Networked Symbolic Violence on Micro-blogs in China

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to understand the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence in the Chinese micro-blog sphere. The main research questions are: (1) what are the main features of networked symbolic violence on the Chinese micro-blog Weibo, and (2) What are the main aspects of networked symbolic violence? In this study, the theory of structural violence, symbolic violence and the law of the mental unity of crowds will be used as the theoretical framework. Through a literature review and two case studies using content analysis, the findings of this study reveal that networked symbolic violence has four different stages: the beginning phase, the rising phase, the explosive phase and the dying down phase. And there are four main types of networked symbolic violence on Chinese micro-blog, they are aggressive language, aggressive symbols which contain metaphorical expressions of insult to attack others online, malicious rumors, and revealing others’ privacy. Furthermore, the networked symbolic violence on micro-blogs has four phases: a beginning phase, a rising phase, an explosive phase, and a dying-down phase. In the discussion part, the phenomenon of the crowd in the micro-blog era is discussed. Some tentative measures are also provided to prevent and stop networked symbolic violence on Chinese micro-blogs. Finally, the author indicates that it is necessary to conduct further researches on the cause of networked symbolic violence in Chinese society.
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1 Introduction

The initial idea of this thesis was from the question of what people can do and what people cannot do on the micro-blog. In contemporary China, the micro-blog is a very popular social network media. Using no more than 140 Chinese characters, pictures or videos, people can share what they think with others, not only with their friends but also a larger crowd through the micro-blog. However, what people cannot do on the micro-blog platform should be considered at the same time.

According to a report from the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), at the end of 2011, the number of registered users of the micro-blog in China had already reached about 250 million (CNNIC 2012, 29). However, three years ago, the micro-blog was just an emerging phenomenon and most Chinese people were unaware of it. It took around three years for the micro-blog to expand from its beginning in 2009 to its enormous explosion in 2011 (Xinhua.com 2010). Nevertheless, while the micro-blog has brought some happiness and convenience to us, the platform has also introduced new challenges as well. And one of those is violent speech acts; that is, the use of language as means to intimidate, discriminate, and threaten other individuals or groups on micro-blogs. Erzgräber and Hirsch (2001) indicated that there is one perspective of symbolic violence which concentrates on the symbolism of exercising violence and comprehends violence as language or cultural expressiveness. This kind of symbolic violence conveys violence through language, for example, using language to “shout, abuse, offend, slander, libel, discredit, belittle, disparage, debase, ignore, or make a fool of someone, including humiliation and character assassination” (Imusch 2003, 25). Even though this kind of symbolic violence is termed symbolic, it looks more like a variant of psychological violence (Imusch 2003). According to this definition, the phenomenon of violent speech acting on networks such as micro-blogs is a kind of symbolic violence. Therefore, in order to better understand this emerging phenomenon in contemporary China, it is named “networked symbolic violence” by the author.

Through the micro-blog, political events or gossip about stars, even normal things about ordinary
people, have become the focus of online discussions. In the process of these discussions, diverging opinions have emerged. However, some netizens\(^1\) regard the micro-blog platform as a battlefield (Tian et al. 2012). They use violent speech as their weapon to attack and even abuse others online. To make the problem more serious, with the development of heated online discussions targeting single individuals or groups, more and more people have joined in this violent event, and as more bloggers join in the discussion, gradually a violent crowd is created. Networked symbolic violence potentially affects not only the targeted individual or group but also brings negative effects to the society. Therefore, networked symbolic violence has already become a serious social issue, which cannot be neglected in contemporary China.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

The study of networked symbolic violence on micro blogs in China belongs to the study of media and violence within media and communication studies. Media violence is a broad research area, which concerns the depiction of violence through various media, for example, books, newspapers TV, movies, video games and the Internet (Trend 2007; Hao and Wang 2009). Numerous studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s in North America and Britain focused on the relationship between violence and TV or movies, especially the influence of the media violence on children (Berger 2003; Trend 2007; Boyle 2005). With the rapid development of Internet technology, in particular, the advent of social network media, an increasing number of scholars have begun to focus on the violence in Internet media (Funk et al. 2004; Michele et al. 2007; Chen 2010; Dai 2009).

In China, networked symbolic violence is an emerging phenomenon. This thesis attempts to explore the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence by analyzing two current Chinese cases of it on micro-blogs. This case analysis intends to facilitate the identification of the main features of networked symbolic violence, as well as the process of finding the main aspects of networked symbolic violence that would facilitate further research, not only in China but elsewhere where

\(^1\) A netizen is a person actively involved in online communication.(Yu et al., 2011)
this phenomenon might arise. Hence, the study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the main features of networked symbolic violence on the Chinese micro-blog Weibo?
2. What are the main aspects of networked symbolic violence?

Finally this thesis will discuss whether or not networked symbolic violence should be regulated and propose some tentative measures.

1.2 Significance of research

Networked symbolic violence on micro-blogs is a newborn phenomenon in China. Thus, in the present, there are two challenges concerning networked symbolic violence. Currently, there is no in-depth research into this new phenomenon, either in China or western countries. Consequently, there is vague and incomplete understanding of its features and implications for online debate. Secondly, the lack of a comprehensive understanding has led non-existing regulations and other measures to manage networked symbolic violence in contemporary China. Networked symbolic violence on micro-blogs has a negative influence on the quality of debate and formation of public opinion online. Accordingly, the study of networked symbolic violence is necessary and urgent in contemporary Chinese society.

1.3 Outline

The following outline of this thesis is intended to give the reader a picture of the structure of the study.
Chapter One gives readers a wide introduction, research questions, the significance of the research as well as an outline. In Chapter Two, the previous research and some literature reviews from China and western countries will be provided, for example, an overview of the micro-blog, a comparison between Twitter and the Chinese micro-blog Weibo, and also previous research on the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence. In Chapter Three, a theoretical framework is offered for the reader, the theory of structural violence, symbolic violence and the law of the mental unity of crowds will be utilized here, which will help the reader understand the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence in contemporary China. While the method approach used in this study is provided in Chapter Four, critical case study and content analysis will be the main methods employed. The results analysis of this study will be offered in Chapter Five, after which they are discussed in Chapter Six. Finally, Chapter Seven concludes this study and identifies further research areas.
2 Previous Research & Literature Review

The second part of this thesis is comprised of a discussion of previous research in the area of networked symbolic violence and a literature review. The section will introduce social media platforms, but will primarily focus on micro-blogs in the context of China. An overview of the micro-blog and previous research on networked symbolic violence will be provided not only from China but also western countries.

2.1 Social media platforms in the Chinese context

The world has witnessed the rapid growth of the Chinese economy in recent years. At the same time, the economy has been driving the development of Internet technologies. The number of Chinese netizens\(^2\) has increased greatly. One report from the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) indicated that, until the end of 2011, the number of Chinese netizens was more than 513 million. From 2004 to 2011, the popularity of the Internet grew by approximately 31.1 percent (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: the scale of Chinese netizens and the popularity of the Internet (Source: 29th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, CNNIC)

At the same time, Internet use increased the number of social media in China, such as blogs,

\(^2\) The definition of netizen use here: Chinese citizens that are over 6 years old and have used the Internet in the last 6 months (CNNIC).
micro-blogs, social network sites, and video-sharing sites as they grew in popularity. Among those social media, the advent and development of the micro-blog has had a huge impact on Chinese society. Until the end of 2011, the number of registered users of the micro-blog was up to 250 million. This proportion increased more than 296.0% from 2010, and the rate of usage among netizens increased to 48.7% (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: the number of micro-blog users and the utilization ratio from 2010 to 2011 (Source: 29th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, CNNIC)**

![Graph showing micro-blog users and utilization ratio from 2010 to 2011]

### 2.2 The micro-blog phenomenon in general

“The micro-blog is a platform based on user relationships and user generated contents (UGC), and can be used for information sharing and broadcasting” (Zhang 2011, 4). The registered users can update their messages and share them quickly with no more than 140 characters on the micro-blog. “The character limitations on microblogging force us to communicate in a more succinct manner. The content of our text messages are written completely differently than our e-mails. This is why they are read” (Lon and David 2009, 263). At the same time, with the rapid development of information technology, you can update your micro-blog through any devices, such as computer, mobile phone, and tablet. Miles Efron gives it a more complete definition and suggests how to use the micro-blog:

“The term microblog describes an increasingly common information medium. Usually comprising brief textual entries written on an ongoing basis, a typical microblog is
written by a single person or entity and is read by anywhere from zero to hundreds of thousands of ‘followers.’ Users of microblog services such as Twitter are likely to maintain a microblog of their own. Likewise, each user typically follows some number of other peoples’ microblogs. As millions of users broadcast updates to their followers, microblogs appear attractive insofar as they promise access to timely information written by people we have chosen to pay attention to” (Miles 2011, 1).

Today, the service called Twitter is the most popular micro-blog platform around the world (Zhang 2011). In 2006, Evan Williams, the inventor of the blog, established a new company, OBVIOUS, and then launched the Twitter service. As the leader in the micro-blog area, Twitter has introduced a new concept of network communication. Just as Joel said in his book *Twitter Power*, “Twitter is a two-way communication tool; it is not just as a billboard for making announcements, but as way of holding a conversation with people who matter” (Joel 2009, 26-27). According to Twopcharts (American information statistics website), until the 24th of February of 2012, the number of the registered users of Twitter was already more than 500 million (Twopcharts.com). However, because the violence, pornography, slander, rumor, and even the speeches that are against the Chinese government are unlimited on Twitter, Twitter was blocked by the Chinese government in July of 2009, so the people in mainland China cannot use Twitter in a legitimate way (Baidu.com).

Although Twitter is blocked, micro-blogs still exist in China and are called—Weibo (微博). Weibo vividly describes the features of the micro-blog in the Chinese language. 微(Wei) means mini and 博(Bo) means blog. “The first microblog website, Fanfou, was established in May 2007” (Zhang 2011, 4), and from that time, Sina.com, Tencent.com and Netease.com, almost all of the portal sites in China, established their own micro-blog service. Especially in 2010, the micro-blog service rapidly increased with more and more people, such as entertainment and sports stars, politicians, experts, and even some ordinary people, opening their own Weibo in China. Recently, Sina Weibo has taken the lead in the micro-blog service in China. Sina Weibo officially launched in August of 2009. Sina made a statement that, by October 2011, the number of registered users of Sina Weibo had reached 250 million, and the volume of tweets per day had increased to 90
million, with almost 50,000 companies having opened branded accounts (Sina.com). In only five years, Weibo has shown its tremendous influence and potential in China, which could be related to the main features of the micro-blog: free access, instantaneity, interactivity, and a diversity of access tools. China has already entered into the micro-blog era (Zhang 2012).

2.3 Micro-blog features in general

As described above, the main features of the micro-blog are: free access, instantaneity, interactivity, and a diversity of access tools. 4A could be used to represent those features. The micro-blog contains 4A elements which are different from other network communication channels. These 4A elements are: Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime, Anything (Zhao and Lai 2010).

2.3.1 Anyone

Compared with traditional media, the micro-blog is available to anyone with access to the Internet and thus allows the individual to easily publish their ideas to a wider audience without interference from others. Micro-blogs, unlike traditional media, allow more individuals to have the same opportunity to speak and be heard. Anyone can be a news producer and news receiver, whoever they are, a millionaire or a poor person; a star or an ordinary person; an expert or a student. In addition, the communication mode is different between traditional media and Internet media. In 1948, the famous American communication studies scholar Harold Lasswell defined the objective of media communications research as discovering “who says what to whom in what channel with what effect” (Sun 2009, 16). A figure could be used to show this theory.

Figure 3: Lasswell’s communication mode

![Diagram](image.png)

This figure shows a typical linear communication mode, which means that the audience cannot
reply or express their viewpoint but can just listen. In the traditional media communication mode, the opportunity to communicate between the media and the audience is unbalanced. On the other hand, communication through the micro-blog is totally different from the traditional media. Without the constraint of the traditional media mode, there is an interactive process between different people. In the micro-blog, the communication mode is one-to-many; anyone has the opportunity to spread information and communicate and all of the micro-bloggers will be your audience or fans if you are interesting enough.

2.3.2 Anywhere and anytime

Anywhere and anytime are very important features of the micro-blog. Here, anywhere refers to the place that you can use the micro-blog service. With the constant extension of Internet services, the rate of network coverage has increased very quickly, not only in some western countries but also in China. Especially in China, Internet technologies have made tremendous progress in recent years. Until the end of 2011, the number of broadband netizens that were accessing the Internet by household broadband reached 392 million (CNNIC 2012). Furthermore, the number of mobile netizens has already increased to 356 million (CNNIC 2012). The traditional media have to use interviews, edits, and broadcast equipment; however, as long as you have Internet equipment, you can update your micro-blog at any time. In particular, due to the development of 3G and even 4G network technologies, people can update their micro-blog with new and fresh information, such as uploading pictures and videos, in a very short time. Therefore, everyone can use the micro-blog anywhere and at anytime as long as the network access and the access tools are available.

2.3.3 Anything

“Microbloggers usually post messages in a decentralized fashion. This is different from a news article or an academic paper, which usually focuses on a specific topic” (Liu et al. 2012, 77). The micro-blog is a multiple-information platform. Using no more than 140 characters, you can publish anything you want (even one word) on your micro-blog, or you can just upload a picture
or a video. However, in the traditional commercial media, the editor and journalist are forced to pay great attention to audience preferences. The commercial media will choose specific topics to make an in-depth or continuous report according to the taste of the audience, as well as advertisers.

### 2.4 Distinction between Twitter and Sina Weibo

As the most influential micro-blog service providers in western countries and China, respectively, Twitter and Sina Weibo exhibit some similarities and also some distinctions. For instance, first, Weibo and Twitter are information-publishing platform—anyone can publish anything he or she wants on this platform. In the meantime, the users have to use micro-blog service under local law. In terms of service from Twitter: “You may use the Services only if you can form a binding contract with Twitter and are not a person barred from receiving services under the laws of the United States or other applicable jurisdiction” (Twitter.com). Additionally, Sina Weibo has stated that: “You cannot do anything which is forbidden by the law and regulation of the Chinese government” (Sina.com). Secondly, Weibo and Twitter are all commercial media and they are all run by private companies. These two micro-blog service providers exist for the purpose of making a profit. The advertisements on their homepage are their main way of making money. The sponsorship of advertisers has been an important funding source for the development of Twitter as well as Sina Weibo. Thirdly, with the development of information technology, there are various means for micro-blog users to log onto Weibo and Twitter, such as cell phones and tablet computers.

However, there are still some distinct differences between Twitter and Chinese Weibo. And even Chinese weibo has its own unique features superior to Twitter (Ding 2011). It is incorrect to consider Chinese Weibo as merely a complete duplicate of Twitter. In order to better understand why networked symbolic violence is influencing so many Chinese people in the micro-blog world, it is necessary to analyze the main differences between Twitter and Chinese Weibo.
2.4.1 Censorship

Censorship is a distinct feature of the Chinese media sphere, not only in the traditional media but also in the network media. At Sina Weibo service website, the website administrator is in charge of checking almost all of the messages, pictures, and videos. If the website administrator finds a message in violation of Chinese regulations or laws, the message will be deleted. Furthermore, the message which contains some “sensitive words or information”, for example, “Tiananmen Movement”, “Falun Gong” and “Cultural Revolution”, etc. will be blocked as well. However, it is important to note that the censorship is conducted after the information is published on the micro-blog. Consequently, the system of censorship does not necessarily stop unlawful entries from influencing the micro-blog sphere.

2.4.2 Certified user system

In order to avoid any confusion and misunderstanding about micro-bloggers’ individual identity, there is a system of authentication. Sina Weibo carries out a certified user system for some famous people, companies, and organizations, which increases the credibility and demonstration effect of users in certain areas. So far, the following users have an opportunity to apply for certification: (a) those that are well-known and influential in a certain field; (b) famous corporations, organizations, universities, media; (c) well-known stars in the area of entertainment, sports, etc.

2.4.3 Rich media content

It is generally known that the limitation of characters (no matter Chinese or western) in one tweet is 140. However, Chinese micro-blog Weibo allows 140 Chinese characters or 280 western characters. In addition, compared to English characters, most Chinese characters contain more rich meaning and “140 characters can convey far more than is possible in English” (Sky 2011, 77).

Furthermore, Twitter users can upload messages and pictures on Twitter, while Sina Weibo allows
its users to upload not only messages and pictures, but also videos, audios, and tons of thumbnail emoticons as attachments by a simple click (Alia 2011). These features make Weibo a rich and interesting environment for bloggers and the followers. Weibo uses some functions which westerns only can use on Facebook and other social network media.

2.4.4 The mode of comment

There are two options for commenting at the Weibo site. The followers can either comment directly after the original author or check the option of post the comment as “my micro-blog” spontaneously. This style looks similar to that of the comment mode on Facebook. However, on Twitter, the comment is directly posted on one’s own micro-blog and you cannot see the comment on the timeline of the original author (see Figure 4 & Figure 5).

Figure 4: The screenshot from Sina Weibo

![Sina Weibo screenshot](image1)

Figure 5: The screenshot from Twitter

![Twitter screenshot](image2)
2.4.5 Social media aggregation

On Sina Weibo, registered users can set up in settings sharing their status on other social network media, such as Renren.com (one social network website which is similar to Facebook), Kaixin001.com (one social network website which is similar to Facebook), QQ (most popular instant message service in China), and Sina Blog (biggest blog host in China) (Alia 2011). Of course, you can share your status and some new information from other social network media on your micro-blog as well. That means that micro-blogs in China are already connected and integrated with other Internet platforms. The audience coverage of the micro-blog is huge. However, Twitter does not have this kind of function.

2.4.6 Micro groups

The micro group is an exclusive feature of Sina Weibo. Every user can establish three micro groups and the user can join in any group if the group administrator allows him or her to come into the group. In the micro group, every group member can share his or her common interests and publish their viewpoints and conversations. The micro group brings the people that have similar interests together and they form a new social network, which is significantly different from the way in which Twitter operates.
What is more, there are still other special points concerning the micro-blog service, such as content filters on the home page, voicemail tweets, automatic URL shorteners, etc, which are only found on Facebook. “Weibo makes microblogging more of a social thing than Twitter” (Alia 2011, 2). All of these functions make Sina Weibo not only interesting and convenient but also more complicated to study than Twitter.

### 2.5 Media and violence studies

It is difficult to determine the origin of media and violence studies. However, one thing is certain, which is that media and violence studies have had a very long history. “Violence in entertainment is as old as civilization itself” (Bruce et al. 2003, 1). Even Plato was concerned about the effects of plays on youth” (Cynthia 2007, 1). In contemporary society, with the development of media, violence has already appeared in various media, such as TV, films, video games, popular music, etc. Why has violence appeared in the media more and more frequently? The answer is just as Trend indicates in his book: “We like to watch” (Trend 2007). The demand for television programs can create huge economic benefits, therefore, films with a high content of violence have become very widely distributed (Lukesch 2003, 515).

Different scholars have provided different definitions for media violence. In general, however, the majority of scholars agree with the definition that the National Television Violence Study (NTVS) has provided. The NTVS, which is a comprehensive examination of the content of American television programs, defines media violence as:

“Any overt depiction of a credible threat of physical force or the actual use of such force intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings. Violence also includes certain depictions of physically harmful consequences against an animate being or group that occurs as a result of unseen violent means, thus there are three primary types of violent depictions: credible threats, behavioral acts, and harmful consequences” (Bruce et al. 2003, 2).
The types of violence can be classified according to two categories. The first one is the violence which is related to some events in the real world. The other one is literary fiction (see figure 6).

Figure 6: distinctions in the media’s presentation of violence (Source: Groebel and Gleich 1993, 44)

In these two types of media violence, fictional violence has been particularly focused on by many scholars.

“Hitherto, the diversity of the means of media production, beginning with pictures and print, has broadened to include first the audio media and audiovisual data storage media and then the borderline area of interactive computer games and relatively realistic forms of experiencing cyberspace through whole-body activity; each of these media can use its own code to convey the subject of violence to the person experiencing it” (Lukesch 2003, 514).

The research on media violence has already extended to various media platforms, especially the effect of the media violence on people. Through a great number of investigations, researches and
analyses, a substantial proportion of studies have demonstrated the relationship between violent behavior in the media and people’s behavior in real life (Anderson et al. 2003; Funk et al. 2004; Bushman 1998). The effect of media violence on children has been particularly significant: “Screen-based media violence (television, movies, the Internet, and video games) is the most prevalent and most thoroughly studied source for children and adolescents” (Funk et al. 2004, 24). Furthermore, “it is believed that repeated exposure to real-life and to entertainment violence may alter cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes” (Funk et al. 2004).

Some scholars have proposed various theories to explain the effect of media violence on people, especially on children. For example, Bandura (1983) established the social learning theory. He thinks that observing and imitating are the main methods for children to learn social skills. Since the cognition and morality of youngsters are still at an “immature” stage, they will imitate and learn behavior indiscriminately. Further, Huesmann (1986) has proposed the social cognitive theory based on social learning theory. Huesmann indicates that when children observe violence in the mass media, they learn aggressive scripts for social behavior. Additionally, Berkowitz has proposed the theory of media effects. His experiments revealed that “media effects are conditioned responses to semantically associated stimuli” (Bushman 1998, 538). More recently, Berkowitz has suggested that “the aggressive ideas suggested by a violent movie can prime other semantically related thoughts, heightening the chances that viewers will have other aggressive ideas in this period” (ibid).

However, “not every viewer or player will be affected noticeably, but from understanding the psychological processes involved, we know that every viewer or player is affected in some way” (MVC 2012, 339). Therefore, Lukesch also proposed some suggestions to control and regulate the media violence according to the following six aspects: 1) responsibility of the legislator, 2) responsibility of the media, 3) infrastructural measures, 4) in-school measures, 5) out-of-school activities, 6) working with parents (Lukesch 2003, 534).
2.6 Violence in a general sense and networked symbolic violence

Before attempting to define networked symbolic violence, it is important to understand some other concepts first. This section will explore the concept of violence in a general sense, as well as its connection to networked symbolic violence.

2.6.1 The definition of violence

In order to understand what networked symbolic violence is, it is necessary to explore what is violence. Normally, the violence is always considered as the physical behavior which will cause direct injury or the infliction of pain. And “commonly documented forms of physical violence include: being hit, punched, pinched, poked, scratched, pushed or kicked” (Albert 2012, 390). Similarly, as Parsons states, “In philosophy and political theory, violence is typically conceptualized as physical and/or psychological harm and injury caused by direct, and in some cases intentional, action through the application of vigorous or extreme physical force” (Parsons 2007, 174). World Health Organization (WHO) also focuses on the research of violence. The definition of violence of the WHO is “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (WHO 2002, 4).

However, regarding the definition of violence, various scholars have provided different answers, as Imbusch (2003) has stated:

“It is clear that individual understanding of the concept may relate to very different forms of violence, so that the diversity of the concept of violence can today be considered to a good extent to be the diversification of different ways of understanding violence which previously did not exist as such” (Heitmeyer and Hagan 2003, 13).

Even though every individual defines the concept of violence from a different perspective,
Imbusch (2003) has indicated that violence can be deduced from at least seven questions, which give readers a complete picture of the meaning of violence: “Who exercises violence? What happens when violence is exercised? How is violence exercised? Who is violence directed at? Why is violence exercised [reasons]? Why is violence exercised [objectives]? Why is violence exercised [justifications]?” An answer and explanation of these questions can be found in the table below:

Table 1: The concept of violence and its strands of meaning (Source: Heitmeyer and Hagan 2003, International Handbook of Violence Research, p 22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Relevant dimensions</th>
<th>Definition criteria</th>
<th>Elements of definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who?</td>
<td>Subjects</td>
<td>Perpetrators as agents</td>
<td>Individuals, groups, institutions, structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What?</td>
<td>Phenomenology of violence</td>
<td>Injury, harm, other effects</td>
<td>People, objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How?</td>
<td>Ways in which violence is exercised</td>
<td>Means, circumstances</td>
<td>Physical, psychological, symbolic, communicative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whom?</td>
<td>Objects of violence</td>
<td>Victims</td>
<td>People, objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why? (Reasons)</td>
<td>Causes and reasons</td>
<td>Interests, possibilities, contingencies</td>
<td>Forms of justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why? (Objectives)</td>
<td>Goals and motives</td>
<td>Degrees of expedience</td>
<td>Intentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why? (Justifications)</td>
<td>Models of justification</td>
<td>Deviating from or corresponding to norms</td>
<td>Legal/illegal, Legitimate/illegitimate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, Johan Galtung, who is a famous scholar in the field of peace and conflict studies, used six dimensions to describe how to define violence: “(1) violence can be physical or psychological, (2) it can use negative or positive means of influence, (3) it can have an object or not, (4) it can have a subject or not (personal vs. structural), (5) it can be intended or not, (6) it can be manifest or latent” (Derriennic 1972, 362). In order to understand the distinction between different types of violence, Galtung constructed a typology of violence into three categories: personal (direct),
structural, and cultural violence:

“Direct violence is intended to insult the basic needs of others (including nature), structural violence with such insults built into social and world structures as exploitation and repression, and cultural violence, aspects of culture (such as religion and language) legitimizing direct and structural violence” (Leonisa 2007, 3).

Figure 7 introduces Galtung’s differentiation between direct (personal) and indirect (structural) violence. Accordingly, Galtung defines violence as “…the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is. Violence is that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of this distance” (Galtung 1969, 168). In other words, “when the potential is higher than the actual is by definition avoidable and when it is avoidable, then violence is present” (Galtung 1969, 169). According to this definition, war and conflict, which cause direct injury or the infliction of pain, are considered to be examples of violence; and speech which hurts the victim emotionally can be regarded as violence as well. Once external factors block people to present their potential, violence exists.

**Figure 7: A typology of violence (Source: Jácome 2012, 15)**
Galtung further stated that it is important to distinguish different kinds of violence (Han 2012). The first point is the difference between physical violence and psychology violence. It is easy to accept the idea that physical violence is when human beings are hurt and even killed. Psychological violence, however, is more covert than physical violence. However, it is very difficult to estimate harm to one’s mentality. Secondly, the emergence of violence is sometimes intentional behavior and sometimes is unconscious behavior; people seem always focus on the intentional rather than the unconscious in this regard (ibid).

2.6.2 The difference between violence and networked symbolic violence

To begin with, it is obvious that violence in a general sense and networked symbolic violence are very different in the sense that violence in a general sense is not possible in the online world. With the development and spread of information technology, people have constructed a new environment in the Internet world. This environment could be called as a new society (Qi and Deng 2001), because in this society people can do many things that they cannot do in real life. It is apparent that the boundary between real life and virtual life has become less and less discernable (ibid). Although this gap is diminishing, it is important to realize that the real world and the virtual world are still different although interconnected.

Secondly, the manifestation of violence in a general sense and that of networked symbolic violence are different. The former, in our real life is physical violence; however, networked symbolic violence contains many different aspects. Networked symbolic violence spreads by language, written words on the Internet, which makes this violence a “gentle violence,” because you do not have to use force, a gun, or other tools to hurt others—perhaps you just post some words so that you can create a huge storm or hurt numerous people.

Finally, the effects of physical violence and networked symbolic violence are different as well in certain aspects. The effects of the former are more direct and obvious. Networked symbolic violence causes an indirect impact, but this kind of violence will affect more people and a bigger
space.

2.7 Previous research on networked symbolic violence in China

Networked symbolic violence is an emerging phenomenon, which first began to appear with the development of the social media in China (Zhang 2009). Consequently, networked symbolic violence has only recently been addressed by Chinese scholars. In addition to the Chinese research community’s efforts to understand this phenomenon, there are a growing number of articles about networked symbolic violence in periodicals, on TV programs, in newspapers, and at news websites. This attention by the non-research community further attests to the growing importance of this phenomenon in the Chinese context.

While there are no books on the topic, Chinese research has produced a number of articles. In the research community, scholars research this topic from various points of view, such as sociology, communication studies, politics and law, etc. Using the largest Chinese search engine Baidu.com and typing the key words “networked symbolic violence” (网络语言暴力) to search for relevant articles, news reports, and blog entries, about 391,000 results³ were found. In addition, when the relevant studies were searched in Wanfang Data⁴, which is a database service provider in China. There were 39 academic papers⁵ which contained master theses, Ph.D. dissertations, and conference files about networked symbolic violence. Through summarizing and analyzing the articles about networked symbolic violence in China, these articles can be classified into the following parts.

2.7.1 The definition of networked symbolic violence

In Chinese academia, there appears to be no authoritative definition of networked symbolic violence. Defining networked symbolic violence is thus very important, in particular for ensuring

³ http://www.baidu.com/, until 15th June 2012
⁴ Wanfang Data, an affiliate of the Chinese Ministry of Science & Technology, provides access to a wide range of database resources, serving as a gateway to Chinese culture, medicine, business, science, engineering, etc.
⁵ http://www.wanfangdata.com.cn/, until 15th June 2012
a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon over time.

Initially, the term of networked symbolic violence was used to describe the netizens’ use of extreme language to abuse and attack others online. More specifically, networked symbolic violence refers to an attacking action using speech to abuse and attack specific people online (Zhao 2009; Huang 2010). In fact, these kinds of radical sentiments reflect some netizens’ discontent with their real life or contemporary society. Once the netizen experiences some displeasure, disappoint or complaint, they will use the network to express their feelings (Zhao 2009).

In 2007, *Renmin Daily* summarized the definition of network violence in contemporary society (Deng and Wang 2007). The first point of networked symbolic violence is, in the name of morality, to punish other people and to try to solve some problems not only on the Internet but also in real life; second, to try to search for and publish others’ private information without the permission of the party, and incite the public to use violent and insulting language to attack others on the Internet, and third, to attempt to extend the violence from online to offline and to hurt or threaten an individual or group in real life.

In *Research of the Phenomenon of Networked symbolic violence among the University Students* (Tian et al. 2012), the authors also offer a definition of networked symbolic violence. In this essay, the authors regarded networked symbolic violence as a form of soft violence as well as an extension of normal physical violence. From their viewpoint, networked symbolic violence is when a large number of netizens publish or use seditious, aggressive, and contumelious language to attack others or reveal someone’s private information so as to influence the party’s normal life (including relatives’ and friends’ normal life), and harming others’ reputation, mentality, and psychology.
2.7.2 The main types of networked symbolic violence

There are three main manifestations of networked symbolic violence, which are: (a) using insulting and threatening language, (b) spreading rumor, and (c) using the Internet to actively investigate individuals or groups for the purpose of using insulting and threatening language (Jin 2009; Zhou 2010; Tian et al. 2012; Lei 2010; Li 2010).

i. Aggressive, insulting, and threatening language
Aggressive, insulting, and threatening language is the most typical type of networked symbolic violence (Zhou 2010). Some netizens use aggressive, insulting, and seditious language to attack others for the purpose of causing emotional distress. These written languages are acerbic, malicious, and even cruel. In China, common network violent phrases are, for example, “操” (fuck), “你妈的” (son of bitch), “傻逼” (idiot), “二百五” (stupid people) and “脑残” (people that have a mental problem), etc.

On the other hand, “with so much of popular teenage discourse infiltrated with words such as ‘ho’ (prostitute) and ‘bitch’ and quick communication codes such as ‘omg’ which means ‘Oh my God’, which have developed through MSN and text messaging” (Shariff 2008, 29). This phenomenon also happened in China. Accordingly, more and more Chinese netizens are using some words or signals which contains metaphorical expressions of insults to attack others, such as “艹” (fuck), “TMD” (son of bitch) and “SB” (son of bitch), etc.

ii. Rumor
Malicious rumors are one of the most important parts of networked symbolic violence (Zhou 2010). The meaning of rumor according to the Oxford Dictionary is “a currently circulating story or report of uncertain or doubtful truth⁶.” The influence of rumor is huge. Some netizens do not even know whether the information is true or not before they spread it. Sometimes even though people do not use any dirty language, the spread of the rumor can still cause serious mental damage to other people. A rumor can influence not only the individual but also the entire society,

⁶ http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/rumour?q=rumor
for instance, rumors of the earthquake in China, rumors of nuclear radiation in Japan (from this rumor, a huge number of Chinese people believed that iodized salt could prevent nuclear radiation and this caused a shortage of iodized salt in China), rumors about political incidents in Beijing, and so on. These rumors all cause instability in the whole society.

iii. Internet-based “Man Hunt”

In 2001, a new method of online search came into being in Chinese society, which is called Internet Man Hunt. Internet Man Hunt was created by Map.com in 2001. Internet Man Hunt is an act whereby netizens actively collaborate to find and reveal negative information on public officials and public figures on the Internet (Zuo 2009). The British media call this online behavior in China a “Human flesh search engine.” The U.S. media call it “Chinese style Internet Man Hunt.” This type of collaboration has also been referred to as “Person engines” (Huang 2010, 3).

In the early stage of Internet Man Hunt, it was used primarily for entertainment purposes (Zuo 2009). The neitzens would gather and share gossip online on entertainment stars. The use changed, however, especially during the period of the Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan Province 2008, when many people lost their relatives and friends. Initially Internet Man Hunt was used by thousands of netizens to help survivors of the earthquake get in touch with family outside the affected areas. In addition, Internet Man Hunt was also used for investigating the corruption of the officials that were in charge of building contracts.

However, Internet Man Hunt seems like a double-edged sword. Due to the shortage of Internet laws and regulations in contemporary China, Internet Man Hunt has evolved further and is currently being used by some netizens to search for others’ private information and to publish it online with or without their consent. One research which focused on Internet Man Hunt events in China from 2001 to the April of 2010 shows that 35 percent of a person’s friends and relatives will be affected if the person has been searched online (Huang 2010).

Internet Man Hunt is always mentioned in connection with networked symbolic violence (Zhou 2010). However, Internet Man Hunt is not equal to networked symbolic violence. When Internet
Man Hunt is out of control, especially when Internet Man Hunt reveals others’ private information so that it hurt others or victims’ friends, Internet Man Hunt becomes one type of networked symbolic violence.

2.7.3 The network mob

Xu Jin (2008), in her article *The Analysis of the Phenomenon of Network Public Opinion Violence*, argues that the essence of networked symbolic violence is the collective behavior of the “network mob” (Xu 2008). A single netizen may not create networked symbolic violence. However, in the context of collective behavior, a crowd tends to gather together and become more and more radical in some special environments.

In 2009, *China Youth Daily* and the news center of Tecent.com conducted an online survey about the question, “What are the typical features of the network mob?” (3226 participants in total) The results are presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>content</th>
<th>percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netizens that have the tendency to sanction others in purpose</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netizens that always use bad or dirty language online</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reveal others’ private information without the permission of the party</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threaten the human safety of the party</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always question the moral character of the party</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow others’ opinions blindly</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chen Haolei (2009) analyzed the features of the “network mob” and the reasons that cause the phenomenon of network mobs in contemporary China. In his article, *Network Mob: the Mob in the Virtual Space*, he discussed some of the reasons behind the phenomenon of the network mob, such as the immediate factor (the netizen individual), the remote factor (the features of the Internet) and social factor (the Chinese environment).
In addition, the China Dominant-journalism Development Center published a report in 2007, *Analyzing the Phenomenon of Network Mob in China through Data from CNNIC*. This report attempted to research the connection between main features of Chinese netizens and the phenomenon of the network mob through details such as age, educational background, and career. This report demonstrates that both the age and education level of netizens are relatively low—the majority of Chinese netizens are composed of students and young workers in factories.

### 2.7.4 The causes of networked symbolic violence

The causes of networked symbolic violence are a very popular research topic for Chinese scholars, and they have analyzed these causes according to various aspects.

Chen Guojing (2010), for example, analyzed the cause of networked symbolic violence from the perspective of psychology. She thinks that the prevalence of networked symbolic violence is not occasional. The change in psychology is one of the main reasons. The author underlines three kinds of psychology in the process of networked symbolic violence. First, the individual tends to get full release on the Internet. Second, a feeling of inferiority drives some netizens to commit irrational acts online. The third one is group psychology.

Tian Juan et al. (2012), in the article *Research on the Phenomenon of Networked symbolic violence among University Students*, point out that university students are the main propagators of networked symbolic violence since university students are too young to deal with their emotions correctly online. University students have the desire to pursue freedom and display their personal characters. They cannot wait to express their viewpoint on a topic which they are really interested in so it is easy for them to ignore the consequences after publishing their speech online.

Wu Jiang and Gu Quan (2006) think that the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence is

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7 CNNIC: China Internet Network Information Center
closely related to the social environment in contemporary China. The socio-economic gaps in China are big and growing parts of the population are discontented with unfair, corrupt, and untruthful phenomena in society. At the same time, and perhaps of most importance to the public, is the shortage of appropriate channels to express their discontent. As a consequence, various online networks have become a platform where they can express themselves.

In the study of the cause of networked symbolic violence, the majority of articles begin by researching the factor of netizens, the factor of the Internet environment, and the factor of Chinese society (Dai 2009; Tu 2009; Li 2009; Xu 2008). In particular, Sun Jian (2009) has conducted a comprehensive research and analysis on the cause of networked symbolic violence. He presents the idea that the psychological features of netizens, the features of the Internet, and the media environment shape networked symbolic violence. He especially refers to the theory of the “news field”. Sun indicates that even though “news field theory” is always used to analyze the traditional news media, “news field theory” is also useful to be utilized in the Internet media. He thinks that, under the background of commercial society, the click rate of media reporting in the news field is one of the main causes of networked symbolic violence in contemporary China.

Lei Shasha (2010) thinks that networked symbolic violence tends to be classified into two kinds, those that contain conscious and unconscious behaviors. The former refers to networked symbolic violence behavior aiming at one person or one thing on purpose since this person or this thing causes discontent in the society. Some netizens post radical speeches online during this process. Those radical speeches will disappear automatically with the disappearance of discontent in the society. On the other hand, the unconscious behavior of networked symbolic violence refers to some of the people publishing radical speeches online only because they hate the society. The obvious feature of this group of people is that they do not have a concrete target to blame but use written language to attack anyone or anything online. Another difference between the conscious and unconscious behaviors is that the people sometimes feel guilty after they conduct networked symbolic violence.
2.7.5 The effects of networked symbolic violence on Chinese society

There are many relevant studies about the influence of networked symbolic violence on the Chinese society, for instance, The Analysis on the Cause and the Countermeasure of Networked symbolic violence of Li Xianling (2010) and Research on the Guidance of Networked symbolic violence of Zhao Yanshu (2009), etc.

Li Xianling (2010) thinks that networked symbolic violence will have a big impact on the modern Chinese language. The crowd that uses words or symbols that contain metaphorical expressions of insult to attack others has gradually become larger, not only online but also offline in recent years, and has already influenced the purity and health of the modern Chinese language as well as causing confusing in the usage of the language. Next, she thinks that networked symbolic violence has created a big challenge to interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is showing a tendency to lack politeness, sincerity, and truth little by little in the society. Finally, networked symbolic violence will affect traditional Chinese morality.

Zhao Yanshu (2009) thinks that networked symbolic violence violates the people’s legitimate rights and interests, affects normal life, and does physical and emotional harm to the parties. In particular, networked symbolic violence is very harmful for the healthy growth of teenagers.

2.7.6 The prevention of networked symbolic violence

On the topic of the prevention and improvement of networked symbolic violence in contemporary Chinese society, Chinese scholars provide some good advice and solutions.

Dai Yuqiang (2009) thinks, to start with, that improving the quality of netizens is necessary. Every netizen is supposed to make a clear distinction between right and wrong and to be against harmful information. Second, the administrator of the website should take responsibility for guiding positive and healthy public opinion, and deleting violent language and rumors as quickly as possible. Third, the government should establish relevant laws and regulations on the Internet.
The netizens, Internet service providers, and regulators should take corresponding responsibility.

Zhao Yanshu (2009), in her thesis *Research on the Guidance of Networked symbolic violence*, discussed the possibility of conducting the real name policy for networks. According to one investigation, there are more than 50% netizens objecting to a real name policy online because these people think that this system will deprive people of freedom and equality in the Internet world. However, Zhao thinks that the real name policy can control the networked symbolic violence phenomenon, which is helpful for the healthy development of the network environment. The advantages of conducting a real name policy far outweigh the disadvantages. Therefore, the government can try the real name policy online.

Some scholars have pointed out that contemporary Chinese society is lacking a set of effective regulations to manage or regulate networked symbolic violence (Zhao 2009; Liang 2010; Li 2011; Li 2008). On the other hand, they think that the establishment and implementation of online laws and regulations are not easy in contemporary China. The government should set up laws and regulations that are appropriate to the Chinese society through sufficient investigation.

### 2.8 Previous research on networked symbolic violence in western countries

In western countries, networked symbolic violence exists in the society as well. However, western scholars prefer using terms such as cyber bullying, cyber stalking and online or Internet harassment to present this phenomenon. In particular, the term cyber bullying is used relatively frequently. Through searching the database of the Social Sciences Citation Index, the number of articles related to cyber bullying was 142 in 2012. Most of the studies research and analyze the phenomena of cyber bullying from the perspective of psychology and education science, and have paid much attention to the influence of cyber bullying on children. Throughout these studies, they discussed and summarized the definition, categories and characteristics of the phenomenon of cyber bullying.
2.8.1 The definition of cyber bullying

Shariff indicates that, in *Cyber-bullying: Issues and Solutions for the School; the Classroom and the Home*, it is difficult to make a clear definition to the phenomenon.

“In the case of cyberspace, because of the range of possibilities, the fluidity with which it is possible to move from one form of technology such as email, MSN, Facebook, MySpace, web-blogs, chat rooms and so on, and the capacity for millions of people to read and participate in various forms of communication, any definition of cyber-bullying must be applied with a caveat” (Shariff 2008, 28).

Therefore, cyber bullying should be understood and analyzed in various contexts. Shariff also thinks that the definition of cyber bullying from previous studies can help us to understand the difference between cyber bullying and traditional bullying. For example, the Canadian scholar Bill Belsey defined cyber bullying as follows:

“Cyber-bullying involves the use of information and communication technologies such as email, cellphone and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal Web sites, and defamatory online personal polling Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others” (Bauman 2005, 2).

In the meantime, Shariff thinks that American lawyer Nacy Willard’s definition of cyber bullying is more comprehensive. Willard describes “cyber bullying as speech that is ‘defamatory, constitutes bullying, harassment, or discrimination, discloses personal information, or contains offensive, vulgar or derogatory comments’ ” (Willard 2003, 66).

Another widely-used definition of cyber bullying is from the article *Cyberbullying: Its Nature and Impact in Secondary School Pupils*. Smith and colleagues define cyberbullying as “aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly
and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Smith et al. 2008, 376).

2.8.2 The types of cyber bullying

Compared to the relevant studies in China, the types of cyber bullying has been described in a much more detailed way in western studies. For example, in Trolley and Hanel’s Cyber Kids, Cyber Bullying, Cyber Balance (2010) and Kowalski et al.’s Cyber Bullying (2008), the authors think that cyber bullying can be summarized at least according to ten types:

Table 3: Cyber Bully Types (Source: Trolley and Hanel’s Cyber Kids, Cyber Bullying, Cyber Balance, 2010 and Kowalski et al.’s Cyber Bullying, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Avenue</th>
<th>Definition of Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flaming</td>
<td>Online “fights” using electronic messages with angry and vulgar language. Generally involves equivalent strength aggressors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment</td>
<td>Repeatedly sending offensive and insulting messages. The online equivalent of direct bullying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber stalking</td>
<td>Engaging in online activities that make a person afraid for his or her safety. Using technology for control in an abusive dating relationship. Includes many of the other forms of aggression. Is generally in the context of a personal relationship. Generates fear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denigration</td>
<td>Sending or posting cruel gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships. The online equivalent to indirect bullying with wider dissemination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impersonating</td>
<td>Impersonating someone to make the person look bad, get into trouble or danger, or damage that person’s reputation or friendships. A new form of aggression made possible by the ability to create a fake profile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outing</td>
<td>Sharing someone’s secrets or embarrassing information or images online. A new form of aggression made possible because targets put damaging material in an electronic form that others can use against them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trickery
Tricking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, which is shared. Deceiving someone online to humiliate or cause harm. A new form of aggression made possible because it is easier to deceive someone online and obtain damaging information that can be shared.

Exclusion/Ostracism
Intentionally excluding someone from an online group, like a “buddy list.”
The online equivalent of relational aggression: “You are not my friend.”

Happy Slapping
People, usually teenager, walk up and slap someone, while another individual, also usually a teenager, captures the violence using a camera phone. The behavior often involves more than a “slap”, however, and often constitutes assault with associated legal ramifications.

2.8.3 The characteristics of cyber bullying

The characteristic of cyber bullying is also one of the most important points in western studies. “Electronic media by their nature allow for traditional forms of bullying to take on characteristics that are specific to cyberspace” (Shariff 2008, 32). In Shariff’s Cyber-bullying, Issues and Solutions for the School, the Classroom and the Home, the author summarized the characteristics as follows: firstly, “The anonymous nature of cyberspace first made it attractive to young people” (Shariff 2008, 32). Ordinary netizens use a screen name instead of their real name. Thus, the perpetrator can attack others online without restraint and their real identity will not be discovered by others. The second point is the size of the audience. The author indicates that perpetrators can easily get support from onlookers and bystanders (Shariff 2008). The third point is the prevalence of sexual and homophobic harassment, which is may be “related to the gender differences in the way that males and females use the Internet and cellphone technologies” (ibid). The fourth concern is the permanence of expression; once insulting speech and pictures are posted online, millions of people will read and see and even download them. However, “online communications have a permanence and inseparability that are very difficult to erase” (Shariff 2008, 34). Finally, Shariff indicates that online social communications tools, such as My space, Facebook and
YouTube, play an important role in developing the influence of cyber bullying.

2.9 Conclusion

The previous literature review indicates that Chinese and western researches have attempted to make sense of networked symbolic violence. There are still some distinctions between Chinese and western studies in terms of research perspectives. In particular, most of Chinese studies have tried to give the audience a general understanding of the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence. Chinese scholars have researched and analyzed networked symbolic violence through the perspective of communication studies and psychology. On the other hand, western studies have mainly focused on analyzing the effect of cyber bullying and cyber stalking on teenagers. The theory of education and psychology is their main theoretical foundation.

Nonetheless, we are still short of a comprehensive definition and theoretical framework to guide further inquiries, in particular, the definition based on the condition of the contemporary Chinese society. Further, the topic of networked symbolic violence in micro-blogs is still under-researched in China.

Some definitions of networked symbolic violence were obtained from the research on networked symbolic violence events in China; however, these definitions are incomplete in terms of describing the whole picture of networked symbolic violence. Some scholars, superficially, think that networked symbolic violence is just using violent language to attack others. Nevertheless, the previous definition of networked symbolic violence still has caused some inspiration for this study, in particular, in the context of the micro-blog environment.

According to a comparison between the types of networked symbolic violence in Chinese literature and the types of cyber bullying in western studies, it is obvious that western studies have classified cyber bullying in greater detail. The types of cyber bullying reach and even more than nine in western studies. On the other hand, there are only three types typically discussed in
Chinese studies. Aggressive, insulting, and threatening language, and malicious rumors and revealing privacy are the main types of networked symbolic violence in China and have already been explicitly demonstrated by some scholars. However, the classification of networked symbolic violence in Chinese studies will be used in this study. One of the most important reasons is that the classifications in the Chinese literature are more simplified. Chinese scholars put those types which contain similar meaning together. For example, flaming and harassment all contain the meaning of insulting, so that these two types are put into types of aggressive speech. Another reason is the main object which will be discussed here; that is, Chinese micro-blogs contains a huge amount of information. This simplified classification will be helpful in examining the features in the micro-blog sphere more easily and quickly. Therefore, aggressive, insulting, and threatening language, and malicious rumors and revealing privacy, will be the main criteria for investigating the language used in the content analysis.
3 Theoretical framework

This chapter mainly concerns the theoretical framework in this study. The theory of structural violence of Johan Galtung, the idea of symbolic violence of Pierre Bourdieu, and the law of the mental unity of crowds of Gustave Le Bon will be used to understand the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence in this study. In the final part of this chapter, a theoretical model will be constructed to support chapter five (results and analysis) and chapter six (discussion).

3.1 Structural violence

The Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung, known as the “father of peace studies,” made a huge contribution to the field of peace and violence. Galtung focused on the relationship between peace and violence. He did not research or analyze the concept of peace and violence separately, because he thought that peace was the absence of violence (Galtung 1969). Through researching the origin of violence, Galtung classified violence into two types: personal violence and structural violence (Galtung 1969). In 1996, Galtung extended the meaning of violence and then proposed the concept of cultural violence (Xiong 2012) in his path-breaking 1969 article, “Violence, Peace and Peace Research.” Although the concept of structural violence was first proposed in the field of peace and violence studies, Galtung’s structural violence is widely used and has been extended to clinical medicine, anthropology and sociology (Ho 2007). Structural violence is built on the structure of society, politics, and economy. “The concept draws attention to the role that institutions and social practices play in preventing people from meeting their basic needs or realizing their potential” (Albert et al. 2012, 391).

“Structural violence occurs when the actual life expectancy of a social group - say the group of less developed countries in the world - is less than what it potentially could be. The actual life expectancy is observed. The potential life expectancy has been operationalized either as the maximum observed life expectancy, or as the life expectancy that would exist if wealth was distributed equally across all social groups (countries)” (Robert 1998, 1).
Structural violence is different from personal or direct violence (see Table 4), “which is indirect in that there may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances” (Ho 2007, 4).

Table 4: Alternative indicators of violence (Source: Kohler et al., 1976)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Violent Input</th>
<th>Violent Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral (Armed) Violence</td>
<td>Attributes of actors</td>
<td>(3) e.g., number of persons killed in war, made homeless etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) e.g., number of armed men</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attributes of instruments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) e.g., bomb tonnage dropped on cities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Violence</td>
<td>Attributes of structure</td>
<td>(5) e.g., number of persons killed by lack of necessities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) e.g., maldistribution or lack of food, shelter, medical care, education etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hannah Arendt indicates that “structural violence is not the most flagrant manifestation of power, but rather should denote that organized relations of power function to perpetuate or suppress instances and relations of violence” (Parsons 2007, 178). Structural violence kills people slowly by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. There are many kinds of structure violence in society, such as institutionalized elitism, ethnocentrism, classism, racism, sexism, adulthood, nationalism, heterosexism, and ageism (Peña 2011). People suffer harm indirectly, often through a slow and steady process; however, there are no clearly-identifiable perpetrators. In other words, since the perpetrator is a specific social structure or social institution, it is very difficult to identify the perpetrator of violence.

Anthropologist and physician Paul Farmer also concentrated on the study of structural violence. As he states:
“Violence is structural in two ways. Firstly, social inequalities based on race, gender, class and ethnicity are structured so that individual behavior choices are circumscribed and structurally limited and conditioned. Secondly, inequality in terms of exposure to risk and access to health care also constitutes a form of violence” (Massé 2007, 7).

Farmer “expanded our understanding of structural violence by stressing that violence that occurs in the absence of an agent takes place in an environment where underlying social structures constrain the individual agency of the poorest, and thus puts them at risk of tragic fates such as disease or even political violence” (Triana 2011, 6). In other words, Farmer used the term “structural violence” to describe “the inequalities inherent in society that prevent the destitute poor from climbing out of poverty” (Walley 2011, 1). The main different viewpoint between Galtung and Farmer is that “Galtung disregards the importance of human agency associated with indirect violence; however, Farmer places a greater emphasis on the agents that create and perpetrate such socio-economic structures” (Triana 2011, 6). Dr. Farmer also explains the effects of structural violence:

“Structural violence is often embedded in longstanding ‘ubiquitous social structures, normalized by stable institutions and regular experience’. Because they seem so ordinary in our ways of understanding the world, they appear almost invisible. Disparate access to resources, political power, education, health care, and legal standing are just a few examples. The idea of structural violence is linked very closely to social injustice and the social machinery of oppression” (Farmer et al. 2006, 2).

Similarly, Clark thinks that “structural violence has the effect of denying people important rights” (Clark 2011, 1).

“When people starve to death, or even go hungry, a kind of violence is taking place. Similarly, when human beings suffer from diseases that are preventable, when they are denied a decent education, housing, an opportunity to play, to grow, to work, to raise a family, to express themselves freely, to organize peacefully, or to participate in their
own governance, a kind of violence is occurring even if bullets or clubs are not used” (ibid).

What is more, Galtung indicates that social injustice, which causes structural violence, contains the injustice of resource allocation as well as the injustice of power distribution, which exists everywhere, including the international and domestic community, and developed countries and developing countries. In particular, structural violence in “third world countries” is more typical and widespread (Han 2012). Galtung also thinks that real peace is built on the elimination of social injustice and structural violence (Xiong 2010).

3.2 Symbolic violence

In the first part of this thesis, one kind of explanation of symbolic violence from Erzgräber and Hirsch was already introduced. However, there is still the understanding of symbolic violence of Pierre Bourdieu which would helpful in understanding the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence in contemporary China.

Pierre Bourdieu is a famous a French sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher. His research ranges from sociology, anthropology, education, history to linguistics, philosophy and art, etc. This pluralistic research background makes his theories non-isolated, which helps in understanding a phenomenon from different perspectives.

Bourdieu’s symbolic violence theory is helpful in explaining “how particular groups can retain dominance in a society without resorting to physical violence” (Johnson et al. 2011, 2). Bourdieu proposed and discussed the notion of symbolic violence in his article Symbolic Power (1979), and he indicates that symbolic violence is “the power to impose…instruments of knowledge and expression… of social reality, which are arbitrary but not recognized as such” (Bourdieu 1979, 80). Still, in his book The Logic of Practice (1980), Bourdieu offered a more vivid description and explanation:
“A man possesses in order to give. But he also possesses by giving. A gift that is not returned can become a debt, personal loyalty or prestige—is the one that is obtained by giving. In such a universe, there are only two ways of getting and keeping a lasting hold over someone: debts and gifts, the overtly economic obligations imposed by the usurer, or the moral obligations and emotional attachments created and maintained by the generous gift, in short, overt violence or symbolic violence, censored, euphemized, that is misrecognizable, recognized violence” (Bourdieu 1992, 126).

In other words, Bourdieu “saw symbolic violence as being the violence embodied in concepts, language, and systems of symbols aimed at obscuring, veiling and glossing over unspoken conditions of rule” (Imbusch 2003, 25).

Bourdieu regards symbolic violence as “a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims” (Bourdieu 2001, 1). The reason why he calls symbolic violence gentle violence is because “it is the unconscious consent that the dominated give, or cannot but give, to the relation of domination because they, as well as the dominant, take the established social order for granted” (Jung 2004, 109). People may not even be conscious of the existence of this kind of violence. Symbolic violence “makes the social world appear natural, even to those who fare badly in it” (Jung 2004, 108). People always regard this kind of power as a very ordinary thing in their life and are even accustomed to this kind of power. “When most members of a society accept its norms as natural, rather than arbitrary, then they also accept the outcomes of these norms as natural, even when the outcomes go against their own interests” (Johnson et al. 2011, 3). Jenkins says that “in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate” for groups (Jenkins 2002, 104). This legitimacy “obscures the existing power relations, often making them unrecognizable to and misrecognized by, agents” (Cushion and Jones 2006, 142).

Through the comparison of structural violence and symbolic violence, it is apparent that these two kinds of violence are caused by social structures and social institutions. In addition, “the notion of symbolic violence is to understanding how social class inequalities are reproduced” (Paul and
Julie 2004, 15), which is very similar to the notion of structural violence. However, symbolic violence is more covert or secret and even more gentle, which uses a legitimate style existing in people’s life. In other words, symbolic violence is a kind of legitimate structural violence. As Paul and Julie state, symbolic violence is “an act of violence precisely because it leads to the constraint and subordination of individuals, but it is also symbolic in the sense that this is achieved indirectly and without overt and explicit acts of force or coercion” (ibid).

3.3 Law of the mental unity of crowds

Crowd mentality has also been named as conformist mentality or group psychology, which is an important part of social psychology. Gustave Le Bon is sometimes considered the founder of crowd psychology, with his seminal book The Crowd. The crowd, as Le Bon (1930) defines it, is a psychological group. The most important point is that people in a crowd have some common points in their psychology and their individual characteristics have gradually disappeared already, and this constitutes a crowd. Le Bon argued that crowds are impulsive, mobile, irritable, credulous, irresponsible, and even stupid (1930). Once the individual joins a crowd, because of the influence of some elements, such as anonymity and others, he or she will be out of control and possibly commit some radical and impulsive behaviors against society (Le Bon 1930). Le Bon thinks if one thousand people get together accidentally in a public place, however, they do not have a clear aim, and from the perspective of psychology, those people cannot be called a crowd (ibid).

Gustave Le Bon calls what makes people get together the law of the mental unity of crowds.

“Under certain given circumstances, and only under those circumstances, an agglomeration of men presents new characteristics very different from those of the individuals composing it. The sentiments and ideas of all the persons in the gathering take one and the same direction, and their conscious personality vanishes. A collective mind is formed, doubtless transitory, but presenting very clearly defined characteristics. The gathering has thus become what, in the absence of a better expression, I will call an organized crowd, or, if the term is considered preferable, a psychological crowd. It
forms a single being, and is subjected to the LAW OF THE MENTAL UNITY OF CROWDS” (Le Bon 1930, 9).

He says the following about the formulation of a crowd: “The disappearance of conscious personality and the turning of feelings and thoughts in a definite direction, which are the primary characteristics of a crowd about to become organized, do not always involve the simultaneous presence of a number of individuals on one spot” (Le Bon 1930, 9). Here, the author focuses on the idea that one’s personal identity will definitely be changed by a crowd, and he thinks that the disappearance of one’s conscious personality is the biggest characteristic of the crowd. In addition, the most striking identity of a psychological crowd is:

“Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character, or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a crowd puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation” (Le Bon 1930, 11).

Le Bon thinks that crowd behavior has nothing to do with the quality of individuals—once the individual enter into a crowd, the crowd will change his or her ideas and desires so that the individual will follow the majority in the crowd in doing something.

When Le Bon mentioned the emotion and morality of crowds, he argued that crowds have certain features, as seen below (Le Bon 1930, 14):

(1) Impulsiveness, mobility, and irritability. The individual can control him or herself but the crowd is always impulsive so the people in the crowd will not make a consideration before their action. Of course, the crowd is changeable because there are so many different people in it and they all have different opinions, which are always changing.
(2) *Crowds are credulous and readily influenced by suggestion.* Le Bon concluded that emotions and behaviors can be transmitted from one person to another just as germs can be passed along, and he believed that this process of contagion accounted for the tendency of group members to behave in similar ways (Forsyth 2006, 572). The individual in the crowd is impulsive. Therefore, through infecting each other, it is very easy for a crowd to reach an agreement.

(3) *The exaggeration and ingenuousness of the sentiments of crowds.* The emotion of a crowd is very simple, good or bad. They only pursue a simple and direct result. In particular, the tendency of exaggeration and ingenuousness always acts on some bad sentiments (Le Bon 1930).

(4) *The intolerance, dictatorialness, and conservatism of crowds.* It is because of the emotion of crowds that they are very illiberal. In the “mind” of a crowd, the question for them is just yes or no, and the choice for them is just to accept or reject. Second, crowds are also dictatorial because they have a great number of individuals which are simple and extreme. Furthermore, “Their rebellious and destructive outbursts are always very transitory. Crowds are too much governed by unconscious considerations, and too much subject in consequence to secular hereditary influences not to be extremely conservative” (Le Bon 1930, 24).

(5) *The morality of crowds may be higher or lower than any other individual in the crowd.* Due to the characteristics of the crowd, it is impossible for crowds to be moral. Le Bon thinks that the crowd, “on the contrary, … may exhibit at times a very lofty morality” (Le Bon 1930, 25). He thinks that the individual may not do lofty deeds, but in the name of glory and honor, the individuals in crowds are particularly affected.

Reasoning power is also one of the important parts of crowds that Le Bon analyzed in *The Crowd.* In his viewpoint, the reasoning power of the crowd is very simple and unskilled. The crowd regards that all similar things have the same functions or features, as Le Bon stated in the following: “The characteristics of the reasoning of crowds are the association of dissimilar things possessing a merely apparent connection between each other, and the immediate generalization of particular cases” (Le Bon 1930, 29).
Le Bon classified the factors which influence crowds’ opinions and beliefs into two kinds: remote factors and immediate factors. The former includes race, traditions, time, political and social institutions, and institutions and education. Here, the present author will focus on the elements of tradition as well as political and social institutions. Firstly, Le Bon thinks that “Traditions represent the ideas, the needs, and the sentiments of past” (Le Bon 1930, 37). Traditions are very important to everyone because traditions are the heritage of one’s race. The behavior of all people in a race not only follows laws and regulations but also traditions. The cohesion of one’s race depends on the inheritance of the tradition. Nationality, educational background, and even social class will change; however tradition will not. Secondly, political and social institutions are another factor that should be considered here. Researching and analyzing any social phenomenon, this phenomenon should be put into a certain social background: “The idea that institutions can remedy the defects of societies, that national progress is the consequence of the improvement of institutions and governments, and that social changes can be effected by decrees” (Le Bon 1930, 39). Here, Le Bon demonstrates not only the political and social systems themselves but also the society which is under this kind of political and social system. That means that one’s social background is one of the most important factors for crowd behavior.

The immediate factors contain: (1) images, words, and formulas; (2) illusions; (3) experience; and (4) reason (Le Bon 1930, 46). The focus in this part of the current discussion will be placed on two factors in making the analysis as well. The first is images, words, and formulas. Images, words, and formulas can contain some aspects which are very common communication methods in our normal life, such as pictures, videos, and language. However, it is these common communication methods that have a big influence on everyone, just as Le Bon said: “Handled with art, they possess in sober truth the mysterious power formerly attributed to them by the adepts of magic. They cause the birth in the minds of crowds of the most formidable tempest, which in turn they are capable of stilling” (Le Bon 1930, 47). Apparently, Le Bon placed the influence of images, words, and formulas at a very important level. Similarly, Hoffer also thinks that only one slogan, one word, and even one badge can be the source of the power for those people that own hope (Hoffer 1951). The second immediate factor that will be emphasized here is experience. Le
Bon thinks that experience is almost the only effective way for people to establish the truth in their mind (Le Bon 1930). Experience is conveyed from generation to generation so that the experience is more useful than the truth for the crowd. This kind of viewpoint is similar to the concept of constructionism. According to the theory of social constructionism, “knowledge in some area is the product of our social practices and institutions, or of the interactions and negotiations between relevant social groups” (Gasper 1999, 855). That means that everyone's knowledge about the world is different because of the variation in the background of the social environment or practices or experience.

Another point raised by Le Bon concerns the leaders of crowds.

“As soon as a certain number of living beings are gathered together, whether they be animals or me, they place themselves instinctively under the authority of a chief. In the case of human crowds the chief is often nothing more than a ringleader or agitator, but as such he plays a considerable part. His will is the nucleus around which the opinions of the crowd are grouped and attain to identity” (Le Bon 1930, 54).

There are three kinds of methods for the leader to mobilize crowds: affirmation, repetition, and contagion. These methods all have different functions. Through these methods, the leader attempts to affect and control crowds. The action of these methods can be a little bit slow, but their effect can last a long time when these methods are produced. Le Bon emphasizes the function of contagion. He thinks that contagion has a big influence on crowds. Contagion not only can force the individual to accept some viewpoints but also lets him or her to accept some modes of feeling (Le Bon 1930). What is more, Le Bon considers that the prestige is a kind of power for controlling crowds in the world: “Prestige in reality is a sort of domination exercised on our mind by an individual, a work, or an idea” (Le Bon 1930, 60). Prestige can be classified into acquired prestige and personal prestige. The former one stems from name, reputation, and fortune, while personal prestige is a special characteristic which is peculiar to the individual (Le Bon 1930). Both acquired prestige and personal prestige, among crowds, have a big influence on the members of crowds.
3.4 Conclusion

The phenomena of networked symbolic violence should be researched and analyzed from both a sociological and psychological perspective. First, the cyber world, in a certain aspect, is a virtual real world (Tu 2009). The emergence of network symbolic violence is closely related to the social background and condition (ibid). Not all of the issues online will result in networked symbolic violence. Networked symbolic violence is a reflection and catharsis of some radical social moods (Dai and Leng 2009). These radical social moods contain nationalism, sympathy for disadvantaged groups, the anti-rich and anti-official, etc. In other words, the objective of networked symbolic violence is sometimes social injustice which is from factors of politics, economy and so on.

The reason why the theory of structural violence was chosen here is that the theory of structural violence is closely related to the two cases in this study. First of all, the theory of structural violence emphasizes the imbalance in the social political and economic structure. In recent years, China has experienced huge development, in particular in the field of the economy. However, the social contradictions which are caused by the transformation of the Chinese society have increased rapidly (CASS 2011); thus the imbalance between the current situation of social politics and economy and people’s basic needs has become more and more serious in China. From the point of view of politics, the governmental information is not very transparent. From the aspect of the economy, the gap between the rich and the poor has become wider (ibid). Secondly, the theory of structural violence indicates that this kind of violence will affect people’s basic rights, including housing, working, education, and even the freedom of speech. In China, some social institutions have already, from a certain viewpoint, affected people’s basic rights, for example, the strict media censorship. It is difficult for ordinary people to publish their thought in the traditional media. However, the micro-blog as a relatively opened space has become a channel through which netizens can express their radical emotions.
At the meantime, the theory of symbolic violence also could be used to explain some the points regarding the cases being discussed here. According to the concept of symbolic violence of Bourdieu, symbolic violence refers that the power acts on people but people think it is nature. Even though some Chinese laws and institutions are legitimate, they still harm or influence the public’s rights and benefits. This point will be mentioned in the case study as well.

What is more, this thesis is particular interested in understanding the creation of the crowd in the network and their subsequent networked symbolic violence. Networked symbolic violence is a kind of group violence (Chen 2009). Group psychology is valuable for researching and analyzing group violence (ibid). Why netizens tend to become out of control online in some networked symbolic violence events is worth exploring and discussing.

Some scholars have used different psychological theories to analyze the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence. For instance, some Chinese scholars have used convergence theories, emergent norm theory, deindividuation theory, and social identity theory (Chen 2010; Dai 2009; Huang 2010; Jin 2009). However, the merit of law of the mental unity of crowds is that this theory is more comprehensive, which is proposed based on the social environment and social relationship. Especially, Le Bon’s opinion focuses on the social background which does not disappear but become the most important phenomenon not only in the contemporary western society but also Chinese society (Feng 2002). In addition, Le Bon indicates that the crowds’ convergence has gradually become one of the important features in modern life (Le Bon 1930), which is also reflected in the Internet world. Regarding the condition of anonymity, the individual in the crowd may become irresponsible so they may do something out of control, irrationally, or even express violent behavior. Meanwhile, some well-known people have also played a crucial role in the crowd, which means sometimes they become the leader of the crowd. It is possible that every move they make will affect a great number of individuals in the crowd. Furthermore, the crowd always shows its lofty morality in the event; however, this kind of morality is not a real morality but is just behavior committed in the name of morality (Feng 2002).
4 Methodology

This chapter will introduce the research methods applied to the empirical investigation in exploring the features of networked symbolic violence in contemporary Chinese micro-blogs. The quantitative research design has attempted to obtain accurate and precise results through a statistical sampling approach (Brockington and Sullivan 2003). In this study, the quantitative content analysis method was necessary in order to explore the various features of networked symbolic violence. This chapter begins with a description of the research design, as well as a description of the various methods used. Next, the cases will be introduced. Finally, the content analysis will be described in detail.

4.1 Research design

This study used several case studies to empirically investigate networked symbolic violence in Chinese micro-blogs. Case-based research has many advantages. According to Jocher, “The case study as a technique for presenting data is one of the oldest methods as well as one of the most important” (Jocher 1928). Case study analysis “focuses on a small number of cases that are expected to provide insight into a causal relationship across a larger population of cases” (John 2007, 86) Robert K. Yin has made a classical definition for the case study research method which is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin 1984, 23). At the same time, Yin also mentioned two strengths of the case study research method:

“Case studies investigate real-life events in their natural settings. The goal is to practice sound research while capturing both a phenomenon (the real life event) and its context (the natural setting). One strength of the case study method is its usefulness when phenomenon and context are not readily separable…Another strength is that the method enables you, as a social scientist, to address how and why questions about the real-life events, using a broad variety of empirical tools” (Mattew 2006, xxvii).
Therefore, “case studies are a valuable tool for understanding human behavior in depth” (Stake 1995). In the meantime, critical case study is one of the important categories of case study. Patton (1990) defines critical cases as “those that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things.” Moreover, Patton thinks that through critical case study, we can come to the conclusion: “if it happens there, it will happen anywhere," or vice versa; "if it doesn't happen there, it won't happen anywhere” (Patton 1990, 174).

Hence, the critical case study here is an appropriate method for the research and for answering the following questions: (1) How do networked symbolic violence events develop on the micro-blog?, and (2) What are the different phases of networked symbolic violence? Through answering these two questions, the main features of networked symbolic violence in the Chinese micro-blog Weibo should be concluded. Furthermore, according to Yin’s research on the case study, he claims that there are at least five procedures of the case study method: (1) designing case studies; (2) preparing to collect case study evidence; (3) collecting case study evidence; (4) analyzing case studies evidence; and (5) reporting case studies (Yin 2009). In the following chapter, case studies will be conducted based on these five steps.

Yin said that there are at least six sources of evidence in the case study method: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts (Yin 2009). In order to better understand and analyze the case, one source is not enough and the evidence should be collected from multiple sources. In this study, the evidence from documentation and archival records will be utilized.

“Except for studies of preliterate societies, documentary information is likely to be relevant to every case study topic” (Yin 2009). Documentary information contains written materials, such as books, journals, articles, agendas, announcements, and magazines and newspapers, which will offer not only a theoretical foundation for the present study but also some fresh research results. Additionally, archival records contain computer files and records (Yin 2009), and those records are mainly quantitative, such as statistical data, service records, organizational records, and survey
data (Yin 2009). The statistical data from the Sina Weibo advanced search system will be used in this study.

4.2 Choice of case

Selecting the case for study is of central importance: “in order for a focused case study to provide insight into a broader phenomenon, it must be representative of a broader set of cases” (John 2007, 91). That means that the selection should be guided by the aim of finding typical cases. The “typical case” exemplifies “what is considered to be a typical set of values, given some general understanding of a phenomenon” (ibid). Therefore, there are certain standards for selecting cases: location, timing, structure, nationwide influence, and complete documents.

(1) The location of the event for the present discussion should be China because the main purpose of this thesis is investigating Chinese networked symbolic violence.

(2) The second point is timing. Networked symbolic violence on Chinese micro-blog Weibo is an emerging phenomenon in contemporary China. In order to better understand this emerging phenomenon, it is necessary to select cases from recent years. Consequently, cases were selected from 2011 and 2012.

(3) The complete structure of an event is important. In the case studies section of this study, four phases of the cases will be examined: 1) the beginning of the case; 2) the rising phase; 3) the explosive phase; 4) and the dying-down phase of the case. Through researching these four phases, the reader will obtain a whole picture of the networked symbolic violence event in the Chinese micro-blog Weibo.

(4) The cases selected have to have had a huge influence on Chinese society. How can one identify whether the influence of events is huge or not? Here, the report coverage of the media will be used, especially Chinese media, to judge the effects of an event. For example, from the governmental media to the private media, and from the central media to the local media, they all paid attention to this event; or this event was a headline or the main news in the Chinese mainstream media.
(5) The documents and materials of the case should be relatively complete so that a case study and content analysis can be conducted.

Because one case is not sufficient to investigate and analyze the main features of the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence, it was decided to select two cases that both had been widely discussed in the Chinese media. The Ghostwriter event and the Guo Meimei scandal were picked from a number of cases of networked symbolic violence in Chinese micro-blogs.

4.3 Description of cases

The cases are introduced through a general description in this section. The description includes the following features: time, platform of networked symbolic violence, domestic and international media coverage, online search results, and an overview of the event.

Then, the case will be described in detail in order to provide the reader with a whole picture of the two cases. Both positive and negative public opinion exhibit the process of formation, being sustained, and fading away. This process can be classified into three steps: first, the relevant information is gathered; second is the battle of different opinion; and third, the specific public opinion fades away (Xu 2008). The acts of networked symbolic violence as a special expression of public opinion online also follow this life cycle. Based on this life cycle, the cases will be analyzed from the aspects of beginning, rising, and the explosive and dying-down phase.

4.3.1 The Ghostwriter event

**Time:** 15\(^{th}\) January, 2012 to June, 2012

**Platform of networked symbolic violence:** Sina Weibo

**Media coverage:** CCTV (China Central Television), Dragon TV (governmental television in Shanghai), People.com (Chinese government website), BBC, Southern Weekly (famous Chinese magazine), Sina.com (portal news website in China), Tecent.com (portal news website in China),
Netease.com (portal news website in China), etc.

**Online search results:** Using the Chinese words 韩寒 (Han Han) and 方舟子 (Fang Zhouzi) as key words together to search with the online search engine. There were about 16.3 million results on Google and 3.23 million results on Baidu.com, which is the biggest Chinese search engine (12th June, 2012).

**Figure 8: Top 5 issues of entertainment and sports (Source: Baidu.com)**

The Ghostwriter event has caused enormous controversy in the Chinese society. Wide discussion has taken place not only on Chinese Weibo and in some of the new media but also in some of the traditional media. According to the ranking of top 5 issues of entertainment and sports on Baidu.com (see Figure 8), the Ghostwriter event is in third place, which is only one networked symbolic violence event on this ranking list. Meanwhile, from the beginning of the Ghostwriter event, some media have reported it in a follow up, especially some governmental media, such as the Renmin Daily, the Xinhua News Agency and CCTV. Just as the Renmin Daily said, “The Ghostwriter event is a typical networked symbolic violence case in the Chinese micro-blog sphere” (Renmin.com).

**Overview of the event:**

Han Han is a very popular young writer and professional speed racer in contemporary China. His

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9 [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-01/31/c_122629971.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-01/31/c_122629971.htm)
books, for example *Triply Doors* and *Disorder in Changan*, have received very good sales in the market and have influenced many young people. Mai Tian, who is a very famous IT practitioner in China, suspected that Han Han was faking his articles and books, although Mai Tian apologized to Han Han shortly after the accusation because Mai could not find any evidence to prove that Han Han was not the original author.

However, the participation of Fang Zhouzi makes this case even more complicated. Fang Zhouzi is a Chinese biochemist and popular scientific writer who is controversial for his many campaigns against academic fraud. Fang Zhouzi insisted that Han Han was not the original author of his articles and books. Fang Zhouzi said he had some clues to prove that “Han Han’s masterpieces” were finished with the assistance of another person. Han Han and Fang Zhouzi engaged in a very hot debate in the social media, and at the same time, their fans and supporters also joined in.

**I. The beginning phase (from 15th January, 2012 to 16th January, 2012)**

In the beginning of 2012, Mai Tian, who is a very famous IT practitioner in China, published an article, *Artificial Han Han: a Farce about Citizen*, on his blog on 15th January, expressing doubt as to whether Han Han was the original author of his articles or not.

Figure 9: the blog entry *Artificial Han Han: a Farce about Citizen* from Mai Tian’s blog

Mai Tian offered three main reasons: (1) the reason why Han Han won the first prize in the New

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Concept Writing Competition\textsuperscript{12} in 1999 was because the claims examiner of this competition, Li Qigang, was a university classmate of Han Han’s father; (2) the style of Han Han’s articles had been changed a lot in recent days. Han Han was good at criticizing the phenomenon in the cultural arena, but now he is mainly focused on political issues because his publisher, Lu Jinbo, helped Han Han to advertise himself in the society. (3) Han Han is a writer as well as a speed racer. He likes joining car races. However, Mai Tian thinks that it is impossible for Han Han to take part in so many car championships and to finish his novels at the same time. The publication of this blog entry aroused a huge storm in Chinese society, especially on Chinese micro-blog Weibo.

Sina Weibo, as the most popular micro-blog service provider in China, has some special functions. Advanced search is one of these special functions, through which you can search the previous micro-blogs you want to read. Through this advanced search function, some information could be found, for example, how many micro-blog entries were published on Sina Weibo during a certain time.

\textbf{Figure 10: advanced search function of Sina Weibo}

Since Han Han and Mai Tian were the main factors in this phase, Han Han (韩寒) and Mai Tian (麦田) were used here as key words to do a search with Sina Weibo. The result showed that, on the first day (from 12:00 a.m. of 15\textsuperscript{th} Jan to 12:00 a.m. of 16\textsuperscript{th} Jan), the number of messages on Sina Weibo was 6,425. On the second day (from 12:00 a.m. of 16\textsuperscript{th} Jan to 12:00 a.m. of 17\textsuperscript{th} Jan), the result was 9,387. That means that the total number of messages about Han Han and Mai Tian was 15,812 during the first two days of this event on Sina Weibo. Furthermore, in the following week, Mai Tian’s article was forwarded 3,797 times. According to a rough estimate, the comments

\textsuperscript{12} The New Concept Writing Competition is one of the most influential writing competitions in contemporary China. The ideas of this competition are: creative, personality, and real.
of this article were more than a half million. At the same time, the number of Mai Tian’s fans on Sina Weibo had already reached more than 40,000.

At this stage, the majority of micro-blog entries mainly focused on three different kinds of aspects: (1) forwarded articles of Mai Tian; (2) participation in voting on this event (mainly about those that would be supported); (3) regarding this event as entertainment.

It was obvious that the article on Mai Tian’s blog was the fuse of this event. There are mainly three reasons to explain why the public was so interested in this event. First, the background and the influence of Han Han should be mentioned here. Han Han is a Chinese professional speed racer, writer, and chief editor of Party. He got first prize in the New Concept Writing Competition in 1999 with his article, Peering at the Human through a Cup. In the second year, Han Han’s first novel, Triple Door, was published. Until then, the sales volume of Triple Door had already reached more than 5 million. In 2010, Han Han was selected as one of the “100 most influential people in the world” by Time Magazine. Han Han, who had 6 million’s royalty income in 2011, was in seventh place on the Chinese Writers Rich List (Zuojiafuhaobang.com). However, although Han Han had become a star, the controversies did not stop. Han Han resisted the Chinese education system and even criticized Chinese policy sometimes. For some of the young generation, the special personality of Han Han and the criticizer-style of Han Han’s articles were the main reasons why young people were crazy about him. As one of the most outstanding writers of the “Post 80’s generation,” Han Han was almost the idol of one generation. His articles represented the voice of a large number of young people. If some evidence proved that Han Han was faking his articles and books, the public would have formed a negative image as their model. Secondly, it has to be admitted that the faking has already become one of the serious social problems in contemporary China, and has already permeated some aspects of Chinese social life. This event stimulated the public to criticize the faking in Chinese society. Third, the analysis in Mai Tian’s blog entry seemed fair and reasonable—Mai

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13 Party: The Chinese name is Du Chang Tuan (独唱团). Party is a multiple-style magazine which contains stories, essays, fictions, news and poetry, etc.
14 Post 80’s generation refers to the generation which was born after 1979. This generation is the first after the official implementation of the One Child policy in the Chinese law. It was also the first year of the Reform and Open Policy.
Tian had collected some concrete and detailed evidence.

At this stage, the blog entry of Mai Tian was a fuse on the network which attracted a huge number of netizens, even though the initial reaction of most netizens was just to share the information so that they could get entertainment. Gradually, the netizens became aware that they had the same object and interest, which were to make clear the truth of this event. Under this circumstance, the increasing number of netizens got together simultaneously. However, through spreading information on micro-blog one by one, the transformation of the information was inevitable. In consequence, bad-quality information was created by this kind of spread of information on the micro-blog.

II. The rising phase (from 16th January, 2012 to the end of March, 2012)

On the second day after Mai Tian publishing his blog, Han Han replied to Mai Tian’s query and offered a 20 million Yuan (Chinese currency) reward to those that could find evidence to prove his faking. Han Han said that every word in his article was by his own hand. In the meantime, more and more people joined in this debate, especially some stars. Some people supported Han Han, and some people agreed with Mai Tian’s viewpoint. Lu Jinbo, who is a famous web-writer and publisher in China, also responded to Mai Tian’s suspicion. Lu thought that Mai Tian’s question was ridiculous. Han Han’s father replied to Mai Tian’s query as well. He thought that there was no sense to query Han Han. Han is a good writer. Fan Bingbing, who is a famous entertainment star, published a micro-blog in which said she that she trusted Han Han so that she would add another 20 million Yuan to support Han Han.

On 18th January 2012, Mai Tian suddenly published a message on his micro-blog and apologized to Han Han. Mai said that he did not have enough evidence to prove Han’s faking. Just as it was thought that the event was over, Fang Zhouzi joined in this event. Fang Zhouzi, who is a Chinese biochemist and popular scientific writer, published a micro-blog to query Han Han continuously. Fang Zhouzi published an article on his micro-blog, saying that Han Han had some problems with his morality. The participation of Fang Zhouzi made this event complicated once again. During this period, both sides constantly presented their evidence to support themselves. Finally, Han Han
and his father officially sued Fang Zhouzi. And then the Court of Shanghai Putuo District formally initiated an investigation into the case between Han and Fang.

In the meantime, the emotion of the increasing number of netizens had been gradually aroused in this period. The increasing curiosity and desire to learn the truth, and the attempt to protect the reputation of their idol, made some netizens’ mood out of control. Some netizens started attacking Han Han and Fang Zhouzi on micro-blog with violent speech. Networked symbolic violence was developing rapidly in this period.

During this process, the various viewpoints and public opinions came together. The large-scale debate made the increasing number of netizens join in this event. The main distinction between the rising phase and the beginning phase was the participation of the great number of people. In particular, some famous people, such as writers and entertainment star, joined in the event. It is unlikely that ordinary people would attract a great deal of attention; however the participation of stars would definitely increase the influence of the event.

Stars use their influence and appeal to affirm and repeat their viewpoint so that their fans can trust their idol. For instance, Han Han emphasized that he did not find anyone to ghost write his articles and books. He even rewarded 20 million Yuan to those who could find evidence to prove that he was faking. This kind of stimulation by money attracted many people. On the other side, the participation of Fang Zhouzi made this event more complicated. Some people thought that the apologies and the quitting of Mai Tian meant the end of this event. However, Fang Zhouzi questioned Han Han’s work continuously and he repeated his viewpoint on his micro-blog, and he published some articles on his micro-blog, such as Rumor Monger: Han Han, the Literature and History Level of Genius Han Han, the Farce of Han Han’s Reward, etc.

During this phase, it is clear that the viewpoints were divided into two sides on the micro-blog. One side trusted Han Han, and the other one suspected him. With the development of the debate, both sides offered some evidences to support themselves. A deadlock appeared just at this time. If any side tended to take an advantage in this debate, they had to use more aggressive speech to
attack the other side. The aggressive speech here could be classified into two types. The first one was direct, violent speech. Some netizens become irrational. They wanted to use violence speech to put pressure on their opponent. The other one was guessing. Some netizens tended to publish writing which contained the meaning of guessing in order to make the public feel confused. Although there was little or no direct evidence, perhaps some people made up stories just through their imagination, and the guesses were still provocative. In general, networked symbolic violence was rising rapidly during this phase.

III. The explosive phase (from the beginning of April, 2012 to the beginning of May, 2012)

The constant coercion of Fang Zhouzi and the repeated responses of Han Han made Fang and Han the main actors during this phase. From the camp of Fang Zhouzi, he kept using sharp words and powerful evidence to prove Han Han’s faking. On the other side, in order to demonstrate his innocence, Han Han had to publish the original manuscripts of his book (see Figure 8).

Figure 11: Han Han publishes the original manuscripts of his book on his blog.

Even though the original manuscripts were published, Fang Zhouzi still insisted on his viewpoint. Finally, Han Han had to sue Fang Zhouzi in court so that his innocence could be proved through judicial investigation. The Shanghai Putuo Court also accepted Han’s appeal. However, just when all of the people thought that this event was supposed to be solved in a judicial way, Han Han applied to withdraw the suit. This act of Han Han made many people, especially his fans, feel
confused.

In this circumstance, some irritated netizens not only attacked their opponent in the virtual world, but threatened and even tended to use the real violence in real life. In April of 2012, one netizen burned Han Han’s book in front of the bookstore to show his suspicion of Han Han’s faking. He also called on the government department to investigate this event so that the public could know the truth. At the same time, Tinglin Twon’s Solo Group, which is the micro-blog of Han Han’s music band, said that Han Han had suffered death threats online. One netizen published a micro-blog entry, saying: “I declare that if the government doesn’t investigate Han Han’s Ghostwriter event, Han Han and his father don’t admit their faking and apologize to the public in half a year, I will use unprecedented radical action to stop this event.” Not only Han Han, but also Han Han’s team, Han Han’s company, and even Han Han’s boss all received this kind of email.

During this stage, two different viewpoints were being fought on the micro-blog, which made the networked symbolic violence reach a climax. Some netizens became irrational because of the stimulation of the strong public opinion online. They tended to follow others’ opinion blindly. Of course, neither side wanted to lose its advantage in the battle field of the network. Therefore, Han Han sued Fang Zhouzi. Fang Zhouzi did not even care about the result of the litigation. Their actions got the strong support of their fans, and the netizens gradually went out of control—not only online but also offline.

However, after a period of debate, the speech violence on the network was gradually transformed into real violence when some people realized that their desire to obtain the truth cannot be satisfied. Those people that wanted to solve the problem through violent methods in real life used the name of justice and morality to engage in some radical behavior. Under the virtual and anonymous environment, some netizens regarded the network as a platform to blow off steam. They not only used some dirty, radical, and violent language to abuse others but also stirred up others to join their group. Through this means, these network mobs tried to pressure the parties to tell the truth.
IV. The dying-down phase (After May of 2012)

After the threatening speech was reported by the media, it seemed that both sides of the debate were tending to reduce the influence of this event. Han Han appealed that the netizens treat this event rationally, and in order to avoid conflict online he also indicated that he would never reply to this event. In the meantime, Fang Zhouzi decreased his micro-blog entries on Sina Weibo and tried to use moderate speech in his entries. In addition, the focus point of the network media transferred gradually from Han Han’s faking to blaming networked symbolic violence. The traditional media created some special programs to review the Ghostwriter event and analyzed the entire process of this event, in particular, the emergence of networked symbolic violence. The common point of the network media and of the traditional media was that they all strongly criticized the acts of the network mob. Furthermore, other hot spot issues and emergency events in the society had already attracted the public’s attention. Since the report about the Ghostwriter event occupied almost the majority of the space in the media during the previous 6 months, the netizens also felt tired of this event.

On the surface, the reason why this event gradually faded away was because the advent of networked symbolic violence and the violent behavior in real life aroused the blame of the public. In fact, according to the description stated above, the influence of the Ghostwriter event decreased for various reasons. All issues online also have their life cycle, and these issues will end at a certain time.

Jin (2008) indicates in his article the Development Mechanism of the Network Public Opinion that: (1) the public opinion which is wrong will fade away automatically once the truth is revealed; (2) the public opinion which is correct will disappear automatically once those questions that are focused on by the public are answered; (3) if those questions are solved during a certain period, the public opinion will calm down from the climax temporarily; however, the public opinion will not fade away until all of the questions are answered.

The Ghostwriter event belongs to the third type of Jin’s research. No one knows the truth of this event until now—the public still wonder if Han Han faked his articles or if Fang Zhouzi created
unfounded rumors. Han Han doesn’t reply the relevant topics about this event any more, and Fang Zhouzi still discusses this topic sometimes.

### 4.3.2 The Guo Meimei scandal

**Time:** the middle of May, 2011 to September, 2011

**Platform of networked symbolic violence:** Sina Weibo

**Media coverage:** CCTV, Dragon TV, People.com, BBC, CNN, Southern Weekly, Xinmin Daily (largest-circulation daily in Shanghai), Sina.com, Tecent.com, Netease.com, etc. Furthermore, it was showed from *The Report of Social Public Opinion and Crisis Management in China* (Jiao Tong, 2011) that the term of “Guo Meimei” was one of the most popular words on the network in 2011. In the ranking of *Top 10 issues in the Chinese Civil Society* conducted by Beijing University and the mainstream Chinese media, “Guo Meimei scandal” was in the second place, which is also the only one networked symbolic violence event in the top 10 issues.

**Online search results:** Using Chinese words 郭美美事件 (the Guo Meimei scandal) as key words to search with the online search engine. There were more than 5.44 million results on Google and around 2.35 million results on Baidu.com (13th June, 2012).

**Figure 12: the public attention ranking list 2011 from Baidu.com (Source: Baidu.com)**
Guo Meimei had the biggest public attention in 2011 according to the ranking list from Baidu.com (see Figure 12). And in the top 10, Guo Meimei scandal is the only one networked symbolic event.

Figure 13: the most popular topic in 2011 top 10 (Source: Sina.com)

What is more, according to the investigation report from Sina.com (see Figure 13), Guo Meimei scandal was in the fifth place of the top 10 popular topic in 2011, which is the only one networked symbolic violence event in this ranking list.

An overview of the event:

From the middle of May to the 20\textsuperscript{th} of June, 2011, Guo Meimei published some details on her luxury life on Sina Weibo and claimed that she was the commerce general manager of the Red Cross Society of China. This micro-blog entry has caused a big storm in Chinese society.

“The Red Cross Society of China (RCSC), the only national Red Cross society in the People’s Republic of China, is a humanitarian social relief organization” (Redcross.org.cn)\textsuperscript{15}. The Red Cross Society of China adheres to the principle of promoting a humanitarian spirit, love for

\textsuperscript{15} http://www.redcross.org.cn/，中国红十字总会官方网站，the official website of the RCSC.
humanity, and dedication. The public quickly demanded to know how a 20-year-old girl was appointed to be the manager of the Red Cross Society of China, and that she could afford such a luxury life. The Red Cross Society of China and Sina Weibo offered an explanation and did some public relations, and some Weibo followers are still angry about that. Some netizens searched the personal profile, family background, and even some private information of Guo Meimei—and even the public attacked people that were not connected with this event.

The Guo Meimei scandal was the first time that the public used network tools, in particular the micro-blog, to query the credibility of the government on such a big scale, which was difficult to imagine before. The Red Cross Society is a symbol of charity, which has a good reputation in China. Even though the Red Cross Society of China is in the name of a non-governmental organization, this organization still has a strong governmental background. For example, the main leaders of the RCSC are assigned by the Chinese government. The public thinks that donations should be used for all that need help; however, the Guo Meimei scandal made the public disappointed, not only with the RCSC but also with the Chinese government.

I. The beginning phase (from the middle of May, 2011 to 21st June, 2011)
From the middle of May to the 20th of June the 20th June of 2011, Guo Meimei, who was only a 20-year-old girl, posted photos about her lavish lifestyle on Sina Weibo. She was living in a villa; she owned a Lamborghini, a Maserati, and three Mini Coopers. She said that she only took first-class flights. Her mother and she had more than ten Hermes handbags.

Figure 14: a screenshot from Guo Meimei’s personal homepage on Sina Weibo16

From the screenshot from Sina Weibo (see Figure 15), it is obvious that Guo Meimei is a certified micro-blog user on Sina Weibo. The title, according to here, was the commerce general manager of the Red Cross Society of China.

**Figure 15: a screenshot from Guo Meimei’s personal homepage on Sina Weibo**\(^\text{17}\), *(the certified title of Guo Meimei was the commerce general manager of the RCSC.)*

From 20\(^{th}\) June of 2011, Guo Meimei became “popular” online. Her micro-blog was forwarded more than a thousand times in just two hours. In the evening of the 20\(^{th}\), Guo Meimei had only around 5 thousand followers\(^\text{18}\). However, by the 3\(^{rd}\) of July, 2011, the number of her followers on Sina Weibo reached 360 thousand. And now, Guo Meimei even has more than 820 thousand followers on the micro-blog (until 27\(^{th}\) July, 2012). The public was really eager to know what the real identity of Guo Meimei was and why she was so rich.

\(^{17}\) http://www.weibo.com

\(^{18}\) On Sina Weibo, the followers are called fans (粉丝).
In the beginning of this event, pictures of luxury and her identity as the commerce general manager of the RCSC were two important fuses that made a large number of people focus on this event in a short time.

To begin with, pictures of luxury attract people’s attention. The gap between the rich and the poor in China has become large in recent years. Those that like showing off their wealth would be looked down on by ordinary people. Secondly, the title of Guo Meimei made some netizens feel shocked. The introduction of Guo Meimei on her Sina Weibo shows that her title as the commerce general manager of RCSC, which meant that the title of Guo Meimei was certified by Sina Weibo and that this title represented her real identity. However, this title was inconceivable to the public. Thousands of people raised money for this charitable organization, and the public had some questions: how can a girl who is 20 years old be the manager of the RCSC and why does she own so many luxurious things, etc.? These two points stirred up the anti-rich and anti-official emotion of the public.

II. The rising phase (From 21st June, 2011 to the end of June, 2011)

A girl who is only 20 years old being the commerce general manager of the Red Cross Society of China was impossible to conceive for ordinary Chinese people. With the development of this event, a large-scale search online was conducted by the netizens. Only in a few days, the personal information of Guo Meimei was found and revealed by the netizens.

In the evening of the 21st of June, one micro-blog entry on Guo Meimei’s Sina Weibo made this event become more and more complicated. In order to eliminate the misunderstanding of the public, Guo Meimei posted a micro-blog entry on her homepage: “The company I am working for

http://www.weibo.com

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has cooperation with the RCSC. The abbreviation of my company is the “Red Cross Trade Association”. Our company is mainly in charge of the advertisement of personal insurance and medical equipment…Maybe my title on Sina Weibo confused some people.” It was because of this message that the range of netizens searching online became wider and wider. First, the netizens wondered if the certification system of Sina Weibo was useful because they could give a title to anyone without careful inspection. Second, the netizens doubted the principle of the RCSC. Why did the RCSC operate a business program with some companies? Would there some power-for-money deals in the RCSC? In addition, the netizens made a detailed and comprehensive investigation into those that were relevant to this event. The investigation ranged from basic personal information to a detailed schedule of parties. The netizens drew a relationship graph of parties according to their own speculation.

Figure 17: a relationship graph of the Guo Meimei event according to the speculation of netizens

Furthermore, only through one similar wrist watch (see Figure 18), the netizens surmised that one of the passengers that took the same flight as Guo Meimei was the vice chairman of the RCSC. Various versions of the relationship between Guo Meimei and the vice chairman of the RCSC were spread on micro-blog. However, the fact is that the surmise of the netizens was just groundless speculation. In addition, some netizens established micro groups. Most of these micro

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20 http://huashangbao.com/?action-viewnews-itemid-524
groups aimed at attacking Guo Meimei and the RCSC, and they tried to find out the truth behind the Guo Meimei scandal.

Figure 18: the groundless speculation of netizens

Finally, under huge social pressure, Guo Meimei had to explain and apologize on her personal homepage several times. She admitted that because of her ignorance and vanity she fabricated the title of commerce general manager of the RCSC. Her behavior, she said, made the netizens misunderstand the RCSC and affected its reputation. She apologized to the RCSC and to the public.

At the same time, the RCSC replied that they did not have a direct relationship with Guo Meimei and that she was not on the staff of the RCSC. Sina Weibo also made a statement to apologize to the public because they did not check the real information of Guo Meimei. However, the influence of the Guo Meimei event did not come to end there and became more and more serious.

During this phase, the netizens had already become the main part of this event. The processes of this event are developing and changing constantly with the movement of the netizens. It can also be seen that there were two evident features during the rising phase. They were Internet Man Hunt and malicious rumors.
The first feature was the Internet Man Hunt. Thousands of netizens joined in this large-scale search online. During this phase, some netizens got together, not only making a real crowd but also a real psychological crowd. They all had the same aim, which is to find the truth. Internet Man Hunt is a good tool for the netizens to find the information of some individuals.

Second, the advent of the malicious rumors can also be attributed to the psychology of the crowd. One of the important reasons for the origin of rumor is because the crowd has a strong imagination. At this stage, the netizens believed the information online more easily than the reports from the government. Only because of some photos, one similar wrist watch, and the relationship graph that was made by netizens without investigation, the majority of netizens deeply believed that there must be a close relationship between Guo Meimei and the RCSC. Lots of netizens crazily forwarded these rumors via the micro-blog. Through this constant spread of rumor, more and more people became affected by this uncertain information, and the rumors gradually became network public opinion. What is more serious, the negative information made an increasing number of people participate in the crowd that searched for information of Guo Meimei using the Internet Man Hunt. Finally, a vicious circle was created by the netizens and the networked symbolic violence was gradually pushed to a climax.

**III. The explosive phase (from the beginning of July, 2011 to the beginning of August, 2011)**

With the development of this event, the Internet Man Hunt action by the netizens gradually reached a climax. More and more information was found by the netizens. Even some little evidence or clues was enlarged by the netizens. On the micro-blogs, in particular Sina Weibo, the netizens were using various insulting and dirty language to attack Guo Meimei and even her family members. On the micro-blog, some netizens thought that Guo Meimei exchanged her luxury life with her dignity and used the public’s donation to buy her expensive handbags. Some radical netizens even published speech suggesting that Guo Meimei should be killed by herself. It was unbelievable is that this kind of speech was supported by many netizens.

Simultaneously, the investigation into the RCSC was continuing by the netizens. The netizens found that some facts did not fit the previous statement of the RCSC. In particular, the RCSC
insisted that there was no organization called the “Red Cross Trade Association.” However, some information proved that the “Red Cross Society of Chinese Business Area” which had some similarities with the “Red Cross Trade Association,” did exist. On micro-blogs, the netizens released their anger toward the RCSC; they abused the RCSC and its officials. It was widely believed by the netizens that the RCSC used the donations from the public indiscriminately. The angry netizens claimed that they would never donate money to the RCSC. In fact, during the period of the Guo Meimei scandal, the number of donations to the RCSC decreased rapidly and some branches of the RCSC did not even receive any donations for a few months. The RCSC published statements several times; however, the statements did not eliminate the netizens’ queries and even brought about a crazier Internet Man Hunt. With the search of the netizens, an increasing number of relevant companies and organizations were revealed, not only some commercial corporations but also government departments, such as the Ministry of Finance. Furthermore, the number of people that became involved in this scandal was more than ten and some of them were government officials.

More seriously, the behavior on micro-blog gradually extended to real life. Guo Meimei was blocked by some people at the airport. Those people required that Guo Meimei explain the relationship between her and the RCSC. Otherwise, they would not let her leave the airport. Under the huge pressure, Guo Meimei posted messages on Sina Weibo again and again. She begged the public not to create rumors anymore and not to hurt her and her family.

Figure 19: Guo Meimei said that the rumors and violent speech had already affected her real life.

In order to decrease the misunderstanding of the public about her and to explain the origin of her

http://www.weibo.com/u/1741865482
money, Guo Meimei and her mother were interviewed by the famous financial expert Lang Xianping. In the interview, Guo Meimei and her mother confessed their inappropriate behavior on the micro-blog and apologized to the public. They also demonstrated the legitimacy of their property. However, after the program, not only Guo Meimei but also Lang Xianping was attacked by the netizens on the micro-blogs. Some netizens even used dirty language to abuse Lang since they thought that he was just the assistant of Guo Meimei and her mother. What is more, some netizens posted rumors on the micro-blog. They thought that Guo Meimei and her mother not only paid money to Lang Xianping but also had sex with him.

With the in-depth exploring of the netizens, they found that the truth of this event was much more complicated than the official statements. The statement from the RCSC also contained some obvious weaknesses which raised suspicions. For instance, the RCSC initially stated that there was no “Red Cross Trade Association,” but the netizens found that there existed the “Red Cross Society of Chinese Business Area”; the RCSC also said that there was no immediate relation between Guo Meimei and the RCSC, which meant that there might be a remote relation between Guo Meimei and the RCSC. These factors all made the public, especially the netizens, dissatisfied and angry. The majority of the netizens thought that the RCSC lied to the public and that it was Guo Meimei that used the public’s donations to buy her luxurious things.

After a period of ferment, the netizens’ emotion finally erupted because of the stimulation of some external elements. The irrational emotion of the netizens not only broke out in the online world but also in real life. At this stage, the radical emotion of the netizens reached a climax.

**IV. The dying-down phase (after the middle of August, 2011)**

In September of 2011, the RCSC published punishments for the individuals and organizations connected with the Guo Meimei scandal. What is more, the RCSC began establishing a system of experts, a supervisory committee, and a public information platform so that the RCSC could improve its social credibility. A series of actions on the part of the government gradually took effect in eliminating the irritation of the public.
At the same time, the influence of the Guo Meimei scandal decreased by degrees from September of 2011, which particularly reflected the statement on the micro-blogs. The rational statements gradually increased. Furthermore, not only the online media but also the traditional media made some in-depth reports and analyses of the Guo Meimei scandal, through which the spread of rumors and speech violence online was reduced and this enabled the netizens to treat this event more rationally.

From this phase, it is obvious that the influence of the Guo Meimei scandal had gradually decreased. However, this decrease did not happen in only one day or in a short period of time, but during a long period. In this period, many internal and external elements all affect the development of the Guo Meimei scandal. The public gradually lose interests in this scandal. Compared to the Ghostwriter event above, the fade away of the Guo Meimei scandal was affected by many more complicated elements.

First, some other emergency events distracted the attention of the public, for example, the High-speed train accident in Zhejiang province, Lai Changxing’s repatriation from Canada\textsuperscript{22}, the DaVinci Products scandal\textsuperscript{23}, and so on. In particular, during the period of the High-speed Train Accident, people’s attention was attracted by this accident. And micro-blogs in China were full of the information about this accident. Therefore, the public gradually transferred their focus from the Guo Meimei scandal to the High-speed train accident.

Second, the government tried to reduce the influence of the Guo Meimei scandal in order to protect the credibility of the government. During the period of the Guo Meimei scandal, not only was the RCSC affected seriously but also some government departments. Therefore, some traditional media and even the Internet media did some special reports to guide the audience toward a more rational approach.

\textsuperscript{22} Lai Changxing was accused in China of over a multi-billion dollar smuggling operation. Mr. Lai fled to Canada with his family in 1999, but he was denied asylum and has fought to stay ever since (BBC.com).

\textsuperscript{23} DaVinci Products is a luxury brand in China. In July of 2011, the media reported that DaVinci counterfeited their products. However, in the face of evidence, DaVinci insisted that they did not make fake products.
In this circumstance, the radical emotion was gradually transferred to other emergency events. However, it should be admitted that until now there were still many people focusing on the Guo Meimei scandal.

4.4 Content analysis

It is also helpful to use the content analysis method in the study of networked symbolic violence on the Chinese micro-blog Weibo. After finishing the research and analysis of the different phases of networked symbolic violence, the content analysis method will be utilized here. Content analysis is a research method which is widely used in various scientific research fields, especially in the field of mass communications (Robson 2002). “Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff 2004, 18). Similarly, Paisley indicates that “content analysis is a phase of information-processing in which communication content is transformed, through objective and systematic application of categorization rules, into data that can be summarized and compared” (Paisley, in press). In general, “Content analysis is a scientific tool, which provides new insights, increases a researcher’s understanding of particular phenomena, or informs practical actions” (Krippendorff 2004, 18). In this study, through analyzing micro-blogs and the comments on the micro-blogs on Sina Weibo regarding the two Chinese networked symbolic violence events discussed above, an attempt is made to arrive at the general features of networked symbolic violence in the Chinese micro-blog Weibo.

According to the procedures of content analysis suggested by Colin Robson in his book Real World Research, there are six steps for carrying out a content analysis (Robson 2002, 352-357).

Step 1: Start with a research question

The present study seeks to explore the main features of networked symbolic violence on the Chinese micro-blog Weibo through exploring and analyzing the messages on the micro-blogs and the comments on the micro-blogs. Therefore, the research question is: What are the main features
of language use in the case of networked symbolic violence? The percentage of different language use will be examined in networked symbolic violence cases, more specifically, the percentage of violent language and non-violent language in one certain case.

**Step 2: Decide on a sampling strategy**

All of the materials of the cases discussed here are in Chinese, so they will be translated into English. At the beginning, an example of the basic structure of one micro-blog on Sina Weibo will be introduced here (Figure 20).

**Figure 20: The structure of one micro-blog on Sina Weibo**

The webpage of a micro-blog is composed of a micro-blog entry and comments. The top of this picture is the main part of the micro-blog entry. Underneath are comments on this micro-blog entry. There are 20 comments shown on every page. The sample in this study is the comment on micro-blog entries.
Ifeng.com is a very credible network medium in China. During the Ghostwriter event, Ifeng.com made a special report on this event, whose name is “Fang Zhouzi VS Han Han,” Ifeng.com made a clear and detailed analysis of the whole event. Ifeng.com interviewed both sides of the event and also collected various reports from different media. At the same time, Ifeng.com also focused on the effect of the different actors in this event. According to this report, in the Ghostwriter event, there were eight people that were the main actors according to the research and analysis report from Ifeng.com. They are: (1) Mai Tian: a famous IT practitioner in China. On his Sina Weibo, there are three micro-blog entries about the Ghostwriter event. (2) Lu Jinbo: a web-writer and publisher in China. He has seven blog entries about this event. (3) Han Han: a popular young writer in contemporary China as well as a main actor in this event. He published some speeches on the micro-blog of Tinglin Twon’s Solo Group. The number of micro-blog entries was thirty. (4) Han Renjun: Han Han’s father. He has ten micro-blog entries about this event. (5) Fan Bingbing: a famous entertainment star. She has one micro-blog entry about this event. (6) Wang Fan: the author of “H File of Han Han.” There were three micro-blog entries about this event on his homepage of Sina Weibo. (7) Li Qigang: writer, poet and literary critic in China. He published five micro-blog entries about this event during the past few months. (8) Fang Zhouzi: a Chinese biochemist and popular scientific writer. He is the most active person in this event. Until the 16th of June, 2012, Fang Zhouzi had written seventy-seven micro-blog entries about this event.

Similarly, the research and analysis report from Ifeng.com is also used here to identify the main actors in the Guo Meimei scandal. Ifeng.com made a special report whose name is “Guo Meimei Scandal Causes the Crisis of Confidence for the RCSC”. As analyzed in this report, the main actors are Guo Meimei, The Red Cross Society of China, and Lang Xianping. Some micro-blog entries were deleted by parties or the micro-blog service provider since these speeches on the micro-blog created a negative influence on the society. Therefore, until now, there are twenty relevant micro-blog entries on Guo Meimei’s personal homepage of Sina Weibo. Only thirteen micro-blog entries about the Guo Meimei scandal were found on the official Weibo page of the

24 http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/special/zhiyihanhan/
RCSC. Lang Xianping published two blog entries on Sina Weibo. Hence, the total number of the micro-blog entries in this event is twenty-five.

In order to make sure that the sample size was big enough, three micro-blog entries were selected for different phases of one case. Therefore, there will be twelve micro-blog entries employed in this study, which will be listed in chronological order.

Then, the simple random sampling method was used to choose the sample of comments. According to the formulation:

\[ \hat{p} = \frac{X}{n} \]

P is unknown. The 95% confidence interval is

\[ (\hat{p} - 2\sqrt{\frac{0.25}{n}}, \hat{p} + 2\sqrt{\frac{0.25}{n}}) \]

So the sample size is determined as:

\[ 4\sqrt{\frac{0.25}{n}} = W \]

Here, \( n = 4/W^2 = 1/B^2 \), where B is the error bound on the estimate. In order to make sure that the error bound on the estimate is less than 5%, the sample size should be at least equal to or more than 400. That means that the number of comments picked should be at least equal to or more than 400. Therefore, 400 comments (samples) will be picked in each micro-blog entry. Therefore, there will be 4800 comments (samples) picked in twelve micro-blog entries in each case. How to use random sampling method to choose the sample of comments? Here, all comments (samples) will be divided into 10 parts evenly. Then, forty comments will be picked in each part.

**Figure 21: the method to pick samples in this study**
Step 3: Define the recording unit

The research target of the content analysis was the micro-blog entries and their comments (tweets); therefore, the recording unit of this study should be the number of comments of micro-blog entries.

Step 4: Construct categories for analysis

There are three aspects that will be investigated in the content analysis: the categories of language use in cases, the percentage of different violent language use in one event, and the anonymity in the event.

There were two categories of languages investigated; one was violent language and the other was non-violent language. In addition, the percentage of different violent language use in one event will be examined. According to the classification of majority scholars’ research (Deng and Wang 2007; Tian et al. 2012; Jin 2009; Zhou 2010), networked symbolic violence can be classified into at least three categories: aggressive language, rumor, revealing privacy. In the present study, aggressive language will be divided into aggressive speech and aggressive symbols.

(1) Aggressive speech: Using dirty, insulting, threatening language or speech which contains
strong hostility to attack or abuse others, and using speech to threaten other’s safety and property; stirring up or promoting others to commit some radical behavior in real life.

(2) **Aggressive symbols:** Using special words or signals which contain the metaphorical expression of an insult to attack others.

(3) **Rumor:** Spreading fake, uncertain or doubtful stories or reports.

(4) **Revealing privacy:** Revealing information about other’s private life.

What must be mentioned here is that it is inevitable that we will meet overlapping phenomena in content analysis. That means some comments (samples) contain more than one category, as discussed above. In order to present the distinction between different categories, the overlapping phenomena will be defined first: for the category of aggressive speech, rumor and revealing privacy, if a comment can be in more than one category, then we will look at which category occupies the more of the sentence and then we will put it in that category; for the category of aggressive symbol, as long as the aggressive symbol appears in the sentence, this comment will be considered as the category of an aggressive symbol. To better understand this definition, some examples are showed below.

**Example 1:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>懒得理黄礼贤：方舟子就是个人渣。下贱，心理变态。。。他自己也有很多事情是作假的。</td>
<td>Fang Zhouzi is rubbish. He is a son of a bitch. He is a psychopath. … He also faked his articles.</td>
<td>In this comment, the netizens used aggressive and dirty speech to insult Fang Zhouzi and implied that Fang Zhouzi also faked his articles. However, there is more aggressive speech than rumor, so this comment will be put into the category of aggressive speech.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example 2:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>你的 diaodiao: usb 方</td>
<td>Fang Zhouzi is a son</td>
<td>In this comment, the netizen used aggressive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 5: Test the coding of samples of text and assess reliability

Because computer coding will be utilized here, the errors will be checked using computer procedures.

Step 6: Carry out the analysis

The results will be analyzed in the next chapter.

4.5 Delimitations

The data have some limits, first, because the micro-blog is fickle; for example, some people delete their micro-blog entries, especially when they are forced by outside forces. The integrity of the original material could thus not be ensured in certain aspects. For example, some micro-blog entries of Fang Zhouzi in Ghostwriter event and some micro-blog entries of Guo Meimei in Guo Meimei scandal were all deleted because of the pressure from society. Second, there were some speeches on the micro-blogs which had a special meaning or some speeches contained more than one meaning which was difficult to understand. Third, the two cases used here were all from China; hence, the problem of language translation must be considered. Those complicated conditions imposed difficulty regarding the proceedings of the coding.
5 Results and Analysis

The content analysis will be conducted in this chapter. The cases will be analyzed according to language use and type of violent language used in different phases of networked symbolic violence. In the conclusion part, the main aspects and the main features of networked symbolic violence on the Chinese micro-blog Weibo will be offered.

In order to better understand the degree of the networked symbolic violence, especially the language used in the networked symbolic violence, the language used in normal micro-blog entries will be examined here so that we can make a comparison of the degree of violence between normal micro-blog entries and micro-blog entries in networked symbolic violence cases. According to the ranking list from Baidu.com26 (see Figure 22), three of the most popular entertainment stars in China were selected here. They all have already registered their Sina Weibo. They are ELLA, SJ, and Zhang Jie (张杰). The random sampling method was used here to pick three micro-blog entries from these stars to examine the degree of violence in their micro-blog entries.

Figure 22: the ranking of the most popular entertainment stars in China (Source: Baidu.com)

The detailed operation procedures are the same as those of the Ghostwriter event and the Guo

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Meimei scandal in this study. The results are shown in following:

Figure 23: the language used in two normal cases

From the results above, it is apparent that the percentage of violent speech in normal micro-blog entries on Chinese micro-blogs is around 1%, which is very small.

5.1 Case 1: the Ghostwriter event

Through the simple random sampling method, twelve micro-blog entries were picked from difference phase in the first case. These entries were from Han Renjun, Lu Jinbo, Fan Bingbing,
Han Han (*Tinglin Twon’s Solo Group*), and Fang Zhouzi. In order to better explain the content analysis of this case, some examples of non-violent speech and violent speech (aggressive speech, aggressive symbols, rumors and revealing privacy) will be shown.

### I. Non-violent speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>阿土豆的小花:一切以经济发展的为中心，使现在很多学生更务实，但也因此失去热血和理想，不再像个青年。方不是没有评价政治的能力，而是见过当年的腥风血雨不再开口，否则以他的尖刻犀利指名道姓穷追猛打风格早就被弄死了。</td>
<td>The policy that focuses on the central task of economic construction makes a great number of Chinese students become realistic. Some students lose their passion and ideals. Fang Zhouzi did not criticize politics because he already experienced the Cultural Revolution; otherwise he will not stop criticizing.</td>
<td>The netizen analyzes the Ghostwriter event rationally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>桔子小五：应该说我是不关注他的，不值得关注。而我也才二十出头，是无法关注一个陌生人十来年的。但年纪小并不代表我没有自己的看法与价值观。</td>
<td>I did not follow him on the micro-blog or I think it is unworthy to be concerned about him. I am only around twenty years old, which does not mean that I do not have my own ideas and values.</td>
<td>The netizen analyzes the Ghostwriter event rationally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>乌-嘴：翻看正反两方资料，考察现象背后的世道人心!</td>
<td>We should concentrate on the evidence from both sides, and then identify who is right and who is wrong.</td>
<td>The netizen thinks that the public will tell right from wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>手机用户 1914813353：对</td>
<td>For those who fake their study, we should</td>
<td>The netizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>原文</td>
<td>翻译</td>
<td>评论</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>于伪学者、伪科学家就应该像鲁迅先生一样“痛打落水狗”让他不敢再有造假之心</td>
<td>blame and criticize them.</td>
<td>thinks that the public should blame those who have faked their articles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>东西北门：有社会责任感的教授啊</td>
<td>Fang Zhouzi is a good professor and he has a strong sense of social responsibility.</td>
<td>The netizen thinks that Fang Zhouzi has a sense of social responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 他从海上来：社会需要这种质疑的精神！我个人认为这个人在造假。</td>
<td>The whole society needs this kind of spirit of questioning. Personally, I think Han Han was faking his article.</td>
<td>The netizen thinks that society needs those people who dare question faking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yuanfang 的星愿：作为一位有一些知名度的人物，应该像李开复、俞敏洪等一样多多关心社会民生，别老是在批判甚至攻击别人，关注你是个错误！</td>
<td>As a well-known person in the Chinese society, Fang Zhouzi should focus on people’s livelihood rather than always criticizing and even attacking others. Following you on Weibo is a mistake.</td>
<td>The netizen thinks that Fang Zhouzi should focus on social political issues rather than gossip.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>老曾 gg：言多必失</td>
<td>Careless talk leads to trouble.</td>
<td>The netizen thinks that what Fang Zhouzi said was too much for the public to trust him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
虞古月：到韩仁均去看看，
觉得有些道理；到老方这
看看，也觉有理。不过，
老方损人厉害多了。

What Han Rengjun said makes sense, but what
Fang Zhouzi said also makes sense. However,
Fang Zhouzi is more aggressive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Chinese text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Aggressive speech | whocare1010: 你他妈傻逼吧。我去，
无不无聊                               | What the fuck; you are son of a bitch. Fuck you! | The netizen used “你他妈傻逼,” which means fuck you in this comment to insult Fang Zhouzi. |
|                   | william3612: 出问题，出你妈比方
舟子                                   | Has a problem? What the fuck is the problem? Fuck your mother. | The netizen used “你妈比,” which means fuck your mother in this comment to insult Fang Zhouzi. |
|                   | 起个名字太难了吖：1967年9月28日方
舟子他母亲生了一条方舟子，以后就未见再生，这是什么情况？ | The dog Fang Zhouzi was born in September 28th, 1967. | The netizen used “他母亲生了一条方舟子,” which implies that Fang Zhouzi is a dog to insult Fang Zhouzi. |
<p>|                   | ㄆ奈：又要犯贱了。。。。               | You are a bitch.                     | The netizen used “犯贱,” which means bitch |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dagel 汐洲：团你妹啊 人家爱发哪发哪 傻逼</td>
<td>You are a bitch.</td>
<td>The netizen used “傻逼,” which means bitch in this comment to insult Fang Zhouzi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jokey_comeback:</td>
<td>What others do has nothing to do with you. Fang Zhouzi, you are a dick. You are shameless.</td>
<td>The netizen used “臭不要脸的,” which means shameless in this comment to insult Fang Zhouzi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>萧萧潇涵涵涵: 你说你他娘的这辈子就咬着韩寒不放了是吧</td>
<td>You are a son of a bitch. Why do you always criticize Han Han.</td>
<td>The netizen used “他娘的,” which means fuck you in this comment to insult Fang Zhouzi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>小二来杯凉水：神经病</td>
<td>Fang Zhouzi has a mental problem.</td>
<td>The netizen used “神经病,” which implies that Fang Zhouzi has a mental problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>王铮 Uther: 真傻比，忍不住骂你，没事找事。</td>
<td>You are a bitch.</td>
<td>The netizen used “傻比,” which means bitch in this comment to insult Fang Zhouzi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>云断丶：你就是只癞皮狗每天喷粪</td>
<td>You are just like a dog which takes a shit every day.</td>
<td>The netizen used “癞皮狗,” which means a dog in this comment to insult Fang Zhouzi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive symbol</td>
<td>将天敞开: 你是SB</td>
<td>The netizen used “SB,” which means son of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Username</td>
<td>Comment</td>
<td>Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hello 生活</td>
<td>Fuck your mother. What the fuck are you focusing on?</td>
<td>The netizen used “nima,” which means fuck your mother to insult Fang Zhouzi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-YesHoohowl：这nima</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fuck your mother.</td>
<td>This comment was written in English. It does not have a real English meaning but the Chinese meaning, which is mother fuck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EASecret 二胖：</td>
<td>Sun your mother.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun your mother</td>
<td>Son of bitch, you should focus on yourself. Don’t be like a dog.</td>
<td>The netizen used “SB,” which means son of a bitch to insult Fang Zhouzi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>掌上天津：sb，把你自己管好了再说，别天天跟疯狗一样乱咬人</td>
<td>You are son of a bitch.</td>
<td>The netizen used “傻B,” which means son of a bitch to insult Fang Zhouzi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese 大叔：人间极品！！！纯傻B，真小人！！！</td>
<td>I will support Fang Zhouzi. Fuck Sina Weibo, fuck Lao Chen, fuck Muzili.</td>
<td>The netizen used “CNM,” which means mother fuck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>蓝色航程：支持方舟子。CNM 新浪微博工作人员，CNM 老沉，CNM 木子美。封了老子吧。</td>
<td>Finally, bitch Fang Zhouzi left here.</td>
<td>The netizen used “SB,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>拉风的悟空：SB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>终于滚蛋了！跟谁稀罕你似的~///</td>
<td>No one will care about you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>梦想的原野：sb，走好</td>
<td>Son of a bitch.</td>
<td>The netizen used “SB,” which means son of a bitch to insult Fang Zhouzi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>自閉症兒童_Well：太好了，你TMD有种别回来。</td>
<td>Good, good, it is better that you never ever come back. Son of a bitch.</td>
<td>The netizen used “TMD,” which means son of bitch to insult Fang Zhouzi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>檬晞：原来你是gay啊</td>
<td>You are gay.</td>
<td>The netizen said Fang Zhouzi is a gay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>士口水寿：方舟子在外面也有小三</td>
<td>Fang Zhouzi also has a mistress.</td>
<td>The netizen said that Fang Zhouzi had a mistress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>杨小小兵VictorYang：韩寒肯定有找人代笔，否则为什么到现在不出来解释</td>
<td>Han Han must find other people to help him write. Otherwise why he has not explained this event until now.</td>
<td>The netizen said that Han Han must find other people to help him write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>一百只蝴蝶翩翩起舞：你自己老婆的学历是真是假的，你自己怎么不去查查</td>
<td>You should also check your wife’s master degree, because it is also a fake one.</td>
<td>The netizen said that Fang Zhouzi’s wife also faked her master degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>蔷薇岛屿Sunbeam：方舟子不遗余力地炒作韩</td>
<td>The reason why Fang Zhouzi criticizes Han Han is because Fang wants to make money and become</td>
<td>The netizen said that Fang Zhouzi always attacked Han Han</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1.1 The beginning phase (from 15th January, 2012 to 16th January, 2012)

Figure 24: Micro-blog entry 1, Han Renjun’s micro-blog entry

27 http://www.weibo.com/u/1443511045
This blog entry was published on the 16th of January, 2012, and received 2976 comments and was forwarded 3528 times. The general content of this blog entry is: since Han Han replied to the Ghostwriter event on 16th January, Han Renjun also made a statement about this event on his Sina Weibo.

**Figure 25: Micro-blog entry 2, Lu Jinbo’s micro-blog entry**

This micro-blog entry was published on the 16th of January, 2012, and received 1224 comments and was forwarded 2794 times. In this entry, Lu gave a response to Mai’s question about Han Han’s faking.

**Figure 26: Micro-blog entry 3, Fan Bingbing’s micro-blog entry**

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28 [http://www.weibo.com/lujinbo](http://www.weibo.com/lujinbo)

29 [http://www.weibo.com/fbbstudios](http://www.weibo.com/fbbstudios)
This micro-blog entry was published on the 16th of January, 2012 as well, and it received 7209 comments and was forwarded 7502 times. Fan Bingbing will add another 20 million yuan to those that can find evidence to prove Han Han’s faking.

The results of the content analysis in the beginning phase of the Ghostwriter event are shown below:

**Table 5: Language use during the beginning phase of the Ghostwriter event**
(The total number of samples is 1200.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language use</th>
<th>Micro-blog entry</th>
<th>Violent speech</th>
<th>Non-violent speech</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>The percentage of violent speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>5.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>7.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>9.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6: The number of different types of violent speech during the beginning phase of the Ghostwriter event**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Micro-blog entry</th>
<th>Aggressive speech</th>
<th>Aggressive symbol</th>
<th>Rumor</th>
<th>Revealing privacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1.2 The rising phase (from 16th January, 2012 to the end of March, 2012)

Figure 28: Micro-blog entry 4, Fang Zhouzi’s micro-blog entry

This blog entry is from Fang Zhouzi, which received 1134 comments and was forwarded 403 times. In the blog entry, Fang thinks that Han Han’s fans created networked symbolic violence online.

Figure 29: Micro-blog entry 5, Han Renjun’s micro-blog entry

30 http://www.weibo.com/fangzhouzi
31 http://www.weibo.com/u/1443511045
This blog entry was published on the 27th of January, 2012, and received 6841 comments and was forwarded 14149 times. The general content of this micro-blog entry was that Han Han’s father, Han Renjun, published an article so that netizens could make a comparison between his article and Han Han’s article.

**Figure 30: Micro-blog entry 6, Fang Zhouzi’s micro-blog entry**

This micro-blog entry was published on the 18th of February by Fang Zhouzi, and received 5371 comments and was forwarded 1407 times. This blog entry also indicated that there was enough evidence to prove Han Han’s faking.

The results of the content analysis in the rising phase of the Ghostwriter event are shown below:

**Table 7: Language use in the rising phase of the Ghostwriter event**

(The total number of samples is 1200.)

32 http://www.weibo.com/fangzhouzi
Table 8: The number of different types of violent speech in the rising phase of the Ghostwriter event

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Micro-blog entry</th>
<th>Aggressive speech</th>
<th>Aggressive symbol</th>
<th>Rumor</th>
<th>Revealing privacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 31: The percentage of different types of violent speech in the rising phase of the Ghostwriter event

5.1.3 The explosive phase (from the beginning of April, 2012 to the beginning of May, 2012)

Figure 32: Micro-blog entry 7, the micro-blog entry from Tinglin Twon’s Solo Group

33 http://www.weibo.com/u/2577139143
This micro-blog entry was published on the 15th of April by Tinglin Twon’s Solo Group. This micro-blog entry said that Han Han was threatened by some netizens, and that some of these netizens would use radical action against Han Han and his family members.

**Figure 33: Micro-blog entry 8, Fang Zhouzi’s blog entry**

This micro-blog entry was published on the 16th of April by Fang Zhouzi, and received 1649 comments and was forwarded 535 times. In this micro-blog entry, Fang thinks that the death threats from the netizens were made by Han Han himself.

**Figure 34: Micro-blog entry 9, Fang Zhouzi’s blog entry**

34 http://www.weibo.com/fangzhouzi
35 http://www.weibo.com/fangzhouzi
This micro-blog entry was published on the 17th of April by Fang Zhouzi, and received 1300 comments and was forwarded 416 times. Fang implied that Han’s father always used his social networking to help Han Han.

The results of the content analysis during the explosive phase of the Ghostwriter event are shown below:

Table 9: Language use during the explosive phase of the Ghostwriter event  
(The total number of samples is 1200.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language use</th>
<th>Micro-blog entry</th>
<th>Violent speech</th>
<th>Non-violent speech</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>The percentage of violent speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>25.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>22.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: The number of different types of violent speech during the explosive phase of the Ghostwriter event

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Micro-blog entry</th>
<th>Aggressive speech</th>
<th>Aggressive symbol</th>
<th>Rumor</th>
<th>Revealing privacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1.4 The dying-down phase (after May of 2012)

**Figure 36: Micro-blog entry 10, Fang Zhouzi’s micro-blog entry**

This blog entry is from Fang Zhouzi. He published it on the 4th of May this year. This blog entry received 2580 comments and was forwarded 3116 times. Fang Zhouzi analyzed that it was impossible for Han Han to write the article, *Peering at the Human through a Cup* (杯中窥人).

**Figure 37: Micro-blog entry 11, Fang Zhouzi’s micro-blog entry**

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36 http://www.weibo.com/fangzhouzi
37 http://www.weibo.com/fangzhouzi
This blog entry was published on the 26th of May, and received 2409 comments and was forwarded 2873 times. Fang Zhouzi said that he had already found evidence to prove Han Han’s faking in his book *Triple Door*.

**Figure 38: Micro-blog entry 12, Fang Zhouzi’s micro-blog entry**

"天才"演出来就是戏。戏上，方舟子们又是一波排场。/ @方舟子 微博无间道，让韩寒再次展现自己的作文底色。还是也是的，给个面子就往里钻。

This blog entry was published on the 9th of June, and received 836 comments and was forwarded 332 times. In this micro-blog entry, Fang Zhouzi expressed the idea again that Han Han does not have much talent in writing.

The results of the content analysis during the dying-down phase of the Ghostwriter event are shown below:

**Table 11: Language use during the dying-down phase of the Ghostwriter event**

(The total number of samples is 1200.)
Language use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Micro-blog entry</th>
<th>Violent speech</th>
<th>Non-violent speech</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>The percentage of violent speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>16.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>10.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: The number of different types of violent speech during the dying-down phase of the Ghostwriter event

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Micro-blog entry</th>
<th>Aggressive speech</th>
<th>Aggressive symbol</th>
<th>Rumor</th>
<th>Revealing privacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 39: The percentage of different types of violent speech during the dying-down phase of the Ghostwriter event

5.1.5 Summary of the Ghostwriter event

According to the content analysis from the different phases of the Ghostwriter event, the following summary is offered:
(1) Figure 40 shows the content analysis of twelve micro-blog comments. The degree of networked symbolic violence in the first micro-blog entry is the lowest, which is only 5.50%. The percentage of the violent speech increases gradually from the first entry to the fifth entry. In entry 7, the percentage of violent comments reaches 25.50%, which is the highest among all the entries. Then, the degree of networked symbolic violence begins to decrease. The percentage of violent speech in entry ten is 10.25%.

Figure 40: the percentage of violent speech in the Ghostwriter event

(2) In chart 41, the percentage of different types of violent speech in the Ghostwriter event is offered. It is obvious that the aggressive speech and aggressive symbols in the micro-blog comments occupy the major part. The percentage of aggressive speech goes from the lowest at 52% during the dying-down phase to the highest at 70% during the rising phase. The percentage of aggressive symbols is around 30%. On the other hand, the percentage of rumors and revealing private information is not extensive.

Figure 41: the percentage of different types of violent speech in the Ghostwriter event
Therefore, according to the research and analysis above, a rough trend graph about this case of networked symbolic violence could be concluded as follows (see Figure 42):

**Figure 42: a trend graph of the Ghostwriter event**

According to Figure 42, it is obvious that the beginning of the Ghostwriter event was in the middle of January. With the participation of an increasing number of netizens, the influence of networked symbolic violence increased rapidly between February and April. In particular, the networked symbolic violence of this event reached a climax during the first few days of April. The influence of the event was even extended from the network to real life. Under the huge
denouncement of the public, networked symbolic violence gradually faded away by the end of May.

5.2 Case 2: the Guo Meimei scandal

Through the simple random sampling method, twelve micro-blog entries were picked from this case as well. They are from Guo Meimei, the micro-blog of the Red Cross Society of China, and Lang Xianping. In order to better explain the content analysis of this case, some examples of non-violent speech and violent speech (aggressive speech, aggressive symbols, rumors and revealing privacy) will be shown also.

1. Non-violent speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HotShotKevin：知错能改还是一枚好姑娘</td>
<td>If you can correct your mistakes, you are still a good girl.</td>
<td>The netizen thinks that Guo Meimei is still a good girl if she can realize her mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>老王家的戴美美：美美~是你揭露了红十字会的黑暗，让大家看清楚了他们的本质，拯救了广大劳动人民的爱心和血汗钱。虽然你的方式方法有些让人意外，但还是挺你哦！</td>
<td>Guo Meimei, you revealed the ugly truth of the RCSC; you make the public know the essence of the RCSC; you save the public’s money. Even though you used an amazing way to help the public, I still support you.</td>
<td>The netizen thinks that the Guo Meimei scandal helps the public figure out the RCSC and he will support Guo Meimei.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEIJIAIYI-V：不管昨天发生了什么，今天发生的事情将决定你的未来。</td>
<td>No matter what happened, everything is all the time.</td>
<td>The netizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commenter</td>
<td>Message</td>
<td>Updated Message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>生了什么，不管昨天有多难堪，有多无奈，有多苦涩，都过去了，不会再来，也无法改变</td>
<td>past. You cannot change it anymore.</td>
<td>hopes that Guo Meimei can correct her mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>就是喜欢阿森纳：悬崖勒马吧</td>
<td>Correct your mistakes.</td>
<td>The netizen hopes that Guo Meimei can correct her mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>编号 7052：有了你，才让我们真正知道了红十字会，我为红十字会默哀！</td>
<td>You help us to figure out what the RCSC is. I will take a moment of silence for the RCSC.</td>
<td>The netizen thinks that the Guo Meimei scandal helps the public figure out the RCSC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>小小房山娃：你要怪就怪网络的强大吧，替你难过，希望你快点好起来，我们大家都是人……</td>
<td>You can just blame the Internet. I am so sorry for you. Hope you can recover soon.</td>
<td>The netizen hopes that Guo Meimei can correct her mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>一只秋惠：真的想改过就要实际行动，你以为在网上说说就行了？现在谁还会信你？“红十字会”真是刺痛人民心呐</td>
<td>If you want to correct your mistakes, please use your action to prove everything. No one will believe you. The RCSC also hurts the public.</td>
<td>The netizen hopes that Guo Meimei can correct her mistakes through real action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>杂杂杂杂欣：应该看看山里的贫困孩子们缺什么，现在过的是怎样的生活你</td>
<td>You should look at the kind of life those poor kids in the mountain area have.</td>
<td>The netizen condemns Guo Meimei.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>知道吗？</td>
<td>Netizens did not hype this issue, but you hype it by yourself.</td>
<td>The netizen thinks Guo Meimei just wants to become well-known through this scandal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>han Nah 马不停蹄的长膘：网友没有炒作，是你自己炒作你自己</td>
<td>I think your introspection is good. Some netizens’ criticism is prejudiced.</td>
<td>The netizen hopes that Guo Meimei can correct her mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>请叫人家小纯纯啦：我觉得你自我反省是好的。我认为有些网友对你的批评是带有偏见的。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**II. Violent speech**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Comments of micro-blog entries</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive speech</td>
<td>@佛山混凝土销售人员：你不如去死吧</td>
<td>You should go to hell.</td>
<td>The netizen said: you should go to hell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beyond-有一种信仰：妓女！！！！！凤姐升级版！！！！！</td>
<td>You are a whore. Absolutely a whore.</td>
<td>The netizen said that Guo Meimei is a whore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>不明显双眼皮变成明显单眼皮：狗改不了吃屎</td>
<td>You are a dog. You like eating shit.</td>
<td>The netizen used dog to describe Guo Meimei.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>@未成年禁止偷</td>
<td>You are a son of a bitch. Fuck you.</td>
<td>The netizen said Guo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>帖: 说你妈比啊狗比</td>
<td>Meimei is son of a bitch.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>嘴填屎：你是婊子</td>
<td>You are a son of a bitch.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>决战 z 中原：回复@杜维 Boy:你操你自己妈逼，你和你玩69就玩去呗。老子不管，你妈个逼贱种。</td>
<td>Fuck your mother.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>手机用户2370156573：陪哥睡一晚上。口交肛交加内射。哥会宽恕你的。</td>
<td>I want to have sex with you. I want to give you a blowjob, have anal sex with you.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>盛夏一抹凉风：尼玛！拉出去的屎你还想吃掉啊？！</td>
<td>You want to eat your shit.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>米多米少：回复@月光下的小野猫啦啦:你离了你妈逼果然活不了呵呵，你妈逼都快长你脸上了</td>
<td>Fuck your mother.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>决战 z 中原：回复@杜维 Boy:想</td>
<td>You want to become a star. You can have sex with anyone. I want to say:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive symbol</td>
<td>Traditional Chinese</td>
<td>Simplified Chinese</td>
<td>English Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>红你妈个逼，我已经忍无可忍了，我决定改变立场，由以前的操你妈个逼改成我操你妈个逼。祝你妈个逼，早日大红大紫。</td>
<td>fuck you and fuck your mother. bitch.</td>
<td>You will die. Bitch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@ZGAFAM:莫志文:不用怕  你快死啦 狗b</td>
<td>首就说得不懂就问：各位不用花大力气骂郭sb了，最好的做法就是取消关注，想骂的时候搜索一下就行，很方便。</td>
<td>We don’t have to abuse this bitch on a micro-blog. What we should do now is stop following her on her micro-blog.</td>
<td>The netizen used “SB,” which means son of a bitch, to insult Guo Meimei.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roseenrose:回复@郭小美美的后援_0pl:QU NI MA DE</td>
<td>Fuck your mother.</td>
<td>You are a bitch.</td>
<td>The netizen used “QU NI MA DE,” which means son of a bitch, to insult Guo Meimei.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>街边卖鱼旦：卖B 没卖对地方,,出事了吧</td>
<td>You are a bitch.</td>
<td>You are a bitch. You will become a dog in your next life.</td>
<td>The netizen used “B,” which means bitch, to insult Guo Meimei.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>学雷锋 007:回复@鑫 CBR22:你个 2B 你转世</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The netizen used “2B,” which means bitch, to insult Guo Meimei.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>投胎变成狗吧</td>
<td>踢实况：反省你 MLGB</td>
<td>Fuck your mother.</td>
<td>The netizen used “MLGB,” which means mother fuck to insult Guo Meimei.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BoBo4418：都 Jb 这名声了，还腆个脸来炒作，为了成名，你睡干爹干爷也就罢了，还 jb 来挑战我们的底线。</td>
<td>You are a bitch. In order to become a star, you can have sex even with your nominal father.</td>
<td>The netizen used “jb,” which means dick, to insult Guo Meimei.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>小葱猫：无心之过？你个 SB</td>
<td>Honest mistakes? You are a son of a bitch.</td>
<td>The netizen used “SB,” which means bitch, to insult Guo Meimei.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@钊杰兄:艹你吗的 B</td>
<td>Fuck your mother.</td>
<td>The netizen used “艹” and “B,” which means fuck you to insult Guo Meimei.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>大大丶小错觉：你炒作吧 SB</td>
<td>You continue to hype your luxury life. You are a bitch.</td>
<td>The netizen used “SB,” which means bitch, to insult Guo Meimei.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumor</td>
<td>生活生不如死 x：新浪微博，太贪了，人家给你钱都随便给人认证，都不知道事情的严重性。</td>
<td>Sina Weibo is so bad. As long as you give money to Sina Weibo, Sina will give you a certified name.</td>
<td>The netizen implied that Sina Weibo earned money by certifying some people, even though these people are not well-known in the society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>中文内容</td>
<td>英文内容</td>
<td>网民所表达的含义</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>依然无花果：中国的慈善，像是八旗子弟的自留地，养家糊口的门路而已。不必大惊小怪。</td>
<td>The Chinese charity is just for the government.</td>
<td>网民认为政府是中国慈善的唯一来源，捐款被浪费。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>与子偕老 vv：刚看完王刚讲故事你个骚B 炫富的代价 哈哈哈 被人包养的才有那么多钱 你的B 可真金贵。。。</td>
<td>After watching Wanggang’s program, I feel you are a bitch. You make money through having sex with others.</td>
<td>网民认为郭美美被包养，通过性交易赚取金钱。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>叼叽齐哇：GMM今天就要从外地回来，有没有人去几场截她啊</td>
<td>Guo Meimei will come back from another place; anyone wants to harass her at the airport?</td>
<td>网民呼吁网友在机场拦截郭美美。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@辣笔小球： @郭美美 baby 你妈真牛B 3219元就能搞定经济适用房，我出32190万，你能帮我搞一套不？</td>
<td>You mother is very powerful. She can only use 3219 yuan to get an apartment. If I pay 32190 million, can you help me get one?</td>
<td>网民查询到郭美美母亲的财务信息。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>涟漪 ricky：郭母和王军在外面合开公司，背后很可能牵扯出一堆高官的。</td>
<td>Guo Meimei’s mother and Wang Jun set up a company, which is related to many officials.</td>
<td>网民查看到了郭美美母亲的财务信息。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revealing privacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
呆呆_口木口木:
对啊，你男朋友是 86 年的，但你的“干“爹却真有其人啊

You boyfriend was born in 1986, but you still have your nominal father.

The netizen implied that Guo Meimei’s boyfriend was born in 1986.

5.2.1 The beginning phase (from the middle of May, 2011 to 21st June, 2011)

Figure 43: Micro-blog entry 1, Guo Meimei’s micro-blog entry39

第一次抱小狗，还没断奶呢 sequel 的一顿扭一点都不配合，毛很舒服虽然很可爱。
但很臭很臭很臭要臭晕了。

This micro-blog entry was posted on the 21st of May, of 2011, and received 2186 comments and was forwarded 362 times. Guo Meimei flaunted her wealth on Sina Weibo.

Figure 44: Micro-blog entry 2, Guo Meimei’s micro-blog entry40

骑马呀骑马骑了一小时下来腿全废腿都没力气了，以后每周都要跟爷骑马
开心一幸福ing 😅

This micro-blog entry was posted on the 21st May of 2011 as well, and received 2153 comments and was forwarded 308 times. Guo Meimei again flaunted her wealth on Sina Weibo.

39 http://www.weibo.com/u/1741865482
40 http://www.weibo.com/u/1741865482
This micro-blog entry was posted on the 19th of June, 2011, and received 10113 comments and was forwarded 2358 times. Guo Meimei once again flaunted her wealth on Sina Weibo.

The results of the content analysis in the beginning phase of the Guo Meimei scandal are shown below:

Table 13: Language use during the beginning phase of the Guo Meimei scandal
(The total number of samples is 1200.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language use</th>
<th>Violent speech</th>
<th>Non-violent speech</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>The percentage of violent speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Micro-blog entry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>9.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>9.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: The number of different types of violent speech during the beginning phase of the Guo Meimei scandal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Micro-blog entry</th>
<th>Aggressive speech</th>
<th>Aggressive symbol</th>
<th>Rumor</th>
<th>Revealing privacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

41 http://www.weibo.com/u/1741865482
5.2.2 The rising phase (from 21st June, 2011 to the end of June, 2011)

Figure 47: Micro-blog entry 4, Guo Meimei’s micro-blog entry\textsuperscript{42}

This micro-blog entry was published by Guo Meimei on the 26\textsuperscript{th} of June, 2011, and received 17121 comments and was forwarded 17427 times. Guo Meimei said in this blog entry that because she was young and innocent she had faked the fact that she was the commercial manager of the RCSC. She felt deeply sorry and apologized to the RCSC and the public.

Figure 48: Micro-blog entry 5, Guo Meimei’s micro-blog entry\textsuperscript{43}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
  & 2 & 23 & 10 & 4 & 0 \\
\hline
3 & 28 & 10 & 3 & 1 & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{The percentage of different types of violent speech during the beginning phase of the Guo Meimei scandal}
\end{table}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure46.png}
\caption{The percentage of different types of violent speech}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure47.png}
\caption{Micro-blog entry 4, Guo Meimei’s micro-blog entry\textsuperscript{42}}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure48.png}
\caption{Micro-blog entry 5, Guo Meimei’s micro-blog entry\textsuperscript{43}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{42} http://www.weibo.com/u/1741865482
\textsuperscript{43} http://www.weibo.com/u/1741865482
This micro-blog entry was published by Guo Meimei on the 26th of June, 2011 as well, and received 17100 comments and was forwarded 111,630 times. Guo Meimei apologized to RCSC again.

Figure 49: Micro-blog entry 6, Guo Meimei’s micro-blog entry

Guo Meimei wrote this micro-blog entry on the 26th of June as well, and it received 180936 comments and was forwarded 26117 times. She apologized again about her behavior and she hoped that the netizens would stop hyping this event.

The results of the content analysis during the rising phase of Guo Meimei scandal are shown below:

Table 15: Language use during the rising phase of the Guo Meimei scandal
(The total number of samples is 1200.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language use</th>
<th>Micro-blog entry</th>
<th>Violent speech</th>
<th>Non-violent speech</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>The percentage of violent speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>20.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>19.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>21.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: The number of different types of violent speech during the rising phase of the Guo Meimei scandal

44 http://www.weibo.com/u/1741865482
5.2.3 The explosive phase (from the beginning of July, 2011 to the beginning of August, 2011)

Figure 51: Micro-blog entry 7, RCSC’s micro-blog entry\(^{45}\)

This micro-blog entry was posted on the 4\(^{th}\) of July, 2011, and it received 226388 comments and was forwarded 41294 times. In this micro-blog entry, the secretary-general of the RCSC answered questions from the netizens on the micro-blog.

Figure 52: Micro-blog entry 8, RCSC’s micro-blog entry\(^{46}\)

---

\(^{45}\) http://www.weibo.com/u/2205860842

\(^{46}\) http://www.weibo.com/u/2205860842
This micro-blog entry was published by the RCSC on the 7th of July, 2011; it received 68386 comments and was forwarded 14179 times. In this micro-blog, the RCSC stated that they did not have any relations with Guo Meimei.

**Figure 53: Micro-blog entry 9, Lang Xianping’s micro-blog entry**

This micro-blog entry was published by Lang Xianping on the 7th of August and it received 47431 comments and was forwarded 54343 times. Lang Xianping lashed out against those network mobs that used rumor and insulting speeches to abuse him in this micro-blog entry.

The results of the content analysis during the explosive phase of the Guo Meimei scandal are shown below:

**Table 17: Language use during the explosive phase of the Guo Meimei scandal**

(The total number of samples is 1200.)

---

47 http://www.weibo.com/langxianpinghk
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language use</th>
<th>Violent speech</th>
<th>Non-violent speech</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>The percentage of violent speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Micro-blog entry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>32.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>38.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>26.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18: The number of different types of violent speech during the explosive phase of the Guo Meimei scandal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Micro-blog entry</th>
<th>Aggressive speech</th>
<th>Aggressive symbol</th>
<th>Rumor</th>
<th>Revealing privacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>92</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>108</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>79</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 54: The percentage of different types of violent speech during the explosive phase of the Guo Meimei scandal

The percentage of different types of violent speech

5.2.4 The dying-down phase (after the middle of August, 2011)

Figure 55: Micro-blog entry 10, Micro-blog entry 8: RCSC’s micro-blog entry

48 http://www.weibo.com/u/2205860842
This micro-blog entry was published on the 16\textsuperscript{th} of August, 2011, and received 7862 comments and was forwarded 2365 times. The RCSC published their work information on Sina Weibo after the Guo Meimei scandal.

**Figure 56: Micro-blog entry 11, Micro-blog entry 8: RCSC’s micro-blog entry\textsuperscript{49}**

Guo Meimei published this micro-blog entry on the 18\textsuperscript{th} of August, 2011, and it received 55974 comments and was forwarded 7939 times. She used a song to express her mood during this period.

**Figure 57: Micro-blog entry 12, Guo Meimei’s micro-blog entry\textsuperscript{50}**

This micro-blog entry was posted on the 29\textsuperscript{th} of August by Guo Meimei and it received 12906 comments and was forwarded 3081 times. Guo Meimei confessed her mistakes on the micro-blog, but she asked the public to give her some private space.

The results of the content analysis during the dying-down phase of the Guo Meimei scandal are shown below:

\textsuperscript{49} http://www.weibo.com/u/2205860842

\textsuperscript{50} http://www.weibo.com/u/1741865482
Table 19: Language use during the dying-down phase of the Guo Meimei scandal
(The total number of samples is 1200.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language use Micro-blog entry</th>
<th>Violent speech</th>
<th>Non-violent speech</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>The percentage of violent speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>18.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>23.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>19.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: The number of different types of violent speech during the dying-down phase of the Guo Meimei scandal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Micro-blog entry</th>
<th>Aggressive speech</th>
<th>Aggressive symbol</th>
<th>Rumor</th>
<th>Revealing privacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 58: The percentage of different types of violent speech during the dying-down phase of the Guo Meimei scandal

The percentage of different types of violent speech

- Aggressive speech: 68%
- Aggressive symbol: 5%
- Rumor: 1%
- Revealing privacy: 1%
- Other: 26%
### 5.2.5 Summary of the Guo Meimei scandal

According to the content analysis of the different phases of the Guo Meimei scandal, the following summary is offered:

1. In Figure 59, the percentage of violent speech in the Guo Meimei scandal is offered. The degree of violent speech gradually increases from the first micro-blog entry to the eighth micro-blog entry. After the eighth micro-blog entry, it is obvious that the percentage of violent speech starts to drop. In the whole case, the percentage of violent speech in the first two micro-blog entries is 9.25%, which is the lowest. The percentage of violent speech in the eighth micro-blog entry reaches 38%, which is the highest in the case.

   ![Figure 59: percentage of violent speech in the Guo Meimei scandal](image)

2. In Figure 60, the percentages of different types of violent speech in the Guo Meimei scandal are showed. Among the four different types of violent speech, aggressive speech in the micro-blog entries’ comments is still the biggest part. The percentages are all more than 60% during the four phases. The highest one reaches 72%. Aggressive symbols rank in second place with 20% during the four phases. On the other hand, the percentage of rumors and revealing privacy is still not too great.
Therefore, according to the research and analysis above, a rough trend graph about this networked symbolic violence case could be concluded as follows (see Figure 61):

**Figure 61: trend graph of the Guo Meimei scandal**

From Figure 61, it is obvious that the Guo Meimei scandal started in the middle of May. From the middle of June to the beginning of July, there was an apparent rise tendency in this period. The influence of the Guo Meimei scandal increased quickly during this period. Furthermore, the explosive phase happened in the middle of July. The netizens stopped being angry about Guo Meimei, the RCSC, and even the government on the micro-blog. In real life, not only Guo Meimei
but also the RCSC were all seriously affected by this event. Finally, under the effect of different aspects in the society, such as the government, traditional media, and other emergency events, the influence of the Guo Meimei scandal gradually decreased after the middle of August.

5.3 Conclusion

In this section, content analysis was used for the two case studies. The aim of this study in this part was to obtain: (1) the main features of networked symbolic violence events on the Chinese micro-blog Weibo, (2) and to try to summarize the main aspects of networked symbolic violence.

From the two case studies above, first the feature of four stages of networked symbolic violence event can be summarized; they are:

(1) The beginning phase: the advent of social controversial events makes a great number of netizens pay attention to the event. Little networked symbolic violence appears in this phase.

(2) The rising phase: the various opinions and ideas gradually converge. Through exchanging information constantly, the behavior of netizens becomes aggressive, radical and violent. Networked symbolic violence rises quickly at this stage.

(3) The explosive phase: with the development of debate online, the networked symbolic violence becomes more and more serious. Some netizens attack the parties with violent speech in the name of morality, and even networked symbolic violence is extended to real violence in real life.

(4) The dying-down phase: due to various internal and external elements, the focus of public opinion is transferred to other things and networked symbolic violence gradually fades away. However, the effects of the networked symbolic violence event on society will still last a long time.

Additionally, in both cases, speech violence is mainly carried out by aggressive speech and aggressive symbols, which means that the aggressive speech and aggressive symbols are the main types of violent speech in the contemporary Chinese micro-blog Weibo.
By comparing and summarizing the literature from different scholars, and given the research and analysis of the cases discussed here, the main aspects of networked symbolic violence can be summarized as follows. Networked symbolic violence stems from the Internet world, which is an extension of the real violence in peoples’ normal life. Networked symbolic violence mainly focuses on controversial issues which are caused by the inequality of the social structure and social relationships. Networked symbolic violence is one kind of structural violence as well as symbolic violence. Networked symbolic violence uses violent written language and symbols as the main carrier and with the help of the network’s public opinion to attack others, and reveals others’ private information maliciously and spreads rumors. The main feature of networked symbolic violence is thus verbal attacks by the hands of many, which seeks to hurt the victim emotionally, but sometimes also the individual’s physical wellbeing. Furthermore, the features of the Chinese micro-blog Weibo and the crowd psychology of netizens play a significant role in the explosion of networked symbolic violence. The phenomenon of networked symbolic violence has come to a climax by pushing a great number of netizens.
6. Discussion

In this section, an in-depth discussion will be launched to help the reader understand the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence in the micro-blog in contemporary Chinese society. First, the theoretical framework which was introduced in the third chapter will be utilized here to interpret the result. Next, some tentative measures will be offered to regulate networked symbolic violence on the Chinese micro-blog Weibo.

6.1 Interpretations of the results

So far, the main results of this study have already been presented. In particular, two points should be emphasized here. First of all, networked symbolic violence is a kind of structural violence and symbolic violence in contemporary Chinese society. Secondly, the features of the Chinese micro-blog Weibo and the crowd psychology of netizens have played a significant role in the explosion of networked symbolic violence.

6.1.1 Structural violence and symbolic violence in the Chinese society

Galtung indicates that structural violence is built on the structure of society, politics, and the economy. When social institutions and social practices cannot meet people’s basic needs, structural violence will appear in the society (Galtung 1969). Similarly, the “conditions of power and government and the structures of violence they embody, Bourdieu wrote, become unrecognizable to the extent that they seem no longer able to be challenged and are thus overlooked, but at the same time are accepted” (Imbusch 2003, 25). This means that symbolic violence is a kind of legitimate structural violence. Therefore, structural violence and symbolic violence are both caused by the social structure and social institutions.

One of the main perspectives in this thesis is that networked symbolic violence in China is a sort of structural violence as well as symbolic violence. The advent of networked symbolic violence in the Chinese micro-blog sphere is closely related to the structure and institutions of Chinese society.
From observing the two cases in this study, it is obvious that these two networked symbolic events were all stirred up by controversial social issues. The controversial social issues could be called a fuse here. These issues embody people’s discontent with the social reality and complaints about social injustice. According to the two controversial cases in this study, some typical social contradictions and conflicts which are caused by social structures and institutions can be summarized.

I. The wealth gap in China

Although some statistical agencies have different results, it is no doubt that China is one of the most unequal countries in the area of the wealth gap in the world (Chinanews.com 2012). The rapid growth of the Chinese economy has not narrowed the gap between the rich and the poor. The income gap between the urban and rural, between the north area and the west area, between different industries, and between different social groups has widen in recent years (Kang 2012), and the problem of the gap in wealth in China has become more and more serious.

The reformation of the economic and social institution in China has provided a huge motive power for economic growth, but it also has brought with it some social problems. There is a strange phenomenon in the income distribution in China, which is that one’s career and industry are very important factors in determining your income (Kang 2012). For example, the industries of real estate, mineral products, and securities are the most profitable in China. Some people become millionaires overnight through speculation. Still, if you can find a job in the industry of electric power, telecom, petroleum, tobacco or some other monopolized industries, or if you can get a job in a government department, you will get a high and stable income. On the other hand, some laid-off workers, peasant workers, and some low-income groups cannot even get the basic allowance for living. These people become vulnerable groups in the Chinese society. From a certain point of view, they are the greatest victims in the reformation of economic and social institutions in China (Kang 2012), because they have not had a fair environment or fair treatment from the beginning. The millionaires are minority after all, but the number of vulnerable groups is huge. The big wealth gap has caused serious opposition in the society. The rich people take advantage of their resources to get more profit. The corruption phenomenon is also very serious.
Therefore, the people that are in the lowest class have strong anti-rich and anti-official emotions, but it is not easy for them to express their dissatisfactions under the policy of coercion.

The cause of the big wealth gap in China can mainly be attributed to the incomplete and inadequate social system and institutions found there, such as the economic institutions, tax system, social security system, etc. (Kang 2012). Furthermore, inflation and the inequality of the social resource allocation have exacerbated the social contradictions (ibid). Take Guo Meimei scandal as an example. In the Guo Meimei scandal, the question why the commerce general manager of the Red Cross Society of China had so much money became the focus in this event. Charity has always been regarded as a lofty career in China and the RCSC is a typical model in the field of charity. However, in this scandal, the luxury life of Guo Meimei enraged the public. The anti-rich and anti-officials were the main causes of the explosion of this event.

II. Open government information

“The Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on Open Government Information (OGI Regulations) published on April 24, 2007, and effective one year later on May 1, 2008, mark a turning point away from the deeply ingrained culture of government secrecy toward making Chinese government operations and information more transparent” (Horsley 2007, 1). This regulation was the first which required that the relevant administrative department publish information for the public. Article 9 stated: “Administrative organs shall actively open up government information conforming to one of the following requirements: (1) involving the direct interest of citizens, legal persons or other organizations; (2) requiring the broad knowledge or participation of the social masses; (3) reflecting situations of the administrative organ such as setup, functions, operating procedures, etc.; (4) other information that should be actively opened up according to laws, regulations and relevant State provisions”51. China is a highly-nationalized country, and most organizations and corporations have a strong governmental background. According to the regulations, the public has the right to know the government information that is

relevant to their immediate interests. The central government has carried out this regulation in order to promote a transparent government. However, the implementation of this regulation has not been positive in the past four years. The main reason for this phenomenon is that the reformation of the political system has fallen behind the development of the economy (Kang 2012). Before the implementation of the Reform and Open policy, China carried out a planned policy for the economy, which caused the system of “big government, small society.” “Big government, small society” embodies a highly-powerful government and a relatively weak society, and governmental power that have almost no limitation (Li 2010). However, in contemporary Chinese society, some government departments do not put public service in first place but still regard themselves as the executor of the national executive power. Furthermore, the phenomenon of corruption exists in some government departments. As a result, some government departments are reluctant to open governmental information.

The Red Cross Society actually is a very famous charitable organization globally, while the RCSC in the Guo Meimei scandal has a deep governmental background—the chairman and main leaders are all appointed by the government. However, the RCSC does not have a set of systems by which it can open up information. Before the Guo Meimei scandal, the RCSC never published where the funds were going and how they were being used. Some people even thought that the officials of the RCSC were corrupt. For another example, in the beginning of 2011, the central government required that every central government department publish its expenses for official receptions, vehicles, and overseas trips. However, some departments could not do so, which disappointed the public. The problem with open government information is quite common in China. Some information should be published for the public, but the government keeps it as a “secret.” On the one hand, the public has a strong desire to ask for information. On the other hand, the government is unwilling to publish some information. As a result, the contradictions and conflicts become inevitable.

III. Lack of integrity

In the Ghostwriter event, on the surface, it was just a war of words online between two groups of people that supported their own idols. However, the debate on the phenomenon of faking was the
main point in this case: the public really concentrated on the issue of integrity. The faking had already become a more and more serious social problem in the Chinese society, which extended from clothes to food, and even to education degrees. It seems that fake “stuff” had already become a label of China. The faking has brought a huge negative influence to the public. The phenomenon of faking not only shows that some people lack the consciousness of integrity but also reveals some drawbacks concerning the social institutions in China. The government has ignored the importance of fairness and honesty during the process of the economic construction and has pursued economic growth excessively. Therefore, some people have gotten lost and have become unscrupulous in order to get more money.

**IV. The media censorship in China**

The Chinese media are a mouthpiece for the Communist Party and the government. Accordingly, the media are an important propaganda tool for the party and the government. China has strong media censorship compared to some western countries. It has a specialized propaganda department which is mainly responsible for censoring news reports. Almost all of the Chinese media have to conduct their news reports according to the unified deployment of the propaganda department. On the one hand, the media censorship indeed filters some harmful information and purifies the media environment; on the other hand, the media censorship also affects people’s freedom of speech. It is not easy for ordinary people to express their ideas about some social problems, especially problem with the government; ordinary people cannot speak but only see. They do not have an appropriate channel to express their emotions. However, the advent of the Chinese micro-blog Weibo is gradually changing this situation. People finally have found a platform to let off their steam. Therefore, the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence in the Chinese micro-blog sphere is a kind of emotional release under the pressure of structural violence and symbolic violence.

**6.1.2 The crowd phenomenon in the micro-blog era**

According to the research and analysis for two networked symbolic violence events in the Chinese
micro-blog sphere, a developing trend graph of networked symbolic violence was summarized. It is obvious that there is a rapid growth of symbolic violence on micro-blogs between the rising phase and the explosive phase in the case. The reason for this situation, to a large extent, is closely related to the huge changes of netizens’ psychology in the micro-blog environment. Le Bon conducted research and an analysis on crowd behavior and psychology in people’s real life. However, crowd behavior also happens not only in real life but also in the Internet world. In this part, Gustave Le Bon’s Law of the Mental Unity of Crowds will be utilized to analyze the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence in the Chinese micro-blog Weibo.

I. Anonymity in the micro-blog

The number of registered micro-blog users in China was more than 250 million in the end of 2011 (CNNIC 2012, 29). Although some well-known people chose to use their real name to show their identity, the majority of netizens are still anonymous. The huge number of anonymous micro-blog entries is similar to the anonymous crowd which Le Bon emphasized in *The Crowd*. The anonymity in the micro-blog is one of the important reasons for the emergence of networked symbolic violence.

“The individual forming part of a crowd acquires, solely for numerical considerations, a sentiment of invincible power which allows him to yield to instincts which, had he been alone, he would perforce have kept under restraint. He will be the less disposed to check himself from the consideration that, a crowd being anonymous, and in consequence irresponsible, the sentiment of responsibility which always controls individuals disappears entirely” (Le Bon 1930, 12).

Similarly, Zimbardo thinks that anonymity and responsibility are important features of the deindividuation process (Forsyth 2006). These two features are closely connected with each other. Deindividuation theory indicates that people easily decrease their self-control and sense of responsibility in the state of anonymity (Forsyth 2006).

In daily life, people’s discourse is restricted by their status, occupation, and environment. The
behavior of all people has a moral bottom line (Xu 2008). Once the people cross this moral bottom line, they will be punished by laws and regulations. On the other hand, on the micro-blog, people’s behavior is totally different from their real life in the context of anonymity. Netizens use a nickname that they like during the communication on the micro-blog, and this nickname can be changed at any time. Therefore, the identity of all people is diversified on the micro-blog and even the identity of all people can be made up at any time. The anonymity of the micro-blog reduces the restraining force of social norms. Therefore, speech on the micro-blog can become violent, false, or inflammatory easily. One of the important reasons why some netizens dare to use violent speech to attack others on micro-blogs is because of their anonymous identity. They are the majority of the anonymous. They do not have to be responsible for the consequence of their violent speeches.

II. The leader of the crowd

“The network will not create violence by itself. The origin of networked symbolic violence is from the violent crowd, which is composed of the netizens” (Chen 2009, 69). A violent crowd can be divided into two parts. One is the leader of the crowd. The other is the members of the crowd. The Chinese micro-blog Weibo has already established a real name certified system to avoid any confusion or misunderstanding concerning micro-bloggers’ identity, which is a good measure. However, during the spread of the information on the micro-blog, some famous people become the leaders of the crowd and the leaders of the networked symbolic violence.

As Le Bon said: “As soon as a certain number of living beings are gathered together, whether they be animals or men, they place themselves instinctively under the authority of a chief” (Le Bon 1930, 54). He further stated, “The multitude is always ready to listen to the strong-willed man, who knows how to impose himself upon it. Men gathered in a crowd lose all force of will, and turn instinctively to the person who possesses the quality they lack” (ibid).

As can be seen in the two cases analyzed above, the speech of some well-known people on the micro-blog played an important role in guiding the public opinion. And some speech even had negative effects. It is these people that influence the crowd’s thought and emotion through various
methods, and then stirs up networked symbolic violence. Some irrelevant netizens would join in the event unconsciously with the guidance of the leader. These people could be called as the leaders of the event.

At the same time, the leader of the crowd is good at using various means, such as affirmation, repetition, and contagion, to affect the crowd, especially some “surprising speech.” On the micro-blog, “surprisingly speech” will attract more attention (Meng 2011). In order to achieve the effect of “surprising,” some “leaders” always use some radical, critical, and even insulting language to attack others online so that they can attract more focus from the public. In this circumstance, the increasing number of people will keep pace with those that are using “surprising speech”. If they do not follow the “surprising speech,” their voice will totally disappear from the crowd.

Here, one aspect of the identity of some Chinese people should be mentioned, which is that “the crowd mentality of Chinese people is very strong” (Tu 2009). The Chinese people like group activities. In the subconscious of the Chinese people, the person will think: “I must do this thing because others are all doing this thing,” and “What is supported by the majority of people is right” (Tu 2009, 31). It is because of the crowd mentality that some Chinese people lack independent thinking—they are easily affected by the slogans and images.

III. Impressionable crowd in the micro-blog

From Le Bon’s (1930, 9) viewpoint, “The crowd of netizens is a heterogeneous crowd” (Chen 2009, 69). A heterogeneous crowd refers to a crowd that is made up of “individuals of any description, of any profession, and any degree of intelligence” (Le Bon 1930, 73). The heterogeneous crowd is impressionable. There are three reasons. First, the crowd is “always dominated by considerations of which it is unconscious.” Their brain activity will disappear and the physical activity will increase in the meantime. Their intelligence will lower and their sentiments will completely change. The intelligence level will not affect the judgment of the different members in the crowd; the clever persons also become retarded in their judgment. Second, the crowd is always influenced by their emotion—they are seldom affected by evidence,
and their reasoning ability is very weak. Third, the crowd is also affected by strong authority (Le Bon 1930). That means that once someone joins a crowd, the individual will become irrational, impulsive, and radical. Therefore, it is easy to understand why an irrational and impulsive crowd becomes extreme impressionable.

On the micro-blog, the netizens are also easily affected by various factors. Even if only a little stimulated, the netizens will be affected and become angry. In particular, the netizens are highly sensitive to the surprising speeches and pictures. For some hot spot event in the society, the mood of netizens is already sensitive and passionate. Therefore, it is easily for them to connect these surprising speeches and pictures to the hot spot event.

IV. The power of the crowd
Le Bon (1930) indicates that the crowd is impulsive, mobile, and irritability. “Whether the feelings exhibited by a crowd be good or bad, they present the double character of being very simple and very exaggerated” (Le Bon 1930, 22). Le Bon also argues that: “A commencement of antipathy or disapprobation, which in the case of an isolated individual would not gain strength, becomes at once furious hatred in the case of an individual in a crowd” (ibid). Le Bon demonstrates that the emotion of the crowd is very direct and immediate. On the micro-blog, the aggressive speech and symbols are the most direct and immediate means to attack others. This aggressive speech and these symbols are simple and colloquial, and express the netizens’ feelings directly. In the meantime, the malicious rumors and the revealing of other’s private information not only affect the individual but also have a negative impact on the whole society, which makes the ordinary public live in fear.

V. The morality of the crowd in the micro-blog
Even though the crowd exposes some weakness of itself sometimes, it still often advocates morality (Le Bon 1930). As Le Bon said: “The morality of crowds may be much lower or much higher than that of the individuals composing them” (Le Bon 1930, 14). Furthermore,

“Doubtless a crowd is often criminal, but also it is often heroic. It is crowds rather than
isolated individuals that may be induced to run the risk of death to secure the triumph of a creed or an idea, that may be fired with enthusiasm for glory and honour…” (ibid).

In daily life, there is a common phenomenon in society: even though the majority of people regard abuse as immoral, using insulting or violent language to attack immoral people is still reasonable. In the micro-blog world, it seems that the netizens also follow such a law. Generally speaking, the netizens do not begin speech violence online without reason. Only when the netizens are dissatisfied with social justice will the majority of people attack some individuals. However, it is obvious that the attacking behavior is in the name of morality. “Maybe due to the limitation of the reality, it is difficult for ordinary people in real life to be heroic. Hence, the netizens tend to achieve their heroism in the network” (Chen 2009, 69). Unfortunately, due to the anonymity of the micro-blog, it is difficult for the netizens to regulate their emotions so they will attack others online unconsciously and radically.

The sense of justice and heroism is a noble quality of human beings. However, in the network world, which lacks obligations and regulations, these outstanding qualities will be changed by irrationality. Consequently, the release of heroism gradually becomes networked symbolic violence, and even “during a violent debate online, the truth of the event will be covered and transferred” (Chen 2009, 70).

6.2 The effect of networked symbolic violence

As seen in the majority of networked symbolic violence cases, networked symbolic violence is a reflection of the radical emotion of some social hot spot events, especially some unfair issues in the society. During the development of networked symbolic violence, the violent speech not only hurts some victims emotionally and physically but also disturbs the Internet environment. The effects of networked symbolic violence deserve our serious consideration.
6.2.1 The effects of networked symbolic violence on individuals

Networked symbolic violence has a large, negative influence on the individual (Li 2010; Zhao 2009; Tu 2010; Shariff 2008; Li et al. 2012). Under the attack of violent speech online, the individuals in the event are always vilified. In a networked symbolic violence event, because of the anonymity on the micro-blog, some netizens use aggressive, insulting and seditious language to attack others, and some netizens spread malicious rumors and reveal others’ privacy to infringe on the victims’ reputation. Furthermore, the victims’ relatives and friends are also easily affected by networked symbolic violence (Li 2010). To make the problem more serious, under the incitement of the crowd on the micro-blog, networked symbolic violence is even extended to people’s real life (Zhao 2009). Therefore, the effects of networked symbolic violence perhaps are not only on the individual, but also the group of people that are relevant to the victim.

6.2.2 The effects of networked symbolic violence on Chinese society

First, networked symbolic violence, especially malicious rumors, may cause social unrest and make the ordinary public panic (Zhao 2009). A great number of typical examples demonstrate this point, such as rumors of the earthquake in China, rumors of nuclear radiation in Japan.

Second, networked symbolic violence also has a negative influence on social morality (Zhao 2009). For some netizens, the reason why they use violent speeches online is because they want to criticize the unfair phenomena in society. The starting point of maintaining justice from the point of view of the netizens is with good intention; however, in the process of the criticism, the netizens become gradually out of control. They use insulting language, reveal others’ privacy and even spread malicious rumors wantonly, which deviates from basic social morality. In consequence, networked symbolic violence may let all of the people online believe that the only way to stop injustice is by the more serious violence, and this can become a vicious circle on the Internet.

Finally, it is also possible for networked symbolic violence to affect the Chinese culture,
especially the Chinese linguistic culture (Li 2010). Networked symbolic violence contains a great number of dirty, aggressive, pornographic, and even “bloody words” and symbols. Violent speech will be used by people more and more frequently because of the quickness and breadth of networked symbolic violence on the micro-blog, which will create a bad language environment.

6.3 Tentative measures to regulate networked symbolic violence on the Chinese micro-blog Weibo

Some western countries have already established laws and regulations in order to prevent network crime, such as the USA, Australia, and Germany. In China, many Chinese scholars have also provided some suggestions to prevent networked symbolic violence in Chinese society. These suggestions from western countries and China offer some options to establish a set of measures to prevent networked symbolic violence in China. In the author’s opinion, the best way to decrease and even eliminate the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence is to remove those unreasonable stuff from the social institution and try to make the current institution more transparency. Next, according to the contemporary national condition in China, some tentative measures will be proposed from the perspectives of Chinese information policy, Chinese Internet laws, and the regulations and network ethics of Chinese netizens.

6.3.1 Improving information transparency and strengthening public opinion guidance

Information transparency is important for preventing networked symbolic violence in China. Most of the government information is not open to the public. Additionally, compared to some western countries, China has strict media censorship, not only of traditional media but also digital media. Therefore, the ordinary Chinese people lack the channels to know the fact and truth. Once the public finds some unfair things in the society, they will abreact their radical sentiment on the micro-blog, which a media platform that is more available compared to other media for ordinary people. Australia is a good example of the implementation of information transparency policy. In order to ensure the public’s right to know, the majority of non-classified archives in the
government are available to the public. The main departments of Australia all have information officers that publish the government information and make statements for those controversial events in society (Chen 2012).

Second, strengthening public opinion guidance is important as well. A crowd is very easily affected (Le Bon 1930) and will become excited even if there is just a little suggestion and information. In people’s real life, some netizens are very easily used by the leader of the crowd and for this reason correct media guidance is necessary. The traditional media, such as newspapers and television, make an in-depth report and analysis in the beginning phase of the event or even before the occurrence of the event, which is a helpful measure to resolve the misunderstanding of the public.

With the development of social network media, in particular the micro-blog, the features of anonymity, openness, and interaction allow all people to have a chance to be a journalist on the network. However, the traditional media are very different from the network media. The traditional media prefer reliable news sources, deep investigation, and rational analysis from different points of view. Hence, compared to the network media, the traditional media are more stable (Chen 2009). The traditional media should focus on and follow up on hot spot social issues, especially controversial events. At the same time, the traditional media guide public opinion through rational reports before the event becomes out of control, which will be very helpful in avoiding the advent and spread of networked symbolic violence.

6.3.2 Self-discipline of netizens

Furthermore, improving the awareness of the netizens’ self-discipline is also very important. Especially in the complicated network environment, the netizens should learn how to make a rational analysis before they publish their speech online anonymously. The netizens should make sure of the objectivity and authenticity of their speech, and not believe or spread uncertain information and not invade others’ privacy. In front of controversial events, the netizens should
keep calm and try not to jump to conclusions, such as who is right and who is wrong, who is just and who is evil. The netizens should learn how to publish moderate speech online as well as think about the other’s side (Lin, 2010). Furthermore, when the netizens are attacked by others’ violent speech online, the netizens should know how to use the legal means to solve the problem rather than using violent means. The self-discipline of the young people is especially important. Schools should set up some courses about how to control inappropriate behavior online to help the young students establish correct Internet morality.
7 Conclusion

China has already entered the “Micro-blog Era” (Xinhua.com). With the development and popularization of the micro-blog in China, an increasing number of Chinese netizens want to join in the discussion online and express their thoughts via networks. However, in front of some unfair social phenomena and controversial events, some netizens attempt to let off steam on the micro-blog, and the netizens gradually become irrational, violent, and aggressive. The radical emotion of netizens easily becomes networked symbolic violence.

Other researchers (Zhao 2009; Huang 2010; Jin 2009; Zhou 2010; Tian et al. 2012; Lei 2010; Li 2010) have studied networked symbolic violence on the Internet in China. The present thesis, however, sought to expand our understanding of this phenomenon by focusing on the fast-developing micro-blog community in contemporary China. This thesis addressed two research questions: (1) what are the main features of networked symbolic violence on the Chinese micro-blog Weibo? And (2) What are the main aspects of networked symbolic violence? In order to answer the research questions, a review of the relevant literature was offered and two case studies were conducted in this study.

To begin with, by using the quantitative content analysis, the main features of networked symbolic violence were summarized: (1) networked symbolic violence on the micro-blog, as discussed above, has four phases: the beginning phase, the rising phase, the explosive phase, and the dying-down phase; (2) networked symbolic violence on the Chinese micro-blog Weibo mainly contains aggressive speech, aggressive symbols, malicious rumors, and revealing privacy. In addition, aggressive speech and symbols take up a big part of the networked symbolic violence, and an understanding of the main features of networked symbolic violence will be useful to prevent and control it.

Second, through summarizing previous studies, and analyzing two cases in China, the main aspects of networked symbolic violence was offered. In this study, networked symbolic violence was seen as a kind of structural violence and symbolic violence in the Chinese society. Networked
symbolic violence not only contains aggressive, insulting language, but also aggressive symbols which contain metaphorical expressions of insult in attacking others online. Additionally, on the surface, even though the Internet Man Hunt and rumors do not have violent attributes, these two network behaviors still have a strong, negative influence on individuals. Hence, the Internet Man Hunt and rumors belong to networked symbolic violence as well. Still, the influence of networked symbolic violence even extends to real life, which will not only hurt the victim emotionally, but sometimes also the individual’s physical wellbeing. Furthermore, the feature of network environment and the psychology of netizens crowd play a big role in the developing process of networked symbolic violence event.

Third, in the discussion section of the present study, the result of this study was interpreted by the theory of structural violence, symbolic violence and law of the mental unity of crowds. And then, the effect of networked symbolic violence in the contemporary Chinese society was discussed. What is more, two tentative suggestions in terms of Chinese information policy, Chinese Internet laws and regulations, and the network ethics of Chinese netizens for regulating networked symbolic violence were also offered. They are: (1) improving information transparency and strengthening the guidance of public opinion, (2) the self-discipline of netizens. These tentative measures may play a positive role in preventing and controlling networked symbolic violence.

The biggest novel point of this study, as well as its difference from other studies, is that the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence is not researched and analyzed as an isolated phenomenon but place in the context of the contemporary social background of China. This study provides a definition of networked symbolic violence. Compared with previous studies, this study regards structural violence in China, which is caused by the social structure and social institutions there, as one of the main reasons for networked symbolic violence in contemporary Chinese society. Another novel point is that this study takes the Chinese micro-blog Weibo as the main research object. In the micro-blog sphere, various factors, such as the feature of anonymity online, the diffusion of responsibility online, and the incitement of the leaders of a crowd, stimulate netizens so that they sometimes become radical, violent, or out of control. From the author’s viewpoint, with the development of information technology, media violence presents the various
features and the micro-blog has already been one of the important platforms for media violence. Furthermore, from the trend graph, the degree of netizens’ violent speech presents the apparent tendency of a normal distribution from the beginning phase to the dying-down phase, which may be helpful with the research on networked symbolic violence in the micro-blog sphere in the future.

In conclusion, the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence is quite a big topic, which not only occurs on the micro-blog but also other Internet media. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct further research on networked symbolic violence. In particular, it is valuable and necessary to continue discussing preventive measures for networked symbolic violence. In contemporary Chinese micro-blog sphere, the real name policy has already been implemented by the most of micro-blog service providers. However, whether the real name policy could stop networked symbolic violence in Chinese context is still a question. For China which is establishing the harmonious society, the phenomenon of networked symbolic violence should be paid a great attention.
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