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## Reflecting the digital nationalism in China: A case study of The Great Translation Movement

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# Reflecting the digital nationalism in China: A case study of The Great Translation Movement

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## **Abstract**

The Great Translation Movement is a digital activity organised by Chinese diasporic netizens, having launched during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. The movement seeks to translate the ultranationalist, pro-Russian and anti-Western sentiments, as well as the ongoing discussion about the social events from the China online discourse and show them to the broader audience in the West. In fact, what lies behind online comments such as "Putin the Great", "US is demeaning China," and "the system is fatally broken" is the phenomenon of digital nationalism in China. Thus, this paper examines the two sides of digital nationalism. On the one hand, by promoting nation-patriotism online, the authoritarian regime of China increased support by the Chinese people worldwide. But on the other hand, nation-building in the age of ICT is a complex process that produces unpredictable outcomes, especially under the circumstances such as polarised online discourse and social discord. Thus, this paper examined the most recent data curated by the GTM, aiming to comprehend GTM's participant's ideas and behaviour and the consequences of CCP's engagement in the digital nationalism process.

# 1 Introduction

In 2022, many new social media accounts arose in the overseas Mandarin-speaking online world (CDT, 2022), aiming to record public opinion in mainland China and leave a "true collective memory" for netizens. Among them is The Great Translation Movement (GTM), a digital activity that seeks to translate and reflect the nationalistic discourse in China to a broader audience outside the Great Firewall (GFW). However, translating literature into foreign languages so that Western civilisation could better comprehend China's national character is not novel, as Lin Yutang, a Chinese philologist, attempted in the last century with his book *My Country and My People* (1935). Nonetheless, nation-building is a dynamic process since the nation's imagined community in which a shared sentiment creates a collective identity and connects individuals in solidarity powered by network connections (Anderson, 2006; Hobsbawm, 1983). In other words, nationalism in today's age of network society is a dynamically changing notion that differs from what Lin reflected before. Today, network connections are enhanced by the rise of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), in which actors behave in bounded ways and result in complex interactions in the sense that they create unpredictable outcomes (Schneider, 2018, p.7).

Returning to the GTM, the movement was launched in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war in early 2022. The organisers stated that the goal of GTM was to expose to Western audiences the actual level of pro-Russian and nationalistic content on China's strictly regulated online platforms (McCarthy, 2022). In fact, what lies behind polarised online comments such as "Putin the Great", "US is demeaning China," and "the system is fatally broken" is the phenomenon of digital nationalism in China. To address this issue, previous research (Schneider, 2015; Gries, 2004; Wang, 2019; Shen & Breslin, 2010) has frequently examined the censorship measures imposed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the implementation of ICT technology in Chinese cyberspace. Nevertheless, the vigorous online political discussion of the

Chinese diasporic netizens, active on the Mandarin-Chinese Internet outside the GFW, should be addressed.

Furthermore, given that GTM participants and translation contributors are mainly anonymous overseas Chinese netizens, the paper's goal is to understand their ideas and behaviours and the relevance of their engagement in the context of the imagined community. Moreover, in light of Russia's unsuccessful military engagement in Ukraine and the unpopularity of zero-tolerance policies, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) desired to strengthen its authority by tightening its censorship control over public opinion. As the consequence of that, Schneider (2018) noted that a minor modification could cause unforeseen outcomes in the digital nationalism system, which will be examined through the most recent data from 2022 curated by the GTM.

Henceforth, the paper will conduct the research project, which can be broken down into five sections. The first section is the literature review. The chapter addresses the studies of nationalism as the driving factor connecting the Chinese diaspora and the homeland people. At the same time, it aims to answer how and why China's digital nationalism emerged and what role the CCP plays in this process. By answering these questions, this paper creates an understanding of the background in which GTM was formed. The second section is the methodology. The chapter consists of a description of the collected data and the grounded theory method used for analysis. The third section is the analysis, in which the GTM case will be dismantled into different elements to give a deep look at the movement. The fourth section is the discussion and conclusion regarding the driving ideas for GTM's participants. Also, the GTM's reach and influence will be clarified in the study of digital nationalism. The final section includes a bibliography and a list of abbreviations.

## 2 Literature Review

This chapter discusses current research on the rise of nationalism in China, the driving factor behind the launch of the GTM. According to Duara (1993:9), that nationalism is a continually shifting relationship between self and other, and this shifting relationship constantly reshapes one's identity. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend the dynamic interaction between China's nationalism and ICT technology and how China perceives, acknowledges, and creates its own relationship with the members of its imagined community (Li, 2012).

In the first place, this chapter underlies the formation of Chinese nationalism and its influence on the diasporic community and how to strengthen their sense of attachment to the homeland culture. Then, the second part of this chapter investigates the system of digital nationalism in China, which provides some clues to explain the origins of the translations by GTM. Thus, the literature review provides a glimpse of the theoretical understanding of the GTM as a cross-border movement.

### 2.1 From Official Nationalism to Global Cultural Nationalism

To address nationalism in China from the constructivist modernism view, the proponents of this idea characterise nations as "imagined communities" and nationalism as a "created tradition" in which shared sentiment creates a type of collective identity and connects individuals in political solidarity powered by network connections (Anderson, 2006; Hobsbawm, 1983). In other words, nationalism can be seen as a malleable and abstract idea that links the country's people and creates solidarity. Anderson (2006: 44–46) pointed out that the convergence of capitalism and print technology and the catastrophic diversity of human language enabled a new sort of imagined community vital to the modern country. In the past century, mass media such as radio, film, and TV have an indispensable role in creating a shared imagination and made the spread of mundane national symbols easier (Billig 2009: ch.5; Hardin, 1995: 147). Therefore, nationalism (Mínzú zhǔyì 民族主义) in China has seen a relative

concept of relationship, a discourse that is constantly changing under different circumstances, such as historical events and periods. (Yang, 2009: 37).

Many studies of Chinese nationalism have described the phenomenon as state or official nationalism (He & Guo, 2000; Zhao, 2000; Hughes, 2006; Shirk, 2007). Scholars have pointed out (Zhang, 2001; Gerth, 2003; Shirk, 2007; Adeney, 2009) that official nationalism serves the state of the elites to respond to the internal or external pressures and serves as a tool for maintaining power. Backing to history, in the early 20th century, a relatively small Chinese elite group with access to Western and Japanese literature and ideas sought to create a model for the nation that would allow them to mobilise China's vast population for the nation's independent movement (Mitter, 2004, p. 118). Liang Qichao<sup>1</sup>, a famous reformist in modern China history, described it as "the desire by a group of people of the same race, language, religion and custom to form an independent country to seek public good and resist foreign aggression" (Wang, 2016).

With the power shift from the Republic of China (ROC) to the People's Republic of China (PRC), the CCP government has undertaken efforts to popularise patriotism, which is an essential component of its education system (Wang, 2016). Eventually, the patriotism promotion reached its top in 2019, when the "Outline for Patriotic Education in the New Era" was promulgated (The Paper, 2019). The outline builds on the former ideology education framework. It is replete with discourses by Chinese President Xi Jinping, incorporating ideas put forward by him, for instance, the "New era", the "Chinese dream", and the "Great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" into the outline. Under the ambiguous party-state ideology, education creates blurred boundaries between nationalism and patriotism and between the national state and the party-state. Subsequently, national-patriotism sentiments and pro-CCP narratives are widespread

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<sup>1</sup> Liang Qichao was a Chinese politician, journalist, thinker, and social and political activist. His ideas profoundly impacted Chinese intellectuals of generations from the New Culture Movement to the present reformist fraction of China. (Xiao, 2002).

among young netizens in China's cyberspace. This resulted in several successful self-organised Internet events that benefited the increasing online support of Chinese netizens to CCP. For instance, the Jihad 6 June, when Chinese hackers attacked Korean pop stars' home pages or fan communities in 2010(Wu, Li&Wang,2019, pp. 39-30).; the Diba Expedition, when hundreds of thousands of Chinese netizens logged on to Facebook intending to protest Taiwan's independence claim, flooding with massive comments to the Facebook pages of political figures such as the Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-wen (Wang, 2019).

The successful implementation of nationalism promotion among Chinese netizens encouraged CCP to extend their version of the imagined community worldwide through the Internet. Since the hitherto Chinese national identity is understood in a broader term as a cultural identity, it comprises all diasporic communities who speak Chinese and identify with Chinese culture, regardless of where they reside (Li, 2012). Traditionally, members of this complex group represent different generations, places of origin, tenures outside China, and political and ideological stances, consisting of Chinese nationals working and residing overseas (*Huáqiáo* 华侨), ethnic Chinese with foreign citizenships (*Huárén* 华人 or *Huáyì* 华裔), and overseas students (*Liúxuéshēng* 留学生)(Li, 2016). Historically, the Chinese diaspora community had many contributions to their homeland. For instance, the overseas diasporic community provided financial and political support for China's revolutionary overthrow of the Qing Dynasty, its war against Japan during World War II, and other national liberation movements (Li, 2007; Young & Shih, 2003). Except during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when overseas connections were viewed negatively, the Chinese government consistently wooed overseas Chinese to support its soft power expansion. Since the 1990s, the Chinese government has regarded "new migrants," including students, migrant workers, and immigrants, as patriotic Chinese based on their cultural allegiance rather than citizenship (Nyiri, 2001; Thunø, 2001).

Interestingly, as most of the abovementioned groups of people fit with the description of "informed nationalists", meaning many of them are fluent in both Chinese

and English and have full access to Western media (Wang, 2019, p. 39), they did not rely on Western media as many people expected (Zhou, 2005, p. 208) but instead believed the nationalistic narrative by CCP. What is the reason for such phenomena? Withstanding the Chinese diaspora in a more complex social media environment than in China, the vast majority of these Mandarin-speaking Chinese diaspora still insist on using Chinese social media such as WeChat and platforms such as Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent (Zhang, 2021). Furthermore, Zhang (2021) noted that, in contrast to early overseas Chinese, who lived on the periphery of both societies, contemporary Chinese migrants are co-present in their residential countries and the mainland Chinese internet discourse. Digital networks play a significant role in building transnational Chinese national identity. In addition, China has established the Federation of Returned Chinese and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office under the State Council to contact Chinese citizens residing in foreign countries (Li, 2012). In the majority of Chinese embassies and consulates, a cultural consul in charge of overseas Chinese affairs works to maintain tight ties with the Chinese diaspora through social apps such as WeChat.

Today, in light of the government's measures, only a few in the diaspora would criticise China's cultural nationalism. Nevertheless, in the mind of the Chinese diaspora, the current political system is still linked with corruption, lack of free speech, environmental issues, corrupt labour practices, and human rights abuses, which harms China's international reputation (Li,2012). Numerous Chinese dissidents in the West oppose the current Chinese system, making it challenging for Beijing to project an image of a harmonious, responsible society. CCP can achieve limited success by relying on pro-Beijing diasporas, who frequently have strong commercial and family links in China and can be brainwashed or purchased (Li,2012).

In short, China's cultural nationalism resembles a giant pocket, intending to use nationalistic symbols and historical links to attract the cultural identifications of Chinese across the globe. Enhanced by the hybrid measures of digital networks and physical government engagement, a unifying cultural nationalism has been spread among the

global Chinese diaspora, despite some dissents opposition. Thus, digital nationalism is becoming a phenomenon of "global cultural politics" in the age of social media. For this reason, when examining nationalism in Chinese cyberspace, the entire Mandarin-speaking Chinese netizen community must be viewed as a transnational cultural whole. Eventually, the core of the cultural whole, the sociotechnical system of the Chinese Internet, must be thoroughly explained.

## **2.2 Sociotechnical system of the Internet under an Authoritarian Regime**

The next part of this chapter will examine the sociotechnical system which shapes nationalism in China. It consists of the following three elements:

First, the state and party promote a state-led nationalism enhanced by algorithms and big data technology to inspire unity and legitimate their actions. By December 2021, the number of Internet users in China reached 1.032 billion and 99.7% of internet users use mobile phones to access the Internet (CNNIC, 2021), generating ever-increasing amounts of data ranging from geo-location to online payments that allow the government to "see" society (Scott, 1998). Creemers (2017) observed Xi Jinping's administration, which caused a comprehensive structure for information technologies control to support an ultimate vision to position digital technology at the centre of propaganda, public opinion, and social control operations. China's cyberspace is transitioning to a panopticon, a centralised, unidirectional observation and monitoring paradigm.

To this extent, following Castells' (2009) belief of Internet power, that "there is a smaller class of privileged individuals, comprised of capital owners, managers, state functionaries, etc., who retain executive permission across certain portions of the network or, in the case of extremely powerful organisations and individuals, across the network as a whole." As Schneider (2018) demonstrates, the CCP and its leading propaganda cadres use precisely these executive permissions to manage the PRC's media system. Agents with such executive authority are able to modify the writing permissions of other agents in the mass communication network, for example, by

accrediting journalists, hiring editors, and dismissing photographers, among other actions. In addition, they have the authority to add or remove entire nodes from this network, such as by shutting down a business, arranging a merger, assigning a publishing license, or establishing new distribution channels (Schneider, 2018, p. 83). In short, Creemers (2015) reviews that the Internet could be a tool not only for surveillance but also a digital Panopticon-like stimulant for netizens' self-restraint in China.

Second, there are internet users who spontaneously produce their politically-orientated content and engage in discussion. Gang and Bandurski (2011:71) have pointed out that digital technologies have been a game changer for political communication in China as much as elsewhere. Many scholars (Brady, 2008; Castells, 2009) believe that thanks to the extremely rapid proliferation of information and communications technology in China will result in a rise of new social networks with unprecedented power to counter the might of China's adaptive propaganda state. A large number of Chinese Internet users' posts on social media are attempting to take action on small-scale political and social issues (Bolsover, 2019). These are restricted to relatively safe and sanctioned topics such as kidnapped children, rural poverty, local corruption, and animal cruelty. According to Stockmann (2010), the public has faith in the non-official media that arose due to commercialisation and is more likely to get political information from non-official sources. New online platforms such as microblogs, forums, and blogs have created new routes for spreading political information in recent years; these channels supply a great deal of unauthorised information to the public, often using online spoofs (Ègǎo 恶搞) as a popular form of implicitly political expression and entertainment for readers (Meng, 2011). However, these user-generated comments are under heavy internet censorship, which refers to removing online content to prevent individuals from accessing information deemed harmful to the government (King et al., 2013).

Moreover, a study (Gunitsky, 2015) indicated that the Chinese government had employed online commentators to promote Party aims (Han, 2015a, 2015b). These

comments, also known as 50-cent or Internet Water Army (Wǎngluò Shuǐ jūn 网络水军) comments, look to originate from ordinary netizens but are prepared by the government for propaganda purposes (Bremmer, 2010; Deibert & Rohozinski, 2010; King et al., 2017; Miller, 2016). Such "soft propaganda" is meant to discreetly influence public opinion and encourage citizens to accept official ideology (Greitens, 2013; Huang, 2015; Hung, 2010). It unsurprisingly increased the numbers of "little pinks"<sup>2</sup>, a word referring to average citizens who like expressing strong support for the leadership, which is ubiquitous on the Chinese Internet today (Fang & Repnikova, 2017). What is more, the government can make patriotic netizens into "thought work collaborators" by bolstering their opinions and silencing opposing viewpoints (Hung, 2010; Repnikova & Fang, 2018, p. 763). In such circumstances, anyone who calls for peaceful solutions or questions China's shortcomings will be labelled as "passing the knife" (*Dì dāozǐ* 递刀子) to the West, in other words, the so-called "hostile foreign forces" (*Jìngwài díduì shìlì* 境外敌对势力) (Wong&Liang, 2021). Eventually, only the recklessly pro-CCP regime fraction can be observed on the political spectrum, while other fractions and ideas fall under the iceberg of the Chinese Internet.

Third, the rise of Internet consumerism accelerated strong emotions like anger and fear online (Kuo, 2021). Due to many new features of social media apps, such as the instantaneous display of the number of clicks, likes, and comments, managers of these accounts are now pursuing more visually appealing data (Fang, 2017). These accounts have diverse origins and aims and include commercial marketing accounts and official media, such as People's Daily and CCTV News. Account managers have discovered that certain types of content, such as "breaking news" stories and nationalistic content, can boost statistics (Feng, 2019). For example, there are two typical forms of nationalist content: positive (e.g., "My country is fantastic") and

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<sup>2</sup> The Chinese word *Fěnhóng* (粉红) refers either to the colour pink or the "hysteric fan of red (ideology)", often showing a lack of independent thinking skills, believing official Communist Party propaganda and showing strong patriotic (Party) tendencies (CDT, 2022).

negative (e.g., "the West is demeaning China"); each attracts a lot of clicks, likes, retweets, and comments on the Internet (Fang, 2017).

Also, the tech businesses in China are under the scrutiny of government involvement. Due to the social media platform maintained by Internet companies ability for potential mobilisation, association, and large-scale communication on social was viewed as a potential risk (Creemers,2017). On the other hand, it also provides the authority with valuable insight into public opinion (Creemers, 2017). That explains that rather than large open and interactive media such as Weibo, the leadership implicitly supported more private platforms, such as WeChat, where surveillance is still possible (Creemers, 2017). As a result, private companies like Sina or Tencent err on caution and apply the overarching policy framework conservatively (Ng, 2013, p. 24; MacKinnon, 2012).

To sum up, The China case demonstrated how the CCP uses interfaces and algorithms to curate content, promote specific activities and guide how users can behave and shape the internet discourse in favour of its political legitimacy. Schneider (Kuo, 2021) has pointed out that all the elements of this sociotechnical system result in a networked logic filled with feedback loops that generate resonance: a small change in one interaction can cascade to produce powerful, unexpected results elsewhere.

### **2.3 Summary**

As mentioned earlier, China's nationalism has undergone a historical process of formation. Historically, the Chinese elite employed nationalism to overthrow Western countries' pressure and feudal regime to gain political power. Simultaneously, Chinese diasporic have consistently participated in these movements throughout time and regime changes, being incorporated into China's cultural nationalism. Digital networks and government measures have propagated cultural nationalism throughout the global Chinese community, leading to CCP's popularity and support among the majority of Mandarin-speaking Chinese online space. Thus, to comprehend the driving factor of

rising nationalism, this chapter further examined the sociotechnical system maintained by CCP.

As stated, this paper concluded three critical elements of the sociotechnical system in which Chinese nationalism gets filtered. To start with, the non-democratic government of CCP authorities can use social media to reinforce state ideology and strengthen authoritarianism via information controls and regulations (Creemers, 2017). Then is the monotonic user-generated nationalistic content flooding the Internet. To explain this, Schneider (Kuo, 2021) stated that interfaces and algorithms filter content, promote particular activities, and direct user behaviour in digital nationalism. Last are the behaviours of the Chinese tech-business titans such as ByteDance, Sina, and Tencent, which profit from viral interactions fueled by intense emotions (Kuo, 2021).

In conclusion, nationalism in today's online society is malleable, and the increased communication capabilities of information technology will significantly impact the development of the imagined Chinese community worldwide. China exemplifies a shift in internet power from civil society to the elites of government authority and commercial enterprises, who have a more comprehensive understanding of the logical framework of internet communication. This gives them more power to manipulate the internet discourse, including nationalism in their preferred form, as if they were moulding dough. Nevertheless, the GTM was born in the context of this complicated background.

### 3 Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology used to analyze the phenomenon of GTM, which reflects the ongoing digital nationalism in China. In terms of analyzing, most experts have focused on the little pinks, the youthful jingoistic Chinese Internet nationalists. However, they are not the only group of individuals who lead the polarised ideas as a result of censorship and public opinion leading in China. Thus, this research study aims to shed light on the Chinese oversea netizen community, which is unacknowledged by mainstream academics and the general public; they are an extremely active but relatively invisible group in the GTM. Consequently, this paper intends to comprehend their behaviours and mindset.

Furthermore, more specific data are required to address the status quo of digital nationalism in today China's society, which experienced recent impacts not only from Russia's failing invasion but also from unpopular China's zero-covid policies and lockdowns. As a result, since the CCP attempted to gain political credibility by tightening censorship and manipulations, the Chinese internet has witnessed unprecedented rising nationalistic sentiments online.

Based on these facts, the analysis has investigated GTM as a decentralised digital activity organised mainly by Chinese diasporic netizens to translate the online discourse, including radical patriotic rhetoric within the GFW, into other languages. As the campaign developed, translations were selected to reflect the echo chamber of Chinese netizens discussing several social and international events of 2022. As a result, the Twitter account now receives hundreds of translations per day, submitted through direct messages (Yang, 2022). In terms of eligibility for publishing them, GTM (TGTM,2022) announced on its Twitter account the criteria for content to translate and the rules of participation below:

No.	Criterion
1	When selecting the target material for translation, influential comments, for instance, have tens of thousands of retweets and likes on Weibo or Zhihu, should be considered.
2	Individual netizens' comments, that do not acquire many endorsements are likely to be viewed as the opinions of lone extremists and should not be considered.
3	People who do not speak a single foreign language but only Chinese can still retweet the contents of GTM and tweet their findings with the hashtag.
4	Chinese netizens who fear for their safety due to the censorship and security department activities can also anonymously report their findings to the official account.

From March 7, 2022, to December 14, 2022, the @TGTM Official account gained 234,000 followers, and a total of 1,972 tweets were retrieved, providing up-to-date data and statistics. These tweets usually consist of translated images or videos with subtitles, followed by a brief description from the publisher. In addition, other sources, for instance, press coverage, observers' comments, the author's observation from online chatrooms, and other related discourse, will likewise contribute to the sources for analysis.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the research subject, which encompasses area studies, communication and media studies, and political science, this paper utilizes constructivist grounded theory to undertake an analysis (Charmaz, 2014). The framework of the study is built on a continuous process of simultaneous data gathering and analysis guided by the research questions. Therefore, the three guiding research questions and answering methods are detailed below:

## **1. Who were the GTM participants, and what kinds of thoughts led them to initiate the movement?**

The analysis of GTM participants will be conducted using "guerrilla ethnography" methods (Yang, 2003), examining the entire process, from forming of the ideas, launching the activities and involvement, exemplifying features such as anonymisation and disintermediation (Etling, Faris, & Palfrey, 2010). To reach that, the paper located participants by tracking media headlines, following active social media accounts, and gleaning hints from the GTM Twitter account's official announcements.

## **2. How does GTM reflect the current digital nationalism in China? What is the significance of the content displayed by GTM?**

To address the second question, this paper tracked the dates when the GTM Twitter account gets the most retweets with an analysis tool of Twitter account activity. As a result, the paper identifies the timeline of the most-discussed events, mapping China's turbulent social development in 2022. Furthermore, the paper categorises the translations by GTM about these events and shows the current characteristics of the content of digital nationalism in China. Each GTM's tweet used for analysis comes with a web snapshot link in the bibliography, providing a trackable source archive. The timeline of the most-discussed events demonstrates below:

<b>No.</b>	<b>Events</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>1.</b>	The launch of the Twitter Account @TGTM_Official	March 7, 2022
<b>2.</b>	Chinese online pro-Russian narrative on the Russian-Ukraine war	March 12,2022
<b>3.</b>	Implementation of lockdown measures in Shanghai	March 28,2022
<b>4.</b>	Chinese pro-Russian narrative on the Russian Ukraine war	April 7,2022

5.	Voices of April (Live reporting the life of Shanghai inhabitants under the lockdown)	April 14,2022
6.	Pro-Russian narrative on the Russian Ukraine war, Various extreme nationalism comments	May 25,2022
7.	The assassination of former Japan Prime minister Shinzo Abe	July 8,2022
8.	Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan	August 2,2022
9.	CCP official Li Zhanshu's visit to Vladivostok, Russia	September 14,2022
10.	Seoul Halloween crowd crush	October 30,2022
11.	Fire accident in Urumqi	November 25,2022
12.	White Paper Protest in China	November 29,2022

### 3. What are the reach and influences of GTM?

For the final question, this paper will address the media and observer's coverage of GTM and highlight some positive and negative opinions. Since the translation efforts have perturbed Chinese state media, this paper will scrutinize their arguments to justify the banal nationalism in China and search for hints about China's soft power propaganda's larger narrative. By contrast, the western media's appraisal of GTM demonstrated that the translation had benefited a broader audience.

With answers to each question and ongoing comparison thorough investigation of a variety of individual cases (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), this paper constructed a cluster of theories to provide a more comprehensive view of the composition of the GTM. In the end, the paper examines the digital nationalism process that interacts with the Chinese diasporic community, which led to some unexpected outcomes.

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 GTM participants and the “Keyboard Politics”

Despite being officially prohibited in China, Twitter is among the most popular social networks worldwide. The Chinese netizen community on Twitter is relatively active, they enjoy using it to discuss China's political and socioeconomic issues openly. Due to their demand for free speech, many netizens have abandoned major social media platforms such as Weibo, where they could connect with a larger number of audiences. Therefore, in comparison to Twitter, Sina Weibo is a casino in danger of being dismantled because it has repeatedly been subject to CCP's censorship. On the other hand, Twitter is a never-close pub with unbroken historical internet archives and social connections. For this reason, members of the GTM accordingly have been posing their activities on Twitter.

On March 7, 2022, GTM participants began translating articles from the Chinese online on Twitter using the hashtag "#TheGreatTranslationMovement" and the "@TGTM\_Official" account to curate and centralize resources for tweets. The decentralised structure of posting is verified by the geolocating of the Twitter account analysis tool, that 848 tweets were posted in 192 locations of different users worldwide. Notably, the decentralised structure and anonymity character derive from security concerns. According to sources of Bitterwinter (Chen, 2022), more than 40 participants living in China were arrested by CCP's state security department. Furthermore, with participants who do not physically locate in China, once they are identified, they will also have to be aware of the consequences of their activities on family relatives still living in China (Ridgewell, 2022). Thus, it is evident that the CCP's internet censorship apparatus no longer restricts its actions within the GFW but also exerts its impact on the Chinese diasporic netizens community.

Regarding the background of the GTM participants, the official tweet announcement of GTM claimed that the participants are mostly "Chinese netizens from generation Y around the world" (TGTM, 2022a). Moreover, participants of GTM

explained in an interview with Deutsche Welle (Liu, 2022) that the majority of early contributors to the translation were users of Chonglang TV, a Chinese political discussion community on Reddit. This user group is inspired by the classic Japanese picture *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (*Shénnàichuān chōnglàng lǐ* 神奈川冲浪里), and Chonglang (冲浪) is the Chinese word for net-surfing. Members frequently refer to themselves as Ronins (*Làng rén* 浪人, a Japanese term for samurai who became masterless upon the death of his master or after the loss of his master's favour or privilege), Friend of Kanagawa (*Shén yǒu* 神友), or Ratman (*Shǔ rén* 鼠人, as a metaphor for rats, showing empathy for those who live in the dark corner of the society and cannot speak out) (Zhu, 2021). According to name references, this group of netizens naturally present a solid favour for Japan.

On the other hand, the Chonglang TV community has a tremendous antipathy for the Chinese nation. Many members mention China with the word Shina (*Zhīnà* 支那), a derogatory term used to refer to China in Japanese. Along with the abnormal glossary they use, the group also constructs a system of reinterpretation of political ideas, which evoked extensive discussion through Chinese netizen political debate. These ideas can be summarised into the following concepts:

**“Accelerationism” (*Jiāsù zhǔyì*) 加速主义)**

The term "accelerationism" is originally a western social concept, which proposes that social progress, such as capitalist growth and technological change, should be drastically intensified to destabilise systems to create further radical social change, referred to as "acceleration" (Becket, 2017). In this case, the term acceleration (*jiāsu* 加速) often links to the netizens' anxiety about rapid social changes in China. On the one hand, they criticise the flaws in the CCP's programs. But, on the other hand, they ironically wish that the wrong policy will lead to the Party's quick end. In general, accelerationism refers to the notion that "if a system is fatally broken, the only way to speed up its collapse is to fuel its process rather than resist it or patch its flaws" or "Things must sufficiently deteriorate before they may improve" (CDT, 2022).

This idea of accelerationism has become popular among the discussions on Chinese diasporic forums, for instance, Pincong, Wenxue City and various Chinese subreddits. Therefore, Ronins, the Chonglong TV subreddit users, satirically believe that Xi Jinping's increasingly authoritarian rule will eventually be the catalyst for the implosion of the CCP, earning him the title of Accelerator-in-Chief (*Zǒng jiāsù shī* 总加速师). (Chinese state media often refer to Deng Xiaoping as the "Architect-in-Chief" (*Zǒng gōngchéngshī* 总工程师) of Reform and Opening). As an illustration, Ronins are hesitant to reject or protest against the zero covid policy, wolf warrior diplomacy, and other CCP propaganda. Interestingly, they view these as vital measures leading to the self-destruction and restructuring of Chinese society.

Accelerationism and Accelerator-in-Chief are both censored keywords in mainland China. Therefore, the search engine will not provide an adequate explanation for this internet slang. Moreover, a search on Twitter for keyword accelerationism reveals many bot accounts with English usernames that automatically generate a tweet containing the keyword every hour. Robots are common computational propaganda by CCP, they are pieces of code designed to replicate human activity to promote a particular message or individual in online spaces, and fake accounts are manually administered social media accounts that are created and used for the purposes of manipulating online public opinion overseas (Bolsover, 2019).



**Figure 1** The hashtag #加速主义 for Accelerationism on Twitter is contaminated with the flooding robot-generated messages. (March 22, 2022)

### Hsien-chungology (*Xiàn zhōng xué* 献忠学)

Hsien-chungology is a form of Chinese Internet political slang named after the historical figure Chang Hsien-Chung (*Zhāngxiànzhōng* 张献忠), broadly used to symbolize and describe things such as extreme social disarray and the growth of random killings. Chang was a Chinese peasant leader who led a revolt and committed the killings that depopulated the region of Sichuan at the end of the Ming dynasty (Cheng, 2019). According to a famous narrative of his life, he erected in Chengdu a pillar known as the Seven Kill Stele with the inscription:

"天生万物以养人，人无一物以报天，中间有七字“杀杀杀杀杀杀杀”。

"Heaven produces countless things to nurture man. Man has nothing valuable with which to recompense Heaven. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill."

In the context of Internet subculture, Chang Hsien-Chung is associated with two definitions. One is a rebel responsible for mass destruction and massacres. The majority of Internet users who utilize this Chang Hsien-Chung meme are satirizing the massive human suffering caused by the leftist movements of the 20th century, such as the Great Leap Forward movement, which resulted in millions of deaths in China. The second meaning relates to those who committed violent crimes that resulted in death or injury, particularly those who were dissatisfied with society and carried out random attacks.

Even though the Hsien-chungology meme has multiple interpretations, it is evident that they all lead to the expression of "hoping that someone will massacre people in order to destroy the current social order." With several indiscriminate attacks happening in China in 2021, this meme became popularly discussed due to social dissatisfaction. Similar to "accelerationism", keywords for Hsien-chungology are censored on the mainland Chinese internet; for example, Zhihu, a popular Chinese Quora-like web, does not provide any results when searching it.

As a result of censorship, neither of the memes mentioned above can be found on the mainland Chinese Internet, despite their prevalence in diasporic netizen debates. Nevertheless, these naive or even absurd political ideas mirror the Chinese government's severe restriction on current political information, which stimulates the use of metaphors in such discussions and debates. Chinese netizens formerly invented the term "Keyboard politics" (*Jiànpán zhèngzhì* 键盘政治) to disparage internet users with immature political beliefs. The unsystematic perspective of 'keyboard politics' has contributed to the discussion of public issues to some degree, yet it may lead to a more 'polarised' viewpoint. However, the emergence of polarised opinions among the populace is a global phenomenon associated with rising social inequality and the expansion of social media. This issue has been aggravated in China

by the transition from open discussion platforms like Weibo (a social app similar to Twitter) to closed platforms like WeChat, as well as by the suppressed emotions of Chinese citizens due to CCP worldwide censorship activities against them. However, looking at the bright sight, the attempts of theorising, sharing and forwarding translations are all signs of a new link and feelings of resistance to the regime among the Chinese community worldwide.

## **4.2 Categorisation of the translations by GTM**

GTM's Twitter account updates its findings daily from the Chinese Internet and translates them into various languages. Following the Twitter account analysis tool, top languages used are English, Japanese, and Chinese, besides there are less used languages, for instance, Ukrainian, French, Spanish, etc. In terms of the origin of the translated texts, they are divided into four categories:

### **4.2.1 Official propaganda**

The first category comprises various findings from the official Chinese propaganda, most of which are related to the Pro-Russia narrative on the Russian-Ukraine War. Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February of this year, China's stance has been scrutinised by world media. In diplomatic situations, China has neither publicly opposed nor completely supported Russia's military operation, keeping an ambiguous neutral position. However, the propaganda machine inside of the GFW provided some clues to China's attitude, and GTM revealed it.

To illustrate, Xinhua News, the state news agency, published an article titled "Six comments on Russian-Ukraine War" (*Xīnhuá shè liù píng é wū chōngtū* 新华社六评俄乌冲突)(TGTM, 2022a). The article accused the U.S. has a Cold War mindset and taking advantage of the situation (Russian-Ukraine conflict). Even more, since the U.S. is falsely claiming that China acquiesced in the escalation of the conflict, they are the No. 1 Crime (*Zuikuí huòshǒu* 罪魁祸首). The original article has been shared on Wechat more than a hundred of thousand times and gained 7,000 likes.

Another example is the interview of the Chinese ambassador in Russia, published by Russian Today on Weibo, stating, "China and Russia will enhance the cooperation, deepen our mutual benefits, ... and build the community of human destiny." This post has 3748 likes and 395 comments on Weibo (TGTM, 2022b).

Moreover, GTM translated the speech Li Zhanshu, the then member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CCP, publicly expressed China's understanding and support for Russia during his visit to Vladivostok on September 2022. (TGTM,2022c).

### 1. US taking advantage of the situation

#### 一批美国“趁火打劫”

俄乌冲突牵动世界人心，包括中国人民在内的国际社会，都希望乌克兰早日重归和平。然而，美国《纽约时报》等西方媒体近来却无端散布谣言，诬称中国“坐山观虎斗”“将在俄乌冲突中成为赢家”“希望从地缘政治变化中获益”云云。

妄言“中国赢家说”，是美国罔顾事实，把他们大发战争财的邪恶心思生搬硬套到中国头上。从“点火”到“拱火”，从“火上浇油”到“趁火打劫”，美国在乌克兰问题上的“四步曲”玩得让人“由衷叹服”。



The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has touched the hearts of the world, and the international community, including the Chinese people, hopes for an early return to peace in Ukraine. However, the New York Times and other Western media have recently spread rumors, falsely claiming that China is "sitting on the mountain and watching the tiger fight" and "will be the winner in the Russia-Ukraine conflict" and "hopes to benefit from the geopolitical changes" and so on.

The "Chinese winner" argument is a reckless attempt by the U.S. to apply their evil war-mongering ideology to China. From "lighting the fire" to "arching the fire", from "pouring oil on the fire" to "taking advantage of the fire", The "four steps" of the U.S. on the Ukraine issue are "heartfelt".

**Figure 2** Xinhua News and its statement of "US taking advantage of the situation": Example of the GTM translation of the Chinese Official Propaganda (April 6, 2022)

## 4.2.2 Nationalist Opinion leaders

The second category introduces the discourse of nationalist opinion leaders, who are usually well-known scholars or journalists. With their expertise and nationalist-style

speech, these opinion leaders have amassed many followers on the Internet. Their influence is inextricably linked to their populist statements and fandom mobilisation.

To illustrate, Shen Yi, a lecturer in the Department of International Politics at Fudan University and a Weibo influencer with 1.9 million followers, questioned in his post-West media reports on the Bucha Massacre and justified the legitimacy of the Russian Army (TGTM, 2022d). The original post gained 1,249 likes on Weibo.

Hu Xijin, a senior editor of Global Times, CCP's party newspaper, which has 24,82 million followers on Weibo, repeatedly called for military assault threats against Taiwan, even against Pelosi and the U.S. carrier formation (TGTM, 2022e). The original post received 111,000 likes and has 14,000 comments on Weibo.

Zhang Weiwei, a Chinese scholar head who is regularly quoted by Chinese media on international relations in his role as director of the China Institute at Fudan University in Shanghai. During the Chinese political talk show named This is China (*Zhè jiùshì zhōngguó* 这就是中国), Zhang explained to his audience why China has more freedom of speech than the West. He argued that in China, people do not have to care about the Western style of "politically correctness". The TV talk show program itself has 94 million views on Bilibili, a popular video-sharing website among Chinese youth (TGTM, 2022f).



**Figure 3** The Internet Series of “This is China” on Bilibili. According to the description, this series aims to promote core values such as “National confidence” through the live discussion between above-mentioned professor Zhang Weiwei and the youth. (Retrieved on December 10, 12)

### 4.2.3 Ubiquitous Internet Nationalism

The third category of translations focuses on the most popular nationalistic comments from Chinese internet users on various social media platforms. Then there are the internet users who produce their own content, engage in discussion with nationalist symbols and anti-western rhetoric. Under the propaganda of a "Stronger China" (*Qiángguó* 强国), the notion of being a strong united nation seems to have become the new faith, which sells self-esteem and a feeling of being secured to Chinese netizens. In contrast to the appraisal of the strong country's confidence narrative, the analysis recognises the dark side of Chinese netizens' hatred attacks on Western countries and values.

Not surprisingly, a large amount of translations come from pro-Russian narratives. For example, when CCTV, China's state television account, posted news on Weibo that stated there was new evidence of U.S. bio-military activities in Ukraine, a netizen commented: "I firmly believe the acts against humanity committed by the U.S., they are poisoning everywhere, including the current pandemic in every Chinese city", reached 3,245 likes. Another said, "What is the difference between this and Japs (a reference to the Sino-Japan war)," and reached 4,731 likes (TGTM, 2022g).

Referring to Japan, the news by Xinhua News reporting the assassination of Shinzo Abe on Tiktok has 2.2 million likes. Netizens celebrated the incident with comments like "Hope he is not fine – 117,000 likes and "I will stop dieting for today, eat something good to celebrate – 20000 likes" (TGTM,2022h).

Under the Tiktok video reporting the Seoul Halloween crowd crush (TGTM, 2022i), Chinese netizens neither did show their mercy with top-liked comments such as "You need to step out a hundred monkeys in westerner's festival (awesome emoji)" and "A yellow-skinned person rush to celebrate a westerner's festival" had the most popularity with 7,187 and 1,959 likes.



**Figure 4** Chinese netizens celebrating Shinzo Abe's death on Tiktok. Example of the GTM's translation. (July 8,2022)

#### 4.2.4 Recording ongoing social events

The fourth category concerns media coverage of ongoing social events in China. Social events in China usually have a complex character, and they frequently evoke controversy and unhappiness among the public. Therefore, Chinese officials often conceal the facts and mislead the public's opinion with unreliable propaganda. For this reason, many mainland Chinese netizens “jumped off the GFW” using VPN services in order to access the censored information on the overseas platform. According to the statistics, the Economist (2022) estimates that 10 million people are using VPNs daily in China, up from about 2 million at the pandemic's outset.

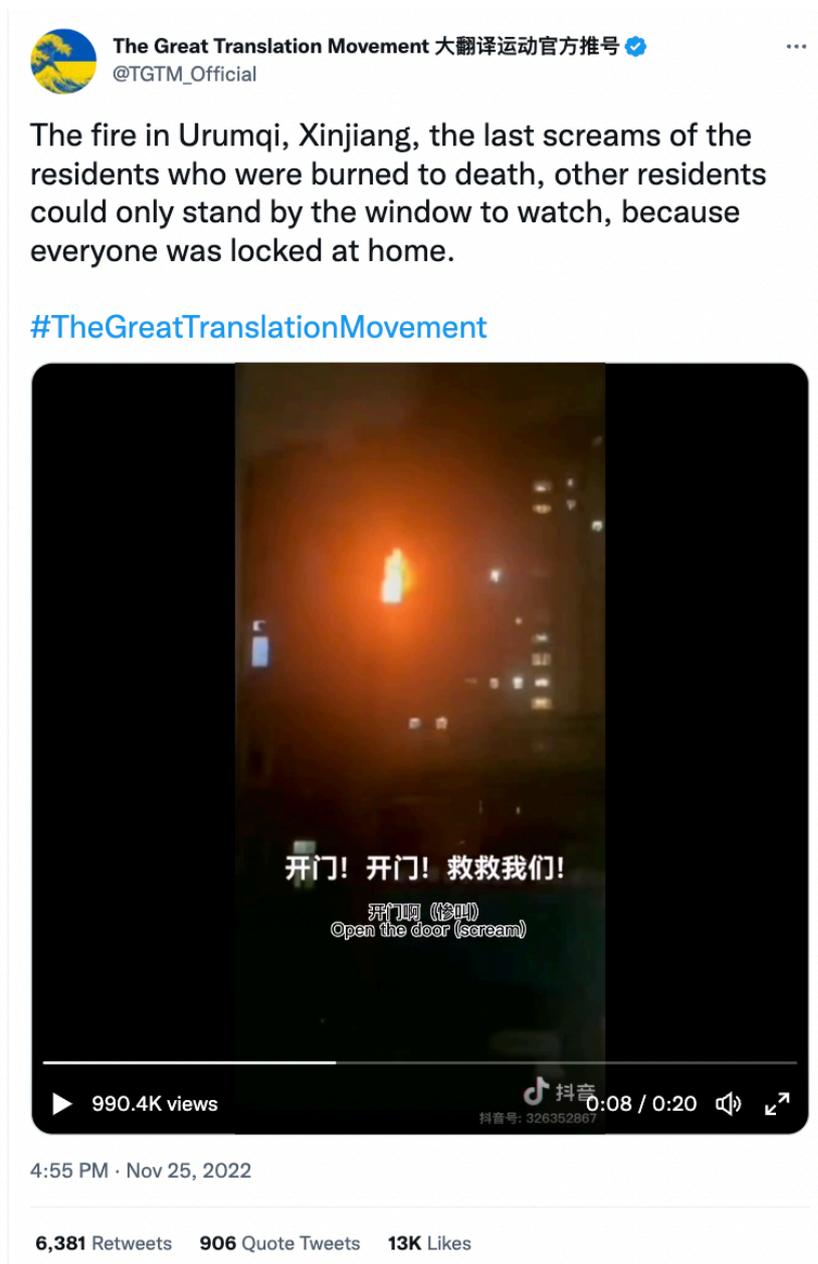
During the Shanghai lockdown in April, GTM began to report and translate the reality of the situation in the city, as well as some CCP leaders' positive comments on the lockdown measures. For example, the killing of a dog whose owner tested positive for COVID-19 by epidemic prevention officials was one of the most widely shared postings (TGTM,2022j). In addition, GTM uncovered the impacts of the tight zero covid policy on Shanghai residents, including food shortages in quarantine and an old man whose heart surgery was denied due to a closed hospital (TGTM,2022k&l). In contrast, during an interview with state media, the mayor of Shanghai demonstrated his commitment by stating, "The city will find a solution for the pandemic by obeying the General Secretary's orders" (TGTM, 2022m).

As many real situations under Zero-covid measures were systematically removed from all social media platforms in China, GTM archived these contents and translated them to a broad audience. The very peak was the report about the drastic fire accident in Urumqi, Xinjiang, recording the last screams of the residents who were burned to death, but other residents could only stand by the window to watch because everyone was locked at home due to covid restrictions (GTM, 2022n). The video has reached almost a million views. A few days later, at the end of November, the long-standing grievance of Chinese citizens was triggered by this incident and resulted in a series of protests against COVID-19 lockdowns, namely White Paper Protests. GTM had a follow-up report to the event, together with other diasporic Twitter accounts; for instance, "Teacher Li is Not Your Techer"<sup>3</sup> (@whyoutouzhele) live-tweeted the demonstrations in real-time, provided with a unique view into how rapidly and widely the outbreak of protest echoed across the nation. What is noteworthy, is that not merely foreign observers and Chinese diasporic netizens but also mainland Chinese protesters had access to this information using VPN services in order to learn more

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<sup>3</sup> Li, a 30-year-old painter living in Italy, live-tweeted the demonstrations in real-time; his followers quadrupled in two weeks to more than 800,000. Journalists, observers and activists monitored his feed closely, and some of his posts were aired on television worldwide. (Gan, Xiong and Hong,2022)

about the ongoing event. According to the New York Times (Mozur, 2022), some protesters in Shanghai joined the demonstration the following day after seeing a live video of the protest at Urumqi Middle Road in Shanghai on Twitter.



**Figure 5** The video of the fire accident in Urumqi recorded by GTM. As the original video was removed from the Internet within the GFW, the video saved by GTM left an accessible archive of the incident for the Chinese diaspora and the Chinese internet users who jumped out of the GFW. (November 25, 2022)



The Great Translation Movement 大翻译运动官方推号  
@TGTM\_Official

...

Shanghai, Nov 27, 15:03. The intersection of Wulumuqi Middle Road and Anfu Road. A man holding a bouquet of flowers was arrested by police. In inhumane China, flowers are also a sin.

[#TheGreatTranslationMovement](#)



4:30 AM · Nov 28, 2022

822 Retweets 52 Quote Tweets 2,830 Likes

**Figure 6** The live report of the demonstrations in China by GTM. Oversea social media accounts have become an accessible and important online source for acknowledging the real situation inside of China's GFW. (November 28, 2022)

Summarising all four categories, the coverage of GTM is a kaleidoscope of public discourse in China's volatile year of 2022, mapping the banal nationalistic sentiments and social issues, disengaging Chinese netizens on the mainland and aboard from fake news and political propaganda. GTM vividly showed the increasing number of "war wolf" diplomatic engagements and the increasingly blatant lies and anti-Western hostility in China's official propaganda. There are indeed sensible and irrational voices in every society, and even the Western world has its fair share of extreme nationalism. With a billion Internet users, China can't be an exception. But most importantly, what truly empowered the GTM is the lack of necessary pluralistic discussions on the

internet debate, particularly when certain voices are intentionally favoured, selected, or even amplified by the system, is like providing the GTM with a source of life-sustaining water.

### **4.3 GTM's reach and influences**

The task of translating Chinese media and social media content is not novel. Journalists, academics, and professionals engaged in China-related work often conduct this activity to assist non-Chinese language users in comprehending essential information about China. Nevertheless, GTM provided a new avenue for internet users worldwide to observe the rarely acknowledged dark side of the Chinese Internet (Jung, April 5, 2022). Notably, in comparison to other translation activities, GTM has attracted considerable attention from Chinese officials, western observers, and casual internet users.

#### **Anger from Chinese officials**

The Global Times, CCP's flagship newspaper, quickly expressed unfavourable attitudes, accusing GTM is orchestrated by the mentioned "hostile foreign forces", namely Western and Taiwanese intelligence establishments. Moreover, the Chinese newspaper stated that those individuals employ a system that divides the Chinese population into "non-mainlanders" and "mainlanders", aiming to create the impression that Chinese people are naturally virtuous but have become evil owing to "continuous brainwashing" by the communist regime. As stated, the GTM is a campaign against China and fuelling racism against Asians. Similarly, the Cyberspace Administration of China (2022) believes that the notorious online postings of "hosting Ukrainian women refugees" originated from Taiwanese accounts.

Late in April, Shanghai media, The Paper (2022) released their investigation of GTM named "Dismantling the Great Translation Movement", the most detailed analysis by Chinese media. Furthermore, the report team examined the content from a professional translator's perspective, citing examples of discrepancies between original texts and translations, and criticised that they do not meet professional

standards in terms of accuracy and completeness. What is intriguing is the netizens' discussion section under this article, that there are nationalist netizens who support the GTM that it is "a genuine reflection of China's public opinion that fills the gap of overseas propaganda", and some others who caught the awareness of the radicalised image of the Chinese nation.

In July, when GTM again revealed how Chinese netizens appraised Shinzo Abe's death, the Global Times reacted again. The article stated that the explanation for China's society's mixed reaction shows that they are normal and real. Chinese people are not sophisticated, and they dare to express their love and hate explicitly (Wang, 2022).

Despite the Chinese officials' denial and attempts to discredit the GTM, authorities appear alarmed, particularly by what they call the “backflow” of these translations from abroad. For instance, Chinese high schools stopped the classes that teach the so-called "right ideas" of the Russo-Ukrainian war, and the video-sharing platforms deleted a large number of aggressive comments from videos about Japan. In addition, popular video-sharing websites, such as Bilibili and Xigua Video, have removed videos that explain or even criticise the GTM in order to reduce netizens' attention to it. According to the Economist (2022), on November 28, the government's internet watchdog declared a “Level 1 Internet Emergency Response”, requiring the highest level of content management. It ordered Chinese e-commerce sites to curb sales of censorship-circumvention tools, including VPNs and foreign Apple accounts (which enable downloads of apps forbidden in China). It also instructed Chinese tech firms to scrub user-generated advice on jumping off the GFW. These acts clearly indicate China's concern and anger over the leak of the online discourse within the GFW, which led to the deterioration of the image of a courteous Chinese nation it has always wished to present to the world and to its own citizens.

### **A digital window to the real China**

In the Western media, varied perspectives on the GTM also include some concerns and scepticism. Some media experts claimed that the translated posts do not reflect the views of the Chinese public on a full scale but instead appear to select a portion of the shock value statements (e.g., extreme statements) (McCarthy, 2022). Furthermore, a Business Insider article (Sun, 2022) pointed out that the posts which gain traction on China's social media must be seen in the light of its highly censored environment, where nationalistic voices thrive and liberal voices have largely retreated or been edited. Since the Mandarin-speaking Chinese online environment has been distorted by censorship, it is important to acknowledge that readers should not rely too heavily on online attitudes and language to determine what Chinese people genuinely feel.

Despite the shortcomings mentioned above, the GTM's practice is widely welcomed and appreciated by media and academics outside China. According to Radio Free Asia (Hsia, 2022), Chinese dissident Gong Hejian believes that the Chinese Communist Party's internal and outward propaganda are distinct. Some Chinese have become so hostile and unreasonable due to internal factors that they cannot comprehend the Russian-Ukraine War. The GTM has employed this strategy to expose China's domestic propaganda to the global online community. He believes this action could be a decent strategical approach to destabilize the CCP system. Shen Boyang, director of the Taiwan Democracy Lab, reiterated this viewpoint (Hsia,2022).

According to Global Voices (Lam, 2022), the interviewed Chinese novelist Chang Ping claims that the GTM aims against the propaganda machine that produces a large number of patriotic "zombies" and "little pinks". Cai Xia, a former professor at the Party School of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, who fled China, endorsed the initiative. She made the following comment:

"...This translation not only exposes the CCP's totalitarian ideology that poisons the Chinese people, but...it also reminds global governments and people to be

wary of the infiltration and poisoning of the CCP's external propaganda, false information, false narratives, and misleading public opinion space" (Cai, 2022)."

Others claim that this social media campaign poses a dilemma for Chinese censorship: if the influx of nationalistic discourse is prohibited, the CCP will lose a portion of its believers; if it is implicitly tolerated, it will be the same as supporting such extreme rhetoric. Yang Dali, a political science professor at the University of Chicago, reportedly told Voice of America that the TGTM might positively impact China by suppressing extremist rhetoric and fostering introspection. In addition, the accusatory articles of the Global Times are driven by money motives, according to Yang, who said in a statement, "The individuals behind these attacks are not Chinese government officials, but what I call nationalist entrepreneurs. They identified a way to profit off internet outrage in China." (VOA, 2022).

Given these points above, Chinese officials pursue increasing China's soft power overseas with external propaganda programs. However, the translations of GTM challenged the image of China's "peaceful rise" and the larger narrative of Western hegemony that Chinese foreign propaganda has long tried to portray. Ironically, the constant reactions from the Chinese officials provided momentum to GTM, raised many people's attention of China's rising digital nationalism, and rit a long-term digital activity mapping an Internet environment of heavy censorship and high nationalism. In general, GTM brought value in helping the broader audience to build a more comprehensive understanding of China, first through the identification of banal nationalistic sentiments alarming the consequences of promoting populist values online. Second, the GTM provided a digital window for western society to see the public opinions and most discussed social events in China.

## **5 Discussion**

The analysis outlined a worrying picture of the current situation of Chinese digital nationalism. Since the implementation of the GFW, China's internet discussion has been cut off from the rest of the world. While Chinese netizens cannot speak freely

about their own nation, they are free to discuss any other country or nation. With the rise of the Great Translation Movement, Chinese officials have made an effort to mediate and suppress some nationalistic internet comments.

GTM's participants, who often come from the diasporic community, inherited many behaviours from the web 2.0 age, such as using online spoofs and special glossaries to express political ideas implicitly. However, as mainland China's cyberspace no longer provides the soil for free political discussion, they have moved their activities to the overseas digital space. Hence, facing the heavy cross-border censorship and propaganda activities by the Party, these "Keyboard politicians" can only place their political expectations on the ideas of concepts based on an ideological core of cynicism. For example, accelerationism, which naively asserts that authoritarian rule will eventually be the catalyst for the implosion of the CCP. Nonetheless, these expectations are a "negative escape" because there is no way to predict whether things will necessarily improve when they first deteriorate sufficiently. Identifying these naïve political ideas led to an answer that the lack of rational and moderate discussion on the Internet and feeling for the turbulent policy changes in China facilitated the emergence of "Keyboard Politics".

What is more, when the collision of opinions on the Internet does not exist anymore, and only certain chosen voices are amplifying, digital nationalism will grow wildly. The categorisation of different groups showed the CCP together with the elites group had harnessed the internet power (Castells, 2009), which is the power to shape political decisions by influencing the discursive contexts and symbolic resources in which events occur. This paper found that many nationalistic speeches captured by GTM did not only come from the regular netizens but also the official media, tenured professors, well-known journalists and top strategists. They have joined the Party's propaganda machine, partially because of their faith in the ideology, but more probably, it is a result of Internet consumerism. Hence, these actors' activity resulted in a misleading of nationalism that the majority of Chinese netizens echoed. The memories of disgrace in Chinese history illustrate "the Opium War", the "Burning of the Imperial Palace", "the pay of

indemnities", the "Sick man of East Asia", and "Sino-Japan War", today such nationalistic symbols are ubiquitous on the Chinese cyberspace. These are the sources of the netizens' arrogance, xenophobia, and oversensitivity to a public mentality.

Furthermore, the evaluation of GTM's influence found that the response from Chinese officials is unusually intensive. The Party is upset by the exposure of a stark contrast between its internal and external propaganda programs and the resulting undercutting of its soft power expansion. Therefore, the state media has given multiple explanations for GTM, with the Global Times claiming that GTM is a Western and Taiwanese intelligence agency's "cognitive war" against China. After all, what GTM has done is only an original translation of what Chinese netizens have stated to the rest of the world, which has nothing to do with the anti-China "foreign hostile forces".

In addition, Chinese official media emphasised that the Chinese who celebrated Abe's death because they were not sophisticated and merely dared to express their love and hate explicitly. However, what caused this lack of sophistication? Most problems link to the CCP's education system that eradicates critical thinking and promotes nationalism. A smaller portion can be attributed to a society where criticism of others is one of the greatest taboos possible. When someone not in a position of "authority" criticises, they are considered disrespectful. Therefore, the lack of "sophistication" may be placed entirely on the shoulders of people who currently use it to justify awful behaviour.

Overall, while GTM exposes the fanatical thinking of netizens within the GFW, Western governments may not be overly concerned about extreme nationalism, and future research on China will continue to rely more on the translation and analysis of official Chinese government documents. On the one hand, the GTM has stimulated a significant number of China observers to overcome the language barrier and learn more about the highly emotional and banal nationalism that resulted from the process of the authoritarian government's internet governance. On the other hand, the

overseas platforms, free from censorship measures, have become an archive documenting the mainland China's real social situation, providing a genuine collective memory. Gradually, these overseas digital activities have become an extension of the imagined community of Chinese cultural nationalism with a connection by Internet, providing the foundation for rational and moderate discussions and warnings regarding the formation and polarisation of nationalism in the digital age.

## **6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, through the lens of nationalism and digital network theories, this paper has observed three key elements behind the Great Translation Movement.

First is the diasporic netizen community, the main participants of the GTM. Historically, the Chinese diaspora community had many contributions to their homeland's political and social development. During this process, the rise of technology brought the possibility to compose the Mandarin-speaking community worldwide, no matter where they reside, into a Chinese cultural nationalism. They are connected using Chinese social media such as WeChat and platforms such as Baidu, and Alibaba, where they interact and become involved in state-led patriotic-nationalism propaganda. Thus, Chinese digital nationalism is becoming a phenomenon of "global cultural politics" in the age of social media.

Nonetheless, the diasporic lives outside of the GFW, where the freedom of information is relatively guaranteed. Although the network and media made them ever close to the homeland, the rapidly rising nationalistic sentiments and the one-dimensional political communication in Mandarin-speaking Chinese online cyberspace brought their cautions. Therefore, this leads them to a polarised end, whether they will become the so-called "little pinks", the youthful jingoistic Chinese Internet nationalists or the "keyboard politicians" who hold naïve political concepts based on an ideological core of cynicism. In short, the translation of dark hatred Chinese comments is at the same time a warning to the rest of the world, but also a self-examination of the nation's character by the Chinese diasporic community.

The second finding is the newest outcomes of digital nationalism recorded by GTM. One is the confirmation of predictions regarding the current measures of authoritarian controls since Xi Jinping assumed power, that his trajectory of the so-called "new era" has been a blend of authoritarianism, populism and state-led nationalism. A society of Panopticon-like surveillance that digital technology is becoming a potent and oppressive tool in the hands of China's autocrats to spy on and control the entire society. While changes in ICT (particularly big data and artificial intelligence) benefit an ordinary netizen, it has far empowered entities such as large corporations and governments. Large corporations and governments are the only entities with these vast resources and the ability to utilise them fully with algorithms. Since the rise of ICTs enhances network connections, various network actors have been mutually involved. These bounded interactions are complex in the sense that they create some hardly predictable outcomes.

To illustrate, this paper noted that GTM provided a glimpse into some of these outcomes. In 2022, the unpopular zero-covid measures and Russia's unsuccessful military progression in Ukraine accelerated the public discourse censorship in China. Therefore, the analysis conducted a ramification of these findings through the eyes of GTM, which consist of four categories. The first category is the Chinese official propaganda flooding Chinese cyberspace. The second category is the emergence of online nationalist opinion leaders, who cooperate with video-sharing media websites and gain many followers. The third category showed that user-generated content could reach more likes and shares when they are related to nationalistic sentiments or anti-Western rhetoric. Finally, the fourth category is a surprisingly different result, which covers the live report of ongoing social events in China. Since many live reports on ongoing social events were being censored, the desire for factual information led many mainland Chinese netizens to jump off the GFW with VPN service and rely on the archives of overseas websites. In the end, the link between netizens across the Great Firewall provided momentum to several demonstrations, for instance, the White Paper protest in mainland China.

The third element is the GTM's reach and influence. The digital activity challenged the image of China's "peaceful rise" and the larger narrative of Western hegemony that Chinese propaganda has long attempted to portray. Ironically, the constant reactions from Chinese officials fuelled GTM, transforming it into a long-term digital activity mapping an Internet environment rife with censorship and nationalism. In addition, the GTM has enabled many China observers to overcome the language barrier and learn more about the authoritarian government's internet governance. And what is more, is that the backflow of translations from abroad alarmed many netizens within the GFW. As a result, the diasporic netizen provides the foundation for rational and moderate discussions and warnings regarding the formation and polarisation of nationalism in the digital age.

Overall, the study shows that nationalistic sentiment, disseminated by digital networks, enables both Chinese netizens living within and outside the GFW to share emotions together in one imagined community. Thus, digital nationalism is a double-edged sword for the CCP. On the one hand, by promoting nationalism in cyberspace, it receives more legitimacy to the regime's authority. Nevertheless, when social events occur, the overseas Chinese, who have the right to freedom of information, are also highly motivated by nationalism to participate in and usually capable of spreading uncensored news. With the assist of ICT technology, modern Chinese netizens abroad can still contribute to the democratisation of socio-political development in mainland China, the same as their predecessors have done in history. Therefore, scholars and policymakers should emphasise the issue of China's Internet cyberspace, considering its information environment for the cross-border nationalism-building process. In the future, the contestation on virtual territory may be more significant than many contesting the physical spaces.

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## List of Abbreviations

CDT	China Digital Times
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
GFW	Great Firewall
GTM	Great Translation Movement
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China