

# A SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA CENSORSHIP IN CHINA: AN INVESTIGATION INTO WECHAT PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

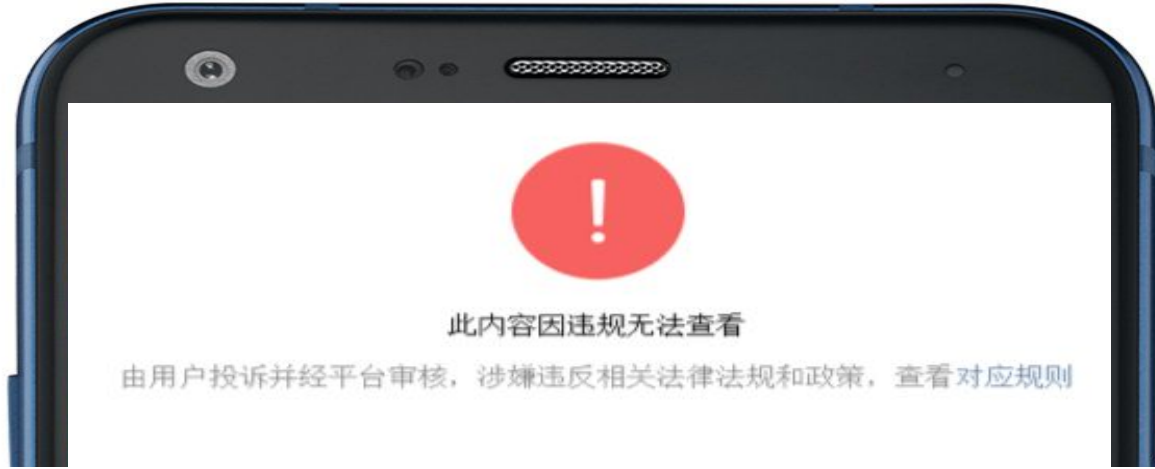
THE SYMPOSIUM ON CYBERSECURITY LAW IN PR CHINA: COMMUNICATION AND GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVES  
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Tai, Y., & Fu, K. W. (2020). Specificity, Conflict, and Focal Point: A Systematic Investigation into Social Media Censorship in China. *Journal of Communication*, 70(6), 842-867.

# INTERNET CENSORSHIP IN CHINA

- "We will...put in place a system for integrated internet management to ensure a **clean cyberspace**" (Communist Party of China National Congress 2017)
- Studies agree on the primary goal of the censorship being maintaining **regime stability, contributing to authoritarian resilience**
  - **Criticisms of the governments** (Fu et al. 2013)
  - Postings with **collective action** potential (King et al. 2013)
  - **Fear, Friction, and Flooding** (Roberts, 2018)

Fu, K., Chan, C., & Chau, M. (2013). Assessing censorship on microblogs in China: Discriminatory keyword analysis and the real-name registration policy. *IEEE Internet Computing*, 17(3), 42–50.

King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. E. (2013). How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression. *American Political Science Review*, 107(2), 326–343.

Roberts, M. E. (2018). *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside Chinas Great Firewall*. Princeton University Press.

# EVEN PRO-REGIME COMMENT WAS CENSORED .....

特朗普万万没想到：今天我们为什么要狠狠的“感谢”他！（深度好文）

红德参考 米国时刻 今天



**Title translation: Trump, you can't image: Why we should forcefully “thank” you? (In-depth good article)**

自从特朗普上台之后，世界局势风起云涌，所到之处，臭气熏天！

两个字那就是疯狂，去年刚从中国拿回去2000多亿合作订单，回去转头就不承认中国市场经济地位！与金正恩隔空对骂，整一副非打不可的样子。

但结果呢，似乎与特朗普的预期并不一样，还有些偏离！

这一偏离就偏离了，只是这偏的优点多，甚至在一定程度上，中国还应该感谢特朗普的疯狂！

# FOCAL POINT (SCHELLING, 1960)

- . A Game Theory idea - “focal point for each person's expectation of what the other expects him to expect to be expected to do.”
- . A group of participants, in an absence of prior coordination and communication, share knowledge by means of signaling and recognizing some properties of salience, e.g. ideas, labels, or images
- . For example: two individuals who are unknown to each other tend to choose meeting place according to norm and common understanding, say meeting at Grand Central Station in New York

## FOCAL POINT AND INTERNET CENSORSHIP

- Focal point – specific elements in the social media text that are susceptible to be associated with the controversy of an issue;
  - Specific company names involved in trade depute or specific date of event;
  - Name (an officer or a celebrity) or organization (say a university) in relation to #metoo;
  - Specificity of the call for action details leading to suppression;

# WECHAT



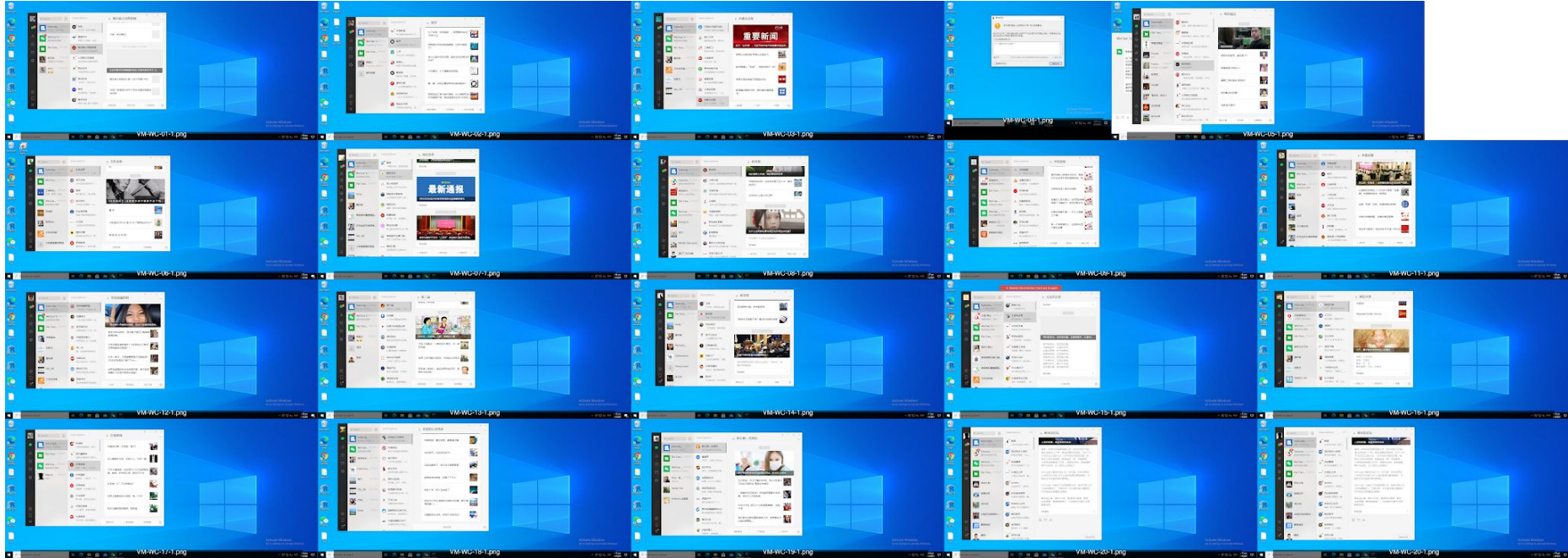
- As of October 2018, >1,000 million active users (Tencent 2018)
- Facebook-page like "public account" (微信公眾號)
  - Monthly active public accounts reached 3.5 million with 797 million users actively following them (Tencent 2017)
- Becoming the key social media platform in China
- No API, no simple URL access, not search engine indexed – “App crawling”

# "APP Crawling"





# VIRTUAL MACHINES



Search

Subscriptions 6:00 PM  
读书人冯学荣:冯学荣:...

File Transfer



← ↻ A |

Copy URL

### 著名浙商、万向掌门人鲁冠球今日去世! 没有退休时间表的他, 要休息了

原创 2017-10-25 钱江晚报 钱江晚报

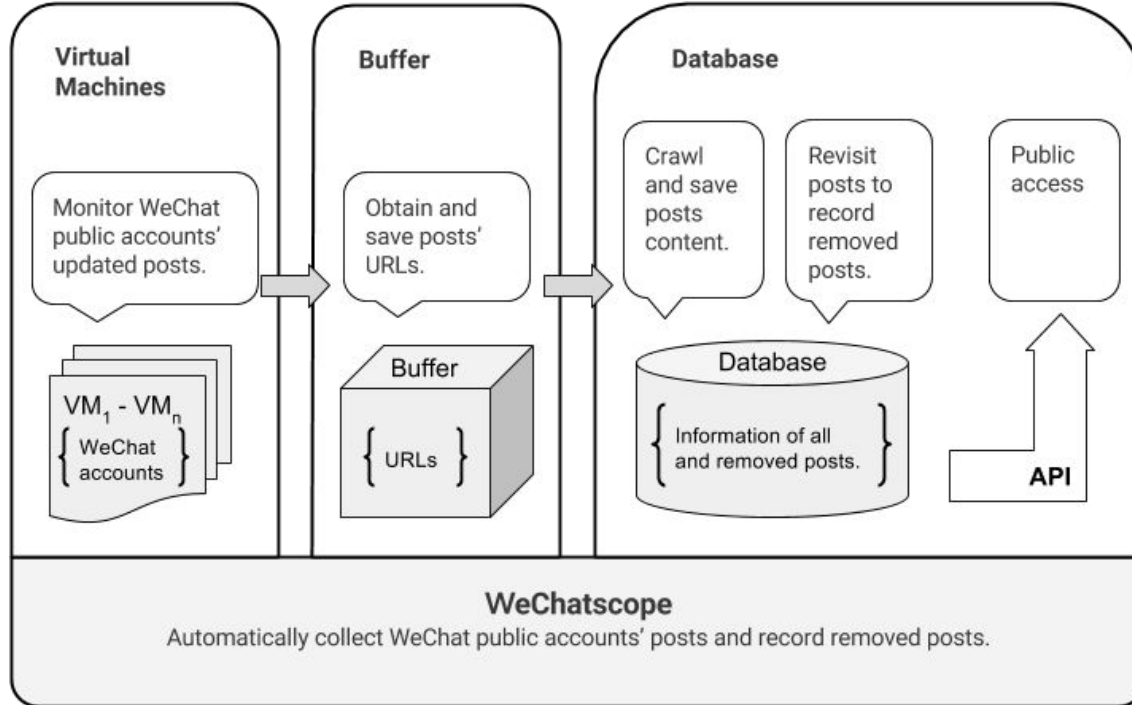
钱江晚报记者刚刚获悉, 著名浙商、浙江万向集团董事长兼党委书记鲁冠球于2017年10月25日逝世, 享年72岁。

当记者得到消息赶到某医院ICU病房外时, 鲁老先生已经离开了医院, 医护人员说, 他离开的时候还有生命体征。记者试图联系这段时间一直在抢救他的潘医生, 值班护士劝道, 算了, 鲁老先生在最后一时间里并不希望被打扰, 入院也是化名。另一位为鲁冠球看病的杭城

# System architecture

# WechatSCOPE

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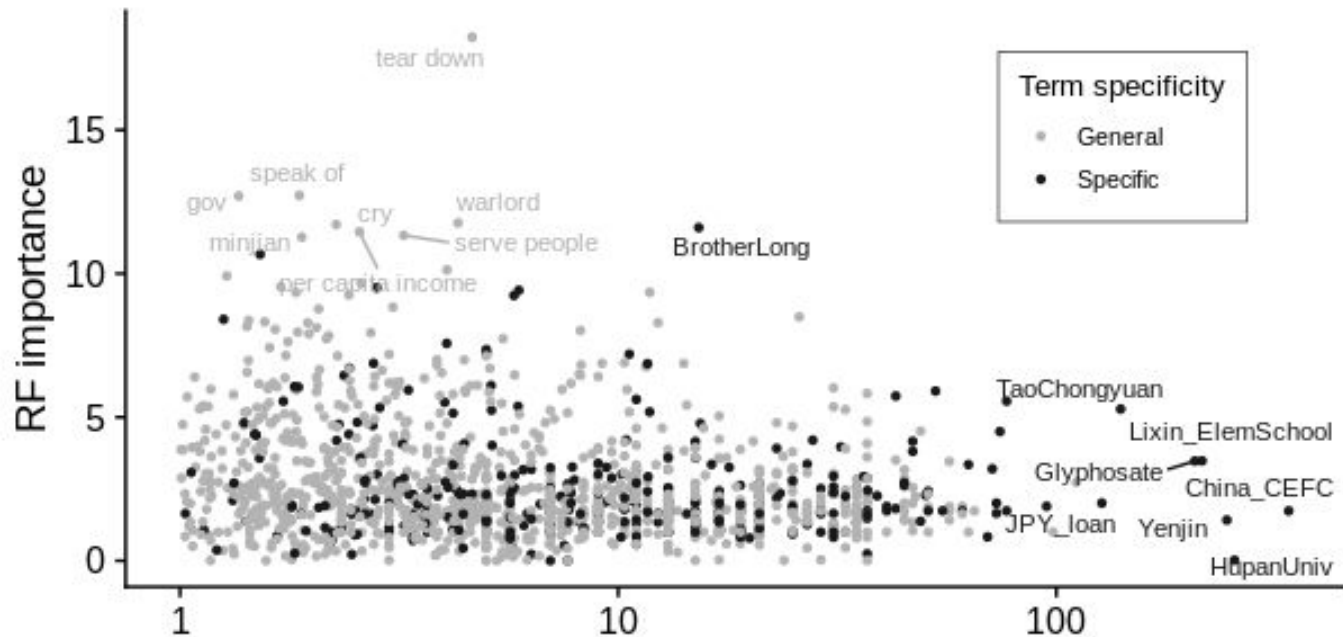


VM: virtual machine; URLs: Uniform Resource Locators;  
API: Application Programming Interface

# METHODS

- . Case-control matching - adjusting for confounding influence of inherent nature (individual account) and the variations of topics (by correlated topic model);
- . A sample of 4,560 articles with 2,280 pairs of censored and remained articles from 751 public accounts;
- . Modelling by Random Forest
  - . Large set of features and each with small contribution (Breiman, 2001);
  - . Robust approach to finding feature importance - RF importance score, chi-square, and relative risk, i.e. the ratio of term occurrence frequency for each term in the datasets (Fu, Chan, Chau, 2013)

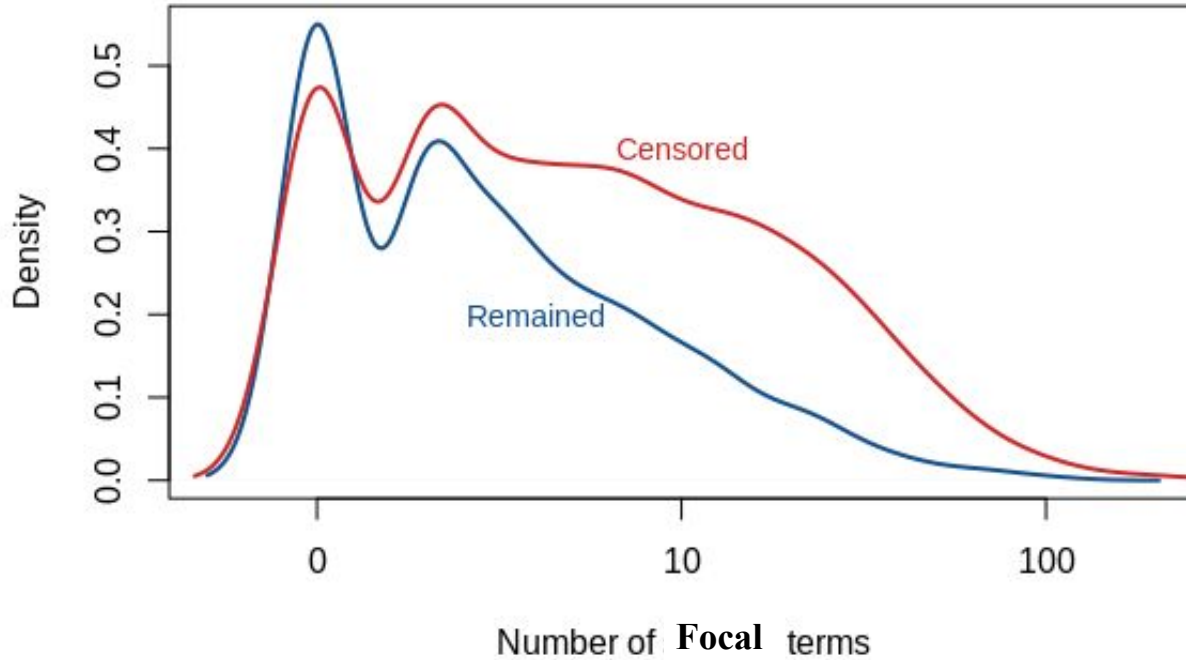
# Important “Censored” Focal Terms



Focal

Relative Risk (RR)

# DISTRIBUTION OF SPECIFIC TERMS IN CENSORED AND REMAINED ARTICLES



# TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

- . A systematic approach to examining Internet censorship, i.e. no access to proprietary data
- . Reconceptualization of Internet Censorship in China - not only criticism or calls for action, but Focal Points;
- . While the topic nature and the author identity are controlled, articles referring to more “focal terms” are more likely to be censored than those with fewer;