

**Shanghai Residents' Cognition, Attitudes and Expressions towards  
Significant Political Events  
——A Case Study of the 2013 “Two Sessions” of China**

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**Abstract**

China's “two sessions,” namely, the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), has significant meaning to the political life of the nation. It collects opinions and advice from different groups of people annually. “Two sessions” 2013 was especially eye-catching, because new state leaders were elected at the meetings. Using CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system, the Media and Public Opinion Center of Fudan University (FMORC) conducted surveys of China's “two sessions” every year from 2007 to 2013. In 2013, the influence of new media on public opinion has become increasingly significant. Microblog and WeChat have become two types of important media for Shanghai residents to express their opinions and take part in China's “two sessions.” Based on the empirical findings, this paper examines Shanghai Residents' cognition, attitudes and expressions towards “two sessions” 2013 and analyzes how new media affect the public opinions on significant political events.

**Keywords:** Microblog, WeChat, political opinion, influence of new media, Shanghai residents

## **Introduction**

The “two sessions” of China refers to the National People’s Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). It has significant meaning to the political life of the nation.

In contemporary China, the main organizational form for people to exercise their rights by voting is the People's Congresses at all levels. And the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, known as CPPCC, is the place of great importance for different groups of people to have consultations before making important decisions (Tang, 2013). It collects opinions and advice from different groups of people annually.

Under the system of the “two sessions,” NPC and CPPCC stand for the people’s will in different regions and sectors. The combination of the two forms are the broadest and the most important institutional carrier for Chinese citizens’ political participation. The system of “two sessions” connects the government and the public from two dimensions, i.e., region and sector, greatly broadens the channels for public opinion to be heard by the government, and expands citizens' political participation in an orderly way. On the platform of “two sessions,” the adoption of public opinion by the political system encompasses a series of political processes linked under the leadership of the ruling party, like expression of public opinion, comprehension of public opinion, public opinion influencing the decision-making, supervision by public opinion and so forth (Sheng, 2011).

The 2013 “two sessions” was especially notable, not only because new state leaders were elected at the meetings, but also because new media, microblog, WeChat and the like, played an important role in the information communicated about the “two sessions.” Making use of their advantages such as fast speed and high interactivity, through cooperation with traditional media on special reports, releasing rolling news, innovatively promoting the expression of public opinion and government seeking advice from netizens online, and conducting surveys about popular issues (Liu & Zhang, 2013), the new media have greatly changed the traditional information communication pattern about significant political events.

The “two sessions” is not only the most significant political event every year in China, but also the focus of all types of media. Through studying Chinese people’s reaction to China’s 2013 “two sessions” from five perspectives, namely “awareness and attention,” “information channels,” “topic of concern,” “comprehensive evaluation,” and “expression and participation,” this paper examines and discusses people’s cognition, attitudes, and expressions towards significant political events and the influence of new media, including microblogs, WeChat and the like, on the information communication of those events.

### **Method**

Using CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system, with a method of random sampling, this study has successfully interviewed 291 Shanghai residents above 18 years old throughout the 17 districts and counties of the city. With a 95% confidence level, the sampling error is  $\pm 5.7\%$ . And from 2007 to 2013, we successfully interviewed 2,076 Shanghai residents with CATI system.

The sample is 50.5% male (n=147) and 49.5% female (n=144); 4.6% (n=13) with no more than elementary education, 19.4% (n=55) with junior high education, 25.1% (n=71) with senior high or technical secondary school degrees, 17.0% (n=48) with junior college degrees, 29.0% (n=82) with bachelor degrees, 4.9% (n=14) with master degrees and above. There are 33 interviewees between 18 and 25 years old (11.6%), 57 between 26 and 35 years (20.0%), 39 between 36 and 45 years (13.7%), 45 between 46 and 55 years (15.8%), 61 between 56 and 65 years (21.4%) and 50 over 66 years (17.5%).

### **Results**

#### **Awareness and Attention**

The results shows that Shanghai residents’ awareness rate of 2013 “two sessions” is quite high, with only 5.5% saying they didn’t know about it. Besides, Shanghai residents’ awareness rate of 2013 “two sessions” is the highest since 2007.

Figure 1

*Are you aware of China's 2013 "two sessions" ?*

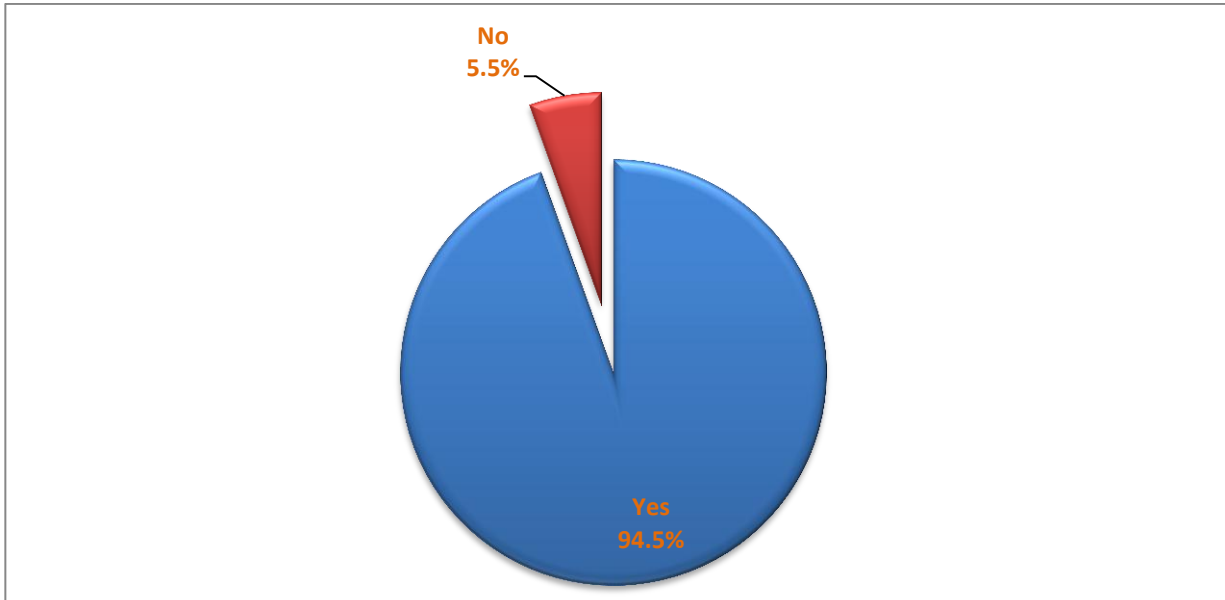
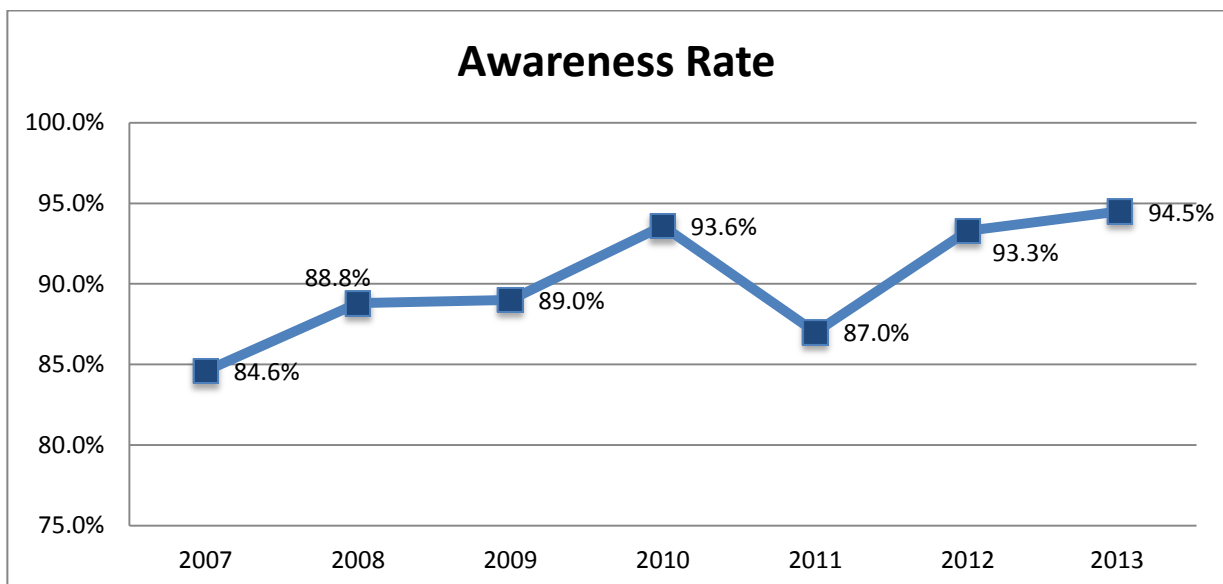


Figure 2

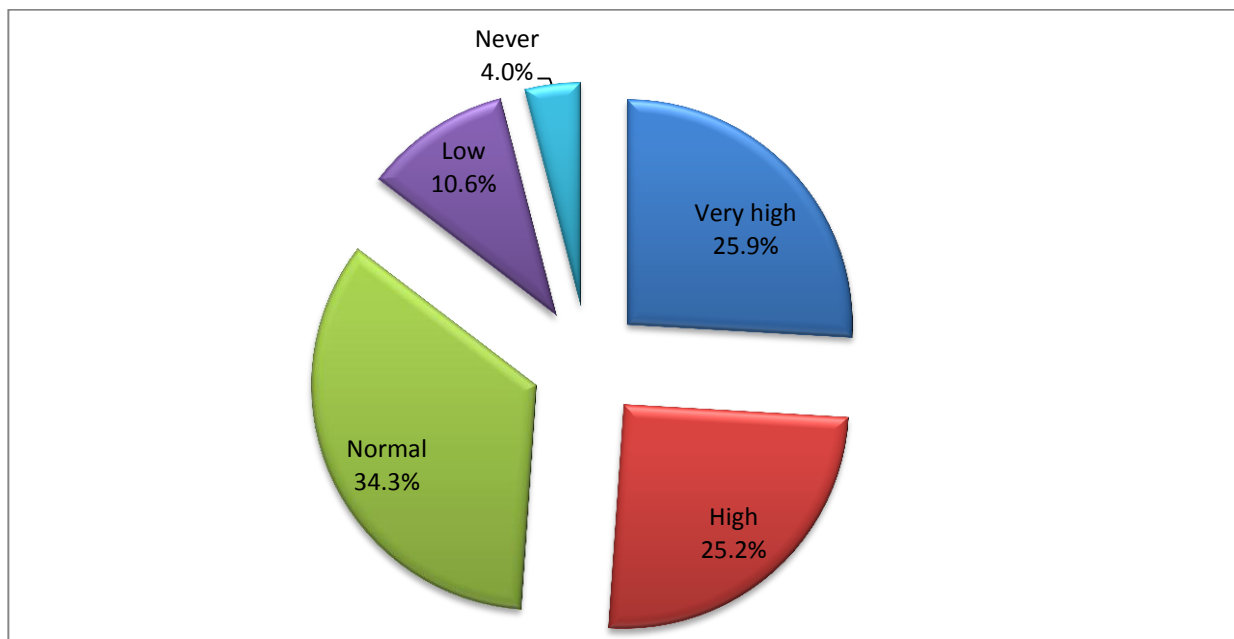
*The Variation Tendency of Shanghai Residents' Awareness Rate of China's "Two Sessions" Since 2007*



Among the interviewees with knowledge of the 2013 “two sessions,” 25.9% said they were highly concerned about it; 25.2% showed a comparatively high attention rate; 34.5% normal; 10.6% low; only 4.0% said they paid no attention at all. The proportion of “very high” is the largest since 2007.

Figure 3

*Shanghai Residents' Attention Rate of China's 2013 "Two Sessions"*



### Information Channels

Among all the information channels, television, comprising 63.8%, is still the major channel for interviewees to get information about the “two sessions.” It is followed by the Internet (21.7%), newspapers (6.7%), radio broadcasts (3.4%), mobile phone newspapers and mobile TV (3.4%), and interpersonal communication (0.7%). It should be noted that the proportion of interviewees gaining information about the “two sessions” through Internet is the highest since 2007, surpassing 20% for the first time.

Figure 4

*Most Important Channels for Shanghai Residents to Get the Information of China's 2013 "two sessions"*

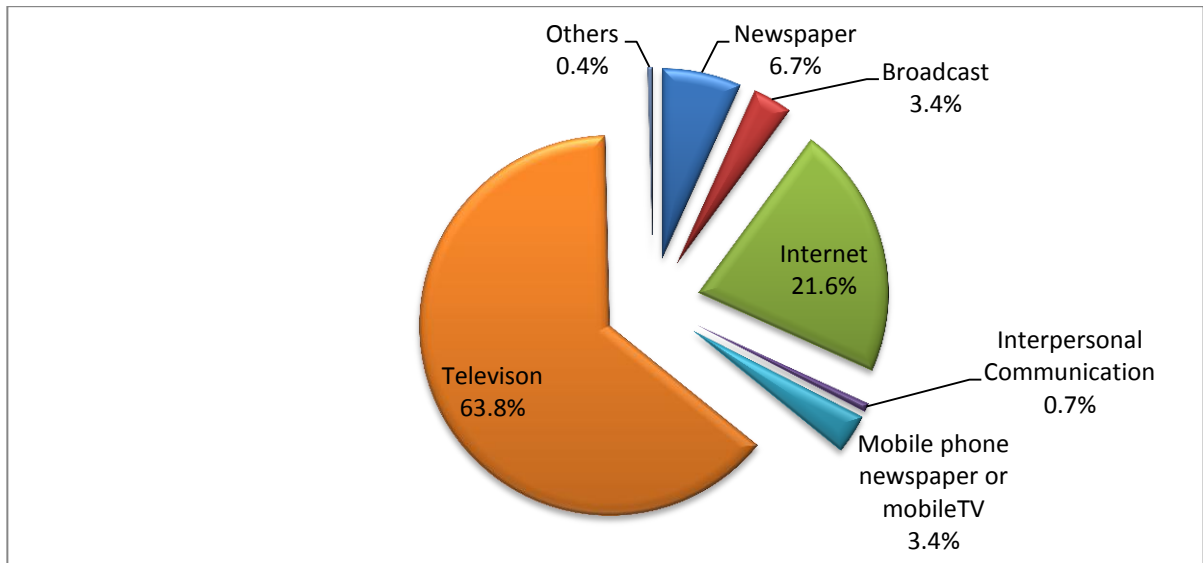
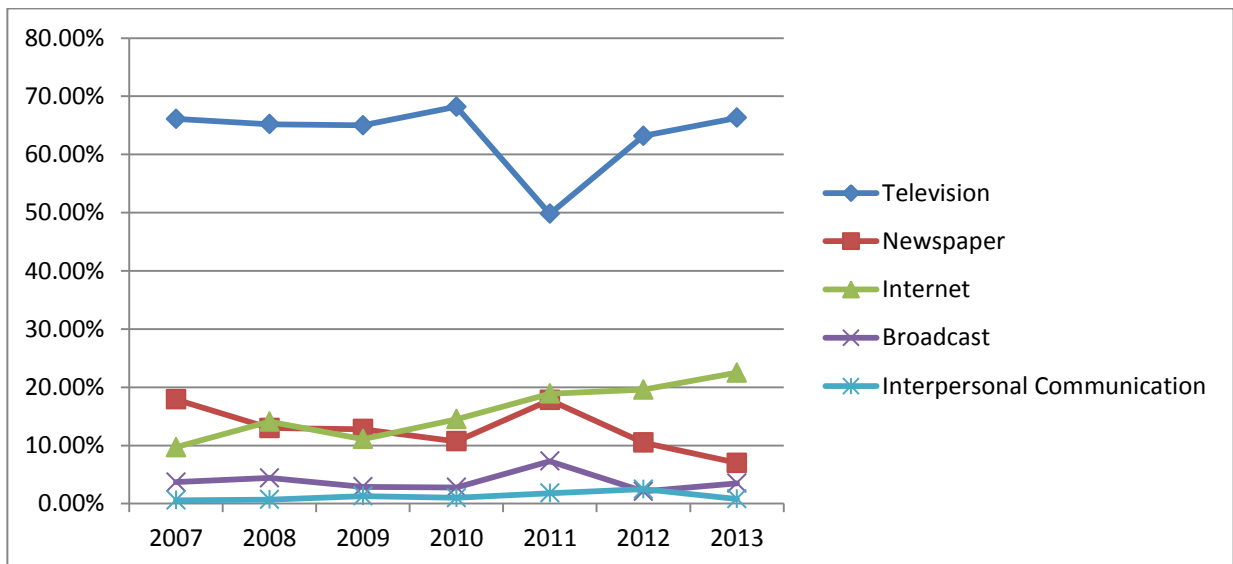


Figure 5

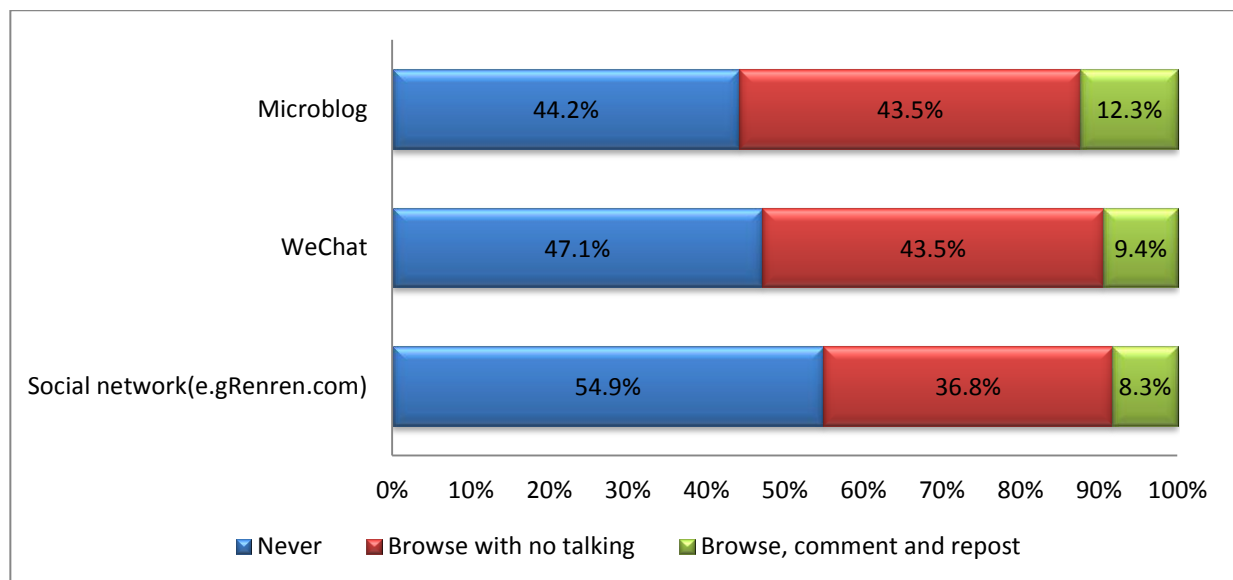
*The Most Important Channels for Shanghai Residents to Get the Information about the "Two Sessions," 2007-2013*



Online social media such as microblogs and WeChat have seen rapid development in recent years and many people get to know and participate in “two sessions” through those new types of media. According to the survey, among all the netizens, 55.8% of them browsed information or took part in discussions regarding “two sessions” on a microblog, 52.9% do so through WeChat, and 45.1% through social networks.

Figure 6

*The Most Important Online Social Media for Shanghai Residents to Express Opinions and Take Part in China’s 2013 “Two Sessions”*



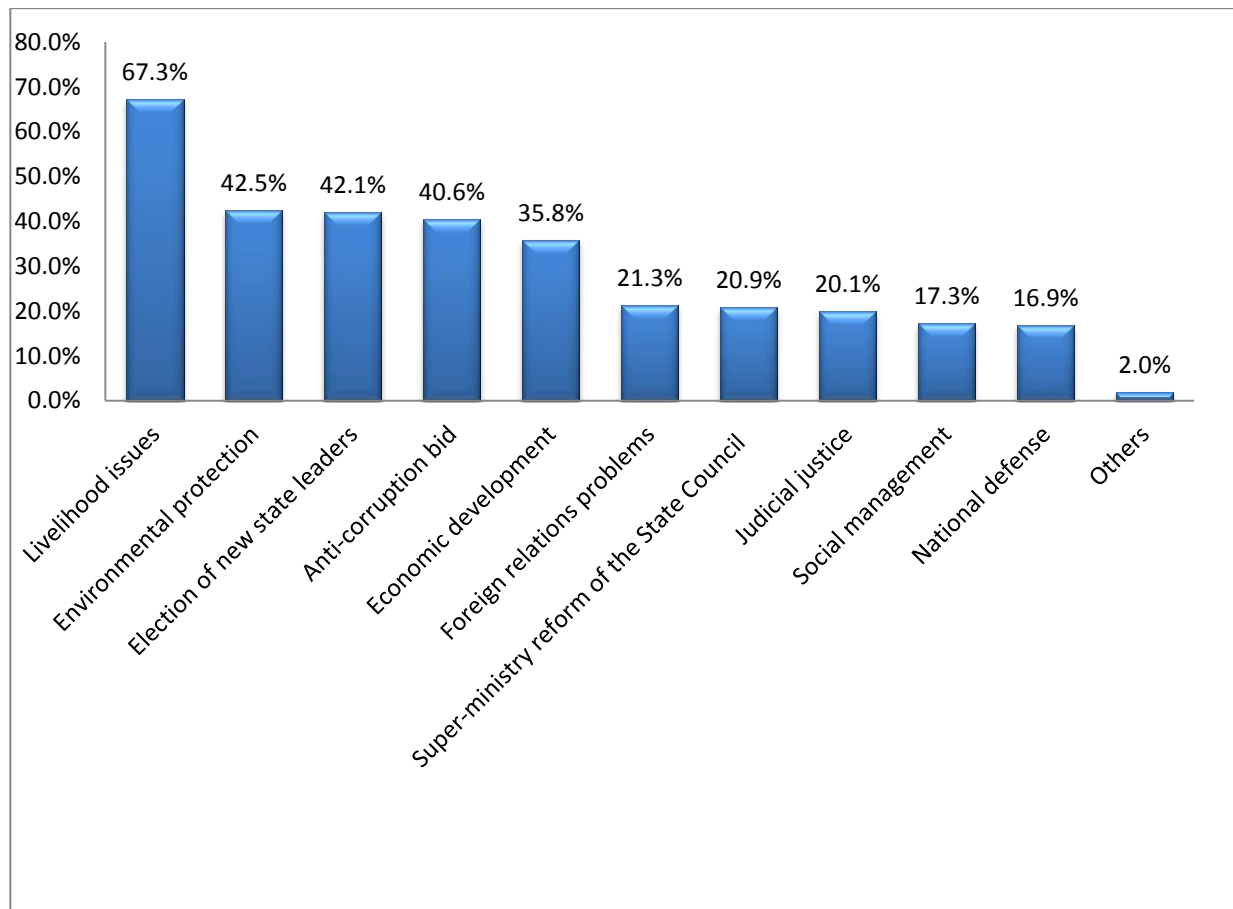
### Topic of concern

Among the topics of the “two sessions,” the one that drew the greatest attention is the “livelihood issues,” with 58.6% of interviewees showing their concern. Due to the worsening air quality exceeding PM 2.5 in China’s large cities in recent years, interviewees’ concern over environmental protection (37.0%) has obviously risen, ranking second among the topics. As an important item on the agenda of China’s 2013 “two sessions,” election of the new state leaders (36.6%) ranks third on the list of topics of concern. It is

followed by anti-corruption concerns (35.3%), economic development (31.2%), foreign relations problems (18.5%) and the State Council's super-ministry reform (18.2%).

Figure 7

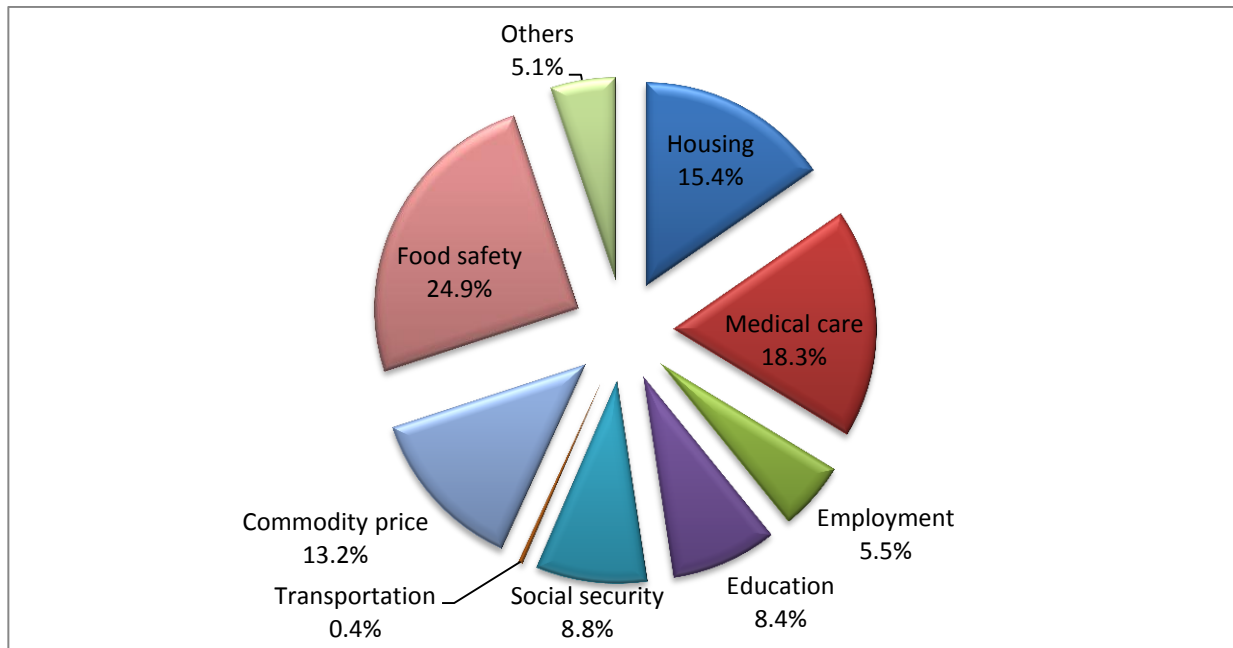
Topics of Concern for China's 2013 "Two Sessions"



Among the livelihood issues, the problem drawing the most attention is food safety (24.9%). It is followed by the problems of medical care (18.3%), housing (15.4%), commodity price (13.2%), social security (8.8%), education (8.4%), employment (5.5%), and transportation (0.4%).



Figure 8

*The Most Concerning Topics of Livelihood Issues***Comprehensive Evaluation**

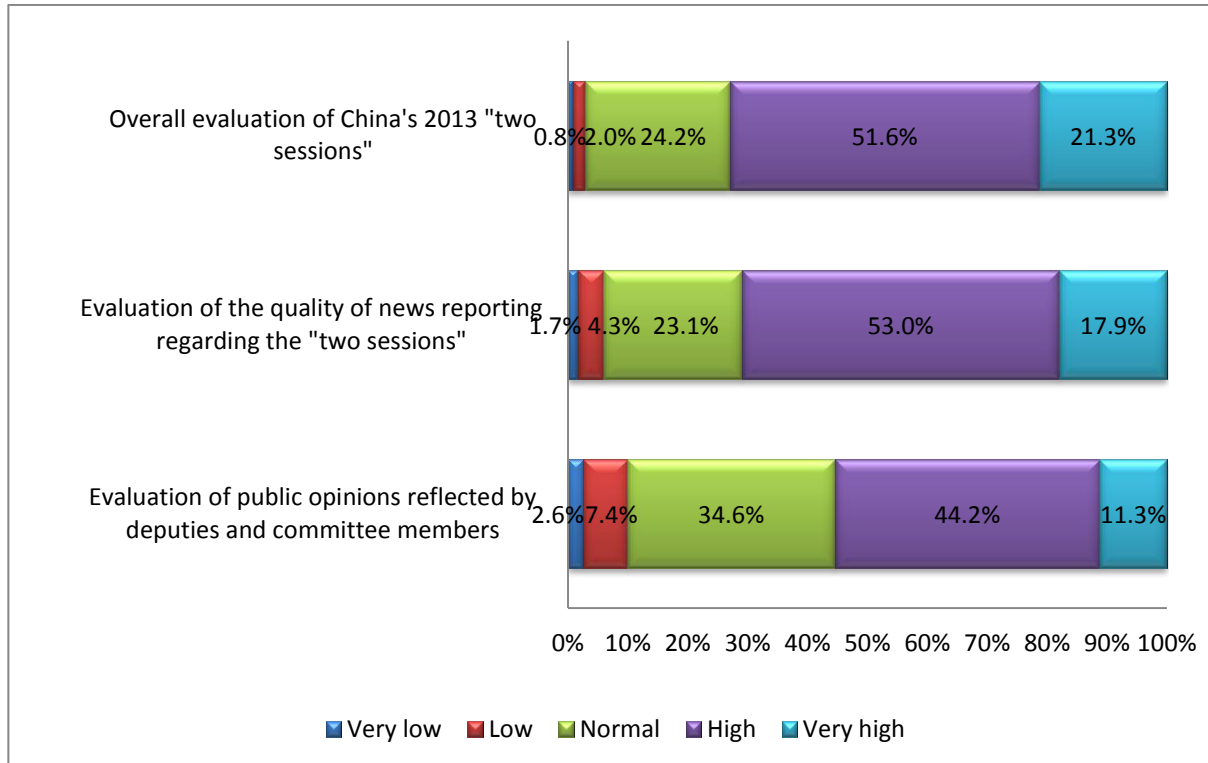
According to the survey, the comprehensive evaluation of China's 2013 "two sessions" is relatively high. When asked about the degree of satisfaction of the "two sessions," 21.3% of the interviewees chose the option of "very high," 51.7% of them chose "high," 24.2% chose "normal," 2.0% chose "low," and 0.8% said they were extremely unsatisfied.

As to the evaluation of the quality of news reporting regarding the "two sessions," 17.9% of the interviewees chose the option of "very high," 53.0% of them chose "high," 23.1% chose "normal," 4.3% chose "low," and 1.7% said they were not satisfied at all.

When evaluating how public opinion was reflected during the "two sessions" by deputies and committee members, 11.3% of the interviewees chose "very high," 44.2% of them chose "high," 34.6% chose "normal," 7.4% chose "low," and 2.6% chose "very low."

Figure 9

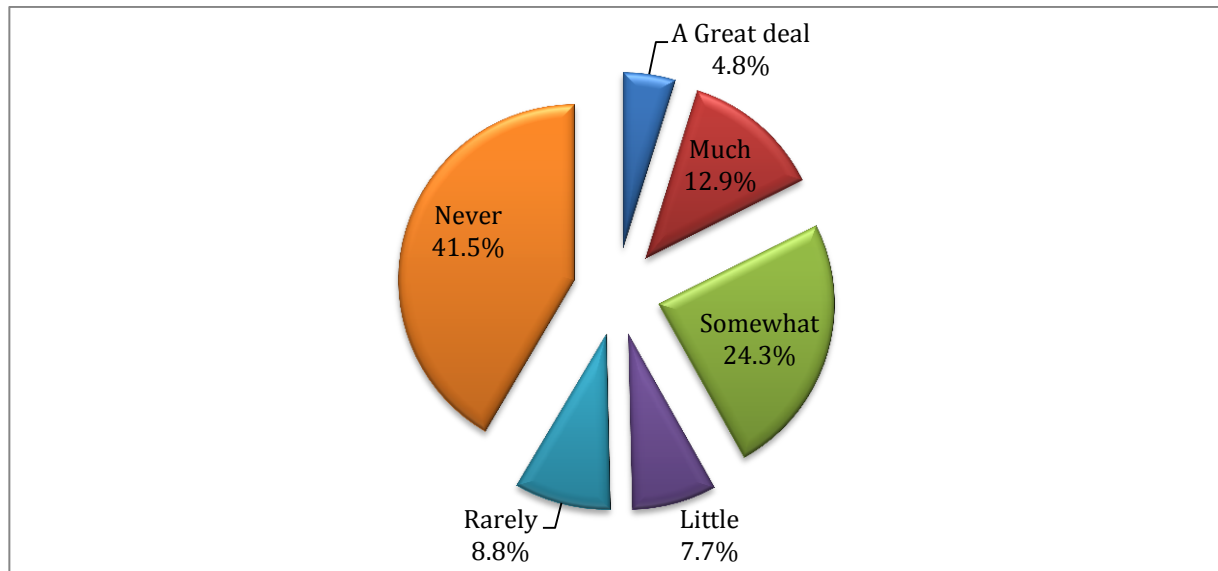
*Shanghai Residents' Comprehensive Evaluation of China's 2013 "Two Sessions"*



**Expression and Participation**

Among the interviewees with knowledge of 2013 "two sessions," 41.5% said they had never participated in discussions about the "two sessions" with others, 8.8% of them said they rarely discussed that topic, 7.7% had a few discussions on "two sessions," 12.9% reported many discussions with others about "two sessions," and the interviewees who discussed "two sessions" a great deal only accounted for 4.8%.

Figure 10

*Shanghai Residents' Discussions of China's 2013 "Two Sessions"***Discussion**

The awareness rate of China's 2013 "two sessions" is relatively high, while special events would lead to obvious changes to the attention rate. Compared with four years ago, the 2013 "two sessions" had the highest awareness rate, because new state leaders were elected at the meetings. The ruling ideas of the new leaders will have a significant influence on China's development for some time. People look at the new government with curiosity and hope, hoping the new leaders will bring reform and further development. The "two sessions" provides an important window for the public to know the new leaders and the future direction of development, thus attracting high attention of all social sectors.

Television is the most important channel for people to get the information about the "two sessions" in the past seven years. The important sources for information about the "two sessions" are broadcast live on television, supplemented by interviewing, discussing and commenting, providing in-depth news reports as soon as possible. Television information is easy to access, because television penetration is high and the majority of

Chinese families have televisions, and it is not necessary to acquire certain skills in order watch television. For people who are not familiar with the Internet, television is their major channel to gain information about significant political events quickly.

Since 2010, the Internet has surpassed newspapers and become the second largest information channel for the public to get information about the “two sessions”. In 2012, the number of people gaining information about the “two sessions” through the Internet (19.6%) was almost twice the number through newspapers (10.5%). While in 2013, the number of people gaining information about the “two sessions” through the Internet (22.5%) became more than three times that of newspapers (7.0%). Compared with news in newspapers, online news has the advantages of instantaneity, continuity throughout the day, and integration. Its instantaneity enables people to get the latest news of significant political events quickly, its continuity enables people to pick up updates whenever and wherever they want, and since multi-media means words, pictures, videos, and audio are integrated on the Internet, it provides people with a much more comprehensive knowledge of significant political events. It is predictable that the Internet will play an increasingly important role in the news reporting of significant political events in the future.

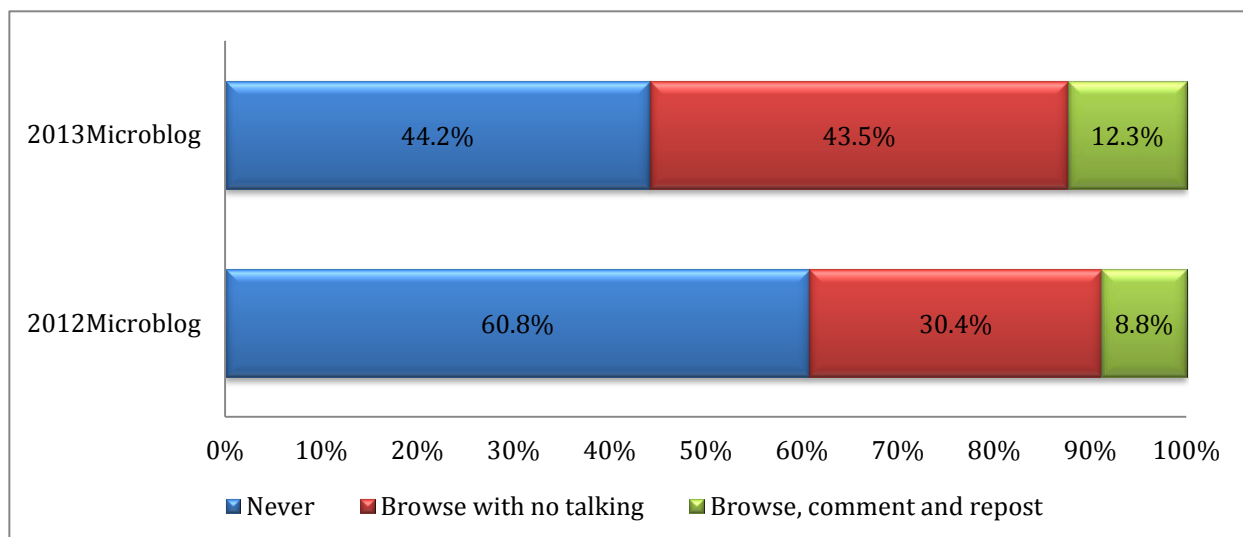
Microblogs and WeChat have been the most important online social media for Shanghai residents to express their opinions and take part in China’s “two sessions.”

In the aspect of news reporting, microblogs and WeChat have enhanced their cooperation with traditional media. Sina Weibo (one of the most commonly used microblogs in China) cooperated with traditional media including CCTV, Xinhua News Agency, and People’s Daily and promoted their official microblog accounts on its platform and released microblog posts aiming at their news reports (Liu & Zhang, 2013). As to WeChat platform, CCTV released their “Observing the ‘two sessions’ through WeChat” section on it, where they set a topic every day to interact with the audience. Then they picked several typical comments of the audience and broadcast them on the program “24 Hours” at 11 p.m. every day on CCTV News Channel (Wang & Yi, 2013). In this way, it not only integrated the advantages of traditional media, but also provided a platform for interactions between traditional media and the public.

Online social media represents a particularly promising forum for revealing the promise that digital technologies could lead to greater political and civic engagement (Pasek, More, & Romer, 2012). According to the survey, in 2012, 8.8% of the netizens not only browsed information about the “two sessions” on microblogs but also reposted and commented about the meetings, while in 2013, that number increased to 12.3%. As the use of microblogs expands and deepens gradually, people are getting used to discussing and participating in significant political events through online social media. On the one hand, online social media like microblogs have disrupted the traditional media-dominated information communication pattern when reporting the “two sessions.” Microblog users can express their opinions about the “two sessions” through their microblog accounts, enabling each of them to become a “we media.” On the other hand, by way of the “micro-interview,” “# my proposals on ‘two sessions’#” discussions and the like, the communication channel between the public and government officials and “two sessions” deputies is established, so is the public communication platform to “seek advice from netizens on microblogs.” With the online social media including microblogs, the willingness and capacity of the public to discuss and participate in significant political events have greatly developed.

Figure 11

*Shanghai Residents’ Information Acquisition, Commenting and Reposting on Microblogs about the 2012 and 2013 “Two Sessions”*



During the “two sessions,” people pay more attention to the issues which are closely related to their daily life. Among the topics of concern, the one drawing the most attention is the livelihood issues, followed by environmental problems. The election of new state leaders ranks third. Till now, since 2007, the livelihood issues have always been of the top concern during the “two sessions” every year. In spite of the importance of elections of new state leaders, anti-corruption aid and economic development, the essential problem to the public has always been how the quality of their daily life can be improved. During 2013’s “two sessions,” the interviewees’ attention rate of the environmental problems even surpassed the rate of the election of new state leaders. That is because on the one hand, the environmental problems, including air pollution, are closely related to people’s daily life and people cannot survive without those indispensable resources like clean air and water; on the other hand, it reveals an urgent hope of the public for effective policy measures to improve the environment. Among the livelihood issues, food safety (24.9%), medical care (18.3%) and housing (15.4%) are the top three topics of concern. All three of those topics are related to people’s basic survival needs. Only when the problems of food safety, medical care, and housing are properly solved, can people go further to pursue better education and careers.

Shanghai residents’ overall evaluation of the “two sessions” of China is relatively high. However, the evaluation of how the NPC deputies and CPPCC National Committee members’ proposals reflect the public opinions is slightly lower than the overall evaluation of the “two sessions.” The “two sessions” represent China’s representative democracy, and deputies of the “two sessions” should pay attention to people’s concerns and the proposals submitted by them should contain solutions to problems of concern to the public. Ruan (2009) believes that direct election, deputy professionalism, reinforcement of the information communication between voters and deputies, and enactment of laws supervising deputies’ execution of duty are effective measures to improve power supervision of China’s representative democracy. More explorations and practices are needed to improve China’s “two sessions” system and to promote the process of China’s political democratization.

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