What Makes Angela Merkel Cry? How Junk News Shaped Europe Perception in Chinese Social Media

- A Study of Social Media Posts obtained from WeChat Public Accounts in 2018

1. WeChat (微信) as China's "Super App":

- 80% market share among all social media apps in China
- Wide range of features integrated into one app: messaging, chat, news, games, direct payments ...
- WeChat-based information consumption 240 billion RMB (35 billion USD) in 2018

2. What is WeChat Public Accounts (公众号):

- A service for media, companies, authorities, "self-media" (自媒体) providing content to a broad audience
- 20 million registered accounts, of which 5 million are active,
- 5 billion daily page views

3. What is Europe?

Key word search with:

- Europe (欧洲) + EU (欧盟) + 47 member states Council of Europe
- + Belarus (白俄罗斯), + Vatican (梵蒂冈)
- - Russia (俄罗斯),- Turkey (土耳其)
- = 11000 posts dealing with Europe or various European countries

4. Who is talking about Europe?

- State Media
- Self-Media with nationalistic point of view
- Commercial entities promoting immigration projects

Number of Posts by European Country

- >1000
- 301-1000
- 101-300
- 0-100

5. What are they saying?

1. America First, 2. Refugee Crisis, 3. A Chinese Dream: Europe as a Destination of Migration

6. Conclusion:

- In light of tensions between global powers, Europe is often portrayed as having a secondary, sideline role, either suffering indignity in the shadow of U.S. hegemony, or standing up against the United States — alongside China. This overarching narrative is deployed to legitimate China's position against the U.S, or as a counter-balance to its interests.
- Where Europe-specific issues are concerned, there is a deep polarization of perception on the Chinese side. On the one hand, Europe is perceived as being in the midst of a prolonged disaster owing to the refugee crisis and its imagined fallout. Simultaneously, it is portrayed as an ideal destination for immigration for Chinese middle class.
- A substantial proportion of social media content referring to Europe in the Chinese social media space can be classified as "junk news," often adopted or adapted from unreliable sources outside China.