



**CHINESE YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT WITH
JOURNALISM: PERSPECTIVES AND ATTITUDES
TOWARDS THE NEWS**

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Abstract

The changing media landscape in China has created a diverse society where young audiences often suffer from confusing and conflicting values. There is an increasing concern that young people's sense of citizenship is in decline, suggesting a lack of awareness that may be indicative of an alienation towards news.

The purpose of this study is to enhance scholarly understanding of the relationship between Chinese young citizens and news. The research was conducted in Beijing, involving 12 focus groups and 40 semi-structured interviews with teenagers, and 10 in-depth interviews with their parents and teachers.

Evidence obtained highlights that young citizens have a general negative view towards national news media regarding news objectivity, balance, and depth. Results also suggest that young citizens struggle to understand the top-down form of news in China. The gaps between young people and news raise questions about their relative grasp of news literacy, and their perspectives on what counts as good journalism.

Briefly, the analysis reveals that: a) while news plays an important role in providing young citizens with information in their daily lives, consistent consumption of news does not necessarily result in enhancing their news literacy; and b) young citizens' perspectives on news are shaped by both foreign news concepts and domestic news stereotypes.

The study reaffirms that multiple dimensions of citizenship and cultural traditions in different social contexts need to be integrated when examining the relationship between young citizens, news and news education. Looking to the future, the thesis presents a strong case for a new approach to help reduce the gap between young

people and national news, offering specific recommendations for better developing news literacy education strategies best suited for China.

Contents

Abstract	II
Contents	IV
Contents of Figures	IX
Contents of Tables	X
Acknowledgements	XI
Declaration.....	XIII
Chapter 1 Introduction: Young citizens in the changing social and media environment	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 The social context of the study	2
1.2.1 Social transition and changes in Chinese journalism.....	2
1.2.2 Values in transition and the changing Chinese journalism	4
1.2.3 Media literacy education.....	7
1.2.4 Young people as media users and news audiences	19
1.3 Research rationale and aims of the study	29
1.4 Conception and general research methodology	33
1.5 Structure of the thesis and layout of the dissertation	34
Chapter 2 Young people, citizenship and news	36
2.1 Introduction.....	36
2.2 Young audiences, media and culture	37
2.3 Young people and citizenship	38
2.4 Media and young people's political socialization.....	44

2.5 Young people, media and identities	46
2.5.1 <i>The relationship between young people, media and identities</i>	46
2.5.2 <i>Young citizen's identity in Chinese social context</i>	50
2.6 Youth and news.....	53
2.6.1 <i>Young people, news and politics</i>	53
2.6.2 <i>Youth and news literacy</i>	59
2.7 Summary of literature review	64
Chapter 3 Methodology	66
3.1 Introduction.....	66
3.2 General research design	66
3.3 The sample for this study	69
3.4 Conceptual references	70
3.5 Justification of the methods	73
3.6 The research framework and gaps identified in the literature	81
3.7 Specific procedure.....	83
3.7.1 <i>Pilot study</i>	83
<i>Purpose and rationale</i>	83
<i>Sampling and data collection</i>	83
<i>Data Analysis</i>	84
3.7.2 <i>Focus Groups</i>	85
<i>Purpose and rationale</i>	85
<i>Sampling and data collection</i>	86
<i>Data analysis</i>	88
3.7.3 <i>Semi-structured intensive interviews</i>	89

<i>Purpose and rationale</i>	89
<i>Sampling and data collection</i>	89
<i>Data analysis</i>	91
3.8 Ethical considerations	92
3.9 Strength and weakness of the methods	93
3.10 Concluding reflections	95
Chapter 4 News in the eyes of young people	96
4.1 Introduction.....	96
4.2 News in young people’s daily lives	96
4.2.1 <i>What is news?</i>	96
4.2.2 <i>What news do young people consume?</i>	100
4.2.3 <i>News apathy</i>	109
4.2.4 <i>Indiscriminative news consumption</i>	113
4.2.5 <i>Further discussions</i>	116
4.3 Young people’s requirements, preferences and expectations of news.....	120
4.3.1 <i>News requirements and preferences</i>	120
4.3.2 <i>Difficulties in understanding news</i>	121
4.3.3 <i>Further discussions</i>	123
4.4 Perceptions of news quality	124
4.4.1 <i>Definitions of quality news</i>	124
4.4.2 <i>Perceived criteria for quality news</i>	125
4.4.3 <i>Young citizen and Western news values</i>	129
4.4.4 <i>Further discussions</i>	132
4.5 How do young people regard Chinese journalism?	134

4.5.1 <i>Problems in Chinese journalism</i>	134
4.5.2 <i>Expectations of news development</i>	136
4.5.3 <i>Further discussions</i>	140
4.6 Young people's participation in news and its potential	142
4.7 Conclusions	147
Chapter 5 How young people evaluate news: findings from five case studies and their implications for news literacy education	155
5.1 Introduction.....	155
5.2 News samples selection	155
5.3 News samples evaluation	156
5.3.1 <i>News example One: the Japanese earthquake</i>	156
5.3.2 <i>News example Two: 7/23 fast train tragedy in Wenzhou</i>	162
5.3.3 <i>News example Three: Gaddafi</i>	168
5.3.4 <i>News example Four: Yao Ming's retirement</i>	176
5.3.5 <i>News example Five: Meimei Guo</i>	179
5.4 General observations from the examples	184
5.5 What young people expect of news education	191
5.6 Further discussions	194
5.7 Conclusions	201
Chapter 6 Conclusions	203
6.1 Introduction.....	203
6.2 The relationship between young people and news.....	203
6.3 News literacy education for Chinese young people	216

6.3.1 Discussions of the relationship between young people and news literacy education.....	216
6.3.2 Implementing news literacy education in China.....	219
6.3.3 Recommendations	230
6.4 Limitations and further research	236
6.4.1 Limitations of this study.....	236
6.4.2 Further studies.....	239
References	243
Appendices.....	274

Contents of Figures

Figure 1.1 The comparison of different age groups of young users of the Internet.....	20
Figure 1.2 Devices chosen for accessing the internet	21
Figure 3.1 Research framework.....	81

Contents of Tables

Table 1.1 Average numbers of hours young Chinese people spend online per week in 2008 and 2009	20
Table 4.1 Reasons for young people's news apathy	107
Table 4.2 The relationship between teenagers, media environment, news consumption and perspectives	145

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Declaration

This thesis has been created by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree. The work in this thesis has been undertaken by myself except where otherwise stated. The materials related to findings have been published in:

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Chapter 1 Introduction: Young citizens in the changing social and media environment

1.1 Introduction

In recent times, young people's relationship with news has become an issue worthy of attention. Scholars and educators have expressed concern about young people's cynicism towards news, distancing themselves from mainstream journalism.

This study explores the relationship between young citizens and news in China, an increasingly cultural diverse society, with its media in the process of becoming globalized. To do so, the following questions are raised: how do young people engage with news? And what gaps lay in the relationships between young people and the news?

This chapter will set the context of the study. It begins with a description of the social context, which influences the characteristics of young people's citizenship, their educational background and their media environment.

Following this, it briefly introduces the aims and objectives of the thesis, as well as its major theoretical and methodological approaches.

1.2 The social context of the study

1.2.1 Social transition and changes in Chinese journalism

China today has entered a period of reform with increasing international exchange in recent decades. Society has witnessed rapid changes with significant adjustments and economic development (Xi et al. 2006).

In China, political exclusivism centres on the leadership of the Communist Party, which claims to be the guarantor for maintaining the country's social and political stability, and the basis for the steady rise of its economy (Scalapino 1989). However, since 1978, instead of being financed exclusively by the government, newspapers, television and other media have been allowed to compete in the marketplace (Shirk 2010). When market dynamics come to be seen as a democratic force in society, traditional Chinese values become eroded and are evolving into Western values.

In terms of journalism, under the Communist regime, Chinese media used to shun 'negative' reporting before the media reforms in 1978, but have changed gradually from then on. According to Zhao (1998, p.34): "Since the 'opening up', media increasingly moved from 'leader-oriented' to 'reader-oriented' positions, and journalists started to emphasize 'truthfulness', 'brevity', 'timeliness', 'liveliness' and 'readability' in their stories".

Disaster news and crisis reporting gradually became acceptable. However, Chinese journalism's still heavy reliance on official sources and overarching censorship issues contribute to the limited value of news (Wu 2011).

Journalism in China has been deeply impeded by political imperatives and commercial pressure and journalists' identities have long been shaped by China's unique cultural traditions. However, current trends have become more optimistic. Journalism in China is becoming increasingly open and its professionalism is constantly improving (Shirk 2010) and at the same time, it is required to be more responsive to audiences (Burgh 2003).

In this critical period, Chinese news is facing new tasks and challenges on the new media platforms, including the rapid change of social interest groups and respective moral standards. Generally, citizens' trust in the media has significantly decreased, particularly since it is now difficult for the government to control the internet in an age of global communication (Li 2009). As a result, audiences who used to have no choice but to believe what appeared in the media are now confronted with an open environment that has seen a flood of citizen and foreign news at the same time. In the meantime, some developed countries have influenced China by spreading Western interpretations and definitions of democracy, based upon freedom and human rights as universal values. The Chinese government believes that, currently, the internet does not spread enough China-made ideas and values while those of the Western world enjoy an open internet which allows a free flow of information (Li 2009). Consequently, the Chinese government is losing its power to influence its citizens by failing to maintain traditional values. Currently reports about China from various angles pour in from overseas, and the prevalence of citizen news is increasing the developments of news. Both of these developments challenge the truthfulness and balance of official Chinese news media and strike at the core traditional Chinese value system. In spite of this, Chinese journalists have never directly challenged the traditional organization of media power structures (Polumbaum 2003).

As a result, the news environment is becoming increasingly complex in the globalized context, with an ever greater mix of citizen-generated news. This environment needs

to find a balance between top-down control and bottom-up demands, if it is to survive in global and local contexts. Meanwhile, the drift away from traditional values also causes audiences, especially the young whose value system is still in the making, to feel confused and lost in this newly multi-perspectival environment. Results from the Chinese Youth Study Institute (2013) show that currently young citizens are continually exhibiting new characteristics and trends in their use of media and news¹. But it is not clear what young citizens think about Chinese media in the globalizing media arena and how much they value Western ideas imported from the Western world via the media are new issues that need to be explored.

1.2.2 Values in transition and the changing Chinese journalism

Before the reform and opening-up in 1978, China as a society was organised around the work unit system and people played the role of unit members. As the reform deepened, much of the responsibility of the unit shifted to wider society, and the government units' control and influence over their members weakened considerably. Accordingly, transitions in social and economic relations caused a moral change (Lu et al. 2006).

A wide range of values is referred to as 'traditional virtues of the Chinese citizens' (*zhonghua minzu de chuantong meide*)², which, according to political leaders, ought to be celebrated, developed fully and carried forward. These traditional virtues include self-control and self-sacrifice, with high values being placed on collectivism, loyalty, modesty, humility, thrift, industry, education, discipline etc. (Liu 2010). It seems that the expectation for modern Chinese citizens to cultivate these moral

¹ <http://www.cycs.org/Article.asp?ID=10777>

² <http://baike.so.com/doc/357503.html>

qualities will continue to accompany China on its journey towards reaching the goal of becoming a harmonious society, which theoretically serves as an extension of the ruling party's 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' doctrine.

At the same time, with the development of pluralistic communication patterns, interactions between native and foreign culture have greatly increased. Also, as noted, the internet has proved to be a successful medium for exporting Western values to China. However, although China had carried out its open door policy and the new media have provided a platform for dialogues about pluralism, the Chinese government has long tried to keep a tight rein on traditional and new media to prevent challenges to its political authority (Tong 2011). This has often entailed strict media controls using monitoring systems, shutting down publications or websites, and even the jailing of dissident journalists and bloggers/activists (Shirk 2010).

In spite of heavy top-down monitoring, however, with the opening up of the market, Chinese media have become increasingly commercialized, with growing competition, diversified content, and an increase in investigative reporting. Along with that, more informal news and grass-roots (citizen) voices are emerging, forcing the mainstream media to present a more pluralistic picture, with much conflict in views, angles, and ideology.

China's reform and opening up can be summarized as dual modernity (Liu 2010). The dualism here represents a search for a modern identity for China in an age of globalization. This process has entailed paradoxes: it is a search for continuity with the cultural tradition, alongside integration with, as well as resistance to, global capitalism (Zhang 1997). The contradictions and complexity inherent in such a process have led commentators to describe present-day China in postmodernist terms.

Together, social transformation under the auspices of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the modern age has entailed a series of apparent contradictions, contrasts and tensions – between, for example, individualistic values and collective norms, old and new values, choice and risks, China and the west, material wealth and moral decadence, fragmentation and social cohesion, and so on.

In such environments, teenagers, as ‘citizens in the making’, growing up in an era of social transition, have become a source of major and controversial debate within audience studies (Johnson 2006).

Chinese authorities have found it disturbing that there is excessive coverage of pop culture trends on mass media, and media coverage about traditional Chinese culture and values is diminishing. Whether young people are becoming increasingly Westernized and thus have no wish whatsoever to keeping their roots has become an issue of much social focus in China (Liu 2010). After trying to hamper young people’s using of the internet, mainly by stopping them from entering internet bars and limiting their time surfing online, some experts studies of young people suggested that the most effective way to protect younger generations from the negative impacts of mass media should be media education rather than government-driven campaigns (China Daily 2004).

Indeed, media play an important role in constructing young people’s perspectives on society and therefore media literacy is a strategy which can be implemented to change the way young people are affected by media. Previous studies assert that becoming media literate may be the way for young people to take control, and to be more able to identify and control the borders between the real world and the world manufactured by the media (Burke 2008). As a result, media literacy is an important bridge connecting young people to the real world. Therefore, it is essential to include the

subject of media literacy when studying the relationship between young people and news.

However, up to the beginning of this century, media literacy education in China was still in its infancy (Cai 2002). Chinese scholars and authorities have since then paid attention to this issue and endeavoured to build a model to implement media literacy education in curriculums (China Daily 2004). In the next section, a brief history of media literacy education and recent discussions on this topic will be introduced.

1.2.3 Media literacy education

History and development of Media literacy education

The notion of media literacy has been used for several decades, but has long proved contentious (Luke 1989). Literacy associated with print media usually means the ability to read printed texts (Sinatra 1986) and visual literacy includes thinking about images (Adams and Hamm 1989). However, the fundamental objective of media literacy is critical autonomy in relationship to the media (Kubey 1997). Information acquisition and decoding are a synergy that mediates varied messages, thus in the new media era, communication to some extent has become more complicated and more advanced capacity and skills are required in the negotiations of the meanings of messages.

Some more recent definitions involve the understanding of the technological, political, and economic constraints affecting the transmission of mediated messages (Lewis and Jhally 1998). Others have suggested media literacy depends on knowing how the media function in society (Messaris 1998). Still others assert that media literacy is

dependent on critically processing media content and on constructing comparisons between media content and social reality (Potter 2001).

The definitions of media literacy have been associated to the technological evolution in society while the developments of media literacy education are bound up with social background and historical ideology; they reflect contemporary audience studies and communication theory, developing closely in line with media technology.

Media literacy has its roots in 1930s Europe and broadened its field of vision to a worldwide scale (Buckingham 2000). Generally media education, the means to improve media literacy, can be divided into four historical periods, starting with Inoculation and Discrimination as the first paradigm. It is generally accepted that the foundation of media literacy theory is F.R. Leavis and Deny Thompson's book *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness*, published in 1933. The work took cultural salvation as its core concept, which the authors defined as preserving the literary heritage, language, values, and health of the nation it was seen to embody and represent. This encouraged students to discriminate among media, thereby resisting the negative influence of mass media (Masterman 1980), an effort later termed inoculation. This work makes the first suggestion of a systematic enlargement of the discourse of media into education curricula; it also provided exercises related to news, advertisement and popular novels. With the central mission as culture salvation, the aim of media education was to encourage students to discriminate and resist, thereby arming themselves against the false and corrupting influence of the mass media, and to move on to the self evidently good and true values (Buckingham 1998).

The next period, the paradigm of cultural studies and popular arts, was between the late 1950s and early 1960s, when it became clear that popular mass media would not

just wither and disappear and media education entered its second phase (Buckingham 2000). The culture canon was opposed in their work, since culture by that time was recognized not as merely for elitist consumption, but as a varied form of expression, incorporating both high and low culture, and integrated into daily life. Hall and Whannel (1965) 's book *The Popular Arts Proposing Media Literacy*, particularly signified movie literacy. It recommended media pedagogy with less stress on media immunity, holding a historicist outlook, which treated mass culture as a shared product. At that time teachers began to recognize and build upon students' everyday cultural experiences (Murdock and Phelps 1973). During this period, mass culture was no longer considered a negative by-product of the industrial civilization process, but a component of it; and the skills that audiences should be equipped with were no longer inoculators, but were discrimination, i.e. enhancing the ability of media content selection.

The demystification period, which came in the 1970s with the ascendancy of screen theory, represented the third paradigm. In this period the screen became the most significant vehicle for new developments in semiotics, structuralism, psychoanalytic theory, post-structuralism, and Marxist theories of ideology (Buckingham 1998). Discrimination on the grounds of cultural value was effectively replaced by a form of ideological demystification. Students were urged to put aside their subjective views and to do systematic analysis, which helps to reveal the ideologies hidden beneath media texts, thus liberating themselves from the influence. The analysis was associated with political economy studies of media institutions. Discrimination, by then however, was replaced by ideological demystification (Buckingham 1998). At the same time in the USA, like in many other countries, such as France and Canada, media education was centred on film education. However, in most cases screen education focused on media technology but not media culture itself. Still, even back then many teachers dedicated their classes to the studies of film language and aesthetics of film. Since the above points neglect some of the complexities of the

specific historical and social circumstances, a more thorough analysis of the evolution of media education, with regards to the changing social and cultural climate of their times, as well as their relation to the on-going struggles for control over educational policy making is needed (Buckingham 1998).

Media education today is in transition and has stepped forward onto the fourth stage. The 1990s and early 2000s became quite productive years for the media education progress in the UK (Buckingham 2003). In 1996 the College of Education of the University of Southampton opened a Media Education Centre led by Hart, who suggested that the effectiveness of media education was based on practical activities. He argued that the topics of the majority of media-related lessons exclude the political sphere, and there was a scarcity of practical application of the experience of pupils, and a lack of connection with their previous knowledge (Fedorov 2008).

Media literacy education in terms of practical application can never been separated from the idea of cultivating active citizens in various situations (Fedorov 2003). Influenced by postmodern thought, diversification and pluralism could be seen in media education theory, with the study object shifting from media to active audiences. Although advocates of the changing literacies endorse technological determinism, there are claims regarding the social and cultural impact (MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999). Rather, they refer to the supposed underlying shift from modernity to post-modernity, with both technology and literacy being shaped by this grander transformation (Livingstone 2004). Based on post-modernist analysis, social science consists of various expressions; it is impossible to find one media education paradigm that can be shared by all society, as there is no one model to suit all spheres of learning (Yao 2000). As extending conceptions of literacy associated with the new media, it has developed a sophisticated account of the individual skills involved in decoding media texts, with an interactive view of the relationship between reader and text. Literacy, by extension, cannot be conceived solely as a feature of the user but

must also be seen as medium-dependent, a co-production of the interactive engagement between technology and user.

More recently, Fedorov's (2008) model of media education includes a focus on perception and media aesthetics alongside establishing ways the media may be evaluated on their own merits. Additionally, it takes a more collectivist approach to understanding the social implications of mediated messages. This model involves four modules: 1) verification of levels of students' media development and media perception; 2) training for the practical creation & perception of media texts; 3) instruction in critical analysis of the media; and 4) establishment of understanding of media history and context, including acquiring familiarity with the contemporary social & cultural situation.

Starting by criticizing that the old model of media education failed to acknowledge the complexity of young people's experiences with the media, and ignored the changing media environment, some researchers have developed a more complex view of the ways in which young people and children judge media, and how they use media to form their personal and social identities. Buckingham (1993) contends that media education should pay closer attention to what students already know rather than assuming what they know is invalid. Moreover, he also argues that media education should pay more attention to the relative status of teachers and students, since young people may be inclined to reject what teachers tell them, especially when cultural differences are concerned. He suggests that media education needs a coherent program of initial and in-service teacher training and a more egalitarian relationship between teachers and students. In his later work, *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture* (Buckingham 2013), he suggests a new paradigm which criticizes media education dominated by protectionism or critical analysis. He argued that the new paradigm of media education should feature some of the following:

- Not perceiving young people as victims that have been manipulated by the media or focusing on seeking defects in media;
- Not focusing on the defects of media, respecting the media experiences young people already have and not pinning teachers to authoritarian roles;
- Encouraging young people to take turns in being passive knowledge acceptors and active participants in creating media culture;
- Identifying young people not as passive knowledge-accepters but as active participators involved in creating media culture;
- Placing more weight on amusement in media education, since overstressed objective analysis draws young people away and decreases their interest in using media and frustrates their media exploration; and
- Giving students more flexibility in media literacy education, with opportunities for self-reflection, and with an awareness of their own positions and tastes in media production.

Regarding media literacy in the local context and in practice, a paper, “*National Media Literacies*” (Jenkins et al. 2009), centres on ways to address sets of social and cultural competencies young people need to acquire in order to function effectively within the newer kinds of mediated, participatory culture. New Media literacy focuses attention on the analysis of experience elements associated with creating or personalizing as well as using new media is also suggested by Jenkins. The identified skill set includes: collective intelligence, including the ability to compare information; judgment skills to evaluate information source credibility; trans-media navigation abilities; and the negotiation of diverse perspective and alternative norms.

Regarding media literacy as a means to encourage citizen participation, discussions on media education place a stronger emphasis on digital literacy in the new media era (Park 2012). Digital technologies are recognized as a crucial tool for strengthening young people's participation in civic and political life (Bennett 2008; Jenkins et al., 2009). Meanwhile, media literacy has been situated within a broader context. It goes beyond access to technology into the competencies of the users who are situated within cultural and social contexts (Sourbati 2009). Some studies argue that we need to add other dimensions to media literacy, such as an ethical dimension that is posed by the increased use of public media to participate in their community and the larger world (Jenkins et al. 2007).

Beyond the academic field, the increasing visibility of media literacy in the education agenda is obvious. In the United States in 2011, the College Board used a media literacy question in its essay portion of the SAT (Bunin 2011). There are other different types of practices involving media literacy education across the curriculum. For example, teachers are involved in a staff development program in media literacy and develop unique approaches for integrating media literacy concepts into language arts, history, math and science at the ninth grade level (Renee Hobbs and Richard Frost 2011).³

To sum up, in pioneering countries media education has reached a mass scale, supported by rigorous theoretical and methodological research. It is not reducible to a feature or skill of the user, but is better understood as co-production practices in the interactive engagement between technology and user. Consequently, literacy is

³ Instructional Practices In Media Literacy Education And Their Impact On Students' Learning <http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/instructional-practices-media-literacy-education-and-their-impact-students-learning>

dependent on interface design and it changes as technology changes. In developing countries, like China, whose media development is increasingly catching up with the developed world but whose media education is still in the rudimentary stage, it is not yet certain whether a developed, Western model of media education can possibly work well, especially when considering cultural discrepancies and the difference in social systems.

Media education in China

In an analysis of the development of Chinese media education, Tang and Sun (2009) showed that this started at a level below that of Western countries but has developed rapidly. It is also generally argued that media education in China should be developed in a localized and practical way that addresses China's social context and is established on Chinese young people's characteristics.

Some scholars have contended that the main body of media education in mainland China should ideally be based on the country's media system, social system and mass audiences (Zheng 2010), or on its education systems (Li 2003). Specifically, Bu (2002) argues that the objectivities of media education should include:

- 1) formulating a critical reaction towards information among young people;
- 2) developing their knowledge about different media, especially the advantages and shortcomings of each, and training them to be aware that the information that media offers is the consequence of how a media system runs and of the relationships between politics, economics and culture;
- 3) creating an immunity of harmful information and inappropriate material; and
- 4) developing the ability to use the mass media for self-development.

Based on Western ideas of media literacy, some scholars argue for the practical significance of media education in the context of China and it is generally accepted that media enlightenment is necessary to citizens at the present time (Zang 2003); and in the globalising world, citizens not only need critical thinking about media texts, but also the ability to communicate between different cultures and to deeply understand democracy (Chen 2004). Media education is an effective way of promoting media literacy (Zhang and Shi 2004) and the aim of media literacy should not only be in accordance with current developments in educational reform, but also in line with trends in social reform (Li 2003).

Although many scholars have responded to media literacy developments by producing a large amount of research, quantitative studies take up the majority while qualitative ones are relatively few and do not offer enough depth. Moreover, though there are a number of quantitative studies concerning audiences and media consumption, there is little evidence that they possess an evaluative framework with which to understand their data (Tang and Sun 2009). Existing Chinese studies are relatively separated from each other, partly due to the differences in urban and rural geography - which means studies in a certain area of China are not representative enough to be cited as a general phenomenon.

Although Chinese media education is not yet mature and China is below the Western average level of media literacy, Chinese scholars are trying to catch up with the global trends, and have presented innovative ideas, compared with the arguments in the past ten years. Some have paid attention to media education in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and suggested that media education in mainland China is comparatively generalized and not based on the demands and characteristics of Chinese audiences (Zhong 2006).

Besides, although Chinese youth share some common characteristics, they are not a homogeneous group. Socio-geographical origins, different family backgrounds and other social and cultural factors generate heterogeneous outlooks, just as in other societies. The most striking differences among Chinese youth can be related to their rural/urban origins. It seems, however, that official statistics in China do not usually distinguish between rural and urban youth in talking about Chinese youth and thus far, most scholarly and media attention on Chinese youth has focused on the urbanites, especially college students (Zhang 2005).

Although many scholars pay attention to theories of media education, there is not much normative, systematic analysis of how media education should be carried out in mainland China, and due to the characteristics of its culture, media and educational policy, this is a complex case.

In respect of the practical mode of media literacy, scholars hold different attitudes towards the method and modes of education. Some suggest that media education should not be applied generally to all citizens, but focus on different groups, according to the degree of the citizen's education level, age, area, etc. (Sun and Zhu 2006). The most mentioned mode of media education is social education, organizational education and self-education (Lu and Guo 2007). With regards to young people, most scholars suggest that media education should be put into school curricula and teachers should play the role of media educators and should be educated themselves as well. In addition, parents should be better able to participate in young people's media education (Zhang 2005).

Although media literacy education has not been generally applied to the curriculum in China, involving media literacy in existing regular lessons in Chinese classrooms has been suggested by the authorities and many scholars (Chen 2009). A few schools have

tried media education as an experimental practice, with content being close to the Western model, such as telling students how media are constructed, the features of each medium, discussing the role of audiences, etc. (Zhang et al. 2011). Besides, weekend classes and summer/winter camps for media literacy are organized by private companies to enhance young citizens' knowledge on media, thereby enriching their post-school lives (Xu 2012). Besides, there are publications (mainly books) and other media products in the market helping young citizens to enhance their media literacy by themselves or with the help of parents.⁴

Currently, media literacy has been regarded as a key area of youth development by the Chinese Ministry of Education. Meanwhile, several universities with specialties in media education studies have been working with primary and middle schools to develop young people's media literacy (Xu 2012). Given the social reality in China, with both academic provision and governmental support, the prospect of media education looks considerable.

In the understanding of the aims and functions of China's media literacy education, due to the variety of cultural background and social reality, a multi-perspective review is required. The research has a less constructed theoretical framework compared to Western studies and the quality of Chinese works is uneven. As David Buckingham explained at China's first international seminar on media literacy education held in October 2004 in Beijing, media literacy education could have more than one definition, not only from the perspective of knowledge systems but also from a comprehensive perspective on the skills (Zhang 2006).

⁴ <http://www.docin.com/p-52822654.html>

In attempting to develop citizenship, media literacy today needs to invite new thinking about the aims and purposes of media education (Allan 2012). However, although China has been performing quality education for many years, it is difficult to carry out media literacy education in formal education (especially the heavy burdened primary and secondary schools) due to the restrictions of the existing education system.

No matter how advanced the theories are, media education for young people is primarily carried out at school. As some scholars have argued, schools are the main setting of media education (Zhang 2005). However, although scholars in China are trying to catch up with the leading ideas about media education – and some of them have achieved so, at least conceptually – teachers in middle schools still lag behind. Schools and parents pay more attention to students' grades and enrolment rates and teachers also complain about the additional teaching burden caused by media education.⁵ Although the studies in universities showed that media education in some schools was promising, the teachers in these schools feel less positive, since the students are not literate enough, forcing them to teach things from the very basic level (Liu 2010).

To sum up, although there are a lot of arguments concerning how media education should be carried out in China, there is in practical terms no generally approved framework for it. Besides, it is common sense that China should have a local characterized media education rather than copying the Western model; however, due to social limitations, there are problems for media education to be carried out with complete liberal and critical ideas. Moreover, as suggested above, schools may not be an ideal place for media education as a result of the social and educational system. So

⁵ <http://js.qq.com/a/20131120/010921.htm>

it is essential for young citizens to find a way to develop media education by themselves. Thus it is crucial to study what they want from media education and how they expect it to be, which in turn should start with learning their media experience and the way they consume media products, especially news.

1.2.4 Young people as media users and news audiences

1.2.4.1 Young people as media consumers

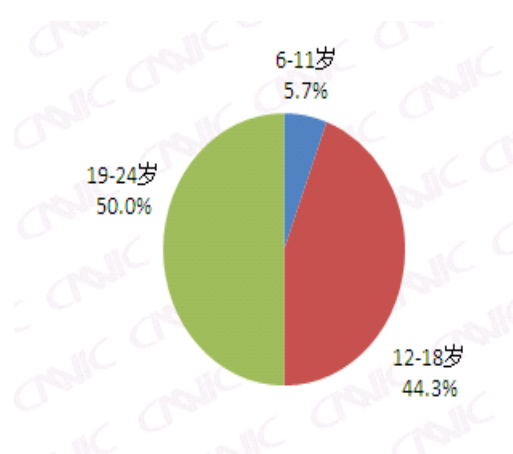
The media play a significant role in connecting citizens to the society. Although media have been influential to young citizens' daily lives, a growing number of the debates about young people's relationship with politics have reached pessimistic conclusions (Mindich 2005; Bennett 1997). The weakening of citizenship awareness does not exist independently. A range of social and cultural factors have been attributed to this crisis: the decline of trust in the government, the redundancy of information, the decline of traditional values etc. (Pelevin 2012).

Added to these are the rise of issue politics, an emphasis on individual identity, and the fusion between news and popular culture (Gerodimos 2010). The media have featured prominently in these discussions. This is due to the crucial role of media in citizenship development, whether it works as a watchdog of those in power, or as the voice of the authorities, or as a public sphere. How news is perceived partly rests on the tension between the audiences and the media, and the relationship between young citizens and news is of particular interest here.

With the vigorous development of media and journalism, the cultural impact of news has gained a growing attention. For some, news on television is believed to be responsible for failing to empower young people (Buckingham 2000). The Internet

presents some positive aspects but there are also negative issues on the information highway, especially when it is related to young audiences. As the internet has surpassed traditional news media to become the main news source among young people, teenage audiences, viewed as “persons in the making”, have become a major area of audience research (Johnson 2006). In China, young people make up the majority (167 million up to 2009) of new media users, and middle school students, from 13 to 18, and account for a considerable proportion of this group (Bu 2010).

Figure 1.1 The comparison of different age groups of young users of the Internet



(CNNIC 2009, p.4, cited by Bu 2010)

As Figure 1.1 indicates, among all the young internet users (from six to 24 years old), the group of middle and high school students (from 12 to 18, marked as red) takes up 44.3%, which is close to the college group (from 19 to 24, marked in green).

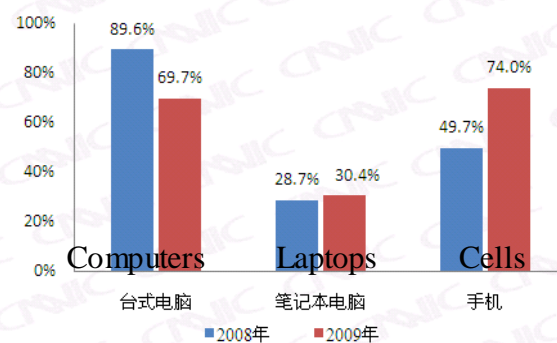
Table 1.1 Average numbers of hours young Chinese people spend online per week in 2008 and 2009

	Pupils in primary school	Middle school students	College students	Non-students	Total
2008	7.8	9.7	18.4	--	14.6
2009	5.9	12.1	18.6	21.6	16.5

(CNNIC 2009, p.12, cited by Bu 2010)

The data in this table (1.1) shows that between 2008 and 2009, the average time middle school students spent online grew from 9.7 hours per week to 12.1 hours per week, while the data of college students stays almost the same and pupils in primary schools showed a decline.

Figure 1.2 Devices chosen for accessing the internet



(CNNIC 2009, p.12, cited by Bu 2010)

Figure 1.2 shows that computers, laptops and mobile phones were young people's main devices to access the internet, with mobile phones surpassing the others to become the most frequently used devices (74%, compare with 69.7% for computers and 30.4% for laptops) in 2009.

CNNIC (2009, cited by Bu 2010) also examined young Chinese people's reasons for getting online and shows that the main motives for their internet use are getting information, entertainment, and communication. Their consumption of the internet is apparently entertainment-motivated. Even though middle school students consume news a lot, their consumption of news is less than those of online games and online music.

For young citizens, the internet now rivals television as a main source of national and international news. Concerning parents' influence on media use, 42% of parents claimed that they do not interfere at all in children's media activities, and 27% said that they just limited the time of using media rather than paying attention to the actual content (Fubon Cultural & Educational Foundation 2008).

1.2.4.2 Characteristics of Chinese teenagers

Young people's perceptions and experiences of the internet reflect their experiences as real persons in their offline socio-cultural environments (Larsen 2007). This means that in order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between young people and the Internet as well as other media, rather than studying them as mere media users, we need to take a holistic approach to them as human beings, taking into account who they are (or who they perceive themselves to be) in real life. We need to locate them in their 'everyday life worlds' and 'social-biographical situations' with their specific 'relevance structures' (Schutz and Luckmann 1973). To this end, studies need to view the media as a technology in interaction with key institutions that affect young people's lives. These social structures include the state, the family, the school, the cultural environment, the market and the workplace, among others. Reflected in this study, the relationship between young citizens and media needs to be examined with Chinese young citizens' unique characteristics in social environment, especially with respect to their cultural tradition, family influence and educational situation.

Since China is going through reform and opening up to more international exchange, contemporary Chinese youth inevitably bears the mark of this. Contemporary Chinese teens were born after the 1990s, and due to the differences in the social environment they live in, teens of this period demonstrate certain differences in terms of values, cultural life, behaviours and so on.

The media have been meaningful for young people within the socio-cultural context of today's China. The question of young people's status as citizens is important: it affects how they are viewed and treated, how youth policy and services are developed, and how young people feel about themselves and their value in society.

Studying young Chinese's sense of identity requires a consideration of the relevance and meaning of the media to their everyday reality, such as their only-child status, high parental expectations, the exam-oriented educational system, being young, their lack of authority in the family and society, the competitive labour market and their 'emerging adulthood' (Liu 2010).

Young people are still being influenced by the traditional virtues of China, such as community spirit and obedience to parents, teachers and government; yet they do not know much about the depth and essence of traditional culture (She 2010). Research on the status quo of Chinese adolescents' moral concepts and characteristics showed that young people highly value some traditional precepts such as obeying their parents, being honest, keeping one's word and humanity as the most valuable moral points; and consider patriotism very important (She 2010). However, Yuan (2006) suggests that modern young people are longing for equality and democratic rights and the influence of traditional culture had declined when compared to the past and to some features of modernism.

A survey of youth all over the country by China Youth and Children Research Centre shows that the life goals most valued by the majority of youth are a contribution to the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics, a happy and harmonious family and a successful career. The major life goals of contemporary Chinese youth

show that their practical values are orientated towards a powerful country, stable family and successful career.

She (2010), while analysing the features of young people's morality, recognizes the role which morality plays in both social and individual development but sees it more as a discipline in personal and social activities rather than something young people should actively partake in as citizens. She also addressed the fact that young people generally have a positive outlook on the nation and society, although they show much disgust to the dark side, with more than 25% saying that they are not satisfied with society and showed little trust. In addition, moral standards are the main standards for self evaluation by young people. And although they provided a good concept and idea of morality, few of these ideas could be traced in young people's actions. However, although some degree of citizenship awareness could be seen, young people's moral identity and outlook are quite susceptible and easily influenced by feelings.

Moreover, being the only child of the family, with so much love and expectations concentrated upon them, young people are mentally fragile as they have many pressures upon their schoolwork; this has given rise to many self-esteem problems for students. With the boom of multiculturalism and in an era of an intense information explosion, they may feel confused and in doubt of both the world and themselves; this contrast between the ideal and reality can lead to ambivalence (Shi and Yu 2011).

Liu's book addressed the complexities of Chinese urban youth' identity as reflecting the material and cultural conditions of China's dual modernity under socialism with Chinese characteristics; this is a generation of youth that is torn between traditional and modern, local and global influences and is in search of a direction (Liu 2010). They have been referred to as the most self-centred generation, the collapsed generation, the generation with no sense of responsibility, 'the strawberry generation'

(good-looking but weak-willed people who cannot cope with pressures or difficulties), and so on. Actually, many members of this generation seem to identify themselves as the victims of the aforementioned societal problem, which has served as a motivation for them to establish their own online communities. And it is not easy for young people to form a determined identity.

Given the situations discussed above, it seems that the conflicts between traditional culture and modern culture and between Chinese and foreign values among young Chinese give rise to an ambivalent mindset. This turns out to construct a collective character that reflects the complexities of social context (Liu 2010). Generally speaking, young people are not rich in social experience and comparatively simple minded, and accordingly more vulnerable and are more easily affected by the media than adult citizens. This leads to a decline of trust in the society and tends to lead to apathy and the avoidance of responsibilities as real citizens (Ai 2010).

Under this circumstance, with the dramatic social transformation which resulted in young people's paradoxical identities, "they (the young generation) are characterized by a series of other paradoxical elements to varying extents: they are simultaneously materialistic and idealistic, internationalist and nationalist, global and local, apolitical yet nationalistic, modern and traditional, blessed with material prosperity and yet under great pressure to strive for greater material wealth" (Liu 2010, p.76).

As debated above, in a transitional China influenced by consumer culture, young people are confused and can easily become rebels against educators. However, except the negative influence brought by new media in the social transformation, Smith et al (2005) argue that accounts of young people lacking citizenship are actually based on a misperception of youth; resentment and even resignation are inherently political responses. Thus it is important to recognize how young people themselves respond to

the notion of citizenry and how this citizenry is reflected in their relationships with media.

1.2.4.3 Young people and news

Products of institutional journalism are largely felt to be irrelevant to young people's lives (Barnhurst 1998). Many discussions express concern about the problems associated with changing the culture of citizenship (Buckingham 2000; Carr 2006; Meijer 2006), and young people's turning away from traditional news is a sign of a failure in which the older generations no longer engage with young people adequately as they did in the past (Buckingham 2000). There is a growth of cynicism among young people and some researchers believe teenagers are becoming increasingly disengaged from a political process that they believe largely ignores them and their interests (Buckingham 2000; Meijer 2006; Raeymakers 2003). However, political detachment, as Buckingham (2000) argues, can be interpreted as a response to young people's "positive exclusion from that domain — in effect, as a response to disenfranchisement" (p. 218). Media producers, who only want to appeal to young people as consumer citizens, have to accept some responsibility for fostering political citizenship by providing teenagers with critical and challenging news services that such young people want and deserve.

In mainland China, the relationship between young people and news is still a fairly new area of interest that develops along the recent growth of the media industry. Television entered common households in the 1980s, and personal computers in the 1990s. Greater access to different media intensified the awareness that media have tremendous influence on young people's knowledge, values, attitudes, learning and social behaviour (Wen 2009). The Chinese media system is controlled by the state, in order to create a favourable media environment for the young, the state enacted many

measures in various aspects. The state administration of radio film and television (SARFT) encouraged local television stations to develop channels specifically to enrich children and young people's lives. The government and education bureau have paid much attention to young people's education and citizenship cultivation, proposing daily news education at school. For example, in some middle schools, making notes of news summaries is included in homework, and young people are encouraged to embrace journalistic activities, such as setting up *Zhongxue Shishibao*, a newspaper specialized for middle school students, and *Xinwendaidaiku*, a television news programme in which young people and children are recruited as journalists and reporters. But all the effort seems to have little effect. A study showed that young people still prefer viewing adult programmes for news (Wen 2009).

As news made especially for young people fails to appeal to its target audiences, it implies a gap between young people and news producers, who seem to have no idea what young people need and want. To some degree, the ways in which young people participate in making news reflect how they would like to engage with news. Based on some instances of young people's participation in citizen journalism, the next section will discuss how young people respond to and participate in news in their own lives, by analysing how they participate in making news reports, comment on news, and redistribute news on social networks.

1.2.4.4 Young people's participation in social events

Chinese youth is believed to be lacking a voice due to their junior status in a society which is characterised by patriarchal power. They have been long criticised for being irresponsible (Liu 2010). But this image changed during the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008. Many young people donated, and some of them worked in the earthquake-stricken Sichuan province as volunteers. Han Han, a 'post-80' (people born after the

1980) young writer, travelled to the area to blog about the latest news and started an online donation campaign.⁶ Zhang Qi, a second-year student in the Sichuan Cuisine School, who knew the earthquake-stricken area well, heard on the radio that rescue helicopters had nowhere to land. She posted on her QQ blog and the BBS (A bulletin board system) about the plains she knew around the area, and asked people who saw her posts to forward them. After more than 2,000 forwards, her post was noticed by *Morning News* journalist Xinwen Chenbao, who contacted the rescue team about the places Qi suggested. On investigation, it was found that her suggestions were suitable and several helicopters landed safely.⁷ These two cases suggest that some young people in China have a sense of social responsibility and are sophisticated in their use of the media to participate and fulfil their citizenship obligations.

However, negative media portrayals of young citizens can also be found. Occurring almost at the same time as the above-mentioned examples, Zhang Ya, a girl who was 20 years old, posted a four-minute video online, which contained remarks about how the disaster stopped her from playing online games (as more than 100,000 people died in the earthquake, the Chinese authorities had stopped website entertainment for three days to grieve the dead). She gloated over the suffering of the victims⁸. Many internet users saw her post. Soon the girl was located in Shenyang and held by the police.⁹

Thus, it can be seen that young citizens' responses to news is not always sophisticated or appropriate. Their participation is nowhere involved enough and far from being able to force changes to the media's policy on reporting, which is dictated by the government. But the fact that there is participation now can be regarded as a

⁶ <http://www.hbtv.com.cn/news/2013/0423/305503.shtml>

⁷ <http://news.163.com/08/1217/13/4TCC02QR000131UN.html>

⁸ <http://cjuijun.blog.163.com/blog/static/12951023320099793716355/>

⁹ <http://www.scol.cn/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=155575>

promising start, as there are examples of audience-sponsored pluralism and freedom of speech, which are manifestations of modern democratic citizenship.

In order to promote young people's positive engagement with news, the study highlights the need for a research agenda that listens to young people about what they expect of news engagement and then contrast their narratives with those of current news. The following section will briefly introduce how this study is constructed, in order to investigate young people's own perspectives on news.

1.3 Research rationale and aims of the study

1.3.1 Research rationale

As previously discussed, Chinese audiences are facing a conflicting environment, including cultural conflicts between the traditional and the modern, the national and the Western. Young citizens, whose perspectives on news are considered to be vulnerable and susceptible, are believed to have a vague attitude towards traditional and modern citizenship, as well as having an inclination towards a consumer culture (Cheng 2008). In this situation, rather than condemning young people's lack of interest in news, or their dull sense of citizenship, it is imperative to understand how audiences relate news to themselves. Furthermore, how they think of high quality news, and how they expect news to manifest. Hence, the present thesis aims to address this gap, by bringing together the various elements of young citizens' media experience.

To be more specific, the subjects were chosen for the following reasons:

Firstly, with the vigorous development of media and journalism, the cultural impact of news has gained growing attention. Being a part of the primary Chinese audience of the new media, teenage audiences, viewed as citizens in the making, have become a major topic of audience study (Johnson 2006). Young people are the most important audiences for the future of journalism, accordingly their positions as citizens are important. This position affects how they are viewed and treated, and reflects how they identify themselves in society. However this generation is not as engaged with the news media as it could be (Meijer 2006). A large body of research has discussed the reasons for young people's news apathy (Meijer 2006; Buckingham 2000; Carr 2006). At present, most of the studies with regards to the relationship between young people, news and media education, are based on Western theoretical frameworks. However, there are no known studies featuring qualitative evaluations of how these theories work in the Chinese context, where the media and education are delivered in a controlled manner. Accordingly, it would be interesting to understand what young people in Chinese media systems think of news and whether their news apathy is caused by the same factors as seen in the West.

Secondly, although schools and governments have paid much attention to citizenship, young citizens still have difficulties in understanding news, which may illustrate that the media education is not working effectively. Thus, the causes and the relationship between media, education and young people's own demands is worth studying. Furthermore, as news quality is becoming increasingly important for audience perception of news, especially in the new media era, this evaluation of young citizens' news perspectives and news literacy will take their perception of news quality as an essential aspect. News credibility, which is the most important attribute of news quality, should be addressed and discussed, not only from a journalistic and scholarly standpoint, but also through the eyes of audiences. This is to gather a more comprehensive picture on the impact of news and address how audiences think of innovative forms of news (Fubon Cultural and Educational Foundation 2008). As

discussed before, young citizens take in a considerable amount of new media as consumers and have started to take part in their own online activities, for either private use or public participation. In light of this, what these young citizens think about news and how they react to news is worthy of deeper insight.

Therefore, by undertaking this study, the main aim is to contribute to the existing knowledge of teenage news usage and teens' responses to news, within the setting of Beijing - one of the oldest centres of culture and politics in China and a city with a high concentration of media and education resources.

1.3.2 Aims and stages of questioning

The purpose of this study is to enhance the understanding of the relationship between young people and news, in association with the function of news literacy education in a Chinese context. Specifically, it will examine the general role of news in young people's lives, how they consume and evaluate news reports, and how their news literacy is related to these. Based on the findings, models which could be appropriate for Chinese news literacy education will be discussed. This study poses three research questions:

1) How do young Chinese citizens view news in general?

This question focus on what is news in the eyes of Chinese youth and how they relate news to their daily lives, in association with their identity and citizenship awareness during their consumption of news.

2) How do young Chinese citizens actually consume news?

This part involves what kind of news do young people like, which news media they regularly use and how their news consumption behaviour links with their news literacy.

3) How do young people evaluate the standards of quality news?

This question concerns with what is quality news in their eyes, what are the criteria they use for evaluating quality news, and how they evaluate news reports with these criteria. Findings of these questions reflect the level of news literacy that young people have and what aspects of news literacy they need to be more equipped with.

The next section will introduce its conceptual and general methodological approaches.

1.3.3 General approaches

The presentation of the empirical findings takes place in three steps corresponding to the study's research objectives. 12 focus groups were conducted, as well as 50 semi-structured interviews, to do the following:

1. Explore the relationship between news and young Chinese citizens' daily lives to see what they want from and expect of news, and how their sense of citizenship is in operation during news consumption.
2. Explore young Chinese people's consumption and evaluation of news and how this reflects their level of news literacy, and thereby investigating what difficulties young citizens have in understanding news and what they would demand in news literacy education.

3. Investigate, on the basis of the relationship between young people and news and their news literacy, whether the Western model of news literacy education fits China's current situation, and if not, which would be the best way to promote news literacy among young Chinese.

1.4 Conception and general research methodology

The young people in this study are teenagers aged from 13 to 18. In this research they are identified as young citizens, not yet fully developed adults, which means they are still under the protection of their guardians, and do not yet have the right to vote in China. They are still citizens in the making, or citizens-to-be (Buckingham 2000), attempting to form their citizenship and identities.

In this study, 'news perspectives' is a general concept, describing both how young people consciously think about news and the perspectives they unconsciously bring to their consumption of news. These perspectives express attitudes which young people have to journalism, including what are the functions of news, what news means to citizens and what is good journalism.

The term 'news quality' refers to the quality of news reports as judged by a range of relevant criteria. News here refers to the news in diverse forms, including original reports, either by professional or citizen journalists, as well as news reports forwarded from other media (such as newspapers).

The notion of 'news experiences' refers to the whole activity of young people's consumption of news. This includes young people reading/watching/listening to news,

as well as their reactions to news, whether active or passive, formal or informal. An example of an active reaction to news might be a young person on the scene of a crisis sending a video which they have made to their local news station; an example of a passive reaction might be a young person briefly thinking about a news report but taking no further action.

The essence of a formal reaction to news is that the young person takes the news report very seriously - perhaps thinking about it and discussing it extensively with friends. This reaction might also include actively responding to a news report by posting comments on it. An informal reaction might include a young person posting a comment, but in this case the post is likely to be frivolous and without in-depth thought.

1.5 Structure of the thesis and layout of the dissertation

There are six chapters in this study. This brief introduction describes the overall aims and objectives. A brief description of the contents of the later chapters is as follows:

Chapter Two presents an overview of the related literature in detail and focuses on research into young people and the news. It begins with a brief study of young people, media and culture, and discusses studies of young citizens and how media shape their identities. Following this, it focuses on the relationship between young people and news in China.

Chapter Three explains and justifies the different methodological approaches that have been applied, in order to collect the most relevant information and data. It also states the criterion by which the secondary research is conducted.

Chapter Four looks into the relationship between young citizens, news and media education. It also classifies and presents the data collected in the interviews. These findings reflect on important issues and concerns discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter One.

Chapter Five provides a description of how young people evaluate news in practice, based on how the research participants perceived the quality of a sample of news reports. This chapter also discusses specifically what difficulties young citizens actually have in understanding news, thereby discussing what kind of news literacy they may need.

Chapter Six provides the conclusions to the study, beginning with a summary of the information and data gathered from both primary and secondary research methods, which have been classified and analysed. Furthermore it discusses whether the Western model of media education can work in China and makes some recommendations on how to develop China's media education. Finally, it gives a brief overall summary of the research's findings of teenage news perspectives and possible development points in the area.

Chapter 2 Young people, citizenship and news

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in the introductory chapter, news reform and value changes in individual citizens are linked to the social transformation in China. Given the role of the news in democratic society, the gap between increased usage of the internet and young people's apathy towards news, it is important to examine the gap between young people and news. The purpose of this chapter is to review the research regarding young citizens and to identify the role news plays in their daily lives, in order to formulate a research agenda linking young people's attitudes towards news with their news consumption.

The chapter starts with an outline of young citizens' traits and the role media plays in their lives, and its impact on their sense of citizenship. After reviewing the role of media in society, the notion that current socio-political, technological and cultural shifts should move away from grand narratives and instead focus on the young news consumers and their own experiences of news consumption. The discussion then centres on the role of news in young people's everyday lives, the current patterns of news literacy education and the role that news literacy education can play in the relationship between young people and news.

Finally, the chapter puts forward a research agenda based on the need to listen to the young citizens about what they expect of news and news education, and then contrast their narratives with those of current news and news literacy education.

2.2 Young audiences, media and culture

Media serve to shape youth identity, which then has a significant effect on education and the living experience of young people. It is generally argued and believed that the proliferation of the media, especially new media, threatens to infiltrate young citizens' minds with values of consumerism, materialism and individualism (Dang 2011). Young people have not only been affected negatively but also been misperceived by the mass media in many occasions.

Previous research has reflected on how young people are represented in various mass media channels, such as newscasts, magazines, advertisements, and popular culture forms. There is much evidence of a lack of positive representation of the young in the media, which views them as irresponsible and pathological, or even frames them as society's problems (Giroux 2004; Li 2003). Many discussions also revolve around young people's declining political interest, low citizenship awareness and dropping participation in political discussions (Delli Carpini 2000; Pirie and Worcester 2000). In China, news reports always describe the young as naive, over-entertained and dependent, thus distorting their image (Pan 2006). Besides traditional media, online news also represents youths negatively, often picturing them as ill-conditioned (Xu 2011). This stereotypical image of young people, however, is changing as new media allow them to gradually have their own voices heard. Thus young citizens' media use behaviours, how they think of media and how they identify and express themselves in the process has become more and more worthy of note.

Media have arguably become a dominant force defining the sense of self which constructs symbols and resources for generating a common culture (Kellner 1995). In the age of media globalization, it is a common social phenomenon that young people from different countries and cultures share some childhood through the media, especially entertainment forms such as film and music (Davies 2010). However, it is

highly doubtful whether young people from different cultural backgrounds see media in a similar way. Moreover, unlike other kinds of media content, news involves high ideology and country-specific political interest. Hence it remains uncertain whether young people's increasingly globalised media views extend to their perspectives on news content, especially when this is complicated by them mingling in their local cultural and social contexts.

Porfilio and Carr (2008) have called for an understanding of youth culture that is more diverse, fluid, dynamic and engaged than is portrayed in the media. Ultimately, with an open-minded view on the youth culture, a critical examination of young people's sense of self should become a part of the reviewed version for studying the relationship between young people and media. Accordingly, how they identify themselves as citizens, how they understand democratic and participatory citizenship are essential to the question. In order to investigate young people's identity and citizenship, the next section will introduce the theoretical framework of citizenship and relate it to young people's current statuses.

2.3 Young people and citizenship

Citizenship is the state of being a citizen of a particular social, political, national, or human resource community (Turner 1993, p.2). There have been two main components of citizenship, rights and responsibilities (Barnes et al. 2004): rights to "participate in the processes of governance" and the obligations upon individuals "as a consequence of mutually recognized membership of a particular grouping" (p.187). Citizenship was equated by Leary (2000) as connoting a bundle of rights, including the right to vote, and the right to receive certain protection from the community, as well as obligations.

Rights and responsibilities have found their way into much modern discourse about the nature of modern citizenship. It is argued that the prevailing view of good citizenship suggests that people should be actively involved in politics, should be knowledgeable about public affairs, and should hold strong democratic values (Theiss- Morse and Hibbing 2005, p. 227). Good citizenship was measured using The Citizenship Index (Bens 2001), with criteria such as

“well informed, civic-engaging, accountable, meeting family and neighbour needs, attentive to health, showing civic behaviour, showing environmental concern, showing moral and ethical behaviour, being open to new things” (p. 194).

There has been a significant increase in interest in the concept of citizenship over the past few decades around multiculturalism, globalization and increased transnational migration. These factors challenge the notion of citizenship as a contained sense of national identity or cultural unity (O’Byrne 2003, p.117). In the modern world, new standards for citizenship place great responsibility on individuals. While previous perspectives on governance relied more on citizens rather than on leaders, modern citizenship is more inclusive so that all citizens are now required to meet certain standards.

Putnam (1993, p.175) disputed the general point that the virtues and identities of citizens were important in democratic governance. This has led to writings on issues of civic virtues and practices, civic identities, and citizenship education. According to William Galston (1991, p.221-224)'s prominent account, responsible citizenship requires four types of civic virtues:

- a. general virtues: courage; law-abidingness; loyalty;
- b. social virtues: independence; open-mindedness;

- c. economic virtues: work ethic; capacity to delay self-gratification; adaptability to economic and technological change; and
- d. political virtues: capacity to discern and respect the rights of others; willingness to demand only what can be paid for; ability to evaluate the performance of those in office; willingness to engage in public discourse.

New standards of citizenship pose challenges for all citizens but they seem to be particularly challenging for young people (Kennedy 2010). Since youth is socially constructed as distinct from adulthood, young people are socially identified distinctly from adult citizens. Hall and Williamson (1999) observe: “We tend to think of young people as being on their way to being full members of society. Yet the very fact that we think of them in this way as citizens highlights the fact that they are still only incomplete citizens, still falling short of full membership (p. 5).”

Young people have been referred to as citizens in the making (Marshall 1950). They are believed to be apathetic because they fail to understand the political basis and are ignorant of their responsibilities and their rights (Osler and Starkey 2003). Osler and Starkey argue that if citizenship education is based on this deficit model which serves to define them as “less good citizens”, this can possibly lead to compensatory programmes which are unlikely to engage them (p. 245).

It has been noted by a number of writers (Sherrod et al. 2002) that when it comes to civic engagement, young people do not seem to respond enthusiastically to the responsibility. Kennedy has shown how school age students are more inclined to be involved in socially oriented activities rather than political activities (Kennedy 2007).

It was suggested that disengagement from politics is a widespread phenomenon, the targeting of political education predominantly at young people implies an assumption about the particularly undeveloped condition of young people's citizenship (Pattie et al. 2003).

While the young generation was believed to have less interest in political issues and have less sense of citizenship, other researchers argued differently. Even though young people are in the condition of undeveloped citizenship, there are more to blame than criticizing the young themselves. For example, young people's sense of citizenship is also negatively affected by pressures from society. The postmodern conditions of citizenship, indicating the new postmodern multiplicity of citizenship or diverse and multiple identities (multiculturalism) (Horvath 2009), may be related not only to the new media environment but also the social environment, which is the reality that young people have to confront. Smith et al. (2005) found that certain narrow conceptions such as the employment oriented model can serve to exclude young people. Other models such as that relating to socially constructive participation better highlights young people's citizenship. According to these models, the assumption that young people lack citizenship and need interventions to develop it is not based on concepts of citizenship but on how youth is (mis)perceived. As Cathy et al. (no date, cited by Bennett 2008) pointed out, the disengaged youth viewpoint leads to something of a narrative of despair about young citizens, overlooking the many innovations that they have brought to our public communication spaces (Bennett 2008). Buckingham (2000) suggested that young people were not citizens because they were not seen as citizens. How young people's citizenship status is viewed will have an impact on how young people are represented and treated in daily practice, which will, in turn, impact on their self-identities and worldviews.

Bennett (2008) suggests that rather than seeing young people as lacking citizenship, it would be more appropriate to view this as a changing citizenry: it is the traditional

civic ideal of the Dutiful Citizen versus the emerging youth experience of self-actualizing Citizenship. While the Dutiful Citizen feels an obligation to closely follow daily news and participate in government-related activities such as voting and party politics, the Actualising Citizen has a diminished sense of government obligation, a mistrust of mainstream news media and politicians, and a higher sense of self-purpose (Marchi 2012).

Consequently, a more critical understanding of young people's citizenship is required – one that will scratch beneath the surface of representations of youth, and consider what citizenship means in the context of young people's experiences and relationships (Smith et al. 2005). What citizenship responsibility means to young people is associated with how they relate themselves to news, whether they think it is necessary to be informed, to participate in political discussions and to join citizen journalism.

Along with the developments of the new media, new discourses in the political and social arenas have brought cultural fusion as well as cultural crush. Thus dimensions in citizenship have embraced more possibilities, but at the same time have been more negotiated within local contexts. Impinging on citizenship are the effects of globalization processes in the form of culture, technologies and the media. However, globalization is often seen as something that is done to developing countries in Asia and Africa (Beall 2002), rather than shared as an equal player in development, emerging economies are experiencing new forms of domination. As a result, the global culture of consumerism is placing a strain on traditional cultures and communitarian values.

As these observations illustrate, the status of young citizens in the context of social policy could be reflected as ambiguous. Therefore it calls for a more conceptually comprehensive and inclusive view of youth citizenship in a specific cultural and

social context, so that the understanding of young people's status as citizens in the unique cultural background can be better appreciated.

The teenagers in this study were raised in a Chinese social system that was enmeshed in its national culture and local context. However, to some extent they are believed to be divorced politically from the realities of the national culture. How do these young people construct their identity when they reflect on important citizenship qualities? This is a key question not only for this research but also for understanding how group identity in the future might influence political life as young people assume their full citizenship responsibilities. This research will take an open view of citizenry to look into young people's status in their experience of news, depending on how participants identify their citizenry. Since young people's civic engagement is partly hinged to how they choose to identify themselves as citizens, it would be crucial to link their sense of citizenship to the changing media environment, the development of which directly leads to their changing ways of participation in news and political debates. Thus it would be important to highlight whether or not young citizens have a new sense of citizenship in the new media age.

In order to acknowledge the tension between traditional values and Western ideas in the time of media transformation, this study is going to identify the changes of traditional values in the face of globalization and look into how Chinese young people's sense of citizenship, if influenced by the Western model as a result of media globalization, mixes with local culture and social context, and how this mixture is reflected in young citizens' perspectives on news and civic participation.

2.4 Media and young people's political socialization

Socialization is the process whereby we learn and internalize the values, beliefs, and norms of our culture and, in so doing, develop a sense of self (Croteau and Hoynes 2012). While there are many socializing agents in our lives, including parents, peers, schools and churches, the media increasingly occupy more of our social space than ever before.

A large amount of research have focused on media and political socialization (Adoni 1979; Chaffee and Tipton 1970; Eveland et al. 1998) and it has been confirmed that in the digital age mass media have surpassed parents, teachers and friends in providing information thereby involving young people in political experience (Chaffee et al. 1970). Studies have also discussed political socialization in the form of political knowledge (Eveland et al. 1998), political attitudes and political values (Adoni 1978) and the behaviours in political participation (Conway 2012).

There is a gap in arguing whether or not consumption of media is positive to political socialization, especially in terms of knowledge of news. McLeod and McDonald (1985) argued that the regular consumption of political news contributes to young people's political knowledge thereby enhancing their political participation. However, it is unclear whether new media consumption has the same function, since a lot of research indicates that the high frequency of online consumption is negatively related to young people's political socialization (Ostman 2012; Loader 2007). Specifically, McLeod et al. (2002) assume that the popularization of news would impede audiences in acquiring political knowledge in case they prefer its entertainment rather than political values, and this perhaps holds people back from engaging in complicated political discussions. Mindich (2005) contends that a minority of young people who use the current media gains deep knowledge of news and politics. Today, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and other digital social media seem to serve as more of a

distraction from political news than as a way to inform. Notwithstanding this, Krugman and Hartley (1970) found that even passive, aimless consumption of media could enhance one's political knowledge. It is obvious that whether media consumption is positively related to political socialization needs to be examined within specific conditions. For example, Prior (2007) argues that in new media platforms, amongst which people have a great deal of choice, the discrepancy between people's individual political knowledge is increasingly likely to be caused by individual content preferences rather than by different political opinions, and people who prefer entertainment news are less likely to participate politically.

This last point implies that individualised use of media is increasingly significant in one's political socialization. The conclusion regarding whether random media use can contribute to political knowledge and understanding remains ambiguous. Since young people's political knowledge and interest in politics are crucial in building up a democratic society (Lupia and Philpot 2005), the expanding discrepancy between people in political socialization, caused by the difference in the individual use of the media, is one of the many reasons why media literacy is called for (Kellner and Share 2007). In order to discuss whether young people's usual patterns of consumption of news, if it happens to be random and careless, can accelerate their news literacy, we need to look more closely at the individual use of news media, thereby probing into young citizens' orientations in their consumptions of news.

2.5 Young people, media and identities

2.5.1 *The relationship between young people, media and identities*

Identity means defining a person as a social object interlocked into group membership and social relationships (Stone 1962). Specific identities include name, gender, age, family and occupation (Rosenberg 1981). As previously discussed, the contemporary weakening of citizenship awareness is accompanied by an emphasis on individual identity. Given the fusion between news and popular culture, how young citizens identify themselves during their media consumption is an inevitable issue in discussing their relationship with news.

To understand the debate on young citizen's identity in news, an effective starting point is to have a brief review of the relationship between media and identity in general. In his book, *Media, Gender and Identity*, Gauntlett (2002) explores the role of mainstream media within people's everyday lives to examine how self-identities are shaped through media use in contemporary Western societies. Significantly, his analysis highlights that in such societies widely-held conceptions of the self have changed, now recognizing identity as a more fluid and malleable phenomenon than previously conceived. Consequently, Gauntlett notes that whilst earlier models of media research proposed that popular culture was a "backwards-looking force" (p.247), coercing individuals into prescribed traditional roles and hostile to social change, it may now be more applicable to conceptualize the media as an - albeit limited - "force for change" (p. 248). Gauntlett suggests that within a capitalist context, popular media facilitates the desire to create new modes of life and, in doing so, demonstrates a disregard for tradition by encouraging individuals to formulate their identities beyond the confines of orthodox norms.

Expanding on this theme, Thompson (1995) has considered “the self, experience and everyday life in a mediated world” (p. 207) in order to investigate the role of communication media within modern societies and its impact on processes of self formation. He states that individuals actively create a meaningful sense of self thereby appropriating and incorporating available symbolic materials into a consistent narrative of self-identity. Thompson (1995) asserts that while individuals construct their identities, the materials they are using for self reflections are not equally accessible to all, and as a result, their identity construction is restricted and is conditional upon the particular circumstances of their lives in the reality.

In contrast to this, the conditions of limited, conditional identity constructions have changed with the development of media. With the growth of new media, citizens’ self-construction is more and more reliant upon availability of the media they are using and the forms of communication they received from media (Awan 2007). In the digital age, the views of citizens are widened and their ways of perception have also been broadened. As a result, their knowledge is no longer limited to a local scope. In other words, within a more diverse range of mediated materials the media function as a resource that citizens can exploit reflexively into their understanding and narratives of self-identity. Besides, he states ‘individuals are continuously confronted with new possibilities, their horizons are continuously shifting, their symbolic points of reference are continuously changing’ (Awan 2007). It follows from this point that the citizen identification is very likely to stretch onto a global level.

The media act as a resource through which young individuals conceptualize and construct their sense of self (Pande 2007). In examining the relationship between media portrayals of consumerism and patterns of youth consumption, some research concluded from empirical evidence that young people tend to be increasingly sophisticated in interpreting the media discourse, and the meanings they endow in

consumerism have a significant role in the construction of identity in an unstable world characterized by flux and change (O'Brien 2010).

There has been a tendency to reduce complex associations to mono-causal relationships. Research in the broad area of young people and the media has been strongly influenced by behaviourist assumptions. Early traditions of media research tended to follow a simple model of cause and effect which assumed that individuals soak up media messages and respond in a predictable fashion (Cumberbatch and Howitt 1989), while more recent approaches have come to view young audiences as playing a more active role in the construction and negotiation of meanings (Gunter 1997; Buckingham 1993). Yet some theorists take the notion of the active audiences too far since there is a lot of evidence of social, political and economic factors serving to limit the amount of information that young people can be actively engaged with (Lerner and Anderson 2003).

Aware of the ideological influence of media representations of consumerism, it might well be argued, young people actively use those representations to their own everyday advantages. Young people do not simply construct their identities through the goods and the images constructed for them by the mass media, but those negotiated meanings provide a means to an end, the end lying in the emphasis young people place on constructing valid peer relationships in a risky society.

In studying young people's responses to news, given the fact that young people's citizen identity is to some extent actively constructed yet in part confined within the traditional definitions of citizens, it is useful to discuss citizenship in respect of active and passive citizenship. 'Active citizenship' reflected in the citizenship education curriculum, with its three strands of social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy (Crick 1998). In investigating a globalized sense of

citizenship within a localized cultural context, especially when the local culture is against being active citizens as it is in China, it would be useful to see how this mixed citizenship is reflected in audiences' consumption of and reflections on media.

According to Galston(1991)'s prominent account, whether citizens are active or passive depends on, or at least largely related to how governments define them to be and whether the active/ passive reactions are encouraged or hindered. How citizens identify themselves under the government's citizenship promotion approach is still open to question. In China, the values of traditional culture and authorities' interferences are still influential. Daoist 'non-action' belief, which specifies that individuals should focus on their own minds and should be passive in their responses, is deeply rooted in Chinese mentality (Wang and Stringer 2000) and 'good' citizens are believed to be reflexive and behave in an appropriate manner which does not create conflict. However, considering that in the social construction of identity today the media seems more influential than government, questions have raised on whether young audiences' identity as citizens remains the same or has been influenced by the Western ideas. Since news plays an essential part in moulding young citizen' political perspectives, it would be crucial to explore how they identify themselves during news consumption to gain an understanding of how they relate themselves to news and how news socializes them.

It has been argued that young citizens are alienated from news partly because they fail to identify themselves in news reports (Meijer 2007). However, whether young citizens are capable of criticizing this rather than accepting what news portrays them to be is still open to question. So is the possibility that news portrayal of young people does not carry weight during their socialization. All these assumptions need more empirical investigation into how young citizens react to news. And rather than discussing how the media portray young people or how young people are identified

by the media, it would be more useful to study the social context within which young citizens' identities have been formed and shaped.

2.5.2 Young citizen's identity in Chinese social context

Having considered the importance of citizenship for democracies and the multiple factors which impact upon the formation of citizens' identities, this chapter now turns to draw to the cultural context into the idea of democratic citizenship and discusses how these can be accommodated.

Indeed, in the course of globalization and modernization, it has been acknowledged that Western-based citizenship values are gradually infiltrated into Chinese society, affecting how individual citizens identify themselves and how they contribute to a democratic society. However, Western-based theoretical frameworks of democratic citizenship do not completely suit the reality of Chinese society and its cultural tradition which emphasizes no-action citizenship and values collectivism over individual citizenship (see Section 1.2.2). Consequently, in studying young citizens' citizenship, it is essential to discuss how the concept of modern citizenship is integrated into their traditional sense of being citizens, and how they practise citizenship in both traditional and modern terms.

Several recent political events and trends throughout the world point to the importance of citizenship practices¹⁰ and suggest that the health and stability of a modern democracy depends not only on the justice of its institutions, but also on the qualities and attitudes of its citizens (Kymlicka and Norman 1994). These include: (a) their sense of identity and how they view potential competing forms of national,

¹⁰ <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/04/03/opinion/ireport-awards-hawkins-gaar/>

regional, ethnic, or religious identities; (b) their desire to participate in the political process, in order to promote the public good and hold political authorities accountable; (c) their willingness to show self-restraint and exercise personal responsibility in economic demands and personal choices that affect their health and the environment; and (d) their sense of justice and commitment to a fair distribution of resources (Kymlicka 2000).

In China, however, the instability of modern history leads to uncertain forms of ethical standards and there's little citizenship education or practice. As a result, young people do not have a certain sense of identity of being modern citizens, as what has been defined in Western countries. Two points can be reflected in the social context of China regarding the building up of young citizens' identity: the first is the "harmony maintenance" policy, which somehow impedes the developments of citizens' critical thinking. Admittedly, this policy may accelerate the country's stability, thus doing more good than harm to its current steady economic development. Nevertheless, from a long-term citizenship-based point of view, the restriction of public opinions is ultimately more detrimental than beneficial to society. Secondly, with regards to cultural tradition, young people are encouraged to focus on their study rather than paying attention to politics or other social activities. As it was addressed in an old saying, good students should have 'two ears shut to what happens outside and one mind focused on sages' books.'¹¹

Concerning the qualities and attitudes of citizens, the Chinese concept of citizenship is based on community rather than the traditional Western cornerstones such as individuality, constitutional rights, political decision-making procedures and social institutions (Liu 2010). Today, however, it is widely accepted that theorists must pay

¹¹ <http://wenwen.soso.com/z/q137690193.htm>

close attention to the qualities and conduct of individual citizens, including their responsibilities, loyalties, and roles. The need for such theory of citizenship received support from Putnam (1995). He showed that regional governments performed very differently, despite having more or less identical institutions. However, it appears that the best explanation for the variation in performance was not the differences in income or education of the citizens, but rather the differences in their civic virtue, what Putnam calls their 'social capital'— their ability to trust, their willingness to participate, their sense of justice (Putnam 1995).

Young people are in the process of discovering themselves and trying to play a role in society. During this period, they experience changes in their bodies, thoughts, lifestyles and witness a transition in the expectations that parents and society have on them. This is a period when young people continually ask “who am I”, being engulfed in an identity crisis that is salient among youth (Marcia 1980). Young people’s construction of identity has been influenced by parent-child communication styles and their exposure to media. Age and parents’ educational levels showed significant effects on the teens’ media usage, as well as on their identity-achievement levels and family communication style (Lears 1992). In China, family still has a strong influence on children, and parenting and media generate a jointed effect on young people’s formation of identities. In this process, young people attempt to build a concordant self, which on the one hand means socially integrated, while on the other hand means keeping their own characteristics.

Young people are able to attain a higher identity on the premise of building a balanced and harmonious self between individual, social and family expectations. It is only when their identity is in harmony, that they can have a feeling of a “stable self”, which is the basis for them, as active citizens, to develop a sense of social responsibility. It is only when young people find who they are, and feel safe and

stable with their identity, that they will use the media with the clearer purpose of searching the information they need, rather than of escaping from the reality.

To sum up, young citizens' identity in the Chinese context is a complexity shaped by the convergence of culture and family influences, governmental interferences, media effects and active constructions by selves. As discussed above, to understand young citizens' experience of news and their perspectives on it with regards to their sense of citizenship, it would be important to understand how they identify themselves during their consumption of news and associate their identity with their reactions to news.

2.6 Youth and news

2.6.1 Young people, news and politics

Some scholars have criticised that today's young people are no longer interested in news and are less civic-minded than their prior generations (Mindich 2005; Patterson 2007; Bennett 2008). Evidence about declining levels of political knowledge and participation, typically lead to a view of young people as merely ignorant, apathetic and cynical (Bennett 1997). On the one hand, the media have commercialized youth culture and on the other hand, there is growing concern about young people's declining interest in news media.

Mindich (2005) contends that there has been a "generational shift" away from news, particularly political news, and foresees its negative consequences for the future of democracy. Patterson (2007) notes that when young adults and teenagers follow the news, they "are attracted disproportionately to stories that have little or no public affairs content" (2007, p. 16). Moreover, Jowell and Park (1998) found that the trend towards less engagement signals a generational change whereby "they just feel they

have better things to do with their time, such as finding partners, homes and jobs” (p.8).

These studies are representative of the disengaged youth paradigm (Bennett 2008), which takes traditional civic actions such as voting and news consumption as the proper measures of a healthy democracy.

The problems in the relationship between young people and news are always linked with young people’s interest in politics. A recent piece of research suggests that young people's lack of interest in news is coterminous with their lack of interest in politics and the formal political process (Galston 2001). Rather than focusing on the interest in news itself, the issue needs to be examined within a wider range, taking into account their lack of interest in politics. One of their studies on youth civic attitudes, indicated that young people (16-24 years old) were negative about politics and

“were frustrated as they felt that politicians ignored them. The overriding view was that politics was boring and complicated which did not act as an incentive to become involved” (Institute for Conflict Research 2006, p. 3).

However, others contend that waning consumption of traditional news media does not necessarily mean young people are uninterested in news (Meijer, 2006; Marchi 2012; Raeymaeckers 2004). In previous research, Barnhurst (1998) has gone as far as to claim that the products of institutional journalism are largely felt by young people to be irrelevant to their lives. Most news, it seems, belongs to a realm beyond their everyday life. In this respect, Bird (2003), as cited by Meijer (2007), has argued that much news hardly impresses its viewers, unless they are personally affected by it.

What is more, there are other arguments suggesting that mainstream news have failed to keep pace with the changing cultural competencies of young people (Katz 1993).

Young people's apathy towards news is also being debated in research into the issues discussed above regarding political socialization. James and Prout (1990) take the notion of political socialization that is highly functionalist. They see young people as passive recipients whilst adults attempt to mould them into their allotted social roles. The approach here is essentially psychological as young people are affected by adults' notions that children are only citizens-to-be and are too young to understand and participate in politics. Thus their disaffection with politics, for example, is a sort of psychological dysfunction caused by the lack of information, rather than a result of the political system's shortcomings. Buckingham (2000) suggests that we must provide the relevant information in an appropriate format and the disaffection with politics will disappear.

Buckingham (1999) argued that young people's alienation of news is linked with the gap between politics and their lives, suggesting that the dimensions of news and politics fail to socialize young people. He concludes with a call for a more popular, relevant form of news accompanied by broader political strategy. Bennett (2008) also observes that if there is a decline in the credibility in public institutions and discourses that define conventional political life, the fault lies more with government performances and news narratives than with citizens who cannot engage with them. Some studies have proposed to concern a more flexible definition of news and politics (Meijer 2006; Marchi 2012).

Although a large number of studies have reached pessimistic conclusions about the relationship between young people and news, other studies present a brighter picture. Some researchers found that young people do in fact value news. Gauntlett and Hill

(1999) asked their young British respondents to keep a diary of their TV viewing behaviour during a period of five years. Based on these diaries, the researchers claim that news programmes increasingly became part of the youngsters' daily routine as they grew older. Data gathered by Raeymakers (2003, p.173) indicates that in the sample over 40 per cent of young respondents (age 16-18) consume news regularly. The study concluded that young people's interest in TV news increases as they mature. In the Netherlands, more than one out of three in the age group 15-17 and more than one of two in the age group 18-24 report that they follow the news on a daily basis (CBS 2003). Some results posit that youth have an interest in current events but just find conventional news boring (Meijer 2006; Livingstone 2002; Raeymaeckers 2004), difficult to understand (Raeymaeckers 2004), and irrelevant to their lives (Barnhurst 1998); Buckingham 1999; Flora 2006).

Dwelling on the question about whether young citizens actually like news or not, it would be interesting to find out specifically what kind of news they do and do not value, and why. In other words, rather than generally concluding whether young people like news or not, it would be better to group news reports into different categories and investigate what kind of news (what kind of topics, genres, or narratives etc.) they tend to attend to. Naturally, such discussion of the kind of news young people prefer should be drawn on their experience with the news, starting from their news use patterns.

Concerning this, World Association of Newspapers (2007) analysed the general patterns and rituals of news consumption among young people all over the world, and found the following key characteristics:

1. Multiple sources: young people are getting news and information from many media sources, not just one;

2. Passive vs. interactive: young people are interested in passive forms of media (TV) but they want to interact with them, and contribute content to news media;
3. Young people do not have a clear news ritual;
4. News needs change with age.

An additional concern relates to the present fragmented news environment and its associated potential for the weakening of democratic deliberation. Marchi (2012) contended that if people get information from different places, the possibility to hold common conversations and debates is diminished. However, Marchi (2012) also admitted that the new news strategies of today's youth offer possibilities to strengthen rather than weaken national conversations. New patterns of news consumption has the potential to open a gate to a new model of conversation, and the dilemma in the relationship between young people and public discussions needs to be examined in a more dynamic and diverse manner.

In the digital age, with new news forms infiltrating young audiences' daily lives, another argument relevant to young people's consumption of news is focused on whether they are sophisticated users. Hart (1994) and Putman (1995), cited in (Buckingham 2002), believed that young people held a negative attitude towards news, as apathetic and cynical yet sophisticated. It has been proved that young people are aware that news is constructed (Buckingham 2000). Furthermore, Buckingham (2000) suggested that young people's lack of interest in news and politics is a sign of their being rational citizens since they are aware of their powerlessness in making things different. However, the description of young people as sophisticated might be misleading, as a study by Lewis (2008) showed that since young people are perplexed by whether they are interested in news and not sure how much news literacy they actually possess, that gap is yet to be proved by further studies. With regards to young people's capacity to understand news, little evidence can be found to suggest that

young people in China are now more able than they previously were, to distinguish between government-influenced news and news not controlled by government.

Regarding young citizens, news and politics, Buckingham (2000) has called for thinking about politics as a cultural phenomenon, which should take into account individual experiences and factors such as class, race, age, gender, education and so forth. He suggested that this should have a wider definition of politics when talking about young people and politics and should allow them to realize the political dimension which lies in their individual life. Young people's ideas about news are not a mere development of intelligence, but a process of identity being constructed socially.

In this perception, it is essential to address the qualitative measures, such as the social and political situation, as well as young people's individual circumstances when studying the relationship between young people, news and politics. Unfortunately, most Chinese research into young people as news consumers has been done quantitatively, with some mixing qualitative methods, to mainly explore their ability to process information (the ability of dealing with information) and their participation inclination. Given the cultural diversity in Chinese society and the complexity in the relationship between young people and the changing media environment, previous research into young people is not yet sufficient and lacks diverse discussions. Therefore, it calls for a more open-minded perspective and to listen to young people's own narratives so as to correctly diagnose gaps of current studies. The next section will review previous studies of young people and news literacy, identify the gaps between young people and news in this discussion and relate it to young people's narratives in the following chapters.

2.6.2 Youth and news literacy

Previous research has focused on solutions for drawing young people back to news, rather than interpreted low rates of news consumption as signs of youth being tuned out from the world of politics. For instance, Raeymaeckers (2004) concludes that news producers should use clearer language and provide greater background and story contextualization. Meijer (2006) argues that news organizations need to develop new quality standards that young (and all) people will not find boring. In relation to this, Mindich (2005) made several suggestions, including

a) Producing a news environment for young people – for example, having news presented in their desktops and emails, making news a part of their daily lives.

b) Changing our expectations: civic knowledge could be included in education and young people would value news more if it links with their entrance examination or college admissions

c) Making politics meaningful again: creating a system that looks beyond election days and build long-term generational affiliations with politics; drawing attention to the importance of the everydayness of politics and relating politics to young people's normal lives rather than only engaging them in special political events.

d) Creating, consuming and teaching high quality journalism

The points suggested above attempt to integrate news into young people's education and daily routines, namely, making high quality news and politics natural part of their lives.

These suggestions make practical sense, yet how they might materialise in practice needs to be rigorously examined. Such examination would need to take into account how young people think news can be changed to suit their literacy level, rather than criticising young people's lack of interest in news or simply raising their news literacy. Nevertheless, the above suggestions provide new ideas and present new challenges to news literacy education, since they on the one hand lower the boundary of news to fit daily consumption and, on the other, maintain the need for higher quality. In calling for a stronger sense of citizenship and a higher news literacy level, these suggested elements can be useful for examining news literacy in the new media environment.

News literacy comes from the parent concept of media literacy. News journalism at its core is about news judgment, which can be described as a form of vision, a way of knowing the here and now that leads reporters and editors to notice events and issues that are likely to matter in a democratic society (Lugalambi 2012). As audiences become more web-savvy, demanding information that is more mobile, immediate and tailored to social networks, news organizations have to respond, creating a new, fresh face for journalism. There are four major innovations in digital media currently reforming the information flow and influencing the future of journalism: citizen news voices, mobile technologies, participatory tools and spreadability. These trends force traditional news media to provide more participatory spaces and carry out news reports in diverse forms of multimedia packages (Mihailidis 2012). In this case, in addition to the focuses on digital skills in making news reports, new versions of news literacy are supposed to involve more social aspects to obtain a better understanding of how to encourage citizens' participation.

News literacy, in a more traditional sense, means the understanding of how news works, including the underlying media and technological systems that support certain

meanings embedded in news texts and the creative process that yields them (Reese 2012). Reese (2012) suggests that in the digital age, news literacy is a social practice, and, as such, it should be located within a set of power relations, along with its moral, political and cultural context.

News literacy has recently been studied from many theoretical angles, ranging from civic voices as political engagement to how news literacy works within local contexts a globalized news environment (Reese 2012, p.69) and what journalists should do to meet with demands from new media and to open dialogues with the public (Martin 2012, p.86-89).

In relation to political engagement, Allan (2012, p.26) underlines the importance of citizens developing their news capabilities, which are both intellectual (being able to discover and analyse information) and practical (being able to manipulate media and to create and disseminate content).

In terms of global news literacy, as Reese (2012) writes, it is essential to promote the ability to “understand, decode and create media with particular awareness of one’s social location within an international context” (p. 65). This means that young people, as global citizens, should not only pay attention to global news, but also to adapt news to different cultural contexts and have deeper reflections on news, linking their experience into larger framework of global news, connecting local news with its social context and compare it with news from other contexts.

Regarding journalism development, the emergence of more globalized conceptualizations of core democratic information values bring a more widespread embrace of these values, which ultimately rest on ideas of free expression, proactive

citizenship, transparent governance, and a vigorous public sphere populated by multiple and diverse perspectives. This may open new avenues for imagining more suitable forms of journalism for twenty-first century contexts (Mihailidis and Shumow 2011).

On the practical level, Melki (2012, p.141) has examined news literacy in the spectrum of incorporating digital skills and critical analysis in practical education pedagogies. The study constructed a link between the literacy of producing text and using digital skills. It has been argued that both digital skills and critical analysis are essential in converting students from consumers to producers. Besides, practicing the skills by making news reports was highlighted. Students could not become truly critical consumers of media without producing media texts themselves, and the best way for students to understand the constructions of media texts is through engaging in media text construction activities.

In addition to combining digital skills with critical analysis, it has been suggested that students should bear a sense of independent learning and being initiative, and they ought to learn the “logic that governs use of digital technology” (Melki 2012, p. 142). In the light of this, students will then have instructions for using digital tools. In the workshop the study suggests, six tips were offered to promote young people’s critical literacy: they were asked to pose a hypothesis, a proposal, do background research, data collection, data analysis, and to present the research findings (Beane 2005, cited by Melki 2012).

Although the process of introducing and practicing the procedures of making news is beneficial in providing a comprehensive understanding of journalism, how to put this complicated project into practice requires more attention. Melki’s study concludes by suggesting that media literacy including digital skills and analytical abilities requires

extensive effort and time from students, teachers, and sometimes media literacy researchers and the general public. The practical pedagogy model could be adopted in diverse classroom and sharing through digital media, providing a global approach to media literacy that is student driven, with connection to analysis of the role of media and its function in democratic progresses.

To make news literacy education more operative, Shumow and Chatterjee (2012, p.125) discussed effective teaching methods after conducting two pedagogy experiments of multimedia news literacy education. They emphasized both digital skills and critical engagement. The subjects of this study are more professional, since the target are students of journalism rather than common youth. But as the research stressed the vague gap between audiences and journalists by suggesting that in the new landscape students were both a producer and a critical consumer, the results of this study can still shed some light on common news education.

In comparison to Melki's study, this research paid more attention to distinctive types of media, and students were asked to grasp the features of each medium and identify the most appropriate application for specific news stories. Besides, this research paid more attention to the cooperation between students - the engagement inside the classroom as well as the out-world. Teachers' control was relinquished. Students cooperated with each other and made full advantage of the interactivity of social network. This project placed a stronger emphasis on engagement via which students developed the ability of problem solving. The idea of digital fluency (Resnick 2003, cited in Shumow and Chatterjee 2012), was adopted, as how to use the technological tools are no longer 'skills' but fall within the requirement of knowing how to construct meanings by choosing and using them.

This study also highlights the importance of in-depth and cross-cultural engagement of global scope and impact. It lays stress on the connection between media production and digital literacy and sees journalism in broader terms, especially the context of economic, political and cultural globalization. Students should learn about their own media landscape in relation to the rest of the world from both audiences' and journalists' perspectives in the digital age (Shumow and Chatterjee 2012).

In order to observe students' literacy of examining specific news reports, Mujica joined case studies into the latest description of news education in classrooms, in addition to doing textual and contextual analysis, translation, simulations, and production (Mihailidis 2012). In this research, students were demanded to view media texts critically and then relate them to broader context. This study focused on using particular media texts to challenge students with real difficulties and examines students' critical view and abilities to relate it to broader issues.

In short, the latest models of news literacy share some common features: they stress both skills and critical perspectives; media production is highly valued, and news literacy is seen from a broadened perspective, globally yet with regards to specific social context.

2.7 Summary of literature review

Overall, this chapter attempts to connect the discursive sites of young people, citizenship and news in order to probe how youth citizenship and identities associate to their engagement with news.

The chapter begins by reviewing past approaches concerning the general relationship between young people and media. Following this, the chapter turns to discuss how media moulds the process of young citizens' political socialization. It then focuses on how young people identify their positions as citizens and how this identity reflects on Chinese young citizens. The chapter then moves on to explore the relationship between young citizens and news, with regards to research which asserts that young people's sense of citizenship is declining due to their consumer-based and entertainment-oriented consumption of news. This perhaps reduces youth to the passive status of consumers. As a result, more active involvement in the construction of news and current affairs might begin to reflect young people's democratic needs.

To sum up, the engagement of youth is not yet sufficient and more often than not, to a large extent, young people are still identified as passive, irresponsible consumers, rather than active and valuable democratic citizen-like audiences. Attempts to challenge this, require a better recognition of fresh ways of accessing young people's consumption and perspectives of news, in association with their news literacy.

This study takes on this challenge by looking at how young citizens engage with news during their daily lives and how they reflect on news culture in a top-down news environment. The next chapter outlines the methodologies employed within the study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's research methodology, explaining how the research questions were answered. It starts with a presentation focusing on how the research design links to the research questions. Following this, the justifications of the methods are introduced with regards to the sample selected. Then, the chapter moves on to elucidate the specific research strategy, i.e. what was done to achieve the study's objectives at each stage. Finally, after presenting the main ethical issues that arose during the planning and implementation of the project, the chapter analyses the strength and weakness of the methods adopted.

3.2 General research design

As stated in the first chapter, the aim of the research is to explore the relationship between young people and news in China, involving three questions:

- A) How do young Chinese citizens view news in general?
- B) How do young Chinese citizens consume news?
- C) How do they evaluate the criteria of quality news?

In order to answer these questions, this project began with a pilot study, which involved a brief survey to obtain young people's general view on news as well as two focus groups to locate the key areas that young people would be interested in when talking about news and news consumption. Following this, twelve focus groups were conducted with young people on issues surrounding the three research questions. Finally, forty in-depth interviews with young people and ten with relevant

adults were conducted, seeking individual opinions on salient issues that arose from the focus groups. In particular:

Phase 1: Pilot Study

Scholars such as Wimmer and Dominick (1997) have suggested an extended approach, in which each respondent fills a questionnaire expressing their own personal views prior to the focus group discussion. Given that the focus group participants may be unwilling to express their opinions in the focus groups, this study follows this advice, conducting a small survey on young people's general attitudes toward news in January 2011, several months before the focus groups. The survey asked rudimentary questions about how participants define news, their news resources and preferences of news. This was followed by two focus groups with the same participants, to converse about how news connected to their daily lives. These two focus groups were an experiment testing the aspect of news that young people would like to talk about, as well as pre-empting any obstacles that may happen in the future focus group interviews.

The pilot study helped to adjust the original interview questions. Prepared with refined questions, the further work of investigating young people's patterns of news consumption and their demands for news were carried out during the focus groups.

Phase 2: News in the eyes of young people

12 focus groups with middle school students and in-depth interviews with 20 teenagers were conducted in the second stage, to investigate young people's relationship with news. Questions involving

- how they relate news to their daily lives,
- what are their news habits,
- what was high quality news to them,

- what were the problems of current news and
- how they expected news to develop were presented to them.

Afterwards, participants were also required to present their favourite news topics. The ones that most frequently suggested were chosen as the examples of news reports in the next section.

In addition, brief interviews were conducted with young peoples' parents to discuss what they thought of the relationship between young people and news, as well as middle school teachers and experts on young citizens' studies, concerning their views on current forms of news education (see Appendix).

Phase 3: How do young people evaluate the quality of news

Follow-up in-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 20 teenagers (different from the 20 previously interviewed) to look into young people's evaluation of the sampled news reports.

In order to investigate how young people evaluated news and the criteria they used to identify high quality news, participants were asked to share their opinions of chosen news examples, regarding how they consumed these news reports, what they thought of their quality, and how they considered these news items could be improved.

These interviews contextualized participants' evaluations of the samples chosen by them, by looking into their criteria to evaluate news in practice and to identify young people's difficulties in understanding news reports. In other words, general attitudes toward news were applied to specific, actual news report samples.

The ensuing sections are centred on elucidating how the research proceeded respectively on each stage in more detail.

3.3 The sample for this study

Before presenting these elements of the study in more detail, it is crucial to elucidate the rationale and philosophy upon which this research design is based – in particular the theoretical approach and the sample evaluation. At the level of users, a focus on middle school students is intended to address a gap in the existing scholarship as few studies have focused on Chinese teenagers' perspectives on news (several studies focus on pre-teen children or adolescents, e.g. Livingstone 2003, yet they focus on Western teenagers). Whilst not being otherwise atypical of many student populations, this group has two particular traits:

Beijing is the capital city and the political centre of China. Young people there are relatively better equipped with the most advanced media and have been better educated, with comparatively advanced political knowledge. Their views on news probably represent the most advanced ideas of their generation.

Beijing is one of the oldest cities in China, characterized by its long history and apparent feature of its deeply rooted Chinese culture. At the same time, it is one of the most globalized cities in China. Accordingly, young people from Beijing can be considered as the typical image of the new generation, as described by Liu (2010), under the cultural influences of both local and global, traditional and modern. So although this sample cannot represent the general attitude of all young people in China, the findings may provide material that might be indicative of patterns in the Chinese youth population.

Since the sample in this study aims to represent Beijing teenagers, the chosen schools needed to be located in different areas and divided into different types of schools with participants divided into different age groups.

The participants representing the sample were recruited in groups from different middle schools and interviews in forms of focus groups and intensive interviews were considered appropriate for this study. The next sections present some important conceptual references used in the interviews and justify the rationale for the chosen methods.

3.4 Conceptual references

The important concepts relevant to this study, news quality and news values, need to be addressed and clarified here. Although ostensibly not crucial to the theoretical framework, these concepts are intimately related to this research and contribute to shaping the interviews. For example, when examining young people's perspectives on news quality, interview questions were constructed in terms of news values. These more focused, purposeful interview questions help to raise more formulated and relevant answers. By encouraging participants to consider news quality in the realm of news professionalism, the interviews generated discussions centring on the criteria of news quality, rather than discursive conversations concerning journalistic skills or technological support.

Besides, since a lot of discussions during the focus groups and intensive interviews concern how young people consider the differences between Chinese and Western news, formulated arguments on news values are addressed here to discern and clarify the dissimilarities between the two distinctive forms of journalism professionalism. This forms the base of the follow up debates.

News values

Many researchers have attempted to define what news is. Lippmann, an early voice in the establishment of news values (Lippmann 1925), believed that the public, blinded by the chaos of local opinions, were not fit to make decisions about newsworthiness. Accordingly, it is the journalist who should decide what constitutes news for the public to digest.

Journalists relied on news values to decide whether a story was worthy of publication. Gatlung and Ruge's ground-breaking work, which "has long been regarded as the study of news values" (Harcup and O'Neill 2001, p. 264), defined 12 key factors that make news worthy. News values have come to include categories such as conflict, human interest, magnitude, unusual nature, prominence, proximity, tragedy and timeliness, to name a few (Gibbs and Warhover 2002; Shoemaker et al. 2007).

It should be cautioned that these values cannot be generalized to all media contexts. For instance, the old news values may no longer valid in the modern time. Some researchers have simplified news values. For example, three essential elements which allow information to become news were interest, timeliness, and clarity (Guo 2012). According to Fuller, the essential elements of news are timeliness, significance and interest for any given community (Fuller 1996). These elements underline the influences of audience community on the making of news. News is no longer made solely by journalists, but the result of the dynamic negotiations between news organizations and the public.

News values that universally appreciated by a certain country may fail to apply to other types of journalism professionalism. McQuail (2003) argued that the influence

of society is ubiquitous, it arises all of the external relationships that media have. In this respect, media organizations operate in a field of social forces, where they interact and negotiate with sectors and members of the wider societal environment. For example, in China, journalism has long been regarded as an important ideological, cultural and opinion front. Marxism has been regarded as China's guiding principle since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 (Guo 2012).

One of the signatures of Marxist journalism theory is its perception of news media as a political weapon. This perception is adopted and reflected in the Chinese socialist perception of journalism's societal role. Chinese socialist journalism theory is closely associated with the Chinese Communist Party's thoughts on journalism (Wu et al., 2009). The backbone of Chinese socialist journalism theory includes aspects such as regarding the press as the mouthpiece of the Party; the Party's press control must be upheld; the press must serve the public, socialism, and the interest of the whole nation, and so forth (Guo 2012).

In this study, the term news value refers to what makes a news report valuable in young people's eyes. The research examines what type of news values do Chinese young people tend to agree: whether they prefer Chinese news values, or those from the West.

News quality

Zaller (1999) defines high quality news as good information about matters of general political or social significance. The varied language adopted to describe news media performance contains assumptions about what "good" news would look like. *Objectivity, balance, neutrality, plurality, and bias* are among the concepts used to evaluate news media programming.

Gladney et al. (2007) produced a comprehensive list of quality standards, including news credibility, utility, immediacy, exclusivity, good writing, simplicity, etc. Zaller (2003) promoted a new standard of news quality. He argued that much criticism of news was based on an ideal of citizenship and a standard of quality that is neither realistic nor necessary for the functioning of democracy. He proposed a new, less demanding standard of quality and defends it as adequate to the informational needs of citizens in a democratic country.

With the fundamental understanding of what news quality consists, this research attempts to find out that in the digital age, how the concept of news quality was defined by young citizens, and how this changed with different people.

3.5 Justification of the methods

3.5.1 Primary data collection

There are generally two kinds of research methodology for primary data collection: quantitative and qualitative (Creswell 2013). The quantitative approach is concerned with the gathering and analysis of data in numeric form. It tends to put the stress on a comparatively large-scale and representative set of data. The quantitative approach is sometimes viewed as the way to collect facts (Gomm et al. 2000). In contrast, the qualitative approach tends to provide rich information about relatively few cases.

In this study the research aim was to examine the relationship between young people and news in the Chinese context, by looking into their own perspectives on news. In doing so it requires young people's own words and individual perspectives. Therefore

a qualitative research design, within an exploratory approach, is considered to be the most appropriate in order to achieve the objectives.

3.5.2 Doing Interviews

Interviews are a typical kind of qualitative approach to gain information on a particular topic or a particular area, when information from the respondents is needed by the research (Berg and Lune 2004). Interviewing is a purposive conversation (Frey and Oishi 1995), the choice of the type depends on what is appropriate to the subject (Kajornboon 2005).

There are three main types of interviews defined by the degree of structure, namely: structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Bryman 2006). Structured interviews use questions on a standardized schedule and could make the analysis and comparison easy, whilst also reducing interviewer's bias. The semi-structured interviews not only inquire specified questions, but also try to get more clarification and elaboration (Seaman 1999). The greater latitude and flexibility offered by the semi-structured interview, is suitable for gathering data based on people's emotions, experiences and opinions (Fielding 1994). Unstructured interviews are the opposite of structured interviews, as these are carried out without a pre-determined list of questions. Interviewers have the freedom and power to make their own statements. The strength of these types of interviews is the high individual responses that it generates. But one of the weaknesses of informal conversations, could be that they are too wide and varied to be useful with groups (Morgan 1997).

This study chose semi-structured interviews since they help to situate young interviewees' perspectives on news in their daily context, providing an opportunity for deeper exploration of the qualitative dimensions of young people's experience as well

as a context for interpreting the data obtained in the pilot study. Meanwhile, constructed within certain boundaries, employing semi-structure interviews ensures that the conversations are structured and corresponding to the research questions.

Since semi-structured interviews have an advantage in assisting the interviewer to ask more specific questions, in this study, choosing this kind of interview helps to narrow down the general research questions by focusing on specific aspects. This provides the flexibility to discover issues the research had not previously considered and leave the space for interviewees to make comments. Moreover, the face to face interview can help the researcher to observe and assess emotions and attitudes (Seidman 2012). It enables deep exploration of various statements about young people's dynamics of daily consumption of news. In addition, doing face-to-face interviews highlights non-verbal communications, which helps the interviewer to observe young people's reactions to each question rather than obtaining their descriptive answers only.

The types of interviews chosen for this research are focus groups and individual in-depth interviews, which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

3.5.3 Focus groups

A focus group is an interview style designed for small groups of unrelated individuals, formed by an investigator and led as a group discussion on some particular themes (Barbour 2005). The researcher invites informants whose characteristics represent those of the target research population, and collect data by engaging the participants in conversations. The focus or object of analysis is the interaction inside the group (Patton 2005). The uniqueness of conducting focus group interviews is its capability to generate data based on the synergy of the group interaction (Morgan 1996). Using this approach, researches would be able to learn through discussions and develop

among different groups (Freeman 2006). It provides a means for collecting qualitative answer in some situations where a particular collection of data necessary (Berg 2007).

Focus groups in themselves are a controversial source for data collection. Generally, there are several advantages in using a focus group interview:

- It is comparatively easy to conduct;
- It is economically efficient;
- It generates opportunities to collect data from group interaction;
- It gives speed in the supply of the results;
- It allows a relatively large sample size for a qualitative study (Freitas et al. 1998)

There are, however, disadvantages in using focus group interviews. For example, (Freitas et al. 1998) address the drawbacks as follows:

- The research is not carried out in a natural setting; and the researcher has less control over the data generated;
- The data may be difficult to analyse;
- The interviewer must have good interview skills;
- Assembling a group may require additional resources

Furthermore, some researchers claim that focus groups are not a good method because of “the potential influence of one or two respondents, since one person may dominate the conversation and negatively affect other people’s opinions thereby influence the outcome of the group” (Wimmer and Dominick 1997, p. 461). Although this could occur, focus groups have the potential to create a snowball effect by inspiring other participants to spark new ideas (Oatey 1999). For instance people may not give their

personal views, but rather contribute to a more general 'groupthink' (Chioncel, Veen et al. 2003). Another problem is that not everyone has an equal chance to speak. There is heavy reliance on the interviewer, to ensure equal participation (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999).

The quality of the data acquired from a focus group interview may not be as good as with one-to-one interviews and better conducted "to detect ideas that will be further investigated using another research method" (Wimmer and Dominick 1997, p.97). Consequently, it was decided that this study would produce better findings if the focus groups were combined with intensive interviews, to allow for more reliable results and greater understanding, and to extend the insufficiently answered questions.

3.5.4 Intensive interviews

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique, which comprises conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea or situation (Boyce and Neale 2006).

Intensive interviews use open-ended questions and allow the respondent to answer liberally. This is an appropriate way to deal with sensitive topics. However, this type of interview needs good connections between interviewers and respondents (Nichols 1991). In intensive interviews, questions are not standardised (Wimmer and Dominick 1997). The approach is comparatively flexible. Moreover, a large amount of details would emerge.

As a result, the weakness of this approach is apparent. It could be time consuming and possibly very costly. Furthermore, there could be issues with biased responses (Oatey

1991). In addition, the results could be hard to analyse and relate to a bigger sample, since “the non-standardisation of the questions in this method means that it is difficult to generalise it on a larger scale” (Wimmer and Dominick 1997, p. 158).

Despite these limitations, intensive interviews were used in addition to focus groups to allow opportunities for potential participants who may not feel included or comfortable talking openly in a group (Boyce and Neale 2006). Since intensive interviews can grant a context or set of insights, these are a vehicle for developing explanations to superficial results from earlier studies (Hochschild 2009).

3.5.5 Focus groups and intensive interviews in this research

As reviewed above, there are generally pros and cons in using any interview method. The focus group interviews and intensive interviews chosen for data collection in this study, were conducted with both advantages and disadvantages in mind. Based on my study, the young participants seemed relatively shy and less experienced. Doing group discussions, might have given them the opportunity to generate new ideas alongside those sharing similar characteristics and background (Stewart 2007), so they may feel more relaxed to be accompanied by their classmates to join the discussions, and they can be inspired and encouraged in case there is an ice-breaker in the same group. Focus groups have the potential to give voices to young people who might be uncomfortable about speaking in individual interviews. Besides, participating in group discussions may provide young people a sense of contribution, which probably encourages them to speak (Big Lottery Fund Research 2005). Furthermore, focus groups provide opportunities for interaction and argument (Field 2000) with their peers, who share the same level of knowledge and similar experiences thus may have more to converse. Besides, compared to quantitative studies, surveys for example, focus groups could be more flexible. For instance, as the focus group interviewer, I

could play an active role and interact with the participants rather than just observing. For example, I could try to encourage the participants to react to the previous answers from another group member by asking: what do you think of his/ her ideas? Do you have different ideas? Considering what he said about..., how do you feel? This helped to elicit arguments in details.

However, the disadvantages were apparent as well in this study, as addressed before in 3.2.3. For instance, in terms of focus groups, it is possible that some young people might not be willing to air their views in front of a group, and they were very likely to be influenced by the opinions of other members in the same group.

During the process, the variation in age needs to be taken into consideration since the participants' literacy, ability, sensitivities and level of comprehension differ substantially at different ages (Bennett et al. 2008). In this study, participants were divided into middle school and high school groups, to make sure that the participants could converse in the easiest and most comfortable way. Though this study did not discuss the differences between younger participants and older ones, or between male teenagers and female ones, using a focus group approach in this research proved to be beneficial in providing qualitative data from both group views and individual ideas. This study endeavoured to provide the dynamics of young people's various perspectives on news, and compared to other methods, focus groups were best qualified for presenting the dilemmas in young people's attitudes towards news.

In-depth interviews were an offset for some defects in focus groups, for instance, it provided opportunities for young people who did not want to air their views in front of a group. Besides, one-to-one interviews facilitated relating the interviewees' perspectives to their experiences and background, therefore helped the researcher to understand more about the particular opinions thereby identifying specific cases.

Nevertheless, corresponding to individual backgrounds could produce a large amount of data and possibly the conversations could go discursive. On this account, this research employed semi-structured type of interview, endeavouring to keep the conversation pertinent.

Additionally, adults were also involved in this research to talk about what young people need from news and education. More often than not, parents and teachers might know young people better than they knew themselves. Besides, family and education were considered to be the essential influences in the formation of young people's sense of citizenship and their use of media, which were directly associated with how young people thought about news and how they consumed it. In spite of this, data obtained from these interviews were not substantially used in the analysis. This was because that during the interviews, I found that the influences from families and schools were not as strong as they were described in previous studies, and the gaps between young people's ideas and the ones of their teachers and parents were not as wide as I perceived- for most of the time, adult participants' ideas were quite in line with what the young participants had said. While these would have benefited this work as complementary evidence, it was deemed better to save space it might be better to give more space for young people's voices by using their own words as much as possible, since the aim of this study was to explore young people's own perspectives on and attitudes towards news.

Questions were focused around an interview schedule to ensure relevant responses, with opportunity for expansion or clarification. Since there was no previous research to draw on from China on this particular issue, discussions and disagreements allowed for opportunities to ask for clarification and to explore ideas and perceptions that could be compared across the different focus groups. Interviews and focus groups lasted from half an hour to one hour. They were taped, and supplemented by notes written during the interviews.

3.6 The research framework and gaps identified in the literature

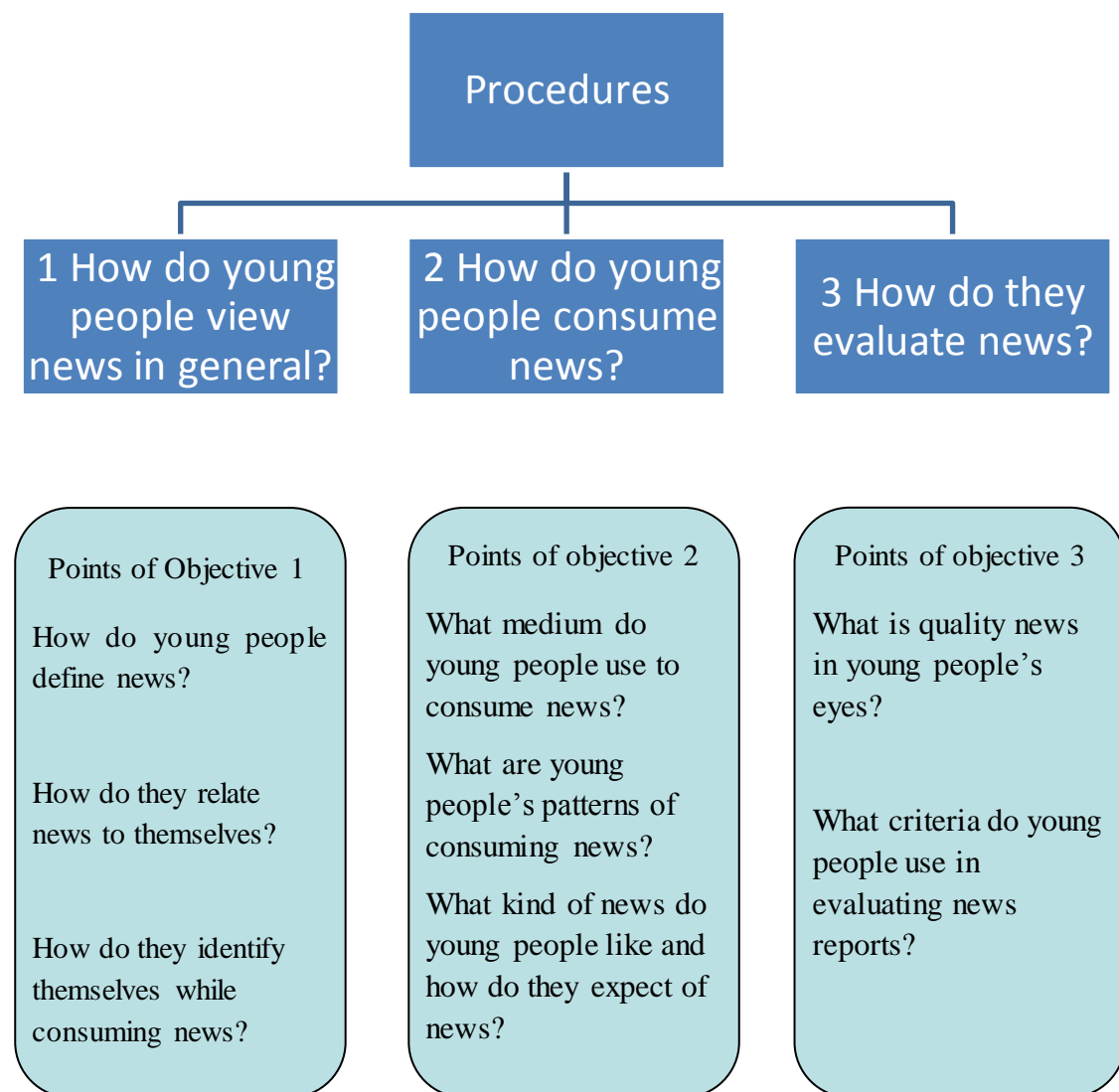
This section gives an overview of how the theoretical framework applied to this research. It starts by suggesting the gaps identified in previous studies concerning journalism, citizenship and media education.

As indicated in Chapter Two, the main gaps identified in the relevant studies regarding young people and news were:

- Whether young people are interested in news or not;
- Whether the young generation have a sense of citizenship or not;
- Whether young people are sophisticated during their consumption of news.

In order to investigate these gaps, the theoretical framework proceeded in this study as follows. Figure 3.1 illustrates how the research design fits into the theoretical framework and demonstrates the procedures of exploring each question corresponds to the gaps identified.

Figure 3.1 Research framework



As indicated in the above figure, the research first looked into what Chinese young people think of news in general, then investigated how young people consume news and what they expect of news development. In attempting to examine if young people are news knowledgeable or not, in other words, how much news literacy they actually have, the analysis then moved on to discover how they evaluate news reports.

Following this, further questions concerning teenagers' problems in news consumption and their expectations of news were discussed, in order to explore young people's demands for news and news literacy education.

3.7 Specific procedure

3.7.1 Pilot study

Purpose and rationale

The primary aim of this pilot study was to obtain young people's definition of news and how they related news to themselves. In doing so, it helped to provide a general picture of what is news in young people's eyes. The follow-up focus groups concentrated on the kind of topics that young people were interested in talking about regarding news, in order to develop and adjust the research questions for the next stage.

Sampling and data collection

Participants were recruited from across Beijing, eight of which were introduced by the headmaster in Beijing Fuzhuang Middle school and four were recommended by friends from other schools. These young people were all middle school students (age ranging from 13 to 18) varied in their grades. This was to ensure their representativeness of the broader community.

The pilot study was conducted in January of 2011, with a sample of 12 participants who responded to the most general questions in this research. First, the participants were asked to write down

- Their definition of news
- What news meant to them
- How they consumed news in their everyday lives.

Following this, participants were separated into two groups of six people, to discuss what they would like to talk about news.

Though surveys had the benefit of contributing quantitative data, which was more objective, and could also provide some personal opinions, the answers given by were not as rich as I expected. For instance, during the small survey in the pilot study, the answers provided by participants were too short, and some of them told me afterwards: I did not know what to say. During the pilot study, I could feel that most of the participants were willing to engage and contribute; however, the results were not as exciting as I expected. Thus I felt that in the following interviews, I should adjust my way of interviewing, by providing more details and clarifications while asking questions, or giving the shy interviewees a little push and inspiring them to link the questions to their daily experiences.

Data Analysis

The pilot study was only an exploratory and testing attempt and, as such, it did not follow a strict procedure of sampling and data analysis. The interviews were not taped at this stage. I only took quick notes of the brief ideas of their discussion. But in the course of the interviews, I observed the participants' reactions to each question and made notes of these observations too. For instance, I found that majority of participants hesitated while talking about news on newspaper or radio, and the discussions on these topics were quite short and barely continued. This was a sign that the participants knew little about these forms of news. However, I also noticed that they did not show any aversion towards news on traditional media. This is an

indication that even though young people were more inclined to new media, they were open-minded towards news of various forms. This observation helped to shape the later interview questions by focusing more on investigating young people's perspectives on the contents and quality of news, rather than on the forms of news.

Moreover, results identified their interest in conversing about the ways in which news was consumed and to discuss the problems of current news. This helped to narrow down the general research question, focusing more on how they consume news (including which media they use and the patterns of their news consumption); and how they evaluate news (regarding how they identify the deficits of current journalism; how they expect it to develop and what is high quality news in their eyes). The refined questions were adopted in the ensuing focus groups (see the section below).

This was an experiment simulating focus groups, in order to focus the study on what young people would like to talk about in relation to journalism, ensuring that would have a rich discussion during the focus groups.

3.7.2 Focus Groups

Purpose and rationale

The aim of conducting focus groups is to obtain data concerning how young people consume news and how they identify themselves while consuming news. Specifically, as demonstrated in 3.3.2, questions were raised concerning:

- What medium do young people use to consume news?
- What are young people's patterns of consuming news?

- What kind of news do young people like and how do they expect current journalism to develop?

In addition, in order to proceed to the questions concerning how young people evaluate news reports in the next stage, the last question in the focus group was extended to: what was quality news in their eyes.

Sampling and data collection

The sample involved 12 focus groups, each with three boys and three girls. Each chosen school was allocated four focus groups, including two middle school groups (with students age ranging from 13 to 15 years old) and two high school groups (with students age ranging from 16 to 18 years old).

After finishing the initial review and had my questions list concerning the gaps identified in previous studies, I considered which school to conduct the focus groups. I contacted some headmasters, and, among key schools, Beijing No.2 Middle School and Beijing No.5 Middle School were most willing to help. In order to ensure the data did not only come from privileged schools, I also contacted the headmaster in Fuzhuang Middle school, which was a common school, where most of the students there were from relatively poor families. The headmaster agreed to help at once.

Due to the legal consideration, I could not directly come into the classes and talk to the students. I told the headmasters in each school which kind of participants I needed (four groups in each school, including two groups for high school and two for middle school; six participants for each group, containing two from each grade, and with equal numbers of boys and girls). Then the headmasters asked the teachers in charge

of the classes to tell his/her class about my study and ask for volunteers, and the headmasters arranged a spare classroom for me to do the interview during the ‘morning break’ or the ‘afternoon break’ (which was between the second and third class, and lasted for about fifty minutes). So when I arrived, the participants were already there waiting for me.

In comparison to surveys, during the focus groups, I could observe participants reacted to the questions and how they reacted to each other rather than just giving the answers. As a result, details beyond what answers to questions were obtained. For example, when facing the question ‘would you like Chinese journalism to change its style?’, some participants hesitated for a while, and some looked at other members in the group, which indicated that the participants were not sure about their answers. So I kept asking them why they were not sure about the answer.

At the beginning of each focus group, I would follow the protocol to tell the participants about the topics and aims of the interview, and the ethical consideration (Please see Section 3.8 for details). Each time, I started the interview by asking them to talk about how they used news, whether they were happy with their user experience in the most general way. Seven focus groups (four in Fuzhuang Middle school, two in Beijing No.5 Middle school and one in Beijing No.2 Middle school) finished before the break ended; on average, the interviews lasted for half an hour. In order to show respect, I did ask more questions when participants told me that they had no more to tell, although I felt a little regret afterwards since I sensed some discussions might potentially have gone deeper if I had pushed it a little.

Data analysis

Focus group interviews generate large amounts of data, which tend to overwhelm novice, as well as experienced researchers and a central aim of data analysis is to reduce data (Rabiee 2004). In the light of this, the main task of data analysis was to classify the data and discern the most useful information.

This study followed Yin (1989)'s stages of analysing data for the focus groups. firstly, I listened, transcribed and examined the recordings. Then, I categorised them into groups under the general research objectives, such as how young people think of news in general, how they consume news and how they think of current news. Following this, I grouped the similar evidence and deleted the discursive details not relevant to this research, in order to address the answers most pertinent to the research questions.

The next stage involved identifying a framework (Rabiee 2004). On this stage, I took notes of the text and found that new ideas emerged from these. I combined them with quotes from the interviews and notes from the observations I carried out during the focused groups and categorized them into emerging themes, these I have presented in a table format (as displayed in the appendix). At this stage descriptive statements were formed and an analysis was carried out.

On the third stage, I associated the answers with the theoretical framework and reflected on whether the questions had been answered. What is more, whether my findings filled the gaps identified in previous studies.

Following this, as Krueger and Casey (2000) suggested, I read the answers and the notes to reflect upon whether the questions I proposed were fully answered; and whether the answers generated new questions. Then I listed the questions lacking

depth in their answers (such as why young people are not happy with Chinese news; whether they agree with the traditional news values or if they are expecting to consider news values to be examined afresh), to be the questions for the next stage of intensive interview.

There were new questions raised from the answers. For instance, participants said that they did not understand news. In this respect, questions concerning why they failed to understand news and what blocked their comprehension, were also listed for the next stage.

3.7.3 Semi-structured intensive interviews

Purpose and rationale

The first purpose of this stage is to complement the questions not fully answered, obtaining more detailed data of young people's consumption of news, with regards to their identities during the consumption. The second purpose of conducting intensive interview was to look into how young people evaluate news reports.

Sampling and data collection

The 40 intensive interviews were divided into two parts.

Participants of the first 20 intensive interviews were recruited from the focus groups. The reason for this was that during the group discussions I found that some students were attempting to speak but did not, due to lack of time or their unwillingness to speak in front of a group. Therefore, following the focus groups, I asked if there was anyone interested in having a one-to-one interview, and these 20 participants

expressed their interest. Questions focused on how they consume news; whether they had a sense of citizenship while consuming news; what kind of news was considered to be of high quality; how they expect journalism to develop and other topics that they would like to talk about concerning the questions discussed during the focus groups. These interviews were conducted in schools and since the students volunteered to participate after the focus groups, these 20 intensive interviews did not allocate participants' age and gender in an average way.

In order to obtain a better understanding of young people, ten in-depth interviews with the teenagers' teachers, parents and scholars of young people studies, were conducted between the two sections of intensive interviews with young people. Questions of these interviews involved:

- How do you think of the current relationship between young people and news?
- What do young people need from news and news literacy education in your opinion?
- Do you have any suggestions regarding how to improve young people's news literacy?

Following this, another 20 in-depth interviews were conducted, in order to obtain data regarding how they evaluated news reports. In this section, participants were provided with printed news reports. They were asked to read them and talk about their quality, with prompts such as: "Do you think this is a good news report?" Or "Do you think this is good journalism?" If they had difficulties to understand the news reports, they were asked to point out which word or sentence impeded their comprehension. These 20 participants were introduced by family and friends, from different schools and areas in Beijing. There were 11 boys and 9 girls, age ranging from 13 to 18 as well. These interviews were conducted in cafés or KFCs.

Compared to the focus groups, the semi-structured interviews proceeded more smoothly, since the majority of the participants were more relaxed and most of the conversations went on like chats rather than interviews. Six of the interviews even became a little too informal and the participants wandered from the subject. When this happened for the first time, I asked the participant to go back to the questions we were supposed to talk about, but the boy then became a little nervous and I felt that he could not talk as freely as he had been. So when this happened again in the following interviews, rather than suggesting “could you please turn back to our question”, I just listened to whatever they talked about, and tried to connect the interviewee’s topic to my questions, and thus generally getting our questions back on track. Several participants were a little shy at the beginning, so I changed the order of the questions. Instead of starting with general questions concerning news quality, I asked them to read the news reports first and to tell me how they felt about them. After this, they were asked to talk about more general questions like “how do you evaluate a news report”.

Data analysis

Following the same procedure from the data analysis of the focus groups, three stages were followed. The first stage was to read the transcripts and categorise them into different groups respecting different questions.

In the second stage, I looked at the notes from the observations and integrated them into the categorised answers. I then reflected on the conceptual framework from the literature review, to see whether the gaps were filled and if there were any new questions raised.

While examining the notes from the observations, I noticed that although young people approved to the Western- based news values, their understanding of them were still shallow and their perspectives of news were mixed with Western news values and Chinese news styles. These observations were taken into account, when discussing whether young people are sophisticated news users.

The next step of the analytic framework consists of an examination to develop the data in relation to other observations. Since this study attempts to obtain an overview of how young people in China see news in general, I did not link the participants' perspectives with their individual experiences and family backgrounds.

Thus in the third stage, I looked at the interviews with middle school teachers, experts in young people studies and parents of teenagers, combining their views with young people's ideas, endeavouring to discern an outline of what young people need from news and news literacy education.

3.8 Ethical considerations

In the approved research proposal, I considered the ethical issues related to the research and made the following claims according to the ethical guidelines of Bournemouth University:

Both ethical issues related to organizations and individuals (the schools and the teachers and students in the study) were considered before conducting the interviews. These issues included the order of the schools, permission to conduct the research, fully informed consent from the participants, and confidentiality.

Before conducting the focus groups and intensive interviews, I had had the permission from the headmasters in each school. The teachers and students were fully informed of what would happen during the interviews. Participants were all volunteers, and were well informed of their right to withdraw at any time. They were also informed about the recording and were assured of not being cautious about their comments. In order to protect young people's identity, all the cited participants were presented with changed names.

In order not to disturb the normal order of the school, or not to interfere with the teaching, all the participants were gathered during the break (eight of the 12 focus groups were gathered after lunch and another four were conducted after school).

The survey in the pilot study and the rest of the intensive interviews were conducted during winter break, there was no need worrying that this might disturb participants' schooling. All participants were volunteered for the interviews. Participants and their parents were informed of the questions of this interview and there were no sensitive questions involved. Before the survey and interviews, I told them that they could speak without restraint, and feel free to let me know if there was any question that they preferred not to answer.

3.9 Strength and weakness of the methods

In addition to the limitations of the focus groups and intensive interviews that were addressed in Section 3.5, there are some limitations and drawbacks of interviews as well (Boyce et al. 2006). Some of these are described below

- **Lack of Time:**

Because the focus groups were conducted in schools and during term time, in order not to affect the participants' attending classes, the time was limited. At the end of some of the focus groups, some participants said that they did not have time to think about the questions carefully and there was more that they could have said, if more time was provided.

- **Limited Scope:**

This type of data collection has a limited scope, because the quality of the answers given by the respondents depends largely on the type of questions. Hence, a significant amount of planning was required for designing the interview questions. Moreover, there is a fixed or limited scope for the respondents to answer the questions. Therefore, the responses might not be abundant enough.

- **Unbalanced focus group opinions**

During the focus group discussions, young people were easily directed by one or two very active participants who led the discussion at times. Even though 12 focus groups were conducted, the answers and opinions obtained were not as rich as I had expected. Thus, the discussion might not have been balanced enough. I should have encouraged each of the focus group participants to contribute and to inspire them more when they were talkless. In further studies, the interviewer should try to give more chances to each and every participant to speak, or specifically ask questions about the ideas from the participants who did not talk

Moreover, during the focus groups, participants barely discussed with each other, but more tended to speak with me. This resulted in less interaction, thereby having less of a snow ball effect related to the interactive aspect(Cameron 2000). Some participants told me afterwards: "I would love to argue with the group members, and it was not because that I was too shy to argue, it's just that I did not know what to say. As to

some of the questions, I did not think of them before, though I did not agree with others' opinions, I did not know how to dispute.”

Besides, there were only 12 focus groups including just 72 participants, and some intensive interview participants who were not systematically selected. For example, some participants of intensive interviews were suggested by family and friends, and some are from the schools where the focus groups were conducted. As a result, the opinions of the participants might not be typical enough to reflect the ideas of their generation. For instant, if participants were recruited from same family background, they might be more typical in representing young people of a certain group.

3.10 Concluding reflections

This chapter has demonstrated the philosophy of the study and outlined how the research design corresponds to the theoretical framework. Following this, the procedure of how the research was carried out has been articulated. The discussions about how to conduct each step were elaborated on by demonstrating their rationale, sampling and analysis of data. Ethical consideration involves reflections on the potential issues of harm, consent, and confidentiality that may affect all participants.

In addition to the acknowledgment of the strengths and weaknesses, limitations of the approach were addressed. Taking a reflexive approach predicts the possible obstacles that may emerge during the research process, and discern the contour of the research.

Chapter 4 News in the eyes of young people

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between young people and news. In order to explore the first two research questions, the chapter starts with an examination of the general perception of news by the participants in this study. Following this, it explores how young people consume news and how they relate news to their lives. Then, the chapter presents their attitudes towards a range of issues, focusing on what quality news is to them, and how they think about Chinese news. These responses will be used in Chapter Five for a more detailed investigation of how young people evaluate news reports, and what difficulties they have while reading them. Each section is followed by a discussion which addresses the key findings linking with the facets of the research questions. The chapter then moves on to consider the issue of youth participation. It draws on how young people behave whilst participating in citizen news. From this, young citizens' potential or capacity of participating in making news can be analysed.

4.2 News in young people's daily lives

This section presents how young people define news and how they relate news to their daily lives. The definitions and observations presented below guided the next phase of studying young citizens' preferences and expectations of news (see Section 4.3).

4.2.1 What is news?

Journalism is essential to ensure that the citizenry of a democratic society is well informed (Christians 2009). To some extent, how young citizens define news reveals

how they relate news to a democratic society, and how they see themselves as part of a well-informed citizenry.

“How do you define news?”

When asked how they defined news, participants initially provided brief answers such as “reports of new things”, “stories about newly happened events”, and “events with social influence”. A 17-year-old participant defined news as “reports that reflect the situation of people’s lives and social development”. As the focus group progressed, more definitions were added, including some that shed light on the participants’ expectations of what news should do. The young people seemed to believe that news should go beyond merely informing. For example, the educational and entertaining functions were also addressed.

“What does news mean to you?”

After initial hesitation, some of the participants provided answers such as “to know about the outside”, “to be informed”, and “to see something new”. The most oft-mentioned answers were: “to pass time”, “to have a topic to talk about”, “to entertain”, and “for homework and exams” (in some middle schools in China, making notes about what is in the news is a part of homework, and questions in exams often refer to current events). Analysing all the answers, it would appear young people use news for four key purposes in their daily lives:

- a) Being informed
- b) Relaxation and entertainment

c) Communication (for chatting with friends)

d) Obligatory work

McQuail (1983) identified that the mass media are used for connection or disconnection. Media-related needs (McQuail 1985) can be classified under the following headings:

- (1) cognitive needs
- (2) affective needs
- (3) personal integrative needs
- (4) social integrative needs
- (5) tension release needs.

How young people relate news to themselves in some measures indicates how they would need to be informed. Judging from the responses in the focus groups, news serves as a diversion and plays a role in personal relationships, providing conversational topics – but according to participants’ purposes for consuming news, there was little evidence that consuming news was associated with young people’s identity as citizens. Young people’s interest in news is affected by their discourse of citizenship (Buckingham 1997), and reading news brings about a sense of belonging and the feeling of being citizens (Barnhurst and Wartella 1998). Although the majority of participants agreed that a good citizen should pay regular attention to quality news – through comments such as “a real citizen should have a sense of responsibility and care about their nation and big international events” – few participants said that they, as young citizens, felt the responsibility to pay attention to news. Only four of the 72 participants in the focus groups felt as “grown up citizens while consuming news”. About 50 of them reported a low sense of being a part of the

citizenry while reading news. The results indicate that young people were aware of the importance of news, yet somehow they did not see the citizen's normal obligation to be informed as something that young citizens like themselves should have.

The participants' understanding of citizenship emerged as a confused mix of traditional Chinese thoughts and vague Western concepts. The values of responsibility and integrity associated with being a citizen that most participants talked about were linked with the traditional Chinese model (see Section 1.2.2). Only two groups among the 12 focus groups noted: "A real citizen should take part in voting". Another one group said: "A real citizen should have the ability to think independent thinking." Marchi (2012) had found that because of the influence of social networks, young people have become more engaged, taking part in news participating, including making comments on online news and contributing photos to professional news reports. However, from the responses of the participants in this study, it appears that most young citizens still hold traditional values of citizenship, even though the ways in which they are informed and participate in political discussions have changed.

As Marchi (2012) Suggested, when the Dutiful Citizen feels an obligation to closely follow the daily news and participate in government-related activities such as voting and party politics, the Actualising Citizen has a diminished sense of government obligation, a mistrust of mainstream news media and politicians, and a higher sense of self-purpose. Results from this study show that young citizens recognize citizenship in accordance with the first (Dutiful Citizen) model, though they are not – or think they are not – capable of fulfilling the associated responsibilities as teenagers. However, their responses to news reveal some characteristics of Actualizing Citizens, such as being doubtful about mainstream news and no longer submitting to government obligations unconditionally.

The responses from participants underline two contradictions in the relationship between young people and news. Firstly, participants were aware of citizenship, but did not apply it to themselves. Secondly, the way they assumed news ought to be consumed were very different from the manner in which they actually consumed it. Although most participants felt that the entertaining and communicating function of news had surpassed its function of informing, they were quite aware that the satisfaction given by media content can be more than a habit or pastime. There is also a contradiction in their perspectives of how news ought to relate to life, and how it actually does. Despite stressing the importance of news to society and being mindful of the role of news in citizens' lives, in actual life, participants still follow an easy, entertainment-focused way of news consumption, within which habitual use of news is an important part.

This brings up two interesting questions. One, what news do young people consume? And two, how do their news consumption behaviours relate to their sense of news? The following sections will look into what types of news appeal to young people (news on which media, of what style and about which subjects), and how their consumption of news affects their understanding of it.

4.2.2 What news do young people consume?

4.2.2.1 Medium choice: new media vs traditional media

In this study it was seen that young people consumed news from a variety of sources across various media channels — television, mobile phones, the Internet, and print. Mobile news and internet news were the most frequently consulted news sources. The data obtained in this study show that although time on surfing the net was similar among different participants (two hours per day on average), time spent on online news proved to be uneven, from anything between ten minutes and 60 minutes.

Although the internet has become the main news source for young people, news on traditional media still plays an important role. Half of the participants said they scanned several news websites and blogs to see what's going on in the world and most rarely picked up a newspaper, but the majority of participants acknowledged the importance of television news in their news consumption and 12 participants said they did read newspapers as well. Although the web “serves virtually all their news needs”, as most of the participants said, traditional news was not blamed by them for not being useful. As one participant put it: "It's not that I have anything against reading a printed newspaper, just that the internet is more accessible... It's just a matter of convenience ... it is free.”

About 60 participants in the focus groups said that daily news texts on mobile phones were one of their most frequent ways of accessing news. Some scholars believed that young adults would come to view social networking as very important (Lenhart et al. 2010). The findings from this inquiry support this view. Weibo (Chinese Twitter), Renren (a Chinese Facebook), MSN Messenger, MySpace, and blogs appeared indispensable to young people. However, participants indicated that they visited social networks not for news but to communicate. They explained that although some news was mixed into their social network feeds, it was often personal news rather than significant formal news reports. But participants identified Weibo as a very important news source, and the majority said they browsed the site as often as they could.

The young participants in this study showed a clear multichannel pattern of news consumption. Although the traditional news media were their main way of accessing news, their choice of news media was based on convenience rather than a particular preference for any new or old medium. The findings shed light on the relationship between new and conventional media consumption. Little evidence emerged that

showed students are abandoning traditional media for new media forms. Traditional and new media seem to be complementing each other—a point previously argued by scholars such as Diddi and LaRose (2006).

News on new media is less fixed by time, place, and routine—elements that reinforce a habit. In young people's daily lives, media use is largely a solitary affair. Since new media are highly selective, it reinforces what users are already interested in, rather than generating a habit for news (Patterson 2008). Despite the internet's capacity to become an addiction, young people's pursuits are largely determined by the interests they bring to the Web. Their existing preferences govern the sites they choose to visit. A Pew Research Centre study (2006) indicates that the new media are not powerful in strengthening the news habit of those who use it as a news source. Compared with the typical newspaper reader or television news viewer, a typical internet news user spends far fewer minutes per day attending to news. The on-demand nature of the internet news can work against the formation of an online news habit, because it breaks the link between ritual and habit. In this study, most participants did not think that their increasing news consumption via new media was proportionate to their interest in news. That is to say, although with the emergence of new media, news seems to be closer to young people's daily lives, this does not mean young people rely on it and necessarily consume more of it.

The process of consuming news was recognized by participants as “what real citizens ought to do”. Despite this, they did not relate their “random use of news” or “easy way of reading news” on new media to any sense of being citizens:

I may agree that reading newspapers makes me more like an adult, but I hesitate to call Weibo-ing (twittering) a way of acting like a real citizen. Actually, grown-ups don't Weibo as much as we do and spending so much

time on Renren and Weibo, it feels like I am not being mature enough.” (R, 15, male)

I think if I click the official web for serious news, I could have a sense of being an adult citizen. But I don’t think I will do that—you know, if I am surfing the web, it is a sign that I am not looking for serious things. (P, 14, male)

I am sure there are people turning to internet for serious stuff, but as far as I know, the ‘formal’ news on new media is not as good as the ones on newspapers. So I think new media are just not a place for ‘serious citizens’—maybe in the future, but not now. (H, 17, female)

The responses indicate the participants did not hold a strong sense of citizenship when they consumed news on new media, since participants did not consider themselves to be citizens while using online and mobile news. Traditional forms of news, such as newspapers, used to play a role in young people’s daily ritual in their transition into adulthood (Barnhurst and Wartella 1998). However, results of this research indicate that this is no longer the case, and the ritual of being a citizen in news consumption (Buckingham 2002) may have diminished. Moreover, the results showed that participants were aware that what kind of news or news media the audience consumed partly depended on how they identified themselves. Given the situation that the young citizens-in-making are still struggling to make sense of their identity, and they no longer see consuming news as part of the ritual of being citizens, a new question arises: would news made for young people generate a clearer sense of citizenship and identity in them?

4.2.2.2 News for adults vs news for young people

The focus group interviews revealed that the news sources that participants relied on were almost identical to the sources adults used. For instance, they informed themselves by visiting general news websites mainly targeting grown-ups. Participants did not subscribe to the idea that ‘young people may like young people’s news’. To them, the idea of ‘news for young people’ conveyed a diminished sense of citizenship.

I would rather browse adult news webs, though they are boring and confusing, anyway they are better than young people news webs—they are idiotic. (Yang, 14, female)

I feel that I have been treated like an idiot when reading young people’s news—as if we are not able to comprehend the easiest things... I am not an adult yet but also not a little kid in kindergarten. (Zhong, 13, male)

While some focus group participants were turned off by the idea of young people’s news, some others were unfamiliar with such news. One said: “I do not even know there was news for young people... what is that?” Several others said that although they were aware that there was news made especially made for young people, they did not “know where it is... on which programme, or on which web”.

This seems to indicate that young people’s news is not reaching its target audiences. An interviewee for this study, Bu, a consultant for the China Youth Computer Information Service Network, said: “I accept that young people should have their own news web. Providing young people with such web services as Zhongqing net (a website for Chinese youth) is a good idea, but it failed to attract its target audience,

which means the producers and editors have little idea of what young people actually want from news and media.” Apart from this issue, teenagers also seemed to believe that quality news must involve depth in the reports— in other words, ‘easy-reading’ is the opposite of quality news. They assumed that young people’s news, which is relatively simple and not so insightful, “cannot regard it as serious news”, must be of low quality and thus not worth the efforts.

Most participants, hence, preferred news for adults, which is more “formal, adult-like” (Jin, 16, male). This indicates a desire to receive news like adult citizens rather than being treated as immature children. It also brings to fore another dilemma in young citizens’ relationship with news: although they did not see themselves as fully responsible, well-informed citizens as adults, they also had an antipathy to being treated like “un-grownups”. In Chapter One, it was discussed how young people were shown in news reports as misperceived, and teenagers were presented to be weak, naïve and irresponsible (Liu 2010). The language used in news produced for young people and the way young people were presented in such news reports highlight a discord between how young people want to be perceived and how they are perceived by adults..

Discussions above have the implication that Chinese journalism has limited knowledge of the young audiences’ situation. Without understanding what their needs and wants are, even news specializing in young people’s issues cannot raise their interest in it. The failure of young people’s news to reach its target audiences lead to questions about what kind of news young people really want in their daily lives. The next section strives to shed light on this.

4.2.2.3 News and daily lives

Young people consume news for many reasons: to seek work opportunities, to get information, to have some pastime etc. Participants said that they wanted to “get something” from news; they have utilitarian motives, and these motivations outweigh their inclinations for news driven by citizenship awareness.

Although news has permeated into young people’s daily lives in various forms, young people still perceived news in a traditional manner. As discussed in Section 4.1, to some extent, the participants were aware that news should be associated with citizenry in a more substantive way than personal interests. However, they did not necessarily apply this in their daily consumption of news and were largely informed by informal news. They regarded serious news “significant to the world but not significant to us”. Some participants complained that “news has little to do with our lives” and “the information is not useful”. As one student put it:

Politics is politics, which is not close to us. How can I spend a lot of time on Gaddafi, even if the story is interesting? It is so far away. (Bo, male, 16)

The relevance of news appears to be very important in stimulating young people’s interest (Raeymaeckers 2004). The potential impact of a particular piece of information on their own lives and its perceived relevance to their personal situations was seen to spur the interest of young people. However, there was evidence that the topics that young people are interested in are hardly reflected in the mainstream news agenda. Meijer (2006) has pointed out that more often than not other forms of information, such as soap operas, can be more informative, because they are more attuned to young people’s specific interests, needs and media consumption behaviours. This was echoed in comments such as the following:

I know traditional news is very informative, but sometimes the information is not what I need. For example, I want to buy a new mobile phone, and need to know about the latest iphone, but the news only says that the new iphone is coming, but no details. So the news does not suffice to my needs and I need to look at the websites. (Qiao, 17, female)

As discussed in 4.2.1, young people expected news to provide them information to use as conversational topics. However, many participants said news did not supply them with good topics for conversations:

It is weird to talk about what's in the news with my friends...we chat about online games, sports, and movies. Little does news say much about these. (Hong, 15, male)

My friends and I usually discuss fashion and cosmetics, so fashion magazines or television series on fashion are more useful than news in offering us topics to talk about. (Qing, 16, female)

Some participants admitted that soft news about celebrities influenced their value system much more than traditional news, “especially when there is a character in it”:

I have to say that sometimes I can't help but follow the 'stars' way', follow their dressing styles, their tones, their behaviours... even though I know they are just 'acting cool' and their ways of life are not good for us to follow... It's a kind of too unrealistic, too material. (He, 15, female)

I am quite aware that the stars are not saints, while some ‘extraordinary heroes’ in CCTV news are; but never do I have any impulse to follow the people in news. (Lu, 16, male)

Some participants blamed traditional news for not being relevant to their lives and said that was why they did not consume news. It does seem that there exists a gap between news and the daily lives of young people, and this has become an issue, creating some apathy towards news. But this study also found that irrelevancy was not the main reason for young people’s aversion to news: information irrelevant to their lives—for instance, entertainment news—still appears to influence their values and attitudes.

Most participants recognized that less traditional news forms, such as mobile news, some casual online news reports and news on social networks, formed an important part of their media consumption. However, these news reports did not necessarily relate to their lives more than traditional news did. Nonetheless, emergent forms of news available on online platforms, though sometimes being recognized as “informal” and “less standardized” by participants, won young audiences’ attention, despite it being perceived by them as of low quality. Participants also said that informal news, whether it was interactive or not, gave them a higher sense of engagement than traditional news did. Here emerges a question regarding young citizens’ apathy towards news: is the apathy caused by the irrelevance of news to the lives of young people, or is it because news fails to arouse their interest and attention?

4.2.3 News apathy

4.2.3.1 News apathy and the dullness of news

As highlighted in Chapter Two, media scholars have expressed concerns about the problems associated with the changing nature of citizenship (Bennett 2008). Many fear that audiences are becoming increasingly disengaged from a political process that they believe largely ignores them and their interests. More than one study has concluded that young people express low level of interest in media coverage of political affairs (Buckingham 2002; Henn et al. 2002; Pinkleton and Austin 2004), preferring human-interest stories over political (including social and economic) and legal (including crime and accidents) news. The main reasons identified in this study why young people are alienated from news are presented in below (Table 4.1). Besides the general reasons, Chinese young citizens were also negatively influenced by heavy schoolwork, and the cultural pressure that students ought to focus on studies rather than other extraneous information (see Chapter One).

Table 4.1 Reasons for young people's news apathy

	Social causes	Personal reasons
General reasons	News is less attractive	Less interest in politics
	News and politics are not related to their lives	Young people feel being alienated by news and politics
	High social pressure	Think there are better/ more important things to do
	Journalists are better educated and draw news in a more literary way	Poor literacy
	Television news makes audiences less critical	Prefer visual messages
Chinese-specific reasons	High school demands	No time for news and politics
	Cultural influence	Used to understand citizenship as “no action”

In attempting to fill the gap of whether or not young people are interested in news, this study asked focus group respondents what kind of news they liked. Answers varied. Some participants said they did not like news in general, but were interested in specific topics. For instance, male participants tended to like science news, sports news, and, to some extent, political news. “War news especially,” said a 13-year-old male respondent. Most female respondents said they preferred fashion news and human interest stories.

The narrative mode of news stories emerged as another reason for the respondents' low interest. "News is too boring" was a common comment. A 16-year-old male respondent said: "I do not mean political news is boring, but the way it is reported fails to attract the bulk of the attention. Hard news can be more attractive if it is more story-like, or provides some interesting details." Previous studies have suggested that narrative storytelling could have a positive effect on perceived comprehension, learning, interest and enjoyment. If young adults expect hard news stories to be difficult to understand, then that is something they will lose interest in quickly (Zerba 2008).

In general, most participants said they were not interested in news because "it is not appealing", but they "would be okay if it remains that way, because news should be like news". One male respondent (15 years old) suggested that "Politics is politics, it should be serious". This answer corresponds to the previous study, which presented that some young people are convinced that "real" news should be "boring" and about serious stuff (Raeymaeckers 2004).

4.2.3.2 News apathy and news quality

About 50 participants said that they were not interested in news because it is not believable enough. A 17-year-old female respondent noted: "It's not that I am not interested, I actually like it, but I found it is less reliable, sometimes filled with adulation."

Some participants indicated that they did not watch news because "it is not good enough" and "it was not telling the truth". Young citizens came across as being aware of the deficiencies in the Chinese state media, especially the question about its

credibility, and some of them attributed their news apathy to it. However, whether the problem of news credibility is the main reason for young audiences' low interest in news is doubtful.

Previous research has discussed the relationship between political apathy and disaffection with media coverage among citizens, including cynicism and scepticism (Gwinn Wilkins 2000). Cynicism frequently is attributed to dissatisfaction with media coverage. Cynicism refers to a lack of confidence in, and a feeling of distrust toward, the political system, government officials, and related institutions, including the media (Cappella and Jamieson 1985). The link between cynicism and apathy is uncertain, but scepticism, which is seemingly relative to cynicism, is suggested to be a positive response. As Kuklinski and Peyton (2007) observe, deficits in media satisfaction do not relate only to cynicism. Scepticism assesses individuals' critical evaluation of public affairs information sources, it is a constructive response to political blunders and public affairs news media, representing a critical but open posture toward news media and politicians.

Scepticism contributes to enhanced information seeking rather than reduced information seeking and civic disengagement, and dissatisfaction caused by distrust of news can serve to accelerate the consumption and participation of news. Indeed, scepticism toward the mainstream news media is related to extra national news consumption and this links citizens to the broader public sphere (Tsfati and Peri 2006).

If these arguments apply to the case of young Chinese citizens, then their dissatisfaction and distrust of mainstream news may not necessarily lead to their news apathy; on the contrary, these may potentially contribute to their critical reactions to news. To be specific, sceptical young citizens would recognise that media and politicians have limitations, motivating them to use additional information sources to

confirm or disconfirm information they question. As a result, their dissatisfaction with news has the potential to contribute to their scepticism, which can actually result in engaging them in information seeking and news-making. However, in this research, participants felt that the deficiency in news credibility resulted in their declining appetite for news rather than in critical reflection or information seeking. It appeared that to an extent, they were cynical rather than sceptical. This raises some interesting questions. How can cynicism be converted into the more healthy scepticism? Is the answer a more interactive news environment? Would increasing consumption of news by itself promote scepticism about news?

4.2.4 Indiscriminative news consumption

Young people appeared to be careless consumers and passive audiences. Nearly half of the participants in the focus groups watched news just “because my father/mother watched it and the television was on”, and despite watching news, they had “no idea what it is about”. Even when consuming news by themselves, not much attention was being paid to the content. It appeared they were using news for company, or to fill in spare time. Some participants suggested the activity of watching news was “nothing but a habit”:

I watch CCTV news every day, for nothing, but I am used to turning on the TV at seven. (Ke, 15, male)

It is a kind of habit, which I think I take from my dad ... I just feel that it is the time to turn it on, and just let it on, but I won't cease anything in hand for it. (Mei, 16, female)

Such ‘news for habit’ consumption was through traditional media avenues, of which the most mentioned one was television. Obviously the fixed time of news reporting plays an important part in forming the habit of news. As to new media, the habitual process of consuming news was less evident, since the respondents could get news whenever and wherever they wanted it. In spite of the numerous sources of news available on new media, young people said they were more like habitual gazers than active information seekers. Diddi and LaRos (2006) provide an insight into this pattern:

When confronted by a myriad of media choices, the consumer lapses into habitual patterns of media consumption in order to conserve mental resources, rather than repeatedly engaging in active selection (2006, p.194).

Participants saw news on new media as something between passing time and information seeking. In all, 32 participants said the websites they visited were the ones linked to their email or MSN, and news just showed up each time they logged on. That is to say, some of their news routines were not to read news, but came about for other reasons. New media have presented young people the option of choosing news for themselves. To some extent, they were no longer passive audience members. However, this did not seem to accelerate their understanding or recalling of news. Participants admitted that they did not remember most of the news and “often have no idea what I had read”, but “it is better than traditional news anyway”. A 13-year-old female respondent put it this way:

I think I can remember online news a little better because I can choose what I read—and make sure that what I read is what interests me already, at the first step. (Jiang, 13, female)

Internet news selected by the participants themselves was less for “company” but rather “to know something new”. Online news was consumed more on the basis of their needs and wants, and young people were more certain of what they wanted to see. One participant said, “When I look at the headline, or watch the preliminaries—perhaps a short video introduction, I would have some idea whether I want it or not.” However, it also emerged that young people often “click just because the headline is attractive” and uses “some eye-catching words”, or perhaps “the report is placed in a noticeable position”. In short, young people appear to find internet news alluring, which seems to suggest that although they were not entirely passive consumers when they accessed the new media platform, they were not totally active users either. One participant said, “I refresh my Weibo page on mobile phone as often as I can, and get news in this way.” This was echoed by other members:

On Weibo, news comes to me every minute, and in short sentences, very easy to read. (Jia, 15, female)

I use Weibo, and Renren, and have these APPS on my mobile, so I can gather information here and there, piece by piece. (Chen, M, 17)

As debated in Section 4.2.2, news comes to young people through a variety of channels, and they choose the easiest, most convenient and cheapest way of consumption, rather than by considering the quality of news or because of their preference for some media. Most participants said they did not access news intentionally. On the contrary, they usually “had a glance at news” when browsing their social network. This demonstrates that young people normally do not focus on news, but consume it by chance as part of their multi-task online activities.

4.2.5 Further discussions

4.2.5.1 Young people's general perspectives on news

Young people in China were keen to be informed about their world, and saw the media as playing an important part in this. Although they are aware of the differences between news media and the technological revolutions occurring within it, judging from the responses of focus group participants, young people appeared not to relate the developments in the news media to democracy, viewing the changes only as changes in format. The internet seemed to have been woven into the fabric of the daily lives of young people in China, and they used the web for news as well as for entertainment. They relied very heavily on the web for both academic and general information.

Although consuming news now and then, focus group participants did not show much interest in news. They were also not satisfied with news mainly because of its irrelevancy, its narrative mode, and because they found it dull.

4.2.5.2 Young people's consumptions of news

During young people's consumption of news, the internet and mobile news, followed by television news, were the most frequently consulted sources. Traditional and new media seemed to complement each other. Participants showed little discrepancy between traditional or new media as long as they provided high quality news in a convenient way.

The internet and mobile phones had brought a large number of informal news into young people's lives which took a great part of young people's total consumption of

news. News on new media provided more choices of news diets and made dialogues possible, notwithstanding this, to a large extent, young audiences still remained passive when they were consuming news.

Although news seemed to have got a lot closer to young people's daily lives with the emergence of new media, they did not rely on it. Social media were perceived as important for communication rather than for consuming news. Purposeful information seeking was more likely to occur online, but most of their news consumption was incidental. Young people consumed news in random ways, largely depending on their 'news habits', as opposed to deliberately choosing news for its quality. News sources providing in-depth coverage of national and international events were seldom consulted.

News carried on new media has even influenced their news habits and dependency. With the introduction of mobile technologies, young people's consumption of news has increased significantly. However, as they used information disseminated on mobile devices, young people would be more inclined to consume brief snippets of news, rather than more substantial versions with proper background. Also, accustomed as they were to checking only news headlines, young people were becoming news "grazers" (Morris and Forgette 2007), without reading "deep". In light of this, young people in China could hardly be expected to improve their understanding of current events through consumption of news. They were more likely to remain cynical rather than sceptical about news.

It is also noted that young people tended to engage in other activities while watching or reading news. For instance, while watching news, they might be listening to music, checking their emails, blogging, etc. Thus, they were not paying attention to the news they are consuming. This habit results in limited retention, and they seemed to be

using news for entertainment rather than information. Thus, young people in China consulted news and know about significant events—but this knowledge is superficial and they were unable to develop opinions about the news they had consumed.

In sum, the news that young Chinese people consumed was mostly simplified and fragmented versions of events, accessed on new media platforms, especially on internet and mobile devices. This did little to deepen their understanding. The habit of consuming such news appeared not to lead to a positive relationship between young people and news. Thus, it can be argued that even though new media news has woven itself into the fabric of young people's daily lives, it did not help bridge the disconnect that exists between young people and news.

4.2.5.3 News consumption and young people's citizenship

It would appear that the young Chinese people in this research had only a limited and perhaps confused understanding of identity and citizenship. There were contradictions in their idea of what citizenship meant and how they thought of themselves as citizens. The media have a strong influence on the young people's sense of citizenship (Buckingham 1997). Today young people are faced with a variety of interactive media. This has affected which forms of media products they value. Findings of this study reveal that young people considered interactivity very important in their consumption of news. Nevertheless, being interactive online did not automatically develop active citizenship. By making their own choices of what to read or watch online, and by selecting which news topic to follow on Weibo and other apps on mobile or iPad, young consumers felt that they were interacting—but in reality they are not. News consumption seemed to satisfy their social needs to some extent, but their way of superficially reading news did not give young people the skills or understanding to interact effectively with news. Thus, although news conveys to

young people information about the society and offers possibilities for them to interact, it did not automatically associate them to the adult world, or equip them with the skills for being real citizens.

This study shows that young people's news experiences were barely motivated by awareness about their citizenship and they had ignored their identities as citizens during news consumption. Also, online news worked against the formation of a news habit (Tewksbury 2005), and young people had little reliance on news. This diminishes the ritual of being a citizen. That is to say, no matter how much young people accessed news, psychologically they did not associate with news the same way as real citizens do. Partly this is the result of the tradition of being 'no action good citizens', rather than critical, well-informed ones (see discussion in Section 1.2.4); and partly, this is due to the nature of Chinese journalism, which functions as the 'throat and tongue' of the Communist Party.

From this research, it would appear that although young Chinese citizens still hold the traditional values of citizenship, their ways of being informed and participating have changed. As the concept of citizenship develops in the modern society, the modes of being citizens are no longer confined to the original type. Participants in this study seemed to believe in the traditional Chinese concept of citizenship. However, their reactions to news have revealed some characteristics of their being modern citizens, such as mistrusting mainstream news, and no longer being willing to submit to government obligations unconditionally.

Given these changes, the next section aims to examine what young citizens expect of news.

4.3 Young people's requirements, preferences and expectations of news

4.3.1 News requirements and preferences

As previously discussed, for young people in China, news seems to be a diversion rather than an influence that helps form their identity as citizens. Focus group participants derived some understanding of the world from their news consumption, and used news to enhance their personal relationship by discovering conversational topics. More than 50 of the 72 participants said their demands of news were “not completely satisfied”. As the discussion above has shown, this was mainly because of the poor quality of news that they consumed and also their own incapability to comprehend news.

In terms of news preference, most participants preferred short, scannable articles with pictures or video. They also indicated that the option of users' control was essential. The majority said they had little sense of commitment to certain news reports; if news failed to engage them, they would move on. Several participants said they navigated to articles or videos that appeared interesting based on the headlines, but if they found the content either uninteresting or not what they expected, they would not stay. These results are in tune with the earlier findings that young people are much like “news grazers”(Morris and Forgette 2007), and their habits of consuming media are not suitable for consuming in-depth or complicated journalism.

As to the kind of news content they preferred, they used such terms as “pleasurable”, “interesting and funny” and “easy”. Young people appeared to prefer “effortless news reports” for daily consumption, as such news allowed them to feel “comfortable”. If a news report required an effort to read or watch, they would move on. Obviously, their

choices of news were associated with to extent to which news reports are interesting and easy to use, and the news reports that appealed to them needed to fit their news consumption patterns and to suit their level of news literacy. Even though young people valued quality news, the news they regularly consume is still the kind that they could understand without taking much effort.

4.3.2 Difficulties in understanding news

About 50 participants of the focus group claimed they did not pay attention to news because they could not understand it, and they did not remember what news they had seen.

I have no idea what CCTV is talking about, even when I stare at it from beginning to the end. (Cheng, 15, male)

I can hardly remember anything after watching, except when there is very shocking and attractive news, say, the earthquake in Japan. (He, 14 female)

Though many participants said “I cannot understand”, few were able to pinpoint the reason behind this. Most of them were puzzled when asked, which seem to suggest that they barely considered it further and did not think that not understanding news was a problem.

A noticeably significant difference in news preferences was seen across different age groups, which suggests that young people’s news preferences could be in part based on their ability to comprehend news. Younger participants tended to accept simple and straightforward news while the older preferred in-depth reports, and most

participants in the high school group admitted that when they were young, they liked “news which I could understand”:

When I was a kid, I thought good news was the ones I knew what it’s talking about. (Deng, 15, female)

When I was younger I thought that good news was understandable news. (Chong, 14, female)

The majority of younger students (between 13 and 15, in middle school) said they could not understand the language of the news reports, which was “hard to follow”. A 14-year-old male participant said: “People won’t like things they fail to understand. Simple words would be accepted by most people, even people with less education.” Thus, young people’s low appetite for news may to some degree be caused by young people’s less-developed language skills and lack of knowledge about the society.

Besides, in general, journalists are better educated than the average citizen and possess a more advanced vocabulary and knowledge (Rogers 1999). So news reports written by journalists can potentially be harder to understand for people who are less educated. The participants of this study were teenagers and hence not as well educated as adults, and since exposition is generally less readable than narration, the interpretative and explanatory characteristics of modern news stories may also come at the cost of readability (Fishkin 1985, cited by Conley 1998). Since news stories are not as simple as they used to be, young audiences, with comparatively less news literacy, may feel lost in the mass of information.

4.3.3 Further discussions

It is hard to say whether it is the difficulties of understanding news that reduce young people's passion for consuming news, or whether it is their disinterest in news that leads to their less focused way in news consumption which results in difficulties of understanding news. Either way, younger people in China have problems in understanding news. When evaluating news, they first asked whether they could understand it. Many participants acknowledged that comprehension was the first requirement of "good journalism". "Good journalism", in their eyes, was not "high quality" news, but news they could understand.

News literacy and news interest are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. News interests could also be enhanced by citizens' recognizing the duties and responsibilities of citizenship. Buckingham (2000) discusses how children have not been recognised as citizens in their own right, for they are being prevented from having involvement in political decisions because it is believed they are incapable of understanding politics – and this leads to young people's apathy in news and political affairs. The findings of this study show that young people did have problems in understanding news and political issues. However, this should not be a reason to exclude them from politics. Political engagement and news comprehension complement each other and are mutually beneficial. Being news savvy may enhance young people's ability of understanding political affairs, which in turn will make them news savvy. However, this consideration does not seem to be present in the Chinese society, which has arguably contributed to young people's inadequate understanding of journalism and the overarching politic situation in China.

As discussed earlier, students who took part in this study were able to tell the difference between "what news should be like" and the "news that they need and want". Although they did not relate to 'high quality news', which they said they could

not understand, or to their obligations as young citizens, participants were aware of the importance of high quality news to the citizenry in general. This lead to the question regarding what kind of news is considered to be of high quality - which we are going to discuss in the next section.

4.4 Perceptions of news quality

There has been much discussion about whether young people are sophisticated news users (Mayer 2006; see also discussion in Chapter Two). And the sophistication, in terms of news literacy, regarding not only to the skills of using or making news, but also refers to the aptitudes of analysing news in a critical way (Street 2003).

Currently China does not provide a formative media education concerning news literacy development for young people. It would be interesting to explore Chinese youngsters' performance in evaluating news, and to have an insight into their 'uneducated' views about news. This section aims to find out young people's own criteria for evaluating news quality.

4.4.1 Definitions of quality news

As previously mentioned in Chapter Three (see Section 3.4), 'quality journalism' was defined as content that effectively communicate matters of general, social or political significance, which is implicitly intended to help citizens in their role as democratic decision-makers (Zaller 1999). The young people who participated in this study defined high quality news mainly as "well made news" and "professional journalism". In this context, they mentioned Western news values such as "being objective", "arrive in time/come in the first time", "balanced news", and "profound/in-depth". Further, they talked about journalism technology, which was explained as "news with

good shots, good pictures”, “with skilful interviews” and “news with good writing”. In addition, some of them felt high quality news should be “vivid”, “lively”, “interesting” and “interactive”.

4.4.2 Perceived criteria for quality news

The majority of participants seemed to agree with the Western values of quality news. They listed the criteria for high quality news as truthfulness, timeliness, objectivity and profundity. All participants thought “truthfulness” was essential to high quality news, and most of them marked it as the most important. Trust in news has long been seen as an important component for democracy. As addressed in Chapter Two, citizenship embodies a relationship between rights and obligations (Barnes et al. 2004). If the right of being rightly informed is encroached, but obligations are still required, it breaks the balance of relationship surrounding citizenship. In fact, obligations cannot be fulfilled without ensuring rights. Participants also spoke about the requirements of speed and perspectives:

High quality online news should be even faster. If not, no matter how good it is, it will get buried in a sea of newly arrived information. (Mo, 16, female)

High quality news should be having various views. (Hong, 13, female)

...reported from different angles. (Min, 16, female)

...give the same opportunities to different group to speak. (Han, 16, female)

News reports can't be personal. (Linyu, 14, female)

...with calm observation. (Chen, 13, male)

...without individual judgment. (Hui, 16, female)

With no subjective comments. (Yuan, 17, female)

High quality news contains good shots and good interviews. (Li, 15, male)

High quality news should be with nice photos and perfect sound. (Chen, 14, female)

Although the criteria mentioned by the participants were similar to the professional ones discussed in Chapter Three, such as interest, timeliness, and clarity (Guo 2012), their understanding of what these values actually meant appeared to be vague and confused. For instance, participants understood balance as “each side has the right to talk to the camera” and “different opinions”. Objectivity, to them, was about being “calm”, “not emotional”, and “no personal comments”. In-depth news was explained as “follow-up reports” “reports with rich information” and news which “keeps coming” and “detailed stories”. There was no mention of background or social context behind the story. This implies that young people did not consider these factors so important to news, however, more often than not, it is their lack knowledge of these factors that causes their failure to understand news reports. As discussed in Section 4.2.2, young people prefer news for adults to news for young people, and teens believe that quality of news is partly based on its depth. Thus they assume that news for youth, which is relatively simple and not ‘deep’, must be of “low quality” and hence not worth their attention. Depth is highly valued by young people, and they believe that news for

adults is “what high quality news should be like, even if I can’t understand it”. Many participants made comments similar to this about news for youth: “I suppose even if young people can understand it, it must not be of good enough quality.”

As depth emerged as a major criterion for young people in China, how they defined in-depth requires more attention. As with their understanding of objectivity, young people did not understand depth in the same way journalists or adults do. With the introduction of new media technologies, young people were increasingly used to consuming information on internet and mobile phones (see Section 4.2.2), and this may be the reason for their appetite for short news stories. Moreover, information online and on mobile phones is constantly updated. During the interviews, some participants defined in-depth news as “keep updating”. It would appear, then, that young people’s ideas of the depth of news are probably derived from their daily forms of consuming news.

Changing standards?

Zaller (2002) contended that if news quality is of too high a standard to inform citizens, it would not be realistic or necessary for the functioning of democracy, a standard more tailored to the needs of low information voters could be accepted (see Section 3.4). However, it seems that young citizens in China, despite finding that high quality news is too difficult for people of their age, by and large do not want news to lower its standard.

In terms of regular news, previous studies have suggested that because of the emergence of citizen news and other forms of informal news, audiences—especially young ones—have a changing attitude towards the criteria for quality news (Buckingham 2002). In other words, traditional values of news such as objectivity are being examined afresh. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants in this study said

they, in one participant's words, "would like news to keep its traditional standards and remain believing in objectivity, balance and so on". Only ten participants out of the 72 interviewees said things like "I prefer new standards" "Being appealing", "being interactive", or regarded "multichannel" as new criteria for high quality news in the digital age.

As to other forms of news, young people did not think of entertainment news or other informal news as "good quality news", although they consumed a lot of such news. In addition, most of them believed that entertainment news was not objective, and did not need to be. They also had a tolerant view of the quality of other forms of non-professional news, such as citizen journalism:

Of course general news should be some way higher than e-news, and should provide more than mere facts. (Kong, 16, male)

Normal people were not trained to make news, so it is understandable if their filming is bad or their reports are less clear. (Ting, 14, female)

To sum up, while young people had a more forgiving attitude towards the quality of e-news and citizen news, when it comes to serious news, most of them agreed with the standards set by professional journalism in terms of Western-based news culture. Generally, young people consult Chinese news media to be informed, in spite of this, participants tended to believe in Western-based news values. This brings questions concerning whether young people would associate these news values to Chinese news which they regularly consume.

4.4.3 Young citizen and Western news values

4.4.3.1 How young people relate Western news values to Chinese journalism?

It turned out that young people who took part in this study were quite aware of what news “should be” as per Western standards. Most of them were aware that the national news in China did not meet the requirement of quality news as seen by the West. News values in Western countries are defined in the literature review and have been taken as a form of standardisation and associated with audiences’ satisfaction of news reports (Gantz and Wenner 1991). According to the data from the focus group interviews and my observations of the group dynamics during interviews, some of the attributes appear to have an impact on audience’s satisfaction. For instance, the quality dimension of a news programme contributes to the audience’s satisfaction—source credibility, technology factor, being timely, and good content are all positive influences.

In comparison with the news values in China, which features press control prominently (see Section 3.4), participants tended to agree with the values of the Western world. Even though Chinese journalism also features truthfulness as a lifeline of news, participants were sophisticated to distinguish the difference:

If news has to speak for someone, it cannot be objective. (Yin, 17, male).

Keeping harmony in news means that news reports need to avoid the bad news, and news cannot be objective if we only have good news. (Yue, 18, female)

In addition, even though most participants tended to agree with Western values for news, they felt it would not be possible to apply those values to Chinese journalism.

An 18-year-old participant said, “Our government would not allow Chinese news to use the standards of CNN news.” Another participant said:

I prefer online news; at least it is fairer, for it is possible to air public views. But sometimes the sharp views get blocked out. So I don’t think we can have the so-called objective news. (Lin, 18, male)

Such statements indicated that some young people in China were sensitive to the discrepancy between Chinese and Western news. However, though they seemed to hold standards that were close to those held by professional journalists in assessing quality of news, they were not sufficiently sophisticated to evaluate news reports. Their understanding of the criteria seemed to be second-hand and quite theoretical. The setting in which Chinese young people were raised does not seem to provide a social and cultural basis for them to comprehend Western ideas. For instance, objectivity, which can be traced back to market competition (Schudson 1981), is not naturally developed in Chinese journalism. To a large extent, Chinese news is still controlled by government authorities. As previously discussed, democracy is only a concept rather than part of the Chinese culture. That is to say, democracy and some of the attributes of quality news, such as objectivity, are foreign concepts for Chinese journalism and its audiences. These concepts are accepted by Chinese audiences without a firmly embedded cultural root. In light of this, and given the reality of the Chinese media environment, it is hardly possible for Chinese audiences to relate these concepts to their experiences of news. Hence, compared to Western citizens, it may be more difficult for Chinese citizens to understand the values of news profoundly.

4.3.3.2 Why Chinese young people agree with Western-based news values

As discussed in the last section, this research found that participants used Western values in assessing news quality and held positive attitudes towards Western journalism. They believed that BBC and CNN could be more objective and of higher quality than Chinese news media, even though they had not watched these channels themselves. Ms Jin, a head teacher at Beijing Fuzhuang middle school, said:

Young people nowadays are too obsessed with the US culture, they watch their television series so often, agree with their ideas, and I suppose that these American values are somehow ingrained in their minds.

What Ms Jin observed is consistent with what Davis (2010) has noted about childhood in the era of global media. Young people's programmes such as cartoons and children's movies do not directly affect young people's political perspectives. Globalized culture does not affect news perspectives directly, but may introduce the concepts of democracy or freedom of speech, and thus forms young people's fundamental impression of what democratic society ought to be like. This influence is an unconscious process, beyond either the educator's awareness, and also beyond the young people's awareness, and that may explain why young people had no idea why they felt good about Western countries and where the affection came from. Media nationalism constitutes an important extension of the political being in the Chinese context. In other words, one needs to put the political indifference and nationalist passion together in order to gain an understanding of how Chinese youth negotiate a Chinese self in the context of rapid and profound social transformation due to various global forces (Liu 2010).

As mentioned in Chapter One, China's reform and opening leads to dual modernity (Liu 2010). The dualism here represents a search for a modern identity for China in the age of globalisation. This process has entailed two apparent paradoxes (Yu 2006):

a search for “continuity with, as well as a departure from, the socialist legacy and cultural tradition of the past, and integration with, as well as resistance to, global capitalism” (p.6). The characteristics of dual modernity are not only a feature of China’s opening up, but also a character of Chinese citizens, whose concepts, values and identities are swinging in the collision between global views and cultural tradition.

There is a general tendency among Chinese young people to compare China with the Western developed societies as a way to voice their discontent with news in their local context. This tendency reflects the dilemma of being both local and global at the same time. Chinese leaders see modernity as both hope and danger for China (Bakken 2000). Modernisation and globalisation, it is believed, would not only bring challenges to China economically, but culturally as well. As a result, modernity and global views have somehow been excluded from media education. Young people get knowledge and experience of modernity and globalisation through media and real life more than from education.

4.4.4 Further discussions

This section sought to identify the determinants of what young Chinese people considered quality news reports. The discussion above brings to light several paradoxes in young people’s perspectives on news. This can be summarized as follows:

There are major limitations and contradictions in young people’s ability to understand news and their attitude towards it. Although young people provided news evaluation standards that were very close to professional ones, they only had a superficial understanding of these standards. For example, ‘balance’ in their eyes seemed to equal the average time or space accorded to each side, and pluralism means “giving

the camera to different people” (see Section 4.4.2). This points to the insufficiency of their news literacy. Besides this, as discussed in Section 4.2, young people found it difficult to understand news and felt that good journalism should “make sense”. However, they did not want to lower the quality of news to fit their news literacy.

Moreover, young people in this study did not approve of a tailored standard of news for people with low information. Participants preferred news made for adults rather than news made for youth. They felt news should be in-depth and objective and did not think news tailored for youth was quality news. This view is potentially linked to how young people define news. They saw news as serious and significant – not entertainment.

The new generation is more creative and open. However, it is also believed that the young people are more forward-looking (Liu 2010) but are also emotional and mentally fragile (She and Yu 2010). Although participants in this study were aware of the significant role news plays in building an informed citizenry, they did not relate news to democratic dialogues in any substantial way. This may partly be due to the system in China, where news fails to bridge the gap between authorities and citizens. Consequently, it is hard for Chinese young citizens to understand news and its values in terms of democracy. This raises questions about what Chinese young people think of the Chinese news culture, and whether they would apply the radical opinions to Chinese journalism which they condemned for not being objective. In the next section, our discussions will focus on how young people think of national (Chinese) news: Growing up in a globalised news environment and tending to agree with Western news values, do they expect a change in Chinese journalism?

4.5 How do young people regard Chinese journalism?

4.5.1 *Problems in Chinese journalism*

Participants were asked what they thought of Chinese journalism. A major issue that emerged in the discussion was lack of objectivity. All participants spoke about this problem.

I do not always believe in it (national news), not because I think it provides wrong facts, but because it lacks objectivity. (Ling, 17, female)

It's terrible that the media acts as the mouthpiece of the authorities and speaks only for them (Chou, 15, male).

It (Chinese journalism) is the problem of our system. Open information is important for news development. Monopolisation is harmful—that is the cause of ‘one voice’ (Li, 18, male).

Previous studies in the west have discussed how young audiences are sophisticated, cynical yet inconsistent in their use of mass media (Keane and Fam 2005). In the context of China, young people expressed themselves to be “not so happy with current news” because—as 14-year-old Henzhi put it—“the decent news reports speak too much of the government and informal ones (such as citizen news and entertainment news) are of low quality and full of mistakes”.

Participants saw the way news was coloured by the ideology, values and interests of the government as a problem. They were not sure if Chinese news had a “peaceful

appearance” because government censored “harmful” news, or if it was because the news media were too cowed to post stories of conflicts. Whichever was the case, they found such propagandist news “disgusting and worthless”. There was a feeling of repugnance in their comments, which at times were emotional. Their description of national news contained words such as “nonsense” and “meaningless”.

Driven by their emotional perspectives on news, young people in this study judged Chinese journalism based on their impressions of it. Chinese journalism was perceived to be official; having this in mind, young people thought Chinese news was generally not objective thus largely ignored the quality news reports within it. They claimed that there was very little quality news available. However, scholars interviewed for this study disagreed, saying there was quality journalism from publications not under government control. They pointed to news magazines such as *South Weekend* and *Finance*. However, these magazines were rarely read by middle-school students. In other words, it could be argued that the young people in China had very little—if any—exposure to quality news. As the ability to fathom quality news seems to be beyond the news literacy of young people, young audiences are in need of news guidance. This could lead them to consuming quality news and help them reach a more sophisticated level of news consumption.

Though being emotional and radical, participants presented a strong sense of citizenship by suspecting authorities’ news and having their own opinions. This implies that although young people notionally valued traditional citizenship, they were actually embracing citizenry in new terms (see Section 4.2.5).

Young people are less credulous about news than their parents were. Yet, participants did not appear to be radically critical about journalism (see Section 4.5.2). Their news perspectives were diverse and easily influenced, and they appeared to judge news by

impressions rather than the content. However, this emotional news perspective did not seem to have much influence on their thoughts about the development of national journalism. Although expecting news to be neutral and objective, the young people seemed to be realistic about what changes they could expect in Chinese journalism, which will be explored in the following section.

4.5.2 Expectations of news development

After they discussed the problems of national journalism, participants were asked what they thought should change in Chinese journalism.

“China should allow more private media which are free from the shadow of the government,” a 15-year-old female student said. Another student, a boy of the same age, said: “Foreign media should be accessible for Chinese audiences. We can’t get foreign TV channels, not even ones from Hong Kong and Taiwan. The Internet can help with that, but my English is not good enough, so I prefer the website fenghuangwang (www.ifeng.com).”

In the high school groups, participants spoke about allowing the market forces to guide the development of the news industry. As one respondent put it: “I think news media should develop freely. The government should use market rules to control the media and eliminate inefficiency. Thus the media will be able to develop freely, and naturally.”

Though there were many emotional comments on other matters, when questioned about national journalism, participants showed great prudence and restraint with their comments. The most common theme was that change would need to be “gradual”.

They also suggested extracting “experience from Western news while keeping some original features” and “developing it in a Chinese way”. Some suggestions were as follows:

Western journalism is more advanced, but it does not suit us—at least not now.
(Cheng, 18, male)

Even if we can copy the Western system, adjustments and improvements should be made gradually. (Meng, 17, female)

To adopt some of the Western criteria, and keep some of our own... for example, open the media and allow different voices, but also provide pictures of harmony to give audiences the optimistic view that we are living in a harmonious society. (Cui, 16, female)

Leave space for the government—since our media have become the organ of the Party and is kept by it, it should say something to please the authorities to make them happy, thus to gain more governmental support for further development. (Zhai, 18, male)

Keep censorship—just not that strict... our country is still developing and is unstable...keeping an eye on the news media is reasonable. (Chang, 16, female)

We can't just copy the Western way, if we just follow the Western way we will lose our distinctive flavour. (Zheng, 14, male)

The participants were asked what they would do if they were able to change the state of current journalism. Their responses were interesting:

I would filter the low quality news reports, rather than the ones with sensitive topics. (Long, 16, male)

Keep censorship on the CCTV news webs and the so-called ‘mainstream news’ pages, meanwhile give more freedom to other news sites. (Ban, 15, male)

Bring in more foreign reports with Chinese subtitles... global views may contribute to balanced news views. (Bing, 17, female)

As can be seen from the above, young people believe that Chinese journalism should not copy the Western way. However, as they seem to have only a superficial knowledge of the country, they have unclear views of what the “Chinese way” actually is. Young people recognise Western journalism standards, but feel confused whether they are suitable for China. Although the teenagers were dissatisfied with Chinese journalism, they would rather choose a moderate way to change it. They were fearful of losing the character of Chinese journalism, and hoped that the national news would acquire “a distinctive Chinese style”. Though young people’s ideas of the problems of news and how to develop national journalism were vague, in some ways they can be seen as reasonable and practical. For example, during the intensive interviews, participants were asked to imagine themselves to be journalists and describe what kind of reports they would like to make for the earthquake in Japan (see Section 5.3.1). Below are some of the choices presented by the participants:

Half data report, half human report—first I would show the amount of victims, economic losses... then give camera to the people and let them express their feelings. (Xizi, 14, female)

I would interview both the authorities and the victims, and let them speak directly to the camera. (Bing, 17, female)

I hope both national and foreign interviewees would appear in my story. (Han, 15, male).

[Chapter 5 will present a detailed discussion of these and related findings.]

In general, participants assume professional journalists were more qualified to produce news reports. However, they also thought that official news was less credible and less objective due to the constrained news environment. More than half of the participants believed that citizen journalism could complement professional journalism. Nevertheless, many had doubts about the credibility of citizen journalism and thought it might be “even less credible than official news”. Some participants rested their hopes on individual journalists.

Participants were aware of the gaps between news and audiences, for instance their wish for news to be more democratic to what news actually represents. And whilst most participants did not know what caused the gaps, only four groups out of the twelve were aware that the gaps were caused by social reasons, the others blamed journalism itself. Obviously, in order to understand the real problems of Chinese news, young people need to gain better knowledge about society, as well as the relationship between society, journalism and audiences.

It is clear that in China, the relationship between society, journalism and audiences is complicated. When journalism is developing whilst being affected by government control, market pressure and globalization, audiences are experiencing these cultural and value transformations as well. As discussed in Chapter One, social transformation resulted in creating some paradoxical ideas in the minds of young people in China. There is a conflict between traditional and modern cultures, and Chinese and foreign values. Liu (2010, p.76) writes:

“They are simultaneously materialistic and idealistic, internationalist and nationalist, global and local, apolitical yet nationalistic, modern and traditional.”

This creates a collective character that reflects the complexities of the social context (Liu 2010). The findings of this study support Liu’s (2010) thesis. Young people in China have ambiguous identities. Through their media experiences, they are to some extent linked to a globalized world. Global opinions, in turn, affect the way they see local issues. The young people in China are thus trying to relate Western values to Chinese journalism, even as they attempt to link Chinese news to a broader, globalized context. Unfortunately, as teenagers, young people do not have an in depth understanding of either Western news culture, or the relationship between journalism and society in China. As a result, in attempting to figure out the future of Chinese journalism in a global news culture, participants’ perspectives turned out to be ambiguous and paradoxical.

4.5.3 Further discussions

Most participants tended to respect Western news values. However, a few participants felt that Chinese journalism should be partly subservient to the authorities and “keep a harmony society”. Participants were able to see the difference between Chinese and

Western journalism and acknowledged the deficiencies in Chinese news, identifying a lack of objectivity as a major problem. They acknowledged Western journalism standards as good, but were unsure whether these were suitable for China. During the focus group interviews, although participants had strong views about Chinese news, when asked how to change Chinese journalism, their answers were restrained and reasonable. Their comments also showed that while participants were sophisticated in identifying the weaknesses of Chinese journalism, they did not have a clear, constructive way of evaluating news. Their perspectives came across as random and strongly influenced by the styles of news that they regularly consumed.

In terms of the criteria that participants used for evaluating news, in previous debates young audiences' news literacy was seen as containing both digital skills and the capacity for critical analysis (Shumow and Chatterjee 2012, Melki 2012). In this study, young people knew about the criteria for evaluating news, though not in a comprehensive way. This means that they knew about the criteria of quality news such as objectivity and balance, but had little idea what could be count as an objective and balanced news report. This may imply that young people's understanding of news values were superficial, insufficient to support a sophisticatedly critical evaluation of news reports.

Visual and entertainment-oriented media productions have played an important role in the digital age, forming a significant part of what young audiences consume. Young people, meanwhile, are becoming progressively indiscriminate in their media consumption. As Postman (1984) pointed out, media are a metaphor; irrationalism may be the characteristic of the media consumption of the younger generation. However, the contradiction between young people's perspectives on news and how they see journalism developing is produced by certain social and media circumstances in China. Their perspectives on news contain more dilemmas caused by the conflict between patriotism and aversion, between traditional values and rebellion against

authority. These perspectives combined with patriotism and rebellion, on one hand, may promote young audiences' passion to take part in citizen journalism and challenge the traditional media, and possibly in a positive way if participants possess a good sense of citizenship and news literacy. But on the other hand, if their sense of citizenship and news literacy were poor, the public space could be filled with radical comments and low quality posts, which would counteract the development of healthy journalism. In the next section, the study will look at the situation of young people's participation in news in several specific events.

4.6 Young people's participation in news and its potential

As discussed earlier in this chapter, young people applied different values when evaluating citizen journalism. In general, they felt all high quality news should be believable, accurate, and in-depth. However, they seemed to be more tolerant towards citizen journalism. As debated in Chapter Two, there exists a gap in our knowledge about whether or not young people use traditional values to assess the quality of news in the digital age. This research indicates that they do. Participants still applied traditional criteria for formal news reports, but had a more tolerant attitude towards citizen journalism. Based on some instances of young people's participation in citizen journalism (as demonstrated in Section 1.2.4.4), and based on the evidences regarding participants' news literacy, this section discusses how young people's making news reports may contribute to their news literacy and their potentials in participating in citizen journalism.

A previous study (Scheufele 2002) found that the willingness of media participation is irrelevant to media literacy, suggesting that interpersonal communication affects the willingness of media participation. However, media knowledge and interpersonal

communication skills are proportional to the effectiveness of participation (Lu and Guo 2006). The results of this research indicate that news literacy was not proportional to the sense of citizenship. Meanwhile, media usage and participation are spontaneous and influenced more by casual factors (for interpersonal communication) rather than an educational interest. It is difficult to evaluate how their perspectives of news have influenced young citizens' participation in news. Distrust in news could provoke young audiences' critical thinking, which results in scepticism (see Section 4.2.3.2). However, so far young citizens' scepticism about news does not seem to have resulted in their active participation in news. This may partly be due to Chinese people's tradition of 'no action' and the tradition of 'students should fix only in sage books and pay less attention to politics' (She 2010). Another reason could be the revolutions the Chinese society has undergone, which caused people to consider themselves to be powerless in changing the country's political situation. Having said that, the lack of trust in news has the potential to create democratic awareness in the audiences, and with the use of new media, they have the potential to form a collective civic power. Although highly influenced by the tradition of 'no-action', with the development of new media, some active citizens have shown instances of civic participation.

As argued before, China has no tradition of a critical citizenry, and it is very likely that young people have little sense of being citizens even when s/he is acting like one. However, after their participation in the rescue work after the Wenchuan earthquake, young citizens' image has begun to change in news reports. This in its turn helps the young to identify themselves as active and responsible citizens.

According to Galston (1991), responsible citizenship requires various civic virtues, comprising general virtues, social virtues, economic virtues (such as work ethic, the capacity to delay self-gratification, adaptability to economic and technological change), and political virtues regarding capacity to respect the rights of others,

willingness to engage in public discourse, and so on. In China, some of the civic virtues are quite difficult to be practiced by young citizens. For example, independence of young people is highly impeded by patriarchal influence, and open-mindedness is limited by the formative education. Further, young people are not capable of being economically independent. Due to high school pressure, young people cannot find work until they graduate from college. These factors prevent young people from constructing identities of citizenship before their adulthood. In this scenario, news reports and other posts in the media criticising young citizens may affect their awareness of citizenship before they form their own identity as citizens. This identity from the media can affect the way young people construct their own identity of citizenship. On the other hand, positive comments in the media could encourage more civic participation. This can possibly form a beneficial circle of citizenship identity, participation, and news literacy. Admittedly, such a virtuous circle is premised on the positive interaction between young citizens and the media.

The ‘keep harmony’ and ‘non-action’ policies of Chinese philosophy are temporarily good for a society in transformation, bringing peace and stability to its citizens. However, as mentioned in Chapter Two, citizenship awareness makes it clear that the health and stability of a modern democracy depend not only on its institutions, but also on the qualities and attitudes of its citizens—on their sense of identity, how they view potentially competing forms of national, regional, ethnic, and religious identities, etc. (Cavalier no date). Citizenship awareness also includes their desire to participate in the political process in order to promote the public good and hold political authorities accountable. Thus, the encouragement of democratic citizenship has a long-term effect on the health and stability of modern society, and the virtues of citizenship are not only based on national interest but on individual interest as well. Citizen participation, from a long-term perspective, enhances both individual and social news literacy.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, young people are excluded from news and political participation as they lack media and news literacy and are insufficiently informed about politics. But considering the current examples of positive participation (see Chapter One), young citizens' involvement could be positively influential, even though they lacked news literacy. Citizen journalism does not necessarily require advanced knowledge or skills. For example, young citizens might use blogs to disseminate information. Though they might not have a sophisticated understanding of the information that they are disseminating, the response of other users to their posts encourage the spread of informed awareness. In other words, although they might not be sophisticated themselves, young people are capable of producing and disseminating news on certain occasions. Citizen journalism bears different forms and levels of participation, and no citizen should be excluded from participating on the basis of age or knowledge.

In young people's participation in making news, just as in their news usage, the characteristics of postmodernism can be seen. As discussed in Chapter Two, pessimistic developments in postmodern citizenship include a decline of solidarity, diversity of public spheres, depoliticizing, and a new and pluralistic political culture (Buckingham 2000). However, though post modernists view new media as being associated with a decline in citizens' participation in the public sphere, new forms of media usage provide a platform where citizens' voices can be heard. This arguably counters the forecast of the decline of citizenship in society. In other words, news media are likely to introduce new ways of being active citizens and encourages new forms of citizen participation.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, due to the limitations of the political environment, school pressures and top-down education, young people have been alienated from news. They are uninterested in it and even show aversion to it. They are not satisfied with the role of citizen that society and education forces on them. However, the

postmodern way of participation may draw young people back to news to some extent. Further, postmodern news usage and participation, in the form of informal news consumption, seem more like entertainment than formal political socialisation. This is in line with young people's news consumption patterns and their media usage preferences. In light of this, citizen news could be seen as a new route to introduce politics to young citizens. Nevertheless, as discussed in Sections 4.4 and 4.5, young people do not always trust the quality of citizen news, even as they question the credibility of mainstream news.

At a social level, young citizens' dissatisfaction has the potential to inspire a passion for participation in news, thereby contributing to Chinese citizen news. At an individual level, young citizens' scepticism is more likely to contribute to their involvement. This can increase their social resources and skills, which in turn has the potential to contribute to greater engagement among young citizens. For its part, such civic engagement has the potential to accelerate individual news literacy. Rather than waiting to be educated to a higher level of news literacy and citizenship awareness, it is possible that young citizens can cultivate their literacy through everyday news consumption and participation.

However, despite the various possibilities of engaging in news introduced by the new media, "the internet is not, yet, 'the answer' to young people's disengagement with news, though it may support the development of the skills and literacy required for engagement" (Couldry et al. 2007, p.32).

That is to say that new media do not automatically result in young people's positive participation in news. In order to build a constructive relationship between young citizens and news, young audiences need to be properly guided in their media experiences.

Based on the above discussions, and given that Chinese young citizens have not received standard news education and are still living in a media environment that they assumed lacked credibility, spontaneous participation inspired by scepticism seems to be a good way for young citizens to cultivate news literacy. This opens up a space in news for young citizens to add their own voices. Even though this space may not be powerful enough to challenge national journalism, this is a positive sign showing that news has begun to bring in young citizens' voices. Further, this participation can also be seen to gradually affect young people's own news literacy and their sense of citizenship.

4.7 Conclusions

This chapter sought to provide some insights into young Chinese people's relationship with news. The data from the interviews and focus group discussions indicated that teenagers were not satisfied with current forms of news and news education in China. In the intricate relationships between young people, news and news literacy education, the gaps are not caused merely by young people's poor grasp of citizenship, the media environment, or the consumption of news by themselves but integrated with each other. As debated earlier in this chapter, young people's use and understanding of news are intimately associated to their daily lives. Table 4.2 shows how young people's characteristics, the media environment, and their consumption of media work together in forming their news perspectives.

Table 4.2 The relationship between teenagers, media environment, news consumption and perspectives

Characteristics of teens	Media environment	News use	News perspectives

Emotional, susceptible	Mass information, conflict facts, media in transition	Random	Irrational
Patriotic but rebellious	National news under control, but news media imports multi voices from abroad	Possibility to access different sides	Vogue and emotional views of news quality when foreign media reports the dark side
Less sense of citizens	Full of entertain news	Prefer soft news and entertainment news	Being informed rather than being rightly informed, passive audience
Westernised	One voice as main stream	Pay even less attention to national news	Being repulsive to national news, and produced a favourable impression of foreign news
Tired by heavy school work and Imposed news work	News top-down, media education top-down	Passive use of news: bear up news homework/ political exam	Passive news audience, separate news work with their own news values

As discussed in Chapter One, young people in China are mostly from the generation of the one child policy and do not have siblings. Therefore, their main personality characteristics are believed to be susceptible to their emotions, to some extent they may lack of citizenship awareness (She 2010; Liu 2010), and may be Westernized but patriotic. Furthermore, they are busy with school work and worried about future work pressure. This makes them quite practical. The arbitrariness in their characteristics leads to their casual way of consuming news and irrational perspectives on news. The lack of citizenship causes the entertainment-oriented news consumption, which all

result in their amount of news consumption not being proportional to their news literacy.

Due to the heavy schoolwork, young people had little time to reflect on news in an active way, but to consume it for homework and exams. Young people are believed to be Westernized, and to some extent rebellious. This was apparent in their discontent towards official voices, which caused them to glorify Western-based news and distance them a step further from Chinese news. However, their rebellion subsists alongside a sense of patriotism. This reflects in their contradictory feelings about news, when Western media report news about the dark side of China.

In summary, young people's perspectives of news are affected by various factors, including their own personality characteristics, the media environment in China, and their habits of news usage. It is inappropriate to point to any single element as the cause for young people's apathy towards news. At present, it seems that none of these elements are performing a positive role in a democratic relationship between news and young citizens. It is apparent that more attention should be given in coordinating the relationship between young people's characteristics, the news they consume and the way they consume it, rather than focusing on single aspects.

4.7.1 Gaps between young people and news

This study found that there are various causes for news apathy among young people in China. Besides the general tendency of the young generation to pay less attention to news mostly due to its irrelevance to their lives and dullness in narrative style, the alienation in China was also caused by low trust in the quality of news, questions about its credibility, and lack of news literacy.

Firstly, news on new media platforms, which is highly influential in generating news consumption among young people, has lowered their news literacy (see Section 4.2.4). Although such news has contributed to the socialisation of young people better than traditional news did, it has also driven them from quality news. As a result, the news literacy they possess is not sufficient to understand quality news. Moreover, young people felt that news was meant for the elite. That is to say, young people considered news as something naturally “too difficult for the young to understand”.

Secondly, participants did not have much faith in mainstream news’ credibility and objectivity. They also doubted the quality of citizen news. Therefore, young people felt that there was no news that is fully reliable.

Thirdly, young people failed to identify themselves in their experiences of news: on the one hand, they did not have a sense of citizenship while consuming news; and on the other hand, young audiences did not see themselves represented substantially in news and therefore felt alienated. They were longing to engage in news, yet could not ascertain their values as young citizens in making news.

Fourthly, participants supported Western news values, but they did not have a good understanding of these values and were not certain how to relate them to Chinese journalism.

To some extent, a postmodern way of participation could be seen to be connecting young people with news. The participation, which was random and fragmentary, is caused by young people’s patterns of news consumption. Since this participation was by way of entertainment and went on randomly and voluntarily, it eased the apathy

young people have towards news. Thus citizen news participation, which seemed to be de-political, could well be a new route to draw young citizens closer to news.

4.7.2 Dilemmas in the relationship between young people and their perspectives on news

There exist several contradictions in young people's perspectives on news, which can be summarised as follows:

Dilemma One: How they see the relationship between news and citizens and how they relate news to their lives

Young people were keen to be informed about their world and saw the importance of news. They relied heavily on the web and consume news frequently. However, they consumed news in random ways, largely depending on habits as opposed to news quality. But although news seemed to have become closer to young people's daily lives, young people did not rely on it. They had a vague understanding of identity and citizenship during their consumption of news. Most participants believed that news was indispensable to citizens, but they felt that news had little personal significance. The importance of news attributed by participants did not necessarily link with their actual behaviour of consumption. Paradoxes were revealed in their perspectives between how they figured citizenship and how they thought of themselves.

Dilemma Two: Frequency of news consumption and the level of literacy

The introduction of internet and mobile technologies has increased the news consumption of the young people in China. New media news was more frequently consulted and favoured by participants. However, while new media have pushed news into young people's daily lives much more than traditional news has ever done, news

on new media is served in fragments, without background and context. Used as they were to this kind of information, young people were perhaps more inclined to brief news without background, checking only news headlines, thus becoming ‘news grazers’. Hence, news on the new media platforms had done little to improve young people’s news literacy. Therefore, even though new media news has now woven into the fabric of young people’s daily lives, it has not helped connect young people with news.

Dilemma Three: Ability to understand news and attitudes towards news

Participants had difficulty in understanding quality news and thought good journalism should “make sense”. However, young people did not like to lower the quality of news to fit their level of news literacy. Though young people were capable of providing a series of news evaluation standards, they failed to understand news values correctly. Their criteria seemed to be second-hand and their understanding of them is superficial. Nonetheless, they wanted news to maintain quality, even though they did not understand it.

Dilemma Four: Their preferences in news consumption and expectations of news

Young people preferred news that was easy, entertaining and convenient. If news took much effort for them to understand, they were likely to pull out. However, it was found that young people’s satisfaction with quality news did not encourage them to read it. Similarly, their criticism of low quality news (for example, entertainment news) does not keep them away from consuming it. This suggests that young people’s patterns of consuming news had moved on to a new media model—they prefer brief, fragmented, random and interactive news. Despite this, their basic perspectives on news were in line with the traditional values associated with quality news (timely, objective, balanced, in-depth).

Dilemma Five: Agreement with Western news values but “no rush to change”

Participants were able to discern the differences between Chinese and Western journalism, and tended to prefer Western news values. They acknowledged the deficiencies in Chinese news, and pointed out lack of objectivity as a major issue. However, they were not sure if Western values were suitable for China. Although Western news culture appealed to them, and they had an aversion to the Chinese news culture, they did not advocate a hurried change. Any change needed to be slow and gradual, they felt, and to incorporate characteristics of Chinese society.

Dilemma Six: Traditional or modern citizens?

Findings of this study demonstrate that young citizens hold traditional values of citizenship, but are also starting to show characteristics of active citizens. For instance, they were beginning to question mainstream news, and were not willing to submit to government obligations unconditionally. Young people's conception of citizenship remained conformed to how citizenship is defined traditionally in Chinese culture, with a strong emphasis on collectivism, modesty, loyalty, etc (She 2010; Liu 2010) and with bare mentions of Western values such as independence, critical thinking and active participation. However, their way of practising citizenship—their method of being informed, and means of participation had changed, and they had moved towards more Western practices.

The values and identity of young Chinese citizens were caught up in the collision between their views inspired by global culture and cultural tradition. This creates the dilemma of young people being local and global, passive and active, and traditional and modern at the same time. This leads to an unstable and irrational perception of news. Though they were critical of the quality of Chinese news, young citizens' views are also influenced by their sense of patriotism and rebellion. For instance, young people criticise Chinese news radically, but they did not want to see negative reports

about China on foreign media. This, on the one hand, may promote the young people to undertake citizen journalism and challenge authoritative media. On the other hand, it could be destructive, as young citizen journalists could well publish emotionally charged ideas and misleading information. How this will turn out largely depends on the news literacy and sense of citizenship the citizen journalists develop. Hence, in the next chapter, we will consider the participants' news literacy by examining how they evaluate specific news reports.

Chapter 5 How young people evaluate news: findings from five case studies and their implications for news literacy education

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline young people's evaluation of news reports about specific events. As detailed in Chapter Three, participants in the focus groups were asked to select topics of news they liked to talk about the most. Five topics were selected, including the earthquake in Japan, the fast train tragedy in Wenzhou, news about the death of Libyan dictator Colonel Gaddafi, sports star Yao Ming's retirement and the events of Guo Meimei which involves a young girl's unfit job as a manager in charity and her luxury life. Following this, participants were asked how they consumed these news topics, what they thought about the quality and credibility of the selected Chinese news reports, and what they expected the reports to be presented during the intensive interviews. In addition, participants were asked to read the news reports that they identified as 'hard to understand', and asked for words/sentences that bothered them. They were also asked whether there were other factors that made it difficult for them to understand the reports. This reflected how much news literacy they had while reading news reports. The key findings and their implications for news literacy education are presented below.

5.2 News samples selection

Focus group participants were asked to talk about recent news reports that they had found interesting. The answers were ranked, and the top five turned out to be: the

Japan earthquake, the Wenzhou train tragedy, the fall of Gaddafi, Yao Ming's retirement, and the Meimei Guo event.

5.3 News samples evaluation

5.3.1 News example One: the Japanese earthquake

The 2011 earthquake was a magnitude 9.0 undersea earthquake off the coast of Japan that occurred on Friday 11 March 2011, which was the most powerful earthquake recorded that have hit Japan. Chosen as the “most memorable” news event by the participants, this international news about a tragedy was of significance but does not need much background knowledge to comprehend what happened.

How participants consumed this news

News regarding the Japanese earthquake “appeared on almost every news medium”, and participants said they accessed it from “all kinds of media”, “mainly from televisions”. Some of them came to know about the story from newspapers and some read it on Weibo or on mobile platforms first. As Min, a 14-year-old male said, “I cannot remember which media let me know about it first, or perhaps someone told me about it...” Two other responses:

I did not find many differences between TV news and mobile news on this event. I am good with either as long as it provide accurate reports and good pictures.
(He, M, 15)

I watched the news on TV, but I did not hear the reporter clearly, so I searched more information about it with my mobile while watching it. (Tong, M, 17)

The answers confirmed that young people were not selective of news sources, as discussed in Chapter Four. They did not differentiate between news media, and, quite often, they tended to engage in multiple media activities at the same time, getting information from various sources.

News quality and credibility

Most participants answered ambiguously when they were asked about the quality of the earthquake news reports. Generally, when consuming news, they were focusing on the content rather than the quality of the news reports. For instance, as a girl put it:

I cannot remember the quality of the news...the most interesting thing to me is what is the magnitude and how many people died...I was focusing on these and did not pay attention to the quality of the news report when I read it (Min, M, 14).

When judging the believability and objectivity of the news report, 30 of the 40 in-depth interviewees said that this report was objective. As long as they felt the report was based on facts and not subjective, they tended to acknowledge it as objective. Other participants said that it could be more objective if the report had included more interviewees, for example, allow people from different ages, or of various degrees of injuries, to express their feelings.

I think it is objective... it is based on fact... I did not feel anything hidden... The numbers of the dead and the injured are exposed, and also the amount of loss ...both common people and authorities had their voices on the news, so I think it was balanced (Chong, F, 16).

The interviewees were all adults, if they (the journalists) had interviewed some children, I would think this report to be more balanced (Jia, F, 13) .

Regarding news quality, half of the participants said that it was understandable if news about earthquake or other crisis is not high quality enough.

I think we should be tolerant to tragedy news. I mean, if the filming or the light, or the voice is not good, ... but the journalist had tried their best, it (the news report) can still be regarded as a high quality news story. (Jin, M, 16)

I would understand if war reports are not so good in quality... there are so many impromptu recordings, I think we won't be too critical towards the news reports on crisis events. (Chen, F, 13)

How participants expected the news to be presented

In terms of the style of the news reports, results showed that young people strongly valued visual materials in reports, especially when consuming tragedy news, as reflected in the following comments:

I would take a lot of pictures instead of speaking to the camera, a lot of close-ups. (Fu, M, 17)

I expect to see more good photos. It is more vivid than describing how bad the damage is by words (Hong, F, 15).

Moreover, details of news were highly valued by participants. 16 participants expected the news stories to provide statistics that they could relate to. For instance, Chao, a 14-year-old girl, said,

The numbers (about the loss) seem large, but it does not really make sense to me. I hope it can be described like it equals to the total GDP of half a year or something.

In addition, it turned out that both citizens' voices and official voices were valued by participants. 33 participants said that the news report was good because it contained both common people's voices and voices from the authorities.

When participants were asked how they would report the news if they were journalists, this is how three of them responded:

Half data report, half human report—first I will show the amount of victims, economic losses... after interviewing the officers I will give camera to the people and let them express their feelings. (Ke, M, 13)

I will interview both the authorities and the victims, and let them speak directly to the camera. The authorities should appear first and the report will seem to be more authoritative. (Chen, F, 15)

I hope both national and foreign interviewees will appear in my story. After that, the report will be summarised by an important person from official voices (Jiang, F, 14).

The imagined news reporting exercise indicated that young people placed high value on the voices of common citizens in news. However, most participants chose a stereotypical CCTV way of doing reports (to start or conclude by official voices or authorities), despite their aversion of CCTV forms. After years of influence by CCTV, although they agree with the standards of Western journalism, young people still could not elude the influence of Chinese news. Perspectives on news, as the outlook of journalism, not only consist of concepts and values, but are also related to the forms and styles of news that audiences regularly consume.

Further discussions

The results presented above support the previous finding that young people did not have a preference for traditional or new media so long as they either provide news in a convenient way (see Section 4.2.2 and 4.2.5). In terms of young people's perspectives on news quality, although participants highlighted the importance of news quality, they seldom paid attention to the quality of news reports when consuming them. Besides, high quality news did not necessarily impress them more than low quality news, such as entertainment news. Young people had more tolerance for entertainment news regarding its quality. Moreover, although they assumed that serious news should maintain high quality, young people thought it was understandable if decent news reports made in crisis events failed to meet a high standard.

The results of this experiment are also in line with the previous finding that young people wanted objectivity in news, but they did not have a good understanding of what objectivity means. In their eyes, objectivity equated to multiple voices. Beyond that, they were not capable of judging whether a news report was objective. They tended to arrive at a quick conclusion, on the basis of whether a news report provided opposing perspectives. For example, if the interview in a news report contains both official and common-citizen interviewees, 52 participants “would regard it as objective.”

The earthquake news sample evaluation and the discussion in Section 5.3.3 confirmed that young people viewed international/Western news with less suspicion vis-à-vis national news. It is also worth highlighting what the focus interviews illustrated. Young people were unhappy about news credibility and objectivity due to censorship, not because of the ability of journalists to produce objective news. Participants believed that when the Chinese media report news about other countries, it would be objective, when there is “nothing to hide”, “no need to speak for a certain group” and “it would be okay if they (journalists) criticise a foreign government” (Kun, Male, 16). This means that participants had confidence in the national news media’s ability to produce objective news, when freedom is provided for their reports, not being restricted by certain rules or under censorship.

Results also showed that young people highly valued “visual stuff” in news, and expected more videos or photographs. Moreover, some of them expected the information in the news to be specific and clear. For instance, they felt the total loss could not only be described more clearly, but also by using analogies so that they could understand the magnitude better. One question that deserved attention was whether young people had enough news literacy to understand complicated news, and whether the media should lower its standards to serve young audiences. According to the findings from this exercise, participants not only valued the common normative

standards of quality news (such as news objectivity, the depth of news) but also appeared to be seeking more from news. For instance, they wished that news reports could be visually attractive, vivid, interesting and detailed. Young people's expectations imply that to some extent, the quality of news ought to be raised rather than lowered. In this case, in order to engage young audiences, rather than reducing the quality to fit their literacy level, news ought to provide more details, statistics and videos or photos to help them to understand the reports.

5.3.2 News example Two: 7/23 fast train tragedy in Wenzhou

Two fast trains derailed each other and collided on a viaduct in the suburbs of Wenzhou, China on July, 23rd, 2011. Four cars fell off the viaduct, with 40 people killed and at least 192 injured. The authorities ordered to bury the fallen wagons and did not report the exact number of the people killed and injured. These actions elicited strong criticism from online communities, especially on Weibo. In response, the government issued directives to restrict media coverage, which was met with limited compliance, even on state-owned networks.

Rated as the second-most memorable news report by participants, this news involved comparatively complicated situations. Initially reported by the mainstream media, it was later picked up by citizen journalists. In general, this example illustrates how young people kept themselves informed, drawing from both authorities and citizen voices.

How participants consumed the news

Participants said they were first informed about this news by traditional media, mainly by television. But new media were the main sources for following it up—they got the subsequent information from mobile news, online news, and Weibo:

I saw the news on TV, and then I saw rumours about it on Weibo. It stirred my curiosity and I searched on websites and Weibo to learn more about it. (He, 17, M)

News reports on TV only tell what happened briefly, they are very dull. But there is a lot of intriguing stuff on Weibo. For example, there were people trapped in the train weiboing to let us know how they were, and there were people talking about what caused the accident: was it because of the poor quality of the train, or due to the negligence of the driver, or for some other reasons. I would like to know all sorts of things about it that TV or newspapers won't tell (Du, M, 18).

Participants said that because the official narrative was not believable or lacking, they turned to citizen news for answers. It seemed, then, that new media were more capable of offering a multidimensional view of a news story, even in a fragmentary way. All participants said they were happy about how news delivered on Weibo since the reports were brief and kept updating. Participants said they felt as if they got it “bit by bit”, “piece by piece”, and that makes news “easy and convenient”; and “there’s more fun in finding out the truth in this way” (Liu, M, 13).

News quality and credibility in young people's eyes

About news quality and credibility, one male participant of 15 said, “The first thing in the report is to tell the truth, before mentioning other aspects of news quality.” This indicates that news credibility comes first than its quality. In the light of this, participants were pleased about the news on Weibo, for its not being under strict surveillance of the official guidelines. Participants tended to have more tolerance

towards the quality of Weibo news also because it was made by common citizens rather than professional journalists. Moreover, although acknowledging the deficiency of citizen journalism's objectivity, participants considered that news on Weibo had contributed to the objectivity of news journalism because it had provided opinions outside official voices.

For each message or text of citizen journalism, I won't expect it to be that objective, but I hope the 'continuous series' as a whole, can be a balanced one. (Liang, M, 14)

The official ones were trying to hide something, and the citizen ones did not have objective views. I felt disappointed with the news media, but still, citizen news can expose some resources that we cannot get from mainstream news. Anyway, I am curious about the news and would like to see exactly what is going on (Yun, M, 18).

If official reports were convincing enough, I would not turn to believe Weibo. I am quite aware that news on Weibo is less credible, for it comes from the grassroots and has neither authority nor professionalism. But anyway, it's better to have citizen journalism which can challenge the official voices (He, M, 15).

I am not happy with the credibility of all sources. The official media are obviously lying, and the grassroot media, like Weibo, are full of gossip and rumours, which confused me; but still, I enjoy Weibo news, it revealed the truth little by little (Min, F, 14).

The responses confirm the previous findings discussed in Chapter Four that young people believed that official news had better quality and was more professional, yet they still doubted its credibility; that they thought citizen news to be more real but of relatively low quality; and they had more tolerance for the quality of the latter.

How participants expected the news to be presented

The majority of the respondents felt strongly that official news ought to tell the truth, and that was a basic requirement. They contended:

I hope fairer journalists will dig out the truth, what exactly caused the tragedy and how many people died in the event, and why the government has hidden the truth. The news I am reading now does not make sense. (Ke, M, 13)

The official voice has no credibility. I hope people who know the facts would contribute to the post as much as possible. (Liang, M, 14)

As to citizen journalism, while having more tolerance towards its quality, participants expected more exciting posts and sharp views.

I hope Weibo news can be even bolder in challenging official voices. I wish citizen journalists can expose whatever spicy resources they found, without caring too much whether they are exact enough (Tong, M, 15).

Though the CCTV is disappointing, I do enjoy this conflict between official voice and rumours. It makes news much more exciting, and you know what, the

sharper Weibo news is, the more it stirs my interest in news, I want to know what exactly happened and I would like to dig more. (Che, M, 16) .

Moreover, even though holding opinions against mainstream news, 13 participants presented emotional patriotism. For example:

I hope in future the investigations will finally form a true, objective and balanced story... but I hope it is national journalists who do the investigations, not the foreign ones. Yes, I do hope foreign journalists can join Chinese news, but not just so they can expose the darker side of Chinese life—it is too shameful (Fu, M, 13).

Further discussions

This example is a typical event in which Chinese journalism tried to hide what happened from the public (like the SARS outbreak, which occurred in 2003). Again, the blocking of information caused more suspicion and feelings of rebellion among audiences. Based on their comments on news coverage of the fast train tragedy in Wenzhou, young people did not have much trust in either the authorities or the official news media. They placed their hopes on individual journalists and the power of citizen journalism, but had little idea how much this could influence Chinese news in general.

In the previous chapter it was suggested that news consumed on new media platforms is brief and fragmentary and does not lead young consumers towards in-depth knowledge. This consequently results in their cynicism triumphing over scepticism in their news consumption: a feeling of distrust toward news and lacking confidence in the political system surpassing young people's reasonable and constructive response

to news. As discussed in Section 4.2.3, participants felt that the deficiency in news believability resulted in their declining appetite for news. More often than not, this adds to their apathy towards news rather than to accelerating critical reflection or information seeking.

Nonetheless, the example of the 7/23 train tragedy demonstrates that for the news topics they were interested in, young people would like to know more about the complexities of the event concerned and were capable of being sceptical news searchers online. That is to suggest, even when the news reports consumed are not of high credibility, young people's cynicism towards news can potentially convert into scepticism, as long as the news topic is appealing to them. In other words, when doubting the credibility of news, cynicism is likely to trigger their curiosity about the events, motivating young audiences to search other news sources for the truth. In this process, they are likely to gain more knowledge about the news story and can thus form their own judgments based on the evidence they found.

Moreover, the event can be seen as an infringement of the citizen's right to information. But none of the participants aired any views concerning citizenship, which may imply that in real life, young people did not have much awareness of the link between news and citizenship, and were not always aware of their rights.

It appeared that young people would be satisfied with the official narrative if they found it trustworthy, but if they did not, they would seek answers from citizen news. Young people expected citizen news to complement official voices. In addition, some young people actually enjoyed the conflict between the official voice and citizen news, as it brought more "fun" to news, and stirred their curiosity. Therefore, the insufficiency and gaps in official news are likely to encourage young people's scepticism towards news, stimulating their curiosity and helping them become active

information seekers. This, on the one hand, may improve their news literacy, and on the other hand, could accelerate their citizen awareness: helping them to keep independent judgments and to think actively, not yielding to the authorities' voices.

Besides, though participants did not like national journalism, they still appeared to want to show China in a better light when foreign news reports stories about China. They did not want Western media to reveal the dark side of China even if they could report in an objective way. The conflict between patriotism and dislike for government were revealed in the comments. Patriotism, to some degree, could possibly have clouded their perspectives, and young people themselves appeared quite aware of that.

To sum up, young people's evaluation of news reports of the fast train accident is an example that reflects the discrepancy between official voices and citizen news. This example provides insights into the conflict between patriotism and rebellion in young people's news perspectives, and their attitude to official and citizen news. In addition, this example demonstrates young people's willingness to seek insights and acquire varied perspectives of the news that they are interested in. This illustrates that for certain events they have the potential to be sceptical news audiences rather than news gazers (Morris and Forgette 2007).

5.3.3 News example Three: Gaddafi

Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan revolutionary and politician who had been the head of Libya for 42 years, governed the country according to his own ideology. In 2011, an anti-Gaddafi uprising led by the National Transitional Council (NTC) broke out, resulting in civil war and this resulted in the government's downfall. Gaddafi was captured and killed by NTC militants.

This news topic was the third most frequently mentioned, and one which young people consumed mostly via traditional media. This news was an international event, political news, with complex information and complicated background. Participants identified it as “the most difficult news report”.

How participants consumed the news

Most participants said they heard about Gaddafi on TV or read it on mainstream news websites.

“I also saw it in newspapers, covered as a big event, and when I went to buy magazines at the newsstand, I just glanced at the headline,” one 15-year-old female participant said.

“News like the Gaddafi event, which is significant but far from our daily life, was mainly got from the official news media. I believe that for important international news, official news is more authoritative” (Jun, Male, 16).

Responses showed that participants obtained this news mainly from official resources and rarely paid attention to Weibo or mobile news, which are normally their preferred news sources.

News quality and credibility

All participants felt that in this event the official media “told the truth” as “there was no reason to lie”. Consistent with the previous suggestion, young people were willing

to accept official news or “authorized voice” if they felt it was credible, and normally they would not check more on citizen news if they were not suspicious of the information.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, young people seemed to be less sensitive about news objectivity in foreign news in the Chinese media, for they appeared to believe that what happens outside China did not impact the Chinese government, and hence the media could present such news more objectively. However, though believing this news report as objective, participants did not consume the news carefully and knew little about the story. This lack of knowledge arguably did not allow them to judge whether a report was objective or not. Though the participants mentioned the news on Gaddafi, many said they did not know “what had exactly happened”.

In all, 29 students said they had “no idea of what is the interim committee” and “from the beginning to the end I did not know that the news was talking about”. It seemed that little about the event was understood or absorbed by the participants. One participant said, “It is so far away from me and my life. It’s none of my business.” Most young people said that they recalled the news because it was “mentioned a lot by the news media”, or they remembered it because they “wrote its headline down for my homework of news notes”. However, three male students who said they had a great interest in news and tended to watch it seriously rather than as pastime provided more details about the topic—for instance, they were aware of what happened to Gaddafi’s family. They also mentioned the interim government.

A 18-year-old boy, Tao, who described himself as “a news junkie”, provided very comprehensive insights on this topic. He talked about the interim committee. He said:

I do not think Gaddafi's news is irrelevant to our life. Because Chinese government admit the interim committee later than many other countries, which perhaps cause a not-so-good term... I mean, the interim committee won't have a very good impression of our country. It is the interim committee that will be in charge of Libya for a while, so at least for diplomatic strategy China should build a good relationship with it... But our government did not even admit it in the first place. This may affect the long-term relationship, also the trade with each other in the future.

Although this was an exceptional case, it indicates some young citizens could have the capacity to possess good knowledge of events, in case he or she is interested in it. It is also possible for young people to have insights into political debates, even if the debate seems to be irrelevant to them. Being young does not necessarily cause a low appetite in politics, and it is inappropriate to exclude teenagers from social activities and political discussions because they are citizens-to-be.

The participant, Tao, said that he "do have difficulties in understanding news reports, and very often"; however, this does not discourage him from following news: "When I meet difficult words or unclear description of the background, I just search online to find answers. It's not that hard... just a click away."

Indeed, digital technologies create more possibilities for young people to be news savvy, and complicated news stories do not necessarily prevent them from comprehending it. In the light of this, rather than focusing on raising young people's level of news literacy in terms of reading ability and political knowledge, it is equally crucial, or even more imperative, to ignite their passion for news.

How participants expect the news to be presented

Participants wanted the news about Gaddafi to be more comprehensible and more interesting, like a story. 17 participants suggested the news reports surrounding the event should “have a clue to follow”. They expanded:

First tells us how this power was built, how it was abused and how it collapsed, then show us how it was rebuilt. Without that, I was completely lost in the many pieces of news (Qi, F, 13).

I want to see more plots... I want to know more stories about Gaddafi’s political career, give me more detailed stories that can prove he is a bad guy” (Bei, M, 13) .

A total of 11 participants expected to hear more voices from local common people, “How common Libyan citizens think about it”, “ I would like to know whether they like or hate Gaddafi”, “What kind of government do Libyan citizens want.”

Further discussions

In addition to the findings that young people tended to trust mainstream media’s news credibility when they reported about a foreign country, and participates’ stressing on citizens’ voices in news reports, the Gaddafi news reports raise more issues regarding the teenagers’ inefficiency in news literacy.

The responses from this experiment support the analysis in Chapter Four that young people’s interest in news is strongly connected with their own ability to understand it.

This ability, for its part, is connected to the students' background knowledge of the news topic concerned and their social contexts, rather than their news literacy.

If students lack basic knowledge of a news event, their ability to judge the quality and credibility of news about that event is compromised. More than 30 participants did not appreciate the reportage on Libya, an international political issue, because they did not have the knowledge to understand it.

About half the participants mentioned they remembered the Libya events only because they kept notes to finish their homework, and wrote the headlines without knowing the content of the story. Seen this way, there may be a number of news stories that were beyond their news literacy that young people tackle for their political homework. Political knowledge is essential to news literacy. As this experiment indicates that young participants' failure to understand news was in part caused by their lack of political knowledge, drawing upon that news education in terms of political knowledge to enhance news literacy could be the way forward.

However, the current system of political education needs to be adapted to hold the interest of young people. The student response on the Gaddafi news showed that their news literacy education, including homework for keeping news notes and exams concerning current political events, had not effectively contributed to advancing their news comprehension skills.

In order to find out why young citizens failed to understand news and what factors impede their comprehension, this study chose the news about Gaddafi's fall from power as an example, as most participants said news reports on Libya were the most confusing, compared to other topics. So participants were asked to read selected

online news text on Gaddafi and identify which part/point they failed to understand. According to their responses, the factors impeding young citizens' comprehension of news can be classified into four:

a) Advanced words and expressions beyond their vocabulary

For example, in the first Gaddafi news report experiment (the news report is included in the appendix), 'ce fan' which means 'counterespionage', is an advanced written word in Chinese, and some participants said they had no idea what it meant. Another example was 'te shi' which means 'envoy'.

b) Narrative mode that is hard for young people to follow

Some participants said they were "okay" with every word and every sentence, but after reading the reports, they still had "no idea what it was talking about, especially the long reports". Some participants complained that the sentences in the reports were very long, and "so are people's names, and the place names". They said they had to read "again and again" to figure out what the report was talking about.

c) Terminology that requires background knowledge to understand

Some participants said they didn't know the identity of "the temporary committee/ National Transitional Council (NTC)", which appeared in several news reports. Nor did they understand the relationship between this committee and the old regime, and the purpose of this committee (see the sample A of Gaddafi news in the appendix) About the sentence that began 'China's position on the Syria issue reflects the international principles...', participants said they were not clear what China's position exactly was.

d) Vague context without specific explanation

For instance, the bottom line of sample B (see appendix) says, “The Libya new regime asks Niger to extradite Saif al-Islam (Gaddafi’s third son). This was declined by Niger and Niger even approved him to have Niger nationality.” Some participants were confused why Niger was doing this and what this reaction means. Their questions included: “Does it mean Niger is friendly or not friendly to Libya?” “What would Niger get from that?”

The responses indicated that participants did have problems understanding news. However, it appears these were mostly due to their literacy (vocabulary, reading ability) and their lack of knowledge, rather than their literacy of using news media. Hence the question is whether news literacy education is capable of qualifying young citizens to be news literate. As discussed in Chapter Two, previous studies of news literacy have debated broader issues such as the relationship between media/news literacy and citizen journalism (Allan 2012), how globalisation and international news media such as the BBC impact local journalism (Reese 2012), pedagogic models to encourage news literacy (Melki 2012), and so forth. However, examining the issue from the angle of young citizens, what news literacy actually consists of may benefit from fresh thinking.

While some changes and developments are expected in news literacy and journalism itself, the obstacles that impede young people from understanding news (complex words and expressions, lack of background and explanations, and narrative mode that is hard to follow) is in this new media age only ‘a click away’ (see the above section concerning the interview with Tao). If young people have the enthusiasm for news, they would be able to sort out the problems by themselves with the help of new media. Thus, at this point, the essential question in the relationship between young people

and news is whether they have the interest/passion to acquire the literacy they need to understand news, rather than how much news literacy they have.

5.3.4 News example Four: Yao Ming's retirement

Basketball superstar Yao Ming's retirement was also on the list of the most proposed news topics. Yao, a Chinese professional basketball player who played for the Houston Rockets of the National Basketball Association (NBA), announced his retirement from professional basketball due to foot and ankle injuries in July 2011. This news is both celebrity and sports news, which is considered by young people "pretty close to entertainment news" (Yang, 14. F).

How participants consumed this news

Participants said that Yao Ming's retirement news appeared "everywhere"—on new media, including online news and mobile news, and also on traditional media such as televisions and newspapers. Most of the participants said that they preferred the online version, because it allowed them to consume relevant information, such as Yao's future plans and family stories easily.

News quality and objectivity

Participants considered that news reports such as those about Yao Ming's retirement, had "little objectivity related to news", and "this news doesn't necessarily need to be objective". For it is the kind of report that is "not a serious political affair" and there is "no position to be taken" and "no conflict in the situation".

Therefore, though the participants showed that they were aware that news is constructed and to some degree subjective, they are not aware of news objectivity when consuming entertainment news, sports news and soft news. They often ignored that all news reports were constructed and biased (Hackett 1984), and tended to believe that soft news “has little to do with objectivity”. This affirms the previous assumption that young people have different criteria in evaluating dissimilar sorts of news. However, the more aware among the participants had some interesting observations to make, which indicate that in terms of young people’s familiar news topics, participants had their own opinions and were active in expressing them.

I saw that the Associated Press link said that Yao Ming was irreplaceable and China therefore lost the best sports star¹². It confirms Yao’s contribution, but I think it is over pessimistic to say that China no longer has a man of weight. Though Yao is an irreplaceable man in NBA as a Chinese, it is an arbitrary conclusion to say that China has lost the man of weight (Ping, M, 18).

Another participant said:

The US does not know China very well. They like NBA, so they think NBA is very important. But Chinese people love other kind of sports like table tennis, and we have our own superstars such as Hao Wang (a table tennis player). He may not be as famous as Yao Ming, but he is still a hero in China. So Yao Ming’s retirement does not mean we no longer have sport giants (Hu, Male, 17).

¹² (<http://sports.sina.com.cn/k/2011-07-11/13095653594.shtml>)

The interviews confirmed the assumption that young people's evaluation of news objectivity, is largely dependent on how much they know about the event. A boy mentioned the website Sina, which provided converged news coverage. He thought it to be "of high quality because it provided an overall view and nearly all the information".¹³ A landing page was dedicated to Yao Ming's retirement on the website, and contained all related topics about his career, such as reports about him in different stages of his life, his injuries, his family, even gossip about him. When asked what else they would like to know about Yao Ming's retirement, participants said they wanted to know what he was going to do in the future; how much he earned before his retirement; and whether NBA or any sports committee were planning to give him any awards. Girls said they would like to know how Yeli (Yao's wife) and his family felt about his retirement, while boys were curious to know if his retirement had affected NBA, and who would replace him.

How participants expect the news to be presented

Some participants said they would not mind soft news not being objective. They would expect a more vivid, detailed, and subjective report as long as there was a good, exciting story. They said they wanted more details. "A converged serial of reports" was suggested. Participants preferred that they could "get everything by a click on the same page", instead of searching it on different websites.

Further discussions

Yao Ming's retirement is a combination of sports news and celebrity news, which is in the area of young people's news preferences. Many expected more details. Also,

¹³ <http://sports.sina.com.cn/nba/retireyaoming/>

they did not expect such soft news to be objective. Though young people were sophisticated enough to know that news was constructed (Buckingham, Banaji et al. 2005) and the characters in the news story built up seeming greater than their true selves in real life, this did not prevent them from looking up to or trying to mimic them. As discussed before, celebrity news and other forms of entertainment news can, at times, be more informative to young people than traditional news. Especially, as they supply young people with conversation topics and other information (such as what is new in fashion, or the latest product of music players) that they require. Therefore, news websites that present all the information concerning the same celebrity or subject are welcomed by young people, and the feeling that information is “just a click away” leads them to pay more attention to the event and its context.

5.3.5 News example Five: Meimei Guo

This event was originally an entertainment news feature, but later became a serious public discussion, with contributions from citizen news resources. A twenty-year-old girl showed off her luxurious life on her Weibo (Chinese Twitter) by posting hundreds of photos of her expensive cars, designer dresses and handbags, and her grand houses. Since she claimed herself to be the manager of the Red Cross (a medical charity), people begun to suspect how a young girl would be able to get the position and whether she had embezzled charity money.

How participants consumed this news

All participants said that information about this event was mainly obtained from Weibo. The story began there, where Guo Meimei posted the photos which aroused the questions. The Guo Meimei story lasted several days and, as Min, a 15-year-old participant put it, people consumed the story “bit by bit, like reading a novel”.

As discussed previously regarding the 7/23 fast train tragedy, most participants enjoyed the process of “digging out the truth online”. They said that news “with something hidden” stimulated their interest. Also, the “unknown” or “dark side” revealed by citizen news on the internet, stirred their citizen awareness and raised their confidence in citizen journalism. Some participants said that when following an on-going story “with something behind”, they preferred news on new media, since these provide more options for them to search their required information..

News quality and objectivity

As mentioned in the Chapter Four, young people draw a strict line between hard news and soft news, and hold distinct criteria for evaluating them. For instance, to them, hard news should be of high quality, which means it ought to be timely, objective, balanced and well written/ filmed; while when referring to entertainment news, they were more tolerant about its quality.

The Meimei Guo event featured a series of reports, some of which followed the hard news style of reporting, while others were given the soft news treatment. It originally appeared as entertainment news, but because of the questions about Meimei’s lifestyle and her claim she was a Red Cross manager, it became something more significant. Participants held varying opinions about whether this was “good news”. Only a few said the reportage was objective. He, a 17-year-old male, said: “The video provided evidence, rather than just words. So I believed it was true”. Hong (F, 16) said that because both sides—Meimei’s detractors as well as Meimei and her mother—were given the right to speak to the camera, “it was balanced”. Other responses included:

It was not objective, because objective news should be calm, there're so many emotional parts to this event (Min, F, 15).

It mostly appears on Weibo and online news, which was not so authorised. There were no famous journalist who gave explanations (Liang, M, 14).

Bing (M, 17) said that the reportage was not objective because "in the beginning there were just other people gossiping on Weibo and Meimei Guo did not appear. Objective news should contain each point of view." However, he added that later "Meimei and her mom spoke their minds and gave explanations. I think the whole series of reports were fair and objective, though each piece on its own was not so" Chen (M, 15) said: "Not all the people in this event showed their faces and spoke to the camera... Neither side was convincing." Whilst He, another respondent said:

At first the news was suspicious and included many guesses, no evidence was presented about Meimei's real identity, from beginning to end. I still could not find out how she was related to the Red Cross and who paid for her luxurious lifestyle. (He, F, 17).

Some participants seemed unsure whether the Meimei Guo event should be "so objective", since it was not "typical hard news". The quality of video and audio posted online by citizen journalists was quite low, and Memei was not identifiable in some of the photographs. But this did not put the young audience off. They showed tolerance, and more than one person said that it was perfectly understandable that improvised photos are "like this". Although previous evidence showed that if mainstream news was believable enough, young people would not turn to citizen news(see the 7/23 fast train tragedy). Notwithstanding this, the reflection of the

participants in this case indicates that if the news event was attractive, presenting conflicts among posts, they would pay less attention to “professionalism”, which they themselves had defined as “high quality video and audio, good edit, being objective and balanced”. “Seeing the spicy posts and hot debates on Weibo is more funny than directly obtaining the fact of what happened on television news”, said Ge, a boy of 16.

Answers again confirm the previous findings that young people were quite tolerant towards citizen journalism in its objectivity, especially when citizen news expose reports that mainstream news failed to cover.

“Such as in the Guo Meimei stories, if citizen journalism can reflect some social issues ignored by the mainstream press, no matter if these reports are high quality or not, it is a good thing for the society.” (Tan, F, 15)

How participants expect the news to be presented

A total of 35 participants said that they were interested in this news, and were quite happy with what they received. As news audiences, some participants mentioned that they enjoyed the process of getting the whole picture piece by piece, like completing a puzzle. If they were journalists, some participants said, they would raise sharper questions and dig out more details, such as “instead of how this girl is connected to the Red Cross, find the exact person who got her in”; “search her bank account and see where the money came and went”.

Several participants said to be disappointed with the understated way in which the mainstream media played this news. “You can say this it is soft news, but when it becomes an important topic, the official news media should pay more attention to it,” said a 16-year-old female respondent. Opposite views were raised as well. For example, some participants said this kind of news “should be left to citizen news”.

Tang (M, 17) expanded: “Mainstream media should not waste so much time on a shallow girl unless it has been confirmed that she is connected to any important and corrupted officer.”

Further discussions

Meimei Guo’s news reports were not mentioned by some of the participants at first. But since it was an event that was covered by various news platforms, and also because it was first published on Weibo, which is one of the news sources most accessed by young people, the researcher asked them specifically about this event. All interviewees knew about the event. The reason why they had not mentioned it was because, as one participant put it, “Oh, I thought this cannot be counted as news.” Many respondents, especially females, showed great interest and knew the details. Also, they had great enthusiasm and curiosity about how the Meimei’s investigation on was progressing.

The fact that many young people did not think the Meimei event was worth mentioning when asked about current news indicates that they think of news as being significant, serious and traditionally constructed. Young people were capable of categorising if a report was typical hard or soft news. Furthermore, they used divergent criteria when judging hard and soft news. Nevertheless, they appeared to be unsure when it came to news “in the vague zone”. They had no stable criteria for evaluating news of this kind, and were confused when soft news appeared on official news channels.

In the Meimei Guo event, as well as in the 7/23 fast train tragedy, participants presented a stronger sense of citizenship when they consumed citizen news, than when they consumed mainstream news about social issues, arguably because the

process of digging out the truth provided them with a heightened sense of morality. Young people were not mindful of their citizenship while consuming entertainment news, but they claimed to be excited when seeing ordinary people questioning Meimei Guo's real identity and looking for the truth. Possibly, this gave them a sense of being active citizens and behaving in a way that active citizens' ought to behave. The responses also revealed that although young people did not deeply understand news objectivity and balance, they valued highly the notion that all parties were given the right to speak in a news story, perhaps because it made it more objective.

5.4 General observations from the examples

What kind of news impresses young people

Based on the news reports selected, the common features that impressed young people were as follows:

1. Being important and continually appearing on news media

A total of 28 respondents believed that the news of the Japanese earthquake impressed them “not because the news story is good”, but because “it is very important”; “it is so severe and so many people died.” In this particular case, news quality did not seem to be something that the respondents noted. Many participants said that they did not actually remember whether the reports were good or not. He (M, 17) said: “I just know an earthquake happened, and it is an important event.”

Responses indicate that the news reports that impressed some participants most were not always the ones of great importance, but the ones that were reported repeatedly on news media. For example, they mentioned the Meimei Guo event and Yao Ming's retirement, which were not as serious and “hard” as other events. Zhong, a 15-year-

old male respondent put it thus: “If a news report appears online every day, I cannot ignore it.” Another respondent said: “It (the Meimei Guo news) shows everywhere, and even though it was a small thing, it becomes bigger and bigger, seems more and more significant.”

According to the agenda setting theory, media have the capacity to influence what people think about (McCombs and Shaw 1972). Young audiences’ impressions of news, largely depended on the frequency of reports. News influences the subjects that people think about, but not their attitudes towards these subjects. As for young people, news reports lead them to recognise what is important, by stressing its significance or raising the frequency with which the report is repeated. However, it seems that current journalism only points out what important events happened, rather than prompting young audiences to think about it. Given the nature of Chinese journalism, more often than not, it fails to provide news stories from various angles or with multiple perspectives. Therefore, it is hard to inspire young citizens to reflect on it. That is to say, though Chinese news and current form of news education successfully made young audiences remember about the most significant news events by raising the frequency of the news report, or emphasizing the importance of certain events; it did not actually succeeded in sparking young people’s reflections on these events.

As previously discussed in Chapter Two, news plays an important role in constructing young people’s (political) socialization, and informs them of what’s important in the adults’ world (Eveland et al. 1998). However, currently, news only shows young people what to know, but does not fulfil its task of signifying “what to think about”. That is to suggest, just indicating what was significant, is not enough to connect young people to society.

2. Readily comprehensible

The news samples selected by participants were relatively simple and easy to understand. They required little knowledge of the background and social contexts. Among the samples, the Gaddafi event was an exception. It required political knowledge to fathom it out. Looking at the topic, most participants only recalled, “Gaddafi lost Libya”, or other fragmental details about his family. Only three participants were able to speak with any insight about that event. Although young people selected Gaddafi news as a topic they wanted to talk about, that did not mean that they comprehended it. In other words, knowing about an event does not mean comprehension. It appears that sometimes young people merely notice news, rather than being informed by it. Without sufficient news literacy, information does not necessarily lead to informed citizens.

3. Plots or suspense interest young people

Participants said that they liked the news samples because “there is a story inside” (Yang, M, 13), or it “has something unknown that I feel curious about (Ling, M, 15)”. The indication is that a story-like news report is more likely to attract young people. Although young people usually “just glance at the headlines” (see Section 4.2.4 and 4.3.1) “suspenseful” news stories succeed in keeping holding their attention.

4. Closeness and familiarity, either to their own lives or to their daily topics

News stories that are familiar (the Yao Ming reports) or the ones that happen nearby (the 7/23 fast train tragedy), tend to attract and impress young people. As Jian Wu, a 16-year-old male, said: “I heard about Yao Ming’s retirement on TV. Just because I heard his name, I paid attention to the story.” Similarly, Zhang, (M, 14) expanded on the importance of proximity. “If the 7/23 train tragedy happened in a foreign country, I might not pay so much attention.” Another respondent added: “I have some relatives

in Wenzhou, so when I heard that it happened in Wenzhou, I wanted to know more details about it”(Zhou, F, 16). As discussed in the previous chapter, though young people think the quality of foreign news is better than national ones, the news samples they selected were mainly national news. This suggests that foreign news have not become their main source. Thus, news reports that young people recalled are the ones with:

- A. Significance (caused by being repeatedly reported)
- B. Straightforwardness (easily comprehensible content)
- C. Simplicity (no requirement of context or prior political knowledge)
- D. Closeness

Besides the news on Gaddafi, none of the news topics selected by the young people were consumed completely in the official news media. Participants said that none of those events appeared as news topics in their school exams. These topics were chosen by the young people, who noted that these were “memorable”, and were about what they “would like to talk about”. This suggests that the news education in schools favoured the official news media. Here the researcher would like to suggest that both official news channels, and the news literacy educators in schools should be more concerned about what young people need and want.

The news topics chosen by the young people reflected their preoccupations and interests. It can be argued that the impression that news makes on young people do not depend on the quality of news alone. Participants admitted that although they remembered certain news reports and found them memorable, this did not mean that they were satisfied with the reports. In other words, although young people know the criteria for evaluating the quality of news, their impression of news does not

necessarily associated with its quality. The next section will look at how young people describe the quality of the news reports selected.

Young people's attitude towards news

Though the number of participants in this study is limited, some of the typical characteristics of the young audiences' attitude towards news can be discerned. Young people consume news from various media, and in a 'post-modern way'—sporadic, de-centred and while multitasking. The popularization of the Guo Meimei news among young citizens reflects the entertainment-oriented consumption of news.

Nonetheless, participants showed a good sense of citizenship, especially when consuming news reports exposing the darker side of society. In such cases, they tended to be sensitive and sceptical, showing a strong sense of what was right and just. Sometimes this sense became a bit emotional: they judged news by their impressions on it, did not have fixed patterns of evaluating news (not firmly correlated with the criteria they suggested before), and were perceptual in evaluating the chosen reports. The passion that participants showed for news about Meimei Guo indicates that news objectivity is not mandatory for there being interest in certain news reports. To some degree, it is not quite correct to say young people had low interest in news; more appropriately, we can infer that they were not quite satisfied with news in general but did have interest in certain kinds of news.

The responses to the news experiment confirmed that young people were not satisfied with the credibility of the official news reporting of Meimei Guo. However, official news still plays a very important role in their lives. Even though it may not always win their approval, it at least constructs their basic idea of what news should be like. This is partly why at the beginning they did not consider the Meimei Guo event when

asked about the news that interested them most. Also, their firm stereotyping of news formats may provide answers to the question raised previously: Why did young people unconsciously follow the CCTV model of reporting when asked to imagine being journalists themselves, when they were so radically against official news?

In fact, just like in the case of the 7/23 fast train tragedy, young people liked to listen to 'the voice of authority' if it was trustworthy. But they would look for answers in citizen journalism, and even in rumours, when the official voice is not sufficient to provide them what they want. Young people expected citizen news to complement official voices. In fact, the insufficiency of official news, and the conflict in official news and its citizen counterpart may stimulate young people's scepticism towards news and generate their citizen awareness.

Young people's selection of news and their preferences for certain news items did not match up with their own criteria for good journalism. Interesting events still played an important part of young people's evaluation of news. They drew a clear line between formal news and entertainment, but when confronted with topics that fell between serious news and entertainment news, they were not sure whether soft news should appear as formal forms of news. Further, they had different opinions about what mainstream media should pay attention to.

How they use the criteria to evaluate news reports

Results indicate that participants used traditional news values to evaluate traditional news reports. But for other forms of news, they altered the criteria. In general, young people felt that news reports on serious events should be objective and professional, and with high quality video/photo shots. They were, however, more tolerant of the quality of news reports of tragedy. They were also more tolerant of the quality of

citizen news, as they acknowledged that citizens are not professional journalists and might not have their skills at news production.

When it came to other forms of news, they used lower standards while assessing them, and were of the opinion that most celebrity news and other forms of soft news do not necessarily need to be objective. But they had other requirements for such news. They wanted soft news to be intriguing, read like a story, provide details, and be presented in multimedia.

Are they sophisticated news audiences?

One of the significant gaps identified in the literature review is information about whether young people are sophisticated in their use of news. As discussed in Chapter Four, young people's thoughts on news are unstable and sometimes emotional.

It is inappropriate to categorize young people as either an absolutely media literate or illiterate audience. They were sophisticated in *some* respects. For example, they were aware of the qualities of news, capable of using multimedia platforms to consume news, and did search for the additional information on topics they were interested in. However, the deficiencies in their news literacy cannot be neglected. For instance, they failed to understand news reports with political backgrounds, and they did not have a good grasp of news values. So, in order to narrow the gap between young people and news, rather than criticising their low appetite for news or saying they are not literate enough, it is crucial to identify what they are lacking, and fashion a news literacy education accordingly. In the next section, we will investigate what young people want from news literacy education and what forms of education may help to promote their news literacy.

5.5 What young people expect of news education

News education could help tackle the lack of news literacy on the part of young people. After they evaluated the news stories, participants were asked about news education, and what they wanted from it. Most of them were in favour of news education, though there were respondents who said: “I would like to have news education, but I don’t want to learn how to make official news” (Min, M, 16).

Their expectations of news education can be classified into five groups: How to understand news, how to gain information effectively, how to comprehend the social context of news, how to learn new technology, and how to be a citizen journalist. They described the ideal version of news literacy education as follows:

I hope it (news literacy education) can tell me how to watch news, how to understand news. (Qing, M, 13)

... how to read news effectively... I mean, there are too many things online and I would like to be taught how to select useful ones. (Ding, F, 14)

Show the new technology of media and teach me how to use them. (Ke, M, 16)

Show me how to use the latest news software, as news APPs. (Dong, M, 15)

How to understand news in forms of social perspective. (Lin, F, 16)

I hope after learning I would be able to see the relationship and conflict between different interest groups from news. (Jia, F, 15)

... some training about how to be a grassroot (citizen) reporter. (Ning, M, 16)

Teach me how to do filming, editing, and interview strategies. (Fu, M, 17)

The responses illustrated that participants' demands on news education were multi-dimensional and involved the most significant facets of news literacy education. Young people's expectations of news education emphasised their desire to learn practical ways of accessing news—for example, through new mobile phone apps. News comprehension was also among the list of their expectations. This confirms that young people did have some interest in news and recognised the importance of being news savvy. They were also willing to participate in citizen journalism. All these counter the conclusions of some previous research that the young generation has a declining interest in news and politics.

However, although participant's enthusiasm for receiving news literacy education implies their potential interest in news journalism, what young people expected from news literacy education was not in accordance with the one they received. They did not approve of the way news was presented in the official media, and they disliked current news education particularly because the coursework involved required them to reproduce the official narrative from government websites.

News literacy education can empower citizens and help them be active citizens in a democracy. However, the current news education is politically biased, and had little idea of young people's demands. Most students, as well as the teachers interviewed,

said that news coursework and political exams, as a part of the news education in China, were “forced work”, and not conducive to promoting critical thinking and citizen awareness..One middle schoolteacher of politics described it as “a burden to students”:

It (news homework) is obviously not successful. You see, in high school grade one, all of our students have to take political exams, so perhaps they will pay attention to what the news is talking about, but as soon as they enter high school grade two, (in which students are split up into science and arts batches) students of science will stop caring about news since they no longer need to take the exam. I think news homework and exams are ineffective, if not counterproductive, in helping students to develop an interest in news. (Yan, F, 51)

A head teacher pointed out:

The intention of including news in homework is good, but this is not working effectively. Even if students are obliged to watch news, this does not mean they are thinking much about it, not to mention they like or believe in what they watched. A better way would be to let students talk about news and share their views, or encourage them to give small presentations of news analysis. (Ke, male, 34)

News literacy education influences young people’s consumption of news and awareness of citizenship. But its effectiveness largely depends on how news education is being carried out, and how it is received by students. Positive news literacy education can develop young people’s interest in news, and promote their citizenship awareness. The aim of positive news literacy education should be to infiltrate quality

news into the daily lives of young people, not thrust it there. Unfortunately, according to the interview responses, news homework and exams are now playing a negative role and do little to boost citizen awareness. They push young people to watch news without giving any consideration to their interests, thus fail to narrow the gap between young people and news.

5.6 Further discussions

5.6.1 News consumers and their sense of citizenship

Young people identified themselves as consumers in their experience of news most of the time. However, this does not imply a low sense of citizenship on their part. As seen from their comments above about hard news reports, they seemed to have a strong sense of righteousness, especially when confronting reports revealing the dark side of the society (see the 7/23 fast train tragedy and the Guo Meimei news), and voluntarily follow citizen news, when they found the mainstream news was not trustworthy, in order to be rightly informed. It would thus be inappropriate to characterise them as less responsible citizens, or blame them for their insufficient interest in news. In fact, young people values news in their own ways and their sense of citizenship, although not strictly the type of citizenship described by many scholars, permeates to their consumption of news. From this perspective, the traditional understanding of citizenship seems to fail to capture young people's democratic possibilities in a full scale.

Evidence revealed that whether young people are interested in news or not is not relevant to whether they identify themselves as citizens. Though citizenship was considered to be a promoter for news consumption, since citizens regard it an obligation to be informed (McCombs and Poindexter 1983). In this study, however,

participants' interest in news is hardly motivated by their sense of citizenship, but more depend on whether the news report is interesting or not. Moreover, young people's appetite for news is likely to increase during its consumption if the news stirs their scepticism, which, in turn, could lead the young people to track down the truth by searching for insights into the story.

Though favouring foreign news to Chinese news, participants still tend to consume Chinese news. Even though news about Gaddafi and the Japanese earthquake were foreign, these were mainly obtained by participants from the national news media; also, participants remember these news items only because they had been reported repeatedly. This illustrates that for certain reasons—such as the cultural and language gap, limited access to foreign news websites and social networks such as Facebook—foreign news has not become an important part of the daily news consumption of young people. At this point, it is hard to see young citizens as global news consumers, despite the fact they can access the Internet and they favour the characteristics of foreign news.

In the globalized media era, young audiences are being exposed to a global view of all media products—for example, movies, novels, etc. As they are growing up, they are increasingly connected with the outer world. However, as news from abroad is not as popular as movies or music to young people thus not being a very profitable media product for importation, and young people are not the target audiences of news, news reports from abroad are not often translated into Chinese and reach the young Chinese. And because of the language gap, it is not easy for young Chinese people to understand the original reports online. Thus, though young people have grown up with a global culture, global news is not part of this culture.

As a result, in association with the discussions in Chapter Four (see Section 4.7.2), Chinese young people's perspectives on news were a combination of Chinese and global news culture: it was mixed up with memories of Chinese news styles with which they were familiar with but not satisfied, and Western values of news, which they approved but understood only vaguely. In light of this, and given the influence of traditional culture on citizenship, it is more appropriate to recognize Chinese teenagers as globalizing citizens rather than global citizens.

5.6.2 The globalizing citizens to be

Given the evidence in young people's expectation of the Japanese earthquake which illustrates that their inclination to Western news values and thick Chinese news styles, in order to obtain a balanced comprehension of news in global contexts, we need to consider young people's relationship with news with respect to the influence from both global and national news culture.

As discussed in Chapter Two, media globalisation brings about a common consciousness, which, in turn, encourages homogeneity of worldviews. However, this does not indicate that the homogenization loses out to domestication (Davies 2010). As Reese (2012) argues, becoming aware of the world as a single place may cause us to stand in detachment to ourselves. Rather than assuming that globalisation means a uniform imposition of a global standard across a range of local circumstances, we should more realistically deem it as interplay between local and cultural (Reese 2012). Participants' inclination to the forms of Chinese news in their making of news reports demonstrated that the influence of national news culture cannot be ignored in understanding their perspectives on news.

If we are to consider young people's understanding of news in a global context, we need to consider it as consisting of more than the standards of Western based journalism. Evidence obtained during the evaluation of news reports in the course of the in-depth interview demonstrates that participants, to some extent, accept that global news equals to, or at least mainly refers to journalism in developed countries. Unfortunately, though participants tended to agree with Western news culture, this does not automatically ensure understating it. As suggested earlier, how news is appreciated is strongly affected by the media environment, patterns of consumption, and the stereotypes of news reports that audiences frequently consult (see Chapter Four). Perspectives on news are still domesticated through experiences of local news, the values of which are often taken for granted. In fact, it is unlikely that one culture would entirely accept the globalised perspectives on news. Media globalisation sceptics have argued that no truly transnational news platforms have emerged, permitting the kind of cross-boundary dialogues associated with a public sphere (Sparks 2007).

5.6.3 Bridging young people to news: news literacy education

Above discussions concerning news evaluation exercise aimed to provide insights into how participants use the criteria of news values to evaluate news reports thereby looking into how much news literacy did they actually possess.

Based on the previous findings, including how they consume it, how they think of news quality, how they evaluate news quality, along with the characteristics of young people's current news literacy and what they expect of news literacy education, the following discussions attempt to look into three questions:

- What news literacy education needs to do to associate young people with news?
- What are the problems in current news literacy education?

- What are the difficulties for developing Western-based news literacy education in China?

5.6.3.1 Interesting young citizens in news

Mihalidis (2012) has argued that news literacy can serve as the bridge for building more dynamic, relevant, and comprehensive approaches to teaching, learning and understanding news across the globe. News consumption and participation indeed connect young citizens to public discussions, but how this bridge works relies on the literacy with which they communicate. In addition to the actual news literacy, news education also consist the part of raising young people's sense of citizenship.

As discussed in Chapter Four (see Section 4.2.5), young people hesitated to connect news to themselves because they were still citizens-to-be; besides, due to Chinese news culture, it is hard for Chinese young citizens to understand news and its values in terms of democracy (see Section 4.4.4). As a result, since it would be difficult for Chinese young people to recognize news as a democratic tool in the society, it is equally difficult for them to recognize the importance of their participation in news in the progress of creating a democratic society.

In this case, understanding how citizenship is associated with news in the Western-based news culture helps to encourage young people to connect themselves to news.

Identity as citizens situates young people in a position that requires to engage in reading, watching news or participating in political discussions, since citizens are those who requires to be rightly informed and actively engaged. With strengthening

sense of being global citizens, young people would pay more attention to global events, endeavour to play the double roles of both consumer and producer, and uses his/her right and obligation to engage in public discussions. Once someone possesses the above senses, s/he will see news literacy as a way of citizen empowerment and a bridge connecting individual citizens to the democratic society.

In addition to stressing on the identity of being citizens, young people also need to know more about how news works for a democratic society. Indeed, for many reasons it would be difficult for Chinese teenagers to do so (as discussed above). However, the Western-based news culture highlights the connection between news and individual citizens. Understanding the democratic function of news while highlighting citizenship is the way in which young people can automatically connect themselves to news, or in other words, relate news to themselves as citizens.

Consequently, news literacy education in China is confronted with two main questions: how to introduce news in democratic terms in a non-democratic regime against young people's inadequate understanding of democracy, and how to implement news literacy education within the boundaries set up by the authorities. In the following section, our attention will draw on the problems of current news literacy education in China and discuss why it fails to fulfil the task of making news literate citizens.

5.6.3.2 The problems in current Chinese news education

As debated previously, media education has developed in China over a short period (Cai 2002), and news literacy is currently implemented in forms of homework of keeping notes for news and involving discussions of news events in political exams. Media literacy education is still in its infancy and lacks proven models, not to mention

formative, globalized news literacy education. Opportunities for news literacy education in China are far and few, compared to those in the Western world, and a matured theoretical research in terms of local situation is lacking, particularly on the relationship between news and young audiences. This deficiency of theoretical foundations in journalism and audience studies, has adversely influenced the theories of news literacy education.

The deficit in news literacy studies is arguably a result of two characteristics of the Chinese media: its feature of being the party's voice, and its financial dependence on the government (Guo 2012). Given this dependency on the government, it is more difficult for Chinese news literacy educationists to adopt the Western framework constructed for empowering young citizens.

Due to the unique social and media context that exists in China, there is no ready-made model that can be applied to its news education. Moreover, since the education in China is also under the government's control, it is doubtful whether it can be used to serve as an antidote to the mainstream news.

It is safe to say that the current media education in China is top-down. It creates a controlled, protective environment, which attempts to turn young citizens to a certain sort of information. This is against the trend of new media development, where information is spreading into every fabric of young people's daily lives, influencing them with modern ideas of what being a citizen means to them. Even though protective models possess some advantages, especially when confronting young people who are less experienced and comparatively vulnerable, this model is no longer helpful in contributing to young people's news literacy in the digital age. Since it is against what they are experiencing in their everyday lives when being exposed to such variety of news and sources.

Utilizing homework and setting examinations about news content have become a novel way of controlling students' thinking about news. Control is no longer realized merely by blocking messages out or through other forms of censorship, but more subtly, by pushing students to think in certain authoritarian directions. This sort of news literacy education forces students to pay attention to official news and to consider news events from the official perspective. Admittedly, adding news notes in homework and examination about news, can push students to pay more attention to news. Notwithstanding this, this method does little to accelerate young people's independent thinking, and does not help in developing young people's interest in news. This could be more harmful than doing media content protection, since it neglects critical thinking and drives young people to be passive news consumers rather than active citizens.

5.7 Conclusions

In the news evaluation exercise, young people showed a significant tendency to consume entertainment-oriented news and did not apply traditional news values and the criteria of high quality in judging such reports. Their news evaluations were sometimes based on feelings over rational opinions on the news reports' quality. This indicates that young people do not have structured news literacy and are not critical enough in their evaluation of news. However, sophistication was seen in their use of multimedia platforms when consuming news, and they demonstrated that they had the potential to search out more information on topics they were interested in.

Based on these findings, it is crucial to develop a bridge between young people and quality news. As previously debated, news literacy education, if carried out in an appropriate way, can improve the relationship between news and young audiences.

However, student participants and some teachers interviewed were critical of the current news education, which they said was implemented as a sort of political education, and did little to fill the gap between young people and news.

Based on the gaps identified within this study, this researcher recommends a negotiated way of implementing news literacy education for young citizens. News literacy education should take into consideration the characteristics, needs, and preferences of young citizens, as well as the reality of the social and political environment in which they consume news. It calls for multi-angled news education, with regards to young people's citizenship awareness, digital skills, and the ability to critically analyse news reports.

It also suggests that news needs to accommodate young people better, by altering its forms. While remaining high in quality, news narratives should also adopt a form that is more open, legible and interesting, to provide reports on multimedia platforms and to offer more choices for young audiences. News producers should also include young people's voices and create more possibilities for them to participate in making news.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the key findings of this study and reflects on what news and news literacy education should do to narrow the gap between young citizens and news in China. Beginning with a broad analysis of the relationship between young people and news, it then focuses on young people's views of quality news, their patterns of consuming news, and how they identify their citizenship during the consumption respectively. Following this, the chapter analyses how young citizens evaluate news reports. The chapter seeks to refine the core arguments characterising the news literacy of young Chinese citizens. It suggests the kind of news education they need and what forms are applicable to the Chinese society. The limitations of this inquiry and suggestions for future research are also set out.

6.2 The relationship between young people and news

Revisiting the research questions concerning young people's definition, consumption and evaluation of news, the relationship between young Chinese people and news can be summarized in the following sections. Section 6.2.1 and 6.2.2 debates young people's overall perceptions on news, involving how they define news and relate themselves to news; Section 6.2.3 focus on their consumption of news; while Section 6.2.4 aims to analyse how they evaluate the quality of news. After these, Section 6.2.5 looks at how young people's participation in developing news reports is narrowing the gap between young people and news by associating them to a more dynamic news environment. Lastly, Section 6.2.6 and 6.2.7 are going to discuss the relationship

between the findings of the research questions and the issues emerged in the relationship between young people and news in the process of making global citizens.

6.2.1 Young people's general attitude toward news

Results from this research confirm Buckingham's (1998, p.127) assertion that young citizens' alienation from news and politics should be interpreted as "a result of exclusion and disenfranchisement rather than ignorance or immaturity". Young people in China had a keen desire for information from around the world and acknowledged the importance of media in information dissemination. Moreover, they accepted that it is citizens' responsibility to pay attention to news, and acknowledged that being rightly informed was essential to both individual citizens and society.

Nevertheless, as news audiences, young people were caught between being consumers and being citizens. Though being aware how citizens should relate to news, young people did not think that they should take the responsibilities as full citizens and did not show much interest in news because of their powerlessness to understand news and its relevance to their daily lives. On the one hand, they were longing to engage with news, but on the other, they thought of themselves as too young to participate in making news.

Like youth in Western countries, Chinese teenagers in this research did not show much interest in news in their daily media consumption. However, Chinese young people's apathy towards news was particularly associated with their dissatisfaction with Chinese news, which they felt was not credible enough. Their perspectives on news were influenced by the foreign news values they admired, and the fundamentally different Chinese news reports they consumed: young citizens approved Western values used to evaluate news, yet were accustomed to typical

Chinese news styles. The result was that the young audiences' perspectives had suffered from a conflict of two types of news professionalism.

To some extent participants showed sophistication in criticising the credibility of Chinese news. However, due to their aversion to the nature of top-down Chinese news and to the voice of the authorities, the dynamics of national news culture had largely been ignored by young people. In other words, young people had an over simplified view of Chinese journalism. Since this is state-controlled, the tensions between the market, public interest and other forces in the digital news arena had been neglected by them. That is to suggest, the authoritarian regime had led to young audiences' narrow definition of news and had limited their understanding of the dynamics of news culture. This had made it more difficult for young people to associate news culture with social culture in broader terms.

For a democratic society to function efficiently, citizens need to understand how important the media are in bringing transparency and accountability to the government and the corporate world (Bertot and Grimes 2010). A review of scholarship in this area had identified a gap in knowledge about young people's sense of citizenship (Liu 2010; Buckingham 2000). This research has found that the new generation was open-minded and creative. By presenting critical views about news and politics, participants showed a willingness to be active and responsible citizens, even though sometimes they articulated that they did not perform as citizens should. For example, more often than not, they chose entertainment news over information which they identified as the type that real citizens ought to pay attention to, and they infrequently posted comments on news regarding social issues.

Young people are not active in their consumption of news and rarely consider news a tool to promote democracy. As a result, Chinese young people had not understood the true value of news and its real functions in society, and thus failed to associate news to their individual citizenship beyond the right of being informed. This may be partly due to the social system in China and the non-democratic media environment they have been accustomed to. In this respect, under a non-democratic media system, it is hard for news to play the role of a democratic communicator between authorities and citizens. Young citizens were also very unlikely to understand news in a democratic manner and relate themselves to news in terms of being active citizens with critical minds.

Hence, to a large extent, young people are still passive consumers rather than active citizens in their experience of news. Nevertheless, the conflicted idea between traditionally defined citizenship and modern understanding of it was reflected in young people's experiences of news: while young people understand citizenship as it was defined traditionally, the ways in which that they realize their citizenship (for instance, the methods of being informed, means of participation, etc.) have changed, and they have presented some characteristics of being actual citizens in modern terms, such as suspecting authorities' voices (see Section 4.5.1). The contradictory condition is a result of young people's vague identity of themselves in their consumption of news, which we will explore with more details in the following section.

6.2.2 Young people's identities during the consumption

Participants saw themselves as 'citizens to be', which was how they were defined by adults. News coverage, as well as some studies about young citizens, was loaded with terms of apathy or ignorant for picturing young people's perceived disengagement with news, and young citizens' opinions and voices only played an insignificant role

in current news coverage. Therefore, young people probably accepted, or at least were influenced by the images that news reports labelled them to be. The misinterpreted images of young people caused young people's failing to feel about their values in society. Though being aware of citizenship, they did not seem to consider the status of being active citizens, and hardly include news consumption activities, when they spoke about being young citizens. They were longing to engage in developing news reports, yet they did not feel powerful enough to participate in joining social activities and political discussions. In this sense, the gap between young people's actual citizenship and how were perceived by adults and portrayed by news reports had widen the gap between young people and news.

Some participants said they get a sense of morality and responsibility when watching citizen news that featured ordinary people contributing to the process of finding out the truth. However, this sense of citizenship was transitory and not strong enough to ignite young people's passion in joining citizen journalism. Young people still needed a stronger and more constant sense of citizenship which can motivate their participation in making news.

Since the concept of citizenship is developing and has embraced various dimensions of being a citizen (Bennett 2008), it is becoming more open than conventionally assumed. The disconnection between young people and how they were identified by news reports has brought questions that journalism should reconsider the term of citizenship, especially for young citizens. The narrow and traditional understanding of citizenship in terms of voting and taking part in formal political discussions needs to be questioned. In fact, young people have been acted as postmodern citizens (Buckingham 2002) during their consumption of news – which means they were cynical, distracted, no longer possessed of the civic virtues in traditional terms. More often than not, young citizens presented diversities of identities and participatory behaviours in their relationship with news. As Buckingham (2013) pointed out (see

Section 1.2.3), students need to bear flexible media literacy with awareness of their own tastes. Therefore, we need to move beyond the division between seeing them processing or not possessing citizenship, or assuming that they process a certain type of citizenship (such as being absolutely active or passive citizens).

The identities of citizens are considered to motivate young people to consume news and participation in social activities (Delli Carpini 2000), and a narrow conception of citizenship often serves to exclude young citizens (Smith et al. 2005). In this case, rather than seeing postmodern citizenship as a signal as losing association with news and politics, it would be more appropriate to consider postmodern citizenship as having various aspects. These could include a multi-facet manner of news consumption and participation, which opens more possibilities for the relationship between young people and news.

Within the context of China, we need to be aware that young generations are still being influenced by traditional culture in their formation of identities, and their ways of participating in social activities and political discussions are still limited. However, due to new media platform, they are no longer passive citizens. Looking at the positive way they responded to the Wenchuan earthquake (see Section 1.2.4.4 and Section 4.6), there is great potential for them to shift from passive audiences to active citizens. However, it is doubtful whether increased news consumption will help the questions of confused identity that young people in China seem to have. As debated above, there are gulfs between their real situations and how they were perceived by news reports or understood by scholars of young people studies. However, even though young people might have processed more sense of citizenship than adults assumed them to have, we cannot ignore the fact that there is still a gap between how young people perceive news ought to be consumed by citizens and how they actually consume it.

6.2.3 Young people's news consumption: young citizens as news gazers

Participants consulted new media for news more than traditional media. Still, traditional media were related to their lives and they did not think there were much difference between traditional media news and new media news, as long as they provided good news in a convenient manner. The Internet has woven into the fabric of young people's daily lives and young people had relied heavily on it for general information. Young people consumed news in a random way, and their choices of news diets depended on habits rather than on news quality, and what news they selected to consume was largely based on perceptual factors (striking headlines, for example). Moreover, they seldom consulted news sources that provided in-depth coverage of national and international events. The points addressed above indicate that young people's consumption of news is largely oriented by the convenience of news usage, and not search-driven. In addition, at times they consumed news due to parental influences, or used news as a pastime. They were also pushed to consume news by homework requirements. In this sense, in their daily news consumption, young people were mainly passive consumers.

More often than not, young people engaged in multi-tasking online, and consumed news alongside other activities. This fragmented, less-focused manner of consumption did not allow young audiences to associate with the background of political events and in-depth discussions on news. Consequently, young people were not used to connecting what they were reading or watching to the background of the stories, and this did not help them to understand news reports in depth. Therefore, young people's daily consumption of news did little to fill the gap that exists between them and

quality news of depth. In order to encourage young people to consume quality news, how young people perceive quality news needs to be explored.

6.2.4 Young people and news quality

Although quality news was not part of the daily news experiences of young people, participants in this study were able to critique news, judging it on the basis of quality, particularly credibility. But while young people in this study were able to identify standards that were very close to Western-based professional criteria to evaluate news, their understanding of the values they used was superficial (see Section 4.4.3 for discussion).

Chinese young people's perspectives on news quality came across as ambiguous. They believed that news should be of high standard even though their news literacy was not developed enough to appreciate this standard, as they felt news is for the elite (see Section 4.2). They preferred news made for adults to that made for young people, because they believed that depth was critical to quality news. Although they favoured informal and entertaining news, and wished news to be more appealing and popular, young people still wanted to see the quality of journalism rise and expected that formal news should keep the traditional news values. Apparently, young people seem to hold different criteria when evaluating traditional and entertainment news.

Given the contradictions in young people's relationship with quality news, the gaps between their news literacy and their calls for high quality news, and the conflict between their demands (for high quality news) and preferences (entertainment news and soft news), there is a case to be made for pluralism in news. On the one hand, young people were in need of news supplies which allow differing levels of news that can meet demands from audiences of all ages, rather than those that serve a certain

age group. On the other hand, the dynamics of young people's relationship with news, their varied preferences of news, and their different perspectives on quality news, signal that they are longing to consume news in diverse styles, allowing different entertainment formats, and to make an effort to adjust itself to young audiences. This, in order to address "a more popular, relevant forms of news journalism" (Buckingham 2000, p.131), would provide young people a wider choices in news, more variety of styles of news reports during their news consumption. The suggestion here is not to lower the quality of news to fit the literacy standards of the young audiences, but to provide a more diverse news environment capable of satisfying citizens of different ages and various educational levels.

Regarding the criteria of evaluating different types of news, in addition to entertainment news and other informal forms of news, young people also showed much tolerance towards the quality of citizen journalism. In the current supply of news, young people were not satisfied with the quality of news, for they considered mainstream news to be too official to trust, while citizen journalism lacked professionalism and news quality. However, as new media add to the richness of citizen journalism, young people began to realize the possibilities of news to involve citizens' voices and the boundaries between mainstream news and citizen journalism were not as clear as they used to be. Even though the disconnection between young people and news was evident, participation in developing or contributing to news reports has begun to fill the gaps.

6.2.5 Young people's reactions to news (filling the gap)

Based on how participants perceived Chinese news and its quality, we can see that these young people were not satisfied with the news they got. They were critical, but this was not a reasoned criticism supported by systematic reflections. Their

perspectives on news were often emotional—fluid, impressionable and unstable. They struggled to balance their rational and emotional opinions when confronted with questions concerning how journalism should develop in China, caused by their dilemma of appreciating Western values associated with quality news but being accustomed with the Chinese style of professional journalism.

Although the participants blamed news for its lack of quality, previous research that found young people had low interest in news do not account for the reasons behind their reluctance to engage with news. In this research, participants' description of news literacy education and their desire to be citizen journalists indicated there was potential here. Young people were interested in news and had been creating news content as citizen journalists. To some extent, the restrictive media environment that exists in China did not encourage this, and moreover, the pressure from busy schooling had also driven the young away from taking time to pay attention to social events (Shi and Yu 2010). There was also the cultural influence, which discouraged participation and critical judgment (Liu 2010). Nevertheless, it is heartening to see the awareness of citizenship and civic participation that focus group participants displayed, and promoting these could encourage them to have a richer media experience. This is likely to be a more effective strategy than forcing a news and politics education as a way to promote good citizenship.

The gap between young people and news are gradually filling in the course of their participating in news (including developing news reports, contributing photos and videos to mainstream news, as well as commenting on news). The casual manner, the postmodern way of news engagement — the deconstructed reaction to news sporadically, the non-conscious way of being real citizens—were actually drawing young people one step closer to news. This was in line with young people's news consumption patterns and their media use preferences. Though casual, as this participation was processing forms of entertainment voluntarily, it had eased the

aversion young people had towards news. Thus, informal news resources, though seemingly a de-political product (Buckingham 2000), is actually a new route of political socialisation. The question is how to relate young people's participation to news of better quality. In doing so, we need to find a way to integrate what they defined as quality news into their everydayness of media consumption.

6.2.6 Young people and news: overall discussion

This study attempts to address three research questions, concerning how young people in China define news, how they consume it and how they evaluate it. Referring to the gaps identified in the literature review (see Section 3.6), this study contributes to the knowledge regarding relationship between news, informed citizenry and news literacy education in China.

This section explores the relationship drawn between the key findings of the research and how these were informed by the theoretical framework. After placing the key findings together, the section discusses the connection between them. On this basis, looking into how news literacy education should link to the research questions, in order to improve the relationship between young people and news is important.

The definition of news and the perception of how news was related to daily lives, would have a reflection on how young people recognized the function of news. How news was consumed indicated the relationship they were having with news; while how they thought of high quality news implied what functions they expected news to have and what kind of relationship they would like to have with news.

Based on the evidence obtained, we can see that young people's definition of news did not have a great influence on their patterns of consuming news but associated with their evaluation of quality news. For instance, young people defined news in traditional terms of seriousness and assumed that high quality news should comply to traditional news values, while the news they regularly consult is unsystematic and casual. This way of consumption caused a superficial understanding of news, and this demonstrated insufficient news literacy. This emerged during their evaluation of news reports.

In terms of the role news literacy education ought to play in the relationship between young people and news, and given the evidence obtained, I would like to suggest that young people were in need of a broader view on news. One that opens more spaces in terms of participation, encouraging young people to involve themselves in making news reports rather than just being informed.

We can recognize that the gaps were not only present between young people and news; but there are also disconnections identified in young people's own perceptions' of news: between how young people thought news ought to be consumed and how they actually consume it.

In academic research, as well as in the practice of news literacy education, how young people consume news cannot be separated from how they perceive news. The way young people appreciate the function of news would impact on how they position themselves in the making of news: a consumer, a bystander, or a citizen who is obliged to actively react to news and to contribute to journalism. Daily consumption of news is even more crucial for young people in China, where news literacy education is yet to come. It is in the progress of consuming news in daily lives, rather than in news education curricula, that young people can relate the theories of news

values to specific news reports. This, to associate news reports to broader social contexts by searching information, thereby integrating themselves into the real media environment and recognise the function and values of news.

6.2.7 Shifting between local and global news culture

On the basis of what has been discussed in the former section, we can say that in terms of general attitudes towards news, the consumption of news, and the evaluation of news quality, the trend of moving towards global news culture in young people's media experiences has been shown.

Currently, within a globalizing Chinese new environment, Chinese young people's perspectives on news were still a mixture, with insufficient understanding of both Western and Chinese news culture: they processed a beautifying view on the former, and simply understood the latter by ignoring the dynamics behind the apparent top-down mode.

In spite of this, with the digital news environment and the increasing influence of globalization, young people's general understanding, consumption and evaluation of news were gradually connecting to the outside world. Specifically, they approved the democratic function of news, presented willingness to change the current top-down model of news and showed enthusiasm for citizen journalism. Their ways of consuming news were similar to those of their contemporaries in the West, and they accepted the Western standards of news values to evaluate quality news. There were clear signs that Chinese young people were gradually taking up a more open and plural relationship between news and citizenry, in spite of the influences from family, society and traditional cultural.

At present, the global news environment provided by the digital platform, cultural traditions, top-down forms of mainstream news and other social issues (such as the one-child policy and the intensified social pressure (Shi and Yu 2010)), have worked together in forming Chinese teenagers' unique perspectives on news; none of the forces could be neglected when examining young people's relationships with news.

As illustrated in Chapter One, Chinese young people present a dual character (Liu 2010), as a result of the influence from both traditional and modern ideas, and the impact from both local and global culture. This dual character has enhanced the uncertainty of identity of young citizens. This is reflected in their experience of news (see Section 4.7.2): they accept, and are inclined to the Western news culture, but cannot avoid the influence of local news culture. This adds to the pluralism, as well as complexity in young people's news perspectives, and raises new questions to news literacy education such as: how to coordinate between local and global news culture?

6.3 News literacy education for Chinese young people

6.3.1 Discussions of the relationship between young people and news literacy education

Young people were aware of the importance of being news savvy and displayed considerable enthusiasm in receiving news literacy education. They were willing to be news-savvy and to learn the skills of making news reports. This challenges the pessimistic view of previous studies that identified young people as merely cynical (Putman 1995). Although more often than not, participants' perspectives on news were emotional and not constructed, there is another dimension to this issue. Young people had a perceptive way of understanding news, rather than seeing it as young

people's being ill-informed and being ignorant, it would be more appropriate to say that young citizens had their own ways of perceiving news, which were intimately associated with their daily lives. The ways of their news consumption and evaluation were no longer confined to the traditional manners, and this opens more possibilities in their relationship with news and citizenship.

In light of this, young people were competent in adapting news consumption to their daily needs of being informed. Their decline in citizenship and illiteracy when relating to news should not be a worry. What is more, it is not necessary to force them to consume news by imposing news education (such as news homework) on them. The results of this study show that young people were critical news audiences and it is the failure of the current journalism not to connect quality news with the way in which young people consume everyday media. However, the entertainment- oriented way of news consumption and the inclination to the easiness of news, had excluded young people from a keen search for quality news.

In order to develop a better relationship between young people and news, it is suggested that it is not enough to discourage the tendency to represent young people as ignorant and irresponsible in news; it is equally inappropriate to regard them as responsible and sophisticated news users. Therefore, in order develop news literacy education which fits their needs, it is crucial to discern the contour of what they already know and what they still require. Besides, more attention needs to be paid to what forms of news would be better received by them, in order to associate news literacy education with young people's interests.

A healthy relationship between young people and news does not merely depend on the amount of news consumption but the quality of it. In order to help young people engage with quality news, news literacy education needs to focus on ways in which

such news becomes part of their daily consumption. Considering that Chinese young citizens' perspectives on news are caught between Western and Chinese values, a strategy driven by any one system is not likely to work. If we aim to take news literacy education in a global direction, it ought to go beyond exclusive news culture, since news is still domesticated, the frames and references of which are often taken for granted (Reese 2012). News literacy education, thus, needs to supply young citizens with an open, multi-perspective way of understanding different styles of journalism and news cultures, with specific regards to local news culture, rather than teaching them a set of values confined to one type of journalism.

Given this social reality, it would be idealistic to expect Chinese journalism to adopt Western values, particularly as it is doubtful if these values would suit China. Therefore, it is hardly possible to change the nature of Chinese journalism to suit the demands of the young audiences. But despite this limitation, news literacy education is responsible for equipping young people with both digital and critical analytical skills, helping them distinguish the difference between local and global news culture, and connecting young people to the global news arena. The way that young people relate to news and news literacy education is dissimilar in different societies, and varies between people of different culture and social backgrounds.

Chinese young people's perspectives on news were distinguished by their objection to Chinese news culture. Unlike the circumstances of their Western contemporaries, in addition to the styles of news reports, news culture by itself has widened the gap between young people and news in China. Because of their aversion to this news culture, young people often excluded themselves from mainstream news and paid little attention to official voices, and meanwhile dislike the current news literacy education for its being in line with this news culture. This implies that young people's impressions of Chinese news culture reduced their interest in news, and in part made

them think that news was not worth attention, therefore result in their ignoring even the high quality reports among the Chinese news outlets.

However, what needs highlighting here is that being within a top-down news environment is not an excuse to simplify the dynamics of local news culture. Since Chinese news media have long been under the control of the authorities, the other functions of news, such as news as a democratic tool, as a watchdog, are often ignored by citizens. And the tensions between market, public interest and other forces are also seldom noticed.

In this situation, it is crucial for news literacy education to coordinate the relationship between young people and Chinese news, help young people overcome their prejudices against Chinese news and engage with it. However, whether news literacy education is capable of fulfilling this task largely depends on how it is carried out. Certain types of news education in the form of news notes have proved unsuccessful and have even widened the gap between young people and news. Indeed, how to implement news literacy education endeavouring to build democratic citizens, and with regards to young people's own needs and wants, meanwhile making sure that the developments are built within the tolerance of the authorities, is a thorny question.

6.3.2 Implementing news literacy education in China

6.3.2.1 Implementing news literacy education in the curriculum

In this research, young people's views on news and citizenship in general, their news consumption and their evaluation of quality news are three crucial facets in examining the relationship between young people and news. Based on previous discussions within this paper, this section is going to look at how to implement news literacy

education in China from these three perspectives. Part A discusses how to positively connect young people to news, by building up their global citizenship; Part B focuses on teaching the digital skills which help young people to use news; and Part C and D illustrate how to enhance young people's capacities of evaluating news, with regards to strengthening their abilities of critical analysis and developing their social knowledge.

A) The making of global citizens

As the school curriculum is the main focus of students' attention, it is an effective route to develop news literacy education. The findings from the focus group interviews showed that young people's identity was vague. It is difficult to build a solid relationship between young people and news, if young audiences are still hesitating between positioning themselves as consumers, citizens to be, or citizens with full responsibilities.

Therefore, the first issue to be addressed is to build up young people's identity as citizens and to relate to their responsibility to consume news, which means young people ought to have a clearer identity when consuming or developing news reports. Namely, they should recognize how creating and consuming news is related to developing identity as citizens. Only when they are actively engaged in news, can they be rightly informed thereby obtaining a comprehensive understanding of society and politics, and move beyond the mainstream ideologies.

“Despite the difficult situation that young people are experiencing, youth participation is increasing in diverse social processes in which they are speaking up and have seized communication's tools to put them to work in ways that defy the dominant understanding of politics” (Reguillo 2009, p.31).

In the digital world, news literacy education should encourage students to be aware of their dual roles as both consumers and producers on new media platforms. In order to do so, they need to realize to what extent they can engage actively in citizenship through communication and media practices. These practices can be extensive rather than being confined to news. For example, in the recent past, Belarusian young people have published a youth-driven underground magazine. This provided a social and political critique, while tapping into the youth-bound popular culture through poems, stories, comics and fashion (Vidanava 201, cited by Enghel and Tufte 2011). In this case, the communicative space allowed the young to feel empowered and thus promoted more choices with regards to citizenship practices. In light of this, this researcher would suggest it is possible to empower young citizens by way of media practices in a variety of forms, rather than via their participation in news as it is traditionally defined.

By incorporating the principles of global citizenship into education, young people may recognize the pluralism of cultural backgrounds and identify themselves as global. Chinese young people today are no longer passive audiences or traditional citizens who do not take action. As a result of globalisation, they no longer passively receive consumer culture. They adapt and recreate their own images with their peers and influences from other cultures, and develop identities that reflect this complexity. The Internet and use of new technologies have been a major factor in enabling young people to recreate their own identities (Weber and Mitchell 2008). Kenway and Bullen (1999) refer to the influence of cyberspace and the importance of young people being not only observers, but also critical engagers in understanding the wider world.

However, globalization does not automatically make young people global citizens (Bourn 2008). As debated in Section 5.6.1, although this generation has grown up within a global media environment it has, to a large extent, shared global media culture. Still, they have not been familiar with global news culture as much as other media culture (such as global film culture), since they seldom consume news as they are growing up. Hence, in terms of understanding global news, young people still have areas for development regarding this.

Young people should be encouraged to link themselves to the wider world. In order to obtain a better understanding of global news, news literacy education should encourage young people to compare news cultures from different perspectives. Global news culture, chiefly represented by Western-based news culture, is comparatively more advanced but not necessarily flawless. Therefore, news literacy education ought to stress both the benefits and deficits of global media. As young people's perspectives on Chinese news are unstable and emotional, and present a tendency to glorifying Western news, it should be aware that this creates young people's cynicism against national news. Thus, news literacy needs to provide an objective view on different styles of news culture, rather than praising or condemning a certain type.

In addition to introducing general knowledge of global news culture, the material of news literacy education should not be confined to national news reports, but extend to a global level. Discussions in classes should allow foreign issues, and if possible, with the help of the Internet, young people should have more communication with other countries. They could start by using cyberspace or social networking for this, forming friendships, observing people's lives throughout the world, and looking at news from other people's eyes. It is critical for young citizens to develop a sense of being global citizens in their consumption and reaction to news, and establish the relationship between the global and the local.

B) Developing Digital skills

Digital skills, understood as the abilities for students to use and learn on the digital platform, are the fundamental requirement of news literacy (Hobbs 2011). In order to connect young people to news as well as to society, digital literacy involves more than the ability to use computers or operate a digital device, and provides more of a starting point for discussion than a final answer.

Resonating with Yoram Eshet (2004)'s argument, digital literacy includes a large variety of cognitive, sociological, and emotional skills, which young citizens need in order to function effectively in news environments. The tasks required in this context, include utilising digital reproduction to create new, meaningful materials from existing ones; constructing knowledge from hyper-textual navigation; evaluating the quality and validity of information; and having a mature and realistic understanding of the rules that prevail in cyberspace.

At this point, news literacy educators and students need to think through, what digital literacies mean to young people. This will depend on how young people perceive the role of news in their lives, and the value of news in society. In order to consider this, it is important to recall the previous findings of this research.

As previously debated in Chapter Four, new media have successfully spread news into young people's daily lives, in forms of fragmental information without background or in-depth discussions. This has resulted in young people's news literacy not being proportional to the time they spend consuming news. Besides, as suggested earlier, young people are relying on this way of consuming news. It has become a

strong habit, and they prefer these kinds of news in their daily lives (although they assume news should be serious and in-depth).

Given this situation, it is not likely that young people will change the habit of their media consumption in a way that will enhance their news literacy. However, educators can respond to this trend by making full use of the advantages of the new media platforms to reach young people. Thus, the researcher suggests that in digital skill training, the focus should not only be on the skills of operating computers and other equipment, but also on how to raise young people's news literacy, given the random nature of their consumption. Furthermore, teachers should consider how to enhance young people's understanding of news via the fragmentary information they receive.

The news homework previously discussed (see Section 4.2.1), which related to keeping news notes in terms of writing down what happened, caused students to just glance at the news topics, which in fact encourages them to be news-gazers. If the news homework continues, it should consider how to encourage young people to practise the digital skills and to use these skills to obtain a better understanding of news. It would be better if news notes could be replaced by reflections of news. For instance, news literacy education could encourage students to access different media (such as CCTV, BBC and CNN), and see how they present differently on the same news event. Otherwise, students can compare the news reports on different media platforms (such as on newspapers, televisions and the internet), and write down what they think of the reports from different media. With efforts to associate young citizens to news, digital skills are not isolated capacities referring simply to the use of media, but are always related to enhancing the abilities of understanding news reports in a critical way.

C) Strengthening critical analysis

Doing case studies to promote young people's understanding of news analysis

As previously discussed, given the political limitations in China and the controlled manner of education, we may face some obstacles in developing young people's critical analysis. Hard news sometimes involves sensitive political issues, pointing directly to sharp debates which criticize the government. These debates are often avoided in China's classrooms. However, hard news and debates are indispensable in young people's news literacy education, if modern ideas of being critical citizens are required. This section discusses how to promote Chinese young people's ability to critically analyse news.

Doing case studies is probably an effective way to promote young people's news literacy in terms of critical analysis, as Mujica (2012) has suggested. The news sample evaluation in this study, shows that young people had an unstructured way of evaluating news, and did not have a deep understanding of news values (see Section 4.4.4). Doing case studies can lead students to read news reports rather than studying theories, and the following discussion would then help young people develop their analysing abilities via discussions with their classmates. In addition, in the process of discussing, young people will obtain a deeper insight into certain news topics.

Considering the educational limitations of China as a top down model, the selection of news cases is worth attention. If stories are too sensitive or not 'politically right', it is possible that they would be excluded from the class discussions. However, stories too simple and less sensitive may be not challenging enough to arouse lively discussion; and it is the controversial news that appeals more to young people (see Section 5.4). One possible solution is to apply news cases from Western journalism. On the one hand, using Western news samples will avoid sensitive local topics; giving both the teachers and students more freedom to judge. On the other, as already discussed,

foreign news was seldom consulted by young people and as a result they lack the knowledge needed to make a judgment on global issues. Therefore adopting foreign news reports could connect young people to an undeveloped area of their news literacy.

Modern ideas of news literacy education highlight the importance of encouraging global news literacy, and using Western news cases in news literacy education connects young people to global stories. In addition, as debated in Section 2.6.2, becoming global citizens does not only mean that young people are supposed to know more about what happens in different geographic regions, but also that they should be able to connect the stories to wider backgrounds. Making connections between stories and the larger framework of society involves having a social understanding, the ability to consider news as a complex interplay between local and cultural forces, rather than a uniform imposition of global news culture (Reese 2012).

Learning news values as tools of critical analysis on news

Zaller (1999) defines high quality news, as high-quality information about matters of general political or social significance. The results of this study have shown that young people's ways of evaluating news were unstructured, and follow no set patterns. They paid more attention to the language of the news narrative, the quality of its images, and so on. They did care about the credibility of the news reports, and some of them valued the authoritative status of the speaker (see Section 5.3.1), and tended to notice whether a report was balanced (by which they meant "each side has the right to speak to the camera"). This revealed that their judgments can be clouded by ostensible balance and objectivity, which indicates their difficulty in distinguishing between biased and objective news reporting.

Therefore, news literacy education is responsible for providing specific and in-depth knowledge of news values to young people, moving beyond the introduction of the concepts. Students need to see how the news values work within news reports. For instance, when teaching news objectivity, students need to be provided with examples of news reports, and to understand why it is considered to be objective, or why it fails to provide a balanced view.

Given their general way of judging news quality, participants in this research were very casual consumers, arbitrarily deciding if a news report is good journalism or not, based on rather flimsy impressions they had about news outlets. More often than not, young people paid more attention to the appearance rather than the substance of news reports. That indicates that news literacy education needs to help students develop their intellectual tools, to critically evaluate the types and sources of information they come across every day, rather than limiting the critical evaluation in news literacy education classes.

In order to develop the ability of critical analysis, simply knowing the news values or criteria of quality news is not sufficient. In fact, young people's failing in understand news is often associated with lacking literacy in a broader term rather than a mere lack of news literacy (see Section 5.3.3). In addition to introducing news values and associating them with specific cases, young people need broader information on news backgrounds and the society and culture where such news originates from, endeavouring to obtain a comprehensive understanding of news.

D) Providing Knowledge of the social reality relative to media

Given the gaps between the Chinese media and their Western counterparts, and considering the emotional responses young people made about national news during

the focus group interviews (see Section 4.5), this researcher would argue that Chinese young citizens should be provided with a news literacy education that also stresses rational analysis of news while still acknowledging the social context of Chinese news and differences between national and Western news.

Young citizens need more knowledge about the history of Chinese journalism and social reality in China, which may help them to understand how the news culture of China has been formed, and rationally understand its advantages and drawbacks. They ought to know that the drawbacks of national news relate to the long centralised type of organisation and patriarchal tradition that China has seen, rather than to any current political restriction. They need to realize that democracy is a firmly rooted culture rather than a policy or social system.

China controls its media to avert possible violence (Yang 2003). Social networks have been a significant force in bringing ‘angry youth’ together in many parts of the world. This researcher would suggest that in countries like China, it is better for young people to see new media as a civilising influence on democracy rather than a force for violence.

As previously discussed, democracy is a culture rather than a regime, and it cannot be firmly planted into a country by mere changes in policy. If young citizens act like radical citizens or ‘angry youth’, and use media as a tool to gather irrational emotions, it is inevitable that the government will push harder on media restrictions. But if they understand the roots which caused the conditions of national media, and speak less radically online, making mild, rational conversations in public discussions, the online debate will be carried out in a peaceful way instead of causing upheavals. If the online environment and society remain stable, it is possible for the government to relax the vigilance and restriction against new media, and there are great chances for positive

dialogues between official and citizens' voices. To sum up, enhancing young citizens' knowledge of the social reality of media, letting them see national mainstream journalism more unemotionally, and educating them to see new media not as a place of rebellion will probably help facilitate a conversation between the government and the young.

6.3.2.2 Enhancing news literacy education after school

News literacy cannot be achieved by schools alone in China, if we aim to guide young citizens to develop a relationship between young people and news in terms of making critical and active citizens. It needs effort from individuals as well, besides being part of the school curriculum. In terms of implementing modern ideas of citizenship, when the news media and education departments are state-controlled, and the content and quality of news literacy education in terms of democracy cannot be guaranteed. Besides, as we have seen in this study, the reasons why the young fail to understand news are various and not confined to the realms of news literacy, or information literacy; they also refer to political and social understanding. In this regard, news literacy requires teachers with various capacities. However, currently, in schools, apart from the specific domains such as language, mathematics, and biology, teachers are not fully equipped for all these capacities. The result is that, school curriculums in China are not ready to provide full-scale news literacy education. So an applicable suggestion here would be to encourage students to develop news literacy by themselves.

That is to say, with the skills learned from school, young people will be trained for the digital skills of media usage; in doing so students would be able to connect to the information (including background material or certain specific areas of knowledge) they need to understand news reports with the help of digital media. The internet

helps young people to stretch a news story by offering additional hyperlinks for related information. That is to say, with the digital skills obtained, young people can personalize their consumption of news, to choose what they would like to pay attention to, which story they would like to dig into or expand, to examine its credibility by checking information from other reports, and so on. To sum up, with digital skills, broader literacy can be obtained by the young themselves via new media—the young will be able to customize a news diet that suits them.

Reese (2012) has argued that the global news arena has brought pressures towards the transparency of news in individual countries, with the result that slanted or false news in individual countries is challenged by other international news organizations and audiences. With regards to this, in the global news arena, if national (Chinese) news is not credible enough, this would not necessarily drive young people away from news. It is possible for them to use other resources (such as news from other agencies or the reflections from audiences) to check the information they receive. That is to say, with the news transparency produced by the open, globalized news environment, the criticism caused by young people's low trust on national news would not prevent them from being rightly informed. On the contrary, through information seeking and checking, this criticism has the potential to convert into scepticism. In light of this, if young people apply the digital skills and analysis abilities in their daily news consumption, after school news consumption would be as effective as the curriculums in enhancing young people's news literacy, for they would have more freedom in linking to whatever news sources they need, thereby connecting themselves to a wider news supply and more dynamic opinions.

6.3.3 Recommendations

Suggestions for journalists

Young people failed to identify themselves as citizens during their consumption of news (see Section 4.2.3) and thought news was irrelevant to their lives—even news concerning young people’s issues. Hence, a more relevant form of news is needed. In order to fulfil this, journalists should communicate more with young audiences—not only for constructing narratives that are comprehensible to the young, but also to understand their ‘news needs’. To reach the young audiences, a journalist needs the capacity to make news reports legible and engaging for citizens, including the young. Young people’s status as producers of content should be acknowledged by journalists, and their participation should be considered a contribution to the pluralism of news in the digital age.

Further, rather than blaming young citizens for their low appetite for news or insufficient news literacy, current news production ought to keep pace with their changing competencies so as to accommodate young audiences. For example, news producers need to provide news on a multimedia platform with links to relative information. In addition, in order to satiate young people’s appetite, news needs to allow for some elements of entertainment and sometimes put serious discussions in some entertaining forms. This will create a more diverse news environment capable of satisfying citizens with different preferences and of different needs.

The above suggestions, however, do not mean that news producers ought to lower their standards to fit younger audiences, although sometimes young people are not literate enough to comprehend news reports. On the contrary, young citizens expect an improvement in the quality of news, and strongly feel that traditional news values such as objectivity, balance and depth are required in news. They have also added new standards to measure quality of news: interesting, interactive, visually impressive

or memorable, etc (see Section 4.4.2). As Johnson (2006, cited by Meijer 2006) pointed out:

“Popular media have sharpened young people’s minds by continuously confronting them with a steady stream of increasingly complex and multi-layered stories. More and more young people have become accustomed to multitasking and are able to keep up with a much higher visual pace, open endings, a broad range of characters, styles, multiple-threaded narratives and complex subject matter ” (p. 21).

This suggests journalists ought to pay attention to the new standards of news quality, embracing more possibilities of news, rather than stopping with just the traditional news values. As indicated in Section 6.2.4, considering the dilemmas in the relationship between young people and quality news, journalists should provide young people with a more abundant news diet with news suits for different literacy levels and various news appetites.

Suggestions for news literacy educators

From analysis presented above, we can conclude that there are two problems currently in China’s news literacy education. The first is the young people’s inability to comprehend news. The second is that there exists a significant gap between young people’s news demands and what is available to them in the form of national news. Evidences showed while young people were adapting themselves to the digital era of news consumption, current news literacy education did not keep up with the trend. Several suggestions can be put forward to improve the situation.

Considering young people’s general attitudes towards news, educators should have a more positive perspective on youth citizenship. Rather than criticising their infrequency in engaging with news and content creation, news literacy educators need

to reflect on how young people are defined by society and how they are presented in the media. Young people should have the right to take part in social events and political discussions, and also in making news. Given their enthusiasm in being citizen journalists, citizen news might be a good way to promote their citizenship awareness.

Given young people's preferred way of consuming news and the types of news they regularly consume, news literacy education ought to involve more types of popular news reports rather than just focusing on serious news. Indeed, in order to raise young people's news literacy and to enhance their understanding of in-depth news coverage, news literacy education demands the introduction of high quality news. Therefore, news literacy education needs to break the distinction between serious news and soft news, bringing depth to traditionally defined soft news materials. For instance, some human stories, such as celebrity news, could refer to politicians thus combining popular content with serious content which can develop in-depth reports.

Appropriate news literacy education will help resolve young people's lack of news literacy. It is a good idea to involve political education in news literacy education, as introducing political knowledge could help students understand the background of news reports. However, this will be effective only if the educators are aware of what young people need. This requires educators to begin with young people's demands, rather than execute an education that is compulsory and top-down.

Educators of news literacy need to be aware that the current curriculum for news literacy has little appeal to students. Young citizens see it not only as dull, but as a burden. Thus, it is important for educators to reflect on the result of their work. They need to participate in a dialogue with young people, and adjust media education considering young people's requirements. Old forms of news education such as

keeping notes on news reports, if they continue, need to connect with young people's interest in news, and to develop young people's critical thinking about news rather than just keeping the note. Though it would be difficult for young people to change the status quo of Chinese journalism on their own, at least the roles that news literacy education are now playing in their lives could be negotiated. News literacy education must endeavour to build a better relationship between young people and news, and fill the gaps in their knowledge by providing a more pluralistic view on journalism, and better experiences of consuming news.

Whilst connecting young people to global news, the relationship between young citizens and national news cannot be neglected. News literacy education and the cultivation of a sense of citizenship should be developed respecting the Chinese news culture. Though being brought up in an age of media globalisation, and tending to hold Western values about news, Chinese young people are still rooted in their national culture, and Chinese journalism, as it is executed today, still influences them significantly. It is essential to build a media education model that can accommodate both the young audiences' demands and the cultural characteristics of news they are used to. In this regard, the study suggests that the media education model in Hong Kong may serve as a more valuable reference point than Western models for China, as Hong Kong and mainland China share the same cultural background and traditional values. For instance, as addressed in Chapter One, parental authority is a strong influence on the young people in China (Liu 2010). The Hong Kong model of media education, where parents are encouraged to view/use media products with their children, aligns well with Chinese traditions. Further, the Hong Kong model also encourages media education in communities, which is in tune with the collectivism spirit of Chinese culture ¹⁴.

¹⁴<http://www.docin.com/p-204905311.html>

News literacy educators also need to be aware of young people's cynicism towards Chinese news, given how young people evaluate the criteria of quality news and the performance in their news reports evaluation. Evidence shows that young people held cynical views towards Chinese journalism and tended to believe in Western-based news culture, while they were not sophisticated in understanding either. That is to suggest, news literacy education is responsible for interpreting how news values make sense to students in association with journalism in the real world, rather than being responsible for theoretically introducing ideal news professionalism while being blind to the realities of contemporary journalism.

In the light of this, news literacy education needs to be alert to the effects of teaching the idealistic Western-based journalistic professionalism. It needs to build students' critical thinking in responding to local news culture and current events. If news literacy education is built on the ideal of journalistic professionalism, students may be frustrated with the fact that journalistic practice today does not meet the idealistic vision we have for it as the watchdog on power and catalyst to democracy. If students leave the course having higher expectations for journalism without the reasonable understanding of local news culture and social reality, this may result in cynicism, which could increase their apathy towards news.

At any rate, bridging the gap between young people's demand for news and the deficiencies of China-made news is not a simple task. Implementing news literacy education in a bottom-up manner (rather than top-down) has the potential to help. News literacy education should systematically introduce how Chinese values have evolved historically, and compare them to Western news values. In addition, some concepts such as news objectivity need to be introduced in-depth, even as critical thinking is fostered. This may help alleviate the antipathy youngsters have towards conventional news in China and also balance out their admiration for Western news and values.

6.4 Limitations and further research

6.4.1 Limitations of this study

The findings of this study cannot be generalised, given the limited number of people interviewed. Thus, the scope for extrapolating the news consumption patterns described in this thesis is limited. Moreover, this research does not cover all types of news reports that help shape the perspectives of the young audiences in China—for instance, the researcher did not attempt to investigate weather and sports news, or financial news. A more comprehensive study involving a broader range of news topics may have produced different results.

The range of news examples used in this study was also limited. In order to ensure sufficient responses to each type of news report, the news topics were chosen by participants and only comprise the ones that they felt interested in. Thus, the study is confined to news that young people recalled, which means that the stories studied in this research might be news stories that young people were most impressed with, and not necessarily quality news.

Significantly, the data in this study was based on a small number of interviewees and only focused on a limited age group, who are busy focusing on schooling rather than engaging themselves in media consumption. Their patterns of media usage may not be dynamic enough. There are strong indications that the ways of consuming news in China are changing, and that new, and more complex patterns have emerged. However, a longitudinal study involving participants from a range of ages and backgrounds is needed to document such changes in the general population.

This study employed a qualitative method, employing only 40 student participants in in-depth interviews and 72 in focus groups. It is recommended that future researchers conduct a broader inquiry, with more interviews so that the findings are more generalizable. The primary objective of this research was to explore teenagers' perspectives on news in China by analysing their reactions to examples of news reports. However, the samples adopted are still specific reports, and could possibly be different from the general profile of news coverage. As a result, there might be some bias in the sample selection that has influenced the findings of this study. Hence, it is suggested that future researchers attempt a broader study, both in terms of the number of participants and also the news samples used.

Further, the importance of Chinese culture on young people's attitudes to news should be considered more thoroughly in future studies. It has been argued that thinking about politics is a cultural phenomenon and should consider individual experiences and factors such as class, race, age, gender, education, etc. (Conover 1988). Unfortunately, due to the limited number of participants in this study, the researcher was not able to divide them into specific groups and hence has only attempted a general description.

Because of the absence of democratic citizenship in traditional Chinese culture, it was hardly possible to relate young people's awareness of Chinese citizenship to their news consumption and engagement patterns. Hence, although based on the characteristics of Chinese young people, this research has not systematically associated citizenship to young people's specific ways of consuming news or to their particular perspectives on news. For example, this study did not examine whether young people with a greater sense of citizenship during their consumption of news are more likely to consider the democratic rather than the entertainment function of news. Citizenship is a vague idea for most young Chinese people, who are confused between the local and global ideas about it; thus citizenship is hard to address specifically in

this context. It would be beneficial to study how young people's definitions of citizenship have changed with the development of globalised journalism, but this requires a long-time study with a historical view, and currently, the existing research concerning Chinese young citizens is not sufficient to provide an answer.

Another issue needs to be addressed here is the translation. The languages translation is a common problem in research when it comes to qualitative data (Beate 2014). In this research, more often than not, different participants used near synonyms which generally only needed the same English word in translation. However, although the English word may have correctly translated a participant's Chinese word, there was the possibility that it did not capture all the shades of meaning of a participant's word. The possibility also remains that there may have been shades of difference of meaning in participants' answers which this study did not adequately capture.

In addition, some of the translations might not be precise enough to convey the most accurate meaning. This could be misleading when it happened to key words or important concepts in this research. For example, young people's feelings of news were described by themselves as 'qing xu hua', which I used the English word 'emotional' to translate since that was the English word that could best convey the meaning. However, the word 'qingxuhua' has a range of possible meanings or connotations, which includes sentimental, moody and emotive, although it also expresses the meaning of being emotionally swayed by the content of news. I made the decision to use 'emotional' to translate this word because it had the fewest negative connotations.

I would like to suggest that young people's ideas about news were inconstant, based on feelings rather than on reasons, and 'emotional' in this study did not necessarily

suggest that young people were moody. But using this word is still likely to give English readers a false impression that this description had a negative hint.

In this study, all the interviews were conducted in Chinese, yet the majority of the literature review was western-based and the theoretical framework was in English. This being the case, another problem of using two languages is the variance of understanding certain terms in different social contexts. This problem turned out to be more apparent when it came to key concepts. For example, “citizens/ citizenship” (Gong Min in Chinese) were understood differently by Chinese and western people. When I interviewed the participants, I asked ‘what was good Gong Min’ in their opinions. ‘Gong Min’ in China is usually thought as “good person” or ‘good resident’, and participants naturally considered this question with their Chinese way of understanding the concept and thus did not associate the idea of ‘citizens’ with news and public events. As a result, when this concept was involved in the questions during the interview, Chinese participants did not consider this idea referring its political implications such as the responsibilities to engage in public events. Consequently, this caused obstacles in fitting the interviews into the western-based theoretical framework within which the word ‘citizens’ exists.

In future work, greater importance need to be attached to translation issues, considering the accelerating pace of internationalization in research, and comparative international research in particular, and the growing importance of multiculturalism in social research.

6.4.2 Further studies

This thesis has underlined a series of gaps in the relationship between young citizens and Chinese news. While new media have increased the possibilities for young

citizens to participate in making news, it is safe to say that new media on its own cannot guarantee an informed citizenry or create quality journalism.

The response from the participants of this study indicates that the gap between young citizens and news is not just caused by young people's deficiency in news literacy or the conventions of Chinese journalism. It is linked to a broader cultural context and social environment, both of which are subjects of political governing.

By far the biggest challenge to the news engagement of Chinese youngsters identified by this study is that young audiences use Western values to judge the quality of Chinese news. The question then is, are young citizens' perspectives on news able to influence the development of news and news literacy education? Do journalism and news literacy education make efforts to address the issues and try to fix the gap between themselves and young audiences?

While the study has only concentrated a particular age group, its approach has the potential to open up a series of avenues for future studies. One possible path is to explore how young people's views on news direct their news consuming behaviour. Likewise, it is equally possible to explore how young people's news literacy impacts upon their news using behaviour in a more specific way. For instance, it would be interesting to explore whether an enhanced ability to understand news texts would result in their preferring text news reports to those in the form of video; or whether young people's aptitude in understanding news texts would motivate them to create news in texts rather in other media forms in citizen journalism. It would also be worth exploring whether young people learning the skills to make news reports is positively related to their interest in participating in citizen journalism.

‘Public’ has long been an indispensable concept in journalism studies. Although this study was not focused on ‘public’ while examining news and young audiences, the examination of ‘public’ is still intimately related to future studies when discussing news literacy education- since the ‘public’ concept is inevitably necessary when discussing news in terms of its democratic function. After all, the overall aim of news literacy education is to connect young people to news as responsible citizens and to encourage them to participate in and contribute to public journalism. Therefore, the connection between news and ‘public’ is a significant issue for future research and journalism studies need to pay close attention to what users of particular groups (teenager news audiences, for example) need and are interested in. This change can be facilitated through developing the news literacy education curriculum to exploit the interest of young people in digital media.

In any case, a more open-minded and dynamic approach to engage citizens in news and news-making will be crucial for a successful news strategy: an approach that allows for increased conversation between young people and journalists. Much more investigation needs to be conducted into the reasons for young people's disconnection from news, with more comprehensive analyses of the apparent gaps between young people and news. This investigation also needs to examine young people's news preferences and literacy and how their participation as young citizens might contribute to a paradigm shift in Chinese journalism.

Young people, their news literacy, news media and participation are elements that worth developing further with attention to how they interact with each other. The above elements, as well as their relationships, need to be examined in association with the specific cultural context and social reality. In China, there is a lot to develop in probing how young people’s behaviour in their participation in citizen journalism contribute to the development of national news, and how to shape news literacy education according to young people’s changing relationship with news. In terms of

engendering democratic intercourse between young citizen and news, given that state policies are still influential to news literacy education and youth news participation, the future challenges for enhancing the relationship between young people, news and news literacy are enormous.

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Appendices

Appendix I Interview questions for students

Questions of the pilot study (a small survey): young people's general perspectives on news

Questions	Information to obtain from this question	Relevant studies	Gaps identified in previous research
What is news in your mind?	Definitions of news in their words	Theories regarding the definition and function of news	Whether young people are interested in news
What does news means to you?/ why do you watch/ read news?	The role that news plays in their life	The role of news to inform citizenry	

Questions for the focus group interviews

Questions regarding young people's consumptions of news

Questions	Information to obtain	Relevant studies	Gaps identified in previous research
How do you get/ access news?	Frequently used news media	Young people's consumption of news	Whether young people have a sense of citizenship in their consumption of news
What kind of news do you like?	News preferences	Young people's preferred news style	
How long do you spend on media each day? And how long on news?	Whether news takes a portion in media activities	Young people's use of media and their consumption of news	

Questions regarding young people's attitudes towards Chinese news

Questions	Information to obtain	Relevant studies	Gaps identified in previous research
Are you happy with current news? Why or why not?	Young people's satisfactory of news use	Use and gratification	Whether young people are sophisticated news consumers
Do you believe in present news?	Young people's new trust	News credibility	
How do you expect Chinese journalism to develop?	How young people expect of the future of Chinese news		

Questions regarding news literacy education

Questions	Information to obtain	Relevant studies	Arguments in previous research
Would you like to have news literacy education?	Young people's attitude toward news literacy education	What do young people need from news literacy/ what news literacy should do for young people	What digital literacy consists of?
What do you think it should contain? What would you like to get from media education?	Young people's demands and expectations of news literacy education		How to implement news literacy education in curriculums?
How do you feel about current forms of news literacy, for example, keeping notes of news as homework?	Young people's attitudes towards current news literacy education		

Questions prepared for intensive interviews

Questions regarding general ideas of quality news

Questions	Information to obtain	Relevant studies	Arguments in previous research
What is high quality news in your opinion?	How young people think high quality news should be like	News quality Whether young people are news literate (what they already know about news and what they do not)	Whether young people are sophisticated news consumers
What are the characters/ criteria of high quality news	Their criteria of evaluating news quality		
How do you define news objectivity? What do you think objective news should be like? What is balanced news in your eyes?	Their comprehension of the key elements of quality news		What should news literacy education do to fill the gap between young people and news
How do you judge whether a news story is objective or not?	How young people evaluate news objectivity		

Questions of news reports evaluation

Questions	Information to obtain	Relevant studies	Arguments in previous research
Do you think this is a good report? Why you think it is good/ or not good enough?	How young people think high quality news should be like	News quality How news should adjust itself to involve more young audiences	Whether young people are capable of identifying quality news How to improve young people's capacity of understanding news?
Why do you think this report is objective/ balanced/ in-depth (or not)?	Their comprehension of the key elements of quality news	Whether young people are capable of analysing news reports	What news needs to do to enhance the relationship between young people and news?
Where do you think the report could improve?	How young people would like to enhance the quality of the reports		

Appendix II Interview questions for parents

Question	What information do you hope to get from this question	Relevant studies	Arguments in previous research
Do you limit your child's media use? Would you do anything to guide your child in media use?	Parents' interferences of young people's consumption of news	Young people's consumption of news and parental influences	What parents could do to guide young people's use of media
How do you feel about your kid's media use?	The attitude of parents of young people's media use		What parents could do to develop children's citizenship
What do you think news should be like in your kids' life?	Expectations of the role that news plays in kid's life		
Do you have any expectations for his or her citizenship development?	citizenship development from views of parents	Young people's citizenship and family influences	
How do you feel about their news education? How do you feel about their news education at school?	Parents' attitudes toward news education	Not found	Not found

Appendix III Interview questions for teachers

Questions	What information do you hope to get from this question	Linking with literature	Arguments in previous research
Do you think news is important to young people?	How teacher think news may affect students	The relationship between young citizens and news	Teachers' role in news literacy education What teachers should do to enhance young people's citizenship as well as digital skills in news literacy education classes?
Do you think it is necessary to have news education ?			
What do you think should be contained in the news education?			
Do you think news is related to citizenship development?			
Is there any kind of news education in your school? Is it effective?	News education in practice	News literacy and school curriculum	What teachers should do to improve news literacy education?
What do you suppose news literacy should be like? Do you have any suggestions?	Teacher's opinions of current news education		
What kind of issues you are concerned in current news literacy?			

Appendix IV News samples

1 introduction of the 723 Fast train tragedy:

New York times reports

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/25/world/asia/25train.html?ref=world>

BBC REPORTS

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-14271163>

2: the Guo Meimei Event

http://shanghaiist.com/2011/06/24/showing_off.php

China Red Cross cluster fooled by a 20-year-old brat

Only shortly after a scandal involving the the Red Cross' financial management was uncovered, they have to deal with another scandal. This one involving a bratty rich 20-year-old mini-blogger called "Baby Guo Meimei" (郭美美 Baby), openly flaunting all her riches (huge villa, designer handbags, luxury cars and high end cosmetics) on Sina Weibo, China's Twitter. And, she claims to be the general manager of Red Cross Commerce, allegedly a company that handles advertising for the Red Cross on vehicles.

Her money flaunting ways prompted quite a few to conclude that she might be wasting Red Cross charity money to finance her lavish lifestyle. Many have since decided to boycott the Red Cross Society of China.

Later, Guo Meimei was connected with Red Cross Society of China Vice-President Guo Changjiang. A netizen claimed that the vice president had a microblog that followed only four other people's microblogs. One of them belonging to Guo Meimei. Guo Changjiang's blog was deleted only shortly after those claims were made. There were also claims that Guo Meimei might in fact be his daughter, an accusation denied by one of his staff members, who says Guo Changjiang only has a son.

It was then not only denied by the Red Cross Society of China that Red Cross Commerce even existed, but that they ever had an employee named Guo Meimei. On

Wednesday, Guo Meimei herself wrote on her micro blog that she had no relationship with the Red Cross Society of China or Guo Changjiang, and that she was indeed an actress and hurt by the negative responses:

"I am an actress the rumors have hurt me," she wrote. "I and my family members are taxpayers. How can people attack us about how we spend our money?"

And indeed, curious netizens uncovered that, in the past she worked as a model and actress, in Shenzhen, but was little known to the public. Her family apparently is not wealthy, and are said to now be wondering how, in the last two years, she has become this rich.

To make things even more complicated and confusing, some microbloggers are calling the Red Cross claims that Red Cross Commerce does not exist false, and calling Guo Mei Mei a "second wife":

According to some personal microblogs and some official media microblogs, there is indeed a commerce under China Red Cross Society, and this commerce nominated Shenzhen Tianlue Group (深圳天略集团) to help persuade people to participate in a fundraising events. And after they raise money, they will share some of the fund. The current president of Shenzhen Tianlue Group is Qiu Zhenliang (丘振良), and according to one netizen's disclosure, Qiu Zhenliang met C-Class model Guo Meimei in Shenzhen, and has an intimate relationship with her. Guo Meimei should be a second wife kept by Qiu Zhenliang.

All this drama, many claim (one being Zhao Zizhong, a professor at the Communication University of China) is likely to be staged by an attention-whore. If this is true, we bet the Red Cross isn't very happy about that. If this whole thing really is only to get attention, congratulations, the plan worked: The number of the rich girl's followers on Sina Weibo shot up from several hundred to more than 108,000 by yesterday night.

By Nele Diels

Appendix 5 The Gaddafi news series (for testing participants news literacy and find out why they fail to understand news)

Baidu- top 20

<http://international.caixun.com/content/20120807/NE037ab1.html>

a 叙利亚总理叛逃 巴沙尔不会走卡扎菲老路

2012年 08月 07日 20:34 已有 4453 人阅读 字号: **T** | **T** 复制链接 打印

[财讯网]据叙利亚国家电视台 6 日报道，总统巴沙尔免去总理里亚德·希贾卜的职务。另据多家媒体报道，希贾卜被策反，已脱离巴沙尔政府，加入反对派，成为自去年叙国内爆发冲突以来，脱离叙政府的最高级别官员。

这次高调的叛逃行动被美国解读为巴沙尔政权已经濒临崩溃的边缘，使叙现政府的命运和叙利亚的前途再次成为众所关注的焦点。美国国务院和国防部甚至悄悄抓紧制定应急方案，以防叙总统巴沙尔·阿萨德下台后出现安全真空，准备安置难民、维持市政服务和重建经济。

再加上此前安南特使的辞职（背景故事？）以及叙政府和反对派在阿勒颇的大决战（**what happened and who won?**），似乎各方在叙利亚问题上即将摊牌，或许在未来的一个月之内叙利亚局势将发生根本性的转变。但叙利亚巴沙尔政府与反对派鹿死谁手，巴沙尔的去与留当前下结论还为时过早，还要看阿勒颇之战的最后结果。

当前，反对派武装“叙利亚自由军”正加紧在第二大城市阿勒颇与政府军展开激战，其他城市也有武装冲突发生，战火有扩大蔓延的趋势。军事专家称，阿勒颇之战是叙利亚所有战争的“战斗之母”，实际上也是如此。

若反对派赢得阿勒颇之战，不仅将控制国内第二重要的城市，而且将掌握连接土耳其的关键口岸，获得更多武器和物资援助，那时西方国家军事叙利亚将顺理成章，利比亚的一幕也将在叙利亚重新上演。

对叙利亚政府军而言，一旦阿勒颇失守，可能意味着第一块多米诺骨牌的倒下，其连锁反应将是无法承受的。若叙利亚政府军取胜，将会大大提升政府军的士

气，严重削弱反对派武装的气焰，更能制止西方国家军事介入叙利亚危机的可行性，或许在接下来反对派武装会被一一清剿，甚至被赶出叙利亚。

自从去年卡扎菲被杀，人们就把目光转向叙利亚，叙利亚是否会成为下一个利比亚？实际上，叙利亚和利比亚是不同的，巴沙尔也不会走上卡扎菲的老路。

一方面利比亚是一个部落国家，所以当“宗主”卡扎菲失去地位的时候，其实所有人都在抢夺自己的地盘，而这种行为就是看起来的墙倒众人推，更重要的事实就是卡扎菲的势力实际上并不在首都圈，而是防卫着自己的部落，尤其是首都失陷让反对派有了更大的底气。

二看兵力，叙利亚有 30 万的军队，20 多万的陆军，是卡扎菲绝对不能相比的。卡扎菲一共 7 万多人，真正的陆军也就 5 万多人。而且叙利亚政府军装备要比卡扎菲好得多，西方是不是光靠空中力量就想解决还是个未知数。

三来，美欧很难获得武力攻打叙利亚的借口。这一点从中国与俄罗斯曾三次联手在安理会否决涉叙决议，在联合国大会涉叙问题上两次投反对票就可见一斑。而利比亚不同，在联合国通过了设立禁飞区的决议，为欧美武力攻打利比亚提供了借口。如果欧美绕过了联合国对叙利亚大打出手，那么其他势力也不会坐视不利，很有可能爆发中东的大规模战争。

对于俄罗斯而言，叙利亚塔尔图斯港极具军事战略重要性，是俄罗斯在独联体国家以外唯一的海军后勤基地，也是俄罗斯的军火市场和铁杆盟友。中国在叙利亚问题上的立场，一方面是体现了国际原则，联合国的公正性，另一方面有意支持叙利亚政府，虽然叙利亚与中国没有太大的直接关系，但是其与伊朗唇亡齿寒，而伊朗对中国的重要性，恐怕人人皆知，这也是中国力挺叙利亚的目的之所在。

实际上，叙利亚危机迟迟不能得到解决的背后原因是各国在叙利亚问题上各怀鬼胎，所以导致大国之间在叙问题上很难达成一致。当前叙利亚局势还处于僵持局面，对巴沙尔政权的存亡下结论还为时尚早，说其走上卡扎菲老路更是无稽之谈。


(牛琚琚 撰稿)

http://news.ifeng.com/world/detail_2012_07/31/16439149_0.shtml

b 中东媒体称卡扎菲儿子要被任命为尼日尔政府首席顾问

人民网 7 月 31 日电（安国章） 中东媒体报道说，目前有一条消息在利比亚民众中广为流传：已加入尼日尔籍的卡扎菲第三子萨阿迪将被任命为尼日尔政府首席顾问，未来几天尼日尔政府会对此发表正式声明。

据中东《祖国大地报》网昨天晚间报道，该报驻利比亚记者??利比亚作家阿斯阿德发表的几篇报道说，目前有一个消息在利比亚民众中广为流传：卡扎菲之子萨阿德将被任命为尼日尔政府首席顾问，未来几天尼日尔官方就此要发表正式声明。阿斯阿德还在报道中引用消息灵通人士的话说，“为了担任新职，萨阿迪已经搬入新居，他的新居位于尼日尔首都尼亚美富人区，靠近尼总统府，周围有严密的安全警卫。”

据报道，现年 39 岁的萨阿迪 [Saif al-Islam](#) 曾是利比亚一支精锐部队司令，去年 9 月初逃离利比亚到了邻国尼日尔，随后申请了政治避难。利比亚新政权曾要求尼日尔把他引渡回国接受审判，结果不仅遭到尼日尔的拒绝，还批准他加入尼日尔国籍。 

<http://world.cankaoxiaoxi.com/2012/0730/67558.shtml>

c 报：维基揭秘称阿尔及利亚出卖卡扎菲

转发到：2012-07-30 17:44 来源: [参考消息网](#)

核心提示： 《阿拉伯耶路撒冷报》援引维基揭秘网站发布的电报称，在卡扎菲距的黎波里 100 多公里的拜尼沃利德地区打过电话后，阿尔及利亚情报部门确定了他所在的地方，并告诉了英国同僚，因为当时英国特种部队正在追捕卡扎菲。

参考消息网 7 月 30 日报道 维基揭秘网站最近透露了有关卡扎菲被杀的一些新内幕。

据英国《阿拉伯耶路撒冷报》报道，维基揭秘网站发布的电报称，为了阻止卡扎菲与在阿拉伯马格里布国家的“基地”组织合作，阿尔及利亚希望消灭卡扎菲。

该网站说，在卡扎菲距的黎波里 100 多公里的拜尼沃利德地区打过电话后，阿尔及利亚情报部门确定了卡扎菲所在的地方，并将此情报告告诉了英国同僚，因为当时英国特种部队正在追捕卡扎菲。

美国驻利比亚外交官 2011 年 9 月 1 日发的这份电报指出，阿尔及利亚一位外交人士证实，在卡扎菲的妻子和儿女 2011 年 8 月 26 日去阿尔及利亚避难后，卡扎菲也曾要求到阿尔及利亚避难，但阿尔及利亚总统拒绝接听卡扎菲一再打来的电话。

http://news.ifeng.com/world/special/xuliya/content-3/detail_2012_07/20/16174111_0.shtml

d 突尼斯总统呼吁阿萨德下台以免重蹈卡扎菲覆辙

2012 年 07 月 20 日 09:46
来源: [国际在线](#)

国际在线专稿：据俄新网 7 月 19 日报道，据埃及媒体周四报道，突尼斯总统马尔祖基呼吁叙利亚现任总统阿萨德下台，以免重蹈卡扎菲被反对派击毙的覆辙。

马尔祖基说：“阿萨德应该尊重自己的人民，关心自己亲人的生活，并考虑不重蹈卡扎菲命运覆辙的问题。”

他认为：“阿萨德没有其它出路，只能把权力交给自己的副手。”

叙利亚当局与反对派之间的冲突已持续一年有余。今年 4 月，叙利亚冲突各方根据安南计划已宣布停火，联合国观察员负责监督停火协议的执行情况。尽管如此，反对派和政府军都定期传出有人员伤亡和冲突发生的消息。

联合国数据显示，叙利亚冲突中死亡的人数已超过 1.2 万人，约 23 万人成为难民，百万人需要人道主义援助。叙政府表示，超过 2500 名军人和执法机关工作人员在与反对派的武装冲突中死亡，更有超过 3200 名平民丧生。(陈述)

http://news.ifeng.com/world/detail_2012_07/09/15888142_0.shtml

e 卡扎菲官邸旧址将建利比亚“白宫”

2012 年 07 月 09 日 14:50

来源: [国际在线](#)

国际在线专稿: 据《卫报》8 日消息, 象征卡扎菲统治的阿齐齐亚兵营曾是黎波里最严密的禁地, 这里遍布地道、兵营和具有伪装意味的别墅, 卡扎菲一家和其前政权的高官就居住在这座“紫禁城”的重重高墙内。而随着利比亚 7 日迎来 40 多年来首次民主选举, 利比亚官员日前称, 将在阿齐齐亚兵营旧址上建立新国会大厅, 还计划建一所博物馆和图书馆。

具有 200 个席位的利比亚国民议会下月将取代利比亚全国过渡委员会, 然而新国会尚没有落脚地点。利比亚过渡政府日前已经做出计划, 将在阿齐齐亚旧址中心部位建立新国会大厅, 外加一所博物馆和图书馆。全国过渡委员会 (NTC) 秘书长奥斯曼·本萨希 (Othman Bensasi) 7 日晚对《卫报》记者表示, 其将就在阿齐齐亚兵营旧址上建新的国会大厅一事作出提议, “这十分紧迫。”

本萨希表示, 他希望新的国会大厅能在 2013 年下半年建成, 因为利比亚那时将举行新一轮大选。本萨希说, “阿齐齐亚兵营就在黎波里市中心, 届时人们可以走进去观光, 而不像卡扎菲时代连靠都不能靠近。这将使我们利比亚的‘白宫’。” (苏然)

http://news.ifeng.com/mil/3/detail_2012_07/09/15887202_0.shtml

f 卡扎菲政权兵营或改建为议会大厦 民众异议颇多

2012 年 07 月 09 日 14:21

来源: [中国日报网](#) 作者: 欧叶

据英国《卫报》7月8日报道，利比亚“全国过渡委员会”准备提议将卡扎菲政权的阿齐齐亚兵营改建为议会大厦。

利比亚“全国过渡委员会”秘书长奥斯曼·本·萨希7日告诉记者：“我将提出这个提议，这非常紧急。”由200位代表组成的新议会将在下个月取代“全国过渡委员会”，议会目前还没有办公地点。他希望议会大厦能在2013年年底竣工。

的黎波里一所大学的工程学教授阿卜杜拉·本·沙特对把阿齐齐亚兵营改建成新议会大厦计划持怀疑态度。他表示：“这里应该成为国家公园。的黎波里其他的绿地都被前政府用来建造自己的别墅了，我们需要这里的绿地。”

一个的黎波里居民说，如果议会选址在别处会更好，因为阿齐齐亚兵营里挥之不去的是暴政和独裁的阴影。另一个卖蛋的小贩建议把这里改建成办公室：“的黎波里是利比亚的商业中心，我们需要在这里做生意。”

阿齐齐亚兵营占地面积大约4公顷，多年来一直是卡扎菲及其家人居住的地方。卡扎菲政权倒台后，阿齐齐亚兵营成了一个垃圾场。（欧叶）

<http://news.sohu.com/20120615/n345729430.shtml>

g 利比亚高法取消“赞扬卡扎菲罪”

2012年06月15日14:22

来源：人民网

新华社上午电 利比亚最高法院14日宣布，接受律师申诉，不在法律条款中禁止民众赞颂前政权领导人卡扎菲。

上述条款原写入法律，由执政当局全国过渡委员会5月通过。按规定，赞颂卡扎菲及其支持者违反法律，须入狱服刑。

律师萨拉赫·迈尔加尼提起申诉，认为法律应确保利比亚的自由民主，“赞扬老卡罪”无异于违宪。最高法院14日宣布，裁定上述法律条款违宪。（来源：新民晚报）