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Final Paper

“Bro Bro China Flies at Wills”: Can Political Idolization Mobilize and Radicalize Online Political Discussion?

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“Bro Bro China Flies at Wills”: Can Political Idolization Mobilize and Radicalize Online Political Discussion?

Abstract

This paper theorizes a process of idolizing political entities as Political Idolization and explores the influence of using idolizing expression on online mobilization and sentiment intensification during political discourses. We collected around 40,000 tweets in Weibo and Facebook and investigated the cross-platform Expedition jointly launched by the Fandom Girls, the Idolization party, and the Diba, the conventional party. After applying dictionaries, regressions, supervised machine learning and sentiment analysis, we found that a) Fandom Girls adopted more idolized expressions while the Diba adopted more hegemonic expressions; b) neither of the two expressions exhibits systematic impact on mobilization with the idolizing expressions having weaker influence; and c) positive comments tended to receive positive but less replies. With expectation of more relevant study in future, we also provide recommendations highlighting possible directions and models when there are data of quality. This paper hopes to contribute to the literature of fandom politics and social protest, highlighted the potential of political idolization.

“Bro Bro China has been on stage for 5,000 years with 1.4 billion active fans. Bro Bro China flies at will, *i-zhong* (us, exclusive fans) will always follow you!”¹

A Prevalent Slogan in Fandom Girls’ Expedition to Facebook

Introduction

It is said that we are living in a world “amusing ourselves to death”, where the once “serious matters” can turn into entertaining carnivals (Postman, 1985). As a trend involving political science, communication, and sociology, fandom politics starts to draw scholars’ attention, Dean (2017) highlights the integration between fandom and politics as well as the capability for fan communities to politically intervene in broader affairs beyond fandom and produce political outcomes. For instance, ongoing political affairs can be affiliated with football clubs (Whigham et al., 2020). International contests or animated television programs are found to strengthen national myths or positive attitude to nationalistic mobilization (Steinberg, 2017; Ismangil, 2018). Meanwhile, nationalistic sentiments may be playfully mitigated by the diverse and cosmopolitan stage of EuroVision (Kyriakidou, 2018). Compared to these settings, online communities are a better intermediary for an empirical study on fandom politics due to the

blurred boundary between reality and imagination in internet activities and the availability of online big data for systematic analysis.

Based on the above scholarly observations, we are motivated to theorize a rising phenomenon called *Political Idolization*: the process turning any political entity into idol, whether a figure or a country, by adding idolizing elements to the entity. The concept *Political Idolization* draws an analogy with *Politicized Fandom* proposed by Dean (2017), in which the former emphasizes the idolization process in inherently political matters, while the latter focuses on how fandom groups are politicized. This will empirically explore whether *Political Idolization* can mobilize and radicalize a prominent online protest.

While the dramatic actions of Donald Trump sweep across Western social networks, media start to notice an idolizing process about him (The New York Times, 2017; The Washington Post, 2017; The Rolling Stone, 2019). Over the Great Firewall, on Bilibili (China-equivalent YouTube), Chinese “Trump fans” playfully call him “Trump Babe” (川寶) and decorate his chanting music video “Keep America Great” with fanatic slogans and memes in pink. In Bilibili, the video is viewed 4.0 million times, as compared to the 0.95 million for the official version on YouTube (Camille & Haley, 2020). Young netizens created an online carnival by nicknaming him “Chuan Jianguo” (川建國, literally means constructing China), an imaginary Chinese spy secretly messing the United States up (The New York Times, 2020; Global Times, 2020). Some valiant tales of Trump have received over 100,000 heart-warming comments as if from fans to a hero, such as “Your real identity is unknown to anyone, yet your contribution will last forever” (你的真名無人知曉, 你的功績永世長存) (Chaoyinsujun, 2019). Apart from Trump, politicians such as Lee Keqiang, Xi Jinping, Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders, and Jiang Zemin are found to be somewhat idolized (Qiu, 2015; Chang & Ren, 2017; Dean, 2017; Dyck, 2018; Fang, 2018). Nevertheless, the idolization of political figures is just one dimension of Political Idolization.

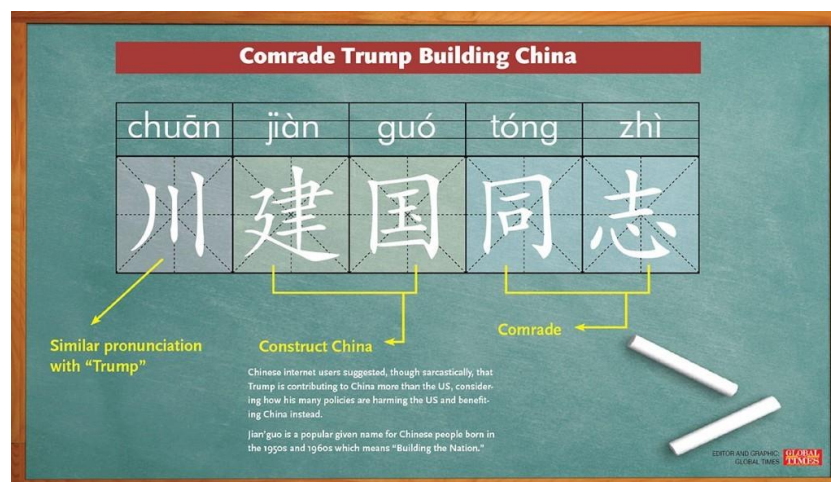


Figure 1. Full Explanation of Mr. Trump's nickname Chuan Jianguo (Global Times, 2020)



Figure 2. The fandom-style support for Mr. Trump by young netizens (Bilibili posts, 2020)

Apart from idolizing political figures, there is a broader political idolization personifying a country into an idol, who needs to be supported in the international arena. The Little Pink is one key contributor. It is a group of fanatic defenders of China adopting playful elements when they participate in the crusade-similar online protest called expedition (The Economist, 2016; Fang & Repnikova, 2017; Liu, 2019). In particular, the Fandom Girls (*fan quan nv hai* 飯圈女孩, literally means rice circle girls) idolizes China as a lovely idol “Bro Bro China” (*a zhong ge ge* 阿中哥哥) and creates fanatic slogans as stated in the prologue during their joint expedition with the Diba (*di ba* 帝吧) to Facebook in 2019. It aims to defend China’s national dignity against the “Hong Kong separatists” or “Western slanders” with the Diba. Despite the rising significance of political idolization, there lacks empirical research grounded on big data from social networks.

Compared with idolizing a political figure, idolizing a country may stimulate nationalistic sentiments, indicating significant trends such as playful patriotism and fandom nationalism (Kyriakidou et al., 2018; Chen, 2019; Wang, 2019). Therefore, as an exploratory study of political idolization, this paper investigates how the Little Pink, particularly the Fandom Girls, uses idolized expressions to mobilize Chinese netizens and how these expressions affect cross-platform political discussion in both Weibo in Chinese Mainland and Facebook in Hong Kong.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

The literature review is organized along three aspects, namely the Fandom Girls as a main vector in idolizing China, the mobilization ability of idolizing expressions, and their effects on sentiment radicalization of political discourse. Four hypotheses are derived in this section.

I. The Fandom Girls: The Real Little Pink Idolizing China

The online protest has been considered a threat to the repression of authoritarian regimes (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002; Breuer & Groshek, 2014; Lorentzen, 2014; Reuter & Szakonyi,

2015). Nevertheless, recent incidents in Chinese Mainland indicate the opposite, where the presumably liberal young netizens turn out to defend the state spontaneously. The Little Pink is one such vector, which originally refers to ignorant yet nationalistic fangirls a pink-decorated online literature forum (Fang & Repnikova, 2017). It is revealed that the 296,000 members of the Little Pink, identified by new followers of the state media, are 57.9% females (Zhu et al., 2016). As the vanguard of cross-platform expedition straddling Mainland and global social networks, such as the 2016 expedition to Facebook in Taiwan (The Economist, 2016; Yang & Chen, 2017), the Diba is considered as the major representative of Little Pink to defend China in the international arena (Liu, 2019; Wang, 2019). However, the Diba, evolved from a community ironically mocking a football player as “Emperor” (*di* 帝), is inherently masculine.

More recently, a more feminine vector self-named as the Fandom Girls came under the spotlight. They actively defend China in online expeditions to global social networks with tens of thousands of members (Bloomberg, 2019). Borrowing from the fandom communities in the entertainment industry, its distinctive personification of political entities with anime, comics, games, and novels (ACGN) elements characterize their expedition, compared to the masculine and hegemonic discourse by the Diba. Thus, the Fandom Girls is actually the real Little Pink in terms of both original meaning, gender composition and its playful defense to China. The paper will identify it as the main actor in political idolization.

So far, there is yet a decent study outlining the differences between the Fandom Girls and the Diba, nor research focusing on the former. For the Diba, qualitative case studies indicate that it argues for the superiority of China in a hegemonic tone with paternalistic, condescending and scoffing elements (Guo & Yang, 2016; Wang, 2016; Wang, 2019). Examples of hegemonic expressions include arguing for China’s contemporary superiority [condescending], calling Taiwan as the “disobedient daughter” of China to emphasize the former’s absolute control over the latter [paternalistic], and dismissing the “enemy” as “spicy chicken” (*la ji* 辣雞, a homophone of rubbish) [scoffing]. By contrast, the Fandom Girls produced a lovely and personified nickname turning China as their idol Bro Bro China and created fanatic slogans cheer-leading for him. For instance, “Bro Bro China files at wills, *i-zhong* (us, exclusive fans of China) will always follow” (阿中哥哥勇敢飛, 中唯永相隨), “guarding the world’s best Bro Bro China” (守護全世界最好的阿中哥哥), and “calling (supporting) Bro Bro China” (為阿中哥哥打 Call). As such, the Fandom Girls tends to idolize China in nationalistic online expeditions, exemplifying our exploration in political idolization.



Figure 3. Typical expressions used in the 2019 Fandom Girls' Expedition (Weibo tweets, 2019)

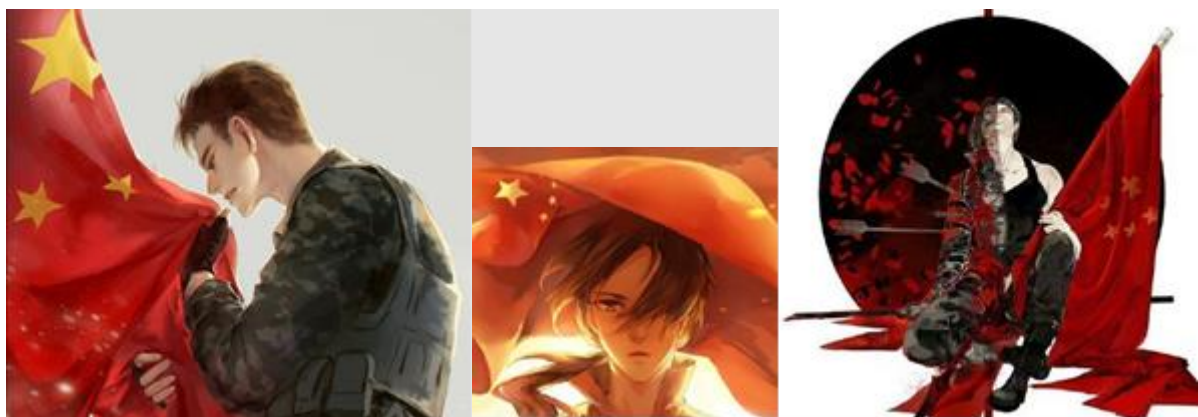


Figure 4. China depicted as a delicate idol to be defended in the 2019 Fandom Girls' Expedition (Bloomberg, 2019; Weibo tweets, 2019)

To test the above observation and to uncover the preference of expression used in political idolization, it is necessary to make a descriptive inference about how the Fandom Girls differs from the Diba in terms of expressions characterizing the phenomenon in both internal mobilization (on Weibo, China-equivalent Twitter) and external expedition (on Facebook). The

results found here may help us gather terms and expressions that the two vectors adopted and facilitate the next step of our research. Given that the Fandom Girls and the Diba both retweeted some tweets on Weibo, we can control the characteristics of the original tweets. Thus, our first descriptive hypothesis in the paper is stated as below.

Hypothesis One (H1). *On Weibo, the public accounts related to the Fandom Girls adopt more idolized expressions while the Diba adopts more hegemonic expressions.*

II. Political Idolization: Influence on Mobilizing Political Discussion

In the first part, we identified the Fandom Girls as the main vector of political idolization and briefly discussed how it idolizes China. Turning to a more analytical perspective, our point of interest is the influence of idolized expressions on mobilizing political discussion.

Literatures have discussed how social networks mobilize online social protest. Early in 2009, blog use is an equally important predictor as traditional sources for political involvement online (Zuniga, 2009). Social media facilitates intergroup collaboration beyond geographical constraints for a large and coordinated “cycle of protest” (Breuer et al., 2015). Likewise, Lee and Ting (2015) proposed “media and information praxis of social movements” and investigate the phenomenon of mediatization, where young activists utilize media skills to launch, organize, and mobilize collective actions. This motivates our exploration of the mobilizing mechanism among Mainland young netizens on Weibo, as a mirroring online political protest against the latest wave of social movement in Hong Kong.

More specifically, the 2016 expedition to Facebook by the Diba can be considered as a collective emotional game, where participants sharing the common identity as “allies” jointly conquer a given place of the “emeriers” (Wang, 2019). With expressions only known to a distinctive group, participants can create a collective identity and produce a sense of social connection (Gal et al., 2016; Fang, 2018). Thus, expressions related to fandom and ACGN may have the potential to mobilize members of perceived communities. With macro evidence, youngsters’ immersion in ACGN industries is found to strengthened national identity and nationalistic sentiments in playful and idolized manners (Liu, 2019).

Therefore, the idolizing expressions in the 2019 expedition by Fandom Girls, which adds to the playfulness of the collective carnival, may contribute to the mobilization of online political protest. Such effect may be observed in both the mobilizing process and the result of mobilization (i.e., expedition). Therefore, the second and the third hypotheses are stated below.

Hypothesis Two (H2). *On Weibo, idolizing expressions can mobilize political discussion by attracting more attention from netizens compared to hegemonic expressions and plain text with no idolizing or hegemonic elements.*

Hypothesis Three (H3). *On Facebook, the participants responded to the mobilization of the Idolization Camp by applying idolized expressions when joining the expedition and thus, contributed to political idolization.*

III. Political Idolization: Influence on Radicalizing Political Discussion

Scholars have explored whether playful elements will stimulate or mitigate the radicalness in political discussion. Kyriakidou (2018) suggests that the playful and cosmopolitan atmosphere in an international singing contest can temporarily mitigate extreme nationalistic sentiments. By contrast, the nationalistic sentiment is observed to be stimulated in video game competitions (Ismangil, 2018). Some warn of the danger of backfire of inappropriate jokes (Kramer, 2011) and sudden intrusion of playfulness in a serious discussion (Edgerly et al., 2016). It is also found that intrusion of antagonistic views or alien language can stimulate political hostility (Bail et al., 2018; Lee & Liang, 2020). Overall, the effects vary across several qualitative case studies. With large data collected for social networks, this research empirically contributes to the debate.

For Chinese nationalistic online expeditions, there are unsubstantiated claims that the heavy use of memes and parody by the Diba is believed to deliver political messages less seriously, and reduce extreme sentiments arisen in a fierce political discussion (Guo & Yang, 2016; Wang, Li & Wu 2016; Mao & Cai, 2017). Furthermore, the feministic and playful expressions from the Fandom Girls earned credits in easing confrontations in highly sensitive political debates by state media (The People's Daily, 2019; The Observer, 2019). Nevertheless, fanatic words and memes may be considered intrusive and offensive for Hong Kong netizens with different political identities and socio-cultural backgrounds. Similar to the negative emotions stimulated by the Diba's Expedition in 2016 (Guo & Yang, 2016), it is revealed that Hong Kong netizens were antagonized by the Fandom Girls and planned revenge (Chen, 2019).

Therefore, it is worth our empirical investigation to explore whether the political idolization, indicated by the usage of idolizing expressions, can really mitigate the radical sentiments in online political discussion, or will reversely antagonize the audience, many of whom may be unfamiliar with or even hostile to the idolizing discourses from Mainland. As such, the third and fourth analytical hypotheses, given different reference groups, are specified as below.

Hypothesis Four (H4). *On Facebook, the idolizing expressions are more likely to reduce the radical sentiments in online political discussion than the hegemonic ones.*

Data

Based on the hypotheses stated above, pre-expedition data on Weibo (mobilization stage) and expedition data on Facebook (implementation stage) are needed. From our extensive search and close observation, there were two joint-expeditions to Facebook organized by the Diba and the Fandom representatives on 17th August 2019 (the First Expedition) and 30th September 2019 (the Second Expedition). The former focused on supporting the Hong Kong Police Force and pro-government politicians, while the latter aimed at flooding the accounts of international media outlets and pro-West Hong Kong politicians with the voices from Chinese Mainland.

I. Weibo Data (Mobilization Stage)

We identified four groups as the main mobilizing parties in Weibo: The Diba (帝吧), the Fangirls (飯圈女孩), the Bro Bro China Chanting Site (Azhong) (阿中哥哥應援站) and the China Support Group (ChinaSup) (China後援團). Each of the groups has an official account for making major announcements and several functional accounts, e.g., meme production, rumor dispelling, etc. To ensure comprehensiveness of our database for model training and enrich our understanding of the four groups, we applied Weibo-crawler from Github to download all the public tweets and their related information from fourteen accounts (see Appendix) in the period between 1st June 2019 and 31st December 2019, which covers the peak period of the Hong Kong Anti-Elab Movement. A total of 24,277 tweets were collected.

II. Facebook Data (Implementation Stage)

From those scrapped tweets, we manually extracted tweets mentioning the two joint-expeditions and located the “battlefields” in Facebook. Due to the internet policy in China, several Weibo accounts were forced to shut down and were re-created after September 2019. In this case, only the Facebook targets of the second expedition (30th September) can be retrieved based on Weibo tweets. There were seven Facebook fan pages identified to be the targets (see Appendix). The expedition time was set from the publishing time of expedition announcement in Weibo (30th September 2019, 10:40 a.m.) to 24 hours after the official start of the expedition (1st October 2019, 21:15 p.m.), which is the active hours of leaving comments in line with the expedition plan (Wang, 2019). Having specified the targets and the time of the expedition, we scraped the posts and the two levels comments from the mentioned seven public fan pages using the standard Facebook API. A total of 16,769 comments were collected and 2,903 among them were classified as initial Expedition data.

Methodology

To find appropriate methods for this research, we draw references from studies on social movements, social networks, online activism and political discourses. In this study, dictionary approach, supervised modeling and sentimental analysis are the key methods used.

I. Dictionary Method

Despite the claimed prevalence of idolizing and hegemonic elements in the expeditions (Guo & Yang, 2016; Wang, 2016; Yan, 2016a; Wang, 2019; Bloomberg, 2019), previous studies have yet provided systematic definitions of them. It is necessary to establish structured dictionaries. Dictionary uses the frequencies of keywords in a document as a measurement (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013) and is used for initial classification in this research. The four mobilizing groups identified earlier contain both hegemonic and idolizing expressions, though to different extents.

After segmenting the tweets from the four groups using Pkuseg (Luo, et al., 2019), a Chinese segmentation package with the highest F-1 score among similar code providers, we first extracted the top 100 frequently used phrases and unique phrases from frequency tables and the tf-idf documents respectively, following the basic text mining procedure. Next, we extracted more phrases from a report about fanatic expressions from Weibo data (Weibo Advertising, 2019) and our observation. Then, three authors independently labeled the extracted phrases, and only commonly agreed terms are included in the dictionaries. This produces 126 terms in the Idolization Dictionary and 104 terms in the Hegemony Dictionary, where the former contains idolizing expressions (fandom, ACGN, or personified), while the latter contains hegemonic expressions (condescending, paternalistic, or scoffing). Examples in the two dictionaries are shown in Table 1 and Table 2. For complete dictionary, please see the details in the Appendix.

For each tweet, each term in Hegemony Dictionary or Idolization Dictionary will add one to its *Hegemony Count* or *Idolization Count*. To account for the intensity of these terms in a tweet, we normalized the counts by the tweet's length and respectively turned them into *Idolization Score* and *Hegemony Score*. These two are measurements for the sentimental radicalness in a tweet. While their difference indicates the tendency in using political discourse, their sum (Sum Score) denotes the overall sentimental radicalness in political discussion since the two expressions are both nationalistic.

Table 1: Examples from the Idolization Dictionary and the Hegemony Dictionary

Idolization Dictionary			Hegemony Dictionary		
Fandom	ACGN	Personified	Condecending	Paternalistic	Scoffing
世最美	鹰酱	哥哥	天朝	爷	早白
应援	毛熊	我兔	朝贡	爸爸	黄尸
唯粉	星辰大海	本命	久跪	儿子	废青
打call	大国梦	爱豆	井底之蛙	女儿	丑态

II. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) and Fixed Group Effect Regression

Regression is a straightforward method to investigate the impact of using idolizing and hegemonic terms in mobilizing online protests. OLS with robust standard error is the baseline model controlling the heteroscedasticity. Besides, since the Weibo tweets of the Idolization Camp are collected from different account groups (i.e., the Azhong, the ChinaSup and the Fangirls), we also used fixed group effect regression to balance the results.

On Weibo, likes, comments and retweets are common ways for viewers to interact with the original tweets and spread their thoughts. These three metrics reflect the popularity and the intensity of the discussion that a tweet mobilizes in the context of political protest. Therefore, the *Like Count*, *Comment Count* and *Retweet Count*, as proxies for the mobilization ability of tweets, are three dependent variables in the regression models specified below:

Equation 1:

$$\text{Like Count} = \beta_1 \text{Idolization Count} + \beta_2 \text{Hegemony Count} + \beta_3 \text{Idolization Count} \times \text{Hegemony Count} + \beta_4 \text{Control Variables} + \text{Group Fixed Effect} + \epsilon$$

Equation 2:

$$\text{Retweet Count} = \beta_1 \text{Idolization Count} + \beta_2 \text{Hegemony Count} + \beta_3 \text{Idolization Count} \times \text{Hegemony Count} + \beta_4 \text{Control Variables} + \text{Group Fixed Effect} + \epsilon$$

Equation 3:

$$\text{Comment Count} = \beta_1 \text{Idolization Count} + \beta_2 \text{Hegemony Count} + \beta_3 \text{Idolization Count} \times \text{Hegemony Count} + \beta_4 \text{Control Variables} + \text{Group Fixed Effect} + \epsilon$$

The independent variables of interest are the *Idolization Count* (β_1), *Hegemony Count* (β_2) and their interaction term (β_3). Given that the Idolized Camp and Hegemony Camp have already successfully organized massive expeditions with idolized and hegemonic expressions, we predict that β_1 and (β_2) will both yield positive results, signifying a positive correlation between these expressions and their mobilization abilities. Besides, according to our close reading and initial dictionary results (see results), the two camps may both use the hegemonic

and the idolized expressions. In this case, we add β_3 to examine if there are dependent relationship between the two expression categories.

The length of the tweets and the number of likes, comments and retweets (whichever two pairs not as dependent variable in the model) may also influence the outcome variables. Therefore, they are grouped as the control variables.

III. Supervised Machine Learning

As for supervised machine learning (SML), it reduces the risk of a problematic dictionary as it allows validation test to evaluate the model performance (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013). The result of supervised model often outperforms that of dictionary-based lexicon approach in detecting sentiment (Ortigosa et al., 2014). Employing supervised learning in this research complements the dictionary approach and helps to classify the tweets on Weibo or comments on Facebook into two categories, namely hegemony and idolization.

SML usually starts by manually labeling the training data and using it to predict the categories of the remaining data (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013). Since the Weibo data are from four mobilizing groups, the tweets for model building already contain group labels when scrapping. Thus, it is not necessary to do manually labeling.

We use ‘pkuseg’ package to segment the text and transform them into tf-idf representation. Then ‘XGBoost’ classifier is adopted for prediction. Since the prediction result is satisfactory, we consider our model well-trained. The results are discussed in the next section.

IV. Sentiment Analysis and OLS Regression

To quantify the sentiment of the Expedition comments and their reply threads, we employed the Baidu Senta library. This python library supports sentence-level sentiment classification and is the most comprehensive Chinese sentiment analysis to our knowledge. The results returned the probability of positive sentiments of 16,769 Facebook comments. By using the origin prediction results from SML, we perform t-tests to compare the positive sentiment probability of the initial comments and their reply threads, and also compare the differences in the number of reply threads and likes. Besides, we employed an OLS regression testing using the positive probability of the reply threads, like count and comment count to test our hypothesis of intensification of sentiment during the Expedition in Facebook. The following are the three regression model equations:

Equation 4:

$$\text{Reply Positive Probability} = \alpha \text{ Comment Positive Probability} + \beta$$

Equation 5:

$$\text{Like Count} = \alpha \text{ Comment Positive Probability} + \beta$$

Equation 6:

$$\text{Reply Count} = \alpha \text{ Comment Positive Probability} + \beta$$

Results

To facilitate our analysis, we classify the four Weibo mobilizing parties into Idolization Camp and Hegemony Camp. Figure 5 reports the mean scores for each mobilizing party. The Diba (n=13,362) is the only party in the Hegemony Camp, defined by the higher *Hegemony Score* than *Idolization Score*. It is surprising that the Diba, considered as the typical Chinese nationalists, turned out to be less radical than the rising fandom nationalists, indicated by the lowest Sum Score among the four. Whereas, the Azhong (n=4514), the ChinaSup (n=3797) and the Fangirls (n=2604) all receive a higher *Idolization Score* than *Hegemony Score*. This classifies them into the Idolization Camp (n=10915) and main contributors to political idolization. Among the three, the Azhong is the most radical one that uses both idolized and hegemonic expressions intensively.

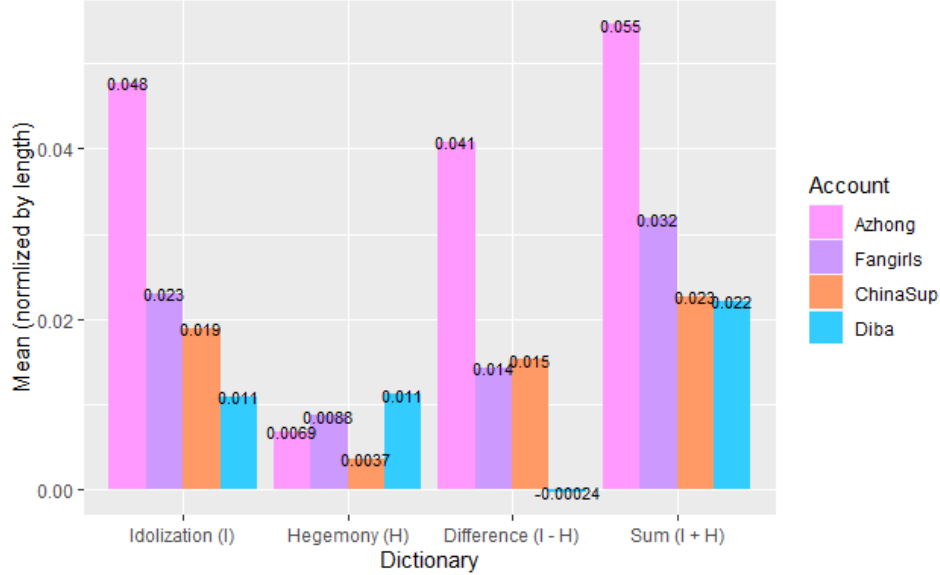


Figure 5. Mean of grouped dictionary score of four parties

I. The preference of expressions for the Idolization Camp and the Hegemony Camp

In *H1*, we hypothesized that the Idolization Camp adopts more idolized elements than the Hegemony Camp. The following results prove our prediction.

Figure 6 visualizes how likely the tweets contain both idolizing and hegemonic terms in each party, where a tweet goes more idolized to the right and more hegemonic to the top. For the three parties classified as the Idolization Camp (in red), their points tend to lean towards the right than those of the Diba (in blue). The red points whose *Hegemony Score* equals 0 and *Idolization Score* is higher than 0.2 also suggest that idolizing parties often write tweets with intensive idolizing terms but without hegemonic ones. Overall, the Azhong, the ChinaSup and the Fangirls belong to the Idolization Camp, while the Diba is the only actor in the Hegemony Camp.

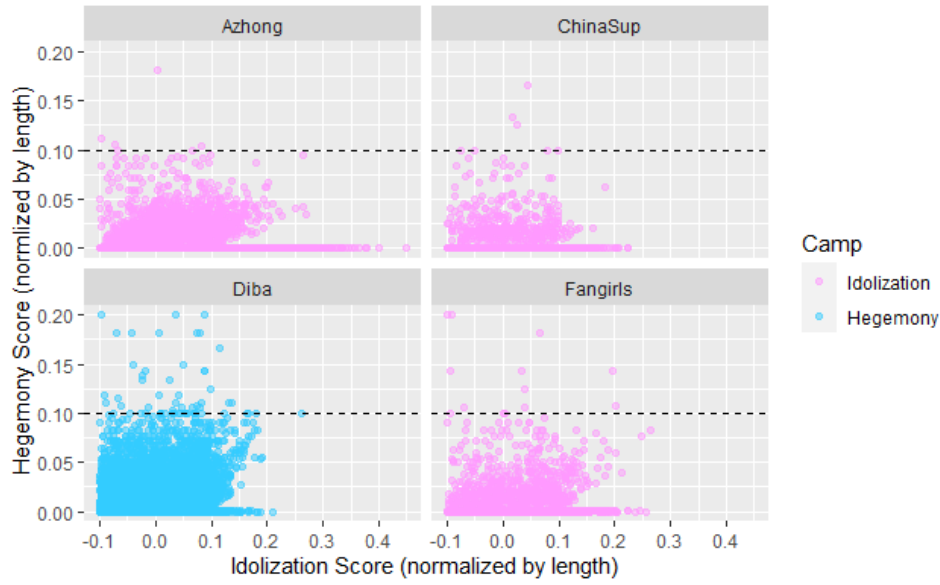


Figure 6. The distribution of *Idolization Score* vs *Hegemony Score* in four accounts

Besides, we extracted tweets from the parties apart from the four accounts (Third Party) that both two camps have retweeted, and calculated the dictionary scores for both original tweets and the retweets. Using the original tweets as a control and measure the change of idolized and hegemonic expressions after retweeting, we can tell if the Idolization Camp tends to add more idolized expressions than the Hegemony Camp and the Third Party. For a total of 7,233 retweets of the two camps, only 76 unique original tweets were shared by both.

Table 3 reports the results from a pairwise t-test accounting the difference across three groups. Among all comparison groups, it seems that only the difference between the Idolization Camp and the Third Party in *Idolization Score* is statistically significant at 0.01 level. However, both camps may selectively retweet the tweets suiting their preference, and the expressions added in their retweets could be roughly consistent with the original tweets. Meanwhile, many tweets from the Idolization Camp cannot be retrieved from censorship issues and technical problems.

It is hard for the small sample here to yield strong evidence to support the difference under the rigid standard of 0.01.

Table 3: Pairwise t-test of Idolization Score and Hegemony Score for common retweets

Pairwise t-test for Idolization Score			
Group A	Group B	n	P-value
Idolization Camp	Hegemony Camp	76	0.307
Idolization Camp	Third Party	76	0.00333
Hegemony Camp	Third Party	76	0.0531
Pairwise t-test for Hegemony Score			
Group A	Group B	n	P-value
Idolization Camp	Hegemony Camp	76	0.462
Idolization Camp	Third Party	76	0.0646
Hegemony Camp	Third Party	76	0.0263

Considering the small sample size, we extended our sample scope to include all retweets instead of only common retweets. Of the total 7,233 retweets, the Idolization Camp has 3,556 while the Hegemony Camp has 3,677. Table 4 presents the results from pairwise t-test. It provides very strong evidence to prove the difference between either pair of camps, except the insignificant *Hegemony Score* between the Idolization Camp and the Hegemony Camp. For the *Idolization Score*, the Idolization Camp, as hypothesized, are the highest among three and is double of that of the Hegemony Camp. The presence of the Third Party indicates that idolized and hegemonic terms patent of the two camps despite the relatively lower scores at this early stage of political idolization.

Table 4: Pairwise t-test of Idolization Score and Hegemony Score for all retweets

Pairwise t-test for Idolization Score					
Group A	Group B	Mean(A)	Mean(B)	n(A), n(B)	P-value
Idolization Camp	Hegemony Camp	0.02537068	0.01687132	3556, 3677	2.23e-12
Idolization Camp	Third Party	0.02537068	0.005519677	3556, 7233	2.91e-78
Hegemony Camp	Third Party	0.01687132	0.005519677	3677, 7233	1.54e-27
Pairwise t-test for Hegemony Score					
Group A	Group B	Mean (A)	Mean(B)	n(A), n(B)	P-value
Idolization Camp	Hegemony Camp	0.06306188	0.06745032	3556, 3677	4.12e-01
Idolization Camp	Third Party	0.06306188	0.003623391	3556, 7233	8.64e-09
Hegemony Camp	Third Party	0.06745032	0.003623391	3677, 3556	1.28e-11

The above analysis results prove that the Idolization Camp adopts more idolized expressions than the Hegemony Camp and the Third Party. Therefore, *H1* is confirmed.

II. Does idolizing expressions help mobilize political discussion on Weibo than hegemonic and plain expression?

H2 concerns the mobilization ability of the idolized and hegemonic terms. The regression models take *Idolization Count*, *Hegemony Count* and their interaction terms as the main independent variables; and *Like Count*, *Retweet Count* and *Comment Count* as the dependent variables. Given the Idolization Camp data are collected from three parties, fixed effect regression is needed to account for group effect. Therefore, for the Idolization Camp, there is one Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model (Model 2) for drawing reference with the Hegemony Camp and the Third Party and one Panel Linear model (Model 1) for making inference. The Table X is a summary of the three dependent variables, while Figure 7, 8 and 9 are the regression results.

Table 5: Summary statistics of the three dependent variables by three camps

	Idolization Camp	Hegemony Camp	Third Party
Like Count	54	1828.6	44368
Comment Count	7	180.3	3012
Retweet Count	5.4	113.3	8694

In the regression models, if the coefficient of *Idolization Count* yields a positive value with statistical significance, it means using more idolized expression may increase the public attention of the tweet by the value of the coefficient. In addition, if the coefficient of the interaction between *Idolization Count* and *Hegemony Count* yields significant result, a dependent relationship between the expressions is indicated.

There is yet unified evidence to support our hypothesis. In figure 7, one more idolized term within the Fandom Camp is associated with 5 more likes, but 0.2 fewer retweets, and no discernible effect on comments. Apart from that, idolized expressions are uncorrelated with the outcome indicators outside the Idolization Camp, except a marginal significance on retweet in the Hegemonic Camp. One of the reasons is that the *Comment Count* and *Retweet Count* of the Idolization Camp are lacking variance as compared to its *Like Count* and variables of the other two camps (Table 5). The single-digit mean, 7 for *Comment Count* and 5 for *Retweet Count*, may be give a reliable estimation. Therefore, the inconsistent results cannot provide a concrete conclusion of whether idolized expressions mobilize public political discussion. However, our study preliminarily identifies the limited correlation between the idolized expression and public

responses, i.e., positive for likes but negative for comments, conditioning on their presence in an idolization-infused community.

Nevertheless, this model leads to another interesting finding that hegemonic expressions may bring more significant impact than idolized expressions. The coefficients of the *Hegemony Count* in Figure 9 and 10 infer that one more hegemonic expression may bring along 41 more retweets and 18 more comments within the Hegemony Camp. Meanwhile, *Hegemony Count* may also decrease the number of likes in both Hegemony Camp and the Third Party. The magnitude of decrease, which is 320 for the Hegemony camp and 6,074 for the Third Party, is even higher than the likes they could have received, based on the constant values in Figure 8. As such, hegemonic term may be a double-edged sword that stimulates the numbers of comments and retweets but discourages likes. Whether positive or negative, the hegemonic expressions exhibited much stronger and more robust correlation with the outcomes than the idolized expressions.

	Dependent variable:			
	like_count		OLS	
	panel linear			
	Fandom Camp (1)	Fandom Camp (2)	Patriarchy Camp (3)	Third Party (4)
fan_count	5.123*** (1.509)	7.734 (6.788)	-100.947 (160.737)	-2,943.755 (2,821.816)
pat_count	-1.730 (11.740)	1.999 (14.165)	-320.088*** (76.834)	-6,074.743*** (2,219.285)
length	0.002 (0.078)	-0.0001 (0.090)	-3.002*** (0.686)	80.250* (42.521)
comment_count	3.487* (1.819)	3.488*** (1.232)	13.105*** (0.909)	8.459*** (1.744)
retweet_count	6.739*** (2.014)	6.688 (4.342)	1.679** (0.672)	0.064 (0.071)
fan_count:pat_count	-18.972 (14.235)	-18.468 (17.050)	417.463** (198.823)	1,304.208 (1,159.838)
Constant		-8.754 (18.547)	-408.764*** (80.601)	19,288.940*** (4,595.954)
Observations	10,912	10,912	13,362	7,974
R ²	0.170	0.170	0.875	0.620
Adjusted R ²	0.169	0.170	0.875	0.619
Residual Std. Error		677.767 (df = 10905)	2,379.908 (df = 13355)	138,107.500 (df = 7967)
F Statistic	371.272*** (df = 6; 10903)	372.894*** (df = 6; 10905)	15,565.340*** (df = 6; 13355)	2,162.411*** (df = 6; 7967)
Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01				

Figure 7. Regression results of like count (Equation 1)

	Dependent variable:			
	retweet_count			
	panel linear	OLS		
	Fandom Camp (1)	Fandom Camp (2)	Patriarchy Camp (3)	Third Party (4)
fan_count	-0.198** (0.093)	-0.399*** (0.117)	42.127* (25.506)	1,628.091 (2,179.195)
pat_count	-0.582 (1.667)	-1.176 (1.876)	41.460*** (14.478)	-908.533 (1,151.184)
length	0.014** (0.006)	0.013*** (0.005)	0.009 (0.103)	-37.601 (33.353)
like_count	0.007*** (0.003)	0.007*** (0.002)	0.056*** (0.017)	0.085 (0.080)
comment_count	0.362*** (0.066)	0.366*** (0.065)	-0.020 (0.194)	2.204 (1.995)
fan_count:pat_count	1.852*** (0.636)	1.848 (1.250)	-86.335** (37.733)	-482.078 (843.702)
Constant		1.758*** (0.361)	0.860 (10.536)	-406.311 (3,893.500)
Observations	10,912	10,912	13,362	7,974
R ²	0.404	0.406	0.416	0.128
Adjusted R ²	0.404	0.406	0.416	0.127
Residual Std. Error		22.461 (df = 10905)	433.663 (df = 13355)	158,945.200 (df = 7967)
F Statistic	1,233.501*** (df = 6; 10903)	1,241.979*** (df = 6; 10905)	1,585.830*** (df = 6; 13355)	195.048*** (df = 6; 7967)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figure 8. Regression result of retweet count (Equation 2)

	Dependent variable:			
	comment_count			
	panel linear	OLS		
	Fandom Camp (1)	Fandom Camp (2)	Patriarchy Camp (3)	Third Party (4)
fan_count	-0.101 (0.108)	-0.002 (0.146)	-8.112 (6.725)	-57.870 (2,179.195)
pat_count	1.031** (0.457)	0.774 (1.533)	18.472*** (2.545)	19.752 (1,151.184)
length	0.010 (0.007)	0.009 (0.007)	0.346*** (0.049)	-5.537 (33.353)
like_count	0.008** (0.004)	0.008 (0.006)	0.059*** (0.002)	0.068 (0.080)
retweet_count	0.798*** (0.110)	0.801*** (0.230)	-0.003 (0.026)	0.013
fan_count:pat_count	-0.197 (0.180)	-0.150 (0.994)	-5.600 (5.656)	35.158 (843.702)
Constant		1.534* (0.800)	40.701*** (3.216)	36.333 (3,893.500)
Observations	10,912	10,912	13,362	7,974
R ²	0.385	0.388	0.865	0.628
Adjusted R ²	0.384	0.388	0.865	0.628
Residual Std. Error		33.241 (df = 10905)	160.345 (df = 13355)	12,384.050 (df = 7967)
F Statistic	1,135.492*** (df = 6; 10903)	1,151.534*** (df = 6; 10905)	14,317.610*** (df = 6; 13355)	2,243.830*** (df = 6; 7967)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figure 9. Regression result of comment count (Equation 3)

While the results from regressions do not prove our initial hypothesis that idolized expressions has greater mobilization ability, they do not mean that the idolized expressions are completely useless. Recall that the Hegemony Camp and its hegemonic expressions have been developing since 2016 its first and foremost Expedition while the idolized expressions in politics were only introduced in mid-2019. It may take time for the idolized expressions to evolve into a

successful case, like the hegemonic expressions. Besides, the data loss of the Idolization Camp in the period of their popularity peak, the diverted audience of each account groups also affect our estimate. Nevertheless, the 0.8 R-squared value in the Hegemony Camp model gives us confidence that with data of better quality, our model will be able to draw a more accurate inference for the mobilization ability of the idolized expressions.

As the first scholarly exploration of the effect of idolized and hegemonic expressions on political discussion, these results still shed light on future study (see Discussion and Contribution). In essence, there is yet a conclusion about the mobilization ability of the idolized expressions but the positive results for the hegemonic expressions. Still, it is conceivable that the hegemonic expression has a stronger impact on political mobilization than the seemingly softer idolizing expressions.

III. Do the mobilized participants also use idolized and hegemonic expressions during the expedition on Facebook?

As discussed, the number of likes, comments and retweets are three proxies measuring the mobilization ability of the camps. Alternatively, there is a complementary angle observing that by investigating if their targets of mobilization, i.e., the participants of the expedition, adopted similar expressions in their expedition to Facebook. The Expedition we used for this paper is the Second Expedition on 30th September 2019 by the two camps. There are 16,769 comments in which 2,903 comments written in simplified Chinese classified as the Expedition comments. Our dictionary results show that the messages exported by the participants did adopt both idolized and hegemonic expressions. Since the Weibo-based dictionary terms were found used in the Facebook expedition, we also tried to apply our Weibo-trained SML model to group Facebook comments into the Idolization Camp and the Hegemony Camp.

Based on the dictionary results, idolized and hegemonic terms appeared in the second expedition. The results align with the situation in Weibo that it is not uncommon to see the presence of both idolized and hegemonic expressions in the same comments of Expedition. The highest *Idolization Count* is 2 while that of the *Hegemony Count* is 4. From our observation of those matched idolized comments, Bro Bro China (阿中哥哥), a personified nickname for China; and Tsai Tsai Zi (蔡蔡子), a nickname for the Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen, were used in the Expedition in the context of celebrating the National Day of China. Besides, they tend to adopt irregular yet seemingly cute fonts for mentioning places, such as “CN”, “HK”, while other characters in the same sentence are in typical typing fonts.

For more hegemonic terms, the superiority of China and being Chinese Mainlanders is obvious. When referring to Taiwan, they purposely added the word “province” after “Taiwan”, which

serves to downgrade its status and assert the unquestionable sovereignty of China. Occasionally, they also used “Dumb-wan” (呆灣) to mock the naïve thinking of the Taiwanese. While some sarcastic terms seemed to be glorifying foreign countries as “empire” (帝), they were actually mocking those pro-West Facebook users as watchdogs and slaves for foreign countries like the United Kingdom and the United States.

The dictionary findings are intriguing and indicate that idolized and hegemonic terms are brought to Facebook through the Second Expedition. The terms appeared also give us a clear picture of the different contents and sentiments that the Idolization Camp and Hegemony Camp delivered to Facebook. However, the dictionaries only contain around 200 terms, and the mixed use of idolized and hegemonic expressions may hinder the dictionary in making accurate classification separating 2,902 Facebook Expedition comments into the Idolization Camp or Hegemony Camp. Therefore, we would like to use our Weibo-trained SML model for doing comment classification given its ability in acknowledging unobservable factors of each category.

As introduced in the Methodology section, our SML model utilized 90% of account-labeled training data to test whether it can accurately categories the remaining 10% data into the two camps. The results of the validation test are listed in Table 6. The F1-score, which is a balanced calculation between actual positives and predicted positives, for predicting whether the tweets are from the Diba or the Fandom Girls reaches 0.85 and 0.78 respectively. These satisfactory results give confidence to our model in classifying the two origins of expedition comments on Facebook.

Table 6: Supervised Machine Learning performance on predicting the origin of the tweet

	Precision	Recall	F1-score	Support
Idolization Camp	0.69	0.90	0.78	825
Hegemony Camp	0.94	0.78	0.85	1593
Accuracy	-	-	0.82	2428
Macro Average	0.81	0.84	0.82	2428
Weighted Average	0.85	0.82	0.83	2428

IV. Can idolizing expressions mitigate the extreme sentiment during the expedition?

So far, the expedition solely launched by the Idolization Camp, if any, cannot be located. Given that expedition on Facebook is a direct outcome of mobilization on Weibo of the two camps, it is justifiable to apply a model trained by hegemonic and idolizing terms on Weibo tweets to categorize the comments on Facebook into the Hegemony Camp and the Idolization Camp. In the Second Expedition dataset, we assume that all initial comments in simplified Chinese are

the main messages brought by the Expedition participants. There are 288 comments identified as Idolization origin and 2,615 comments as Hegemony origin. We then use the comment ID and parent comment ID to link all the reply threads under these Expedition comments. According to our manual screening, the prediction is reliable. The comments and their reply threads were given a probability of positive sentiment by Baidu Senta to measure the intensification level of discussion.

H3 focuses on the intensification of sentiment triggered by the idolizing and hegemonic expressions in the context of political discourse. We use the comment sentiment, reply thread sentiment, the number of like and the number of comments as proxies to measure the intensification of the sentiment during the Expedition. The t-test results in Table 7 report the significance of the difference between the two camps. For the comments, both idolized comments and hegemonic comments do not share significant difference in sentiment level. The average positive sentiment probability for both camps is 0.57. As for the reply threads, i.e., the discussion under each comment, the mean probability of positive sentiment decreases to 0.28 and 0.32 for the Idolization Camp and Hegemony Camp respectively. Given that the Expedition is an aggressive political action taken by the Chinese mainlanders against the pro-protest Facebook pages, the political messages in the initial comments can arouse negative feelings among pages supporters and followers. This result matches our expectation. However, the reply threads under the Idolization Camp receiving lower mean positive sentiment probability runs contrary to our hypothesis that seemingly soft idolized expressions may help mitigate the aggressive emotion aroused during the Expedition.

By contrast, the number of likes received by the Idolization Camp in Facebook outnumbers the Hegemony Camp by one average like. Given that Facebook allows several emotional reacts, namely angry, like and sad, we assume that the number of likes should be positively correlated to positive feelings. Therefore, intuitively, the Idolization Camp's comments received more likes and should have more positive sentiments. Meanwhile, based on previous literature, we also know that the Hegemony Camp has a team responsible of giving likes to like-minded people. Although it is unclear whether the Idolization Camp adopted the same strategy, we are reserved to draw concrete conclusion as the sentiment measured in the reply threads shows contradictory result.

Table 7: Pairwise t-test for Four Metrics between Idolization Camp and Hegemony Camp

	Camp	Mean	t	df	P-value
Positive Probability: Comment	Idolization Camp	0.5670309	0.22488	346.18	0.8222
	Hegemony Camp	0.5728696			
Positive Probability: Reply	Idolization Camp	0.2803664	1.5204	153.58	0.1305
	Hegemony Camp	0.3299135			
Like Count	Idolization Camp	2.548611	-2.3629	373.04	0.01865
	Hegemony Camp	1.508034			
Reply Count	Idolization Camp	0.5729167	-0.51586	514.26	0.6062
	Hegemony Camp	0.4871795			

In addition, to provide a more wholistic understanding of the relationship between having more positive sentiment in the comments and the replying behaviors and to choose suitable measurement of emotion intensification, we use *comment positive probability* as the independent variable indexing the level of sentiment in the initial comments and use *reply positive probability*, *reply counts* and *like counts* as the dependent variables accounting the likelihood of receiving response. The results are shown in Figure 10.

The results show that higher positive sentiment probability in the comments will have 0.169 more chance to receive replies that are also positive in general. It is quite consistent with our real-life experience that giving good comments are more likely to receive good comments from other people. However, in the context of the Expedition, even though the comments from the Idolization Camp have over 0.5 positive sentiment in average, the content of comments are still considered aggressive due to the anti-protest stance they carry. In this case, the positive sentiment probability of the reply thread may not be a good indicator of the emotion level in the Expedition.

As for the *Reply Count*, positive comments may receive fewer replies. Intuitively speaking, positive messages will not particularly arouse the interests of people, but negative messages, especially offensive ones, may lead to more arguments in the end. Therefore, it is a practical measurement that can be of future values. As for the like count, there is yet a solid evidence proving as a valid indication of emotional values.

All in all, the regression results infer that fewer reply threads and more positive sentiment probability of the reply threads are valid indications of a more peaceful political discussion. Combining our empirical sentiment analysis of the Expedition, idolizing expressions do not really serve mitigating effect during political discourse, but rather having the tendency of arousing more negative sentiments than using hegemonic terms.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Reply Positive Probability (1)	Like count (2)	Reply count (3)
Comment Positive Probability	0.169*** (0.028)	0.173 (0.364)	-0.379** (0.193)
Constant	0.256*** (0.016)	1.512*** (0.254)	0.713*** (0.135)
Observations	955	2,902	2,901
R ²	0.037	0.0001	0.001
Adjusted R ²	0.036	-0.0003	0.001
Residual Std. Error	0.340 (df = 953)	7.842 (df = 2900)	4.163 (df = 2899)
F Statistic	36.622*** (df = 1; 953)	0.227 (df = 1; 2900)	3.854** (df = 1; 2899)
<i>Note:</i>	* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01		

Figure 10. Regression result of Equation (Equation 4, 5, 6)

Limitations and Recommendations

The analysis results support part of our hypotheses that the Fandom Girls adopt more idolized expressions, but reluctant to prove their mobilization ability and the sentiment mitigation effect. This section outlines the possible reasons that hinder accurate inference in this paper and provides relevant recommendation for future study.

I. Unequal size of the comparison groups and their data loss in Weibo

The first can be the much smaller size of the idolizing parties compared to the Diba. As a community established in 2016, the Diba has a larger community than the Fandom Girls, which slowly rises after mid-2019. The number of tweets posted by the Diba almost equaled the sum of the three Fandom Girls' accounts. Its average likes, comments and retweets are also much higher. According to the Metcalfe's Law (Shapiro & Varian, 1999), the capability of the Diba community can be roughly proportional to the square of its members count. It is more likely for the Diba to boost its hegemonic impact on political discourse. One large community can be much more influential than three smaller communities even though their combined magnitude may be comparable to the former.

Fandom Girls' accounts being shut down by the Weibo authorities also hinders the idolizing expressions to exert influence. During the peak of the Expeditions against Hong Kong Anti-elab Movement from June to September, the Weibo accounts of the ChinaSup, the Fangirls and the Azhong were forced shut down and were only recreated in September and October.

Recreating accounts signifies rebuilding followers and loss of previous tweet data, which significantly affects our calculation of their mobilization ability. Although the Diba also experienced similar problem, the re-creation process happened earlier in July. This makes the Expedition-related tweets accessible, unlike those Fandom Girls' accounts.

Given the lack of a unified Fandom Girls' community and constant account blockage in Weibo, it is not practical at this stage to conduct a big data analysis using surface data. Rather, we noticed that a lot of coordination and mobilization are done through more secluded channels, such as group chatting in Weibo and QQ community. In this case, qualitative research applying cyber-ethnography may help with discovering a more complete mobilization mechanism in the Fandom Girls' community. By then, big data can do an empirical test with regularly backed-up Weibo data.

II. Inadequate awareness of the idolizing elements and social networks' algorithm

Though some idolized terms, e.g., Bro Bro China, is well-known in the Chinese context, the idolizing discourses are not highly accessible for outsiders, who are not members of Fandom. Meanwhile, the hegemonic expressions seem to suit the tastes of general Weibo audience better, particularly around the peak of Mainland hostility to the Hong Kong social movement where terms expressing sovereignty overlap with hegemonic expressions. As in Table 4, the expression differences between the Hegemony Camp and the Third Party are smaller, compared to those between the Idolization Camp and the Third Party in the mobilization stage. Besides, in the context of the Expedition, all simplified Chinese comments are regarded as invasion for other Facebook users. It could be a possible reason leading to the same sentiment level of the reply threads even their initial comments were contributed by different parties.

The algorithm of social networks often recommends posts to users based on the possibility of receiving positive interaction, and thus exacerbates the invisibility of the idolizing expressions. The fact that political expressions, in this specific context of political protest, on Weibo and Facebook is still dominated by hegemonic discourse, the algorithm worsens the mobilization ability and sentiment mitigation of the idolizing expressions.

III. Cofounding factor: the political stance of the Expedition

In this paper, we argue that idolizing expressions adopt more ACGN, personified and fanatic elements and may help ease the extreme sentiment usually observed in online protest. However, our results reflect that maybe the content of the Expedition is fundamentally unpleasant to the Facebook users. After all, the anti-protest stance that the Idolization and Hegemony Camp from Mainland China is on the exact opposite of those targeted Facebook fanpages. If we solely

observe the reaction based on the Expedition data, the political stance may hinder the estimation of the true impact of idolizing expressions.

IV. Supervised Machine Learning

In our study, we use the model trained on Weibo data to identify the camps of the Facebook comments. Although the model has a good performance in predicting Weibo data, the performance on Facebook data is not very satisfactory. The official accounts on Weibo are more mobilization-oriented and is used to recruit more members, while their expedition on Facebook targets the audience with a different political stance, so the wordings can be different.

In our practice of analyzing the Second Expedition data, we assume that all initial comments using simplified Chinese are initiated by the expeditors, who belongs to either the Idolization Camp or Hegemony Camp. The assumption may result in great loss of information, since there are lots of Expedition comments uses traditional Chinese and even Cantonese. However, we may not do a better classification due to limited knowledge.

In future analysis, we may manually label some comments as a training set and use it to train a model and predict the rest comments, but this process can be time-consuming and costly. Another practice is to identify the text or sticker templates of both Camp, and do the classification based on the templates. Wang (2019) has adopted this approach and successfully identified templates in Diba expedition using machine sorting algorithm. In our case, an additional step is required to distinguish the templates Camps. Still, the categorization of templates may be inaccurate if we lack insider information. A better way to solve the issue is either contacting the organizer of the Expedition to collect information or find Camp-specific expeditions to avoid categorizing, though the latter approach may undermine the practicability of controlled experiment.

V. Sentiment Analysis

The main constrain in sentiment analysis comes from the lack of Chinese sentiment analysis tools. The Baidu Senta library only supports binary sentiment classification, so we fail to measure the polarization of the comments and replies. We are looking forward to more advanced Chinese sentiment analysis libraries to increase the accuracy of sentiment analysis and enrich the measurement of sentiment.

The five limitations explained are wished to be of value to future study. In short, political idolization is on the rise together with the global trend of politics turns entertaining and fandom becomes politized. Apart from Bro Bro China, other countries are also moving towards fandom in political context, such as *Hetalia: Axis Powers* and *Year Hare Affair* (Taylor, 2007; Street,

2012). With the popular use of social networks, we expect gradual rise on scholars' attention in political idolization.

Discussion and Contribution

This section discusses the contributions of the study to the existing literature in three (I, II, and III) theoretical and two (IV, V, and VI) methodological aspects, shedding light on understanding political idolization and inspire further explorations on it.

VI. Theorization of *Political Idolization* and its Exploratory Empirical Test

This study is the first theorizing a novel trend of idolizing political entities as *Political Idolization*. While the concept is broad and flexible at this early development stage, this research conducts exploratory test on its effect using the expeditions organized by the Fandom Girls and the Diba. Specifically, whether the idolizing expression (personifying with fandom or ACGN elements) can contribute to online mobilization and radicalization of political communication, as compared to the already-developed hegemonic expressions and plain discourse.

We observed that idolizing expressions have less direct association on online mobilization and possibly equal effect on intensification of sentiment in political communication, as compared to hegemonic expressions. The idolization parties are among the first vector contributing to the phenomenon of *Political Idolization* in China. Although they are currently under-developed as to the conventional nationalism represented by the Diba, they are likely to grow and bring stronger impacts on political discussion. As such, the insignificant results observed today can be a sign of the starting point of *Political Idolization* and an indicator of the potential significant to trace and study political idolization with other incidents.

Besides, as we used the Diba as one of the comparison references, our results also responded to previous qualitative research over gathering nationalistic youth (Wu, 2019; Luo, 2019) and cross-cultural communication (Yan, 2017, Ma, 2019). It is observed that using hegemonic expressions can indeed address to part of the audience in Weibo, but may not necessarily foster peaceful discussion in outside China, namely Facebook.

VII. Mobilization and Radicalization in Online Political Discussion

This paper provides preliminary evidence on nationalistic expressions and online behaviors in cross-platform online protest in Weibo and Facebook, as compared to the existing studies in Europe (Frissen, 2021) and Hong Kong (Stott et al., 2020). More specifically, it focuses on the contributors of mobilization and sentiment radicalization of online political protest. Adding to

the literature of mobilization in online protest (Vissers, 2012; Anduiza et al., 2014; Theochari et al., 2015), our research distinguishes the idolizing discourses from the hegemonic ones in the two-staged mobilization-expedition process respectively on Weibo and Facebook. The results still recognize the hegemonic expressions as the mainstream in online nationalistic protest, while identifying the novel idolizing political discourses. In line with the mobilization in online communities (Gal et al., 2016; Fang, 2018; Wang, 2019), it also investigates the noteworthy dynamics of fandom nationalism, shedding lights on further study on its development.

In line with the rising concern on radicalization of political communication worldwide, its effect on political discussion is considered as a major threat to sociopolitical stability in China (Zhao, 2019). The statement of “no radicalization without identification” highlights that members of sociopolitical organizations are more likely to go radical with the common identity and preference in the group (Van Stekelenburg, 2014). This seems particularly applicable to the prospective impacts of fandom communities and its idolizing terms on radicalizing online political discussion. In our case, the Idolization Camp is already more radical, proxied by the *Sum Score*, than the mainstream Diba. This may be an early indicator of radicalization caused by political idolization, which is to be advanced by future study. When the idolizing discourse goes more prevalent, its feedback will encourage the algorithm to further promote its spread, which may exacerbate the impact of political idolization.

VIII. Political Idolization as a Double-Edge Sword for the Regime

This empirical study adds to the evidence on the change of online political discussion from pro-liberal to pro-state in China. Internet is not simply a liberating technology in China, where the general atmosphere of online political discussion changes from pro-West and challenging the regime in earlier years (Esarey & Qiang, 2008; Lei, 2011; Yang, 2011; Tong et al., 2013) to more pro-state one as manifested by the expeditions by the Fandom Girls and the Diba, which seems to reinforce the regime’s discourse.

Although the political idolization in the 2019 expeditions to Facebook is welcomed by the Chinese regime, political idolization can be a nuisance for the party-state. The fans of Bro Bro China may turn against the agents of the idol if he is not performing satisfactorily. These dangerously mirror international conflict and economic downturn, or some incidents such as the misconduct in face of the COVID-19. Meanwhile, the regime finds it hard to repress the political idolization at will. On one hand, crushing it will discourage the young supporters and give rise to the liberal camp, hostile to the party-state; on the other hand, it is eroding the regime’s monopoly of nationalism and may turn against the regime in its weakness.

IX. Methodological Discussion on Regression

A major weakness of applying regression in social network research is the endogeneity brought by the algorithm. In social networks, the tendency to further publicize the widely recognized tweets will strengthen the voice of the mass, while personalizing the recommendations to meet individual preferences worsens the selection bias. Therefore, the outcome variables in the regression (likes, comments, retweets) can reversely affect the chance of public exposure of the tweets and other covariates, which is often hard to be accounted in conventional regression models. Likewise, although we have controlled the effect of groups in the regression analysis, some confounding factors may not be perfectly accounted, such as the preference of the “Third Party”. Such concerns limited our capacity to establish firm findings and argue for causal effect. As such, computational methods are needed to complement, in some cases correct, the traditional regression methods. To better argue for causality, further research may employ carefully designed online experiment, or quasi-natural experiments such as the difference in difference (DID) from exogenous shocks (i.e., change of internet policies or breaking news).

Conclusion

This paper is inspired by a rising trend of turning political identities into idols and tries to provide a preliminary theoretical framework for its related studies. The Fandom Girls in China were identified as one of the leading vectors contributing to political idolization in Weibo and their Crusade-like Expedition to Facebook, jointly organized with a more hegemonic nationalistic group (the Diba) is examined. The hypotheses concern the usage of the idolizing expressions, their mobilization ability in attracting political attention and the sentiment radicalization during online protest. The results infer that idolizing expressions are still in the early development stage and are reluctant to effectively mobilize their audience as compared to the well-established Hegemonic group. Adopting more seemingly cute idolized expressions in online protest may have tendency triggering negative sentiment. Besides, we also investigated the limitations that hinder more accurate estimations, and provided novel recommendations for future reference. The discussion further reinforces this paper’s contributions to wider literature in computational social science.

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Appendix

1. List of Weibo Accounts and Available Data Variables

Accounts

Diba (帝吧): 帝吧官微, 帝吧管理員, 帝吧網友 M, 帝吧朕長, 帝吧資訊, 帝吧震驚部

Fangirls (飯圈女孩): 飯圈女孩官微, 飯圈女孩管理員, 飯圈女孩圖文站, 飯圈女孩應援站

Bro Bro China (Azhong) (阿中哥哥): 阿中哥哥應援站, 阿中哥哥反黑站, 阿中哥哥圖文站

China Support Group (ChinaSup) (China 後援團)

Available Data Variables

id, content, pic_url, video_url, location, date, tool, like_count, comment_count, retweet_count, topic, tagged_account,

original, original_id, original_account, original_post_id, original_content, original_pic_url, original_video_url, original_location, original_date, original_tool, original_like_count,

original_comment_count, original_retweet_count, original_topic, original_tagged_account,

2. List of Facebook Fan Pages and Available Data Variables

Pages

BBS: 1180 comments

CNN: 2847 comments

HOCC: 8239 comments

Joshua Wong: 2899 comments

New York Times: 215 comments

Next Media: 1126 comments

Washington Post: 263 comments

Available Data Variables

Id, parent id, level, object_type, query_status, object_id, message, date, time, like_count, comment_count, attachments.data.0.description, attachment.type, group

3. Dictionary

a. The Idolization Dictionary (memes excluded)

The Idolization Dictionary						
awsl	xtms	发糖	守护	星辰大海	粉丝	一个大国梦
awzh	y1s1	可爱	安排上了	有一说一	糊了	喷子
blx	zgbr	后援	小透明	本命	糊穿地心	
C位	zqsg	哇哈哈	巴巴羊	毛熊	脚盆鸡	
dbq	CN	哈哈哈哈哈	帅气	沙雕	腹黑	
girl	HK	哥哥	帝帝	港剧	蛤	
hyq	us	唯粉	应援	爱我中华	视奸	
izhong	世最可	啊我死了	康康	爱豆	走花路	
jjyy	世最美	喜提	彩虹屁	牛牛	超话	
KY	云追星	团团	怕怕	玻璃心	追剧	
ky	保护	土味情话	我兔	白象	追星	
nan	兔兔	大国梦	打call	皮一下	锦鲤	
nbs	兔子	大旗	打卡	盖章	阿中	
Pick	公举	大猪蹄子	打榜	确认过眼神	阿伟	
rnb	冲鸭	天朝姐姐	抓虫	社会人	饭圈	
skr	刷数据	央央	抱抱	私生饭	鬼畜	
tcjj	刷榜	女友粉	抱走	空瓶	鹰酱	
wlsw	加油吖	好友圈	挽尊	站站	黑子	
xfxy	加油鸭	妈妈粉	控评	米帝	可可爱爱	
xswl	反黑	姐姐粉	文宣	米果	八一四	

b. The Hegemony Dictionary

The Hegemony Dictionary					
cnm	十三亿	尼哥	河马	耗子	鬼佬
mdzz	十三亿分之一	崛起	泡菜	脑残	黄尸
nmsl	十四亿	崛起	活该	脚盆鸡	黄痴峰
rt	十四亿分之一	川皇	港毒	舔	
sb	华夏	帝	滑跪	虽远必诛	
万众一心	卖国贼	帝国	爷	蛆	
丑态	南波湾	废青	爸爸	蛮夷	
久跪	呆湾	恶心	爹	观猴	
九百六十万	喷粪	操	犯我中华	解放军	
乱港	国贼	暴徒	狗日	贼	
二毛	土澳	甲由	狮子	跪久	
五千年	复兴	朕	猴子	跪舔	
井底之蛙	大国	朝贡	玩球	轮子	
伟大	大毛	权力	畜生	霸权	
傻逼	大赏	权威	白痴	香港村	
儿子	天朝	梧桐	白皮	香港街道办	
公知	女儿	武统	祖国	香蕉人	
匪帮	姑奶奶	毛爷	祖宗	骆驼	
香港区	宗主	汉奸	祸港	骚不拉几	
香港县	小丑	汉斯猫	精美	高卢鸡	