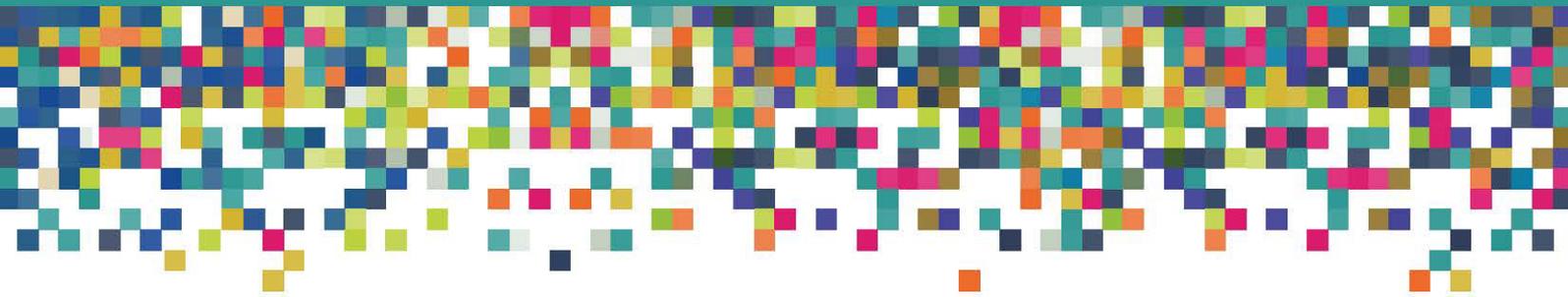




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ENVISIONING SOLIDARITY

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Chinese NGO Communications
on Philanthropic Campaigns

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ABSTRACT

The project employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine mediated discourses of solidarity constructed by Chinese NGOs in a philanthropic campaign, the 99 Giving Day. It begins by exploring concepts of solidarity, mediated solidarity in NGO communications, drawing from theoretical frameworks in the Western context, notably from Lilie Chouliaraki's works. The aim is to scrutinize how NGOs from a non-Western society, specifically China, construct and convey solidarity. This project serves as a bridge between various theoretical perspectives and provides insights into the realm of NGO communications in China, adding layers of complexity to the global expressions of solidarity.

To analyse this phenomenon, Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional framework is employed. This approach is applied to dissect two extensive series of articles in the education sector produced by Chinese NGOs during China's largest internet-based philanthropic campaign, the 99 Giving Day. The analysis reveals both resemblances and divergences in discursive strategies when compared to Western approaches. Chinese NGOs as storytellers and visualisers of the solidarity employ artful textualities and grand narratives to enact a solidarity of pity, manipulating the voices of others to emotionally engage with their potential audience. Meanwhile, a discourse of ironic solidarity has been implemented to promote the notion of benefits and rewards for donors. This discourse focuses on the donors while silencing the marginalized, reinforcing hierarchical distinctions between benefactors and beneficiaries. Notably, there is a distinct influence of Chinese social norms and cultural values. The discourse embraces positive narratives around dreams and emphasizes family bonding, intertwining with discourses of national solidarity. However, these discourses have failed to adequately address the structural causes of socioeconomic imbalances and geographical disparities that gave rise to the educational inequality in China.

INTRODUCTION

The digital philanthropic festival, 99 Giving Day, launched by Tencent in 2015, has become a huge phenomenon in China. In 2022, 2048 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) brought 3800 projects to the public throughout 99 Giving Day, raising 3.3 billion with 27.58 million netizens involved (Pandaily 2022; Wang 2022; Tencent Charity 2022). As it represents the peak of interaction between NGOs and the wider public, the preparation for the campaign starts more than three months before this three-day event which takes place from September 7th to 9th (Huang 2022, 1069). The name of 99 Giving Day's theme song in 2022, "Togetherness for Good," hinted at an underlying concept of the campaigns: solidarity. Throughout the festival and its preparation, Chinese NGOs have been active in constructing discourses of solidarity.

The concept of solidarity has been developed in Western contexts. Émile Durkheim (1893[1984]) developed his theories around solidarity as the cohesive bonds that unite individuals within a society, emphasizing a social solidarity incorporating differences rather than mere sameness (45). However, the concept of solidarity has faced criticism for being overused and overly idealistic and has sometimes been dismissed as an essential concept in the modern world.

The true challenges in constructing solidarity arise not only from the shifts in techno-environment and values of the public but also from how solidarity is configured in discourses. In the humanitarian sector, solidarity has been explored through the mediated distance between those who might help and those in need. NGOs, as one of the main mediators, contribute to those various forms of mediated solidarity through their communicative strategies.

On the other hand, China, with its distinct socio-cultural background, has similar yet different forms of expressing solidarity. While solidarity in social movement have been discussed, the social changes in Chinese circumstances have taken on different shapes (Wang 2019). Social organizations in China choose a path of non-confrontational and gradual changes, which can be exemplified by philanthropic actions (Wang 2019, 1-2). With their seemingly global narratives but national mission in nature, questions are raised around works of NGOs: to what

extent can they promote social solidarity? What can be drawn from the Chinese context about solidarity that hasn't been explicitly articulated before?

This project intends to investigate how Chinese NGOs use a mediated discourse of solidarity in their philanthropic campaigns. Recognizing the power of discourse and the influence of NGOs as creators and disseminators of messages within social contexts, their communicative strategies are carefully examined through Critical Discourse Analysis, considering the issues observed in their Western counterparts' communicative structures. Beginning with theoretical chapters introducing concepts of solidarity, mediated solidarity, and NGOs' communication around solidarity, the project delves into the analytical possibilities of solidarity, employing China as a case study. The methodology chapter offers rationale for the chosen methods, explains the research design and sampling strategies, and provides an analytical framework and reflexivity. The chapter of analytical findings then presents the results of CDA using the conceptual frameworks, with new findings that add more depth and complexity to the narratives of solidarity. The conclusion, while drawing upon the analytical findings, points to potential of future research.

Ultimately, this project tries to broaden the understanding of solidarity in a practical and extended context, presenting insights that go beyond the Western paradigm of solidarity through the perspective of NGOs and reflecting on the challenges of building true solidarity in a modern society.

THEORETICAL CHAPTER

To understand how solidarity is produced, concepts of solidarity are introduced in the following chapters, followed by reviews of literature on mediated solidarity and NGOs as mediators of solidarity. After introducing the western theories and concepts, the Chinese context of solidarity and NGOs is brought into the conversation. Finally, this chapter provides a conceptual framework and research objectives.

2.1 Concepts of Solidarity

Solidarity is a concept marked by contested natures and dilemmas (Xu 2009, 8; Markham 2018, 468; Rippe 1998, 355). The challenges in theorizing solidarity arise from its varied scopes and diverse nature, ranging from family and community to social, national, and global levels (Daurians and Wouter 2020, 205; Laitinen and Pessi 2015, 8). It is context-dependent and unpredictable in its manifestations (Vasilev 2015, 8). As a concept, solidarity requires continuous re-examination and promotion from diverse perspectives within various societies, especially considering the evolving world of media and technology (Vasilev 2015, 13; Nikunen 2019, 35). Scholars from different disciplines demonstrate that solidarity plays a crucial role in promoting social justice, altruistic values, and public benefits for underprivileged groups, as well as fostering a sense of obligation to help those in need (Mohanty 2003; Hooks 1986; Moraga 2015; Gaztambide-Fernández et al. 2022; Desai 2021).

In their comprehensive study, Laitinen and Pessi (2015) provide a thorough examination of the concepts of solidarity, exploring its descriptive and normative dimensions. Descriptively, as understood in social psychology, the authors highlight the significance of solidarity in developing inner group relationships that contribute to creation of unity, collective attachment, and group consciousness within societies or communities, while they also shed light on its function as an emotion encompassing collective feelings and energy, incorporating elements of love and altruism (Laitinen and Pessi 2015, 2; De Blasio and Selva 2019, 24; Collin 2011; Ahmed 2014). As Richard Rorty (1989) emphasizes, solidarity encompasses “all prosocial thought and action” (Rorty 1989 cited in Laitinen and Pessi 2015, 2).

The normative aspect of solidarity can be traced back to Émile Durkheim’s renowned book *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893[1984]), in which he develops sociological frameworks of solidarity. According to Durkheim, solidarity encompasses various essential elements such as trust, friendship, respect, and care towards every member of a social group. His value for solidarity over individual egotism sets up a foundation for studies understanding the internal force that bind people together in a society.

Meanwhile, complementing Durkheim (1893[1984]), the contested nature of solidarity is emphasized: solidarity features inclusion and exclusion for group interests and involves

shared emotions, attitudes, and behaviors that united around group norms (Rorty 1989, 176; Tuomela 2007, 81-2; Silver 1994). It is described by Habermas (1989) as being opposite to justice: it refers to we-thinking while justice refers to impartiality and neutrality. Paulo Freire (2018) emphasizes that “true solidarity” requires the privileged group to make sacrifices to achieve social justice for the oppressed (49). The paradox of solidarity is raised here, concerning the balance between solidarity and justice, between solidarity of entire humanity and solidarity of certain groups, between “participatory democracy” and “solidarity based on national consensus” (Wilde 2013, 44; Silver 1994, 569). Given this paradox, criticism stems from the fact that the contested nature of solidarity itself has been ignored within the broader conception of solidarity. Inadequate emphasis has been placed on the distinct scopes of solidarity, which might possibly determine the characteristics of its forms and occasionally lead to tensions among them (Laitinen and Pessi 2015, 9; Vasilev 2015, 7). The usefulness of the concept has faced challenges under its ambiguity, with some considering it to be a mere symbolic gesture (Rippe 1998, 356).

2.1.1 Tensions and Challenges

As highlighted by Laitinen and Pessi (2015), “we are all parts of different solidarities” (9). On the micro level, we have solidarity of families, groups and communities; on the macro level, we have solidarity of a society and even the entire humanity (Laitinen and Pessi 2015, 7-11; Rippe 1998, 371). Dralans and Wouter (2020) point out that solidarity within families has fundamentally different natures compared to other forms of solidarity due to its biological bonds and legal obligations and should not be interpreted under a unified or universal conception (Rippe 1998, 363; Dralans and Wouter 2020, 202). National solidarity, on the other hand, focuses on social issues within national boundary and national bonding that builds upon exclusion (Kaplan 2022; Silver 1994 542-44). It appears to be in further tension with global solidarity or the solidarity of entire humanity (Wilde 2013, 44).

Global solidarity, associated with cosmopolitanism and a stand of humanitarianism, represents an important dimension of solidarity that reaffirms the idea of providing moral support to distant others (Boltanski 1999; Scholtz 2008, 233-36; Derpman 2009). When Vasilev (2015) argues that solidarity is a powerful intuition that calls for moral responsibility not only towards immediate proximate group members but also towards all those who may potentially

be affected (2), Chouliaraki and Vasterggard (2021) also criticize the use of national boundary to constrain support (2). The criticism is extended to the constructed solidarity based on similarity and proximity, as it creates an improper distance between those in need and those who could potentially help, erasing the diversity of identities and voices (Chouliaraki 2011, 365; Silverstone 2007, 47).

To classify and comprehend solidarity, it could be more appropriate to use Rippe's (1998) framework: solidarity based on interpersonal relationships and social ties, and project-related solidarity that does not require actual social relationships. As this approach involves issues with fewer territorial boundaries, it represents a more modernized form of solidarity in platformed societies (356; Van Dijck, Poell, and Waal 2018). However, it also entails challenges as targeted "projects" often arise because of contingencies, where not necessarily those in actual need receive help, but rather those who are able to articulate their needs and be heard in certain circumstances (Rippe 1998, 359). The challenges include lacking long-term support, neglecting certain individuals in need, and resulting in mere expressions of concern without substantive actions (ibid. 359).

In the following section, I will explain the significance of communication in the process of constructing solidarity and explore how mediated solidarity incorporates new dimensions into the concepts of solidarity. Specifically, I will examine the role of NGOs as mediators in fostering solidarity.

2.2 Mediated Solidarity: NGOs as Storytellers of Pity and Irony

The challenges of solidarity extend beyond conceptual discussions to the actual obstacles in its realization. Debates surrounding its diminishment in the process of modernization and individualization are developed (Fenton 2008, 48; Sterjno 2005, 327). Durkheim (1893[1984]) proposes a shift from "mechanical solidarity", in traditional communities, based on members' similarity and collective consciousness, more rigid and concrete, to "organic solidarity" in modern society, based on the interactions and interdependence of individuals, more fluid and complex. Corresponding to his argument, the advent of new technologies and media platforms has fundamentally transformed the dynamics and expressions of solidarity, reshaping our understanding and engagement with local, national, and global issues. As

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Martin Scott (2014) eloquently points out, media has the capacity to bring distant suffering closer to audiences, yet it keeps interfere this process (139).

Within the extensive and diverse imaginations enabled by media and technology, mediated solidarity finds its fertile ground for cultivation (Chouliaraki 2013a, 112; Orgad 2014, 21; Couldry 2008, 36). Nevertheless, having the capacity to develop images of suffering without sufficient ethical consideration poses the risk of reducing suffering to simple spectacles, turning viewers into passive observers who merely watch without acting (Nikunen 2019, 26; Orgad 2014, 43; Chouliaraki 2006b).

While media serves as a crucial tool in understanding inequalities and suffering and establishing spectatorship, NGOs, as referred to by Shani Orgad (2013) as “visualizers of solidarity,” play a pivotal role in creating narratives of distant suffering, producing content for mediated solidarity, and disseminating it on the platforms which simultaneously shaping this process (Nikunen 2019, 26; Orgad 2013, 296-97; Smith 2002). In the realm of media-enabled spectatorship, NGOs are instrumental in constructing what Chouliaraki (2008a) refers to as “global moral imagery,” presenting suffering as “problems that need to be solved” (343). They actively shape the lens of spectatorship, drawing attention to humanitarian crises and issues in need of collective action.

Through their communication efforts, NGOs set the agenda, launch missions to assist others, bear witness to suffering, and ensure the smooth functioning of their operations, in which they hold significant power in shaping solidarity actions and driving social changes (Salamon 2014, 16-18; Zhang 2015, 366; Kirk 2012; Yanacopulos 2015). In their discursive construction of solidarity, as Chouliaraki (2013b) points out, the mediated vulnerability plays a significant role in eliciting solidarity through feelings of pity (111). It encompasses the presentation of shocking and astonishing pain to visually capture audience’s attention (Chouliaraki 2013b, 112). Scholars criticize the phenomenon where NGOs, operating within an attention economy, are driven by a market logic of competition (Tufekci 2013; Chouliaraki 2013a, 6). To continuously attract potential donors, they must adapt the communication strategies to brand themselves, which align with organizational communication strategies in the marketing sector (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Cooley and Ron 2022; Vestergaard 2008; Barnett and Weiss 2008, 34; von Engelhardt and Jansz 2014, 471).

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A new communicative mode, as identified by Chouliaraki (2011, 2013a), arises from shifts in the landscape of the aid sector, characterized by platformization and technologicalization, marketization and instrumentalization, as well as professionalization. All of these trends contribute to a transformation from solidarity of pity to solidarity of irony (Chouliaraki 2013a, 1-2). Ironic solidarity places individual moral fulfillment above collective judgment and shared interests. It leverages the suffering of distant others to create a facade of caring without making meaningful contributions or commitments to bring about social changes (Gaztambide-Fernández et al. 2022, 254). In essence, it prioritizes personal gratification over addressing the genuine needs of vulnerable individuals and can even result in silencing their voices altogether (Chouliaraki 2011, 364; Thompson 1995, 225; Orgad and Seu 2014, 918).

To be more specific, Chouliaraki (2011) identifies several characteristics of communicating ironic solidarity. These features include a lack of reflexivity, depoliticization, and disregard for structural problems and the use of playful textual strategies to manipulate narratives and evade criticism over the representation of suffering (*ibid.*, 363-70). Additionally, these communication efforts often employ discourses that prioritize emotions other than genuine moral concern, with narratives that empower the self while downplaying the experiences of others, enacting a narcissistic spectatorship (Chouliaraki 2013a, 18). In this context, a question of whether solidarity can still thrive under such conditions has been raised. Consequently, we may wonder about the emergence of new forms of solidarity in these dynamics.

Emotions are intricately intertwined with and central to the concepts of solidarity (Collins 2001). The strategic use of emotions to drive donations has evolved into an indispensable approach for NGOs. Through texts and discourses, emotions associated with solidarity serve as both outcomes of the communication process and vital catalysts for motivating actions (De Blasio and Selva 2019, 26; Millan 2018; Markham 2018). NGOs use a range of emotional appeals in their narratives, including both negative and positive, to influence the attitudes of their audience (Chouliaraki 2010).

Scholars uncover various narratives employed by NGOs in their communication efforts to promote solidarity, each with similar aims and underlying logics (Chouliaraki 2006a; Dogra 2012; Vestergaard 2008). Orgad and Seu (2014) offer a critique of NGOs' communicative practices by examining the concept of mediated intimacy and analyzing the metaphors of

bonding. In doing so, they illuminate an additional dimension of the ironic solidarity: the utilization of personal and intimate narratives (storytelling) to cultivate a sense of identification and care, often overlooking disparities and circumventing structural challenges (Silverstone 2007, 47). By constructing narratives of innocence and need, these texts frequently focus on children and women, portraying them as deserving recipients of assistance (Vestergaard 2021, 107; Orgad and Seu 2014, 917; Yeoh and Kim 2022). Individuals are depicted as devoid of agency and grappling with helplessness, thus contributing to the prevalent saviour narratives within NGO communications (Madianou 2013, 256).

While the representation of suffering remains a central topic of debates in NGO communications, there is a growing awareness for the positionality of benefactors. While research still tends to focus more on representation issues from a distant position, adopting a lens of solidarity “within” invites us to examine the construction of “we”, including our limitations and capacities through discourses (Vestergaard 2021, 114). From an intermediary perspective, researching the solidarity discourses of NGOs can expose deeply ingrained ideologies and power dynamics. Furthermore, researching solidarity discourses from the Global South, which has historically been portrayed as the object or recipient of solidarity, can help challenge and break down the existing power structures (Dutta and Pal 2020).

2.3 Communicating Solidarity in the Chinese Context

Considering the predominant theories of solidarity originating from the Global North, a crucial question arises: can these Western concepts of solidarity be suitably employed and tailored to accommodate varied social and cultural contexts? The following chapters bring China into conversation, delving into the topic of national solidarity. They also provide an overview of Chinese NGOs and their association with concepts of solidarity.

Solidarity within a nation’s boundaries is often fostered through a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood (Rorty 1989). Anderson’s (1991[2006]) notion of the imagined community emphasizes the collective imagination that arises through media consumption, contributing to a shared temporality across space and nurturing a collective national consciousness. According to Calhoun (1997), assertions that create collective identities, mobilize people for common goals, and assess individuals and practices are what shape nations in the main (5).

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Through the construction of discourses, national identity is forged, and national solidarity is promoted.

While literature of nationalism emphasizes collective identification and a sense of belonging, discourse of national solidarity highlights inter-group bonding and cooperation (Kaplan 2022, 398). Kaplan (2022) explains how national solidarity can be discursively constructed through metaphors of kinship, friendship, and strangership. To create a social imaginary of a shared destiny, the kinship metaphor emphasizes bonds through sameness (shared genealogical ties), the friendship metaphor extends sociability, and the strangership metaphor treats everyone as equals (Sznajder 2002; Kaplan 2022, 402-5; Wang and Liu 2020, 12). These metaphors play a crucial role in establishing connections with distant others within national boundaries, transforming strangers into friends and eventually brothers (Kaplan 2022, 413). Kaplan's (2022) research captures the main tropes in national solidarity narratives, but it does not address the constructed language in the moral aspect of care, or the dynamics in choosing to assist specific groups while excluding others. Discourses for caring the strangers-turned-brothers as individual responsibility has left to be explored beyond national bonding.

While nationalism has been considered a vibrant aspect of Chinese culture, grand narratives have grounded national solidarity since ancient times (Zhang 2015, 361; Townsend 1992; Zhao 2004; Karl 2002). Notably, the close relationship between family and nation, rooted in Confucian family values, establishes family-like social structures and a value system that connects the family, nation, and the world (Liu and Wang 2020, 10; Chen and Chung 1994, 96; Gu 2012, 43).

The Chinese discourses of national solidarity that implemented from a top-down perspective under different leadership, promote ideal national stories (Wang 2014; Yan 2021). Presently, the main discourse of national solidarity revolves around the concept of a common destiny or the "Chinese nation community" (中华民族共同体), the big family narrative, collective interests, and "the Chinese dream," which emphasizes unity and progress under the leadership of the party state, aiming for citizens to achieve a better life (Liu and Wang 2020, 8; Wang 2014, 7). Consequently, official narratives prioritize public interests and social goods (Wang 2019, 12; Wu 2017, 125).

However, diverging from a traditional top-down perspective, the moral landscape of Chinese citizens is far more complex than the stereotypical notion of nationalism (Schneider 2018, 53). Influenced by globalization, scholars engage in debates surrounding the individualization and liberalization of China (e.g., Yan 2011; Barbalet 2016; Hansen and Svarverud 2010). The process of neoliberalization has not only impacted China's market economy and led to socioeconomic disparities between regions but has also introduced individualistic values that emphasize self-improvement, perfection, and competitiveness (Harvey 2007, 120; McGuigan 2014, 232). Yan (2021) discusses a moral crisis among young Chinese individuals, as they transition from a Maoist communist morality that prioritized collective responsibility to an individualistic moral framework. Consequently, it becomes challenging to envision national solidarity within an ever-more complex and diverse moral landscape of care, where understanding the motivations behind support becomes even more difficult.

2.4 Chinese NGOs' Work for Public Interests

Chinese NGOs play a vital role in this context, serving as key intermediaries that not only actively engage in actions of help and support but also strengthen the sense of solidarity. In the past few decades, the social sector in China has grown tremendously, with voluntary NGOs coming to the forefront, particularly in response to the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008 (Shieh and Deng 2011; Teets 2009; Xu 2014). This natural disaster prompted the emergence of these NGOs, which assumed crucial responsibilities during times of crisis (Song et al. 2022, 5; Wang 2019, 1-2). At the same time, political constraints have limited the options for NGOs to openly articulate solidarity (Marquis, Zhao, and Yang 2016, 43). All NGO practitioners in China operate under the umbrella term "Gongyi," which is translated as public interests (Wu 2017, 125-8; Wang 2019, 4). State-supported volunteerism has led to active citizen involvement in the NGO sector, engaging in politically safe activities (Wu 2017, 126; Wang 2019, 35; Song et al. 2022, 5).

When referring to NGOs in China, the term is often used interchangeably with a wide range of social organizations that address development issues and advocate for socioeconomic equality (Marquis, Zhou, and Yang 2016, 42). As of January 2021, statistics from the Chinese Social Organization Web indicate a remarkable total of 900,914 registered social organizations nationwide, encompassing foundations and formally registered non-profit organizations

(Wang 2021). However, the exact number of grassroots NGOs remains difficult to measure. Due to the field's complexity and diversity, along with different systems of naming and the intertwined relationships between the state and civil society, it is challenging to establish rigid categorizations for NGOs in China based solely on the nature of their work (Wang 2019, 15).

While the relationship between state and civil society has always been a central topic of debate, more scholars shift their attention to the question of whether the state, due to its own structural deficiencies, has been implicitly delegating certain developmental responsibilities to the social sector (Yu 2017, 35; Wang 2019, 47; Yang and Calhoun 2007, 229; Fong and Murphy 2005). Scholars discuss Chinese NGOs not from the perspective of social movements but rather as agents actively working towards social improvement and promoting public interests within the social good sector (Yang and Calhoun 2007, 212; Wang 2019; Marquis, Zhou, and Yang 2016). Their focus extends beyond emergencies, as they now aim to address long-term economic disparities and imbalances through a new model of partnership and cooperation with the state (China Development Brief 2021; Wang 2019, 28; Shieh and Deng 2011). Wang Jing (2019) further describes this approach as “non-confrontational activism,” which includes resource relocation assistance and discursive development around social issues (25).

One major demonstration of their non-confrontational work of solidarity for social goods is their involvement in philanthropic campaigns. Chinese NGOs, in addition to creating their own philanthropic campaigns, have adapted to the Chinese digital philanthropic landscape structured by major tech companies (Yu 2017, 36; Wang 2019, 3; Song et al. 2022, 2; Marquis 2023; Bloomberg 2022). Tech conglomerates like Tencent and Alibaba, in response to governmental calls for corporate social responsibility, have developed and configured new ways of doing good through their platforms (Song et al. 2022; Yu 2017, 38; Wang 2019, 5; Huang 2022, 1065; Tu 2016).

Corresponding to Chouliaraki's (2013) observations in the changing environment characterized by platformization, technologicalization, and instrumentalization in the global aid sector, China is also undergoing similar transformations. The emergence of “handy philanthropy” aligns with the trend of individualized and loosely connected actions of solidarity, making it easier for individuals to get involved in daily charitable activities

available online and offline (Yu 2017, 40). According to Yu (2017), this represents a “market-driven, consumer-empowered, and individualistic form of personal improvement” in the name of charity (35). Under these changes in the digital philanthropic environment, communication strategies of Chinese NGOs have been affected and changed (Huang 2018, 26). While literature on solidarity has focused less on the discourse of NGOs and more on their actions, it is crucial to recognize the discursive power they hold, which can shape people’s ideology on who is worth helping and what is embracing as “doing good”, influenced and shaped by digital philanthropic environment, national value-system, and social cultural contexts.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the literature review concerning solidarity, mediated solidarity by NGOs as storytellers and visualizers, the Chinese context of national solidarity and the work of NGOs, a complex and contested nature of solidarity is revealed. This project delves into mediated solidarity within a dispersed yet networked society, approaching it from a non-media centric perspective. Instead, it seeks to explore how Chinese NGOs envision solidarity with distant others through their languages. The project aims to investigate whether the communicative approaches employed by Chinese NGOs, who hold distinct roles compared to their Western counterparts within a society, align or diverge from the communicative trends discussed in the global non-profit sector. Ultimately, through this case study, the project intends to shed light on the tensions and challenges in building solidarity within modern society, regardless of the diverse social backgrounds involved. Drawing from the literature review, six theoretical assumptions have been formulated:

1. Ranging from localized communities to nation and entire humanity, different scopes of solidarity have intricate relationships with one another, sometimes resulting in tensions.
2. The political economy of solidarity has undergone a transformation due to the rise of media and technology, prompting mediators and agents of solidarity to adjust and react to these changes. Within this study, media is regarded as a tool utilized by

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mediators, including non-governmental organizations and other social forces, to cultivate solidarity among individuals.

3. NGOs, as the visualizers and storytellers of solidarity, play a crucial role in its discursive construction, particularly by employing narratives of pity.
4. The evolving landscape of solidarity has impacted the communication strategies of NGOs. A solidarity of irony is now conveyed through self-centered emotional narratives that compete for attention.
5. In the Chinese context, digital philanthropic campaigns fueled by big tech companies have been structuring the communication strategies of NGOs. Given the multifaceted dynamics within China's social sector, the non-confrontational efforts of NGOs encompass diverse expressions of solidarity.
6. National solidarity has been constructed through discursive efforts using various national metaphors. In China, it is deeply intertwined with historical cultural values of kinship and a top-down implementation of national narratives.

To comprehend both common trends and subtle nuances within the expressions of solidarity in China, the following questions are posed:

RQ: How do Chinese NGOs use mediated discourses of solidarity in philanthropic campaigns?

Sub 1: To what extent, if any, are the mediated discourses of solidarity by Chinese NGOs based on pity and irony?

Sub 2: To what extent, if any, do the mediated discourses of solidarity by Chinese NGOs intersect with discourses of national solidarity?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Text is performative and serves as a tool for understanding morality (Vestergaard 2021, 104). When analysing texts, it is essential to separate the potentials and imaginations conveyed within the text from their actual effects on the audience's perspectives (ibid., 105). Among the

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various methods of text analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) stands out for its analytical focus on ideology, hegemony, and power within language. Developed both as a theory and a methodology, CDA considers “language as social practices” and examines the power dynamics inherent in language and discourse (Janks 1997, 328; Wodak 2001, 2).

In post-structural theory, it is recognized that we are unconsciously shaped and constituted by discourses, which eventually become what is commonly referred to as ideology and everyday common sense (Janks 1997, 341). CDA aims to resist and challenge these taken-for-granted discourses (Wodak 2001, 3). Its focus on deconstructing the positionalities of speakers is particularly useful in unravelling the key aspects of NGO communications in philanthropic campaigns, including their strategies to mobilize potential donors (Janks 1997, 332; Chouliaraki 2008, 675).

The core value of CDA lies in its recognition of the significance of social, cultural, political, and historical contexts. It acknowledges that “all social practices are tied to specific historical contexts and serve to either reproduce or contest existing social relations and different interests” (Janks 1997, 328; Fairclough 2011, 3). In other words, CDA aims to move beyond linguistic analysis and understand the types of statements that have been accepted by society and dominant cultures, and whose interests and benefits these statements serve (Anderson 2003, 12; van Dijk 2011, 3). In this case, CDA enables us to look beyond the messages of NGOs and delve deeper into the social, cultural, historical contexts that shape, enable, and expect these imaginaries of solidarity. It raises questions about the types of solidarity articulated and configured in discourse, whose solidarity it represents and with whom, and how solidarity is manifested and enacted through various expressions within Chinese society (Fairclough 2011, 3).

Another important reason for choosing CDA is its emphasis on intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Wodak 2001, 12; Janks 1997, 338; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 28; Fairclough 1992, 2003). Scholars in the field of CDA recognize that discourse as an event is connected to earlier events and sets the stage for subsequent statements (Anderson 2003, 12; Jäger 2011, 4). My research attempts to explore the interconnections between discourses: the juxtaposition of a newer discourse of ironic solidarity and the discourse of solidarity based on

pity, and the links between the discourse of solidarity in philanthropic campaigns and the broader field of aid for distant suffering. These interconnections may have further implications for the connections between global and national solidarity.

Language plays a crucial role in constructing our orientation towards others and the world (Chouliaraki 2008, 691). In this project, understanding the embedded social expectations, the constructed imaginary and symbolic relationships between potential donors and distant suffering, as well as the social and cultural contexts that shape the portrayal of “us” and “others” in texts, is crucial for comprehending the underlying structural systems and power dynamics beyond the surficial messages. Conducting CDA allows us to grasp the power of a position that is capable of support (Vestergaard 2021, 108).

4.2 Selection of Texts

To operationalize the methodology, a purposive sampling approach has been adopted. The primary data collection focuses on the largest internet fundraising festival, the 99 Giving Day, with millions of citizens and thousands of NGOs participating each year since 2015 (Song et al., 2022, 11). Given the strict control of daily crowdfunding by the government, 99 Giving Day has become a crucial source of funding for many grassroots and registered NGOs (Wang 2019, 119-20). Considering the significant efforts that NGOs invest in the event, this philanthropic festival can provide a rich database for mediated discourses of Chinese NGOs.

Since it is a Tencent-developed philanthropic event, NGOs employ the widely used social media platform WeChat (Tencent’s major product) to convey their campaign messages and communicate with their target audience (Wang 2019, 30). A pilot study was conducted, with the sampling period lasting from 30 days before, throughout, and after the 99 Giving Day of 2022 to include a comprehensive period of analytic materials. Public articles of NGOs who were on the project list of Tencent were analysed. From the pilot study, I noticed that there are different types of articles NGOs produced for the campaigns: rules and guidance for donation on 99 Giving Day, stories of the recipients, stories of the volunteers and NGOs, and the combination of all three. To focus on the embedded discourse of solidarity, I will be focusing on the latter three.

Despite the variety of projects including education, health care, and disaster relief during the 99 Giving Day, education sector stands out as the most prominent throughout the event, displaying a lower level of intervention from governmental forces (Wang 2022). Education inequality serves as a representative issue directly intertwined with the economic disparities in Chinese society (Harvey 2007, 142-44; Postiglione 2006). Consequently, for the purpose of this study, the chosen articles primarily concentrate on the education sector.

Two series of public articles posted by two NGOs' Wechat official accounts have been chosen, centred around the theme of 99 Giving Day. One is from Shenghai Chunhuaqiushi Organization (上海春华秋实), a NGO supporting disadvantaged students from western regions of China to get higher education (Sample A); second is from Daiaiqingchen Organization (大爱清尘“Love Save Pneumoconiosis”), a well-known NGO that supports miners living with pneumoconiosis (also known as black lung disease) and their families (Marquis, Zhou, and Yang 2016, 44) (Sample B to J). Sample A contains 8 pieces within a single post, while Samples B to J consist of pieces that were posted daily before and during the 99 Giving Day in 2022 (Appendix 1 to 3). These two NGOs stood out due to the significant amount of money they raised and the prominent reputation they have earned (You 2022). When CDA does not seek for generalization, the selected materials are considered sufficient to provide valuable insights and nuances into the discourses of solidarity in China (Jäger 2011, 51; Meyer 2011).

4.3 Analysis Framework and Operationalization

Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional model will be used as a basic structure for analysis. To operationalize the methodology, a template has been implemented based on theoretical frameworks, drawing from national solidarity, the Chinese cultural values and social norms, and modes of international aid-field communication, but not limited to the features specified in it (Table 1). While I acknowledge that the contexts and scopes of international NGOs may differ from those of local NGOs, their language tools are still valuable for analysing solidarity, as they might address similar issues arising from social-economic imbalances and operate in similar communicative contexts.

Table 1: Analytical Framework

Level	Framework	Operationalization
Textual	It is a descriptive-level linguistic approach to the text that concentrates on vocabulary, syntax, and sentence structures, aiming to reveal various values, such as expressive, relational, and experience values (Fairclough 2013, 93; Zheng 2023). It is possible to examine a variety of word uses and functions, including metaphors, the use of active and passive voice, etc. (Fairclough 1989, 110–111; Zheng 2023).	<p>Naming and pronouns: us vs. them (van Dijk 2007, 51).</p> <p>Sentence construction: syntax and transitivity (van Dijk 2007, 54).</p> <p>Vocabulary and style: Asiatic/Romanesque, etc. (Charteris-Black 2013, 30-54).</p> <p>Cultural/social symbols: idioms, sayings, clichés (Jäger 2011, 53).</p> <p>Rhetorical means: metaphor, parallel, repetitions (Jäger 2011, 54).</p>
Discursive	This dimension is concerned with the texts' situational and intertextual contexts (Janks 1997, 338). How different audience segments may perceive a text, how the discourses relate to, conflict with, or support one another are all taken into consideration	<p>National discourses: kinship, friendship, strangership (Kaplan 2022).</p> <p>Discourse of pity: the logic of innocence, need, and worthiness (Vestergaard 2021, 111).</p>

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	<p>(Chouliaraki 2008, 675; Wodak 2001, 7; Zheng 2023).</p>	<p>Discourse of irony: self-moral fulfillment and benefit (Chouliaraki 2011, 2013).</p> <p>Mediated intimacy: personal stories and emotional narratives (Orgad and Seu 2014).</p>
<p>Societal</p>	<p>This dimension concentrates on the broad social-cultural background to interpret the texts as social struggle processes governed by institutional power structures and ideologies (Fairclough 1989, 117; Zheng 2023). It investigates how societal context influences discourse and how language, as a social practice, develops, maintains, or challenges specific beliefs (Wodak 2001, 11; Zheng 2023).</p>	<p>Historical, social, cultural contexts and values in China that support specific forms of solidarity:</p> <p>Values for education;</p> <p>Urban-rural divides;</p> <p>Values for kinship;</p> <p>Chinese emotion work: silent endurance and facework (Harvey 2007, 121-151; Wang 2019, 62-5; Chen and Chung 1994, 96; Postiglione 2006).</p> <p>NGOs' social roles and social images in China (Huang 2022).</p>

4.4 Ethics and Reflexivity

CDA has been subject to criticism regarding the potential subjectivity of interpreters and their privileged position in “criticizing everything in a social and formal analysis” (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 8). It has been argued that the interpretation of texts departs from a political motivation rather than a purely textual one (Stubbs 1997, 4). As a postgraduate student studying at a higher education institution, my critical lens towards language usage and its underlying motivations has already shaped my approach and attitude towards the texts from the beginning. My personal experience in philanthropic campaigns, both as a potential donor and a volunteer, can also influence my interpretation of the texts. It is highly possible that there are additional interpretations to the texts, given the subjectivity of interpreting solidarity in the conversation.

The relationship between language and cognition has remained unclear, casting doubt on the extent to which language can accurately represent reality and manifest the power dynamics (Stubbs 1997, 5). In this case, to what extent the discourse of solidarity represents real solidarity and how language can either detach from or engage with social cultural values, power, and ideology, requires further exploration. Moreover, CDA’s linguistic analytical tools are primarily based on English. Therefore, when applying CDA to another language, certain linguistic dimensions may be overlooked, even if the analysis is conducted on original texts but English was utilized as the analytical language (Stubbs 1997, 1). The challenge of navigating between bilingual modes of thinking might limit the analysis. To address this limitation, I have tried to incorporate distinctive cultural, social, and political contexts into the linguistic dimension and explore the extent to which language can encompass these contexts.

Additionally, limitations arise from the education theme of the samples, as the language of solidarity may vary in other sectors. However, since education is the most vibrant area where NGOs can safely involve themselves without political constraints, it could still be representative and shed light on underlying problems. The focus on large NGOs rather than grassroots NGOs is another drawback. This decision was made because, in China, the public

gives more attention to and trust to NGOs with well-known names compared to grassroots NGOs, which indicates another hierarchy of the industry (Huang 2018, 37; Huang 2022, 1069).

When compared to content analysis, CDA may be more difficult to reach generalized findings, but it excels at diving deeper into conceptual and inter-discursive conversations, going beyond patterns of language use. By socially and culturally contextualizing the discourses, the methodology enables a more thorough investigation of how these discourses incorporate the ideology of solidarity.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following chapters provides a detailed discussion of the results obtained from CDA. These discussions shed light not only on the power NGOs hold but also on the power dynamics in which they are involved. The analytical findings are presented with four major themes: Solidarity of pity in artful textualities and mediated distance; solidarity through positive narratives; solidarity of irony among NGOs and donors; Solidarity through kinship and family-ties.

5.1 Solidarity of Pity: Artful Textualities and Mediated Distance

NGOs in China leverage artful textualities to represent distant suffering and wield their power in creating discourse and narratives to attract a wider audience (Chouliaraki 2011, 364). Chouliaraki has highlighted the shift in solidarity from grand narratives of humanity, from pity to irony in her works (2011; 2013). However, the samples still exhibit a grand yet individualized narrative of pity. At the linguistic level, the texture and style of language in these samples are strikingly similar. They adopt a lyrical and Asiatic style of language that sets an emotional tone from the outset of the articles. For example, beginning with “even after witnessing much disorder, imbalance, injustice, coldness, and falsehood, still maintain faith in the majority of truths, believing that sincerity will overcome hypocrisy, justice will ultimately prevail over evil, and kindness can awaken conscience” (Sample K), the thrownness of big words and grand optimism immediately set up the tone for the whole article. The explicit designation of “we” as the subjects has been absent in this case. However,

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a “collective we” can be inferred through emphasizing the triumph over evil, fostering a sense of togetherness through assertion of shared beliefs.

Throughout the samples, abstract concepts, and powerful terminology, such as “humanity,” “big love,” “sincerity,” “justice,” and “kindness” have been utilized (Sample A to K). The parallelism and repetition of words further amplifies the potency of language, infusing the textualities with a captivating lyrical quality right from the outset, attempting to evoke a strong emotional response (Bloor and Bloor 2007, 67). The deliberate expression of contrasting elements includes words like “imbalance,” “injustice,” “coldness,” juxtaposed with “warmth” and “justice,” as well as a dichotomy between “the helpless them” and “we who embark on the journey of altruism” (Sample A). This skilful deployment of language style effectively sets NGOs as the primary storytellers who begin their stories as following:

Endless distant mountains, crumbling old houses, eyes filled with dreams, exhaustion, and helplessness—they continue to tug at our heartstrings. We fondly remember every person we met during that journey—students who endured hardships but pursued their dreams with determination, parents who endured through storms and uncertainty out of love, volunteers who tirelessly worked to protect dreams... (Sample A).

When students, parents, volunteers are the central figures of NGOs’ articles, it is essential to ascertain who precisely constitutes the “we” in this context and who assumes the role of spokesperson for this collective identity. In sample A, the “we” pertains to the NGOs, who “fondly remember every person [they] met during the journey,” alluding to a form of volunteer tourism. The parallel opening of “endless distant mountains,” “crumbling old houses,” and “eyes filled with dreams” using adjectives for concrete objects instead of the previous abstract concepts this time, is another example of a grand opening in Asiatic style.

The power wielded by these NGOs extends beyond their artful language style; it also involves the creation of distance within the text, positioning the “we” as the NGO volunteers and potential donors, while designating the “they” as the recipients. A sense of intimacy is artfully cultivated between the NGOs and their audience through the strategic use of pronouns, the skilful presentation of suffering stories, contributing to mobilization (Orgad and Seu 2014).

After a brief description of the family background, Sample B tells the story of a daughter trying to support her family as her father suffers from pneumoconiosis. Sample C depicts a

girl who lost her father before the college entrance examination. Sample D showcases a girl's journey from the brink of dropping out of school to achieving top grades. Sample G revolves around sisters awaiting scholarship funds, wishing for continuing school.

The themes of individual tragedy can already be discerned from the samples, operating within a competition of pity (Vestergaard 2021, 106-7). Chouliaraki (2013) has underscored the voicelessness of people in need within the communicative structures of NGOs. However, the rhetoric of Chinese NGOs shows that just delivering one's sorrow does not necessarily translate into getting one's voice heard (Georgiou 2018, 47-49; Couldry 2010). The language of storytelling keeps the recipients in these stories at a distance, objectifying them, and confining them within a literary framework. The characterization of these individuals implies a reinforcement of the imbalance between the positions of the storytellers and the beneficiaries as the main characters of their storytelling, resulting in a false impression of vocal that leads to true silence.

During her youth, at an early age, she witnessed and experienced the weight of death, illness, poverty, and their accompanying realities. This caused her to be introverted, delicate, and reserved in speech (Sample D).

I noticed by the kitchen door, there was a seven or eight-year-old child, diligently shucking corn, seemingly listening yet not really paying attention to our conversation. She began scraping the unripe corn kernels off the cob using a serrated rubbing board, quickly filling a basin at her feet. The little girl was dressed in a pale-yellow shirt that nearly matched the colour of the corn kernels (Sample B).

While many peers in the city are still immersed in gaming and endlessly scrolling of screens, at such a young age, she has weighty responsibility on her delicate shoulders. She has abandoned vanity, is dressed modestly, and eclipses the world's splendour with her youthful endurance in the face of adversity (Sample A).

Fictionalized images are constructed around the characters. For the children, third-person nominal forms are used, speaking from a position of who remains at a distance from them. The beneficiaries are depicted as "weak," "young and innocent," "introverted and quiet," emphasizing the burden of life they carry, particularly highlighting the fragility of little girls amidst a heavy and miserable life, corresponding to Vestergaard (2021)'s observation in mobilizing logic of texts. These images further encapsulate them within emotionally driven stories of their struggles, portraying them not as unique individuals with their complex

dimensions of humanity. While these narratives primarily function as triggers for pity-based solidarity, they sentimentalize the imagined audience, configuring a specific way to call for solidarity.

Another instance of artful textualities can be observed in the portrayal of environmental barrenness. While a substantial portion of discourse in humanitarian communication constructs an imagery of distant poverty, Chinese NGOs' communication generates imagery for poverty within the country, primarily in rural areas of the southwestern regions of China.

The bedroom's ceiling is covered with red and blue woven bags, blocking the view of the sky above. Beneath the woven bags are the beds of sisters, piled with bedding for all seasons. Another area, surrounded by woven bags, is the kitchen. The family's only source of food is a single huge pot on the mud-covered stove, and beside the door are a few crooked home-grown pumpkins. (Sample A).

The sample above consists solely of environmental descriptions with no human subjects mentioned. The language style is plain compared to other provocative parts. However, it is powerful in its simple and straightforward articulation because the imagery of the house has been enacted through the "authentic" lens of the volunteers. The detailed description and close-up lens here add to the overall rhythm of the article, where a plain description and non-emotional tone can contribute to the emotional impact of the text.

Through purely depictions of houses, which potentially serve as indicator of economic status, the language endeavours to vividly portray the appearance of poverty in rural areas. Compared to urban landscapes and modern skylines constructed in the past decades, this depiction might resonate with the targeted audience's generation, who may now belong to the middle class but still carry memories of their childhood in the countryside, embedded in the macro history of development (Deng 2000, 1). The intertextuality of the texts builds upon a collective memory of peasantry, accentuating the rural imaginary and its relation to China's long history of agrarian economy (Harvey 2007, 120; Shi et al. 2011, 551; Halbwachs 2020; Wong 1999, 210-211).

The narratives of poverty in the rural areas stem from Chinese socio-economic background. A persistent disparity exists between urban and rural areas, the eastern economically thriving districts versus the western neglected mountainous areas (Harvey 2007, 143-44). Since the

economic reformation in 1980s, unequal resource distribution including within the education sector has been a core issue in the country (Harvey 2007, 145; Li 2008, 51; Zhang 2007, 162). The eagerness of rural migrants to move to urban areas has further intensified the gap between the “centre” and the “periphery” (Xiang and Wu 2022, 73). Consequently, the imagery of poverty depicted in the narratives of NGOs has been crafted from the perspective of the middle class, targeting potential donors from the “centre”.

The recipients described by NGOs are often compared to a “normal child” living a “normal life” in the city (Sample A, B, D, E, G). The beneficiaries’ living conditions, marked by poverty and family illness, prevent them from experiencing a “normal life.” This comparison serves as an incentive to evoke pity from the audience while also speaking directly to potential donors who are parents themselves. The stark contrast drawn between urban and rural children, as well as rural and urban lifestyles, further accentuates the perceived distance and distinction between “us” and “them,” resulting in the marginalization of those on the fringes (Huang 2022, 1072; Chouliaraki 2010, 136; Orgad 2011, 408).

The samples could be situated in a social context where both officials and citizens have been making efforts to overcome the “traumatic” past, as evident in national narratives and social policies related to China’s modernization (Wang 2014, 3; Galtung 2011). The implied ideology of modernization and development trends in the country, includes embracing an urban, modern lifestyle, further appealing to potential donors residing in the city.

Notably, aligning with Chouliaraki’s (2013) observations on the dismissal of causes in modern solidarity support (18), the structural and historical roots of urban-rural divide is not explicitly addressed in NGOs’ rhetoric. The solidarity of pity is based on the constructed imaginary of poverty and distance within national boundaries, further contributing to the construction of national solidarity either through a collective memory of the agrarian past or a united ambition to prosper the whole nation with fast. However, these narratives again fall into the logic of saviourism between different social classes.

5.2 Solidarity through Positive Narratives

As Chouliaraki and Vestergaard (2021) have summarized, positive and negative imagery are both utilized in appeals of aid field to foster solidarity. In the case of the 99 Giving Day, NGOs

primarily rely on highly positive narratives of overcoming suffering, which can be exemplified by the recipients' success in school. For example, the article, "Why did she, on the verge of dropping out, manage to climb from the last position in the class to the honour roll?" (Sample E), uses a rhetorical question as title to set up a suspense from the beginning, with the aim of attracting the readers. The verbs, including "climb," promote values of diligence, hard work, consistency, optimism, and a passion for life despite adversity.

"I have nothing to complain but work hard" (Sample C).

"Life has been like this. I do not want to complain" (Sample E).

Quotations from the participants' speeches increases the articles' persuasiveness and trustworthiness, frequently emphasizing the virtues of being "tough," "strong," and "determined," highlighting the beneficiaries' ambition. All the linguistic methods and reasoning add to the worthiness of support, legitimizing NGOs to seek for greater donations.

She wants to become a scientist in the future to invent many wonderful things that can change the world, while her sister aspires to teach and contribute to society with her own efforts (Sample J).

While highlighting their innocence and their anticipation for assistance, NGOs employ narratives of dreams within a broader social-cultural context that highly values the pursuit of dreams and taking social responsibility. On the macro level, the dream narrative links to the "Chinese dream" of rejuvenation, characterized by notions of "strength, prosperity, and advancement" (Wang 2014, 11). On the micro level, it aligns with the ideals of neoliberal citizenship, emphasizing competitiveness, individual responsibility, and progress (McGuigan 2014, 236; Yu 2017, 8; Murphy 2004, 5). Ironically, while the narratives emphasize individual success, they also interweave with the discourse of "positive energy" promoted by the state, speaking to discourses of national solidarity that feature positive emotions (Wang and Liu 2020, 9; Yang and Tang 2018, 9). Moreover, within these positive narratives, tragedies and sufferings are depicted as "gifts" for personal growth, thereby mitigating the pains with a sense of hope. Beneath the surface of the optimistic dream narratives, what remains concealed are the harsh realities of suffering and the filtered truth of genuine needs beyond monetary considerations (Yang and Tang 2018, 2).

Everyone has the right to pursue their ambitions, yet due to poverty, some kids stop in front of opportunities. Our goal is to support them in continuing their education, provide equal educational opportunities, and end the intergenerational cycle of suffering and poverty (Sample B to J).

The example above shows how the dream story broadens its appeal by emphasizing the right to equal opportunity in realizing one's dreams. The modality of language indicates a high degree of commitment, in this case, a strong request for obligation (Charteris-Black 2013, 112). They develop an argument that equals not preventing one from "chasing dreams" with "contributing to society in the future," underscoring the duty to support dreams while creating a solidarity for a lofty goal. Consequently, a grand narrative of national progress is strengthened, and everyone involved is now responsible for creating a better society.

5.3 Solidarity of Irony among NGOs and Donors

The solidarity of irony is enacted through a discourse that centres around self-moral benefits and fulfilment, targeting the people who may provide help (Chouliaraki 2013). This involves discourses that align with the interests of potential donors (Janks 1997, 328; Chouliaraki 2008, 677). Due to cultural norms that promote humility and modesty about one's achievements and prevent an emphasis on personal contributions, Chinese NGOs have a more subtle and intricate articulation of ironic solidarity (Wang 2019, 64; Bond, Leung and Wan 1982; Lü and Huang 2008).

As discussed above, apart from directly silencing the voices of others, the irony in the envisioned solidarity by Chinese NGOs lies within their paternalistic position, determining who are "worth mourning for or saving" and those who are not (Chouliaraki 2006a, 97). The interactions between NGO practitioners and children in need has been presented in the articles.

I asked loudly and sharply in an aggressive tone, "do you really want to go to school?"
She didn't say a word but cried uncontrollably (Sample I).

In the sample above, the Chinese idiom "咄咄逼人", translated as "loudly and sharply", used to describe speakers from a position of attack or power in a conflict. The transitivity in the sentence, with the speaker taking actions toward the recipients, implies that the agency belongs to the narrator, who can ask questions, raise doubts, and investigate, and further able

to deliver this scenario to a wider audience in their own words. In contrast, the student is portrayed with a material intransitive verb: cry, remaining in passive position of receiving. NGO practitioners, acting as interviewers, who pose probing questions during their visits to students (Sample I, E), may indicate a deficiency in mature ethical considerations within the Chinese aid sector.

Another ironic discourse that pervades the materials is the narrative of life-changing and destiny-altering. NGOs, portrayed as agents of change using money to fulfil the mission of “changing lives” (Sample A to J). A high modality of expressions such as “must be entirely different” (Sample G) and “change their entire life” (Sample B, D), contributes to constructing solidarity around a concept of collective “life-changing” projects with a sense of pride. The practitioners’ argument is based on a syllogism which consists of a major premise: students can change their lives through education; a minor premise: education needs money; a conclusion: money can change the fate of disadvantaged students (Charteris-Black 2013, 11). The underlying reasoning technique simplifies the process of achieving educational equality, empowers the contributors with lofty missions of creating a prosperous tomorrow for others, and connects money with the capability to spark change. Once more, it reinforces the hierarchy between those who might help and those in need, as well as the imagined gap between privileged middle-class residents and those who reside in the impoverished mountainous areas (Sample A, B).

A significant socio-cultural value in China –that gaining academic excellence is the only route to prosperity for underprivileged children– has grounded the narrative of “destiny changing through education”. Social policies have been building the path to success in Chinese society by encouraging academic excellence (Hannum et al. 2011; Li and Li 2019). The repeated statements from students like “I can only change my life by succeeding in school” (Sample BCD) and “he won’t be in the same situation if he didn’t quit school” (Sample J) further strengthen the worthiness of support and the credibility of the projects.

Meanwhile, stories of volunteers are also contributing to building a solidarity of irony (Sample A, I). The NGO members are portrayed as individuals who tirelessly work for love, providing warmth, support, encouragement, and “lighting up the lives of students in need” (Sample A). Sample I is a speech of the founder of “Love Save Pneumoconiosis”, who, from a position of

leadership, adopts a narrative of pity and emphasizes “not forgetting the founding missions, ideals, and love”. Using phrases such as “ordinary people like you and I,” the founder draws the audience closer, urging them to donate by sacrificing a cup of coffee or milk tea to save money for others’ education (Sample I). The ease of donating and supporting has been strengthened, as well as the pleasure of support. “Feel the delightfulness of help” and “roses given, fragrance in hand” have long been the clichéd slogans but treasured values in the Chinese context.

When the proposed easy actions of sacrificing coffee or milk tea contrast with the grand narratives of one’s contribution to changing others’ lives, e-certificates proposed in the end of their articles, serving as both a reward and a proof of donation, become another ironic element in NGOs’ strategies, representing a materialized benefit for the donors (Sample K, J, H). The irony lies in the transition from a mental reward to a tangible demonstration that one can showcase to others, despite the seemingly “easy” and “small” action taken. The platform-enabled environment facilitates the circulation of e-certificates, strengthening a sense of self-fulfilment in the networked society (Papacharissi 2018).

Donations under the name of “Gongyi”, public interests, are further transformed into a product of facework within Chinese culture, indicating a shift in motivations of helping (Yu 2017, 43; Gao 1998; Tian and Li 2021). The performative presentation of self on social media, where the audience is also invited to share their contribution on the platforms, complementing the overall performance of NGOs. A wider circulation of such content is the key goal of their communication. Consequently, it can be implied that the ironic reward in the discourse for solidarity is built upon the marketing logic that centred around the self, emotions, and attention (Chouliaraki 2011, 369; Orgad and Seu 2014, 922; Papacharissi 2018).

5.4 Solidarity through Kinship and Family-ties

Kaplan (2022) examines various metaphors of national solidarity including kinship, friendship, and strangership. In the Chinese context, national solidarity is primarily based on kinship, which is anchored in familial values throughout society (Wang and Liu 2020, 8). Sacrifice for family is a common theme chosen by NGOs, expecting a strong resonance from the audience. The campaign’s mobilization efforts center on the concepts of motherhood and

fatherhood, emphasizing the bonds between sisters and brothers, parents and children.

Sample F and H contain two letters to fathers:

You continue working regardless of the weather—whether it's windy or rainy, freezing cold or scorching hot—and you never complain. You always smile pleasantly while claiming, "I have enough for the children's expenses," even with a modest monthly salary. You taught me how to face life's difficulties with optimism. I've learned about hard work and persistence thanks to your actions and words. No matter how tough and exhausting the studies are, I will overcome them all. Please wait patiently and calmly for the time when the flowers bloom and happiness come (Sample F).

Your love is like a cup of tea, keeping your own pain in your heart, and emitting only a pleasant fragrance. Mom and Dad, thank you for your considerate care! In the past, I used to wonder why you worked so hard, struggling with yourselves. Now I understand that it's all for me (Sample H).

The letter format utilized in the articles' direct address to "you," the father, provided an unusual window into the relationship between father and son. The letters portray a moment of rupture in masculinity in a society where father and son rarely disclose their true feelings to one another, making the articles more emotionally compelling in the Chinese setting of "silent endurance" (Wang 2019, 62-5). The depicted children have undergone a process of reconciliation and growth amidst the tragedy. They transformed from initially incomprehensible and immature emotions to a state of being full of love and gratitude toward their parents (Sample F, H). A reciprocity is discursively enacted through the promise of the future, wherein the students express their determination to succeed and give back to those who have supported them. The forms of letters with stated thankfulness, a hymn to immense love, target the audience who are parents with comparable emotional experiences.

"Even if our family faces difficulties, we must ensure our children receive an education" (Sample A).

"I just hope that my child can study well, move forward, and never have to go backward again" (Sample H).

Corresponding to letters from children, the words of parents reflect an intergenerational familial solidarity (Liu 2017, 3). The discourse is situated in the Chinese social expectations for parents, where supporting their children's education is a primary obligation of familial solidarity. In these cases, expressed through a strong tone of assertion, the parents' unshakable dedication for their children showcases their urgency to overcome the tragic

destiny of their families (Zhong and Ho 2014, 155). The intertextuality with the narrative around “望子成龍” (a desire for one’s child to become a dragon) reveals a familial value that resonated throughout the nation, in which parents eagerly express their hopes for their children’s achievements.

The manifested family solidarity is differentiated yet connected with other discourses of solidarity (Draulans and Tavanier 2020, 205; Wang 2014). It is particularly evident in obligation stemming from blood bonds. The metaphor of “sacrifice” activates associated mental recognition and cultural meanings that showcases the blood, sweat, hardships, efforts, and struggles of parents for their children (Charteris-Black 2013, 198-99). Moreover, the metaphor links to a national discourse that views children as the “flowers and the future of the nation” (Sample F, J, K). Propagated by the government and media, the discourse highlights that children are not only the hope for a single family but also for the entire nation, which, again confirming the credibility of NGOs and merit of support (Wang 2013, 9).

National solidarity, although not explicitly called upon, revolves around national narratives of changing the destiny and building the future of a country (Sample A). A mirrored family setting between us and the other, reinforces the notion that “love is the same” in every family (Chouliaraki 2013, 4). This emotional intimacy overshadows anything beyond the roles of recipients as fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters. It provides a sense of relief by focusing on aspects that the audience would like to see while concealing others, around familial love and bonding. However, while this approach may appear to be more humane, it lacks moral depth and is again confined to sentimental reactions (Chouliaraki 2011, 370). Through the demonstration of shared values, an implicit call for solidarity across nation has been strengthened through the narratives of kinship (Calhoun 2002, 150; Kaplan 2022, 403).

5.5 Deficiencies of NGOs’ Communicative Strategies: Loss of Structural Critiques

The grand narratives of pity towards individual destinies have been built upon the foundation of national solidarity that effectively transforming strangers into a unified brotherhood. The positive narratives of dreams are situated within the discourse of “the Chinese dream” and a requirement for neoliberal citizenship. A promising future constructed for potential donors

and supported children is to become “global citizens” and encouraging them to “dream big” (Sample I). However, what is not explicitly stated is their underlying proximity to national development initiatives. These projects may not directly address global issues but instead utilize grand narratives to emphasize their importance, falsely framing themselves in a global scale.

While overlooking structural issues, the emotional strategies that NGOs have adopted and the intimate relationships they attempt to build with their audience are limited to mental persuasion, failing to effectively stimulate broader political discourse or engage with social institutions (Orgad and Seu 2014, 918). In other words, solidarity is implemented in the discourse through a personalized approach, emphasizing individual connections with the text and mobilizing individuals without necessarily committing to broader policy changes (Chouliaraki 2013, 180; Wu 2017, 141).

However, viewed from the perspective of survival, NGOs in China face a critical question of how to maintain political safety and legitimize their operations, which means they are restricted in their ability to tackle the main issues (Shieh and Deng 2011, 183-35). Scholars question the supposed apolitical nature of depoliticized forms, suggesting that their communications and actions are indeed “politically oriented”, under an implicit form of supporting governmental causes (Marquis, Zhou and Yang 2016, 43).

CONCLUSION

This project aims to explore mediated discourses of solidarity that Chinese NGOs use in their philanthropic campaigns. A Critical Discourse Analysis on their public articles reveals that Chinese NGOs have constructed discourses of solidarity with various narratives and metaphors, specifically contextualized in the Chinese sociocultural background.

Contrary to the global trend of abandoning grand narratives, the discourse of solidarity based on pity has been built through artful textualities in a poetic, Asianic, grand manner. The Chinese social sector continues to adopt grand narratives in the name of serving public interests. NGOs, as storytellers and visualizers, have the power to harness the experiences and voices of distant others, enacting and strengthening the gap between those in need and

those who can help. In the Chinese context, the distance has been built on the imaginary of rural areas, which is rooted in the core social problems of urban-rural divides.

Compared with traumatic and tragic storylines, Chinese NGOs paradoxically adopt a very positive narrative focus on the “dreams,” which follows a logic of personal endeavour to overcome sorrow and pains, eventually leading to a bright future. By highlighting individual effort and academic excellence, this uplifting story illustrates the logic of being deserving of assistance. The tasks of NGOs and donors are alleviated through the narrative of destiny changing, in which the irony of solidarity is presented through donors’ benefits, ease of helping, and the simple joys of donating. While all the communication tactics rely on Chinese sociocultural norms, the other key subject revolves around kinship, family bonding, and the emotional connection between parents and children, which are basic aspects of Chinese national culture. The discourses of NGOs built upon the discourses of national solidarity further turn strangers, the distant other, into brothers with the potential donors through shared values of family.

Overall, the discourse of “solidarity” has become a tool manipulated by NGOs to communicate with their audience, lacking moral judgment and focusing primarily on emotional appeal (Chouliaraki 2011, 2013). Without leading to actual changes, their communication work might further silence the voices of the marginalized (Yu 2017, 38; Wang 2019, 3).

From the debates of solidarity concepts to the communication of solidarity in the global aid sector, this project has been built on the literature of solidarity in Western theoretical frameworks. It aims to investigate the overlapping and distinct discourses of solidarity in a setting of the Global South, which could provide more complexity to the conversation about solidarity. While Chinese NGOs display similar patterns of expression in their communicative structures to their Western counterparts, they also demonstrate more contextualized discourses of solidarity, incorporating various cultural values and symbols, which cannot be easily examined from a top-down perspective.

Additionally, this study aims to hint at a broader conversation on solidarity, in which additional research might be done on the theoretical review of the tensions or collaborations

between national solidarity and global solidarity. While it may serve as an exemplary and introductory case study for investigating solidarity in a nation that cherishes collective ideals, how it is produced, delivered, and presented differently than in a democratic society remains a topic of exploration.

The limitation of this project stems from the ambiguity of solidarity as a concept and its manifestation in discourses. Complementary approaches, such as interviews with NGO members and further audience research on the receiving end, can be used to investigate the internal forces within a society that draw people together. In addition, the research could potentially be expanded to other nations in the Global South, where different forms of solidarity can be studied and compared. In the end, I wish this project can expand the conversation on solidarity and redirect attention to its diverse manifestations in various contexts, particularly focusing on how to foster genuine solidarity in the modern world.

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