable. Due to Chinese citizens' direct memory of or school education in the Japanese occupation and the misery that accompanied that period, ethnic slurs are also bandied about. Finally, nationalist rhetoric is infused throughout in response to the current-day Diaoyu Islands dispute.

Examining just one of these strains of rhetoric is quite difficult since all three are intertwined in various discourses both outside of the comments and within in the comments themselves. Peter Gries discusses the tension between China's constructed nationalist image as a "victor" opposed with the competing notion that it is a "victim," particularly of Japanese aggression in the twentieth century (2004:69-85). For example, a post which reads, "Nanjing's 300,000 people are also people in general, are also citizens" (南京的三十萬人也是一般人啊, 也是平民), references the estimated 300,000 Chinese citizens who died in the Japanese attack on Nanjing in 1937, a clear use of the victimization strain that Chinese citizens and the government often recall during contemporary conflicts with their former bullies.

This sense of victimization is often employed not only to link the usage of ethnic slurs and nationalist rhetoric in the comments, but also to connect sexist slurs to nationalism. This is expressed most vividly with mentions of the comfort women, a historical reference to the euphemistic name Japanese soldiers gave to captured/indentured Korean/Chinese (and even some Japanese) women to serve as, essentially, sex slaves during World War II. Though there

are a few cases of sexist slurs being used to feminize men, most of the misogyny is aimed at Aoi herself or at Japanese women—for example, “Let’s cause a bloodbath in Tokyo! Kill all the small Japanese men, and gang rape the Japanese whores” (血洗东京! 杀光小日本男人, 轮奸日本婊子。). However, Japanese men don’t escape censure in this message: the calls to rape Japanese women are a clear demasculinization of Japanese men, an attempt to portray them as unable to protect their fellow female in the same way that Chinese men were unable to defend their wives’s, sisters’, and daughters’ honor during the Sino-Japanese Wars.

Though, ideally, in order to really grasp the types of rhetoric and the nuances in the discourse being employed in the comments one would read all them, due to the extremely large set, it is infeasible to do so. This is one of the major drawbacks of leaning on Big Data, though scholars like Franco Moretti claim that “distant reading” is superior to more immersive approaches to large datasets of text (2013).

Despite Moretti’s persuasive all-quantitative approach to textual analysis, I decided to use a mixed method approach to comprehending what might be taking place in the comments: first, I built sets of keywords centered around sexist and ethnic slurs, nationalist rhetoric, and other repeated terms that I induced were noteworthy and representative of certain types of comments after reading subsets of the corpus. Table 5 is a description of the various slurs and terms that I generated along with the number of messages that contain those terms. I categorize as “negative” all the terms that are slurs along with assorted others that I found to be closely connected to negative sentiment, for example 滚, which literally means “roll” but is more generally understood to mean “Go away.” I then checked these terms categorized as negative against terms I classified as “positive,” which include pet names Aoi’s fans use for her like 苍老师 (Teacher Aoi). I verified that each group was distinct from each other by performing logistic regressions

of all positive terms on each of the negative terms. In all cases, those messages found to contain a negative term were more than 60 percent less likely to appear in a message with a positive term—and sometimes much more than 60 percent. For example, a message with “go away” was more than 85 percent less likely to also contain a positive term than one without a comment containing “go away.” Table 6 is a pairwise correlation matrix which shows just how tightly related certain groups of terms are with others. Not surprisingly, looking at the cross tabulations of what comments contain two different terms most terms don’t overlap with others since comments, which like Weibo posts are restricted to 140 characters, typically only contain one such term, if any. This is due not only to the length limitation of the medium, but also because some of the pairings don’t naturally correspond—a sign that the keyword sets I developed were a success.

However, not all pairings of keywords showed a negative correlation in the way that “go away” did with terms of positive valence.<sup>61</sup> Some pairings showed a much higher than average affinity for coming together, and they are represented with the positive coefficients in Table 6. Again, not surprisingly, most of the words that I classified as negative correlate strongly with other negative words, indicating that compared to other terms they appear together at higher rates than they do apart, while positive words correlate in the opposite direction. This was another sign that the keywords classified as positive were sharply different from those classified as negative—not a totally trivial accomplishment considering quantifying a user’s mood from short online texts has been a topic of research in multiple fields (O’Connor et al. 2010; Dodds and Danforth 2010; Bollen, Pepe, and Mao 2009).

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<sup>61</sup> Of interest is that the pro-China phrase “The Diaoyu Islands belong to China” is also negatively correlated with most of the negative terms, indicating that most users who used this term were less likely to express other negative sentiments, indicating that pro-Chinese sentiment and anti-Japanese sentiment might not share as much overlap as one might think.



After building sets of keywords and confirming that they did indeed represent certain sentiments, the next step would be to actually read and translate individual messages to see how certain terms are used and how they interacted with other terms. It is only by performing this step that one can understand that while it is overwhelmingly fans of Aoi who use pet names like “Teacher Aoi,” the occasional usages of these pet names in messages with negative terms is often due to an ironic usage of her nickname in order to insult her.

However, even though certain terms do share an amount of overlap, for instance nationalist sentiment and sexist slurs, the two terms don’t necessarily directly interact with each other and are at times used simply to criticize both parties at hand, Aoi and the Japanese government, for example: “Lowly cunt, the Diaoyu Islands belong to our China” (贱逼, 钓鱼岛是我们中国的). However, of particular interest to me was when the two expressions did interact with each other, for example: “Everyone must together boycott Japanese goods. Only then will you fucking starve. Don’t forget that you are also a Japanese commodity!” (大家一起抵制日货, 你他妈只有饿死, 别忘了你也是个日货!). The boycott of Japanese goods is directly related to the objectification of Aoi as an item to be consumed—what Chinese citizens call an A-片, a.k.a. a pornographic disc. However, the comment also revels in the “victor” rhetoric of China—the country is now so powerful that if they successfully boycott Japanese goods, the Japanese will have no recourse since their economic might has since been dwarfed by the ascendant China. The insult here thus operates on both this nationalist economic level—China as dominant in the economic sphere—as well as on the gender battlefield—Chinese citizens can now buy and throw away Japanese women as they please, a role reversal from the last century. I have translated a number of these similarly interesting comments which utilize two sets of keywords in Appendix

D.2, and at some later date hope to perform more critical analysis of other ways in which sexist and misogynistic language is employed for nationalist ends.

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

This corpus of 200,000-plus comments is a fascinating source of detailed information on how Chinese Internet users interact with each other online and I hope to make it more widely available to others interested in examining anti-Japanese and sexist discourse online in China. In addition to the sorts of content analysis introduced in this chapter, much could also be done with the meta-data that is included with each comment, data which includes characteristics about each individual user such as gender, location, how long they've had their account, whether their account is verified or not, what device they used to post their weibo, and so on. As this project was begun only a few months ago, this chapter merely presents much of the context behind the online firestorm and briefly touches on some of the different ways of thinking about the kinds of rhetoric, particularly insults and slurs, that Chinese Internet users employ on Sina Weibo.

Future lines of inquiry include emoji usage and how they fit in with the keyword sets developed (Appendix D.1). For instance, certain emoji are strongly associated with particular sentiments. Not surprisingly, those who wrote something with an anti-Japanese slur in their message were twice as likely to use an emoji expressing anger. Conversely, those who use anti-Japanese slurs were only 10 percent as likely to use the "Love you" emoji.<sup>62</sup> Appendix D.1 also translates a number of the comments that use the "group" emoji— an emoji that is on the surface

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<sup>62</sup> But there are still a small number of messages that had both a "love you" emoji as well as anti-Japanese sentiment. What are these messages and what does the writer use the emoji to express? Questions like these are ripe for investigation.

an ambiguous one and not obviously positive or negative—in myriad ways: some to express group anger, others to show that the commenter identifies with others, and even a threatening one wherein the commenter states that she should come over and be their comfort woman, with the group emoji serving a menacing function, almost as if the commenter is gathering others to crowd around Aoi waiting their turn to be "comforted."

Of course, not only can qualitative analysis of this dataset be performed, but the plethora of individual-level data makes this corpus a goldmine for tying these particular anti-Japanese and sexist statements to particular individual characteristics. Examples include spatial analysis of where particularly high concentrations of say anti-Japanese users cluster (my initial analysis indicates that Yunan, Guizhou, and Anhui are the provinces with significantly greater than normal anti-Japanese users, but of course, with the city-level data, we can even hone in closer on more specific areas) or other characteristics which closely relate to such behavior. Some simple regressions I've run conclude that, surprisingly, females were 20 percent more likely than men to use anti-Japanese and sexist slurs. Meanwhile, users who were verified—meaning that they had confirmed their identity with Weibo—were nearly 25 percent less likely to use slurs. In particular, they were nearly 60 percent less likely to express some of the most vile sentiments—for example the keywords related to rape—an interesting conclusion which has ramifications on those researching the effects of real-name registration on online speech (boyd 2012).

Hopefully, I'll be able to pursue such threads in the coming year and other researchers will recognize that this type of analysis is possible with publicly available Weibo data.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION—MAKING SENSE OF BIG DATA

Over the course of these three chapters, I have presented various ways of utilizing a social media website like Sina Weibo as a laboratory for research. As researchers enamored with Big Data are all too well aware, there is a wealth of information and data simply waiting to be collected and organized online. However, the major challenge is not just of locating and collecting data, but rather it is making sense of it all. I have sought to provide a number of ways of slicing the data, both in qualitative and quantitative fashions while making sure not to eschew the essential background and context that is needed to truly grasp the narrative of what is taking place within the data.

To reiterate something I mentioned in chapter one: this thesis isn't purely an exercise in excoriating China for its so-called censorship regime. Regardless of one's personal views on the CCP's censorship of free speech in China and its methods for preventing dissent, one must acknowledge that the Chinese Communist Party is not alone in its attempts to regulate culture and media, either historically or around the world today. From the Qianlong Emperor's (r. 1735-1796) vast book-burning efforts to France's *lois scélérates*—the press censorship that took place under the Third Republic beginning in 1893—history is replete with examples of the tension that exists between a government that wishes to promote and protect the nation versus one that allows its citizens to openly speak their minds. That tension continues to this day, with every country having its own manner of regulating speech and information online, often in the name of

protecting its citizens from terrorism or crime or for other legal reasons—even Western, free-speech-loving ones. For instance, recognizing the importance of protecting intellectual property in the digital age, America sought to develop laws that would defend artists and content creators from online piracy. Unfortunately, the end product in 1998 was the much-maligned Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), which was exploited by the music recording industry to sue individuals for incredible sums of money for allegedly sharing songs online. Before the DMCA, record companies were not able to tie copyright infringement that they detected online to a specific person; after the DMCA, they were able to subpoena the identity of an individual from the user’s Internet provider (“RIAA v. the People: Five Years Later” 2008). This sort of personally identifying data is collected by all Internet providers now and is liable to be shared with law enforcement and companies due to the passage of laws such as the DMCA, the Patriot Act (“Module V—Governmental Collection of Data” 2003), and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (Reitman 2012). These and other, similar laws allow the government to monitor Internet users, suppress the sharing or transmission of certain information online, and punish those who break these laws. This is in addition to run-of-the-mill Internet monitoring that most websites and Internet browsers employ to track and serve ads more effectively to Internet users.

And yet, while one can argue about whether these sorts of controls in America and Europe constitute censorship or merely a lack of total privacy—or even perhaps whether they are in fact inherently “a good thing” (Fish 1994)—the consensus is that China’s Internet-monitoring policies are much more severe—and can have harsh, real-life consequences for Chinese citizens. In 2004, the journalist Shi Tao leaked a government e-mail to a New York organization. Authorities traced the leak to a Yahoo! e-mail account, and after compelling the company to

release the identity of the e-mailer, they arrested Shi and sentenced him to ten years in prison.<sup>63</sup> And in 2010, a woman was sentenced to a year in a labor camp for sharing a Twitter post (Grammatica 2010). Such real-life reactions serve as deterrents to other Internet users and warnings that they should censor themselves virtually lest they be caught by those watching their conversations.

This blurring of the virtual and real life is at the core of what I have explored in this paper. It is no longer useful to segregate the Internet to an otherworldly realm, believing it has exceptional rules and culture. The gradual convergence of Internet culture and real-life culture is both paradoxically an example of the power of the Internet and the power of offline authorities, for the CCP in some ways has co-opted the Internet in China, but users are now also able to effect real change and put pressure on their leaders via the Internet. The Internet has both “sold-out” as well as grown up into a force that matters.

Weibo is a fantastic tool for exploring the sorts of questions brought up in this thesis, but again, one should not make the mistake of some Big Data proponents and suppose it to be the end-all, be-all for understanding Internet culture or civil society in China. One should not be blinded to the fact that while Internet use in China has been growing at an incredible rate in recent years—now at over half a billion citizens connected, with many new users residing in rural locations and accessing the web via their relatively inexpensive mobile phones—hardcore Internet users in China are on the whole still a group of more-educated, young urban citizens. Weibo reflects a still limited slice of Chinese society, but so long as one is aware of this, Weibo

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<sup>63</sup> Activists and Western politicians pilloried Yahoo! for its act, comparing Yahoo! to a police informant. To its credit, Yahoo! tried to rectify its mistake, and the company has since campaigned for Shi’s release. In 2008, a number of companies led by Yahoo!, Google, and Microsoft formed the Global Network Initiative, an NGO that pledged to protect the privacy of online users and obliged participating companies to prevent another Shi Tao case from ever happening.

adds very useful data points in studying China and is particularly exciting because of the ease in collecting vast quantities of detailed personal information it allows that would otherwise be impractical or impossible from conventional surveys and interviews. Collaboration between traditional researchers and those who are adept at collecting and analyzing Big Data is of course the ideal goal. Researchers at the University of Hong Kong and the work by Gary King at Harvard should serve as the models, and I look forward to the projects that come out of such dual quantitative/qualitative work and hope that I may play a part in this.

Certainly, all three projects have threads still to be explored and uncovered, but hopefully enough has been presented to convince readers that using Sina Weibo as a data source is not too daunting and certainly worth the trouble. My desire throughout this thesis project has been to tell the stories that are in the data: by explaining why certain topics are blocked on Weibo in chapter one, by attempting to uncover the effects of the National Congress on politicians career prospects as signaled by Weibo in chapter two, and by sharing the ways in which Chinese Internet users talk about gender and nationalism in chapter three.

I'm particularly curious to see how the narrative in chapter two plays out: as noted in the conclusion, it appears that in the post-Congress period, search blocks dropped significantly, an indication by some news outlets and China watchers that perhaps Xi Jinping's widely-publicized preference for reforms would take place in the coming administration and perhaps a more open and transparent Internet would arise. Indeed, the reduction in search blocks seems to have held, but censorship of major news stories is alive and well as only a brief glance at the latest headlines at *China Digital Times* or deleted posts page at Weiboscope would tell us. Chinese authorities have certainly recognized that the Internet poses threats to legitimacy and the potential to upend stability—thus making censorship a key element of maintain both legitimacy

and stability—but they’ve also seen the potential value of maintaining direct contact with citizens via social media—both for good governance and for surveillance. This ongoing contention and compromise—How much criticism can the government tolerate before cracking down? How much regulation can netizens (and the media companies themselves, as evidenced during the Southern Weekend controversy in January 2013) endure before revolting?—is hopefully reflected in this thesis and I hope readers come away with a healthy respect for both sides in this debate. Weibo is a fantastic proxy for tracking this debate, and by recognizing the intertwined actors who influence Weibo, and in turn, are influenced themselves by the responses from Weibo, one can gain a greater sense of what sorts of power struggles and arenas of cooperation are at play, today and tomorrow, on Sina Weibo and online in China.



## APPENDIX A

### GLOSSES OF FIVE SENSITIVE WORDS FOR CHAPTER ONE

#### A.1 新左派 (THE NEW LEFT)

新左派 (**The New Left** / *xīn zuǒpài*), in its Western usage, is a collection of ideas and people from the 1960s that rejected the traditional Left and its emphasis on labor and class struggles. Instead, those in the New Left called for new approaches to Marxism that departed from orthodox theory and instead focused on student activism or other alternative “anti-Establishment” movements. The Chinese New Left, in contrast, is a term which arose in the 1990s and was used by critics on the Chinese Right (free-market, pro-individual rights, anti-Maoist, “liberal”)<sup>64</sup> to denigrate those who advocated against the incorporation of capitalist principles into the Chinese economy, in an attempt to smear them as Maoists. Since the current Chinese economic model is a mixture of neoliberalism and socialism, the Chinese New Left can

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<sup>64</sup> In China the Left is considered “conservative” and believes in, on the whole, more socialist, nationalist, and Maoist principles than those on the Right. When trying to reconcile this seeming disconnect with American political terminology, it is perhaps helpful to link Left with a more pro-state (strong government) stance and the Right with an individual rights (small-government) position. It just so happens in China that the Left is the more “conservative” one (trying to maintain the traditions of Mao and communism) while the Right, which takes many of its influences from the West, is the new “liberal” strain which seeks to reform the Chinese government and economy. In (radically simplified) Chinese terms, anti-Japanese sentiment and The New Deal would be placed on the Left, the Tiananmen Square protests and privatizing state industries on the Right. For more clarification, see Tea Leaf Nation’s translation of a CNPolitics chart detailing the two sides (Jimmy 2012).

seem at times conservative (and supportive of the Communist Party) as well as critical of the government (when attacking the government's neoliberal approach to the economy).<sup>65</sup>

**Why it is blocked:** Though the Chinese New Left was shaped in the 1990s by a number of intellectuals, economists, and writers (a number of whom, including the scholar and leading New Left figure Wang Hui, are reluctant to embrace the term)<sup>66</sup> with nuanced positions on free speech, democracy, global trade, environmental protection, and the Cultural Revolution, today the New Left is popularly associated with Mao revivalism and anti-capitalist movements, a mixture which alarms many leaders who remember the pernicious excesses of the Cultural Revolution and its wave of uncontrollable popular attacks on innocent landowners and businesses, among others. Bo Xilai was in many ways the face of this so-called New Left: while he was party secretary in Chongqing he mandated the singing of Revolutionary-era songs, transmitted quotes from Mao's *Little Red Book* by text message to everyone in Chongqing, and erected statues of Mao throughout the city, in addition to re-orienting the city's economy around state-owned industries. Bo was ousted from office in April 2012, but 新左派 had been blocked well before then.

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<sup>65</sup> For an excellent discussion of the current state of China's intellectual sphere and the development of the New Left, listen to Kaiser Kuo and Jeremy Goldkorn's podcast with guest Mark Leonard (Kuo and Goldkorn 2012).

<sup>66</sup> "Wang was quick to say that he disliked the New Left label, even though he has used it himself. He prefers the term 'critical intellectual' for himself and like-minded colleagues, some of whom are also part of China's nascent activist movement in the countryside, working to alleviate rural poverty and environmental damage" (Mishra 2006).

## A.2 宪法法院 (CONSTITUTIONAL COURT)

宪法法院 (**constitutional court** / xiànfǎ fǎyuàn) is the court charged with adjudicating cases that concern the constitution. In some countries, it is distinct from a supreme court, which is the highest court in a country and the court of last resort for non-constitutional cases. In the United States, the Supreme Court does both tasks. China's Supreme People's Court serves in the model of a supreme court and does not currently have the power of constitutional review (Backer 2010).

**Why it is blocked:** The power of the courts is a controversial issue in China. The modern Chinese court system is often a less-than-independent entity (Yardley 2005) and there is no separation of powers between the courts and the state to prevent the state from abusing its authority. In recent years under Xiao Yang, the president of the Supreme People's Court (SPC) from 1998-2008, a number of reforms held promise. In 2001, the Supreme People's Court agreed to rule on a case and decided that a student, Qi Yuling, should be awarded damages after another student stole her identity and test scores to attend college. But what made the case more interesting was not just the decision, but the argument: the Court premised their ruling on the Chinese Constitution, arguing that according to the document, Qi had the right to an education, the first time the Court had asserted its ability to oversee the Constitution. As the case was decidedly non-political, legal scholars saw this as a gradual introduction of constitutional review into the Chinese legal system. However, those hopes were temporarily dashed after the Communist Party re-asserted its power over the courts and issued a doctrine known as the "Three Supremes" (三个至上). It held that judges must consider political ramifications and social

stability in addition to the law.<sup>67</sup> In 2008, Wang Shengjun, who does not have a law background, was appointed as the new President of the Supreme People’s Court, and in 2009, the landmark Qi Yuling ruling was withdrawn, an indication that the SPC was stepping away from making constitutional judgments (Kellogg 2009).

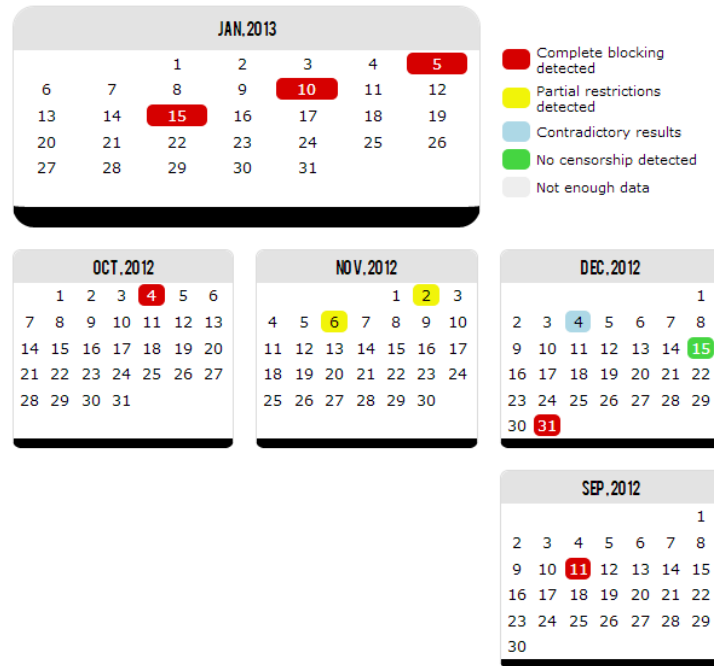
The question of what role the courts should play and the importance of upholding China’s constitution exploded at the beginning of January 2013 when the highly-respected *Southern Weekend* (also known in English as *Southern Weekly*) magazine’s editors objected to the replacement of their annual New Year’s editorial. The editorial, which concerned the need for improved constitutional rule, was replaced by a paean to the Communist Party. *Southern Weekend* editors and staffers went on strike and the drama—which involved public demonstrations by citizens, coded messages of support from media outlets and companies fed up with censorship, a teary-eyed refusal to print an editorial attacking *Southern Weekend* by its sister magazine *Beijing News*, and even calls of solidarity from glamorous celebrities—served as an inauspicious start to the Xi Jinping era. Eventually a truce was struck: *Southern Weekend* staffers returned to their offices while several officials either lost or will lose their jobs, reportedly including the despised Guangdong propaganda chief who started the tempest, Tuo Zhen (Wade 2013).

My records show the term has been blocked for over a year, and thus has been sensitive for some time. However, according to GreatFire.org,<sup>68</sup> it was unblocked in November 2012, before becoming re-blocked some time in late-December—around the start of the *Southern Weekend* controversy.

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<sup>67</sup> From a Hu Jintao speech in 2008 describing the Three Supremes: “In their work, the grand judges and grand procurators shall always regard as supreme the party’s cause, the people’s interest and the constitution and laws.

<sup>68</sup> <https://en.greatfire.org/s.weibo.com/weibo/宪法法院>



**Figure 3.** Search status of 宪法法院 on Sina Weibo as reported by GreatFire.org

Perhaps the block is coincidental, but depending on when exactly the block of 宪法法院 took place, one could make a credible case that it is related to the event.

### A.3 一夜情 (ONE-NIGHT STAND)

一夜情 (**one-night stand** / *yīyèqíng*) originally described a single theater performance, usually by a guest performer on tour. Today, however, the term is more commonly used to mean a single sexual encounter, in which neither participant has any intention or expectation of an ongoing relationship.

**Why it is blocked:** Sex is a touchy subject in China—though you wouldn’t necessarily know it from talking to young Chinese folks or from reading classic Chinese novels like the erotic *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (*Jin Ping Mei*). *A People’s Daily* (the English-language

newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party) article about a sex toy exhibition gets at some of the contradictions regarding sex in contemporary China. Though the business manager of the event admitted that “Sex and adult products are a sensitive topic in China. We are a little worried about the reaction from the audience,” sex toy sales are reported to be thriving. And yet, a survey mentioned in that same article revealed that only 21 percent of men surveyed knew where the clitoris was located on the female body (“Adult Sex Toy Expo Touches Sensitive Area” 2004).

China has historically been quite accepting of what some might consider deviant sexual behavior, with frank discussions of homosexuality, concubines, prostitution, and the pleasure of sex found in traditional texts and historical accounts. But things changed markedly in the twentieth century, first with the Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) efforts during the New Life Movement of the 1930s to promote good citizen behavior—which included the censoring of scenes of sexual impropriety in movies—and then again after the Communist Revolution in the 1950s (Xiao n.d.). Mao decided that in order to strengthen families and build the best society possible, it would be best to go on the attack against deviant sexual behaviors.<sup>69</sup> “Anti-spiritual pollution” campaigns took place periodically over the next three decades, with pornography being a prime target for attack.

Though many sexual taboos remain in contemporary China—for instance virginity among women is still prized, pre-marital sex still looked down upon by the older generation, and distributing pornography is still a crime—China has undergone an opening up of its sexual behaviors. Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1997 and the government now views sex shops and phone sex lines as potential avenues for improving mental health (Aredy 2012). However,

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<sup>69</sup> Mao was a huge hypocrite regarding sex. At the same time he was legislating and speaking out against non-traditional sexual behavior, he was famously engaging in sex with a whole harem of young women. His sexual excesses have been fodder for books including *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, a memoir by Li Zhisui, one of Mao’s personal doctors (Zhisui 1996).

as evidenced by the blocked words uncovered by my project and from other findings, the government and Weibo still view sexuality as a sensitive topic, to be treated with caution. Anne-Marie Brady notes that of a previous list of banned words which were revealed, a third of them were sex-related, “reflecting the strong ban on pornography in China and the dominance of pornographic websites on the World Wide Web” (Brady 135).

#### A.4 上蔡县 (SHANGCAI)

上蔡县 (**Shangcai** / *Shàngcài xiàn*) is a county in Henan province and part of Zhumadian City. Zhumadian is home to 62 different dams, including Banqiao Dam. Shangcai contains a number of villages, including Wenlou (文楼村).

**Why it is blocked:** A densely-populated farming community, Shangcai remained quite impoverished until the arrival of blood plasma buyers in the 1990s provided a modicum of wealth for the poor farmers, who made roughly \$5 each time they gave blood—enough for some to build houses one beam at a time and afford to send their children to school. However, due to an appalling lack of sterilization and safety standards, nearly 700 in the town of 3,000 have become infected by HIV over the years.

The “AIDS village” (as Wenlou came to be called) case impugned just about everyone: health officials for not regulating the blood drives until 1996; blood profiteers for cutting corners on equipment and sanitary practices; local officials for receiving kickbacks when welcoming in the incompetent blood takers; surrounding communities for shunning the village after rumors spread of a mysterious sickness; central and provincial authorities for trying to sweep the scandal

under the rug—ignoring reports from doctors that AIDS was sweeping through the village—and leaving the village to fend for itself;<sup>70</sup> local officials again for siphoning away most of the aid<sup>71</sup> that came in once the story broke globally in 2001; and the state media for playing along with the Party and holding up Wenlou as a model village that overcame adversity and is now on the path to recovery.<sup>72 73</sup> The only heroes of this tragedy besides the courageous victims in Wenlou and their steadfast families are the two doctors who traveled to Wenlou during the crisis, treating the patients and publicizing their plight: Gui Xi'en and Gao Yaojie.

## A.5 富女 (RICH WOMAN)

富女 (**rich woman** / fù nǚ) is a term for women with money. It may refer to one who is independently wealthy due to her job, but more typically it is used derogatorily online to criticize the obscene wealth of the wives, mistresses, and daughters of rich businessmen and government officials.

**Why it is blocked:** The term is specifically blocked due to a June 2011 incident involving a 富女. Twenty-year-old Guo Meimei (郭美美), who listed her job title as commercial

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<sup>70</sup> To the government's credit, a gleaming new AIDS treatment facility has since been erected and orphanages established to care for the hundreds of children who have lost their parents to AIDS. Wen Jiabao visited Wenlou in 2005 and 2007, visits which were as much political theater as they were genuine expressions of caring ("The premier's visit" 2007).

<sup>71</sup> Asia Weekly (亞洲週刊) has a devastating story on the malfeasance by Wenlou's party secretary, Liu Yuemei (Soong 2006).

<sup>72</sup> An English article in the *People's Daily*, the state newspaper, contains the following section headings: "Death rate approaches a normal level"; "AIDS-hit women give birth to healthy babies"; "'Sunshine home' set up in every town"; and "AIDS patient families rekindle hopes of life." "Five years ago, Wenlou village became China's famous 'AIDS village'. But things have changed now..." ("China's 'AIDS Village'" 2005).

<sup>73</sup> An "inspirational" romance film, *Love for Life* (最爱), about an AIDS village and featuring stars Zhang Ziyi and Aaron Kwok showed in Chinese theaters in 2011. The movie was supported by the government.



general manager of the “China Red Cross Chamber of Commerce,” had been posting for months about her glamorous lifestyle on Weibo, which included photos of her horseback riding, flying in first-class, and flaunting her prized possessions: Hermes handbags, an orange Lamborghini, and a white Maserati luxury car. When Internet users discovered her account, investigations and outrage spread throughout Weibo. Eventually, netizens identified Wang Jun, a board member at a company who organized charity drives for the official Red Cross Society of China as Guo’s potential boyfriend, and he subsequently resigned from his job.<sup>74</sup> Chinese Red Cross officials denied any connection with Guo, though they admitted her supposed organization did exist. Netizens demanded a full accounting of where their donations had gone and Chinese Red Cross launched an investigation which turned up improprieties. However, despite the thorough investigation, Chinese Red Cross’s reputation was already seriously damaged, and donations fell by nearly 60 percent in 2011 compared to the previous year.<sup>75</sup>

The Chinese Red Cross scandal was just one of a series that shook Chinese confidence in charities—which are supposed to be tightly regulated by the government. One of the most notorious occurred in the pre-social media age: in 2001, reporters uncovered vast corruption in the China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF) program Project Hope, which aimed to assist impoverished children in getting an education (Bandurski 2007). In August 2011, another rich female was ensnared in a charity scandal: 24-year-old Lu Xingyu (卢星宇), the daughter of billionaire Lu Junqin (卢俊卿), was accused of extracting exorbitant management fees of over

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<sup>74</sup> Though some news reports claimed that the luxury cars were actually Wang’s, Guo claimed in a TV interview that Wang had gifted them to her. Further confusion was sowed when Guo and her mother claimed that Wang Jun was merely a close family friend and Guo’s “godfather,” (Ding 2011) a line that state-aligned media like the Global Times pushed (Jingjing 2011).

<sup>75</sup> Though this may be due partly to the fact that fewer natural disasters than usual occurred in 2011, the Guo Meimei scandal and the loss of credibility after undoubtedly was a major reason as well (“Donations to China Red Cross” 2012).

\$20 million from her charity China-Africa Project Hope, another CYDF-affiliated program. Her rambling defense of the charity was lambasted by netizens.<sup>76</sup> And on an individual level, Zhang Ziyi was accused of charity fraud and of not fulfilling donations as promised in 2010. In an interview she tearfully admitted to an oversight on her part and donated the balance of what she had pledged.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Fauna, “‘Lu Meimei’ & China-Africa Project Hope Controversy,” chinaSMACK, 22 Aug 2011.

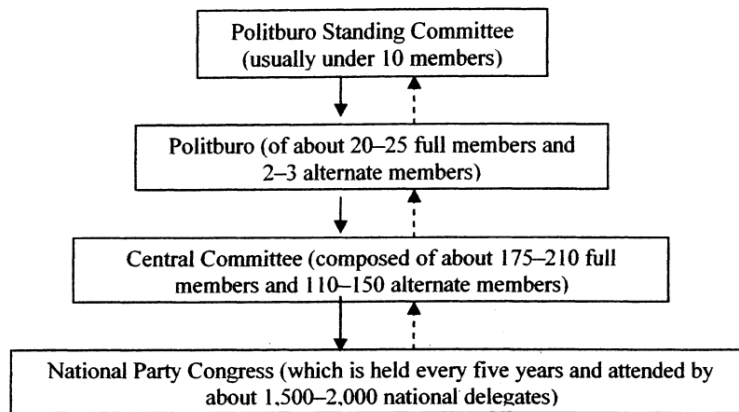
<http://www.chinasmack.com/2011/stories/lu-meimei-china-africa-project-hope-charity-controversy.html>

<sup>77</sup> Raymond Zhou, “Actress denies charity fraud,” China Daily, 16 Mar 2010.

[http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-03/16/content\\_9593921.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-03/16/content_9593921.htm)

## APPENDIX B

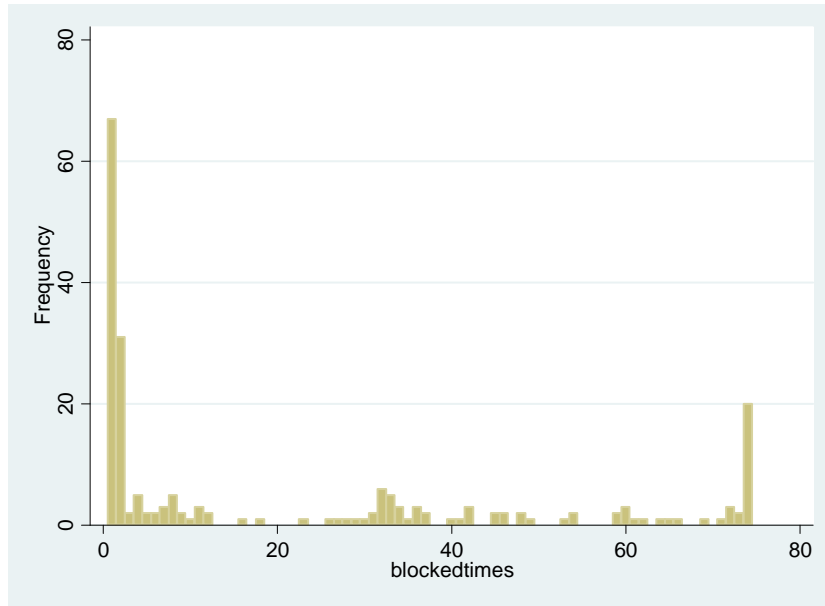
### FIGURES AND TABLES FOR CHAPTER TWO



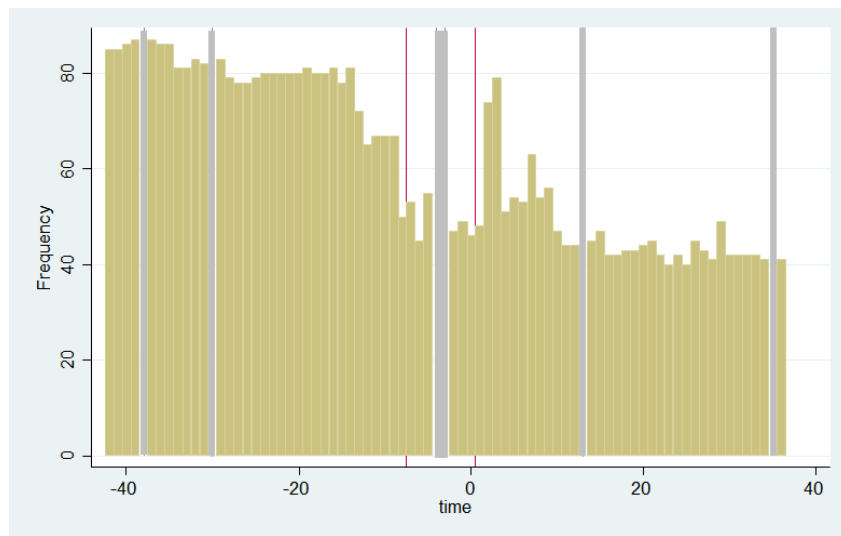
*Note:*

Solid arrows refers to the actual direction of authority, dashed arrows indicates nominal direction of authority and the fact that membership at the end of the arrow comes from the beginning of the arrow.

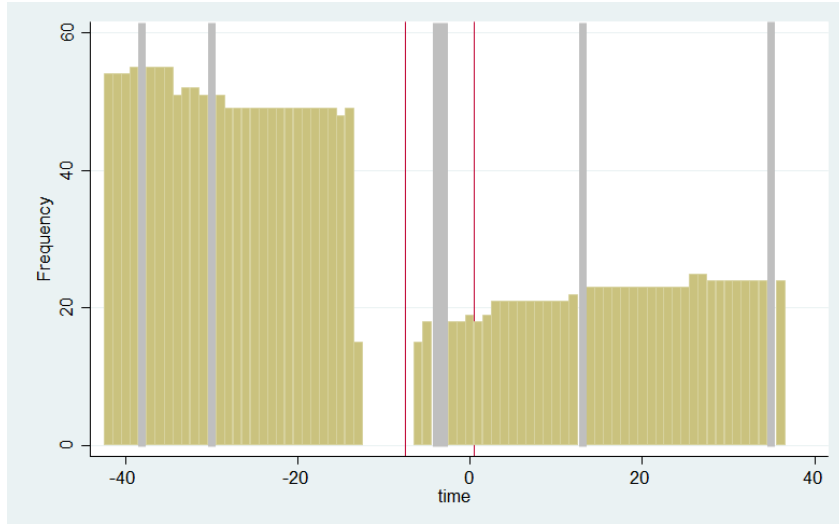
**Figure 4.** Hierarchy of Chinese Communist Party (Sheng 2005)



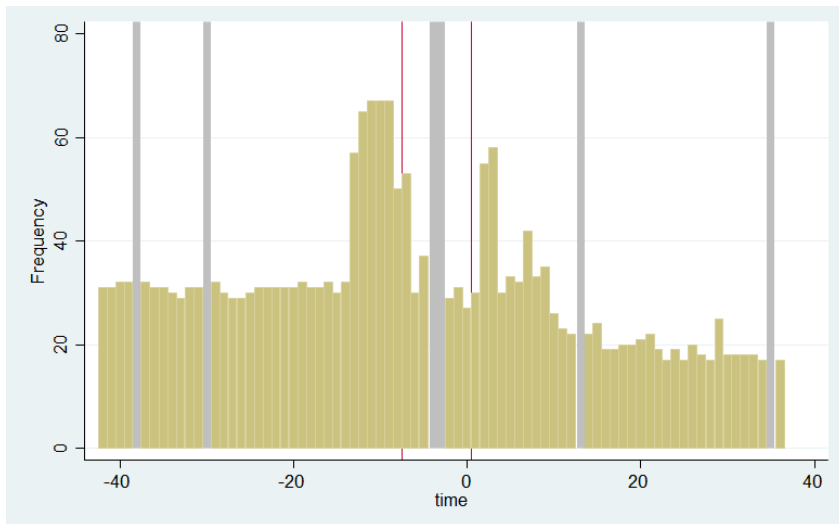
**Figure 5.** Number of times each name was blocked during the observation period



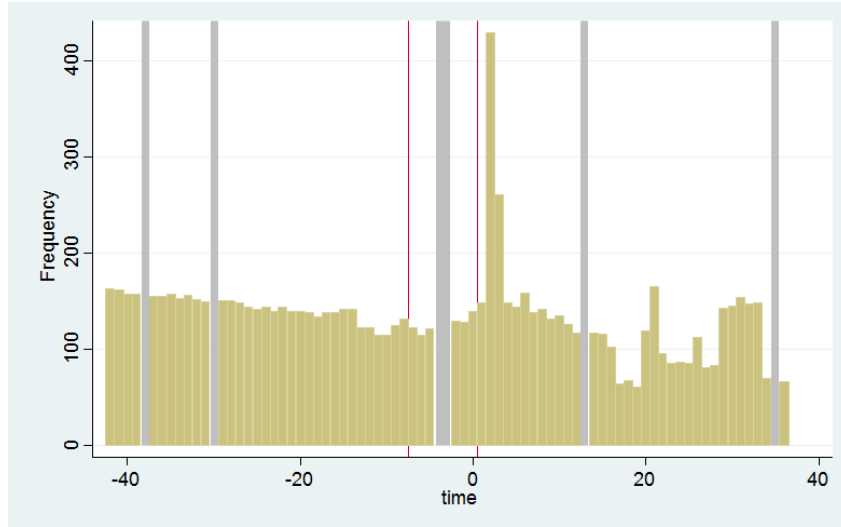
**Figure 6.** Number of individuals blocked over time (gray = no observations recorded; red = start and end of National Congress)



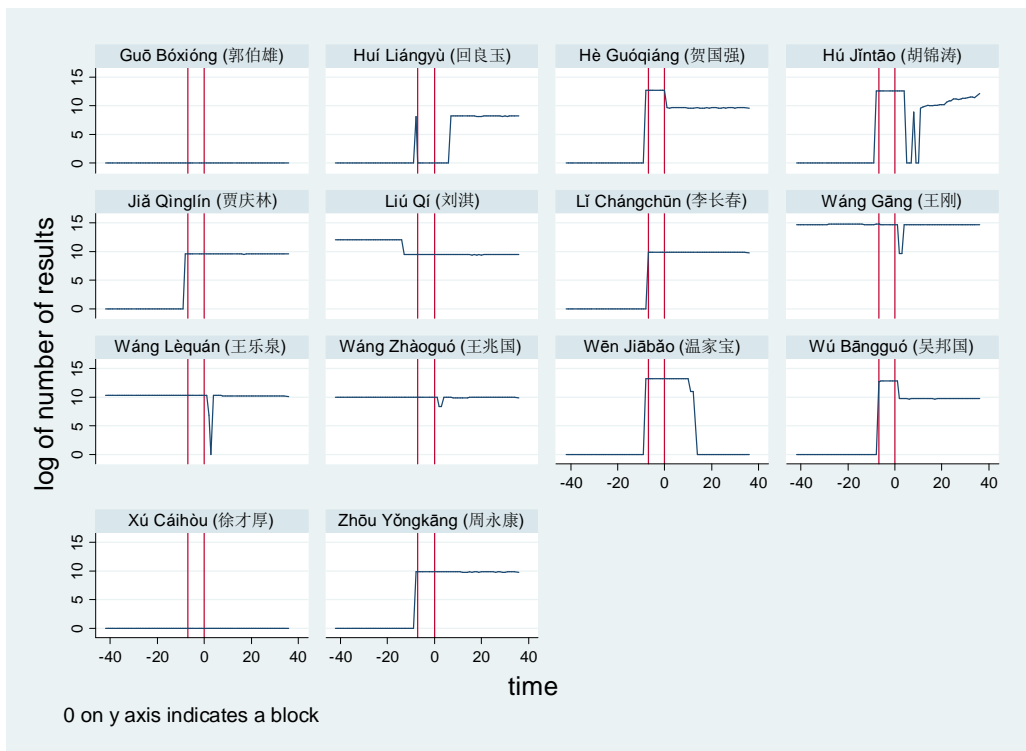
**Figure 7.** Number of names explicitly blocked



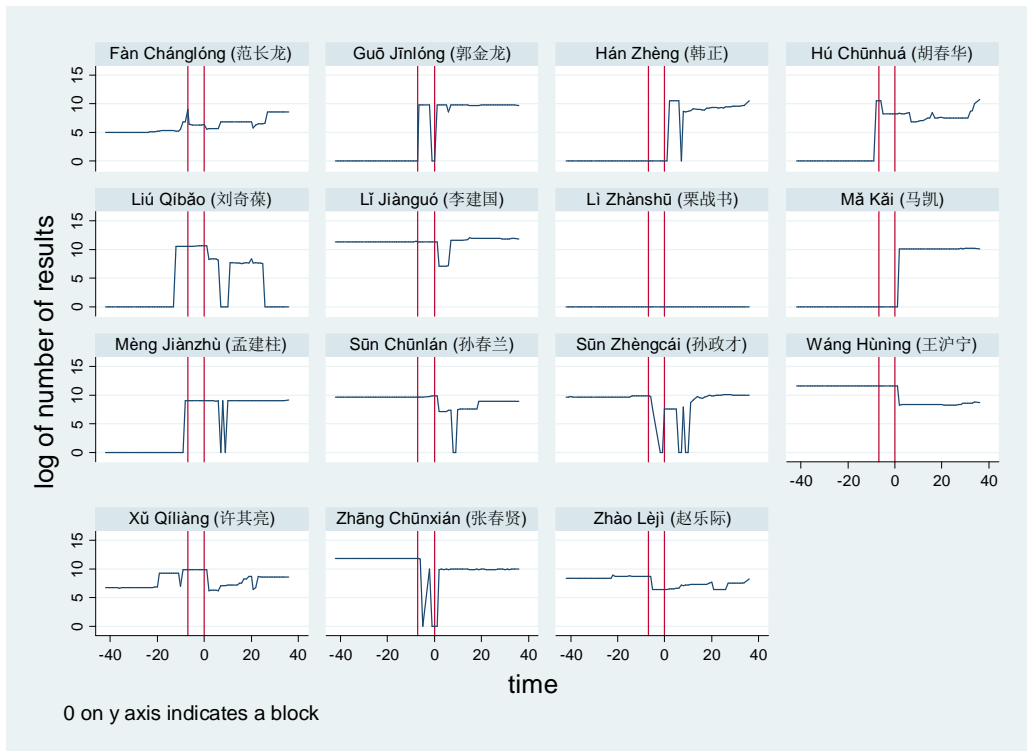
**Figure 8.** Number of names reporting "no results" returned



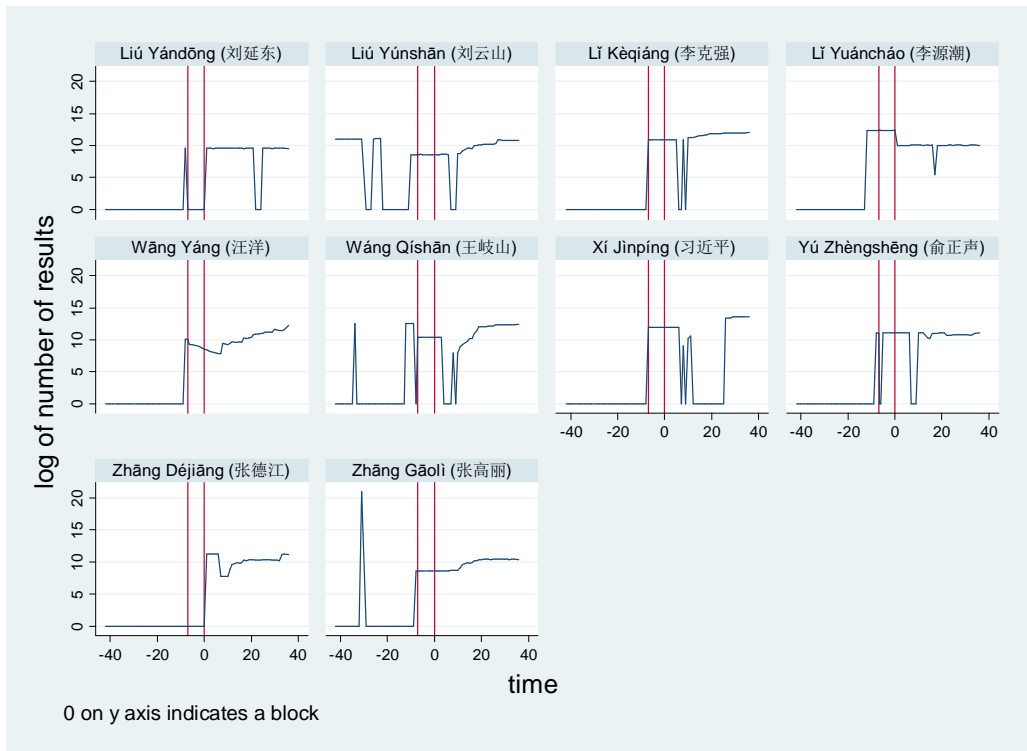
**Figure 9.** Number of names partially blocked over time



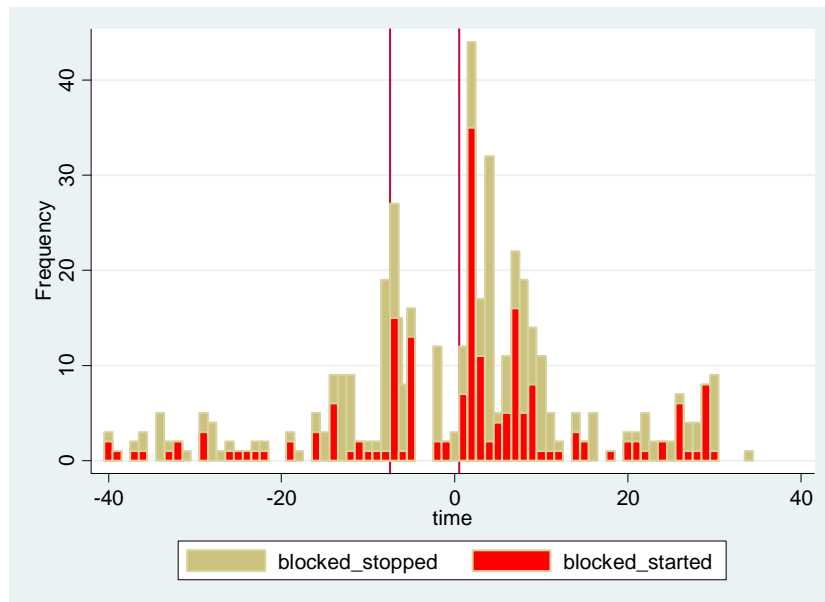
**Figure 10.** 11 of the 14 retiring Politburo members blocked at least once during observation period



**Figure 11.** 10 of the 15 incoming Politburo members blocked at least once during observation period

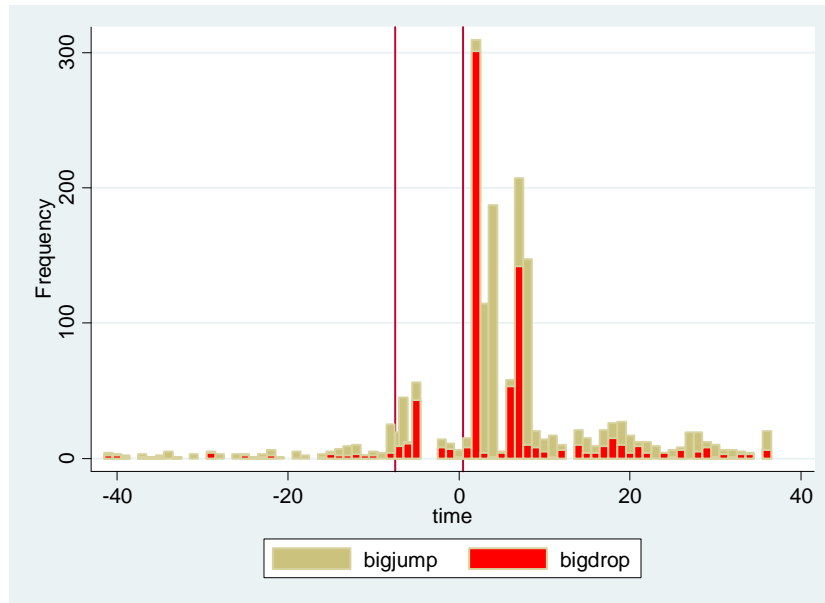


**Figure 12.** All 10 of the re-elected Politburo members blocked at least once during observation period



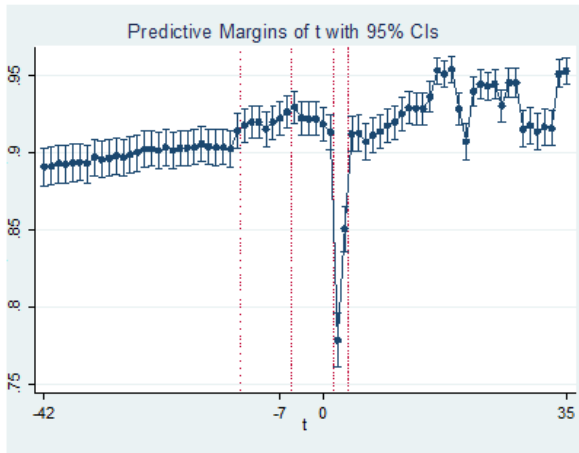
**Figure 13.** Number of changes in block status over time



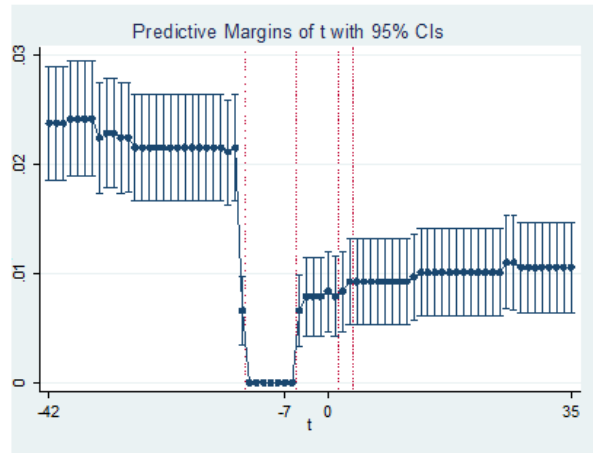


**Figure 14.** Number of “big jumps” and “big drops” in search results over time (greater than 33 percent change in number of results)

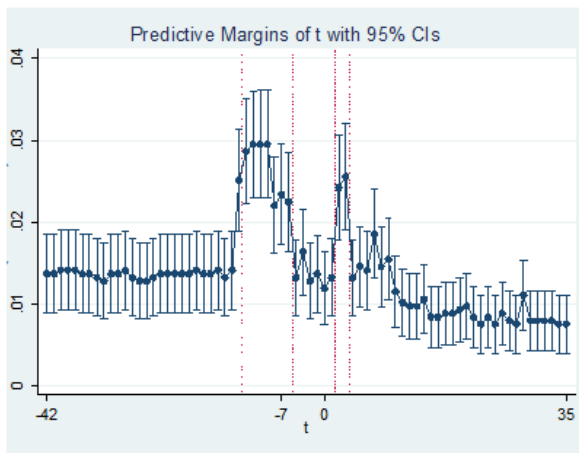
Probability that a name will not be blocked or partially blocked



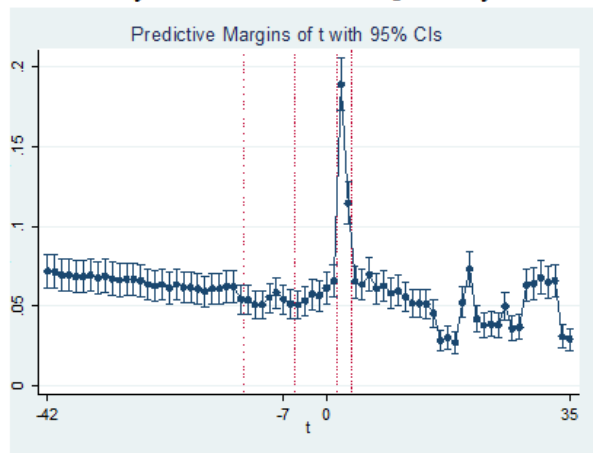
Probability that a name will be explicitly blocked



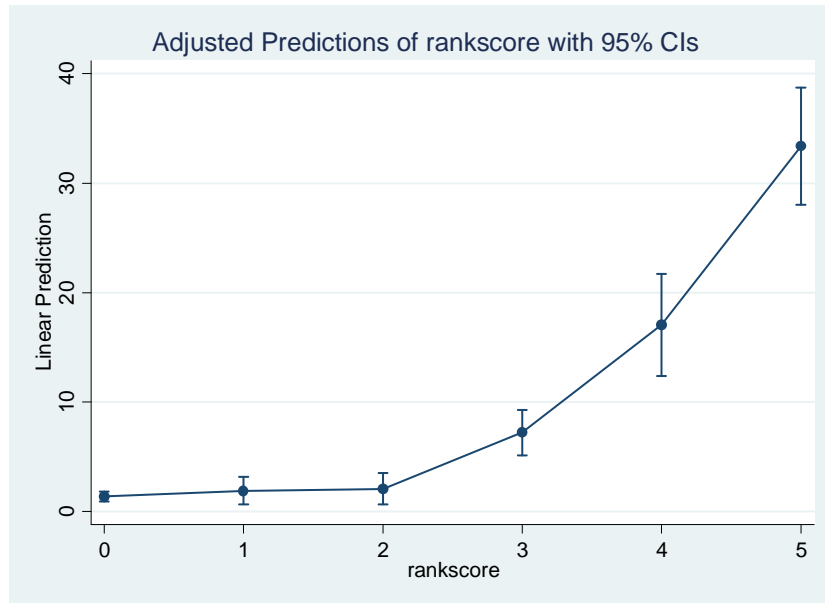
Probability that a name will be blocked with no results



Probability that a name will be partially blocked



**Figure 15.** Probability of certain block status over the course of observation period over the course of the observation period (red lines indicate the start and end of the various “phases”)



**Figure 16.** Estimated number of times blocked based on rankscore

```

Random-effects logistic regression      Number of obs   =   167980
Group variable: id_search              Number of groups =    2270

Random effects u_i ~ Gaussian          Obs per group:  min =     74
                                          avg =    74.0
                                          max =     74

Wald chi2(9)                          =   154.27
Prob > chi2                            =    0.0000

Log likelihood = -4924.3292

```

| t62blocked            | OR       | Std. Err. | z      | P> z  | [95% Conf. Interval] |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------|--------|-------|----------------------|
| path_0tocc18          | 1.379379 | .8167054  | 0.54   | 0.587 | .4322175 4.402149    |
| path_cc17to0          | 45.86419 | 35.00895  | 5.01   | 0.000 | 10.27393 204.7439    |
| path_cc17to0cc18      | 3.54994  | 2.595316  | 1.73   | 0.083 | .8470681 14.87728    |
| path_cc17topolit18    | 1778.093 | 2394.148  | 5.56   | 0.000 | 127.0099 24892.66    |
| path_polit17to0       | 121971.6 | 223257.8  | 6.40   | 0.000 | 3374.525 4408641     |
| path_polit17topolit18 | 268704.7 | 487652.6  | 6.89   | 0.000 | 7664.633 9420178     |
| sc_minister_current   | 2.164789 | 1.585093  | 1.05   | 0.292 | .5154091 9.092408    |
| female                | .8473445 | .2608157  | -0.54  | 0.590 | .4635079 1.549041    |
| minority              | 2.275436 | .9013535  | 2.08   | 0.038 | 1.046848 4.945902    |
| _cons                 | 3.26e-06 | 5.56e-07  | -74.12 | 0.000 | 2.34e-06 4.56e-06    |
| /lnsig2u              | 3.485012 | .0513261  |        |       | 3.384414 3.585609    |
| sigma_u               | 5.711638 | .1465781  |        |       | 5.431455 6.006273    |
| rho                   | .9083926 | .0042711  |        |       | .8996703 .916427     |

Likelihood-ratio test of rho=0: chibar2(01) = 2.6e+04 Prob >= chibar2 = 0.000

**Figure 17.** Odds ratios for a panel data logistic regression of various ranks and whether they are fully blocked

**Table 2.** Logistic regression table of whether or not a name is blocked on individual characteristics by phase

|                       | (1)<br>blocked      | (2)<br>blocked<br>phase1 | (3)<br>blocked<br>phase2 | (4)<br>blocked<br>phase3 | (5)<br>blocked<br>phase4 | (6)<br>blocked<br>phase5 |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| blocked               |                     |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| path_0tocc18          | 0.21<br>(0.62)      | -1.18<br>(1.05)          | -0.78<br>(1.34)          | -2.17<br>(1.84)          | 0.95<br>(0.72)           | 0.48<br>(1.02)           |
| path_cc17to0          | 3.80***<br>(0.80)   | 6.19***<br>(0.76)        | 8.27***<br>(1.21)        | 11.99***<br>(1.62)       | 4.36***<br>(1.06)        | 9.41***<br>(0.84)        |
| path_cc17tocc18       | 1.15<br>(0.75)      | 3.28*<br>(1.28)          | 7.49***<br>(1.35)        | 10.30***<br>(1.69)       | 1.54<br>(0.90)           | 7.20***<br>(1.13)        |
| path_cc17topolit18    | 8.08***<br>(1.80)   | 10.39***<br>(1.63)       | 11.13***<br>(1.80)       | 14.54***<br>(2.25)       | -22.71<br>(2793.45)      | 10.72***<br>(1.86)       |
| path_polit17to0       | 12.08***<br>(0.47)  | 20.00***<br>(1.45)       | 17.96***<br>(1.79)       | 13.94***<br>(2.01)       | 5.36**<br>(1.68)         | 11.04***<br>(1.49)       |
| path_polit17topolit18 | 14.28***<br>(2.12)  | 23.19***<br>(1.48)       | 19.90***<br>(2.41)       | 13.34***<br>(2.09)       | -22.69<br>(3292.66)      | 12.45***<br>(2.05)       |
| sc_minister_current   | 0.71<br>(0.74)      | 1.50**<br>(0.52)         | 0.70<br>(1.42)           | 0.50<br>(1.81)           | -0.11<br>(1.04)          | 1.04<br>(0.89)           |
| female                | -0.34<br>(0.34)     | 0.02<br>(0.25)           | -0.36<br>(0.62)          | -0.63<br>(0.72)          | -2.07***<br>(0.53)       | -0.26<br>(0.43)          |
| minority              | 0.76<br>(0.42)      | 0.81*<br>(0.33)          | 5.59***<br>(0.73)        | 0.13<br>(0.86)           | 0.80<br>(0.55)           | 1.38**<br>(0.44)         |
| time                  | -0.05***<br>(0.00)  | -0.04***<br>(0.01)       | -0.30***<br>(0.06)       | -0.04<br>(0.06)          | 0.19<br>(0.28)           | -0.05***<br>(0.01)       |
| _cons                 | -14.57***<br>(0.19) | -15.53***<br>(0.26)      | -22.00***<br>(0.76)      | -24.68***<br>(0.43)      | -10.47***<br>(0.75)      | -18.87***<br>(0.27)      |
| Insig2u               |                     |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| _cons                 | 3.79***<br>(0.05)   | 3.82***<br>(0.06)        | 4.29***<br>(0.06)        | 4.92***<br>(0.06)        | 3.32***<br>(0.06)        | 4.42***<br>(0.06)        |
| N                     | 167980              | 63560                    | 15890                    | 13620                    | 4540                     | 68100                    |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table 3.** Multivariable logistic regression table of what blk status a name will be on individual characteristics by

phase

|                       | (1)                            | (2)                            | (3)                           | (4)                             | (5)                             | (6)                             |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                       | mblocked                       | mblocked                       | mblocked                      | mblocked                        | mblocked                        | mblocked                        |
| 1                     |                                |                                |                               |                                 |                                 |                                 |
| path_0tocc18          | 1.34 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.09)  | 1.33 <sup>*</sup><br>(0.68)    |                               | 0.78<br>(1.11)                  | 1.22<br>(0.86)                  | 1.38<br>(0.82)                  |
| path_cc17to0          | 3.60 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.07)  | 3.46 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.48)  |                               | 2.92 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.79)   | 3.81 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.59)   | 3.80 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.58)   |
| path_cc17toacc18      | 2.36 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.08)  | 2.16 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.60)  |                               | 2.46 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.68)   | 2.53 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.66)   | 2.49 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.62)   |
| path_cc17topolit18    | 3.87 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.10)  | 4.45 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.62)  |                               | 4.05 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.79)   | -15.53 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.49) | 1.87<br>(1.07)                  |
| path_polit17to0       | 5.06 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.08)  | 6.13 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.70)  |                               | 3.86 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.87)   | 4.00 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.89)   | 4.04 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.75)   |
| path_polit17topolit18 | 5.33 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.10)  | 9.97 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.74)  |                               | 3.81 <sup>***</sup><br>(1.14)   | -15.37 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.52) | 2.55 <sup>*</sup><br>(1.08)     |
| sc_minister_current   | 0.26 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.07)  | 0.51<br>(0.48)                 |                               | 0.37<br>(0.68)                  | 0.00<br>(0.69)                  | -0.07<br>(0.68)                 |
| female                | -1.57 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.13) | -1.13<br>(0.65)                |                               | -16.95 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.32) | -15.58 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.31) | -17.95 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.29) |
| minority              | 0.09<br>(0.09)                 | 0.25<br>(0.49)                 |                               | -0.23<br>(0.99)                 | 0.01<br>(0.71)                  | -0.09<br>(0.71)                 |
| time                  | -0.02 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.00) | -0.02 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.00) |                               | 0.02<br>(0.01)                  | 0.02<br>(0.08)                  | 0.01<br>(0.00)                  |
| _cons                 | -5.44 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.05) | -5.42 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.32) |                               | -5.43 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.43)  | -5.31 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.45)  | -5.39 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.41)  |
| 5                     |                                |                                |                               |                                 |                                 |                                 |
| path_0toacc18         | -0.41 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.06) | -0.51<br>(0.40)                | -2.85 <sup>**</sup><br>(1.00) | -0.93<br>(0.67)                 | 0.21<br>(0.23)                  | -0.19<br>(0.30)                 |
| path_cc17to0          | -0.51 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.11) | -0.91<br>(0.76)                | -2.61 <sup>*</sup><br>(1.02)  | -2.49 <sup>*</sup><br>(0.98)    | -0.65<br>(0.56)                 | 0.08<br>(0.36)                  |
| path_cc17toacc18      | -0.30 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.08) | -0.32<br>(0.48)                | -0.27<br>(0.71)               | -0.22<br>(0.62)                 | 0.40<br>(0.31)                  | -0.47<br>(0.37)                 |
| path_cc17topolit18    | 1.31 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.10)  | 0.32<br>(0.81)                 | -0.04<br>(0.77)               | 1.85 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.50)   | -1.53<br>(1.00)                 | 1.96 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.19)   |
| path_polit17to0       | 1.16 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.12)  | 1.52<br>(1.12)                 | 1.40 <sup>*</sup><br>(0.61)   | 0.43<br>(0.84)                  | 1.03<br>(0.65)                  | 1.15 <sup>*</sup><br>(0.47)     |
| path_polit17topolit18 | 1.65 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.12)  | 4.72 <sup>***</sup><br>(1.25)  | 1.93 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.52) | 2.58 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.51)   | -0.48<br>(0.71)                 | 1.43 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.22)   |
| sc_minister_current   | -1.11 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.12) | -4.41 <sup>***</sup><br>(1.00) | -2.50 <sup>*</sup><br>(1.04)  | -16.96 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.27) | -0.51<br>(0.39)                 | -0.52<br>(0.27)                 |
| female                | 0.32 <sup>***</sup>            | 0.45 <sup>*</sup>              | 0.58 <sup>**</sup>            | 0.49 <sup>**</sup>              | 0.08                            | 0.11                            |

|                       |                    |                    |                    |                     |                     |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
|                       | (0.02)             | (0.18)             | (0.19)             | (0.19)              | (0.13)              | (0.17)             |
| minority              | 0.68***<br>(0.03)  | 0.70**<br>(0.21)   | 0.72**<br>(0.22)   | 0.77***<br>(0.22)   | 0.22<br>(0.17)      | 0.70***<br>(0.20)  |
| time                  | -0.01***<br>(0.00) | -0.01***<br>(0.00) | 0.00<br>(0.01)     | 0.03***<br>(0.01)   | -0.59***<br>(0.05)  | -0.01<br>(0.00)    |
| _cons                 | -2.92***<br>(0.01) | -3.01***<br>(0.12) | -3.02***<br>(0.14) | -2.93***<br>(0.11)  | -0.28*<br>(0.13)    | -2.90***<br>(0.12) |
| <hr/>                 |                    |                    |                    |                     |                     |                    |
| 6                     |                    |                    |                    |                     |                     |                    |
| path_0tocc18          | -1.54***<br>(0.21) | -3.00***<br>(0.74) | -0.18<br>(0.76)    | -17.43***<br>(0.26) | 0.30<br>(0.53)      | -2.48***<br>(0.60) |
| path_cc17to0          | 0.44***<br>(0.13)  | -1.16*<br>(0.51)   | 1.72**<br>(0.53)   | 1.33*<br>(0.62)     | 0.65<br>(0.68)      | -0.14<br>(0.59)    |
| path_cc17tocc18       | -0.41*<br>(0.17)   | -1.85**<br>(0.60)  | 1.24*<br>(0.54)    | 0.12<br>(1.12)      | -0.29<br>(0.72)     | -3.00**<br>(1.03)  |
| path_cc17topolit18    | 1.68***<br>(0.15)  | -0.38<br>(0.83)    | 2.97***<br>(0.59)  | 2.59***<br>(0.61)   | -16.26***<br>(0.32) | 1.61***<br>(0.42)  |
| path_polit17to0       | 2.45***<br>(0.13)  | 1.83**<br>(0.70)   | 4.30***<br>(0.44)  | 2.07*<br>(1.03)     | 1.93*<br>(0.81)     | 0.94<br>(0.72)     |
| path_polit17topolit18 | 3.09***<br>(0.13)  | 6.42***<br>(1.04)  | 4.66***<br>(0.50)  | 2.87**<br>(0.96)    | -16.18***<br>(0.36) | 2.11***<br>(0.37)  |
| sc_minister_current   | 0.11<br>(0.14)     | -1.02<br>(0.53)    | 0.43<br>(0.50)     | 0.16<br>(0.81)      | -0.25<br>(0.73)     | 0.20<br>(0.54)     |
| female                | 0.07<br>(0.05)     | 0.17<br>(0.36)     | -0.03<br>(0.33)    | 0.06<br>(0.42)      | -0.39<br>(0.35)     | 0.02<br>(0.40)     |
| minority              | 0.82***<br>(0.05)  | 1.06**<br>(0.39)   | 0.69*<br>(0.35)    | 0.65<br>(0.47)      | 0.67<br>(0.35)      | 0.63<br>(0.45)     |
| time                  | -0.01***<br>(0.00) | 0.00<br>(0.00)     | -0.06**<br>(0.02)  | -0.02<br>(0.02)     | -0.04<br>(0.07)     | -0.02***<br>(0.01) |
| _cons                 | -4.43***<br>(0.03) | -4.20***<br>(0.23) | -4.70***<br>(0.30) | -4.49***<br>(0.25)  | -3.44***<br>(0.25)  | -4.15***<br>(0.24) |
| <i>N</i>              | 167980             | 63560              | 15890              | 13620               | 4540                | 68100              |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table 4.** Logistic regression table of whether or not a name exhibited signs of having search results being manipulated on individual characteristics by phase

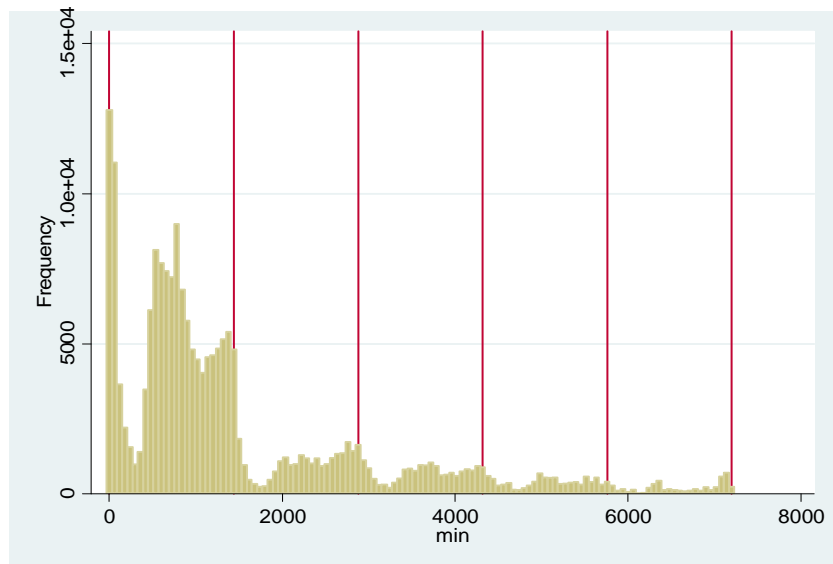
|                       | (1)                | (2)                    | (3)                    | (4)                    | (5)                    | (6)                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|                       | rblockchange       | rblockchange<br>phase1 | rblockchange<br>phase2 | rblockchange<br>phase3 | rblockchange<br>phase4 | rblockchange<br>phase5 |
| rblockchange          |                    |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |
| path_0tocc18          | 0.44**<br>(0.14)   | 1.67***<br>(0.38)      | -0.97<br>(0.75)        | -0.60<br>(0.47)        | 1.15<br>(0.62)         | 0.34<br>(0.19)         |
| path_cc17to0          | 0.46*<br>(0.21)    | 1.94***<br>(0.56)      | -0.34<br>(1.00)        | 0.88<br>(0.47)         | -0.38<br>(1.00)        | 0.42<br>(0.28)         |
| path_cc17tocc18       | 0.71***<br>(0.18)  | 2.06***<br>(0.48)      | 0.07<br>(0.80)         | 1.16**<br>(0.38)       | 2.11*<br>(0.87)        | 0.50*<br>(0.24)        |
| path_cc17topolit18    | 2.52***<br>(0.31)  | 3.05***<br>(0.82)      | 4.13***<br>(0.91)      | 3.64***<br>(0.52)      | 5.53*<br>(2.48)        | 2.86***<br>(0.38)      |
| path_polit17to0       | 1.70***<br>(0.32)  | 3.55***<br>(0.75)      | 4.67***<br>(0.87)      | 2.01**<br>(0.62)       | 1.43<br>(1.73)         | 1.40**<br>(0.42)       |
| path_polit17topolit18 | 2.64***<br>(0.36)  | 3.72***<br>(0.86)      | 6.23***<br>(0.97)      | 3.39***<br>(0.61)      | 2.71<br>(2.27)         | 2.82***<br>(0.44)      |
| sc_minister_current   | -0.02<br>(0.19)    | -1.04<br>(0.61)        | -0.37<br>(0.87)        | -0.31<br>(0.48)        | -0.40<br>(0.86)        | 0.15<br>(0.24)         |
| female                | -0.10<br>(0.08)    | -0.08<br>(0.26)        | -0.16<br>(0.31)        | -0.54*<br>(0.22)       | -0.01<br>(0.33)        | -0.09<br>(0.10)        |
| minority              | -0.01<br>(0.10)    | 0.17<br>(0.33)         | 0.76*<br>(0.38)        | 0.21<br>(0.26)         | -1.45**<br>(0.46)      | 0.13<br>(0.13)         |
| time                  | 0.02***<br>(0.00)  | 0.05***<br>(0.01)      | 0.35***<br>(0.04)      | -0.13***<br>(0.03)     | -4.87***<br>(0.27)     | -0.01***<br>(0.00)     |
| _cons                 | -4.55***<br>(0.05) | -6.54***<br>(0.31)     | -4.19***<br>(0.49)     | -5.36***<br>(0.21)     | 3.62***<br>(0.56)      | -4.20***<br>(0.08)     |
| Insig2u               |                    |                        |                        |                        |                        |                        |
| _cons                 | 0.14*<br>(0.06)    | 1.61***<br>(0.14)      | 1.93***<br>(0.17)      | 0.72***<br>(0.19)      | 4.15***<br>(0.07)      | 0.51***<br>(0.08)      |
| <i>N</i>              | 167980             | 63560                  | 15890                  | 13620                  | 4540                   | 68100                  |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

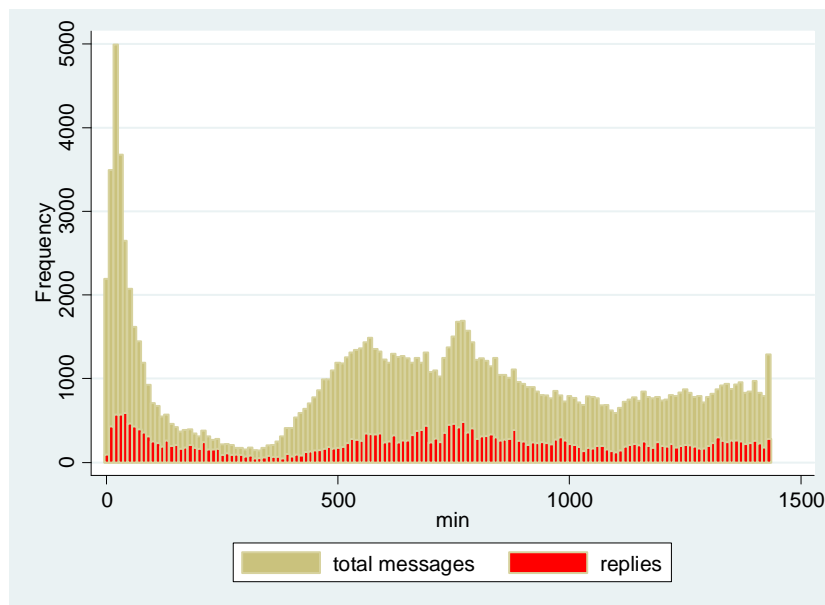
## APPENDIX C

### FIGURES AND TABLES FOR CHAPTER THREE



**Figure 18.** Number of posts each hour during first five days





**Figure 19.** Replies as share of total posts every ten minutes during first 24 hours

**Table 5.** Number of comments in corpus containing certain phrases

| Rape: 959                       |              |       |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-------|
| adulterous rape                 | 奸淫           | 76    |
| AIDS                            | 艾滋病          | 76    |
| fuck to death                   | 操死 / 草死 / 廿死 | 157   |
| gang rape                       | 轮奸 / 强奸      | 596   |
| rape                            | 强奸 / 强暴      | 458   |
| rape and murder                 | 奸杀           | 41    |
| Sexist slurs and phrases: 6,278 |              |       |
| cheap cunt                      | 贱逼           | 126   |
| comfort woman                   | 慰安妇          | 613   |
| cunt                            | 屄            | 81    |
| gouri (dog fucker)              | 狗日           | 1,660 |
| loose woman                     | 骚货           | 197   |
| pariah dog                      | 贱狗           | 29    |
| prostitute                      | 妓女           | 988   |
| prostitution                    | 卖淫           | 81    |
| sex worker                      | 性工作          | 54    |
| slut                            | 贱人           | 684   |
| whore                           | 婊子           | 2,093 |

### Anti-Japanese sentiment: 11,828

|                              |       |       |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|
| boycott Japan                | 抵制日   | 2,202 |
| gaoyaoqi (plastic flag)      | 膏药旗   | 2     |
| Japanese devil               | 日本鬼   | 1,261 |
| Japanese dog                 | 日本狗   | 1,527 |
| Japanese pirate              | 倭寇    | 292   |
| Japan belongs to China       | 日本是中国 | 335   |
| resist Japan                 | 抗日    | 865   |
| boycott Japan                | 抵制日   | 2,202 |
| small Japanese               | 小日本   | 5,656 |
| turniphead                   | 萝卜头   | 58    |
| yellow Japanese              | 皇军    | 163   |
| ziweidui (masturbatory army) | 自慰队   | 124   |

### Fuck you: 4,611

|                           |     |       |
|---------------------------|-----|-------|
| cao (fuck)                | 艹   | 1,490 |
| “grasp” you (fuck you)    | 操你  | 1,484 |
| “grass” you (fuck you)    | 草你  | 635   |
| tamade (fuck your mother) | 他妈的 | 1,089 |

### Negative words (including all of the above): 33,964

|                  |       |        |
|------------------|-------|--------|
| cheap            | 贱     | 3,025  |
| Nanjing          | 南京    | 1,422  |
| Nanjing massacre | 南京大屠杀 | 923    |
| “roll” (go away) | 滚     | 10,683 |
| wicked           | 奸     | 3,259  |

### Pro-China: 13,843

|                            |        |        |
|----------------------------|--------|--------|
| Diaoyu Islands are China's | 钓鱼岛是中国 | 13,843 |
|----------------------------|--------|--------|

### Neutral sex words: 824

|              |              |     |
|--------------|--------------|-----|
| make love    | 做爱           | 219 |
| xingai (sex) | 性爱           | 471 |
| breasts      | 咪咪 / 奶子 / 巨乳 | 139 |

### Positive words: 24,639

|                               |           |        |
|-------------------------------|-----------|--------|
| hope for good relations       | 希望中日友好    | 408    |
| <i>jiayou</i> (encouragement) | 加油        | 1,268  |
| kind                          | 善良        | 926    |
| love you                      | 爱你        | 1,223  |
| Sister Sora                   | 空姐        | 2,416  |
| support Sora                  | 支持苍 / 支持空 | 974    |
| Teacher Sora                  | 苍老师       | 19,456 |

**Table 6.** Correlation matrix between different phrases and slurs with repeated texts by same user removed<sup>78</sup> (N in parentheses)

|                           | NEGATIVE<br>(31,501)  | rape<br>(878)      | sexist<br>(5,767)    | anti-<br>Japanese<br>(10,936) | fuck you<br>(4,164) | “roll”<br>(10,333)  | Nanjing<br>(1,342) | NEUTRAL<br>SEX<br>(705) | PRO-<br>CHINA<br>(12,500) |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| NEGATIVE<br>(31,501)      | -                     |                    |                      |                               |                     |                     |                    |                         |                           |
| rape<br>(878)             | -                     | -                  |                      |                               |                     |                     |                    |                         |                           |
| sexist<br>(5,767)         | -                     | 0.0306***<br>(93)  | -                    |                               |                     |                     |                    |                         |                           |
| anti-Japanese<br>(10,936) | -                     | 0.0380***<br>(162) | 0.0488***<br>(686)   | -                             |                     |                     |                    |                         |                           |
| fuck you<br>(4,164)       | -                     | 0.0258***<br>(67)  | 0.0534***<br>(375)   | 0.0439***<br>(512)            | -                   |                     |                    |                         |                           |
| “roll”<br>(10,333)        | -                     | 0.0074***<br>(67)  | 0.0966***<br>(1,013) | 0.0833***<br>(1,402)          | 0.0464***<br>(508)  | -                   |                    |                         |                           |
| Nanjing<br>(1,342)        | -                     | 0.0362***<br>(45)  | 0.0265***<br>(111)   | 0.0460***<br>(244)            | 0.0099***<br>(51)   | -0.0001<br>(69)     | -                  |                         |                           |
| NEUTRAL SEX<br>(705)      | 0.0063**<br>(138)     | 0.0024<br>(5)      | 0.0200***<br>(60)    | -0.0005<br>(37)               | -0.0033<br>(9)      | -0.0055**<br>(22)   | -0.0028<br>(2)     | -                       |                           |
| PRO-CHINA<br>(12,500)     | -0.0303***<br>(1,430) | -0.0105***<br>(21) | -0.0197***<br>(200)  | 0.0022<br>(706)               | -0.0159***<br>(150) | -0.0099***<br>(558) | -0.0070**<br>(56)  | -0.0031<br>(705)        | -                         |
| POSITIVE<br>(23,665)      | -0.1025***<br>(1,306) | -0.0161***<br>(35) | -0.0428***<br>(218)  | -0.0472***<br>(598)           | -0.0365***<br>(155) | -0.0709***<br>(206) | -0.0164***<br>(72) | 0.0052*<br>(103)        | 0.0765***<br>(2,672)      |

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

<sup>78</sup> Due to Weibo’s restriction of a user from posting the same comment two times in a row, some users who wanted to post the same message multiple times to the thread resorted adding a few extraneous characters at the end of messages to make them different from their previous comment. In order to not have these duplicate messages bias the results, I dropped all identical messages from the same user, which came to a little over 10,000 messages, about 5 percent of all comments.

## APPENDIX D

### TRANSLATED COMMENTS FOR CHAPTER THREE

#### D.1 SELECTED COMMENTS CONTAINING EMOJI TRANSLATED BY AUTHOR

1. Teacher Sora, you belong to the world and not to Japan. 🍻  
苍老师、你是世界的不是日本的！[围观]
2. Teacher Sora, we'll always love you 🍻  
苍老师 永远喜欢你[围观]
3. Oh, 🍻. Don't try to encourage the Japanese government again. After a few days, it won't just be you who is ours, but all Japan! 🇨🇳 🐼 ☀️  
噢[围观]你再不劝阻日本政府'过几天'除了你是我们天朝的'全日本都是了！[给力][熊猫][太阳]
4. Attack, all attack. To those who lack spirit, the Chinese people will show those Japanese that they have spirit. Brothers and sisters, rise up, let's put economic sanctions in place 😡 🍻

渗透，都是渗透。对谁都没志气，中国人民就对日本有志气。兄弟姐妹们顶起，经济制裁才是上策啊.....[怒][围观]

5. 🍷❤️👍  
[赞][心][围观]

6. 😞. It's not that we don't believe in friendship, it's your bastard of a prime minister who has embarrassed China!! But today's China is powerful! 🇨🇳👊  
[失望]不是我们不想友好、是你们那个混蛋首相非要跟中国过不去啊！！现在的中国可是强大的！[围观][拳头]

7. 🇨🇳 We citizens are all cannon fodder. Citizens are innocent. The Diaoyu Islands are China's.  
[围观]人民都是战争的炮灰，人民无罪，钓鱼岛是中国的

8. Crush the Japanese devils. Capture Sora Aoi. 🇨🇳✈️  
打倒日本鬼子。活捉仓井空。[围观][飞机]

9. Come over and be our comfort woman. 🇨🇳  
来当我们的慰安妇吧[围观]

10. Wait until our People's Liberation Army flattens your Masturbatory Army [slur], then we'll come to save you. At that time we'll set free you Japanese and Asia will be peaceful. And America's conspiracy will be foiled. 🤔  
等我们解放军踏平你们自慰队的时候我们就来救你，到时候把你们日本一解放亚洲就和平了美国的阴谋也就破灭了。[爱你]

11. @Sora Aoi. You are a mighty woman. Love you, love you. 🤔🤔 But I also want to say, you are the world, you are ours. Lastly, miss, if Chinese men join the army, we'll kill an extra two Japanese yellow soldiers [slur]. 😡
- @苍井空 你是伟大的女人 爱你爱你[爱你][爱你]不过还想说的是你是世界的是我们的。最想说的是老娘要是男人的话绝对参加解放军多杀两个日本黄军[怒]

## D.2 SELECTED COMMENTS CONTAINING ANTI-JAPANESE TERMS AND SEXIST SLURS

1. If you don't return the Diaoyu Islands, then we'll take you to be our comfort woman.  
Japanese dog.  
不把钓鱼岛还回来...拉你去做慰安妇...日本狗
2. Good my ass! Die prostitute! The Japanese devils are cheap goods  
好你老母! 死妓女! 日本鬼子就是贱货!!!
3. Lowly bitch, Japanese pig, die Japanese pirate, small Japanese, you should die.  
下贱人, 日本猪, 死倭寇, 小日本, 给劳资死。
4. Fuck your mother, a bitch in the end is a bitch, to kill all you Japanese is what's going to happen sooner or later.  
草尼□的 贱人终究是贱人 灭你小日本是早晚的事
5. First rape then kill! Small Japanese go away! Bitch!  
先奸后杀! 小日本滚回去! 婊子!
6. This is a treasured prostitute. ///@郑褚 1982: The comments are so beautiful! // @秦松

野鹤: First rape then kill! Small Japanese go away! Bitch!

我嚟。这还是个宝鸡人呢。//@郑褚 1982: 评论好美 //@秦松野鹤:先奸后杀！小日本滚回去！婊子！

7. Until now I realize that surprisingly I haven't paid attention to Sora. PS. The characters that you wrote are better than those who call on hurting or killing you by a thousand times. // //@郑褚 1982: The comments are good. // //@秦松野鹤: First rape then kill!

Small Japanese go away! Bitch!

才发现我居然没有关注苍老师，果断粉上。PS.汉字写得比某些喊打喊杀的人好千百倍//@郑褚 1982: 评论好美 //@秦松野鹤:先奸后杀！小日本滚回去！婊子！

8. Good friends my ass, you fucker go produce a hairy AV disc, to call you a teacher is to give you respect, but on the other hand you are TV prostitute, what fucking credentials do you have to say "China-Japan should be good friends", the government might be quick to attack, do the citizens also have good relations?

友好你妈 B 啊、你它妈的就是个拍毛片的、叫你一声老师那是抬举你、不然的话你就是个上电视的婊子、你它妈的有什么资格说什么《中日人民友好》、政府都快干起来、人民还能友好吗？草你妈的如果真有人跟小日本友好、它奶奶的也是个狗汉奸才会生出这种杂种

9. Boycott Japanese goods, boycott Teacher Sora.

抵制日货，抵制苍老师。[偷笑]

10. We welcome Teacher Sora to come to China to be our comfort woman.

欢迎苍老师来中国做慰安妇

11. Teacher Sora? A Japanese prostitute has you calling her a teacher? Disgraceful.

苍老师？一个日本妓女被你称作老师？！丢人。

12. Fuck Little Japan to death.

操死小日本！

13. Is it true that Chinese girls were raped by Japanese devils?

是不是中国女孩被日本鬼子强奸生下了你？

14. Whore, go away and return to Japan. Be a comfort woman. The Japanese Self-Defense

Force is trash. It would be better to call you the Japanese “masturbatory army” [a slur and pun on Japanese Self-Defense Force]. Die. Sora Aoi, fuck your mother, you AV actress get out of her and go home to Japan. Stupid cunt, fuck all of Japan’s women.

妓女滚回日本 做慰安妇别 什么 J8 日本自卫队垃圾 不如叫日本自慰队 死吧苍井空

草你妈 B AV 女优 滚回日本 2B 草日本全国女人。



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