

**Making Media Work:
Public Opinion Shaping in Sino-South Korean Relations**

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Abstract

How does the Chinese party-state make use of mass media to narrate state agendas regarding fluctuated foreign relations in the face of challenges from a rising nationalism and media reforms? What roles do official media, commercialized media and new media play in this process? Do the latter ones run counter to the state agenda by any chance or help maintain it? This project attempts to address the questions with an in-depth content analysis to provide a snapshot of the ways in which the Chinese propaganda machine has adapted to the new era and fostered sophisticated methods to convey messages to its audiences and reveal the roles different media outlets are playing by looking at news reporting about South Korea between 2012-2018. Findings suggest that 1) The state not only appeals to the nationalist audience to show aggressive official stance but also tries to avoid breaking the long-established, well-maintained diplomatic ties by exploiting different types of media; 2) state-run media play a major role of setting media agenda while commercialized media outlets help amplify official discourse but also make different voices from the mainstream state agenda; 3) to target and affect different readership, media outlets may differentiate tones according to specific platform and new media are mostly used to accentuate the diplomatic confrontations to cater to heated nationalistic angers.

Introduction

Over recent years, China has experienced fluctuated bilateral relations with South Korea.¹ China observers, although aware of Sino-South Korea strategic cooperative partnership, were pessimistic about a longstanding relation before 2013 (Hwang 2012). Such concerns, however, vanished and transformed into balancing and then intimate Sino-Korea relations after 2013 when Park Geun-hye was elected the 18th South Korean president (Kai 2016). People's Press (Renmin Chubanshe), a propaganda organ of CCP, published Chinese translated biography of Park in 2013.² Relations strengthened when Xi Jinping later became the first Chinese leader who paid an official visit to South Korea without stopping by Pyongyang first. Intimacy then turned into honeymoon in 2015, marked by Park's controversial attendance in the military parade for China's 70th anniversary commemoration of the end of WWII "pushing back against the pressure in the U.S. and Japan", as was commented by *Global Times*, a well-known pro-government nationalist tabloid in China (Junsheng Wang 2016). All honeymoon dreams were mired in a slump, nevertheless, as Park decided to deploy Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD) in February 2016 and declared an official agreement in July. Feeling exasperated, the Chinese government took advantage of both state-run and commercialized media assets to mobilize the masses into an anti-Korea movement for retaliation. For example, it was widely reported that heavy metals content in more than half of South Korea made cosmetics exceeded national standards (see, for example, The Beijing News 2016). Multiple newspapers also kept reporting how some local villagers in South Korea demonstrated against the plan of THAAD (Bian 2016). *Global Times* (2016) invited several IR experts in China to brainstorm why China must retaliate South Korea and discuss in detail how the Chinese government avenges through economic sanctions.

It is quite common for authoritarian states like China to use propaganda to maintain control over their populations, influence public opinion, shape political narratives, and to mobilize the grassroots into various campaigns in the face of ebb and flow of foreign relations; after all, China has been notoriously regarded as a propaganda state "informational indicators" such as newspaper articles, slogans to encourage the masses into revolutionary campaigns (see, for example Bennett 1976; Cell 1977; Perry 2012). However, the Chinese party-state is now encountered with two significant challenges that likely weaken state capacity to achieve such goals political and diplomatic goals: a rise of nationalist expression as well as media modernization reforms. Situated in such challenges, how does the authoritarian China manipulate public opinion amid the Sino-Korean diplomatic crisis through mass media?

This project attempts to answer the question with an in-depth content analysis to provide a snapshot of the ways in which the Chinese propaganda machine has adapted to the new era and fostered sophisticated methods to convey messages to its audiences and reveal the roles different

¹ South Korea is interchangeably used with Korea. Unless otherwise noticed, Korea refers specifically to South Korea. North Korea appears as North Korea or DPRK in this paper.

² Kim Byung-man. 2013. translated by Xing Liju and Chen chao. *Juewang Chuangzao Xiwang: Piao Jinhui de Chuanqi Rensheng* (Despairs Creates Hopes: The Legendary Life of Park Geun-hye). People's Press (Renmin Chubanshe)

media outlets are playing by looking at news reporting about South Korea between 2012-2018. Findings suggest that 1) The state not only appeals to the nationalist audience to show aggressive official stance but also tries to avoid breaking the long-established, well-maintained diplomatic ties by exploiting different types of media; 2) state-run media play a major role of setting media agenda while commercialized media outlets help amplify official discourse but also make different voices from the mainstream state agenda; 3) to target and affect different readership, media outlets may differentiate tones according to specific platform and new media are mostly used to accentuate the diplomatic confrontations to cater to heated nationalistic angers.

Propagation through Media: New Challenges

Since its foundation, the Communist Party in China has drawn on totalitarian regimes' propaganda methods to define official rhetoric and shape public opinion. In recent several years, however, two possible challenges are inclined to make the party-state's absolute control over its population negotiable: the challenge from modernization of Chinese mass media, resulting in the party-state's declining capacity to set up official agenda and rising nationalist sentiments as a result of the party's increasing demands for shoring up legitimacy by mobilizing antiforeign fervor.

Challenge 1: Demands for nationalist mobilization

The Chinese government has been obsessed with an intention to fuel anti-foreign sentiments particularly after the "Tiananmen Incident" as a way to rebuild faith and confidence among Chinese people for bolstering a discredited regime and filling ideological vacuum thereafter left, at times by a narrative of China's century of shame and humiliation at the hands of imperialist powers (Lieberthal 2004; Saich 2004; S. Zhao 1998; Zheng 1999). The humiliated past gets ordinary people ingrained in such collective memories and forges the society's ideology of nationalism containing a strong antiforeign sentiment and a victim complex, calling for the Chinese government to redeem the past humiliations and take back all "lost territories" (Reilly 2012; X. Wu 2007). Regardless, the Chinese government has made effective efforts to contain popular nationalism under the guidance of Deng Xiaoping's "*taoguang yanghui*" (keep a low profile and bide your time) maxim.

Currently, however, the party-state is experiencing a "strident turn" in which the ordinary people as well as the Chinese state together demand to take a confrontational position and to adopt tougher measures against the Western powers (S. Zhao 2013). On one hand, CCP is currently based on the performance-based legitimacy (D. Zhao 2009) but domestic instability, ethnic unrest and the present economic slowdown in China together push Beijing to behave more confrontational and aggressive in maritime disputes for a rally effect (Duan 2017). On the other, the rise of China's economic power and its role as an international powerhouse—or put it in another way, Chinese policy makers' careful assessment of China's relative power—empowers Chinese leaders to make more assertive and proactive claims on diplomatic conflicts (S. Zhao 2013, 545). Therefore, the

state propaganda machine is deeply embedded in a high demand for tougher clout on foreign affairs dripping from above and anti-foreign outburst from bottom.

But meantime, it is frequently asked whether Xi Jinping since his presidency in 2012 is redefining or departing from the “lying low” strategy, should the government follow the old diplomacy in a new century, or is it necessary to interpret *taoguang taohui* differently (Hu 2018; Jianwei Wang 2018; J. Wu 2012).

Challenge 2: Modernization of Media

Two waves of media reforms also likely compromise the party-state’s capacity of opinion manipulating. On one hand, a media marketization reform occurred some thirty years ago pushes many media outlets to make money from subscription and advertising as the government reduced or withdrew state subsidies. To survive the market competition and raise profile, nonofficial newspapers begin to publish critical news stories divergent from state agenda and thus change the political and media landscape. Many believe that such wave of commercialization, by opening a space for vibrant public sphere, has empowered the commercialized media outlets (Lei 2018) and destabilized media practices (Ma 2000, 23). Critical journalists, at a certain degree, are able to maintain a fluid, collaborative tie with central authorities through continuous acts of guarded improvisation to achieve the goal of improved governance (Repnikova 2018).

On the other hand, the explosion of information and communication technologies (ICT) has increasingly marginalized traditional media as more and more people turn to the Internet for political expression (Yang 2009). Many traditional media outlets have registered account on the Chinese microblog server, Weibo, to tweet real-time reports and breaking news much earlier before news get printed in papers, often in a more liberal light. According to Lei and Zhou’s (2015) observation, major Internet portals not always reprint news articles in accordance with but instead contradict the requirement of Department of Propaganda.

Yet, many others argue that neither marketization nor information technology help produce a liberalized media market in China because varied range of newspapers and cascade of many voices make no difference provided that the party-state has exerted tight control over the media for its own agenda; thus, on major issues the latter speak with only one voice conforming to the party line (Brady 2008; Hassid 2008; Stockmann 2013). The state has also adapted their propaganda strategies by adopting more sophisticated methods to influence public opinion and shape political discourse through Internet policing (Brady 2008), self-regulation of Internet service providers (MacKinnon 2009), government employed internet commentators (fifty-cent army) (Han 2015; King, Pan, and Roberts 2017) and even search results burying (Roberts 2018).

How does the Chinese state deal with these challenges at the same time under Xi Jinping’s reign? In other words, how do the central authorities make use of mass media to narrate state agendas encountered nationalistic upsurge but also follow the guidance of lying low in foreign relations? What roles do official media, commercialized media and new media play in this process? Do the latter ones run counter to the state agenda by any chance or help maintain it? There is a rich body of literature providing invaluable insights into nationalism and opinion management. Yet,

few of them unravel the dynamics of how the Chinese state tackle an interaction between top-down nationalistic demands, bottom-up xenophobic sentiments and requests to keep a low profile through opinion management. In addition, we may need more scholarly attention paid to distinguishing roles of different types of media, especially the same media brands on disparate platforms, playing in the manipulation process.

To fill in the gap and fully examine the above questions, this paper focuses on news reports germane to South Korea published between 2012 and 2018 (from the year of Xi Jinping's first presidency till now) by official and commercialized newspapers and tweets posted on their Weibo accounts. The paper focuses on South Korea for several reasons. First, in a vast and burgeoning literature on China's state and society interaction in foreign relations, very few attempts have ever been made to explore Sino-South Korea interactions, let alone popular sentiment shaping. This is understandable. Unlike states such as U.S. and Japan over which a national discourse of shame and humiliation is shaped because of wars, nor like North Korea who plays an enormous role in determining (in)stability in the Korean Peninsula and at times compromises China's global image as a rising power, South Korea is a marginalized country case being long forgotten in terms of its weaker diplomatic and military power.

Second, popular discourse on South Korea contradicted with the state narratives before the advent of THAAD. South Korea had dedicated to boosting strategic and cooperative partnership with China since establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 with no major confrontations identified at the diplomatic level until THAAD. The Chinese government, thus, usually portrayed Korea as "Chinese people's old friend" (zhongguo renmin de lao pengyou). At the grassroots level, in contrast, anti-Korea hatred become a major trend as many Chinese people regard South Korea as a lilliputian state (danwanxiaoguo) that at times steal China's civilization and make them their own (for news reporting on such issues, see, for example, Sohu.com 2017). A project on South Korea, therefore, allows us to unravel how the Chinese government appeals to different voices.

This paper contributes to the academic entrepreneurship in three ways. First, it adds to the current China politics literature as one piece among the few that focus on China's media propaganda on South Korean issues. Second, it is trying to engage China's state opinion control in the state's response to rising nationalism and a struggle to follow the old diplomatic thoughts, which is barely dealt with. Last, it also aims to offer an empirical insight into media politics by examining roles of different types of media in a time- and platform-sensitive manner.

Data

In order to trace the process in which China's media outlets manipulate public opinion in Sino-Korean relations and to explore how different media outlets play their roles, I look at four news sources, namely, the *People's Daily* (Renmin Ribao) and *The Beijing News* (Xinjing Bao, *BJ News* thereafter) and their respective official Weibo accounts.

Sponsored by China's Propaganda Department, *People's Daily* is believed representing leaders' official stance and sometimes publishing editorials written by national leaders. It serves as Party mouthpiece and the most authoritative form of media in China (G. Wu 1994). Therefore, *People's Daily* is selected as the official media outlet. On its Weibo server, *People's Daily* has more than 70 million followers and had published 91,000 tweets on varied topics.

The *BJ News* was selected as the nonofficial outlet that would be compared with *People's Daily*. Founded in 2003, *BJ News* is a Beijing local newspaper with a geographical coverage of Beijing metropolitan area. Despite a regional media outlet and jointly hosted by Shanghai based Guangming Daily (Guangming Ribao) and Guangdong based The Nanfang Daily Group (Nangfang Ribao) and then taken over by Beijing Municipal Propaganda Department in 2011, *BJ News* is known for higher level of frankness and more critical reporting than many other media outlets in China.³ *BJ News* also sets a Weibo account, owning 31 million followers and posting 89,000 tweets in total.

Originally, I collected 6,123 articles with respect to South Korea published between January 2012 and August 2018 from *People's Daily* printed newspapers (shortened to "pdpaper" in the following analysis) and 514 tweets from its Weibo account (shortened to "pdweibo"). Also, from *BJ News* (shortened to "bjpaper") 1,100 articles were scrapped with the title mentioning South Korea and 495 tweets on *BJ News'* Weibo ("bjweibo" thereafter).

In order to conduct a quantitative analysis to unearth the pattern of media coverage of Sino-Korean relations over years, I randomly selected 100 news articles or tweets from each news source and constructed a small dataset of 400 entries.⁴ These 400 news were then typologized into seven topics, including politics (news about South Korean domestic politics and foreign relations with, for example, North Korea, China and America), economy (news regarding commercial entities, international trades, etc.), society (articles that talk about Korean social issues such as population ageing, suicide, etc.), mass culture (messages about Korean entertainment industry as well as cultural exchange between China and Korea), sports (news covering international or regional sports games), public health (news about disease, disease control and plastic surgery), tourism⁵ (tourism information pertinent to South Korea). Moreover, based on the tones of news reporting, I divided them into positive, negative and neutral. I also tracked years of publication of each news story. Furthermore, based on the date of publication and Sino-Korean relations development timeline, I categorized them into five stages. China had a regularly strategic and cooperative partnership before Park Geun-hye took office in February 2013 (Stage "Regular1"). During the

³ Stockmann (2013, 71) developed an official-semiofficial-commercialized media spectrum based on media practitioners' perceived openness of a number of newspapers. Although *BJ News* is not exactly included in her spectrum, it should fall into Stockmann's category of commercialized and critical media outlets according to the criteria (see, for example, Tong 2013).

⁴ The author has been aware of concern of the number of cases selected from *People's Daily* against the total number of articles published (only 2% were selected for content analysis). However, it is widely known, and will be shown below, that *People's Daily* produces invariably stories regarding party leaders having meetings or attending ceremonies with limited variance and the content is notoriously formalistic, ritualistic and ideological (Huang 2015, 420). In this vein, the selected news is of considerable representativeness.

⁵ Tourism is singled out in this study because many have realized that the Chinese government started to weaponize outbound tourism as economic bans to retaliate rivalries in recent years if needed (see, for example, AsiaToday 2016).

first three years of presidency of Park, China and Korea organized numerous governmental visits and developed boosted cooperative relationship, which I called “Honeymoon”. The Honeymoon stage came to an end when South Korean government announced it would deploy THAAD system (Stage “Regular2”), while in July 2016 Sino-Korean relations deteriorated as the U.S. and South Korea officially agreed to deploy THAAD (Stage “THAAD”). But businesses and cultural exchanges got back to routine as soon as the new Korean president, Moon Jae-in, was elected (Stage “Warmup”). Please see Table 1 for the distribution of cases among each variable and detailed information of the “Stage” variable.

Table 1 Description of Variables

Variable	Number of Cases						
Year	2018 n=40	2017 n=55	2016 n=49	2015 n=53	2014 n=74	2013 n=79	2012 n=50
News Source	pdpaper n=100	pdweibo n=100	bjpaper n=100	bjweibo n=100			
Topic	Politics n=180	Economy n=29	Society n=39	Mass Culture n=47	Sports n=64	Public Health n=18	Tourism n=23
Tone	Positive n=162	Negative n=151	Neutral n=87				
Stage	Regular1 (01/01/2012- 02/24/2013) n=61	Honeymoon (02/25/2013- 12/31/2015) n=195	Regular2 (01/01/2016- 07/07/2016) n=18	THAAD (07/08/2016- 05/09/2017) n=62	Warmup (05/10/2017- 08/31/2018) n=64		

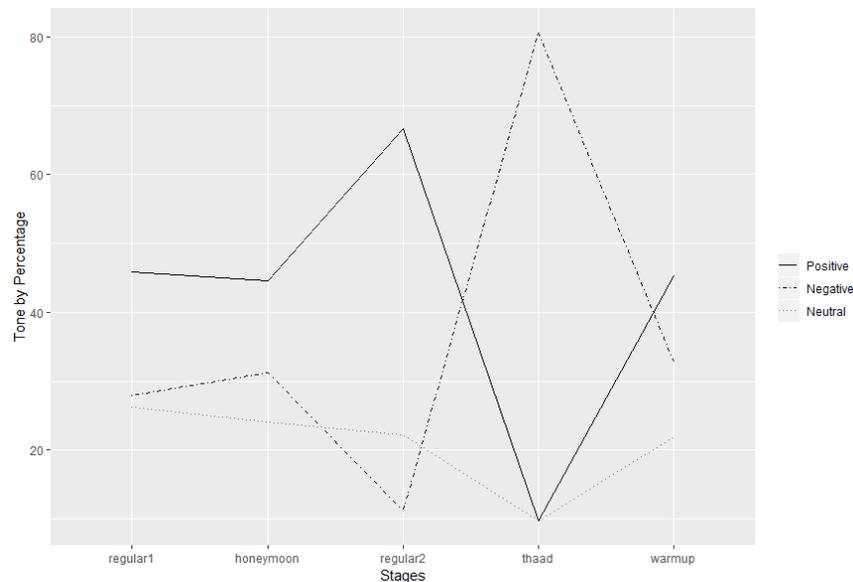
Notably, this 400-entry dataset is constructed particularly for a quantitative analysis. To probe how official rhetoric and marketized media have engaged themselves in the diplomatic war with South Korea through an in-depth content analysis, I turned back to the original dataset and searched for the dynamics and nuances that might not be conveyed by the quantitative method due to the sophisticated information management tactics, including but not limited to censorship, under the authoritarian propaganda apparatus.

Results: What the Dataset Tells Us

As conventional wisdom believes, the propaganda system is supposed to alter the tones of news reporting as bilateral relations oscillate. When relations are healthy and prosperous we should be able to see news coverage framed in a more positive, or non-negative, manner, which then turned into negativity as soon as confrontations come into being. To scrutinize tone changes over time, I used the number of articles written in each tone divided by the total number of articles

published during that stage and then obtained the percentage of each tone at every stage (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Changes of Tones, 2012-2018



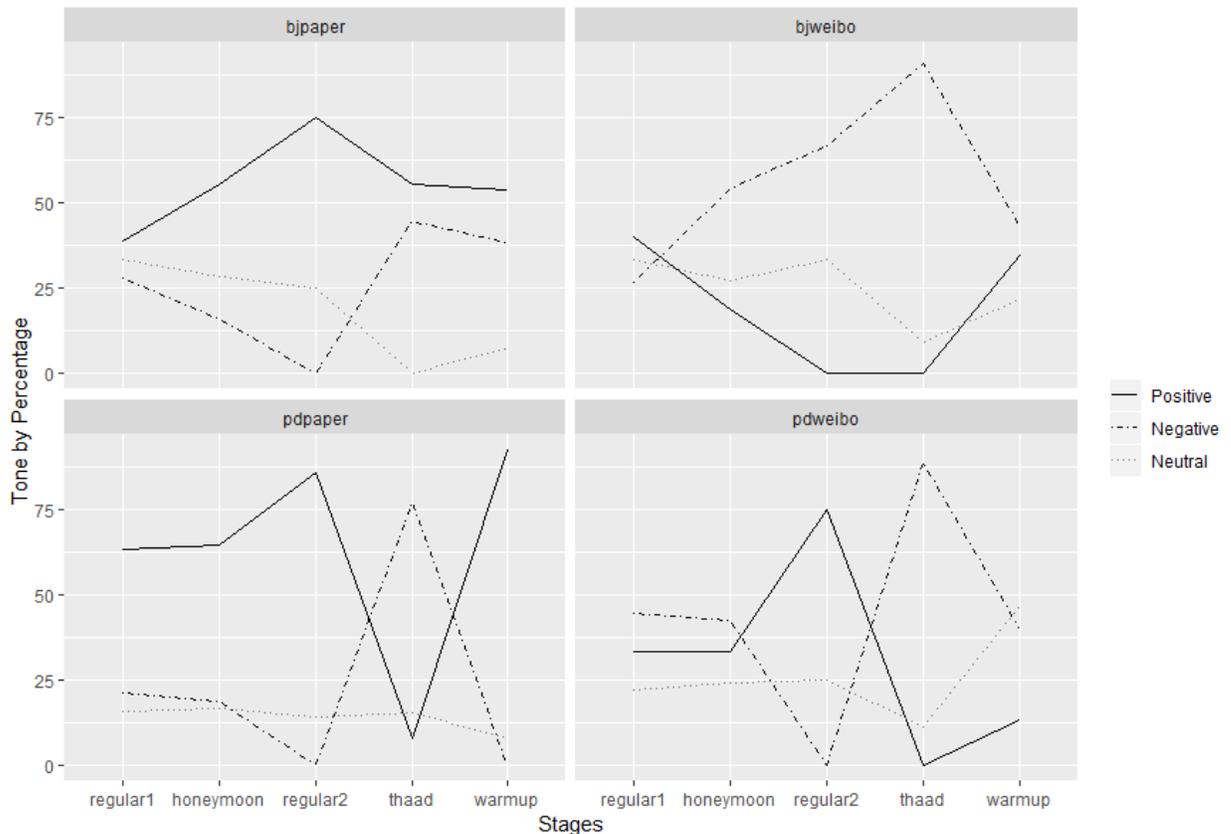
As expected, tones that media reporting employed changed from positive to negative and rose up over time as Sino-Korea relations honeymooned in around 2013 and 2015, deteriorated in 2016 due to THAAD and then warmed up over the last year thanks to minor changes of THAAD policy brought by a new South Korean president. Positive tones are plummeting in the years of 2016 to 2017, reflecting the influence of the diplomatic conflicts over media coverage and how the Chinese media transmitted such confrontations to its readers and citizenry at large. The change of tone before and after THAAD is also statistically significant in the Tukey test ($p < 0.001$) whereas at any other phases tone changes are all nonsignificant. Irrespective of significance, it looks intriguing that a discernable rise of positive tones occurred after honeymoon but before the THAAD dispute, the phase at which South Korea announced the THAAD decision but not yet to deployed. Also, positive tones touched bottom because of THAAD but there were still ten percent news coverage framed in a favored fashion. Both drive us to disaggregate the news sources and inspect which media outlets made such reporting and why they did so.

Disaggregating the tones change according to various media platforms reveals somewhat different images hidden behind the waves of opinion management. Most of the positive news reporting are made by traditional media platform. Interestingly, *People's Daily* journalists published ten percent articles even during the hay day of THAAD confrontation (2016~2017) and BJ News made this number much higher. Except for news and editorials pertinent to THAAD and Park Geun-hye's political scandal⁶, *People's Daily* barely reported negative news about South

⁶ The former Korean president, Park, was accused of influence peddling and then suspended all powers almost simultaneously with THAAD.

Korea. On the contrary, both Weibo accounts publicized considerable amount of negative news regardless of stages of bilateral relations. *BJ News* Weibo tweeted no more than 30% news about in a favorable manner (see Figure 2 for the comparison). Tukey HSD pairwise test also indicates that tones Weibo editors employed were significantly different from traditional journalists ($p < 0.001$). Contrary to Reilly (2012) and Stockmann (2013), expression of popular anger was unlikely constrained in marketized media and the Internet. Instead, over the whole THAAD crisis before China heated up relationships with Korea social media played a critical role in mobilizing anti-Korean outrages.⁷

Figure 2 Changes of Tones by News Sources, 2012-2018



Furthermore, all three platforms tended to frame South Korea favorably before THAAD dispute started, except *BJ News* Weibo who posted zero tweets in a positive tone. *People's Daily* and its Weibo published 80% articles and 75%, respectively, favored South Korea regardless that some anti-Korean sentiments had already aired online. Three days after THAAD was announced

⁷ These outrages, of course, if not constrained, would have otherwise resulted in unmanageable devastation as happened to the 2012 anti-Japanese demonstrations when anguished citizens smashed Japan-branded vehicles and vandalized shops selling Japanese goods (please refer to Weiss 2014 for an intensive review of the incidence). It is grounded to believe that violence is forbidden by central leadership on Korean matter since it would blemish government-endorsed "patriotism". Global Times (2017) harshly criticized any violent actions like car smashing or shop vandalizing in the anti-Korean campaign as "sarcasm" (gaoji hei) of patriotism.

by then Korean president, PD Weibo still published a message about the Chinese IT conglomerate Alibaba's investment in a South Korean entertainment group and then tweeted an advertisement promoting outbound trips to South Korea. On the contrary, BJ News Weibo posted a news article about some plastic surgery disaster in Fujian done by an self-alleged Korean surgeon.

Analysis: Beyond the Dataset

While the findings of this small dataset illustrate the reporting patterns of official media outlets and commercialized daily papers and disparities between traditional and new media, I turned to the original corpus of all news articles for a more intensive analysis.

Similar to findings suggested in the quantitative analysis, other than a large wave of positive propaganda prevailed before THAAD was officially agreed in July 2018, even during the THAAD confrontation (July 2016 to April 2017), many news reports were framed in favored tones and they were all published by *People's Daily* and *BJ News*. For example, on October 25, 2016 *People's Daily* printed a news report of an event hosted in the capital of South Korea named "China Day in Seoul", implicitly conveyed a message of cultural exchange within two countries as if THAAD deployment had not been stated. *BJ News* later reported a love story of two well-known Korean popstars in a leisurely fashion. But in effect, at that moment, Korean stars were unofficially kept from entering the country to perform and taken away from screens due to THAAD (Mullen, 2017). Moreover, *BJ News* published another five articles related to South Korea positively.

If the Chinese state deemed it necessary to ferment anti-Korean sentiment, why were there so many articles that highlighted exchanges in terms of culture, society and trade between China and Korea while THAAD was announced first and then the South Korean government decided to make it happen? Despite the fact that official rhetoric tends to portrait South Korea as a foe by guiding the reader in a certain direction and prompting vehement reprimands against THAAD deployment, the authorities' agencies and mechanisms are dynamic and wavering.

Many believe that Xi Jinping has condoned Deng Xiaoping's *taoguang yanghui* strategy and changed not only in terms of more aggressive stance but also of provocative nationalist mobilization. But in fact, the Chinese government tended to address the crisis in a less aggressive and more "smart" way. The Chinese government at the outset intended to downplay the tension that would have arisen between herself and South Korea. *People's Daily* broadcasted a total of mere four reporting the THAAD issue including editorials out of 371 articles talking about South Korea before THAAD agreement was announced in July 2016, while *BJ News* published three articles about THAAD with twenty-nine others on Korean movies, dramas, etc. There was even only one tweet broadcasted on Weibo by *BJ News* whereas *People's Daily* didn't mention THAAD until July. The party-state outreached to South Korea in anticipation of maintaining this good neighbor. As a result, cultural and economic exchanges were still highlighted even while the THAAD crisis was in full swing.

Indeed, such “goodwill” was also accompanied by offensive mobilizational actions with an intention to pressure the Korean government due to its handy utility in augmenting Chinese “negotiating leverage” disputing with foreign governments (Weiss 2014). There was an increasing number of articles outrageously critical of THAAD, resulting in a stirred-up anti-Korean spree at the grassroots level. In addition to spreading information about China’s official firm stance against THAAD and waves of civil protests in both China and South Korea, news outlets disseminated negative news on varied topics other than ideological indoctrination. For example, it was widely reported that heavy metals content in more than half of South Korea made cosmetics exceeded national standards⁸ or that Chinese tourists were at times prohibited from entering South Korea or facing with further interrogations by Korean Customs officials.⁹

How did the Chinese government use mass media to maintain a balance between these contradictory political behaviors and not run counter to the demands of mobilizing popular nationalism or render an image of a too soft government? In other words, what roles did different types of media play in this manipulating game? The traditional *People’s Daily* newspaper, reflective of the state directives, takes the lead of setting official rhetoric of disparaging THAAD, and the commercialized media must base themselves on reports by *People’s Daily* to learn the government position on foreign issues (Stockmann 2013, 93). *BJ News* broadcasts news reporting concerning South Korea in a more positive light and broadens the involved topics to society, economy, and so forth.

New media like the Weibo server provides state propaganda apparatus and media practitioners with a different platform. Although neither expression of positivity or negativity was constrained, both *People’s Daily* and *BJ News* refused to tweet pro-Korea messages on Weibo. There are grounds to believe that official as well as commercial media posted non-favored news reporting to attract audience or avoid any potential troubles, since they could have taken advantage of the ambiguity of state directives on non-THAAD issues otherwise. Consequently, such considerations were exploited by the propaganda officials to shape nationalistic outpourings and to appeal to nationalist readership. After all, nationalists, online or offline, tend to exert considerable influence over policy making and not easily to be suppressed once instigated (Han, 2017; Gries, Steiger, and Wang 2016; Reilly 2014; X. Wu 2007). Furthermore, online official media outlet was used to “win hearts and minds” of netizens, considering that PD Weibo seems quite down-to-earth (jiediqi) through publicizing more plural, real-time news on sports and social issues (Esarey 2015).

Does *BJ News* just devote itself to follow the lead of Chinese government or serve as watchdog or something in between? It is true that *BJ News* broadcasted news reporting concerning South Korea by following *People’s Daily’s* lead. However, *BJ News* amplified the intention of the

⁸ The Beijing News. (2016) Half of 25 Types of South Korean Semi-permanent Make-ups Not Meet National Criteria. (25 Zhong Hanguo Banyongjiu Huazhuangpin Jinban Bu Hege). 2016-10-07. Retrieved on Aug. 31, 2018. <http://www.bjnews.com.cn/world/2016/10/07/418998.html>

⁹ People’s Daily Weibo. (2016) More than One Hundred Chinese Tourists banned from entering Jeju, Consulate General said they are verifying. (Baiyu Zhongguo Youke Jizhoudao Beiju Rujing, Zonglingguan: Zheng Heshi Yuanyin) Retrieved on Aug. 13, 2018. https://www.weibo.com/2803301701/EbS4VpEg1?from=page_1002062803301701_profile&wvr=6&mod=weibotime&type=comment#_rnd1537998279148

party mouthpiece. This could be interpreted in two ways. First, the commercial daily paper seems working as an amplifier accentuating the positive facet of South Korea as China's partner. As one of the most significant party organs *People's Daily* goes extreme lengths to shape the political landscape for the whole nation while the nonofficial media outlets bridge the gap between the state and society by focusing on topics such as sports, mass culture, tourism and so forth.¹⁰

Second, *BJ News* may take advantage of such openings to establish a "fluid, state-dominated partnership" that offers a different voice even during diplomatic crisis (Repnikova 2018). A number of interviews in Stockmann's study (2013, 91) has shown that media practitioners have more space for discussing international news in accordance of their own line of thinking than reporting domestic divisions, unless the Chinese state itself or issues regarding Japan, Taiwan and North Korea are involved. As discussed above, *People's Daily* did NOT negating cooperation and exchanges with Korean government. Although anti-THAAD or Sino-Korea crisis moved to the center of public discourse, media practitioners including critical journalists were not forbidden from reporting Korea in a positive light except reporting about THAAD. As a result, so long as standing behind state media agenda on the very specific issue—or boycotting THAAD in this regard—all commercial media are secure. Receiving this message, *BJ News* insisted on publishing pro-Korea news amongst the anti-THAAD propaganda. It is certainly true, however, that *BJ News* has incentives to reported non-political issues in a non-negative manner about Korea to cater towards its readers since, after all, there are abundant Chinese not identifying themselves nationalists and thus the nationalistic sentiment is overestimated (Johnston 2017; Li 2015). Despite, critical journalists aspire to frame news reporting with their own thinking deviated from an officially settled discourse.

Conclusion

Up until this point, it has been noticed that the party-state has taken advantage of different media outlets to balance its nuanced agencies during waves of opinion management that not only respond to outraged nationalists and mobilize grassroots to protest South Korea but also shape an image of friendly and responsive neighbor that endeavors to reconstruct harmonious bilateral relations. To address the dilemma of relying on nationalism for the use of domestic legitimacy and diplomatic signal and minimizing the benign influence it would wield in tarnishing China's international image, propaganda department exploited official and commercialized media outlets and different platforms to keeping nationalism at bay but pursuing muscular foreign policy online at no risk of "audience cost".¹¹

¹⁰ Official media outlets differ from nonofficial outlets regarding the issue areas they are concentrated on as the latter without state subsidies is induced to audience demands for more relatable news topics to ordinary life. See Appendix B for the distribution of issues areas among each news source.

¹¹ According to Fearon (1994), domestic audience would punish their leaders for backing down from making commitments to deliver antforeign promises because of feeling betrayed. Li and Chen's coauthored paper (n.d.) through a survey experiment

Meanwhile, this study demonstrates dynamics of different types of mass media. The state-owned media outlets set media agenda and provide a lens that enables one to trace the historical trajectory of any topic but also are incentivized to appeal to the nationalist sentiment for more readership. Commercialized media outlets, other than follow the official line, dedicate to build up public media agenda divergent from the official discourse as much as they can.

But limitations of this study are straightforward. This project is not able to examine articles in more depth written by critical journalists due to pre- and post-censorship (in)formally institutionalized by the propaganda apparatus. It is likely that some critical articles on Sino-South Korean relations or THAAD dispute were censored or deleted. However, this project has shown that critical, commercialized daily papers such as *The Beijing News* might air different voices departing from mainstream nationalistic sentiments once the critical journalists detect openness of government position on international issues. Moreover, it needs a larger dataset to include more newspapers and articles to study the nuances of Chinese media outlets. Further studies on this track is in process.

confirms that audiences in authoritarian China can also punish their leaders for pulling out of public commitments. This study supports their findings. For example, People's Daily posted a tweet on June 12, 2018 that listed a few visa-free foreign tourist destinations including Jeju, South Korea. Some netizens commented below, saying that it was "inappropriate" for such an "official media outlet" (guanmei) to recommend outbound trips to South Korea as China had not ended the diplomatic war with South Korea and tried to persuade Weibo editor to delete such message. See https://www.weibo.com/2803301701/Gl1M2oIGu?from=page_1002062803301701_profile&wvr=6&mod=weibotime&type=comment

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Appendix A

All South Korea related news were obtained by collecting articles with titles containing Han (韩) instead of Hanguo (韩国, South Korea) as *BJ News* archive doesn't allow searching keywords by any other means but by title. In Mandarin, South Korea could be shortened to Han (韩). If, thus, Hanguo were used as the keyword we may lose many relevant news articles titled with, for example, Mei Han (US-Korea), Zhong Han (Sino-Korea), Hanju (Korean Dramas). Meantime, however, the character of Han works as a common Chinese last name such that I spent some time removing reports in association with people surnamed Han but having nothing to do with South Korea. I also used Sade (萨德, THAAD) as another entry keyword because the THAAD dispute marks the turning point of Sino-Korea relations, resulting in an adding of five more news reports to the dataset. Notably, in Chinese, a search of Sade (萨德) could result in many news articles not related to South Korea. For example, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, which, when translated into Chinese, is pronounced and spelled Asade (阿萨德). I deleted them due to irrelevance. Afterwards, I created a total of dataframe constituting 1,100 news stories. 495 news stories are published between 2012 and August 2018 by its Weibo editors.

In comparison, *People's Daily* archive allows readers to search for news reports by both titles and texts, so I used Hanguo (韩国, South Korea) and Sade (萨德, THAAD) as the keywords. I obtained articles with titles and texts containing South Korea totaled up to 6,099 after deleting 273 duplicated entries. Reports containing Sade as the keyword had 12 duplicates and 119 irrelevant reports. A deletion of those reports resulted in 157 entries germane to Sade. When combining articles containing Hanguo and Sade, I also deleted the duplicated ones and finally set up a total of 6,123 entries. On the Weibo platform, there are totally 514 tweets.

Appendix B

Issue Areas by News Resources, 2012-2018

