

The Content Ecosystem Surfaces and the Value of High-Quality Content Becomes Increasingly Prominent—An Interview with Ye Tieqiao, Founder of Hedgehog Commune (Postprint)

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Abstract

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Interview with a Media Technology Innovator

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Content Industry Emerges from the Shadows: The Rising Value of Quality Content—An Interview with Ye Tieqiao, Founder of Ciwei Commune

Journalist: Chen Xuguan

Editor's Note: With the rapid development of mobile internet technology, information content has multiplied, dissemination has accelerated, and users have increasingly congregated online. As content producers and mobile users continue to adapt to one another, a cohort of personalized, professional vertical content producers has emerged, centered on user needs. Ye Tieqiao's "Ciwei Commune" has attracted widespread industry attention. As he continues to deepen his involvement in vertical content entrepreneurship, he notes that with

capital injection, Ciwei Commune will continue to scale and professionalize in the future.

Interviewee: Ye Tieqiao, founder of Ciwei Commune, formerly employed at *China Youth Daily*. In 2014, he served as director of the official Weibo operations office at *China Youth Daily* and founded the WeChat public account “Ciwei Commune” in July 2014. By the end of 2016, he was operating Ciwei Commune full-time.

China Media Technology: Ciwei Commune initially focused on the “pan-media circle” before shifting its focus to the entire content industry. What prompted this expansion of your content scope?

Ye Tieqiao: Ciwei Commune’s initial focus on the “pan-media circle” stemmed primarily from my deep interest in how information technology—led by technology and fueled by capital—has become one of the most profound and far-reaching transformations of our era. These changes have triggered deep shifts in communication carriers, media forms, organizational structures, and even media professionals themselves. As mobile internet has penetrated deeper into daily life and smart devices have become ubiquitous, a larger sphere beyond the “pan-media circle” has emerged: the content industry.

The internet has created an enormous content consumption market. According to the latest CNNIC data, a typical Chinese internet user spends an average of 3.78 hours online daily. With 731 million internet users in China—695 million of whom are mobile users—they collectively spend 2.76 billion hours online each day. Aside from time spent on transactions and social networking, the remainder is devoted to content consumption. Within this massive vortex of content demand, the value of high-quality content becomes even more pronounced. This is the fundamental reason why content entrepreneurship has become so vibrant: demand is enormous, existing content supply is far from sufficient, and quality content sources are particularly scarce—meaning opportunities still abound.

Simultaneously, social content platforms have dramatically liberated individual content productivity, not only expanding the number of content sources but also enabling more of them to break through. Content consumption upgrades are also striking, with payment models such as tipping, crowdfunding, and bundled purchases becoming increasingly normalized, while users’ willingness to pay for content has risen substantially. Content formats have evolved as well, shifting from text and images alone to a landscape where text, images, and video hold comparable importance, while VR/AR content and AI-generated content continue to develop.

China Media Technology: You previously conducted in-depth reporting at a print media outlet, and Ciwei Commune now features many deep interview-style pieces. What differences exist between producing in-depth reporting in print versus new media, particularly in topic selection, planning, interviewing,

and editing?

Ye Tieqiao: First, regarding topic selection, there are three key characteristics: First, it's more vertical. Previously we covered a broad range, but now we focus exclusively on news vertical to the content industry. This verticality enables greater specialization and depth. Second, we pursue viral potential more aggressively, prioritizing industry hot topics with dissemination power or events that can stimulate industry sensitivities. Third, we have a stronger audience awareness, considering which audiences a topic needs to reach even before finalizing it.

In terms of planning, print media emphasized thematic and serial reporting, whereas now we focus on single pieces that thoroughly explain one topic, rarely doing continuous or thematic series.

Regarding interviewing, editing, and presentation: First, we limit article length. Print media in-depth reports often ran five to six thousand characters, but our new-style deep reporting has length restrictions. Second, presentation is more diversified, incorporating animation, video, and other multimedia elements.

China Media Technology: We understand that Ciwei Commune not only provides content services to users but also serves as a connector between different industries and enterprises, launching various community-based operations such as the "News Training Camp." Could you introduce its development history and current status? Also, what is Ciwei Commune's current user profile and follower count?

Ye Tieqiao: Vertical media's primary function is connection. Ciwei Commune planned for community operations from the start, so a key early task was building groups. We first established a "Weekly Outstanding In-Depth Reporting Recommendation Advisory Group," whose mission was to recommend the best in-depth reporting of the week. Members came from China's top in-depth reporting media, such as *Beijing News*, *Southern Metropolis Daily*, *Southern Weekly*, and Caixin Media. Subsequently, we created a "Weekly Outstanding Financial Reporting Recommendation Advisory Group" with members from China's leading financial news outlets. We also built a "Journalism Academic Community" group to connect faculty from major journalism schools, which now includes over 150 professors, associate professors, and young scholars from prominent institutions, many of them academic leaders. This group has been crucial for building our influence in journalism schools.

In 2015 and 2016, we recruited thousands of students interested in new media from universities nationwide to form the "Ciwei Commune New Media Training Camp." For this community, we held 20 online lectures featuring prominent new media observers like Wei Wuhui, *People's Daily* official WeChat manager Hu Hongjiang, and CCTV News Center New Media Director Yang Jihong. The response was excellent, further expanding Ciwei Commune's influence among journalism students.

The greatest value of community operations lies in two aspects: First, aggregating influential users who produce content enhances our brand influence. Second, it allows users to participate personally, giving them a sense of belonging and honor that evolves their attention into emotional identification, even seeing you as their spokesperson—creating loyalty far exceeding that of ordinary users. Currently, we're developing products for the New Media Training Camp and will focus on building this product next.

Ciwei Commune has nearly 300,000 WeChat users, 240,000 Weibo users, and over 100,000 users on other platforms, including more than 80,000 on NetEase's platform. We estimate that approximately 40% of our users are university faculty and students from media or media-related disciplines, while about 30% come from traditional and new media organizations.

China Media Technology: From its founding in July 2014 to today, what has been Ciwei Commune's biggest transformation? What iterations has it undergone, and how do you define Ciwei Commune today?

Ye Tieqiao: The biggest change has been shifting from part-time to full-time operation—these are completely different states. Doing something as a hobby versus making it your livelihood are entirely different things. When we operated part-time, Ciwei Commune was simply a self-media outlet, but now that we're full-time, we define ourselves as vertical media.

China Media Technology: Having transitioned from traditional media to self-media entrepreneurship, what insights can you share from operating Ciwei Commune in recent years?

Ye Tieqiao: After the communication landscape changed, Ciwei Commune provided me with a successful transition platform, and I'm truly grateful for the opportunities this era has provided. Like many traditional media professionals who left, compensation was only a secondary reason—the fundamental issue was feeling that the work had become outdated, that the profession no longer carried strong prestige, and that the glory days had faded amid industry reshuffling.

When I worked at the newspaper, the feeling of traditional media being “crushed” by new media was deeply uncomfortable. I always felt I was doing something uncool and outdated, constantly suspecting myself of clinging to obsolete practices. I've always sought innovation but lacked the courage to jump ship immediately. Ciwei Commune offered a practice opportunity and platform that allowed me to gradually understand new media changes and ultimately commit to going full-time. When we first started, I never imagined I'd work on it full-time—I always thought it would remain a self-media side project. Circumstances simply propelled me forward.

China Media Technology: What is Ciwei Commune's current team structure?

Ye Tieqiao: After resigning in November 2016, I began building a dedicated team. Currently, we have 5 full-time staff and nearly 10 part-time members.

For a startup, assembling the initial team is critical, so we've been deliberate about our hiring pace.

China Media Technology: What are Ciwei Commune's new plans and goals for the coming year?

Ye Tieqiao: Our goal is to make Ciwei Commune the number one platform for content industry reporting within a year. Simultaneously, we'll strengthen our offline connection capabilities to link the most authoritative, influential, and compelling content platforms and industry professionals. Therefore, we're focusing on the goal of "building the top content industry reporting platform" by increasing both the quantity and quality of original content, becoming an important source of information and perspectives on major industry events, and strengthening connections with media professionals, new media practitioners, entrepreneurs, and outstanding students preparing to enter the media field through salons, closed-door meetings, industry conferences, and training programs—while building out our product offerings.

China Media Technology: As a content entrepreneur, what is Ciwei Commune's platform layout and strategic focus? Why have you chosen this approach?

Ye Tieqiao: Currently, our key platforms beyond WeChat include Tencent's Penguin Media Platform, Toutiao, and UC. However, because these platforms target intelligent recommendation, it's difficult to conduct operations. Articles that receive prominent recommendations can achieve readership far exceeding that on WeChat, sometimes reaching millions.

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

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.