

## Forging a “Four Abilities” Team in Print Media’s Media Convergence Reform: A Case Study of the Transformation of Xingsha Times’ Editorial Team (Postprint)

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### Abstract

General Secretary Xi Jinping has pointed out that propaganda and ideological cadres must continuously enhance their “four strengths” —namely, footwork, vision, intellect, and writing ability. In February 2019, the educational practice of enhancing the “four strengths” was officially launched as a fundamental and strategic project across the national propaganda and ideological front, delineating clear goal orientations and practical pathways for the construction of journalism teams through its distinct problem-oriented approach. As a regional mainstream media outlet rooted in and serving Changsha County, Xingsha Times, in compliance with the requirements for enhancing the “four strengths” and within the context of integrated media reform, is actively exploring and cultivating a “four strengths” editorial and reporting team that focuses on central tasks, serves the overall situation, and adapts to the integrated media reform milieu by keeping pace with cutting-edge media developments, establishing itself on new platforms, and employing new methods.

### Full Text

#### How Print Media Can Forge a “Four Forces” Team in Media Convergence Reform: A Case Study of the Transformation of Xingsha Times’ Editorial Team

**Abstract:** President Xi Jinping has pointed out that propaganda and ideology cadres must continuously enhance their footwork, vision, brainpower, and writing power. In February 2019, the “Four Forces” education and practice campaign was officially launched nationwide in the propaganda and ideology front as a foundational and strategic project, providing clear problem-oriented guidance for the goal orientation and practical path of journalism team construction.

As a regional mainstream media outlet rooted in and serving Changsha County, Xingsha Times has been actively exploring and cultivating a “Four Forces” editorial team that centers on core tasks, serves the overall situation, and adapts to the context of media convergence reform, following the requirements of enhancing the “Four Forces” and keeping pace with cutting-edge media developments by utilizing new platforms and methods.

**Keywords:** “Four Forces”editorial team; print media; media convergence reform

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In August 2018, President Xi Jinping emphasized at the National Conference on Propaganda and Ideology that “propaganda and ideology cadres must continuously acquire new knowledge, familiarize themselves with new fields, broaden new horizons, enhance their capabilities, strengthen investigation and research, and continuously improve their footwork, vision, brainpower, and writing power, striving to build a propaganda and ideology team that is politically solid, highly capable, pragmatic and innovative, and capable of winning battles” [1]. This represents both General Secretary Xi’ s earnest expectations for propaganda and ideology workers and a clear direction for journalism teams to fulfill their mission under new circumstances.

In recent years, the rise of new media has upended traditional news ecosystems. Under the impact of emerging media such as the internet and mobile smart terminals, traditional media has suffered severe setbacks in its development. As the media landscape and technological environment evolve, county-level media urgently need to accelerate transformation and upgrading to improve their communication power, guidance, influence, and credibility, thereby 打通 the “last mile” of news publicity work. As a regional mainstream media outlet rooted in and serving Changsha County, *Xingsha Times* was founded in 2012. After seven years of development, it now operates seven media platforms including a newspaper, WeChat matrix, Palm Xingsha APP, Weibo, website cluster, electronic reading screens, and bus shelter advertising kiosks. These platforms support each other, disseminate content three-dimensionally, and coexist symbiotically, gradually achieving transformation from a single print medium to an all-media organization. To adapt to the all-media convergence trend and follow the mobile-first principle, Xingsha Times has shifted its work focus from being newspaper-centered to refining the newspaper while energizing new media, adhering to a “mobile-first” development strategy. The previous allocation of 70% of personnel to newspapers and 30% to new media has been reversed to 30% for newspapers and 70% for new media. Following the requirements of enhancing the “Four Forces” and keeping pace with cutting-edge media developments in the context of media convergence reform, Xingsha Times is actively exploring and cultivating a “Four Forces” editorial team that centers on core tasks and serves the overall situation.

## 1. Cultivating Local Footwork for Ground-Level News

According to Professor Shi Anbin of Tsinghua University’s analysis of “footwork,” first, “feet are for standing, and enhancing footwork means journalists must elevate their political stance, firm up their political position, and strengthen their political resolve” [2]. Political firmness is the soul of journalism professionals. Xingsha Times requires its editorial team to uphold the correct political direction, arm themselves with Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, conduct quarterly political and ideological training for staff, and genuinely strengthen the “Four Consciousnesses” while firming up the “Four Confidences.”

Second, “footwork” also refers to the ability to consciously practice the mass line, strive to go deep into grassroots communities, daily life, and among the people, truly staying close to reality, life, and the masses, and actively conducting in-depth investigation and interviews at the front lines [3]. Xingsha Times requires its editorial team to deeply cultivate the region they serve, with the editor-in-chief and editorial board members taking the lead in writing articles. The team is required to leave the newsroom and conduct field visits to streets, construction sites, fields, and residents’ homes, integrating with local towns, streets, and communities to deeply understand the joys and sorrows of grassroots people, thereby obtaining fresh, authentic, and vivid first-hand news materials. Simultaneously, leveraging the grid management system implemented across urban streets in Changsha County, the newspaper has incorporated hundreds of grid workers from five urban streets into its correspondent network, creating separate accounts for them in the converged media editing system to provide submission channels. This enables more timely and efficient access to local news leads, extending footwork farther and wider to reach the last meter of grassroots communities, truly achieving “mud on the feet, material in the mind.”

As the renowned former editor-in-chief of *People’s Daily*, Professor Fan Jingyi, once said: “The closer to the grassroots, the closer to the truth.” Xingsha Times adheres to the principle of “from the masses, to the masses,” mobilizing resources at all levels in Changsha County and exploring the establishment of converged media studios in towns and streets and converged media e-stations in villages (communities). This has created a three-level converged media platform of “county-town (street)-village (community),” building a three-dimensional converged media system. Currently, the newspaper has pioneered converged media studios in Changlong Street and Jinjin Town under Changsha County’s jurisdiction, establishing converged media e-stations in their villages (communities) and dispatching full-time editorial staff to be stationed long-term at these town-level studios. This synchronizes reporters’ steps with local residents, truly achieving integration with the masses and producing quality news that genuinely reflects their lives and needs, fostering a positive publicity atmosphere throughout the county and fully leveraging the Party media’s position as the main battleground.

## 2. Strengthening Training to Expand Vision and Create Quality Work

We are currently in a period of rapid technological transformation. While emerging developments such as the internet, informatization, and big data bring benefits to publicity work, they also pose significant challenges. President Xi Jinping has pointed out: “We must scientifically understand the laws of online communication, improve our ability to use and govern the internet, and turn this greatest variable into the greatest increment for our cause’s development.” This requires propaganda and ideology workers to enhance their “vision”—that is, to be sharp-eyed, broad-minded, and precise in focus. They must “strengthen their ability to observe, judge, and discern global, national, Party, social, public, and public opinion situations. Only then can they maintain their footing, observe calmly, and respond composedly amidst great changes, distinguishing right from wrong and truth from falsehood. Only by grasping the essence of things and their inherent development laws through complex surface phenomena can they improve their observation, judgment, and discrimination abilities, gradually maturing in practical work with increasingly sharp vision, refined observation, and clear discernment” [4].

“Vision is the ability to discover news” [5]. Authenticity forms the foundation of mainstream media credibility. The first priority in developing vision is to carefully screen information for authenticity and communication value. Xingsha Times leverages the big data platform of the Changsha County Converged Media Command Center, conducting multiple training sessions on the converged media editing platform to cultivate employees’ keen observation and ability to see the significant in the trivial. The newspaper requires reporters and editors to make precise judgments and quickly capture valuable information from complex data, helping to enhance the editorial team’s ability to observe, judge, and discern diverse social public opinions. It also regularly organizes reading activities of “reading original works, studying original texts, and comprehending principles” to improve the team’s political acuity and discrimination.

Only with keen vision can novelty be discovered in routine work and daily practice, enabling the creation of news works that resonate with the people through unique perspectives. In recent years, thanks to the editorial team’s sharp vision, Xingsha Times has produced numerous news reports with broad and profound perspectives, such as *The Poetic Life of the New “Tian Han”*, *80,000 New Bosses in Five Years, Why Is the River So Clear?*, *Building a “Changsha Living Room” by the Liuyang River*, and *Foreigners in Xingsha*, effectively elevating raw material into compelling viewpoints. Centering on the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the newspaper launched the large-scale thematic series *Glorious 70 Years, Striding Into a New Era*, employing clear journalistic vision to write vivid news stories that move from points to surfaces and from appearances to essence. This allows the broad public to read authentic stories about Changsha County, hear its fresh voices, and witness its tangible changes, fully playing the newspaper’s role as the “mainstay” and “anchor” in the county’s public opinion arena.

### 3. Creativity as King to Strengthen Brainpower with Institutional Innovation

Journalists should maintain the habit of constant reflection, continuously improving their knowledge structure and deepening their understanding of the laws governing propaganda and ideology work, truly getting their minds moving and active. On this basis, Professor Shi Anbin of Tsinghua University emphasizes: “In an era of rapid change in science, technology, and media ecology, enhancing brainpower also means media workers must leverage cognitive abilities and subjective initiative, using cutting-edge technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and virtual reality (VR/AR) to deepen media convergence” [6].

Only with sufficient brainpower can journalists transform from “hands” to “talents.” Facing transformation pressures, Xingsha Times fully realizes that traditional media must adapt to informatization requirements, strengthen internet thinking, and scientifically grasp the laws of modern news communication and emerging media development. The newspaper regularly holds news reporting planning meetings, ranging from monthly key reporting planning sessions to daily morning pre-assignment meetings, pooling collective wisdom for effective news publicity. Simultaneously, it conducts irregular brainstorming sessions to stimulate brainpower and inspire innovative thinking across the team.

The newspaper intensifies its efforts to cultivate all-media talents, keeping pace with current new media technology trends by sending staff for advanced studies, introducing various technical talents, and organizing internal new media innovation competitions. Outstanding projects receive financial support along with product managers and technical assistance, encouraging the editorial team to strive to become the “all-media and expert-type talents” that President Xi Jinping hopes for [7]. Meanwhile, the newspaper has successively issued measures including the *Xingsha Times All-Media Editorial Position Compensation Distribution Method*, *Xingsha Times Editorial Assessment System*, *Palm Xingsha Client Assessment Mechanism*, and *Xingsha Times Staff Professional and Technical Ladder Evaluation Method* to adapt to media convergence reform needs and motivate the editorial team to exercise brainpower and produce quality works.

“In modern society, think tanks are indispensable ‘external brains’ for promoting economic development and social governance” [8]. Utilizing media resources to build a media think tank represents Xingsha Times’ active exploration during its transformation. The newspaper is accelerating the preparation and construction of its media think tank, leveraging the Party newspaper’ s brand and resource advantages to establish collaborative relationships with experts and scholars from universities and research institutions. It conducts research on socio-economic and livelihood issues, providing new perspectives and insights for local Party committees and governments’ decision-making through research outputs, helping them accurately grasp social dynamics. Additionally, it fa-

facilitates the translation of public policy discourse to correctly interpret major decisions and enhance public trust and understanding of these decisions.

In 2016, the newspaper launched the large-scale investigative report series “Seeking the Path to the Top Five,” providing decision-making references for Changsha County’s goal of entering the nation’s top five counties. In 2017, the Changsha County Party Committee and government twice leveraged Xingsha Times’ all-media platform to publicly solicit “golden ideas” from society, attracting global intelligence. The aerotropolis economic development “golden ideas” campaign collected over 30,000 suggestions within just a few days, providing substantial data. To vigorously promote the development of the digital economy industry in Changsha Economic and Technological Development Zone and empower the transformation and upgrading of the real economy, the newspaper planned and executed the 2018 Changsha ETZ Blockchain Project Signing Ceremony and Industry Development Summit, supporting county economic development. In 2019, leveraging its big data platform and editorial talent advantages, the newspaper participated in editing the *Daily Public Opinion Summary* for the Changsha County Party Committee Propaganda Department and Cyberspace Administration, providing references for leadership decision-making.

#### **4. Technology Empowerment to Improve Writing Power and Create Multi-Dimensional Viral Content**

“Writing power” reflects one’s mastery of language and writing. Only with excellent writing power can the synthesis of footwork, vision, and brainpower be perfectly presented in written form, making mainstream voices more touching, moving, and appealing. Meanwhile, in the context of media convergence reform, the concept of writing power should also extend to the ability to 驾驭 visual communication centered on images and videos, because “the internet was once a decentralized, text-based reading network driven by thought and reason, but has now evolved into a highly centralized, picture- and video-based viewing platform driven by emotion. In this sense, enhancing writing power requires media workers to plan new approaches and demonstrate new capabilities in this new video-oriented landscape” [9].

To enhance team writing power, Xingsha Times holds monthly “Times Lectures,” inviting external professionals and outstanding colleagues to form a gold-medal lecturer team for all staff. This enables employees to learn cutting-edge news writing knowledge, the most creative WeChat promotion strategies, professional daily photography skills, and practical video production techniques. Through the imparting of professional knowledge and practical skills, the newspaper upgrades reporters’ and editors’ writing thinking, language phrasing, planning abilities, and image-video mastery capabilities.

During its converged media construction over the past year, the newspaper has focused on cultivating versatile talents in its editorial team, “transforming the pen in hand into a mouthpiece, pen, camera, and various new media

transmission terminals” [10]. Reporters and editors employ video livestreaming, creative H5, Flash animation, drone aerial photography, 720-degree panoramic shooting, and VR technology to create a three-dimensional, multi-dimensional news reading experience, launching numerous viral converged media products. Among them, long-form graphics like *A Fish’s True Confession* and *Wonderful Night at the Construction Machinery Exhibition* exploded on social media; H5 products such as *2018, I’m Waiting for You in Changsha County*, *Only Secure Blockchains Are Worth Mentioning*, and *Saluting the Unsung Heroes in Changsha County’s Flood Relief* became instant viral hits with novel creativity; micro-articles like *Today, Changsha County Officially Extends an Invitation to the World* surpassed 100,000+ reads within a short time; the “Xingsha Quiz” mini-program themed around “19th CPC National Congress Knowledge Competition” accumulated over 2 million+ participants, earning commendation from the Cyberspace Administration of China. Since 2018, the newspaper has successively launched dozens of well-produced video series including *My Youth at the Project*, *Characters Narrating Red Genes*, *Four Seasons of Taste*, and *Commemorating the 120th Anniversary of Tian Han’s Birth*, sparking heated discussions across the internet.

The newspaper believes that writing power is closely related to media competitiveness. Due to its high-quality work, Xingsha Times enjoys strong dissemination rates. Over the past two years, central and provincial media have republished nearly 10,000 original works from Xingsha Times, including over 260 pieces republished by central media such as *People’s Daily* and Xinhua News Agency, with more than a hundred works winning various journalism awards.

In building mainstream media credibility, the “Four Forces” constitute both important content for the capabilities of propaganda and ideology workers and pathways to enhance these capabilities [11]. Footwork, vision, brainpower, and writing power are four interlocking, mutually complementary, and closely connected aspects that cannot be separated or emphasized in isolation.

In 2019, Xingsha Times will continue to implement President Xi Jinping’s important instructions on propaganda and ideology work, consciously shouldering the mission of publicity work in the new era. The newspaper will optimize organizational structure around key work processes and actively explore a partnership system compatible with the converged media era. It will provide outstanding editorial talent that meets the “Four Forces” requirements for media convergence construction under new circumstances, creating batch after batch of grounded, high-quality works. This will enable the Party media to provide public opinion support for Changsha County’s economic and social development, helping to continuously improve the county’s news communication power, guidance, influence, and credibility, serving as the best interpretation of “the era sets the test, we are the test-takers, and the people are the graders.”

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