

Chinese Expat News Site Resists CCP Influence

A popular source of information among the Chinese diaspora is the website Wenxuecity.com. There have been allegations that the site's funding is linked to the Chinese government. In this post, we investigate these allegations.

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China is increasingly trying to shape narratives abroad, with a [focus on the Chinese-speaking diaspora](#) in its covert operations. A [popular source of information](#) among the Chinese diaspora, especially in North America, is the website Wenxuecity.com, founded by Chinese exchange students in the United States in 1998. Articles in the site's "news" section are re-shares of content from various media outlets, including publicly funded Western media like Voice of America, international media like the New York Times, and Chinese state media.

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特朗普提前离开白宫记者会：我必须去接个“紧急电
幼儿园外持刀砍死两个孩子 广州记者自杀身亡
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亚马逊这是闹哪样？贩售衣帽印着“黑人的命不重要
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多达50万人受影响 特朗普政府宣布恢复公共负担审
这两条消息暗示 美国的新冠疫苗大选前问世几率小
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注意！中国自9月28日起允许这三类“外国人入境
千万个遗忘的节育环 中国女性体内的“定时炸弹”
新冠联 蔡英文 习近平...《时代》百大人物如此评价
尴尬了，女议员参加视频会议 被发现竟是...
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李克强上海考察罕见视频曝光 保镖严肃禁止握手
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Figure 1: The Wenxue City website.

There have been disputed allegations that Wenxue City's funding is linked to the Chinese government, and Wenxue City's founder Lin Wen has commented that most articles on the website originate from official Chinese outlets. In this post, we investigate these allegations by examining whether articles shared on Wenxue City are disproportionately from Chinese state media or Beijing-friendly outlets. We also assess two topics of interest to the Chinese leadership – Hong Kong and coverage mentioning the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) or Xi Jinping – for their editorial stance.

Key Takeaways:

- Overall, Wenxue City does not seem to promote CCP talking points or boost CCP-preferred narratives.
- Publicly funded Western media outlets account for at least 19.0% of all articles shared on Wenxue City.

- Only 16.4% of stories on Wenxue City were traced to Chinese state media and Beijing-friendly international media.
- In topics of special interest to the Chinese government, such as Hong Kong and the CCP or CCP Chairman Xi Jinping, publicly funded Western media and international media make up the majority (a combined 65.0% and 75.6% respectively) of authors. Again, Chinese state media play a minor role.

Only a small and decreasing share of articles on Wenxuecity.com originate from Chinese state media or Beijing-friendly media

For our analysis, we scraped all articles in the “news” category on Wenxuecity.com between January 1, 2019, and August 28, 2020 (see [attached document](#) for details on methodology). Between April 2020 and August 2020, Wenxue City shared about 2,500 articles each month, up from about 2,000 before April 2020 (see Figure 2). These articles are re-posted content from news outlets and posts previously shared on Chinese microblogging page Weibo. Wenxue City lists the source of the content (e.g. the New York Times) as the author of a post. We identified 4,720 unique outlets listed as the author of articles on Wenxue City, with 59 outlets listed 100 or more times. These top 59 outlets are responsible for 63.3% of all articles shared. We classified all top outlets listed as authors according to whether they are a publicly funded Western outlet, international media, Chinese private media, Beijing-friendly media, Chinese state media or General News, (See attached document for examples and details). “General News” (综合新闻) is Wenxue City’s catch-all author title for stories without a named author.

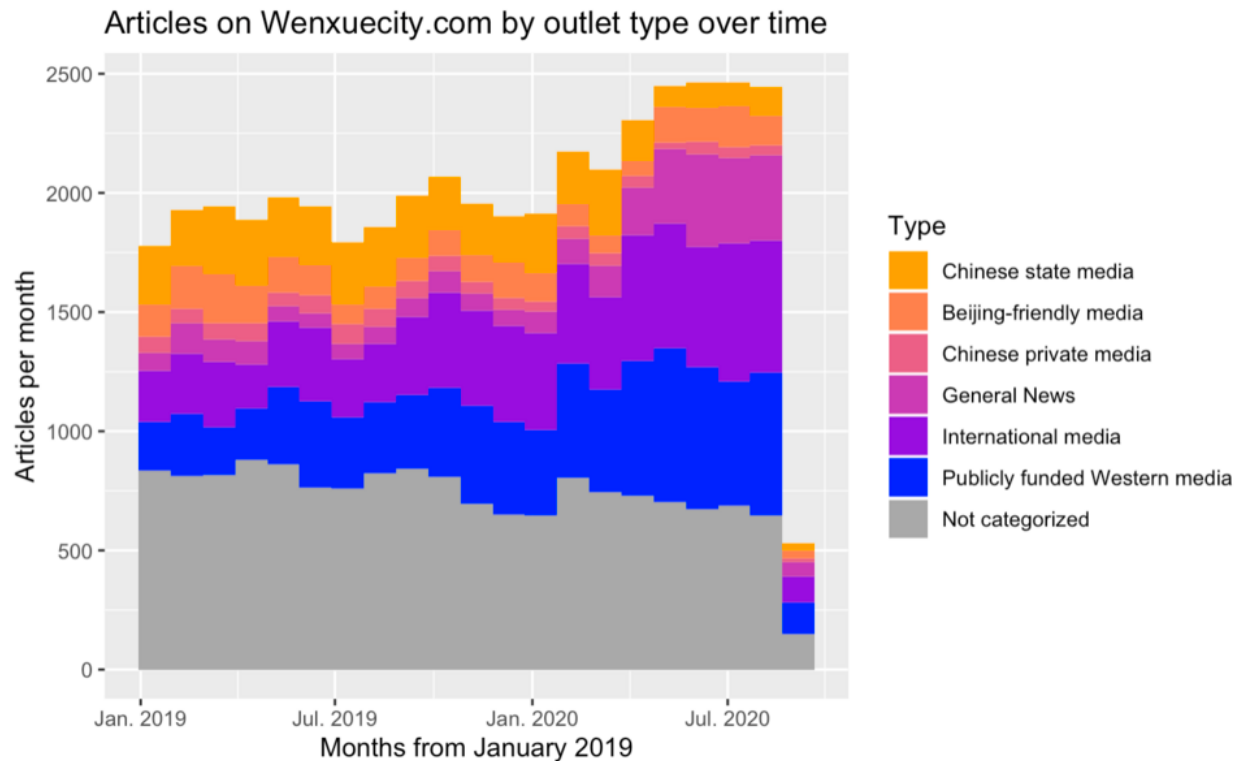


Figure 2: Articles on Wenxue City since January 2019 over time by outlet type. About a third of all articles are shared from outlets with only a handful of bylined stories (these are in grey), whereas frequently shared outlets are mostly publicly funded Western media, international media and General News.

Overall, few articles originate from Chinese state media and Beijing-friendly media, with the share of articles from these outlets decreasing over time. At the same time, an increasing number and share of articles on Wenxue City originate from publicly funded Western media, which also comprise four out of the top five outlets on Wenxue City: Radio France Internationale (2,779 out of all 41,861 articles), Voice of America (2,114), United Daily News (a Taiwanese outlet categorized as international media, 1,332), Radio Free Asia (1,241) and Deutsche Welle (1,053).

Most popular author on Wenxue City is General News, sharing mostly pop culture content from CCP-linked sources

To understand the content and origin of General News (Wenxue City's catch-all phrase for reposted content without a designated author), we looked at a random sample of 100 articles from this group and traced them online to their

original source. We then categorized these original sources using our earlier classification (excluding General News): publicly funded Western outlets, international media, Chinese private media, Beijing-friendly media or Chinese state media.

Of the 100 articles examined, one-third originate from the same two CCP-affiliated outlets, Global Times and Guan Cha. The third most common site, Jun Tian, also known as 5455.org, is based in Taiwan and generally takes an anti-CCP stance. No clear trend was detected in the remaining sources. Many of Wenxue City's General News articles were reposted multiple times to dozens of smaller Chinese content farms such as kuai news or 6do media.

After determining the original source for each of these 100 stories, we next categorized the articles into four groups: unrelated to politics, CCP-sympathetic, no clear sympathies or CCP-critical.

Of the 100 General News articles, over half (54) are articles unrelated to politics, covering mainly pop culture, 41 have no clear sympathies, 5 are critical of the CCP, and none showed overt CCP sympathies (See Figure 3; examples here).

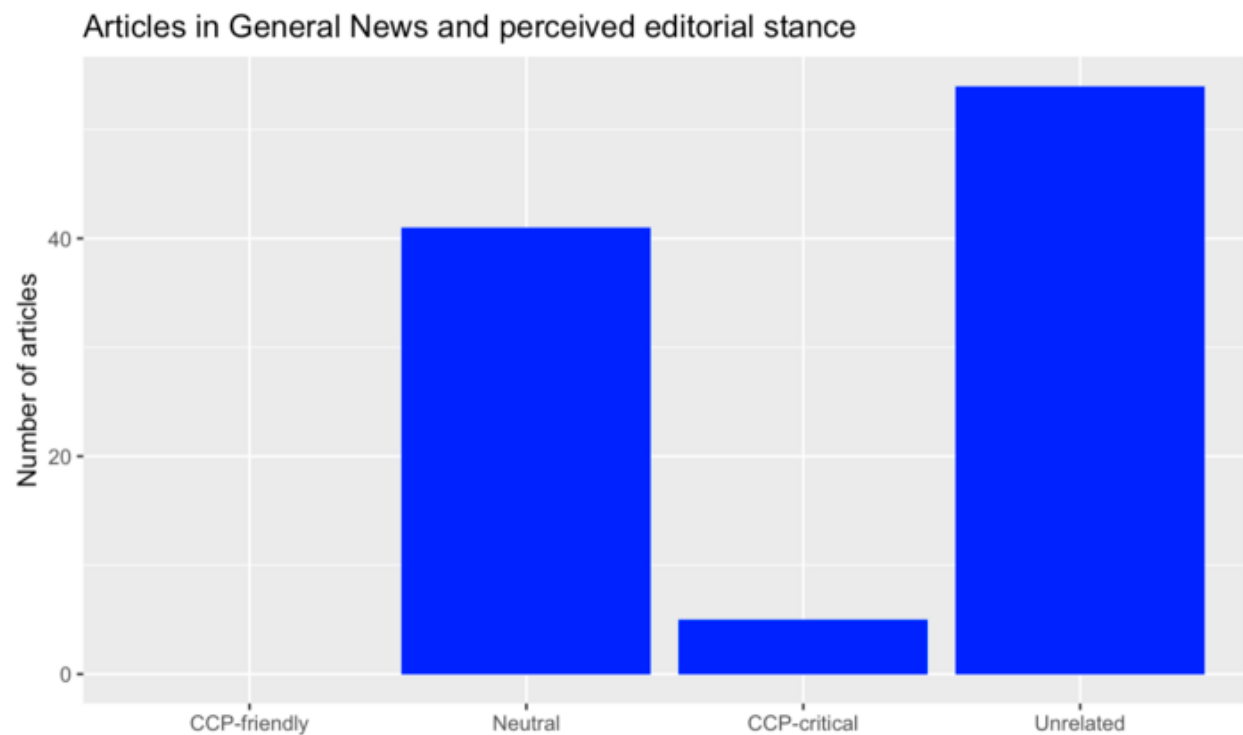


Figure 3: Most articles in General News relate to apolitical content, with most political content striking a neutral tone vis-a-vis the CCP.

Of the 41 CCP-neutral articles covering politics, a majority relate to civil unrest and political gridlock in the United States and other Western nations, including violence at Black Lives Matter protests, President Trump's alleged incompetence in managing COVID-19, and lamentations of partisanship in the U.S. House and Senate. While many of the General News articles are sourced from CCP-controlled sites such as Global Times and Guan Cha, their content rarely mentions sensitive topics such as Hong Kong or Taiwan or engage in overt pro-China rhetoric, but instead focuses on criticizing Western governments, particularly U.S. President Trump.

Wenxue City articles on Hong Kong and the CCP do not appear slanted towards CCP-preferred narratives

To further analyze Wenxue City's editorial stance, we examined two topics of interest to the Chinese government: Hong Kong and the CCP/Xi Jinping. Within the subset of articles pertaining to these topics (as determined by a keyword search), we similarly gathered a random subset of 100 articles and replicated the bucketing categorization that we had done for General News: unrelated to the topic, CCP-sympathetic, no clear sympathies and CCP-critical. We find that in both issue categories, publicly funded Western media and international media comprise the significant majority of outlets. Only a few of the sampled stories contain bylines of a less-prominent author (as marked by "not categorized"; see for example Figure 4). We also find that there is no clear pro-CCP bias in the selection of articles that appear on Wenxue City.

Stories on Hong Kong do not show a clear sympathy with CCP talking points

Articles on Wenxuecity.com mentioning "Hong Kong" ("香港" or "港") in their headline spiked in mid- to late-2019 alongside the Hong Kong protests and again in mid-2020 at the implementation of the controversial National Security Law (Figure 4). The majority of articles shared originate from publicly funded Western media and international media: the top five authors are Radio France Internationale, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle, Radio Free Asia and the BBC.

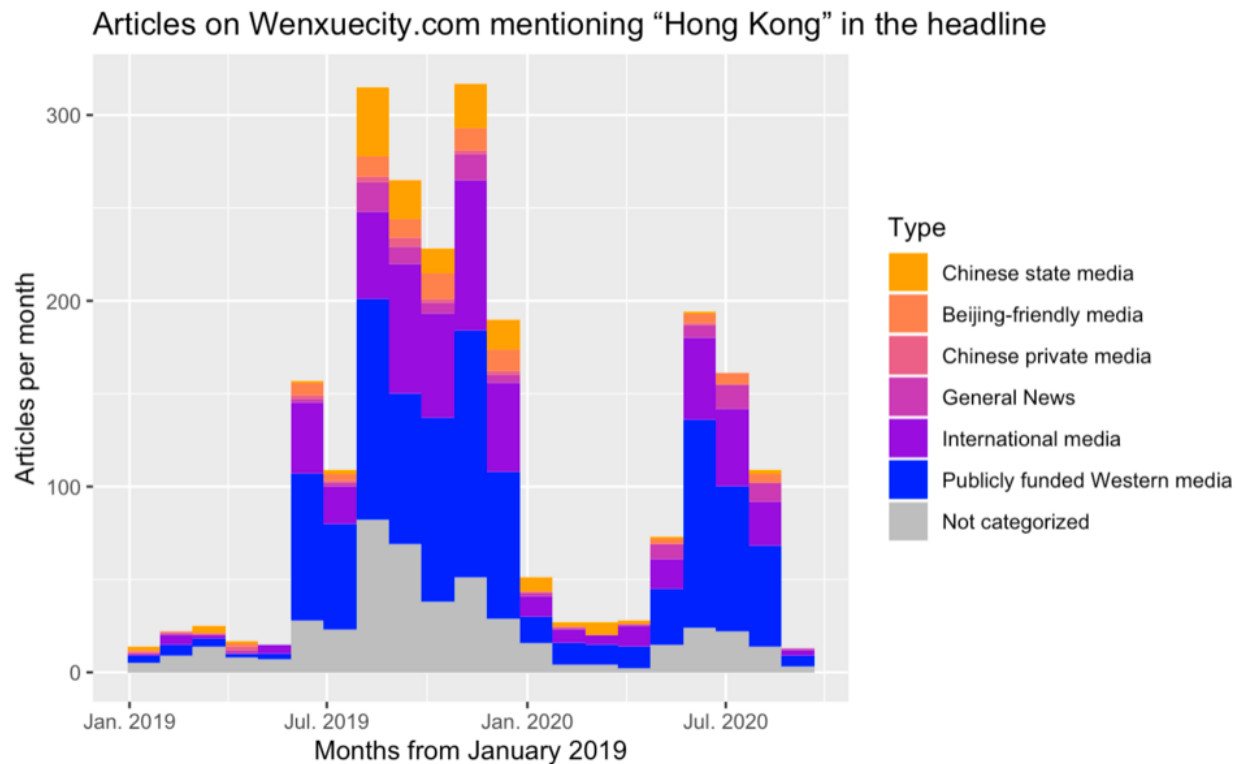


Figure 4: Articles on Wenxue City mentioning Hong Kong spiked in mid- to late-2019 and ramped up again in mid-2020. Most of the content originates from publicly funded Western media or international media.

After classifying articles into one of the four categories mentioned above, we find that categories generally mirror the author, with CCP-critical headlines appearing above Western-affiliated authors and CCP-friendly headlines appearing alongside Chinese state media. Topically, the vast majority of the subset focus on the Hong Kong protests, its day-to-day developments, its political consequences and its connections to overseas organizations (especially the U.S. government).

Of all 100 sampled articles, we find that only 8% are CCP-friendly, such as a man-on-the-street interview with Global Times editor Hu Xijin, a history of U.S. spying in Hong Kong or an analysis of whether the protesters are “anti-China” (see Figure 5). Even the CCP-friendly stories are not blatantly pro-CCP — it could be argued that a Hu Xijin vox pop, for example, is newsworthy even to readers unsympathetic to the CCP.

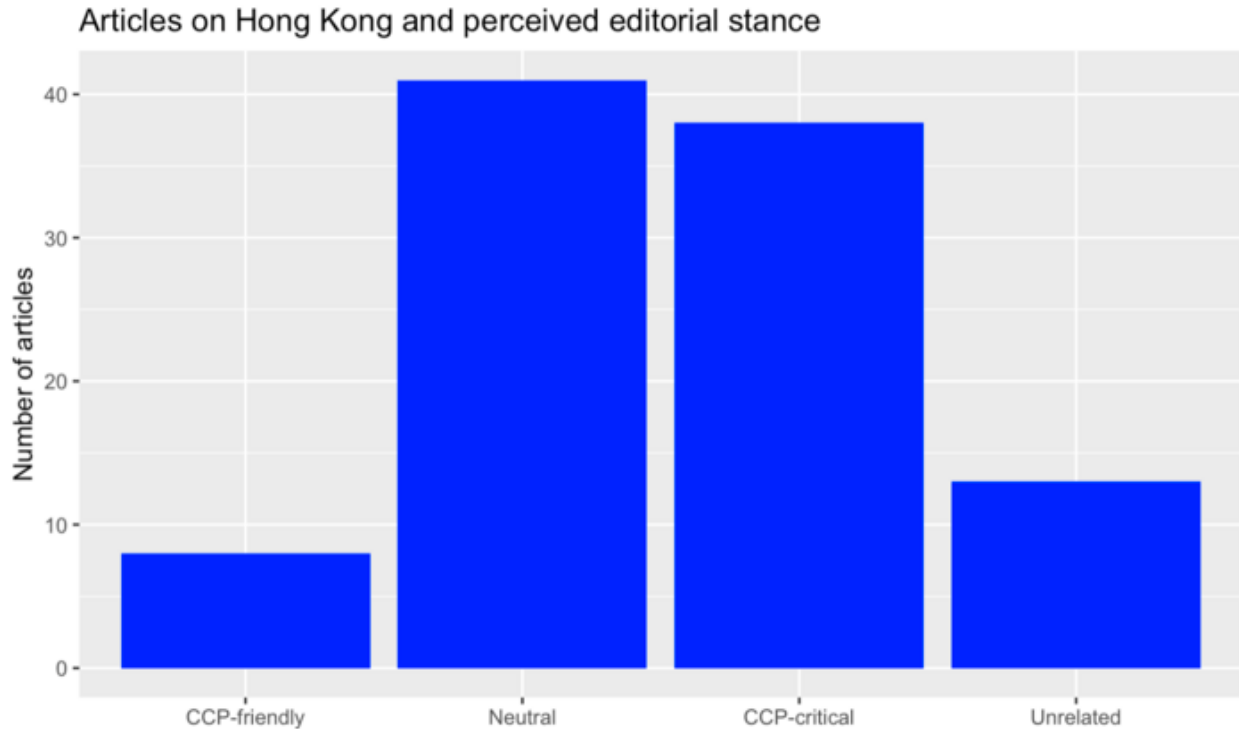


Figure 5: Most articles mentioning Hong Kong strike a neutral or CCP-critical tone, with only little CCP-friendly content.

Notably, 41% of articles strike a neutral tone: they do not show clear political sympathies or are not obviously unsuitable for publication in a mainland Chinese newspaper. Examples of these articles include a first-person description of the damage to Hong Kong's streets, an unembellished reprinting of a Chinese leader's comments about the protests and the announcement of America's reclassification of "Made in Hong Kong" labels on exports. More than a third (38%) of articles take a pro-protester (and by extension, CCP-critical) stance on reporting, such as an analysis of tear gas damage to protesters, stories that debate whether the Tiananmen massacre could occur in Hong Kong, or stories that rebut government claims. The remaining 13% of articles in our subset are not related to the Hong Kong protests, instead focusing on, for example, the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, the Hong Kong annual beauty contests or stories that only incidentally mention Hong Kong.

In sum, a closer analysis of headlines mentioning Hong Kong largely bears out the author-type analysis established above: the stories do not indicate a clear sympathy with CCP talking points.

Most articles on Chinese leadership strike a critical tone

Articles on Wenxue City mentioning the CCP or Xi Jinping (“中共,” “共产党” or “习近平”) in their headline spiked in mid-2019 and again after March 2020 (Figure 6). The significant majority of articles originate from publicly funded Western media, with international media making up most of the remainder. The top five outlets mentioning these keywords are Radio France Internationale, Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, Liberty Times News and Deutsche Welle.

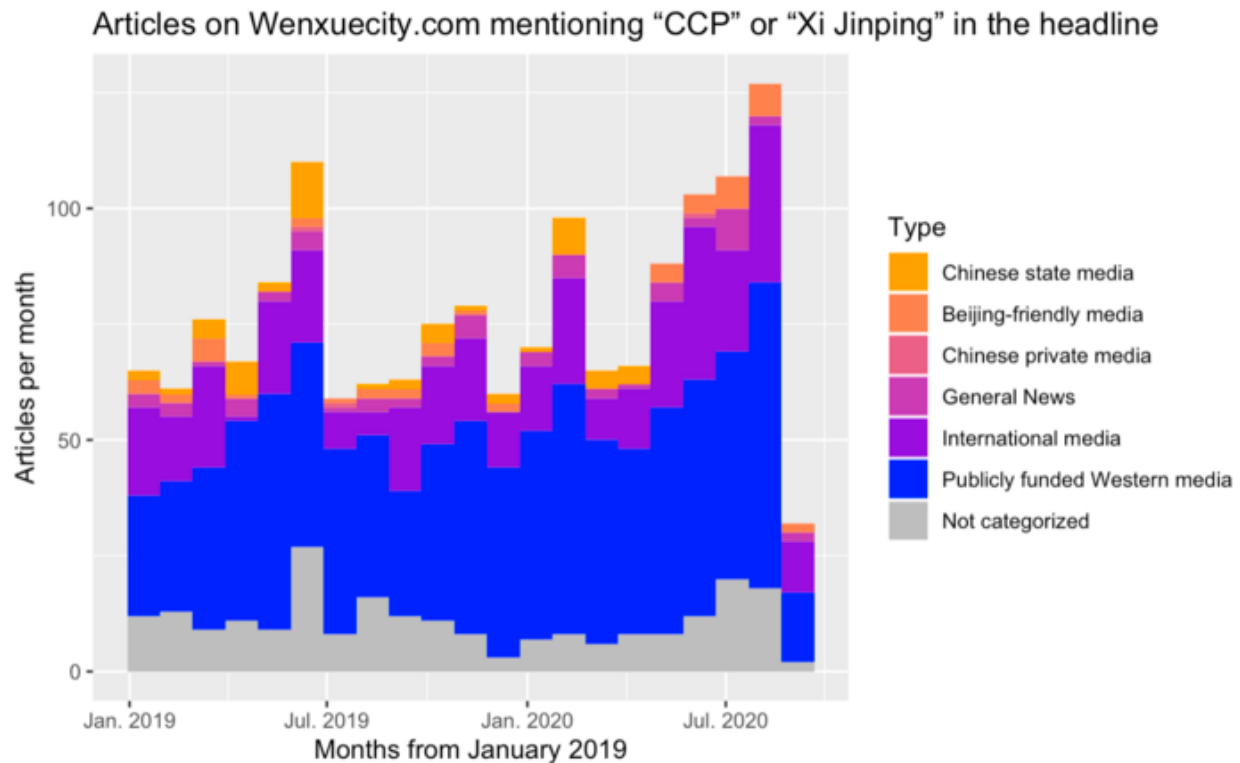


Figure 6: Articles on Wenxue City mentioning the Chinese Communist Party or Xi Jinping. Most of the content originates from publicly funded Western media and international media.

Of 100 randomly selected articles in this category, only 9% resemble CCP propaganda, such as a fluff piece emphasizing President Xi’s frugality (“Besides his daughter, who else has Xi Jinping’s bicycle given a ride?”) or a reprinting of a Xi Jinping speech at a conference (“Chinese state media: Xi Jinping demonstrates how to protect against the virus”). The overwhelming majority are either neutral towards (10%) or critical of the CCP (81%) (see Figure 7). This includes speculation about Xi Jinping’s political strength within the party (“Xi Jinping loses two Trump cards, Li Keqiang gets attacked...again”) or phrasing that implies disrespect toward the Party (“What

the heck is Xi Jinping doing visiting North Korea right before the G20 conference?”).

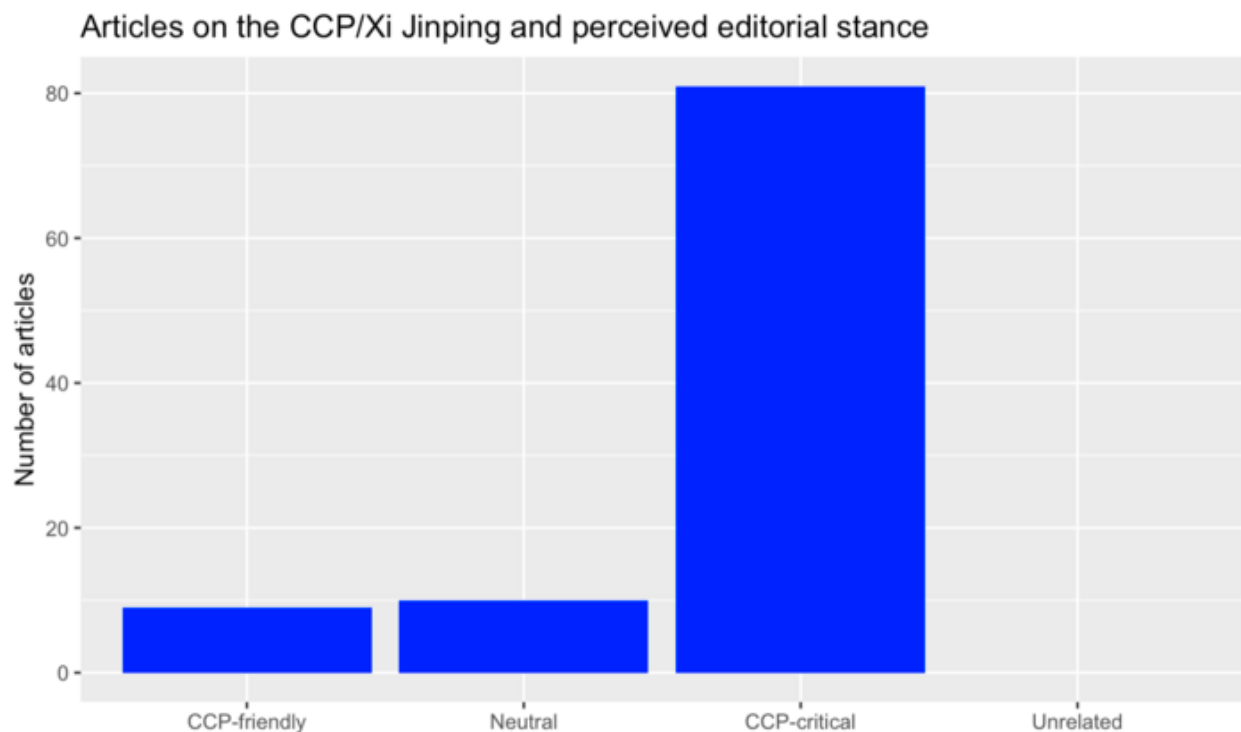


Figure 7: Articles on the CCP/Xi Jinping are overwhelmingly CCP-critical, with only a few articles taking a CCP-friendly stance.

This finding is especially relevant because Xi Jinping and the Party are among the most closely censored subjects in China today. In the sampled articles, not only are Xi Jinping’s political or personal ambitions a frequent subject of speculation, but other taboo topics often appear alongside a mention of him or the Party, including the Tiananmen Massacre (one headline reads, “The ‘last secret’ of the Tiananmen Incident: Hong Kong Publishes State Secrets to Reveal the Party’s Inner Workings”).

Conclusion

SIO’s analysis of Wenxuecity.com did not find a pro-CCP editorial stance. To the contrary, our quantitative analysis of over 41,000 headlines between January 2019 and August 2020 revealed a significant reliance on Western media sources, with only intermittent re-sharing of CCP-friendly or Chinese state media. A qualitative supplementary analysis of 300 randomly sampled stories in three categories (General News, “Hong Kong”-related, and “Xi

Jinping” or “CCP”-related) revealed that the majority of stories are not friendly to the CCP.

In the General News category, a majority of articles originate from Chinese state media, and some are critical of the United States. Most of the content in this category appears to be apolitical.

In addition, Wenxue City does not exhibit the hallmarks of CCP-friendly media abroad. Its re-shared stories about Xi Jinping — one of mainland China’s most heavily monitored topics — are diverse, vibrant and often skeptical.

We cannot rule out the possibility that the site receives funding from the Chinese government (or any other government), as we have no visibility into the site’s financial revenues. However, Wenxue City’s headlines do not appear to be aligned with government narratives.

As one of the most popular Chinese-language news sites among the Chinese community in the U.S. and Canada, Wenxuecity.com is potentially a crucial gateway for expanded Chinese government influence abroad. For now, it appears to have resisted the drift of overseas Chinese-language media outlets into Beijing’s orbit.