

Information and communication technologies and China's international communication to the world¹

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Abstract: Over four decades, ICT rapidly proliferated in China, transforming, and reshaping the country's international communication in theory and practice. In parallel with economic achievements after the reform and opening-up, China aspires to enhance accordingly its international influence, thus requiring its media to emerge on the global stage. The article suggests that ICT plays a significant role in driving Chinese media's global outreach, thereby enhancing soft power and improving its national image. Against the backdrop of continuous hegemony and unbalance in the global communication networks, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched by China aims to benefit developing countries in the Global South by constructing ICT infrastructures. Following the practice, the concept of a 'community of shared future for mankind' was advanced to promote multilateral cooperation and better communication. China shoulders unprecedented responsibilities in an increasingly multipolar world where a new global communication order is expected.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative; Chinese media; global communication order; international influence; soft power.

[es] Las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación internacional de China con el mundo

Resumen: A lo largo de cuatro décadas, las TIC han proliferado rápidamente en China, transformando y remodelando la comunicación internacional del país en la teoría y en la práctica. Paralelamente a los logros económicos conseguidos tras la reforma y la apertura, China aspira a aumentar en consecuencia su influencia internacional, lo que exige que sus medios de comunicación emerjan en la escena mundial. El artículo sugiere que las TIC desempeñan un papel significativo a la hora de impulsar el alcance global de los medios chinos, reforzando así su poder blando y mejorando su imagen nacional. En un contexto de continua hegemonía y desequilibrio en las redes mundiales de comunicación, la Iniciativa de la Franja y la Ruta (BRI) lanzada por China pretende beneficiar a los países en desarrollo del Sur Global mediante la construcción de infraestructuras TIC. Siguiendo esta misma lógica, y con el propósito de promover la cooperación multilateral y una mejor comunicación la práctica, se presentó la idea de 'comunidad de futuro compartido para la humanidad'. China asume responsabilidades sin precedentes en un mundo cada vez más multipolar en el que se espera un nuevo orden global de comunicación.

Palabras clave: Iniciativa de la Franja y la Ruta; medios chinos; orden global de comunicación; influencia internacional; poder blando.

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1. Introduction

The ICT industry in China has been flourishing over the past four decades. Ranking second with a 11.6% global market share and overtaking European Union and Japan, the ICT industry in China demonstrates tremendous market potential (Sava, 2022). The contributions ICT makes to economic development and business growth are widely recognized. As one of the largest industries in the world, the ICT market

is expected to reach a size of \$5.5 trillion in 2022, and almost \$6 trillion by 2023. According to a report released by the Privacy Shield Framework, China's ICT market has reached \$8.1 trillion by 2021, accounting for 55% of the country's GDP. Statistics from the World Bank (2020) show that ICT goods exports in China has exceeded 20% of the total for almost twenty years, achieving 27.1% in 2020. With the implementation of the Internet Plus national strategy and the Made in China 2025 initiative, more

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subsectors emerge in recent years, such as industrial big data, industrial Internet, internet of vehicles (IoV), artificial intelligence (AI), fifth generation of communication networks, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR). Today, China has become a key player in the global ICT competition.

As the social and technological revolution goes on in China, the ICT development draws increasing scholarly attention. A great deal of previous research has touched upon the general studies of the industry development (Wang et al., 2021; Xing et al., 2011), and some detailed aspects in the communication field such as social impacts (Chen et al., 2005; Song & Chen, 2019), major actors (Guo, 2020; Sun & Grimes, 2016), related policies (Miao et al., 2021), and applications (Shehzad et al., 2019; J. Wang, 2018). Despite the eye-catching achievements and abundant studies, little has been covered in the literature about how the largest developing country utilizes communication technologies to expand its influence and make itself better understood by the world. It is probably opportune to undertake a systematic review of the ICT development and China's international communication and globalization.

This paper discusses how ICT development drives China's international communication and enhance its soft power and global influence, especially in the media landscape. We begin by presenting a brief review of several milestones in China's ICT development history, including connection to the Internet, growth of telecommunication networks, digital transformation in the media ecosystem, and proliferation of social media platforms. We then take a retrospective analysis on the process of Chinese media emerging onto the global scene. Based on the previous analysis, we derive a discussion on its triple impacts. Through consolidating ICT infrastructures China set up global communication networks to strengthen soft power and expand international influence. The launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) enables China to lead global governance and benefit the ICT-deficiency-stricken countries. China's rise in the world ICT industry brings theoretical implications for eliminating the Western dominance and bridging the digital divide between the Global South and North.

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of China's ICT development and its impact on the country's international communication strategy. Firstly, the research highlights the significance of ICT in China's soft power strategy, shedding light on how digital technologies are transforming international communication. Secondly, the article examines the BRI and its role in China's participation in global governance, providing insights into the changing nature of global communication. Finally, the paper analyzes the transformation of the global communication order to help better understand the implications of emerging digital technologies and China's strategies for adapting to these changes.

2. ICT development history in China

The construction of telecommunication systems and facilities in China is a fairly long story, while considerable progress occurred after the authorities put the reform and opening-up into the place. Once implementing the neo-liberal economic policies, the Chinese government took priority over the ICT sector, considering it as a powerful propellant of China's modernization (Zhao, 2007). The dynamic industry has gone through volatile changes over the years, which marks some critical milestones in the development history.

Almost thirty years has passed since China getting connection to the Internet for the first time in April 1994, and the development of the Internet in the country sustain tremendous momentum till now. In 2008, China surpassed US with the largest number of Internet users. As of June 2022, the number of Internet users has risen to more than 1.05 billion with Internet popularity hitting 74.4% (China Internet Network Information Center, 2022). The broadband services are available to every rural village. Meanwhile, 99.6% of the Internet users employ mobile phones to get connected. Benefited from the rapid growth of ICT industry, more and more Chinese people have easy access to information at their fingertips.

Such achievements were accomplished due to a rapid expansion of Internet infrastructures. Since the 1980s when the state leaders put emphasis on ICT development to achieve its goal of the 'four modernizations' in agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology (Y. Zhou, 2006), the Chinese government put massive resources and launched comprehensive initiatives to support the construct of Internet infrastructures, including those necessary to backup «broadband, mobile internet, iCloud and new technologies». Benefited from the state's funding, all Chinese university campuses had access to the Internet within 10 years (1994-2004) (Tai, 2006). In 2015, Internet Plus policy was launched to further transform and modernize Chinese industries and business. With the increasing power of the Internet, the government sought to upgrade traditional industries, ranging from agriculture to manufacturing, banking to commerce and many other sectors. Meanwhile, China issued the National Informatization Strategy (2016-2020) to empower itself in terms of ICT. As the plan put, China would pool more resources into the development of cutting-edge information technology, including the fifth generation of communication networks (5G), IPv6, smart manufacturing, cloud computing, and internet of things.

The advent of the Internet period brings about significant digital transformation in the China's media landscape. In the next year right after the connection to the Internet, China Daily and China News Service, the two state-affiliated media, led content digitalization, while other mouthpieces such

as Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television Station (CCTV), China Radio International (CRI), and *Guangming Daily* followed up and set up their Internet portals (Guo, 2020). Meanwhile, the commercial actors adapted successfully to the trend and launched the websites, establishing a lot of big-name corporates, for instance, Sina on news aggregate, Baidu on search engine, NetEase online gaming and news commentary, Tencent on social networking and instant messaging (Guo, 2020).

Additionally, China is committed to improving mobile infrastructures and tries to lead the following generations of communication networks, regardless being lagged behind the superpowers at the earliest stages. The first generation of communication (1G) networks fulfilled the mobile voice at the end of 1970s, while the second generation introduced capacity and coverage in the 1980s, followed by the third generation (3G), which had quest for data at higher speeds to truly 'mobile broadband' experience (Sharma, 2013). In the decades-lasting evolution, China's telecom industry went through several crusades as the major evolutionary footsteps followed: breaking monopoly (1994-1998), service specialization (1998-2002), market consolidation (2002-2008), and service reintegration (2008-2012) (Xia, 2017). However, the country's mobile networks were far from internationally competitive, and China was striving for catching up with the West. It was during the transformation from 3G to 4G, in particular after the year 2012, that Chinese firms became global players in mobile telecommunication technologies and China became a major influencer in the international ICT standards arena (Stewart et al., 2011). According to a report released by China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the number of 4G subscribers in China has rocketed ninefold from 97 million to 849 million within four years since 2014.

State-owned telecom conglomerates and private digital technology companies join efforts to consolidate ICT infrastructure. On one hand, the major telecom operators (China Mobile, China Unicom, and China Telecom) significantly increase investment to boost infrastructure construction with political support and financial aids from the government. Thus, China goes on 5G deployment at an unparalleled rate and leads in this domain. To date, China has built the world's largest optical fiber network and rolled out one point eighty-five million 5G base stations, making it the first country to construct a rather complete 5G network (Xinhua, 2022). China is expected to accomplish a three-fold increase with a total of 5 million 5G base stations by the end of 2025. On the other hand, private tech companies follow the government's pledge and yearn for global expansion. In recent years they invest more overseas and lead digital industries in the destination countries. For instance, Huawei, known as one of the most important Chinese ICT equipment providers,

claimed 29% of the global market share and ranked first, exceeding Sweden's Ericsson (23%), and Finland's Nokia (20%) (Cheng, 2021). Today, China is poised to play a vital role in leading the 5G revolution. The enhancement of Internet and telecommunication infrastructures has changed drastically the digital ecosystems in China, giving rise the proliferation of social media platforms and the dominance of mobile applications. As an emerging media form, social media innovate the way information is communicated and transmitted. In modern China, social media have become quite prevalent and pervasive (Lipschultz, 2020). The recent years witness a rapid growth of China's social media platforms, posing challenge to the global dominance of Facebook (deLisle et al., 2016). Online forums and communities were the first forms of social media to develop in China in 1994. In 1999, instant messaging in China saw a significant development with the release of Tencent's OICQ, which later became known as QQ. Around 2003, user-review websites like Dianping caught users' attention. Blogging gained popularity in 2004, and social networking sites with chatting capabilities, such as Renren, appeared a year later. Launched in 2009, Sina Weibo offers microblogging with multimedia (Chiu et al., 2012). Two years later, WeChat which was released by the Chinese tech company Tencent, becomes one of the most popular platforms. The year 2016 represented a substantial shift in China's social media development as the short video platforms went viral, among which Douyin and its international version TikTok are the most well-known.

Driven by the new information technologies, China's social media turns multi-purpose, which are quite different from their western equivalents. For instance, WeChat served initially for sending instant audio and text messages as well as pictures or moments with friends, similar to a combination of WhatsApp and Facebook. Now, the innovative social media platform has incorporated more functions and embedded itself into the lives of Chinese people. It can be used to receive information and news from WeChat accounts, settle meals by scanning QR codes, pay transportation and medical bills, transfer money and files between friends and colleagues. All this and more can be accomplished without leaving the app. In the first quarter of 2022, the Chinese multi-functional platform had almost 1.29 billion monthly active users, ranking fifth in the global social media landscape in terms of active user number (Thomala, 2022). As the leading social networks worldwide, WeChat catches increasing attention from the international community and is always compared to its Western counterparts such as Facebook or WhatsApp (Montag et al., 2018).

Besides its domestic development, China announced the BRI in 2013, a global infrastructure development strategy, to invest and improve the networks in the destination countries. Two years later, the Digital Silk Road (DSR) was launched,

becoming the essential part of the overall BRI strategy. Aimed at promoting the construction and interconnection of ICT globally, the DSR provided support and assistance to recipient countries as well as Chinese exporters, in particular those technology companies (e.g., Huawei, Alibaba, Tencent). By the end of 2020, over thirty countries had signed DSR Memorandum of Understanding with China, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Dominican Republic. Overall, the strategy demonstrates China's ambition on the global construction of ICT infrastructure and expansion of communication networks to facilitate digital connectivity.

3. ICT drives Chinese media going global

In parallel with remarkable economic and technological achievements, China has been dissatisfied with its soft power for a long time and has lamented its incompatibility with hard power. As for Joseph Nye (1990), who first introduced the concept of 'soft power', international relationships are not only dependent on hard power of economics and military force, but also influenced by soft power of cultural, political values and foreign policies. Soft power exercises influence through public opinion (Servaes, 2012). It has been confirmed in the field of communication that mass media exert a significant impact on public opinion (Baum & Potter, 2008; Lippmann, 1997). In this respect, for countries with different political, economic and cultural systems, the best way to influence public opinion is to increase mutual understanding, and respect of differences through positive media messages, and to encourage more cultural, educational, and business exchanges between countries (Altinay, 2011).

Chinese media are often unknown and inaccessible to the global audience, struggling to make and lead public opinion. On one hand, even the flagship media in the country, for instance CCTV, cannot compete with the Qatar-based Al Jazeera and RT, let alone its Euro-American equivalents BBC or CNN in terms of global influence (Shi, 2017). On the other hand, the West who tends to discredit and distort China's image because of ideological conflicts and clashing interests, thrives for setting international agenda and controls the diffusion of China's story. The populated country is always misunderstood and suspected. According to soft power theory, China should extend global influence and improve its image not only through economic and industrial development but also the promotion of Chinese language and culture, products, trademarks, standards, and technologies (Gill & Huang, 2006). In this sense, expanding the media outreach to a wider range of audience is essential for enhancing China's soft power.

Chinese media going global coincides the fast-growing economics and proliferation of ICT. The development of satellite TV after the reform and

opening-up is considered a benign beginning in the process of China media stepping onto the world stage. In the 1980s, the authorities put into place a system of market economy with Chinese characteristics, exercising a more flexible control over economic liberty, which benefited and bolstered media industry development. This suggests China resumed embracing the world and get plugged into trade liberalization and globalization after almost a decade of break. Since China was recognized as the permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, its international status needed to be consolidated. Coinciding with the prevalence of television, the television broadcasting upgraded constantly and became more internationally oriented. For instance, CCTV (China Central Television), China's biggest state-owned and party-affiliated television broadcaster, aired innovatively the first English-language news program 'English News' in 1985 to make the world hear the country's voice (Hu et al., 2017). With the launch of CCTV-4 in the following years, the first international satellite TV channel, China's international broadcasting reached more foreign audience and entered a new phase (Zhang, 2009).

Soon after completing its accession into the World Trade Organization at the turn of 21st century, the 'going-out' strategy was launched by the government to make central-level media organizations to catch up with their occidental counterparts. Against the backdrop of supporting the internationally competitive media conglomerates, the first English-language news network CCTV-9 came to birth. Meanwhile, CCTV and China Radio International begun to increase their appearance on the international communication scene, and won many awards at global television awards (Tan & Yu, 2009).

It is until the announcement of a strategic plan about international communication in 2009 that the flagship media groups succeeded in penetrating into the global market and participated in the fierce competition. Right after the Beijing Olympic Games, Chinese mainstream media started a new round of capacity building for international communication (Zhou & Wu, 2017). The government released the General Plan for Building Major Media's Capacity of International Communication (2009-2020) in the next year to draw up guidelines for continuity of media going global. As the plan suggested, the internationally influential media groups were to be developed with much more political and financial support from the central government, thereby reflecting the rise of China's overall influence around the world (Hu et al., 2017). With Chinese broadcasting networks expanding, channels in other languages followed to reach more audience. These international channels were grouped together in 2016, giving birth to China Global Television Network (known as CGTN). The media conglomerate also encompasses international divisions, such as CGTN

Africa, CGTN America, and CGTN Europe. To date, CGTN's channels broadcasting in six languages are available in more than one hundred and sixty countries and regions worldwide with over 150 million followers on social media across the globe.

Apart from the continuous changes in the mainstream media system, the rapid emergence and prevalence of social media provides an alternative for China to communicate with the world. The going-out strategy results in more presence in global media, making China achieve a certain degree of success. However, in the neo-liberalist economy of communications, more efforts official media channels spare, more skepticism and criticism the West voices towards China to portray negatively and slur the country's image in response to the 'China threat theory' (Hu & Li, 2014). By contrast, social media impose significant changes in the dissemination of messages, and are characterized highly decentralized, which can involve user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Inspired by the trend, China aimed at the overseas social media to promote views and opinions and to strengthen the international communication (Huang, 2019). Nowadays, all major Chinese media targeted at foreign audience around the world, as well as at overseas Chinese, have one or multiple presences on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Ohlberg, 2019). In 2019, Chinese ambassadors around the world opened respectively their Twitter accounts to join global debates on China and clarify their attitudes, following the government's public diplomacy.

The use of international social media is a transitional choice, while China yearns for building its own international platforms. In tandem with China's maturing livestreaming and e-commerce ecologies, the short-video industry took off around 2014-2015 (Zeng et al., 2021). Among the burgeoning short-video platforms, Douyin, launched by the Chinese new technology giant ByteDance in 2016, stood out of the more than 10 similar competitors in the market. In the next year, the private corporate targeted the global youth and provided them with an international version of Douyin, known as TikTok, which made a huge hit among the Generation Z. According to a media report, by August of 2022, TikTok is available in over one hundred and fifty countries, has more than 1 billion users, and has been downloaded over 200 million times in the United States alone (Wallaroo, 2022). In addition, TikTok registers over 1 billion monthly users, ranking fourth behind Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. It is the first phenomenal Chinese social media platform that makes such enormous success and achieves considerable outreach around the world. Although the international social media are inclined to portray China with a more neutral tone compared to the Western mainstream with a negative one, while the latter plays a significant role in setting the China-related agenda and influencing its frame (Xiang, 2013). However, the globalization

of China's social media may make a difference. A recent study demonstrates that the positive attitude toward China related TikTok videos by users shows the potential of TikTok to act as a tool to form and images and opinions of nations (Highhouse, 2022). To a certain extent, China's going-out strategy makes a step further in terms of media globalization.

Another predominant change in the global expansion of Chinese media lies in media convergence. Media convergence refers to technological or organizational convergence (Hemmingway, 2008), media conglomeration (Winseck, 2002), or the cultural transformation resulted by the collision of top-down and bottom-up media (Jenkins, 2006). In particular, China attached importance to the technological convergence and promoted a digital transformation in online communication since its access to the Internet. One of the earliest cases was the 1995 launch of China Daily's official website, making China's messages available to the outside world (Liu et al., 2014). A vivid example of convergence is the People's Daily moving online in 1997, one of the mouthpiece newspapers, followed by a mobile version in 2007, and the People's Video targeting mobile telephone TV users (Yin & Liu, 2014). The integration of traditional and digital media with far-reaching implications serves not only for leading speech and information inside China, but also for enhancing its international 'discourse power' to rival a dominant West communication order by «telling China's story well» (Huang, 2019).

4. The rise of China's soft power

While ICT development and media globalization provides China with great opportunities to communicate itself to the world, the country's ultimate goals lie in spreading international influence and strengthening soft power. Relevant studies demonstrate that China's soft power has been the central pillar in expanding its regional influence (Lampton, 2006; Sutter, 2005). Soft power is the ability to achieve desirable results through attraction or recognition rather than coercion or payments (Gill & Huang, 2006; Nye, 1990). To make itself more alluring, China makes use of all communication channels, both official domestic media organizations and commercial digital platforms, to increase its presence enhance its voice or discourse power.

The increase of soft power is partly achieved by a cultural strategy, underlying that China's tradition and history should be better connected to international audiences, including foreigners and overseas Chinese. This can be exemplified by the increasing cultural products exports from China to the world in recent years, such as the films (e.g., *The Great Wall* and *Wolf Warrior*), television (e.g., CCTV's expansion and hitting TV dramas), digital platforms (e.g., Chinese content available at the

streaming site Viki) (Zhu & Keane, 2020). Literature on film industry reveals that Chinese government redefines the nature and function of the film sector as a market-oriented cultural industry to be part of soft power and draws on Chinese culture and historical elements such as Kung Fu and incorporation of Hollywood techniques to expand international influence (Su, 2010). Meanwhile, Chinese media increased presence around the world, especially in the African continent over the past decade. Chinese state-owned media issued an African weekly edition of *China Daily* (2012), set up the first Chinese overseas television broadcasting and production center in Nairobi (2012), and developed the 'I Love Africa' multimedia mobile phone application featuring news and entertainment (2012) (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2018). China's soft power strategy has a positive influence on local media coverage in the country (Finlay, 2013).

The rise of China's soft power brings about improving its national image. Much of literature concerning Sino-African relations conclude that China's presence in Africa is more a comprehensive strategic partner than an exploitative colonialist (Moyo, 2016; Rangasamy & Swanepoel, 2011). Despite ideological conflicts, people in Western countries have changed their perceptions of China. A recent survey published by Pew Research Center reveals that about two-thirds of American adults say China's global influence is growing, whereas nearly half of U.S. people consider the United States has been getting weaker (Connaughton, 2022). According to a report (2020) released by the Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies, a state-affiliated think tank, China scored 6.3 in a 10 system regarding its global image, indicating a rise of 0.1 point compared to the previous year, and the developing countries viewed China more favorably than the developed one.

5. China's increasing engagement into global governance

Empowered by technological advancement and media internationalization, China takes a more proactive attitude in global governance and makes its efforts to build the image as the common prosperity contributor. For decades American economic, political and military supremacy bolsters the establishment of global communication networks and its hegemony in this field continues: from entertainment and sport (Hollywood, MTV, Disney, ESPN), news and information (CNN, Discovery, Time) to financial news (Bloomberg, Fortune, Wall Street Journal), to online news portals (Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, The Vice) as well as social media platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter) (Thussu, 2015). China's successful story has far-reaching implications for international communication as the Global South has

found a possible and workable path to prosperity if following the country's steps. With talk of American decline and the 'rise of the rest' (Zakaria, 2008), for example the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), the developing world begins to doubt the effectiveness of 'Washington consensus' and thinks over another alternative 'Beijing consensus' (Halper, 2010).

The Internet and the increasingly digitalized and neoliberal environment are beneficial to making hitherto marginalized voices to be heard and dealing with the imbalance in global media flow (Castells, 2013). To make it come to truth, China speeds up progress in the ICT sector: the launch of BRI, the foundation of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the participation in multilateral institutions and so on. Southern countries are aspiring to establish a fair and just multipolar global governance system. In this vision, China plays a significant role in countering the hegemony of the US and UK while contributing to the common prosperity. Naturally, the concept of 'de-Americanised media world' was put forward, indicating the increasing importance of the Southern countries in global communication and media discourses (Thussu, 2013). China's commitment into ICT infrastructure construction contributes to empowering those less privileged and underdeveloped countries in the Global South and enhancing their interactions with the world. Technological innovations allow the 'imperialized' countries to engage themselves more in international communication instead of merely acting as passive receivers (Chang, 2009). ICT is indispensable for integrating undeveloped nations into the global economic system (Vu, 2011). ICT investment creates and extends value chains in the networked applications market, such as providing better e-commerce or e-education (Emdon et al., 2014).

China is proactive in launching major infrastructure initiatives, in particular the impactful BRI, where information and communication networks construction projects take a large share. In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, referring to the 'Silk Road Economic Belt' and the '21st Century Maritime Silk Road'. As the largest infrastructural proposal around the world, it is estimated to get involved one hundred and forty-nine countries along the routes and produce two hundred and fifty cooperation documents with countries and international organizations to date. On the annual World Internet Conference, China as the host suggested for several times that BRI provided great opportunities for those countries to improve their telecommunication infrastructure.

The launch of BRI further fuels the increasing investment and foreign aid from the Chinese government onto the global information and communication infrastructure. Research shows that China contributed 4% to total global development assistance, half of which was directed to African

countries, with a strong focus on creating information and communication infrastructure (Thussu et al., 2018). China is committed to building telecom's infrastructure in Africa, thus improving ICT access and connectivity in Africa (Wen, 2020). The Beijing-based media company StarTimes has become a leading player in African television broadcasting industry after 20 years of operation. Till now, the multinational corporate has more than 40 million subscribers, and covers the whole population in the continent with more than thirty subsidiaries in African countries. Focusing on mobile TV services and internet business platforms, the ICT firm makes more indigenous people join the digital world.

6. Shift of communication order

The call for a new communication order has begun in the 1970s with research on media/cultural imperialism going on. In the historical context of US media domination, Herbert Schiller (1969), a pioneer scholar in this area, notes that communications constitute a decisive element in the extension of American imperialism. Aware of the global communication and media system problems, those postcolonial countries took part in a debate over media representations of the developing world at UNESCO. In the meantime, they coined the term 'new world information and communication order' (NWICO) to express their common aspirations about democratizing the international communication system and rebalancing information flows. Following the proposal, the World Information Society Summit (WSIS) was organized to further promote the worldwide informatization. However, both NWICO and WSIS, focusing on either technological determinism or digitized informatization failed to fulfill the promises, and ended up with «media/cultural imperialism 2.0» (Shi, 2017, p. 34).

Almost fifty years later, the world order in communication is still far from perfect. The United States continues to distribute the largest volume of media content in the digitalized globe, dominating the world communication order, even though the 'one-way' flow of news and media has been balanced somewhat by the introduction of new media, cultural products, and news sources arising from the South (Buchanan, 2015). To some extent, neither NWICO nor WSIS, the two ambitious proposals fell short of the expectations.

Many factors lead to the unsatisfying result while the digital divide is quite overwhelming. Basically, the digital divide refers to the gap between those who have and do not have access to the Internet and digital technologies (van Dijk, 2006). Figures from International Telecommunication Union (ITU) suggest that the Internet is available to about 4.9 billion people in 2021, accounting for roughly 63% of the global. That means 37% of the global population, most in developing countries, and

the majority of them women, remain offline and unconnected. Access to ICT services is inscribed on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations. At the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) in 2022, Houlin Zhao, ITU Secretary-General, called on all the member states to «promote digital technologies for the good of all» because equitable access to digital technologies is essential for global prosperity rather than a moral imperative.

Against the backdrop, China as an emergent economy attempts to challenge the previous order and seek other solutions, thereby creating a post-American and a post-Western world. It is believed that the year 2008 witnessed that China emerged onto the global scene and grabbed worldwide attention in the communication field (Jacques, 2009), with its ascending economy and the diminishing of US hegemony. Thinking over how to reduce or even eliminate dependency on Western media, and improve media representations of the developing countries, China should come to the forefront for reshaping the global communication order and making a multipolar world.

To fulfill the promises, China embarked on a journey for exploring an alternative to NWICO and WSIS. Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the concept of 'community with a shared future for mankind', with the intention of promoting common development. The Chinese nation has always emphasized harmony but difference, concerted efforts, and mutual cooperation, advocating the good vision of «The world belongs to all» (Dreyer, 2015). The concept encompasses different aspects, including the construction of 'United Nations of Media' (Shi, 2017, pp. 41-44). In 2015, President Xi has already pledged to build a community with a shared future in cyberspace at the China's second World Internet Conference. The supranational and transcultural initiative aims at representing adequately 'the Rest' as opposed to the West in the global media sphere (Gupta et al., 2018). China carried out a series of actions to put the project into place such as the establishment of World Media Summit Global Journalism Awards and the creation of the World Internet Conference.

By virtue of the theoretical innovation, China vows to build a new global communication order, making people across the world achieve better understanding and interactivity. China's going-out policy pursues at first worldwide influence and soft power, but nowadays the rising powering has gone far beyond that and expanded its scope to all human beings and attempts to lead a sino-globalization (Thussu et al., 2018).

Over the years, ICT has been one of the most dynamic sectors in Chinese industry. The increasing investments fuel the construction of ICT infrastructure and facilities in China and bolster the exportation to overseas countries with the launch of BRI initiative. To keep pace with the tremendous achievements

and ascending hard power, China issued the going-out strategy to drive media onto the world stage, which had far-reaching implications for the country's international communication. The ICT development and media globalization lays a solid foundation for strengthening China's soft power and improving its national image. ICT advancement also empowers China to be more engaged into global governance and make contributions to global prosperity and connectivity. Furthermore, the rising power challenges the current communication order dominated by the

West and calls for a new one based on the concept of community with a shared future for mankind.

7. Authorship contribution statement

Debao Xiang: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision, Project Administration.

Weihan Cai: Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Writing – Original Draft.

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