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MSc in media and communication studies

Under the shade of rumour refutation

A critical analysis of #PoliceRefuteRumour campaign on Chinese social media

Mingyi Fang

Supervisor: Fredrik Miegel

Examiner: Mia-Marie Hammarlin

Abstract

Rumour refutation is a series of campaigns that the Chinese authorities invest in combating 'the overflow' of network rumours, especially since 2017. These campaigns reflect the Chinese's knowledge of rumour as false and harmful. Among which #PoliceRefuteRumours on social media platform Weibo is one of the most typical forms conducted most explicitly and exposed problematically. Through a qualitative text analysis to #PoliceRefuteRumours with theories of mythologies, discourse and civic culture, this research argues that the concept of rumour, although appearing concrete and specific, is ambiguous in its signification in the text of rumour refutation. Elements of factuality, harmfulness, subjectivities etc., overdetermine its meaning in a contingent sense. It is a floating signifier that obtains meaning in specific social contexts meanwhile implies the tendency for the prevails of a designated discourse. Such distortion from the ambiguous denotations to the specific concept of rumour is naturalised through a mythical mechanism.

The tension between texts based on the concept of rumour is a site for antagonisms that alternative interpretations exclude each other. However, such antagonisms show an asymmetrical manner for the uneven dispersion of struggles and the unbalanced discursive positions. In the name of the knowledge of the truth, rumour refutation is the hegemonic resolution of this antagonism accompanied by institutional violence. The legitimacy of such hegemonic intervention is argued an ideological manipulation of power and truth claims.

Under such circumstances, by noting the civic character of rumour, it is stressed that the hegemony projected in the rumour refutation text is about the conflicts between different modes of civic participation. Whereas rumours stand for an active mode of participation that remarks intervention and citizenship as rights, rumour refutation represents a normative mode of limited participation that emphasises consensus and citizenship as responsibilities. This project of normative participation in refutation text refers to the authorities' ideal of efficient civic communication with limited tolerance to the disorder of contested alternatives. It argues that the hegemonic intervention results in an ideological and mythical discourse that refers to the accordance with the normative society that authorities expect rather than the factual precision and authenticity. Therefore, such discourse of rumour refutation can not necessarily resolve ambiguity. Instead, it may hinder citizens from proper ways of active participation in civic life and harm its purpose of communicative efficiency.

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Introduction

As one of the oldest media genres (Kapferer, 1990), Rumour receives a renewed special treatment in Chinese social media. The Chinese authorities have released a series of regulations and laws to combat the overflow of rumours circulating on social media and other internetworks since 2017. Several institutions and organisations come up in recent years verifying and debunking the rumour currency. Not to mention the technical devotion of social media platforms to the detection and regulation of rumours. However, the continuous effort of systemic and practical actions does not seem to meet the mission of counter-rumours. ‘The creation of a rumour only needs a mouth; the refutation needs the effort to break one's leg.’ This popular slang shows the typical understanding of the relation between the rumour circulator and those who refute rumours. When it is complained the hard work to combat against rumours, it, on the other hand, implies the extremely negative impression of rumour. It is seen as the ‘dreadful monster’ that threatens society’s stability and harmony, the ‘virus’ that is hard to guard completely (Pang, 2019).

In Chinese language, it is ‘yaoyan’ (谣言) that is referred to in the text mentioned above. Although ‘yaoyan’ is almost consensually translated into rumour (Lei, 2016), it seems to differ in its very signification in Chinese context. In these accusations of rumours as dreadful monster or virus, ‘yaoyan’ has an apparent reference to *falsehood* and *malice*. On the other hand, in the contemporary sense, rumour implies the everyday practices of circulating *unverified* information (Shibutani, 1966, DiFonzo and Bordia, 2009). Based on the knowledge of this distinction, this research continues the direct interpretation between ‘yaoyan’ and rumour for that this taken-for-granted equation is also a part of the narrative of ‘yaoyan’, and they are also not so distinct from each other in real-life practice. A piece of ‘yaoyan’ can still have the side of the general understanding of rumour, while a rumour can also become the falsehood and malice. The constant dynamics between the two terms imply that there is the interplay between their inherent meanings. In the campaign of combating rumours, such interplay is under the specific structure of discourses.

One of the most typical forms of rumour refutation work is the #PoliceRefuteRumours# (*JingFangPiYao*, 警方辟谣) Campaign. It refers to the refutation work conducted by different branches of police institutions on Chinese social media, especially on Weibo. They use this hashtag to mark their post. It is typical because it is one of the few approaches of rumour debunk that directly refers to authoritative force and violence. Hence, it reveals the power structure

encompassed in the discourse of this rumour refutation campaign in the most straightforward way. In China, it is not rare that individuals in China received civil or criminal penalties for their actions of circulating rumours. While there is no crime direct about rumouring but in the name of slander or disrupting network security, the interplay of different meanings makes the punishment strongly related to rumour. Among these penalties, the previous study has already shown that there exist injustice actions (Hu, 2009). It hence exposed the problematic side of this campaign, the taken-for-granted discourse of rumour refutation and the apparent consensus between society and the institutions that rumour is false and harmful. It influences the public's ordinary practices of information exchange, sense-making and potential participation in public affairs. A recent case about the misbehaviour of police in rumour refutation related to the severe consequence of Covid-19 (which will extend further below) is another example that exposes the campaign's hindering influence on people's everyday communication and participation. Is the hostile attitude a deserved one for the one-going circulated rumours, is the rumour gets refuted complied with the definition, and more importantly, is the behaviour of refutation civilly legit? Considering that the refutation action, in this case, is representing the specific interest of the police and authorities, it is also another concern about which kinds of rumour are the target of this campaign.

While these problems have been exposed and considered by both the public and scholars, they are far from sufficiently discussed. Whereas the public's suspicious expression provides fragment evidence about this problem, the scholars in China attempt to treat these issues within the authorities' discourses of rumour refutation (Chang and Jin, 2010, Guo, 2020). However, it is hardly questioned how this campaign and the series of practices make sense. On the other hand, this rumour-refutation discourse is internalised in people's daily communication and scholar's dialogue. Citizens have already accepted this concept of rumour as such and even utilise rumour to attack messages that they conceive as unauthentic and thus need to be deleted; scholars in different disciplines contribute to the program for the better detection and prevention of the spread of rumours. In this case, the campaign of rumour refutation is not only about the actual actions conducted by different institutions but is already merged with people's everyday life. It refers to the resources of people's daily practices and interaction.

This research, therefore, asks for more critical insight into the cultural consequence of the action of rumour refutation. Approaching it, it takes #PoliceRefuteRumour# as a case study. By analysing

the textual patterns, it explores the symbolic mechanism and references that support the validity of different aspects and stages of this action. With the case interpreted through the scope of semiotics, discourse theory and civic participation, this research aims to critically engage with the textual presentation of the mechanism of the process of refutation. It attempts to understand the cultural and institutional recourses that make realise this specific elaboration of rumour refutation. It would portrait the structures and patterns among signs, discourse and the sociocultural context that construct this narrative of Police's refutation of rumour. It reflects on the implication of these refutation practices on the public's participation in civic society and thus examine the source of their civil legitimacy.

Based on the aims above, this analysis is formulated following these three research questions:

1. How is rumour conceptualized in the refutation texts by the #PoliceRefuteRumours# campaign?
2. How can we understand rumour refutation as the resolution of antagonisms between different discourses?
3. How do the antagonisms and its resolution of rumour refutation reflect civic participation and culture in the context of Chinese social media?

Literature review

The psychology of Rumour

The social scientific study of rumour originated mainly from psychological studies. While early psychological studies focused on the tension between a mechanical view of rumour as an inevitable product of message decay and a psychoanalytic approach (Donovan, 2007), in the mid-20th century, there was a shift to social psychology. Within which, Allport and Postman's study (1945) provided an influential insight of rumour. They understood rumour circulation as the process of 'explaining and relieving emotional tensions felt by individuals (p.49).' Contributing to this knowledge, the formulation of rumours was evaluated by two factors: importance and ambiguity of information (p.47). Through their experimental approach, they identified three characteristics of rumour formation and spreading, 'levelling', 'sharpening' and 'dissimilation'.

Rosnow (1988), continuing the social-psychological inquiry, treated rumour as 'public communications that reflect private hypotheses about how the world works (p.12).' He characterized the contextual nature of rumour. While rumour generation is a process of explanation, an attempt to make sense of change or novelty and what it portends for the future. This process extracts meaning from and gives meaning to the context in which it is situated (p.14). He also reviewed and criticized Allport and Postman's psychological studies and reflected that rumour results from the affective combination of uncertainty and anxiety (Rosnow, 1980). Contributing to his rumour theory, DiFonzo, Bordia and Rosnow (1994) provided, in turn, three typical stages which rumours go through: generation, evaluation, and dissemination.

Bordia and DiFonzo (2002) maintain their psychological approach but also emphasise the interpersonal and intergroup level of analysis. Combining the previous dialogues of the psychological circles with the dated empirical studies, they attempted to clarify the conceptualisations about rumour, its effects, motivations etc (DiFonzo and Bordia, 2007). In their understanding, Rumour transmission is heightened by its psychological characteristic of anxiety and uncertainty. On the other hand, it is also noticed the accuracy mechanism and trust in maintaining rumours' transmission. Compared with other forms of unofficial communication of ambiguous information, rumour is essentialised in its function to making sense of the current ambiguity and manage the threat. At the same time, gossip focuses on the context of social networking building. Incorporated ideas from early sociology, it is also noted the notion of culture

in the group mechanisms (p.174). The construction of rumour content is firmly the social representation of the cultural anchoring of certain collective understandings and beliefs. While they have noted the notion of social and group interaction, its focus on psychological patterns means the inability to handle the relation between the inside and the outside of the group and individuals. For instance, they remark the ambiguity of rumour but do not answer how such ambiguity is generated.

The (socio-)psychological approach to rumour supplies the fundamental knowledge of rumour, especially when it comes to the deep research in the factors of emotions, for instance, ambiguity and uncertainty. Although such perspectives have gone through frequent criticisms, it is still acknowledged that there is a continuity from psychology to today's studies. Therefore, to certain degree, this research is inevitably based on the legacy of this tradition, inspired by its theory and interpretation of rumours.

Rumour and public opinions

The early rise of the psychological study is particularly influenced by wartime and in the theme of rumour control (Donovan, 2007). Meanwhile, there was also the sociological concern of this phenomenon. Instead of seeing rumour as pathological, Shibutani (1966) argues rumours as an essential part of the social process that allows human beings to cope with the uncertainties of life. He understood rumour as the improvised news, 'a problem-solving activity by groups of people who are deprived of adequate information', thus rumour as a phenomenon is formulated through the collective transaction and public interactions. Shibutani's research started from the condition which the psychologists at that time often ignored: when institutionalized forms of communication do not provide sufficient information. It is also highlighted the context and spontaneity of rumour. 'It appears that a rumour may be successfully manufactured only under the same conditions under which it would develop spontaneously.' Holding this belief, he criticized the psychological analysis of rumour as tending to individualize it.

Similarly, Peterson and Gist (1951) also criticised the Allport-Postman approach as reducing the social context of rumour to a single chain of subjects and was explained in a uniform and pervasive psychological mechanism. Instead, they emphasised the social setting of rumour where there is tension between the public's interest and concern and the supply of authoritative information. The assumption that rumour is abnormal or pathological reflects the fact that 'the persons involved are

normally expected or accustomed to rely upon authority or upon a different kind of authority (p.160).’ They also saw the creative elaboration- ‘snowballing’ - in rumour circulation, rather than barely psychological mechanisms.

Kwon *et al.* (2013), in a more recent study, testified rumour as the improvised public opinion in the social media context. Their exploring of hostile rumour revealed the socio-historical antecedents in which public interpretations of the situation were rooted. The wedge-driving rumour represents the divisive public minds, of which understanding could help identify any problematic discursive practices and facilitate collective problem-solving.

To conceive of rumour as a sociological phenomenon rather than as a psychological one managed to release the study of rumour from the experiment situation but calls for a more complex societal context. It is focused on the tensions among individuals, collectives, and the institutional and authoritative settings. The interest in public opinion invokes a communicative approach and marks the potential of a political inquiry to it. It, therefore, reveals the civic meaning of rumour circulation in everyday communication.

Rumour and trust

Trust has been a keyword about rumours from the beginning of rumour study (Rosnow, 1988) and has been a trending topic in today’s survey of rumour detection and prediction (Tripathy *et al.* 2010, Hauke *et al.* 2010). However, it was rarely critically reflected. Difonzo and Bordia believe that trust and distrust play a central role in rumour transmission (2006, p.186). They comply with Shibutani (1966) and Kapferer (1990) that rumour is the unofficial or unsanctioned information that arises when people do not trust formal information. Low trust reduces the formal and official ways of communication and increases the need for collective informal sense-making. Trust, in their understanding, inhabits rumour activity.

On the other hand, they also noticed the moderating role of trust in rumour transmission, for that the degree of trust may influence people's response to interpretation. High levels of trust help people interpret ambiguous situations as friendly, while low trust invokes a hostile interpretation. Thus, low levels of trust may lead to the production and transmission regardless of anxiety and ambiguity.

Fine (2007), on the other hand, provides a more dynamic understanding of trust between the public and the institution. Unlike DiFonzo and Bordia, Fine’s idea of trust is not a sole variable that

moderates rumour but is the plural forces that can potentially be contested; it is political (Fine, 2007, p.7). He is consistent with DiFonzo and Bordia that rumour implies the distrust or the breakdown of institutional trust that there is a need for the alternative means of interpretation or approach to relevant information, while, on the other hand, Fine captured that rumour reveals the trust within communities. 'Rumour reveals trust in society at the moment that it questions trust in institutions (p.7).'

He identifies two types of politics of trust, where plausibility refers to the claim that is to be trusted, and credibility, the persons or sources to be credible or trustworthy. 'For rumour to work as communal knowledge, it must be treated as something that might reasonably happen in the world as we know it' (Fine, 2007, p.8). Plausibility is related to the feasibility of the trust claim of rumour information to allow citizens to construct a world compiled with their knowledge and belief. People believe the rumours which are 'too good to be false'. Credibility, on the other hand, refers to the feasibility of the sources of information. 'Credibility is the product of interaction regimes and of institutional position (p.9).'

Social status, reputation and authoritativeness are important factors that influence people's measuring of truth claim from specific informational resources. In the political manner, trust indicates the complex dynamics of rumour diffusion and negotiation with the linkage of the presence and absence of social trust.

The studies of trust transformed it from a variable for evaluation into a dynamic and organic component of rumour circulation. The complexity of degrees and types of trust and the tension between trust and distrust contribute to more political thinking about its function in rumour circulation. Trust hence is believed that plays a vital role in the negotiation between society and institutions. Not only is trust a factor that influences the effect of either rumour and refutation, but the intersection of rumour and trust is also the important site of civic contestation.

Rumour and the collective and community: the anthropological approach

There was another methodological and disciplinary shift in the study of rumour in a contemporary context (Donovan, 2007). While there was a marked decline of the interest in rumour in sociology in the 1970s, the discipline of folklore demonstrated a newfound interest in the subgenre 'contemporary legend' (p.68). The study of rumour, therefore, takes an ethnological or anthropological approach.

As continued with Donovan's idea, there has been a conceptual shift in the meaning or connotation of 'rumour'. Differed from the early pathological perspective of social psychology or the public perspective of sociology, the ethnological approach emphasized more the scope of community or group (Pendleton, 1998, Donovan, 2007). Harney (2006) has reviewed that the study of rumour in anthropology focused on the functionalist role of rumour at either 'reinforcing collective or community norms' or 'its divisive character revealing individual self-interest and the unequal and informal distribution of "information" or knowledge' (p.376)

Rumour is conceived as a means of community construction. Gluckman (1963) treated rumour and gossip as a form of community binding and emphasized the intersubjective factor. Rumour is the social glue that 'maintain the unity, morals and values of social groups,' and a mechanism 'to control... competing cliques and aspiring individuals (p.309).' On the other hand, Paine (1967) focuses on the individual interest and agency in rumours that is portrait as 'a powerful social instrument for any person who learns to manage it and can thereby direct or canalise its catalytic effect (p.283).' Their debate presents rumour as 'a potential site for negotiation between the individual and the state, for identity formation and for engagement with the community (Coast and Fox, 2015, p.228).'

Tuner's (1993) study on the rumour circulated among African Americans argued the congruity between some rumour and their functional concerns. Rumour served as the resources for the more political rejection towards economic patterns and racial oppression (Tuner, 1993, Donovan, 2007). Maqsood's (2019) ethnographical research of rumour and conspiracy theories in tribal Pashtuns army testifies their work and effects they have on relations, tensions and contradictions that rumours can simultaneously breed fear and confusion meanwhile 'help forge intimacy, and provide certainty and coherence' (p.464)

Along with this disciplinary shift, there also raised the attention of rumour in the methodological perspective. Kirsch (2002) and Harney (2006) both have explored the phenomenon of rumour through an ethnographic approach, examined how rumour information was circulated among group and communities (Harney, 2006) or how they understand, interpret, or engage with political and symbolic violence (Kirsch, 2002). Meanwhile, there is also the reflective argument of the application of rumour as empirical material in ethnographical work and analysis (Al Lily *et al.*, 2018. Brown, 2020).

To see rumour from the anthropological perspective means a view from the community. Hence, I argued that this perspective provides a more comprehensive interpretation of behaviour, interaction, and mentalities. In the face of the refutation from the authorities, an anthropological standpoint contributes to insight from below and within the group. The close observation of community interaction also contributes to previous topics of how rumour's functions in community formation and collective sense-making work.

Rumour, falsehood, and misinformation

It has been suggested that 'not only do models of explanation change but, rumours themselves also change – not just in content, but perhaps in the way they are believed or disbelieved' (Donovan, 2007). It implies the instability of the concept of rumours. It is noted that rumour is a buzzword and an umbrella term that includes several phenomena that share some characteristics (Rosnow, 1988, Donovan, 2007). While in the 1960s, the study of rumours is shifted to the discipline of folklore and thus at that period, rumour is almost entirely supplanted in English language scholarship by the 'urban legend' (Donovan, 2007). A more recent focus on the collective talk of public affairs is related to the discussion of misinformation and disinformation.

While it is demonstrated in the rumour study that truth or falsity is unknowable in rumour (Fine, 2007), rumour generally has a bad reputation as false information (DiFonzo and Bordia, 2006, p.8). Even in academia, the survey of rumours is still under the shades of this hypothesis of falsity. Typically, Kapferer (1992) maintained that rumours often arise from the false interpretation of messages and are 'perfect crimes that leave not the slightest trace and require no weapons (p.53).' It is false information that often catches scholars and experts' interest. The study of rumour detection or the modelling of rumour transmission always concerns the negative consequences of those rumours that are wrong or false (Takahashi and Igata, 2012, Jin *et al.* 2017, Hamidian and Diab, 2019). Their knowledge of rumour is often related to false rumours, misinformation, fake news or false trust.

Vasu *et al.* (2019) bring in the term DRUMS (distortion, rumours, untruths, misinformation, and smear) as the substitution for fake news to demonstrate that content distributed online that destabilises society. This group of categories is an ensemble consisting of a sharing family resemblance for that they are connected by a common essential feature but no shared essence. To illustrate this common essential feature, they provide 'six categories on a spectrum based on the

degree of threat they pose to society (p.x).’ Such threat is, closely concerning with falsehoods or beclouding of fact. In another case, rumour is seen as a particularly insidious form of misinformation that gains its power through the social transmission (Berinsky, 2015). In this understanding, rumour is believed the trouble for the prospects of democracy. The prevalence of misinformation can be a severe problem for the mass participation of the democratic system (p.243).

Rumour, to a certain degree, is used interchangeably with misinformation in several academic research (Berinsky, 2015, Aricat, 2017, Tasnim *et al.* 2020). This equivalence, however, leaves issues about the nuances between rumour and misinformation. While rumour is defined as unverified, unofficial, or unsubstantiated, misinformation implies explicitly misleading and falsehood. The shift from rumour to misinformation is typically taken for granted. It is acknowledged the distinction, but it is oddly hindered in practices. With such concerns about the falsity of rumour and misinformation, there is always urgent to detect, control, debunk and manage the transmission of these information flows because of the trustworthiness of the communication environment, democrat participation, social order, or security (Chen *et al.* 2018). Jerit and Zhao (2020), on the other hand, noted the distinction between rumour and misinformation that rumour obtained credibility through social transmission and occasionally turn out to be true, but misinformation is unambiguously false. Nevertheless, it is noted that this difference is easily blurred, and it is unclear whether rumours are a type of misinformation or a vehicle that spreads it.

More detailed knowledge of misinformation based on a threefold division of information, misinformation, and disinformation. While information is a term referred to as truth or factuality, misinformation and disinformation distinguish within ‘false information.’ Whereas these terms are from time to time applied interchangeably (Farkas and Schou, 2018), most scholars use them to distinguish unintentional and intentional false information. However, there is still a difference in their coverage. For some scholars, misinformation referred to all kinds of misleading information while disinformation is the subset of which is deliberately propagated (Guess and Lyon, 2020, p.11). Others see misinformation in a narrowed sense that implies merely the unintentional form of information (Farkas and Schou, 2018, p.299). An updated typology brings in another category of mal information that implies the information based on reality but is utilized to inflict harm on individuals, institutions, or states (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2018). They altogether constitute the phenomenon of ‘information disorder’.

A critical perspective to misinformation and disinformation may bring a different interpretation to the status of such typologies. Stahl (2007) attempted to conceptualise such typologies through the critical research of information system that since there is no universal theory of truth, the distinction between information, misinformation and disinformation is problematic; it is more interpreted as the forces that either emancipate human or alienate or disempowers them (p.91). In this case, the issue of either falsehood or truth is a contingent one that is open for debate. Hence, it opens the door for further critical insight of Habermasian or Foucauldian perspective that inquire topics of rationality, power, and ideology.

Farkas and Schou (2018) identify that under the shade of 'fake news', the claim of falsehood and false information has become an important component of political struggles. With the issue of truthfulness or falsehood suspended, the concept of 'fake news' is studied how it serves to produce political battlegrounds over social reality. Fake news is demonstrated as a signifier that lodged in-between different hegemonic projects, unitized by different positions within the social space as means of discrediting, attacking, and delegitimising political opponents (p.298).

In the western context, misinformation and attempt to correct it are as old as democracy itself. One of the most innovations designed to address the prevalence of misinformation has been fact-checking. It is defined as 'the practice of systematically publishing assessments of the validity of claims made by public officials and institutions with an explicit attempt to identify whether a claim is factual (Walter *et al.* 2019).' Walter *et al.*'s (2019) study testify fact-checking in correcting political misinformation and affect beliefs. It is noticed that truth scales of fact-checking influence the effectiveness of fact-checking.

The studies or rumour and misinformation are, to a certain degree, intertwined, especially when the rumour is interpreted as related to falsehood. Rumour and misinformation are two concepts that are theoretically mutually distinct but, on the other hand, one wall apart. They dialectically complement each other in the study of the process of rumour refutation. The studies of rumour suspend the issue of factuality/falsity by translating it as uncertain and unverified; it succeeds in approaching the ongoing circulation of rumour floating in the air. At the same time, the knowledge of false information contributes to the reflection when rumours are falsified.

Rumour, knowledge, and social truth

While rumour is not defined according to authenticity, there is the tendency in colloquial usage to assign 'rumour' the role of being a metaphor for falsity or distortion. It lies 'towards the "certain falsehood" end of the spectrum' (Berinsky, 2012, p.4). Thus, the concept of rumour is always accompanied by the concept of truth. While talking about public affairs, the fact is approached through socially constructed truth, 'the readings of truth'. In this sense, a constructivist view comes up that truth is constructed within the context of the discussion about the social (Mayers, 1977) or through discourse (Sarbin, 1998, p.146). Truth is made instead of discovered. Sarbin (1998) maintains that the history of truth-making both in jurisprudence and in science supports the constructed and discursive nature of truth. Hence, it is unavoidable to mention Foucault's (1978) effort in tracing the origin and evidence of knowledge and truth in history. Deligiaouri (2018) provides a discursive understanding that 'the most powerful discourse manages to hegemonize "truth"'. It is also noted that 'there are hetero-determined as something is true always in relation and in contrast to something that is not true.'

In his discussion about the history of truth, Baggini (1988) sets out a range of categories of how truth is elaborated in different historical periods, disciplines, perspectives, and social fields. From the 'Eternal truth' revealed in religious narrative, 'Reasoned truth' and 'Empirical truth' formulated through the modern theoretical and scientific perspective, to 'relative truth', and 'authoritative' and 'powerful truth' that is strongly related to the thought considering social structure and power relations etc. His typologies of truth genuinely reject the idea that truth is direct, plain, and simple, rather they are contextual and interdependent; each category of truth implies the differentiated means of legitimately establishing factual knowledge.

Shapin (1995) holds that knowledge about the real world draws on the knowledge about other people and vice versa. In this case, the relations we have to hold our knowledge have a moral character, the relations of trust. He believes that there is a mismatch between how people believe in the characterization of the sources of factual knowledge and how they are actually secured. Contrary to the idea that truth comes from direct individual experience, he argued that no knowledge is achieved with the complete rejection of testimony and authority.

In discussing the trustworthiness of rumour, Fine (2007) demonstrated this social construction of truth that 'rumour is a marker applied to information that a relevant actor considers suspect.' That

is, rumour is believed when it is labelled ‘fact’ or ‘truth’. Thus, the question about the truth in rumour turns out as the one of who has the authority to ‘describe a particular set of truth claims as valid’ and the power-relation that is attached to the legitimacy of such claim (p.8).

Meanwhile, the emphasis on the emotional and affective function of rumour (Allport and Postman, 1945, NiFonzo and Bordia, 2006) corresponds with what Deligiaouri (2018) means for post-truth. It ‘relates to or denotes circumstances in which facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief (p.306).’ She believes that post-truth is a counter-discourse of truth that not only denies it but de-signifies it (p.313). Post-truth does not directly relate to truthfulness but refers to ‘the phenomenon of believing a statement to feel true (Fisher, 2019, p.134).’ The contemporary discussion of post-truth often located such phenomena within the politics of distrust and knowledge, which implies a threat to democracy and science (p.135). In this sense, post-truth is more about the debate about political discourse about lying, misleadingness, propaganda rather than the discussion about ‘the regime of truth’.

The constructivist view of truth problematizes the idea of misinformation and rumour as falsehood. While the truth is no more seen as innocent, nor is falsity. The Foucauldian thinking of the discursive construction, along with historians' discussion of the typologies of truth, reflects the contextuality of truth and the presence of power. Fine’s inquiry explicitly considers the tension between rumour and truth. It provides a powerful resource to critically engage with the rumour refutation activities in the name of truth claim.

Rumour, civic participation, and civil society

Rumour is a topic not rare in the study of political communication. The circulation of political rumours is always a serious concern about the proper manifestation of political and social institution. The origin of the research of rumour is frankly bearing a solid political background (Donovan, 2007). No matter how irrational it is conceived, its attention from scholars and authorities has illustrated its implication and intervention in the civic and political sphere.

The studies of rumouring as the vehicle of public opinion offer the means to examine popular politics, mentalities, and behaviours (Coast and Fox, 2015), although rumour is also circulating within elites. Scott (1985) argues that rumour is part of the ‘hidden transcript that allows subordinate people to express views that differed markedly from those of their superiors (Coast and Fox, 2015, p.226).’ rumour is believed as offering ‘the opportunity to express collective

opinions while avoiding individual responsibilities (p.226).’ Rumour, acting in its function of informing, is thus an important means through which citizens manipulated to get each other expressed and heard, to negotiate with the ambiguous social world outside. Further, incorporated the anthropological idea into such topic, rumour represents ‘a potential site for negotiation between the individual and the state’, and for the formation of identity and community, which provides the recourses for social interaction (Coast and Fox, 2015, p.228). Rumour is significantly based on the degree of the distrust towards authoritative institutions; such distrust plays a vital role in the motivation in the discussion, participation, and even intervention of the operation of such social mechanisms and installation (Fine, 2007, NiFonzo and Bordia, 2006). As Coast and Fox maintained, ‘Rumours about the corruption and greed of governments or social elites reinforced collective notions about the ways in which politics and social relations should function, and rumours about the private behaviour of prominent individuals reinforced popular notions of morality (2015, p.229).’ In this case, rumour is the communicative forces for the informal means of collective problem-solving (Shibutani, 1966). However, Coast and Fox (2015) highlight at the same time that rumour does ‘as much to bind the collective as to divide it’ (p.229). This, on the other hand, reveals the dark side of rumour which is causing confusion, contradiction, troubling democracy and political attachment.

Another focus on the study of rumour engagement in the political emphasis the functionality of agency. In such inquiries, the practice of rumouring is not only participating in the discussion about the politics but also functions as rebellion forces. Rumour, in their research, is invested a ‘heroic signification and hailed as “genre of rebel communication.”’ (Ahmad, 2019, p.56) Studies have shown how rumour works in the movement against the dominant discourses and class (Coast and Fox, 2015, Larson and Lewis, 2018, Ahmad, 2019). Rumour is conceived as modes of resistance. In such cases, rumour occurs not only under the circumstances where official information is absent or ambiguous but also explicitly against the narrative of such discourses. From the perspective of the elite or state, such agency can be interpreted as the potential to stoke riot. Historians have noted that governments throughout history often attempt to suppress the circulation of rumours. The rumour about the return of a long-dead monarch had the potential to provoke or legitimate rebellions, and ‘Rumours about the morality, sexual behaviour or religious beliefs of the monarch could also play a part in undermining royal authority’ (Coast and Fox, 2015, p.227). While riots are ‘the physical manifestation of the dissonance between authority and the mass and point to a

perceived failure to deliver justice (p.228).’ Rumour plays an important role in invoking or commenting on such dissonance and the failure of civic manipulation. Rumour, in this sense, is perceived as destabilising civil society.

Fine (2007) believed that the extent of rumour constitutes an inverted U-shaped curve in the implication of the social where a moderate degree of rumours suggests ‘social participation, investment in collective order and social trust’, while an excessive number of rumours suggests distrust, fear, and the potential of riot (p.17). Rumours, thus, straddle the boundaries between support and resistance (Coast and Fox, p.229). For instance, contrary to the historians’ notice about the royal rumouring above, Barthes’ famous discussion reveals that such rumour about the royal family does not challenge their legitimacy, but on the other hand, naturalised their existence (Barthes, 1972, Leak, 1994). In more general cases, rumours provide the channels for the public to express their anxiety and dissatisfaction, conduct social participation, make sense of the social and bind in community. Rumour, to this degree, does promote the stability of civil society.

Such debate among intellectuals indicated the complexity of rumour in its installation in civic society. However, what is quite a shame is that most of such debate about rumour is centred around the rumour occurring in a specific political context or facing social disruption or crisis, primarily based on the contestation with the formal democracy and government. However, many rumours occurred in the sphere of everyday life, dealing with the ambiguity come across in lifeworld. This wider stage of society is the extension of the life of politics but, on the other hand, constitutes the important part of citizens’ civic participation. In such cases, it is what Dahlgren conceived as the field of ‘the civic’.

Dahlgren (2003) believes that some dynamics of engagement and disengagement can be understood via the concept of culture, and he provides the framework of civic culture to analyse such phenomena. In his idea, civic culture consists of the patterns of communication, practices, and meanings in which identities of citizenship and the foundation of civic agency are embedded (2009, p.103). In other words, civic culture is the cultural motivation and inspiration of citizens’ participation in political projects: they provide ‘road markers for likely patterns of doing and thinking, but never directing automatically (Dahlgren, 2003, p.153).’ It is thus the social capital as the resources that individuals and groups draw upon for their activities (Putnam, 2000, Dahlgren, 2009). This civic culture is anchored in the field of everyday life, treated as the taken-for-granted

orientation for civic participation. Dahlgren (2003) maintains that ‘for a functioning democracy, there are certain conditions that reside at the level of lived experiences (p.154).’ He thus bridges two fields of politics and everyday life. This bridge thus legitimises rumour’s work in realising civic participation outside the forum of politics. The participatory perspective of rumour not only activates when it is about the formal political or democratic issues but performs as the lived cultural resources for the potential of such participation. However, the realisation of the transformation from rumouring to political agenda is another question.

Rumour, under Dahlgren’s framework, functions in various dimensions of civic culture. Its sense-making process is an important resource for the knowledge that is required for participating politically (Dahlgren, 2009, p.108). In this sense, rumour is not only about the knowledge itself but about the access and strategies to acquire relevant knowledge. The anthropological and ethnographic insight of rumour indicates the negotiation between the individual and the collective about how they suit themselves within such interaction (Harney, 2006) through community formation. It emphasises their social agency and their reference to citizenship when actively participating in or even intervening in civic society. One more dimension mentioned here is trust; it has been mentioned that rumour is strongly about the politics of trust and distrust. Thus, such interplay and expression of trust can be more directly incorporated into the process of civic and political participation.

Dahlgren’s civic culture framework is consistent with rumour studies’ discussion of rumour’s role in political and civic participation. Although they have not developed much together, literature has shown that they share several topics. Therefore, it is possible to bridge two fields together and examine rumours’ political role not only in the uneasy circumstances of war, riot or political pressure but also in the everyday context of civic activities.

Rumour and rumour governance study in China.

‘Rumour’ is a popular topic in China especially facing the so-called phenomena of the ‘overflow of internet rumours (Chao and Huang, 2004, Guo and Dong, 2013, Liu *et al.*, 2015).’ Although the research has a diverse disciplinary background from social psychology, sociology, journalism and communication, policy and management, political science to computer and system science, the theoretical origin is between social psychology and sociology. It is mainly based on the dialogue between Knapp (1944), Allport and Postman (1947), Morin (1971) and Shibutani (1966), Kapferer

(1990) etc. In other words, the study of rumours of Chinese scholar is heavily impacted by the mass communication paradigm, where the concern is the motivation and regularity of rumour (Guo and Dong, 2013). This interest in rumours often eventually comes with the study of rumour governance (Guo, 2020). Hence, it is apparent that rumour as a social phenomenon is already conveyed with a specific framework of value judgement.

On the other hand, one of the explicit struggles among their knowledge is about the definition of rumour, especially concerning the question of falsehood and harmfulness. Although imported from rumour studies abroad, rumour is emphasized in its characteristics of 'being unverified' and 'ambiguity' by most scholar; there is another force that indicates that rumours are essentially falsehood (Hu, 2009, Lei, 2016). Another concern about such discussion is that several scholars hold the idea that the falsehood of rumour is deliberately and viciously made compared to other forms of informal communication such as gossip or legends (Zhou, 1998, Guo and Dong, 2013). Zhou (2008) noted that among hundreds of pieces of previous research about rumours from sociology, communication and politics, most of them hypothesise that rumours are 'harmful information.' To testify the regulation of communication or the implication, the purpose of these research is to prevent and control such phenomenon. He continues that 'Chinese scholars tend to examine rumour from the macro perspective and believe that it is the product of the crises of environment... thus [they] almost all highlighted the destructive implication of rumours on existing social institutions (p.52).' In this manner, theories about ambiguity and unverified can also be translated into falsehood and risk to society.

Another topic that interests Chinese scholars is the relation between rumour and the phenomenon of 'mass event' or 'collective movement'. It refers to a general category of social events and movements that a group of people participated in and have a certain degree of implication, either illegal, has a specific purpose or not (Yu, 2009). Mass event has been a centre of the study of public opinion in China. In such cases, rumour, which is seen as the vent of emotion, catalyses, interprets, and reconstructs mass events. Rumour functions as 'group polarization' within the collective movement (Guo and Dong, 2013). Guo (2013) claims that rumour is the primary tool of sympathetic resonance in network protest. Rumour is also seen functions in the activation of public conflicts through cognitive distortion, negative emotion, one-dimensional value judgement and group thinking (Chang and Jin, 2010). Such knowledge marks the idea that rumour as a mean of

communication is emotional and is thus irrational means of expression. Under such topic, research is also focused on testifying the regulation of the transmission and function of rumour in specific events, explained through theories, models or formula (Zhang *et al.* 2009, Wang, 2010, Liu *et al.*, 2015), and leads to the topic of rumour governance. However negative is rumour portrait, it is acknowledged that rumour is not a monster itself but is the particular need under the dysfunction of society (Zhou, 2003). Therefore, the prevention of rumour is believed accompanied by multiple layers demand of the apperency of information of public crisis, people's psychological and cognitive agility and the function of intellectuals and opinion leaders (Chang and Jin, 2010).

Such mainstream voice of the study is, however, not unquestioned. Hu (2009) criticises 'the demonization' in such streams of labelling rumour of being vicious and false. Such a label is utilised by the authority to attack the legitimacy of social protest, demonize the dissident (p.77). On the other hand, this demonised accusation causes the abuse of legal and administrative power, impacting citizens' freedom of speech. The opposition between rumour and mass communication implies the block of free flow of information and a valid expression approach (Hu, 2009, Tsai and Lin, 2019). He highlighted another characteristic of rumour as a social protest, which is often mentioned in Chinese research. However, instead of interpreting it as destructive (Guo, 2020), He insists on the degree of rationality and strategy through the protest invoked by rumours. 'It is not strong as the previous tools applied by the revolutionaries but is more powerful than what Scott has observed "weapon from the weak" (Hu, 2009, p.75).' He mediates his critics by observing rumour in new media about the crisis of information verification, the more profound emotional impact of conflicting rumours and rumour as the information bomb in such 'convergent culture'. In this case, Rumour is more complex than the 'old knowledge about it', 'it is more dangerous and meanwhile more exciting (p.90).'

Similar to Hu, Zhou (2008) comments that the fact of society indicates that rumour does not occur pathologically but is the normality of public opinion. Hence, rumours are not limited to the situations of mass events and public conflicts but the different social life layers. Although he continues with the social-psychological approach to rumour, he noted that the new context of the internet not only conceives the potential for the production and transmission of rumours but also offers access to verification. There are dynamics between the proliferation of rumour and the forces

to reduce it through communication. He admitted the validity and function of rumour in people's everyday interaction while claiming its limitation facing the network circulation of information.

Additionally, there are several other scholars' voices for the normal functions of rumour in society. Cui (2016) emphasizes that apart from the negative effect of rumour, it is undeniable that rumours' role in social coordination reflects social issues, expresses social protests, and provides mental comfort. Shi's (2016) study complements that rumour is the collective recognized oral tradition that brings together the communities' values. He also noted the entertaining aspect of rumour circulation. It is language folklore that is both repulsive and inextricable. Chen (2014) argues that while rumours are demonized and stigmatized in mainstream media, some scholars, on the other hand, politicalize them. He insists that instead of seeing it as a form of resistance or protest, it is more practical to understand it as social capital that conceives the politics of trust.

Nevertheless, no matter which position situated the research, they are still under the strong implication of the narrative of rumour governance and rumour control; they differ in their degree of attitude towards such social phenomenon. On the other hand, while scholars are quite passionate about the study of such campaigns of rumour governance, and of course, rumour refutation, such mechanism of rumour governance is seldom reflected. Apart from Hu's critics on its impact on freedom of speech, studies have also touched on the issue of censorship and the control of public opinion (Zou and Tang, 2020). Additionally, they analyse both the rumour and the strategies applied to counter rumours in a public affair, questioned the effectiveness of such strategies. However, the issue remained how such mechanisms are legitimised despite the exposure of its problems. Another inadequacy that is noticeable both in China and the field of rumour study is that it is hard to situate it in the regular context of civic culture. Fine (2007) marked that rumour is an integral part of civil society. However, it is often situated in a more radical context of rebellion and resistance. Studies have frequently noted rumour's function in the sense-making and expression in the communication of the public, even about political issues. However, such functions are rarely explicitly talked about in a civic manner.

This research is centred on the legitimacy of the issue of rumour governance in China. Meanwhile, since such mechanisms of refutation have explicitly impacted citizens means of civic participation, it is an extreme reflection on the study of the civic aspect of rumour practice.

Methodologies and methods

Qualitative text analysis and the methodological instructions

This research applies qualitative text analysis to understand the tension between the rumouring and the refutation practices. From the humanist approach, text analysis emphasises the process of interpretation, searching for meaning, and how this sense-making practice is represented (Bernard and Ryan, 1998, McKee, 2003). Through this approach, text is understood as the sphere where the rumour-refutation interaction between the public actors and the authorities happens. Hence the analysis of text opens the interpretive and analytical space to this tension and relation. In this research, the text is examined qualitatively. It focuses on the quality of text that represent this case: the descriptive and informational characters of the textual interaction (Bernard and Ryan, 1998, Kuckartz, 2012). Through this soft systematic categorization to text, the analysis provides access to critically engage with and interpret the case through specific theoretical scopes, thus understanding the representation of the rumour and refutation practices. Text functions as the traces and performance of how people have made sense of the world (McKee, 2003).

To access text in this way emphasizes a social constructionist position, where the principal is that the reality is constructed through social processes (Couldry and Hepp, 2017). As the very joint practice of the public sense-making of situation, Rumouring serves as a specific role in interpreting the social facts and ‘constructing a world that makes sense to us’ (p.32). On the other hand, the refutation towards rumour is thus a response toward certain interpretation; it demonstrates another but the official interpretation of facts. Text, in this sense, are the very bricks of the construction. The rumour and the refutation both work at the building up of the construction of the social world. Since the social is believed as the outcome of our joint process of social construction, this social world is the intersubjective sphere of social relations that we experience (p.32, 35). Hence, although rumouring also has a psychological or subjective factor, it is the shared understanding that vitals for the collective construction in this research. Thus, this research focuses primarily on how this collective constructed interpretation is represented and handled especially through the instrument of the #PoliceRefuteRumours# campaign, which social relations between the public and the institutions of police work in this representation.

This social constructionist position to rumour study emphasizes the rejection of the essentialist identification of rumour. The social does not exist on essentially a given interpretation, but through

how we made it (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, p.37). This fundamental factor of the social world emphasizes the understanding of its context-dependency (Flyvbjerg, 2001). 'It means an open-ended, contingent relation between contexts and actions and interpretation (p.45). This position complies with qualitative text analysis, which opens for alternative interpretation (Bernard and Ryan, 2009, McKee, 2011) and the note of rumour text as contextual and contingent (Rosnow, 1998). It claims the need for a contextual understanding of the text of rumour and refutation (Kuckartz, 2012). In this sense, the interest of this research is to study the relations between texts of rumour and refutation in specific contexts. Context defines the type of phenomenon that is encountered (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.49). Not only rumouring is part of the construction of the social world, its own meaning and application is also an outcome of the contextual construction. Through the analysis of text, it is committed in this research to understand how this construction is made and negotiated.

Based on this social constructionist position, this research takes a cultural-communicative approach towards rumour. It borrows mostly from the anthropological tradition of rumour study. It sees rumour as the pattern of one culture and community, which can be translated as part of a way of living. This asks for the understanding of rumour practices as normal behaviour and happens in everyday life (Shibutani, 1966). More specifically, rumouring is regarded as distributing certain information and knowledge that form and shape communities (Harney, 2006). This communicative focus of rumour study is consistent with the social constructionist idea, which emphasises that 'communication is the set of practice through which we "make sense" of our world,' thus it is critical to how the social world is constructed (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, p.30). Rumour in this tradition is studied on its function in people's communicative practices, how people get 'informed' and build community in the absence of verifiable information and transparency. Therefore, rumouring in this sense can be understood as a special case of public discussion and engagement. When it comes to public or political affairs, it can be seen as 'a way for the people participating in "rumour publics", making use of the limited knowledge they possess, to solve problems, make sense of changing or uncertain conditions, and construct explanatory narratives in the face of fluid and ambiguous situations (Harney, 2006, p.376).' This approach evokes the corresponding reflection on the refutation as the institutional and authoritative response towards this community-based communicative practices, and the refutation practice is thus part of this communication process: the inconsistent and even contested.

This perspective echoes with Dahlgren's (2009) idea to see civic engagement through the culturalist scope. Dahlgren (2009) emphasizes that citizens' participation in civic discussion and practice is based on a sense-making agent, where key themes such as meaning, identity, and practice are discussed (p.7). Rumour text, therefore, is the possible resources for civic participation (Coast and Fox, 2009). His highlight of such civic culture implies that civic agency must be an integrated and dynamic part of a larger cultural environment relevant to politics (Dahlgren, 2009, p.103). It is Dahlgren's idea of civic culture that strengthens this research's epistemological reconsideration of the legitimacy of rumour refutation based on rumour's possible civic characteristics: it is also possibly political. While civic agency and engagement are not explicit in the research for that text is always a mediated form of the representation of such agent expression, the tension between rumour and refutation text is analysed as reflecting the cultural conditions for such engagement.

Theoretical frameworks

This research applies the discourse theory inspired from Laclau and Mouffe to conceptualise this textual tension between rumour and refutation text. While they see that social meaning is contingently fixed through discursive articulation, this temporary discursive closure comes with the struggle between different discourses (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). They provide several critical tools to analyse the discursive struggles, such as 'antagonism' and 'hegemony'. These concepts can be beneficial in understanding the contested relation between rumour and refutation, understand rumour as textual resistance (Ahmad, 2020) at the same time approach to themes of, for instance, identities and representation.

Foucault provides the fruitful concept of power/knowledge in the discussion of discourses. Even from the most fundamental understanding of Foucault, power is believed as both oppressive and productive, while at the same time bound up with knowledge (Foucault, 1978, Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Power provides the possibility for the formation of the social. In this case, it is explicit that certain power relation exists that maintains the tension between rumour and refutation. The specific way of forming knowledge/information is also an important insight towards the understanding of rumour and civic culture (Shibutani, 1966, Dahlgren, 2009). Meanwhile, this claim of knowledge about factuality is strongly related to his conception of truth, which is embedded in and produced by the power system (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The multiple-form truths are 'produced by a certain regime of power, a product of power through the technology of control (Taylor, 1984,

p.160).’ The Foucauldian approach is applied in this research to understand the power dynamics in the production of truth-claimed knowledge in refutation text and on the other hand, the dissolution of rumour knowledge in/after the antagonisms of discourses.

Barthes’ (1972) Semiotics is applied to approach another task of analysing the linguistic patterns of these texts. He provides a package of theoretical tools to analyse how signs perform or convey meaning in context. His interpretation of concepts such as mythology makes it possible to examine the unquestioned linguistic and symbolic phenomenon, answer how such phenomenon is taken for granted and opens for the insight of ideology in the practices of speech. While signs are formed arbitrarily through the linkage between signifier and signified, the secondary signification of myth is, on the other hand, a result of the ideological operation. This inspiring idea of the symbolic offers a keen insight into the institutional forces and their implicit manifestation in the representation and knowledge about the social reality. To approach the text rumour and refutation and unpack the dynamic structure of various signifier and signified, it is intended to look for the system of signification that works to produce the specific meaning of rumour and what symbolic structure is there that derives such signification.

Sampling and empirical material

This research collected samples according to Flyvbjerg’s (2001) strategic casing in order to achieve both the systematic conceptualisation and nuanced understanding of the case. From his point, samples are selected, more importantly, to maximize the utility of information. It means that the choices of the empirical material are strategically based on the purpose of research. Hence, while this research does not strictly follow the information-oriented case-selection provided by Flyvbjerg, it highlights the consistency between the choice of analysis and the selection of samples to perform the best analysis, respectively.

A sample of 122 pieces of text (79 pieces of refutation and 43 pieces of rumours), along with 300 pieces of comments, is collected from the #PoliceRefuteRumour (#警方辟谣#) on social media platform Weibo released between 2018-2021, in the purpose of presenting a typical view about the landscape of the situation of this case. It is aimed to provide a descriptive understanding through qualitative text analysis based on a premiere categorization of the material (appendices 1.). They are typical in the sense that they are listed as the most trending ones based on the websites’ algorithm. Although it is displayed that this hashtag earns over 600 thousand discussions, the actual

number of samples is, on the other hand, also influenced by the quality of empirical material. In this sense, the repetitive coverages and posts, incomplete and deleted posts, and some non-textual posts have not been included in the selection. All the samples collected are posted between 2018 and 2021 to keep the sample up to date.

In order to provide a deeper understanding of the case through theoretical scopes, the strategic sampling of critical cases and extreme case are applied, which is assumed to reveal more information about the phenomenon and the deeper causes (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.78). Critical cases are those cases that have strategic importance in relation to the general information, while extreme cases are those unusual cases that demonstrate the characteristic in an especially dramatic way (p.78-79). Around 14 pieces of samples are collected as critical cases. These cases are critical towards the general phenomenon of rumour refutation and thus provide this research with the evidence to situate its viewpoint. These cases provide certain details and information but are typically inadequate or unconvincing in its verification or falsification. In most cases, they provide an alternative interpretation with either more or limited verified information but do not necessarily negate the validity of the rumour information. Rumour is thus identified and refuted based on this inadequate verification. Some of these cases have even evoked several suspicious voices in the comments. These cases 'permit the logical deductions of the type' (p.79) for that they expose the symptoms that display the mechanism of this refutation practices explicitly and problematically and is the site for the questions of its legitimacy.

Several sole cases are utilised as extreme cases in different parts of the research. They expose most dramatically specific features of rumour and its refutation in form, content, and practices. They maximise how such mechanism is problematic qualitatively and demonstrate the most significant issues loudly in a distinctive and deviant way (p.79).

One of the cases is noted here for its extreme in its consequences to society. It is the announcement of the refutation of several doctors' early warning about COVID-19 at the end of 2019. While they are believed as whistle-blower later in this systematic crisis of pandemic, their messages were at that moment identified as unverified or unauthentic information. Therefore, this refutation post was seen as an important sign of the dysfunctionality of local officials, resulting in the authority's production of misinformation, the postponement of public resolution and actions towards urgent crisis, and eventually the outbreak of this hygienic crisis in Wuhan city. It is also an urgent case

that has evoked a massive amount of public anger and criticism towards the police and the government's misbehaviour. Its severe negative consequence dramatically questions the validity of refutation practices, thus opening the wide possibility for critical inquiry.

The symbolic rumour

The matrix of the meanings of rumour

Coming with the topic of rumour reputation is at first the issue of defining and identifying rumours. In fact, the rumour-claim of certain information represents a certain standard of value judgement since, at least in Chinese context, ‘rumour’ is seen as a negative practice towards society (Zhou, 2009). Therefore, to define rumour in this research does not mean to explain rumour as such, but to crystalize its meaning in social contexts and positions. The specific use of the concept of rumour to identify certain material implies its meaning in that context. Here the special actor that identifies rumour, the police, contributes to the even more complexity of the meaning of this concept. Since the police are represented as institutional violence while at the same time speaking for public security, their identification of rumour is directly related to their institutional position and interests. In this case, the question about the definition of rumour is transformed into the one that: among numerous messages produced and communicated every day, which aspects and characters evoke the polices’ effort to identify and refute certain kind of message?

While it has been greatly believed in the study that rumour, as the unverified information, is not necessarily concerning authenticity or factuality (Fine, 2009), it is, on the other hand, strongly related with this issue in this topic. In *modern Chinese dictionary*, ‘yaoyan’ is explained as ‘messages without factual bases.’ A report posted on the official rumour-refutation platform claims that ‘the basic element that constitutes a rumour is “no factual basis”’ (Han and Chen, 2020). Either in everyday life or the campaign of rumour refutation, ‘rumour’ is a word applied to illustrate that certain information is false. Therefore, although rumour as a concept consists of multiple phenomena in social life, it obtains a specific and narrowed meaning in this practice of rumour refutation. Correspondent with this localised definition, the refutation of rumours is firmly centred around the falsification of messages. Terms, such as ‘untrue’, ‘fake information, and ‘not happening’ are frequently applied to perform a decisive judgement of rumour:

*‘...It has been verified that there were no stabbings in Handan Railway Station in recent days and the information is **false**...’* (HDWJZF¹, 2020.8.12)

*‘...After our investigation and verification, the net rumour that the female owner was “gang raped”, “Split up” and other content are **untrue information**...’* (PAXD, 2020.8.4)

¹ The reference stands for the initials of the account post the referred quote on Weibo. For complete reference and transcription, see *appendices 2*.

It is also quite the case that verification terms (*'It has been verified...'*) are accompanied by this falsehood claim, although the verification is not necessarily sufficient. While it may be considered consistent since the claim that certain information is untrue is achieved with the support of verification, it makes the general definition of rumour less precise for that in this case, rumour means, precisely, false rumours. It, therefore, puts the practical meaning of rumour in a distant position compared to the concept of 'rumour': the general concept of rumour elaborates the phenomenon of the ongoing spreading of unverified and ambiguity information, while 'rumour' in this case is also about the result of the verification.

While factuality is presented as the core parameter in the identification of rumour, it is far from fully adequate. The second element that constitutes the illustration of one rumour is 'effect'. Effect here refers to 1) the scale of influence and 2) the consequence. For the first, it is about the speed and the range of message transmission, rumour is believed as influential when it is shared in a large degree within a particular deal of communities. '*...On January 29, a message **quickly** circulated in the WeChat group...*' (CDWJXCZF, 2020.1.30), '*...February 2, 2021, a message titled [...] spread **widely** in the WeChat group, Moments² and other network platforms...*' (ZGJFZX, 2021.2.3)' Terms like 'quickly', 'widely' are applied as the support of evaluation. It makes sense in another aspect that it is the influence of these messages that draws on the polices' attention. It will never be a rumour when it is just individual's monologue. A rumour is hence also public. The scale of effect works as both constructing what is rumour and as the constructed idea about it. The consequence of rumour is, in most of time, negative ones. Rumour is evaluated based on its 'harmfulness to society' (Shen, 2000). 'When deciding whether a certain piece of information constitutes an online rumour, it may be unreasonable to directly categorize the dissemination of the information as an illegal act without considering the harmful consequences (Han and Chen, 2020),' as is said in a report for the refutation of internet rumour. It is not an exception in this case:

*'...On July 8, this sensational picture and text appeared in the local WeChat group in Enshi, **causing panic** among the public...*' (PAES, 2019.7.9)

*'...After the occurrence of Sichuan Changning 6.0 magnitude earthquake, some false information photos spread **madly** in several WeChat Groups and Moment, **affecting social order, triggering panic**' (SCGA, 2019.6.18).'*

² Moments is a part of Chinese application, WeChat, where users share post semi-publicly to mutually accepted friends.

While factuality functions, to a certain degree, as the decisive element in identifying rumour, the scale of influence and consequence of rumour fulfil the precondition for the identification. By stressing the effect of rumouring as out-of-control, more severely, ‘*madly*’, ‘*vicious slander*,’ ‘*disrupting the public order*’, ‘*panic*,’ or more gently ‘*misleading*’, rumouring is identified as the irrational practices and is harmful. This conceptualisation thus asks for the actions to reorder or re-rationalize from the effect of rumour.

Meanwhile, some other aspects may not perform as significantly as the tree elements above but show vital roles in constructing the nuances and distinctions in the concept of rumour. One of them is subjectivity. It comes to the subjective intention in the production and share of rumours. While in a large ratio of the cases, subjectivity is invisible (rumour is spread anonymously), it functions significantly when evaluating the properties of the rumouring practice. In one case where I wrote that ‘...*The netizen Song(female) fabricated and disseminated false information such as “five students were killed in Shangqiu University” ...*’ (SCWJXCZF, 2019.11.6.) ‘fabricate’, ‘disseminate’ are utilised to stress her intention and consciousness when producing and spreading such messages. While in another case, it is illustrated that,

‘Some people mistakenly believe that the content of the screenshot is the process of the Hezhang County epidemic social prevention and control team to deal with the new coronavirus infected people.’(WBGZ,2020.1.29)

It implies that such rumour messages are produced and transmitted based on an unconscious misunderstanding. This difference is similar to the key distinction between misinformation and disinformation (Farkas and Schou, 2018). In the Chinese context, it is, on the other hand, related to the issue whether the rumouring behaviour is unlawful. It is noted in the official report that ‘subjective malice is the key to distinguishing between rumours that are illegal and those that are not (Han and Chen, 2020).’ In the police text of refutation, some also emphasise the administrative or the legal forces.

‘anyone who spreads rumours, falsely reports dangers, epidemics, police information, or intentionally disrupts public order by other means shall be detained [...] Those who seriously disrupt social order will be investigated for criminal responsibility in accordance with the law (NQGA, 2019.2.12).’

The elaboration of subjectivity in rumour text hence influences not only on the categorization of rumouring, but also the attitude of the institution towards these rumour text and the actors.

It is meanwhile noticeable that these elements and parameters work not only collectively but also interrelated and intertwined. For example, subjectivity can contribute to the degree the consequence. On the other hand, they are not distributed equally or balanced in every case. While some are present, some others may be absent or invisible. Even the key element of the claim of falsification is implicit in some cases. All this work contributes and at the same time contests the dynamic of what is presented as ‘rumour’.

Overdetermining rumour and the floating signifier

It is apparent that through the manipulation of these several elements, the concept of rumour may obtain a specific meaning, which is *the intentionally or unconsciously made and widely spread messages that are no factual basis and have negative effects on society*. However, the degree of complexity added to this term of rumour does not contribute to the concreteness of meaning. On the contrary, what is identified as rumour is quite distant from this seemingly specific definition. In other words, there are distinctions between ‘form’ and ‘content’ of rumour, the inconsistency between the signifier and the signified.

The core elements of ‘(non)factualty’, which is directly related to the literal meaning of rumour that both Chinese public and scholars accept, shows its poverty in several cases, for example,

*‘Guangdong Fogang police refuted the rumour that “**man robbed a bank**”: actually **robbed one subject’s backpack in the hall**, because the value of less than 1000 yuan was detained’ (XKB, 2021,2.9.)*

This short piece of text displays the ‘rumour’ message as ‘*man robbed a bank*’ and refutation as ‘*robbed one subject’s backpack in the bank*’. It is ambivalent about the claim that the latter is eligible to negate the factuality of the former. The robbery did happen in a bank. It is rather evident to come up with this narrative based on the information, with a certain degree of details lost. While in this case, it may be still arguable for the verification that this small detail may determine the criminal property of the case, while in another case, the verifying detail works differently,

*‘... received a report of **child abduction**... [The children] were deceived by Fang...on the ground of helping to get things...The police [...] confirmed that Fang was **mentally disordered** and had coordinated with the relevant hospital for his treatment (PANA, 2020.6.13).’*

In this case, it delivers that the case does not count as a child abduction for that the actor was mentally disordered. However, this makes the false claim of rumour problematic for that it does

not alter the information that the child was abducted but serves as complementary information to clarify the situation.

Meanwhile, there is a tendency in these cases to relate or conflate false information and unverified ones. It functions not only in the justification of refutation (*it is known that Zhang received a picture [...] later disseminated it **without verification***. JXCB, 2020.1.14.), but also the form of substitutions between sentences.

*'It has been **verified** that the incident took place in Linqu, Shandong...Please do not forward **unconfirmed** messages... (SCGA, 2018.8.30)'*

In this case, the refutation claims that the incident did not occur in the corresponding location in the rumour text, then it comes to inform the public not to forward unconfirmed messages. Here it is noticeable that while the meaning of rumour, in this case, is more similar to misinformation/disinformation since it inherently conveys a false claim, its reference to unverified messages is close to what is generally studied as 'rumour'. Here is the explicit chain of equivalence that links these concepts together (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002).

This claim of falsehood is thus in the presentation as 'non-factual, 'no sufficient detail', 'partly untrue', 'unverified' etc. These equivalences make the configuration of rumour in a rather contingent setting: in different cases, the evaluation of factuality refers to different meanings.

Adding to the ambiguity of the meaning of rumour is the work of other elements of effect and subjectivity. While it is identified that rumours are negative, even harmful to the society, the evaluation of this negativity is arbitrary. In the text, rumours are represented through terms like '*disrupting of the social order*', '*causing public panic*' etc., but what these claims specifically mean is absent in the text. They function more like the empty signifier of abstract concepts that are manipulated by adding or vanishing meanings. One extreme example of the manifestation of negativity to society is:

*'A puddle of white liquid on the road, someone spread [...] that four children were crushed by a dump truck, brains all over the ground... On July 8, this sensational picture and text appeared [...] **causing panic among the public**. The police investigation found that a local man born in 1990s made up facts to create rumours online, and now Liao seat has been detained by the police (PAES, 2020.7.9).'*

It is indeed described horrifying and sensational in the text, which may agree with 'causing panic among the public'. However, the case is that it is a parody of the traffic accident: it is a package of

milk boxes crushed by a vehicle, the four kids are the images on the boxes. It is an idle joke that someone made up for a pastime and this humour makes sense immediately when it is conveyed with the picture of four crashed milk boxes. But in the refutation text, the sense of humour is overlooked; only the sensational and terrifying elements are intentionally noted. Not only the effect but also the subjectivity is manipulated.

The chain of equivalence works again in the evaluation of subjectivity. As is mentioned, in several cases, the subject of rumour in the text is absent. Thus, it is not straightforward to identify the intention of producing rumour in the refutation text, but through texts like *'Hope everyone will not believe or spread rumours. [...] the public security organ will crack down on those who deliberately distribute and spread rumours to cause social panic!'* (FYTHGAZX, 2019.7.11) the anonymous, no-subject rumour is thus equivalent to deliberate behaviour of the distribution of rumour. To be more specific, misinformation is conflated with disinformation.

These elements do not either decide the identification of rumour solely or work as the accumulation of effect. They overdetermine it. Overdetermination demonstrates 'a very precise type of fusion entailing a symbolic dimension and a plurality of meanings (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985 p.124).' This overdetermination means that the meaning of rumour in this research only makes sense in the field of symbolic. The regularities of its formation merely consist of the relative and precarious forms of fixation that accompany the establishment of a certain order (p.124). To be more specific, none of the elements is decisive, no matter how fundamental it appears. They are all relational values that make sense in relative order. The meaning of rumour is never a complete project. This overdetermination from these elements into rumour, to establish a relation among them is thus the articulation of a discourse.

In these refutation texts, the concept of rumour is the part of discursive formation. In this sense, it is never finished or completed. As is mentioned, what 'rumour' identifies in the actual text are quite arbitrary compared to its specific and narrow definition. Even the fixation of a single element into the discursive relation, to articulate it into element is a contingent case, let alone the result of their joint articulation work. What adds the instability of the meaning is the uneven dispersion of moments in this discursive formation (p.133). When these elements are articulated in discourse, they function in different ways and show different weight in different cases.

*'It is reported that a netizen had spread a rumour in a WeChat group that "more than 200 people had died in Shijiazhuang", which was **seriously untrue**...'* (BDWJXZF, 2021.1.7)

*'Someone had spread **false information** about a student jumping from a building at the school. After investigation, [...] posted "third grade a girl jumped", "jumped at school", "depression", "died" and other rumours to a WeChat group, **causing adverse social impact**..'* (PACD, 2019.11.20)

Comparing these two cases, they are all presented as sensational messages based on limited factual support. While in the first one, it is its 'serious' violation against factuality that is stressed. In the latter case, it is indeed mentioned that this is 'false information', but all the details elaborated are pointed to 'causing adverse social impact'. Thus, it is its social impact that is emphasized. Therefore, rumour is articulated in different positions of the matrix of elements of such as factuality, harmfulness, subjectivity. Within the whole campaign of rumour refutation, this variable positioning contributes to the multiple interpretations of rumour.

The concept of rumour thus became a floating signifier. Floating signifiers are signifiers with a weak link to the signified, making them open to different interpretative investments (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, Trivundža and Vezovnik, 2021). What rumour is in different refutation text signifies various forms of messages. It is worth mentioning here that the literal meaning of 'yaoyan' in Chinese, is 'ballad and speech'. It was historically applied both as eulogy and slander but was later detached from the first one when it dates (Lei, 2016). This signifier is awaited to link to the vast signifieds in different historical and societal conditions. This proliferation of signifieds contributes to the sense of ambiguity of signifier that it is incapable of being wholly articulated to a single discursive chain (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p.143). It is through the interplay between these elements that a temporarily fixed meaning is articulated. Therefore, rumour as a floating signifier is not simply equivalent to being polysemy since there is always the tendency in the articulation that one specific signified is designated (Farkas and Schou, 2018). floating signifier 'is a concept used to describe a precise historical conjuncture in which a particular signifier is used as part of a battle to impose the "right" viewpoint onto the world (p.302).'

Hence, the manifestation of the floating signifier is far from an autonomy but an object for manipulation. From Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) sense, floating signifiers are utilised for the investment of discursive struggles, especially 'positioned within different signifying systems of conflicting political project (Farka and Schou, 2018, p.302).'

In this case, rumour is open to the signified that may be even opposite to what is defined.

Rumour as a myth

There is a split between the specificity of the concept of rumour and the ambiguity of its signifieds: how can rumour as a concept be defined in a narrow and specific manner but open to multiple possible kinds of materials? It is floating on one side but fixed on the other. What is more crucial is that rumours are demonstrated as a self-evident and clear phenomenon facing this split. While it is believed that it is the split of signifier and signified that defines a *sign* (Barthes, 1972, p.122), a specific mechanism works to unify these split fragments of signs. This mechanism, as is discussed, is far from arbitrary but is out of certain motivation. The fixation of the floating signifier is also always happened in a specific historical and social context. More importantly, this mechanism not only works at the specific case of refutation campaign but is the everyday resources incorporated in this discourse. It is consensus and taken-for-granted; it is, therefore, a mythical speech.

In the mythology scope, this split can be translated into the distinction between the denotation and connotation attached to a signifier (Barthes, 1972, Leak, 1994). Denotation, in this case, figures the meanings that the group of materials convey, that is loosely gathered in the name of ‘rumour’: they can be inadequate, unverified, unpleasing, partly untrue, or completely made-up etc. Suppose someone attempts to mark down this denotation; in that case, it can merely land to a rough position close to the general idea about rumours or turn to the literal meaning of ‘*Yaoyan*’: The folks’ ballad or proverb (speech) that comment on current affairs. On the other hand, the connotation identifies the regularity that performs in the impression of rumour in these refutation text: it is false/non-factual, widely spread, and harmful to society.

Another terminology that Barthes applied to substitute ‘denotation’ and ‘connotation’, ‘language-object’ and ‘meta-language’ can better describe the relations between the twofold for that connotation is the second language that speaks about the first (Barthes, 1972, p.114). The most important mechanism of a myth is that of the *second-order semiological system*. It is the work of signification based on the existed symbolic chain. In this process, what is a sign in the first system functions merely as a signifier in the second one, and the ‘raw materials of everyday life are transformed into modern myths’ (Leak, 1994, p.15). The consequence of this transformation is that the sign in the first order is no longer considered its details of ‘linguistic schema’, but functions only as a total term that ‘lends itself to the myth’ (Barthes, 1972, p.112). In this case, ‘rumour’ explicitly loses its nuances and multiplicity in the representation from denotation to connotation. There is even no necessary for any details for the manifest of rumour:

‘[#PoliceRefuteRumour] False information related to the solved case of the murder of a South Medical University girl happened 28 years ago, refuted!’ (PANJ, 2020.2.4)

This sole sentence functions as the whole text of one piece of rumour refutation. It is noticeable that there were no details that validate this refutation narrative, even ‘rumour’ as a word is reduced to any details. It is just an abstract and pale signifier that is simply equivalent to ‘false information’ without either resistance or support. The denotative meaning of rumour is almost absent in this text: it empties itself, ‘it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letters remain (Barthes, 1972, p.116).’ There is the overflow of signified that is open to the attachment to the concept of rumour. However, served as the form in the mythical system, it has put all its richness distant and calls for a connotative signification to fill it.

Nevertheless, as Barthes stresses, myth does not hide or vanish denotative meaning. It distorts it (Barthes, 1972, p.112). The denotative meaning is given there, but the connotation distorts it. Meanings are utilised for the function of connotation. In this case of rumour, the ‘typical’ characteristics of rumours are never neglected. They are ‘insufficient information’, ‘unverified’, ‘publicly discussed’, ‘partly incorrect’, ‘made-up’ etc. However, these characteristics are translated in the mythical sense that they are ‘false information’, ‘madly spread’, ‘disturbing social order’, ‘causing panics.’ On the other hand, these claims can hardly connect to ‘rumour’ without this translation since it will lose its ‘rationality’ for this accusation. It is the *distorted* chain of equivalence works that makes sense of this signification. Laclau has discussed that (Cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002) floating signifiers function as the myth that is the distortion of the representation of reality, ‘as a principle of reading a given situation, which terms are external to what is representable in the objective spatiality constituted by the given structure.’ This distortion is invested to make their particular understanding of the society the prevailing one (p.40).

In this sense, the denotative rumours function as the alibi for these harsh accusations in a connotative manner. The connotative translation departs from it. Therefore, the form is empty but present, while the meaning is absent but full (Barthes, 1972, p.122). This alibi position is explicit when it comes to the seemingly paradoxical coexistence of being ‘unverified’ and ‘false’.

*‘Police reminded: [...] It is **illegal** to spread online rumours. It is hoped that the majority of netizens will consciously resist online rumours and refrain from arbitrarily forwarding **unverified information**, let alone deliberately fabricating them (NQGA, 2019.2.12).’*

In this case of notification, even when myth is already connotatively conceptualised (rumour is illegal), it needs the re-designation to the denotative sense for that it is where the connotation is generated.

It is graphic in this sense that the myth of rumour perpetually consumes from the meanings such as ‘unverified’ but meanwhile put it at disposal when it is signified into the connotation of ‘falsehood’.

This may be a clear description about this relation: the connotation keeps absorb recourses from the denotation, but at the same time extends and distorts its meaning. It is this distance that, in Barthes (1972, p.122) sense, that, the split of sign never appears happening since the contradictive meaning and form never meet.

This distance of the potential contradictions leads to the most significant function of myth that it transforms culture/history into nature, ‘as self-evident and devoid of human origin (Leak, 1994, p.21).’ It may be too exaggerated to say that the connotation of ‘rumour’ is devoid of human origin but is depicted as innocent and essential. This connotative understanding of rumour has been internalised in the whole social sphere in China. It is applied by the institutions and individuals, casually or formally, even written in regulations and dictionary inquiries. It is believed to come with the signifier of ‘rumour’ naturally; it becomes the default. Thus, the application of this connotative concept become a practice taken for granted.

One of the consequences of the naturalization of this myth is that through the distortion from meanings to forms, the connotative understanding of rumour becomes the dominant of the sign. It works even without sufficient support from the content. It is self-sufficient alone. Rumour as a mythical ‘form’ already conveys what is expected to deliver without necessarily related content.

Turn back to the case of the murder of a girl (PANJ, 2020.2.4.). In that text, it is explicit that the signifier of rumour delivers its connotation in a naturalized manner: this message is a rumour. It is false, that is it. There is no need for any content to prove this statement.

However, no matter how naturalized it appears, myth is never a natural phenomenon. As Barthes (1972) pointed out, ‘it is the motivation that causes the myth to be uttered’, and the ‘concept (connotative interpretation) reconstitute the chain of causes and effects, motives and intentions (p.117).’ It is also explicit that that manifestation of rumour is an object for artificial manipulate.

Either sufficient or unconvincing verification needs motivation, practices, and the investment of subjectivity. Rumour refutation is never an autonomy itself but is applied in specific social contexts. To get an approach to it is to 'connect a mythical schema to a general history, to explain how it corresponds to the interests of a definite society', how application of rumour influences the social relation, manipulating powers, values, and representations. It is thus, in Barthes idea, to 'pass from semiology to ideology' (Barthes, 1972, p.128).

Refuting rumours: hegemony, power, and ideologies

The tension of antagonisms and hegemonies

It is apparent that the coexistence between the discourses of rumour and its refutation is far from harmonious. Instead, it is a sphere full of conflicts. In fact, rumour refutation is an explicit expression of the counterattack against rumour transmission.

*'In the face of online rumours and other illegal acts, the public security authorities will promptly **show their swords** and investigate and deal with them in accordance with the law (PATZ, 2020.1.28).'*

This *'show their swords'* metaphor, along with the equivalence of 'online rumour' with illegal acts, illustrate the hostile attitude of the authority towards the 'rumour' phenomenon explicitly. It is something against the social norm and regulations so much that it deserves explicit violence.

The text of refutation is always in specific contact with another text, the rumour: it makes sense by negating the latter. Therefore, this discourse is always formed through discursive struggles. Referring to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), since the social phenomenon is never total, the articulation of meaning is always open for social struggles. In this case, this struggle is centred around the very concept of 'rumour'.

In the identification of rumour, it is not much interest of the authorities about how the rumour message is circulated or what value or interest is represented. Instead, the struggle is focused on a simplified way: 1) whether one message is true and 2) whether that message can be identified as rumour. The second one concerns what has been discussed the conceptualization of rumour. It turns out as an implicit struggle since the concept of rumour is already a naturalized result of mythical speech: It is unquestioned in either in the campaign or the public's everyday interaction. It is the first issue that takes the prominent role of the struggle: the true representation of social reality. Constant use of terms like *'not really...'* *'not true...'* is a direct reference of this discursive struggle and contradictions into the antagonistic relation.

Antagonism takes place when different discourses mutually exclude each other (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p.47). Antagonism is based on existing discursive struggles, and at the same time, there is concrete tension that respective forces negate each other. 'The (antagonist) relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985,

p.156).’ In this case, it is strongly expressed in the refutation text that the rumour message is not part of the real situation. For example,

*‘...After investigation, the above-mentioned woman has been **ruled out** for stealing children and whether she is associated with the man suspected of theft is still under investigation...’* (JMZTCPT, 2018.10.13)

While refutation text turns an antagonist position against rumour, it may not actually be completely opposite to what is illustrated in the refutation when it comes to the rumour text.

‘On March 1, 2021, a video of a man digging out "gutter oil". [...] After a preliminary investigation, the man in the video, [...] has not been sold. [...] Please do not believe or spread rumours (WDP, 2021.3.24).’

In this case, the investigation turns out that the only conflict between rumour and refutation is whether the ‘gutter oil’ has been illegally sold. It does not contravene the discourse of rumour about the production of ‘gutter oil’ but merely alters certain details in the story. It has already been mentioned in content several cases of refutation work instead as a complement to the rumour text. However, the refutation text concludes with the position against the ‘rumour’, to treat it as ‘*not to be believed*’. Therefore, in this case, antagonist relation focuses more on the position of refutation but not necessarily in content or based on the factual contradictions about the representation of social reality.

This positional antagonism partly results from the ambiguity and the mythical schema of rumour: the implicit antagonism between the connotation and denotation of rumour. The antagonist relation of the last case is significantly related to the claim of ‘rumour’, the floating signifier as the site where different discursive struggles invest their meanings (Jorgenson and Philips, 2002). However, the antagonism of the concept of rumour, on the other hand, results in the instability of this position: what is the target of refutation is not a concrete case. It is the mythical work of rumour that makes sense of this positional antagonism between rumour and refutation. An alternation can, therefore, be distorted into an absolute antagonist position.

Nevertheless, it is not sufficient to claim this is ‘one-dimensional hostility’ for that it appears that it is only the antagonist position from the refutation discourse. Although the rumour discourse is passively incorporated into the antagonist project of the refutation text, what is equally vital is that it is positioned antagonisms within the discourse of the social. These rumours can be translated into an antagonist understanding of ‘the project of society’ manipulated by the authorities: they

provide an alternative understanding of certain social affair, some fragments of this project, which is thus positioned as the antagonist. While some are implicit, others are explicit:

'The old lady is a retired police officer, and her son is also a civilian police officer, [...] As a public official, knowing the law and using his power for personal gain, he has caused incalculable damage to society and people's property (anonymous netizen³, 2021.1).'

In this case, the rumour text claims an accusation of the misbehaviour or even corruption of the police officers. It is thus in a loud antagonist position against the project of a healthy and transparent government administration. In other cases, several rumour texts themed about 'child trafficking', the specific crime in social life, also conflict against the idea of 'the stable and secure society'.

As Laclau and Mouffe (1985) claimed, 'any position in a system of differences, insofar as it is negated, can become the locus of an antagonism (p.163).'

In this case, the antagonisms of rumour are located dispersedly in different positions in this grand project of the construction of social reality and perform their struggles. They either directly or indirectly encounter the discourse of refutation, which is the agent of this grand project. Therefore, it is fair to say that the antagonisms are *asymmetrical* between the various discourses of rumours and their refutation. While rumours may antagonize certain part of the project of the society respectively in different manner, the refutation discourse, through absorbing the meaning of these rumours into its concept, attempts to centralise these antagonisms into the simplified issue of the true interpretation of social reality. It thus dissolves them by simply one act, to refute it. The asymmetrical manner not only refers to the differentiated focuses of antagonisms but also their unbalanced positions.

Thus, the discursive space of rumour refutation is not so much of actual antagonisms but in dominance or hegemony. Despite the ambiguity left in the language use in actual cases, the refutation takes such forms of affirmation and objectivity. 'Hegemonic intervention is an articulation which by means of force reconstitutes unambiguity (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p.48).'

Hegemony is the process that specific discourse attempts to dominate over other struggling ones, where the fixation of specific meaning happened. It is thus the purpose of hegemony from antagonism to present the articulated discourse as objective and closed (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

³ These anonymous rumour posts while may be posted in private group chats or public website, are republished publicly through repost, news coverage or refutation text. The original is untraceable. Thus, the poster is anonymous for the ethic reason and because of being able to check.

In the case of rumour refutation, it is quite apparent how affirmative this text expresses as if the objectivity of such is without a doubt.

'[8 rumour spreaders were investigated and punished according to the law] Recently, some medical institutions in the city found that they had received a number of cases of pneumonia, and the municipal building committee issued a briefing on the situation. However, some netizens then published and forwarded false information on the internet without verification, causing adverse social impact. After investigation and verification, the public security authorities have summoned eight offenders and dealt with them in accordance with the law...' (PAWH, 2020.1.1)

This refutation text consists of three sentences. No specific evidence is provided while a strong statement is made against such rumours. This refutation discourse appears as so self-evident itself that it is seemingly an objective result.

However, to situate it based on discursive antagonism, it is not hard to identify that this objectivity is based on the repress of alternative interpretations. It is in turn its appearance of being self-evident that exposed the limit of objectivity in the refutation discourse for that it is the self-evidence without evidence. This signifier is applied arbitrarily in discursive articulation. The realisation of this objectivity is thus the result of hegemonic intervention, 'The development from conflict to objectivity passes through hegemonic interventions whereby alternative understandings of the world are suppressed, leading to the naturalisation of one single perspective (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p.37).'

What counts essential in the concept of hegemony is that it takes the form of consent, 'the processes through which subordinated forms of consciousness are constructed without recourse to violence or coercion (Barrett, 1991, p.54).'

Hegemony creates certain social consensus, where the interest and values of classes and groups are universalised (Bates, 1978, p.360, Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p.32). In this case, hegemony seems to function similarly with the myth for that they can both extend the values and interests of certain groups to the whole society (Leak, 1994, p.25). Myth and hegemony perform as the two sides of the same entity. This text of refutation is partly the result of this organisation of consent and social consensus. 'The hegemony formation embraces what it opposes it for that insofar as the opposing force accepts the system of basic articulations of that formation as something it negates (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p.172).'

This text of refutation is circulated among citizens without server rejection as if it is taken-for-granted. Meanwhile, it is also constituting this social consensus for that it keeps repeating the same discourse that constantly

echoes with existed consensus. No matter how harsh the statement is, it is still in the name of 'verification', accompanied by 'remind' from the police. However, it is already mentioned that some rumour refutation texts were transformed into a crime announcement, and certain 'remind' takes the form of warning or threats,

*'The police reminded that the Internet is not a place outside the law, and the police will investigate and **punish** illegal acts that disrupt the social order by publishing information on the Internet and **will not tolerate them**. I hope that the majority of Internet users comply with relevant laws and regulations, do not create rumours, do not believe in rumours, do not spread rumours, and build a harmonious and clear cyberspace...'* (PAWH, 2020.1.1)

In the name of 'remind', this text takes an especially demanding tone to prevent the public from 'believing and spreading rumours.' In this sense, although the act being punished may not be the specific case here about rumouring, they are built connections through chains of equivalence (what is punished is illegal acts, what is not hoped is rumour related.) Hence, here exists at the same time the more explicit and violent operation of power that excesses hegemony. In other words, hegemony companies with more violent intervention. Consent and force nearly always coexist (Lears, 1985, p.568).

There eventually exist the double hegemonies related to this rumour refutation discourse. The first is the fixation of the connotative concept of rumour as the dominant definition. The second is that the actual application of this term to claim that certain representation of the social reality is correct. In this stage, the existence of power relations and the ideological mechanism is transparently exposed.

Power and truth, the mechanism of ideologies

Insofar as the unevenness of discursive dispersion, the centralised outcome the asymmetrical antagonism, the collusion of hegemony and explicit performance of violence, they all point to the very topic of power in such discourses. Power, in this case, is understood as the instrument that manipulates to produce such domination and inequality. It is, therefore, relational that become apparent when it is exercised. In the hegemonic paradigm, power performs in the form of 'symbolic' and 'disciplinary' (Lash, 2007, p.55).

Such discipline and symbolic orders of power imply what Foucault (1982) said, 'a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions (p.789).' Power is thus understood as not only oppressive but productive (Townley, 1993, 521). It constitutes discourse, knowledge, bodies, and

subjectivities. In such cases, knowledge is believed as the site for the operation of this disciplinary power. ‘There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault, 1977, p.27).’ Here, power is related to the specific knowledge about the right view about the social reality, as such the issue of the truth.

While both the speech of rumour and rumour refutation are circulated in the communication of their symbolic network, there is only one type of discourse that is conceived as ‘knowledge’ in respective discourse.

*‘... **The correct way to use alcohol does not need to be spread through rumours. Especially in the critical period of the current fight against the epidemic, we should seek truth and be pragmatic, reject rumours, work together to fight the epidemic, and refrain from spreading rumours or creating chaos** (PACD, 2020.2.8).’*

In this case, it has been explicitly declared that the knowledge about alcohol (*‘the correct way to use alcohol’*) is not a case accessible from rumour. This antagonist position thus transforms the communicative practices into such of the power relations because it is not the only field of the production of meaning, but about the domination of means of constraint (Foucault, 1982). By declaring specific certain information is knowledge while the other is not, the declaration becomes knowledge itself. It is the knowledge about rumour. In this case, it is the irrelevance between the forms of rumour and the correct information to use alcohol.

There are several expressions in texts which relate the knowledge about rumours, such as, *‘Rumours stop at the wise’* (FYTHGAZX, 2019.7.11), not to mention the repetitively discussed reference to the legal entries about the punishment of rumour. Either legally or intellectually, the behaviour of believing, spreading, or producing rumours, is seen as a lack of specific knowledge. Meanwhile, such judgment itself becomes also knowledge.

These two types of knowledge correspond to the double hegemonic interventions. They are both produced as the effect of the operation of power: it implies the dominance on the interpretation of social reality while also the definition of the concept of rumour. These hegemonies come with the disciplines around such discourses: it asks for a tamed view about the society and a normative relation with rumour. Disciplines, in this sense, show ‘the manner in which systems of objective finality and systems of communication and power can be welded together (Foucault, 1982, p.788).’

Power is responsible for both the construction of the social world and how such a world can be discussed. It is thus both a productive and constraining force.

One of the most explicit manifestations of power relation in such cases is the that of the hegemonic duality of 'truth/falsehood'. In other words, the speech of rumour is excluded from such discourse of the truth. However, according to the Foucauldian perspective, even truth is subordinate to power, for that the production of truth is still within 'the types of discourse which makes it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanism and instances which enables one to distinguish true and false statement (p.1980, p.131).' Thus, truth is embedded in and produced by the system of power. Hence, truth is rather the 'effect' created within discourse (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p.14). The certain truth is created through discursive articulation, the dominance of specific discourse, and the manipulation of hegemony and violent forces. Rumour refutation, in this sense, is such a mechanism to create truth: it manifests the accepted view of the social reality while, on the other hand, the failure of alternative ones in such discursive struggles.

The manipulation of power relation makes rumour 'constitutive outside' of truth discourse. Such notion highlights that 'the creation of an identity implies the establishment of a difference, difference which is often constructed on the basis of a hierarchy (Mouffe, 2005, p.15).' In this case, rumour is supplement to what is conceived as truth. Follow the conception from Laclau and Mouffe (1985), discourse always articulated through 'chains of difference'. In such contingency of the symbolic order, it is through comparing, differentiating from each other that the signifier obtains a relative meaning (p.160). Therefore, rumour functions as a constitutive role in such discourse aimed for the truth. Its external position mirrors the accepted truth, highlights the differentiation and the power relationship in-between.

In several cases has been shown, truth appears not as 'such' but as 'not such' ('*such message is unauthentic*'). In a more general sense, the truth in refutation text always makes sense by negating existing interpretations.

*'On the night of October 8, a message about 'a girl encountered robbery' spread quickly, there is even information saying, 'child robbery'. It was verified that [the police] received a report that a man was **dragging a girl** at [...] and was stopped by the public... (SCCAW, 2019.10.9)'*

Here what is conceived as the accepted truth ('a man was dragging a girl') and rumour ('a girl encountered robbery', 'child robbery') cannot be distinguished as truth or falsehood explicitly

when encountered independently. On the other hand, the refutation text provided either no sufficient information to support that it was not robbery. Discourses thus remain relational and interdependent. Through this specific oppositional position of exclusion, it makes sense such truth operation; one is accepted while the other is excluded. Therefore, what matters the most in distinguishing the truth from the (false) rumour is, again, the deliberately positioned oppositional and antagonist relation.

However, the constitutive character of rumour simultaneously makes possible alternative power relation within such discourse. Just as ‘Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free’ (Foucault, 1982, p.790), power is always accompanied by resistance. In such course of discourses, it is still an unfinished project, however hegemonic is it articulated. Even a myth is, for Barthes (1972), still a site possible for alternative interpretation. Not to mention that rumour discourses are also constructed around their own points of antagonisms. What is excluded as rumour in the refutation text functions as knowledge during the circulation of such messages.

*‘This morning at around 8:40 am [...] there was a child theft incident. [...] Please pay attention to watch over the children, do not leave the children out of sight. Recently the society is **a bit of chaos** (anonymous netizen, WeChat group, 2018.10.14).’*

*‘Parents **on the alert**: two traffickers from out of town, carrying a large suitcase, tried to snatch an 8-grade-student and were eventually rescued by a group of well-wishers. One was caught and one ran away (anonymous netizen, WeChat Group, 2019.10.9).’*

In these cases, such messages functioned as not only as representing knowledge about the social reality (it is a bit of chaos) but also as the guidance/discipline to engage with such reality (pay attention, be on the alert) Alternative power relations hence operate in such discourses where are such knowledge is produced.

There are more nuanced forms where certain information is either formed into knowledge or excluded from it through the dynamics of power tensions, but they are put in an unequal an unbalanced manner. What is rather more important in such cases is the issue of legitimacy when conducting such power. Legitimacy is ‘the belief among citizens that a power-holder has the right to power and the authority to dictate appropriate behaviour (Gerber and Jackson, 2017, p.82).’ In other words, legitimacy refers to the judgement towards power-related practices. It is consistent with the procedure of knowledge production since legitimacy is in accordance with common ‘norms, values, beliefs and definitions (Suchman, 1995, p.574).’ The norms, beliefs and definitions

surround this phenomenon of rumour and refutation is heavily mythical and hegemonic intervened, the legitimacy is, in turn, an ideological effect: While rumouring is often believed as an invalid practice, rumour refutation is in contrast in nature the practice that its legitimacy that is rarely questioned, in other words, its legitimacy becomes the social consensus.

Ideology is such a mechanism that produces social consensus. While myth is the discourse that naturalises social and political concepts, ideology is believed the actual use of such mythical discourse and its effect (Leak, 1994). It naturalizes the supposedly distorted discourses. In this case, it is about the distorted connotative definition of rumour, the hegemonic character of refutation discourse and the dominant position of the police and authorities when conducting such practices. The ideological effect not only makes such consequences of social and institutional intervention into a taken-for-granted phenomenon but makes this mechanism appear as if it is already common sense. Ideology is, therefore, 'real' and material in such discourse of rumour: it connects the individuals with the institution and authorities; it is the social existence that maintains the unquestioning legitimacy of the behaviour of rumour refutation. It also constructs the conceptual framework where people subscribe their subject to it: the realm of thinking (Purvis and Hunt, 1993). Therefore, Rumour refutation is the explicit expression of the ideological schema that is already written in people's minds.

The civic-political site of rumour refutation

Constituting the civic culture

Rumour, which has been remarked as the site of antagonism, is ‘the political’. In Mouffe’s (2005) sense, the political, which differs from ‘the politics’, refers to the collective antagonism and conflicts that are constitutive of human society (p.9). This antagonism, which concerns how society is instituted, serves as the crucial resources and the origin of institutional and formalised politics. In a general sense, rumours function as the means to collectively make sense of society, solve problems and construct a meaningful interpretation. It, therefore, constitutes public opinions. What distinguishes rumour from public opinion, in a broad sense, is that ‘it is not verified through customary channels’ (Peterson and Gist, 1951, p.159), while in this case, is that these expressions as believed as not only unverified but false and harmful to the society. What makes rumour in such status is that such rumour messages are formulated based on inadequate information and intellectual resources: When accurate information is inaccessible, relevant knowledge must be produced through alternative ways (Fine, 2006, p.7). The fact is that unlike the indeed false information or slander, the analysis has shown a countable amount of the rumour cases with a solid factual basis. The interpretation of such facts is not necessary to say as distorted. Some of them are, in some degree, inadequate or inaccurate, but they are refuted in the significant concern for being external to the hegemonic discourse of the society.

‘A message titled A woman was sexually assaulted by a man claiming to be a “police officer” when she was isolated in a hotel [...] spread widely on network platforms, the content is partly untrue.... (ZGJFZX, 2021.2.3)’

To give another example here, this message accusing the sexual assault from the self-claimed police officer is refuted because the actor was not but pretended to be a policeman. In Comparison of two speeches, the rumour text is not necessarily violent to what is factual. It is elaborated as ‘self-claimed police’, and according to the speech from the person concerned in this case, that actor did claim as a police officer when entering her room. It makes sense in such a situation to conclude such speech based on her subjective knowledge about such experience. The rumour text is not an antagonist to the factual discourse, even not so antagonist towards the real subject of police, but the hegemonic management of whose impression: it discredits the image of the police. It is this intervention that leads to the necessity to locate such stories in the opposite position.

On the other hand, it is their concerns about society and public affairs that characterised this group of rumours. As is noted, it is their public concern that received attention and effort from forces of the police and authorities. That is, it is the *claimed* public influence that distinguishes it from those rumours that get no refutation, from gossips and other idle and inaccurate everyday talk. This discussion and continuous circulation about the public and society highlight such rumouring behaviour in participating in these spheres.

Such participation in the public based on the degree of public concern is a typical way of civic participation. Rumours, as informational resources, the sense-making practices, the soft glue of community formation, function as the constitutive part of the civic cultures in the society where they are circulated. By referring rumour to the civic cultures, it is emphasized its role as the condition that generates civic participation and engagement and facilitates democratic life (Dahlgren, 2009).

Rumour serves in different dimensions of civic cultures. Apart from rumour as the participatory practice that constitutes the key dimension, it has also been analysed how rumour produces knowledge. Such knowledge about the public is a must for people to be politically engaged (Dahlgren, 2009, p.108). Rumours show a solid relation to the circumstances of the everyday reality around people. In this case, they seldom perform concern about the actual political or administrative forces but the more general civil environment. These rumours contribute more to the public's negotiation with the general lifeworld than the necessarily political or democratic life. The previous study has shown that more politically sensitive rumour is more likely to be censored and deleted in China, (Zeng *et al*, 2017), these refuted rumours, on the other hand, imply that they are politically secure to the institutional forces of politics. Nevertheless, as the civic culture, they serve as everyday resources for such political life (Dahlgren, 2009). In this sense, the alternative interpretation of social affairs through rumour circulation is thus the appropriation of inadequate information, to 'integrating it in relation to one's existing frame of reference and making it personally meaningful (p.109).'

Another dimension that is crucial in such cases is trust. 'A horizontal trust among citizens is necessary for the emergence of the social bonds of cooperation between those who collectively engage in politics (Dahlgren, 2013, p.24).' It is based on a degree of trust that the circulation of specific pieces of rumour happens within communities. Although the production of rumour may

not be based on a legit foundation of fact or belief, the circulations of rumour among groups and communities are strongly related to the trust among them, especially considering rumour is spread significantly via personal communication, which shuttles between private and public spheres. It is not rare in the rumour text that it attempted to claim trust.

'On February 9, 2020, the health inspection department confirmed that Li was a patient with a new coronavirus infection pneumonia (anonymous netizen, Weibo, 2020.2.9).'

'Today, a colleague in the group sent this message: driver's attention, bumper stickers on the rampage at the road elevated No.2... (anonymous netizen, Weibo, 2018.3.12).'

In such cases, it is obvious that rumours claim trust via referring to the credibility of their sources. It is claimed from either the official sources or the closed person concerned. In more general cases, rumour claims the plausibility of the content through plenty of details. In this case, even rumours are not necessarily adequate or accurate, they are 'too good to be false'. 'It must be treated as something that might reasonably happen in the world as we know it (Fine, 2006, p.8).' Hence, the plausibility of rumours is strongly related to the existing knowledge framework of the societal world and belief. People share and spread certain rumours because they believe it might happen. In such cases, rumour can present groups' collective imaginary about society. For instance, 'the child trafficking' rumours reflect the public's sense of insecurity about their children (Child trafficking is indeed a severe problem in China, Jiang and Sánchez-Barricarte, 2013). The previous study also shows that rumours against the authoritative institutions reflect the public consensus about the sense of insecurity about these institutions, 'The public subconsciously views representatives of the public authorities as unkind, abusers of power and violent perpetrators who are used to hiding the truth (Hu, 2009, p.87).'

This, on the other hand, boosts the distrust to the institutional, official sources. 'Rumour reveals trust in society at the moment that it questions trust in institutions (Fine, 2006, p.7).'

Especially when rumours are embedded as the unaccepted interpretation of the social, the expecting discourse from the authorities is in turn not sufficiently trustful. This degree of distrust can function as the outsources of the alternative approach to the political and democratic process (Dahlgren, 2013, p.17). For the rumour public, this distrust in belief may be the motivation inherent in their continuous rumour talk.

The dimension which makes rumour a questionable status in civic culture is identity. Identity highlights that participating in civic issues needs the knowledge of a civic self, to see themselves

as actors who can make meaningful interventions (p.24). The rumour public, however, is hardly presented as being aware of the meaningfulness of their action in civic or democratic change. They work at their own or community's need for negotiating with the life world surrounding them but seldom have the political intentions. However, civic culture itself is significantly impacted by the sociocultural current of society and the intentional intervention of political economy and organized power (Dahlgren, 2009, 2013). The unequal relation between the rumour and refutation discourses is the epitome of that between the public agency and the authorities' project of society. It has already been mentioned that more deliberate political talk in rumours is not a case of refutation but of more violent intervention. Such lay production of everyday knowledge is thus outside of such scope. The cases related more to a political self are intentionally hindered. However, such rumouring matters for that it provides the everyday recourses for such conscious political participation. Although the circulation of rumours is not necessarily based on civic intention, their practices do function civilly: they participated in discussing the public and the social. Such rumour concern contributes to the formation of their civic identity. Social activism can root in the tension between their rumour practice and the violence against their collective behaviour, illegitimate refutation.

'Seven cases of SARS have been confirmed at the South China Fruit and Seafood Market and are in isolation at the Emergency Department of our hospital, Houhu Campus.'

*'The latest update is that coronavirus infection is confirmed, and virus typing is underway. **Please do not spread the word** and tell their family members and relatives to take precautions (Li, WeChat Group, cited in Liu, 2020).'*

These are two pieces of messages circulated in a group chat of medical colleagues. Apparently, it is not the poster's purpose to bring this information to the public since it is noted to '*do not spread the word*', but instead for family and community concerns. However, the circulation of these messages, travelling from the private to the public, together with other fragment evidence, functions as the very early whistle blow of the breakout of Covid-19 pandemic in Wuhan city, China. Later, the refutation of these messages as rumour facing the pandemic out-of-control and the unfair treatment and the death of one whistle-blower because of infection triggered one of the critical parts of the digital activism (Shih, 2020, Davidson, 2020, Ma, 2021).

However, raising the civic concern of rumour activity does not imply that rumour is all publicly good; either does it negate or ignore the factuality of such a case and the potential negative

influence. As have been shown, there are rumours that are deliberately distorted or misinterpreted for personal or selfish need, causing confusion and negative sentiment. However, it attempts to provide a counter-hegemonic interpretation against the speech of rumours as ‘false and harmful to the society’ that appears solid and complete in Chinese context. What is more is that it puts the conduction of rumour refutation in need of more deliberation. Apart from cases that can be identified as disinformation or harmful in a hard affirmation, there are still a countable number of other rumours refuted in a similar tone. Rumour, containing such a decredited definition, becomes a stigmatised label that has been crudely attached to excessive objects. The mythical and ideological mechanisms manipulate such attachments. What is thus identified at the centre is that the hegemonic structure that realizes such distortion.

Modes of participation

Based on the struggles on rumour, the hegemonic structure is focused between the authorities’ project of society as the normative discourse and the rumour as the alterative interpretation of that social world. Whether based on a factual basis or not, the rumour discourse intervenes, contests with, or even disrupts the supposed official discourse, therefore evoking the refutation as the hegemonic force. In this case, the antagonism is surrounding the practices of participation. Through the interaction between rumour and refutation text, different actors express about, involve, and intervene in social and civil phenomena (Dahlgren, 2013, Rosanvallon, 2008). In the context of civic culture, the conflicts between discourses have another aspect: what degree of participation is ‘normatively and functionally desirable’ in such hegemonic discourses (Dahlgren, 2013, p.20).

The refutation text explicitly expressed that participatory practices via rumour are unsatisfying for that they are seen as ‘*blind speculation*’, ‘*irrational approach*’, ‘*gullible*’ and ‘*incorrect*’, etc. The more severe cases are illustrated as ‘*fabricating facts*’, ‘*being malicious*’, ‘*violent to the law*’. Even its connotative definition can be decoded into its negative judgement. Based on the criticism against such practices, the other mode of ideal or normative participation is formulated:

‘...Hope that the majority of Internet users will not create, believe or spread rumours... (SCGA, 2018.6.18)’

‘...Do not believe or spread unverified information... (JMZTC, 2018.10.13)’

‘...Everything should be subject to official and authoritative information...(BDWJXCZF, 2021.1.7)’

Rumours are undesired; thus, the normative mode of participation excludes this form of communication. Such accusation is, noticeably following the chains of signifiers, extended to the denotative meaning of rumour of ‘unverified information’. On the contrary of these prohibitions, ‘official and authoritative information’ appears in a quite dominant position. Every interpretation should be based on the standard of the speech from the official and authoritative resources.

Carpentier (2011) provides the model of minimalist-maximalist participation (Dahlgren, 2013, p.20) to help understand the distinctions between ways of engagement to democracy. For Minimalist participation, it emphasizes on the dynamics of representation. In the democratic model, the role of the citizen is primarily limited to their selection rather than production. ‘Public opinion is treated as macro-aggregations of popular sentiment, rather than a dynamic process of interaction (p.21).’ On the other hand, the maximalist position sees participation as multi-dimensional, emphasising the ‘heterogeneity of political voices and positions (p.21).’ Thus, alternative approaches of participation, especially in the political scope, are expected, with a degree that is balanced with representation.

What should be noted here is that this model is not completely consistent with Chinese context. For the first, it has been mentioned that civic participation through rumour is not directly related to the democratic or electoral process. Secondly, there are no clear distinctions between political traditions of liberalism and republicanism in China. However, such a model is inspiring here because it provides the conception that interprets the conflicts in the modes of participation between discourses.

It is evident that the discourse of rumour refutation implies a quite limited and narrow way of participating in civic and social affairs: Everything should be subject to official and authoritative information. The discussion is hence legit only based on the official narratives. In this case, when it is claimed that the information is official and authoritative, it inherently excludes the alternative interpretation or information: it is indubitable, which is strongly related to the production of truth. Under the dominance of the truth, subjects and agency are only expected to activate to follow such speech. ‘Participation’ maybe only released based on the premise of consensus. On the other hand, participatory practice illustrated in rumours attempts to provide the alternative understanding apart from the official and authoritative version or when it is absent. They make sense of social facts in accordance with individual or collective knowledge, belief, or intentions. In this sense,

participation takes a more active form, but in an undesired way. Therefore, these two modes of participation located at two poles of participation, whereas on the one side, participation is so constrained that agency is almost hegemonically silent; on the other side, it is the participation that is excessive to the official and authority's tolerance.

The practices or claim of such participation is meanwhile reflections of the distinctions on civic identities. The normative participatory mode highlights the received citizenship, or state-centred citizenship, which is defined within the legal parameters of state power (Dahlgren, 2003, p.62). Therefore, participation must comply with laws, regulations, and social order. It is the same reason that makes sense of the police intervention of rumour refutation, representing the state institution and social security. In this sense, it is the citizen's responsibilities that is marked in such discourse, where citizens are disciplined to discriminant information, contribute to the circulation of official, authoritative information, and maintain social order. Meanwhile, the rumour participation reflects more on the achieved citizenship which is based on political agency. That is, citizenship is obtained through their participation in the civic project. It is remarked more at the side of right, which dispatches their capabilities and needs to make sense, understand, negotiate, and communicate about public affairs and the broad social and political world.

Here it is helpful to summarize what the project of society refers to in the refutation discourse. A few frequently mentioned keywords can help illustrate the portrait of this project: 'social order', 'security', 'healthy online environment'. In other words, it is a normative society expected by the authorities of China where these parameters solidly exist. It is a project that appears so completed that no room for disruption exists. However, it is a discourse itself, so that these affirmative statements are not finished however they claim. Thus, it is a result of hegemony; while there is alternative discourse circulated antagonist to it, this project remains the dominant position. Refutation as such organization of consent conveys to and echoes with the public that the alternative information is false and harmful. In such discourse of social order and security, elements about social conflicts and risks are unwelcomed. Even if the heterogeneity is acknowledged in this normativity, it appears in a harmonious and non-conflict ensemble (Mouffe, 2005, p.10).

Antagonisms are thus unfavourable in this project, and the solution to the antagonisms of ways of participation, based on such hegemonic discourse, is far from innocent. Apart from the collusion of explicit expression of power, they aim to form the hegemony of such a social project about

harmony, social order, and security. It is, thus, the ideological mechanism that validates the refutation in such a purpose. It is seen as natural and taken-for-granted but at the same time has a specific institutional purpose. It ideologically connects the normative and factual aspect of civic culture. The normative has a deep impact on the actual practices as if it is already intertwined with the factual world that is experienced (Dahlgren, 2003, Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). This hegemony, to see society as a completed project, is constitutive to the practices of conduction such refutation: achieved citizenship becomes the subjective resources that are limitedly favoured. The participation accompanied is thus received more harsh treatment and even forceful intervention. In this sense, it is even hard for the refutation actor to see the public opinion as to the collective interaction; rumour is remarked in individual responsibility instead of collective practices.

Tolerance and the efficiency of civic communication

The most significant thing about rumour refutation is not necessarily to present the verification and truth but to get rid of rumour. It is thus an antagonism in the position of between friend/enemy discrimination (Mouffe, 2005, p.14). To see rumour in such scope, to achieve such goal through hegemonic intervention and more powerful methods, is thus based on the strong hostility or limited tolerance towards such phenomenon. Since rumour constitutes a vital part of civic participation, tolerance thus inevitably carries the civic responsibility. Tolerance in the political sense refers to 'a willingness to extend the rights of citizenship to all members of the polity, [...] to allow political freedoms to those who are politically different (Gibson and Bingham, 1982, p.603).' Rights and freedom are here significantly about speech. Limited tolerance, in this case, is the limited freedom and rights allowed to that alternative interpretation and opinions in rumours that are antagonist against the project of the normative society. The practices of producing, spreading, and interacting with the rumour information are unacceptable. They are labelled as intellectual, moral, or legal disordered: the idea of rumour convey by the refutation institution is similar to the early psychology tradition that it is socially pathological (Allport and Postman, 1947). Even the very early study of the psychological study of rumour, to a certain degree, attempted to make sense of such phenomenon within collective behaviour. However, in the discourse of rumour refutation, rumour is reduced as a simple error of society in need of fixing. While the content of rumour is not identically civic or political, to identify and label rumour is an action becoming political, for that it is utilized to attack and dominate dissident speech. When rumours are identified as the

communication channel that is morally and intellectually intolerant, the content that it is conveying is also untrustful.

This limited civic tolerance serves the project of the society, especially in the order of communication in such society. While it is shown that public communication about social affairs should be authentic, precise and in the order that is accordance with the authorities, it is only in a closed discourse that this project can be realized. Rumour refutation aims at an efficient civic communication model where messages are transmitted harmoniously without unacceptable noise. In this sense, harsh refutation is consistent with this hegemonic closeness. However, it is merely a normative model, and hegemony can never be a finished project. Ironically, it is the lack of efficient official information that calls the need of rumour within the public (Coast and Fox, 2015). The appearance of rumour does not necessarily mean the violation of the order or efficiency of communication but can possibly expose the dysfunction of formal communication. Not to mention rumour contributes to the build of ‘a recognized group with shared value, belief, and concern [...] which is at the heart of a well-functioning public sphere (Fine, 2006, p.17).’ What matters more is that such idea of normative communication, especially when it is referring to the general communicative practices, inherently negates or rejects the ambiguity in citizens’ everyday communication. Even the idlest talk of lay public is expected to follow precisely the official and normative narration. It is in this sense that even the case above about the parody joke (PAES, 2019.7.9) is also in need of exclusion, for that it is the unaccepted polysemy. Under such circumstances, this demand for the efficiency of communication is possibly hindering or discouraging citizens’ participation in civic life. While rumours are historically an integral part of civil society (Fine, 2006, p.17), they are almost impossible to be a proper way of participation in such a communication model. The citizens really need an amount of knowledge and social capital if they expect to take part in civic life because the proper circulation of information should always be true, rational, and complied with the official and authoritative discourse.

Further, the efficiency of communication is also problematic because the analysis of rumour refutation text already shows that such practices are far less than efficient or precise, although in the name of verification. Instead, countable texts are ambiguous themselves, either in the reasoning of rumour-identification or in the display of ‘truth’. Efficiency becomes a concept build on mythical and ideological mechanism. It does not necessarily ask for precise or authentic

information, but that information precisely and authentically complies with the hegemonic program. Truth is not the ultimate value but the instrument that builds the project of society. In this sense, what is referred to through such refutation discourse is not necessarily facts and beliefs that constitute the truth, but the power relation and hegemonic position. Such distortion of reference makes rumour refutation the practice that can be realized easily and abused. The link to factual verification in this refutation discourse becomes obscure under the shade of institutional expression of power. Therefore, the real need for efficiency of communication is altered; it became the efficiency without the consideration of efficiency. The text of rumour refutation becomes, to a certain degree, open to arbitrariness but at the same time mythically convincing and trustful.

It is evident to claim that in such structures, rumour is understood in an oversimplified term. The complexity of rumour is concealed. Comes to the key concern of social order, rumours as important means to express opinions and make sense of the world, to a degree, help promote social stability (Fine, 2006, p.17), but at the same time, are historically perceived as a driver of change, destabilising civil society (Coast and Fox, 2015, p.228). However, in such structures of hegemony, they are situated in the only exiled position. This reduction is managed ideologically. However, the question is that whether the rejection of the polysemy of rumour is capable of reducing its factual implication. The study has shown that even verification backfires the belief of rumour (Aricat, 2017, p.60). The denial of the civic character of rumour does not ultimately hinder the public's civic practices through rumour but push it to the grey area of civic life. The brutal refutation of dissent or antagonist discourse does not either contribute to the social order but is possibly causing serve consequences. The case of the refutation of the early 'rumour' about COVID-19 in Wuhan is still a hurtful example. Although ideology makes refutation possible within the symbolic order, the practice still has a consequence in the real social world. On the other hand, this narrowed interpretation of rumour conceives the problems concerning the legitimacy of power, the relation between hegemony, more violent instruments, and the possibility of the antagonist forces against these installations.

Conclusion

The primary argument of this thesis is to understand the discursive and ideological position of rumour refutation in the social and civic context in China. Through a qualitative text analysis in-depth, it attempts to convey a holistic view of different textual aspects of sign (language), discourse and sociocultural context. Starting from the notice of the ambiguity of meaning in the application of rumour, it figures that different elements of factuality, harmfulness, scale of influences, subjectivity, etc., overdetermine the contingent fixation of meaning in different text. There is a split between the narrow and concrete definition of rumour as ‘falsehood and harmfulness’ and its ambiguous meaning when it refers to the actual textual presentation in either rumour or refutation. Rumour becomes a floating signifier that is the site where different discursive struggles invest themselves; on the other hand, it implies the tendency for the prevails of a designated discourse. It is argued that the split is mediated through a mythical mechanism. It distorts the denotation into connotation, translates the loose ensemble of ambiguous rumour messages into a fixed concept. It is argued that in this mythical schema, Concepts of rumour departs from and perpetually consumes the resources from the meaning of rumour, such as ‘being unverified’, while at the same time puts it at disposal, signifies the empty form into falsehood, harmfulness etc. Therefore, mythical speech is to naturalize this distortion as if the concept of rumour is taken for granted. It is argued that the effect of this naturalization is ideological, for the linguistic and textual form itself obtains meaning without necessary accordance with the content. Rumour refutation as a form of communication conveys certain judgment itself, implies that the rumour text it refers to is false. On the other hand, it is the representative of authority and thus correctness.

To understand further the tension between rumour and refutation text, I argue that the practice of rumour refutation is based on the antagonisms between discourses. It is noticed that this antagonism is positional rather than the contradiction in content. That is, a refutation text may not possibly exclude rumours in content, but it is put opposite to its position. While rumour may be interpreted as antagonist expression of various part of the social, rumour refutation opposes the general phenomenon of rumour. Therefore, antagonisms at the two sides show an asymmetrical manner. The resolution of this antagonism, on the other hand, is argued a hegemonic intervention. It is the discursive triumph that takes the organization of consent, colluding with institutional forces of warning, threat and administrative and legal penalties. There are double hegemonies, for the first

is the consensus of the definition of rumour. The second is the correct view and interpretation of the social world based on this consensus.

Therefore, the formulation of such hegemonies is based on the production and circulation of certain knowledge. The claim of this knowledge is, on the other hand, the claim of power. While it is analyzed how the interplay of knowledge and power contributes to the symbolic dynamic at both sides of rumour and refutation, the knowledge/power in rumour discourse is conceived as invalid after refutation. On the other hand, knowledge produced by the refutation discourse prevails over the rumour and other alternatives. It obtains the truth effect that is seemingly self-evident but is still embedded in the system of power. Rumour functions as the constitutive outside in such power relations that mirrors the correctness of 'truth'. The production and maintenance of the validity of this truth discourse in rumour refutation is an ideological mechanism for that it is realized through hegemonic intervention, through the internalization of this mythical installation into social norms and consciousness.

When it comes to the implication of this discursive struggle in the social and cultural world, this research attempts to translate it into the framework of civic culture. It argues that rumour constitutes an integral part of civic culture for that it is the significant form of communication that informal groups and communities applied to collectively make sense of the social world and express their opinions. Based on the discussion about the antagonist nature between rumour and refutation, it is argued that what triggers refutation is not necessarily rumours' falsehood or harmfulness, but its intervention against the hegemonic discourses. It, on the other hand, marks rumour's prominent role as participation in these spheres. While the rumours refuted in this case rarely directly refer to the political or democratic process, they work as the cultural recourses in everyday life for the potential of these practices. Although rumours are conceived as invalid knowledge by the authority, it still plays an important role for the circulators to negotiate with the social world, provides the guide to handle everyday hardness and risk. The circulation of rumour plays the politics of trust among communities and social institutions. 'Rumour reveals trust in society at the moment that it questions trust in institutions (Fine, 2006, p.7).' Rumours portrait the imaginary of social issues and the untrustful authorities. This distrust is a significant motivation to participate in civil society. Rumours also possibly contribute to the formation of a premiere civic self. It cultivates the subjective resources for social activism.

Through the refutation of the rumour discourses, it meanwhile rejects the participation represented by these discourses. Antagonism between rumour and its refutation, in the civic perspective, can be translated into the antagonism of different ways of participation. Rumour presents an extensional mode of participation that conflicts with the official or authoritative narrative and expresses the informal and undesired voice. On the other hand, rumour refutation represents a restricted participation mode based on the acceptance and consensus of hegemonic discourse. All interpretation should be subject to official and authoritative information. This discourse portrays the program of the normative society that is stable, harmonious and in order. It is hegemonic in the sense that it appears as solid and completed. In this sense, rumours conflict with both the meaning and the structure of this hegemonic discourse, thus become the unfavored way of participation. The antagonisms between the two modes of participation also emphasize the distinct aspects of citizenship. Participation through rumour implies the achieved citizenship that marks the civic agency and active engagement with the civil society. It highlights citizenship as the right to get informed, involved and influence the development of society. In contrast, rumour refutation suggests the received citizenship that state-centred property of this identity. Citizenship implies accordance with laws, regulation, and social order. It highlights the responsibilities of citizenship to comply with the normative form of communication.

Acknowledging the difference of participation represented by the discourses of rumour and refutation, the hegemonic intervention, accompanied by violent forces, implies limited political tolerance. To a certain degree, Rumour refutation represents the unacceptance of dissident opinions and alternative interpretations that intervene, challenge, or disrupt. It is argued that although the rumour gets refuted may not have political characteristics, rumour refutation becomes a very political practice. This limited tolerance serves the hegemonic program. It is the normative idea of society. Accordingly, rumour refutation portrays a normative and efficient mode of communication. Messages are expected to transmit harmoniously without unacceptable noise. However, it is argued that the overpower of efficiency, especially against the ambiguous communication in everyday life, hinders and discourage the public's participation in civic life. It demands a certain degree of knowledge and social capital in order to participate. On the other hand, the analysis shows that refutation text does not necessarily contribute to efficiency in actual communication, but many of which are confusing and ambiguous. It follows the ideological mechanism. Efficiency does not refer to the factuality, accuracy or public good, but hegemony and power relation. Therefore,

efficiency does not imply precise and authentic communication, but that is precisely and authentically accordant to the hegemonic project of society. The consequence of this distortion of efficiency is that the reference of refutation is also not necessarily the factual evidence but the resources of hegemony. In this sense, it is reflected that refutation may either not contribute to the normative project of the social, it may harm the efficiency and hence the trustworthiness of formal communication, expose its ideological and mythical mechanisms, and conceives the potential residence against these social installations.

This research performs mainly as critics on the rumour refutation campaign in China, especially concerning the phenomenon of the abuse of symbolic and institutional power in this case. Furthermore, it aims to reflect on the legitimacy of power in the name of truth. Rumour, in this case, maybe a deviant example compared to its application in the general academia or international context. However, similar phenomena are circulating around the globe in the name of misinformation, 'fake news,' etc. It is not new that these terms are applied for specific political interests (Farkas and Schou, 2018). Combating programs such as fact-checking is also currently a controversial topic (Brandtzaeg and Følstad, 2017). In this sense, the Chinese case also serves as an extreme case that maximizes its institutional and symbolic characteristic. In China's civic context, such counter-rumour campaigns take such hegemonic and dominant forms and trigger unique social antagonism. However, criticism on the rumour refutation campaign does not imply the complete negation of its contributions, nor does it mean the indulgence of the circulation of mis/disinformation. The question on the legitimacy of truth claim does not mean the rejection of the existence of truth. However, it is aimed to note that while the rumour is a complex phenomenon, there is a subtle relationship between truth as the institutional reference to power and the factual recourses that have real social implications. It always needs to be cautious to maintain their balance.

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Appendices

1. Extract of analysis table⁴

space and platform	rumour text	Theme	aim of the rumour	emotion representation	refutation text	Aim	Rumour form	refutation form	Refutation term	rumour is understood as the behave of...	the rumour text is believed as...
微信	太吓人了 ，昨天下午我们小区发生命案，装修公司三个人把隔壁 20多岁 的小妹给轮奸了之后给支解了， 太吓人了 ！详情明天给大家说👉👉又是碎石案 还带轮奸案	rape,murder	Informing accident affairs (official) (express emotion)	Scary	近日，网传“成都新都佳乐国际城一名女业主被轮奸后分尸”引发网友关注，经我局调查核实，网传所述女业主被“轮奸”“分尸”等 内容均为不实信息 。//目前，已对 造谣人员 依法展开调查。请 不信谣，不传谣 。	informing of the police's resolution. Remind	casual messaging	refute as a criminal report	不实信息	信谣、传谣	(partly) unauthentic
今日头条	这老太太是退休警察，儿子也是民警，此前去韩国（韩国疫情严重）做床眼皮，韩国回来后集中隔离14天，据说早就托关系把人提前捞出来，回家后根本不把所在社区放在眼里，拒不配合，四处游达，瞒报行程！ 发疯以把第一时间把儿子，儿媳扫送至外地 ，至今未报出二人行程，你们想想孙女、老伴都感染了， 到底谁怕谁 ？老太太住在宏达家园，难道13岁孙女自己住华润橡树湾？不与其父母同住？作为公职人员，知法犯法，以权谋私，对社会建设，人民财产造成了不可估量的损失， 强烈要求政府给人民一个正义，严惩知法犯法人员 ！	Covid, Police	Informing accident affairs/ Demanding to the government	Angry, skepticism	近日，有网民在网上发布涉及我市新冠肺炎疫情确诊患者尹某某的相关信息，称“尹某某为退休民警”“尹某某儿子为在职民警”。经调查核实，尹某某及其配偶均为某企业退休工人，其子女也 都不是 人民警察。// 希望广大网民遵守法律法规 ，切勿造谣传谣，对于制造、传播谣言的违法犯罪行为，公安机关将依法严肃处理。	Verification. Police remind	casual comment	verification with details	均为、都不是	制造、传播谣言的违法犯罪行为	(partly) unauthentic
今日头条	4月3日上午，两名美国籍男子，在泰安馆餐厅吃自助餐时，故意 调戏 对面吃饭的两个女孩，并做出 侮辱性动作 。餐厅工作人员劝说时，外国人不仅不认错反而辱骂工作人员，酒店经理随即指酒店保安时，一名外国人说酒店歧视外国人，在酒店大堂大吵大闹。随后酒店保安人员将其控制，并送往 警察局 。该2名男子以危害社会公共安全罪和 不遵守中国法律法规 暂时被收监。据悉这2名男子因抵触妨碍执法令，除了罚款外可能还要 面临牢牢3月 ，目前两人已正处于拘留期间	harrasment, (foreigner/ American)	Informing accident affairs (official)		近日，有网传“两名美籍男子在泰安吃自助餐调戏女孩被收监”的消息，警为经过调查核实， 辖区未接到相关警情报告 ，此信息系谣言，希望 广大市民和网友不信不传 。//警方正告，网络不是法外之地，在网上发布信息、言论应遵守法律法规，对于 造谣、传播、散布谣言、扰乱公共秩序 的违法行为，公安机关将依法追求其法律责任。	Verification. Police's remind	coverage/report	verification referring to authorities/annoument	未接到相关警情报告	造谣、传播、扰乱公共秩序	No corresponding report
微信	【关于市区出租车停运的通知】为全力做好新型冠状病毒感染的肺炎疫情防控工作，有效切断病毒传播途径，确保人民群众生命安全和身体健康，根据市新型冠状病毒感染的肺炎 防疫指挥部 的公告要求，自2020年1月26日0时起，市区出租车一律停止运营，恢复时间另行告知。恳请广大驾驶员理解、支持和配合！达州市城市交通客运管理处。	Covid, traffic	Informing of "new regulation"		【达州出租车停运】造谣男子被警方行政拘留！ 请广大网友不信谣、不传谣、不造谣 ！面对 网络谣言 和其他 违法行为 ，公安机关将及时亮剑，依法查处。疫情当前，惟有万众一心，团结一致，才能攻克时艰。	Police's remind	official annoument	refute as a criminal report	改为、造谣、虚假信息	网络谣言和其他违法行为	disinformation
微信	车牌号浙B1.0535这个车刚从武汉回来，车上的人确诊了偷跑回来的，回 江的 ，大家看到了及时报警， 希望大家留意 此车牌号，转发各个群，朋友圈，以免更多人受到 感染	Covid	informing accident affairs/ advice	Worry	【网传武汉新型冠状病毒感染者潜回遂宁系谣言】目前遂宁警方在工作中发现，遂宁本地微信群流传一群聊照片和信息，传言“一辆车牌浙B1.0535的车从武汉回来，车上人确诊感染病毒，且来到蓬南镇、拦江镇等地”！经核实，全国 无此牌照小型汽车号牌 。大型汽车号牌浙B1.0535在遂宁 无过车信息 ，全国各地出现类似谣言。//遂宁公安郑重提醒：网络不是法外之地，请广大网友提高甄别能力，不造谣，不传谣，以官方发布信息为准，构成违法犯罪的，公安机关将依法查处。	verification. Police's remind	casual messaging	verification with details	无、无过车信息、类似谣言	造谣、传谣	partly unauthentic

⁴ Marks in the text stand for different themes. Pink bold means details, yellow bold is for expression of emotions Black Bold refers to verification term, red subject to the appellation of audience, purple stands for the reference to legal measurement. Italic stands for the expected behaviour. Double slashes (//) distinct different parts of text.

2. Case references and complete transcription

1) BDWJCFZF (@保定网警巡查执法 Internet Police of Baoding City), 2021.1.7.

‘A netizen in Baoding spread the rumor that “more than 200 people died in Shijiazhuang” and was detained for 6 days the next day.’ On January 6, 2021, the police received a report that a netizen spread a rumor in a WeChat group saying: ‘More than 200 people died in Shijiazhuang.’ which was seriously untrue. After receiving the report, the Baoding Internet police immediately launched an inspection and quickly identified the offender: Yang, male, 27 years old, from Quyang. After verification by the public security organs of Quyang County, Yang confessed to his behavior of fabricating false epidemic information in the WeChat group. At present, Yang was sentenced to 6 days of administrative detention by the Quyang County Public Security Bureau for violating the ‘Public Security Administration Punishment Law of the People's Republic of China’ and fined one hundred yuan.

Baoding police reminded: At present, the information of the epidemic in Hebei’s hometown is affecting everyone’s heart. The masses should not hear from hearsays. The latest information on the epidemic should be obtained from official government or authoritative news media. The changes in the epidemic affect people’s hearts and the spread of rumors have seriously affected the current situation of epidemic prevention and control work. It is hoped that the general public will not believe in rumors or spread rumors, and that everything will be subject to official authoritative information and take personal protection. Public security organs will punish rumors and spread rumors in accordance with the law, and resolutely maintain a good social order.

2) CDWJXCZF (@成都网警巡查执法 Internet Police of Chengdu City), 2020.1.30.

[Network spreads that two highly suspected infected patients in XXX left the hospital by themselves. Refutation: the rumours are not true!] On January 29, a message circulated rapidly in a WeChat group, saying "YYY residents VV Ying and ZZ Mei were diagnosed with highly suspected novel coronavirus pneumonia on January 28, and they left the hospital privately at 00:00 on the 29th, not knowing where they were going".

XXX Health Bureau debunks the rumour: This message is not true, the two do exist, but are not suspected virus infected, but just ordinary patient’s family members who accompany their family to the hospital.

Chengdu Internet Police solemnly reminds: Do not create, believe, or spread rumours, please refer to the official release for related information.

3) FYTHGAZX (@阜阳太和公安在线 Public Security Online Taihe County), 2019.7.11

[The child stealing incident reappeared in Moment, the police confirmed that it was a rumour] At 13:00 on July 11, CCC Police Station received 110 instructions, and some people called the police that someone had stolen a child at the entrance of a restaurant near DDD. After receiving the police, the police rushed to the scene immediately. After investigation, the situation was untrue, and it was a misunderstanding caused by the two parties. However, people who did not know the truth at the scene took a video claiming that someone had stolen a child and sent the video to WeChat Moments, causing widespread dissemination. The rumours stop at the wise, hope everyone will not believe or spread rumours. At the same time, the public security organs will severely crack down on those who deliberately distribute rumours and cause social panic.

4) HDWJZF (@邯郸网警执法 Internet Police of Handan city), 2020.8.12.

On August 11, Handan Internet Police found when they patrolled online that a netizen had posted the message “A girl was stabbed several times at Handan Railway Station”. The police attached great importance to this information and immediately verified it. It was verified that there were no stabbings at Handan Railway Station in recent days and the information was false. Please do not believe in rumours, spread rumours. The public security authorities will pursue their legal responsibility according to law if they create or spread rumours that touch the law.

5) JMZTCPT (@警民直通车_普陀 Public Security branch Putuo district) 2018.10.13.

[The net transmission of the kidnapping case on GL Road and TC Road is false information] On October 13, there was a message on the Internet that someone robbed a child on GL Road and TC Road. In this regard, Putuo Public Security quickly carried out an inspection of the relevant situation. After investigation, at 8:29 in the morning, a police theft occurred near TC Road on GL Road. A man tried to steal gold jewellery from a child in a stroller and escaped after being found. During the process, the crowd suspected a woman (the woman in the video posted by a netizen) was an accomplice of the escaped man, so she was captured.

After investigation by the police, the above-mentioned woman has been ruled out for stealing children and whether she is related to the man suspected of theft is still under investigation. The theft case is also being further investigated. The police remind the public not to believe or spread unverified information, so as not to cause adverse social impact.

6) JXCB (@江西晨报 morning journal of Jiangxi), 2020, 1.14.

[The police have found the rumor-monger of ‘a case of positive nucleic acid test’] The police have found the spreader Zhang in a milk tea store on the 8th. It is reported that Zhang received the picture sent by his sister working in the field, and then spread without confirmation.

7) NQGA (@宁强公安 public security organ of Ningqiang City), 2019, 2.12.

[Police refutes rumours] Recently, a netizen posted a bloody video in a WeChat group and claimed the video of the “scene of the killing of one full family in GG Street” in our county. After verification by our bureau, there has been no such malignant case in Ningqiang recently. The majority of netizens are requested not to spread, believe, or spread rumours.

The police reminded that the Internet society also has a legal bottom line. It is illegal to spread online rumors. It is hoped that the majority of netizens will consciously resist online rumors and refrain from arbitrarily forwarding unverified information, let alone deliberately fabricating them.

Our country's "Public Security Administration Penalty Law" stipulates that anyone who spreads rumors, falsely reports dangers, epidemics, police information, or intentionally disrupts public order by other means shall be detained for not less than 5 days but not more than 10 days, and may be fined not more than 500 yuan; If they are detained for not more than five days or fined not more than 500 yuan. Those who seriously disrupt social order will be investigated for criminal responsibility in accordance with the law.

8) PACD (@平安成都 public security organ of Chengdu City), 2019.11.20.

[Female detained for rumoring "student jumping from a school in Chengdu"] On November 14, the police received a report from a school staff that someone had spread false information about students jumping from the building. The police took Hu to the police station for investigation based on the evidence provided by the police. After investigation, Hu posted ‘a girl in the third grade jumped off the building’, ‘jumped at school’, ‘depression’, ‘dead’ and other rumours to a WeChat

group on November 13, spreading and causing adverse social impact. His behavior has constituted a deliberate disturbance of public order and was punished by administrative detention for 5 days in accordance with the law.

9) PACD (@平安成都 public security organ of Chengdu City), 2020.2.8.

[The Internet spread ‘The residents of a certain community in Chengdu caused an explosion when disinfecting household’, a rumour!] Recently, a video was transmitted online saying that ‘a family in a community in Chengdu used alcohol to disinfect the whole house and turned on the air conditioner, causing an explosion’. After verification, the video showed that the fire did not occur in Chengdu, but the facade of XXX residence, Jurong City, Jiangsu Province. There were no casualties at the scene. The main burning materials were two garbage trucks and garbage piled in the garbage transfer station. The video has been grafted to Nanjing, Wuhan, Yichang and other places, and many places have refuted the rumors. Police reminder: The correct way to use alcohol does not need to be spread through rumours. Especially in the critical period of the current fight against the epidemic, we should seek truth and be pragmatic, reject rumours, work together to fight the epidemic, and refrain from spreading rumours or creating chaos.

10) PAES (@平安恩施 public security organ of Enshi city), 2019.7.9.

[4 children were run over by a car? It was milk spilled! Rumour monger detained] A puddle of white liquid on the road, someone spread in Moment that this were four children crushed by a dump truck, brains all over the ground. On July 8, this sensational picture and text appeared in the local WeChat group in Enshi, causing panic among the public. Police investigation found that a local 90s man fictitious facts and rumours on the Internet. Currently he has been detained by the police. At about 10:00 a.m. that day, a man working at a car trading Co., Ltd. in Enshu, received a segment from a customer on WeChat, which had a picture of crushed milk boxes, milk spilled on the road. He thought the picture was “quite interesting”, so he used his own WeChat account nicknamed “XXX” and edited a false message with the following content, ‘Urgent notice: today there was a major car accident on YYY road: four children holding hands across the road, they were crushed by dump truck because of being, the brains were out, the scene was quite tragic. Urgently looking for their relatives! Please forward to each other!!!’ and released publicly. After the release of this false text message, a number of his WeChat friends asked whether was true, many people said that

after reading it triggered panic emotions, there were also some netizens advised to delete the untrue information, and some enthusiastic netizens directly reported to the public security organs. Enshi City Public Security Bureau quickly disposed of the case, He confessed to the illegal act of fabricating facts and publishing false and inaccurate information in his circle of friends, and he is currently under administrative detention by the police according to the law for disturbing public order by falsifying facts.

11) PANJ (@平安南京 public security organ Nanjing City), 2020.2.4.

[#PoliceRefuteRumour] False information related to the solved case of the murder of a South Medical University girl happened 28 years ago, refuted!

12) PANY (@平安南阳 the account of the public security organ Nanyang city), 2020.6.13.

[Alert Notice] At about 16:00 on June 13, 2020, Meixi Branch received a report from the public of children abduction, and immediately instructed the police to rush to the scene for disposal.

When Yin (5 years old) and his partner were playing on the side of the RR road, they were deceived by Fang (female, 61 years old, from WWW City) who passed by here on the grounds of helping to get things. The father called the police when he found out that his son was missing. After tracking for two kilometres along the way, the police found Yin and Fang on MM Road, and safely sent Yin back to his parents.

After consulting the medical records and diagnosis certificates of relevant medical institutions, the police confirmed that Fang was mentally handicapped and had coordinated with the relevant hospital for his treatment. The police remind the general public that they do not believe or spread rumours and work together to build a safe Nanyang.

13) PATZ (@平安通州 public security organ Tongzhou city), 2020. 1. 28.

[The man who spread the rumours of 'Dazhou Taxi Suspension' was detained by the police] Please do not spread, spread, or believe rumours! In the face of online rumours and other illegal acts, the public security organs will promptly show their swords and investigate and deal with them in accordance with the law. In the current epidemic, only one heart and unity can overcome the difficulties.

14) PAWH (@平安武汉 public security organ Wuhan City), 2020.1.1.

[8 rumour spreaders were investigated and punished according to the law] Recently, some medical institutions in the city found that they had received a number of cases of pneumonia, and the municipal building committee issued a briefing on the situation. However, some netizens then published and forwarded false information on the internet without verification, causing adverse social impact. After investigation and verification, the public security authorities have summoned eight offenders and dealt with them in accordance with the law.

The police remind that the Internet is not a place outside the law, and the police will investigate and punish illegal acts that disrupt the social order by publishing information on the Internet and will not tolerate them. I hope that the majority of Internet users comply with relevant laws and regulations, do not create rumours, do not believe in rumours, do not spread rumours, and build a harmonious and clear cyberspace..., and build a harmonious and clear cyberspace together.

15) PAXD (@平安新都 public security organ Xindu City), 2020.8.4.

Recently, the Internet rumour “In Chengdu XXX International City, a female owner was split the body after gang rape” has aroused the concern of netizens, after our investigation and verification, the net rumour that the female owner was “gang rape” “split the body” and other content are untrue information. At present, the rumourmongers have been investigated in accordance with the law. Please do not believe or spread the rumours.

16) SCGA (@四川公安 Public security Sichuan province), 2018.8.30.

[Refutes the rumours! The whole nation’s hospitals of Traditional Chinese Medicine are helping the injured child find family members] Today, many WeChat groups are posting “XX City Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine admitted to a juvenile in a car accident”. The video is the same, but the locations are varied. It was verified that the incident occurred in Linqu, Shandong. The injured teenager has found his parents and received proper treatment. Please do not forward unconfirmed messages recklessly, and hope that your children are safe!

17) SCCAW (@四川长安网 Politics and Law Committee of Sichuan), 2019.10.9.

[Zigong police informed that ‘Two girls were robbed by two men just after school at the back door of a school’ is a rumour] On the evening of October 8, a message that ‘a girl near a school in Zigong

was robbed by a man' spread quickly on the Internet and attracted attention. There is even message that it is 'grabbing a child'. @ZigongPublicSecurity informed that, after verification, at 18:00 on October 8th, the Nanhu Police Station of the HZ City Public Security Bureau received a report stating that a man dragged a girl at the intersection of HL Street and was stopped and blocked by the masses. The police rushed to the scene for disposal. During the disposal, the man violently obstructed the police's performance of official duties and was forcibly summoned by the public security organs in accordance with the law. Currently, the perpetrator Zhong (25 years old) has been criminally detained by the police in accordance with the law, and the case is still under investigation.

18) SCGA (@四川公安 Public security Sichuan province), 2019.6.18.

The internet is not a place outside the law! Please do not create or spread rumours. After the occurrence of Sichuan Changning 6.0 magnitude earthquake, some false information photos spread madly in several WeChat Groups and Moment, affecting social order, triggering panic. At present, the earthquake is still being verified, and rescue is still underway.

The public security organs solemnly reminds that the use of natural disasters to deliberately spread rumours, commit fraud, collect money, and deliberately create panic and other illegal and criminal activities will be severely cracked down in accordance with the law. It is hoped that the majority of netizens will not spread, believe, or spread rumours, report them promptly when they find them, and jointly maintain a healthy network environment and a good social order.

19) SQWJXCZF (@商丘网警巡查执法 Internet Police of Shangqiu city) 2019.11.6

[The Internet spread that "five girls from Shangqiu colleges and universities were killed" is a rumor, and the publisher of the rumor was detained according to law] Recently, a netizen Song (female) fabricated and spread false information such as "five students from Shangqiu colleges and universities were killed". The spread on the Internet has severely disrupted the public order of society. At present, Song XX (female) has been administratively detained for five days in accordance with the law for violating the provisions of Item (1) of Article 25 of the "Public Security Administration Punishment Law of the People's Republic of China."

Police reminder: The Internet is by no means a place outside the law, and spreading rumours is illegal. The public security organs will severely punish illegal acts that maliciously fabricate and spread rumours, spread rumours on the Internet, disrupt social order, and affect social stability.

20) WBGZ (@微博贵州, account of Guizhou Province) 2020.1.29.

[It is rumoured that a person infected with the new crown virus was found in Guizhou] A few days ago, a screenshot of the “Details of the Movement of Cases and Personnel in XXX City (1)” was circulated on WeChat. Some people mistakenly believed that it is the process of the Hezhang County epidemic social prevention and control team to deal with the new coronavirus infected people.

In this regard, the Hezhang County Social Epidemic Prevention and Control Team refuted the rumours to the public. The screenshot content is a video dubbing draft of the Hezhang County Epidemic Social Prevention and Control Team to carry out an epidemic prevention and control exercise on January 24, 2021. So far, people who have no sense of the new crown virus in Hezhang County, please do not believe or spread rumours. The public security organs will severely crack down on those who deliberately create or spread rumours to cause panic.

21) WDP (@微东坡 Propaganda Department of Dongpo district) 2021.3.4.

[A man in Meishan, Sichuan, digs out ‘gutter oil’ and even flows on the table? The police dismissed the rumours] On March 1, 2021, a video of a man digging out "gutter oil" in the sewers of MM Square in Meishan, Sichuan, aroused the attention of netizens. On March 3, the Public Security Bureau of Dongpo District, Meishan City issued a notice explaining the situation.

According to the report, after preliminary investigation, the man in the video, Zhang, began to collect kitchen waste oil in February 2021, and then resold it to a Chengdu ST Co., Ltd. that has the qualifications for recycling and processing waste animal (plant) grease to produce biodiesel. Up to now, Zhang has collected a total of about 300 kilograms of kitchen waste oil, placed in three buckets in rented houses, and has not yet been sold.

The police will work with relevant functional departments to continue to intensify inspections and law enforcement to ensure the safety of tables for the public. Please do not believe or spread rumours.

22) XKB (@新快报 New Express) 2021.2.9

[Guangdong Fogang police refuted the rumour that “man robbed a bank”: actually robbed one subject's backpack in the hall, because the value of less than 1000 yuan was detained] On February 9, the relevant person in charge of the Fogang Public Security Bureau in Qingyuan, Guangdong refuted the rumour that “the man robbed the SSS Bank”. The man claimed that the man snatched the victim's backpack from the bank, and the police imposed administrative detention on him because the value of the item did not reach 1,000 yuan.

23) ZGJFZX (@中国警方在线 Chinese Police Online), 2021.2.3.

On February 2, 2021, an information titled ‘woman in Hebei Shahe a hotel isolation, by the self-proclaimed “police” personnel swipe card into the house sexual assault: police have filed a case’ spread widely in the WeChat group, Moment and other network platforms, the content is partially untrue.

After investigation: Fan Z and his wife are personnel for isolation in XXX Hotel on January 8, 2021. 19 January 17:29 pm, Fan reported that his wife was raped in the hotel by a police officer named Zhang YY (attempted). After receiving the alarm, the Bureau of Criminal Police Brigade police immediately rushed to the hotel to carry out investigations. After investigation, Zhang YY (male, 34 years old, Shahe City, people) is the staff of the hotel, not the Bureau of the police. At present, the suspect Zhang YY suspected of rape (attempted) is in criminal detention, the case is under further investigation.