

Military Network Transformation: Where Is the Path Forward?—Exclusive Interview with Wu Tianmin, Director of the Online Communication Center of PLA Daily [Postprint]

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Abstract

Building a New Pattern of Mobile Network Communication Spanning Internal Networks, External Networks, Military Camps, and Society

Full Text

Exclusive Interview: Where is the Way Forward for Military Network Transformation?

An Interview with Wu Tianmin, Director of the PLA Daily Online Communication Center

By Reporter Diao Yigang

Building a New Pattern of Mobile Network Communication Spanning Internal Networks, External Networks, Military Camps, and Society

On December 25, 2015, Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, President of the State, and Chairman of the Central Military Commission, inspected the PLA Daily, extending congratulations on its 60th anniversary on behalf of the Party Central Committee and the Central Military Commission, and put forward requirements and ardent hopes for innovation in the newspaper's news and public opinion work. More than a year later, *China Media Technology* magazine conducted an exclusive interview with Wu Tianmin, Director of the PLA Daily Online Communication Center and Editor-in-Chief of China Military Online, to learn about the newspaper's progress in advancing media convergence and new media innovation since Chairman Xi's visit.

Achievements in Media Convergence and New Media Innovation

China Media Technology: After Chairman Xi Jinping inspected the PLA Daily and delivered an important speech, what work has the newspaper undertaken regarding media convergence and new media innovation, and what achievements have been made?

Wu Tianmin: Under Chairman Xi's gracious care, the PLA Daily's online and new media endeavors have focused on realizing the Party's goal of strengthening the military under new circumstances. Following the strategic deployment of the Party Central Committee to accelerate media convergence development, we have updated our conceptual thinking, improved strategic planning, optimized internal structures, and accelerated talent cultivation. We have actively seized the mobile terminal market, developed converged media, built new platforms, researched new technologies, and expanded our user base, achieving remarkable results in all areas of construction.

We have actively expanded our communication positions. The PLA Daily Online Communication Center now operates numerous websites and new media platforms, including China Military Online, the Ministry of National Defense website, PLA Daily website, Bayi Internet TV, China Military Photo Center, China National Defense Mobilization website, Chinese People's Liberation Army Talent website, PLA Daily client app, "Military Reporter" Weibo account, "Military Reporter" WeChat account, and China Military Online WeChat account. In 2016, we continued to expand our mobile communication positions, completing the revision and launch of mobile versions for China Military Online and the Ministry of National Defense website. These mobile websites adopt responsive design, enabling smooth switching between PC and mobile terminals, achieving cross-screen presentation and maintenance-free, barrier-free browsing, which greatly enhanced the user experience quality of our mobile platforms. On August 1, 2016, the military version of the PLA Daily client app and its Blue Letter subscription account were officially launched, allowing military smartphone users to browse PLA Daily's converged media content in the palm of their hands. This also marked the preliminary formation of a new communication pattern spanning external networks and internal networks, covering both military camps and society, for the PLA Daily, a 60-year-old organ of the Central Military Commission.

A large number of high-quality original works have emerged. Over the past year, we have successively produced and launched several phenomenal online propaganda products with over 100 million views, such as the conscription promotional short film *Battle Declaration* and the Weibo topic *Military Camp Plastic Surgery School*. These have not only generated strong domestic response but also attracted attention from foreign media such as Reuters and the Associated Press. The online special feature "Chairman Xi Personally Posted on Weibo During His Inspection of PLA Daily" won the first prize of the China News Award, achieving a new breakthrough following two second-prize awards in 2015. In

the first “Five Hundred Positive Energy Works” selection organized by the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, China Military Online won 21 awards, the most among all websites nationwide. In commemorative activities for the Red Army’s Long March victory organized by the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, China Military Online won the Outstanding Organization Award, with three works receiving Excellence Awards. The large-scale online special feature “Theory Online: The Long March Spirit” garnered over 11 million clicks across the entire network, and the series of sand painting works received praise from leaders of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission and widespread acclaim from netizens.

Our influence has grown rapidly. In the 2015-2016 national news website communication power rankings, China Military Online was listed among the “Top Ten National Industry News Websites.” In February 2017, among more than 4.8 million websites nationwide, China Military Online broke into the top 200 in Alexa’s Chinese website rankings, ranking 6th among central news websites. In the latest comprehensive communication power ranking of national industry news websites, China Military Online placed 3rd. The PLA Daily client app has exceeded 6.4 million downloads, ranking among the top 10 Chinese news website apps in communication power and 1st in the latest mobile communication power ranking of national industry news websites. The “Military Reporter” Weibo account has over 37 million followers, ranking 1st in the latest Weibo communication power ranking of national industry news websites. It has won the Central-level Media New Media Award and has been consecutively listed among the “Top Ten Most Influential Weibo Accounts in China” for two years.

Guiding Principles for Media Convergence

China Media Technology: As the organ of the Central Military Commission, what is the action guide for the PLA Daily’s media convergence and new media work, and what are the main similarities and differences with central and local media?

Wu Tianmin: During his inspection of the PLA Daily, Chairman Xi put forward the “Three Adherences”—adhering to the PLA Daily’s allegiance to the Party, adhering to strengthening the military as the foundation, and adhering to innovation as the priority—and the “Three Strengthenings”—being stronger politically, stronger in communication, and stronger in influence. These are the fundamental guidelines and action guide for the PLA Daily’s Party committee in promoting media convergence development and new media construction. At the beginning of last year, the newspaper’s Party committee designated 2016 as the “Year of Breakthrough in Convergence Development,” requiring that we take the thorough implementation of Chairman Xi’s important speech during his inspection of the PLA Daily and at the Party’s news and public opinion work symposium as guidance. We must adhere to the unity of research and problem-solving, combine hardware improvement with software optimization, further transform our conceptual thinking, clarify development ideas, and pro-

mote communication innovation, striving to build a new-type military media flagship. Compared with other central and local media, I believe the general principles are consistent. However, the PLA Daily's media convergence and new media construction place greater emphasis on closely focusing on realizing the Party's goal of strengthening the military under new circumstances, and fulfilling the mission of disseminating the voice of the Central Military Commission, expounding China's national defense policies, recording the steps of our military's strengthening, showcasing the good image of the armed forces, and conducting online public opinion struggles.

Platform Integration and Resource Consolidation

China Media Technology: Through the construction of new media platforms, which media platform resources has the PLA Daily effectively integrated, what challenges and difficulties were encountered during the integration process, and how were they overcome?

Wu Tianmin: The PLA Daily's online and new media platforms have actively integrated a large amount of high-quality, distinctive resources from military news media. Taking content from the PLA Daily, China National Defense Daily, China National Defense Daily Military Special Issue, PLA Pictorial, Global Military, Military Reporter, Defense Reference, China Militia, National Defense Education, as well as Changzheng Publishing House and Great Wall Publishing House and PLA Photo Agency as primary resources, we have also collected resources from various military newspapers, journals, books, photos, and film and television dramas across the entire armed forces. This approach is unique in China's internet landscape, earning us a reputation for rapid and timely military news communication, authoritative and accurate content, exclusive information acquisition, and rich and diverse forms.

Although the PLA Daily itself possesses abundant news resources, in the past, simply reposting PLA Daily content through new media after basic editing did not yield ideal results. Therefore, we have extended the advantages of PLA Daily's original content, authoritative reporting, in-depth interpretation, and commentary to new media platforms. Using technical means such as charts, animations, and videos, we have repackaged and promoted PLA Daily's news resources to create micro-masterpieces of converged media. At the same time, we emphasize interactive cooperation between the newspaper and online platforms, making joint operations the norm. Throughout the past year, whether covering military reforms, major military operations, or large-scale military missions, we have been able to seize the initiative and occupy the high ground of public opinion, thanks to the strong support from our brother departments at the newspaper. Whether it's exclusive major news topics such as commentator articles from our newspaper or frontline interviews during major missions, or authoritative information such as military academy enrollment, graduate assignments, and interpretation of military regulations, our editorial colleagues have generously contributed their carefully edited manuscripts for advance presentation

on online and new media platforms. During every major reporting campaign, editors from both print and online media hold joint planning sessions and organize collaboratively. For example, during the launch of the Shenzhou-11 manned spacecraft, Military Reporters were also China Military Online journalists, helping to coordinate video interviews with aerospace experts. As soon as the press conference announced the names of the two astronauts, authoritative information was covered across all PLA Daily media platforms, effectively enhancing the speed and quality of our online and new media communication.

Construction Concept for the “Central Kitchen” Platform

China Media Technology: What is the construction concept for the PLA Daily’s new media platform (or convergence development platform, all-media platform, central kitchen)?

Wu Tianmin: The PLA Daily uses the construction of a “central kitchen” as the starting point to integrate information data, production elements, and operational support, creating a converged media communication platform that integrates diverse products including text, images, video, audio, animation, and virtual reality, achieving one-time collection, all-media presentation, and multi-channel release. Currently, the newspaper’s technical department is planning to build a new-generation cloud data center relying on large state-owned and local enterprises to provide underlying technical platform support for all-media collection, editing, and distribution. We are also upgrading the security protection systems for the Ministry of National Defense website and China Military Online in collaboration with central-level media and large local network information enterprises. Both projects have been included in the “13th Five-Year Plan for Integrated Economic and National Defense Construction.”

Content Innovation as the Foundation

China Media Technology: In 2015, Chairman Xi Jinping pointed out during his inspection of the PLA Daily that content innovation is fundamental. What content innovation work has the PLA Daily’s online and new media platforms carried out, and what results have these efforts produced?

Wu Tianmin: In the past, our main task was to repost content from the PLA Daily and its subsidiary publications, resulting in a relatively small number of high-quality original products. Over the past year, we have not been content to be “porters of nature.” We have emphasized transformations in thinking patterns, discourse systems, and presentation forms, striving to convert our content advantages into communication advantages and development advantages. We have successively produced and launched several “phenomenal” online propaganda products with over 100 million views, such as the conscription promotional short film *Battle Declaration* and the Weibo topic *Military Camp Plastic Surgery School*. These have not only generated strong domestic response but have also attracted attention from *Reference News*, *China Daily*,

and *Global Times*, as well as from foreign media such as Reuters, *The New York Times*, and the Associated Press. American media even called on their military leadership: “Don’t fall too far behind the Chinese military.”

Bayi Television has successfully completed 18 large-scale live broadcast reports, including the launch ceremony for the “Xiongguan Mandao—Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Long March Victory” themed converged media coverage, the return ceremony for peacekeeping martyrs, and the launches of the Tiangong-2 space laboratory and Shenzhou-11 spacecraft, initially achieving normalization of online live broadcasting. Works such as “Yu Xu: These Images Are for Your Personal Collection, I Have Treasured Them” released by Bayi Television have garnered over one million clicks from China Military Online alone and have been forwarded and broadcast by CCTV’s evening news program and numerous local television stations. In the first “Five Hundred Positive Energy Works” selection organized by the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, China Military Online won 21 awards, the most among all websites nationwide. Throughout the year, the Online Communication Center has received 54 national and military-level awards, exceeding the total number of awards received since the center’s establishment. With our team of about one hundred people, this averages to one award for every two people, representing a bountiful harvest across the board.

Application of Advanced Technologies

China Media Technology: In the era of media convergence, how can we quickly and effectively use advanced technical means to publicize the Party Central Committee’s spirit, theoretical innovation achievements, and major decision-making deployments of the Central Military Commission? What good practices and experiences does the PLA Daily have, and what achievements and successful cases have been accomplished?

Wu Tianmin: Technology research and development has long been a strength of many commercial websites but was once a weakness of China Military Online. Over the past year, we have made historic progress in front-end presentation technology support and research and development. China Military Online’s special topic templates and self-developed H5 templates have been put into frontline application, with steady improvement in both the quantity and quality of H5 creations. Now, during major news events, H5 products from the PLA Daily’s online communication center have become a brand that attracts industry attention and recognition. Over the past year, our H5 products such as *Putting the People First* and *How Have the Three Services Answered the Commander’s Question About Victory?* have been rated as outstanding works of theoretical innovation communication by the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission. All 12 special editions commemorating the Long March victory in the PLA Daily have been transformed and created in H5 format, producing a batch of high-quality works that have won widespread acclaim from the industry.

Last year was also the inaugural year of VR for the Online Communication Center. In mid-April, the “PLA Daily New Media • Xisha Journey” reporting team and netizen representatives visited Yongxing Island in the Xisha Islands, enabling hundreds of millions of netizens to watch Xisha simultaneously with PLA Daily reporters in 360 degrees for the first time. New products such as *Panoramic Interaction / View the Long March Themed Exhibition Without Visiting the Military Museum*, *China Military Online Exclusive Release: Panoramic Tour of the Dongfanghong Satellite Launch Tower*, and the first 3D military VRMV *Four Crossings of the Chishui River* have refreshed the experience for numerous netizens. At the end of the year, China’s first military VR channel was launched on China Military Online. During the Long March publicity campaign, we successively released three sand painting works: *Xiongguan Mandao*, *Bloody Journey*, and *The 25,000-Li Expedition*. These were not only broadcast on CCTV-4’s *China Public Opinion Field* program but were also rated as theoretical communication innovation works by the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission. Additionally, our drone aerial photography, panoramic oil paintings, sand paintings, GIF animations, and military-themed naked-eye 3D works have effectively enriched the forms of expression for military online news.

Talent Team Building and Innovation

China Media Technology: During the new media platform construction process, what new innovative measures has the PLA Daily taken in talent team building and other aspects?

Wu Tianmin: Over the past year, we have shared a common feeling: we once believed that “when concepts change, the world widens.” Now we realize that migrating from traditional media to new media, this conceptual change is precisely an extremely difficult transformation. The difficulty lies in the fact that the conceptual change required to master new media is no longer a purely intellectual activity but a thought storm that must be driven by professional skills. New media is born with internet genes and digital genes. Only those who possess internet thinking and understand digital development, product design, user experience, and interactive communication can be considered to have “changed their brains.” Chairman Xi said, “The internet is mainly a cause for young people; we should recruit talents without sticking to conventional patterns.” This word “recruit” is vivid and apt, meaning we cannot simply expect people wearing “old shoes” to spontaneously transform into new media experts; instead, we should focus more on the “barefoot” new generation.

Where are they? They are right beside us. Over the past year, from *Battle Declaration* to *Military Camp Plastic Surgery School*, the wisdom and capabilities of the new online generation have made us more firmly realize that the future of military online communication belongs to the new generation. We must give them full trust, create better conditions for their growth, help them start smoothly, and accelerate their progress. For over a year, we have actively implemented production process reengineering and human resource allocation adjustments.

Vertically, we have established professional teams for planning, media assets, news, television, photography, front-end presentation, monitoring and review, and project operations. Horizontally, we have divided into project groups for online articles, special topics, live broadcasting, H5, VR, comics, GIFs, sand paintings, graphic illustrations, and naked-eye 3D, initially possessing the production capacity for a relatively complete range of online media products. We have blazed a new trail of creating high-quality products with elite teams. It can be anticipated that with the arrival of adjustments and reforms in military news units, there will be more flexible and efficient approaches to organizational structure and human resources for the military network, and we look forward to this with great anticipation.

Strategic Deployments for 2017

China Media Technology: What are the key tasks and strategic deployments for the PLA Daily's convergence development in 2017?

Wu Tianmin: Over the past year, the PLA Daily's online communication comprehensive capabilities have made significant progress. However, overall, we are still in the process of exerting effort and on the path of catching up. When speaking of catching up, we used to habitually say "the task is heavy and the road is long." Now we see that "the task is certainly heavy," but "the road cannot be long indefinitely," let alone indefinitely delayed. Today's media competition is prominently manifested in the convergence development competition driven by online and new media. As the online vanguard of the newspaper's overall transformation, the Online Communication Center must have a sense of crisis that "if we don't innovate daily, we will regress daily," must have the courage to break some pots and pans, and must have the wisdom and strategy to clarify innovation goals and identify innovation paths. This year's overall approach is: guided by Chairman Xi's important speech during his inspection of the PLA Daily, taking the adjustment and reform of news units as an opportunity, and focusing on improving the influence of all platforms as the core objective, we will continue to deeply advance production process adjustment and optimal allocation of human resources. At the level of production relations, we will continue to liberate and release productivity, comprehensively improve the overall quality of personnel in terms of thinking and business, pay close attention to the scale and quality of original production, and vigorously promote institutional innovation, communication innovation, content innovation, technological innovation, and service innovation. We aim to achieve "major development" on the basis of last year's "breakthroughs." To this end, we will focus our efforts on the following aspects: First, focusing on content innovation as the foundation, we will establish specialized project product teams. Second, we will integrate technical forces and regard optimizing online communication presentation technology as the most active innovation lifeline. Third, we will adjust organizational structures, changing the past approach of designing production processes around release platforms and human resources, to build a quality- and efficiency-oriented mil-

itary online communication talent team. Fourth, we will continuously enrich media asset sources and develop extensive strategic cooperation with military and civilian media. Fifth, we will strengthen user awareness, enhance operational promotion, significantly improve the brand influence of the PLA Daily's online media group, and make the "PLA Daily" gold-lettered signboard, forged through historical trials, shine even more brilliantly in the information network era.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.