The American Presidential Elections through Chinese internet users' eyes

A critical discourse analysis

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis studies the discussion revolving around the topics of democracy, the American democratic electoral system, and the Chinese view on the candidates of the 2016 American Presidential Elections. In particular, it examines statements that were posted in the comment sections underneath news articles on the following three platforms: *QQ News*, *Southern Weekend* and *Guancha*. These articles are all related to the 2016 Elections, which I consider to be unique because of the continuously growing disparity between the two major candidates, and the outcome, which took the whole world by surprise. The latter was also the case in China, where social media and news platforms were filled with articles and posts about the elections. As these contained useful information to gain insight into the non-governmental Chinese stance on democracy, this seemed to me like an extraordinary opportunity to focus on the online discourse in which Chinese internet users engaged. Hence, the research question of this thesis is as follows: What do online comments on Chinese news articles about the 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections reveal about Chinese democracy discourses in digital China?

In Chapter 2, I provide an overview of discourse theory and the discourse analysis approach that it generated. The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on this account of "discourse" and its analytic implications. I subsequently provide an overview of how the Chinese media landscape has changed since the Reform and Opening Up period, focusing specifically on the rise of the internet in the mid '90s and the debate on whether it can be considered a potential driver for civic discourse or not. I also provide background information about the news platforms that were the primary sources used in the analytic stage of the thesis. In Chapter 3, I describe the research method, explain how I selected source materials, justify the choice for these specific materials, and explain the work-steps of the analytic part of the thesis. In Chapter 4, I present the results of my analysis offering an overview of the quantitative data over the three platforms, followed by the data by each specific platform. This is followed by the results of the qualitative analysis, whereby I focus on the topics that seemed most prominent during the analysis of my source materials. In Chapter 5, I present the conclusion, whereby I discuss shortcomings of my analysis and provide suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2: Studying Discourse in a Chinese Context

The aim of this thesis is to explore statements made by Chinese internet users on three different internet platforms, all of which were posted in the comments sections underneath articles related to the 2016 American Presidential Elections. The focus will be on how these internet users discuss the democratic election system in the U.S., the presidential candidates, and the U.S. in general.

In the following chapter, I provide a short overview of discourse theory and the discourse analysis approach that it generated. This account of "discourse" and its analytic implications will provide the theoretical framework for this thesis. Subsequently, I provide an overview of how the Chinese media landscape has changed over the past half a century, and of the debate on whether the internet can be considered as a public sphere. Finally, I discuss the primary sources used in the analytic stage of the thesis.

2.1 Discourse in a "language-in-action" Process

The discourse analysis approach has been used by various academic disciplines for different research purposes, resulting in its exact notion becoming unclear. Originally developed in disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, and philosophy, it was later used in communication studies, cognitive psychology, social psychology and artificial intelligence.[1]

Scholars embedded within a socio-linguistic approach define "discourse" as "a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts"[2] or "a way of signifying a particular domain of social practice from a particular perspective"[3]. Other scholars, such as Chilton, who adopt a purely linguistic approach, define it as "the use of language".[4] Schiffrin, Tannen and Hamilton divide the various definitions of discourse into three main categories: (1) as anything beyond the sentence, (2) as language use, and (3) as a broader range of social practice that includes nonlinguistic and nonspecific instances of language.[5] In the first category, analysts look beyond the sentence boundary and focus on how the form of sentences is influenced by surrounding sentences in text and talk.[6] In the third category, discourse is defined even "broader", with scholars considering sounds, visuals, tastes and smells to be

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[1] Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton 2001: 1.
[2] Wodak 2003: 21.
[3] Fairclough 2010: 7.
[4] Chilton 2004: 16-27.
[5] Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton 2001: 1.
[6] van Dijk 1997: 7.

meaningful expressions in communication analysis.[7] With these different definitions in mind, it is fair to say that discourse can span all forms of communication.

"Discourse analysis" is the approach or methodology that followed from the above-mentioned theoretical debates surrounding the concept of "discourse". It is used for analyzing the structure of language and the way it is articulated. Its purpose is to grasp how language constructs meaning. A meaningful expression, either an act or spoken/written statement, is drawn from a pool of generally accepted knowledge in a society while, simultaneously, contributing to this general knowledge. Norman Fairclough differentiates four dimensions of the knowledge pool within a society: knowledge of (1) language codes, (2) principles and norms of language use, (3) situations, and (4) of the world.[8] All forms of communicative expressions have influence on this background knowledge by either reinforcing or challenging it. James Paul Gee calls this process "language-in-action".[9] Over time, this process may lead to a change of what a society holds to be true. If and when the majority of society accepts this background knowledge, this discourse has turned into the "hegemonic discourse".[10]

Society's background knowledge shaped by a "language-in-action" process is what the French philosopher and sociologist Michel Foucault (1926-1984) described as "the flow of knowledge through time".[11] Foucault was a pioneer in discourse theory who put the relationship between discourse, text, society and power to the forefront. Foucault's diachronic research on mental health, crime and punishment, and sexuality in France gave rise to the critical discourse analysis (henceforth abbreviated CDA) paradigm that Ruth Wodak defines as follows:

> CDA may be defined as fundamentally concerned with analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language.[12]

By doing a critical discourse analysis, the analyst is extensively concerned with the notions of history, ideology and power. In the flow of text and speech through time, certain (groups of) people have more power in making statements that reinforce or challenge the status-quo. For

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[7] Schneider 2013.
[8] Fairclough 2010: 33.
[9] Gee 1999: 11.
[10] Fairclough 2003: 124.
[11] Foucault 1972.
[12] Diachronic research considers the development and evolution of a language, or in this case a variety of themes within a discourse strand through history. Discourse strands are a variety of themes that arise within a discourse. Synchronic research studies language or discourse strands at a certain point in history. Jäger 2001: 2-47.

them, discourse can be the mechanism in producing and reinforcing power, or it can have influence on power by undermining and exposing it.[13] Ideology is seen as an important aspect of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations in society.[14] The power structures that exist in a society are therefore a result of the dominant ideology within this society.[15] By analyzing discourse, scholars are able to decipher ideologies and judge to which extent these ideologies influence the background knowledge of our communication processes. CDA takes a particular interest in the ways language mediates ideology in a variety of social institutions.[16]

However, this thesis does not follow a classic CDA focus, because I do not explicitly focus on social relations and the influence of power, history and ideology on social relations, as it is not possible to systematically gain insights into the social status and background of the commenters to the news articles; in other words, I am unable to perceive how the actors in my source materials are socially linked. Instead, this study focuses on the content of the discussion that Chinese internet users engaged in as they commented on online threads related to the American Presidential Elections and, more specifically, on how they discuss democracy and the U.S. electoral system. I discuss the exact ways in which I conducted this discourse analysis below, in Chapter 3.

2.2 Chinese Media Landscape after the Opening Up

Although the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) chose to reform and open up its economic and social sphere at the end of the '70s, it retained strong control on the traditional media outlets as they were viewed as being crucial for the regime's survival.[17] However, in the past decade the Chinese media landscape strongly liberalized. Along with rapid market reforms, formerly state-subsidized and state-controlled media were decentralized and encouraged to compete in the marketplace.[18] Zhao Yuezhi argues that media decentralization had the consequence that the central government was no longer capable of funding media outlets since revenues were no longer flowing to central organs.[19] This decentralization was paralleled by a growing public demand for more media services in the early '90s. Instead of government funding, advertising became the new lifeblood of a media scene over which the CCP saw its control

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[13] Foucault & Hurley 1990: 101.
[14] Wodak 2003: 10.
[15] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002: 68-69.
[16] Wodak 2003: 10.
[17] Brady 2008: 1-3.
[18] Zhao 1998: 53.
[19] Ibid. 53.

decreasing. Overall, the Chinese media scene expanded in scope, changed in structure, and became more diversified and sophisticated.[20] Nowadays, media content is no longer solely dominated by a government propaganda agenda but is filled with topics of a variety of political, social, economic, entertainment, and cultural interests.[21] The style of the major commercial media outlets is different from state-owned outlets because they compete to attract audiences by pushing the boundary of state control and by covering social and political issues, sometimes even providing controversial opinions.[22]

2.2.1 The Rise of the Internet in China

The internet's emergence has brought a significant change in China's media landscape. Private internet was established in 1994, and internet usage has been growing exponentially ever since.[23] The latest report of the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in January 2017 stated that in December 2016 China counted 791 million internet users.[24] In the past years several media outlets have heavily moved onto the web and into social media, where they distribute some of their most controversial and audience-engaging content.[25]

According to Qiang, the internet is the first media platform that enables Chinese citizens to have public discussion and debate.[26] Yang Guobin has summarized the three major contributions of the internet in China: it has (1) fostered public debate and the articulation of problems, demonstrating the internet's potential to play a supervisory role in Chinese politics, (2) facilitated the activities of existing organizations while creating a new associational form, the virtual community, and (3) introduced new forms of political expression and organizational dynamics into popular protest.[27] The publication of online news articles and the subsequent discussion on a whole range of domestic and international incidents enabled people to influence government policies, decisions, and politicians' behavior.[28] The increased dynamism among Chinese internet users can be explained by the users' emerged rights consciousness and the rise of populist nationalism.[29] These online discussions are to some extent allowed by the central government because they can serve its interest. Related to first

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[20] Tang, Jorba & Jensen 2012: 224.
[21] Wang 2009: 31–56.
[22] Gang & Bandurski 2010: 39-43.
[23] Tai 2006: 119.
[24] China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) 2017.
[25] deLisle, Goldstein & Yang 2016: 2.
[26] Qiang 2003: 70-76.
[27] Yang 2009.
[28] Tang, Jorba & Jensen 2012: 221.
[29] deLisle, Goldstein & Yang 2016: 13.

contribution mentioned by Yang, online discussions and digital media in general can serve as a "safety valve" for citizen frustration and brings potential stability-threatening problems to the attention of the authorities, who can then respond with ameliorative or repressive measures.[30] In Yang's third contribution, digital media can serve as a "pressure cooker" that increases social and political tensions.[31]

2.2.2. State Control on the Internet

Chinese authorities are trying hard to keep the media and internet under state control. By installing the "Great Firewall", authorities are able to limit the information available to users and to monitor their online activities.[32] If certain webpages or blogs are deemed to contain social and/or political controversial content, the authorities may decide to close the specific webpage, or even undertake further steps in counteracting controversial internet content. In this atmosphere of deterrence, internet users conduct self-censorship to avoid hardships. However, studies have shown that it is an impossible task for the state to control all public expression.[33] In this way, public expression, including political expression, is allowed as long as it does not lead to collective action.[34] In this context, the state recently came up with regulations to limit the anonymity of internet users.[35] Yang Guobin has also shown that internet users can negotiate with political control by pursuing rightful resistance to central censorship, they can engage in posting artful contention and they can even employ digital "hidden transcripts" in order to resist state power.[36]

Digital media has also given the authorities the opportunity to guide citizens' opinions by using such media to mobilize or even pay a group of people to guide online discussion (the so-called *wumaodang* 五毛党 or "fifty-cent party") in Chinese blogs and comments sections. The existence of these kinds of phenomena, such as the *wumaodang* and the *human flesh search engine* movement, might jeopardize the quality of the discourse analysis and twist its outcome. *Wumaodang* became a common name for the astroturfing technique, adopted by numerous state agencies such as local propaganda offices, ministries and even schools and

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[30] Ibid. 2.
[31] MacKinnon 2008: 31–46.
[32] Tang, Jorba & Jensen 2012: 228.
[33] Han 2015: 105.
[34] King, Pan & Roberts 2013: 326–343.
[35] Jiang 2016: 41.With regard to the analyzed news articles in this study, in order to take part in the comments section of news websites, registration via a Chinese cell phone number was mandatory.
[36] Yang 2009: 57-62.

state-owned enterprises.[37] However, these government-affiliated *wumaodang* members are distinct from "volunteer *wumaodang* members", who express pro-Chinese government or anti-Western statements without being paid by the government.[38] Han Rongbin defines astroturfing as the technique of users posing as spontaneous voices when they are really organized or sponsored by certain groups, and in this case the Chinese state.[39] This army of online commenters is engaging in online expression anonymously and promotes a pro-government discourse. Han considers this a new propaganda technique, although it might have mixed results, as common internet users have become aware of the presence of these commenters, which leads to the opposite effect of astroturfing, namely "chipping away the party-state's legitimacy".[40]

The *human flesh search engine* (*renrou sousuo* 人肉搜索) is a movement in which thousands of volunteer "cyberguards" unite to expose the details of an offline person or several people on the web.[41] Usually, the person or people they wish expose are perceived as evildoers that need to be punished for evil acts or corrupt conduct.[42] The search for a single person can expand quickly in scope and might even lead to anger mobs once it is picked up by a big share of internet users. It may sound surprising that the Chinese government supports this phenomenon, but David Herold argues that it led to a new, democratic element in Chinese politics as it is "accepted and to some extent supported by the central government as a form of checks and balances for local and mid-level politicians and party members.[43]

Later in this paper, I look at the content of online political discussions related to a foreign political event, namely the American Presidential Elections in November 2016. By looking at these discussions, I try to discern which stance Chinese internet users have towards the U.S., the electoral system, the presidential candidates, and the democratic election system.

2.3 Can We Speak of a Chinese Online Public Sphere?

Citizen participation in online political discussions, its communicative processes and how the internet affects Chinese society have recently become important research fields. The focus point of scholarly work has revolved around the question of whether the internet is providing

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[37] Han 2015: 105.
[38] King et al. 2017: 1.
[39] Ibid. 110.
[40] Ibid. 106.
[41] Herold & Marolt 2011: 129.
[42] Ibid. 129.
[43] Ibid. 140.

a new public sphere in the Chinese context or not. In this study, I assume that the use of online media and its social functions are facilitating rather than undermining the engagement of Chinese internet users in political discussions. Following this assumption, it seems logical that online media enable internet users to discuss topics such as democracy as well. In this way, I expect that political discussions lead to a better understanding for Chinese internet users of what democracy and its elections entail.

In the aftermath of the Tiananmen Massacre, sociologists engaged in a heated debate on whether the civil society paradigm was applicable to the Chinese context or not. Scholars such as Timothy Cheek argue that the paradigm is not applicable because the Western notions of "civil society" and "public sphere" presuppose a dichotomy between state and society.[44] This dichotomy does not exist in China as there are no independent labor unions, democratic parties, dissident intellectual circles, or autonomous churches.[45] He Baoguang argues that in China, these demarcations are only blurred, so it is valid to speak of a Chinese "semi-civil society".[46] However, Tai Zixue argues that the Habermasian model of public sphere/civil society is in fact applicable to China because it is a fluid model that has to be understood in dynamic terms that take the different socioeconomic, political, and historical conditions of a certain location into consideration.[47] This concurs with Yang Guobin's multidimensional understanding of the Chinese internet. According to him, the internet and its activist potential is in dynamic interaction with (1) state power, (2) culture, (3) the market, (4) civil society, and (5) transnationalism.[48] Yang argues that this interactive scheme is the locus where political discussion takes place.

Tai argues that after three decades of economic reform and development, the social conditions that once contributed to the birth and prosperity of civil society in the West are also emerging in China.[49] This is in line with what James Tyson and Ann Tyson argue, namely that the rise of a middle class and a liberalized media landscape are contributing to the rejuvenation of society, the emergence of a political public sphere and, finally, the weakening

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[44] The Western notion of "civil society" can be traced back to Alexis de Tocqueville, who presented it in his book *Democracy in America* as "voluntary, non-political social organizations that strengthen democracy in order to prevent a tyranny of the majority and protect diversity, uniting equal but weak individuals into powerful groups". By equating "civil society" to the notion of "social capital", scholars such as Robert Putnam have enlarged this group of social organizations with several other non-political civic associations. Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti 1994.
[45] Cheek 1992: 124-145.
[46] He 1997: 8.
[47] Tai 2006: 51.
[48] Yang 2009: 9.
[49] Tai 2006: 51.

of the power of state control.[50] Tai believes that digital communication can play a particularly important role by providing channels through which non-official political discourses can emerge.[51] This thought has led to a technological determinism discourse in which scholars such as Shirky or libertarians such as Chase and Mulvenon believe that the internet is a force of democratization, and that it might thus pose a threat to the Chinese party-state's legitimacy.[52] Jiang Min has called this a "grassroots empowerment", a narrative that focuses on the internet's low cost, decentralized structure, greater access to information/ideas, communication speed, users interactivity, connectivity across space, online dissent, organization, and mobilization.[53] However, a counter-current followed that Yang Guobin defines as "determined technology", arguing that the internet does not lead to democratization, mainly because of the rapid colonization of cyberspace by private capital, information access inequality, and state censorship.[54] Jodi Dean agrees that cyberspace is colonized by global capital and claims that online regulatory interventions are made to have the internet appear as a public sphere.[55] Instead, she argues the internet is "the material basis of the global economy".[56]

A more accurate and complete characterization may be that the internet empowers *both* state and society,[57] because on the one hand the emergence of new online channels – such as emails, online forums, and social networking sites – open up a previously unavailable and relatively autonomous space to the Chinese public to engage in political conversation and even influence the government;[58] yet on the other hand the still capable and determined Chinese party-state has adapted and developed new means of limiting and controlling speech in cyberspace, including mechanisms of participation, monitoring, regulating, censoring, and sanctioning (see section 2.2.2.).[59] The dual empowerment feature is reflected in how Jiang Min renders the Chinese internet, namely as "a sphere composed of diverse yet connected spaces where the influence of the state varies, thus creating disparate conditions for public deliberation".[60] Jiang draws a distinction between four types of online space in China

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[50] Tyson & Tyson 1995.
[51] Ibid. 79.
[52] Shirky 2011: 28-41. See also Chase & Mulvenon 2002.
[53] Jiang 2016: 31.
[54] Mou, Atkin & Fu 2011: 342.
[55] Dean 2003: 100.
[56] Ibid. 98.
[57] Jie 2016: 155.
[58] Hyun & Kim 2014: 767.
[59] deLisle, Goldstein & Yang 2016: 4.
[60] Jiang 2010.

"extending from the core to the peripheries of authoritarian rule: central propaganda spaces, government-regulated commercial spaces, emergent civic spaces, and international deliberative spaces".[61]

If I assume that political discussion in China is taking place in a context of dual empowerment, then the internet can to a certain extent be considered as a driver of civic discourse. Shen et al. have pointed out that Chinese internet users engage in a modest level of online expression.[62] They argue that "albeit the government censorship has successfully eroded people's beliefs about the power of the internet, the networking function of the internet could bring incremental changes to the Chinese society through constructing loosely structured networks which have crucial implications for opinion expression and civic collective actions and for the realization of a civic public domain in the long run".[63]

In analyzing political discussion in China, I have to avoid the caveat of exoticizing the use of the internet in China. Payal Arora has pointed out that too much Western research on internet applications in developing countries has a postcolonial scope, since it focuses merely on the internet's utilitarian means, meaning that scholars tend to miss "the actual engagements and ingenious strategies that the poor employ to cope and escape from their current plight".[64] Therefore, Arora urges to not overlook the leisure function of the internet. Interestingly, in the Chinese context, various researchers have argued that Chinese internet users merely go online "to play".[65] Yang Guobin's arguments against this view that the Chinese internet only provides an outlet for triviality have been elaborated earlier this chapter. CNNIC's Statistical Report on Internet Development of July 2016 shows that the rates of internet uses are at least varied between utilitarian and entertainment means.

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[61] Ibid.
[62] Shen et al. 2009: 451–476.
[63] Ibid. 470.
[64] Arora 2012: 99.
[65] Yang 2009: 1.

Table 2.3.1 The main internet uses

Types of use	June 2016 Utilization rate (% of internet users)	Types of use	June 2016 Utilization rate (% of internet users)
Instant messaging	90,4	Online shopping	63,1
Search engine	83,5	Online gaming	55,1
Netnews	81,6	Online banking	48,0
Online videos	72,4	Live streaming	45,8
Online music	70,8	Internet literature	43,1
Online payment	64,1	Travel booking	37,1

Source: adapted from CNNIC 2016.[66]

In what follows, I present background information on the news websites from which I chose the articles that provided the comments analyzed in this thesis.

2.4 Primary Sources

As my primary source material, I have chosen the comments sections of articles on the three commercial news websites: *QQ news, Guancha,* and *Southern Weekend.* My justification for this choice is that censorship is less strict when it comes to topics with no direct link to domestic political affairs, that commercial platforms enjoy more liberal freedom because they do not have to take into account the demands of the Publicity Department of the CCP to the extent of their state-owned counterparts have to, and that this specific topic has no direct link with democratization processes inside China, which would make it politically sensitive.

The liberal source *Southern Weekend* and a conservative *Guancha* are complemented with *QQ News* articles, as these articles altogether deliver a diverse range of commenters. Assuming that *Southern Weekend* and *Guancha* attract commenters with an ideological background in line with the editorial stance of these papers, the three platforms should then altogether deliver a broad spectrum of stances towards the American democratic system. *QQ News* has an extensive amount of news articles that are shared on social media by Chinese internet users. A large share of these articles offers the opportunity to leave comments. During the first coding round (for explanation, see below), it already seemed that these articles were far more popular than any other discussion forum.[67] For instance, the first *QQ News* article (see appendix) provides a readers count that has reached the counting limit of 100.000 readers. Since *QQ News* articles are very popular, their comment sections also attract a high range of rather short comments. This is reflected in the disparity of themes among the collected

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[66] China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) 2016.
[67] Coding is defined by Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss as "extracting concepts from raw data and developing them in terms of their properties and dimensions". Corbin & Strauss 2008: 159.

comments of each platform in my corpus (see below). Previous studies have mainly focused on political views in blogs and on Weibo, but it is clear that comment sections on *QQ News* have turned into a prevalent platform for public discussion too. I believe *QQ News* enables more and more common people to engage in political discussion. Next to that, the entry barrier for posting a comment underneath a *QQ News* article is no higher than a posting on Weibo, and it is lower than writing for instance a blog entry.

2.4.1 QQ News

QQ News is the news website of the social networking service QQ. Its developer is Tencent Holdings Limited, a Shenzhen-based internet company. Denemark and Chubb argue that China's major online news portals, such as Tencent, explicitly proclaiming their independence from the state media and are as such claiming to be more reliable.[68] This is reflected in the self-identification of the company as the "The Fact Faction". Tencent is profiling itself as a professional, objective, and credible platform on foreign affairs; if Yang and other proponents of the internet as a potential public sphere are correct, then an open discussion towards foreign democratic elections may be expected in *QQ news'* comments section.

2.4.2 Southern Weekend (*Nanfang Zhoumo*)

The *Southern Weekend* is a commercial newspaper and news website portal owned by the Nanfang Media group. The Nanfang Media Group is based in Guangdong province and publishes under the local Communist Party Committee's supervision. However, they have built an audience of liberal-minded readers outside Guangdong Province.[69] The paper is considered one of the most critical and politically influential commercial newspapers and is known to push the limits on domestic political reporting.[70] However, an incident over a New Year's editorial in January 2013 caused damage to the reputation of the newspaper in China. Several journalists of the Nanfang Media Group found out that, on the eve of the publication of the New Year greetings message, the paper's content had been heavily changed due to the interference of the Propaganda Department of Guangdong, under supervision of Tuo Zhen.[71] These journalists vented their frustration on Sina Weibo by spreading an open letter by the newspaper's Editorial Department.[72] This was followed by a large-scale online movement in which citizens collected signatures in several petitions to support the paper. However, three

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[68] Denemark & Chubb 2015: 61.
[69] Ibid. 10.
[70] Shirk 2010: 10.
[71] Chen 2015: 288.
[72] Ibid. 288.

days after publication, the senior staff took over the official Weibo account of the newspaper and denied the accusations in an official statement. The journalists' responses on Weibo were censored and removed, which led to a strike threat. The conflict between the staff and the Propaganda Department, backed by the newspapers' senior staff, did not lead to any relaxation of censorship, but caused some damage to the status of *Southern Weekend* as a liberal newspaper, as journalists went back to work after one week.[73]

2.4.3 Guancha

Guancha is an independent editorial website, established by the Shanghai Observer Information Technology Company in 2012 and is co-sponsored by the Shanghai Spring and Autumn Strategy Development Research Institute, an academic group under the Shanghai Federation of Social Science Associations.[74] It is the offspring of the magazine *Social Outlook* (*Shehui Guancha*)[75] and aims to act as an independent "online news and comments aggregator".[76] On the platform, a wide range of Chinese and foreign scholars and experts provide their interpretation of daily trends and political events. As there is a significant amount of scholars and experts on the platform, the variation of topics and ideological stances is quite diverse. *Guancha* is known to attract rather conservative and nationalist Chinese scholars, scholars who question democratic election systems and criticize neoliberalism.[77] Because of its diverse content, *Guancha* should function as a corrective to the *Southern Weekend*.

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[73] Ibid. 296.
[74] Sssa.org.cn 2017.
[75] Utopia 2015.
[76] Guancha.
[77] Zhihu 2015.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In the previous chapter, I introduced the theory of "discourse", defining this key term as the meaningful expressions people make during communication processes. By making these expressions, actors engage in the "language-in-action" process of reshaping background knowledge and therefore also public opinion. In addition to this, I provided a short overview of how the Chinese media landscape has changed since the reform period, and more specifically how the rise of the internet in the mid '90s caused a debate of whether or not it can be considered a potential driver for civic discourse. In this chapter, I describe my research method, explain how I gathered the materials, justify the choice for these specific materials, and explain the work-steps that I adopted for my analysis. As previously stated, the focus of this thesis will be the discourse of Chinese internet users with regard to democracy and democratic elections.

3.1 Selecting the Source Material

In order to analyze democracy discourse on the Chinese internet, I selected online news articles that were published around the period of the American Presidential Elections of 16 November 2016. I conducted a so-called synchronic analysis (see footnote 12), since I analyze material in a single time frame. Apart from two exceptions (see below), all articles were published in a time span of two weeks before and two weeks after the elections.

To select my source material, I needed to use a search engine to find useful *QQ news articles*. The search terms I used were: 美国大选, 论美国的民主 and 美国大选 in combination with 民主.[78] Figure 3.1 below shows how the abovementioned search terms enabled me to find a wide range of *QQ News* on sogou.com. I repeated this process on the search engine baidu.com. After the first coding round, however, I had to conclude that not all of the articles were relevant for my research, because the majority had no direct link with the elections, had no comments section, or had a comments section that had not incited any relevant discussion.

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[78] The English translation of these terms: "American big election", "discussing American democracy" and "American big election democracy".

With regard to the *Guancha* and *Southern Weekend* sources, I manually looked for articles about the American elections and their comments sections. In the end I found three *Guancha* and seven *Southern Weekend* articles that had relevant discussions in their comment threads.

Figure 3.1: Print screen of the website sogou.com taken on 19/11/'16.

All of the articles were posted either in late October or early November, except for one *QQ news* article of mid-December 2016 and one *Southern Weekend* article of mid-September 2016. The former article deals with the recounting of the votes in the aftermath of the elections, when it seemed that, after the recount, Trump had even more votes than initially counted. The latter article deals with the money laundering routines of presidential candidates. Both articles seemed interesting to include, as several Chinese internet users made relevant statements with regard to the democratic election system in the comments sections. My final corpus consists of a selection of 1046 comments, totaling 764 *QQ News* comments, 152 *Guancha* comments and 130 *Southern Weekend* comments. With regard to the *Guancha* and *Southern Weekend* news articles, I included all the comments these articles sparked in my source material. For *QQ News*, I opted to randomly pick a representative amount of comments because this platform does not offer most "liked" or most "commented-on" threads. I was able

to take screenshots of all of the comments a short time after these articles were posted. This might be valuable as it seems that some have been deleted or censored already. The appendix contains a list of all the articles found using the selection procedures mentioned above.

3.2 Conducting the Discourse Analysis

In section 2.1, I provided an overview of the discourse theory and what discourse analysis aims to investigate. In the following section, I give an overview of the work steps that discourse analysis offers for analyzing source materials.

In the book *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, a range of renowned CDA scholars such as Meyer, Wodak, Jäger, and Fairclough provide overviews of the history of critical linguistics and CDA. They elaborate on discourse theory, offer their views on discourse analysis, and explain how to perform the analysis.[79] Meyer argues in his chapter that CDA sees itself in the tradition of Grounded Theory, "where data collection is not a phase that must be finished before analysis starts but might be a permanently ongoing procedure".[80] This means that empirical research is a circular process, which is exemplified in the figure below.
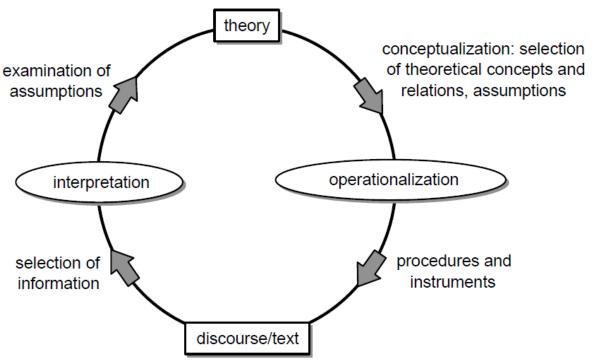

Figure 3.2 Empirical research as a circular process.[81]

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[79] Wodak & Meyer 2003.
[80] Meyer 2001: 18.
[81] Ibid. 19.

Grounded Theory, a methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss, contains three phases which are strongly connected during empirical research: collecting, coding, and analyzing.[82] The coding phase can start before one has completed the collection of data, since coding during data collection will give insights into other material that may be worth including. The coding phase also consists of three phases: open, axial, and selective coding.[83] Firstly, open coding means putting conceptual labels on the source material and is described by Strauss and Corbin as follows:

> Open coding requires a brainstorming approach to analysis because, in the beginning, analysts want to open up the data to all potentials and possibilities contained within them. Only after considering all possible meanings and examining the contexts carefully is the researcher ready to put interpretive conceptual labels on the data. Conceptualizing data not only reduces the amount of data the researcher has to work with, but at the same time provides a language for talking about the data.[84]

For this paper, I first created a list of concepts and features I came across during a first skimming of each platform. Secondly, axial coding goes hand in hand with the first phase since it is defined as "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by linking categories".[85] It consists of disaggregating the core themes the researcher traced in the first round and looking at its conditions, consequences, and so forth. Strauss argues that this results in cumulative knowledge about relationships between that category and other categories and subcategories.[86] In practice, this meant structuring the list of concepts and features by dividing them into discourse strands and smaller sub-categories. Finally, selective coding means the researcher selects coding data in order to come to the conclusion of the analysis. For my analysis, I ordered the strands and categories to interpret the discourse strands that emerged from each platform, and I summarized the main arguments each offers.

In order to process the material coherently, I have chosen the method of discourse analysis that Florian Schneider, the supervisor of this study, summarized on his website politicseastasia.com. Schneider expands the approach of Siegfried Jäger, who offers a "little toolbox for conducting discourse analysis" that contains a list of analytical guidelines for

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[82] Glaser & Strauss 1967.
[83] Corbin & Strauss 2008.
[84] Ibid. 159.
[85] Ibid. 96.
[86] Strauss 1987: 32.

processing materials. [87] Schneider integrates this list with his own experience and the works of other discourse analysts such as Paul Chilton and Norman Fairclough. [88] Jäger and Schneider both agree that a discourse analysis has to start with establishing the context of the research, which first means determining what the discourse position of the source material might be with regard to the theme in question, and also justifying the subject of analysis. In Chapter 2, I provided background information of the source materials and justified the research project. In what follows, I delve deeper into the concrete work-steps I took and the issues I focused on in order to come to the conclusion of my research.

What Schneider recommends first, is preparing the source material in order to execute the final analysis. [89] After collection of the source material, both printed as a hard copy and stored digitally, the real analysis can begin. The work-steps are as follows: (1) coding of the material, (2) examining the structure of the text, (3) collecting and examining discursive statements, (4) identifying cultural references, (5) identifying linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms and (6) interpreting and presenting the data. [90]

How the first step, the coding process works, has already been elaborated above (open, axial and selective coding). It is important that a researcher comes up with *coding categories* first in order to grasp the *discourse strands*, or themes, the source material contains. [91] In order to detect the main coding categories, I skimmed quickly through the source materials or *discourse fragments*. I later verified that these coding categories were indeed traceable among the comments of the first platform. I then repeated the process on the other two platforms. This repetitive process is what Mayring calls "evolutionary coding". [92]

In the second work step, Schneider focuses on examining the structure of the text. [93] In this research, the source material contains rather short *QQ News* comments and some longer comments posted on *Guancha* and *Southern Weekend.* However, in terms of length, the comments I gathered for this research are not comparable to the texts Schneider has in mind when he wrote his working-steps. Therefore, the focus on structural features is rather limited here. As a result, I will focus on how the arguments of the longer comments in the corpus of *Guancha* and *Southern Weekend* are built up and framed. The third work-step involves

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[87] Jäger 2001: 52.
[88] Schneider 2013.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Mayring 2002.
[93] Schneider 2013.

looking at the statements that were collected during the coding process. By examining these, I will be able to specify which statements emerge within a specific discourse strand. In the fourth work-step, Schneider recommends that researchers look among the statements for references to other sources.[94] This enables the researcher to detect which role intertextuality plays in the argumentation. The fifth work-step is directed towards language. Schneider advises scholars to look at word groups, grammar features, rhetorical and literary figures, direct and indirect speech, modalities and evidentialities.[95] The last work-step, interpretation and presentation, speaks for itself.

In my analysis, I adopt a quantitative and qualitative approach to investigate the source material. By using the program Nvivo 11 Starter, I collected the data for the quantitative analysis, which forms the basis for a deeper, qualitative analysis. In my analysis, I concentrate on the concepts and coding categories that I have identified in the discourse fragments, as long as they relate to the democracy discourse and the American Presidential Elections. I also explore how the text, and more specifically the argumentation, is structured. The focus on linguistic issues will be rather limited here, since Chinese is not my native language and, therefore, I will not be able to grasp all the linguistic features as required for an in-depth analysis, but I will still try to detect for instance what word groups are used, look for common features, metaphors, etc. In Chapter 4, I no longer make use of the terminology "coding categories", but adopt the terms "discourse strands" and "subcategories" since these are the common terms in a discourse analysis. The results are presented in the following chapter.

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.

Chapter 4: Results

In the previous chapter, I provided the outline of the research method I adopted during my analysis. The analysis I made is mainly based on the Grounded Theory, which involves a collecting, coding and analyzing phase. These were adopted in both the quantitative and the qualitative analyses of my research. Besides this, I also explained in the previous chapter how I gathered these materials and, which choices I made, and what work-steps I followed. In this chapter, I present the results of my analysis. In order to support and explain the results, I use comments that I translated myself.

I firstly offer the results of my quantitative analysis. I explain the words which occur most frequently in the overall corpus, and I consequently connect them to the democracy and Presidential Elections discussions in the source material. After that, I focus on the most frequent words in each of the three platforms. This is followed by a description of the discourse strands I deemed most prominent during the analysis of my source material. I describe how these discourse strands are constructed and which strategies, arguments or vocabulary the commenters use in order to stress the relevance of certain themes in the discussion.

4.1 Quantitative Data

By taking a look at the Word Cloud in figure 4.2, the key words that immediately stand out across the three platforms are "the United States" (*Meiguo* 美国), "democracy" (*minzhu* 民主), "president" (*zongtong* 总统) and "election" (*xuanju* 选举). Remarkably, the common Chinese names for Hillary Clinton (*Xilali Kelindun* 希拉里克林顿) and Donald Trump (*Telangpu* or *Chuanpu* 特朗普 or 川普) are missing from the Word Cloud. This is due to the fact that these names are not added to Chinese dictionaries (yet). The prominence of the key words "the U.S.", "democracy", "president" and "election" suggests that a discussion of American democracy and the presidential elections took place.

Other interesting words that deserve to be noted are for instance "China" (*Zhongguo* 中国) and "socialism" (*shehui zhuyi* 社会主义), suggesting that some of the comments focus on China as well. Furthermore, the words "people" (*renmin* 人民), "elite" (*jingying* 精英), "society" (*shehui* 社会) and "interest" (*liyi* 利益) imply that the comments sections were also able to generate a discussion on (American) society. These words are vital because they are part of the prominent discourse strands presented later in this chapter.

Figure 4.2: Word Cloud of most frequently used words in the overall source material, conducted with Nvivo 11 Starter.

In the list of the 50 most frequently used words, the Chinese names of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump are included because the research program Nvivo 11 Starter offers a word search function, enabling me to check manually how often their names appeared in the source material. During the qualitative analysis of my research I kept track of how Chinese commenters spelled Hillary Clinton's and Donald Trump's names. This way, I could include the several variations of their Chinese names in the list of the most frequently used words. Concerning the Chinese names of Donald Trump, four variations were traceable, namely *Chuanpu* 川普 (appearing 51 times), *Telangpu* 特郎普 (appearing 4 times), *Telangpu* 特朗普 (appearing 110 times) and 特朗铺 *Telangpu* (appearing once). I retraced a lot more variation and inventiveness among the Chinese names of Hillary Clinton, ranging from more neutral transliterations of "Hillary" *Xilali* 希拉里 (appearing 168 times), *Xilali* 西啦里 (appearing once) and "Clinton" *Kelindun* 克林顿 (appearing 16 times), to a probably less neutral transliteration of "Hillary", namely *Xilihuala* 稀里哗啦 (appearing once) and finally three derogatory transliterations for "Hillary", namely *Xilali* 稀拉痢, meaning "thinly scattered dysentery" and appearing once; *Laxi* 拉稀 and *Laxi* 拉希, both meaning "to have diarrhea" and appearing respectively seven and three times.

Word	Translation[96]	Count	Word	Translation	Count
美国	The U.S.	360	一定	Certain	29
民主	Democracy	258	利益	Interest	29
总统	President	212	人类	Mankind	28
希拉里[97]	Hillary	197	发展	Develop	28
特朗普[98]	Trump	166	女人	Woman	28
中国	China	142	应该	Should	27
选举	Election	106	历史	History	26
一个	One	92	安倍	Abe	26
国家	Nation	78	代表	To represent	25
没有	Not have	75	尴尬	Awkward	25
当选	To be elected	73	已经	Already	25
社会	Society	69	经济	Economy	25
政治	Politics	65	喜欢	Like	23
制度	System	63	评论	Comment	23
人民	The people	60	作者	Author	22
精英	Elite	59	觉得	Think	22
问题	Problem	53	这种	This sort	22
世界	World	42	选民	Electorate	22
支持	To support	38	出来	Come out	21
现在	Now	38	媒体	Media	21
自由	Freedom	37	存在	Exist	21
可能	Likely	34	真正	True; Real	21
大选	Big election[99]	32	其实	Actually	20
投票	To vote	31	选择	Choose	20
知道	Know	30	文章	Article	19

Table 4.2: List of the 50 most frequently used words, conducted with NVivo 11 Starter.

When looking at the most frequently used words in the comments corpora of *QQ news*, *Southern Weekend,* and *Guancha* separately, new striking features come to the fore. The separate tables and Word Clouds are provided in Appendix B, C and D.

Firstly, the results suggest that the comment section of *QQ News* attracted a less profound discussion around topics such as democratic electoral systems or the American socio-political situation than the other platforms. This should not be surprising, as most *QQ News* comments are shorter and tend to directly discuss the presidential candidates, the result of the election, and its consequences. This is reflected in one of the most striking features of the quantitative

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[96] Own translation according to the context of the subject.
[97] Includes the variations 希拉里, 西啦里, 克林顿, 稀里哗啦, 稀拉痢, 拉稀, and 拉希.
[98] Includes the variations 川普, 特郎普, 特朗普, and 特朗铺.
[99] Referring to the American Presidential Elections in November 2016.

analysis, namely that the variations of Hillary Clinton's Chinese name other than 希拉里 only appear in the *QQ News'* corpus, signifying that there was no similarly negative Clinton focus among *Guancha* and *Southern Weekend* discussions.

The fact that the word "woman" (*nüren* 女人) was the eleventh most frequently used word (with 28 counts), suggests that a lot of discussion revolved around the fact that the United States might have its first female president. The word "superstar" (*juxing* 巨星), referring to Donald Trump and appearing 8 times, and derogatory terms such as "bitch" (*biaozi* 婊子), referring to Clinton and appearing 7 times, and "madman" (*fengzi* 疯子), referring to Trump and appearing 11 times, not only confirm that the majority of the *QQ News'* comments were directly discussing the candidates, but also reveal the commenters' liking towards the candidates. The occurrence of the first two words also suggests that the discussion was sometimes gendered. The appearance of "Abe" (*Anbei* 安倍, 26 times)[100] may seem peculiar, but it is due to the fact that the Japanese Prime Minister met Donald Trump the day before the fourth *QQ News* article was published, which invoked a lot of discussion between Chinese internet users.[101] This reference to Abe only appears in the corpus of *QQ News* article four. Lastly, the word "awkward" (*ganga* 尴尬) appears 24 times in the *QQ News* comments corpus, nearly all (22 times) underneath the third article. This appearance may seem remarkable as well, but it is due to the fact that the article discusses the recount of the votes in Nevada and Wisconsin, which finally resulted in president-elect Trump widening his lead.

Taking a look at the quantitative word distribution of the *Southern Weekend* corpus (see Appendix C), the high ranking of "democracy" (*minzhu* 民主) suggests that this topic was much more important there than it was in the *QQ News* comment sections. The summaries in Appendix A show that these articles discuss a large variety of topics. This variety seems to be reflected in the word frequency table and Word Cloud. I will further elaborate on this range of topics in the next section (4.3 Discourse strands). Besides this, I would also like to point out that the word "system" deserves a higher ranking in the word frequency table since Chinese commenters used two translations for the word in the discussion, namely *zhidu* 制度 and *tizhi* 体制. Adding both Chinese terms would elevate the topic to the 14th position, with 14 counts.

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[100] Appearing in the comment section of the last *QQ News* article only.
[101] CNN 2016.

In the *Guancha* corpus, the top position for "democracy" is striking. The word table and Word Cloud in Appendix D suggest that the comment section of *Guancha* was able to generate discussions around (the American) democratic system. Words such as "society" (*shehui* 社会), "elite" (*jingying* 精英), "interest" (*liyi* 利益), "community" (*gongtongti* 共同体), and "social class" (*jieji* 阶级) suggest that the *Guancha* comment section focuses strongly on a socio-political discussion.

4.2 Discourse Strands

In the following sections I elaborate on the themes that appeared most frequently in the source materials. These themes include the main presidential candidates, the electoral system, the general political system in the United States, American or Chinese socio-political discussions, and even self-reflections on the Chinese political system. In Appendix E, I provide an overview of the discourse strands across all platforms, which is useful in comprehending the tables in the sections below.

4.2.1 Main Discourse Strands *QQ News*

As previously stated in the quantitative analysis, the discussion around topics such as the presidential electoral system and American society incited a less profound discussion on *QQ News* than on the other platforms, because the discussion there tends to focus on the presidential candidates, the result of the election, and its consequences for China. This is reflected in the table below.

Discourse strands *QQ News*		Count
Democracy		122
	Negative towards democratic elections	89
	Positive towards democratic elections	33
Clinton		113
	Anti-Clinton	81
	Pro-Clinton	25
Result of the election		92
China focus		82
U.S. focus		72
Trump		58
	Pro-Trump	36
	Anti-Trump	22
Sexist language and other vulgarity		58
Japan focus		58
Both candidates		39
	Both bad candidates	36
Election 2016		29
	Criticizing the presidential campaign	6
Confusion		16
Difficult future		12
Anti-Democratic Party		6
Irrelevant discourse strands		*150*

Table 4.2.1: List of the discourse strands emerging from the 764 *QQ news* comments.

Table 4.2.1 shows it is difficult to ignore the importance of the discourse strand "democracy". The major share (89 out of the 122) of comments that include this strand has a negative stance towards democratic elections (see Appendix E). The following example is a reaction on the request of 4.3 million Americans to the Electoral College to change the result of the vote:

愿赌服输！这就是美国人的诚信与民主吗？若每一次选举都这样可以重来、还有什么信义可言？所谓的民主就是这样可以反复的吗？[102]

If you want to bet, you have to accept when you lose! Is this the integrity and democracy of the Americans? If every election can just get a do-over, what else can you have faith in? Is that how it is in the so-called democracy, you can just do it over again?[103]

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[102] Comment number 168 on *QQ News* article 4, belonging to the subcategories "Negative towards democratic elections" and "Reversing the elections" (under Election 2016 discourse strand).

[103] Own translation according to the context of the subject.

It should not be surprising that 63 of the 89 comments of the subcategory "Negative towards democratic elections" are posted in the comment threads of the *QQ News* articles 3 and 4. These articles talk about the recount of the votes and the request to revoke the Election's result, which clearly invoked a large wave of anti-democracy statements in China whereby the functionality of the electoral system was called into question.

Interestingly, even in the comments to the rather neutral articles 1 and 2, still 26 comments fall into the negative subcategory. It highlights in the first place that *QQ News* commenters in general have a negative stance towards democracy, but more importantly, that their stance is substantiated with three main arguments. Firstly, that the electoral system has brought forward an incapable female favorite (see extensive strand "Anti-Clinton" and "Sexist language and other vulgarity" below) or even two incapable candidates (reflected in the subcategory "Both bad candidates"). Secondly, that the Presidential Campaign of 2016 was filled with scandals and mudslinging, and lastly, that the U.S. is not a true democratic country. The reasons for this last argument are diverse. Some commenters argue that the American democratic system is in the hands of the rich elite, others mock the American democracy for being unable to organize trustworthy elections, since the recount of the votes resulted in a different result from the original count. Some *QQ News* commenters consider the difference in results as a proof that there must be a conspiracy to give Clinton more votes, which is in line with what Donald Trump stated after the elections.[104] Below I provide an example of a comment of the strand "Negative towards democratic elections", containing the criticism on the presidential campaign:

> 真是民主国家！选个总统得相互攻击相互埋汰之后就任！这样总统能为国家出力？[105]

> This is really a democratic country! *(irony)* (*They*) elect a president who can take office after a round of mudslinging! Can this kind of president be a strength for the country?

The other 33 *QQ News* comments in the democracy discourse strand belong to the subcategory "Positive towards democratic elections". Apart from belonging to this subcategory, the following example is also a critique on the Chinese political system, and therefore also belongs to the "China focus" strand. It is an example of something that King et al. have put

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[104] Restuccia 2016.
[105] Comment number 26 on *QQ News* article 1, belonging to the subcategory "Negative towards democratic elections" and the subcategory "Criticizing the presidential campaign" under discourse strand "Election 2016".

forward, namely that online criticism on the central government is allowed, as long as it is not generating any collective action on the ground:[106]

> 你妹的[107]，美国人民囿选总统的权利，我连选个小小的村长的权利都没有。[108]

> F*** your sister, the American people have the right to elect a president, and I don't even have the right to elect the leader of tiny village.

The lion's share of the comments in the 'Clinton' discourse strand belongs to the subcategory "Anti-Clinton" (81 out of the 113). This is in sharp contrast to the positive/negative ratio of comments towards Donald Trump, a discourse strand ranked on the sixth position. In the "Trump" discourse strand, 36 comments fell into the "pro-Trump" subcategory, while only 22 "Anti-Trump" comments appeared. Table 4.2.1 shows that I also created a "Sexist language and other vulgarity" discourse strand, as I noticed that these types of comments were going a step further in their derogatory language towards Clinton use than the "anti-Clinton" strand comments, and that they were all gender-focused. The comments belonging to this sexism strand are not incorporated in the "anti-Clinton" strand. If I add up these 58 sexist comments with the 81 "Anti-Clinton" comments, then I can conclude that a significant share of the 614 relevant *QQ News* comments were aimed at denigrating Clinton. Below I provide examples of the discourse strands "Anti-Clinton" and "Sexist language and other vulgarity":

> 不要灰心嘛，希奶奶，这界不行再下界嘛。[109]

> Don't be disappointed, grandmother Hillary, if it is not possible in this life, then in the next life.

> 拉希里你是干不了总统了！还是回家干你的总统吧！[110]

> Hillary, you can't become president anymore! You'd better go home and f*** your president!

Interestingly, the sexist strand only appeared in the *QQ News* source material. Jodi Dean argues that with the rise of the internet, a major share of less experienced users gained access to the internet, which brought forth some hostile environment issues: cyberspace content

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[106] King et al 2013: 326–343.
[107] Chinese swearing word.
[108] Comment number 150 on *QQ News* article 2, belonging to the subcategory "Positive towards democratic elections" and discourse strand "China focus".
[109] Comment number 98 on *QQ News* article 3, belonging to the subcategory "Anti-Clinton".
[110] Comment number 41 on *QQ News* article 3, belonging to the discourse strand "Sexist language and other vulgarity" and subcategory "Anti-Clinton".

became sexist, racist and offensive.[111] I would therefore argue that besides the fact that this platform is able to attract a wide public of readers (see section 2.4), it also attracts commenters which are less experienced in engaging in discussions, which I would argue is reflected in the 16 comments of the discourse strand "Confusion", in which the commenter clearly did not understand the procedures of the U.S. election, and also in the fact that this platform was not able to raise a socio-political discussion in general, but is limited to a direct discussion of the presidential candidates, the result of the election, which outcome of the election would be beneficial to China, and statements that these elections are irrelevant for China (see below).

The "Result of the election" strand contains three subcategories (see appendix E). Firstly, the subcategory "Prognosis" with 16 comments, appearing under articles 1 and 2, which were posted before the elections. Secondly, the subcategory "Criticizing the recount of the votes" with 45 comments, all of which appeared under article 3. As one of the examples below suggests, the comments in this subcategory resonate with the emergence of "awkward" (*ganga* 尴尬) in the Word Cloud and table in Appendix B. Lastly, the subcategory "Reversing the elections" with 31 comments, all of which appeared under article 4. I divided this subcategory further into smaller units, as the comments in this subcategory were still very diverse. Some of these sub-subcategories are as follows: "Will not come to a reversal"; "The result should be respected"; "Seeking a re-election"; "Reversal is loss of face"; etc. Below, I provide examples of the three subcategories under the discourse strand "Result of the election":

> 绝对是希拉里赢！有点脑子的人都知道。[112]
>
> It is definitely Hillary who will win! The people with a bit of brains all know.
>
> 这就尴尬了……[113]
>
> This has become awkward……
>
> 美国不可能允许翻盘。翻盘是自己打自己的脸。[114]
>
> The U.S. will definitely not allow a reversal. Reversal is equal to hitting your own face.

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[111] Dean 2003: 98.

[112] Comment number 26 under *QQ News* article 2, belonging to the subcategory "Prognosis".

[113] Comment number 108 under *QQ News* article 3, belonging to the subcategory "Criticizing the recount".

[114] Comment number 80 under *QQ News* article 4, belonging to the subcategory "Reversing the elections" and to the sub-subcategories "Will not come to a reversal" and "Loss of face".

The "China focus" discourse strand consists of four subcategories: "Benefits for China", appearing 26 times; "Questioning the Chinese political system", appearing 25 times; "Setting China in a positive light", appearing in total 16 times under articles 1 and 2; and finally "The Election is irrelevant for China", appearing 15 times. Earlier in this thesis, I referred to the argument of King et al. that online criticism is allowed as long as it does not lead to collective action.[115] The second subcategory "Questioning the Chinese political system" exemplifies this. In more recent research of King et al., the authors argue that government-related *Wumaodang* (see 2.2.2) commenters seem to avoid controversial issues and instead focus on cheerleading and setting up positive discussions of valence issues.[116] They define cheerleading as "expressions of patriotism, encouragement and motivation, inspirational slogans or quotes, gratefulness, discussions of aspirational figures, cultural references, or celebrations".[117] Therefore, I argue that a share of the comments belonging to the three subcategories in the strand "China focus" which have a positive view on China, as well as the subcategory "Anti-U.S./End of U.S. hegemony" (see below) in the strand "U.S. focus", are likely to be *Wumaodang* comments defined by King et al.[118] However, this demands further research. Below, I provide representative examples of the four subcategories under the strand "China focus" (see footnotes 117-120):

> 希拉里若是当总统，中美关系必将破裂，希拉里一直以来就是个反华分子。[119]
>
> If Hillary becomes president, then the Chinese-American relations will inevitably be broken, Hillary has always been an anti-China member.
>
> 我都快三十了！还没投过票[120]
>
> I am turning 30 soon! And I still haven't voted yet.
>
> 还是中国好。总统不用人选。[121]
>
> China is still better. A president should not be elected by people.
>
> 其实说实话跟我们有关系吗？[122]

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[115] King et al. 2013: 1.
[116] King et al. 2017: 3.
[117] Ibid. 6.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Comment number 150 under *QQ News* article 1, belonging to the subcategory "Benefits for China" and the discourse strand "Anti-Clinton".
[120] Comment number 154 under *QQ News* article 2, belonging to the subcategory "Questioning the Chinese political system".
[121] Comment number 142 under *QQ News* article 2, belonging to the subcategory "Setting China in a positive light".

Actually, to speak the truth, does it have anything to do with us?

The "U.S. focus" discourse strand is the fifth most frequent strand. Out of the 72 comments, 49 fall into to the subcategory "Anti-U.S./End of U.S. hegemony". The other two subcategories "Pro-U.S." and "Splitting up of the U.S." applied to, respectively, 11 and 12 comments. I enlarged the anti-U.S. strand by incorporating the comments claiming that America's power is in decline. This type of comments is often combined with claims that China's power is on the rise. A recurrent feature among these comments is their substantiation with the argument that Hillary Clinton is the better presidential candidate. The commenters believe that if Clinton makes it to the Oval Office, she will take the U.S. into a recession. A representative example of the largest subcategory "Anti-U.S./End of U.S. hegemony" is:

服了美国人，你们就作吧，美国就是被你们慢慢作得走向衰退的[123]

I salute you Americans, you go on, the U.S. is slowly being led into recession by you

The last *QQ News* discourse strand I would like to mention, is the "Japan focus". As mentioned in the quantitative analysis, *QQ News* article 4 invoked a lot of Shinzo Abe-related comments. As the article discusses the possibility of reversing the election result, many commenters made fun of Abe's meeting with Trump, as they think Abe met the new president-elect too early, and that the Japanese PM could have another meeting with Clinton if the result were to be reversed:

老美群众是在赤裸裸的耍安倍狗吗？[124]

Are the American people teasing Abe?

4.2.2 Main Discourse Strands *Southern Weekend*

As previously stated, the *Southern Weekend* articles covered a wide variety of topics. The most frequent discourse strand is the "Democracy" strand. Apart from the subcategories mentioned in table 4.2.2 below, the strand also contains the subcategory "Negative towards democratic electoral system", appearing four times. This subcategory is not included in table 4.2.2, since I chose to present strands and subcategories that emerged at least five times. The

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[122] Comment number 24 under *QQ News* article 2, belonging to the subcategory "The Election is irrelevant for China".

[123] Comment number 45 under *QQ News* article 3, belonging to the subcategory "Anti-U.S./End of U.S. hegemony".

[124] Comment number 130 under *QQ News* article 4, belonging to the discourse strand "Japan focus".

table below suggests that the stance of *Southern Weekend* commenters towards democracy and its electoral system is rather mixed.

Discourse strands *Southern Weekend*	Count	
Democracy	48	
Meaning of democracy and democratic system		13
Positive democracy statement		8
Negative towards American or Western style of democracy		6
Negative democracy statement		6
Positive towards democratic elections		6
Disapproving the comments that pursue democracy		5
China focus	40	
Questioning the Chinese political system		21
Setting China in a positive light		6
The Elections are irrelevant for China		5
U.S. focus	23	
Negative towards American political system		10
Anti-U.S./End of U.S. hegemony		5
Trump	13	
Pro-Trump		6
Election 2016	12	
Criticizing the presidential campaign		8
Societal discussion	6	
Media	5	
Irrelevant discourse strands	29	

Table 4.2.2: List of the discourse strands with subcategories emerging from the 130 *Southern Weekend* comments. Note: strands and subcategories counted less than 5 times are not included.

Table 4.2.2 suggests that, in line with the *QQ News* corpus, the strand "Democracy" was the most common theme among all *Southern Weekend* comments. However, on this platform the discussion delved deeper than on *QQ News*. The comment below is a representative example of how many *Southern Weekend* commenters, having a positive view on democracy, discuss their understanding of the system, and how it should be adopted to serve the people in general. A recurrent argument among these statements is that the electoral system comes with certain regulations (such as the existence of the Electoral College) that are established to keep the system sustainable. In this way, the system enables citizens to reach free will (as argued in the example below), and makes it possible to divide wealth in a society. Below, I firstly provide a comment to the discussion "Meaning of democracy and democratic system", and then an

example of a comment belonging to the "Negative towards American or Western style of democracy":

> 个人认为人的终极目的是自由意志，民主只是现阶段人类发现的最接近或者说最有可能甚至是唯一符合目的精神让所有人人达成自由意志的手段。当然，这个目的只是对承认自由意志存在的人而言，对于偏向宿命论的人而言不合适[125]

> I personally think that humankind's ultimate aim is free will, democracy is at the present stage just the closest, or the most likely, or even the only means discovered by mankind which is conform to vigorous spirit that enables all people to reach free will. Of course, this aim is only for those who recognize the existence of free will, it is not fit for those who tend to believe in fatalism.

> 这就是美国民主的又一典范，一切皆有可能，它能把一个学徒选为总统，一个黑人变为总统，也能把毫无从政经验的人变为总统[126]

> This is another example of American democracy, everything is possible, it can get an apprentice to become elected as president, or a black man as the president, but also someone with no political experience to become a president.

"China focus" is the second most common discourse strand. This strand consists of seven subcategories, four of which also belong to the "China focus" strand in the *QQ News* articles (see footnote). [127] Next to these subcategories, I also established the subcategories "Comparison with Chinese style of democracy", appearing three times; "We should focus on ourselves", appearing twice; and "China's political and societal history" and "Positive towards Chinese style of democracy", each appearing once. It is clear that a major share of *Southern Weekend* comments falls into the subcategory "Questioning the Chinese political system" (under the "China focus" strand), which is in line with the liberal ideology credited to the newspaper. Below, I provide a comment that contains a cynical metaphor appearing several times in the *Southern Weekend* corpus. I put this metaphor into the "Questioning the Chinese political system" subcategory because I interpret the eunuch as a cynical reference to Chinese commenters mocking the democracy of other countries. Those who posted this comment consider China as a country without a democratic system, therefore without any legitimacy to mock the current American political situation.

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[125] Comment number 8 under *Southern Weekend* article 7, belonging to the subcategories "Meaning of democracy and democratic system" and "Positive democracy statement".

[126] Comment number 1 under *Southern Weekend* article 1, belonging to the subcategory "Negative towards American or Western style of democracy"

[127] "Benefits for China"; "Questioning the Chinese political system"; "Setting China in a positive light" and "The Election is irrelevant for China".

太监嘲笑别人性生活泛滥[128]

It is flooding with eunuchs mocking the sex life of other people

The examples above and below belong to a minority of the comments that openly discuss democracy in China, and I consider them both as examples of what Yang Guobin called "online citizen activism".[129] The example below is the only example among the *Southern Weekend* comments that fell into the subcategory "Positive towards Chinese style of democracy". However, the following example could also be interpreted as cynical criticism and therefore belonging in the subcategory "Questioning the Chinese political system". This is one of the limitations of my research, namely that the analysis remains my personal interpretation:

有两种民主 1 是欧美这样一人一票 人民做主 2 是我国这样人大代表 为民做主[130]

There are two types of democracy, one is the Euro-American sort, where the people decide, one vote per person, the second is like our nation's where the National People's Congress takes the decisions for the people

4.2.3 Main Discourse Strands *Guancha*

A look at the table of discourse strands in the *Guancha* source material reveals the importance of the "democracy" strand once again. This time, the strand contains seven subcategories. A look at Appendix E reveals that I established a subcategory called "The American electoral system" (discussed in 34 comments) which contains the sub-subcategories "Positive towards democratic elections" and "Negative towards democratic elections". While these emerge as subcategories at the other two platforms, here they are established "only" as sub-subcategories because discussions on this platform went much further than a simple positive-negative juxtaposition. The other sub-subcategories are for instance: "Problematic American electoral system", appearing 12 times; "One vote per citizen discussion", appearing 4 times; "Explication of the voting system", appearing 3 times and "Tyranny of the majority", appearing once.

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[128] Comment number 7 under *Southern Weekend* article 6, belonging to the subcategory "Questioning the Chinese political system" .
[129] Yang 2009.
[130] Comment number 15 under *Southern Weekend* article 7, belonging to the subcategories "Positive towards Chinese style of democracy"; "Positive democracy statement" and "Comparison with Chinese style of democracy".

Discourse strands *Guancha*	Count	
Democracy	88	
The American electoral system	34	
⇨ *Problematic American electoral system*		*12*
⇨ *Negative towards democratic elections*		*10*
⇨ *Positive towards democratic elections**		*4*
Meaning of democracy and democratic system	23	
Positive democracy statement	15	
Negative democracy statement	11	
Negative towards Western/U.S. electoral systems*	4	
U.S. focus	55	
Anti-U.S./End of U.S. hegemony	16	
Problematic American electoral system	12	
Negative towards American political system	11	
Societal discussion	30	
Elitism	19	
China focus	18	
Populism	14	
Trump	12	
Anti-capitalism	12	
Socialist, Marxist views	10	
Irrelevant discourse strands	*32*	

Table 4.2.3: List of the discourse strands emerging from the 152 *Guancha* comments. Note: strands and subcategories counted less than 10 times are not included, (*) (sub-) categories with an asterisk are exceptions due to their relevance.

The comment below is an example of the (sub-)subcategory "Problematic American electoral system". It is at the same time belonging to the strand "United Nations voting system" as well. This strand is not included in the table above, since it only emerged three times in the *Guancha* source material.

> 取消选举人制度意味着颠覆美国立国之国，从此没有美利坚合众国，美国走上中央集权道路，宁可象你说的这么简单！美国选举人制度是基于州国来设计的好比联合国。联合国能说大国十票，小国一票么？[131]

> To abolish the Electoral College system signifies overthrowing the nationhood of the U.S., from then on there's no United States of America. The U.S. embarking on the path of centralization, if it were only as simple as you say it is! The American Electoral College is installed by the states *(has proportional representation)*, it's better

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[131] Comment number 14 on *Guancha* article 2, belonging to the subcategories "Problematic American electoral system" and "United Nations voting system".

than the UN voting system, can the UN say that the leading powers get ten votes and small countries just one vote?

This comment is an example of how the discussion on *Guancha* concerning the American electoral system is mainly focused on the existence of the indirect election system, and more specifically, the Electoral College. The majority of the commenters has a rather negative stance towards this system and argues it is necessary to reform or decentralize the electoral system. The commenters that disagree with this stance contend it is impossible to change the system, providing arguments that system reforms require the approval of two thirds of the Senate and Congress, and 38 American states. In addition, they argue that this will eventually disrupt the country's unity.

If we look broader than the discussion that merely focused on the American electoral system, then we come across the discussion revolving around the meaning of "democracy" and the functionality of a democratic system. In analogy with this type of comments on *Southern Weekend*, I divided these into the subcategory "Meaning of democracy and democratic system". Some of the commenters literally discuss what the definition of democracy is, but others delved into a deeper discussion, whereby two main features come to the fore. Firstly, a big share of these comments is linked to the subcategory "Elitism" (see below). These comments, in line with the content of the article (see Appendix A), denounce the American elite for calling "populism" undemocratic. The leftist commenters support populism since they consider Trump to be an anti-establishment candidate (see below), just like how he wants to present himself. Secondly, a major share of the commenters has an utilitarian vision on how to govern a nation, since they argue that democratic rule is "not an aim, but a means", meaning it is merely a tool for good governance and that it is not necessary to have a democratic system to reach a good level of governance.

A notable share of the comments that fall into the discourse strand "U.S. focus" belong to the "Anti-U.S./End of U.S. hegemony" subcategory. However, we should be cautious and keep in mind that this may be an example of a *Wumaodang* comment:

> 中国体制本身就是一种优势，国家可以将国内经济发展形成合力，对外可以投资，对内可以拉动内需。美国是通过二战掠夺世界资源，以战胜国优势获取资源整合。在新的国际形式下，中国保持良性运行，必将成为世界经济大佬。[132]

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[132] Comment number 27 under *Guancha* article 3, belonging to the subcategories "Anti-U.S./End of U.S. hegemony" and "Setting China in a positive light" (under discourse strand "China focus").

The Chinese system is the superior sort of system, the nation can develop the domestic economy by forming combined forces: foreign forces can invest and domestic forces can stimulate the domestic demand. By engaging in World War II, the U.S. plundered global energy sources, by means of war they obtained superiority over all resources. In the new international pattern, China will remain handling peacefully and will inevitably become a global economic heavyweight.

The third largest discourse strand is "Societal discussion". The three subcategories under the strand are "Elitism", appearing 19 times; "Class struggle, mobility and social justice", appearing 6 times and "Sectionalism", appearing 5 times. A major share of the comments belonging to the biggest subcategory "Elitism" describes President-elect Donald Trump as the leader of an anti-elite/anti-establishment movement:

特朗普的当选恰恰证明了精英没有能力拦截民众真正支持的领导人，这正是美国民主性的表现。[133]

The election of Trump just proves that the elite no longer has the ability to bar leaders the people really support.

By adding up the eight anti-elitist comments in the subcategory "Elitism" with the eleven "Negative democracy statements"; the twelve comments in the discourse strand "Anti-capitalism"; the ten comments in "Socialist, Marxist views" and the ten comments that lauded the anti-elitist article number 3 in general, I am able to gather a wide range of leftist comments. This is completely in line with the conservative image of *Guancha*. In addition, the table above indicates that the statements questioning the Chinese political system (appearing five times) are not as prevalent as they are on the other platforms, and show that *Guancha* clearly contains more negative statements towards the United States and its political/electoral system (cfr. discourse strand "U.S. Focus").

The last discourse strand I would like to focus on is "Populism". The comments of this strand focus on this phenomenon in the United States. As previously stated, the majority of the "Populism"-related comments perceives this phenomenon as an anti-elitist grassroots movement, whereby Hillary Clinton is the incarnation of an elitist politician:

说的很好，简单的将反对意见归为民粹主义只能证明西方精英阶层的傲慢和无知[134]

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[133] Comment number 11 under *Guancha* article 3, belonging to the subcategories "Populism"; "Pro-Trump"; "The reason why Trump is elected" and "Positive democracy statement".

Very well said, by simply classifying the opposing viewpoints as populist *(and anti-democratic)* this only proves the arrogance and ignorance of the Western elite.

如果是希拉里的选票数少、但是选举人票数多而当了总统 ，美国媒体以及这位美国小哥一定会大肆赞颂美国的选举人制度成功阻止了民粹主义者特朗普，美国的选举机制如何优越 云云。[135]

In the case that Hillary should not have had enough popular votes, but still enough votes in the Electoral College to become President, then the American press and even this American little brother (*author of the article)* would have praised the American Electoral College system for succeeding in holding back the populist Trump. In which way is the American electoral system superior?

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[134] Comment number 5 under *Guancha* article 1, belonging to the discourse strand "Populism", and sub-categories "Elitism" and 'Anti-U.S./End of U.S. hegemony"
[135] Comment number 40 under *Guancha* article 2, belonging to the discourse strand "Populism" and subcategory "Anti-Hillary".

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study suggests that the 2016 Presidential Elections in the United States were able to incite discussions around democracy, the American democratic (electoral) system, and its socio-political context in the comment sections of the three Chinese news platforms I selected. The research question of this thesis was as follows: What do online comments on Chinese news articles about the 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections reveal about Chinese democracy discourses in digital China?

The quantitative analysis of this study already suggested that *QQ News* was not able to incite a discussion as profound as the other two platforms. This is because *QQ News* discussions mainly focused on a direct discussion about the presidential candidates, the result of the election, and which consequences it had for China. The qualitative analysis of *QQ News* pointed out that the tone of the democracy-related comments was rather negative. This is due to the fact that many commenters deprecated Hillary Clinton, argued that both the presidential candidates were incapable for the presidency, or criticized the turbulent presidential campaign. Another remarkable feature of the *QQ News* discussions is the sexist and vulgar language directed at Clinton. I argued its emergence is due to the fact that *QQ News* is able to attract a wide public of users, whereby less experienced users post this kind of statements.

Comparatively, *Southern Weekend* was able to incite a more profound discussion around democracy. Most commenters had a positive view on the concept of democracy, and discussed how the system can serve its people in the best possible way. Besides this, the platform contained a considerable share of comments that adopted the democracy discussion to question the Chinese political system. These comments resonate with the liberal ideology that is linked with *Southern Weekend*.

The choice to incorporate *Guancha* in the source material of this study is because the platform is known to have a conservative background. The commenters in this discussion had a rather negative view on the concept of democracy and its electoral system because of the problems in the aftermath of the American Elections, particularly the recount of the votes and the request to revoke the result. More importantly, these commenters were not convinced that democratic rule is a precondition to govern a nation properly, since these commenters argued that democracy is "not an aim, but a means". Besides this, the commenters on this platform criticized the American elite for labelling "populism" as undemocratic. My analysis suggests

these commenters are in favor of Trump as he profiled himself as an anti-establishment candidate. This anti-establishment profiling resonates well with *Guancha'*s conservative and anti-capitalist image.

Overall, Chinese commenters had a rather negative stance towards democracy, partly because of their disliking of one or even both of the presidential candidates, the turbulent campaign, or the chaotic aftermath, but also because commenters believed democratic rule is merely one of the possible means for good state governance. Although this discourse analysis was only based on a modest-sized sample of online comments and was limited by the state's control of the internet, I consider it sufficient for supporting Yang Guobin's statement that the Chinese internet is not merely an outlet for triviality, as a major share of the comments can be seen as engagements of "online citizen activism". Should text-based research on this topic be elaborated, it would be useful to enlarge the amount of comments, and news articles from other sources could be included. Recent research has improved online text-based research, enabling researchers to better distinguish between comments made by *Wumaodang* members and comments that can be considered civic discourse. If research on other types of content should be conducted, I suggest carrying out interviews, although the political climate in China might restrict this kind of research.

My study tried to be a modest contribution to the debate whether we can consider the internet in China as a potential driver for civic discourse. I consider this study relevant in confirming Yang Guobin's account on the Chinese internet being filled with "online citizen activism". Hitherto, much research has been focused on the official Chinese view on democracy, and what the notion means when used in official propaganda. However, this analysis of the discourse in the comment section of online news websites has helped to gain a better understanding of the non-governmental stance towards the American democratic system, and the unofficial Chinese view on democracy in general.

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Appendix A: Summaries of the Source Materials

Guancha article 1: 杨光斌：特朗普当选，他们却说这届选民不行——"民粹主义"已经成为掩盖政治真相的污名化概念 Yang Guangbin: Trump is elected, they only say this electorate is not okay – "populism" already became the stigmatization concept in covering up the political truth, 24/11/'16 http://www.guancha.cn/YangGuangBin/2016_11_24_381629.shtml

The author of this article advocates for a new understanding of political concepts in order to be able to achieve a trustworthy political system. He blames Western media and analysts for misinterpreting the result of the election. Instead of reflecting on the political system, they prefer to blame the result on the rise of populism. He argues that American elites are no longer representing the people, and especially the lower classes. According to the elite, populism is a trend in which the government is unable to satisfy political needs, but the author argues it is a hollow term invented by the elite that conceals a deeper political truth, namely a bifurcation between the elite and common people. Yang explains the difference between left- and right-wing populism and argues they are both products of a globalizing world and is initiated by neo-liberalism which exacerbated the enormous wealth gap in the U.S., because there is no sufficient protection of the poorer class who sees their jobs taken away by immigrants. After the financial crisis in 2008, the younger people who were not able to find a job supported Saunders (left-wing populism), the agricultural workers in the south of the U.S. supported Trump (right-wing populism). Yang argues that common people are less and less involved in true politics and stay "political correct" by avoiding discussion of "peoples" as they want to avoid being called racist, and avoid discussion of the notion "class" as they want to avoid being called Marxist. As a result, the elite can only use populism to clarify the political situation instead of questioning its role in/and the political system.

Guancha article 2: 美国 80 后欧永鸣：我不明确特朗普担任总统的目标是什么 The U.S. after the '80s: I'm not sure what the objectives of Trump's presidency are, 12/11/'16 http://www.guancha.cn/SamOverholt/2016_11_12_380282.shtml

This article is an interview with Sam Overholt, a Master's student from Nanjing University. In the interview he expresses his aversion towards Donald Trump, but also admits the other candidate Clinton was not his favorite candidate either. He expresses that Trump is in history the fifth president who lost the popular vote, but won by having the majority of the votes in the Electoral College, leading to the conclusion the electoral system is problematic. The interview concludes with his opinion on the future U.S.-China relationship, whereby he

argues that as Trump is a businessman, there will not be a big impact on the economic ties between both countries.

Guancha article 3: 张飞岸：美国大选呼唤民主观念的更新 Zhang Fei'an: The U.S. election calls for a renewal of democratic ideas, 11/11/'16
http://www.guancha.cn/zhangfeian/2016_11_11_380227.shtml

Zhang Fei'an argues that the United States is not a real democracy but a country where the elite dominates the country in name of democracy, where Electoral College votes are respected over popular votes, and where the media supports the Democratic Party and Hillary Clinton. She contends the U.S. seems democratic because the candidates were able to have intense debates, but that a system of checks and balances eventually will thwart Trump's populist policy. Zhang argues that the election of Trump reveals a rift between the American elite and the common people, which is stirred by an increased wealth gap caused by globalization and liberalization, and allowing a greater rift between the white people and other ethnic groups on the one hand and between the middle and lower classes on the other. The election also proves that the elite were this time unable to bring forward a capable candidate that the common people wanted to support. Zhang expresses her concern, considering that the wealth gap is growing which is enabled by ownership of capitalist property, about which candidate will be able to represent the common people. Zhang is convinced that Clinton was the candidate playing by the rules of the elite, while Trump disregarded political correctness. Rather than focusing on the uneven wealth distribution, the elite prefers to focus on ethnic and religious conflicts. The second part of the article delves deeper into the meaning of liberal and social democracy, and links it with social rights. In her opinion, liberal democracy is no true variant of democracy as it disrespects the popular vote. In other words, democracy should represent and be in interest of the majority of the people. She concludes by considering that the Presidential Elections of 2016 were a testimony of the public dissatisfaction with the invalid U.S. democracy and pinpoints it as a starting point for people to think about democratic concepts, functions, and models.

Southern weekend article 1: "局外人"逆袭 "The outsider" is doing a counter-attack, 10/11/'16 http://www.infzm.com/content/120738

This article is an account on the eventful Election Day, combined with opinions of several Americans on the elections and the candidates. By expressing their opinion and explaining the reasons why they voted for a specific candidate, the author is able to map what sort of people voted for Trump and explain why Trump was able to gain the most votes in specific states, for

instance in the Rust Belt and where the coal industry is mainly located. The author also delves deeper into the background of Trump and his pursuit of political power. Furthermore, the author argues that Trump remains an unexpected winner, but contends that Trump owns most of his success due to his profiling as an anti-elitist candidate and his straightforward way of talking. He concludes that it was an unusual election, which tears the American society apart, and reveals a great rift between the elite and common people.

Southern Weekend article 2: 大选何以让美国人焦虑不安 The elections can make the Americans very anxious 4/11/'16 http://www.infzm.com/content/120714

This *Southern Weekend* article sets off by claiming that the performance of both presidential candidates during the campaign was very disappointing and looked like a soap opera. As a result, the U.S. will have its most unpopular president since the 1930s. The author links poor government performance with unsuccessful economic policies to be the causes of a decline of middle class income and racial problems, which in some cases resulted in extreme violence. This is all happening in the framework of a risen populism, which is embedded in anti-globalist and isolationist thought. These issues are testifying that the American political system, i.e. the American democratic system, should be questioned. The author argues that there is an exaggerated impact of money on American politics, which enables the upper class to manipulate the political field. In the last section of the article, the author blames American democratic imperialism for bringing many other countries into turmoil.

Southern Weekend article 3: 时评|美大选"权力游戏"步步惊心 Commentary: The "Game of Thrones" elections are step by step more startling, 2/11/'16
http://www.infzm.com/content/120592

This article deals with the e-mail controversy of Hillary Clinton in which she used private email servers to handle official duties when she was still Secretary of State. This controversy was even more stirred up by the Republican candidate Donald Trump, who for several weeks had been criticizing the FBI and the Justice Department for the way they dealt with the "mail gate" in order to prove that the election is manipulated. By highlighting that the Elections are evolving into a money and "power game" (Chinese transliteration for "Game of Thrones"), the author argues the 2016 Elections is one of true chaos. The author concludes that the attention of the election should be focused on policy issues.

Southern Weekend article 4: 国大选"十月突变" "The sudden October change" in the elections, 21/10/'16 http://www.infzm.com/content/120359

This article consists of an analysis of the eventful months before the election. This analysis focuses on both presidential candidates' background, their contrasts and which scandals they have both faced. With regard to Trump, the author focuses specifically on the controversy around sexist comments made by Trump and how he is received by other key Republican figures. With regard to Clinton, apart from focusing on her health issues, the author also focuses on the fact that WikiLeaks released an archive of emails, causing Clinton to be involved in the "mail gate" and the fact that Democratic Party claimed that the Russian intelligence agencies were behind the leaks. The author highlights that this controversy was doing no good to the level of confidence American citizens have in Clinton. However, the author points out that the scandals are having different results to both candidates' popularity, namely that the media is mainly focused on the controversy revolving around Donald Trump. The last section of the article delves deeper into the concern of the American voters towards the outcome of the elections and ends with an anti-political discourse in which politics is being called "a dirty industry" and politicians "gang liars".

Southern Weekend article 5: 看美国大选怎么洗钱 A look at how money gets laundered in the American elections, 8/9/'16 http://www.infzm.com/content/119518

The following article summarizes an analysis undertaken by Bloomberg over how the Democratic Party is able to launder money. It delves deeper into the legal regulations of how American people can fund the Democratic Party. Apparently, by transferring a non-restricted sum of money to Democratic Party Committees in each American state, it can avoid the legal restrictions that exist when funding the Democratic National Committee directly. The article suggests that the Democratic Party in this way already whitewashed 9 million USD. The author reveals that the Republican Party in theory can do the same, but that Bloomberg has not found any evidence of similar behavior. With regard to Donald Trump, his fundraising movement has not funded the Republican Committees.

Southern Weekend article 6: 美国大选急转弯 A sudden turn in the American elections, 3/11/'16 http://www.infzm.com/content/120609

This article also deals with the "mail gate" of Hillary Clinton, in particular with the fact that the FBI director James Comey reopened the investigation on the private emails of Hillary Clinton less than two weeks before the Election. It reports how the emails came into FBI hands due to the investigation of former Congressman Anthony Weiner, who is a former aide to Hillary Clinton and who was faced with child pornography accusations and caused

Clinton's campaign team to insist that the emails were leaked by Russian intelligence agencies. Apart from the legal procedures before the announcement of reopening of the "mail gate" investigation, the article also talks about the consequences these controversies have had on the popularity of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

Southern Weekend article 7: 赢的是特朗普，不是美国民主 The winner is Trump, not the American democracy 10/11/'16 http://www.infzm.com/content/120737

The article focuses on two major problems the American democratic system is facing. Firstly, a welfare trap whereby the group of tax money receivers has grown, concluding that this is an unsustainable situation. Secondly, it focuses on the challenges cultural pluralism brings to American society, whereby the author is worried about the sustainability and ethnic balance of the American society. He/she argues that the American democracy has always been a proud "export product" of the U.S., but that the past election highlights the hypocrisy of American democracy because the liberal media has treated both candidates in a complete different way, meaning that the "degenerated" media was having liberal prejudices. A last minor section deals with the political standpoints of both candidates and highlights the importance of the election for the global political scene.

QQ News article 1: 美国大选 U.S. Presidential Election, 7/11/'16
http://news.qq.com/zt2016/USelection/index.htm

The following *QQ News* article is an index page offering a wide variety of articles dealing with the Presidential Elections and its social repercussions. It offers a guidebook with the procedures of the election, a comparison of the policy plans of the two main candidates, an article about the eleven "swing states", an educational and professional background of both candidates, and is followed by an opinion section in which several journalists analyze which candidate is the best choice.

QQ News article 2: 2016 美国大选日时间表 全民 "狂欢" American Election day's schedule all the people rejoice in excitement, 7/11/'16
http://news.qq.com/cross/20161105/8Rv69M7R.html

This webpage is the guidebook of the electoral procedures mentioned in the previous article, but offers a separate comments section. The article highlights that the election is organized in six different time zones, provides a clear overview of the closing times of the poll stations state by state, in which state the first results will be announced, when the final result can be

expected, whether the voting referenda are reliable, why the election day is being held on the 8th of August and, finally, which new regulations are to be adopted within each state.

QQ News article 3: 美大选重新计票落幕 特朗普比首次结果多 162 Recounting of the votes ended: Trump has 162 more votes than the first time, 13/12/'16 http://news.qq.com/a/20161213/013755.htm

This short *QQ News* article deals with the recount of the votes in Wisconsin, resulting in 162 extra votes for Donald Trump, which confirmed his victory. Furthermore, the article talks about the motivations of the Green Party's leader Jill Stein for claiming a recount of the votes and her failure to organize a recount in Pennsylvania and Michigan.

QQ News article 4: 430 万人联名请选举人改票 美国大选可能翻盘？ 4.3 million people jointly request the Electoral College to change the vote: can the American elections outcome be changed?, 19/11/'16 http://news.qq.com/a/20161119/017689.htm

The main focus of this article is the fact that 4.3 million Americans signed a petition to request the Electoral College's electors to not follow the result of the popular vote. The petitioner's main argument is that candidate Hillary Clinton received in total more votes than her opponent, and thus advocates for a direct election. The article further reports that many experts believe that their request will be unsuccessful because it is against the law for Electoral College electors to vote differently, but that it is successful in bringing the discussion of the existence of the Electoral College mechanism into public spotlight again. One expert states that in history there have been some electors who changed their mind and voted differently from the voters they represent, but this never led to the situation in which the final result was completely different from the popular vote.

Appendix B: Quantitative Analysis of the *QQ News* corpus

Word	Translation	Count	Word	Translation	Count
美国	The U.S.	198	政治	Politics	12
希拉里[136]	Hillary	197	已经	Already	11
总统	President	165	奥巴马	Obama	11
特朗普[137]	Trump	106	疯子	Madman	11
中国	China	65	看看	To look	11
民主	Democracy	52	历史	History	10
一个	One	47	经济	Economy	10
选举	Election	46	一直	Constantly	9
国家	Nation	39	出来	To come out	9
世界	World	34	制度	System	9
女人	Woman	28	战争	War	9
没有	Not have	28	投票	To vote	9
支持	To support	27	重新	Again	9
安倍	Abe	26	不要	Do not	8
尴尬	Awkward	24	代表	To represent	8
人民	The people	20	发展	To develop	8
可能	Likely	18	巨星	Superstar	8
投票	To vote	18	直接	Direct	8
大选	Big election	17	第一	First	8
应该	Should	17	不错	Not bad	7
希望	To hope	16	之后	After	7
现在	Now	15	其实	Actually	7
知道	To know	15	喜欢	To like	7
一定	Certainly	14	婊子	'bitch'	7
感觉	To feel	13	心里	In the heart	7

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[136] Includes the variations 希拉里, 西啦里, 克林顿, 稀里哗啦, 稀拉痢, 拉稀, and 拉希.
[137] Includes the variations 特朗普，川普, and 特郎普.

Appendix C: Quantitative Analysis of the *Southern Weekend* Corpus

Word	Translation	Count	Word	Translation	Count
美国	The U.S.	71	确实	Really	8
民主	Democracy	70	经济	Economy	8
中国	China	31	规则	Rule(s)	8
特朗普[138]	Trump	31	个人	Individual	7
选举	Election	28	价值	Value	7
国家	Nation	22	实质	Essence	7
一个	One	21	当然	Of course	7
没有	To not have	20	权力	Power	7
问题	Problem	20	知道	To know	7
总统	President	16	程序	Order	7
评论	To comment	16	竞选	To run for	7
作者	Author	15	觉得	To think	7
正义	Justice	15	体制	System	6
书记	Secretary	14	出来	To come out	6
人民	The people	14	别人	Other people	6
喜欢	To like	14	媒体	Media	6
文章	Article	12	怀孕	Pregnant	6
社会	Society	12	手段	Means	6
这种	This sort	10	现在	Now	6
希拉里	Hillary	9	福利	Well-being	6
自由	Freedom	9	不要	Do not	5
代表	To represent	8	人类	Humanity	5
制度	System	8	参加	To join	5
当选	To be elected	8	国内	Domestic	5
政府	Government	8	可能	Probably	5

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[138] Includes the variations 川普, 特朗普, and 特朗铺.

Appendix D: Quantitative Analysis of the *Guancha* Corpus

Word	Translation	Count	Word	Translation	Count
民主	Democracy	136	历史	History	14
美国	The U.S.	91	媒体	Media	14
社会	Society	52	存在	To exist	14
精英	Elite	52	本质	Essence	14
政治	Politics	48	选择	To choose	14
中国	China	46	一定	Certainly	13
制度	System	46	少数	Minority	13
选举	Election	32	民主党	Democratic Party	13
总统	President	31	选民	Electorate	13
特朗普[139]	Trump	30	当选	To be elected	12
问题	Problem	29	西方	The West	12
没有	To not have	28	资本主义	Capitalism	12
自由	Freedom	27	共同体	Community	11
人民	The people	26	其实	In fact	11
一个	One	24	可能	Probably	11
利益	Interest	21	大选	Big election	11
人类	Mankind	20	投票	To vote	11
多数	Majority	19	正确	Correct	11
国家	Nation	17	阶级	Social class	11
形成	To form	17	需要	To need	11
现在	Now	17	已经	Already	10
社会主义	Socialism	17	必须	To have to	10
发展	To develop	16	概念	Concept	10
真正	Real	15	票数	Number of votes	10
希拉里	Hillary	14	这种	This sort	10

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[139] Includes the variations 特朗普，川普, and 特郎普.

Appendix E: Conceptualization of the Source Materials

Below I provide an overview of the discourse strands and (sub-)categories that emerged from the source materials. Some of these themes only emerge at certain platforms. I provide the abbreviations of the platforms where the strand or subcategory emerged. QQ stands for *QQ News*¸ SW for *Southern Weekend* and G for *Guancha*:

- Clinton
  - ✓ Pro-Clinton   QQ, SW
  - ✓ Anti-Clinton   QQ, SW, G
  - ✓ Reference to Bill Clinton   QQ
  - ✓ Female President Confusion   QQ

- Trump
  - ✓ Pro-Trump   QQ, SW, G
  - ✓ Anti-Trump   QQ, SW, G
  - ✓ Prognosis of Trump's term   SW, G
  - ✓ The reason why Trump is elected   SW, G
  - ✓ Legal steps to avoid Trump's presidency   G

- Both candidates
  - ✓ Both bad candidates   QQ, SW
  - ✓ Both good candidates   QQ
  - ✓ Age of both candidates   QQ

- Democracy
  - ✓ The American electoral system
    - o Negative towards democratic elections   QQ, SW, G
    - o Positive towards democratic elections   QQ, SW, G
    - o Explication of the American electoral system   G
    - o One vote per citizen discussion   G
    - o Tyranny of the majority   G
    - o Problematic American electoral system   SW, G
  - ✓ Negative towards U.S. or Western style of democracy   SW, G
  - ✓ Meaning of democracy and democratic system   SW, G
  - ✓ Negative democracy statement   SW, G
  - ✓ Positive democracy statement   SW, G
  - ✓ Disapproving the comments that pursue democracy   SW
  - ✓ Anti-individualist democracy   G

- China focus
  - ✓ Questioning the Chinese political system   QQ, SW, G
  - ✓ Setting China in a positive light   QQ, SW, G
  - ✓ Benefits for China   QQ, SW, G
  - ✓ The Elections are irrelevant for China   QQ, SW

✓ China's societal and political history		SW, G
✓ Comparison with Chinese style of democracy		SW
✓ Need to focus on China		SW
✓ Positive on China's style of democracy		SW

- U.S. focus

✓ Anti-U.S./ End of U.S. hegemony		QQ, SW
✓ Pro-U.S.		QQ
✓ Splitting up of the U.S.		QQ, SW
✓ Negative towards American political system		SW
✓ Problematic American electoral system		SW, G
✓ Socio-political situation U.S.		SW
✓ Money laundering		SW
✓ Explication of the American electoral system		G

- 2016 election

✓ Does not matter who is elected		QQ, SW
✓ Criticizing the presidential campaign		QQ, SW
✓ Importance of the elections		QQ
✓ The reason why Trump is elected		SW, G
✓ The result should be respected		SW, G

- Sexist language and other vulgarity   QQ

- Confusion   QQ, SW, G

- Japan focus   QQ

- Democratic Party focus   QQ

- Difficult future   QQ

- Result of the election

✓ Prognosis		QQ
✓ Criticizing the recount		QQ
✓ Reversing the elections		
o Will not come to a reversal		QQ
o The result should be respected		QQ
o Seeking a reelection		QQ
o Reversal is loss of face		QQ

- Societal discussion

✓ Elitism		SW, G
✓ Class struggle, class mobility and social justice		SW, G

✓ Sectionalism	G
• Anti-Capitalism	SW, G
• Populism	SW, G
• Socialist/Marxist views	SW, G
• Electoral systems	SW
✓ UN voting system	G
• Racist comment	SW
• American versus Chinese media	SW
• Anti-politics	SW
• Anti-socialism	G
• Democratic Party	
✓ Anti-Democratic Party	SW, G
✓ Pro-Saunders	G
• Globalization	G
• Anti-media	G