MICROBLOGS AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION AMONG CHINESE UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Communication

May 2016

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis and everything I have achieved to my paternal grandfather, Jingshu Yang, who passed away a year ago when I just finished my first year’s graduate study in the US. Graduation from the best medical school in China in your time, you used to be one of the most influential doctors in our province. I have inherited your intelligence, integrity, and tenacious personality, and been deeply loved and blessed by you in almost 25 years. Scenes of your being with me from my childhood to adulthood always flashed to my mind in the past year, day and night, awake and asleep. I wish you could see and would be proud of who I am and what I am doing today. I will cherish our time together and miss you forever.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My deepest gratitude is to my advisor, Dr. Michael Hazen, for the mentoring and company throughout my entire graduate studies. It is my great honor to have met you and worked with you extensively in the past two years. Thank you for helping me all the way to transit and overcome all the difficulties in a different culture, sharing with me your academic and life wisdom, and encouraging me to follow my heart to pursue my dreams and values. Thank you for being such an incredible teacher while I took three of your classes and worked on projects with you. Your encouragement gave me the confidence to believe in myself as a student and a thinker. Without your guidance and support, I could not have become a skillful researcher and a better person. Working with you is the most memorable and formative experience in my life.
I would also like to thank the other committee members, Dr. Ananda Mitra and Dr. Allan Louden, for your guidance and support. I could not have figured out a couple of key issues without your brilliant insights. Thank you for sacrificing your time to help me make this project possible, and recommend me as I applied to multiple graduate schools.

My gratitude also goes to my family who are back in the northeast of Mainland China. My family is quite small, and I would like to thank my parents, grandparents, uncles, and cousin very much for your love and understanding, especially during hard time in my life. Thank my parents for cultivating my independent and critical thinking when I was a child, and thank you for always respecting my own choices. Also, thank you for your constant support, both financially and emotionally, without which I could not even have come to the US to chase my dreams.

Also thanks to all my friends for the passionate participation and generous input in my data collection process. It is such a big achievement for me to successfully get 272 responses in 72 hours after the survey was officially launched. Moreover, your sharing my survey with a wide range of other students has made my results more generalizable.

Finally, I am grateful to my senior high school Chinese teacher, Ms. Xiao, one of the few people whom I see both as a wise mentor and a close friend. Thank you for shaping my worldview and values, and letting me know what kind of woman I want to be at a young age. Thank you for planting the seeds of liberalism and feminism in my heart. Thank you for always having confidence in me and encouraging me when I was not doing as well as expected. I would not have been whom I am today if I had not met you. No doubt that you are my life model, and definitely the most influential person in my life.
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ABSTRACT

The social scientific study of the effect of media use on political participation in the western contexts has been underway for several decades. However, it is a more complicated issue in the Chinese context, given China’s current political institutions and long imperial history. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between the political use of Sina Weibo, political attitudes, and political belief among Chinese undergraduate and graduate students. Data were collected from 272 Chinese students through convenience sampling. Findings indicated that people believe more deeply in individual influence with society tend to have more engagement in Weibo political activities. People perceive more intimidation from information insecurity has less online expression on Weibo. Regarding political belief in nationalism, extremists have more opinion expression on Weibo, more active participation in other Weibo activities, and more passive Weibo engagement than moderates. In relation to cultural liberalism, extreme people had more passive Weibo engagement than moderate people. However, as for political conservatism, students with extreme beliefs have less active participation in other Weibo activities than those with moderate belief. And right-wing students have more passive Weibo engagement than left-wing ones. As with following choices, people relying more on non-governmental information sources perceive more intimidation from both information insecurity and 50-cent party, and tend to be more culturally as well as politically liberal. This study contributes to understanding the predictive role of political belief for engagement in political activities online, and sheds light on the way to categorize Weibo accounts according to their content in order to explore the relationships between Weibo following choices and other variables.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Since his inauguration, President Xi, Jinping has been constantly fighting against corruption and nabbing “big tigers”, the high-ranking officials of the China’s Communist Party who used to have perfect media images. President Xi attempts to retain the Party’s progressiveness and purity, quell public anger, and maintain the regime stability. In this context, on one hand, traditional media, having long been the mouthpiece of the Party, are putting on more editorials and TV shows featured the determination and justice of the Party’s highest leader. They also mobilize Chinese citizens to expose corruption via the official website of the Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. On the other hand, more forms of political discussion are allowed on the new media, especially social networking media such as Sina Weibo, and a series of anti-corruption acts in which online campaigns successfully drew the government’s attention and led to offline actions have encouraged netizens to more enthusiastically participate in the public affairs. In this process, the Internet has shown its capacity in helping Chinese people break the information asymmetry, offer alternative channels, and provide stronger motivations (Shao, Lu, & Wu, 2012).

However, in a country with a long imperial history which still has quite a few authoritarian elements today, the relationship between new media use, political perspectives, and online civic engagement is anything but straightforward. According to the Lerner’s modernization theory (1958), based on empathy, personal mobility is key to
a modern society. Since most people have not developed the awareness to protect their own and each other’s rights, Chinese people tend to be stander-bys and apathetic towards political dialogue (Shao, Lu, & Wu, 2012). Further, their limited civic engagement can be heavily influenced by the government’s preferences and tolerances. Su (2015) have concluded that the Internet and social media is dependent upon the degree of the government’s tolerance and the intensity of official intervention, as well as upon the degree to which Internet activism challenges the overall political and judicial system.

In addition, even though Internet media are providing alternative explanations for historical and political issues, because of the Communist Party’s long-time propaganda, millions of citizens are inculcated with and believe the communist ideology, thus seldom share a common ground with people exposed to democratic values on even the most seemingly self-evident affairs. What is worse, dissenters are easily labelled as maligners or conspirators not only by the Party, but also by the crowd, and the societal practice of informing on others still exists and is even applauded by many people in the society.

A recent case could manifest. In April, 2015, a short video of Bi, Fujian, a popular TV show anchor on China Central Television (CCTV) was released and went viral on the social networking media. At a private dinner party, while he was singing a revolutionary song that eulogizes the Mao’s great leadership, Bi referred to him as “the son of bitch”. He was immediately suspended and according to Reuters, 53.3 percent of the 6,000 netizens supported the ban on Bi’s programs, while 30.8 percent opposed the decision. While a few people questioned the morality of this reporting behavior, others argue that “To inform on a bad guy is never wrong, because it is just similar to provide CCDI with evidence of those corrupted officials.” It was hard to believe what Guseva (2007)
described of the Stalin Era could occur and still be advocated in modern China: “even dinner table conversations were not always sealed from the ears of the secret police. . . . [whose] diligence was met and even surpassed by that of ordinary citizens who often acted as undercover agents themselves: colleagues reported on colleagues, neighbors on neighbors, subordinates on their superiors, and family members of each other” (p. 330). Regardless of the right to privacy, concerning for a due process, or questioning the legitimacy, this kind of public discourse is an extension of class struggle with the underlining logic that the Party is always right, and the current unsatisfying situations all result from conspirators and enemies hidden to secretly sabotage the Party’s successes.

Therefore, in a society with such a split opinion sphere, building common political values on the ruins should be the top priority, which could not be realized without political discussion online. Social networking media, especially Sina Weibo, serve as an opinion marketplace where the majority of Chinese netizens gather and exchange different views relatively freely. It not only embraces the features of convenience, instantaneity, and interactivity, but it also offers an audience the opportunity of selective exposure to large amount of information according to individual interests and beliefs. Since the information on Weibo is not necessarily consistent with the mainstream media, their Weibo use behavior may indicate their existing political perspectives.

Drawing upon Habermas’ classic thesis of the public sphere, this paper starts by analyzing how the features of the media atmosphere and censorship-escaping strategies adopted by Weibo users compete to lead to a wider dissemination of politically sensitive information on Weibo, and the potential for a virtual public sphere to exist in China. The
current study will explore the respective relationships between Sina Weibo use patterns, political attitudes, and political belief. Going beyond the traditional way of operationalizing social media use, this article further investigates how selective exposure to certain media content (e.g., “whom to follow”) is related to different levels of political activities on Sina Weibo and political belief. There is not much empirical evidence of the relationship between these three variables in the Chinese media and political context, therefore this study fills the literature gap and contributes to the understanding of the media and political phenomena in China.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Public Sphere**

The definition of the public and its distinction from the private has been approached from different angles. Habermas simply points out that public means “open to all” (1991, p.1). Other scholars’ approaches range from the consequences of actions (Dewey, 1954), the participants of communication (Goffman, 1963), the scope of communication (Arendt, 1958), and the intent and effects of message (Hazen & Hynes, 2011). In a word, the information disseminated which is meant to be received by and affect outsiders should be considered as public.

The concept of the public sphere was first proposed by Jurgen Habermas in the 1960s, which refers to an interface or intermediate sphere mediating between the state and the realm of the family and intimacy (Habermas, 1987) where independent people autonomously gather and freely discuss public affairs for the good of the many, inform the state of people’s needs, and thereby influence the decision-making process of the state (Pan & Thomas, 2009). This kind of meaningful civic discussion flourishing during the
18th and 19th centuries was initially held by the bourgeois in European public spaces including coffee houses, literary salons, theatres, marketplaces, pubs, political clubs, and table societies (Allan, 2008), where public opinion was formed deliberatively through face-to-face communication. A public sphere is for citizens to form different groups around specific interests (Fuchs, 2014) and engage in “critical public debate” (Habermas 1991, p. 52). Since the public sphere offers a bridge for those outside of the governing class, it is deemed “a new, budding form of democracy” (Poor, 2005, para. 1).

Habermas has been subject to three major streams of criticism, including the working class critique, the postmodern critique, and the cultural imperialism critique (Fuchs, 2014). Researchers argue that Habermas was apparently blind to “the many varieties of exclusion” (Lunt & Livingstone 2013, p.90), and his theory was based upon “a form of direct democracy that could not accommodate the complexity and scale of modern society” (Lunt & Livingstone 2013, p.90). For example, his ideal of the European bourgeois public sphere did not include participants like women (Marcinkowski, 2008) and the working class or proletarian (Negt & Kluge, 1993). Obviously, the plurality of public spheres and the “importance of inclusivity, diversity, identity, the end of consensus government, distributed governance, and the complexity of social systems” (Lunt & Livingstone 2013, p. 95) should not be neglected. In addition, even though Habermas (1962) described the opinion exchange between the governments and opinion leaders rising from the public sphere through press and journals for critical reasoning, communication researchers still criticize Habermas for not fully understanding the role of modern mass media (Marcinkowski, 2008). They maintain that the modern public sphere should be perceived as a network of connected subsidiary public spheres instead of a
single place for direct interpersonal communication (Calhoun, 1992; Roberts & Crossley, 2004). These critiques urge Habermas to further develop his theory, thus in his later works, Habermas (2006) argued that public sphere is an “intermediary system of communication between formally organized and informal face-to-face deliberations in arenas at both the top and the bottom of a political system” (p. 415). Political communication in the modern public sphere is facilitated through the mass media, and “media power resides both within the mass communication technology and the media professionals” (Habermas, 2006, p.8). These refinements expand the scope of the “value-laden” and “historically specific” (Huang, 1993, pp. 222-224) concept, hence retain possibilities to apply the concept to the new media environment in the quasi-authoritarian countries like China.

The advent of the Internet and especially the social networking media era has led to intense debates about their potential for reviving a public sphere (e.g., Dahlberg, 2001; Dahlgren, 2000; Papacharissi, 2002) through offering a huge volume of diverse information, creating an open space for civic discourse, and enabling netizens to connect and interact with each other and openly express themselves on an unprecedented scale. The technological advantage of the new media once brought optimism for accelerating democracy (e.g., Yang, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c), however, with the diffusion of the Internet, evidence began to support the dystopian view. For instance, the proliferation of narrowcast channels may undermine patronage of public affairs content (e.g., Bucy, Gantz, & Wang, 2007). And the rapid colonization of cyberspace by capital can also limit the Internet’s democratic potential (e.g., Dahlberg, 1998). Other scholars have either discovered Twitter’s limitation in enhancing the equality and level of political
participation (Miragliotta 2012), or a general lack of rational—critical debates, reciprocal deliberations, and communicative action in political blogging and in the formation of a collective Islamic identity (El-Nawawy 2010; El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2011). In summary, new media scholars have acknowledged the potential of various forms of online communication in creating a virtual public sphere, even though the influence is not as profound as expected. Papacharissi (2002) concluded that whether the public space on the Internet transcends a public sphere is not up to the technology itself, which echoes the statement from Habermas (1991) that “A public sphere that functions politically requires more than the institutional guarantees of the constitutional state; it also needs the supportive spirit of cultural traditions and patterns of socialization, of the political culture, of a populace accustomed to freedom.” (p.453)

In actuality, when it comes to the potential existence of the virtual public sphere in China’s cyberspace, things become intriguing. The focal point of contention lies in whether China has a civil society brave and powerful enough to confront the central power of the government, considered by many as the premise for the existence of public spheres (e.g., Bergere 1997). On the one hand, the strict government control greatly lightens the impact of the Internet (e.g., Lessig, 1999), because online debates touching on the core of Chinese institutional politics and sovereignty such as the notorious protests on Tiananmen Square in 1989 are always totally censored as soon as they come out (Bamman et al., 2012). It is no wonder that Huang (1993) contended that lacking autonomy from the state’s supreme power makes public sphere inapplicable to China. While on the other hand, there are an increasing number of cases both online and offline of protests and resistance organized by citizens which successfully influenced the
decision making in recent years have demonstrated the rise of civil society in China (Perry & Selden, 2000). In particular, themes like environmental pollution (Holdaway, 2013), food safety or climate change (Yang, 2010) can be openly debated on social network media. Moreover, comments about misconduct (e.g., bribery, corruption, immoral sexual relationships, etc.) of lower level of officials, and regarding the foreign policies with certain countries out of nationalism are also allowed some room for discussion. According to Rauchfleisch and Schäfer (2015), even though such thematic public spheres are limited to certain issues, they meet all the criteria for a public sphere summarized from a series of research: openness, longevity, and participation (Ferree et al., 2002).

Since an ideal public sphere may not even have existed historically (Calhoun, 1992), Rauchfleisch and Schäfer the (2015) contend that whether in China or beyond, whether online or in traditional new media, the existence of public sphere may better be assessed on a continuum; discarding dichotomous terms of a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’, researchers should identify the instances and conditions where public spheres emerge. Therefore, many scholars advocate for the use of a less stringent concept of “public sphere” than what Habermas originally proposed, aiming at rendering “public sphere” more accurate in explaining the state-society relationship in China, which is mainly composed of public discourse, publics involved, and the media (Yang, 2007).

For instance, Huang (1993) put forward the term “third sphere” to replace “public sphere” in Chinese context. Hazen and Hynes (2011) used “public domain” to refer to a broader space encompassing the “public sphere” as well as other “public” activities. Yang (2003) observed that in order to avoid direct use of the term “public sphere”,

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researchers turned to value-neutral concepts such as public space or social space; even though sometimes the term “public sphere” still appeared, it was not strictly Habermasian definition. And the revised concept of ‘sub-public spheres’ or ‘subaltern public spheres’ allows researchers to approach Chinese society using the lens of “public sphere”. Scholars keep using this concept in spite of its limits, because “as a normative category, against which we can measure the democratic claims of existing media systems, it retains a powerful appeal” (Sparks, 2005). Furthermore, Yang (2002) pointed out that “Whether the authors admit it or not, they are implicitly guided by the normative meanings of Habermas’ concept”; “for the development of a Chinese civil society, it is better to have these space than not” (p.7).

Given the scarcity in China of other political forums reminiscent of democratic countries, the Internet is “the single most important avenue for people to criticize government policies and to participate in politics” (Zheng & Wu, 2005, p. 525).

**Sina Weibo**

**Basic Background**

Nowadays, China has a fast-growing online population. Within a little more than a decade, Chinese Internet users have increased from 21 million in 2000 (Millward, 2012) to 564 million by the end of 2012 (CNNIC, 2013), accounting for 45.8 percent of national population (CNNIC, 2014). “The Internet… has become a platform upon which various new media appear” (Lee et al., 2013, p.35), among which social networking media wins high popularity especially between young people. Compared with other countries, 91% of Chinese survey respondents acknowledged that they visited social networking sites in the
previous six months, much higher than 30% in Japan, 67% in the U.S. and 70% in South Korea (Millward, 2012).

Similar to Twitter, being a new form of social networking media, Weibo (microblog) has penetrated China’s cyberspace and a variety of Weibos based on different Internet platform providers have surged, including Sina, Tencent, Netease, Sohu and iFeng (Gu, 2014). According to the research of Data Center of China Internet (DCCI), 88.81% of Chinese netizens over 19 years old are Weibo users. Among these Weibos, Sina Weibo users account for 87.57% of the blogosphere (DCCI, 2012).

Sina Weibo was launched in August 2009, very soon after the government had blocked Facebook and Twitter (Chan et al., 2012). Based on the data from China Internet Network Information Center (CINIC), by the end of 2012, Sina Weibo users account for 54.7% of the total Internet users, with 536 million registered users, 54 million people’s daily use on average (Sina Hubei, 2013), and approximately 100 million messages generated every day (Ya, 2012). Latest data reveal that as of March 2014, Sina Weibo had gained 143 million active users per month and 66 million active users per day (Liu & Zuo, 2014), which makes it one of the five most visited pages on the Chinese Internet (Alexa, 2013) and helps form a Chinese “Twittering class” (Murthy, 2011, p. 786). In light of 2012 Bluebook of China Microblog issued by DCCI, 89.4% of Chinese Weibo users have post-secondary education. As a result of the public’s general distrust of authorities and official institutions (Chiu, Ip, & Silverman, 2012), this group of well-educated Weibo users is showing considerable enthusiasm for public affairs on the Internet.
As a new media technology, Sina Weibo embraces distinctive features of convenience, digitality, interactivity, usability, low cost, instantaneity, and sociability (Jiang, 2016). Breaking the information asymmetry and offering an alternative channel of communication (Shao, Lu, & Wu, 2012), Weibo creates “citizen journalism,” where users are not simply a passive audience, but rather actors who play an invigorating role in collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information (Han, 2011, p. 18). Weibo enables “conversations to occur asynchronously and beyond geographic constraints” (Boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010, p. 1) between people who did not know each other at all. Unlike Renren (Chinese version of Facebook) where two individuals have to mutually follow each other for a loopback interaction, what most commonly occurs on Weibo is open communication, that is, unilateral following is allowed thus ordinary users can keep track of what opinion leaders are talking about. Followers can even @ and private message celebrities. Its importance cannot be overestimated since China has long been a country with a big power distance.

In addition, as a clone of Twitter, Weibo’s interface shares many similarities with its Western counterpart (Gu, 2014), including the 140 characters limit for each post, allowing users to comment, retweet, like, at (@), private message, and use the hashtag (#) to start or participate in a microtopic. And via the mechanism of Weibo “trending list” (Yu, Asur, & Huberman, 2015), which is a ranking of hot topics, public attention can be drawn to the contents which have already won thousands of likes, comments, and reposts. In this case, users turn Weibo into “a news source itself” (Murthy, 2011, p. 784), which can even lead a social agenda.
However, due to the nature of the Chinese language and improvements implemented by Sina Corporation, Weibo has its own unique features (Gu, 2014). First, the structure of written Chinese allows each 140-character post to contain much more information than a post written in English, and sometimes even an entire story is narrated (Canaves, 2011, p. 77), in so much as no spaces are required between Chinese characters and web links are automatically shortened (Gu, 2014). Second, rich media like videos, music, images, and web links can be inserted into Weibo posts as well. To make it convenient for the viewers, video can be watched on the Weibo page directly to eschew users’ trouble of going to the original site of the video, and the embedded photo editing tool on Weibo allows users to post multiple photos as one image in a single post (Gu, 2014). Third, absent from Twitter, Weibo’s unique “threaded comment” function means one click on the “comments” button below the original message will expand all of the comments made by former users about this post into view (Gu, 2014), and readers can like or reply to either the original poster or any commenter directly, which furthers the direct linear “user-to-user information exchange” (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009, p. 1) and achieves instantaneous information sharing among an even broader audience (Boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010). In this way, it is much easier for like-minded Weibo users to flock towards and discuss current controversial issues, engaging in political discussions through “collaboration and coordination” (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009, p. 1), and in many cases the spiral of silence is no longer as effective as it used to be. Further, occasionally the “inverse spiral of silence” (Wang, 2009) comes into sight when the minority opinion wins support and becomes the Internet mainstream.
Admittedly, China is still ranked by international bodies as one of the nations which allow the least freedom of speech and press (Fu, Chan, & Chau, 2013), because the mass media is routinely controlled by the government, with information being used as “a privilege for ruling people but a myth for average citizens” (Shao, Lu, & Wu, 2012, p. 78). However, the sheer volume of “fast-paced” (Boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010, p. 10) information dispersion on Weibo and dissents expressed in a picture format do greatly increase the difficulty for the state control. Therefore, compared with the scrutiny in mainstream media, Weibo users are relatively less bothered by the media content control of the regime (Esarey & Qiang, 2008) and have more room to voice their opinions with political implications, hence Weibo has shown the potential to “help to restore the public to the center of politics” (Zhao, 2008, p. 278).

The government control of Weibo

In China, censorship, including editorial review of the Supervise Committee in the media entities and political monitoring from Ministry of Propaganda in the central government, is extensively imposed on the traditional media content such as newspaper articles, radio programs, and television transcripts (Gu, 2014), leaving almost no room for political dissenting opinions or alternative explanations for social incidents in mass media. A number of researchers counted on the Internet to serve as an unblocked channel for citizens to voice their complaints with overoptimism (e.g., Marmura, 2008), however, since it came out in China, the Internet has been subject to monitor by the Chinese government through various administrative and legal measures, such as preventing websites from producing their own news; rather, all the online news is mandated to be sourced from traditional media or their respective websites (Zhang et al., 2015).
Censorship intensified from the end of 2008 to 2010, when thousands of websites were permanently shut down for “pornography” and “vulgarity,” which appeared to be reasonable excuses but actually umbrella terms for politically sensitive content (Wallis, 2011). Accordingly, the Internet censorship also pervasively exists, and the Chinese government is gradually enacting stricter censoring regulations over Weibo content (Xie, 2012), which renders Sina Weibo a platform with its own characteristics distinct from Twitter.

Like what happens on traditional media, the control of Weibo content is also generally done through both the Chinese central government and the Sina Corporation (Gu, 2014). Until July 2009, the government insisted that all new computers in China pre-install or be able to install the Green Dam Youth Escort content-control application software (Wallis, 2011). The State also “employs tens of thousands of vigilant Internet police” (Esarey & Qiang, 2008, p. 755) skilled in advanced devices to pinpoint sensitive content mainly through “controlling all the interconnecting networks in the country” (Yuan, 2010, p. 493), filtering Uniform Resource Locator (URL), blocking Internet Protocol (IP) addresses, and filtering key phrases on the government’s blacklist (Gu, 2014). For instance, according to the research conducted by Fu et al. (2013), between January 1, 2012, and June 30, 2012, keywords mostly related to the Bo Xilai scandal, Chen Guangcheng diplomatic incident, United States Ambassador to China Gary Locke’s finance disclosure, the one-child policy, housing policy, and the pension system are most likely to be censored. Moreover, Sina Corporation also hires thousands of human censors and adopts sophisticated software to examine and screen “frequently updated lists of sensitive words” on Weibo (Sullivan, 2012, p. 776). In emergency, Sina will increase
staffs to help with the public opinion control. For example, Sina Corporation increased staff working 24/7 to verify information concerning the “salt incident” (Zhang, 2011), which was caused by some Weibo posts indicating that the salt was not edible because the ocean had been polluted by the radiation from Japan’s nuclear power plant.

The censoring control is highly efficient, because it is reported that approximately 30% of the sensitive content can be deleted within 30 minutes after being posted, and 90% of them could be removed within 24 hours (Zhu et al., 2013). As a result, when people want to read some particular Weibo posts, it shows “permission denied,” which means the post has been set by the censor to be inaccessible by other users, under the condition that Sina does not allow user setting to block outsider’s access (Fu, Chan, & Chau, 2013), but the original writer may still see it posted on his own page. Some posts are marked “Weibo does not exist” because they are removed entirely by the censor (Fu, Chan, & Chau, 2013). At times posts are deprived of the commenting function without informing the writer. Even though the major online censoring process is conducted by content providers (MacKinnon, 2009) like Sina, they are to comply with the government’s requirements involuntarily, otherwise they would probably repeat the precedent of Google who refused to provide users’ information requested by the government and was consequently denied access to the Chinese market.

Moreover, criminal penalties also apply to those who disseminate unreal or unacceptable information. On September 10th, 2013, the bill regarding Internet libel went into effect, thereafter anyone who posts such information either viewed or clicked on more than 5000 times or forwarded more than 500 times is considered in serious violation of law and subject to up to three years’ imprisonment (Li & Mo, 2013). As coined by
Deutsche Welle Chinese, “online Cultural Revolution Incidents” occurred when a group of Internet activists were arrested in order to suppress the freedom of information online. For example, in August 2013, a Weibo opinion leader Charles Xue (Xue, Manzi) who had attracted over ten million followers because of his frequent criticism of the government was arrested on a charge of prostitution (Su, 2016), which was commonly assumed that the Chinese government had resorted to the sex scandal to defame its political rival (epochtimes, 2013). The incident was also broadcast on CCTV news, the major mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, aiming at reminding citizens of the evil intention of household dissidents on Weibo and the danger of accepting their arguments. However, it ended up having a counteractive effect to some extent, because as reported the CCTV news ended up helping Xue add 40 thousand Weibo followers.

In addition to censorship, the government has also forced a Real Name Registration (RNR) system on Weibo which requires users to release their real identities, thus making anonymity (e.g., Chan et al., 2012), one of the major advantages of the Internet celebrated in promoting expressions, anachronistic. The RNR system was officially launched on March 16, 2012, after trials in some metropolises. Even though users can choose whether to post their real name or not, they are required by the government to release their identification card numbers or indirect identifiers to Sina Weibo for verification (Fu, Chan, & Chau, 2013), otherwise netizens can only view but not be able to generate Weibo content. Theoretically, in this way, the Chinese government is empowered to identify the original composer of any Weibo post whenever they feel the imperative, putting all the active Weibo users under surveillance.
Furthermore, there are also several mechanisms of mobilizing some of the netizens to combat political dissents, mostly officially called political rumors, such as encouraging netizens to report by clicking a “tip-off” button under a Weibo post. However, since the government always reserves the right to interpret whether a piece of news is rumor or not, it does not contribute to citizens’ knowledge about the truth. Another approach the government uses is to hire the Fifty Cents Party, who as the name implies, are connived to verbally abuse those government critics and are paid 50 cents RMB for each post by the government. It is reported that there are 280,000 to 300,000 50-cent party commentators online practicing the “new pattern of public opinion guidance” proposed by President Hu (Books LLC, 2010). Milder controls are also used, such as sponsoring contests to write “red” (“healthy” or encouraging) messages (Zhang, 2006) and sing “red songs” (including songs of red guards, cultural revolution, and Mao) both online and offline, and ironically some of them might use “freedom of speech” in an opinion marketplace as their argument when being criticized. Basically, these measures meant to trigger conflicts within the people, which could trace back to Mao-era class struggle. The intentions also include diverting public attention from government misconduct to the endless verbal fights, warning the independent thinkers of the price they will pay if they post anything unpleasant, and weakening the society’s power to oppose.

To conclude, the application of surveillance and censorship is a threat to people because they are constantly watched (Gu, 2014), imposing a chilling effect so that netizens will be self-disciplined and self-censored. Being the subjects of surveillance, citizens are disempowered and disengaged in the system (Albrechtslund, 2008).
The coping strategies used by netizens on Weibo

Even though systematic censorship, the Real Name Registration System, and the Fifty-Cents Party are continually imposing a chilly effect on Weibo users, as accurately predicted, “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1990, p.95), on the Weibo platform Chinese people still have more freedom than ever to speak on public affairs. On the one hand, information technological circumvention tools such as a virtual private network (VPN), proxy servers, and software applications like the Freegate are exploited by Weibo users to gain access to the blocked websites (dubbed by Chinese as “climbing over the wall”) for their own purposes (Feng & Guo, 2012, p. 10). On the other hand, thanks to the complexity of Chinese language, savvy users have gradually developed coded phrases to replace the sensitive words by using homophones, puns (Fu, Chan, & Chau, 2013), homonyms, pictures, and metaphors to circumvent the censors and address their criticism of the government without “encountering harsh repression” (Esarey & Qiang, 2008, p. 752).

For instance, Weibo users creatively gave the alpaca a nickname according to its looks in a picture, “Grass Mud Horse,” which is a homophone of the most widely used profane Chinese expression (Qiang, 2011, p. 52). The word “grass” (艹), an obscure alternative writing of 草, is even the abbreviation for “Grass Mud Horse.” Additionally, the word “Harmony,” which was first officially introduced and elaborated by President Hu in the 4th Plenary Session of 16th CPC Central Committee, is replaced by another homophone, “River Crab,” a word which encompasses the implication of “bully” in Chinese folk language (Qiang, 2011, p. 52), referring to censoring or erasing certain content in order to retain a “harmonious” space of opinion. Moreover, researchers
assessing censorship on Weibo have discovered that Weibo users created Pingxi Wang (literally “King who pacifies the west,”) to refer to Bo, Xilai in his scandal (Fu, Chan, & Chau, 2013). All of these innovative rhetorical techniques are becoming increasingly popular and unprecedentedly spread among Chinese netizens.

Furthermore, Sina Corporation also invented such built-in functions as “Long Weibo post” and “Long Picture post” in order for users to overcome the 140-character limitation through generating a longer article or a caricature with ironical voiceover mostly in a .jpg format. Some netizens intentionally disseminate content which has already been censored by reposting the screen-shot versions. Only a click on the small picture can zoom and allow viewers the access to the full meanings. The adoption of long Weibo posts challenges the technological capability of censoring machines to detect taboo from this particular form of posts (Gu, 2014). Netizens’ wisdom renders Weibo a platform with more freedom bridging “the gap between the freedom the government allows and the freedom it should allow” (Wang & Hong, 2010, p. 77). To conclude, Weibo is progressively “changing the face of censorship in China” (Bamman, Connor, & Smith, 2012), and is serving more as a platform for opinion exchange and news commentaries than merely a news outlet.

**The outcomes and influences of the cases mobilized by Weibo**

At the beginning of this century, when researchers first explored the potential of the Internet for social change in Mainland China, many of them were optimistic about Chinese netizens’ future engagement in public debates and collective action (e.g., Tai, 2006; Zheng, 2008). During the past years, users of Sina Weibo did play an important role in quite a few areas, including dissecting officials’ misconducts, exposing corruption,
raising money to help the disadvantaged group, impelling the government to take remedial actions and even change state policies (Gu, 2014), and pressuring the authorities to manage the country with more accountability and transparency (Cheong & Gong, 2010, p. 1). For instance, through the “Human-flesh search engine” on Weibo, China’s “unique form of online vigilantism” (Leibold, 2011, p. 1032), Weibo users often collaborate to conduct a background check, leaking firsthand details of the real life identities of targeted individuals who are often corrupt officials, with the intention to expose them under public scrutiny and bring them to social justice. It is safe to say that the active participation in political affairs has helped Weibo users gradually build their involvement (Albrechtslund, 2008) in society. The agendas discussed by the Chinese people on Weibo were not influenced by newspapers, over which the Chinese government had a powerful control (Liu & Zuo, 2014), rather, occasionally Weibo provides traditional media with a social agenda about what the public is most concerned about (Hassid, 2012).

Through closely examining citizens’ feedback on Weibo, the Chinese government has gradually realized the weight citizen’s opinions carried (Qiang, 2011, p. 58). The linear structure of Weibo enables the grassroots to overcome poor feedback of ground problems from various levels of local governments, cut layers of reports, and directly draw the attention of the central government (Yeo & Li, 2012). It effectively empowers ordinary netizens, which is an obvious advantage over the traditional Petitioning System (also known as letters and calls).

According to the 2012 Third Quarter Sina Government Weibo Account Report, currently there are 33,132 government entities and 17,815 civil servants registered on Weibo. On November 10, 2012, the Chinese State Council opened its official account,
and attracted 240,000 followers in less than 48 hours, with its first post being reposted over 30,000 times (Zhang, 2012). These facts demonstrate the willingness of both the government and netizens to communicate with each other, and their relationship is gradually changing from strictly order and obey to act and react, from “negation” to “more a matter of negotiation” (Barmé, 1999, p. 258). Therefore, Sina Weibo has promoted the bilateral supervision between Chinese government and its people in various aspects of social and political affairs (Gu, 2014), and pushed the “boundaries of associative and communicative freedoms” (Qiang, 2011, p. 57).

However, in Su’s (2015) research of three pairs of seemingly similar cases occurring successively, the completely different outcomes suggest that the power of the Weibo civic engagement is conditioned by first, the reaction, resistance, and action of the official system; second, the degree that Weibo activism defies the overall political and judicial system; and third, individual netizen’s capabilities, social networks, and the specific political climate. Therefore, the argument that the technology per se would achieve genuine political or social changes (Chen, 2014) does not apply to China’s condition. Instead, it is the interaction between various social and political factors, and the balance achieved between public appeal and regime stability through negotiation that contribute to the increasing online civic engagement. Although the digital revolution is not capable of fundamentally transforming the economic and political structures of various societies, it does bring new circulations and forms of power that can be conducive to democratic participation under certain political and social conditions (Su, 2015).
Weibo Use, Political Attitudes, and Political Belief

Recent decades have witnessed the boost in research on the relationship between media consumption, political attitudes, and civic engagement. Some researchers have observed that mass media can discourage citizens’ political participation (e.g., Patterson, 1994), while others have found that media usage does not contribute to political cynicism or disaffection; in contrast, media exposure may positively predict voting and confidence in political institutions (e.g., Leshner & Mckean, 1997). According to Lee (2005), the type of medium examined is one of the factors which account for the mixed results in the research findings, hence it is necessary to specify the medium investigated instead of treating “media” as an umbrella term when their effects are measured.

In more recent analyses, the proliferation of information sources and more media options are frequently examined in the western democratic context (e.g., Moy & Scheufele, 2000; Moy & Pfau, 2000). TV news (Lee, 2005), newspapers (e.g., Becker & Whitney, 1980), daytime talk shows (National Election Studies, 2004), TV entertainment programs (Moy & Scheufele, 2000), and the Internet (Lee, 2005) have all been incorporated in the research of media effects on civic engagement. However, none of these traditional media has the technology fluidity and interactive feature for the audience to produce while consume media content as new media do. Neither can the traditional media audience combine the passive media exposure with active contribution. Thus, it is not surprising that with the emergence and diffusion of social media, the Web 2.0 programs characterized by the “create and collaborate” nature (O’Reilly, 2005) are attracting an increasing amount of academic attention in their civic engagement and political participation promotion effects.
In the face of the unique media atmosphere in China, there is some existing literature that explores the relationship between the use of Internet in general and Weibo in particular and political participation in China. On one hand, Hyun and Kim (2014) have found that news consumption of social media increases the level of online political expression, but online political expression can enhance respondents’ nationalistic and system-supportive attitudes. On the other hand, although the Internet could not be over-optimistically depicted as a new free speech platform (Richburg, 2011), it does promote expression to some extent. For example, in 2008, China Youth Daily conducted a survey, which revealed that higher than 90% of nearly 2,900 respondents suggested they used the Internet to “often” or “occasionally” express their views online (Li, 2008). And following political news online has been found to increase both voting and online participation discussion (Calenda & Meijer, 2009; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). The mixed empirical evidence justifies further research on the relationship between Weibo use, political attitudes, and political belief.

**Weibo use**

**Political activities on Weibo.** Previous research has to some extent oversimplified the new media use and online political engagement patterns. To be more specific, social media use was often operationalized as time spent and frequency of use during a certain period of time, and online civic engagement was mainly approached through the amount of online discussion people participated in, which is unfortunately quite low. For example, nationwide longitudinal surveys conducted in Mainland China have found that over 50% of Internet users do not post their opinions at all, and only 10% post their opinions frequently (Shen, Wang, Guo, & Guo, 2009). When it comes to
college students, consistent results have shown that the majority of respondents choose to “keep silent” while lurking in online forums, with only slightly more than 10% discussing political issues online (Mou, Atkin, & Fu, 2011). It is observed that Chinese people tend not to verbally express strong emotions even towards government wrongdoings and corruptions (Yu, 2006), unless their personal interests are seriously affected (Shao, Lu, & Wu, 2012). Apparently, researchers have failed to exhaust activities netizens participate in, leaving much room for improvement.

Sina Weibo offers not only the options of replying to others and posting personal opinions in online discussion, but also the functions including to repost, like, @, and emoji to favor or oppose without saying a word. Even though people who use the latter ones contribute less to a topic, they have shown some degree of engagement in political and public issues by suggesting their attitudes, hence should be taken into consideration. In fact, an analysis of Weibo hot topics reveals that 65% of the posts in the sample are reposts, nearly twice as higher as the percentage (35%) on Twitter, which means reposts play a much greater role in Weibo than its western counterpart (Yu, Asur, & Huberman, 2015). Moreover, reading news about political and public affairs can be seen as a kind of relatively passive engagement, in contrast, organizing nongovernmental campaigns or activities (Zhang & Lin, 2014) and initiating a polling on Weibo can be considered as a more active type of engagement. Thus, instead of merely asking people to indicate the amount of explicit opinion expression on Weibo, other Weibo-based political activities should also be counted as a form of participation.

**Following choices on Weibo.** Along with time spent and the kind of political activities participated in on Weibo, what kind of Weibo accounts users choose to follow
and what Weibo content they are exposed to need to be examined in more detail. After all, “promoting active citizenship is a social, not a technological activity” (Hardy & Scheufele, 2006, p. 1252), and the content disseminated on Weibo is dramatically different from that broadcast on traditional media in the following ways.

First, due to the extremely strict government controls over traditional media, and the active participation of ordinary netizens in generating Weibo content, there exists a greater discrepancy in the topics, tone, and styles between these two types of media than the technological differences. Based on a content analysis, on one hand, Weibo posts are more concerned with China’s political and legal reforms while newspapers put more emphasis on economy boost and people's livelihood; on the other hand, Weibo content tends to be negative while newspapers are more likely to have positive reports (Zhang et al., 2015).

Research has also shown the different roles the new media and traditional media play in leading public opinion by telling people “what to think about” (Cohen, 1963). For example, Zhang et al. (2015) found that when discussing with others, Shanghai citizens had a personal set of important news that was almost not correlated with the one local newspapers offered, which means Chinese people are becoming more savvy in critically processing newspaper reports (Zhang et al., 2015) while relying more on new media where they can discover unofficial information (MacKinnon, 2008), express discontent, and challenge dominant discourse (e.g. Hu, 2012; Yang, 2009). This echoes the research findings about the agenda-setting competition between the Internet and traditional media in the western world, while the electronic bulletin boards were left behind by traditional media during the 1996 US Presidential election (Robert et al, 2002), the political blogs
caught up during the 2004 US Presidential election period (Lee, 2007), and surpassed traditional media on several important incidents in 2007 (Meraz, 2011).

Second, a form of multimedia presumption, e’gao, a combination of “evil” and “making fun of” the original work, which has its roots in Japanese kuso, a subculture associated with both gaming and satire (Wallis, 2011), has arisen on Weibo. In stark contrast with the normally prudish traditional media style, e’gao illustrates a considerable playful attitude towards the classic and authority. As Meng (2009) put it, its carnivalesque and iconoclastic attitude toward “mainstream” and “officialdom” is the way for Chinese netizens to express criticism and dissatisfaction. Not surprisingly, through challenging “the officially sanctioned norms of media content in China” (Meng, 2009, p. 52) and deconstruction, it grabs attention and encourages more Chinese people to create something original and antagonistic. Immersed into such diverse information rivers of what to cover (the content), how to cover (the style), and why to cover (the aim), Chinese people have to make a choice between Weibo and traditional media about which information source they rely on and believe more. And studies conducted both in and outside Chinese context have demonstrated that the preference for online news platforms was positively correlated with online political participation (Bachmann & Gil de Zu’n’iga, 2013).

Third, research shows that a considerable amount of Weibo content is created by a very small portion of Internet elites (Wu et al., 2012), classified as “broadcasters” (Wallis, 2011). They are called Big V, whose identities have been verified that they are exactly those people, instead of others’ imitations. Most of them are entertainment stars, media employees, famous athletes, and billionaires who are considered as successful idols and
credible information sources by millions of their followers or fans. Guo (2014) argues that audiences have shown their favor for third-party sources on Weibo because they consider them as more useful and less prone to governmental interference than traditional media do.

Additionally, some of the Big Vs are organization entities outlets. Since influential Weibo writers play an important role in leading public opinion (Esarey & Qiang, 2008), Guo (2014) argues that Weibo users seek out to find broadcasters they are interested in, making their personal Weibo web pages both news aggregators and news filters. However, according to research based on the Uses & Gratifications Theory, gratifications for information exchange are pivotal motives for individuals to engage in online civic activities (Cheng, Liang, & Leung, 2015), while entertainment purposes hardly contribute to political efficacy and participation (e.g., Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002, Cheng, Liang, & Leung, 2015). Therefore, research examining new media use should shift its emphasis to how people use media, rather than simply how much (Campbell & Kwak, 2011a).

Fourth, just like any other marketplaces of ideas, the opinions on Weibo are not uniform, either. Those pro-communist voices could also be heard, because first, as mentioned in the preceding section, large numbers of government entities and civil servants registered on Weibo frequently appeal to different interests; and second, owing to the government’s consistent propaganda and Fifty-Cents Party’s intentionally misleading, a great many Weibo users are not overly in agreement or concerned with political issues, rather, they could support some form of censorship (Damm, 2007; Guo, 2007) or even hope to see another Cultural Revolution in the future. For example,
according to a survey conducted in 2008, 70% of the nearly 2,900 respondents agreed that users should exercise some types of “self-discipline” (Li, 2008). It is evident that Weibo content is not monolithic, and the various content may have different impacts on political perspectives and political activities such as discussion on Weibo.

Thus, by selecting certain accounts to follow, Weibo users to a great degree determine what information they are exposed to, and whom they would discuss issues of concern with. Research has also shown that the social network affects individuals’ willingness to engage in political discussion (e.g., Kwak et al., 2005). Beck (1991) has found that Americans have a higher tendency to discuss politics with likeminded friends and family. However, such choice of being with people sharing similar views has been proven to be inconsistent. For example, Mutz (2002) has found that individuals whose discussion networks involve greater disagreement have lower levels of political participation, a finding that was recently supported in a study by Eveland and Hively (2009). However, Knobloch-Westervick and Kleinman (2012) suggest that heavy online news viewers are less likely to select online news congruent with their own political views. Mo Jang (2013) has also found that online news audiences sometimes purposely select counter-belief information when considering serious topics such as controversial science issues. Researchers have also found out that strong personal ties (those whom people feel very close to and with whom people are frequently in contact to discuss various things, including personal issues and feelings) (Campbell & Kwak, 2011b) play such an important role in shaping mobile communication practices (Campbell & Russo, 2003; Ling, 2008), and like-mindedness is not necessarily helpful for those engaged in mobile-based discourse with very few strong ties (Campbell & Kwak, 2011b).
Given the unique features of the Weibo sphere in China, it would further our understanding of selective exposure behavior and its relationship between political activities on Weibo and users’ political belief. Based on the above literature, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: What is the relationship between Weibo users’ following choices and their external self-efficacy and perceived political intimidation?

RQ2: What is the relationship between Weibo users’ following choices and their political belief?

Political activities on Weibo and political attitudes

Civic engagement is a multi-dimensional construct concerning either individual or collective work on issues of public concerns (Levinson, 2010). Heller et al. (1984) defined it as ‘a process in which individuals take part in decision making in the institutions, programs and environments that affect them’ (p.339). Political talk is a hailed as the fundamental building block of participatory democracy (Pan et al., 2006), and it is regarded by many scholars as a form of political participation (Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004). Talking about political and public affairs can help citizens overcome uncertainty as they make sense of the macrolevel political environment (Pan et al., 2006). In online settings, citizens participate more actively in open discussion because they relatively enjoy more freedom in cyberspace (Cheng, Liang, & Leung, 2015).

Previous research has demonstrated that political participation in general is influenced by such factors as political efficacy, information channels (McLeod et al., 1999), political interest (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995), and socioeconomic status (Verba & Nie, 1972). For example, Beck and Jennings (1982) demonstrated the attitude–
behavior link between adolescents’ civic orientations and political participation. Hart and Kirshner (2009) identified that civic attitudes are the central factor in fostering civic engagement of urban Americans. Out of these predictors, particularly in this section, political attitude and the political belief would be the two factors investigated in this research.

**Political attitude**

Individuals develop their political attitudes from their experience with the political system (Almond & Verba, 1989). Political attitude is a multifaceted construct with a few sub-dimensions, among which the following two can reflect Chinese citizens’ perceptions of their relationship with the political system thus are of the concern of this paper. They are self-efficacy and perceived political intimidation.

First, political self-efficacy refers to “the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process” (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954, p.187), which are also named external efficacy by political scientists; in contrast, internal efficacy means “beliefs about one’s own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics” (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991, p. 1407). Beliefs that their actions can make a difference and feelings of competency serve as incentives for political participation (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982).

Generally, both external and internal self-efficacy are positively related to political participation (e.g., Hoffman & Thomas, 2009), and are specifically positively associated with online political discussion (Mou, Atkin, & Fu, 2011). Cynicism is correlated with external efficacy (Niemi et al., 1991), and cynical citizens are usually characterized as lacking political trust and low external efficacy (Hoffman & Thomas,
2009), because confidence in public service institutions can significantly influence citizens’ public actions (Taylor, 2010). Lee (2005) has found that individuals with high distrust of the honesty and capabilities of either individual politicians or the whole political institutions have lower external efficacy. Mou, Atkin, and Fu (2011) have also demonstrated the inverse relationship between social trust and online political discussion. As a result, cynical individuals with lower external efficacy are generally less willing to participate in political activities since they tend to distance themselves from politics (e.g., Pinkleton & Austin, 2001).

Therefore, it is assumed that:

H1a: External self-efficacy is positively related to political activities on Weibo.

Second, political intimidation means that for fear of a social cost, including alienation among friends, family, and coworkers (e.g., Chase & Mulvern, 2002; Rosenberg, 1954), and being vulnerable to criticism (Hayes et al., 2006), people tend to be self-censored and refrain from engaging in political discussions (Hayes et al., 2006). In terms of the aforementioned tight controls of Weibo (in the first section) and the potential criminal penalties for speaking something unpleasant to the Party, such concerns are quite common and could prompt a spiral of silence in public settings. Even though empirical results have shown that the inverse relationship between perceived political intimidation in the form of the human flesh search engine and 50-cent party and online political discussion is not statistically significant, since citizens with higher level of external self-efficacy are more likely to engage in online political discussion regardless of political intimidation (Mou, Atkin, & Fu, 2011), it is hypothesized that:
H1b: Controlled for external self-efficacy, perceived political intimidation is negatively related to the number of political activities on Weibo.

**Political belief**

According to Converse (1964), a belief system is “a configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence” (p. 207). The origin of “left” and “right” in the political domain can trace back to the French estates general in 1789, when people sitting on the left could be viewed as more or less anti-statists, with those on the right being somewhat state-interventionists (Lester, 1994). This has changed a lot as time goes on, and nowadays “a ‘left-wing’ position in modern politics would involve leaning toward such positions as the following, in some mix or other: nationalization of industry; state control of the economy; highly redistributive tax policies; pacifism or arms reduction; egalitarian policies in education; a preference for ecological rather than industrial expansionist policies; positive discrimination towards minority groups; and so on” (Robertson, 1987, pp. 181).

However, it has been accepted by a number of scholars that today the single-axis “right” and “left” should be replaced by a 4-way grid, with one axis for economic freedom and the other for personal freedom (Sznajd-Weron & Sznajd, 2005). Accordingly, studies conducted in the UK suggest that modern political attitudes can be divided into four clusters (conservative, socialist, authoritarian, libertarian) and placed in a rectangular coordinate system, where the “authoritarian” in the lower left quarter wants the government to have a firm hand in both economy and private affairs and the “libertarian” in the upper right quarter wants individualism and low state involvement on
all fronts (Blundell & Gosschalk, 1997). In short, having left-wing views usually entails being pro-redistribution, pro-intervention and pro-nationalization (Cohen, 2001, Jones 2012). This is consistent with the conventional division of right and left in the rhetoric of CCP since the beginning of 20th century, and will be adopted by the present study.

In China, it is acknowledged that the Internet maintains a far more plural inventory of viewpoints than traditional media which are all controlled by the Party (Esarey & Qiang, 2011; Tang & Sampson, 2012). Dissenters and critics keep proffering their interpretations of public policies and political incidents. Witnessing the contrast between online and offline information regarding public issues and political affairs, Chinese Internet users may be more prone to adjust their established views of the current regime (Wu, 2014), which are most likely to be left. However, there are still a substantial number of Chinese citizens who seldom question the legitimacy of the government’s behavior, instead, they just conform to government ideologies, support state censorship (Wu, 2014), and believe the explanations offered by the government about the Chinese society. They may not “use the Internet in accordance with Western expectations” (Damm, 2007, p. 285).

Regarding the relationship between political belief and civic engagement, the Communist Party membership has been demonstrated as an indicator which stratifies the Chinese society in political participation (Guo, 2007). To be more specific, being a CCP member is not only significantly positively related to nationalism (Hyun, Kim, & Sun, 2014), but also suggests more frequent expressive engagement concerning political issues (Pan et al., 2010). Research also shows that those who were supportive of the regime or believed in the officially sanctioned democratic reform were more likely to vote in
noncompetitive local elections (Chen & Zhang, 2002; Shi, 1999). This is not surprising, because as the dominated ideology in the Chinese society, compulsory lessons on socialism and communism are taught all through primary school to graduate school; people who want to apply for the CCP membership have to take extra classes and write lengthy thought reports on a quarterly basis for a couple of years. This process helps potential Party members mentally get prepared to accept the Party’s ideology and always be loyal to the Party, so it is safe to say that these people feel more vested in the system and participate more in conventional activities (Verba et al., 1995).

In addition, whether individuals are motivated by satisfaction or frustration with the system (Pan et al., 2010), they tend to have more engagement in public and political affairs. Bachmann and Gil de Zuñiga (2013) have found that extreme party identification also positively and significantly contributes to online political participation. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that extreme authoritarian and libertarian in the Chinese context are more engaged in political activities, and as an important variable, whether political belief has any relationship with political activities on Weibo requires more clarification.

Taken all the analyses above, the following hypothesis and research question are proposed that:

H2: People with extreme political belief engage in more political activities on Weibo than those with moderate belief.

RQ3: What is the relationship between political belief and the number of political activities on Weibo?
The following is the figure that illustrates the model in this study in order to illustrate the relationships between different variables proposed in the hypotheses and research questions.

Figure I. Model of Study
CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

Design

The present study explored the relationship between 1) political activities on Weibo, 2) political attitudes, 3) political belief of Chinese students in colleges and graduate schools. It used a questionnaire to gather data on these variables using a quasi-experimental design where all of the variables were measured and subsequently analyzed on the basis of their theoretical role as independent variables and dependent variables.

Participants

This study used Chinese students who are pursuing degrees in universities, because they are probably the first online generation in China (Mou et al., 2011). Students that account for 31.7% of the online users are the largest group of Chinese Internet population (CNNIC, 2009), and Sina Weibo is one of the three major social networking sites popular among them. Furthermore, these students have been demonstrated by previous researchers to be a safer and more accessible group (Mou et al., 2011), given the political environment of China.

Participants for this study were recruited through snowball sampling using the author’s private social network, starting with acquaintances who are currently pursuing degrees at different universities in Dandong, Beijing, Xiamen, and Tianjin, four cities located in Mainland China. These universities all admit students nationwide. The recruitment information was also posted on the Weibo and Wechat homepages of the
researcher’s friends in order to attract more participants. A total of 272 individuals submitted the survey. Out of the 272 responses, 15 were dropped because of incompleteness and obvious self-contradictory answers to reverse-coded questions. Of the remaining 257 participants, 94 were males (36.6 percent) and 163 were females (63.4 percent), who ranged from 18 to 38 years in age (M=24.26, SD=3.38). 19 (7.4 percent) were community college students, and 115 (44.7 percent) were college students. 123 (47.9 percent) were postgraduates, including 103 (40.1 percent) graduate students and 20 (7.8 percent) Ph.D. students. Among these students, 235 (91.4 percent) were Han Chinese, and 22 (8.6 percent) were minority. In terms of political party affiliation, 138 (53.7 percent) were nonpartisan; 49 (19.1 percent) were active applicants for CPC Membership; five (1.9 percent) were probationary party member, and three (1.2 percent) were non-Communist Party members.

**Procedures**

Respondents completed a self-report online survey hosted on wakeforest.qualtrics.com. The questionnaire was administered in Chinese, and the respondents were informed that it would take about 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire, and they were assured of anonymity. Students were not offered any compensation by the researchers for completing the survey.

The 45-item questionnaire was composed of five parts. To avoid earlier questions’ influence on the answers of later questions, these five parts were arranged in the following order. The first part investigated demographic information; the second surveyed political activities on Weibo; then came the political external efficacy measure
and perceived political intimidation measure, and the final part asked participants to report their political belief.

The first four parts were developed in English, and translated into Chinese by previous researchers. The fifth part was developed in Chinese, and back translated into English by a scholar. The scales for major variables had been demonstrated to be reliable by preceding studies.

Measures

**Political Weibo use.** In this study, part of the SNS (social networking sites) Use Dimension scale (Zhang & Lin, 2014) was extracted and adapted to measure political Weibo use. Two multiple choice items inquiring how often the respondents “like” and use only emoji on government and politics posts and others’ comments were added. One open-ended question was also added to make respondents indicate the names of the public accounts they follow to get information about political and public affairs. In accordance with the original scale, the question items adopted a 4-point Likert-type scale with 1 = never, 4=many times.

**External political efficacy.** Four items extracted from the research conducted by Pan et al. (2010) with a 5-point Likert-type scale were used to measure external political efficacy. These items (e.g., as long as ordinary people express their opinions, government departments and officials will actively accept them) had been demonstrated to focus clearly on “system responsiveness,” which is the essence of external political efficacy (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990; Finkel, 1985).

**Perceived political intimidation.** According to the scale created by Mou et al. (2008)
(2011), five items were included in order to measure this concept. Examples of items included “I’m afraid my privacy might be invaded by others on Weibo,” and “I don’t believe people online, because they might be 50-cent party members”. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

**Political Belief.** Political belief in the present study was measured through cultural liberalism, nationalism, political conservatism, and economic sovereignty (Wu, 2014). The 16-item political belief scale tailored in the Chinese context included examples such as “Without democratic education, the people should not be given rights of universal suffrage,” and “Human rights have precedence over national sovereignty” (Chinese Political Compass, n.d.). Respondents were asked to self-report their extent of agreement with the preceding statements on a 4-point Likert style scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree).

**Demographics.** Demographic information including sex, age, ethnicity, level of education, major, and CCP Party Membership were also collected.

**Coding System**
A total of 295 accounts collected from 79 respondents were collected from the open-ended question in the survey were coded using a coding system, which categorized accounts into three exclusive types: hard news, story and anecdote, and commentary, according to the majority of content posted by each account. A composite scale was created by making these types on a continuum and giving every type a certain weight to make a continuous scale of following choice, which showed the degree to which people relied on official information sources.
CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Before hypothesis testing, EFA was conducted for each of the instruments used in the study (Weibo political activities, external self-efficacy items, perceived intimidation items, and political beliefs) to determine the dimensional structure of the instruments for this sample of participants. In all cases, Principal Components Analysis was used to extract the factors. Based on the Component Correlation Matrix, a decision was made for each instrument whether to use an orthogonal (independent) rotation or an oblique (related) rotation. If the Component Correlation Matrix showed that the components (factors) were related, then an oblique rotation (Promax) was used. If the components (factors) did not show any relationship, then an orthogonal rotation (Varimax) was used.

The EFA of Weibo Political Activities instrument used an oblique rotation and yielded three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, explaining 62.43 percent of total variance. Since one question item was highly cross loading on both the first and second factor, it was dropped. Thus, the first factor was “Opinion Expression on Weibo”, which consisted of six items (M=1.63, SD=.72) and had an eigenvalue of 5.19 that explained 43.22 percent of the total variance. The reliability of these six items as indicated by Cronbach’s alpha was .85. The second factor was “Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities”, which had an eigenvalue of 1.20 that explained 10.04 percent of the total variance and was composed of three items (M=1.51, SD=.66), with a Cronbach’s alpha was .69. While this reliability was slightly lower than desirable (.70), due to the limited number of items it was used in this present form with an understanding of its reliability.
level. The third factor was “Passive Weibo Engagement”, with an eigenvalue of 1.08 that explained 9 percent of the total variance, including two items (M=2.28, SD=.98). Therefore, the Weibo political activities scale had 11 items, falling into three sub-dimensions as shown in Table I.

The EFA for the Political Belief Instrument used an orthogonal rotation and found five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, which explained 61.36 percent of variance. The fifth factor only had one item, so it was discarded, which reduced the scale to four factors. Therefore, in accordance with Wu’s research (Wu, 2014), the first factor was “Nationalism” with an eigenvalue of 3.74 that explained 23.38 percent of the total variance had six items (M=2.26, SD=.73). The reliability of these six items as indicated by Cronbach’s alpha was .78. The second factor, “Cultural Liberalism”, had an eigenvalue of 2.18 that explained 13.59 percent of the total variance and was composed of five items (M=2.64, SD=.67), with the reliability of .65. The third factor was “Political Conservatism” with an eigenvalue of 1.49 explaining 9.31 percent of the variance and consisted of two items (M=2.33, SD=.94). The fourth factor “Economic Sovereignty” had an eigenvalue of 1.28 that explained 8.00 percent of variance, and included 2 items (M=2.61, SD=.78). To conclude, the overall political belief scale had four factors and included 15 total items as shown in Table II.

The third EFA was for the External Self-efficacy Scale and used an orthogonal rotation that yielded two factors whose eigenvalues were greater than 1.0 and explained 67.73 percent of the variance. The first factor “Belief in Official Unresponsiveness” had an eigenvalue of 2.32 that explained 46.35 percent of variance and had three items (M=3.10, SD=1.02) with a reliability coefficient of .81. The second factor “Belief in
Individual Influence with Society” had an eigenvalue of 1.07 that explained 21.38 percent of the variance and had two items (M=2.54, SD=.89), as shown in Table III.

The final EFA of the Perceived Political Intimidation scale yielded two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, which explained 69.79 percent of total variance. All the five items were kept in the scale. The first factor was “Intimidation from Information Insecurity”, which had an eigenvalue of 2.41 and explained 48.20 percent of the variance and had three items (M=3.57, SD=.96) with a reliability of .75. The second factor “Intimidation from 50-cent Party” had an eigenvalue of 1.08 that explained 21.59 percent of variance and consisted of two items (M=2.89, SD=.95), shown in Table IV.
Table I. Exploratory Factor Analysis – Weibo Political Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion Expression on Weibo</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Repost articles, photos, or video clips on government, politics, economy, and international relationships.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Write blogs or microblogs on government or politics, such as politics, economics, or international relations.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Explicitly comment government and politics issues.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Like on government and politics posts and others’ comments.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Only emoji on government and politics posts and others’ comments.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Follow official Sina Weibo accounts of governmental or political institutions.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities
7. Upload photos or videos shot by yourself on non-recreational latest events (e.g., a small car accident in front of your house). 1.48 .87 .81

8. Poll online. 1.72 .89 .58

9. Organize extracurricular campaigns or activities via Sina Weibo. 1.31 .73 .73

### Passive Weibo Engagement

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Read news on political and public affairs.</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Leave messages or use @ function on your friends’ homepage.</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalues

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variance explained (%)

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43.22</td>
<td>10.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s alpha

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. All students in elementary, secondary, and higher education, should participate in military training arranged by the state.</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The highest interest of society is national territorial integrity.</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. With sufficient comprehensive strength, China has the right of any actions in order to protect its own interest.</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The nation-state should take measures to train and support athletes to win national glory in various international games.</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The US-led Western countries will not really allow the rise of China as a first-rate strong nation.</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. In the decision making of large-scale engineering projects, societal interests take primacy over individual interests.</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cultural Liberalism
| 7. | When severe incidents that affect social security happen, the government should still ensure open communication of information, even if doing so may risk disturbances. | 2.30 | .94 | .49 |
| 8. | Human rights have precedence over national sovereignty. | 2.24 | 1.08 | .64 |
| 9. | Even if there is population pressure, the nation-state and society have no right to interfere with whether the individual wants children, and how many children s/he wants. | 2.42 | 1.05 | .68 |
| 10. | Images of national leaders and founding figures of the country can be teased in literary and artistic works. | 2.45 | 1.02 | .69 |
| 11. | The Chinese citizen should be allowed to keep a foreign nationality simultaneously. | 2.43 | 1.05 | .67 |

**Political Conservatism**

| 12. | The multi-party system of the West does not suit the conditions of China. | 2.25 | 1.04 | .82 |
| 13. | Imitating Western-Style freedom of speech will cause social disorder in China. | 2.39 | 1.03 | .85 |

**Economic Sovereignty**

| 14. | The tariff on imported products should be high to protect domestic industries. | 2.61 | .96 | .80 |
| 15. | The realms that have greatly to do with national security, national economy, and people’s livelihood must be in the charge | 2.59 | .97 | .72 |
of state-owned enterprises.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eigenvalues</th>
<th>3.74</th>
<th>2.18</th>
<th>1.49</th>
<th>1.28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variance explained (%)</td>
<td>23.38</td>
<td>13.59</td>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III. Exploratory Factor Analysis – External Self-efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in Official Unresponsiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Government officials at all levels basically do not care about the opinions of ordinary people like me. *</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. No matter how and what ordinary people do, their impacts are little on the government policies or actions. *</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Now officials at all levels only care about themselves, rather than ordinary people’s benefits. *

Belief in Individual Influence with Society

4. Every citizen, including me, is likely to have impacts on the government policies and actions.  
5. As long as ordinary people express their opinions, government departments and officials will actively accept them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intimidation from Information Insecurity</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2.81</th>
<th>1.84</th>
<th>.85</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eigenvalues</th>
<th>2.32</th>
<th>1.07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variance explained (%)</td>
<td>46.35</td>
<td>21.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV. Exploratory Factor Analysis – Perceived Political Intimidation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intimidation from Information Insecurity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. I am afraid that others will use the human flesh search engine to target me.  
   
   3.03  1.26  .74

2. I am afraid my privacy might be invaded by others online.  
   
   3.87  1.14  .86

3. People online can use all means to find my information.  
   
   3.88  1.14  .80

**Intimidation from 50-cent Party**

4. I do not believe people online, because they might be 50-cent party members.  
   
   3.23  1.13  .78

5. I think others could be 50-cent party members, especially when their opinions about topical issues are not consistent with my own.  
   
   2.54  1.07  .89

**Eigenvalues**  

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Variance explained (%)**  

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48.20</td>
<td>21.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cronbach’s alpha**  

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* - Reverse coded item
Hypotheses and Research Questions Testing

H1a: External self-efficacy is positively related to political activities on Weibo.

H1a tested the relationship between the dimensions of external self-efficacy and of Weibo political activities. To test this hypothesis, a zero-order correlation was used. There was no significant relationship between Belief in Official Unresponsiveness, the first factor of external self-efficacy, and any of the three types of Weibo political activities (r= .03; r= -.05; r= -.07). There was a significant positive relationship between Belief in Individual Influence with Society, the second sub-dimension of external self-efficacy, and Weibo Opinion Expression (r= .17, p< .01), and between Belief in Individual Influence with Society and Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities (r=. 24, p< .01). Further, the relationship between the Belief in Individual Influence with Society and Passive Weibo Engagement was also positively significant (r= .12, p< .05). Therefore, H1a is partially supported, and the second sub-dimension of external self-efficacy (Belief in Individual Influence with Society) is positively related to Weibo Political Activities.

H1b: Controlled for external self-efficacy, perceived political intimidation is negatively related to the number of political activities on Weibo.

H1b was related to the effect of perceived political intimidation on Weibo political activities. It predicted that controlled for external self-efficacy, perceived political intimidation was negatively related to the number of Weibo political activities. To test this, two partial correlations were run with the second factor of external self-efficacy (Belief in Individual Influence with Society) as the control variable. For Political
Intimidation from Information Insecurity, the first factor of political intimidation, it had an approaching significant relationship with Opinion Expression on Weibo (r = -.09, p = .08) and Passive Weibo Engagement (r = .08, p = .09). However, there was no significant relationship between Political Intimidation from Information Insecurity and Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities (r = .01, p = ns). For Political Intimidation from 50-cent Party, the second factor of political intimidation, there was no significant relationship with Opinion Expression on Weibo (r = -.03, p = ns), Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities (r = .06, p = ns), or Passive Weibo Engagement (r = -.01, p = ns).

According to the overall zero-order correlation conducted in H1a, there was no relationship between the first factor of external self-efficacy (Belief in Official Unresponsiveness) and any kind of Weibo political activities, so there is no need to control the Belief in Official Unresponsiveness. Thus, H1b is only supported in one case, where controlled for the second sub-dimension of external self-efficacy (Belief in Individual Influence with Society), Intimidation from Information Insecurity is negatively related to Opinion Expression on Weibo.

**H2: People with extreme political belief engage in more political activities on Weibo than those with moderate belief.**

To test H2, which predicted that people with extreme political beliefs have higher degree of Weibo political activities, the four political belief variables were recoded in the following way. The values more than one standard deviation (1SD) away from the mean value, and less than one standard deviation (1SD) away from the mean value, were both
were recoded as moderate (0). A one-way analysis of variation (ANOVA) with three kinds of Weibo political activities as the dependent variables and four categories of political belief as the independent variables was conducted. According to Table V below, first, Political Belief in Nationalism had a significant effect on Opinion Expression on Weibo ($F(1, 250) = 7.13$, $p < .01$) with people holding extreme beliefs in nationalism ($M=1.79, SD=.84$) having higher levels of Opinion Expression on Weibo than those who hold moderate belief ($M=1.55, SD=.62$). People who have extreme belief also had significant more Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities ($M=1.62, SD=.76$) than those who are not extreme ($M=1.45, SD=.57$), $F (1, 250) = 4.43, p < .05$. The difference between extreme people and moderate people on Passive Weibo Engagement approached significance, $F (1, 250) = 3.15, p = .08$, and extreme people ($M=2.43, SD=1.05$) had more Passive Weibo Engagement than moderate people ($M=2.21, SD=.92$). Second, extreme and moderate belief in cultural liberalism had no significant effect on Opinion Expression on Weibo ($F (1, 250) = .00, p=ns$) or Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities ($F (1, 250) = .37, p=ns$). However, the difference between extremists and moderates on Passive Weibo Engagement approached significance ($F (1, 250) = 2.88, p = .09$), and extreme people ($M=2.46, SD=1.02$) had more Passive Weibo Engagement than moderate people ($M=2.23, SD=.96$). Third, it revealed the difference in Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities between extreme and moderate political conservatism belief holders was statistically significant, $F (1, 252) = 7.27, p < .01$. Specifically, those who had extreme belief in political conservatism had significantly less Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities ($M=1.36, SD=.55$) than those who were moderate ($M=1.59, SD=.69$), which is
the opposite of what was predicted. However, extreme and moderate belief in political conservatism has no significant effect on Opinion Expression on Weibo ($F (1, 252) = 2.57, p=ns$) or Passive Weibo Engagement ($F (1, 252) = .09, p=ns$). Fourth, extreme and moderate levels of belief in economic sovereignty had no significant effect on Opinion Expression on Weibo ($F (1, 246) = .66, p=ns$), Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities ($F (1, 246) = .73, p=ns$), or Passive Weibo Engagement ($F (1, 246) =.01, p=ns$). Thus, H2 was partially supported.

Table V. One-Way Analysis of Variation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Belief</th>
<th>Weibo Political Activities</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nationalism</strong></td>
<td>Opinion Expression on Weibo</td>
<td>Between 1</td>
<td>7.132</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Within 250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 251</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities</td>
<td>Between 1</td>
<td>4.432</td>
<td>.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Within 250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 251</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passive Weibo Engagement</td>
<td>Between 1</td>
<td>3.148</td>
<td>.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Within 250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 251</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Liberalism</strong></td>
<td>Opinion Expression on Weibo</td>
<td>Between 1</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Within 250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 251</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities</td>
<td>Between 1</td>
<td>.367</td>
<td>.545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Within 250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 251</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passive Weibo Engagement</td>
<td>Between 1</td>
<td>2.878</td>
<td>.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Within 250</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Total 251</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Political</strong></td>
<td>Opinion Expression on Weibo</td>
<td>Between 1</td>
<td>2.568</td>
<td>.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Within 252</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 253</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active Participation in Other</td>
<td>Between 1</td>
<td>7.270</td>
<td>.007</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Within 252</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic Sovereignty</td>
<td>Weibo Activities</td>
<td>Within</td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>----------------------</td>
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<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Passive Weibo Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within</td>
<td>246</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>247</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities</td>
<td>Between</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within</td>
<td>246</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>247</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Weibo Engagement</td>
<td>Between</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within</td>
<td>246</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>247</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RQ1**: What is the relationship between Weibo users’ following choices and their external self-efficacy and perceived political intimidation?

**RQ2**: What is the relationship between Weibo users’ following choices and their political belief?

In addition, the study also examined the relationships between Weibo users’ following choices, and their political attitudes (external self-efficacy and perceived political intimidation), and their political beliefs respectively. First, the researcher recoded the responses of the open-ended question in the survey, which asked participants to indicate at least five verified Weibo accounts they regularly follow that have posts regarding public and political affairs. A coding system was adopted, which categorized a total of 295 accounts collected from 79 respondents into three exclusive types: hard news accounts, story and anecdote accounts, and commentary accounts, according to the majority of content posted by each account. The number of each type of accounts was
calculated. The author then created a continuum of categories reflecting the concept of diversity of opinions followed with hard news weighted as 1 at one end of the continuum where all of the sources were government related, story and anecdote weighted 2 in the middle where some diversity of opinion existed but expressed indirectly, and commentary weighted 3 at the other end where some diversity of opinion existed with more direct expression. After that, a new continuous scale of following choices was generated using the following formula:

\[
\text{Following Choice} = \frac{\sum \text{weight} \times n}{N}
\]

(For each respondent, \(n\) represents the number of each type of the account; \(N\) represents the total number of accounts indicated.) This formula not only takes into account the continuum of categories but also weights it by the number of examples that fell in each category.

Finally, a zero-order correlation was run and revealed the following results (shown in Table VI) to answer RQ1 and RQ2.

The first research question is concerning the relationship between Weibo users’ following choices and their external self-efficacy and perceived political intimidation. There was a significant positive relationship between Perceived Intimidation from Information Insecurity, the first sub-dimension of perceived political intimidation, and Following Choices \((r = .36, p < .01)\), which means people relying more on non-governmental information sources perceive more intimidation from information insecurity. The relationship between Following Choices and Perceived Intimidation from
50-cent Party, the second sub-dimension of perceived political intimidation, approached significant (r = .16, p = .08). There was no significant relationship between Following Choices and either of the two factors of external self-efficacy (r = -.11, r = .01).

The second research question is about the relationship between Weibo users’ following choices and their political belief. First, there was a significant positive relationship between Following Choices and Political Conservatism, the third factor of political belief (r = .34, p < .01). That is to say, people relying more on non-governmental information sources tend to be more politically liberal. Second, there is also a significant positive relationship between Following Choices and Cultural Liberalism, the second factor of political belief (r = .22, p < .05). That is to say, people relying more on non-governmental information sources also tend to be more culturally liberal. There was no significant relationship between Following Choices with the other two factors of political belief (r = -.004, r = .10).
Table VI. Correlations between Key Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>V1</th>
<th>V2</th>
<th>V3</th>
<th>V4</th>
<th>V5</th>
<th>V6</th>
<th>V7</th>
<th>V8</th>
<th>V9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1: Scale of Following</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-.107</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.362**</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>.338**</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.218*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2: Belief in Official Unresponsiveness</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.202**</td>
<td>-.233**</td>
<td>-.335**</td>
<td>-.219**</td>
<td>-.151**</td>
<td>-.115*</td>
<td>-.075</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3: Belief in Individual Influence with society</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>-.059</td>
<td>-.080</td>
<td>-.135*</td>
<td>-.167**</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V4: Intimidation from information insecurity</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.368**</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V5: Intimidation from 50-cent Party</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>.160**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V6: Political Conservatism</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.411**</td>
<td>.169**</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V7: Nationalism</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.196**</td>
<td>-.150**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V8: Economic Sovereignty</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.115*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V9: Cultural Liberalism</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).
RQ3: What is the relationship between political belief and the number of political activities on Weibo?

In order to address the third research question, which is regarding the relationship between political belief and the number of political activities on Weibo, a zero-order correlation was used first. However, it only revealed that the relationship between Economic Sovereignty and Online Expression on Weibo approached significant (r= .10, p=.06). Other results showed no significant relationship between any of the political activities on Weibo and any other factor of the Political Belief.

To further explore the data, a one-way ANOVA was undertaken with Political Belief as the independent variable and Political Activities on Weibo as the dependent variable. The four Political Belief variables were respectively recoded in the following way. The values more than the mean values were recoded as right/liberal (1), and those less than the mean values were recoded as left/authoritarian (0). It revealed that there was an approaching significant difference in Passive Weibo Engagement between left and right people in Political Conservatism. Those who were right had almost significantly (F (1, 252) =3.84, p = .051) more Passive Weibo Engagement (M=2.41, SD=.98) than those who were left in Political Conservatism (M=2.17, SD=.97). However, there were no other statistically significant differences in any sub-dimensions of Political Activities on Weibo between left and right groups in Nationalism, Economic Sovereignty, or Cultural Liberalism.
CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

Contextualized in the unique Chinese cyberspace, this study examined how external self-efficacy, perceived political intimidation, and political belief associate with engagement in political activities on Sina Weibo among Chinese undergraduate and graduate students. It not only brought new insight to the relationship between political belief and political activities on weibo, but also provided a tentative way to categorize weibo accounts based on their content into three exclusive groups, as well as created a composite scale to represent the degree to which each respondent relies on official information sources, in order to draw the relationship between account type followed and political perspectives (external self-efficacy, perceived political intimidation, and political belief). The following discussion will summarize the findings, implications, and limitations of this study, which should serve as the foundation for future research.

Findings & Implications

First, this study revealed that the external political efficacy is a multi-dimensional construct with two factors yielded by EFA. They were Belief in Official Unresponsiveness and Belief in Individual Influence with Society, which is consistent with previous studies (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990; Finkel, 1985; Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954). However, a unique discrepancy existed in the relationships between each of the two factors and the number of three types of political activities engaged on Weibo. That is, only Belief in Individual Influence with Society is significantly positively related to Weibo opinion expression, Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities, and Passive
Weibo Engagement. Even though previous research has theoretically distinguished internal political efficacy from external political efficacy fairly well (e.g., Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991), more attention should be paid to the differences between these two factors in order to pinpoint the real incentive for civic participation. This finding can strengthen our understanding of the predictive role of external efficacy in online political discussion and other political activities, which echoes preceding research (e.g., Mou, Atkin, & Fu, 2011), but it may also reflect certain weaknesses of existing literature in treating external political efficacy as a unidimensional concept.

Second, after testing H1b, the present research did not demonstrate Intimidation from 50-cent party, the second factor of perceived intimidation, as a strong predictor for Opinion Expression, Active Participation in Other Weibo Activities, or Passive Weibo Engagement, even with external political efficacy controlled as Mou et al. (2011) have suggested. One of the reasons could lie in the question items of the scale, which basically inquired respondents’ attitudes about intimidation from information insecurity and the attack of 50-cent party. However, as commented by the original creator of the scale, “Some items may be outdated a little.” In other words, these issues at this moment may no longer be the major concerns of Chinese students when they engage in political activities on Sina Weibo. In actuality, tens of the respondents have asked the author “whether my ‘wrong’ political belief would be reported to the authority”, and “whether I would be invited for tea”, a euphemism for being questioned by the police because of inappropriate political opinions in the Chinese political language (Wu, 2013). Therefore, before totally denying the influence of political intimidation on political activities...
participation on Weibo, more research should be done on Chinese netizens’ fear from other types of political intimidation.

The other reason may be the overall political apathy and civic disengagement of Chinese undergraduate and graduate students, which result from “[b]lind subordination to authority” (Deng, 1998, p. 137). This was indicated by one of the respondents, who wrote down “I can’t recall any, because I’m on Weibo just for entertainment rather than topical issues” when he was asked to list at list five Weibo accounts about political and public issues. According to Li’s research (2008) conducted in Ningbo University, a national university located on the southeast coast of Mainland China, 8% of college students were not concerned about whether or not the governments have good governance in this country at all; 18% of the survey participants showed no interest in domestic and foreign occurrences. When respondents are apathetic about political issues, they may not even have the awareness and knowledge to make sense of the intimidation.

Third, in terms of the relationships between political belief and political activities, the current study has found that nationalism and political conservatism were two important factors that contribute to the differences between right and left people in political activities on Weibo. This is probably because issues of these two categories are most frequently mentioned and discussed on different media, either by the CCP or the opinion leaders online, which has yielded a clearly split opinion sphere. Specifically, regarding nationalism, this study found that the extremists had more opinion expression and active participation on Weibo activities, and almost more passive engagement on Weibo than moderate. This not only reaffirmed the association of nationalism with online news use and political engagement (Hyun & Kim, 2015), as well as the link between
nationalistic attitude and motivation to use the Internet for information-seeking and social interaction purposes (Hyun, Kim, Sun, 2014), but also provided empirical evidence for the amount of engagement in Weibo political activities of people who scored extremely low in nationalism.

Furthermore, in relation to political conservatism, this study revealed that right-wing people almost had more Passive Weibo Engagement than left-wing people. One possible reason for this is that right people holding beliefs against the Communist regime tend to read more extensively and think more seriously before act. In addition, surprisingly, extremists had less active participation in other Weibo activities than moderate. This finding calls for further studies to provide theoretical frames to explain.

Last, the study adopted a coding system which categorized verified or official Sina Weibo accounts into three exclusive types, 1) hard news accounts, 2) story and anecdote accounts, and 3) commentary accounts. The author also created a continuous scale which put explicit official news and individualized interpretations on both ends, and the implicit story and anecdote in the middle, and gave each type a certain weight, in order to examine the relationships between Weibo users’ following choices, political attitudes (external self-efficacy and perceived political intimidation), and political belief. It showed that first, people relying more on non-governmental information sources perceived more intimidation from information insecurity. Second, people relying more on non-governmental information sources tend to be more politically liberal. Third, people relying more on non-governmental information sources also tend to be more culturally liberal.
These findings can be expounded in two steps. First, based on the accessibility principle of Shrum’s cognitive theory, when respondents were asked to list five accounts they followed which frequently posed public and political issues, what they wrote down tended to be those that most readily came to their mind, probably because of the frequency, recency, or relevance of these accounts. Second, according to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, consuming different media content can help fulfill different motivations. Based on Lin’s categories (1999), following news accounts indicates surveillance motivation; following commentary accounts suggests personal identity motivation; following story and anecdote accounts implies escape or entertainment motivation. Thus, people who reported following more commentary accounts are likely to seek more opinions instead of just hard news or entertainment, which indicates more serious thinking in order to figure out “why it is” rather than merely “what it is”. Therefore, they are exposed to more schools of thoughts, and inclined to be more critical of the Chinese society and political institutions than other groups of people.

Limitations and Future Research

Strengths of this study include 1) the introduction of political belief into the model, 2) the exploration of the role of political belief on political activities engagement on Sina Weibo. and 3) the coding of Weibo following behavior. However, certain limitations should also be noted. First, there are concerns regarding the reliability of several instruments to measure their constructs. Because EFA yielded a few factors which were theoretically meaningful but only had two question items, the measurement may not be highly reliable. Second, participants were asked to self-report the degree to which they
agreed to each statement on 5-point or 4-point Likert-type scales, which may not be very accurate, because the range of the scale is not broad enough on one hand, and on the other hand, they may feel hesitant to answer those politically sensitive questions honestly. The third limitation of this study was that the results of this study only reveal correlations, instead of causal relationships. For example, this thesis cannot answer whether it is the Weibo following choices that lead to different political attitudes and political belief, or vice versa. Future research needs to further explore the direction of each relationship.

Fourth, the method of coding Weibo accounts can be refined. Through a preliminary analysis of the posts of every account, it is clear that the criteria of content selection of each account are quite different. As a result, some accounts labelled the same still have considerable differences in their posts. This requires detailed content analysis in the future, which is far beyond the scope of this study. Lastly, other variables, like political knowledge and cynicism, should be taken into consideration when we examine the political belief of Chinese citizens, because people who are liberal or right are more likely to have more political knowledge to counteract the influence of CCP’s long-time propaganda about its ideology.
REFERENCES


Campbell, S. W., & Russo, T. C. (2003). The social construction of mobile telephony: An application of the social influence model to perceptions and uses of mobile phones


of political talk and discussion engagement. *Communication Research, 32*(1), 87-111.


http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2378/2089


# APPENDIX I QUESTIONNAIRE

## Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Chinese Translation</th>
<th>Original English</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>性别：男/女</td>
<td>Sex: Male/Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>年龄</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>民族</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>学历：高中/大学/研究生/博士</td>
<td>Level of Education: High School/College/Postgraduate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>专业</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>是否为中共党员（请指明是否为预备党员、入党积极分子）</td>
<td>CCP Party Membership (Please specify whether you are a probationary party member/Active Applicants for CPC Membership)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Political weibo Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Chinese Translation</th>
<th>Original English</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Never(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Many Times(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the last two years, how often did you use the following functions on Sina Weibo? Please use a 4-point scale, 1 = “never”, and 4 = “many times”.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1: almost never, 4: often)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>阅读时事新闻</td>
<td>Read hard news</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>分享（或“转发”）与政治、经济、国际关系相关的文字、音乐、视频</td>
<td>Repost photos or videos clips on government or politics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>上传原创的新近事件的照片或影片（比如，你家门外发生一场小车祸，你将事件现场的照片和经过拍下来并上传至你的相册）</td>
<td>Upload photos or videos shot by yourself on non-recreational latest events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>在投票活动中投票</td>
<td>Vote online</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>撰写议论政治、经济、国际关系等政治和政府相关的日志或微博</td>
<td>Write blogs on government or politics, such as politics, economics, or international relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>参加微博“话题”讨论</td>
<td>Join topic discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>就和政治、政府有关的内容通过评论表达观点</td>
<td>Express opinions explicitly on government and politics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>就和政治、政府有关的内容给他人点赞</td>
<td>Like on government and politics posts and others’ comments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>就和政治、政府有关的内容仅通过发表表情表达观点</td>
<td>Only emoji on government and politics posts and others’ comments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>在朋友的个人页面上留言或者使用微博的@功能</td>
<td>Leave messages or use @ function</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>关注政府部门的官方页面或微博</td>
<td>Follow and interact with official Sina Weibo accounts of governmental or political institutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>通过微博发起和组织课外活动</td>
<td>Organize nongovernmental campaigns or activities via Sina Weibo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>请至少列举出五个你在新浪微博上关注的与时事政治有关的公众号</td>
<td>Please list at least five official/verified accounts you follow on Sina Weibo which frequently have posts regarding public affairs or political issues.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**External Political Efficacy**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Chinese Translation</th>
<th>Original English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>包括我在内的每个公民都可能对政府政策和行为产生影响。</td>
<td>Every citizen, including me, is likely to have impacts on the government policies and actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>各级政府领导基本上不会在意我这样的普通人的看法。</td>
<td>Government officials at all levels basically do not care about the opinions of ordinary people like me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>无论老百姓怎么做, 都很难对政府政策或行为有什么影响。</td>
<td>No matter how and what ordinary people do, their impacts are little on the government policies or actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>只要普通民众表达他们的意见, 政府部门和领导就会积极采纳。</td>
<td>As long as ordinary people express their opinions, government departments and officials will actively accept them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>如今的各级领导干部基本上是只顾自己, 而不是老百姓的利益。</td>
<td>Now, officials at all levels only care about themselves, rather than ordinary people’s benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Chinese Translation</td>
<td>Original English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>我担心网上的人会用 人肉搜索引擎来攻击我。</td>
<td>I’m afraid that others will use the human flesh search engine to target me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>我担心我的个人隐私会被别人侵犯。</td>
<td>I’m afraid my privacy might be invaded by others online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>网上的人可以通过各种方法找到我的个人信息。</td>
<td>People online can use all means to find my information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>我不真正相信网上发表时事政治观点的人，因为他们有可能是网络评论员（俗称五毛党）。</td>
<td>I don’t believe people online, because they might be 50-cent party members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>我怀疑别人可能是网络评论员（俗称五毛党），尤其是当他们的时事政治观点跟我的不一致的时候。</td>
<td>I doubt people are 50-cent party members, especially when they have different opinions from mine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Original Chinese</td>
<td>English Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>西方的多党制不适合中国国情。</td>
<td>The multi-party system of the West does not suit the conditions of China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>在中国照搬西方式的言论自由会导致社会失序。</td>
<td>Imitating Western-style freedom of speech will cause social disorder in China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>发生重大社会安全事件时，即使认为信息公开会导致骚乱的风险，政府仍应该开放信息传播。</td>
<td>When severe incidents that affect social security happen, the government should still ensure open communication of information, even if doing so may risk disturbances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>无论中小学生或大学生，都应参加由国家统一安排的军训。</td>
<td>All students in elementary, secondary, and higher education, should participate in military training arranged by the state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>国家的统一和领土完整是社会的最高利益。</td>
<td>The highest interest of society is national territorial integrity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>如果国家综合实力许可，那么中国有权为了维护自己的利益而采取任何行动。</td>
<td>With sufficient comprehensive strength, China has the right of any actions in order to protect its own interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>条件允许的话应该武力统一台湾。</td>
<td>If the conditions allow it, we should seek the reunification of Taiwan through military measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>国家应当采取措施培养和支持体育健儿在各种国际比赛场合为国争光。</td>
<td>The nation-state should take measures to train and support athletes to win national glory in various international games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>人权高于主权。</td>
<td>Human rights have precedence over national sovereignty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>以美国为首的西方国家不可能真正容许中国崛起成为一流强国。</td>
<td>The US-led Western countries will not really allow the rise of China as a first-rate strong nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>即使有人口压力，国家和社会也无权干涉个人要不要孩子，要几个孩子。</td>
<td>Even if there is population pressure, the nation-state and society have no right to interfere with whether the individual wants children, and how many children s/he wants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>国家领导人及开国领袖的形象可以作为文艺作品的对象。</td>
<td>Images of national leaders and founding figures of the country can be teased in literary and artistic works.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>应该允许中国公民同时具有外国国籍。</td>
<td>The Chinese citizen should be allowed to keep a foreign nationality simultaneously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>在重大工程项目的决策中，个人利益应该为社会利益让路。</td>
<td>In the decision making of large-scale engineering projects, societal interests take primacy over individual interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>应当对国外同类产品征收高额关税来保护国内民族工业。</td>
<td>The tariff on imported products should be high to protect domestic industries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>那些关系到国家安全，以及其他重要国计民生的领域，必须全部由国有企业掌控。</td>
<td>The realms that have greatly to do with national security, national economy, and people's livelihood must be in the charge of state-owned enterprises.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CURRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION

M.A.  Expected 2016  Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC. Communication.

B.A.  2009-2013  Nankai University, Tianjin, Tianjin, China.

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Research Experience

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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08/2015—Current  Freelance Chinese-English translator in education and sports

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